Kiss From a Rose

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Kiss From a Rose

by Sharkeygirl

Summary

Severus wanted money. Hermione wanted a name. What happens when a Snatcher everyone believed to be dead returns and threatens the world?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
"Let me see the moon."

The man writhed on the ground, his hands grasping for a beam on moonlight. He only touched air.

Another man poked his head above the newspaper. "You're still too weak."

The first man’s eyes darted around the tent ceiling for even the tiniest pinhole that might admit a sliver of moonbeam. None was there. The faint glow of the sun illuminated the enchanted tarp during the daytime, but at night there was only a dark blue shadow suspended overhead. Even the floor shielded him from the natural world. It was cement—not grass or blessed dirt but cold, hard, manufactured cement. There was nothing else in the enclosure save the cot on which he slept and the newspapers which lay scattered about the floor. He’d been told that the tent was the size of the Malfoys' living room, but after all this time it provided no more comfort than an Azkaban cell.

"I want to go outside," he insisted, his voice more sinister than before.

"But your wounds…"

He growled as he pushed his companion aside. He burst through the door. Savoring his newfound freedom, he breathed air thick with the smell of pine and tilted his head at a faint howl in the distance. He sneered as he stepped into a clearing between two trees to welcome the object of his desire.

Two clouds separated, exposing the full moon. He cackled as his body slowly morphed into the hideous beast he had yearned to become. He howled his triumph and a warning to the rest of the world as the other looked on.

Fenrir Greyback was alive.

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"She's dead, Lucius," Severus announced as he set the letter he’d been reading onto his lap.

"Who's dead?" Lucius asked as he sat down in a faded red chair across from his friend.

"My grandmother," Severus answered. "Which I find fascinating because I wasn't even aware that she was still living."

Lucius nodded. "I remember my father mentioning her once. I believe she lived in Germany…"

"To escape the war," Severus picked up the parchment. "At least that's what this letter states."

Lucius retrieved his tea cup and its saucer from their perch on the cherry wood table and took a sip. "Why did they inform you of her demise?"

"Allegedly I'm in her will," Severus answered.

"You are?" Lucius asked with a raised eyebrow.
Severus nodded.

"But, I thought you said that she'd disowned your mother for marrying a muggle," Lucius continued.

"She did," Severus answered. "Which makes the recent turn of events all the more intriguing."

"Yes," Lucius answered before raising his tea cup again. "It certainly does."

He took another sip as Severus collected his thoughts.

"The will reading is at noon tomorrow."

"I take it that you intend to go."

"Yes," Severus answered. "Do you know if I'll need an attorney?"

"You shouldn't," Lucius answered. "If it’s like any other will reading I’ve attended the lawyer will simply announce the distribution of her assets along with any comments or conditions contained in the document."

Severus nodded before taking another sip. "No doubt I'll be mentioned just once, and only then as an object of derision."

"No, you wouldn't have been invited to the reading if that were the case," Lucius answered. "She has given you something."

"I wonder how many strings are attached to her generous gift," Severus answered before taking a final sip and setting his cup down.

"I wouldn't ask too many questions. If I were you I'd accept my inheritance and make whatever use of it I could," Lucius answered.

Severus grunted.

"Worst case scenario, she bequeathed you some dreadful antique vase that will spend the rest of its days in your attic," Lucius replied.

Severus chuckled. "I suppose so."

Lucius took another sip. "I wouldn't think too much about it one way or the other. There’s no need to borrow trouble."

"I suppose not," Severus conceded.

Lucius looked out the window at the darkening sky. "I should be going now. Narcissa wanted me home before nightfall."

Severus nodded. "Thank you again for coming."

"Any time. Let me know how things go with the will reading," Lucius replied.

"I will," Severus promised.

The men shook hands before Lucius glided off into the dusk. Severus grimaced as he picked up the tea cups and set them in the kitchen, where they magically cleaned themselves. Casting a lumos spell, he sat down at the table, his chair creaking in protest. He spread out the paper and adjusted the lumos
Two pictures dominated the front page. One showed Ronald Weasley surrounded by adoring female fans, his arms encircling two, maybe three laughing females. In the other panel was a photo of Hermione Granger standing in a doorway. Her face was contorted in rage, but Severus could also detect a glimmer of tears. She slammed the door on the reporters, camera flashes ricocheting off its surface. Above the pictures, the headline read:

GOLDEN COUPLE BREAKS UP FOR GOOD!

Snape turned the page, hoping to find some real news.
Severus tapped his fingers against the long mahogany table, hoping for the lawyer to enter soon so he could proceed with the rest of his day. He sat at the end, directly across from where the lawyer would be seated, provided he ever showed up. According to the wall clock the attorney was already five minutes late.

To his right, a small group of women huddled together, speaking in hushed, foreign tones. If he had to guess, he'd say they were conversing in German. Intermittently, one would lift her head from the cluster and smile, only to return to the conversation. After the third woman poked up her head, Severus scowled. The wait was unbearable enough without suffering the attention of those nosy women.

"Severus Snape?"

Snape’s scowl deepened as Horace Slughorn entered the room. Severus grumbled, "What in Merlin's name are you doing here?"

Horace rushed over and extended his hand. Snape accepted his grasp but immediately regretted doing so when Slughorn shook it quite violently. "It's so good to see you again."

"Indeed," Snape deadpanned as Slughorn released his crumpled hand.

"Severus?"

He stopped breathing at the sound of the voice. "Minerva?"

Slughorn stepped away to allow Minerva access to her former colleague. "Severus!" she exclaimed before hugging him. "It's so wonderful to see you again."

"Yes," Severus answered, stiffening in her embrace.

Minerva stepped away from him, taking notice of the growing darkness in his eyes. She sighed. "Severus, I hope you understand why I couldn't rehire you at Hogwarts…"

"I understand," he answered. "After all, who would want the man who saved Potter's arse teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts?"

Minerva shook her head. "It wasn't like that. I wanted you back, but the Ministry was very clear that they didn't want anyone associated with the Death Eaters teaching, even if that person as heroic as you."

"And I suppose you fought them tooth and nail," Severus growled.

Before Minerva could answer, a man in the doorway cleared his throat. All attention turned to him. He wore finely pressed gray robes, but from the look in his eyes Severus could sense he was concealing something. Nope, he didn't trust this man.

"Shall the reading of the will commence?" the man began.

In silence everyone took their seat. The man enlarged a parchment on the table, cast an interpreting
spell, and began, "The reading of the last will and testament of Priscilla Clytemnestra Prince shall begin. Are all parties present?"

The man turned to a lawyer in blue robes, who examined his list before replying in a deep voice, "Everyone is accounted for."

“Good. Let's begin,” the man in gray continued. "My name is Phineas Schmidt, though you may call me Phin if you so choose."

A few people muttered their greetings to Phin as Severus maintained a stoic silence. Although his stomach was churning, he betrayed no other sign of stress. Severus glanced over at Minerva and Slughorn. While Slughorn’s muscles were relaxed and a smile was plastered onto his face, Minerva was fidgeting. Perhaps she suspected something troublesome as well…

"I, Priscilla Clytemnestra Prince, of sound mind and body, hereby do write out my last will and testament. I understand that soon I will die; even a witch cannot live forever. As a result, I want to detail the distribution of my fortune so as to avoid any problems or misunderstandings which may occur upon my death.

Brunnhilde, you have been a loving friend to me since I first set foot in Germany. You taught me the German language and showed me the finer points of German culture. Truer friends than you do not exist. I know that you have no use for my money. Therefore, I leave you with my vase and my art collection."

The old lady gasped as her eyes bulged. "Danke Schön!"

At least I don't have to worry about an ugly old vase, Severus smirked.

"Gertrude," the man continued as the smirk evaporated. "You have also been a most excellent companion. I have seen the admiration you hold for my silver service. It is yours."

"Ja!" she whispered unable to hide the gleam in her eyes.

One by one, the German ladies all received something from Priscilla. The longer the will reading continued, however, the more curious Snape became. Priscilla was only giving away trinkets. These ladies obviously coveted them, but why had there not yet been any talk of her fortune?

"Now that I have taken care of those dearest to me," the man continued after another excited German outburst, "I must deal with the most important aspect of my will; my vast fortune."

All eyes were on him as their collective breath was held in anticipation. "As my friends would know," Phin continued, oblivious to the tension in the room. "I must deal with the most important aspect of my will; my vast fortune."

"Unfortunately, I was cursed with a rebellious daughter," Phin read on. "A daughter who disregarded my wishes and married a gold digging muggle. I have shed countless tears for her, especially when she bore a son, a son who should have been raised in the family estate as a pureblood wizard, not as a muggle in a shack which should have been demolished years ago. To think that my grandson could've been a squib was devastating. I could scarcely bear it…"

If all I'm here for is to hear my grandmother prattle on about how horrible I am...

"As many of you are aware, I have always been a patron of the art of potions making, even going so
far as to donate a million Galleons a year to various potions programs, including the one at Hogwarts."

Slughorn flashed a toothy smile as Minerva sat up a little straighter.

"My grandson," Phin continued, "Has made me proud by not only rejoining the Wizarding world, but also by excelling in the art of Potions and creating new spells. He has truly exceeded all expectations placed on him not only by me, but by others. Because of his excellence in the potions field and my pity that he had such a horrendous childhood, I have decided that if certain conditions are met, he shall receive my full fortune as well as all of my properties.

All eyes turned to Snape, who sat frozen in his chair. Of all the things he'd expected to hear, inheriting four hundred million Galleons was the furthest thing from his mind. Maybe he could open that apothecary he'd always dreamed of owning. No, maybe he'd open an entire chain…"

"The first and foremost of these conditions is that he takes a wife," Phin interrupted.

Severus was jarred from his thoughts. "What?"

"You must marry," Phin answered. "This marriage must take place within six months, or all of the money shall be passed onto Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

Slughorn and Minerva stared at each other in shock. Meanwhile, Snape was still trying to wrap his mind around what had just occurred. "So," Snape asked in a shaky voice. "I must marry within six months, or I get nothing."

"She wants an heir Mr. Snape," Phin replied. "She expects you to give her one. Failure to do so will result in disinheritance. Any further inquiries?"

How the hell do I overturn this?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who's supported me thus far!
"Marriage?" Lucius exclaimed.

Severus paced between Lucius’ couch and his fireplace. "If I want to see a knut of my grandmother’s money, I’ll have to marry within six months."

"Oh my," Narcissa exhaled as she shook her head. "Still, it doesn’t completely surprise me that your grandmother would have such a stipulation, considering the old wizarding customs."

"Useless wizarding customs!" Severus spat.

"Perhaps the practice is archaic," Lucius conceded as he drummed his fingers on the top of his chair. "Though I’ll still be the first to admit that I look forward to the day Draco tells me that his wife is pregnant."

"But would you withhold your fortune from him if he had never taken a wife?" Severus stood still.

“I considered withholding it from him when he announced that he was marrying Ginevra," Lucius admitted.

Narcissa gave him a look. "She's turned out to be a fine wife for him."

Lucius simply raised an eyebrow as he considered his next words. Before he could utter them, Severus interrupted, "I need to know how to overturn this marriage clause while obtaining my full inheritance. How can I invalidate the will?"

Lucius and Narcissa each gave him a sympathetic look. “Overturning any part of a will is tricky," Lucius began.

"It often takes years," Narcissa answered.

"Years?" Severus asked in a weak voice.

"By then a lower court judge could have awarded the money to Hogwarts, and we all know how hard it would be to get it back then if you continued to contest it," Lucius replied.
"How fast could Hogwarts spend four hundred million Galleons?" Severus asked.

"As fast as they could create secret, undetectable accounts," Narcissa answered.

"Minerva isn't that cunning," Severus answered.

"But don't forget that Slughorn is a Slytherin, and according to you most of the money will be given to his department," Lucius answered.

"One can never underestimate Slughorn," Severus replied, his disdain palpable.

"Maybe someone in the Ministry would have some ideas," Narcissa suggested.

"I'm sure they'd be oh so happy to help an ex-Death Eater," Severus sneered.

"They pay you a monthly pension, don't they?" she asked.

"Only because Potter requested them to do so," Severus argued.

Lucius sighed. "I could give you the names of a few attorneys who specialize in these kinds of cases, but I doubt any of them could do much. The easiest way to gain your inheritance would be to comply with the will..."

"Oh joy! I get to marry a complete and total dunderhead!" Severus replied.

"Would you rather not have the money?" Lucius asked.

Severus exhaled and shook his head.

"Here's an idea," Narcissa suggested. "If you had to get married tomorrow, what qualities would you look for in a woman?"

"One who is mute and invisible," Severus answered.

Lucius' eyes flashed in frustration. "Cissy has a point. The best and the easiest way to get the money would be to take a wife."

"Fine," Severus answered before putting his head in his hands. After some reflection, he looked up and answered, "I want a wife who isn't a dunderhead. I want to be able to have some sort of intellectual conversation with her, not just talk at her while she gives me a vacant expression. Also, I
don't want a wife who spends money frivolously on things that will just clutter up my home. As odd as it sounds, I'd like my wife to at least be able to tolerate me on some level, and not just because I have money. I want a wife who I can tolerate and who can tolerate me."

"Just tolerate?" Narcissa gently probed.

"Can I really hope for anything more?" Snape asked in a quiet voice.

"Yes," Narcissa answered.

"He has six months," Lucius interrupted. "There isn't time for romance or an epic love story. He needs the money now."

Narcissa exhaled. "Perhaps you are right."

Snape’s frown deepened. "One thing we're forgetting, how the hell am I supposed to find said woman?"

"We could make some inquiries on your behalf," Lucius suggested.

"Or we could run an ad in the personals," Narcissa suggested. "Maybe we could try to tap into one of those Wizarding dating communities. I hear those speed dating communities are always looking for available bachelors…"

"Perhaps," Snape answered with a look of defeat. "Give me some time to consider my options."

"I'll look into getting the will overturned, but I cannot guarantee that I will not receive the same answers I've given you," Lucius promised.

"Thank you," Severus answered.

Narcissa gave him a reassuring smile. "Things will work out somehow Severus, I promise."

"I hope you are right," Snape answered before turning to leave. "Goodbye Lucius, Narcissa."

"Goodbye," the couple replied.

With that, Severus stepped outside and apparated home, pondering his next move.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support!
Hermione choked back tears as she stared at the parchment in before her. She'd tried to write this letter at home, but her emotions proved too overwhelming. So she'd decided to take it to the coffeehouse, hoping that the neutral setting would temper them. So far the only benefit to her new location was that she was not curled up crying in a ball.

Determination flared within her as she reflected on how many times she'd cried in the past few days. She was so tired of bawling over her breakup with Ron that she could vomit. Bile then rose up in her throat.

Shit. She covered her mouth and swallowed. Bad thought.

Hermione returned her attention to the parchment. She was so focused on her next few sentences that she did not hear the bell on the door ring, heralding the entrance of another customer.

Severus scowled as he scoured the small coffee shop for a place to sit. A few clusters of people were scattered about, but almost all of them were engrossed in conversation. The few people who sat alone had their noses in a newspaper. Severus found a secluded place in the corner. He strolled over to the newspaper rack and picked up the morning edition for appearances' sake. Then he settled into his seat.

Severus opened his newspaper and began searching for a story to hold his attention for the next few minutes. Nothing captured his fancy. Even the potions section had been taken over by some asinine ramblings about the effort to create a potion to give one the perfect skin tone. Perhaps one of the advice columns would give him some tips on how to handle his latest predicament…

"What'll it be sir?"

Snape set his paper down and examined the waitress. She was wearing a black uniform with a white nametag which read "Florence". Florence appeared intelligent enough, but alas there was a diamond ring on her left hand. "I'll just have the French Roast decaf," Snape answered.

"Okay," Florence answered. Instead of jotting down his order, she remained in place, staring thoughtfully at him.

"Yes," Snape drawled.

Her eyes widened. "You, you're that man who inherited four hundred million Galleons! I read about you in yesterday's evening edition of the Daily Prophet!"

Snape exhaled as the eyes of the other patrons fell upon him. "Yes I am," he answered, his tone and expression warning her to end this discussion.

"Well, congratulations," Florence answered. "I'd make a marriage offer if I wasn't already engaged."

"I'm sure you would," Snape grumbled.

Snape buried himself in the newspaper again in an attempt to deflect the unwelcome attention. Eventually, he heard footsteps clack away from him and the muffled conversations resume. He
turned the page as his thoughts wandered back to his current dilemma.

He'd always heard that a good relationship took time to develop and nurture, time he didn't have. Besides, he just wanted money, not some grand romance. Hell, he'd even give his future wife a hefty alimony in time if she'd just agree to bear him an heir. She deserved some sort of reward for helping him out of this rut. Maybe the promise of an allowance would entice a few suitors…

He grunted again. Even alimony would do little to entice a witch, at least not one with any degree of common sense. Snape knew better than to think of himself as attractive. He wasn't built like a Quidditch player, and intelligence didn't seem to go very far with most people. Forget being nice! He wasn't a cruel man, but no one had ever accused him of being kind, and he didn't plan to start now.

He flipped the page back to the front. Ron Weasley was on the corner kissing an almost unhealthily skinny girl. However, judging by the camera angle, she wasn't afraid to show her, uh, assets. It was beyond Severus how anyone could see Ron Weasley as a worthy candidate for a relationship, but then again Snape was sure he could display this girl's IQ on one hand. Still, maybe he could take a few tips from Weasley, figure out how he of all people could have girls crawling all over him. It's not like he had any better ideas at the moment…

"Your coffee sir!" Florence began in an unbearably cheery voice.

Snape peeked out from behind his newspaper and nodded. She sat the cup down and left. Snape took a sip and prepared to resume his reading when he paused, spotting someone out of the corner of his eye.

It couldn't be her, Snape set the cup down. Surely she's gone somewhere far away from Britain to recover from the sting of Weasley's rejection.

The hair was unmistakable though. It was indeed Hermione Granger.

Hermione was hunched over the table, her brow furrowed in concentration over what could only be a book, maybe a parchment since she seemed to be chewing on the end of her quill. She brushed her hair away from her face, revealing her bloodshot eyes.

On impulse Snape smirked and stood up with coffee in hand, bracing himself for whatever was to come. With an expression much more confident than he felt, he approached Hermione.

Hermione felt his presence before she saw his shadow on her parchment. She quickly rolled it up as his voice began, "A letter to your parents?"

Her head snapped in his direction. “Yes, I haven't written them in a while.”

"Tsk tsk Granger," Snape replied. "They must feel neglected."

"They know that I've been busy," Hermione replied.

There was fire in her eyes, but Snape could also see vulnerability and brokenness. He'd have to proceed carefully if he wanted her to so much as consider having one dinner with him. "I'd imagine you have been busy," Snape scratched a chip in the table. "Anytime elf legislation hits the news I think of you."

"It's something that needs to be done," Hermione began. Before she could continue, Severus pulled up a chair and sat across from her. She glared at him. "I don't remember inviting you to sit here."

"It's rude to converse with someone when you aren't on the same level Granger, don't you know?"
Snape smirked which only served to irritate her further. She smiled as sweetly as she could and replied, "Well excuse my manners, but it is equally rude to interrupt someone while she is writing her parents."

"I do apologize for that," Severus answered. "Still, I could not simply pass by one of my former students and miss an opportunity to catch up. After all, it has been years since we've last spoken."

"Yes," Hermione drawled. "When we last spoke at the Ministry ball two years ago you spent the entire time complaining about how one of the violin players was out of tune."

"He was," Snape interrupted.

"I suppose so, but you needn't have complained about it as long as you did," Hermione replied.

"You know how much I detest those gatherings," Snape replied as he raised his cup of coffee. "A meeting in an intimate setting such as this is much more bearable, don't you agree?"

"I suppose," Hermione replied.

"Then I ask, how is that elf legislation going?" Snape sipped his coffee.

"Not fast enough," Hermione answered in a soft voice.

Severus tried to hide his surprise. "I was unaware that there was a deadline on elf legislation."

"There, look Professor Snape," Hermione replied. "I really do appreciate your efforts to be social, but I'm not very good company right now. I really think I just need to be alone."

"Would catching up over dinner be more convenient for you?" Snape asked.

Hermione's eyes widened. "Why? Where the hell did this sudden interest come from?" she demanded.

Severus shrugged. "I simply want to get to know you better."

"Come off it!" Hermione replied, her voice becoming uncomfortably loud. "I've known you long enough to know that you don't just walk up to someone and ask them for a casual chat! There's always a catch with you! What is it?"

Severus exhaled as people began to stare at them. Under any other circumstance, he'd spin a tale. Hermione though was a Gryffindor, and therefore she would be more likely to comply if he simply told her the truth. "Did you read last night's Daily Prophet?" He asked.

"No, I really don't care to read about my own heartache."

"Last night I graced the cover."

"Why?" Hermione answered, her eyes now glimmering in interest.

"I've inherited a substantial fortune," Severus answered as he considered his next move. Dating her was out of the question now, but maybe she could help him find another potential wife.

"The Priscilla Prince fortune," Hermione answered. "Ginny told me about it the other day."

"I suppose she told you about the stipulation involved with receiving it."
“No, she only told me that Priscilla had died a very wealthy woman. I didn't let her get much further.”

Severus took a deep breath. “I must get married in order to inherit it.”

“Oh.”

“I need your assistance. You know how women think, what they are looking for in a partner. Perhaps you even know some single women yourself who are looking…”

“I suppose you wouldn't even consider me then?” Hermione asked, almost offended by his statement.

“I thought you wouldn't be interested,” Severus answered.

“I'm not interested in a casual dinner,” Hermione admitted.

“Then why are you interested in marriage?” Snape asked.

She gave him an intense look and simply answered in a soft voice, "I have my reasons."

“I see,” Severus answered as he felt control over the situation slip from his hands.

“Would I be a candidate? Is that what you wanted to ask me earlier?” Hermione asked.

“Maybe,” Snape answered. “Or maybe I simply wanted your assistance in finding a proper wife.”

“I take it that I'm the only volunteer for the position of your spouse.”

“Yes,” Severus confessed.

Hermione exhaled. "Then I will go out to dinner with you under the condition that you consider me a candidate for marriage."

"Certainly," Severus answered still trying to puzzle out her agenda. "Where do you want to meet?"

"At that Italian place down the street," Hermione answered. "I believe it's called Vittorio's."

"It is," Snape confirmed.

"Good. Could we please meet there this Tuesday at six then? That will give us some time to prepare."

“Certainly.”

Hermione stood up and collected her things. He could see some of the sadness lift from her eyes, although he was reluctant to claim responsibility for it. "I'll see you then, and thank you, uh…"

"Severus I suppose," Snape answered.

"Okay Severus. Thank you and I will see you Tuesday!"

“Yes, Tuesday at six,” he replied.

With that, she strode out of the coffeehouse, leaving Severus alone to ponder what had just occurred.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for all the support! It is much appreciated.
"A date?" Ginny asked as Hermione tossed another dress onto the bed.

"Yes, a date," Hermione answered.

"Isn't, isn't it a little soon?" Ginny asked as Hermione examined another dress before tossing it onto the pile.

"Obviously it's not too soon for Ron," Hermione growled.

"Ron is just going through something right now," Ginny assured her. "He's trying to find himself. I'm sure he'll see the light soon and come running back to you once her realizes how much he misses you. He always comes back to you."

Hermione shook her head. "Maybe I'm getting a little tired of waiting around while he goes through crisis after crisis. Maybe I'm getting a little tired of not seeing him for months on end. Maybe I'm just sick of Ron."

"You love him," Ginny answered.

Hermione took a deep breath and looked back at her friend. Her eyes betrayed both pain and affection. Ginevra gave her a reassuring smile. "That doesn't matter now," Hermione answered softly.

"Hermione," Ginny began as she moved up and put a hand on her friend’s shoulder. "You and Ron belong together. You've known that since the day you two met. Why don't you call off this date and try to work things out with him? I'm sure he misses you just as much as you miss him."

Hermione's eyes hardened. "Believe me, he doesn’t miss me in the slightest."

Ginny sighed. "Look, I still don't understand what this breakup is all about, but it sounds like it's over something silly."

"Silly!" Hermione retorted as her heart constricted. "You have no idea what you're talking about! Ron was never here with me! He didn't want to be here with me! I don't find that silly at all!"

"I know," Ginny answered as she searched for the right words to say. "I'm not saying it's silly to you I'm trying to make sense of how two people so in love could break up out of the blue."

"What's there to make sense of?" He doesn't want me around anymore, and I'm going on a date with another man."

"I'm sure Ron was under duress when he said he didn't want you around."

"He told me point blank that he wanted nothing more to do with me," Hermione answered, her eyes unable to contain her gathering tears. "He means it this time."

Ginny sighed. "I'm going to see him tomorrow. Maybe I can talk to him for you."

"I doubt he'll listen to you," Hermione muttered as she dried her tears.
"You never know."

"I guess." Hermione forced herself to smile. "In the meantime, which of these dresses do you like best?"

Ginny walked over to the pile of dresses and began to examine them one by one. "They all look a little big for you. I've never seen most of them before either. Where did you get them?"

"I went shopping last month," Hermione shrugged. "I thought they looked good, so I bought them."

"It's not like you to just go shopping on a whim."

"I was bored and lonely."

Ginny resumed looking through the dresses. "You know, we should really go shopping together sometime. It may be fun, help get your mind off of things."

"Maybe," Hermione muttered.

Ginny held up the last dress as she bit her lip. "I have a few in mind, but the perfect dress usually depends on who you're dating. You never have told me who this mystery man is anyway."

"That's because he's a mystery," Hermione winked.

"Well then," Ginny asked with a playful glimmer in her eyes. "How serious do you think he is about you? I mean, he's obviously just a rebound to you, but does he actually think that it's going anywhere?"

"Let's just say that it's probably more serious than you think," Hermione replied with a knowing smile.

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"You still haven't told me about this prospective wife," Lucius began.

"That's because I have no idea how serious she is about marrying me," Snape answered as he sat down in Lucius' library. "She knew about the marriage clause and was quite eager to take advantage of it."

"I take it she's a gold digger?" Lucius asked.

"No, that's the funny thing, I know she's not, yet she's interested in marriage," Snape answered.

"Think she may have had a secret crush on you?" Lucius asked with a smirk.

Severus laughed. "I'm sure she loves me about as much as Rita Skeeter loves telling accurate stories."

Lucius chuckled before his eyes widened. "Dear Merlin, don't tell me you're considering Rita Skeeter."

"No fortune is worth spending so much as five minutes with her," Snape replied.

"Thank Merlin," Lucius sighed. "Is this prospective bride Slytherin?"

"No, far from it," Snape answered. Though you might not have been able to tell the last time we
"Please tell me she's not a Hufflepuff," Lucius replied.

"Of course not," Severus sneered.


"If I wanted you to know I would've told you by now," Severus answered. "Speaking of my date, I should probably take my leave. I promised to meet her in ten minutes."

"Okay, but one more question."

"Yes?"

"Does she have a brain?"

"That," Severus answered with a smirk. "She does have."

With that, Snape stood up and strolled out of the room, satisfied for now to keep his date's identity to himself. "Severus?"

Snape looked towards the direction of the voice. Ginevra stood before him, her eyes filled with worry. "Good evening," Snape answered before continuing on his path out the door.

Ginevra watched him leave the mansion and apparate away. She shook her head as her thoughts returned to the best way to help her friend.

"What exactly are you doing here?" Lucius asked.

Ginevra looked up and answered, "I'm looking for Draco. He promised to meet me here after work."

"He should be here in a couple of minutes," Lucius answered. Then, he noticed the worried expression in Ginevra's face. "What exactly have you been up to anyway?"

"Watching Hermione do something she'll regret!" Ginny answered.

Lucius rolled his eyes. "What, is she getting back with your insipid brother?"

"No! She's dating another man!" Ginny replied.

Lucius raised an eyebrow as an idea began to form. He tried to hide his growing panic as the thoughts became clearer, but then he simply shook the thoughts away.

Severus couldn't be desperate enough to date Hermione Granger.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support! It makes editing this and reposting a lot of fun!
Hermione rapped her fingers on the table, glancing out the window every few moments to see if Snape was coming. She pinched the edge of the tablecloth. Maybe he had changed his mind. Perhaps she'd been too forward with him. Maybe he'd decided that he didn't need the fortune after all, though Hermione found this option unlikely in light of the large sum of money. She shook her head as she lowered it into her hands.

Maybe Snape was another man who simply didn't want her.

"Miss Granger."

She looked up and relaxed when she recognized the face. Severus Snape was still dressed in all black as expected, but his hair looked somewhat less greasy, as though he'd put some effort into his appearance.

Severus stared at Hermione, unsure of his next words. She was dressed in a low-cut black dress. It accentuated the little makeup she had applied to her face, as well as the sparkle in her brown eyes.

Hermione wasn't a child anymore.

"Am I still Miss Granger?" Hermione asked with a flirtatious smile.

"I suppose you may have graduated to Hermione," he admitted. "Still it is odd to think of us in this situation."

"Agreed," Hermione answered, the glimmer vanished from her eyes.

Snape sat down. "Did you ever complete that letter to your parents?"

"Yes," she responded. "They've already replied as well."

"I see," Severus answered before he smirked. "I take it that you didn't tell them about this little get-together."

"Let's just say I told them that I was catching up with an old professor," Hermione replied. "Did you ever find another teaching job? I know about what happened at Hogwarts."

"No," Severus answered. "An ex-Death Eater isn't exactly the first person considered to mold the hearts and minds of the next generation of wizards."

"Oh," she answered as her eyes died again. "I didn't know."

"Excuse me," the waiter interrupted.

Both turned their attention to him as he continued, "May I get you two something to drink?"

"I'll take a glass of Riesling," Severus answered.

"I just want water," Hermione replied.
"Are you ready to order?" he asked.

Hermione looked at Severus who shrugged. "I always just order spaghetti," he answered.

"Always?" Hermione asked with a raised eyebrow

He shrugged. "There are very few things in this world I truly like. When I find something that I do like, I cling to it."

"That's outrageous," Hermione answered. "Give me two eggplant parmesans, one for me and one for him."

"You're kidding," Severus answered as the waiter recorded the request.

"Not a bit," Hermione answered with a gleam in her eyes.

"Eggplant, it doesn't even sound appetizing," Snape commented.

The waiter took their menus and left.

"Maybe you'll feel differently after you try it," Hermione answered.

Severus exhaled. Hermione was not the mute and invisible wife he'd hoped for.

"I suppose you're going to make me try different foods if we become espoused."

"I'm not eating spaghetti every night if that's the question."

"For your information, I am capable of cooking a wide variety of foods."

"Good. So am I."

Snape shook his head. "So I suppose if we wed you'll immediately invade the kitchen."

"Oh trust me," Hermione answered with a sparkle in her eyes. "Once you try some of my food you'll be begging for me to 'invade the kitchen."

Severus chuckled. At least with Hermione he wouldn't be bored. Then, he asked, "I suppose you'll want to maintain your job at the Ministry."

"If I can," she blanched.

"I won't stop you from working. I'm not going to ask you to put your entire life on hold for me," he replied.

"Thank you," she answered. "I may take a break from work anyway."

At first he wondered if she was teasing him, but by the expression on her face he could tell that she was serious. "Do whatever you wish. I honestly never pictured you as a Ministry worker."

"Oh?"

"I always assumed that you'd be one of my colleagues."

She sighed. "I always thought so, too, but Ron didn't like the idea of me studying at the university while he was away playing Quidditch. We argued about it, but when he found me a decent job as a Ministry secretary, I figured I could still make a difference."
"A secretary?" Snape asked.

She nodded. "Sounds stupid looking back doesn't it?"

"Well, you wrote some legislation…"

"I had to bribe Kingsley to even look at it."

"With what?" Severus asked.

Her mouth twisted up. "Ten boxes of chocolate frogs."

Snape's mouth was agape. Hermione began laughing, and soon he joined in, unable to contain himself. After the laughter died down, Hermione asked, "Have you been conducting any research?"

"My resources are limited, but I have a theory on a more powerful serpent anti-venom," Snape answered.

"We almost lost you," Hermione whispered.

"Indeed. The potion almost didn't act quickly enough. I'm trying to remedy that," Snape answered.

Hermione bit her bottom lip. "Part of the anti-venom involves Phoenix tears, correct?"

"Yes," Snape answered.

"But those are rare, and basilisk teeth are even rarer. Have you ever considered using more common ingredients like rattlesnake venom and then altering them to be effective on magical snake bites?"

"I've considered those options and a few potioneers have even experimented with such a process. All so far have failed though,"

"Maybe you need an additional ingredient such as unicorn hair," she mused.

"Intriguing…" Severus replied.

She nodded. "I remember how unicorn blood can sustain life. Obviously it would be inhumane to kill a unicorn, but if we could find the same properties in its hair we may be able to create some type of antivenin prototype. I have a few ideas of you’re interested."

Severus purred. “I am more than interested in hearing your latest ideas.”

He'd never seen the witch's eyes shimmer so brightly.

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"Admit it, you liked the eggplant," Hermione teased as they stepped out of the restaurant.

"I may have found it somewhat adequate," Snape replied.

"You liked it," she answered.

"Maybe," he replied as they began to stroll down the street. They stopped at a corner and waited for the horse carriages to cross the street. "Why, Hermione?"

"Why what?" Hermione asked as they began to cross the street.
"Why did you agree to go on this date? Are you serious about wanting to marry me, or are you using me to make Ron jealous?" Snape asked.

“I am more than serious about becoming your wife.”

“Why?”

Hermione took a shaky breath. "I'll show you in my apartment."

Snape escorted her to her home. Once inside, Hermione locked and bolted the doors. "It wouldn't be fair to spring this on you at the last minute.

"Spring what on me?" Severus asked.

Hermione pulled out a wand and touched it to her stomach. Severus suppressed a gasp as her stomach began to bulge.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for the support! It makes posting this story a joy!
Hermione watched as Severus' eyes grew in proportion to her stomach. Her heart beat slower as the silence wore on. Finally, Severus stated in an emotionless voice, "You're pregnant."

"Yes," Hermione answered softly.

The silence once again dominated them.

"It makes sense," Severus muttered. "It makes sense why you'd want to marry me."

"It was never my intention to deceive you," Hermione answered in a weak voice.

"No, you just don't want your child to be born a bastard," Severus tore his eyes away from Hermione's stomach and refocused them on her face. His eyes still betrayed no emotion. "It makes sense, considering wizard customs."

Tears brimmed at her lower lids. "I remember a woman in my office. I'd just started my job when she became pregnant. She wasn't married; I don't even know who the father was. She, she was fired."

"Thrown into the streets," Severus answered.

Hermione nodded as a tear fell down her cheek. "I'm no fool Severus. I'm not stupid enough to think that they wouldn't do the same to me."

"They'll do worse to you considering your public status," Severus pondered with a flicker of sympathy in his eyes.

"Everyone looked up to me, called me a hero," she choked. The tears now flowed freely. "When the Wizarding World finds out I was stupid enough to become pregnant out of wedlock...this child will never have a moment's peace. The child will only be known as 'that bastard.' My child will spend its entire life being ridiculed for the decisions I made."

Severus exhaled as he tried to set aside his growing discomfort. Hermione continued to fight for her composure, but it was a losing battle.

"I suppose this is Ronald's child."

"Yes."

"Does he know of its existence?"

Hermione's restraint dissolved and she began to weep. Severus' unease faded as he embraced her in an attempt to offer some measure of comfort. She accepted his embrace and cried into his black shirt. Severus shook his head, wondering how Ron could've turned away this woman and his own child.

"The child is the reason for our break up."

"Would you like to sit down, Hermione?"

She lifted her head to squeak out a "yes."
Severus led her to a couch on the other side of the room. As they sat he noticed that it was softer than he was accustomed to, but it was by no means uncomfortable. Hermione buried herself once again in his robes. He debated on massaging her back or offering some other gesture of comfort in addition to his embrace, but he didn't want her to confuse his gesture for desire.

Hermione took a shaky breath and looked back up at him. He wiped the tears from her face with a corner of his cape. She took a shaky breath. "I'm sorry, this is undignified,"

"How far along are you?" Snape asked with no judgment in his voice.

"About sixteen weeks," Hermione replied. She shook her head. "Ron, he came back from break. The first time I was so happy to see him I simply forgot to cast the contraception spell—I know that's stupid. The second time, I knew he hadn't cast the spell right, but I hadn't seen him in a month. Then, I don't know, he wanted to try it without spells because it was more exciting."

"But he never thought about you, did he?" Snape asked.

Hermione sighed. "I suppose not. I was just happy, and in love."

She turned green after saying the word, 'love'. "I told him about it a few days ago."

"Why did you wait so long?" Severus asked.

She sighed. "He was out of town, or the press was there, or something came up. I'd honestly gone two month spans without seeing him due to Quidditch, though I'd write him every day."

"He should've appreciated that," Snape answered.

"I know," she choked. "He'd write sometimes. Still, I thought, no, I knew he loved me. Damnit Severus he loved me!"

New tears flooded her cheeks as she once again began to cry. She buried her face in Severus' clothes, trying desperately to hide her pain. Severus searched for something to say, but none were adequate.

"When I told him," she gasped. "When I told him…"

"Hermione we don't have to," Severus began.

"He told me the child wasn't his," Hermione replied as her breath evened itself out.

"What?" Snape asked.

Hermione nodded. "I told him about a week after his break began. I cooked him a nice meal and we were having a good time. It was lasagna, his favorite. He was so relaxed. I was laughing at his jokes. It was the perfect time to share my news. When I told him about the baby, I thought he'd be happy. I thought he'd want to set a date for our wedding and start our life together. Instead, he looked me in the eyes and said, 'The child isn't mine.'"

"What an arse," Severus muttered.

"He left me on knelt down the floor, pleading for him to accept his child. I tried to convince him to come back, but he told me that he was seeing someone new. If you believe the papers, he has several girlfriends at the moment. Maybe he had them the whole time, I almost don't care anymore," Hermione replied.
She gazed up at Severus. Instead of judgment and pity, she saw comfort and genuine sympathy.
"There was no excuse for Mr. Weasley's behavior."

Hermione sobbed. "Maybe. I don't know."

She took a deep breath and continued to look into his eyes. "I don't want your money," she began in a soft but strong voice. "I don't want you ever to love me. If I never loved again, I would be the happiest woman alive. I also don't want to go back to my parents' house. I don't want to live in the muggle world knowing that my child and I are not like them. I want to stay in this world and make something useful of my life."

Severus nodded, which gave Hermione the courage to continue. "I want to marry you so my child will be legitimate. I want my child to have a good life in this world, not the life of a filthy bastard. You could give my child a name, a sense of legitimacy, a home. That's why I want to marry you."

"I understand," Severus answered.

"I won't ask you to raise her," Hermione continued. "I just want her to have a name."

"Are you sure Ronald won't change his mind?" Severus asked.

"Do you think he will?" Hermione asked.

Severus shook his head. He then examined Hermione. Although her eyes were full of determination, there remained a sense of brokenness within her. He reflected on their time together, and although it had held much promise, he admitted to himself that a child complicated things.

Snape stood up and replied, "Give me some time to consider my options."

"Okay," Hermione whispered.

With that, he stood and left her apartment, wondering how a simple marriage clause could become so complicated so quickly.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support! I'm glad everyone seems to be enjoying things so far!
Severus hadn't reacted the way Hermione had expected.

She'd expected him to scream at her, to berate her for her stupidity at getting into such a predicament and then storm into the night. None of that had happened, which only added to her confusion.

Not that she had any hope of being considered for his bride. With that kind of fortune on the line less scandalous women were bound to land on his doorstep. Still, maybe there was a chance he'd take pity on her...

She buried her head in her pillow. This was Severus Snape she was talking about. She'd never known him to be compassionate. It was too much to hope that he'd have a change of heart now.

She lay on her side and stared into the empty room. Tears trickled from her eyes, though her breathing remained steady. From within her abdomen, she felt a small flutter. She smiled. Hermione put a hand on her stomach and began massaging it, as though to reassure the tiny person within her. "It's okay," she whispered. "You're going to be alright. Mummy will think of something. She won't let us live on the streets."

Hermione sat up straighter as her tears dried. If Snape didn't come through for her, then she'd come up with a new plan. If by some miracle he did, then she was saved.

Either way, she was determined to create some sort of meaningful life for herself and for her child.

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Severus meandered through the streets of Diagon Alley. He couldn’t remember what he was looking for, though he imagined it was an ingredient for a potion. Still, it was hard to think about brewing when every couple of meters he was approached by an unkempt person reeking of cheap alcohol.

"Excuse me, Sir."

Severus looked down. A girl of no more than six stood before him, her green-blue eyes filled with tears. Her clothes, if one could call them that, were of thin cotton, not the luxurious robes most wizards wore, and they were spotted with holes and stains. Her brown hair was matted and tangled, as though it had been neglected for quite some time. He could see smudge marks on her cheeks, as if she had been playing somewhere filthy.

The girl stretched out her hands and begged in a soft voice, "Please sir. Please give me something."

"What do you want?"

"Food, a new shirt, money," the girl answered. "I don't care, I just need something before Mummy…"

There was a crash in the building on their right. The girl's eyes widened as she rushed inside. Severus followed, curious as to the source of the commotion.
He found himself in a tavern where a man stood over a body and a broken table. Others gathered around him, more interested in his words than in the welfare of the person on the floor. "That bitch tried to steal twenty sickles from me!"

The woman raised her head and smirked. Her eyes were still the warm caramel shade that Severus remembered, but they were much harder, much more world-worn. "You weren’t that much fun anyway," the woman sneered as she stood.

The little girl ran to embrace her. "Mummy," she cried.

"Let’s go," the woman answered. Then, both mother and child looked at Severus through haunted eyes. "Hello."

Severus awoke with a start. His heart pounded against his chest as he tried to slow his breathing. He began to calm when he realized that he was still in his bedroom, not strolling down a seedy ally.

He considered returning to sleep, but every time he closed his eyes he saw the look of desperation on the little girl’s face and the hardened look on her mother’s. No matter how Severus tried to convince himself that it was just a dream, it felt real, almost prophetic, unless someone stepped in to prevent it.

Deciding that sleep was futile, he reopened his eyes and dragged himself to the kitchen, where he began to make tea. On the table was a stack of letters from potential suitors. Despite his earlier doubts, four hundred million galleons was enough to attract witches of a certain type. He'd read every single one of the letters, and none of the senders had impressed him. Each woman was a complete dunderhead who only seemed to care about how quickly she could spend his fortune.

Snape set the tea kettle on the stove and sat down at the table. The future he had envisioned for Hermione didn’t necessarily have to come true; after all she was a muggle-born. She could return to the muggle world, but this only made his stomach sink more. He knew from experience that magical beings didn’t belong in the muggle world. Not only would they be freaks as Hermione had suggested, but they would also be vulnerable to the whims of people such as Tobias Snape. Heaven help Hermione and her child if they became involved with someone like him. While he didn’t think that Hermione would tolerate the physical abuse Eileen Prince had, she could nonetheless be vulnerable to the verbal abuse they had endured simply for being different.

Yet, didn’t Severus Snape have a say in this situation? He was not father material, a fact conceded by all who knew him. He had never wanted children, an opinion that had not changed with the years. Still, now that marriage and fatherhood had been thrust upon him, could he live with himself if this child suffered a childhood similar to the one he had? Could he live with himself if this child and its mother suffered in poverty while he lived a life of luxury with a gold-digging dunderhead?

The teapot hissed, interrupting his meditations. He scowled and attended to it. Once he poured himself a cup, he sat back down and took a thoughtful sip.

Why did this child matter so much to him anyway? Bastards were born every day, yet Snape didn’t really think or care too much about it. Granted, none of their mothers had come to him to ask specifically for his help, probably because they knew he would not give them any.

The hoot of an owl interrupted his musings.

Severus flung open the window. The owl flew inside, and deposited ten additional letters. Snape’s stomach sank. Unless he took a wife in the near future the pile was only bound to grow. Maybe someone who wasn’t an idiot would express interest in sharing her life with him, though he doubted his luck in that. He could already tell that most of the respondents were the type of people he feared
and wanted nothing more than to avoid. The only witch he could see himself tolerating for any
length of time was Hermione Granger.

He took another sip as his decision became clear. Snape stood, shook his head to clear his thoughts
and walked to his desk to retrieve a piece of parchment. He might as well get this done and over
with.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading!
"Ronald!" Ginevra called as she stormed towards his bedroom. From inside a bed creaked. "Ronald!"

A woman giggled. Ginny’s muscles constricted. "Ronald!"

"I'll be out in a minute!"

She heard the whispered promises to meet again later. Then, a POP resounded throughout the mansion.

Furious, Ginny renewed her assault on the door.

"Merlin, Ginny hold on a minute!"

"You come out of there right now!"

Ron groaned. Ginny heard more movement from the other side of the door, punctuated by irritable grumbling. The door then swung open. Holes and pelts dotted his robes, which clashed with the color of his sweats. He yawned. "What brings you here at eight o'clock in the morning?"

"Hermione," Ginny retorted.

"What about her?" Ron asked before stretching.

"She's heartbroken without you. All she does is sit around and mope! Ronald, you have to come back to her! She needs you!"

"Bloody hell Ginny," Ron groaned as he wiped the sleep out of his eyes. "Is that all you came here to say to me?"

"Isn't that enough?" Ginny asked. "She loves you, and you love her. Isn't your love reason enough for you to reconcile with her?"

He shook his head. "She doesn't love me Ginny. She only wanted to trap me into marriage. When she couldn't do that, she went crazy on me!"

"What?" Ginny snapped.

Ron gave her a look. "She hasn't told you?"

"Told me what?" Ginny asked.

"About her condition. Has she told you about her condition?"

“What condition?"

Ron stepped out of the doorway and walked past Ginny. He motioned for her to follow him, which she did. Ron led her to the living room, where they both sat down on a ragged orange couch. “I broke up with Hermione because she cheated on me.”
"How do you know she cheated on you?" Ginny asked, more in interest than in anger.

"Because she's pregnant," Ron replied.

"What?" Ginny shrieked.

Ron nodded. "She's preggers, and I know that it's not mine."

"How?"

"Because we always used contraceptive spells, always!"

Ginny sat back and put her head in her hands. "No, no. None of this can be true."

"It is," Ron replied.

"Hermione...she's completely in love with you! She waited for you to come home! You were all she ever talked about! No, it just didn't happen that way! She, she would've told me if she was pregnant!"

"Well she told me all about her bun in the oven."

"How, how far along is she?"

"She claimed to get pregnant when I was last around," Ron answered. "So sometime around New Years."

"Then the child is yours?" Ginny asked.

"No, because we used protection!" Ron snapped. "I don't know who her child's father is, but it's not me!"

"You liar," Ginny growled. "I can see it in your eyes! You're lying through your teeth! Did you only dump Hermione because she was pregnant?"

"No!" Ron replied. "I was getting tired of having only one woman, of not playing the field. When she tried to trap me with the baby, well, that's when I knew that we were over!"

"You two are not over!" Ginny argued as her face became almost as red as her hair. "You two have a child together! You two love each other! You should be begging for her to come back!"

"My mind's made up! We're over!" Ron argued.

"Then tell me, what if the child is yours?" Ginny retorted. "Are you really willing to have your child labeled as a bastard? We both know the social disgrace the child will be facing if you do! Hermione will be an outcast from Wizarding society! No one will ever give her a job or want to help her! As for your child, could you imagine it growing up with the stigma of being a bastard, not to mention the poverty it may endure? Think of when it goes to Hogwarts! Its peers will look down on it, and bully it mercilessly! Do you really want that fate for your child?"

"She should've thought of her child's fate before she spread her legs for another man! I will never claim that child as mine!"

Ginny smacked Ron right across the mouth. "You are repulsive, you know that? I almost can't believe that you're my brother!"
"You know deep down inside that I'm doing what's right," Ron argued. "You're just too blindly devoted to Hermione to admit it!"

"Go rot in hell!" Ginny stood up. "Any man who would forsake his own child is no brother of mine!"

With that, Ginny gave him one last glare and marched out the door. Ron rubbed his mouth and muttered, "Ouch."

"Ginny?"

"What?"

"Tell me, has Hermione seen anyone since I've left."

Ginny stomped towards him. Ron smirked. "I'm right aren't I? There is another man in her life."

Ginny pulled out her wand and performed the bat-bogey hex. Ron screamed as she smiled in satisfaction. Then she left.

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At first Hermione thought that the faint tap on the window was a part of a dream. As she floated back into consciousness, though, the noise became more insistent. Once she heard the squawk, she was fully awake.

Her back popped as she sat up. Hermione knew she shouldn't have slept on the couch, but between her weeping and hoping Severus would pull through, she was too exhausted to make it to her bedroom. She opened the window, allowing the bird in. "No treat."

She untied the letter and began reading the contents. Her face lit up as she read the last sentence. "Well baby, we may not be so doomed after all. Severus wants to see us."

The baby flipped inside her.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading!
Hermione swallowed as she stepped towards his front door. While she hadn't spent much time speculating about Severus' house, she hadn't envisioned this. The house looked as if it had seen better days, though it was by no means structurally unsound. Maybe if someone cut the grass… added a fresh coat of paint…

She set her thoughts aside and knocked on the door. Hearing no response, she knocked again, this time much harder.

"I will be with you shortly!" Severus called from inside the house.

Hermione's arm dropped to her side as his footsteps grew louder. Severus opened the door, his face betraying no emotion. He examined her, as if to determine whether or not she was actually standing before him. While she tried to maintain a stoic facade, he could see both fear and hope in her eyes. He would need to proceed with caution if he wanted this visit to go according to his plan.

"Thank you for coming," he backed away and gestured for her to enter.

"I was honestly surprised that you owled me," she strolled inside.

"We have things to discuss."

Hermione nodded as he closed the door behind her. He led her into a tiny sitting room. Its furnishings matched the general condition of the house, a bit faded and frayed around the edges. She would never think to rock her baby in the rocking chair in the corner; it appeared too fragile to support even one person.

"Impressive isn't it?" Severus asked.

"I, I didn't mean to stare," she began as her face flushed.

"Think nothing of it. I'm very aware of the condition of my house," Severus answered as he motioned for her to sit down.

Hermione swallowed as she sat on the faded leather couch. It was firmer than she tended to like, but it was far from uncomfortable. "The couch is nice."

"I don't believe you came here to discuss my furniture with me," he replied, his face as impassive as ever.

"No," she admitted.

He scanned her again. "I see that you didn't charm your stomach."

She put a hand over her lump. "There was no point in hiding it from you."

"Agreed," Severus answered before a whistle sounded from the kitchen. "Would you like some tea?"

"Yes," she replied.
He stepped out to tend the teapot. The whistle was soon replaced by the clink of cups on saucers and the sounds of pouring and stirring. Snape then returned with the steaming brew. She accepted a cup and replied, "Thank you."

Severus sat on a faded green wing-back to her right. "I've been considering your offer," he began. "Oh," she squirmed under his gaze.

"I wonder if you realize the full implications of this scheme you propose," Snape continued.

"I thought we'd both benefit," Hermione replied. "I thought that my child would have a name, and you would have your fortune."

"Yes, but you forget about my… lack of affinity for children," Severus replied.

"I thought about that," Hermione took a sip of tea. "But I figured two intelligent people could work together to provide some sort of happy life for this baby."

He took a sip, his expression still unreadable.

"I was just holding out hope that we were the answer to each others' problems," Hermione continued.

"You need to consider your options carefully. After all I come with my own baggage," Severus warned. "I am a solitary man and I have no intention of changing. You also know that I am irritable, as well as obstinate. I have no intention of changing those traits either. If you agree to this arrangement, you will have to accept me as I am."

"I will," Hermione promised as she considered his words. "I suppose it's only fair to warn you that I don't like to be told what to do. I refuse to be married to a man who has planned out my whole life for me. Also, I am still just as big a know-it-all as I was at Hogwarts. That will never change. While I'm at it, I really hate it when men don't lower the toilet seat."

"Duly noted," Severus answered as his eyes flickered in humor, then he grew serious. "There is one factor we haven't discussed."

"My child," she answered as her face fell.

Severus took a deep breath. "Most wizards wouldn't be fool enough to mess with their bloodlines by claiming as their own a child they know isn't theirs. It's an issue of pride as much as preserving the bloodline."

Hermione lowered her head as she braced herself for his rejection.

"I'm not one of them," Severus continued. "I couldn't care less about who my heir is."

Her face lit up. "Thank you."

"My issue is that I have no desire to make room in my life for children. I only considered resuming teaching in order to set aside earnings for my own apothecary. I have never cared for children, and children do not care for me. I suspect that you will find this unacceptable," Severus took another sip of tea.

"I don't want my child to have a father who hates it," Hermione softly asserted.

"I would never hate your child," Severus promised. "I would never allow it to grow up with the
hostility and resentment I experienced. But I also would not be the kind of dad who would make funny faces or tickle it in public."

"But you'd love my baby?" Hermione asked.

"I would never make your baby feel as though he or she was a burden to me. I would never make your child feel as though he or she was unwanted. That's all I can promise, I'm afraid," Snape replied.

Hermione lowered her head in thought. Finally she looked him directly in the eyes and replied, "That's better than Ron or anyone else will offer my child. I just wonder if you think you could ever grow to like him or her."

Severus sighed and set the cup on the wooden structure attempting to pass for a coffee table. "Let's just say that I already feel some form of empathy for your child."

"You do?"

"Yes. I don’t want it to have my childhood. No one should have to endure what I did."

"Were you a bastard?" Hermione blurted out.

She covered her mouth the second the question escaped her mouth.

Severus shook his head and exhaled. "No, but I was close enough for my grandmother."

Hermione lowered her tea cup, deciding to leave that subject. "Does this mean you'll marry me?"

"You're the only non-dunderhead who's responded to my proposal," he answered. "I suppose the answer is then, will you marry me?"

"Yes… Yes I will." She breathed in relief. "Thank you, Severus. You won't regret this."

She reached over to embrace him. Severus took a deep breath and returned the gesture. "I should warn you that I am not used to showing affection," he replied. "I suppose that could change somewhat."

"Children need to be touched… to be hugged," Hermione answered before she released him. "Adults do, too." "

"I'll remember those things," Severus promised.

Silence filled the room. "Do, do you think anyone will question my child’s paternity?" Hermione finally asked.

Severus smirked. "They may have their suspicions, but as I said, most wizards wouldn't claim a baby that wasn't their own. Given my ex-Death eater status people will believe I cherish bloodlines all the more. That should be enough to satisfy most people’s curiosity."

"Thank you Severus," she replied. "I wish there was a way I could repay you."

"Just play your part," he answered.

"I will," Hermione promised.

"Good. Now we need to set a wedding date…"
"Next week?"

Severus gave her a look. "Are you that eager, Miss Granger?"

She shrugged. "It might be best to marry while my concealing charm is still effective."

"Makes sense," Severus replied. "Do you care where the wedding is?"

"Not particularly."

"Courthouse it is then."

"I do have a question though."

"What?"

"Who's going to make the wedding announcement?"

Severus’ stomach sank.

"We could flip a coin…” Hermione suggested.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading! It's great to know people enjoy my work!
"Tell me again why we're here," Hermione began as they continued on the path to the mansion entrance.

Severus exhaled. "Because Lucius is a dear friend of mine and deserves to hear about our impending nuptials before we announce it to the press. Besides, you wanted to tell Ginevra about our proposal in person."

"When I said that, I was thinking we could talk in private, not in front of Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco," Hermione answered.

"I thought you said that you and the Malfoys got along better these days," Severus said as they stopped at the door.

"We do," she replied before she bit her lip. "But that doesn't mean I count them among my close friends. I’m not thrilled with the prospect of telling them I'm pregnant."

"It's not like you'll be able to hide your condition from them in five months," Severus replied with a quirk of the eyebrow.

"True," she sighed.

Severus prepared to knock on the door, but a sharp intake of breath made him glance at Hermione once again. The discomfort in her eyes had become full-fledged fear. He lowered his hand. "Should we ask the Malfoys to meet us somewhere else?"

"No," she answered. "I've been here a few times since the Great War. I'm just nervous about what they'll say to us."

"They can't hurt you Hermione. Ginevra and I won't let them," he replied.

She nodded. “Okay.”

Severus searched her eyes. Her eyes had softened, but she bit her lips again. He waited another minute before asking, "Are you ready to enter now?"

"I think so," she replied.

Severus raised his hand and knocked on the door. "Coming!" a high-pitched voice called.

They stood in silence as the door opened to reveal a tiny house elf. "Master Snape! Mistress Granger! Lucius waits for you!"

"Thank you," Snape replied as he stepped in, Hermione following close behind.

"How are you?" she asked the elf as it shut the door

"Fine. Work is fine," it answered before ushering them to the living room.

Lucius sat on a plush white chair, tapping his fingers against the armrest to a rhythm only he could
hear. Narcissa sat in a similar chair beside him, her eyes bright with curiosity. Ginevra and Draco sat snuggled on the green leather couch. Though they were barely touching each other, Hermione could see from their expressions that they wanted to be at home in their bedroom.

"Severus," Lucius began before noticing Hermione behind him. "Good grief Ginevra, I told you not to use this mansion to enhance your social life."

"I didn't invite Hermione," the red head answered.

"Then why is she here?" Lucius asked as Hermione crept closer to Snape.

"I invited her," Snape interrupted.

The spark of curiosity in Narcissa's eyes flared. "Really?"

"Yes really, Severus. Why is she here?" Lucius asked.

"Because she is part of what I need to discuss with you," Snape answered.

"What did you need to discuss with us?" Draco interrupted.

"The will," Severus answered, thankful that the conversation was back on track.

Silence filled the room.

"No way in Merlin…" Lucius muttered.

"I wanted to tell you all before it hit the press that I intend to make Hermione Granger my wife," Severus announced.

Severus examined their faces. Lucius looked as though he'd just been hit by a train, Narcissa appeared to be trying to piece everything together, Draco was shaking his head, while Ginevra’s lower lip quivered. He glanced at Hermione, who remained stoic.

"Screw you Ron," Ginevra growled, breaking the tense silence.

"What does Ronald have to do with any of this?" Lucius demanded as he began to recover from his shock.

Severus turned to Hermione, who pulled out her wand. After steadying her shaking hand, she removed the concealment charm. "Oh Merlin!" Lucius gasped.

"You got Hermione pregnant?" Draco exclaimed.

"Ron did, and he's not coming back to help her!" Ginevra shouted.

All eyes turned to her. She covered her mouth, realizing the damage that had been done.

"Ginevra," Lucius began in a low, threatening voice, "What are you not telling us?"

"I'm pregnant," Hermione interrupted as a wave of courage overtook her.

"Is Severus the father?" Lucius demanded.

"I will be after we're married," Severus replied in a firm voice.

Lucius turned to Ginevra. "Ronald's the father, isn't he?"
"He's denying it," Ginevra admitted.

Lucius shook his head. "Severus, really? You have almost six more months. You don't need to get married tomorrow. Surely there are less scandalous women out there who you could consider for your bride."

"Who I wed is not your decision to make," Severus answered.

"Don't act like some spoiled teenager," Lucius hissed. "You know as well as I do the value that wizards put on their bloodlines." Lucius then pointed to Hermione. "Even a muggleborn like her understands the value of having blood heirs, not just some bastard adoptee!"

"I also know the law," Severus furrowed his eyebrows. "As far as Wizarding law is concerned, the minute she marries me, her baby is mine."

"Maybe we could help you, Hermione," Ginevra interjected. "We could give you money, maybe give you a new home…"

"Thank you for the offer," Hermione interrupted. "But I won't live off your charity simply because you feel guilty."

"What do you call what he's doing?" Lucius demanded.

"With Severus I could at least eventually have a career and my child could have some sort of legitimacy," Hermione argued.

"Severus, is this really your best choice? Can you not wait another few months to find someone more worthy?" Lucius asked.

"I need the money as soon as possible," Severus replied, "and I can tolerate Hermione."

"What about the child?" Narcissa chimed in.

All eyes turned to her. "You've never been one to like children," she elaborated. "Why take on a child so soon?"

Severus stared at a speck on lint on the floor, buying time to formulate his response. After several moments, he looked into Narcissa’s eyes and answered in a soft voice, "Because I need an heir, and this child needs a name."

Narcissa studied his eyes. While she sensed the honesty in his words, she could also see something else entirely, a compassion that wasn't there before, almost as though he already felt a connection to the child. "It's because you had no one, isn't it? That's why you're agreeing to this marriage."

Severus did not say anything, though his eyes told her all she needed to know.

"Cissy don't romanticize this," Lucius began before turning back to Ginevra. "You get your worthless brother back here right now so he can marry his woman and Severus can find himself a proper wife."

"He won't come," Ginevra answered.

"I won't take him back anyway," Hermione interjected. "We're over."

"Damnit Granger," Lucius growled.
"You can either support me or not," Snape demanded. "The facts remain: we are getting married, I will receive my fortune, and her child will become my heir!"

"You're making a huge mistake," Lucius warned.

"Hermione maybe you should think this over. Marriage is a lifelong commitment. You shouldn’t get married out of fear for yourself or your child," Ginevra began.

"Our decision is final," Hermione insisted. "We are going to be husband and wife."

"Severus, I'm speaking as your friend!" Lucius answered. "You are making a mistake! Please rethink this."

He shook his head.

"I support your decision."

Everyone looked over at Narcissa, who gave Severus and Hermione a compassionate smile. "If you need any help, call me."

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

"Indeed," Snape answered.

The couple then spun around and exited the room before Lucius could get another word in.

"Narcissa!" he barked. "You're just going to sit back and let this happen?"

"I'm simply trying to be a friend."

"Hermione deserves better!" Ginevra interrupted.

"Hermione deserves better?" Lucius blurted out. "It's your irresponsible brother who got her pregnant. No, forget that! Hermione's the one who spread her legs. It's Severus who deserves better!"

"Maybe they deserve each other," Narcissa interrupted.

She stood up and glided out of the room with a confident smile on her face. Draco put his head in his hands and groaned, not knowing what to believe.

Chapter End Notes

Wow 1000 views! Thanks so much for reading and supporting me!
"I knew it!" Ron shouted as he threw the *Daily Prophet* across the bed.

"Knew what?" the woman beside him asked as she draped herself over him and began to kiss his neck.

Ron pointed to the newspaper on the floor. "Hermione! There was another man in her life!"

"Why are you thinking about her?" the girl murmured before moving up to his earlobe.

Ron shuddered in pleasure. "Hermione tried to trap me into marriage with a baby. Now she's marrying the real father."

The woman stopped her assault on his ear. "Wait, you dumped Hermione because she was pregnant?"

“Only because I knew the baby wasn’t mine. I knew she was cheating on me, but I couldn’t prove who it was. Now I know. Her baby belongs to Severus Snape,” Ron replied.

“Wait, Severus Snape?” the woman gasped. “As in the greasy git, dungeon bat, and all around the scariest professor Hogwarts has ever hired?"

“That’s him. Hermione cheated on me with him.”

"You poor thing!" the woman swooned before capturing his lips.

Ron returned the gesture and pulled her on top of him, playing the role of scorned ex-lover to perfection.

Inside, he was rejoicing. Now his dirty little secret was safe. When Hermione gave birth, the child would be Severus Snape's problem not his. He might even be able to win public sympathy by crying about how much it hurt to know that Hermione had cheated on him. Hell, if he wanted he could start right now. She would start showing soon, and any man would be horrified if their fiancee left him for Snape.

Everything was turning out just great.

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"No!" Minerva gasped as she slammed the paper onto the table.

"What?" Slughorn asked from his seat to her left.

"Severus is taking a wife," Minerva announced.

"What?" Neville asked from her right.

The Headmistress sighed as a few of the students stopped eating to stare at the commotion. "If Severus Snape could not find a wife and marry within six months he would lose his grandmother's fortune to Hogwarts."
"He's getting married!" Neville’s smile was too bright for Minerva’s liking. "To whom?"

"Yes, who's the unfortunate sap?" Slughorn asked.

The headmistress picked up the paper and continued reading the article. Her eyes widened when she read the name. "He's marrying Hermione Granger."

"Hermione?" Slughorn asked.

"Hermione," Neville pondered.

Slughorn yanked the paper away from Minerva and scanned the front page article for himself. "Why?" Slughorn asked.

"I don't know," Minerva answered.

"Ron and Hermione just broke up, but I never thought she'd be the kind to marry on the rebound," Neville mused.

"Is that the reason?" Minerva asked, still grasping for some explanation.

"Maybe the money enticed her," Slughorn asked. "Four hundred million Galleons is a lot to pass up."

"No, Hermione was never a gold digger." The Headmistress answered.

"Maybe she wanted to help Severus," Neville suggested.

"Isn't marriage going a little above and beyond help?" the Headmistress asked.

Neville shrugged. "Maybe she likes him."

"Excuse me?" Minerva questioned.

"Maybe she thinks they'd be compatible. After her disaster of a relationship with Ron she wants to spend her life with someone who couldn't be more different from him. Maybe she’s decided that she wants an intellectual connection instead of a purely emotional one. It's romantic in an odd way," Neville replied.

"That doesn't make any sense," Slughorn argued.

"None of this does," Minerva answered.

"Still, this is Hermione Granger we're speaking of," Slughorn pondered. "She loves Hogwarts, correct?"

"Of course she does," Minerva replied.

"Then perhaps we could talk her out of this marriage," Slughorn answered. “If she understands what’s at stake for the school she'll call off this engagement.”

"But what if this marriage is good for her?" Neville asked.

"What if her non-marriage is better for Hogwarts?" Slughorn asked.

"Good point," Minerva replied. "I'll speak with her tomorrow."
"I cannot fully express how good it feels to return to my true form," Fenrir began as he reentered the previously oppressive blue tent.

"I'm starting to get the idea. I've been hearing you howl about it for days," Scabior answered without taking his eyes off the latest *Daily Prophet*.

Fenrir snarled as he ripped the paper away. "This is no time for reading. It's time for planning."

"Planning what?" Scabior asked.

Fenrir smirked. "Vengeance on all the people who put me in that deplorable state for so long."

"I was hoping you'd say that," Scabior answered as his eyes flashed in interest. Then his face fell. "But how? Only the Chief Snatcher escaped with us."

"Where is he?"

"He's in the woods about thirty kilometers from here. Once you escaped I contacted him. He should be here within the next hour."

"Perfect," Fenrir purred. "Are the rest of the Death Eaters dead?"

"Bellatrix LeStrange has been lost, along with a few others. Most were imprisoned at Azkaban."

"Good, I can still use them."

"How?" Scabior asked. "We can't exactly go up to a guard and say, 'Hey! Could you please release this list of prisoners so we can revive the Death Eaters'?"

Fenrir snarled at him, but then paused. "You have a point. We're going to need a strategy not only to release them from prison, but also to win their allegiance."

"How do you plan to convince a bunch of Death Eaters to follow a werewolf?"

"I have a plan," Fenrir assured him. "But before I can implement that plan we'll need to do some, well, cleaning up. Tie up a few loose ends."

"Like?"

"Ronald Weasley and Neville Longbottom need to pay for what they did to me. I may have let my guard down once, but that won't happen again. This time, I will catch them off guard."

"How?"

"I remember reading about Longbottom's shiny new greenhouse. That will be the first thing to go."

"You're going to attack Hogwarts?" Scabior gasped.

Fenrir smirked. "Well that certainly would come as a surprise to everyone now, wouldn't it?"

"True, but then what of Weasley? How do you plan to take revenge on him?"

"Does he still have that delicious girlfriend, Granger?"

"Not anymore," Scabior answered.
"Oh?" Fenrir asked.

Scabior retrieved the paper and pointed to the article. "Weasley and Granger split. She's marrying Severus Snape."

"Interesting," Fenrir commented. "I suppose I can save her for later, then. The Death Eaters will want Snape after all. I wouldn't want to spoil it for them."

"Yes, assuming that you can get the Death Eaters behind you."

Fenrir barred his teeth. "Trust me, I know exactly what to do."

Chapter End Notes

He's back...

Thanks again for reading!
Chapter 13

Hermione took a deep breath before climbing up the long and winding staircase to the Headmistress' office. While she'd been surprised to receive a message from Minerva, Snape had not. When she’d shown it to him he'd shaken his head and grumbled something unintelligible under his breath.

Hermione frowned. It was horrible that a rift had developed between Severus and Minerva. Even more horrible was the fact that few people were interested in hearing Severus' side of the war, much less defend his role in it. Maybe once Hermione married Severus people would begin to see him differently, as a hero worthy of kindness, or at the very least respect. Severus may not want his marriage to become a PR campaign, but Hermione owed him for helping her out of this mess. Improving his image was the least she could do.

She stopped in the middle of the staircase to catch her breath. Looking down at her charmed stomach, she whispered, "I had much more energy before you came along."

The baby flipped within her. Hermione smiled. “At least someone has energy today.”

The baby flipped once more.

When the fluttering in Hermione's stomach ceased she took a deep breath and finished her trek upwards.

"Password," the gargoyle demanded before his eyes widened in recognition. "Hermione Granger?"

She nodded as she steadied her breathing. “Hello.”

"Where have you been? We've missed you," he replied.

Hermione's breathing began to even out. "I've been working at the ministry."

"Oh! I'll bet you're already next in line to be the Minister of Magic!" he exclaimed.

"Sure," she answered as she felt a pang of disappointment in herself.

"Anyway, Minerva's very eager to see you again! What's the password?"

"Albus' Army," she replied.

"Enter," the gargoyle replied as the door opened.

"Thanks," Hermione answered.

She stepped into the room and took a quick glance around, enjoying the sensation of being someplace so familiar, a place which had been her second home. Then she thought of Ron and all the times they'd come up to the office together due to some type of mischief. Her throat constricted as she worked to repress the memory of his smile and the way he'd teased her.

"Hermione?"

Her face lit up as she turned to greet the Headmistress. Minerva stood up from her desk and stepped
in front of it to embrace Hermione, who returned the gesture. Minerva's eyebrows rose in surprise. Why was there a bulge between her and the former student?

"It's good to see you Hermione," Minerva began.

"I'm happy to see you as well. I've missed you so much," Hermione replied.

The women released each other. Once again Minerva looked down for the source of the mysterious pressure, but she couldn't see anything amiss. Hermione appeared to be the same weight she’d always been, and her figure hadn’t changed. Odd.

Minerva returned her gaze to Hermione, who was oblivious to the headmistress' confusion. "Why don't you have a seat?" Minerva suggested, indicating a cushioned chair across from her desk.

"Thank you," Hermione replied as she sat.

The Headmistress returned to her place at her desk. "Thank you for coming," she began. "Would you like a jellybean?"

"No thanks," Hermione answered, a hint of green flashing across her complexion.

"Very well then."

Hermione shifted her eyes from Minerva plopping a jelly bean into her mouth to her flat stomach. There was a flash of pure joy as she gazed at it.

Minerva cleared her throat. "I suppose you're wondering why I asked you to come."

"Yes," Hermione returned her attention to the headmistress. "I am curious as to why I'm here."

Minerva locked eyes with her. "I need you to call off your wedding to Severus Snape."

"Excuse me?" Hermione snapped, offended by the abrupt request.

"Hermione, I have no idea what Severus is offering you or why you would even think to become his wife, but I must ask you for the sake of Hogwarts to call off this inadvisable engagement," Minerva replied.

"Why, why?" she stuttered. "Hogwarts has plenty of patrons and benefactors. Why do you need Severus' money?"

"Enrollment is down and we are struggling to cover expenses," Minerva answered.

"So let me get this straight," Hermione began as her muscles began to tense. "You keep Severus from reclaiming his old job, refuse to help him find another employer, force him to live off a small pension from the Ministry, and now you want to take away his rightful inheritance?"

"Hermione, it wasn't quite like that," Minerva replied.

"Well then, what was it like?" she sputtered, her face growing redder by the second.

Minerva sighed. "The parents would have revolted if I'd allowed an Ex-Death Eater to teach here. You must understand that."

"Severus was a spy, not a Death Eater."
"The parents wouldn't have seen it that way."

"They may have if you'd bothered to explain his role in the war to them!"

She shook her head. "Hermione, I understand that you think you're helping Severus by becoming his wife. You aren't. You are damning yourself to a lifetime with an ill-tempered man who will only make you miserable. Surely you see that, don't you?"

Hermione gulped. "I don't have a choice but to becomes his spouse."

"Of course you have a choice!" Minerva insisted. “You could reconcile with Ron, or date another wizard. I hear being single is not detrimental to one’s health.”

"I suppose this will be in the papers next week," she muttered as she pulled out her wand.

"What are you doing?" Minerva asked.

She muttered an incarnation, which caused her stomach to grow.

"Hermione!" the Headmistress gasped.

"This is Severus Snape's heir," Hermione announced.

"You, you willingly had sex outside the sacred bonds of marriage?" Minerva squeaked.

"Yes," Hermione answered.

"Oh Merlin," Minerva groaned.

"If I were to call off my engagement to Severus, would you give me a teaching job here so I could provide for my child?" Hermione asked.

Minerva put her head in her hand. "You know as well as I do that professors must set a good example for the next generation. If I hired you, it would tell the students that bearing children out of wedlock is acceptable. It would encourage sexual promiscuity as well as other immoral behaviors. The parents would withdraw even more children from the school, funds would dry up, and even Priscilla Prince's fortune wouldn't be able to save us."

"I knew you would say that," Hermione answered.

"Hermione..." Minerva began

"That's why I'm marrying Severus. He has no qualms with taking care of me and my child."

"Why, Hermione? Why did you sleep with Severus of all wizards? I thought you were planning to marry Ron! Where is your Gryffindor loyalty?"

"Things change," Hermione answered as she cast the spell to hide her bulging stomach.

"Minerva!"

They both turned towards the shriek. Minerva sighed. "There's no chance that you would change your mind then, I suppose."

"No," Hermione answered.
"Minerva! We're in danger! We're in great danger!" the woman screamed outside.

"Password," the gargoyle began.

"Grim!" she cried.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading, giving me kudos, and commenting! It means a lot to me.
"Sybill what in Merlin's name are you shouting about?" Minerva asked.

"It's horrible!" Professor Trelawney panicked as she burst through the door.

Hermione rolled her eyes.

Professor Trelawney pointed to her former student. "You should beware, too!"

"Beware of what?" Minerva shut the door.

"My vision," Trelawney hissed. "The vision I just had!"

Hermione shook her head. Oh Merlin.

"You may not believe me, but the grim is after you too! I saw it!" Sybil shouted at Hermione.

"The what?" The Headmistress asked.

"I was teaching a class," Sybill began. "I was teaching when suddenly everything went dark. I looked up. There was a grim holding a crystal ball! It looked at me, smiled, and conked me on the head with it! I collapsed, but the assault continued! I screamed for help, but a fire sprang up around the grim! Then everything went black, my breath stopped. I died!"

Professor Trelawney crumpled to the floor and began to weep. Minerva went over to comfort her while Hermione remained in her chair.

"It's okay Trelawney," Minerva rubbed the other woman's back. "It was only a vision."

"But it's real!" she insisted. "I saw the grim! It's a bad omen! I'm going to die! Oh Merlin I'm going to die!"

"It could be a false vision," Hermione uttered.

"What would you know?" Trelawney shot back. "You've never had a love for divination!"

"Hermione has a point. You've had false visions in the past," Minerva replied.

Sybill shot up, her eyes aflame. "Damnit I'm going to die! I'm going to die and that's final! Oh Merlin, I need to make a will, prepare my things…"

Professor Trelawney continued to mutter as she huffed out of the room. Hermione sighed. "That was certainly interesting."

"Indeed," Minerva stood up. "I wouldn't put too much stock in it though. I just hope she hasn't traumatized her students."

Hermione nodded as she stood up. "I need to go."

"Please reconsider your engagement Hermione, if only for the sake of your child. He or she could
find a home here, a good home, if you allow us to inherit that money,” Minerva replied.

Hermione shook her head. "I can't force my child to live his or her first years on the streets. Severus will be good to us. He will provide us with a wonderful home.”

"Are you sure?” Minerva asked.

Hermione glared at her. "Goodbye, Headmistress."

Hermione stood up and stormed out of the office. As she climbed down the stairs she tried to keep her anger in check for the sake of her baby, but it was becoming more difficult by the second. How dare Minerva damn her and her child to a life of social disgrace simply so the school could have more money? How dare Minerva preach morality to her when she had stood by and done nothing when Severus was struggling after the war? Had Minerva always been this callous? Was this the real Minerva McGonagall?

"Hermione?"

She stopped at the bottom of the stairs and looked to her right. Neville smiled and approached her.

"Neville!” she exclaimed before embracing him.

"I just had to see you while you were here,” he replied as he embraced her.

She sighed. "Let me guess, the school needs more money."

"No," Neville replied. "The fortune rightfully belongs to Professor Snape. Priscilla was his grandmother, not Minerva’s."

"Thank you," Hermione sighed.

"Besides, I think it's nice that he has someone in his life. Maybe he'll be less miserable with you around,” Neville proposed.

"We'll see,” Hermione answered with a raised eyebrow.

Neville smiled, noting how similar Hermione’s sceptical glance was to that of her future husband. "I think you two will be great together. I just wanted to congratulate you on your wedding and to give you this."

Neville stepped to his right to pick up a black rose in a pot. "It's beautiful!” Hermione gasped. Then she inhaled the scent and laughed. "It's also very Snape."

"I thought of you two when I pruned it this morning. If you want to use it for your wedding, you may,” Neville offered.

"I'll consider it,” she replied as she accepted the plant.

"The paper said that you two were going to get married next week. Where will the ceremony be?” he asked.

"In a courthouse," she replied. "We want something low-key. This marriage hasn't exactly been popular with the people we've told."

Neville chuckled. "They'll see the light."
"Professor Longbottom!" a student called.

"I should be going," he replied. "Take care!"

"I will," Hermione promised before he turned to walk away. Then Hermione called, "Neville?"

"Yes?"

"Would you like to attend the wedding?"

His eyes lit up. "I'd love to! Just floo me with the details!"

"I will!" she promised.

With that, Neville turned to assist the student. Hermione strolled away, pleased that her visit to Hogwarts wasn’t entirely unproductive.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support!
Severus stared at the cobalt vase which contained the black roses, wondering why Neville Longbottom of all people would support his upcoming nuptials. True, Neville and Hermione had been close during their years at Hogwarts, but it was no secret that the current herbology professor had been terrified of Snape. Maybe he hoped that Hermione would change him, make him softer, so to speak. Severus smirked. No woman would ever be able to accomplish that feat.

A delicate knock jarred Severus from his musings. He raised an eyebrow, wondering if he'd imagined it. Then another, more forceful knock resonated through the house. He sighed and stood up, wishing that he could've enjoyed one of his last days of bachelorhood in solitary peace.

"I'm coming," he called when the third knock sounded. He strolled to the door and opened it.

"Hello Severus," Lucius began, taking note of Severus' cold expression.

"Lucius," he answered as he allowed him entry into his house. "What brings you to my doorstep?"

Lucius took a deep breath as Severus closed the door. "Is your fiancée here?"

"No," Severus replied, his voice distant. "She's out shopping for a wedding dress with your daughter-in-law."

"Oh."

"Did you need to speak to her?"

"No," he answered a little too quickly.

Severus gestured towards the sitting room. Without a word Lucius glided inside, where Snape offered him a place on the couch. Lucius made himself comfortable while Severus returned to his chair.

"You still haven't told me why you're here," Severus began.

Lucius exhaled. "I came to apologize for my outburst the other day. I should not have criticized you the way I did."

"You should not have," Severus replied with an edge of hostility.

"I honestly thought I was doing the right thing," Lucius continued, undeterred. "I truly believed you'd have a better chance of success if you married a woman who, well, wasn't already with another man's child."

"I told you what I was looking for in a woman. Hermione is as close as I've come to finding someone who measures up to my requirements."

"You honestly don't think you can do better?"

Severus' expression softened. "No, I don't."
Lucius examined Severus' face. There was something in his eyes, something on which Narcissa had commented after their earlier confrontation. "Narcissa mentioned something about you empathizing with the child,"

"It's not the child's fault it has a dunderhead for a father," Severus replied as a fire ignited in his eyes. Lucius shook his head. "I still believe that your altruism is misplaced."

"What would you have me do then?" Severus asked. "Turn Hermione and her offspring out onto the streets?"

"What if the marriage doesn't work out?" Lucius asked.

"I told you," Severus replied. "The divorce settlement will be more than enough to compensate for any damage to her reputation. Even if she is disgraced, she and her child will be able to live comfortably."

Lucius nodded. "It seems that you have everything planned out."

"It would seem so," Severus replied, his expression now much friendlier.

Lucius smiled before catching a scent in the air. He turned and noticed the black roses. "Severus! Where did you get those?"

"Neville Longbottom gave them to Hermione who in turn gave them to me. According to her Mr. Longbottom is rather excited about our upcoming wedding."

"Does he think Hermione will tame you?"

"People have been known to suffer from far less outrageous delusions."

"True enough." Lucius inhaled their scent again. "These roses have a wonderful fragrance. Still you don’t seem to be the type who’d have flowers in his home. Why did Hermione give them to you?"

"They reminded her of me," he answered. "And she believed I needed at least one beautiful thing in my house."

Before Lucius could continue, they heard a pounding on the front door. Both men sat up with a jolt. "Snape! Open up!"

"Oh for the love of Merlin," Snape groaned.

"Open this door right now!"

Lucius smirked. "Good luck."

Severus stood up and grumbled, "Thanks."

Severus walked towards the door. Lucius followed him, just to get a glimpse of the action. Severus flung the door open and asked, "What is it now, Mr. Potter?"

***

Hermione stared into the mirror as Ginny placed a tiara on her head. "You really do look beautiful."

"Thanks," Hermione answered. "Still, the dress is awfully expensive."
Ginevra shrugged. "I told you that I would pay for everything."

"Yes, but a thousand Galleons?" Hermione asked.

Ginny smiled. "Draco takes me out to lunch for as much. This is nothing for me."

Hermione's eyes expanded. "Where does he take you?"

Ginny's eyes gleamed. "To restaurants that only serve the finest cuisine."

"Merlin," Hermione answered as she looked back into the mirror. The dress hugged her body, showing off her curves. Her bulge was noticeable, but not overt. If anyone asked, she could always claim to have gained weight, though she wouldn't be able to hide the truth much longer.

She ran her hands along the silky gown once more. The dress itself was white with tasteful beading on the neckline and along the bottom. The train was long, but not long enough to trip over. Overall, Hermione loved the dress. If only she was marrying a man that she truly loved.

A tear came to Hermione's face. "It's okay," Ginevra began. "I'll pay for it. If you want, you can pay me back when you get the fortune. I'm sure Severus won't mind."

"No," Hermione choked. "It's not the price tag. I just thought, I just thought I'd be marrying Ron in something like this."

Ginny embraced Hermione as she cried on her shoulder. The red head shook her head and swallowed the growing rage towards her brother. "It's okay honey," Ginny cast a muffliato spell.

"I don't know why Ron won't raise his baby," she sobbed.

"I don't think he's ready for a family."

"But he needs to be ready! He told me we'd spend the rest of our lives together! I thought he loved me!"

Ginny gulped as Hermione began to pull away from her. "Hermione, I never thought I'd say this, but Ron isn't coming back. When we last spoke he made that clear."

Hermione took a shaky breath. "Really?"

Ginny nodded. "I saw him before you and Severus announced your engagement. He made it very clear that he has no interest in raising this child. He won't even claim it as his."

Hermione's face hardened. "I've honestly considered it Severus' for about a week now anyway. He's the only one besides me who seems to care."

Then Hermione looked down at her bump. "How could I have been so wrong about Ron?"

Ginny sighed as Hermione teared up again. "We all make mistakes. We're all wrong about people from time to time. At least someone is stepping up to take care of your baby. At least your baby has a chance at some sort of life."

Hermione dried her eyes and nodded. "I know. I think, I think it's just the pregnancy hormones. They do a number on you."

"Oh joy," Ginny replied, her sarcasm evident. "I can't wait to be pregnant."

"It's not all bad," Hermione replied as a small smile graced her lips. "It's really interesting when the
baby moves inside of you."

"Can you feel it kick yet?" she asked.

Hermione shook her head. "It'll kick me soon though, I'm sure."

Ginevra undid the muffliato spell. "So do you want the dress?"

Hermione returned her attention to the mirror. "Yes, I love it. I'll take it."

"Good," Ginevra replied. "Take it off then and I'll pay for it! You look wonderful in it."

"Thank you," Hermione answered, wishing she felt as good as she looked.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support! It truly means a lot to me! My next chapter may be posted later than usual. I might go out of town tomorrow with family, and I don't know when I'll be back. Still I'll post as soon as I can.
"What have you done to her?" Potter pushed Snape aside and barged into the house.

"Please come inside Mr. Potter," Snape drawled. "It's so wonderful to see you again."

Lucius suppressed a laugh as Potter locked eyes with Severus. "I can't believe you'd crack jokes after what you've done to Hermione!"

"What have I done to Hermione?" Severus closed the door.

"You've either brainwashed her or put her under the Imperius curse. That's the only possible explanation as to why she would dump Ron to marry you," Harry ranted.

"You think Severus did what?" Lucius asked, his eyes agleam.

Severus shot Lucius a look before returning his attention to Potter. "Tell me, why exactly would I choose Hermione for my wife?"

"Because she's a member of the Golden Trio and as such she'll improve your social standing," Harry answered.

Lucius hummed. "Potter has a point."

"Indeed he does," Severus answered, "Still, I find it amusing that I would choose to marry Hermione right after she and Ron had separated. I still have six more months, give or take a few days, to find a respectable wife."

"Ron told me that you were sleeping with her while they were together! He said that you got her pregnant. You obviously wanted to trap her into marriage," Harry retorted.

"You have me now, Potter!" Snape replied in mock horror. "I learned about my grandmother's will months ago, so I seduced Hermione because, well, I suppose she was the only witch in the proximity who wouldn’t spit in my face. You'd think I'd be more interested in seducing a Slytherin though."

"True," Lucius concurred. "You would."

"Regardless, I knew by the time my grandmother died that Ron and Hermione would be no more. I also knew that Hermione would marry me on the rebound. Oh wait, I put her under the Imperius didn't I?"

"I believe that you did," Lucius answered.

"Okay!" Harry replied, exasperated by the exercise. "Maybe you didn't put her under the Imperius curse. But, why else would she marry you?"

"Because she needs to," Severus answered, his amusement now gone.

"Why?" Harry demanded.

Snape sighed. "That is for her to explain, not me."
Harry clenched his teeth. "I don't know what's going on here, but even you know that Ron and Hermione belong together. Ron loves Hermione. I'll bet he loves her enough to raise your child with her."

This time, Severus was the one who burst out laughing. Lucius joined in, which only served to infuriate Potter. "What is so funny?"

“And they said Hermione couldn’t do worse than Severus,” Lucius gasped.

“What in Merlin’s name are you talking about?” Harry demanded.

"Ron Weasley does not deserve to inhale the same air as Hermione," Severus’ laughter faded.

"What?" Harry asked.

"You heard me. Ronald is a dunderhead who wouldn't know how to appreciate a good witch if his life depended upon it," Severus argued.

Just then, the door opened. "Severus!"

All eyes turned to the women entering. Severus smirked. "Hello Hermione."

“I chose a dress, I think you'll like it…” she began before seeing Harry. Her stomach dropped when she saw the expression on his face. "Hello, Harry."

"Hello, Hermione," he began.

"Hermione, where do you want me to…” Ginny began as she entered carrying a package. She stopped speaking the moment she saw Harry. "Hello, Harry."

"Ginny," he began in a soft voice.

Ginny thrust the package into Hermione’s arms "Here, Hermione. Here’s the dress. I need to be going now."

"How are things Ginny?" Harry asked.

Hermione shrunk the package and placed it in her pocket.

"Fine," she replied before spinning around. "Just fine."

Ginny rushed out and disapparated. Hermione shook her head as she shut the door behind Mrs. Malfoy. “Harry, what a lovely surprise. What brings you here?”

"I was wondering what Snape had done to convince you to marry him," Harry gazed into her eyes. "It doesn't look like he cast an Imperius curse on you."

"A what?" Hermione burst out.

Severus shrugged. "I suppose I should be used to the accusations by now…"

"No, no!" Hermione answered. "Harry, apologize to Severus right now!"

"He's Severus now?" Harry exclaimed.

"Harry!" Hermione argued.
Harry exhaled. "I'm sorry Professor Snape."

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

"May I speak to you?" Harry asked, looking directly at Hermione. "Alone?"

"This is Severus' house!" Hermione answered. "You can’t come in here and tell him where he can and cannot be."

"You two may speak in my sitting room," Severus began.

"No Severus, you shouldn’t be banished from the sitting room, especially when you have company."

"Lucius and I can take our conversation elsewhere."

"There isn’t anything left to discuss, and Narcissa will want me home soon," Lucius answered. "Good day, Severus."

"Good day," Severus replied. "I appreciate your coming by."

"The pleasure was all mine," Lucius nodded. "Good day, Hermione, Potter;"

With that Lucius glided outside the house.

"I'll be in my bedroom reading," Severus replied with a mischievous glisten in his eyes.

He kissed Hermione on the forehead before taking his leave. Hermione watched him stroll down the hallway, her mouth agape. Harry burst out, "Hermione! What was that?"

Harry's voice dispelled her shock.

"Why do you care?" Hermione asked as she led him to the sitting room.

"Because you and Ron were deeply in love! Now he's with a new girl every night and you're marrying Snape."

"No, Harry. I was deeply in love with Ron. He couldn't have cared less about me."

"He loves you," Harry answered. "He just has a hard time showing it. I'm sure if you apologized for cheating on him, he might agree to raise Severus' baby as his own."

"What?" Hermione yelled.

"Ron said that you cheated on him with Snape and got up the duff…"

"I never cheated on Ron! You of all people should know I would never do that," Hermione shouted. "Ron found out that I was pregnant and dumped me. He made it clear that he wanted nothing to do with me and my child."

"What about your fiancé? Is he aware that your with another man's child?"

"Severus is aware of my pregnancy. Because I never cheated on Ron Severus is more than aware that the child is not his. He’s agreed to raise this child as his own. Thus I will soon be Mrs. Snape."

"Why would he agree to raise your child?" Harry asked in a curious voice.

She sighed. "He needs an heir."
"Why can't he, uh, produce his own?" Harry asked.

"Because the sooner he has an heir, the sooner his fortune will be secure and the less likely Minerva will be able to take it away from him," she answered.

"Your marriage sounds like a business deal," Harry replied in a sympathetic voice.

"I can't afford to hope for anything more," she answered in a soft voice.

Harry sighed. "Yes you can. You should just hold out for Ron. I'm sure he will come to his senses."

"Why would he accuse me of cheating, then?" Hermione asked.

"You have to admit that making his child Snape's heir isn't going to help the situation," Harry answered.

"I don't have a choice," Hermione argued.

Harry shook his head. "I know, I just don't want you to have the regrets that I do."

"What happened between you and Ginny is nothing like what's happening between me and Ron," she replied.

"I know," Harry replied. "Still, there isn't a day that goes by where I don't regret not working things out with her."

"Ginny loves Draco," Hermione answered. "She made that very clear, but you wouldn't listen."

"I know, but I've always wondered what would've happened if I'd fought harder for her."

"You fought as hard as you could."

"Maybe," Harry mused. "I don't want you to have the same regret, though. I don't want you trapped in a cold marriage with Snape, always wondering what things would've been like with Ron."

"I can't afford to do that," Hermione replied. "Not with my child's future at stake. I need to provide my baby with a stable home regardless of how I wish things had worked out differently."

"Whatever you say," Harry answered.

Silence filled the room as each digested what the other had said.

"Is, is Ginny happy with Draco?"

"Yes."

Harry's eyes darkened. "He only married her to get back at me."

"They've been happily married for three years," Hermione replied as if to warn Harry not to get any ideas.

"Well, hopefully you and your child can live with your decision to marry Snape," Harry replied before standing up. "Goodbye, Hermione."

With that, he rushed out of the house. Hermione uncast the spell hiding her bulge as she wilted into a chair.
"Are you okay?" a silky voice asked.

Her lips curled upwards. "I'm just tired."

"I heard you shouting," Severus replied. "Then I heard Potter leave."

"He wasn't happy about this marriage. I think seeing Ginny again pushed him over the edge," Hermione answered.

"Obviously," Severus answered before kneeling on the ground and removing her shoes.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"You need to relax," he replied as he removed her stockings as well.

"You, you really don't need to do this," she answered.

"Like it or not, I was the reason you and Potter fought. I feel that I should compensate for that somehow," he replied.

Hermione closed her eyes as he began to knead her feet. She exhaled as she felt her aching muscles relax. "Thanks."

Severus nodded, not saying a word.

"Tell me," she asked. "Will you do this for me even after we're married?"

"On occasion," he answered. "Obviously not when I'm stirring a potion… but you're helping me get my fortune back. I can afford to show you some appreciation."

"This feels divine," she replied. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he answered, looking up at her.

Gazing into each other's eyes they found comfort and understanding.

Maybe this marriage wouldn't be a hellish as everyone predicted.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry I didn't post yesterday. I was out of town and got home much later than expected. I try to post daily though. Thanks for the support!
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hermione had long envisioned that on the day before her wedding she would wake up a little hung-over from her bachelorette party the night before. After taking a bit of sober-up potion, she'd call Ginny and together they'd give her hairstyle a trial run, or make some last minute wedding preparations. Surely there'd be a wedding rehearsal that evening, followed by a dinner with family and friends, and a night where she'd review plans for the honeymoon.

Today there was no hangover, although there was a brief bout of morning sickness. Ginny was somewhere with Draco, and there was no need for a rehearsal. Given the complexities of inheritance law Severus wasn't keen on leaving town until his fortune was in his bank account and honeymooning while pregnant wasn't the least bit appealing to Hermione. With all her previous expectations for what to do on the day preceding her wedding dashed there was only one thing left for Hermione to do.

Sit at a table in the courthouse waiting for Severus and the lawyer to appear.

Hermione put her head in her hands. Of all the things she'd envisioned on the day before her wedding, signing a prenuptial agreement was not one of them.

She shook her head and exhaled, wondering if she should've brought a magazine or something else to read from home. As usual, Hermione had come to the appointment too early, and boredom was only exacerbating her anxiety. Before she could meditate too long on her situation, the door opened. She looked up and smiled. "Hello Severus."

"Hello Hermione," he replied before shutting the door. "Mr. Sandstrom is running late."

"Sandstrom?" she asked.

"The attorney," Severus answered. "Apparently his child is sick and he's struggling to find a babysitter. His wife's already at work."

"Oh," she replied as Severus sat down across from her.

"It's just as well," Severus continued. "We can iron out a few last minute details before he comes."

"Okay," she answered with a shudder.

Severus folded his hands. "Are you feeling well?"

"I'm fine," she replied. "I don't know much about pre-nups, and you of all people know how uncomfortable I am when I don't know what to expect."

"Your anxiety is understandable," he answered. "Prenuptial agreements quite rare in the Wizarding world, but I assumed under the circumstances it would be wise to have one. It's simply in place to prevent confusion should we decide that this marriage is no longer in our best interest."

Hermione swallowed and nodded, noting how matter-of-fact his voice was and how little emotion his eyes betrayed. Perhaps he was already expecting the marriage to fail. She didn't know how to feel about that. On the one hand, she believed that marriages should last forever, but on the other hand
she also believed that one should marry for love, not to save one's child from disgrace.

"In the initial divorce proceedings," Severus began. "Assuming that I inherit the fortune in its entirety, which I should, you will receive two hundred million Galleons."

"What?" she blurted out.

He looked up at her, nonchalant. "You're helping me inherit a fortune. You deserve some form of compensation."

"But that much?" Hermione asked. "I mean, I know divorced couples ideally divide their assets in half, but still…"

"Would you rather have nothing?" Severus asked with an almost playful smirk.

"No," she answered as her shock wore off.

"Hermione, I plan to open my own apothecary with my inheritance. If things go well, which I have no reason to doubt that they will, I will open a chain," he replied. "Two hundred million Galleons may be mere pocket change to you by then."

"I suppose so," she answered. "I guess I just wasn't expecting you to be so generous."

His smirk grew. "I suppose I should be flattered that I can surprise you."

"Maybe," she blushed.

"Back to the topic at hand," Severus continued. "Assuming that the fortune stays the same or grows, you will receive a twelve million Galleon allowance each year."

"Sounds fair," she replied.

"It's only right that my heir be provided for," he replied, his previous playfulness now gone.

"Thank you," she replied.

"No, thank you for helping me obtain this fortune," Snape answered as his eyes softened.

"What about custody of my child?" Hermione asked.

"I'll allow you to dictate that," Severus replied. "I won't drag the child through a nasty custody battle, especially given its, uh, lineage."

"Agreed," Hermione answered with a small smile. "Is there anything else?"

"Yes. Whatever house we live in together you may keep. I won't evict a child from his or her home. I'm not that heartless."

"Thank you,"

"Indeed," Severus replied. "I believe that concludes everything. Is there anything you'd like to add to this agreement?"

Hermione thought before nodding, "Should we have a fund for our child?"

"I have already set one up," he promised. "I plan to deposit forty million galleons into it the second I
obtain my fortune.”

“Thank you” Hermione answered.

“Indeed.”

“That was my only concern.”

Her eyes softened as he gazed into them.

“Very well then,” he answered in a soft voice. "It seems that we are capable of working somewhat
well together."

“Who knows? Maybe we'll even be able to make this marriage work so this pre-nup will be
unnecessary."

"Perhaps, although I would imagine that at some point you'd want to settle down with a man for
whom you actually feel some sort of affection."

“No, I told you, I'm through with love." Then a look of horror came over her face. "Unless, you
want to marry a woman who will fall in love with you."

Severus chuckled. "Do I look like the sort of man who could attract a woman of any type, let alone
one who could love me?"

She squinted and teased, "I don't know, you are very rough around the edges, but you have a certain
charm about you. If the woman in question was obsessed with potions she'd fall for you in a
heartbeat."

"I'm sure she'd be far more interested in my fortune than any potion I could brew," Severus sighed.

"True," Hermione conceded.

"Besides, I told you, I appreciate my solitude. I've never been one for grand declarations of love or
snogging in public, or any of those other things you women seem to enjoy."

"I honestly hated it when Ron and I snogged in public, It always felt like he was marking me as his
property."

"So once again we agree on something."

"That we do," Hermione answered. "Tell me though; is our relationship going to be exclusive?"

"That would be for the best, don't you think? And not too difficult to accomplish since neither of us
is all that interested in playing the field right now. If that changes…"

"My position won't change."

"Neither will mine."

Hermione exhaled. This might not be the fairytale beginning to a marriage she’d envisioned when
she was a child, but at least she believed her husband would be loyal to her. It had been years since
she’d had no doubt in her mind that the man in her life was interested in her and her alone. She’d
forgotten how much she appreciated that sense of safety. How bizarre that she'd gained that security
from one of the most feared professors in the history of Hogwarts.
"Sorry I'm late," the attorney began as he burst into the room.

"You caused us no great inconvenience," Severus answered. "We wanted to discuss some details before you entered."

Mr. Sandstrom raised an eyebrow. "I see."

Once again he examined the couple before him. He’d heard stories about Severus Snape and his infamous sardonic tongue. He was also aware that Hermione was one of the greatest heroines the Wizarding World had ever known, and was much gentler than her future spouse. Before walking into the room he’d expected a confrontation that would rival the Final Battle. Instead he saw two people who were more than content to be in each other’s presence; the picture of two reasonable people who could reach an agreement without outside interference. Already this was becoming one of the oddest prenuptial agreements he’d mediated.

The attorney cleared his throat before sitting down beside Severus. "Shall we begin drawing up the prenuptial agreement then?"

"Yes," Hermione answered with confidence.

Chapter End Notes

Yay! 100 kudos! Thanks so much everyone! It's a pleasure to post here.
Minerva pasted on a pleasant, if insincere, smile as wedding guests filed into the room. The first ones to enter were Draco and his parents, who were too engrossed in discussion to notice the Headmistress in the corner. Neville Longbottom followed close behind. When he saw Minerva he scrambled to a seat as far away from her as possible. Next to enter was Severus Snape, who took one look at her and scowled. "What, pray tell, are you doing here?"

"Making sure this marriage is valid," she replied.

"What?" Severus barked.

Lucius turned in his seat to locate the source of the commotion while his wife and son continued talking.

"Why would you doubt the authenticity of my union with Hermione?"

"Don't act as if you have always behaved nobly. I wouldn't put it above you to fake a wedding ceremony and then have the marriage declared invalid after you've invested your inheritance," Minerva replied.

"I can assure you that this marriage will be valid," Lucius asserted as he strolled to the arguing couple.

"Your 'word' hardly inspires my confidence, Lucius," Minerva retorted.

"Listen, Minerva," Severus growled, fighting to check his temper. "You weren't invited and you're causing a disruption. If you have concerns about the legality of this marriage, then hire an attorney to investigate."

"Your friend Lucius has resources which have a way of persuading people to see what he wants them to see."

“I'm wounded,” Lucius put his hands over his heart. “I would never lie about something as sacred as a marriage.”

“Since when did you care about the sacred?” Minerva asked.

“I have always cared about the sacred. Your issue with me is that we have two vastly different ideas of what qualifies as sacred,” Lucius noted.

“Be that as it may, I’ll only be satisfied that Severus’ marriage is valid if I witness this blessed event myself,” She replied.

“Fine, but stay away from Hermione,” Severus warned. "You don't need to upset her."

"Entering into a loveless marriage hasn't already upset her?" Minerva asked with smirk.

"Hermione is a grown woman who makes her own choices, I was fortunate enough that she chose to spend her life with me. I plan to do everything in my power to ensure she does not regret her decision," Severus continued in a low voice. “Even if that means I must personally throw you off the
"I will leave you two in peace once I'm convinced that you haven't staged this ceremony," she replied with determination.

Before Severus could respond, Ginny poked her head in the door. "The bride is ready."

"Good," Severus answered with one last warning glare to Minerva as he took his place in from of the judge's bench.

"Is the judge here?" Ginny asked Lucius.

"Not yet," he replied.

"Thanks," she answered before retreating into the hallway.

Lucius offered his arm to Minerva and asked, "Would you like to sit down?"

"Indeed I would," she replied as she ignored the proffered appendage, marched to the front row across the aisle from the Malfoys, and took a seat directly behind Snape. Severus bit back the temptation to hex the witch into oblivion.

His murderous thoughts were interrupted when the courtroom door opened once again. Harry Potter appeared, wearing an even more sour expression than Severus'.

"Harry!" Minerva called from across the room.

He gave the Headmistress a small, forced smile, then sat down beside her. Draco shot him a glare, but Narcissa quickly distracted him with a question about the reception to follow. Harry tried to engage Minerva in conversation, but still cast a few side glances Draco’s way.

Finally, the door opened once more, revealing a gentleman in long, black robes and a powdered wig.

"Is this the wedding of Severus Tobias Snape and Hermione Jean Granger?" he asked.

"Yes," Severus answered. His stomach lurched.

"Good," the judge said as he approached Severus. "Where is the bride?"

"Hopefully, she ran," Minerva whispered to Harry.

He snorted back his laughter.

"She's waiting inside. According to Ginevra, Hermione wanted to process into the room," Narcissa explained.

"Very well then," the judge replied. "Will someone please tell her we're ready to start, then?"

"Yes," Draco replied, rushing out the door. Soon he returned with a request. "Uh, is there any way we could play some music?"

The judge glanced at him as if he had grown a horn on his forehead. "We don't play music here."

"Okay," he sighed before returning to the door to inform the bride and bridesmaid.

Taking Ginny's arm, Draco escorted his wife up the aisle, smirking possessively towards Potter when
they reached the judge. Harry snarled while Ginevra squeezed Draco’s hand.

Hermione peeked through the door and gulped. She’d always envisioned coming down the aisle on her father’s arm to the sounds of Classical, maybe Baroque, music, not alone to the tense silence that greeted her. She stepped forward, her grip tightening on her bouquet of roses. As she moved closer to her destination, she glanced at her guests. Neville grinned as if this wedding was the culmination of a long romantic courtship. Ginny eyed Hermione's hair with approval then shot an encouraging glance at her friend. The Malfoy men were largely stoic, but Narcissa exuded a pleased confidence… with a small gleam in her eye. Hermione looked to the other side of the aisle where Harry was pale and Minerva eyed her calculatingly.

Finally she looked at Severus. While he wasn't exactly smiling, there was a softness in his eyes that she found comforting. He was dressed in his customary black, but these robes were tailored differently from his school robes. The cut accentuated his lean form, creating quite an attractive figure.

As Hermione advanced towards Severus, he noticed how well her dress fit her curves. The effect was accentuated by her hair, which was caught into an up-do, balanced by long, curly tendrils along the nape of her neck. The effect was stunning.

Severus Snape couldn't take his eyes off the soon to be Hermione Snape.

Hermione stood before her groom and gave him a nervous smile. His lips curled up for a moment. They clasped hands as the judge began, "Dear friends and family, we are gathered here today to join in the union of Hermione Jean Granger and Severus Tobias Snape. If anyone objects to this union, speak now or forever hold your peace."

All eyes turned to Minerva, who shook her head and pursed her lips. When the moment had passed, the judge continued, "Good. Severus Tobias Snape, do you consent to be bound to this woman?"

"I do."

"Do you promise to remain faithful to her throughout the course of your marriage?"

"I do."

"Do you promise to take this witch in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, to love and to cherish, til death do you part?"

"I do," Severus answered in a strong voice.

"And do you, Hermione Jean Granger, consent to be bound to this man?" the judge asked as he turned to Hermione.

"I do."

"Do you promise to remain faithful to him throughout the course of your marriage?"

"I do," she answered.

"Do you promise to take this wizard in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, to love and to cherish, til death do you part?"

"I do," Hermione answered in a strong voice.
"And now for the exchange of rings," the judge continued, taking an emerald solitaire set in platinum from Draco and a plain platinum band from Ginny.

Severus placed the solitaire on Hermione's finger, praying that he had guessed the right size. It slid easily over her knuckle, much to Severus' relief. Hermione in turn slid the platinum band on Severus' finger, then held his hands in hers.

The judge pulled out his wand and began intoning a spell in Latin. Slowly, a golden wisp emanated from it and wafted onto the rings, where it then began to circle their fingers. Finally, it extended down to their hands, causing them to glow. Severus felt the force of the spell cement their grasp. Hermione looked up at him in awe.

When the glow had subsided, the judge smiled. "By the power invested in me by the Ministry of Magic, I now pronounce you husband and wife! You may kiss your bride."

Severus startled at the words, then looked at Hermione for some sort of cue. She leaned in and tilted her chin upwards. Severus took the hint and brushed her lips with his. Once they recovered from the initial awkwardness of the moment, Severus pulled her closer and began to deepen the kiss.

Hermione abruptly backed away, her eyes wide with wonder. "Severus."

"What?" he whispered.

She took his hand and placed it on her stomach. "Feel."

Severus felt the slight pressure from within her. "Is that..."

She nodded. "This is the first time the baby has kicked."

He took a shaky breath as he felt another pressure from Hermione’s abdomen. "Hello little one."

"Let's give the happy couple a round of applause," the judge announced.

The audience obliged with the exception of Minerva, who made no effort to disguise her disappointment. Severus removed his hand from Hermione's stomach with a small, triumphant smile.

"Please join Mr. and Mrs. Snape at our mansion for a dinner and reception!" Lucius announced to the crowd.

Severus glanced at the audience. Minerva was thinking of ways to kill him and the Malfoys, Neville was beaming, Harry was turning green, Draco and Ginny’s eyes were misty, as if they were reliving their own wedding, and the gleam in Narcissa’s eyes remained. None of these people had any business being in a room together. Severus turned to Hermione, whose complete attention was on the kicking person within her. He had never seen anyone with such a serene expression.

Severus’ stomach sank.

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"My dear boy," Fenrir began as he scrutinized the trembling student restrained in front of him by the Chief Snatcher. "What were you doing outside all alone?"

"I, I was going to play Quidditch," he stammered in a weak voice.

"He was all alone on the Quidditch field," Scabior explained. "It was no challenge at all for us to capture him."
"I see," Fenrir mused. "Tell me, where was the Headmistress? It seems so irresponsible for her to leave her students unattended."

"She's out for the day, as is Longbottom," Scabior answered.

"She, she's going to find out where I am!" the boy spat. "She'll find me!"

"Certainly she'll find you," Fenrir answered. "We will see to that."

"You, you will?" the student asked, afraid to hope.

"Of course," Fenrir replied as he moved closer to the boy. "We're simply in need of your assistance in a small matter."

"Oh?" he replied.

"First," Fenrir began. "We will only harm the hairs on your head."

Fenrir proceeded to pluck blonde hairs from his scalp and handed them to Scabior. He smiled and retreated into another room.

"Okay," the boy said after Fenrir had completed the ritual. "Now what do you want?"

"Well, that's an interesting question," Fenrir mused. "I'm finished with you, so I should let you go. But then again, I could use some new recruits."

"Recruits?" the student asked.

The Chief nodded as Fenrir continued, "Of course, we can't continue our movement alone, and you look like a wizard who could be very receptive to my teachings."

"What?" the boy asked as Fenrir bared his fangs, morphing from a man into a wolf. The boy began to struggle, which only caused the Chief to tighten his grip on the boy. Fenrir approached him, licking his chops and hungrily eyeing his new recruit.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry it's taken a bit to update! I had two days worth of traveling, both of which took much longer than expected. Hopefully this chapter is worth the wait. Thanks again for the support!
Severus watched his guests mill about the Malfoy sitting room. House elves scurried around, keeping
the subdued visitors well supplied with hors d'oeuvres. Ginny and Draco were engaged in an
intimate tête-à-tête. Harry snarled at the blond from the other side of the room, nursing his third (or
was it fourth?) glass of Champagne. Across the room Lucius and Narcissa presided benevolently
over the proceedings, directing the elves and instructing the caterer. Neville stood alone in the corner,
which came as a surprise to Severus. Hadn't he been speaking with Hermione a minute ago?

Neville noticed Severus staring at him quizzically and so he approached him. "The wedding was
beautiful, Professor Snape."

"Thank you Mr. Longbottom," he replied. "Where is Hermione?"

Neville swallowed. "While you were talking to Lucius, Minerva and a lawyer interrupted us, asking
to speak with Hermione privately."

"What?" Severus asked, louder than he intended.

The reception guests glanced at Severus and the now cowering Neville. "She hasn't been gone that
long," Neville replied in a weak voice.

The door opened. "Sorry, I had to step out," Hermione announced as she breezed inside.

"Mozzarella ball?" an elf offered, tray extended.

"Thank you," she accepted one.

"Thank you," she accepted one.

The quiet conversations resumed as Hermione strolled over to her husband. "Where have you been?"
Severus hissed.

"Minerva and the estate lawyer wanted to see me," Hermione began.

"Concerning what?" Severus asked.

Hermione sighed. "They want to make sure our marriage has been consummated before they award
you the money."

Severus' heart stopped, though his eyes remained emotionless.

"That's great!" Neville exclaimed.

Both of them looked at him as though he'd sprouted a tulip on his head. "Excuse me?" Severus
asked.

"Well, once you consummate the marriage, then there will be no question about its validity and
Minerva will be off your backs! You'll finally be a real married couple!" he exclaimed.

"I suppose so," Severus answered, wondering if Neville had inhaled some sort of magical mushroom
spore before he'd left Hogwarts that day.
"It is what's expected of us," Hermione replied in an even tone. "They want me to come into their office tomorrow and take a dose of Veritaserum to confirm the, uh, event."

"Why didn't they approach me about this?" Severus asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "Maybe because you know Occlumency and could easily lie about the entire thing."

"They have a point there," Severus conceded.

"Attention!" Lucius called.

All eyes turned to him. "Thank you all for coming. I believe that now is the traditional time for toasts."

The guests clapped their encouragement, quieting when Lucius continued, "I shall go first."

Lucius raised his Champagne flute. "Severus, we have known each other for years. I know that you have a heart, even though you do your best to conceal it. Marriage is an affair of the heart, not just of the intellect. May your heart teach you to be a worthy husband and father, now and in the years to come. Congratulations, Severus and Hermione!"

"Cheers!" The crowd toasted their approval with a clink of glass.

"I believe it's my turn!" Ginevra piped in. The crowd turned their attention to her. "To Hermione, my best friend: The road which led you here has been unconventional, but happiness relies not on one's fortune, but rather on one's choices. May you always choose well so happiness will be yours even in difficult circumstances. To Severus and Hermione!"

"Cheers!" The crowd chorused.

"I have something to say!" Harry announced.

All eyes turned to the war hero. While Narcissa and Lucius looked on with suspicion, Draco glowered. Ginevra snaked a reassuring arm around her husband, which only to softened his eyes a little. Hermione groaned and Severus edged closer to her, ready to shield her from any unpleasantness. Neville heaved a sigh in anticipation of what he knew would come.

"To Hermione," Harry slurred. "She married the snake of Slytherin, the person who saved our arses, but he's still a jerk. Oh well, at least he isn't Tom Riddle."

Harry laughed at his own joke while everyone else looked on, speechless. Composing himself, he continued, "That's okay, because now Hermione will be condemned to live with regret, regret that she never married Ron!"

"Oh sod it!" Hermione finally burst out.

Harry glared at her. "You don't understand," Harry continued as tears filled his eyes. "I once loved a woman, really loved a woman." He looked over at Ginevra. "I loved you so much!"

"Shut it, Potter," Draco sputtered, his rage mounting.

"No!" Harry slurred. "I love Ginny Weasley. I always have and I always will." Then tears began to roll down his cheeks. "Why don't you love me Ginny? Wasn't I good enough for you? Why don't you dream about me like I dream about you?"
"Harry it's over!" Ginny argued as tears of humiliation began to trickle down her cheeks. "Please just let it be over."

“No," Harry argued. "I love you and Draco doesn't! Don't you see, you're the only woman I'll ever love. You're my soul mate!"

"Potter I'm warning you if you don't finish this disaster of a toast..." Draco interrupted as he disentangled himself from Ginny.

"You'll what? You only married Ginny to piss me off. Why don't you tell her the truth and set her free so she can be with a man who truly loves her?"

At those words, Draco flew across the room and leapt onto Potter, pounding him with his fists until they were reddened with blood. Ginevra screamed for Draco to stop, yet no one moved to break up the fight.

After the surprise of the attack wore off, Harry pushed Draco onto his back, slamming him onto the floor. Severus quickly crossed the room to drag Harry off his godson, though not before Draco could place got one final kick to Harry's leg. "You two should be ashamed of yourselves," Severus admonished. "Such barbaric behavior is not worthy of you or of this occasion."

"I love you Ginny!" Harry wailed as Neville ran over and restrained him. "I'm going to make you love me again, and then we'll spend the rest of our lives in wedded bliss!"

"I'll kill you before that happens!" Draco roared in rage.

"Get Potter out of here!" Lucius demanded.

Neville released Potter as three elves rushed forward to grab Potter and lug him out of the mansion. Ginevra embraced Draco and cried into his chest. Severus strode back to Hermione's side. "Are you feeling well?"

"I'm tired," she whispered. "I'm just tired."

Severus sighed. "Do you want to stay here?"

She shook her head. "Can we go home?"

"My place or yours?"

"Yours. It's bigger."

Severus surveyed the remaining guests, none of whom looked particularly festive any more. "Thank you Lucius and Narcissa, for hosting this beautiful reception. It has been a very full day for us, so I fear that we must now take our leave."

"I understand," Narcissa answered. "Farewell and congratulations."

Severus nodded as he helped Hermione outside. When the bride and groom had left, Ginevra whispered to Draco. "You're cheek is bleeding."

"It's fine," Draco muttered.

She shook her head. "We should put a bandage on it."

Draco nodded and followed her out of the room.
"I, I should probably go, too," Neville replied. "Thank you Mr. Malfoy, Mrs. Malfoy."

"You're welcome Neville," Narcissa answered. "Please do come again, if only to visit Hermione or Ginevra."

"I will," he replied.

Lucius looked around the room and gulped, hoping the events of the day weren't a portent of things to come.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for sticking with me through the reception from hell!
Hermione had barely spoken two words to Severus since they arrived home.

After the reception, Hermione had soaked away the stress and fatigue of the day in a warm bath. Once finished, she retreated to the bedroom. The sun had long since set, but the door had not so much as cracked open.

Severus took a deep breath, bracing himself for whatever was to occur. He softly knocked on the bedroom door, hoping Hermione was still awake and willing to discuss their first night as a married couple.

"Just a moment," Hermione called.

The door creaked open.

She stepped towards him in a white silk negligee covered by a matching robe. A question was in her eyes that her voice dared not ask.

"Hermione," he breathed.

"I'm ready to...close our deal, Severus. The clock is ticking and I'll be damned if I'll let Minerva spoil everything now."

"The marriage deadline is still five months away. If you aren't comfortable with the prospective of having marital relations we can wait. Surely we can stall off the lawyers and use some of that time to acclimate to one another."

"Do you want to wait?"

"I want this to be as comfortable as possible for both of us. We both know a courthouse wedding followed by a violent reception isn’t how a marriage should begin. The last thing you need is for the wedding night to be regrettable."

"Given my condition I'll regret consummating this marriage more if we wait."

He swallowed.

Her eyes softened. “I’m already showing, Severus. In five more months we'll be trying to maneuver around a watermelon. My body will need time to recover about the baby is born. It's better for us to do this now.”

"I hadn’t taken your pregnancy into consideration,” he replied as his eyes rested on her small bump.

"I’ve spent all evening preparing myself for tonight. I’m ready."

Severus gazed into her eyes. “If that’s what you want then I will respect your wishes."

"It's just sex, Severus, and it's not as if we're strangers. I trust you. You're a good man. I know you won't do anything to hurt me."
"It may be many things, Hermione, but it should never be 'just sex'. You deserve to be treated with respect… to be loved and cherished as the extraordinary witch you are.” He drew closer to her. “I may not be capable of love… I may not have enough history with you to cherish you… but I can extend to you my utmost respect. Whatever happens tonight will happen in your time, by your lead, and by our mutual consent."

"I trust you, Severus," she whispered.

Cautiously, Hermione rose up on her tiptoes to brush Severus' lips with hers. He leaned down to accommodate her, willing himself to show restraint even as he allowed himself to experience the waves of emotion her kisses evoked. She was caught off guard by the softness of his mouth… by the gentle strength of his embrace… and by his patience. For someone who had endured years of desperate groping at Ron's hands, these soft but firm caresses were surprising… and infinitely more exciting. Hermione's fingers searched for the buttons on his robe as her body nudged him toward the bed…

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Hermione awoke in the middle of the night, spooned into Severus' body, her arm draped over his waist. The baby kicked within her, sending gentle pressure through the walls of her abdomen into her husband's spine. Severus stirred and rolled over, pulling Hermione into his grasp.

Ironic, she thought as she nestled against him. When Ron and I were together I thought we had been making love, but I didn't have any idea what that meant, until tonight. I feel so protected, so 'cared for,' and yet I don't have near the history with Severus that I had with Ron. How can this be?

She yawned and allowed herself to settle back into a blissful sleep.

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Severus sat in the waiting area on a hard, chipped, wooden bench. He perused a brochure on proper apparition techniques just to appear as though he had something to do. Hermione had already been called into the attorney's office along with Minerva to undergo questioning under Veritaserum to ensure that the marriage had been consummated.

They had been in there longer than expected.

A few times Severus considered interrupting the procedure to see what was taking so long, but thought better of it when he considered the types of questions they were undoubtedly asking and the types of answers she was giving. While he was by no means a squeamish man, he didn't need to hear how he rated as a lover. Of course if they asked him he would have to admit that what he and Hermione had done last night transcended sex, but he had no intention of announcing that to the world.

He shook his head and reread the brochure, noting that Hermione shouldn't apparate after the beginning of her third trimester due to an increased risk to her baby of premature birth. For the most part it was safe to apparate with a newborn, provided one could focus while holding it. Children needed to stand as still as possible before apparating if they wanted to increase their chances of keeping their fingers intact.

After reading the section on apparating with a small child a third time, Severus set it aside and scoured the room for something else to read. His eyes rested on a discarded *Daily Prophet* on the other side of the bench. Since no one else seemed interested in it, he scooted over and picked up the paper, wondering what lies they had seen fit to print today.
He frowned when he saw the image of an inebriated Harry Potter pointing to a wound on his forehead from the day before. Below the picture was the caption: *Snape Marriage Begins in Violence: Boy-Who-Lived Seriously Injured!*

"Oh for crying out loud," Severus muttered as he began to read the article.

Of course it was written by Rita Skeeter.

Much to Severus’ surprise the article began with an accurate account of the wedding ceremony itself. The portion regarding the reception was less than factual.

"Draco just lunged at me," Harry claimed. "I was simply telling Ginny how beautiful she was and how I wished that we were the ones getting married. Draco lost his temper and began pulverizing me. I was unable to defend myself. Draco even threatened to murder me! Ginny was devastated. I think she is appalled that she’d married such a brute."

Severus rolled his eyes and continued reading the article. "Poor Mr. Potter!" Rita began. "Still reeling from the loss of his true love at the hands of Draco Malfoy."

Snape shook his head as he imagined the outrage both Draco and Ginevra would express as they read this garbage.

The door burst open. Severus lowered the newspaper. Minerva stormed out muttering, "This isn't over. Merlin this isn't over.”

The attorney rushed after her, saying, "Minerva, I'm sorry, there's nothing we can do."

“This isn’t over," she repeated in a louder voice. “Merlin this isn’t over!”

Hermione strolled out with a self-satisfied smile on her face.

“I take it everything went well?” Severus asked with a smirk.

"Why would anything go amiss? All I did was I tell them the entire truth," she replied. "Obviously, Minerva didn't like the answers."

“How unfortunate for her," Severus purred as Hermione joined him on the bench.

"Indeed," Hermione answered.

"The interrogation took quite a bit of time."

"That was probably because they gave me two doses of Veritaserum."

"What?" Severus exclaimed before casting a muffliato.

She shrugged. "They didn't believe me the first time I was questioned, so they administered another dose."

“Were they aware that you with child?” Severus asked.

“I told them before the proceedings. They said two doses of Veritaserum wouldn't hurt my baby, although I think it may have made it a little hyper." Hermione rubbed her abdomen. “I've been feeling it flip and kick all morning.”

"Did they question the paternity?" Severus asked in a low voice.
"No," she answered. "From what I understand, the paternity of the child has less to do with you inheriting your grandmother's fortune than it does with who will inherit it after we die. Still, since the child was in utero at the time of our wedding, you will obtain full parental rights when it is born for the duration of our marriage, just as if it were your biological child."

"Don't worry, I fully intend to be its father when it's born," Severus promised.

Hermione’s face brightened. “Thank you.”

“I do not require any thanks. I have my fortune and your child has a home, as do you. It is a very even exchange, wouldn’t you agree?”

“It is a more than gracious exchange.”

"Excuse me," a man with a deep voice began.

Severus uncast the spell and looked up to recognize one of the attorneys who had introduced himself before questioning Hermione. The lawyer gave him an odd look.

“I apologize if we’ve offended you," Hermione began. "Severus and I were discussing some potions he could make for, well, a personal problem."

The attorney's face hardened. "What kind of problem?"

Severus sighed. "She hasn't been feeling well these past couple of days."

"Yes," Hermione agreed. "I didn't think the whole courthouse wanted to hear about how hard it was for me to get out of the bathroom this morning."

The attorney's eyes flashed in understanding. “Morning sickness?”

Hermione blushed.

“I remember you mentioning a baby in there,” the attorney added.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m thrilled to be carrying the Snape heir,” she rubbed her bulge. “But pregnancy isn’t always the most pleasant experience.”

"I know exactly what you mean,” the attorney exhaled. “My wife’s going through the same thing. I can't wait until it's over."

"Indeed," Severus answered.

"Are you feeling okay, Mrs. Snape or shall we postpone this meeting? I don't want to cause you anymore undue stress" he replied.

"No," she answered. "I feel fine at the moment."

"Good, then let's go to my office and sit down," the attorney replied.

They stood and followed the man to a nearby office where he ushered them to two padded blue chairs beside a large oak desk. The lawyer shut the door behind them and began, "As you probably know, everything with the marriage checks out. You even have a little bundle of joy on the way. Congratulations!"

"Thank you," they replied together.
"Now," the attorney replied. "It's going to take about a month for the inheritance to come through. We have to pay off some last minute bills, the German death tax, as well as the attorneys' fees. Also, we'll have to pay international fees to bring it over from Germany."

"How much will that cost?" Severus asked.

"Shouldn't cost more than twenty million Galleons. You'll still have more money left than you'll know what to do with," he assured Snape.

"I simply want enough to start my own apothecary and to take care of this child," Severus answered.

"That you will have," he replied before turning to Hermione. "Do you have any questions?"

"Yes," she answered. "Will we receive the inheritance in one lump sum?"

"You will," the attorney answered. "There's no reason to dole it out in increments, and I can't see anyone making a serious claim against your eligibility for the inheritance."

"Not even Minerva?" Hermione asked.

The attorney chuckled and shook his head. "Not even Minerva. You two have met all of the requirements of the will. She doesn't have a leg to stand on and she knows it."

"Thank you," Hermione exhaled, relieved that Minerva's interference was no longer an issue. Then another distressing through came to mind. "Could she file a claim against my child in the future?"

"As long as neither you nor your husband creates a marriage or some other stipulation in your will then no," he replied.

"Good," she answered.

"Indeed," Severus replied.

The attorney then smiled, "Are there any additional concerns?"

"Not on my end," Severus replied.

"No," Hermione chimed in.

"Then I believe we are finished," the attorney replied as he stood up to shake their hands. Hermione and Severus both shook hands with him before bidding him goodbye.

"Thank Merlin that's over," Hermione grinned as they stepped out onto the street.

"Indeed," Severus exhaled.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Somewhat," he admitted.

"Are you up for Chinese take out?" Hermione asked. "I'd fix a meal myself, but I'm exhausted and cooking is the last thing on my mind."

"Chinese food sounds strangely enticing," Severus replied before they crossed the street.
This chapter was a bear to write and edit. Hopefully it turned out okay. Thanks for reading and for all your support!
"It's almost ready!" Hermione called from the kitchen.

"Thank you," Severus answered as he took a seat at the dining table. The table was dressed in an attractive hodgepodge of china and a centerpiece of freshly cut roses. A garden salad and a loaf of warm French bread were already waiting for him.

Severus served himself some salad and took a piece of bread. In spite of their lunch at a Chinese restaurant, Hermione had insisted on fixing dinner tonight, if only to prove to him her proficiency in the kitchen. Chicken Alfredo was on the menu, a dish Severus had never considered touching. Lumpy white sauce reminded him of the gravy his mother used to make. He grimaced at the thought of ingesting that again.

A timer sounded from the other room. He sighed and prayed that Hermione was as good in the kitchen as she claimed. Merlin knew if she wasn’t at least a decent cook this marriage could prove quite long for all involved parties.

"Here we are!" she announced as she emerged from the kitchen with a covered dish.

As she set it on the table, Severus smirked, "You seem quite proud of yourself."

Hermione sat across from him. "Well, over the years I've perfected this recipe. It will please even the likes of you."

"For someone who’s spent years listening to me critique her potions you are supremely confident in yourself," Severus answered.

"There’s no reason not to be confident." Hermione set her napkin on her lap.

"So said every first-year who waltzed into my classroom," Severus warned.

"The only thing I'm not completely certain of is my ability to get you to admit that you like this meal. That may prove to be somewhat of a challenge."

"I'm not afraid to offer a well-earned compliment," Severus protested as she removed the cover. As Severus inhaled the aroma, he had to admit that it didn't smell completely unappetizing, although the white sauce was still off-putting.

Hermione took Severus' plate and served him. He nodded as he accepted it.

She watched as he expertly spun the pasta around his fork. He glanced up, raised an eyebrow and commented, "I've never before seen anyone so fascinated by my pasta technique."

She shrugged, feigning disinterest. "I'm just waiting for a critique, that's all."

Severus grunted as he lifted the saucy noodles to his lips. Initially the hint of garlic in the sauce was what commanded his attention, but soon its creamy texture wrapped his tongue in ecstasy. Combined with the slight chewiness of the al dente noodles, the result was quite… pleasant.

“Do you like it?” she asked. The second the words came out she inwardly kicked herself for
sounding like one of those eager first-years Severus had grown to despise.

Severus looked at her before swallowing. "It's adequate."

"It is?"

"It isn't as horrid as I thought it would be."

Hermione's face lit up as she served herself. "I knew you'd enjoy it."

She dug into her own plate of noodles, still beaming over her victory. Severus wondered how she could find such great satisfaction in something as ordinary as cooking a meal for him. Maybe there was more to the glimmer in her eyes. Could it be she was anxious to please him? That was no small feat considering his infamous distaste for almost everything. Making him admit he liked something was quite the challenge, the sort of challenge an over enthused Gryffindor like her would be more than happy to accept.

He watched her take another bite. Perhaps her issue went deeper. Merlin knew Ron's rejection was a huge blow. Her desperation to please Severus could be as much about Gryffindor enthusiasm as it was about proving herself to be a worthy wife. The last thing she needed was confirmation that she wasn't good enough for Ron, for Severus, or for anyone else. As someone who'd spent his life trying to prove himself, he completely understood the all consuming need to be good enough...

"Ummm… Severus?"

He looked up from his bite.

"Where am I going to sleep tonight?" Hermione asked.

He finished chewing. Uncertainty loomed where playfulness had danced just a moment ago. Severus took a deep breath, "I presumed that you and I would sleep in the same bed."

"Oh," she answered, her voice betraying her surprise.

Severus sighed. "Anything else would be a bit odd, don't you think?"

"Yes," she replied before contemplating her fork.

Severus shook his head. Just because she had spent the afternoon with him didn’t mean she wanted to be with him come nightfall. "Would you prefer to sleep in another room?"

"No!" she exclaimed. "Of course not. I'm more than happy to share a bed with you. I just didn't know what you wanted."

"I'm not the only party in this marriage. Your desires are important as well."

"They are?"

His heart sank at the genuine surprise in her eyes. "Yes. Your desires matter to me."

Hermione scratched her napkin.

Severus set his fork down. "It may be time to further discuss what we want out of this union."

Hermione bit her lip. "That sounds like a reasonable idea."
“What do you want from this marriage?” Severus asked.

"I want us to provide a nice childhood for our child," Hermione answered.

Severus’ eyes and tone softened. "As important as the child is, I was asking about you. What do you want for yourself?"

Her eyes misted and she whispered, "I want what we had last night."

Thrown by her admission, Severus fought to mask his surprise. Hermione bowed her head, feeling uncomfortably exposed.

"What made last night special for you?" he asked.

"You'll think I'm an idiot."

"If I thought you were an idiot I wouldn't have married you."

She gazed into his eyes and gathered her courage. “Last night was beautiful. You were so tender, so caring. No one had ever been so patient with me, had caressed me with such gentleness. I, I felt like your spouse, not some bed warmer.”

“I care for you Hermione,” he whispered.

She blushed.

“I,” he continued. “I don’t readily display my emotions. I never have. This fact should’ve been evident the day we met. That being said I am grateful to you for agreeing to be my bride.”

“Are you only grateful to me?”

“No,” Severus admitted. “I find you a worthy companion. You are the only person with whom I could envision spending any significant portion of my life.”

Her playfulness returned. “As far as people to spend hours on end time with, I could do much worse than you.”

Severus smirked.

She swallowed. The light in her eyes was snuffed out. “To return to the topic at hand, what I’m trying to say is that all I want from you is to never use or abandon me."

In that moment, her vulnerability was fully exposed. One false word and she would shatter. Severus mulled over his next few sentences, "Hermione, I will never intentionally use you. I'm committed to you and to your child for as long as you'll have me."

“I will be around as long as you want me to be as well,” she whispered.

"If you want to indulge in," he wiped his hands on his napkin. “Marital relations, then all you have to do is ask. We’ve promised each other that this would be an exclusive marriage, so I wouldn't be so unfair as to deny you."

"I know. I’ll make the same offer to you,” She replied. “Still, it all sounds so business-like, as if there isn't any emotion behind it."

"Trust me, there is emotion on my part," Severus assured her. “But I am who I am.”
"I can accept you as you are," Hermione answered with a wan smile.

"I accept you as you are as well," Severus replied.

Her eyes glistened.

Severus cleared his throat. "So, now I ask you, where would you like to sleep tonight?"

"With you," she answered with confidence.

"Very well then," Severus couldn’t hide the gleam in his eyes.

Hermione sat up straighter. She put a hand over her abdomen. "The baby's kicking again."

Severus gave her a half smile. "It seems to be a very active baby."

"It is," Hermione cooed as she looked down at her stomach. Then, her face fell. "How are we going to break the news of my pregnancy?"

"Everyone who needs to know already knows," Severus answered in the same tone he used when speaking to a fellow researcher.

"I wish that were the case, but the press has been all over our marriage. Even if they took no interest in us the concealment spell will only work for another month or so," Hermione replied, her voice equally business-like. "We can’t hide my pregnancy for much longer."

"I suppose if we don’t tell the press, someone else will," Severus mused.

"That's my fear," Hermione replied.

Severus was silent for a moment before proposing, "There are several reporters clamoring for an interview on how our marriage came to be. I suppose we could select one whom we trust and who will be fairly accurate."

"I don't trust any of them," Hermione groaned.

Severus hummed. "Then we'll find one whom we can 'convince' to say exactly what we want him or her to say."

"How?" Hermione asked with interest.

"You worked in the Ministry. Surely you have some secret you can use against one of them," Severus answered.

Hermione's eyes shone. "Rita Skeeter! She's still an unregistered animagi!"

“She is?”

“Yes. She’s afraid that if she’s registered then it would be public record and people would catch onto her tricks. I have proof of her animagus form though, proof which I’d be all too willing to share with others in the Ministry.”

"Then she's won the draw," Severus answered as the gleam in his eyes grew.

"Yes," Hermione answered. "I'll owl her in the morning granting her an interview."
“Sounds like a plan,” Severus replied before taking another bite of pasta.

They ate in comfortable silence.

"Hermione?"

"Hmm?"

"I actually do like this meal."

He'd never seen her look happier.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support! It's great to have readers like you!
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three children, identical in appearance, crept out of the Forbidden forest and onto the grounds of Hogwarts. Two of them hugged the wall while the third knocked on the front door. When no one answered, he snarled. With more force, he knocked again. After a few seconds, Professor Vector opened the door.

"Mr. McTavish! There you are! We were worried sick about you. You know better than to run off for days on end."

Mr. McTavish pulled out his wand and aimed it straight at her.

"Don't you dare point that wand at me! You are in enough trouble as it is," Professor Vector warned.

He muttered a curse, paralyzing her on the spot. The child sneered as he pushed her to the ground. His companions came out of hiding and rushed towards her.

They knew what to do with Professor Vector.

Mr. McTavish closed the door behind him, leaving it open just a crack so his companions could enter when he gave the signal. Whistling, the boy strolled into the wizarding school. His presence was unnoticed by the other students who were scurrying to finish their late night activities. After a few twists and turns, he crept up the staircase to the Headmistress' office, his hand on his wand in case that dumb gargoyle spoke so much as one word to him.

"Sorry, no entrance," the gargoyle began when he noticed the boy.

"But I need to speak to Headmistress McGonagall,"

"I'm sorry, but the Headmistress is in a meeting."

"With whom?" the boy asked.

"Someone who is going to help the school expand," he answered.

"Perfect," the boy purred as he approached the door.

"Mr. McTavish!" The gargoyle said in a louder tone. "I just said that…"

"Silencio," the boy commanded, brandishing his wand at the statue.

The gargoyle continued his rant, but stopped when he realized that he could not hear his own voice. The boy choked back his laughter before pressing his ear to the door.

"There must be some way to prove this marriage is nothing but a sham!" Minerva insisted.

"I told you, they've met all the requirements of the will. Severus needed to be married with six months, and he's taken a bride in less than six weeks. She's even pregnant with his heir." An unrecognizable voice argued back. "The Prince line is secure, just as Priscilla Prince intended for it to be. There is no grounds for contesting the will."
"Damnit I will not be outdone by Severus Snape! I will not!" Minerva seethed. "We are going to sit down and find a loophole in this will if it takes all night. He had to have violated a condition somehow. If we look hard enough we will find it."

"Very well," the other voice sighed.

The boy backed away from the door, confident that the Headmistress was distracted. He gave a parting smirk at the gargoyle before racing down the stairs. He flew through the hallway up to the Astronomy Tower, where he glanced down at the ground.

***

Meanwhile, the other two boys had disposed of Professor Vector in the Forbidden Forest. Now, they stood once again at the main door and stared at the Astronomy Tower.

From atop the Astronomy Tower a light flickered and grew brighter until it turned red. The boys on the ground gave each other looks of satisfaction, then crept through the door. Very few students were still awake, ensuring that their presence went undetected. Once inside, the boys split up; one went to the right and the other to the left. The one on the left rushed through the hallways until he reached a familiar room. Exhilaration pulsed through him as vengeance neared. He pounded on the door until a voice called, "I'm coming!"

The boy stepped back as the woman opened the door. Her eyes widened. "Mr. McTavish! I didn't expect to see you here. What are you doing up at this late hour?"

"I, I had a vision Professor Trelawney," he answered in a meek voice which did not match his darkening expression. "It was quite distressing."

"Oh dear. Come in!" she flung open the door.

The boy entered and shut the door behind him. "Were you sure that it was an authentic vision?" Trelawney continued.

"Oh yes, I'm very positive that it was an authentic vision!" Mr. McTavish answered.

"What did you see?" Trelawney asked.

"Well," the boy began as he sauntered about the room. "It began during the Great War. You… you were fighting someone."

"I was," Sybil confirmed.

"I heard you fought well. It must have been quite terrifying to face so many Death Eaters and Snatchers."

"It was a very scary time. Still, you were going to tell me about your vision."

"Your role in the battle was part of my vision," the boy assured her. "It was the very beginning of what I saw."

"I see," the Professor answered. "Continue."

"Well," he began as he stopped near the cabinet of crystal balls. "I saw you throw a crystal ball at someone."

"Oh yes," she beamed. "I knocked out Fenrir Greyback with a crystal ball."
“How did you feel about knocking him out?”

“Well I don’t mean to brag, but it was one of my finest moments. I was so thrilled to finally take my vengeance on one of the most despicable creatures alive.”

“Did you ever stop to think that maybe that decision wasn't wise?” the boy hissed as he opened the cabinet.


“Lavender Brown was a spineless twit who deserved to die!” the boy hissed. Hair began to sprout from his chin.

“How could you say such a thing?” Trelawney grasped.

“Because I’ve met her.”

“You have?”

“Yes,” he growled as he began to grow taller. Before Trelawney could notice the transformation, he turned and pulled out a crystal ball.

“Excuse me, but I really must ask that you not touch those crystal balls. I need them for class,” Sybil replied.

“Oh, you won't need them much longer,” the boy-turned-man replied.

He turned to face her, his savage eyes boring into hers. Sybil gasped as she recognized the beast in front of her.

"Fenrir," she whispered.

He raised the ball as it finally registered in her what was about to happen. She opened her mouth to scream.

It never came out.

***

"Did you two take the potion?" Fenrir demanded as he burst open the door to Neville's office.

"Of course we did," one of the other two boys answered.

Fenrir, in the form of Mr. McTavish, smiled as his eyes fell on his two henchmen. Between them, Neville Longbottom was bound and gagged to a chair. He kicked and squirmed, but the ropes only tightened.

"Hello," Fenrir began as he approached the hostage. The other two dashed inside the greenhouse with a canister. "Do you recognize me?"

Neville nodded and mumbled. Fenrir laughed. "Of course you don't! You're probably congratulating yourself for killing me!"

Neville stopped struggling and looked at him in confusion. Fenrir inhaled. “Oh my goodness, where are my manners? I’ve gone and changed forms on you haven’t I? Why we can’t have a proper
confrontation if you can’t see my true face now can we?”

Neville was silent.

“Please forgive me, but I’m quite insecure about my appearance. I don’t think I’m ready to reveal myself yet.”

Fenrir laughed. He leaned down until Neville could feel the warmth of the boy’s breath on his face. "Don't worry; we'll be seeing much more of each other in the future. For now though, I'd like to keep my identity under wraps if that's okay with you.'"

Neville said nothing. Fenrir smirked and patted him on the back, sending a stinging sensation throughout his body. “Good! I knew that we could reach an understanding.”

Neville renewed his struggle as a fresh wave of panic gripped him. "Oh don't you want to stay? I thought we were having such a great time. Reunions are always a blast, wouldn’t you agree?"

Professor Longbottom tried to say something, but it all came out as muffled jumble. The more Neville struggled, the brighter the boy’s eyes grew. "Oh how great it is to see you like this. I never thought I'd see the day! Seeing you like this and knowing I caused it makes living in squalor for so long worth it!"

"We're done!" one of the other boys announced.

"Oh good! We can begin the festivities!" Fenrir cried as he clasped his hands together. Then he looked back at Neville. "Oh don't worry! We have something very special planned for tonight. You won't be disappointed with my surprise!"

The other two boys stepped out of the greenhouse, reeking of a scent Neville couldn't identify. Fenrir stepped to the entrance of the greenhouse and sneered, "Let the fireworks begin."

Fire leapt from his wand onto the ground.

BOOM!

Neville screamed as flames engulfed the greenhouse. Tears came to his eyes as he thought of his plants, especially the rare exotic ones, being consumed by the flames. He attempted to stand up and rescue them, but the rope prevented it.

The boys cackled.

"Poor Mr. Longbottom," one of the ones who had been inside the greenhouse crooned.

“How could anyone possibly believe he could save the Wizarding World when he can’t save a single mandrake?” The other yelled.

Neville screamed over their laughter.

Five agonizing minutes passed in the heat of the flames.

"I've had enough partying for one day," Fenrir announced as he pretended to yawn. "Let's leave."

With that, they exited the door, leaving Neville behind to watch the flames devour everything he'd worked for.
Well this was much less sweeter than the last chapter (unless you’re a werewolf). Thanks for reading!
Two aurors cast protective wards around the crime scene. Three others searched Professor Trelawney's room for any possible clue to the identity of the perpetrator. Harry Potter examined the crystal ball cabinet, trying his best to ignore the nostalgia the familiar sights and smells of the room evoked. After inspecting the door one final time he announced, "There are no signs of forced entry here. Whoever removed the ball from the cabinet didn’t use dark magic or physical violence to take it."

"There’s no sign of damage to the door," another auror announced. "Sybill allowed however killed her to enter the room of her own free will.

"Then it was a surprise attack," the coroner stated from across the room.

"That’s the working theory," the first auror confirmed.

Harry walked over to the coroner, trying his best to avert his eyes from Trelawney's now unrecognizable face. "What do you believe was the cause of death?"

The coroner exhaled. "She was bludgeoned to death by some sort of object. Judging by the marks on her head I'd say it was a crystal ball."

Harry hummed.

"Still, I'll need to do a full autopsy before making any judgments," the coroner continued.

"I went through every crystal ball in that closet. I couldn't find blood stains on any of them," Harry replied.

"Then the killer must've taken it with him," the coroner answered.

Harry shook his head and sighed. "None of this makes any sense. Why would anyone kill Sybill Trelawney?"

"I don't know," the coroner answered. "I just look at the body; I can't give you a motive," he replied. "What I can tell you though is that this is one of the most brutal attacks I've ever examined."

"It's also one of the most senseless," Harry shook his head.

"Are you ready to remove the body?" an auror asked as she, along with four other aurors, approached the body with a stretcher.

"Yes, I believe so. I can't tell you much more about the crime until I do a full autopsy, which obviously isn't happening here," the coroner answered.

The aurors lifted Sybil's body onto the stretcher, careful to secure it well. They rushed off down the hall with the coroner in tow. The students had been ordered to their rooms for fear they might accidentally interfere with the investigation. Only a few teachers poked their heads into the hallway to wish their comrade a final farewell.

Harry took a deep breath before exiting the crime scene. In the hallway, he spotted another auror
who appeared as worn as he did from the events of the morning.

"Anything new Ruby?" Harry asked.

"No," she answered. "We've interviewed Professor Vector, but she doesn't remember anything after the three suspects threw her into the woods."

"Did she sustain any injuries?"

"The only injuries she sustained were a few scratches from being thrown onto the ground," Ruby answered.

"Good. How's Neville doing?"

"He's still pretty shaken up, but he feels that he's coherent enough to give a statement to Pearl."

"I wish I could help him," Harry muttered. "Merlin just when life was finally going his way this happens. I can't imagine watching your whole life's work burn before your eyes."

"Me neither," Ruby twitched her foot.

"Is there anything else I need to know?"

"Well, there's one more thing we'll need to do before leaving?"

"What?"
She swallowed. "We need to interview Headmistress McGonagall."

"I thought Dawson was interviewing her," Harry replied.

"She isn't cooperating with him. She refuses to tell us when she last saw Mr. McTavish," Ruby explained.

"What?" Harry exclaimed. "How on earth could she keep something so vital from us?"

"She's in damage control mode. This attack makes Hogwarts look like a dangerous place where students get kidnapped and the administration does nothing. The fact that there was a huge battle on school grounds seven years ago does little to help the school's image."

Harry put his head in his hands and groaned.

"We need someone who can get to the truth," Ruby answered.

"Yes, we do," Harry muttered.

"Since you were one of her star pupils, you might be able to get a statement from her."

"Okay," he replied. "I'll see what I can do. No guarantees, though."

"Don't worry, no one expects guarantees in a crime like this," Ruby replied.

Harry nodded. "Where is she?"

"In the Dining Hall," Ruby answered. "She didn't want to be near the portraits in her office."

"Makes sense. Thanks," Harry answered before rushing off to see Minerva.
Minerva stared at the wall, still trying to piece together the events of the past few days. How could everything go so wrong in such a short amount of time? How could she have let her guard down like this? What would Albus say if he knew what had just happened? She supposed she'd know the answer to that question soon enough thanks to his portrait, but at the moment his reaction was something she did not wish to dwell upon.

"Minerva," a soft voice called.

The voice brought her out of her haze. "Harry?"

Harry strolled over to her. "Headmistress," he began.

She embraced him. "Harry, it's so good to see you again."

"It's great to see you as well."

Minerva hummed.

"I just wish we could've seen each other under different circumstances," Harry continued.

"As do I," Minerva answered before releasing him.

Harry and Minerva sat down. "You probably know why I'm here."

"Yes," The Headmistress answered as her face became stern. "You want to know what happened the night of Sybill's murder."

"That information would certainly help in our investigation," Harry replied.

Minerva pursed her lips. "I told the other auror, I didn't see anything."

"Fine, we'll discuss what happened earlier in the evening. What were you doing last night?"

"I," she began before gulping. "I was meeting with a lawyer."

"About what?" Harry asked with interest.

"I was trying to devise a way to prove that Severus Snape's marriage was invalid."

"Invalid?"

"I thought faked his wedding. His marriage to Hermione happened so soon after Priscilla’s will was read. It was sketchy to say the least. Something was amiss, but I couldn't place my finger upon it. Thus I called a lawyer. He and I were looking over the will trying to discover any loophole Snape could've used to gain his fortune."

"Why was invalidating Hermione and Snape’s marriage so important to you?"

"We need the money. Donors are few and far between." A tear came to her eye. "People will be even less likely to donate after this debacle."

"Perhaps if you apologize to Snape and Hermione, they may consider giving the school a part of their fortune," Harry suggested. "Both of them care deeply for the school, and they wouldn’t want it to shut down if they could save it."
"It's doubtful they'd consider giving me a knut," Minerva replied.

“I don't believe that, but that isn't the issue at hand,” Harry exhaled. “We need to determine a timeline for last night's events. How long were you with the lawyer?”

“It was around nine when the meeting was interrupted. A student ran up to my room and began yelling that the greenhouse was on fire."

"What happened then?"

"We raced downstairs," she began before taking a shaky breath. "It was an inferno, like nothing I'd ever seen. We found and released Neville, then began casting spells to put out the fire, but alas we couldn't save the plants. We did manage to save the structure of the greenhouse though."

"At least all's not lost," he replied with a small smile.

"No," Minerva replied, her expression lightening up a little. "Still, once we put out the fire, we realized that Professor Vector and Professor Trelawney were missing. Hagrid found Septima in the woods, and I," she choked.

"You found Sybill in her room," Harry concluded.

Minerva nodded as she repressed her tears.

"Minerva," Harry began, hoping that he wasn't overstepping a boundary. "There are several reports of three people who looked like a student named John McTavish."

Minerva nodded.

"Who and where is he?" Harry asked.

Minerva's eyes became walled off. Here was the 'damage control mode' to which Ruby had referred. "He's a student here. I believe he's a third year Gryffindor."

"Yes, but where is he?" Harry answered. "We need to interview him. From what I can gather no one has found him."

"I don't know where he is," Minerva admitted.

Harry's eyes widened. "Really?"

"He, I thought he returned home a few days ago," she answered.

"Great, he's home. Where can we find his address?" Harry asked.

“I don't have his address on record,” she admitted.

"Why?" Harry asked.

“Because his parents moved a month ago. I haven't had time to update his information," she replied.

Harry shook his head. "Headmistress McGonagall, you know that you could be arrested for losing track of a student like that."

"Why do you think I never reported his disappearance?" she burst out.
Harry gasped as she covered her mouth. "He's, he's gone?"

She sighed. "He's been gone for some time. We tried to find him, but no such luck."

"So, he could've been kidnapped?" Harry asked.

She nodded as she shut her eyes.

Harry felt the wind leave his body. "You should be fired."

"What could I do?" Minerva snapped. "I have to make Hogwarts look safe! Merlin knows we took a hit during the Great War. We've never recovered!"

"You're breaking the law!" Harry shouted. "You may have allowed a kidnapper to get away with murder! If this person could savagely beat Professor Trelawney to death and burn down Nevill's treehouse do you think he or she would hesitate to kill a child who may have seen and heard too much!"

Minerva shook.

"John McTavish could be dead right now! His blood is on your hands!"

Minerva looked up at him. Her expression was one of a tired and beleaguered headmistress who may not have been ready for the responsibility that had been thrust upon her. "I thought that I was doing the right thing for the school. I thought if we tried hard enough we could find him. Maybe there was no need to report his disappearance. Maybe we could've handled things on our own."

"We have to report his disappearance," Harry muttered.

"No!" she snapped. "We can't!"

"Excuse me," Harry spat.

A belligerent fire had reclaimed her eyes. "You have to keep quiet, for Hogwarts sake!"

"A child is missing and possibly dead! I can't just let that go!"

"Then tell them that he disappeared that night!"

"We both know that someone will contradict that story," Harry warned.

"Then please don't tell your superiors that I knew he was gone."

"I can't do that," Harry replied.

"I can't lose my job," she pleaded.

Harry swallowed. "I can tell them that you never told me exactly how long he was gone, and that you told me that at one point you believed he had returned home. To do anything more would be beyond unethical," Harry warned.

"I know," she whispered. "Thank you."

Harry exhaled as he stood. "I think we're through here."

"One more thing!" Minerva replied.
"What?" Harry asked as he felt a weight swelling inside of him.

"Could you try to minimize this incident?"

“That’s for my superiors and the politicians to decide. I simply collect evidence and make the arrests.”

“Do…do you think they’ll come after me for not reporting his disappearance?”

“I have no idea.”

“If you were them, what would you do?”

“I don’t think you want to know.”

With that, he rushed out of the room, leaving her alone to ponder her life and the exact point when she had become someone willing to sacrifice a child for what she considered to be the greater good.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading! The Snapes will return in force next chapter!
Hermione brushed the wrinkles from her ruby sundress. She adjusted it until it draped over her bump without making her appear too much heavier than the day she'd bought it. Satisfied that she was presentable, her eyes fell on the closed bathroom door. Running water was still audible, She frowned. "Are you ready yet?"

"I will be in five minutes," Severus yelled from behind the closed door.

"Don't take too much longer than that. Rita should be here in about ten minutes."

"Fine," Severus answered.

The water ceased to flow. Severus grumbled out a few phrases, but Hermione thought better than to ask what he had said. No need to have their first argument right before an interview with a less than friendly reporter.

Hermione shook her head as she took out her wand to smooth out the bed sheets. The thin cotton sheets responded to her command.

Truth be told, it was surreal to think of it as her bed with Severus. As much as Hermione loved academia, she'd never considered marrying a professor, at least not in her adult life. Still the more she glanced at her emerald wedding ring and the longer she remained in the house the more she warmed to the reality that she was now Mrs. Severus Snape. There were far less pleasant things in life to be.

Yet for a married couple their connection was unconventional, a fact only complicated by the past two nights. Although they hadn't touch each other last night, Hermione took comfort in the fact that someone slept beside her, even if that person wasn't a man she loved. As the blanket fell into place she wondered how pathetic that made her.

The creak of the bathroom door opening behind her jolted her from her musings. Steam wafted into the bedroom as Severus rushed over to the closet. He flung open the door and grabbed an outfit.

She cocked her head. "Do you wear anything other than black?"

Severus threw on a pair of trousers. "Shouldn't you know the answer to that question?"

"I'm aware of your previous fashion choices, but since you no longer need to scare Hufflepuffs and deduct points from Gryffindors I thought you may add a bit more variety to your wardrobe."

He glanced at her and smirked. "Did you expect me to take up wearing orange?"

"No," she grinned. "I just wondered if you owned any other colors."

"I do not," he answered before putting on his dress shirt. "And do not consider asking me to wear anything other than what I currently own."

"Severus Snape in anything other than black." Hermione gasped. "Perish the thought."

For a moment she thought she heard him chuckle, but the noise was obscured by the collision of wire hangers. Severus mumbled a few times as he shifted some hangers to the right, others to the left.
"What are you looking for?" Hermione asked.

"My cape," he muttered.

"Oh," she answered. "I wouldn’t have the foggiest clue where that is."

Severus pulled out a hanger. “Now there’s a first. There's something Mrs. Snape doesn't know.”

“I,” Hermione began before closing her mouth. Her body radiated heat despite her shudders.

He’d called her Mrs. Snape. Not bushy-haired-know-it-all, not Ms. Granger, but Mrs. Snape. Severus Snape had acknowledged Hermione Snape as his wife in private without being asked to do so. There were no cameras flashing in his face, no reporters barraging him with questions, no adoring fans throwing themselves at him. Instead Severus called her “Mrs. Snape” as a simple statement of the fact that they were married, and that he’d promised to be faithful to her.

“No, I guess I don’t know everything,” Hermione answered. “Mr. Snape.”

Severus stopped midway through trying to remove the cape from the hanger. Had she just called him Mr. Snape as an acknowledgement of their newly forged connection? Had he called her Mrs. Snape first? Was she acknowledging that they’d made promises to each other to be faithful throughout this peculiar union?

He couldn’t think of anyone who had fulfilled any promise to him. Why did he have faith that she would keep her doe to be loyal to him and him alone?

A scratch from the window interrupted their musings. Hermione rushed over to open it. A great horned owl wafted into the room. Her eyes widened as she remembered who owned the bird. She removed the letter from its leg more aggressively than she’d intended. After uttering a faint apology to the bird she tore open the letter. The owl let out a loud hoot but Hermione was too engrossed in the letter to respond. Severus groaned as he ran into the kitchen to fetch a treat, his cape lying on the floor.

When he returned, Hermione was smiling. Severus held out his hand with the treat exposed. With a hoot the owl devoured the morsel.

Severus put on his cape. "What does the letter say?"

"Kingsley is giving me a leave of absence from my job,” Hermione explained.

“A leave of absence?” Severus asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yes," Hermione answered.

“I thought you wanted to continue working.”

“At first I wanted the option to keep working open, but the more I considered my circumstances the more I realized that I detested my Ministry job. Now seems as good a time as any to leave and find a new way to occupy my days.”

“I can certainly understand the need to leave an unpleasant profession.”

"Indeed you could."

Severus’ expression softened.
“Once I was confident that I was making the right decision, I wrote him asking for a leave of absence and explained the circumstances surrounding our marriage,” Hermione continued.

“Did you inform him of your pregnancy?” Severus asked.

“I told him about the baby,” Hermione replied. “He’s offered us his congratulations.”

“Does he believe I am the father of your child?” Severus asked.

"I told him that I was marrying my child’s father,” she admitted.

“I am pleased to hear it,” Severus’ muscles relaxed.

Hermione folded the letter and dropped it onto the bed. "I'll write him back when we finish with the interview."

He nodded.

From across the house, someone rapped on the door. Hermione smiled, "Showtime."

"Indeed," Severus replied with a half grin.

Severus opened the front door, Hermione right behind him. He cleared his throat. "Hello Rita."

"Hello Mr. and Mrs. Snape," she began as Severus stood back to permit her entry. "I'm sorry I'm a few minutes late. It's been a big news day."

"What happened?" Hermione asked. "Did Harry give another interview on the evils of all things Malfoy?"

“No. This was much more interesting,” Rita pushed Hermione aside. “Someone was murdered at Hogwarts!"

"What?" the Snapes chorused as the door shut.

"Yes!” Her voice betrayed her excitement. "Professor Trelawney was murdered at Hogwarts and Professor Longbottom's greenhouse was burned to the ground. The wreckage was horrible! It's a media field day! Oh I’ll have enough stories from this attack to keep me writing articles for months!"

Hermione shook her head. "I'll have to pay Neville a visit. I can’t even begin to fathom what his emotional state must be right now."

"Tell me," Rita purred. "What is the nature of your relationship with Professor Longbottom?"

"Why don't we have a seat in the living room?" Severus suggested, though the implication was more of an order.

"Yes," Rita replied, oblivious to his tone. "Let's do that,"

She strode to the sitting room, occasionally sliding a finger across a dusty shelf.

Severus glanced at Hermione, whose eyes were still wide. He touched her hand, bringing her back to the here and now. "Will you be able to focus on this interview? We can send her away and give her a written statement."

"I'll be fine," she whispered.
Severus nodded. He led her inside the room. Together, they sat on the couch. Hermione leaned into Severus’ shoulder for comfort, hoping Rita would see the gesture as marital familiarity. While he made no further show of affection, Severus did not rebuff her touch. In fact, his eyes had a twinkle in them.

“So,” Rita began. "You two seem cozy."

"Rita," Severus began. "This interview is going to be conducted in a certain way."

“I promise to conduct this interview the same way I do every other interview.”

"That is our fear," Hermione replied.

Rita gasped as Severus wandlessly retrieved the quill. “As I said, this interview is going to be conducted in a certain way, namely our way.”

Rita’s mouth was agape.

"You will be using a different quill for this interview, namely one of mine,” Severus continued.

"Give me my pen back!” Rita demanded as Hermione sat up straighter and smirked.

"I don't think so," Hermione replied. "We asked you to do this interview because we know that you will conduct it in a fair and honest manner."

"Aren't I always fair and honest?” Rita asked in mock horror.

"Only if someone brings up your animagus form," Hermione replied.

The color drained from Rita’s face as her mouth sagged open. "That was your plan the entire time. You choose me to write about your marriage because you could manipulate me."

"Yes," Severus replied.

Hermione's grin widened. "Look on the bright side Rita, you are getting an exclusive interview."

"Where are your quills?” Rita demanded. She pulled an ink bottle out of her pocket and slammed it against the wooden coffee table.

"Here," Severus answered as he pulled one from his pocket.

Rita stomped over and snatched it away. Returning to her seat, she began to scribble something on the page.

"Why did you two decide to marry?” Rita spat as she glanced up from her notepad.

"I needed to marry in order to inherit my grandmother's fortune," Severus answered, his tone serious.

"My baby needed its father," Hermione added.

Rita dropped the pad and turned her attention to Hermione. “Your baby?”

Hermione nodded as she repositioned herself. Rita stared at Mrs. Snape’s swollen abdomen.

“My, my,” Rita muttered as she picked up her notepad. "This does make for an interesting story now doesn't it? How far along are you?"
"I'm four months along," Hermione continued.

"Is it Severus?" Rita asked.

"Why wouldn't it be?" Hermione answered, her grin replaced with a scowl somewhat similar to the one her husband's infamous one.

“Well there was the fact that you were with Ron for almost seven years,” Rita drawled. "Surely that would plant some doubt in a few minds."

“I am more than confident that this child is mine,” Severus interrupted.

“How?”

“As a former Death Eater my bloodline is important to me,” Severus explained. “As an expert legilimens I did everything in my power not to taint my bloodline.”

“I can certainly see where your confidence stems from,” Rita scribbled down his words.

Hermione rubbed the top of Severus’ arm. His muscles lost their tension under her touch. “There is no reason for Severus to doubt my faithfulness to him.”

“Indeed there isn’t,” Severus gazed into her eyes.

For one long moment Rita felt as if she no longer existed. She coughed.

The pair returned their attention to her.

“You must admit that this is all quite sudden, at least it is for people who have been following Hermione’s life.” She turned to the other witch. “You and Ron were in love, were you not?”

"We were," Hermione answered her pain evident.

"Ron doesn't deserve a woman like Hermione," Severus interjected.

Hermione’s eyes bulged as Rita resumed writing. Severus' eyes betrayed no emotion, but Rita could see the confusion in Hermione's. Fascinating.

“Do you have any less gossipy questions?” Severus asked.

“Yes, do you know the gender of this baby?” Rita asked.

“No, but we'll find out at our next prenatal appointment in a few weeks,” Hermione replied.

Now it was Severus who appeared confused. Rita took in the sight and resumed jotting things down.

"I'm just interested.” She poked her head up from the notepad, "When did your love affair begin?"

Hermione flushed at the question as Severus answered, "We met at a coffeehouse a few months ago. We began discussing books and found that we had quite a few things in common."

"Indeed we had much more in common than either of us realized," Hermione replied as her face returned to its normal color.

"When did you begin cheating on Ron?” she asked.

"Would you like to be exposed as an unregistered animagus?” Severus warned.
Rita gulped and nodded. "How is Ron taking your marriage?" she asked in a weaker voice.

"A little too well," Hermione replied.

"I see," Rita replied. "I do see…"

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Rita snarled as she left the house. All of the juiciest details of the Snapes' story had been gutted from her notes under threat of exposure. She never should've agreed to this interview, but oh, they were right, it was exclusive. Merlin knew how much publicity she'd get to be the first to publish that Severus Snape was expecting an heir, and its mother was a member of the Golden Trio…

A smile came to her face as she began to rethink her options. Yes, there was the story that Hermione was carrying Snape's heir, but there was an even bigger story, the one in which Hermione Granger had cheated on her true love, Ronald Weasley. Oh the poor dear must be devastated…and much more willing to talk. Oh to be the first to interview him!

She apparated home and dashed into her office.

Ron would be receiving an owl from her within the hour.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully this has made up for some of the unpleasantness of the past few chapters.
Thank you again for the support!
Severus and Hermione stared at the spot where Rita had sat. After several minutes of silence Hermione glanced at her husband. When his eyes met hers she looked away.

Severus cleared his throat. "When is this antenatal appointment to determine the baby's gender?"

Hermione gazed into her husband's eyes. He betrayed no emotion. "It's in two weeks."

Severus swallowed.

"There’s no need to fret. It’s just a regular checkup. I was going to tell you about it, but with the chaos of the past few days I couldn’t find a good time to tell you. Looking back, I should’ve spent less time finding the perfect moment to tell you about my appointment and more time getting around to informing you of it."

"Perhaps," Severus replied, his expression still stoic. "I could've asked you about your antenatal appointments though."

"Maybe." She wrung her hands. "If you don't want to go, I won't press the issue. It’s understandable that you’d find conducting research or making sure the inheritance is going through more productive than sitting in a room discussing babies."

"No," Severus answered. "I find attending this antenatal appointment vastly more important than anything else I could be doing."

Hermione’s eyes misted.

"You said that during this appointment they would reveal the child’s gender, correct?" he asked.

She nodded.

"That’s all the more reason for me to be there. If I'm going to raise this child then I want to know it on some level. The first step is to know its gender."

Hermione gave him a smile as she placed her hand over her abdomen. "That is very true."

"Unless you don’t want me to come," Severus choked.

"No," Hermione answered. "The baby and I want you there more than anything."

"Then I will be there."

"Thank you."

"There is no need to thank me. Any halfway decent father would want to be there."

"Yes, he would."

A comfortable silence fell between them.
Hermione’s eyes grew and glistened. "It's kicking. Do you want to feel it?"

He nodded. She guided his hand over her stomach. His eyes lit up as he felt the pressure.

"You can talk to it," Hermione suggested.

He looked down at his hand. "I doubt it can hear me."

"You never know," Hermione replied. "I’ve read that babies can hear others in the womb as early as eighteen weeks."

Severus chuckled. "Of course you've read that."

Hermione blushed. "I think the baby is very eager to hear your voice."

"It would be the first child to feel that way," Severus noted.

His smile widened as it kicked against his hand.

"See, it likes you," Hermione answered. "Go ahead and talk to your child."

"Hello," he began as it pressed against him again. "I'm your dad."

Severus paused to feel it kick against his palm again.

"Go on," Hermione whispered. "It wants you to keep talking."

Severus rubbed his thumb over the last placed it kicked. "You like my voice, I guess."

"You guess?" Hermione laughed.

He gave her a look. "I'm trying to get used to all of this. I'm not accustomed to talking to fetuses and having a child respond positively to my presence."

Hermione giggled.

"As I was saying earlier I am your dad," Severus drawled. "My full name is Severus Snape. Do not worry, I won't name you after me."

"Why not?"

"Before I went to Hogwarts no one could pronounce my name. More than a few people made their own interesting variants of 'Severus,' such as Snivellus."

"I hadn’t considered that," Hermione replied.

The baby kicked again.

"I can relate to having a strange name and an undesirable nickname," she continued. "Hermione wasn't any easier to pronounce that Severus. Then there was the fact that I secretly hate being called 'Mione."

"'Mione always sounded so crude." He answered.

She shrugged. "Every time I objected to the name it caused a fight, so I got used to it."

"Hermione is poetic. Shortening it the way Potter and Weasley did just made it sound cheap,"
Severus answered.

She gave him a small smile. "No one's ever liked my name."

"It's adequate," he answered before glancing up at her with a grin of his own.

She chuckled. "Coming from you that's high praise indeed."

"As we've established I'm more than capable of doling out well earned compliments." Severus moved his hand up her abdomen.

"Maybe you've always been capable of it, but it's a skill I hadn't seen you exercise until we were married," Hermione noted.

"Fair enough," Severus muttered as he continued to slide his hand along her abdomen. When he felt a small kick he exhaled. "Your mother and I will do our best to select a short, beautiful, yet easy to pronounce name for you. With a little luck we will pick the perfect name to match your personality."

"We will," Hermione promised.

After a few more moments of stillness Severus removed his hand. "I think baby is tired."

Hermione sighed. "It probably is."

Silence fell between them again, this time a bit more awkward. "I should continue researching my new antivenin potion," Severus began as he stood up.

"Wait!" Hermione exclaimed.

He looked back. "Yes?"

"Did, did you mean what you said about Ron not deserving me?" she asked.

Severus bent down until he was at eye level with her. "No one as smart as you deserves a dunderhead like Ron who is allergic to responsibility."

She bit her lip.

"I've never believed that you and Ron were each other's true love. I've always believed you deserve much better than anything he was willing to offer."

"You were right about Ron not being my true love," she whispered. "For better or worse, you were right."

"I was," Severus answered. "I'm also right about you deserving better. You deserve someone who can bring you happiness and will give you his undivided loyalty."

"Maybe," she answered.

He kissed her on the forehead before leaving. She sat alone on the couch, meditating on everything that had just occurred.

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Tears rolled down Neville’s cheeks as the construction crew pulled out their wands to disintegrate the charred remains of his greenhouse. He’d lost track of how many times he’d told himself not to
cry, but after witnessing the burning of his treasured greenhouse, being interviewed for hours on end, and watching the workers dismantle the ruins, he gave himself permission to express his emotions.

A quiet hoot interrupted his thoughts. He spun around to see a black owl looking up at him. Neville dried his eyes before removing the note from its leg. He unraveled the message and read it. Fresh tears came to his eyes.

Hermione and Severus had invited him over for lunch the next day, a gesture which was much appreciated. Even in his darkest hour, he still had something going for him: his friends.

Well, it was more like one friend and one surly former professor, but the fact that Professor Snape would allow Neville to enter his house meant a great deal to the herbology professor.

Their kindness was enough to give him the strength to walk away from the scorched greenhouse and return to his office, where he'd draw up plans for a new one.

Chapter End Notes

So here is the actual Chapter 25. Sorry for the screw up. It's been one of those summers...

Thanks again for all the support!
Severus’ brow was furrowed as he reread the article. On occasion he glanced over a paragraph twice in order to ensure that he had captured the finer points of the author’s arguments. As many times as he pored over the article, though, he still could not find anything of use in regards to a new antivenin potion.

He groaned and pinched the bridge of his nose. Why was it that everyone who considered creating an antivenin potion was a complete and total idiot? Was it too much to ask that an author understand basic ingredient reactions before scribbling something down and turning it into the first journal one could find? Sometimes he swore the standards in modern journals were so low they might as well be in the gossip column of The Daily Prophet.

A knock on the door interrupted his cogitations. He set the journal down on his desk. Maybe his guest and their lunch would provide a welcome distraction. His back popped as he got up from the chair. Severus grunted, counting the days until he could afford a comfortable chair. He stepped into the hallway.

Hermione raced ahead of him. “I’m coming!”

Severus smirked when he noticed that after all the fuss she’d made about what to wear, she still hadn’t bothered to put on any shoes or stockings. Her sundress did fit her curves quite nicely, though…

He stopped in his tracks.

Where did that thought come from?

Hermione flung open the door. "Hello Neville."

"Hello Hermione," Neville began with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Hello Professor Longbottom," Severus glided to the door, doing his best to imitate a man who was not thinking about how perfectly his wife’s sundress fit her body.

"Hello," Neville replied. "How are you?"

"Fine," Severus answered.

Neville entered.

"The bigger question is how are you doing?" Hermione asked as she shut the door behind him.

"Fine, all things considered," Neville sighed.

"That well," Severus replied with a twinge of sympathy.

Neville nodded.

"What happened to your greenhouse was truly horrible," Hermione replied.
“Indeed it was,” Severus chimed in.

“Thank you for your concern,” Neville raised his chin. “But I’m trying to move forward as best I can.”

“How?” Hermione asked.

His eyes lightened. "I'm already drawing plans for a new greenhouse."

"That's excellent!” Hermione exclaimed as she directed them towards the kitchen.

"Yes, although I don't know if the Headmistress will approve of my designs. At the moment, she has other things on her mind," Neville exhaled.

“Other than finding the missing child-which I know the aurors are taking care of-what on earth could be more important than rebuilding your greenhouse?” Hermione asked.

"Damage control," Neville answered as his face fell.

"You'd think that a greenhouse which is vital for the study of herbology would rank higher than politics," Hermione mused as the men sat down.

"Unfortunately being a Headmaster often involves more damage control than one would like" Severus answered.

"I suppose it does,” Neville’s eyes flickered in understanding.

Hermione swallowed as she contemplated what difficult and unpopular decisions Severus must have made as Headmaster. Her musings were interrupted by a ring in the kitchen.

"I need to take the roast out of the oven," She pointed to a tray of raw vegetables and ranch dip on the table. "Help yourself to a snack in the meantime."

"Thank you," Neville answered.

She raced to the oven.

As Neville reached over for a carrot, Severus asked, "You mentioned something in your newspaper interview about being tied up."

"Yes," Neville replied as he bowed his head. “Although I can’t say much more.”

“I take it Minerva wants as few details about the case made known to the public as possible."

“‘Yes.”

Severus nodded.

Neville leaned forward and whispered, “But she isn’t being completely honest with the aurors and I fear if I don’t turn to someone who could dig up some information on some possible suspects the case will go cold.”

“I don't know how I could help you. Hermione and I aren’t involved with Hogwarts or the Ministry, at least not anymore.”

“True, but I’m well aware that between you two and the Malfoys you have resources even the
Ministry isn’t aware of.”

Severus’ eyes flashed in acknowledgement. "Did you get a good look at the men?"

Neville scanned the room. He replied in a low voice, “As stated before I shouldn't tell you or Hermione this, but I recognized the attackers.”

Neville chewed on his carrot.

"Who were they?" Severus asked.

He swallowed and answered. "They all resembled a student by the name of John McTavish.”

“Who is he?”

“He's a muggle-born, and a Gryffindor. He's also been missing for about a week."

Severus appeared to process the information, but said nothing.

"Here's the roast," Hermione announced. She frowned when she saw the men's faces. “What are you two discussing?"

Severus answered, "Neville said that the attackers resembled the missing student."

"What?" Hermione set the meat on the table. "The paper made it sound like the missing child was unrelated to the attack on the greenhouse."

"It's a lie," Severus answered.

Hermione shook her head as she sat at her place at the table. "I should be more surprised, but considering what's happened to me over the years I should've expected something like this."

"You can't tell anyone what I just said," Neville began. "I wasn't supposed to tell either of you."

"But that's important information!" Hermione argued. "How could she not tell anyone about the attackers' appearance? She could be allowing the attackers to get away with their actions."

"Image," Severus answered. "Her goal is to make Hogwarts appear to be the friendliest and safest place on earth despite evidence to the contrary."

"Oh Merlin," Hermione whispered as she began to carve the roast.

"What else did Minerva tell you not to say?" Severus asked in a neutral tone.

"Well, there were some things they said that bothered me,” Neville replied as he raised his plate, allowing Hermione to dish him up some meat.

"Such as?" Hermione asked.

"They, they said that it was personal. They were getting back at me for almost killing them. Well, at least one claimed I killed him. I don't know about the other two," Neville answered before helping himself to some mashed potatoes.

"That makes no sense," Hermione replied as she motioned for Severus to raise his plate. He obeyed. "You wouldn't hurt a fly."
"I know. The only time I ever hurt anyone was during the Great War," Neville answered.

Severus lowered his plate as his wife’s eyes shone with an idea. She trembled. "You don't think you-know-who is back?"

"Has the mark on your arm been hurting?" Neville panicked.

"No," Severus replied.

"Maybe he hasn't summoned you yet," Neville replied.

Hermione served herself, her eyes clouded in fear.

"I highly doubt Voldemort has returned," Severus continued. "There is no reason to doubt his death, nor is there any reason to believe Voldemort's first act upon returning would be to attack Hogwarts."

"True," Hermione mused.

"Besides," Neville cut in. "Why would Voldemort go after me or use a muggle-born? Surely he has more important enemies than me to destroy and has more loyal followers than some muggleborn he'd never heard of."

"Exactly," Severus answered.

"Still I'm not sure who else it could be," Neville began to cut up his meat. "The next logical suspect would be a member of the Death Eaters, but all of them are either in Azkaban or dead."

"Perhaps a sympathizer evaded capture and wished for revenge," Severus proposed.

"There are still wizards and witches who believe in that garbage?" Hermione asked.

"It's hard to kill an idea," Severus answered. "Even one as twisted as pure-blood supremacy."

"True," Neville agreed. "Still, I saw his eyes. He was so angry, yet so happy that I was suffering. This attack was personal."

"Whoever it was, I hope they catch him soon," Hermione replied.

"Me too," Neville agreed. "In the meantime though, I'm casting every ward I know on my room. The aurors have agreed to provide me extra security for the foreseeable future as well."

"Those are excellent ideas," Hermione replied.

"Indeed," Severus answered.

They began to eat their meal in a comfortable yet contemplative silence. Halfway through the meal Neville commented, "You two look happy together."

Severus set down his silverware. Hermione gulped down her bite and stared at him, her eyes as wide as the roast plate.

After ninety tense seconds, Severus asked. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Neville’s smile was much too large for either of the Snapes’ liking. "You, Severus aren't scowling, and you, Hermione, look relaxed."
Severus and Hermione blinked.

Neville turned to Hermione. "You aren't looking at Severus as though he was some sort of disgusting creature."

"That's because Severus has impeccable table manners," she answered.

"And you Severus, aren't looking at Hermione like she’s an obnoxious Gryffindor," he continued.

"That’s because she’s one of the few people I’ve met who can string together two intelligible sentences," he answered.

"Marriage agrees with you two," Neville answered with a confident gleam in his eyes.

"If you say so," Severus muttered before resuming his meal.

"Indeed," Hermione mumbled before taking another bite.

Neville covered his mouth and laughed. Severus and Hermione glanced at each other as if asking for permission to hex him.

"How is your baby?" Neville asked, ignoring their less than welcoming expressions.

Severus' eyes softened as Hermione rubbed her bump. "It's doing very well. We have an appointment to determine its gender soon."

"Great!" Neville replied. "Would you like a boy or a girl?"

"I couldn't care less if the child is a boy or girl so long as it is not a dunderhead," Severus answered.

Hermione suppressed a chuckle. "I just want one who is healthy, although I'm somewhat partial to a girl."

"Well, hopefully it's a girl then," Neville answered.

"Yes," Severus replied before taking another bite.

"And hopefully she's smart and healthy," Neville continued.

"Here, here," Severus replied as he allowed himself to smile.

"Agreed," Hermione replied.

Severus made a concerted effort to stifle his grin when he realized that he was showing pleasure. The smile did not escape Neville's notice. The herbology professor took another bite and grinned to himself. Severus' scowl deepened. If that Gryffindor dared tell anyone Severus was developing a soft spot for a child...

"So, what kind of plans do you have to rebuild your greenhouse?" Hermione asked.

Severus returned his attention to his wife and their guest.

"Well, I've been thinking for a long time that I need to expand it," Neville began. "After all, I would like a tropical plant section…"
This is more than a bit embarrassing. I was looking over the document which contains the entire story and realized I had skipped over the last chapter. It's a fairly important chapter, so I couldn't in good conscience skip it.

So Chapter 25 has been changed to what it should be, and this chapter is where it's supposed to be. Sorry for the confusion. It's been one of those summers...

Thanks for supporting me in spite of my brain farts! I'll be sure not to let this confusion happen again.
"Still on the front page," Scabior sneered as he threw the paper before the others.

The werewolves cackled. Scabior took a deep breath and continued, "Even that cutesy and surprisingly non-scandalous article about the Severus, his delectable wife, and their little spawn didn't knock us off."

"Ah," Fenrir exhaled. "It's so good to be in the news again, even if they are leaving out more than a few significant details."

"Yeah, why are they keeping so quiet about things?" Scabior asked.

The Chief picked up the paper and scanned it.

"Because Minerva McGonagall wouldn't look like a good Headmistress if beasts associated with the Death Eaters attacked the school disguised as a missing student, now would she?" Fenrir asked.

"Very true," Scabbier mused.

"That's why she made our attack sound like some act of vandalism and the missing student to be a clerical error. No doubt Potter and the Ministry are in on the cover up."

"When are we going to take care of them anyway?" Scabior asked.

The Chief looked up from the paper, his eyes glowing with interest.

"Soon enough," Fenrir promised. "We'll need to finalize our preparations though."

"How long will that take?" Scabior asked.

"Long enough to lull our enemies into a false sense of security," Fenrir tapped his finger against the concrete floor. "I'd say a couple of months."

"What?" Scabbier exclaimed.

The Chief frowned.

"Why wait so long? We have the resources to attack now. Let’s do so before we lose momentum," Scabbier argued.

“Our attacks events need to appear to be random," Fenrir explained. "If they believe that the attack on Hogwarts is related to the next phase of our plan, then they'll start reexamining the bodies found at the Final Battle. It won’t take long for one of them to realize none of the bodies match our DNA. Once that happens, we'll be marked and unable to accomplish our goals."

The Chief, who hummed and nodded in agreement. Scabior replied, "I suppose that makes sense. Still we don’t want to wait too long before recruiting the Death Eaters. Merlin knows it’ll be hard enough to convince them to follow a pack of lycanthropes. If we appear to work too slowly they’ll never join our side.”
"Don't worry, we will revive the Death Eaters soon enough, but you know as well as I do that preparations must be made. We only have one shot at this. Our plan must be executed perfectly," Fenrir replied.

"True," Scabior answered.

"Which also means that we'll have to move the location of our base. It is only be a matter of time before these woods are crawling with aurors," Fenrir continued.

Scabior thought for a moment and nodded. "That makes sense. We are done with Hogwarts, for now anyway."

"Exactly," Fenrir replied. "We need to dismantle the tent and move it tonight."

"Good thinking," Scabior answered before glancing at the boy huddled in the corner. The boy did not notice the weight of Scabior's stare. His entire attention was on the bite mark scarring his arm.

Fenrir cleared his throat. The boy startled and met his eyes.

"Did you hear that?" Fenrir barked. "We're moving the tent tonight, and you're helping out! Your arm is fine enough, don't you think?"

The boy gulped and rose. He stepped outside, followed by the others. As the Chief began undoing the wards Scabior had placed on the tent, a tear trickled down his cheek.

He'd never return to Hogwarts.

***

"Severus?" Hermione asked as she peeked into his office.

He threw his journal onto his lap and muttered, "What?"

"It's midnight," she noted.

"It is?" he asked as he looked up at her.

She yawned. "You should be in bed."

"I didn't think you cared about my sleeping schedule," Severus answered.

"Trust me, I don't," Hermione replied.

Severus picked up the journal. "Then why are you awake and not in bed yourself?"

"I woke up thanks to our little one and saw that you weren't in bed. I didn't know how you were doing, so I decided to check on you," Hermione answered before standing up straighter. "I'm sorry if I intruded and broke your concentration."

"There's nothing to apologize for," he answered. "Truth be told the article wasn't all that interesting or informative."

She flashed him a half smile. "In that case you should consider getting some rest. It's good for you."

He shrugged. "I'm used to staying up at night. I appreciate your concern though."
"Whatever," She answered, her eyes drooping in fatigue. "If you don't want to come to bed, so be it. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," he echoed.

Severus watched her saunter away, careful to memorize the way her white negligee clung to her body. Then he snarled as he stuck his nose back in the magazine.

"You two look happy together."

Severus’ snarl deepened

“You, Severus aren't scowling, and you, Hermione, look relaxed,” Neville’s voice continued echoing in his head. "You aren't looking at Severus as though he was some sort of disgusting creature."

"That's because Severus has impeccable table manners."

Severus gripped the journal until the pages crinkled.

“And you Severus, aren’t looking at Hermione like she’s an obnoxious Gryffindor,” Neville continued. “Marriage agrees with you two.”

He set the journal on the table and leaned back in his chair.

“You two look happy together.”

Happy?

Happy?

Severus shook his head.

Happiness was a strong word for what he felt with Hermione. Was he relieved that he'd married her instead of some dunderhead? Of course! Who wouldn't be? Were they slowly learning to tolerate each other? Yes, and he didn't want anything more. She didn’t appear to want anything more than for him to tolerate her either.

Tolerating each other was a sort of happiness. It certainly wasn't the happiness one felt with a lover, or even a close friend, but it was just as good. True contentment was hard to come by, so one needed to grasp it whenever it came. Very few people had ever brought a smile to Severus’ face, and even fewer of them he’d found worthy to call a friend. To say that he felt that Hermione was merely some acquaintance would be a lie...

He groaned as he stood. Maybe it was getting late. With a good night's rest, he might be able to dream up his own ideas for an antivenin potion. With any luck he’d expel Neville's nasty words from his head as well.

Stupid Gryffindors, he thought as he strolled to his room to sleep beside his wife.

Chapter End Notes
So now we're back on track with the chapter updates. Thanks for all the support! It truly means a lot to me to have such great readers.
Over the years Severus Snape had woken up to a variety different sounds: screaming, shouting, the roar of an approaching train, exploding hexes, and on one unfortunate occasion, the clucking of chickens. Yet he had never before woken up to the sound of a woman sobbing beside him.

Through a sleepy haze he turned towards Hermione. Her head was burrowed into a pillow, a newspaper clutched in her right hand. Once the image registered with his brain he moaned, "Hermione."

She raised herself from the pillow. She wiped her rouge face. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

"I usually wake up about this time anyway." Severus propped himself up on one arm. "What is troubling you?"

She sniffed and handed him the paper. New tears formed in her eyes as her husband sat up.

Severus snarled when he saw the face on the front page. "Why on earth does this arse have a story dedicated to him?"

"Rita wanted to interview him," Hermione croaked. "She thought he could provide some valuable information on a story she covered."

"What could he say that has any value whatsoever?" Severus asked.

"He says that I'm a whore!" Hermione wailed before collapsing in a fresh wave of sobs.

Severus examined the article more closely. His muscles tightened as he read the headline.

*Ron Weasley Devastated over Lover's Betrayal!*

Weasley's face, contorted in tears and distress, dominated the page, although a closer inspection by anyone with eyes and a brain could see the gleam in his eyes. A few times his mouth crawled up into a half smile, but then he'd put his hands over his face was if he were weeping.

Severus shook his head and began to read:

"It's been hard," Ron Weasley began, bravely wiping the tears from his eyes. "To think that she could do this to me while I was out on the road making a living."

Ron Weasley's pain was conspicuous as he discussed his former lover.

"I begged her to marry me. I asked her to set a wedding date. I kept wondering why she always said no. Now I know why. She was sleeping with the greasy git!"

Yes, Ron Weasley, one third of the Golden Trio and Quidditch player extraordinaire, is reeling from the news of his ex-girlfriend's pregnancy and subsequent marriage.

"It makes sense in a way," Ron laments. "Snape is smart, smarter than me. Maybe he seduced her with a love potion or something, or maybe he said a bunch of big words that she found romantic, or maybe rambled on about some journal no one but her would care about. He could've done all those
things. I don't know. All I know is that Hermione betrayed me and wasn’t smart enough to use a contraceptive spell.”

Yes, Hermione Granger's pregnancy came as shocking news to Ron, especially in light of their promise to abstain until marriage.

"I thought she was going to save herself for me until we married. It's the proper thing to do.”

Perhaps her most egregious act came when she announced her pregnancy to poor Ron.

“She asked me to raise the baby, but seriously, why would I raise a baby that isn't mine?” Ron asked.

"Especially when you can't be bothered to raise a baby that is yours!"

Severus threw the *Daily Prophet* across the room.

“What a load of tripe,” Severus grumbled as he turned to Hermione.

Hermione gazed into his eyes. "It was bad enough that Ron abandoned me and his own child, but to lie about it to the whole world, to paint himself as the victim while portraying me as a whore? Why couldn't he have just kept quiet?"

"I don't know," Severus answered.

She sobbed as tears once again began to flow. Severus reached into a drawer for a handkerchief. She nodded before using it to dry her eyes and blow her nose.

"It wouldn't be so bad," Hermione hiccuped. "If I hadn't dated him for years. He wasn't just some one night stand. He was supposedly the love of my life. He pledged his love to me. Sure I knew he could sometimes be a real arse. When we were tracking down the horcruxes, he suspected Harry and I were having an affair and so he walked out on us without even giving us a chance to defend ourselves. I chose to ignore it, to attribute it to stress and the dark magic of the pendant. But it wasn’t dark magic was it? That’s just who Ron Weasley is, isn’t it? He’s a boy who wouldn’t understand responsibility and maturity if they smacked him in the face, isn’t he?”

Severus’ eyes softened.

She gasped. “How could I have been so blind?”

Tears flowed once more.

"You only saw what you wanted to see," Severus answered, his voice laced with tenderness. "It's an easy mistake to make."

“It is?” Hermione asked.

He nodded.

Her lips quivered.

"I made the same mistake," he answered before he could think of the consequences.

Her eyes widened. "Really?"

He sighed. At first he considered backpedaling, but from the expression on her face he could tell Hermione needed to hear the story.
“I didn't want to admit to myself that Lily could never want someone like me,” Severus began. “I couldn’t admit that we weren't meant for each other. She wanted the wealth and prestige that came with being Mrs. James Potter. She wanted the image of the perfect man and the perfect household. She did not want her flawed Death Eater friend. I refused to understand that at the time. We both know of the effects of my failure to move on from that fantasy.”

“I didn’t think you’d understand how I feel,” Hermione mused.

"I only told you about my past experiences because you are my wife,” he answered, his voice considerably cooler.

"Thank you," she whispered in a shaky voice.

"For what?” he asked, his eyes betraying his surprise.

"For sharing your story with me,” she dried her cheeks. “I mean, I don't want to be married to a complete stranger. It helps when you let me in sometimes.”

“I suppose it is in my best interests to be somewhat open with you,” he answered. “After all we are pretty much alone in this situation.”

"Us and the baby," she replied with a small grin.

He gave her a half smile at the mention of the child. Then he put his hand over hers. "I know I can't make you forget that dunderhead Ron, but it would serve you well to leave him behind. Don't let him control you the way Lily controlled me."

"I won't," she promised.

Her tone of voice, the way her head sagged, the tears that still trickled down her cheeks all pleaded for comfort. Still Severus’ next course of action wasn’t clear. He had been so distant from her last night. There was no guarantee that she would accept comfort from him. Taking the risk, he folded her into his arms. He was surprised to feel her bury her head in his chest. When she raised her head to look at him he paused, then pressed his lips to hers.

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"Mother, it's a load of bollocks," Ginny retorted.

"The hell it is!" Molly ranted from the floo. "I don't know how you can look at Hermione after what she's done to poor Ronald!"

"I don't know how you could call Ronald your son after what he did to your grandchild!" Ginny argued.

Narcissa walked by the sitting room, but stopped when she heard Molly shriek, "I can't believe you're siding with that wench Hermione! She betrays your brother, and yet you stand beside her as if she is an innocent victim! Of all the outrageous behavior! I can't believe... Where is your sense of loyalty to your family?"

"Family? You want to lecture me about loyalty to my family? Where is Ron’s sense of loyalty to his child?" Ginny demanded. "Hell, where is your sense of loyalty towards your own grandchild?"

"That baby is not my grandchild! Ron has confirmed it for me!" Molly shouted.
"How?" Narcissa asked from behind Ginevra.

Ginevra turned around and gave her mother-in-law an appreciative smile.

“What on earth are you doing here?” Molly snapped. "This is a private family matter."

“I don’t mean to intrude, but I would like to point out the timeline of Hermione’s pregnancy,” Narcissa offered.

“Oh this’ll be good,” Molly huffed.

“According to Severus, Hermione is approximately four months along. That would place her conception date around New Year’s Day. Wasn’t your son home from Quidditch camp around then?” Narcissa asked.

“Yes, but he wanted to save himself for their wedding night!” Molly asserted with furious confidence.

“Because your son is so well-known for his restraint," Narcissa smirked.

"She has a point," Ginevra admitted.

“I cannot believe what I am hearing!” Molly exclaimed. “We all know the date of conception is difficult to determine. Also we know Hermione went out,” Molly made scare quotes, “‘Christmas shopping’ alone several times during Ron’s break.”

“You’re joking,” Ginny muttered.

“Hermione had plenty of time during one of her little trips to check out Severus’ merchandise, if you know what I mean,” Molly concluded.

Narcissa placed a hand over her mouth. Despite her best efforts a few giggles escaped from her lips.

“If you believe that Hermione ran off with Severus during a shopping trip then you are more daft than I could’ve ever imagined,” Ginevra argued. “Hermione has only loved Ron. She was planning on marrying him. Hermione never cheated on Ron. Never!”

“Well it would make sense that the one who betrayed our family by marrying into that brood of vipers would side with the woman who betrayed her brother!” Molly yelled before ending the floo call.

Ginevra stood frozen, unable to say or think anything.

"Pay no heed to her," Narcissa began as she put a reassuring hand on Ginevra's shoulder. "She'll calm down in due time."

Ginevra turned around and nodded, although her eyes betrayed her pain.

"Now," Narcissa continued. "Let’s discuss what you came here to talk about."

"Oh right!" Ginevra answered with a renewed light in her eyes. "Hermione’s baby shower!"

"Yes," Narcissa began as they stepped away from the fireplace. "I was thinking that we could have it here, or perhaps at your house."

"I was thinking my house," Ginevra answered. “Hermione has been dying to see the new furniture I
put in the second sitting room.”

“Very well, your mansion it is,” Narcissa replied.

“It’s going to be great,” Ginevra gushed. “I have some lovely decorating ideas for my foyer.”

"Oh splendid," Narcissa answered. "What did you have in mind?"

"Well, I'll have to know the baby's gender before I make any concrete plans, but I know there will be black roses everywhere. Hermione and Severus both love black roses….”

Chapter End Notes

Rita had to rear her ugly head at some point. Thanks so much for all the support! It means a lot to me!
They laid beside each other in blissful silence. Severus stroked Hermione's hair, marveling at its softness while Hermione beamed, taking comfort in his touch. She scooted closer and nuzzled into his chest.

"Severus?"

"Hmm?"

"What were you researching last night?"

His fingers froze midway down her mane. Hermione lowered her head and cringed at the thought of ruining such a beautiful moment. Her mind searched for a graceful way to backpedal and restore their previous intimacy. An idea came to mind.

Before she could open her mouth Severus resumed his strokes. "I was searching for articles on anti-venom serums for magical snakes."

She shifted to look into his eyes. "What did you find?"

"Nothing of any use," Severus sighed. "Each article was more asinine than the last. After reading some of them I'm surprised I survived Nagini's bite."

"Are you considering my suggestion to use nonmagical snake antivenin as a base?" Hermione asked.

Severus kissed her cheek. "It's the best way I can think of to detoxify the poison."

"You do?" her eyes widened.

Severus gave her a half smile. How has he gotten lucky enough to marry a woman who could comprehended the complexities of his project? "I do. Your idea is by the far the most plausible solution I've heard."

"All I did was propose a way to mix muggle antivenin concoctions with potions. It isn't that novel of a concept."

"Don't be so certain of that. Your solution is straightforward and obvious, which mean no one else has so much as entertained the idea of it."

"They haven't?"

Severus shook his head. "So far, Wizarding anti-venoms focus on treating the symptoms of the venom rather than eliminating the venom itself. Meaning that if you had found me three hours later…"

"You would've been dead because the potions would've worn off and the venom would still have been circulating in your system. Your body would've shut down from the pain and the blood loss," Hermione finished.

"Yes," Severus answered before kissing the top of her head. Merlin he'd never imagined a woman
talking about a snake bite potion could be so seductive.

"If you need any help I’m more than happy to oblige," Hermione offered.

"I'm in the researching phase right now," Severus' heart raced. “For the most part I’ve been reading potions journals, not that reading would be a chore for you.”

She giggled, "You know I’d love nothing more than to read journals for hours on end."

“I do,” he purred. ‘That is one of the many reasons I desired to be your husband.”

She blushed. Who knew a man appreciating her academic talents could be so sexy?

Severus pulled Hermione closer and kissed her gently on the lips, deepening the embrace as she responded to him.

“Hermione.”

Neither paid any heed to the voice or the knocking at the door.

“Hermione.”

Their kisses became more passionate.

"Hermione!"

The door squeaked with each knock.

Severus scowled as he pulled away from Hermione. He panted. She took a deep breath, "I really don't want to talk to him right now."

"Hermione! It's me! Can we talk?"

"Do you want me to send him away?" Severus grunted.

"I know you're home! I'm not leaving until we talk!"

She shook her head as she sat up. "No, I'll have to speak with him at some point. Still, I’ll need to put something on and make myself more presentable."

“I can occupy Potter until you are ready to greet him," Severus grumbled.

Hermione sat up and flashed him a small, shy smile. “Thank you.”

He captured her lips one last time. “You are more than welcome.”

He crawled out of bed and threw on a robe. Then he trudged to the front door where the knocking crescendoed. Of all the times to intrude, why did Potter have to pick now?

"Mister Potter," Severus growled as he flung open the door, resisting the urge to hex the auror into tomorrow.

Harry swallowed. It had been years since Severus had given him such a cold glare. "I'm sorry if I interrupted something, but I need to speak to Hermione."

"About what?” Severus barked.
"I, well," Harry trembled.

Severus’ expression did not change.

“I came to apologize about what happened at your wedding reception. My behavior was completely and totally unacceptable,” Harry continued.

Severus’ expression was less hostile. "What's done is done; however you owe a bigger apology to Ginevra and Draco. They were more humiliated by the ordeal than Hermione and I were.”

Harry exhaled. "I guess they were."

"Harry?" Hermione called as she approached the doorway.

"Hello Hermione," Harry began as the tension in his muscles eased. "I'm sorry for the intrusion, but I need to talk to you about a couple of things."

Hermione looked at Severus as if asking him permission for Harry to enter. Severus’ eyes softened. He stepped back, allowing Harry to enter. Hermione shook, hoping the meeting wouldn’t be as big a disaster as she envisioned it to be.

"We can talk in the sitting room," she suggested.

"I'll be in my office if you need me," Severus replied.

“Thank you," Hermione gazed at her husband.

“Do not hesitate to call me if things become,” Severus glared at Harry, “unpleasant.”

Harry almost gasped when he saw the affection in Hermione’s eyes.

“I will be fine, but I appreciate your concern,” she replied.

Severus gave her a parting glance before he billowed down the hall.

After Severus left, she turned her attention to Harry. He gave her a sheepish grin. She led him into the living room, not speaking a word.

"I'm sorry for the way I behaved during your wedding reception," Harry began as he sank into a ragged brown chair.

She settled onto the couch and shrugged. "It's in the past, Harry, although I'd recommend you avoid champagne from now on. You can be quite mean when you've had a few glasses.”

“You’re right. I shouldn’t have let myself get out of control as I did. I deeply apologize.”

“I've forgiven you. That being said you need to apologize to Ginny and Draco. Your behavior affected them more than us.”

"So Snape told me," Harry muttered.

Hermione smirked.

Harry cocked his head. "What's so amusing?"

“You do know Snape my name too now, right?" She teased.
Harry blushed. “I hadn't thought of that. Do you want me to call your husband Severus now?”

She shrugged. “It’s up to you. Still it feels odd hearing you call him Snape when we share that name.”

“It’s weird to think of you as a Snape period.”

“I'll admit I'm still getting used to the idea of being Hermione Snape.”

"I think we all are."

The friends sat in silence. Hermione sat up straighter. “Did you only come here to apologize about the reception.”

Harry pursed his lips. "I read the paper today."

Her heart froze. “You did?”

Harry shook his head. "The article was vile, just vile. I couldn't believe Ron would say half of those things about you.”

"Well, that's the kind of man Ron is,” Hermione answered. “He’s an immature twat who wouldn’t know personal responsibility if it came up and kicked him in the teeth.”

"You think so?” Harry asked.

Hermione nodded. "He may have been our best friend at Hogwarts, but he was also the one who turned on us when we were hunting for Horcruxes.”

"But that was the locket’s doing,” Harry argued.

"I'm not so sure about that anymore,” Hermione replied. "I've had some time to think about Ron since he abandoned me and the baby. Looking at some of his behavior over the years, I should've predicted this.”

“I don’t think anyone could’ve expected Ron to do something like this,” Harry commented. “I mean Ron has always been less mature than you, but to abandon his unborn child? I didn't think he was capable of such a thing.”

“If I'd been paying more attention to his behavior I could've seen this coming. He had no problem abandoning me for months on end while he played Quidditch. Even when he was on break or between games he spent most of that time with his fans or other players. For the most part I was an afterthought, or someone he dragged out when he needed a photograph for the front page of The Daily Prophet. Looking back,” she took a shaky breath, “I put much more effort into our relationship than he did.

“He wasn’t always like that. There was a time when he loved you, or at least I thought he did.” Harry rubbed his face. "Maybe the fame got to him.”

"None of that matters anymore,” Hermione answered.

"No, it doesn't," Harry frowned. "There is no excuse for what Ron did. You don’t deserve any of this. I wish you weren’t in this situation.”

"I wish someone had warned me about him,” Hermione answered.
"I never should've pushed the two of you together."

"I think we all got a little caught up in the fantasy of the inseparable Golden Trio."

Harry exhaled. "We did."

Hermione relaxed and shifted her hand. The emerald on her wedding ring shimmered.

Harry asked. "So how is married life treating you?"

That affectionate gleam returned. "Surprisingly well."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "You seem shocked."

"You have to admit that Sna-Severus wasn’t the most beloved professor at Hogwarts."

"True, but he treats me with nothing but respect."

"He does?"

“Yes,” Hermione replied. “For one, Severus isn’t as stifling as Ron. Even though Ron spent more time away from me than with me, he would throw a tantrum if he saw me so much as look in the direction of another man. After almost every Ministry function we’d get into an argument because some man was allegedly flirting with me. Severus on the other hand has a life apart from the one we share. He may conduct research for hours on end, but he will see how I’m doing. I can speak with someone like Neville, and he thinks nothing of it. Yet our lives are not completely separate from each other either since he works from our home. He’s available for me when I need him, but gives me space when I need it. Best of all, he takes my suggestions seriously."

"That sounds…amicable," Harry drawled, "But isn’t it strange, being married to someone you don't love?"

"I honestly don't think about it much," Hermione admitted. "Severus is doing his best to make me comfortable. So far he’s done an excellent job. I can't complain."

"Do you care for Severus?" Harry asked.

"I do." Hermione flushed as she remembered the sensation of his fingers running through her hair. "I actually do."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for not updating yesterday. Traveling can be very time consuming to say the least. Still, I appreciate the support you all give!
Severus raised his eyebrow at the noisy impact of two wooden locomotives. The child at fault for the carnage giggled, oblivious to the potions master’s glower. Severus snarled shifted his eyes in Hermione’s direction. His eyes softened at the sight of her beaming at the child with a hand over her abdomen. No doubt she was imagining what theirs would be like at a comparable age. Severus shook his head and returned his attention to his latest journal. He was probably the least nurturing adult in the office, not that he cared. At least he was present, and was somewhat excited about the prospect of fatherhood, though Merlin knew he’d never show it.

Hermione glanced at Severus. He ran his finger over the same sentence three times, his scowl deepening with each renewed attempt. Her stomach sank as she wondered how excited he truly was about the birth of their child. Merlin knew babies were anything but quiet. A tear came to her eye at the thought of her child being glared at all day. Severus had promised that the child would never feel unwanted, but could he keep that promise once midnight feedings became an issue?

Hermione swallowed. Two reasonable adults like them could work through a little noise. There were always silencing spells, and the Prince manor was supposed to be one of the larger Wizaridng estates. Maybe when Severus’ apothecary opened he would be locked in his potion’s lab away from where she and the baby slept. Their days of sleeping together as husband and wife may be numbered, a thought which only brought more teas to her eyes.

"Hermione?" Severus asked.

She wiped her eyes.

"Mrs. Snape," a Healer called.

Both Severus and Hermione stood and passed through the open door. The Healer made eye contact with Severus and smiled sweetly… a little too sweetly for his taste. They followed her to a hallway where various instruments were lined against the wall.

"How are you feeling?" the healer asked Hermione.

"Better than the last time I was here," she answered as she rubbed her stomach.

"That's good." Her sweet smile grew. “Is this the infamous Mr. Severus Snape?"

"Yes," Severus answered in a sharp voice.

The Healer jumped. "Okay,"

She turned to Hermione as if to ask for guidance on how to handle Mr. Snape, but Mrs. Snape was unaffected by her husband's attitude. Severus on the other hand was smirking, as if he’d proven some sort of point. The healer bit her lip.

"If you would please step on the scale…"

"Oh good, my favorite part," Hermione rolled her eyes.
The Healer chuckled as she guided Hermione into place. "It's all part of the process."

"I know," Hermione sighed. "Still I wish pregnancy wasn’t so hard on one’s waistline."

"Doesn't everyone," the Healer responded as she began shifting the weights until the scale balanced.

Hermione's eyes bulged. "I gained that much?"

The healer shrugged. "I wouldn’t be too surprised. It’s normal for you to gain more weight after your morning sickness subsides."

“But that much?” Hermione gasped.

“Actually that’s about normal,” the healer answered as she grabbed a notepad from a nearby side table and jotted down a number.

“Perhaps you are too much steak last night,” Severus offered with a playful gleam in his eye.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "I didn't eat that much of it. If I recall correctly, you ate more of it than I did."

“Not that much.”

“You had two steaks whereas I only had one.”

“I sense you are trying to make some sort of point.”

“I am.”

The Healer covered her mouth.

"My point is that you're finally agreeing that I'm a good cook," Hermione continued.

"I never said any such thing," Severus argued. "I was simply hungry last night, and the steak was adequate, though a little too done for my taste."

She let out an exaggerated sigh. "My baby is not eating raw meat."

"Blue rare does not mean raw," he teased.

"It may as well be," she answered.

"Rare steak certainly isn't healthy for the baby," the healer interrupted.

They looked back at the her. Severus fidgeted. Hermione bowed her head and muttered, “Sorry.”

The healer giggled. “There’s no need to apologize. You two are amusing.”

Severus stared at her as if she’d exploded every cauldron in his lab. The healer continued unaffected. “Amusement aside, it's time to take you into the examining room so we can record your blood pressure and prepare you for the wand scans."

"Sure," Hermione answered as she and her husband followed the healer in silence.

Severus sat in a cracked leather corner chair as Hermione scooted onto the examining table. The Healer wrapped the blood pressure cuff around her arm, adjusted her stethoscope, and began to pump air into it. Hermione winced at the increasing pressure, relief coming only with the hiss of the
"One-thirteen over seventy-two," the Healer announced. "Right where it should be."

"Good," Hermione squeaked.

"Go ahead and make yourselves comfortable. The Mediwitch should be here shortly," the healer answered before exiting the room.

Severus set his journal on a table beside several medical instruments, none of which he wanted to know the purpose of. "Are you in pain?"

"No, but I hate the blood pressure cuff," Hermione groaned. "You'd think the Wizarding world would be able to come up with something less uncomfortable."

"Why would we do that when we can focus our energies on better tanning potions?" Severus asked.

Hermione snorted. "My thoughts exactly."

She placed her hand on her stomach and rubbed it.

"Is it moving?" Severus asked.

Hermione nodded. "It's flipping around right now. Soon it will be too big to do that."

"Is that what your books say?"

"Yes."

"How many of them have you read?"

"I'd say," she put a finger on her cheek. "Ten."

"Ten?" Severus asked.

"Yes, but there are three I particularly like. I've been reading them over again these past few weeks, just so I know what to expect for the remainder of my pregnancy and for the first few months of motherhood. If you want you can borrow some of them."

Severus shook his head. "I'm not the one carrying a child. I am content following your lead when it comes to pregnancy and the first few years of fatherhood."

"I'm not sure I'll be the best guide. I've never done this before."

"There is no need to be afraid. You'll be an outstanding mother."

Hermione blushed. "Thank you for the confidence. I just want to be prepared," she made a circle on her abdomen with her finger. "I don't want any nasty surprises."

"Trust me, we'll get more than a few," Severus answered with a mischievous grin. "If there's one thing I know about children, it's their love of nasty surprises, like vanishing potions ingredients."

Hermione smirked. "I suppose you might have had some experience with that."

A gentle knock came from the door. "Hello. Ms Gran-I mean Mrs. Snape?"

"Yes. Come in," Hermione called.
The Mediwitch entered with a gleam in her eyes which rivaled Dumbledore’s. “How are you today Ms. Granger, or should I say Mrs. Snape?”

"Very well, thank you." Hermione pointed to Severus. "This is my husband, Severus Snape."

"Hello," the Mediwitch said as she approached Severus with her hand extended. Severus stood and shook her hand.

"Hello," he answered.

"I'm Mediwitch Laurel Branigan, but just call me Laurel. Everyone else does," she answered.

"Certainly, Laurel," he replied before sitting down again.

"Now," Laurel began as she refocused her attention on Hermione. "How have you been feeling this past month?"

"The morning sickness has lessened, thank goodness," she replied.

"Great. When was the last time you experienced a bout of it?"

"Last Wednesday."

"Good," Laurel answered. "Anything else to note, such as bleeding or abdominal pain?"

"No, but I can feel it kick now!" Hermione exclaimed, her eyes shimmering.

"Wonderful! When did that begin?" the doctor asked.

"About two or three weeks ago," Hermione answered. "It actually began to kick during our wedding."

"How sweet!" Laurel squealed.

"Indeed," Severus answered, trying to maintain his decorum amidst the female chatter.

"I’m so happy for both of you," Laurel pulled out a wand. "Oh this is such wonderful news."

Hermione was glowing. "It is."

"Okay," Laurel exhaled. "Unfortunately we’re going to need to start with the uncomfortable part."

Thanks for the warning, Severus averted his eyes.

Several long moments passed. The only sounds Severus could hear were Laurel's assurances and Hermione's mumbled thanks.

"Everything appears fine. I don't see anything that warrants my concern," Laurel concluded.

"Good," Hermione answered.

"You can look up now, Mr. Snape," Laurel announced.

Severus turned back to the women, who seemed to tae too much pleasure in his squeamishness. He scowled, but it didn't reach his eyes.

"Would you like to know the gender of your baby?" Laurel asked.
"Yes, please!" Hermione replied.

Laurel turned to Severus.

"Certainly," he answered.

The witch set her wand over Hermione's abdomen and whispered a few Latin words. After glowing a bright yellow, the wand turned pink. "Congratulations, it's a girl."

"A girl," Severus muttered, wondering how the hell he was supposed to raise a girl.

Before he could retreat too far into his thoughts, the Mediwitch muttered a few more spells. A mist rose from Hermione's abdomen. It formed into the image of a fetus resting. "Yep, definitely a girl," Laurel concluded.

Tears came to Hermione's eyes as she gazed upon the image. "Is she healthy?"

The Mediwitch began to examine the image as Severus moved closer to the mist, just to take a better glimpse. Up until now, he'd only felt the baby kick. Until now, she had been something growing inside Hermione, an abstraction. Now he could see her. She was real, even though he couldn't yet hold her.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Hermione asked.

"She is," Severus whispered, his throat constricted with thousands of emotions.

"From what I can tell, she's healthy," the Mediwitch began.

Tears glazed Severus' eyes.

Laurel continued, "She's also beautiful."

"Indeed she is," Severus answered, his eyes captivated by the misty image. "She's my daughter."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took me a bit to update again. Sometimes my job is more chaotic than I'd like. Thank you for the support!
Severus and Hermione strolled down the cobblestone street in silence, each contemplating the image of the misty fetus from earlier in the afternoon. After a few blocks they stopped at a corner to wait for the traffic to clear. Hermione glanced up at Severus. She opened her mouth, but her throat tightened. After a few moments of failing to find the correct words to convey her thoughts she closed her mouth.

"Hermione?"

"Yes?"

“Nothing,” Severus swallowed, the image of his daughter at the forefront of his mind. “You looked like you want to tell me something.”

“I do,” Hermione drawled.

“What would you like to say?” Severus asked in a soft voice.

“It’s a bit hard to put into words, but I was just thinking about this afternoon.”

“What about this afternoon?”

"I was thinking about how amazing it was to see our baby girl,” she whispered. She’s never seen Severus’ eyes expose so much vulnerability. "Yes, she’s very lovely."

He winced at the word “lovely.” The word lovely couldn’t express half the emotions swirling around his heart. Yet it was the only word he dared speak aloud for fear of revealing too much of his soul.

The intersection cleared. They crossed the street, each wishing the English language had a word which could capture their tempest of emotions.

After two more blocks Hermione cleared her throat. "I was surprised to see you tear up."

Severus stopped and stared into space.

She gulped. Why was she such an expert at destroying intimate moments?

"I didn't know you'd noticed,” Severus choked.

"I did,” she replied.

"I didn't intend for you to see," he whispered.

"Why?” she asked.

He examined her eyes. In his heart he knew that he could tell her anything, but it had been years since he’d exposed his soul to anyone. None of his previous experiences at emotional honesty had ended well. Then again, they were in this marriage together, and they’d be sharing the duties of parenthood with each other. At some point deep emotions were going to come into play…
"You don't have to tell me anything," Hermione bowed her head.

"No," he cupped her chin in his hand. She raised her head.

Severus' lip quivered. "I didn't expect to react so emotionally to seeing her. When I went into the appointment I thought I was going to see another baby. I didn’t expect to see one of the most beautiful sights I’d ever beheld."

Hermione rubbed his back. "I almost cried upon seeing her, too."

Severus murmured. "She's beautiful."

"Yes," Hermione replied. She took his hand and place it over her abdomen. "She's beautiful in every way."

Severus’ eyes watered as the infant kicked his hand. "Yes little one, you are my precious daughter."

The parents stood in silence, feeling their daughter kick. When the kicks grew less forceful Severus removed his hand from Hermione’s stomach. Then they strolled for a few blocks, enjoying the spring breeze and the scent of blooming flowers.

"What are you planning to name her?" Severus asked.

"I have a few ideas, but I’m not settled on anything yet," Hermione replied with a sparkle in her eye. "I thought I'd consult you."

"I wouldn't have the foggiest clue what to name our child," Severus replied.

She grinned. "You have a few months yet to form an opinion."

"Are you sure I’d be the best person to consult when it comes to naming girls?" Severus asked, returning her smile.

Hermione shrugged. "You named the spells and potions you created. How much harder could it be to name an infant?"

"Not much harder I'd imagine." Severus mumbled

His lips fell as they approached the dilapidated house. He shook his head. There was no denying it was in desperate need of repair. He muttered, "I can't wait to move out of this shack."

Hermione hummed. "It has a certain charm."

"Our daughter deserves to have a proper house, not some run down shack" he answered as he began to disable the wards for them to enter.

"We could always refurbish it. If we repainted the outside, put in new carpets, and put new tiles on the roof it would be quite pretty," Hermione commented.

"Even if we did all those things, it would still remind me of the house in which I grew up," Severus answered.

"Oh," Hermione responded as he undid the last ward.

They walked into the house without a word. Hermione kicked off her shoes as Severus recast the wards. Just as he put the final ward into place, they heard a soft peck at the window.
"Mail's here," Hermione sighed. She opened the window, allowing the two perched owls to enter the sitting room.

"I can fetch them a treat," Severus offered.

"That's okay," Hermione answered. "I don't mind to do it."

She rushed into the kitchen before he could protest, returning with treats in her hand. The owls hooted as Hermione fed them. As they ate Severus untied the letters from their legs. The first one he handed to Hermione, but the second letter prompted a sharp intake of breath.

"What is it?" Hermione asked.

"A letter from the attorney," he replied.

"What do you think he has to say?"

"Hopefully he'll say that the estate cleared and we can receive our fortune soon."

Hermione nodded as she peeked down at her letter. Her face brightened when she saw the sender. "My parents wrote me."

Severus muttered something before opening his letter. Hermione watched the gesture with great fascination. Most people, herself included, simply tore open the seal, but Severus carefully slipped his finger under the wax, leaving the paper intact. It was such a simple gesture, yet she couldn’t peel her eyes off of his long, slender feelings underneath that seal.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "What's so fascinating?"

"Nothing," she started.

He grunted as the owls hopped off of her hand, having eaten their fill. As she opened her letter, Severus began to read his.

"It's ours," he announced.

"It is?" she asked.

"It is?" she asked.

Severus beamed. "All the taxes have been paid and the German government has cleared the remainder of the money for transfer. Our galleons could be deposited into my account as soon as tomorrow."

"That's wonderful!" Hermione cried as she embraced Severus.

He held her. His heart raced at the idea of having someone to celebrate this victory with him. When he stepped back to look into her glistening caramel eyes his breath left him. After taking a deep breath, he captured Hermione's lips. She deepened the kiss as he helped her tug off her coat. Then she unbuttoned his top three buttons.

A hoot from the owls brought them back to the present. They backed away from each other, Hermione blushing as Severus lowered his head.

"I've also inherited my Grandmother's mansion in Britain," he whispered.

"Okay," she replied, still breathless.
“It’s only a few kilometers from here,” Severus breathed.

“That sounds wonderful,” Hermione panted as her breath evened out.

"You and I can go to the attorney’s office tomorrow to finalize the arrangements," he continued, barely above a whisper.

"That’s great," she murmured. “I’m uh, I’m going to read my parent’s letter now."

"That sounds like an excellent idea," Severus replied, retrieving the parchment from where it had fallen to the floor in their haste to remove Hermione's coat.

Severus watched Hermione read her mother's tidy script. As his heart rate decreased he tried to sort out what had overtaken him a few moments ago. Perhaps his reaction was due to the emotions of the day, but it was difficult to deny that he desired her. Even now he wanted to lean in… to nuzzle her neck, silencing her weak protests with well-placed kisses…

"My parents want to meet you," Hermione announced.

"What?" he asked, his thoughts back in the here and now.

"They just got back from their cruise and they want to meet you."

"Do they know about your condition?"

"Yes," she replied. "They also believe you're the father."

“Good."

"They simply want to see if you're a good man for me, or at least as they put it, 'better than that last idiot you brought home.'"

"I see," Severus’ stomach sank.

“There’s nothing to worry about. They need a few days to rest so they've asked to see us Saturday. Will that work for you?” Hermione asked.

"Sure," Severus answered in a weak voice.

Why hadn't he ever taken in-laws into account?

Chapter End Notes

I’m so glad everyone liked the last chapter so much. Thank you for all the support! It means a lot to me!
"I thought the attorney said this house had been abandoned since the First Wizarding War."

Severus stopped. Hermione took a few steps along the winding path, but paused when she noticed her husband was no longer beside her. She glanced back at him.

Severus exhaled as he surveyed the groomed landscaping. The bushes were lined up in a straight row without a twig out of place. The exterior of the mansion was pristine. There wasn't a paint chip in sight.

Hermione’s stomach sank. “Is there someone living in the mansion?”

“No one has lived here since my grandmother moved to Germany."

“When exactly did she move?”

“According to my mother, Grandmother Priscilla moved to Germany right after the beginning of the First Wizarding War. Mum tried to find Grandmother when the war ended. With Tobias dead she thought there was a chance of reconciliation, but Mum died before she and Grandmother could reunite.”

“I’m so sorry,” Hermione whispered.

Severus did not betray any emotion. “They made their choices.”

Hermione extended her hand. Severus took it. Together they continued their trek up the path to the front door.

“Severus?”

“Hmm?”

“If no one has lived here for the better part of three decades then why does it look so nice?” Hermione asked.

Severus took a deep breath. "I presume she left behind some house elves to maintain the property."

He braced himself for the inevitable reaction.

"House elves!" she released his hand. "This property comes with house elves?"

"Most estates of this size do.” Severus replied in a calm voice.

"We need to fix that immediately," Hermione announced as she marched towards the door. "By nightfall all the elves will be liberated."

"Where do you propose the elves go?" Severus asked.

She stopped in her tracks. "What do you mean?"
He continued in an even voice, "This mansion has been their home for years. You can't evict them from the only home they've ever known."

"They deserve their freedom," Hermione replied. "I refuse to raise my child in a house where she sees living, sentient beings subjected to slavery. My daughter will not be raised to believe that such barbarity is acceptable."

"Then what shall we do with them?" he asked, his exasperation seeping through. "If I set them free they won't have the first clue where to go or how to support themselves."

"I hate to admit it, but you do have a point."

"Oh dear Merlin," he muttered.

She glared at him. He folded his arms over his chest.

"Think about it, Severus. By paying the elves we'd set an example not only for our daughter, but for the entire Wizarding World."

"What would you have them do with the money?"

"Whatever they wanted. They would live as trusted servants who could come and go as they pleased. No longer would they be oppressed slaves."

Severus closed the gap between them, shaking his head in surrender. "Perhaps we should discuss your proposition with the elves."

"Great idea!" she exclaimed. "They can tell us what they need and we'll negotiate a fair wage with them."

"Whatever you say," Severus sighed.

Hermione skipped ahead. "Our presence will be a blessing for them. After living with a witch like your grandmother who only showed respect for purebloods…"

"Actually my grandmother was a more than tolerant woman," Severus answered.

"Oh?" Hermione replied as they stopped in front of the doorway.

Severus nodded. "She never held anything against muggle-borns or half-bloods. That's why she fled Voldemort; she found his views abhorrent."

"But I thought she disowned your mother for marrying a muggle."

"Grandmother was not opposed to her daughter marrying a muggle, but she was opposed to her daughter marrying a parasite like Tobias Snape."

"Oh," Hermione bowed her head and lowered her voice. "I didn't know."

"I wouldn't expect you to," he answered with no bitterness in his voice.

Hermione glanced up at him. From the look in his eyes it was clear that this conversation was finished.

"Well," she cleared her throat. "Shall we go inside?"
"It wouldn't serve us well to stand out here forever," Severus replied.

Hermione stepped back as Severus cast spells to lower the wards his grandmother had placed on the mansion. As he worked, Hermione admired the dark wooden door edged in gold. If an exterior door was this ornate, she could only imagine what was waiting for them inside.

With a creak, the door opened. Severus pushed it open and gestured for Hermione to enter the main atrium.

Hermione’s mouth was agape. The domed ceiling was higher than the ceiling in the Hogwarts dining room. Hanging from the ceiling was a silver chandelier with several unlit candles. The walls were painted an elegant cream with violets and roses stenciled along the edge. This contrasted with the floor, which was made of highly polished emerald green marble. Hermione couldn’t find the air to breathe.

"So this is what my mother gave up for that worthless bastard," Severus muttered.

Hermione gazed at him. His eyes grew distant, as if remembering another time and place. The memories did not appear to be pleasant.

A loud CRACK echoed through the room.

The couple startled. A tiny elf stood before them. It smiled and bowed. The elf appeared to be in good health, even a little pudgy. It was genuinely pleased to see Severus.

"Master Severus! Mistress Priscilla told us to expect you,” the elf began.

"Yes," Severus replied. "Uh…"

"Please call me Hans!" he replied. Then he noticed the witch beside Severus. "Who is this?"

“She is my wife,” Severus answered.

The elves eyes glowed. “So mistress was right! You could find love!”

Severus rolled his eyes. Had Hans been conversing with Mr. Longbottom?

“My name is Hermione,” she stretched out her hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you.”

Hans stared at the appendage, at a loss as to her intent. Then, his eyes fell upon her stomach. He gasped. "Mistress has a baby inside her!"

"Yes, she does," Severus replied. “She is carrying my daughter.”

"Oh Mistress Priscilla would be so happy!" Hans cheered. "She has a Prince heiress! Oh she always loved baby girls. She would be very glad to know she has a granddaughter!"

"Yes," Hermione replied as her unshaken hand dropped to her side. “I’m sure she would be.”

"Would you like a tour?" he asked.

"I would appreciate that," Severus answered.

“I would appreciate that as well,” Hermione replied.

The elf nodded and gestured for them to follow him. The first stop was a dining room which
accommodated an oaken table larger than the one at Malfoy Manor. There were twenty chairs surrounding it, though Hans assured them that there were many more in storage. Severus said a silent prayer of gratitude that his wife seemed to be as much of an introvert as he was, meaning there would be no need to entertain that many guests.

Through a door to the left was the kitchen, where several house elves were already preparing a turkey dinner. When Hermione asked Hans if any of them had ever been injured on the job, he raised an eyebrow and continued on, pointing out the best features of the ground floor before heading upstairs.

"And here, Master Snape, is the Master bedroom!" Hans announced as they scaled a staircase and peered to the right.

Severus and Hermione stared at the King-sized canopy bed dressed in satin. There were also matching dressers and a huge walk-in closet. Beside the floor-length window was a cozy seating area perfect for early-morning reading. A luxurious master bathroom completed the suite.

"Is it to your liking?" Hans asked.

"It is," Severus answered as he pictured them nestled under the satin sheets, their night clothes strewn about the floor.

"Now to the nursery!" Hans announced as he skipped ahead of them.

They followed him across the hallway to a sunny room containing a golden crib, a padded changing table, a brightly painted heirloom toy chest, and generous amounts of shelving for later use.

"Mistress Priscilla thought you should choose the sheets and the toys," Hans began. "She said you need to give the baby something from your hearts, not hers."

"That was very kind of her," Hermione replied.

"Is this nursery to your liking?" Hans asked, his eyes wide with a desire to please.

"The nursery is more than adequate," Severus replied as he glanced away from the changing table. There were some things he didn't want to dwell upon at the moment.

Hans completed their upstairs tour, then excused himself. "If Master and Mistress Snape need anything, just ring this bell. Other elves are getting your things from the old shack. Dinner is at seven."

"I actually do need something right now," Hermione began with a gleam in her eye.

"Yes?" the elf asked.

"I need to know how much you'd like to be paid!"

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for all the support! It means a lot to me!
The tension was palpable as dozens of elves stared up at Severus with questioning eyes. A few of them muttered amongst themselves about the result of this impromptu meeting. Others grumbled that the master and mistress hadn’t commented on whether or not they liked their dinner. There had to be a way to make it better, if only they would make their preferences clearer.

Severus stood in front of the elves and beside his wife. He sighed, hoping that Hermione knew what the hell she was doing. Hermione smiled as she straightened her posture. If she could persuade Kinglsey to give her a bigger office then persuading these oppressed elves to accept payment would be no challenge at all. The infant within her kicked, as if to give her mother extra assurance.

"Hello," she called above the elves' whispers.

The room was so silent Severus could hear his heart beat.

"My name is Hermione."

"Hello Mistress Snape," they replied in unison.

"Please call me Hermione," she replied. "We're all equals here."

The elves stared at her as if she had just ordered them to shave a hairless unicorn. One trembled and glanced at Severus. "Master?"

He grunted and turned to the elf.

"Mistress Priscilla said you good at potions. Did you create a potion to turn an elf into a witch?" It continued.

"Uh, why would you ask that?" Hermione asked.

"Because that is the only way an elf and a human could be equal," it concluded.

Severus groaned and shook his head as Hermione's eyes bulged.

"No," Severus answered. "I would never turn an elf into a human."

They exhaled. Genuine smiles graced their faces.

"Not that he doesn't appreciate elves," Hermione continued. "We just appreciate you as you are."

"Oh," they answered, their confusion evident.

"Now that Severus and I have introduced ourselves," Hermione began, deciding to change tactics. "Why don't you all tell me your names?"

Their eyes lit up. This was a familiar routine.

"I'm Tilly," a female in the front began.
"I'm Mackerel," a male in the second row replied.

"I'm Bud," another announced.

After each had introduced itself, Hermione continued, “Great! We are so happy to meet all of you.”

“We’re happy to meet you too Master and Mistress Snape,” they answered.

Hermione cringed at the titles. “Now that we’ve been introduced to each other, we’re going to set down some ground rules.”

"You give orders and we serve," Bud interjected.

The others bobbed their heads.

“That may have been the old way of doing things, but I propose a new way of conducting business,” Hermione replied.

“What new way?” Bud drawled.

“We are going to pay you fair wages and give you time off for vacations,” Hermione announced.

Once again the elves turned to Severus, hoping he could shed some light on the situation. He took a deep breath and explained, "She wants to treat you the way she'd treat a servant."

"What are servants?" Tilly interrupted.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. "Never mind for now."

“But we have to mind,” Mackerel cut in. “We need to know how to best follow orders.”

“That’s just it,” Hermione explained. “You don’t have to follow orders for free anymore.”

All elfin eyes fell on Severus.

“She wants to give you coins in exchange for your work,” he explained.

"What would we do with them?" another elf from the crowd asked.

Severus quirked an eyebrow at his wife. Good question.

"You can use them for whatever you want!" Hermione announced. "You may use them to purchase trinkets, clothes…"

The elves gasped.

"This money sounds evil!" Hans answered. The others nodded in agreement. "We don't want it."

"But it wouldn't be fair for you not to take it," Hermione replied.

Now devastated and horrified elfin eyes turned to Severus.

"Master, are you not pleased with us?" Mackerel asked.

"Do you want to get rid of us?" Hans panicked. “Was the tour not good? Was I bad? Should I beat myself?”
"My family has served the Prince house for centuries! Tilly cannot go anywhere else!"

Soon, the room erupted in elves pleading for their jobs. A few promised to beat themselves in exchange for not being given clothes.

"Silence!"

The room grew quiet.

Severus continued, "Coins are not only for buying things."

"Really?"

"They are also very pretty shiny objects."

"They are?"

Severus nodded. "Indeed they are, and Hermione is being very generous in giving them to you."

They looked to Hermione for confirmation. She sighed and resigned herself to the compromise. "Yes, coins are shiny collectable things."

"Master and Mistress want us to stay then?" They asked

"Yes," Severus replied. "We want all of you to stay."

They cheered as they lined up to thank Severus. He rolled his eyes, but gave them each the courtesy of a pat on the head. A few of them went to Hermione for a pat on the head, but most of them eyed her with suspicion before returning to their stations. Hermione couldn't hide her smile. The elves were going to be paid, even if things hadn't quite worked out as she'd planned.

She'd need to thank Severus at bedtime.

***

"Severus?" she whispered as she slipped into the bedroom.

Severus glanced up from his journal with a half smile. Hermione's face brightened as she crawled in beside him and snuggled close. He set the journal on the bedside table and wrapped his arms around her.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"For what?" He kissed her forehead.

"Thank you for supporting me in my efforts to pay the elves and for not making me look like more of a moron than I was," Hermione answered.

"You aren't a moron," he answered. "You were trying to do the right thing. Unfortunately, they don't quite understand what you are trying to do for them."

She frowned. "I wanted to sink into the ground when they started begging you for their jobs. They hate me now."

"They don't hate you. They just need to grow accustomed to you," he answered, brushing some hair off her forehead and smoothing it behind her ear. She hummed before draping her arm around his
torso.

Severus asked, "Do you like the house?"

"It's a little big," Hermione admitted. "But very elegant."

He grinned as she brushed her foot against his.

"It's almost like a dream that I'm even here," Hermione whispered. "I used to pass by mansions like this growing up. All of them had gates and were closed to tourists. I'd never imagined being able to enter one, much less live in it."

"I thought the same thing as a child," Severus admitted. "Mum told me about this mansion, but I never expected to set foot inside it. The world my mother was born into was closed off to me, at least until now."

"It must've been difficult knowing you belonged in this world of magic and mansions, yet you were living in a shack."

"That is putting it mildly."

"I cannot understand being disinherited, but I do know what it's like to have others tell you that you don't belong somewhere even though you know that you do."

"You would know that feeling better than anyone."

"That's what makes all of this so surreal." Hermione chuckled. "Sometimes I would pick up magazines about mansions like this owned by purebloods. I never said it aloud, but I envied them. It just doesn't seem fair that they could be so cruel yet live so luxuriously. Now, it feels like I have the last laugh."

Severus' lips curled up. "We both had the last laugh."

His kissed her on the cheek. She responded by kissing his jaw. Then she exhaled. "Yet if I'm being honest it feels like I'm out of my element, like I'm only pretending that I belong here."

"Do explain," Severus replied.

"I've spent my life in apartments and dormitories. Growing up, the closest I came to being in a place like this was the Burrow. Sure Ronald had what he considered a mansion, but it's a cottage compared to this place. Being here makes me feel like I'm a princess in a fairy tale, like I'm in some dream which will end if I'm not careful enough."

"I understand the feeling."

"I'm not complaining," she added. "Still this is all very different from what I'm used to. It will take some time to get used to."

"I suppose we'll be getting used to it together then, because this is all new to me, as well," Severus replied.

They gave each other reassuring looks before their lips met. When they drifted apart to break for air, Hermione whispered, "Do you want to christen our new home?"

"I've been wanting to do that since the moment we set foot in this bedroom," Severus growled before turning her onto her back.
Thanks so much for the support! It feels amazing to know so many people enjoy this!
"How late do you think they'll be?" Mr. Granger grumbled.

"Now Wilford, I'm sure they won't be late at all," Mrs. Granger tried to assure him, though her voice betrayed her skepticism. "She said her husband was much different from Ronald."

"Well he's just as impatient," Mr. Granger answered. "Good God don't people go out on a few dates before getting married anymore?"

"Perhaps this marriage is only sudden to us. Maybe they've had this planned for quite some time," Mrs. Granger offered.

Mr. Granger raised an eyebrow.

"Hermione did say that she met her husband at Hogwarts," Mrs. Granger continued. "They may have kept in touch over the years. Perhaps he helped her risen up about Ronald so they ran down the aisle together."

"Do you really think anyone could've torn her away from Ron?"

"One can only hope."

Wilford shook his head. "I just don't get it, Muriel. None of this makes any sense."

"I agree, but let's hear Hermione out. Maybe he's a pleasant fellow who will treat her well."

"I'm not counting on much," Wilford sighed. "So far I haven't been impressed with any of her choices in men. First there was the Bulgarian. He couldn’t string together two sentences which weren’t about some sport I’ve never heard of..."

Muriel groaned and shook her head. "I couldn’t believe he thought we’d allow Hermione to go to Bulgaria alone for a summer visit. She was only fifteen."

"At least we could talk her out of dating him for any substantial length of time," Wilford growled.

Muriel clenched her jaw.

"I don’t care if she dates a wizard, but can she at least marry one who has some idea of how people live, or can at least display a modicum of courtesy?" Mr. Granger concluded.

Their musings were interrupted by footsteps outside. Muriel's face relaxed at the thought of seeing Hermione again, but Wilford's muscles tightened. "I wonder if the idiot knows how to use a doorbell."

Muriel groaned. "Please tell me he won't ring it ten thousand times."

It rang once. They lingered on the couch but heard nothing more.

"Are you certain this is the time they wanted us to meet them?" a man’s voice asked from behind the door.
“I’m positive,” Hermione answered. “Knowing my parents Mum is finishing up some cleaning and Dad is on the loo. They’ll be here soon.”

"If you say so."

Mr. and Mrs. Granger glanced at each other. She grinned while he shrugged. Then they rose to answer the door.

Maybe Hermione had finally found a man who had an ounce of courtesy, or at the very least listened to her when she told him not to ring the doorbell more than once.

Wilford flung open the door. He bit his tongue. Hermione was wearing a munsell form-fitting cotton dress, which exposed her swollen stomach. His grip on the doorknob tightened. Here was his only child, pregnant with a man he had yet to meet. Beside her stood the alleged father, dressed completely in black with hair that was stringy, greasy, and (surprise) black. The scowl on his face did nothing to improve the effect.

"Mum, Dad," Hermione began, swallowing when she saw the looks of pure horror and rage on their faces. "This is my husband, Severus Snape."

Wilford raised his top lip. Of course this man would have a weird name.

"Hello Mr. Severus Snape," Muriel replied, her voice still shaky. "My name is Muriel Granger."

“Hello Muriel,” Severus answered before shaking her hand.

"I'm Wilford Granger," Hermione's dad replied refusing to extend a hand to Severus. "Would you like to come in?"

"Yes, thank you," Severus replied in an emotionless voice.

Wilford stepped aside, allowing the two to enter.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Severus," Muriel began as she led them to the living room. "Would you like some tea?"

"I'd hate to trouble you," Severus replied.

"I probably shouldn't drink too much tea in my condition," Hermione admitted.

"Good point," Muriel mused as her eyes fell onto Hermione's stomach. "May I get you something else to drink?"

"Water would be nice," Hermione replied.

“Severus?” She asked.

"I'll have some water as well," Severus replied as he joined Hermione on the couch.

"Wilford?"

"No thanks. I’m fine,” he answered before plopping into a leather recliner.

She nodded. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Do you need any help?" Hermione asked.
"No, but thanks for the offer," Muriel answered, retreating into the kitchen.

The remaining three sat in uncomfortable silence. The sound of water trickling into glasses emanated from the other room. Wilford further examined Severus. No matter how threatening Wilford’s glare was, the scowl never left Severus’ face. If Wilford's new son-in-law ever needed a new career he’d be an excellent professional poker player.

Hermione grabbed the pillow beside her and began pulling at a loose string. When Mum returned she’d need to ask where the scissors were.

“Severus, I’ll bet you’re wondering about the water,” Wilford spoke up, his voice caustic.

“What about the water?” Severus asked.

“You probably have a million questions about it, like how does she get the water without magic? You're probably dying to know how a pipe works.”

"Not particularly."

“You don’t need to pretend not to be curious with me. I'd let you watch her fill the glasses, but I'd hate to see you hurt yourself on the ice maker,” Wilford sneered.

Hermione glared at her father while Severus quirked an eyebrow.

"Dad," she growled.

“I'm only making conversation,” Wilford answered.

Severus remained still, wondering what kind of extended family he had signed on for when he married Hermione.

“Here we go," Muriel entered the room. She glanced at Severus as if she expected him barrage her with inquiries. Instead, Severus remained silent. Muriel released the breath she’d been holding. Then she served the water, to the sound of mumbled, "Thanks."

Muriel perched herself on a rocking chair beside her husband. Finally, Wilford spoke up, "Hermione, this marriage has come as a bit of a shock to us."

"It came as a bit of a shock to me, too," Hermione admitted.

"Why exactly would it come as a shock to you?" Wilford asked. “You were the one who decided to marry him.”

“I know, but I never expected him to propose. He, uh,” she cleared her throat. “He didn’t seem like the kind of man who would ever want to get married.”

“Then what possessed you to marry him?” Wilford asked.

"Wilford!" Muriel hissed. "He's sitting right here!"

"She's pregnant with my heir," Severus interrupted.

Wilford glowered at him. "I suppose you think that will endear you to us."

"Not particularly," Severus admitted.
"Daddy, he's really not that bad," Hermione leaned into her husband. He wrapped an arm around her.

"Were you still with Ron when you two, well…” Wilford asked.

"Yes," Hermione choked.

Muriel sighed. "Well, Rom was no prize."

"But at least he wore a little color," Wilford scoffed.

"Black suits me," Severus replied, glaring at Wilford.

"Severus has worn only black for as long as I've known him," Hermione interjected.

Muriel cocked her head. “I guess it is difficult to imagine him in pink.”

Hermione snorted back her laughter. Severus’ expression softened, though the scowl remained.

"Honey, when did you reconnect with your husband?" Muriel asked.

"Just before I became pregnant," she answered.

"What was his relationship with you at Hogwarts?" Muriel asked.

Hermione blushed. "He was my potions professor."

“The same potions professor who belittled and tormented you?"

“Yes.”

Her parents gasped. Tears came to Hermione's eyes.

"Why the hell did you think marrying a man like him was a good idea?" Wilford asked.

"I know he'll be a great father," Hermione argued.

"Because he has such a great track record with children," Wilford answered.

"He's changed," Hermione argued.

"Are you sure he's changed or are you just hoping he has?" Wilford asked.

Hermione's lip quivered.

"What made you thinking that jumping from one relationship to another was wise? Were you that desperate not to be alone?" Wilford asked.

Hermione sobbed. Severus pulled her closer. She buried her head into his chest.

"You’re out of line, Mr. Granger," Severus warned. “Your daughter has suffered enough already with all the rumors surrounding us."

"And whose fault would that be?" Wilford snapped. "I'm not the one who couldn't keep his pants on. Were you even going to stick around for this child, or did you only marry her because that's what your society expects?"
"I married her because I care about her and for this child," Severus growled.

"Do you love her, or is she just an obligation to you?" Wilford asked.

"Wilford, that's enough!" Muriel interrupted. "You are upsetting your daughter!"

Hermione poked her head up from Severus’ robes. Wilford’s stomach sank at the anguish in his daughter's eyes. He bowed his head. "I'm sorry Hermione. I shouldn’t speak to you like that."

“I forgive you,” Hermione squeaked.

"This situation is not right though. People shouldn’t get married like this. They just shouldn’t," Wilford answered.

"We're doing the best we can," Hermione replied.

"I know you're trying, and I appreciate Severus for trying too. There are several things that could go wrong, all of which would lead to heartache for you and your child," Muriel warned in a gentle tone.

"Mother, I have to do this," she replied.

"It's a little late to undo this marriage now," Muriel answered.

"That's true," Wilford grumbled.

"All I can say is that I hope you make a happy marriage for your child," Muriel replied. "No matter how sudden all of this may seem to us."

"Thank you," Hermione replied.

Wilford shivered. “It’s a little cold in here.”

Muriel rubbed her arms. "I suppose the air is on a little high." She turned to Hermione and continued, "It's been thirty-two degrees here as of late, so I've had it turned up."

"Oh," Hermione untangled herself from Severus.

Wilford glared at Severus. "I suppose you have twenty questions about what air conditioning is."

"I am not an imbecile," Severus growled.

Muriel left to adjust the air conditioning.

"Look, you don't have to pretend with us. Get the damn questions out of the way so we can all move on with our lives!" Wilford replied.

"I don't have any questions about your appliances," Severus argued. "I'm familiar with most, if not all of them. I hardly consider it proper to play twenty questions with someone you've just met."

"You mean you didn't come over here just to see our stuff?" Wilford asked.

Hermione groaned as Severus' eyes grew. "Why in Merlin's name would anyone do such a thing?"

Muriel returned to the living room. "Why would anyone do what?"

"Go to someone's house just to learn about appliances. I spent my childhood among muggles; I can't fathom coming here just to look at your appliances," Severus answered.
"You've lived among non-wizards?" Muriel asked.

"You know how appliances work?" Wilford asked.

“Yes,” Severus answered, his exasperation evident.

Muriel and Wilford looked at each other in horror, realizing what perfect asses they’d just made of themselves.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for all the support! It’s awesome to have readers like you! Also the temperature is in Celsius.
Hermione’s parents stared at each other in horrified embarrassment. Severus huffed. They deserved more than a little humiliation for acting like dunderheads.

"We are so sorry," Muriel began as she faced Severus. "We, we didn't know you hadn't always lived in the magical world and wouldn't have any questions about how we went about our daily lives."

"We, we just thought you'd be so interested in our appliances that you'd come in here and treat this house like a museum. We deeply apologize for making such an assumption," Wilford replied.

Hermione sighed. “Given your history with my previous boyfriends I suppose I should've told you more about Severus' backgounr before bringing him over.”


“I grew up in the muggle world. Until seven years ago I had a house in the muggle world, but I sold it for the funds to buy a slightly nicer property,” Severus answered, his emphasis on the word “slightly.”

“I see,” Muriel drawled.

Severus' scowl faded as he watched Mr. and Mrs. Granger grapple with their humiliation. As much as he disliked both of Hermione's parents, they were part of her family, and by extension, his. Merlin knew Hermione would want them involved in their granddaughter's life. It wouldn’t be right to deny his daughter a relationship with the only grandparents who would acknowledge her as their own.

"Why did you assume such a thing about me?" Severus asked, his voice lacking its previous edge.

"I don't think they liked the Weasleys," Hermione replied in a quiet voice.

"That's an understatement," Wilford interrupted as a fire returned to his eyes. "I couldn't stand them."

"As much as I hate to admit it, I found nothing pleasant about any of them,” Muriel chimed in.

“Even Ron?” Hermione asked.

“Especially Ron,” Muriel growled.

"Mum!” Hermione exclaimed, "I knew you weren't thrilled when the Weasleys visited, but you and Dad found nothing pleasant about them at all?"

“No, there was nothing pleasant about being with them," Muriel replied. "And I'm not ashamed to say it now that you've married another man."

Wilford added, "I couldn't agree with your mother more. They were miserable to be around."

Hermione’s mouth was agape.

“They were nothing but rude to us, and took no interest whatsoever in us as people,” Muriel continued.
“They took plenty of interest in you. Every time they came they always asked you questions!” Hermione argued.

“They asked us questions about our things,” Wilford corrected. "Every time they'd come here, that Arthur fellow would demand to know something or another about our 'muggle' technology. Whenever we'd try to talk about ourselves, he'd ask us some question about a bloody toaster or some other trivial thing. He couldn't have cared less about us.”

“I’ll admit that Arthur can be overly curious about muggle technology, but he always tried to be welcoming, especially during your first trip to the Wizarding World. He took you out for drinks when we bought school supplies, remember?” Hermione asked.

“How could we forget?” Muriel replied, her frown deepening. “I’d never spent so much time explaining how a heater works or how to boil an egg on a gas stove.”

Wilford snorted. “I remember looking at your mother after the meeting him and saying, ‘I hope we never meet anyone that insufferable again.’”

“I told him not to get too upset. The lunch was over and we would never have to interact with him again,” Muriel exhaled.

How wrong you were, Severus thought as his frown faded into a more neutral expression.

“At least he wasn’t Molly,” Muriel answered in a shaky voice.

“Molly can at times be uncouth,” Severus noted.

“Uncouth does not begin to describe Molly’s behavior,” Muriel blinked back the moisture welling in her eyes. "She always asked how I could be happy with only one child, which is an extremely sensitive subject for me."

She turned to Severus half expecting him to respond. While there was a glimmer of curiosity in Severus’ eyes, he did not open his mouth.

Muriel continued. “I developed uterine cancer a year after Hermione was born. I had a hysterectomy soon after my diagnosis.”

Severus nodded, "That must've been difficult for you. I take it you’re in remission.”

She grinned. “I’ve been cancer free for over twenty years.”

“That is great to hear,” he replied.

Muriel inhaled. “Please don’t misunderstand me. I’m very grateful for Hermione, but I would’ve loved to have given her a little brother or sister.”

"Mum," Hermione whispered.

"Over the years I made my peace with the effects of my cancer. Nevertheless, it was hard to hear Molly prattle on and on about the joys of having a large family.”

"I thought Molly knew that your cancer and infertility were sensitive topics," Hermione responded in complete disgust.

"We told her, but she obviously didn't listen. She was too interested in muggle toys and arrangements for our grandchildren,” Muriel answered.
“Grandchildren!” Hermione spat.

“Oh yes,” Muriel answered. “From the time you were nineteen she had everything planned out for you and your future children. She knew the age when you were supposed to have them, what kind of house they’d live in, and which schools they’d attend before Hogwarts.”

Hermione squeezed Severus’ hand. He bit his lip to prevent himself from yelping.

“You were to be a stay at home mom while her precious Ronnekins ran off with every Quidditch groupie he could find,” Wilford added, his voice laced with sarcasm.

Severus gave Hermione’s stomach a sideways glance. What kind of hell had he saved Hermione and the child from?

“It was always about her and her family, her and her world. We didn't matter at all,” Muriel raged.

"I never knew the Weasleys could be so ill-mannered," Severus answered, choking back the sympathy he was developing for these people.

"In Molly's defense, she never did try to actively destroy our house," Muriel answered.

"George said he was sorry," Hermione replied as she released Severus’ hand.

"Then why did it happen three more times?” Muriel asked. "It really burned me when he blew a hole through the roof on Christmas Eve three years ago. I had spent all day cooking a dinner for eleven people because Molly invited her children over, and my thanks was thousands of dollars in renovations due to some untested product! They didn’t so much as asked if they could help cover the cost!"

"I'm all for a joke," Wilford replied, "But George never knew when to stop."

"I can't argue with you there,” Hermione conceded.

"Bill could be reasonable and a pleasant conversationalist, as could his wife, but they never did replace the lamp their baby broke, or clean the carpet she urinated on," Wilford replied.

“Although their baby was quite adorable,” Muriel admitted.

“She was,” Wilford answered in a somewhat affectionate voice.

"Percy was decent, though never around enough," Muriel mused.

"I found him to be a bore," Wilford replied. "Then again, I don't understand the workings of the Ministry, so everything he said about his job was hard for me to follow.”

“Charlie seemed fun enough, but the neighbors did not appreciate his numerous attempts to seduce their seventeen year old daughter,” Muriel replied.

Wilford shook his head. “It took us two years to get back on friendly terms with them.”

"What about Ginny?" Hermione asked as a lump grew in her throat.

“When I say I can’t stand the Weasleys, I don’t include her because I consider her a Malfoy.” Hermione’s mother smiled. "I truly enjoyed Ginny. Unfortunately she wasn't around nearly enough after her mother disowned her. How is she doing anyway?”
"She's doing well," Hermione answered as she relaxed. "She and Narcissa are planning my baby shower."

"That's wonderful," Muriel replied. "Please let us know the day and time when it will be. We'd love to be there."

"We will," Severus promised. "It would be nice to have you there as well."

Hermione fidgeted. "What did you two think about Ron?"

Pure revulsion returned to their eyes.

"There's a reason we never openly encouraged your relationship," Muriel responded.

"He treated you like something he scraped off his shoe!" Wilford snapped. "I can't tell you how heartbreaking it was to read your letters, obviously upset over his drinking and his fans. Still you refused to leave the loser!"

"He was dismissive of all your accomplishments," Muriel snapped. "When we'd speak to him about you and the future he saw for you two he gave us vague answers, as if he couldn't see himself with you five years from now."

"And that's when was sober," Wilford clenched his fists. "When he got drunk, which was surprisingly often he'd spent half the conversation mentioning how attractive your rump was. He was at his absolute worst during your engagement party. If there weren't so many witnesses I would've kicked him into tomorrow for grabbing your butt the way he did."

"That engagement party was terrible," Hermione noted.

"In the meantime you were at a Ministry job you didn’t want in a desperate attempt to make him happy. You were ready to spend your life with him, and he was incapable of acknowledging that you had feeling," Muriel replied.

"I dreaded the day you announced your wedding date. If Severus over here did anything right, it was finally convincing you to get rid of him." Wilford turned to Severus. "Though only time will tell how good you are for my daughter."

"I will do my best to provide for her," Severus promised.

"How?" Wilford asked in a firm but not hostile voice.

Severus rubbed her hand. "I don't know if you understand fully the circumstances surrounding my marriage to Hermione."

"I know she is pregnant with your baby," Wilford answered.

"Yes, that was part of the reason we were married. Another part, however, involved a large inheritance my grandmother left me," Severus explained.

"In order to receive this inheritance, he had to get married," Hermione replied.

"So you married Hermione for your grandmother's money?" Wilford answered.

"No, I married her so we could provide for this child," Severus replied.

"Does she have any protection should something happen to you?" Muriel asked.
"If I perish, Hermione inherits everything. If for some reason thing we decide to divorce, then she will receive a substantial portion of my inheritance. Our daughter has a trust fund as well, so she will be protected should something unpleasant occur. In addition to these safeguards, I am planning to open a chain of apothecaries that I believe I can make very profitable. I intend to provide for our daily needs through my apothecaries and will use the fortune as an emergency fund," Severus answered.

"You've thought this through quite well," Wilford replied.

"Yes, he did," Hermione noted.

Silence overtook the room.

"Mum, Dad?" Hermione finally asked.

"Yes?" they answered.

"If the Weasleys offended you so much, why didn't you ever tell me?" she asked.

Muriel sighed. "You loved Ron. Your devotion was obvious to everyone. You were trying so hard to be acceptable to his family. We understand; we've both been in love before. We also knew that you wouldn't listen to us when we told you about their shortcomings, so we kept quiet, hoping you'd finally see them for yourself and reevaluate your decision to share your life with him."

"I'm sorry I didn't notice their faults sooner," Hermione answered. "I feel awful for putting you two through all of that. I didn't realize how badly you were treated."

"It's done and over with," Wilford answered before turning an eye to Severus. "Before we get too comfortable with each other, are there any relatives of yours we should know about?"

"My only living relation is my godson Draco," Severus replied. "He's also Ginevra, or as you know her, Ginny's husband."

"Well, I think I could stand to have a family meal with Draco and Ginny," Muriel answered.

"I wouldn't speak too soon," Severus warned. "His father, Lucius, is a man of... refined... culinary tastes."

Muriel smirked. "We can handle him. No one could be as picky as Hermione was when she was three."

"Oh?" Severus asked.

Muriel nodded. "She would only eat onion rings."

"Mum!" Hermione teased.

"Onion rings?" Severus asked with interest.

"Oh yes!" Wilford laughed. "Even at Christmas dinner, we had to have onion rings or Hermione wouldn't look at her plate."

"Onion rings actually do sound good right now," Hermione noted.

The Grangers erupted into laughter along with Hermione. Severus chuckled more softly than the others. "I can fix you some right now if you like," her mother offered.
"I really don't want to put you out," Hermione replied.

"Nonsense. We've started off on the wrong foot with Severus. Maybe after a meal we'll all feel much better," Wilford answered.

"Now," Muriel began, "We have turkey, roast beef, and ham sandwich makings…"

"I could go for some roast beef with mustard, if you have the mustard," he answered.

"We do," Muriel nodded

"I'll fix the onion rings," Wilford offered as he stood up. "Would you like anything else to eat, Hermione?"

"Could I have a turkey and Swiss cheese sandwich?" Hermione asked.

"I think we can manage that," Muriel replied.

Everyone stood up and walked into the kitchen, where the conversation soon turned to the Grangers' dentistry practice and their life in Australia. As Severus listened, he found them more and more tolerable. On some level, they were even likable.

Maybe the Grangers wouldn't be the in-laws from hell after all.

Chapter End Notes

Wow! Over 200 kudos! Thank you all so much. You are the best!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Nothing made sense.

Harry scoured the case files for an overlooked clue or an odd piece of forensic data. Nothing stood out as abnormal: no foreign hair, no unusual footprints, no out of place fingerprints, and no DNA evidence of any kind. Every shred of evidence could be traced back to someone who’d been authorized to enter Trelawney’s room earlier in the day, or John McTavish.

Harry furrowed his eyebrows. The boy was still missing. Officially they were searching for a missing person, but Harry feared they would only find a corpse. His stomach churned at the thought of the horrors that boy may have experienced as the killer plucked the hairs from his head. If there was any kind of chance that John was alive then the aurors would need to act soon.

Harry reread the files. There was no two ways around it: the murderer was a professional. The killer knew how to catch a victim off guard and how to dispose of any evidence which may reveal his or her true identity. Harry exhaled and shook his head. Thanks to the war there were too many professional killers to count. Both the Dark and the Light had assassins who held grudges. All Trelawney had to do was rub someone the wrong way, which she was prone to do, and she was as good as dead.

Harry wiped his face with his hands. Perhaps the murder was an isolated event. Maybe the murderer had a personal vendetta, and now that it was fulfilled he or she would fade into obscurity. As appealing as this possibility was though, he knew it was wishful thinking.

Questions raced through his brain. Why kidnap a child in order to murder a divination professor and burn down a greenhouse? If the killer only needed McTavish's hair for a Polyjuice potion, then why not obliviate and release him? Why attack during the school year when there were several potential witnesses? In theory, there should’ve been airtight security keeping predators out and students in. Then again, how many times had he escaped from his room for some misadventure? How many unauthorized people had entered Hogwarts during his days there?

On second thought, security was not an issue.

No, this murder was politically motivated. Someone was trying to send a message by attacking and killing a member of Hogwarts staff. Still who would want to send such a message and who would want to receive it? Why would anyone want to burn Neville’s greenhouse to the ground? A Death Eater seemed to be the most logical suspect, but all the Death-Eaters were either dead or in Azkaban. All of the former Death Eaters had been rechecked for DNA, and the DNA matched the people they claimed to be. The murderer was not an escaped Death Eater, but then who was this individual?

Nothing about this case made any sense.

Harry stood and stretched. He began rummaging around the kitchen for something to eat in the hopes that a full stomach might help him think clearer. Maybe if he ate something he could better ignore the gnawing fear that the case would grow cold or worse, the murderers would attack again. The thought of another crime scene such as Trelawney’s made bile race up his throat.

A soft tapping at the door interrupted his thoughts. He spun around and smiled. The owl was more
than familiar. It was always a welcome sight. He rushed to the window and opened it. The owl fluttered inside and perched itself on the coffee table, where his notes lay. Harry ran over and shooed it away.

It flew onto a window ledge and glared at him.

"I'll get you a treat in a moment," Harry mumbled.

He ran to the kitchen, pulled out some bread crumbs, and scattered them on the floor. The owl dove to the ground and pecked up the crumbs.

As the owl ate, Harry untied the letter from its foot. The exotic scent of Ginny's perfume permeated the note. He closed his eyes and inhaled. Oh how he missed that scent.

He took one last sniff before reading.

Dear Harry,

I appreciate your apology. I forgive you for what happened. I know how alcohol can affect you. Looking back, I should have asked the bartender to cut you off after your second drink. It doesn't matter now I suppose; what's done is done. Draco forgives you as well.

You may wonder why it took so long for me to write and send this letter. I was debating on telling you something. I decided I would inform you of my current condition so you'll be prepared when Draco and I announce it to the media. I am pregnant, Harry. Judging from the tests, I am roughly four weeks along. I don't expect you to say or do anything. In light of your continued feelings for me I thought it would be only fair to warn you.

Part of me will always care for you. I hope that someday we can be friends again, though I understand if this can never happen. I hope you can find someone to make you happy and give you the family you've always wanted. As always, I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

Ginny Malfoy

Harry's throat tightened as he imagined what his child with Ginny would have looked like. He could almost see a baby with jet black hair and almond shaped green eyes cooing as it reached for him. The image was soon replaced with another image; a child with strawberry blond hair and Draco's smirk. A tear trickled down Harry's cheek as he imagined Draco and Ginny together in a room with the infant. Ginny held the baby while Draco whispered in its ear. Ginny would laugh while the baby would stare at Draco with nothing but adoration. Even in Harry's fantasies, Ginny and Draco were happily married.

Harry steadied his breath. It was dinner time. After a good meal he might have a mind clear enough to take another stab at the Hogwarts case. If he worked hard enough, he may be able to erase the specter of the new Malfoy heir from his mind.

***

"Draco," Ginny purred.

"Yes," he drawled. He gave her a soft smile before lying down next to her.

"Do you remember when we talked about children?" she whispered.
"Yes," he answered before capturing her lips. "We agreed to wait until you were ready."

"What if I told you that I was ready now?" she asked, planting soft kisses up and down his neck.

His eyes lit up. "Well I'd say that we should start trying now."

"What if I told you we didn't have to?" Ginevra breathed.

He quirked an eyebrow. "Ginevra, you can't have a baby without trying."

"True," she ran a finger along his torso.

"Well let's get started then," Draco replied.

Ginevra hummed as Draco kissed her collarbone.

Draco kissed her neck a few more times. He paused to gaze into her eyes. Although Ginevra’s eyes were glistening, she wasn’t responding to his advances like a woman who was eager to have a child. "Come on love. You’ve already admitted that we need to try in order to have a baby. Isn’t trying the best part?"

"It was," she answered.

Draco's eyes grew. "You mean…?"

She nodded. "The Healer confirmed it a few days ago."

"H-how far along are you?"

"Roughly four weeks."

"Oh Merlin!" Draco exclaimed before embracing her. "I'm going to be a father! I'm going to be a father!" He backed away. His voice lowered. "Oh Merlin I'm going to be a father."

"I know," Ginevra squealed.

"I have no idea what to do. I mean, Dad was a great father, but I haven’t had so much as a little sibling. How on earth will I know how to raise a kid?" Draco asked.

"You'll be a great father. I wouldn't have married you if I thought otherwise," Ginevra replied.

"I don't know anything about children. I've always wanted a child, but I never really thought about what it would be like to raise one. Oh Merlin! Another life is depending on me and I have no clue what I’m doing!" Draco panicked.

Ginevra took hold of his hand. "You will make a fine father."

"How can I be a great father when I have no idea how to raise a child," Draco whispered.

"I haven’t been a parent either, but we have nine months to prepare. I’m confident that somehow you, me, and the baby will make this family work," Ginevra answered.

The light returned to Draco’s eyes. “Yes, we will make this family work.” He laughed. “I’m going to be a father! Oh Ginevra we’re going to be parents!"

“We are!” she cheered.
Their lips crashed into each other.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for all the support! It means a lot to me.

I know this chapter was a little light on Severus and Hermione, but they'll be back tomorrow.
"Here?" Hermione asked. "You want to build your apothecary here?"

There wasn’t a floorboard which didn’t creak when stepped upon. The paint on the walls was more chipped than the paint on the outside of Severus’ old shack. Hermione crinkled her nose in a vain attempt to avoid inhaling dust. After a few breaths she sneezed.

“Bless you,” Severus muttered.

“Thanks,” Hermione sniffled.

Severus sighed as he glanced around. "I must admit this place appeared more promising on the outside.”

“Even the outside is very bare.”

"An apothecary doesn't need to be decorative in order to be functional.”

"Yes, but it needs to look inviting so people will step inside.”

"So splintered wood does not appeal to you?" Severus teased.

"Not particularly," Hermione answered with a wry smile. She began rubbing her hand on her stomach.

“Is the little one awake?” Severus asked.

Hermione nodded. “She’s flipping around right now.”

Severus smirked. "Maybe we should ask our little progeny if she likes this location."

“Are you serious?” Hermione asked, eyebrow raised.

He shrugged. “Our daughter needs stimulation. One form of stimulation is conversing with her.”

The baby kicked as if to agree.

“I agree that the more we interact with her the better,” Hermione’s hand stayed in one place over her abdomen. “But there’s a difference between asking her how she’s doing and asking her whether or not we should buy an apothecary.”

"The difference isn't obvious. Either way we're asking her a question."

"One key difference is that she is not outside my womb. How can she form an opinion on a place she cannot examine?"

“Perhaps she cannot sense anything outside of your womb,” Severus admitted. “Yet people have claimed that babies sometimes sense things adults cannot. She may sense some potential in this building that escapes us at the moment.”
“If we’re asking an unborn child to help us decide on a location we truly are in trouble.” Hermione groaned. ”Maybe we should eat lunch and then resume looking at buildings.”

"This is the last site I was considering," Severus answered.

"The last site today?"

"The last site period."

"You're serious?"

“Do I appear to be joking?”

Hermione leaned against the wall and moaned. “Great. That's just great. Our dreams of an apothecary are dashed because we can’t find a building.”

"I could always look at an empty lot and build the apothecary from scratch," Severus suggested.

"No!" Hermione shouted.

He gave her a sharp, inquisitive look.

"When I was seven, my parents decided to build a house together,” she explained, her words coming out much quicker than usual. “They spent an entire year fighting over the location, the layout, and even the paint for the bedrooms. My parents nearly spent all of their savings on it. It was an unpleasant year, to say the least."

"I see," Severus replied.

"Don't get me wrong, the house was beautiful when it was finished. It’s unfortunate they spent less than a decade in it before I forced them to move to Australia.” Her eyes grew misty "I just wouldn't want to relive the experience. The last thing I want is for us to spend half our time arguing with each other over some building which may be gone in a decade."

"I do not wish to fight with you either."

She wiped away her tears. "I shouldn't be so emotional over a bloody house."

“There is nothing shameful in being sentimental over a childhood home.”

“It was a beautiful home, but,” she sniffed. “Oh I feel like an idiot for getting so emotional over this house. These damn hormones do a number on you sometimes."

“I do not think you are idiotic for displaying your emotions,” Severus replied, offering her a handkerchief as she composed herself.

Hermione took the handkerchief and nodded. She blew her nose a few times. Then she took a shaky breath and sunk to the ground.

"Are you tired?“ Severus asked.

“No.” She exhaled. "It's my ankles. They're killing me. In light of all the walking we did today I shouldn't have worn heels."

"Do you want to go home?" he asked.
"Not until we’ve decided on a building for the apothecary.” She removed her shoes.

“We do not need to make any decisions today.”

“Yes, but I’d like us to pick a building sooner rather than later. The sooner we select a location the sooner we can start building the apothecary.”

“We?” Severus whispered.

Hermione blushed. “I suppose it’s your apothecary. It was wrong of me to presume otherwise.”

“No,” Severus answered. “I did not mean to imply that you shouldn’t consider it as yours. I just didn’t think you cared enough about it to claim it as your own.”

She frowned.

He put his hand on his head. “I do not mean it as an insult. You are not heartless. Still.”

She leaned closer to him.

“No one else has ever cared enough about my dreams to want to share them and help me succeed in fulfilling them. I,” he whispered. “I would like nothing more than for you to consider this your apothecary.”

She held his hand. “I’ve agreed to share my life with you. If you’ll let me in then I will share all of your dreams, and let you in on a few of mine.”

He chuckled. “I quite like that arrangement.”

Hermione released his hands and dabbed her eyes with a clean corner of the handkerchief. “I think after a few minutes of rest my feet won’t ache as badly. From now on though, flatter shoes will be in order.”

"I'll brew you a pain relief potion if your feet are still aching when we get home," he replied. “There’s a soothing slave I could give you for them as well.”

She gave him a small smile. "Thank you."

“In the meantime I try to remedy your situation.”

“Oh?”

Severus stooped down and began to knead her feet, pausing when she let loose a shudder. The subsequent look of pure bliss on her face encouraged him to continue.

"I'm glad you remembered that you promised to do this on occasion," she whispered.

"I don't forget promises," he muttered as he pressed harder into her feet.

"I know," she breathed.

Her muscles relaxed as he continued his ministrations. She chuckled. "The baby still hasn't stopped kicking since you asked for her opinion on this building. She is very happy today."

"Either that or she's reacting to those burritos you ate," he replied with a playful smirk.
"I was hungry," she replied before frowning. "I'm always hungry anymore."

"I've noticed," he teased.

She pretended to smack him while he ducked.

Leaning back against the wall, she exhaled as he resumed his massage. "After being in here for a few minutes, I’m starting to see the appeal of this location."

"You are?"

"Yes. This building has potential"

"Please elaborate," Severus looked up at her, a spark of curiosity in his eyes.

"We could start by painting the walls a nice shade of cream. The stark white is too harsh. Also, we'd need new shelves. I don't see the ones attached to the walls lasting for more than a couple more years."

"Agreed."

"As for the outside, we could always paint it a nice shade of light blue."

"Blue?"

"Yes. People will remember a blue building."

"Will they remember a blue building for the correct reasons?"

"If it is painted tastefully enough, then yes."

"I still believe gray would be a better color."

"If the goal is to have the apothecary to blend in with everything else then you should paint it gray. I'm just thinking that every other building within a hundred meter radius is either wooden, brick, or painted some shade of gray. Having a different color could increase business," Hermione suggested.

"I will take your thoughts into consideration," Severus replied.

"You will?" she asked.

He gazed into her eyes. "If I wasn't interested in your opinion I wouldn't have brought you along to look at potential locations."

"So, does that make us partners?" she asked.

He stopped kneading her feet. "Yes, I suppose we're partners."

"Are we friends too?" she asked.

"Merlin woman, so many questions," Severus laughed.

"Sorry, I was only curious whether you felt anything akin to friendship towards me," Hermione replied.

"Why would you consider me a friend? Very few people want to be in the same room as me. Why would you desire my friendship?"
She squirmed a little before answering, “To begin with I've spent more time with you than with anyone else this past month. I'm starting to feel somewhat close to you, or at least closer to you than I would be with some acquaintance I only see at the annual Ministry ball.”

He shook his head. "I hate those balls."

"They aren't my cup of tea either."

“Do you want to pretend to be sick next year so I can 'tend' to you during the ball?”

Hermione erupted in laughter when she saw the sparkle in his eyes. "You'd do it, too!"

“Only with your consent of course,” he answered.

"Of course. You are a gentleman after all,” she replied.

The laughter ceased. Silence hung between them.

Severus swallowed. “I will admit, that in the past few weeks, I have become quite accustomed to your presence. I find myself enjoying living with you more that I imagined I would. I have had very few friends in my life; Cissy and Lucius would be at the head of the list, but I am beginning to consider you more than an acquaintance as well. In light of those facts you could be considered a friend.”

Her eyes misted again. "Can you promise me that no matter what happens, we'll continue to be friends?"

His lips curled up. "I promise."

He brushed her lips with his in order to seal the vow.

When they separated, Hermione asked, "Have we decided that we like this place enough to buy it?"

“I would like to consult our daughter before making any purchase,” he answered.

“You really are serious about asking her for input,” she replied.

“According to your books she should be able to hear us at this stage.”

“You said you weren’t going to read any of my books.”

“I had some spare time and little else to do. The book was lying around, so I picked it up.”

Hermione's face lit up. “I wish I could’ve seen it. It would’ve been so cute to see you holding a pink book in your hands taking notes about how best to hold your daughter.”

Severus' eyes glistened. "I am more than eager to meet our daughter and hold her, provided she is ready to leave the womb."

"I am eager to watch you hold her."

He put his hand over Hermione’s stomach. Although he did not change the timbre of his voice, there was a tenderness in it which Hermione had never heard before. “What is your opinion of this location, little one?”

She kicked his hand.
“Do you think this would make a good apothecary?”

She kicked against his hand again.

Severus beamed. "I think she likes it."

Hermione put her hand over his. “We all agree then, this is our new apothecary.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much! It's a pleasure to receive so much support from everyone!
Severus rolled his eyes as he listened to aluminum bottles smack against a porcelain counter top. Hermione yelled the name of a spell Severus had never heard before, and doubted he'd have any use for. She moaned before shouting out another latin phrase. Once again, she voiced her frustration. This process repeated itself three more times. Then he heard the hiss of another bottle. He nearly gagged from the scent of aerosol mixed in with dragonfly air freshener wafting from the bathroom.

"Hermione!" Severus called. “We’re going to be late if you do not come out soon.”

“Give me a minute. I’m almost ready!” she yelled from behind the bathroom door.

Severus sat on the edge of the bed and tapped his foot. Why did Hermione insist on appearing perfect? For the love of Merlin his hair was worse than hers, and he had only spent five minutes washing it. From all the fuss Hermione was making you’d swear she was receiving a lifetime achievement award from the Ministry, not attending a party thrown by her dearest friend.

The door opened, revealing Hermione in an emerald silk dress. Her subdued curls framed her face perfectly. She wore minimal makeup, but her eyeliner brought out the soft caramel of her eyes.

"Is this all right?" she asked.

Severus’ heart raced as he took in the sight of her. I don't want to go to the Malfoys anymore.

“Severus?”

He scratched the bed. “You look lovely.”

Lovely? Severus’ brain screamed. Lovely? You can make an entire speech concerning the seductive nature of potions but the only word you can think to say to your exquisite wife is lovely?

“The dress fits you quite well,” Severus continued. “It’s an attractive color on you.”

Better, but nowhere near adequate to describing her appearance.

"Thank you," she replied as she stepped over to the closet, oblivious to Severus’ stare. "I bought this dress the other day when Ginny and I went out shopping."

"Did she mention why she called this sudden little soiree?" Severus asked.

“No," Hermione slipped her black flats onto her feet. "All she told me was that Lucius, Narcissa, and a few other close friends and relatives would be attending as well.”

“All one hundred of them,” Severus replied.

Hermione choked back her laughter. “She seems quite excited for this party, more excited than I’ve seen her in quite a while. According to her she has an announcement.”

“Did she give you any hint as to what this announcement would be?”

“She was surprisingly secretive.”
“That’s quite unlike her.”
Hermione straightened up. “She is capable of keeping a secret.”

“Just barely,” Severus muttered.
Hermione stuck out her right foot. ”Do these shoes go with this dress?”

"Yes," Severus answered as he stood. "They look fine."

Fine! Fine! Severus kicked himself. Three hours ago you were discussing an advanced anticoagulant potion. Now all you can say to her is fine. What the hell has come over you?

What was coming over him?

She twirled around and straightened her dress. Severus’ lips parted. Merlin if he only had two hours to show her how irresistible she was in that dress.

Still unaware of the reaction she was provoking in him, Hermione took a few steps forward. ”Yep, they still fit me. Not that I'm surprised; I have a few more weeks before the foot edema sets in.”

Severus forced himself to rein in his thoughts as Hermione turned to him.

"Shall we floo or apparate?" she asked.

"Umm, apparate. It's cleaner," Severus answered in a low voice.

“Sounds great,” Hermione answered, noticing Severus’ stare for the first time. She wasn't sure whether to take the gleam in his eye as a sign of attraction or simply pass it off as her imagination.

Severus extended his hand. Hermione took it and flashed him a small smile. His eyes softened as he squeezed her hand and led her outside, where they apparated away.

***

"Hermione! Severus!" Ginevra exclaimed as she greeted them at the door. "I'm so glad you two could make it!"

“Of course we're here,” Hermione embraced Ginny. ”We wouldn't miss it for anything.”

Severus nodded his acknowledgement, though Ginny sensed Hermione was far more excited about a night out than her husband was.

“Go ahead and come on inside,” Ginny continued. “Draco and I plan to make our announcement soon.”

Hermione released her. “I cannot wait to hear your announcement.”

Ginny glanced over at Severus. Not once had he removed his eyes from his wife. She drawled, "I can't wait for you to hear my announcement."

Ginevra raised an eyebrow as she observed the way Severus eyes fell upon Hermione. She'd seen that spark before in Draco's eyes...when they were alone in the bedroom.

"Ginevra?" Draco asked.
She spun around. "Yes?"

"Why are you staring at Uncle Severus?" he asked.

"No particular reason," she answered. "I was just observing him."

"Why?" Draco narrowed his eyes at his godfather.

"He's been giving Hermione some looks I've never seen him give anyone else," Ginevra noted.

Draco smirked. "I'd imagine he's relieved."

"Relieved?" Ginevra asked.

"Yes," Draco continued. "He's happy to have a break from all her know-it-all talk and her bossiness."

"Are you sure he only considers her a bossy know-it-all?" Ginevra asked.

Draco shrugged. "Why would he look at her any other way? They didn't exactly marry for love."

"That doesn't always mean anything."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Mistress Ginevra wants mashed potatoes, yes?" an elf began.

She jumped. Then she gave the elf a small smile. "Yes I do."

"Okay!" the elf answered before apparating away again.

"I swear, those elves need to learn how to write things down so they can refer to their notes for these things," she muttered.

Another knock came from the door. Draco and Ginevra turned to attend to it.

"Neville!" Ginny announced before hugging him. "It's great to see you again!"

"Oh it's so nice to be in here again," Neville began. "The petunias outside are so gorgeous. They smell divine."

"Why thank you!" Ginny exclaimed.

Draco craned his neck around Neville, hoping to get a better view of the grounds. With any luck Blaise would be here soon. As much as he loved his wife, he could only take so many Gryffindors together in one room.

***

If there was one thing Lucius appreciated about having a Gryffindor for a daughter in law, it was that she wore every emotion on her sleeve. She was staring at Severus, as though to discern his mental state. Lucius decided to have a peek at Severus himself. He gasped when he saw the expression on his friend’s face. Was Severus admiring his pregnant wife's figure? Did Severus Snape find someone attractive?

Lucius sneered, keen for some entertainment.
"Severus!" he called out.

The dark man dragged his eyes away from Hermione. "Yes?"

"How have you been faring as of late?" Lucius asked.

"Fairly well, all things considered," Severus replied.

"You have?" Lucius asked.

"Yes, I have." Severus' stomach sank. Lucius had a gleam in his eyes that experience had taught Severus not to trust.

"I'd think that being married to the Princess of Gryffindor would become tiring after a while, especially given her condition."

"She's been through a war and spent a year in hiding. By comparison, pregnancy is much more pleasant."

"Good point," Lucius mused as Draco walked by, engaged in a conversation with Blaise. "I simply remember how Narcissa was when she was pregnant with Draco."

Severus gave him a half smile. "I've never seen you take an order from anyone else the way you took orders from her."

"She could never figure out what she wanted to eat."

"It was humorous to watch you attempt to keep pace with her ever changing mind."

"Don't be too quick to laugh. Hermione will be demanding odd foods from you soon enough. Like Narcissa, her order will change by the minute," Lucius warned.

"Perhaps she will be indecisive at times," Severus replied. "Although Hermione is more agreeable and less high maintenance than most witches."

"Well Severus," Lucius drawled, going in for the kill. "I don't think I've ever heard you call anyone agreeable."

Severus maintained a neutral expression.

"I take it that you've been enjoying her company for the most part," Lucius responded.

"I don't find her company completely unpleasant. I can honestly say we've have some riveting discussions," Severus replied.

"On potions, no doubt," Lucius answered.

Severus glared at him. Lucius chuckled. "Now calm down Severus. There's no harm in building a relationship around potions."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Severus asked.

Lucius shrugged, though his eye glistening in victory. "I'm simply saying that forming a bond with someone over an academic study isn't unheard of, nor is it necessarily bad."

"What are you insinuating?" Severus hissed.
"I think you may actually like your wife," Lucius answered.

Severus gave him a blank stare, but Lucius could see the fear underneath his gaze.

"Attention everyone!" Ginevra announced.

Draco walked up beside her. He pressed her against him. "Thank you everyone for coming. You're probably all wondering why we’ve called you here."

The room was filled with silent interest. "We're expecting our first child!" Ginevra squealed.

"Really?" Narcissa asked.

"Yes!" Draco exclaimed.

The room erupted with congratulations.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for supporting this story! I appreciate everything!
"Oh, Ginny!" Hermione squealed. "I'm so happy for you!"

The friends embraced each other.

"Thank you," Ginevra squeaked.

"When did you find out about your pregnancy?" Hermione asked.

"A few days ago," she replied as they pulled away from each other.

"It's so exciting that you're having a baby, but," Hermione bit her lower lip. "I thought you didn't feel like it was the right time to become a mother."

"I know I said that," Ginevra answered. "But I've felt ready to be a mother for about six months now. I didn't want any pressure to conceive though, so I kept it to myself."

"That's understandable," Hermione answered.

"But just think!" Ginevra gushed. "A year from now our babies will be playing with each other!"

Hermione smiled. "They will be so cute!"

"If I have a little girl then she and your daughter are going to be so adorable!" Ginevra squealed. "They will be doing each other's hair and makeup, and Severus will be scowling the whole time because he claims to hate cute things."

Hermione laughed. "He'll spend half the time grumbling about the mess the girls are making, only to take pictures of them when he doesn't think anyone is looking."

"You know he will," Ginevra calmed herself. "How is your little one doing anyway?"

"She's a kicker," Hermione rubbed her stomach. "In fact, she's kicking right now. Do you want to feel her?"

"I'd love to," Ginevra replied in a soft voice. She set her hand on Hermione's stomach. After moving her hand around she could feel a tiny foot against it. Her eyes widened. "I feel her."

***

"Congratulations Draco," Lucius patted his son on the back.

"Yes, we're so happy for you," Narcissa kissed her son on the cheek.

Draco rolled his eyes at his mother, but he couldn't suppress his smile. "Thank you."

"I'm surprised you two finally decided to have a child. It seemed like Ginevra would never want one," Lucius continued.

"We'd discussed having a child several times in the past years, but we never made any concrete
plans for when to have one,” Draco answered.

“You hadn't really discussed the possibility of a child with us,” Lucius replied.

“Why should I make you two privy to the details of my bedroom?” Draco joked.

The Malfoys laughed as Blaise approached. "Congratulations, Draco."

“Thanks Blaise,” Draco replied as they shook hands.

"Are you hoping for a boy or a girl?” Blaise asked.

"I honestly hadn't thought that far ahead,” Draco answered. “I don’t care which gender the baby is so long as it's happy.”

"That's an excellent way of looking at it," Blaise answered.

"You'll know soon the gender enough anyway," Narcissa assured him.

"I will.” Draco blanched.

Narcissa raised an eyebrow. “Are you feeling well?”

“Yes. I was just thinking,” Draco squirmed. “Uh, just among us, any tips on how to deal with Ginevra during the pregnancy?”

"Always say yes," Narcissa answered, "Give her whatever food she wants, regardless of how ridiculous the dish sounds or many times she changes her order."

Narcissa and Lucius shared a sideways glance and chuckled. Draco’s eyes bulged. "Maybe I should ask Severus how he deals with Hermione,"

"Where is your godfather, anyway?” Blaise asked.

Draco scanned the room until he spotted Severus in a corner, speaking to Neville in hushed tones.

“Excuse me for a moment,” Draco muttered.

Blaise nodded.

Draco slipped away from his parents to confer with his godfather.

"I can put together the secret accounts by Monday," Neville whispered. "There's a goblin who owes me a favor."

"Good," Severus replied. "Create one and return to me as soon as you can. Then we’ll further discuss our plans."

Neville smiled. "Okay."

"Severus?"

Severus turned to his godson, trying to assess how much he'd heard. "Draco. Congratulations on your new offspring."

"Thank you,” he answered as Neville slipped away. "How are things going for you?"
"Very well, thank you," Severus answered, his eyes softening. "I cannot complain."

"Of course you can, you're married to Hermione," Draco smirked.

"Why should I consider my marriage to be a source of discomfort?" Severus asked as his eyes hardened.

“You're married to Hermione, that bushy haired know-it-all. After spending so much time with her I’d imagine you have more than a few complaints.”

"Why should her presence annoy me?"

Draco gulped, wondering why his godfather hadn't rolled with the joke. Severus had been open about his desire for a quiet and invisible wife, two things Hermione was not. Their marriage was a financial transaction, not a joining of two souls. With those facts in mind, why was i Severus was ready to jump down Draco’s throat for implying that being around Hermione could be less than pleasant?

“I remember what she was like at Hogwarts,” Draco cleared his throat. "I figured she would've recited all of *Hogwarts: a History* to you by now."

"Well, she hasn't. She's much more interested in assisting me with my potions research," Severus answered.

"You two actually work together?" Draco asked in a loud voice.

Severus nodded. “She's been an invaluable asset to my research. We enjoy debating and discussing our latest projects.”

Draco stepped back. Our latest projects?

“Don't you and Ginevra discuss work related things?"

"Yes, but we’re different. We, well, we aren't necessarily used to working alone."

"Fair enough, but I've found some of Hermione's ideas quite intriguing."

Draco forced himself to grin. Ginevra was right; Severus was growing quite attached to his arranged bride. Maybe he saw something in Hermione that Draco didn’t, although Draco couldn’t put his finger on what aspect of Severus would find enjoyable. Then again Severus had lived in solitude for almost all his life. Maybe he was happy to finally have someone in his life...or in his bed.

"I don't see any of the Weasleys here," Severus commented.

"We decided to hold off on telling them about Ginevra’s pregnancy," Draco answered.

Severus asked. “Are you sure that's wise?"

“Perhaps not in the long run, but it seems like the best option,” Draco sighed. "We wanted to make our announcement at a drama free dinner party. When we announce that we’re expecting to her family it will be a disaster. They'll cry that the poor child will be brainwashed by Slytherins, and call me a corrupting influence. I’m sure a few of them will lament that she isn’t pregnant with Potter’s child. We didn’t want to deal with all that tonight."

"I understand," Severus answered.
“Draco,” Ginevra called as she rushed over to him.

“Yes?” Draco asked.

Ginevra kissed him on the cheek. In response he kissed her on the cheek.


"Thank you!" she exclaimed, unashamed of her public display of affection. "Hermione and I are already planning playdates between our children."

“You are?” Severus' frown deepened.

“Yes. We think they are going to be so cute playing together. Oh if they’re two girls they’ll be playing with their dolls and putting on makeup and doing their hair…”

Severus’ mind flashed a child dressed in pink holding a doll clad in a matching outfit. He was more than eager to scoop the infant into his arms and kiss her on the cheek.

Ginevra giggled at his twitching eye. "You'll see, it will be so much fun."

“Indeed it will be,” Severus muttered, imagining himself holding the baby without a care to the intimidating persona he'd spent forty years crafting. What on earth was happening to him?

Ginevra put a hand on Draco’s shoulder. "The elves say that the food is ready."

He grasped her hand. "We'd better invite everyone to the dining room then."

Ginevra nodded before turning to Severus. "You should find Hermione if you want to sit beside her."

They walked away, leaving Severus alone with his thoughts.

“Severus?”

His lips curled up somewhere between a neutral expression and a smile. “Hello Hermione.”

His heart skipped a beat as she slipped her hand in his.

"I thought we might sit together," Hermione offered, her eyes betraying her uncertainty.

"I wouldn't be opposed to dining beside you," Severus answered.

They stepped into the dining room in companionable silence while the rest of the chattering guests joined them.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading! It's deeply appreciated!
"That was a lovely party," Hermione began. "I'm so happy for Ginny."

Severus opened the bedroom door for her. She flashed him a smile upon entering.

"Indeed. Draco was rather pleased as well," Severus closed the door behind them.

Hermione put a hand on her stomach, her eyes dancing in joy at the infant’s kicks. Severus was captivated by the scene, his desire for her intensifying by the second.

"Draco will make a great father," Hermione continued. “I’ve never seen him so happy about anything.”

“It is rare to see him smile so widely in public,” Severus replied.

"Ginny says they're already discussing potential names."

“Which names are they considering?”

"Ginny wants to name the child either Fredrick or Frederica, depending on the gender. Draco's insisting on Aquila regardless of whether the child is a boy or girl," Hermione replied.

Severus grinned. "Of course Draco would select a constellation name."

“Aquila is a constellation?” Hermione asked.

Severus stepped beside her. “Aquila means ‘eagle.’”

“I see. Aquila is a pretty name.”

“It’s very Draco.”

“That it is.”

Severus moistened his lips. The moonlight lent an almost ethereal glow to her skin. Her curls framed her face so perfectly. Had anyone ever told her how alluring she was?

"So," she took her hand off her stomach. "Do you have any suggestions for what to name our child?"

“Not yet, but I will let you know if I develop an opinion," he whispered before kissing her neck.

"Severus," she breathed as all rational thought deserted her.

He gazed into her eyes. Her eyes bore into him, as if to determine how serious his intentions were.

"Hermione," he rasped, his expression leaving no doubt as to how much he craved her.

Desire inflamed her eyes. She caressed his cheeks with her thumbs, then lifted her lips to his. With a moan, he pulled her closer to deepen the kiss, massaging her back until his fingers found the zipper of her dress. He gave it a gentle tug, praying she wouldn't refuse him. She whispered in his ear,
"Severus."

"Yes?" He murmured.

She trailed kisses down his jaw, relieving him of his jacket and tie as he released her zipper from its duty.

***

"Ginevra," Lucius called from across the ballroom.

"Yes?" she asked, her attention focused on the elves sweeping away the last traces of the night’s soiree.

"The party was very nice. Thank you for inviting Narcissa and me," He began as he approached her.

"You're welcome," she answered, giving him a sideways glance.

"Even Severus seemed to enjoy himself," Lucius continued. "At least as much as he enjoys anything."

"He did," Ginevra drawled, now facing her father-in-law.

"You seem to believe that he is enjoying married life," Lucius continued, nonchalant.

Ginevra sized him up. "Yes, I think he is very happy with Hermione."

"How happy do you think they are together?" Lucius asked.

Ginevra shrugged. "Happier than anyone thought they’d be."

"If you believe they are happy together then I must ask you to refrain from performing whatever action you’re considering."

"What action do you think I’m considering?"

"Matchmaking, true love, some other romantic notion you Gryffindors prattle on about. I don't know what you have planned but do not interfere with Severus’ marriage," Lucius warned.

“I only want my best friend and her husband to be happy.”

“Then leave Severus alone.”

"Why?" Ginevra snapped. “I want Severus to be happy. Hermione makes him happy. If I were to do anything I’d only have his best interests at heart.”

Lucius sighed. “You may think you have Severus' best interests at heart, but your intrusion into his marriage may end up hurting him more than you could ever know.”

“How could anything I do hurt Severus?” Ginevra asked.

"Did Hermione show any interest in him?"

“She talked to him quite a bit at dinner," Ginevra offered.

"That doesn't mean anything. You spoke with Neville throughout the night, but I don’t believe you have any romantic attachment to him.”
“True.”

“Did Hermione look at Severus the way he looked at her?”

“No,” Ginevra admitted, but then added. “But one day she could.”

Lucius quirked an eyebrow.

“Hermione has never been appreciated for who she is. Her previous partners were either confused by her ideas, or mocked her intelligence. Nobody has ever stared at her like she was drop dead gorgeous, not until tonight anyway.”

“Are you implying that Severus likes Hermione more than your brother did?”

Ginevra took a shaky breath. “A few months ago I thought Ron was Hermione’s soulmate. After seeing the way Severus looks at her and how at ease she was with him…I think she may have found someone who loves her for who she is.”

Lucius sighed. "Severus, is he doesn't become attracted to just any person. He's one of those people who needs some kind of connection with the person in question. It's never a casual one."

“So you agree with me that Severus may be falling for Hermione?”

"I don't know how deep Severus’ feelings towards his wife run," Lucius answered. "I don't think you should push them together though."

"But if Hermione could find love with him…"

"He may not love her as anything more than some odd sort of friend."

"But you said they had a connection."

"How often do you think he's truly fallen in love?"

"Once," she answered in a weak voice.

"Don't get me wrong, Severus wants a family more than anything,” Lucius answered. "He yearns for the love he never had as a child, which is why he searches for it in the most unlikely of places. His problem is that he's never satisfied with his partner. A few dates reveal his partner to be unworthy, so he moves on."

"It sounds more like Hermione is the one who could get hurt!” Ginevra argued. “She can’t take another man finding her unworthy and running out on her! She'd never recover from Severus’ rejection, not after what happened with Ron!”

“I wouldn’t fear for Hermione’s heart. Severus has made a promise to stay loyal to her. As you know, promises mean something to him. Even if he isn’t in love with her, he cares for her deeply. Tonight it showed.”

"Has he ever looked at other women the way he looked at Hermione tonight?"

Lucius exhaled. “Severus’ behavior was surprising. His emotions are usually much harder to discern. He’s never gaze at a woman like she was attractive in public."

"So he feels a strong connection to her?"
"More than likely. But does she feel a strong connection to him?"

“I know she considers him a friend.”

"But could he potentially be more to her?" Lucius asked.

"I don't know." Ginevra admitted.

"I wouldn't push them together," Lucius warned.

"What if she shows interest in him?" Ginevra asked. “Hermione and Severus are stubborn people who have been deeply hurt before. They may dance around their feelings until one of them does something stupid. They may need some extra help in coming together, or at least someone to help them get out of their own way.”

Lucius titled his head upwards. “If Hermione and Severus develop an interest in each other, and this interest is overt to everyone but them, we will revisit this discussion. I would like to be involved with whatever you have planned though. After all, you haven't dealt with Severus as long as I have.”

Ginny hummed as she considered the option. "I suppose I could use your help. After all, dealing with Severus is rather tricky."

"No doubt," Lucius agreed.

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Severus held Hermione close to him, feeling the tiny pressure of the baby's kicks against his bare skin.

He whispered her name.

No answer.

He kissed the top of her head as he ran his fingers through her hair. Damn her hair was soft.

He gazed down at her face. Hermione's eyes were closed, her arm wrapped around his torso. She appeared so peaceful, so trusting of him. Never before had a witch fallen asleep in his arms. It was so comforting, so intimate…

His heart skipped a beat before racing within his chest. Somehow, he'd gotten close to this witch, much closer than he'd intended. He supposed some would argue that it was natural for him to develop some deep emotional attachment to her since she was, after all, his wife. Still the warm emotions surrounding the witch in his arms came as a surprise. Then again, they had agreed to be friends, and it was natural to think fondly of a friend.

Friends were good. Friends who slept together brought on warmer feelings, but they were nonetheless still good. Besides, it wasn't like they intended to be one of those nauseating newlyweds who slobbered all over each other. They were friends and would behave as such. Just the thought of him enjoying a normal marital bond with accompanying love and flowers was enough to make him chuckle.

Pressure from another kick brought him out of his thoughts. He settled in and closed his eyes, enjoying the silence of the night, the witch in his arms, and the baby nudging him from within her.
Thank you so much for all the support!
At first, Severus felt the warm pressure of her body against his. As he drifted towards consciousness, he moaned as she ran her fingers along his jawbone. His eyes fluttered open. The image was blurry at first, but when he shut, then reopened his eyes, he could see Hermione beside him, wearing one of the most serene expressions he’d ever seen.

"Hermione," he rasped.

"Morning Severus," she breathed before kissing his forehead

"How long have you been awake?" he croaked.

She hummed. "I'd say maybe ten minutes. You looked so peaceful I didn't have the heart to wake you." She frowned. "I'm sorry if I did."

“Do not apologize," he pulled her closer. “I usually wake up at this hour. Even if I didn't, I do not mind waking up next to you in the least.”

"Good," she brushed her lips against his.

He grinned. "You were beautiful last night."

"Thanks," she answered. "I didn't know whether or not that dress would still fit me. I had to cast a couple of spells to make it drape around my abdomen, but I thought I looked fine in it."

“You looked more than fine in it," his smile widened at the memory. “I’d even dare to say you looked radiant last night.”

“Thank you," she rubbed his cheek with her finger. "I'll remember to shrink it back to its original size once this little one is born."

"You'd better," he captured her lips with his.

Hermione deepened the kiss until they heard a low rumble. Severus raised an eyebrow as she blushed. "I think I might be hungry."

"I suppose we should have the elves fix you some breakfast then," Severus answered.

"No, I want to make myself an omelet," she answered.

He shook his head. "The elves are beginning to feel as though you're invading the kitchen and putting them out of a job."

"I know they enjoy their work, but I don't feel right ordering them around."

“But you’re paying them to cook, clean, and whatever else we wish for them to do."

“I know, but if I can do something myself I’d prefer to do it myself.” Her face lit up. “Besides, you've never had one of my famous mushroom-bacon-cheddar omelets. You can’t be married to me and eat one.”
"I'm almost afraid to ask what would possess one to put bacon, mushroom, and cheddar together on a plate," Severus replied.

"From what I understand someone was experimenting with eggs and decided to throw those ingredients into the pan with them. From that day forward we had a lovely meal."

"I'll take your word for it."

"You'll see. By the time you finish your breakfast you'll want me to fix omelets every day," Hermione assured him as she sat up.

"We shall see," he answered.

Hermione hopped out of bed and rushed to the closet to select something to wear, impervious to the weight of Severus' stare.

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"I will only admit to finding this meal adequate," Severus argued.

"Your smile says otherwise," Hermione chuckled.

Severus forced himself to frown. "I am not smiling. I take only a minimal pleasure in this meal."

"Your eyes tell a different story," Hermione laughed.

"I am merely amused by your insistence that I somehow enjoy an egg coupled with a mushroom, an already unnatural combination," Severus argued.

"Sure you are," Hermione replied.

Severus took the last bite of his omelet. He pretended to be disgusted, despite his taste buds crying for more.

Her eyes twinkled as he finished eating. "You know, you can be a real grump about things."

"You knew that I was less than agreeable the day you agreed to marry me."

"Yes, but sometimes your obstinence is almost charming."

Severus’ eyes bulged. Charming? What fumes had this woman been inhaling?

Before he could respond to his wife, they heard a POP! Hermione jumped up as Severus turned to the source of the noise.

"Master Snape," the elf began. "There is an auror at the door."

Severus muttered obscenities under his breath as he stood up and glided to the door. Hermione followed close behind, her hand on her wand. Although Severus hadn't mentioned any legal problems, his former ties to the Death Eaters and his wealth made him a target. There was a good chance he’d need backup, even if he’d never admit to it.

Severus flung open the door. "Hello Mr. Potter. How can I be of service to you?"

"I uh, actually came to talk to you about the Hogwarts murder and the burning down of Neville's greenhouse," Harry answered. He stepped inside, mouth agape. The exterior of the mansion didn’t
do justice to the grandeur of its interior.

“Why do you want to discuss the Hogwarts incident with him?” Hermione asked with more than a hint of warning in her voice.

Harry stared at Hermione. Did being married to Severus Snape now make her his personal bodyguard?

Hermione glared at Harry and tapped his foot as if he was a misbehaving child. Severus displayed no emotion, though there was a flicker of affection in his eyes.

"I was curious as to whether or not Severus knew of anyone with a grudge against Hogwarts," Harry gulped. “He once taught there, so he seemed to be a natural person to ask.”

“I am present in this room,” Severus interrupted. "If you want to ask me a question you may do so to my face."

Harry looked up at him. “Do you know of anyone who has a grudge against Hogwarts?”

"I do not," Severus answered.

"I still need to talk to you to see if you know anything which could be of value. Sometimes, one knows more than one thinks," Harry replied.

“What exactly is my husband supposed to know?” Hermione interjected.

“I'm not quite sure,” Harry admitted. “But I still need to speak with him. This case is going cold, and I refuse to let that happen.”

Severus glanced at Hermione. She nodded. "I need to write a few letters. If you need me I'll be in my office."

"Thank you," Severus replied.

She took his hand and squeezed it before leaving. Harry raised an eyebrow. Severus spun around. His eyes darkened, as if to warn Harry not to think too much of their affectionate display. Harry lowered his head. "Is there a place we could sit down?"

“We can converse in the sitting room,” he replied.

"Okay," Harry answered.

Severus led the auror down the hallway until they reached their destination. Harry inhaled as he admired the ornate gold stenciling near the ceiling, as well as the soft emerald carpet.

"Impressive, isn't it?" Severus began.

"I mean, it's hard to believe that Hermione lives here. Heck, it's hard to believe that you live here!” Harry blurted out. “I mean, it’s quite an upgrade from your shack!”

Severus smirked. "Yes, we do prefer this mansion to our previous dwellings.”

“It’s so luxurious,” Harry gasped. “I knew the Princes were rich, but I never would’ve suspected that they were this wealthy.”

Severus smirked. “Would you like an elf to bring you some tea?”
"No thanks, I'm fine," Harry replied.

"Just as well," Severus sat down. "Hermione doesn't like to use the elves for much of anything."

"I'm surprised she let you keep them," Harry took a seat across from Severus.

"They weren't going anywhere," Severus commented. "Still, I doubt you came here to discuss the inside of my house or my elves."

"No, I didn't," Harry cleared his throat. "I came here to talk about the recent crimes committed at Hogwarts."

“So you’ve claimed.”

"I know that you felt disenfranchised when Minerva refused to give you your job back after the war. Did this happen to anyone else?"

"No," Severus answered, his bitterness evident. "I was the only one fired, unless you want to count Dolores Umbridge."

“She isn’t a suspect,” Harry replied. “She committed suicide in her jail cell a few years ago. Forensics confirmed that the body was hers.”

"She's the only one I could think of that would desire revenge against Hogwarts due to her former profession there.”

“Has anyone associated with the Death Eaters ever approached you about revenge against Hogwarts?”

"They'd be more interested in killing me than in confiding their plans to me," Severus replied.

"Good point," Harry replied. "You wouldn't tell the aurors if someone tried to kill you though."

"No, I would not. I'd handle the problem myself."

"Have you…"

"No," Severus interrupted. "I have been fortunate enough to spend a few years neither witnessing nor participating in killings."

“That’s always good to hear,” Harry mused. "To your knowledge, are there any Death Eaters who escaped the Ministry?"

"No," Severus answered. “I am not aware of any Death Eaters who have escaped justice. Then again, I believe that the Ministry should be keeping track of them, not me."

"They should have kept track of them, but I'm wondering if some Death Eaters managed to fool the Ministry into believing they’d been captured or had died when in reality they are still on the loose."

"The only being associated with the Death Eaters who may have escaped the Ministry are the Snatchers."

"No," Harry argued. "We found Fenrir, Scabior, and the Chief Snatcher dead. We cremated them. I watched them burn with my own eyes." An idea then came to his head. "What about Lucius?"

“What about him?” Severus’ eyes hardened.
"Does he still hold a grudge against Hogwarts?" Harry asked. "Has Draco mentioned anything about wanting revenge on Professor Trelawney and Neville?"

"Potter," Severus began in a low, intimidating voice. "Do not insult my intelligence with your feud against the Malfoys. If you want to frame Draco, then I suggest you look elsewhere."

Harry sighed. "I'm sorry, that was unnecessary."

"It was," Severus added.

Harry took another deep breath. "Have Ginny and Draco told you about her pregnancy?"

"How did you know she was expecting?" Severus scratched his cape.

"Ginny wrote me a letter about a week ago which mentioned she was pregnant. She didn't want me to be caught unaware when she and Draco announced it to the press."

"I see."

Harry buried his head in his hands. "How did you live with it?"

"Live with what?" Severus asked.

Harry locked eyes with him. "Don't pretend that I don't know what you felt for my mother, and how you felt after I was born."

Severus shifted to the side.

"How did you survive the pain? How could you wake up knowing that the woman you loved was having a baby with the one person you could not stand?"

I tried to kill James.

Severus stared at Harry, whose anguish was laid bare before him. "I, I did not handle it well,"

"I know how you handled it. After all I saw the penseive. But how did you finally make peace with the fact that Mum started a family with Dad, and not you?"

"Time," Severus replied. "It took some time, but I eventually accepted the truth."

"How much time did it take?" Harry demanded.

Severus sighed. "I cannot pinpoint an exact time frame. All I know was as I lying on the floor of the Shrieking Shack I finally admitted to myself that I loved who I wanted Lily to be and what she represented, not Lily herself."

Harry's eye twitched.

"Harry, I have an idea how you must feel, but you must consider something. If Ginevra had the courtesy to tell you about her pregnancy, then she still cares for you."

"But she doesn’t love me, at least not the way I love her."

"You are correct in saying that you will never be as close to her as you once were. Yet you have some sort of relationship with her. Cherish what you have and don't sabotage it by interfering in her marriage with Draco. Don't make the mistakes that I made."
"I won't," Harry promised. "I know Ginny and I are over forever. The baby makes that clear. It doesn't stop the pain, though."

"You will find someone, I assure you," Severus replied.

"You think so?" Harry asked, his eyes pleading for reassurance.

Severus nodded. "You're a war hero, the boy-who-lived. Girls will line up to marry you when you let it be known that you're available. Don't let one lost love embitter you and blind you to all those who care for you, and could care for you."

"Thank you," Harry answered.

"I am only stating the truth," Severus replied.

Harry leaned back in his chair. "How, how are things with Hermione?"

Severus' eyes softened at the mention of her name. The change did not go unnoticed by Harry.

"As expected life with Hermione is more than tolerable," Severus answered.

"You two seem to get along well, at least from what I've observed," Harry replied.

"She's a tolerable companion and wife," Severus answered. "She's not a dunderhead, which I more than appreciate."

"No, she is not a dunderhead" Harry replied with a small smile before standing up. "I suppose I should be going. I have some forms to fill out."

"Then you should probably leave," Severus stood up. "I can lead you out."

"Thank you," Harry followed Severus out of the sitting room.

They finished their trek in silence. Upon reaching the door Harry looked back at Severus. "Thank you for talking to me, and not just about the case."

"I was more than happy to advise you," Severus replied. "If I can help your investigation in any way, feel free to ask."

"I will," Harry replied.

Harry extended his hand. Severus accepted his grasp and shook it. Then Harry departed.

"How did the interview with Harry go?"

Severus looked back. Hermione was standing in the hallway, wringing her hands. As he gazed into her eyes, an insight flashed through his brain.

Harry's eyes no longer reminded him of Lily.

Chapter End Notes

I am sorry for not updating yesterday. I had a horrible cold and could barely think
straight. Fortunately I'm doing much better now, just in time for my birthday!

Thanks again for the support. I appreciate all of it!
"Hello Ragnok."

"Good morning, Professor Longbottom," Ragnok began.

Neville stepped closer to inspect the vault. He hummed while tapping his chin. "Is everything ready?"

"Yes, although I am curious as to why you should have need of such a large vault," Ragnok replied.

"Why should the size of the vault matter?" Neville asked.

"It doesn’t matter at all," Ragnok replied. "After all, our job is to create vaults, not to question their use."

"That's why Gringott's is the best," Neville answered.

The goblin turned to the vault and set his hand on it. "As you requested, the vault will only open for my touch and my command, although I can extend this right to you if you so please…"

"I would appreciate that," Neville replied, "I may need this money at a moment's notice."

Ragnok raised his eyebrow and scrutinized Neville's expression. Then his eyes flashed with a realization. "Would this financial windfall you're expecting have anything to do with the recent destruction of your greenhouse?"

Neville sighed. "I have a benefactor who's not only willing to finance the reconstruction of my greenhouse, but to help me further expand it. The one stipulation is that I create a separate account in which to deposit the funds."

"Won't the Headmistress question your new source of income?"

"I can always claim that the fortune is part of my war stipend or a bequest from my grandmother."

"I suppose no one would suspect otherwise if you can keep your lies straight."

"I don't like lying to people," Neville admitted, "But I need a new greenhouse. This donor is unusually generous; I'd be a fool to turn him down."

"Him?" Ragnok asked.

"Please show me how to open the vault," Neville replied, his voice warning the goblin not to press further.

"With pleasure," Ragnok replied. "First I need to cast a security spell. After that is set, all you need to do is say 'gold bar' and your name while placing your hands on the door. The vault will then open. We can practice a few times, just to make sure you don't get sucked inside."

The goblin tilted his head with a knowing grin.
"That would be an excellent idea," Neville answered with a sheepish smile.

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"How long must we continue to wait?" Scabior demanded.

Fenrir rolled his eyes.

Scabior continued. "It's been weeks since we've seen any significant action. Now we're losing our edge. It's time to strike before we lose momentum."

"It's a good thing you aren't in charge," Fenrir replied, nonchalant. "You'd have blown the plan by now."

"Plan? All we do is sit in the bushes and watch this guy. If we're feeling energetic we turn a few passersby into werewolves! That's not a plan! It's messing around."

"Better to change a few people than nobody at all."

"Thirty new lycanthropes is hardly the entire Wizarding World," Scabior argued. "All this waiting around isn't getting us any closer to reclaiming the Death Eaters!"

Fenrir pinched the bridge of his nose. "I keep telling you, timing is everything. If we hope to succeed, then everything must come together perfectly."

"What if we wait so long that things no longer perfectly align?" Scabior countered. "What if we are missing our chance?"

"Trust me, we aren’t missing our chance," Fenrir answered. "Our chance will only come when he reveals the location of the one thing I need."

"What do you need?" Scabior asked, more interested than argumentative.

The Chief looked up from his magazine and stared at Fenrir, his interest piqued. Fenrir sneered. "He has the key to getting us in and out of Azkaban unnoticed."

"He does?" Scabior asked.

Fenrir nodded. "About a month before he died, Voldemort made mention of this particular possession, and its unique qualities could be very useful to us. I'm waiting for our target to either give away its location or to give us an opportunity to search for it ourselves."

"Well, what are we looking for? We need to be able to identify it when we see it," Scabior replied.

"That's just the thing," Fenrir replied with a smirk. "You won't see it."

"What?" Scabior exclaimed.

The Chief's eyes flashed in understanding. A sinister smile spread across his face. It took Scabior a few more beats to piece together the clues. His eyes widened. "Oh, I understand."

"Now do you trust my judgment?" Fenrir asked.

"Yes," Scabior answered with confidence.

Just then a POP resounded in front of the house. They fell silent as a man appeared, fiddled with the
wards, and disappeared through the doorway. Everything about his posture spoke of bone-deep weariness, as though he had already seen too much of life. An odd demeanor for such a young man. Fenrir felt a pang of sympathy for him, although his ambition quickly squelched it.

Through the window they watched the man step into the kitchen and seat himself at a table littered with documents. He grasped them one by one, shaking his head every once and awhile as if he was trying to work out a particularly obstinate puzzle. The man looked out the window, as if the glistening stars would provide an answer to his quandary.

Very soon, Fenrir snarled. Very soon you will find me.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Severus was staring at page two hundred thirty-seven, but he couldn’t decipher a single word. His thoughts wandered between his preparations for his impending meeting with Neville and his concern for the witch perusing the morning paper. He’d tried and failed several times to discern her mood in light of the front page story, but she betrayed no emotion. He toyed with the idea of using Legilimency, but decided against it when he considered what would happen if he were caught doing so.

After several tense minutes she lowered the *Daily Prophet* and caught his glance.

"Did you read the paper?" she asked in a non-accusatory voice.

"Yes," he set his book on the coffee table.

She sighed and dropped the paper on the floor. "I knew they'd run articles like that one. How could they not with the Quidditch World Cup coming to Britain?"

"Just because the Quidditch World Cup is coming does not mean we need to see Mr. Weasley’s face plastered everywhere," Severus grumbled.

Hermione shrugged. "I’m not surprised they ran a story on him. I guess I just had an irrational hope that they'd wait a few more months before interviewing him again."

"Hermione, we can drop our subscription," Severus suggested. "We don’t need to spend time reading ever unsubstantiated rumor in Britain."

"No we should keep it," Hermione replied. "As much as I hate to admit it, the *Daily Prophet* is the only real source of news in Britain."

"It's enough to make you want to pack up and move to Germany," Severus muttered.

Hermione chuckled. Severus' eyes softened, but he prevented his mouth from curling upwards.

"It's not as if Ron mentioned me." The sadness returned to Hermione’s eyes. "For which I'm grateful."

"He never should’ve given that classless interview," Severus answered.

“Agreed,” Hermione exhaled.

Severus allowed himself to give her a reassuring smile.

“Still, I'm old news when you consider that now they can speculate about who Ron will bring as his date to the Quidditch World Cup.” Her voice was laced with sarcasm. “After all, his team will surely win and he must celebrate that victory with a special someone. Merlin knows victory alone won’t be enough to heal his heart from his wench of an ex-fiancée. He needs a bedwarmer as well."

Even though she tried to laugh, the sadness remained. Severus sneered. "He really is a useless dunderhead. You are much better off without him."
"I'm beginning to accept that I was only in love with a mirage. Ronald and I were terrible together, and it's best I live my life without him."

“But it doesn’t erase the pain.”

“No, but I wish it did.”

"Indeed."

Hermione's expression lightened. She placed a hand over her stomach. "I feel our baby stretching."

Severus’ eyes lit up. "Are you awake in there, little one?"

The sorrow in Hermione’s eyes was replaced with pure joy. "She is."

"We were beginning to wonder if you were planning to sleep the morning away," Severus cooed. "After all, you were up so late last night."

"You were. You were kept Mummy up for hours."

"Who in turn kept Dad awake."

The smile grew. She motioned for Severus to come closer. He approached her and put his hand on her stomach. The baby kicked against his hand. “Yes, you are very much awake right now.”

Hermione’s eyes darkened. “Returning to the subject of Ron…”

Severus looked up at her, the child still pressing against his hand.

"Even if I was with Ron, I would not have gone to the Quidditch World Cup."

"You wouldn’t have?"

She nodded. "Maybe I could've sat in on the first few games, but sitting in those stands is difficult enough under the best of circumstances. Attending a game when your entire body is swollen like some balloon… uh, no. I wouldn't have done it."

"I can understand that," Severus answered.

"I actually had a dream the night after I found out I was pregnant with this little one." Hermione shook her head. “I dreamed that Ron and I were married on a Quidditch field."

"A Quidditch field?" Severus drawled.

"Yes," Hermione answered.

“I could never imagine you allowing yourself to be wed on a Quidditch field,” Severus replied.

“To tell the truth I don’t know how Ron convinced me to marry him on a muddy field before his hundreds of his adoring fans. All I remember about the dream is that as we were saying our vows, a game was going on above us. Players were flying everywhere, and a couple of times one nearly hit me,” Hermione answered.

"I'm surprised the snitch didn't get caught in your veil," Severus teased.

"Me too," Hermione laughed.
The baby’s kicks intensified, as if she were laughing with her mother.

Then the laugh died and Hermione’s eyes were distant. "I remember kissing Ron once our vows were complete. Then he grabbed a broom and joined the game. I couldn't see him in the flurry of players. I remember standing at the altar, hating my wedding with every fiber of my being."

"I wish I could say you got the wedding you deserved," Severus replied.

"For what our wedding was, it wasn't horrible," she answered. "Maybe it wasn't my dream wedding, but it was beautiful. It certainly wasn't a disaster."

"Has it ever occurred to you that you deserve better than 'it wasn't a disaster?'" Severus asked.

“I’ve already received better than ‘it wasn’t a disaster.’” Hermione replied. “Our baby first kicked on our wedding day. Between that look of pure love in your eyes and her foot against my abdomen.” Hermione wiped a tear from her eyes. “It was one of the most beautiful moments of my life.”

“Next to seeing our daughter for the first time, our wedding was one of the most beautiful moments of my life as well,” Severus choked.

Hermione’s voice was soft. “I deserve happiness. I'm genuinely happy with you and with our relationship. Maybe this marriage isn’t the fairy tale I dreamed of growing up, but you have been wonderful to me and to the baby. It's a different kind of happiness than I expected, but it's happiness nonetheless."

"As long as you are content…” Severus replied.

"I am,” she assured him before looking down at her stomach. "I'll be even happier when I finally meet this little one."

“As will I,” Severus rubbed her stomach again. He directed his attention to the baby. “We are both very excited to meet you. Neither of us can wait to hold you.”

“No, we can’t wait to watch you grow and learn and make your father buy you the most girly, pinkest toy you can find.”

“Our daughter will have much better taste than pink toys, won’t you?”

The baby kicked her father’s hand. “Good girl.”

Hermione shook her head. Some things about Severus were never going to change.

"Hermione," Severus drawled.

“Yes?” She asked.

Severus fidgeted. His mouth twisted a few times. "What are we going to do if the child is a red-head?"

"Don't worry," Hermione replied. "My mother's grandmother had red hair."

"She did?"

"I don't know. I never met her and she died before my mother was born. There aren't any pictures of her, so no one else would know, either."
"That's a positively Slytherin response," Severus smirked.

"Well if you lie in bed beside one long enough you begin to pick up on their habits. Osmosis," Hermione teased.

They laughed together, but grew silent when they heard a loud POP! "Master and Mistress Snape!" an elf announced. "Professor Longbottom is here!"

"Thank you," Severus replied before removing his hand from Hermione’s abdomen and rising. He offered Hermione his hand, which she accepted. Even after pulling her up and making their way to the front door he did not release her hand. Hermione didn't seem to notice, or if she did, chose not to remark on it.

"Hermione! Professor Snape!"

Judging by the expression on his face, Neville Longbottom did notice their hand holding. Severus released Hermione and scowled.

"Hello Mr. Longbottom," Severus began in the most intimidating voice he could muster.

“Hello Severus, Hermione. How are things going?” Neville continued, his grin as wide as ever.

“Both of us are quite well,” Hermione replied.

“You two seem very pleased with life,” Neville noted.

“Both of us are quite pleased.” Hermione patted her stomach. "We were just discussing the baby."

"Oh? I heard it was a girl," Neville cooed.

"It is," Hermione answered.

"Congratulations!" Neville answered. "Does she have a name?"

"We are in the process of selecting one," Severus answered.

"Good luck! I hear that naming a baby can be quite difficult,” Neville responded.

“It is proving to be more challenging than we expected,” Hermione admitted.

“Might I suggest a helpful technique?” Neville suggested.

Hermione's eyes lit up. “Certainly.”

"Name her after something you both like," Neville answered.

"What?" Severus asked.

"Well, it's nice for parents to give their child a name with meaning. That way, the child feels more special. If you name her after something you both love then it will be extra special."

Severus raised an eyebrow. You want me to name my child Potion or Book?

"Belladonna might be nice," Hermione mused.

"Yes, if it wasn't also the name of a poisonous substance," Severus answered.
"I almost forgot about that," Hermione replied.

"You'll think of something. It was just a suggestion," Neville replied.

"It's a good one," Hermione answered.

"Indeed," Severus replied. "There are, however, other pressing matters..."

"There are," Neville responded, his expression much more serious.

Severus reached into his pocket and pulled out a cashier's check for the amount of five million galleons. "If this isn't enough, then let me know and we'll renegotiate."

Neville's eyes widened. "Severus, that's far more than I can accept. When you offered me funding, I thought we were talking about thousands, not millions, of galleons."

"Neville, I do believe in Hogwarts, but I do not approve of the direction in which Minerva is taking the school. You deserve a new greenhouse and we have the means to help you build something unparalleled in the Wizarding world," Severus replied. "Take the money."

"I don't know what to say..." Neville whispered.

"It's a pleasure to contribute to such a worthy cause," Severus answered.

Hermione nodded.

"This means the world to me," Neville choked. "Thank you."

For the first time since the fire, Neville was optimistic about the future.

Chapter End Notes

YAY! 100 REVIEWS! Thanks so much everyone! I love having such great readers like you all!
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ginny raised an eyebrow. "So he really thinks he can open the apothecary in three months?"

Hermione took a sip of her pumpkin juice. "He seems to think so. After working on cleaning it I’m inclined to agree with him."

Ginny’s eyes bulged. “He asked you to clean the apothecary while you’re pregnant?"

"No, in fact he couldn't have been more against it."

"Then why did you insist on it?"

Hermione shrugged. “I was bored so I tagged along with him. When it became clear that I was going to help him clean he attempted to talk me out of it. He gave up after ten minutes."

Ginny smirked. "I'm surprised he lasted ten minutes against you."

Hermione took a gulp of her juice. "I'm glad he relented. It’s been rather soothing to do some menial work. Sometimes it’s nice to know that even if your body is changing you can still do the same things you used to do."

“I see,” Ginny noted as a waiter scurried between tables.

“Anyway, working with Severus has been quite fun. We spent all of last weekend casting cleaning spells on the place, although we had to scrub some areas the muggle way. The floor was just filthy."

"How long did the cleanup take?"

"We worked on it for three days, nearly ten hours a day, but you'll need to subtract the time we took for lunch, which was roughly an hour and fifteen minutes, and then there’s dinner which tended to last another two hours."

Ginny chuckled. "Only you would keep track of how long you ate down to the minute."

"They were rather pleasant meals.” Hermione argued.

"Did you order out?” Ginny asked.

"Yes,” Hermione admitted.

Ginevra laughed. Hermione cocked her head.

"Sorry,” Ginny gasped. “I’m trying to imagine everyone’s reaction to Severus at a muggle restaurant.”

Behind her a man pointed to an item on the menu as a waiter jotted down its name.

“But I needed that Big Mac,” Hermione insisted. “I was going crazy without it."

"Really?“ Ginevra drawled
"Yes. I'd been craving a Big Mac like mad, so he finally broke does and went to McDonalds," Hermione answered.

Ginny cocked her head. "What exactly is a Big Mac?"

"It's a special kind of muggle hamburger. Just talking about one makes me hungry," Hermione’s mouth watered.

"So those are the infamous cravings," Ginny mused.

"You'll feel them soon enough," Hermione assured her.

"As long as I'm not changing my request every five minutes I think Draco will be fine," Ginny answered.

"Well prepare him, because your cravings can change like that," Hermione snapped her fingers. "Yesterday I vacillated between wanting onion rings and a burrito. Severus handed me a burrito and told me to ask the elves if I wanted anything else."

Ginny laughed again. "Did you make it up to him?"

"Of course I did."

"How?"

Hermione gave her a look of mock horror. "Ginny, what makes you think I'd divulge those secrets?"

"Ooh!" she cooed.

Hermione shook her head.

"Did you enjoy making it up to him?"

"Ginny, how do you like being pregnant?"

"I love throwing up every morning, now tell me about you and Severus. I'm dying to hear how you made up!"

Before Hermione could think of a way to change the subject, the waitress came over and announced, "Here is your order, ladies."

"Thank you," they chimed in unison as she set the plate of chicken parmesan before Hermione and the bowl of tortellini before Ginny. The waitress left, leaving the friends to savor their food.

"Seriously, how did you enjoy making this up to Severus?" Ginny asked.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You aren’t dropping this are you?"

"Nope," Ginny answered

"Severus thought I’d sufficiently atoned for changing my order every twenty seconds.” A mischievous grin graced Hermione’s face. “I’m almost tempted to do it again so we have a reason to make up."

Ginny's lips curled up. “I have a feeling annoying Severus won’t be necessary for you to have another makeup session.”
Hermione blushed. Ginny giggled.

Once the laughter died down, they ate in silence

"Hermione?" Ginny asked when her bowl was almost empty.

Hermione set down her fork. "Yes?"

"When you found out about your pregnancy," Ginny swallowed. "Were you scared?"

"Scared about what?" Hermione asked.

Ginny gulped. "I know it sounds stupid, but I'm afraid of giving birth. I mean, I don't want to carry this baby indefinitely, but the thought of the whole birth process makes me queasy."

"I haven't really thought much about it," Hermione admitted before placing a hand on her stomach. "But it's a little late now for second thoughts. I can tell you, however, that if this little girl gets much larger then I'll be more than ready to have her on the outside."

"I can understand that, but you honestly carry the weight well. You also have that glow."

"You get that in your second trimester. It's due to hormones."

"Oh."

"I read in a book that women often get a certain glow during the second trimester," Hermione replied.

"Well, that explains why you aren't nervous," Ginny answered. "If Hermione Granger can read about it, then she doesn't fear it!"

Hermione joined in Ginny's laughter in spite of herself. After they settled down, Hermione continued, "I like knowing what to expect. So far the books have been a great source of guidance."

"Yes, but aren't children inherently unpredictable?" Ginny asked.

"Yes," Hermione admitted. "That's the only thing that really scares me about having her. I fear that somewhere along the line I'll mess up and she'll become a maladjusted adult. She might grow up to hate me because I'm a bad mother, and I won't even know what I'm doing wrong until it's too late."

"Hermione, all you've done since you became pregnant is think of this child and do whatever you felt was best for her. All a child wants is her parents' love and a bit of guidance, both of which you can provide. You'll be a great mother when she's born."

"I tell myself that, but it's scary to think that you have a life inside of you, a little life you are responsible for molding. I want to teach her how to be strong and confident, but I'm not always sure how to go about doing that."

"You'll do a great job teaching her how to be a successful woman. She has a wonderful example in you."

"I'm terrified that she'll make the same mistakes I've made," Hermione whispered. "I wasted years with a man who threw me away once he was done with me. My daughter shouldn't repeat that mistake."

"You couldn't predict what happened with Ron, and things turned out alright with Severus, didn't
they?" Ginny asked.

"Yes, but I don't want my daughter to put herself in the situation I found myself in." Hermione rubbed the place where the baby was kicking. "I want better for her."

"Well, a man who claims her as his daughter is a good start," Ginny replied.

"Severus has been amazing. He'll be an excellent father once she's born. He may not want to show it, but I can see in his eyes when he talks to her that he absolutely adores her."

"Wait, Severus talks to your baby?" Ginny gasped.

"We both do," Hermione replied as her daughter kicked within her.

"I'm sorry, I'm just having trouble picturing Severus talking to, well, any child without scowling."

"I know it's difficult to believe our former potions' professor could be so caring, but it's beautiful when he speaks with her," Hermione answered.

"I'm just glad my niece has someone who will care for her," Ginny replied. "I am still her aunt, aren't I?"

"You are and always will be," Hermione replied. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Good, because I do love my niece," she replied before turning her attention to Hermione's abdomen. "Do you hear that little niece of mine? I love you, and when you're born I'm going to take you shopping and teach you how to dress. After all, we don't want you to dress all in black like your daddy."

"Oh Merlin I'd kill him if she dressed all in black," Hermione then paused. "Although it would be cute if she had a little matching cape like Severus'...."

"You're kidding," Ginevra groaned.

Hermione laughed at the expression on her friend's face. Ginevra laughed along with her as she meditated further on the image of a baby in Snape's clothing.

Surely that was too ridiculous to happen.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the late post. Traveling is always hectic. Also I will try to upload daily, but I can't make any promises. Work is getting more hectic, and is making editing these chapters somewhat harder. Still I will do my best to post as often as possible.

Once again thanks so much for all the support and your patience. I appreciate it all!
Severus’ eyes drooped as he cast the last stasis spell. He suppressed a yawn before the final inspection of his handiwork. All week he'd been brewing the potions needed for the opening his apothecary, but it had proved to be a more monumental task than he’d expected. Tomorrow he’d bottle several of the finished products, but…he groaned…Merlin he still didn't have enough potions for a respectable opening. It would take another two months working eighteen hour days to fully stock his shelves.

He dragged himself up to the bedroom. Hermione was already sprawled out on her side of the bed, her face buried into her pillow. Severus gave her a soft smile before stripping down and changing into his night clothes.

Hermione felt the bed dip. Her eyes fluttered open "Severus?"

"Yes," he answered.

"I didn't know if you were ever coming to bed," Hermione cooed.

“There’s not much more I can do tonight,” Severus pulled the blankets over him. “At least not much more I can do safely. In light of that going to bed seemed to be the best idea.”

“I knew you'd need to sleep at some point, but I thought you’d be so tired you’d go to one of the guest bedrooms.”

“Why ever would I sleep in any bedroom other than this one?”

“Because some of them are closer,” Hermione yawned. “Also the baby can get restless, and then I’m up half the night, and then you can’t sleep.”

Severus kissed her on the cheek. “I sleep just fine beside you.”

“I was getting scared that you’d go to another bedroom once the baby was born because you'd need the quiet. I was afraid you’d see her crying as a nuisance, and that you'd start pulling away from us,” Hermione admitted.

“Our daughter could never be a nuisance to me,” Severus whispered. "I want nothing more than to be in our daughter's life. It will be difficult to be a full participant in her life if I’m sleeping across the mansion.”

Hermione’s smile covered half her face. “I’m glad you want to be there for her.”

“I want to be present and available to both of you,” Severus answered.

Hermione hummed. “I wanted to wait up for you, but I couldn’t keep my eyes open.”

"You should've spent your time resting," Severus replied. "You and the baby need it."

"Trust me, she's fine," Hermione answered before rolling over to face Severus. She snuggled beside him, too fatigued to consider the consequences.
"I suppose she is," Severus replied as he folded her into his arms. She closed her eyes once more and relaxed in his embrace.

A pang of guilt rushed through his body. All week he’d spend hours on end brewing, only coming up for a few minutes to speak with his wife. Books could only keep one company for so long. The witch had to feel neglected. From the day he’d first laid eyes on her it was clear that she was always in need off companionship, even if it came from her git of a husband.

Part of him didn’t want to care how she felt. Hermione knew what she was getting into with this marriage. Severus Snape didn’t do romance, and he had gone too far to delay the opening of his apothecary. No, he was fulfilling his dream, which involved working long hours away from his wife.

Still the idea of her alone in the huge mansion cut him to the core.

"Goodnight Severus," she yawned as she pressed closer to him.

"Goodnight Hermione," he whispered into her ear. He then looked down at her abdomen. "Good night little one."

He shut his eyes as he enjoyed their closeness. Drifting to sleep, two thoughts raced through his head:

I need to make this marriage easier for Hermione. She deserves better than a husband who spends three quarters of his time in the basement and the other quarter in the bedroom sleeping. At the very least I could spend a few more hours with her and take her out to a restaurant or a book store every now and then. I could work less on the weekends as well.

He felt the child move.

Also, we need to name our daughter.

***

Hermione groaned.

"Morning," Severus crooned.

She opened her eyes and stretched out her legs. As she reached consciousness, she felt Severus’ arms around her. She remembered snuggling close to him before she went to bed, but…she gasped. Oh Merlin! He must think I’m a clingy affection-starved schoolgirl!

"Ah, good morning," Hermione flushed. She wiggled out of his embrace, doing her best to ignore her body’s pleas to spend the rest of the day in bed beside him.

"Indeed," Severus replied. Great. Now she is furious with me for neglecting her and is wondering why she thought marrying me was advisable.

"You came to bed pretty late," she grinned.

He relaxed. Her smile seemed genuine enough, so she didn't completely regret entering into this arrangement. "Yes. I was too absorbed in my brewing to notice the time."

"You shouldn't work yourself so hard."

“I need to brew these potions on time for the opening. The only way I can do so is if I work at a steady pace.”
“If you don’t stop brewing so late into the night I’m going to start thinking of ways to stop you from doing so.”

“What are you going to do to stop me?” He teased.

There was a spark in her eyes. "If you work past midnight tonight I'm going to pull you upstairs by your cape. If that doesn’t work I’ll put a full body-bind curse on you and refused to remove it until you fall asleep.”

Severus couldn't tell how serious she was. He smirked, "I'd like to see you try and ambush me."

She gave him an equally mischievous smirk. “Is that a challenge?”

“Only if you want it to be," Severus replied.

“If I were you I wouldn’t challenge me on this. We both know how determined I can be when I set my mind on something. If you won’t take care of yourself then you’d better bloody well believe that I will.”

Severus kissed her lips. "You take excellent care of me."

"You need to take care of yourself,” Hermione answered in a low voice. “You'll run yourself into the ground if you keep working like you have been all week."

"I don't require much sleep," Severus replied. "I'm used to working well into the night."

Hermione swallowed as she envisioned him up all night with the Death Eaters in days past. She could almost hear the briefings Severus gave Albus at two in the morning. After all as said and done Severus would crawl back to the dungeons, casting spells to prevent anyone from seeing the bags under his eyes and the bruises dotting his body. Then he would ingest a cocktail of potions designed to keep him awake for another day of screaming middle schoolers. The next night the process would repeat itself.

After the image passed she whispered, "This isn't the war anymore. You aren't spying. The baby and I won't starve if your apothecary doesn't open tomorrow."

"True,” he mused. "But I want to have the apothecary up and running before the baby is born."

"Severus, the baby needs you to be in some sort of shape when she comes. If we were to ask her what she wants from Daddy right now I guarantee she would want Daddy to take care of himself, not for Daddy to make millions of galleons.”

Severus’ throat constricted at the thought of his daughter reaching out to him.

“"We don’t want you to work yourself to the bone. We want you to be healthy,” she concluded. “You know I support your dream of an apothecary, but I will not support it at the cost of your health.”

“I will keep all that in mind,” Severus choked.

“"That being said I think I have a solution. Why don't you let me help you brew?” Hermione asked.

"Absolutely not.”

"Excuse me?”

"You're pregnant.”
"That does not mean I'm helpless."

"Yes, but God forbid an accident occur that could harm the baby."

"I won't cause an accident then."

"Accidents can happen to even the most cautious brewer."

"I promise I'll be fine."

He sighed. "Some of the fumes are not safe for a pregnant woman to inhale. They could cause health problems in the baby."

She brushed her foot against his. "There are some that I could brew which do not have harmful fumes, correct?"

"Right now I'm brewing two potions which have potentially dangerous fumes for pregnant women. They won't be done for another two days. The seal on the basement door protects you on this level of the house, but it is unsafe for you to be exposed directly to those fumes for more than a few minutes."

Hermione sighed. "I suppose you have a point."

"Indeed I do," Severus answered.

Hermione smirked. "That makes an even more compelling case for you to end your work at midnight so I don't have to come fetch you."

Severus laughed. "That it does."

Hermione beamed. "Can we eat breakfast together? I know you're very busy, but I have grown quite accustomed to your presence at the beginning of the day."

"I would like nothing more than to dine with you," Severus brushed her lips. "I will start coming up for lunch and dinner as well. It's becoming tiresome to spend my entire meal worrying about contaminating my ingredients with crumbs."

She shook her head. "Of course you'd worry about that."

"It's important that the ingredients not become contaminated by…" he began before noticing Hermione's light-hearted expression. He frowned, "You naughty witch."

"Would you have me any other way?" she asked.

"No," he replied before pulling her close and pressing his lips against hers. Hermione yelped as Severus flipped her on her back. Her expression of pure joy encouraged him to begin sliding off her black negligee.

Work could wait.

***

"Mr. Longbottom?" Minerva began.

"Yes?" Neville poked his head out of his herbology journal.
"I've been looking over the plans for your greenhouse," Headmistress McGonagall began. "While I am impressed with your proposal, I fear that it would simply put too much of a strain on our finances."

"Excuse me?" Neville asked.

She sighed. "I admire your enthusiasm for making Hogwarts a center for Herbology study. You’ve made great strides in making Hogwarts one of the top schools for Herbology in Europe. I fear, however, Hogwarts only has enough funds to rebuild your greenhouse as it was. There are not enough resources to enlarge it."

"Don't worry, I have the funds to enlarge my greenhouse and build it to my vision."

"You do?" Minerva asked.

Neville nodded.

Minerva raised an eyebrow. "Where did these alleged funds come from?"

"An anonymous donor was generous enough to provide me with them," Neville answered.

"I see," she drawled.

"The donor has given me more than enough to rebuild my greenhouse. That person was even kind enough to give me some funds for new plants," Neville explained.

"Where did you find this donor?" Minerva demanded.

"The donor approached me with this offer," Neville explained. "I couldn't refuse."

"Are there any strings attached?" Minerva asked.

"The only stipulation is that I cannot donate any of the money to you" Neville answered.

Her eyes hardened.

Severus.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for the support! I appreciate all the encouragement!
"Are you asleep in there?" Hermione asked the little lump in her abdomen. There was no motion. "Did you wear yourself out kicking me all morning long?"

"Hermione?" Severus asked as he entered the dining room.

Hermione felt a happy little flutter dance beneath her protective hand as Severus pulled out the chair beside her and sat down. She grinned. "It's nice to see you come up for air."

“All the potions I’m brewing are simmering at the moment and it is becoming harder to ignore my need for sustenance," Severus began. “Have you eaten yet?”

"No, I was waiting for you to join me."

“I hope you have not been waiting for long.”

“Up until a a few minutes ago I wasn't hungry. The baby hasn’t made eating easy today,” Hermione noted.

“How has she been bothering you? I thought you had gotten past morning sickness,” his heart stopped. "Are you or the baby unwell?"

“No, we're perfectly healthy.” Hermione beamed. “But our daughter has been very busy as of late.”

Severus released the breath he was holding.

“Our little baby has been kicking up a storm all morning. I thought she'd finally settled down, but I felt her react when you spoke to me. She knows your voice.”

“She does?”

Hermione nodded as the baby kicked her mother harder. “She kicks every time you enter the room. I think she likes you.”

"Let's see how much she likes me once she's born," Severus answered with a wry grin.

"Oh I think she will like you just fine,” Hermione assured him before whispering. "I'm certainly starting to like you."

He flushed at the compliment.

“I'll bet she’s just as excited to see you as you are to see her,” Hermione continued.

“While I eagerly await our first official meeting, I am unsure how pleased she will be with me once she realizes that I will be a,” Severus tapped the table as he searched for the right words. “a less than traditional father.”


“You may laugh now, but I meant what I said earlier,” Severus warned. “I'm not making funny faces
at her and I refuse to read sugary sweet fairy tales that will only serve to contaminate her mind and nauseate me."

"You've never mentioned being opposed to fairy tales before," Hermione replied.

He smirked. "An unfortunate omission, but now that I know we're having a girl, fairy princess tales seem to be expected. You may read her as many stories about princesses as you'd like. I will not join you."

"But you'd look so cute reading her a fairy tale," Hermione cooed.

Bile scorched the back of Severus’ throat. "I do not wish to be associated with the word, 'cute.'"

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"I've spent the better part of four decades cultivating the image of a dungeon bat. I prefer not to shatter it," Severus’ eyes fell upon Hermione’s abdomen. “At least not in public.”

“So you’re selective about who you allow to see your emotions,” Hermione mused.

“Spying was easier that way,” Severus noted. “As was getting through life.”

“I suppose it’s better than displaying them for all the world to see,” Hermione mumble the next words, “Like I did.”

“Don’t let Ronald embitter you towards the world,” Severus gave her a playful smile. “Unless you have a burning desire to wear black every day and spend half your time grumbling about dunderheads.”

Hermione giggled as the baby kicked again. “Black looks better on you than it does me, so I fear I will have to allow you to be the embittered dungeon bat.”

Severus’ eyes softened. “Back to the subject of fairly tales, our daughter's young mind should be filled with something more intellectually stimulating than sugary stories."

"Like?"

"Potions journals."

"You're serious?"

“I am more than serious. I will not have a dunderheaded daughter who can't tell Phoenix tears from lacewing flies. Reading potions journals is the best way to educate her on the finer points of brewing at a young age."

"Severus, she'll have no imagination! Her first words will be some potions ingredient!"

"You would perhaps prefer some charms spell?" Severus teased.

She placed her head in her hands. "Our daughter's doomed."

"Probably, but she won't know it for a few years."

"She'll hate us when she's older."

"She won't despise us in the least if she's at the top of her class, creating new spells and potions for
the betterment of wizardkind," Severus answered.

"Perhaps she won’t completely detest us," Hermione replied. "But could you throw in a few fantasy stories with your, uh, potions lessons?"

"I may throw in a few stories I enjoyed as a child."

"Such as?"

“Our daughter may enjoy *The Barber of Seville,*" he replied.

"I've always loved that opera," Hermione whispered.

"You've seen it?" Severus asked.

She nodded. "My parents took me when I was sixteen. It was a wonderful experience."

"We could attend an opera together sometime," Severus suggested. "We could eat dinner beforehand and if you felt up to it, we could take a walk along a nearby river or the ocean. If it's an evening show we can admire the city lights and the architecture."

“I would very much like to spend a night at the opera with you," she replied.

POP!

"Master Snape!"

Severus frowned. "Yes?"

"Headmistress Minerva of Hogwarts Academy is here!" the elf replied.

"Joy," Severus muttered as he rose.

"Thank you," Hermione exhaled before glancing a Severus. He tilted his head towards the doorway. She rubbed her stomach once more before standing up. Together they walked to the front atrium, neither particularly enthused about conversing with this guest.

In the atrium, Minerva tapped her foot. She wore the same expression she did when Hermione was a misbehaving student. The only difference between then and now was that Hermione didn’t so much as wince in the face of her expression.

"Hello Minerva," Severus began. "To what do I owe the displeasure of this visit?"

"You know exactly why I am here," Minerva hissed.

"Perhaps he does, but I don't," Hermione replied in an even tone.

"Oh Hermione, this may come as news to you. Guess how your well-meaning husband has chosen to spend a portion of his inheritance?"

"I wouldn't have the foggiest clue," Hermione answered.

"He donated millions of galleons to rebuild Professor Longbottom's greenhouse but not one penny goes to the rest of Hogwarts!" Minerva exclaimed.

"So Neville told you who his benefactor was then?" Hermione deadpanned.
Minerva glared at her.

“He never could keep a secret,” Severus mumbled.

Minerva pointed to Severus. “I can understand why you would be selective as to who you shared your financial windfall with but you,” she pointed to Hermione. “I expected better from you. Do you have no sense of loyalty to Hogwarts?”

"Yes, that's why I'm happy my classmate, Neville, gets to rebuild his greenhouse," Hermione answered. “I'm even happier that I can help him do so.”

"But why won't you allow the rest of the school to benefit from your good fortune?" Minerva asked.

"I think you mean 'we won't allow you to benefit from our good fortune,'” Severus growled.

“This isn’t about me,” Minerva argued. “This is about you properly spending your riches so the most people benefit from it.”

“I am free to spend my inheritance as I see fit, and I see fit to finance a greenhouse that is capable of accommodating Neville's skills, which incidentally, will benefit the entire school. Your issue with my decision is that my galleons won't decorate the Gryffindor common room or your office.”

"You selfish Slytherin!” she hissed.

"It's my money, and I may do with it whatever I wish," Severus answered.

The Headmistress turned to Hermione. "What do you think of your husband’s attitude?"

"I agree with my husband,” Hermione answered. “We want the money to be used exclusively for Neville’s greenhouse. Period.”

“Are you so desperate for Severus’ approval that you’re willing to go against what you know is right?”

“I wasn’t the one who refused to hire a war hero because of his less than savory past.”

Minerva pursed her lips.

Hermione continued. “Had you kept Severus on for employment, we might have been more willing to donate to your pet projects. But you did not and we will not.”

"So that's how you two feel. You’re so spiteful than you’d turn your back on the institution that molded you into the wizard and the witch you are!” Minerva snapped.

"No, I'm turning my back on the institution that used me, only to toss me aside when I had served its purpose,” Severus replied.

Minerva glared at Hermione, who replied, "I'm turning my back on the institution that abandoned my husband and refused to help me in my time of need. I refuse, however, to turn my back on Neville, who had nothing to do with either event. Hence I will happily donate to his greenhouse fund, but nothing else.”

“So that’s how you two feel.” She marched to the front door. When she put her hand on the doorknob she paused and turned to them. “If you are so opposed to sharing your wealth with every department and every house, then do not expect your child to ever walk the halls of Hogwarts.”
She slammed the door behind her.

Severus and Hermione stared at where Minerva had been standing for a few minutes.

Hermione’s voice shook. "Did we just get our child kicked out of school?"

"I believe so, and she has yet to be born," Severus replied.

They looked at each other and burst into laughter. "We're horrid parents," Hermione gasped.

"This child isn’t out of the womb, and we are already destroying her chances for a normal childhood," Severus admitted.

After leaning into each other their breathing evened.

"Shall we homeschool?" Hermione asked. “We’re more than capable of teaching her simple and advanced subjects.”

"We'll consider that option when she grows older," Severus replied. “Though if we homeschooled her we would be ensured that her teachers were not dunderheads.”

Hermione chuckled. “That we would be.”

Severus held her closer. “In spite of this minor setback, I know you'll be an excellent mother.”

Hermione wrapped her arms around him. “I know you'll be an excellent father, even if you aren't, 'cute'."

Severus kissed her lips. Hermione deepened it, reveling in the intimacy she was beginning to enjoy with her husband.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the support. To all the American readers, Happy Labor Day! I hope your weekend is fun and relaxing.
“Severus!”

Severus’ lips curled into a smile. He put a stasis spell on the simmering Amortentia before gliding up the staircase. Hermione stood in the doorway.

Severus’ heart stopped. Even at six months, her pregnant glow remained. In spite of her expanding abdomen, she managed to carry herself with grace. How did a beautiful woman like her even look in the direction of a greasy git like him?

"Hello Hermione," he embraced her and placed a chaste peck on her cheek.

Hermione replied. "I just wanted to tell you that I was leaving to see Harry now."

Severus salivated. His wife was wearing dark wash jeans and a muggle smock that floated over her curves. On anyone else the choice in apparel would have seemed casual, perhaps even careless, but on Hermione it was enough to drive Severus crazy. It was obvious that he’d spent too much time in the basement brewing.

"I hope that you and Mr. Potter have an enjoyable time," Severus replied.

“We always manage to enjoy ourselves,” Hermione answered.

“Indeed you do,” Severus muttered.

“I think Harry needs a good night out. He’s still torn up about Ginny’s baby, and the Hogwarts case is confounding him.”

“Under those circumstances I’m sure dining with one of his dearest friends will do him good.”

"I should be back by ten. I can't see myself staying awake much past then," Hermione replied.

"Here I thought you'd enjoy some revelry," Severus smirked.

"Yes, because pregnant women are so well-known for carousing all night long," she teased.

Severus chuckled.

“To be honest I think Harry is worried for me as well.” She wrapped her arms around her husband. "He thinks I’m locked up in a gilded cage."

Severus’ blood ran cold. "Do you feel as if you are?"

Hermione’s grin melted away any fears he had. "Not at all. I am much happier here than I could've ever imagined."

"As long as you are content then," Severus answered.

Hermione continued. “Harry is afraid that I spend days on end only reading books and speaking to no one. It’s been difficult to explain to him that under the right circumstances socializing with you
Severus raised an eyebrow. “You are the only person who has ever claimed that I am somewhat pleasurable to be around, or has at least the only one who has been able to say it to my face.”

Hermione hummed. “I’m only telling you the truth.”

Severus smirked. “I’d wish I could be present when you share your latest revelation with Potter. The expression on his face would be worth all the years of antics I had to tolerate while teaching him.”

“I’ll be sure to take a picture, or at the very least give you the memory in a pensieve,” Hermione answered.

“You’d better,” Severus rasped before placing an ardent kiss on her lips.

After a few moments they released each other. Hermione breathed, “As I said I’ll be back by ten.”

"Hopefully I'll have finished brewing by the time you return,” he whispered.

"Indeed,” she purred, her mind still foggy from the kiss.

Severus brushed a loose strand of hair back into place. He contemplated kissing Hermione again, but decided that allowing the anticipation to build may make their reunion all the more thrilling.

Floating back to reality, Hermione released him. "I should get going.”

“Indeed you should,” Severus muttered as she headed for the door. She looked back and gave him a soft smile before closing it behind her.

Severus took a deep breath and slunk back down to his basement lab. Damn the excitement of anticipation. He was already growing impatient for her return. Good God she hadn’t been gone for ten minutes and he was already counting the seconds to her return! What the hell was he turning into, and why didn’t he care about the subtle changes he’d been undergoing since the day Hermione barged into his life?

Deciding that his energy was best spent on brewing than dwelling on his predicament, he removed the stasis spell and resumed creating his potion.

When the Amortentia was ready, he took a long whiff of it. He stepped back. After crinkling his nose he smelled it once more. Then he frowned and mentally retraced all the steps he had taken, trying in vain to determine where he had made his error.

Amortentia should not smell like a bacon, cheddar, and mushroom omelet.

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"Hermione!” Harry exclaimed as she stepped into the restaurant.

"Harry, I hope I wasn't late," Hermione replied as she rushed over to the table.

"No, you're right on time, as always,” Harry laughed.

She exhaled as she took the seat across from him. "Good. I was afraid I'd spent too much time conversing with Severus.”

"Oh?” Harry asked.
“Yes, the conversation was quite,” Hermione blushed at the memory of his lips pressed against hers. “Engrossing.”

“What were you discussing that was so interesting?”

“Nothing in particular, just life.”

“What exactly does Severus Snape have to say about life?” Harry cocked his head.

“Nothing much, he’s been very busy preparing for the opening of apothecary. Still I didn’t want to leave the house without letting him know where I was so I checked on him. The conversation was a bit longer than expected,” Hermione replied.

“Oh,” Harry replied. “I take it you don’t see him much?”

“I don’t see him as often as I would like,” Hermione admitted. “Although he does make an effort to spend whatever free time he has with me.”

“I’d imagine he doesn’t have much free time.”

“No, but he’s great about making time too. He has yet to miss one of my antenatal appointments.”

Harry twisted his lips. "I'm sorry, I can't see Severus Snape at an antenatal appointment. It's next to impossible to picture him tolerating those around him gushing over a baby, much less gushing over one himself."

"Why is it difficult to imagine him being excited about the birth of his daughter?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know, it's just, it's still hard to picture him being soft, especially with a baby. I mean, he wasn't exactly the nicest teacher and he made it clear that he's never cared for children," Harry replied.

"He's softened," Hermione whispered. "It may be subtle, but he's changed. He's as snarky as ever, but he can be quite kind, almost sweet."

Harry blinked.

"Severus even smiles now," Hermione continued.

"Isn't that the sign of the apocalypse?" Harry joked.

Hermione furrowed her eyebrows. "No. Severus deserves to smile every now and then."

"Okay, don't have a cow," Harry answered. What was up with Hermione? She'd never defended anyone this vigorously, not even Ron.

"Madame, Sir?" a man began as he approached them.

"Yes?" Hermione asked.

The waiter, a teenaged boy, gave her a sheepish grin. "I'm sorry I'm so late, we had a spill which I had to help clean up, and anyway, are you ready to order?"

"Do you need to look at the menu?" Harry asked.

"No, I already know what I want." She then looked up at the waiter. "I'd like the Shepherd's Pie with
"I'd like the ham platter, no carrots, and a glass of Firewhiskey" Harry answered.

"Okay," the waiter collected their menus. "I will return with your drinks shortly."

"Thank you," Hermione replied.

"Thanks," Harry muttered before turning to Hermione. "How is your baby doing?"

"She's great," Hermione beamed. "She's growing and kicking like crazy. In fact, she's kicking right now."

“That’s wonderful.”

“Would you like to feel her?”

Harry nodded. He stood up and approached Hermione. Then he put a hand on her abdomen. His eyes lit up. “Hello there little girl.”

Hermione felt the child’s kick Harry’s hand. “I think she likes you.”

“Yeah, I like her too,” Harry choked.

A few moments of kicking passed. Once the child had settled Harry returned to his seat. "Have you picked out a name for her yet?"

"No," Hermione shook her head. “Severus and I can't agree on one.”

"What's your first choice?" Harry asked.

"I want to give her a sweet, traditional feminine name like Sharon or Felicia. I've also suggested Priscilla or Eileen to honor Severus' family but he won't hear of it. Severus wants to name her Eugenia or Mella," Hermione replied.

"Mella?" Harry asked.

“Mella was a potions mistress back in the Middle Ages. She was the first to attempt to cure lycanthropy. Although she failed, she managed to create a garlic potion to keep vampires at bay.”

“That’s…useful,” Harry drawled.

“While Mella was a very accomplished woman, I am not giving my child a name which vaguely resembles a fruit,” she giggled. “Then again, with names like Hermione and Severus who are we to talk?”

"They aren't horrible names," Harry replied.

"No, but they weren't the easiest to pronounce," Hermione answered. "The teachers almost always got our names wrong when taking roll call, and don't get me started on the nicknames."

"What nicknames?"

"Severus actually hated being called Sev. To him, it sounded incomplete.”

“Are you sure he doesn’t want you to call him Sev because of, uhm, Mum?”
“He said that he didn’t like it when Lily called him ‘Sev’ either, but he loved her enough to tolerate it, and did his best to get used to the nickname. For a time he almost liked it, but he's always preferred Severus.”

“I see.”

“As for me, I had, well,” she braced herself for Harry’s reaction. "I had 'Mione."

"You hated being called 'Mione?” Harry exclaimed.

“At first it was a fine nickname, but when Ron said it when we were… alone… it really set me off. It sounded too much like 'Mine.' He said it like I was a possession instead of an equal partner. It bothered me after a while, especially when he would only call me 'Mione and never used my full name. Yet he never listened to me when I expressed my concerns,” Hermione admitted.

"I never thought of 'Mione' bothering you," Harry replied. "I'm sorry if it did."

"It's not a problem," Hermione answered before smirking. “Perhaps Mella isn’t such a terrible name after all. It would be hard to make a bad nickname out of Mella.”

"Mel."

"Hmmm,” Hermione tapped her chin. "I think Severus and I will still be arguing over a name for our baby while I'm in labor."

"There are worse things to argue about."

"Like?"

"Who's going to change her diapers?"

“"I have already made it very clear that he will be changing the first few diapers. At the moment he is too interested in his well-being to argue against me,” Hermione replied.

They both laughed.

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Harry walked home with a slight bounce in his step. While the last few months had been rough for him, it was wonderful to see Hermione doing so well. Whether she wanted to admit it or not, she was happy with Severus. It was obvious from the way she talked about him that she cared deeply for him. Granted he still could not piece together how Severus could possibly be an excellent conversationalist, but Hermione saw something in their former professor that few people had.

Harry pulled out his wand. As odd as it sounded, maybe Severus was a better husband to Hermione than Ron could've been. Harry supposed only time would tell whether Severus could continue to make Hermione as happy as she was right now, but their future was far more promising than anyone would’ve ever imagined.

Harry undid the wards and unlocked the door to his home. He exhaled as he stepped inside and shut the door, casting a lumos spell and scanning the room, as was his custom. Although he saw nothing out of the ordinary, there was a foreboding presence which only strengthened as he walked further into the room.

Something swished behind him. Harry spun around, gasping when he saw a figure blocking the
door.

"Hello, Potter."

Harry trembled at the sound of the voice. Barred teeth flashed in the moonlight.

Harry’s heart was arrhythmic. That couldn't be his voice.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?”

No, it isn’t him. I saw him burn in the flames. I watched him die.

Harry pointed his wand in the direction of the voice. His eyes enlarged as his suspicions were confirmed. He searched for something to say, something to scream, but all he could manage was a whispered,

“Fenrir.”

Chapter End Notes

Fenrir always picks the worst times to make his presence known. Thanks so much for reading and supporting this work!
“Severus,” Hermione called from the top of the stairs. “I’m home.”

There was no answer. No candles were lit. Hermione grabbed the railing of the staircase and craned her neck downwards. She couldn't hear the shuffling of potion ingredients or her husband's footsteps.

Hermione closed the basement door and giggled. She knew where to find her husband.

She called out his name again, as she made her way in the direction of the bedroom. Halfway to her destination she noticed a lit candle from the corner of her eye. She poked her head into Severus' study. In the far corner beside the fireplace sat the dark figure of her husband.

“Severus,” she purred.

"Hermione?” Severus answered, his face buried in the book.

“T'm back from talking with Harry” She reached down to massage that spot just above his shoulder blades that always got so tense when he leaned over to read. "He was quite perturbed but the revelation that you can be an excellent conversationalist."

Severus moaned, "I cannot wait to see your memory of the expression on his face."

She dug into him harder. "You will enjoy it very much."

He hummed as his body further relaxed.

Hermione glanced down at the book in his hands. His shoulders tensed as he slammed the book shut.

She continued to massage him as she angled her body to get a better view of the title. "Advanced Love Potions?"

Severus sighed as he set the book down on the nightstand beside him.

“Why are you reading a book on advanced love potions?” Hermione asked.

He exhaled. "I bungled the Amortentia."

"Really?” she removed her hands from his shoulders.

"Yes," he replied, his frustration seeping through. "I replayed every step in my head, but I cannot deduce where I made my error."

"How do you know you brewed it incorrectly?” Hermione asked.

"The same way every potions master knows when he's brewed Amortentia incorrectly: it doesn't smell as it should."

"What does it smell like?"

Severus gazed into her eyes. His stomach plummeted. How could he tell her that he smelled her
omelets, the same omelets he would never admit to liking? How could he explain his obvious mistake without deluding her into thinking he was a husband out of a romance novel? No, he didn't need to worry about her wanting him to sweep her off her feet and be her romantic hero. She’d made it more than clear she was finished with love. Part of why she’d married him was so she could raise her child without the complication of romantic feelings with her partner. She’d run out of the room screaming in revulsion if he told her the truth.

Then there were his emotions on the matter. Hermione was his friend. He told himself hundreds of times that friends were excellent, especially if they made love every once in a while. When Severus entered marriage he did not want a romantic or spiritual connection, nor did Hermione. There was obviously a miscalculation somewhere. While he held Hermione in great esteem, he felt no true romantic love for her.

Hermione’s stomach churned. She had expected a glib remark, not an uneasy silence. What if Severus had found someone else and was searching for the words to tell her? No, he spent all of his days in the lab, and when he wasn't there he was with her. He couldn't possibly have another lover, unless he had one before they were wed. Had he married her because he was dumped by a woman whom he loved? No, their relationship was fairly open on topics such as old romantic entanglements. He would’ve said something earlier if he was in love with someone else. It was safe to assume there was no other woman involved.

Could he have smelled her?

"What did the Amortentia smell like?" Hermione repeated with a slight quiver in her voice.

The second the question escaped her lips she knew she didn't want to hear the answer. If he had in fact smelled another woman it would break her heart. Severus would be another man who didn’t consider her to be good enough for him. In some ways his rejection would hurt worse than Ron’s because he had led her to think that she was good wife, well at least she was a good wife for him. What if the affection he'd shown her was all in her mind? How could she spend the rest of her life raising a child with someone who saw them as only second best?

Something inside of her screamed that there was no other lover, but this left only one other possibility: Severus smelled something which reminded him or her. If this was the case Hermione didn't know what she would say or do. While she considered Severus a close friend, she wouldn't label her affections “love”. Good Merlin she’d already mucked up a friendship by dragging love into it. She would not make that mistake again.

How could she tell Severus she was finished with romance if he had smelled her, especially when her greatest desire was for him to never abandon her and their daughter?

"I smelled burnt food."

Hermione snapped back from her meditations. "What?"

"Burnt food," he lied again. "Before tonight I'd never smelled burnt food in Amortentia."

“What kind of burnt food was it?” Hermione asked.

“I’m not entirely sure,” Severus lied. "I think it was some kind of pasta or hamburger."

"Those are quite different foods."

"Indeed they are, hence the source of my confusion."
"Does the scent remind you of anyone?" she asked as the baby kicked from within her.

"No, that's the puzzling thing," he replied.

From the look in his eyes, she believed he was telling the truth about the scent not being associated with another woman. Still something was still “off”. He wasn’t being completely open with her about what he smelled. Of course she was too much of an idiot to leave well-enough alone…

"It must be very puzzling. What do you normally smell?" she asked.

“Nothing.”

"Nothing?"

"Yes," he answered. "I have not felt affection for anyone in years, at least not such that their scent was revealed in the Amortentia."

"Interesting," Hermione mused.

"I'm sure I made some minor mistake in my rush to get product ready for the shelves. I'll be able to think more clearly after a good night's sleep," Severus concluded, hoping he sounded convincing.

“Sleep is never a bad idea,” Hermione replied.

Severus stood up and examined Hermione. He could see insecurity in her eyes, the ever-present fear of being abandoned again. Severus gave her a small grin and brushed her lips with his, to assure her that he had no plans on leaving her side. She clung to him and deepened the kiss, catching him off guard. Once he recovered, he pulled her closer, lifted her up, and carried her to their bedroom, the potion all but forgotten.

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"Fenrir," Harry repeated, this time in a louder voice.

“And here I was afraid you’d forgotten about me,” Fenrir replied.

"You, you were supposed to be dead," Harry choked.

"The reports of my demise were largely exaggerated and completely fabricated," Fenrir replied.

"Fabricated?" Harry asked.

"Perhaps I can explain," a voice from the shadows began. A figure stepped into the dim light provided by Harry's wand.

"Scabior," Harry muttered.

"Oh you do remember me!" Scabior replied in false joy.

"How, why?" Harry trembled.

"We weren't as dead as you thought," Scabior bared his fangs. "The Chief over there," he indicated the man blocking the exit, "and I were very much alive after the final battle. There was barely a scratch on us."

The Chief nodded.
“Fenrir on the other hand was a little worse for wear. That's why we hauled him off the battlefield and plucked our hairs."

"The people I burned…"

"I have no clue who they were," Scabior answered. "We simply found some wizards on the battlefield and forced them to drink the Polyjuice potion we had prepared for them. With a flick of the wand they were dead."

“The good news is that we are back and taking vengeance on all those who tried so ineptly tried to stop us from achieving our goals,” Fenrir announced.

“Neville,” Harry whispered. “He tried to kill you. That—that’s why you attacked his greenhouse.”

“Wow,” Scabior sneered. “We’ve finally found an intelligent auror.”

Harry swallowed. Everything fell into place too perfectly. “You, you three are under arrest for arson, kidnapping, and first degree murder.”

The Snatchers laughed. Fenrir snarled. “I think not. I’ve gone much too far to have my plans destroyed by a stint in Azkaban.”

“Where is the boy you kidnapped?” Harry demanded.

“Out back with the other lycanthropes,” Scabior replied.

Goosebumps ran up Harry’s arm. Others?

“Now where were we?” Fenrir asked. “Oh yeah, I was about to silence you forever.”

Harry's mind raced to find a happy memory. When he'd settled on one, he began, "Expecto…"

The wand flew from his hands into Fenrir's. Harry stood up straighter, hoping Fenrir could not see him trembling.

"You truly do overestimate yourself," Fenrir warned as he and Scabior drew closer to him.

“What will killing me accomplish?” Harry demanded.

“I wish to accomplish what Voldemort could not,” Fenrir replied. “I wish to build a new world order in which I am the master.”

Harry's eyes bulged as the implication became clearer.

Fenrir snorted. "I think we've reached an understanding then."

“Think about what you’re doing for a moment. If you kill me they’ll know I was murdered,” Harry warned. "Someone will find me. You will be hunted down."

"Maybe I want them to find you," Fenrir replied. "Maybe I want them to see exactly what I've done to you."

Harry could feel Fenrir's scorched breath against his forehead.

"Maybe I want them to know exactly who is the master of the invisibility cloak and the Elder Wand."
Harry felt his heart stop beating at the mention of those two items. Fenrir placed his wand against Harry's chest, "Avada…"

Harry tried to grab the wand, but was soon pinned to the ground by Scabior. He struggled, trying to use Scabior as a barrier between him and Fenrir's wand. The Chief pulled Scabrior away from Fenrir. Within seconds Scabior overpowered Harry and thrust the auror towards Fenrir.

"Avada Kedavra!"

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for the support! I appreciate it all.
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

This is a warning that there is some mild language in this chapter. It also deals with the aftermath of Fenrir's attack, so it's a bit darker than usual. If it makes anyone feel better, I almost cried while editing it.

Thanks for the support! It's much appreciated!

"It's so senseless."

The coroner shook his head as he stepped into the crime scene. He blinked back the forming tears as his eyes fell on his former comrade.

Aurors guarded Harry's corpse, but none dared to move or to touch it. From their expressions, the coroner guessed that no one had gathered evidence from the crime scene yet, either. A few had shut their eyes, as if to block out the location. A couple others blinked, as if they would wake up if they repeated the motion enough times.

The coroner took a shaky breath and began in a gentle voice, "We need to start this investigation."

"How?" Ruby squeaked. "He was one of us. We can't pilfer around his house and pretend this is a routine case."

"I know," the coroner's throat constricted. "We need to honor his memory by doing our best to give him the justice he deserves."

"It's not right," Another auror muttered. "He shouldn't have died like this. After all he went through, after all he'd done for the Wizarding World, he deserved a long and happy life. He sacrificed so much for us. Now he's just gone. Murdered."

"Slaughtered like he was a fucking cow!" another auror cried.

"I know," the coroner began as he approached the body. "None of this is right."

"There’s no reason for this," the third auror continued. "He didn’t have to die."

The coroner wiped his eyes and took a few deep breaths. "We, we can’t focus on that now. All we can do is help find the murderer."

The aurors parted so he could kneel down to begin the procedure. A tear trickled down his face as he examined the expression of utter horror frozen on Harry's face.

"I'm sorry," he whispered to the lifeless body. "I am so sorry we couldn't protect you."

The aurors watched the coroner make a preliminary assessment of their friend. They needed to begin the investigation, but they also needed to hear what the coroner would say… to have an idea of how their comrade had died. It wouldn’t bring them any peace, but at least they’d have that knowledge.
"Was he bludgeoned to death?" a fourth auror asked.

"No, the body is too clean. There isn't nearly enough blood for it to be a bludgeoning. My guess would be he was hit by the killing curse," the coroner answered.

He watched the aurors react to the news. Some had enlarged eyes, others were trembling, while others turned green.

The coroner pulled out his wand and muttered an incantation. It turned bright green. He frowned.

"There are traces of dark magic on the body, which is consistent with a killing curse."

"The killer did what Voldemort couldn't," Ruby whispered.

Two aurors bowed their heads.

"You don't think he's back, do you?" another began.

"I'm just the coroner," he replied. "I can't discern motives by looking at the body, nor can I trace a magical signature without comparing it to one on file. All I can say is that we can take some comfort in the fact that his death was quick and aside from the brief struggle, painless."

"He saved us," Ruby choked. "But in the end, we couldn't save him."

The coroner took a deep breath as he selected his words. "Part of our job," he cleared his throat, "Part of our job is to be there for wizards and witches in death. It feels empty at times. We often think we should prevent death, not investigate it. In the end though, we do bring killers to justice and give a sense of peace to the world. I fear that's all we can do for Harry."

"I wish time turners were legal so we could've stopped this," an auror muttered.

"I do too," the coroner admitted. "But all we can do now is focus on the present."

They nodded. One by one they gathered their equipment to begin processing the scene. Ruby continued to stare at the body, not daring to move.

"You, you were the one who found him?" the coroner asked.

"Yes," she replied. "He didn't report to work this morning. During my first break, I decided to check on him. When he didn't answer the door, I went inside. That's where I found him." She pointed to the body. "Just like this."

The coroner choked. "Who have you told about this?"

"Just the Aurors Department. I told them what I told you. I said to come to Harry Potter's house alone and not to tell anyone that we were here." Ruby sobbed. "I think they thought I was throwing him a party. Everyone was so happy until they stepped inside."

"We'll have to tell Kingsley about this very soon," the coroner replied.

"I know. I'll tell him," Ruby volunteered. "I would've done so earlier, but I was afraid there'd be a media circus which would hamper our investigation."

"You did the right thing. We need time to collect evidence," the coroner replied. "Perhaps more"
importantly, we need time to process this in our heads."

"I don't think I'll ever be able to wrap my head around what happened to Harry," Ruby replied.

The coroner embraced her and whispered in her ear, "We'll get through this. As a department, we'll make it through this."

"I know," she sobbed. "But it doesn't make it any easier."

"I know it doesn't, trust me, I know."

***

When Kingsley first entered Harry's house, he felt the depression of the aurors bearing down upon him. He took a deep breath and surveyed their work. He walked towards the coroner. "Has anyone found anything significant?"

The coroner replied, "Greg says he can't find Harry's invisibility cloak. He's searched the entire house for it, but no luck."

"Crap," Kingsley mumbled.

"He also commented that the closet appeared to have been ransacked," the coroner continued.

"Well that's just great," Kingsley muttered.

"We're doing their best to find the cloak, but so far we're coming up empty," the coroner replied.

Kingsley's eyes widened. "What about the Elder Wand?"

"Harry didn't tell a soul where he hid it, at least he did not tell anyone on the force its location," the coroner answered.

"So it could be gone too?"

"We don't know."

"Shit," he hissed. "Two Deathly Hollows are missing, and their owner is dead. This day just keeps getting better."

"With all due respect, sir," the coroner retorted. "I'm more upset about Harry's death than a cloak and a wand."

"Yes, but whoever has those items is extremely powerful." Kingsley argued. "They could be in the process of taking over the Ministry as we speak."

"That's for you politicians to worry about," the coroner replied. "As Harry's friend I'm more concerned with finding justice for him than I am about the next Minister of Magic."

"Focus on finding him justice," Kingsley replied with steel in his voice. "He deserves no less."

The coroner nodded.

"Has anyone spoken with the media yet?" Kingsley asked.

"No," the coroner answered. "We're still trying to absorb all of this. The last thing we need are
reporters hampering our investigation.”

"Good. Instruct the others to say nothing until I give the order. I need to meet with some advisors to figure out the best way to announce Harry's death to the Wizarding World," Kingsley replied.

"Yes sir," the coroner replied.

With that, Kingsley left, leaving a very confused and devastated auror force to sift through the wreckage of Harry's home.
"Severus Snape," Kingsley began as the wizard in black entered the room. "We were beginning to fear you weren’t coming."

"I do not appreciate being summoned," Severus replied as he felt all eyes bore into him.

The Weasleys, save Ron who was not present, could not hide their disdain for him. Arthur was snarling while Molly grew redder by the second. George and Bill scowled while Charlie ground his teeth. Severus responded with a smirk that only widened when he noticed Minerva McGonagall glaring daggers in his direction. This meeting may prove more entertaining than he’d anticipated.

"How’s ‘Mione?" Hagrid asked with a genuine smile.

"She is in good health," Severus replied as he took the empty seat beside Hagrid.

"Where is the little wench, anyway?" Molly asked.

"My wife is at home." Severus replied. “She was not summoned as I was.”

“It’s about time common sense prevailed,” Molly huffed. “The last thing we need is that little strumpet playing the victim and creating more drama.”

“I would appreciate it if you would refer to her with respect, Mrs. Weasley,” Severus warned with a glance that could peel paint.

"I did not think it would be wise to ask her to come here on account of her condition," Kingsley replied.

"Why are we here anyway?" a woman asked from across the table.

Severus snorted. Excellent question.

Before Kingsley could answer, a group of wizards and witches dressed in fine robes entered, each of whom appeared as thrilled to be there as Severus was. Kingsley turned his attention to them. “Thank you for coming on such short notice.”

"Did we have a choice?" a man from the group muttered.

"We'll begin soon. Right now we're waiting on one more," Kingsley announced.

"Who?" George asked.

"Your brother," Kingsley answered.

Severus rolled his eyes.

"Are you sure it's a good idea for him to come?" Molly asked. “He's still devastated over his breakup with Hermione. I'm not sure he can be in the same room with Severus and hold himself together.”

“I don’t know if Ron can be in the same room with him and keep a civil tongue,” Arthur added.
"Well we can't have Mr. Weasley upset now can we?" Severus answered.

"All of you sit down," Kingsley sighed. "There are more important things going on here than the love triangle between your son, Professor Snape, and Professor Snape's wife."

Severus scowled at the loss of his chance for a quick exit.

"Are ya 'cited about the baby?" Hagrid asked, his grin as wide as ever.

"I am," Severus replied, his expression softening.

"I'll bet she’s growin’ to be real big," Hagrid gushed

“She is developing quite well,” Severus answered. “We are very eager for her to make her appearance into this world.”

“Well I’m glad you’re eager to see your child now!” Arthur snapped.

“Excuse me?” Severus hissed.

Kingsley buried his face in his hands.

“You were more than willing to foist your child onto my son three months ago,” Arthur continued. "It's nice to know you have a shred of a parental instinct."

“Believe me when I say I have more parental instincts in my hallux than Ron has in his entire body,” Severus replied.

“Don't you dare say that! Ronald would love to have a child someday,” Charlie cut in. "He will make an amazing father when he finds the right woman for him."

Severus choked back his laughter.

“How dare you laugh at my son’s pain!” Arthur shouted. “Merlin, Snape I don't know how you can sleep at night knowing what you've done to poor Ronald."

Severus smirked. "I sleep quite comfortably with Hermione in my arms."

"You bastard!” Molly yelled as she pulled out her wand.

Molly took aim, but before she could utter a word Severus pointed his own wand at her chest. "Don't even consider it."

"You greasy git!" Charlie yelled as he, George and Bill drew their wands and stood beside their mother, "You can't take on all of us at once!"

“Would you stake your personal safety on that claim?” Severus asked in a low voice.

"Sit down!" Kingsley ordered.

The Weasleys glanced at him while Severus maintained his stance.

“If you want to duel with Professor Snape you can do so once the meeting has concluded. Right now we don’t have time for it,” Kingsley continued.

"Mum?" a voice from the doorway called.
"Ronald!" Molly cried as she rushed over to embrace her son.

"Mum, what, what is Snape doing here?" Ron sniffed.

"I don’t know," Molly gave the former professor a pointed look.

"Do you think you can handle being in the same room as him?" Bill asked.

"If it’s too traumatizing to see him we can ask him to leave," Charlie stared at Kingsley.

Kingsley bit his tongue.

"No," Ron answered. "No, I think I’ll be fine."

"Pity," Severus mumbled.

"It’s like they say," Ron continued. "You’re better off without a cheater in your life."

Severus’ smirk returned. "Your loss is my gain."

"Shut up," Charlie demanded before all the Weasleys approached Ron. Soon they were all embracing him and whispering words of comfort.

Severus groaned. The more time he spent here, the less time he had to brew. The less time he had to brew, the less time he had to spend with his wife. Although it might be worth it to forgo brewing today just to share with Hermione a laugh over this three-ring circus of a meeting. At the very least she’d get a chuckle out of Kingsley’s reactions to the Weasleys’ melodramatics.

"Please be seated," Kingsley said in his most authoritative baritone, although an observant listener might have detected a hint of fatigue.

The Weasleys took their seats, but not before directing their most withering glares at Severus. The dark wizard did not give them the satisfaction of a reaction.

Hagrid shook his head. "What a mess."

Severus focused his attention on Kingsley, who had taken his place at the head of the table. "You are probably wondering why I called you all here."

"An explanation would be appreciated," Severus replied.

Kingsley cleared his throat. He sat up straighter and inhaled. "Harry Potter was murdered last night."

The room fell silent. All eyes were staring at him in disbelief.

Kingsley swallowed and repeated, "Harry Potter is dead."

"No," Minerva whispered.

"This is some sort of sick joke, right?" Ron asked.

Severus’ mind went blank as he fought to process the news. This is not possible. Potter, the boy who lived, wasn’t dead. He couldn’t be dead.

Harry Potter wasn’t dead!

"H-how could this happen?" Hagrid asked.
"A killing curse," Kingsley answered. “According to the evidence he was ambushed in his house. He tried to fend off his attacker, but the attacker proved too powerful.”

"No!" Molly wailed, erupting into tears. Arthur pulled her closer to him. Tears filled Bill and Ron’s eyes, while the remaining Weasleys fought to maintain a stoic facade. Severus watched the scene unfold as if it were a nightmare.

How was he going to break the news to Hermione?

"I've summoned our highest ranked politicians, as well as the former Order of the Phoenix, to help me determine our best course of action," Kingsley finished.

Severus’ thoughts wandered to Voldemort’s final duel, where the dark lord unsuccessfully invoked the power of the Elder Wand to kill Harry. How could Harry survive the darkest wizard of all time only to be killed by some unknown assailant?

His eyes bulged at the memory of the wand. "Was anything taken?"

Kingsley nodded. "We can't find his invisibility cloak."

"What about the Elder Wand?" Severus asked.

"It's not at his house," Ron piped in.

"How would you know that?" one of the officials asked.

"Because he told me where it was before he died," Ron explained. "It's at Dumbledore's grave."

"He left it at Dumbledore's grave?" Severus snapped.

"Yes, why?" Ron answered.

Severus gritted his teeth.

“What is wrong with the wand being at Dumbledore’s grave?" Ron asked.

"That's the first place anyone would look for it!" Severus protested.

"It takes a thief to think like a thief," Bill sneered.

"Severus Snape isn't a suspect," Kingsley cut in. "He's here to help, just like the rest of you. Although if anyone has ideas for a potential suspect I would love to hear them."

"Everyone loved Harry," Minerva sobbed. "No one would want to kill him."

"There was one person who would," Molly cut in.

Everyone looked at her.

She growled, "Draco Malfoy."

"Excuse me?" Severus burst out.

“You heard me, Draco Malfoy wanted Harry dead,” she repeated.

“You’re accusing your own son in law of murder?” Kingsley asked.
Molly looked at Severus with a smug expression. "Didn't Draco threaten to kill Harry during your wedding reception?"

"Draco said something along those lines, but he was under duress. Potter got drunk and hit on Ginevra, hence Draco's threat. They peacefully settled their differences after Harry sobered up," Severus argued.

"Besides, what would Malfoy wan' with the cloak?" Hagrid asked, more than a little astonished to find himself defending Draco.

"I don't know, ask him," Molly demanded.

"We'll look into Draco’s possible involvement. Even if he had nothing to do with Harry’s murder he may have some ideas of who would want to harm him," Kingsley replied. "Any other possible suspects?"

No one answered.

"Very well then," Kingsley continued. "Now there's the issue of what to tell the public."

"I think we should only state that he was murdered in an attack," a woman in fine robes chimed in. "There's no use upsetting everyone over the Hallows, especially if the murderer had no interest in them."

"I agree," a man replied. "We may want to leave out the part about the killing curse. No sense in giving anyone the idea that the Death Eaters are coming back, especially with such sketchy evidence."

"But what if they are rising again?" Minerva asked. "What if this attack and the one on the school are related? By not telling anyone, we could be putting lives at risk."

Hagrid blinked. When did you start caring less about the school’s image about more about not putting lives at risk?

"What if they aren't rising again and we create needless panic?" the woman asked. "What if this whole murder is just a spat over a girl as Molly has insinuated?"

"Draco had no involvement in Harry’s demise!" Severus argued.

"Of course you’d say that!" Ron shouted. “He’s your godson."

"We can't rule him out, Draco," Kingsley interrupted. “We’ll need to at least question him."

"Investigating him is a waste of time," Severus warned.

"He threatened to kill someone who is now dead," Arthur retorted. “Surely he’ll need to answer a few questions concerning those threats."

"He did that two months ago in the midst of a brawl," Severus fired back. “All Draco wanted was for Harry to stop flirting with his wife. He never wanted to murder anyone."

"Our priority should be tracking down the Elder Wand so it doesn't fall into the killer's hands," one of the officials interrupted.

"He has a point," one of the politicians conceded. "We should find the Elder Wand and put it in a secure place until the killer is found."
"That sounds like a good plan," Kingsley replied. "In the meantime I'll call a press conference to break the news of Harry Potter's death."

"When?" Severus asked.

"Within the hour," Kingsley replied.

"Could you please wait until evening?" Severus asked.

"Why? Are you going to help Draco escape the country?" Ron spat.

"No," Severus answered. "I want to break the news of Harry’s death to Hermione myself."

Everyone, including the Weasleys, gazed at him with sympathetic eyes.

"She'll take the report of his demise better from me than from some news report," Severus answered.

"We can’t delay telling the press," an official began

"I don’t want her or the baby to come to harm," Severus spoke over her. "After all she’s done for the Wizarding World, surely you can give her the courtesy of hearing about Harry’s death in person from someone she trusts and not from some radio show."

The official closed her mouth.

Severus choked. "Hermione is carrying a baby. Whatever you may think of the circumstances surrounding our marriage, the child should not be put in unnecessary danger. Allowing me to tell Hermione the news myself will decrease the chances that the shock of Harry’s death will harm my child. Don't put our daughter in the middle of this feud. Let me help her and Hermione as best I know how."

Kingsley lowered his head.

"I," Arthur spoke up. "I think given Hermione’s circumstances waiting a couple of hours would be prudent."

"Yeah," George conceded. "Her parents are real arses, but there’s no need for the kid to be hurt."

"There's no need to find Draco right now anyway. Draco won’t run without Ginny," Bill replied. "Ginny has a good sense of justice. For all the heartache she caused Harry, she wouldn’t allow his killer to get away. If Draco ran she’d be the first to turn him. We can wait a few hours to break the news."

"Besides, if Draco was going to run he would've done it by now," Charlie conceded. "There's no harm in waiting."

Ron gazed at Severus as if they were discussing an abstract potion theory.

Kingsley nodded. "I'll wait a few hours before announcing his death to the press. Maybe by then we will have found the Elder Wand."


Kingsley continued. "In the meantime, I may need to reactivate the Order of the Phoenix. Do you all wish to remain members?"
One by one, they each answered, "yes," including Severus.

“Do you believe your wife will want to rejoin?” Kingsley asked Severus.

“I believe she would, but you’ll have to ask her at a later date,” Severus replied.

“Very well then,” Kingsley paused as if waiting for an objection. None came.

"Then it is decided. Meeting adjourned!"

Everyone stood as Kingsley left the room. Some muttered amongst themselves, others offered gestures of comfort. Hagrid turned to give his condolences to Severus.

The wizard had already left.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for not crucifying me after the last couple of chapters. All support and non-stonings are very much appreciated!
I shouldn’t have let him go alone.

Hermione rocked in the leather recliner.

I should’ve stopped him from leaving. If he insisted upon leaving then I should’ve gone with him. I’ve had enough practice sneaking around: he never would’ve discovered me. Merlin what could Kingsley possibly want with him? Why would he want to speak with Severus but request that I stay home?

Hermione’s stomach sank. Kingsley must not want Hermione to interfere with whatever he had planned for Severus.

She could hear Minerva dragging up incidents Severus was involved in as a Death Eater. Either he confess to perform those heinous acts or give up his fortune. Severus might initially refuse, but when it became clear he was going to be retried for his cries he would relent. Minerva would sneer as Severus was forced to sign away his inheritance, or worse, be dragged off to prison. Given Minerva’s connections it wouldn’t be hard to ambush Severus and have him sent away to Azkaban. For all Hermione knew Minerva and Kingsley were writing up a notice to evacuate the mansion within thirty days.

Then a more terrifying thought came to mind: what if Minerva was working to persuade the Ministry that Severus was reviving the Death Eaters?

No one had been arrested for the attack on Hogwarts. Whoever perpetrated the attack had some kind of grudge against the school. While Hermione knew that Severus’ motives for marrying her were pure (or as pure as they could be given the circumstances), the rest of the Wizarding World may find it suspicious that he’d married a member of the Golden Trio. It would be even more suspect that Hermione was pregnant with his heir. The timing was all too convenient for some people.

Hermione pulled out her wand and stood up. If anyone wanted to harm Severus they’d need to duel with her first.

After a moment’s thought she sat down and shook her head. Knowing the Ministry, Severus had been summoned to pay some sort of inheritance tax. Because he was the blood heir to the fortune only his signature would be required. There was no reason to discomfort a pregnant woman. Even if her worst fears were realized, Severus could hold his own against Minerva and the Ministry. Her husband would be more than irritated if a know-it-all former student barged in to save him, unless he found it endearing that his wife would go to such lengths to stand up for him…

She chuckled. Of course he wouldn’t find a protective Hermione endearing. Severus would become a Gryffindor before he ever admitted to needing anyone’s help.

The baby’s kicks jolted Hermione from her thoughts. She rubbed her swollen abdomen, "Are you worried about Daddy, too?"

Her daughter kicked again

"Don't worry little one. He'll be back soon. If he's not," Hermione gripped her wand tighter. “Well
then Mummy will just have to remind everyone who helped defeat Voldemort."

POP!

"Mistress! The Master is here!" an elf announced.

“Thank you,” Hermione exhaled.

Hermione thrust her wand back into her pocket. She raced out of the room. "Severus!"

She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw the look in Severus' eyes. His eyes were as haunted as they were when he explained Lily’s demise at his trial.

“Severus,” Hermione breathed.

"Hermione," he began in a neutral tone. He gazed into her eyes. They were so warm, so nurturing, so trusting. How was he going to tell his wife about her best friend’s demise? If he was too gentle, she might not believe the news; if he was too strong, the words would shatter her. Aside from the murderer she was the last person to have seen Harry alive. How could she accept his death?

“What’s troubling you, Severus?” she asked. Her voice grew louder and quicker. "What happened? Did the Ministry do something to you?"

"No," he whispered.

"Did they accuse you of a crime?"

"No."

"Is, is it about the marriage?"

Severus blinked.

“They said the marriage was valid. It has to be valid! It's valid, right?” Hermione asked.

Words escaped Severus. Of all the things he might have expected to hear from her, concern for him and for their marriage was the last thing on the list.

“I’m still your wife, aren’t I?” Hermione shouted.

Severus’ chest warmed. He couldn’t think of another woman who cared whether or not she was by his side. Perhaps more depressingly, he couldn’t think of another person who cared about his well-being enough to get into a tizzy at the thought of him being injured in some way. Hermione’s concern made it all the more vital that he protect her as best he could.

“No, I was not summoned for anything pertaining to us. We remain husband and wife.”

“Thank God,” Hermione exhaled. “Were they asking you to help with the investigation into the arson of Neville’s greenhouse? I know Harry asked you about it earlier. Was he asking you any further questions?”

The name of her deceased friend stabbed his chest.

"No, no they didn’t question me about the greenhouse."

"Thank Merlin. I was worried that they might be going after you, or that you’d be frustrated because
you couldn’t provide any further information.”

"Hermione, I wasn’t summoned for anything directly pertaining to you or myself.”

Hermione shuddered at his darkening expression, "Then why did the Ministry want to speak with you.”

Severus took a deep breath. "Let's sit down."

"Yes, let's," she mumbled.

He took her hand and led her to the couch in the sitting room. They sat down together. Severus shifted in place until he found the right words.

"Hermione, the meeting to which I was summoned was a meeting of the former members of the Order of the Phoenix.”

“The Order of the Phoenix?”

Severus nodded. "Kingsley felt the need to reunite the Order.”

"Why wasn't I included?” she asked.

"They were afraid of upsetting you, especially given your condition." 

"I'm not a fragile flower.”

"Yes, but the Weasleys were there. Kingsley did not want to cause you any undue stress, especially given the subject we were discussing.”

“Were all of the Weasleys there?”

"All except Ginevra," Severus replied as he took her hand and began to rub it.

"I see,” she twisted her lip. “They, they didn’t mistreat you did they?”

“No they did not,” Severus replied.

“Good,” Hermione sighed. "I take it I am still the worst thing that Ron ever laid eyes upon."

"They are not worthy of your concern.”

“Regardless it was better for me to stay behind.” She put her free hand on her lump. “The last thing I need is their drama upsetting our daughter.”

Severus’ throat constricted.

Hermione put his hand over the bulge. “Say hello to Daddy.”

The child kicked his hand. Severus squeaked, “Hello little one.”

Hermione’s heart stopped. There was no light in Severus’ eyes when he spoke to the child. Instead of smiling, his haunted expression only intensified. This baby was the one thing that had always brightened Severus' mood, up until today.

Hermione whispered. “You’re starting to scare me.”
Severus swallowed. “That is not my intention.”

“What were you and the order discussing?” Hermione asked.

Severus swallowed as he felt the weight of the truth bearing down upon him. "Hermione, there was a murder last night."

“Murder? Who was murdered?” she asked with wide eyes.

Severus removed his hand from her stomach.

"Harry Potter."

Hermione was silent, staring at him with uncomprehending eyes.

"Hermione?"

She shook her head. "You're wrong. Harry Potter can't be dead. I just saw him last night."

"He's deceased, Hermione," Severus reiterated. “He was murdered in his house after he returned from your dinner.”

"No!" she argued.

"Hermione, please listen."

“You’ve been misinformed. You misheard someone! Harry Potter isn't be dead."

"Denying it can't undo the truth, Hermione."

"No!" she shouted. "No! Harry isn't dead!"

"I wish it wasn't so," Severus replied. "But Harry is deceased."

“He’s on a secret mission. He’s undercover! He isn't dead!”

“Hermione please listen,” Severus took her hands. “Please Hermione listen to me. Harry Potter is with us no more.”

She gazed into his eyes, so soft, so full of concern for her. In them she finally grasped the truth. Her heart stopped beating.

“Harry’s dead,” she whispered.

“I’m sorry,” Severus answered in a shaky voice. “I wish it was not the case.”

“He’s dead, he’s dead.”

The baby kicked her abdomen.

“I am so sorry Hermione. I am so sorry love.”

Her chest became a black hole of despair, sucking her into it. Her ears began to ring as she lost all sensation in her limbs.

"He's dead, Severus."
"Hermione?"

She collapsed into his lap.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry about the late update. American football is huge my area and I got a bit caught up in the excitement. I hope the chapter has been worth the wait.

Thanks so much for all your support! I appreciate it all.
“Ginevra.”

Draco rapped on the bathroom door.

“I’ll be out in a moment!” she called.

Draco stepped back at the click of the latch. He gasped as his wife stepped into view wearing a floor length strapless gown that shimmered shades of royal blue. Her auburn hair cascaded smoothly down her shoulders, framing the diamond pendant he gave her for their last anniversary.

Ginevra gave him a sultry grin. "I take it you approve."

Draco closed his mouth and shook his head. Ginevra put a hand over her mouth.

“I very much approve,” Draco wrapped his arms around her. He brushed her lips and whispered, "Maybe we should postpone our trip. Staying home looks pretty inviting right now."

She moaned as she placed her head on his shoulder. “I’m already dressed up though.”

Draco smirked. “Then I’ll help you get undressed.”

Ginevra nuzzled his neck. “As appealing as that sounds, we only have a limited amount of time to go on impromptu vacations before the baby comes. Don’t you want to make every moment count?”

He sighed. “I do.”

He massaged Ginevra's back. She moaned. “Then tell me: where are we going?”

"I was thinking Venice," he replied.

“Venice!” she gasped, her coffee eyes sparkling in delight.

He nodded. "I thought we might celebrate your third month of pregnancy with a mini-honeymoon. Maybe we could eat at that restaurant by the sea you enjoyed so much or walk around the Piazza San Marco."

"That sounds quite romantic," she replied.

"I was also thinking we could take a gondola ride afterwards, if you're up for it."  

“I’m always up for a gondola ride, especially if I’m riding on one with you," she replied, capturing his lips again.

POP!

"Master Draco!"

Draco released his wife. He clenched his fists and turned to the elf. It trembled under his master’s glower.
"What do you want?" Draco barked.
"There's an auror at the door," the elf answered.
"An auror?" Draco asked.
Ginevra raised an eyebrow.
"An auror," the elf responded.
"Why would an auror want to speak with me unless," Draco’s eyes lit up. “Potter.”
Draco stormed out of the doorway, Ginevra following close behind.

“I should've known that Potter would come and harass me on the one night I could take my wife out,” Draco grumbled. “Damn bastard. He’s just going to ask ridiculous questions and waste everyone's fucking time.”

Ginevra tuned out the rest of his expletives.

When they reached the doorway, Draco scanned the room for Harry. His heart stopped when he noticed that Potter was not among the group of aurors at his door. Draco cleared his throat, his glare fading into a stoic facade.

"Hello Mr. Malfoy," an auror began.
"Hello," Draco replied in a flat voice. "What brings you here on this fine evening?"
"We need to ask you a few questions," the auror replied.
"Concerning what?" Draco asked.
"Concerning Harry Potter's death," the auror answered.
Ginny gasped.
Their heads snapped towards her.
"Mrs. Malfoy?" the head auror asked.
She nodded.

“We deeply apologize for your loss,” one of the aurors began. “We know how much Potter meant to you.”

“He, he was a friend,” Ginevra sniffed. She clung to Draco, who wrapped his arms around her.

A female auror stared at the couple. Draco held his wife close, patting her on the back every few seconds and whispering reassurances. There wasn’t a hint of malice, disgust, or joy in his expression. The only discernible emotion was his love for his wife with a hint of shock sprinkled in. Perhaps Draco was good at faking his emotions. After all Malfoys were notorious for their ability to deceive others. Still she’d had quite a bit of experience with murderers. She could usually see something in a killer's eyes to tip her off to potential guilt. Draco showed none of the classic signs.

It gave her pause.
"Are you going to be all right?" a male auror asked Ginevra.

"I just need to sit down," Ginevra choked.

Draco took her hand and led her to a nearby cushioned chair. She sunk into it before squeezing and releasing his hand.

"Mrs. Malfoy, you do not need to be here," another auror offered. "Our questions are directed towards your husband, not you."

"No, I'll be fine," she rasped.

"You might not want to hear some of the answers your husband will provide us," an auror warned.

Draco’s stomach churned.

"I told you, I'll be fine," Ginevra promised.

"Very well then," the head auror answered.

"Mrs. Malfoy," a male auror began, "Is there anything about your relationship with Mr. Potter that you'd like to tell us?"

Ginevra’s bloodshot eyes bulged.

"There were reports of your husband making threats against Mr. Potter a few months ago. Can you confirm this story?" The auror continued.

"You're kidding me," Draco growled.

The head auror gave him a pointed glare.

"Draco may have yelled some things at Harry, but he didn’t mean any of them."

"Have you been in contact with Harry Potter since this altercation?"

Ginevra glared at him. "Harry and I haven't spoken since Hermione's wedding, although I did send him a letter."

"What was in the letter?" an auror asked.

"I told him I was pregnant," she confessed.

"Really?" The first auror began.

"Why did you feel he needed to know that you were pregnant?" Another cut in

"Oh Merlin!" Draco interjected. "What is the point of this interrogation? I don't see anything productive coming out of it!"

"Because Harry Potter is dead, and two months ago you threatened to kill him."

"What?" Draco asked. "That’s done and over with! We made nice-nice and all that. I don't want Potter dead."

"Harry was a former lover. He was also one of the first people your wife told about her pregnancy."
“So?” Draco spat

“Under those circumstances a man may become suspicious of what his wife is doing while he’s in
the office so to speak.”

"Don't you dare imply that this baby isn't a Malfoy!” Ginny yelled, her eyes hard as marble.

One of the aurors jumped.

"I have been nothing but loyal to my husband since the day we began our courtship! I have loved
him and only him since the day he rescued me from those bandits. After loving Draco I wouldn’t
even look in another man’s direction, especially if the man in question is an ex-boyfriend who I
broke up with years ago because it was clear to me that we would never be able to live under the
same roof.”

“Mrs. Malfoy please relax,” one of the male aurors instructed. “All we are saying is that Draco may
have been suspicious of your continued closeness to Mr. Potter.”

“Closeness?” Draco asked. “She's seen him in person maybe five times in the last year. That's hardly
what I consider close.”

“Harry and I are have been over for year. My family is with Draco now,” Ginevra added.

"Do you believe her?" the auror asked.

"Completely." Draco replied.

"Then can you think of anyone else who might want to see Harry Potter dead?"

"I never wanted Potter dead. I wanted him to stop mooning over my wife."

"If you didn't want him dead, then why did you threaten to kill him?"

"Potter was making a toast at the Snapes' wedding reception. During this toast he told my wife that
he still loved her, and said that I only married her to get back at him. I'll admit it, I lost my temper and
punched him. Then he threatened to take Ginevra away from me, and that's when I told him, 'I'll kill
you before that happens,'" Draco explained.

The female auror looked over at Ginevra who nodded. "It's true, that's exactly what happened."

"Where were you between nine o'clock last night and ten o'clock this morning?" one of the male
aurors asked.

"I was with my wife. We were in bed. Would you like a detailed account?" Draco asked.

"No thank you," the auror answered, the corners of his mouth twitching to suppress a grin. He
focused his attention onto Ginevra. "Was he with you all of last night?"

"Yes," she replied. "He was."

The auror sighed before turning his attention to Draco. "Stay in town. We may have more questions
for you."

"Sure," Draco replied, his voice stripped of its previous edge.

The aurors disappeared with a POP. Ginevra gulped. "What just happened?"
“Apparently Harry Potter was murdered,” he replied in a shaky voice. “And I’ve been chosen as the Ministry's scapegoat.”

Ginevra stood and gave him a reassuring embrace.

"Looks like we'll be staying in tonight after all," Draco replied before bringing his lips to hers.

Her kiss assured him that at least one person would forever be at his side.

***


"Are you sure it's the real one?" Scabior asked.

"Let's find out," Fenrir mused.

In the distance he heard a soft pop. A small group of shadows approached. They tiptoed toward the grave. Most people would not have been able to detect them, but Fenrir was not one of those people. His mouth formed a sinister grin.

Waiting patiently until they came into range, Fenrir muttered the spell for Fiendfyre. The Chief and Scabior watched as the fire at the edge of the Elder Wand morphed into a wolf. The flames leapt down onto the unsuspecting aurors. The wolf sprinted and pounced with each flick of the wand in Fenrir's hand. The lead auror screamed. Fenrir and his companions cackled as the other aurors tripped in their attempt to escape from the fiery wolf.

"I'd say this is the real thing," Fenrir announced when the deed was complete.

***

"Help!" Severus shouted as he rushed through the double doors.

The Mediwitches stopped in their tracks to stare at the distressed wizard and the unconscious woman in his arms. One slammed the files she’d been carrying onto the front desk.

"Get a gurney, STAT!"

Before Severus could form a thought he was surrounded by a chaotic mess of barking orders and rapid questions. Their voices were all white noise.

Hermione's chest was rising and falling. Rise and fall. As long as her chest was rising and falling Hermione had a chance. The baby had a chance if that chest continued to rise and fall. Rise and fall. Hermione was still alive. As long as Hermione was still alive there was hope. Rise and fall.

"Mr. Snape! Put your wife on the gurney and answer my question!"

"Yes," Severus muttered.

He squeezed his wife before setting her down. Immediately, Mediwitches swarmed Hermione's unconscious form.

"What happened?" a nurse asked.

"My wife," Severus did not remove his eyes from Hermione. Perhaps his presence would give her the strength to fight whatever had overtaken her.
"Mr. Snape?"

Severus snapped back to attention. "My wife was close friends with someone who recently died. I told her the news, and she collapsed. I tried to revive her, but to no avail."

A nurse lifted up Hermione's shirt.

Severus' throat constricted. "She's pregnant."

"I can see that," the head Mediwitch replied.

"You need to save her and the baby," Severus ordered. "We need the baby. I need my wife. You need to save both of them."

As he was speaking the Mediwitches rushed Hermione down the hallway. "Don't worry," the head Mediwitch replied. "We'll take good care of your wife."

Severus exhaled as the Mediwitch joined the others already halfway down the hall. She barked orders and pointed to a corridor to their right. With great care they maneuvered the wheeled cot into a triage room.

Severus continued to stare down the now empty hallway as he realized the full weight and truth of Hermione's condition.

If he lost Hermione, he would lose one of his best and only friends.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the continued support. It means a lot to me to have readers who enjoy this work.
Severus clung to an obsidian vase of roses. It was a bit surprising that the gift shop sold vases, though it wasn't surprising to see no black roses in stock. For the past half hour Severus had spent a half hour rearranging them into a presentable bouquet. They were presentable as he bought them, but he needed something to busy his hands until he got word on Hermione's condition.

Then he was told that his wife was stable and in her own room. Severus muttered a thanks before taking his leave. He took a deep before entering the room. He didn't dare to hope all was well. Hope was a dangerous emotion, one which inevitably led him to heartache.

The Mediwitch glanced up from Hermione’s sleeping form, blocking it from view. ”Mr. Snape?”

"Yes,” he replied with a catch in his voice.

The Mediwitch tilted her head towards a bedside table. ”Why don't you set the flowers on the table over there?”

Severus obeyed. As he took his hand off the vase two of the roses slipped out of position. He rearranged them. ”How is my wife?”

"She will be just fine,” the Mediwitch began with a small smile.

The Mediwitch stepped back, allowing Severus to get a better glimpse of Hermione. Her eyes remained closed, but her body was relaxed. The color had returned to her face as well. These were excellent signs, but too much had gone wrong in Severus’ life too take his good fortune at face value.

"She was dehydrated and her blood pressure spiked, causing her to faint,” The Mediwitch continued.

Severus did not remove his eyes from Hermione.

“"We were able to lower her blood pressure. Also we have her on some IV fluids. She is expected to make a full recovery,” The Mediwitch continued.

Severus nodded. “What about the baby?”

There was no immediate answer. Severus turned to the Mediwitch.

Her eyes were dead.

Severus’ heart skipped a beat. “Is, is the child alive.”

“For now, yes.”

“What do you mean, 'for now?'”

She took a deep breath. ”The baby's heart rate has fallen.”

Severus chest went cold.

"It's stable, and it's not too far below the normal range, but it is lower than we like to see," she
"Could she be sleeping?" Severus asked.

"I don't think that's the cause," the Mediwitch answered.

Severus diverted his eyes to Hermione’s abdomen. "What happens if her heart rate continues to fall?"

She sighed. "There are spells we can cast to raise it, but because they can hurt both mother and child we don't want to use them unless an emergency arises."

"When would that be?"

"We won’t do anything until the baby's heart rate falls below one hundred beats per minute."

"You can’t, or you won’t?" Severus barked.

The Mediwitch did not wilt under Severus’ glower. “We will do everything we can to ensure that both mother and child are healthy.”

Severus pinched the bridge of his eyes. “I know.”

The Mediwitch’s eyes softened.

Severus returned his attention to Hermione. "Why isn't my wife awake?"

"Mrs. Snape woke up once during our examination, but the potion we used to lower her blood pressure caused her to fall asleep again. That potion shouldn't have affected the fetal heart rate, however."

"I believe I know the potion of which you speak," Severus answered.

"She should be awake shortly," the Mediwitch answered before backing away from Hermione.

Severus brushed loose strand of Hermione's hair back into place.

"We thought perhaps you and your wife would like some time alone together,” she continued.

Time alone with his wife? What on earth was he supposed to say? There was too much to say, yet too few words to convey his meaning.

Then again this wasn’t the first time he’d spoken to a person who could not answer him. He had become quite adept at one-way communication with his daughter. Maybe he could just encourage Hermione to rest and get well. That wouldn't be too difficult to manage.

Severus inhaled, "I would appreciate some privacy, but please continue to monitor the baby."

"We will, I promise,” the Mediwitch put a hand on his shoulder. “We will do everything in our power to restore both mother and child to health.”

"Thank you," Severus replied.

The Mediwitch stepped outside the door, closing it behind her. Severus swallowed and approached Hermione, sitting in the chair next to her bed. He cleared his throat. "The Mediwitch claims that nothing is wrong with you that a little rest and proper hydration won't cure. I am more than pleased to hear that."
Severus shifted and swallowed a few times in an attempt to moisten his drying throat. “I deeply apologize for putting you and our child in this predicament. I should’ve been more tactful in informing you of Harry’s death. Looking back, I should’ve taken more time to plan a speech or rehearse every possible scenario of what could happen.” Severus snorted. “You think that a former double agent would understand the importance of preparing himself to break less than pleasant news, but I didn’t know where to start. Thus I stuttered about like an idiot before tactlessly blurting it out. Before I knew what had occurred you were lying unresponsive on my lap. I have no idea what I could have done differently but I’m sure you’ll be more than happy to enlighten me when you awaken.”

He smirked at his own joke, but Hermione did not move. Severus sighed. "I suppose it will be some time before you are able to answer me, so this is as good a time as any to get a few things off my chest without fear of interruption.”

No response.

He leaned closer to her and began in a soft voice. “Hermione, this marriage has not been at all miserable for me. You must be aware of that fact because I've yet to turn away from your companionship. Still, I did not expect your presence to result in such a pleasant marriage. When I asked you to marry me I expected us to be merely acquaintances, or perhaps roommates who occasionally engaged in intercourse. I never expected to care for you as much as I do, nor did I ever expect you to become one of my dearest friends.

Do not misunderstand my sentiments; I do not love you. If I loved you, I'd only muck things up because I'd say and do all the wrong things in order to keep you. If I loved you, you'd be my obsession just as Lily was. You aren't. You…you're something else entirely."

Severus thought he saw Hermione raise her pinky, but she remained still.

Severus continued. "Even if I do not love you I cannot think of a person who I have cherished more than I do you. I think of you often, even when I'm brewing. My favorite moments of the day include waking up next to you and falling asleep in your embrace. I'd gladly die for you and for our child. If anyone ever hurt you physically or emotionally, I'd make sure they never lived to boast of it. Still, I wanted… no, I needed… to own Lily. She was to be my possession. I was willing to obliterate her spirit by killing Potter and their son. Not once during my schemes did I take her emotions into consideration.”

Severus throat constricted. “I cannot fathom hurting you in such a manner. I could never forgive myself if I stifled your spirit for the sole purpose of forcing you to stay with me. If it ever living with me caused you any harm, I'd rather leave than watch you endure any pain.”

Severus sighed and shook his head. “Perhaps in some ways I care more for you than I did her, but the emotion is so new I don't know what to make of it.”

Hermione's eye twitched, but relaxed. Severus held his breath, but she made no further move. He exhaled. "I don't know what to make of what we have. I only know that if I lost you and the baby, I would lose all hope of any kind of future joy."

His attention then turned to that precious little lump below Hermione's stomach. What was his daughter feeling? Was she aware of the danger in which she had been placed? Could she feel the progressive weakening of her heartbeat? Was she afraid or in pain? He stood and placed a tender hand on the flesh and muscle that separated him from his daughter.
"Hello little girl," he began in a gentle voice. “Can you hear me?"

His stomach churned as his crooning was met with an ominous stillness. "Little baby, please fight, or kick, or give us some sign of life. Your mother and I need you. We love you, and if you'll allow us, we'll show you all of our love. I cannot guarantee you a perfect life, but it will be full of love. Please little baby, please fight. Please give us a chance to show you how wanted and loved you are."

Still no movement. Severus inhaled fragrance of the gift shop roses wafting through the air. "Please, little rose; please give me some sign that you will be with us."

He felt a tiny flutter beneath his hand that turned into a gentle pressure and finally a healthy kick. Tears flooded his eyes as he whispered, "There you go little rose."

"I like that name."

Severus glanced at Hermione. He smiled in relief as Hermione opened her eyes.

Hermione gave him a soft grin in return. “I love that name."

"What name?"

"Rose. I think it's the perfect name for our daughter."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for the support. I hope this has made up for a little bit of the recent angst.
The first thing Hermione sensed upon returning to consciousness was the sweet aroma of roses. Then she felt the gentle pressure of Severus' hand on her abdomen. As her eyes fluttered open she wrapped herself in the comforting sound of his rich baritone, and grinned when he called their daughter "little rose".

"I love that name," she murmured.

"What name?" Severus asked with a grin of his own.

"Rose. I think it's the perfect name for our daughter," she replied as she propped herself up.

"Hermione, I was using Rose as a pet name. The scent of the flowers was overwhelming, and Rose is a pet name for a girl. I wasn't making a suggestion for her actual name," Severus replied.

"But I really like the name. It will fit her perfectly."

"How could you determine that before she's so much as taken her first breath?"

“I can make a few conjectures about her nature based on that of her parents,” Hermione began. “Her parents two of the most brilliant minds of their age and they do not tolerate foolishness. Her father is strong yet he has a tender heart towards those he loves. Her mother is strong-willed yet vulnerable. It’s conceivable that Rose would emulate some of these traits.”

Severus rubbed Hermione’s abdomen. “I could envision Rose acquiring all of those characteristics.”

“Then Rose is the perfect name for her,” Hermione explained. “Rose is a sweet name just like the flower’s fragrance, but it’s also strong when you consider that roses have thorns. It’s both hard and soft at the same time; strong-willed yet tender, just like us.”

"I have always had a fondness for roses," Severus admitted.

"Especially black ones?” Hermione teased.

"Yes," he chuckled.

“So, do you believe that you’ve selected the perfect name for our daughter?” Hermione asked.

He shifted his hand until it was over the fetus. “Do you approve of the name Rose or shall we continue to debate your first name?”

The baby kicked Severus’ hand.

“I believe your name is Rose then,” he answered.

Hermione placed a hand over his. “You are going to be such a great father once she’s born.”

“I will do my best to provide for all her needs,” he choked. “Including the need for love.”

“I know you will,” she whispered.
They sat in a comfortable silence. Hermione inhaled scent of roses once more. Her eyes drifted to the side table. "Severus, did you buy these?"

"They were at the gift shop," Severus answered. "I tried to find the flowers in black, but to no avail. I considered coloring them black myself, but I feared that given my emotional state I would make a mistake and ruin their beauty."

"There is no need to apologize," she replied as she inhaled their scent. "I love red and white roses, too. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Severus' throat constricted as the baby kicked against him once more.

A knock on the door interrupted the moment. "Mr. and Mrs. Snape?"

"Come in," Severus answered.

Hermione shook. Severus had gone from serene to near panicked in record time. Was there something he wasn’t telling her?

The Mediwitch entered and gave Hermione a small smile. "Did you have a pleasant nap?"

"I'm still a little groggy," she admitted. "But I'm feeling much better."

"How's Rose?" Severus asked.

"Rose?" the Mediwitch replied.

"We finally named our daughter," Hermione answered with a twinkle in her eyes.

"It's a lovely name," the Mediwitch answered as she approached Hermione's abdomen.

"Thank you," Hermione gushed. "Severus thought of it."

The Mediwitch turned to Severus. "You've chosen well."

"Thank you," he muttered.

Severus removed his hand and backed away. The Mediwitch pulled out a stethoscope and listened to the baby's heartbeat. She pulled back and nodded. "Rose's heart rate is back up to one hundred forty beats per minute. That's about normal for her."

Severus relaxed.

"Rose was having heart problems?" Hermione panicked.

"No, but for a time her heart rate dipped a little lower than we'd like to see. She seems to have recovered quite nicely though," the Mediwitch answered in a calm voice.

"Is she at risk for any lasting damage?" Hermione exclaimed.

"I don't believe so," the Mediwitch replied. "When she's ready to come out you will have a healthy, happy baby girl."

"Thank goodness," Hermione sighed.

"Indeed," Severus exhaled.
The Mediwitch looked up at Hermione. "How are you feeling Mrs. Snape?"

Hermione sat up straighter. "Well enough to go home."

"Unfortunately that won’t be possible," the Mediwitch answered.

Hermione deflated. "But you said Rose and I were healthy."

The Mediwitch chuckled. "Well I'd be more than happy to permit you to go home if you had only fainted because of dehydration. Unfortunately, your blood pressure was also elevated."

"Is it elevated now?" Hermione asked.

"No," the Mediwitch answered with a reassuring smile. "We want to make sure it stays that way though. That’s why we're keeping you overnight for observation."

"That sounds like an excellent idea," Severus cut in.

Hermione sighed. "I will stay only because I don't want to put Rose at risk."

"Good," the Mediwitch answered. "Would you like anything to eat or drink?"

"Some pumpkin juice and some chips sound good," Hermione replied.

"I'll see what I can do," the Mediwitch answered before exiting the room.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Thank you again for the flowers. They make this room much cheerier."

"You're welcome," he swallowed.

The silence filling the room was far less comfortable than the first.

"Hermione?"

"Yes, Severus?"

“I deeply apologizing for putting you in this position," he answered. “I never meant for any harm to come to you or the child.”

"Why would you think you’ve caused us any harm?" Hermione asked.

"I should have found a more tactful way to break the news to you about," Severus bowed his head. He could not say the next words aloud.

"It wasn't your fault," Hermione placed her hand on Severus’ shoulder. "I don't blame you."

He gazed into her eyes. Aside from her deep sadness Severus saw compassion and sincerity. He whispered. "Thank you."

Severus embraced Hermione. She clung to him and rested her head on his chest. Quiet tears streaked her cheeks. After a few sobs she pulled away from him and asked, "How did he die?"

"Hermione you don't…"

"No, I need to know. How did he die?"
“This isn’t the place to discuss this.”

“We both know I’ll eventually find out how he died,” Hermione replied. “Better to be told about Harry here where my health can be monitored than to be told about him where I would be in jeopardy with little hope of receiving help.”

“You have a point,” Severus cleared his throat. "He died from a killing curse."

“Oh,” she answered.

Severus removed the sheet from the side of the bed. Hermione stared at him while he took her foot into his hand. She nodded. He commenced massaging her foot.

“What else did the Ministry tell you?” She asked.

“They cannot locate the Invisibility Cloak or the Elder Wand,” he continued.

“Shit,” she muttered. “If you need help locating the wand I know where it is”

“Someone else knew it’s location, too. Kingsley is searching for it as we speak.”

“Good,” she shuddered. "Do they have any suspects?"

Severus pressed into her foot harder. "Draco Malfoy."

“What?” Hermione exclaimed.

Severus stopped kneading her foot. "Since Draco threatened Harry at our wedding reception, they believe he must be the killer."

“They must be looking into someone else as well, right?”

“There are no other suspects."  

“How could they not have someone else in addition to Draco? I mean the idea of Draco killing Harry is ridiculous. Even if Draco wanted Harry dead, which is doubtful, he wouldn’t jeopardize his future with Ginny by killing him, especially not when he’s about to become a father.”

"Exactly, but they can't produce a better suspect and there will be substantial public pressure to make an arrest. If they investigate Draco it will at least appear that someone is doing something to find Harry’s killer.”

“Do you have a suspect in mind?”

"No," Severus set her foot down. "But I strongly suspect that someone is trying to resurrect the Death Eaters. It makes too much sense if the same people who attacked Hogwarts also killed Potter. The murderer would prove not only that he was more powerful than Dumbledore, but also that he was more powerful than the-boy-who-lived. It's a strong message to send not only to the Ministry, but to the imprisoned Death Eaters as well."

"You may be right," Hermione whispered as she digested everything. "What can we do?"

"Wait and see if the aurors found the Elder Wand. It's at Dumbledore's grave, correct?" Severus asked.

"Yes," Hermione answered.
"Good. If all goes well, the aurors will have it by now."

"Hopefully," Hermione answered. She set her foot back onto Severus’ hand. With a grin he resumed his massage.

Hermione scratched the sheet. “After my pregnancy, will I be allowed to return to the Order of the Phoenix?”

"I don't know if that would be advisable," Severus answered. "The Weasleys are all still members, and none of them gave me an easy time."

“Was Ron there?”

“Yes.”

"What did he say?" Hermione asked.

Severus rubbed her foot with his thumb. “He called you a cheater.”

“Was that all?" She whispered.

Severus nodded, not having the heart to tell her that Ron had announced he was better off without a cheater in his life; said cheater being her.

His chest constricted at the pain in her eyes. "I suppose that's just as well."

"Hermione…” he began.

"No, I'm fine," she wiped her eyes. "Rose has a father, and his name isn't Ronald Weasley."

“Rose will always be my daughter,” Severus whispered. “I will never stop loving her.”

“I know,” Hermione answered. “I know you’re going to spoil and dote on her until everyone forgets that you were ever called a greasy git.”

“If that is ever the case then I will teach Rose how to scowl so we can both frighten the dunderhead who dares to forget how I acquired my less than stellar reputation,” Severus replied.

Hermione laughed and was soon joined by Severus. When the laughter died she removed her foot from Severus’ hand. Then she leaned closer to him. He pressed his lips against hers. Hermione deepened the kiss, reveling in comfort Severus provided.

The pain of Harry's death would leave a permanent hole in her heart, but Rose's life, full of hope and promise, was just beginning. In the end, Harry would want her to laugh, not cry.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It's much appreciated.
Chapter 55

Kingsley stared into the crowd. He puffed out his chest and cleared his throat. For the better part of the past hour he’d been preparing a speech, but now that he actually faced his public, those words were inadequate. How could he explain that one of the greatest heroes the Wizarding World had ever known was no more? What words could convey the heartbreak of Harry Potter’s death?

He swallowed and sent up a quick prayer for courage. Then in this most authoritative voice he began, "Good evening ladies and gentlemen."

The murmuring of the crowd diminished as the shuttering of camera lenses crescendoed.

"It is my deepest regret to inform you…” He tried to swallow the lump in his throat. After a few gulps he resumed speaking, "I must inform everyone here today that Harry Potter, the boy who lived, is dead."

The cameras fell silent as the crowd gasped in collective shock. Tears were shed. A small voice cried from the crowd, “Harry Potter is dead?”

"Yes," Kingsley responded.

Another voice squeaked from the crowd. "H-how could that happen."

Kingsley braced himself for their reactions. “We believe he was murdered.”

More gasps and tears. Initial shock gave way to horror. Kingsley soldiered on despite their distress. "The cause of death was a killing curse."

"No!" a reporter yelled. "He was too good of an auror to be ambushed like that!"

"I'm afraid it’s true," Kingsley answered. “Harry Potter was murdered in an ambush.”

"But how could he allow himself to be jumped?" another asked.

“Why would anyone want to kill Harry?” a third inquired.

"His case is currently under investigation," Kingsley replied. "It is too soon to announce any definite leads."

"When did he die?" another reporter chimed in.

"He was discovered dead at ten o'clock this morning by Ruby Griffin, an auror and co-worker of Mr. Potter's. Judging from the state of the body he’d been dead for at least twelve hours." 

"Where is Ms Griffin?" Rita Skeeter asked, her eyes agleam with the hope of an exclusive interview.

"Next question," Kingsley pointed to another reporter.

"Do you know anything about the explosion just outside of Hogwarts late this afternoon?" she asked.
The other reporters fell silent and stared at the questioner. "When did that happen?"

"About two hours ago I got a lead on a possible explosion near Hogwarts by one of the older students who has taken an interest in journalism. I was interviewing people at the scene when this press conference was called," she answered.

One by one, the reporters each returned their attention to Kingsley, who was shaking. After licking his lips he answered, "Yes, the Ministry is aware of the explosion."

"What do you know about it?" a reporter asked.

"Is it related to the earlier attacks on Hogwarts?" another asked.

Kingsley hung his head. “Currently the explosion is under investigation. All we know is that two aurors lost their lives and three others are being treated for third degree burns."

"Why were the jurors at Hogwarts before the explosion?" another reporter asked.

Kingsley stared at the reporters, who by now were clinging to his every word. He exhaled, "There was a report of a disturbance. Someone cast some sort of fire spell, and the blaze was beyond our control."

"Were the investigation and subsequent fire related to Harry Potter's death?" a male reporter asked.

"I don't believe so," Kingsley lied. "The Ministry is currently investigating the aurors' deaths as diligently as we are investigating Harry Potter's murder."

"Are there any funeral plans for Harry Potter?" Rita asked.

Kingsley thanked the stars that she had diverted the topic from the White Tomb attack. "Yes. We plan to give him a state funeral and bury him with top honors."

"Has a date been set?"

"No."

"Who about suspects in Harry Potter's case?"

"Are there any?"

Kingsley answered. "We are questioning a few wizards, but no one has stood out as a viable lead."

Rita tapped her notepad. I wonder who's being questioned.

"I will inform you of any new developments," Kingsley promised. "That will be all for now."

Rita sneered. No need, I'll dig up those developments myself.

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"You don't play fair," Hermione gasped through bouts of laughter.

"My dear, it’s not my fault you never grasped the finer points of tic tac toe," Severus teased.

She sighed. "I never should've chosen this stupid game."

"Are we becoming poor sports now?" Severus purred.
"No," Hermione answered with a playful huff. "But I resent being defeated twelve times in a row, especially when I am certain you changed some of my O’s into X’s."

"Now why would I cheat when defeating you fairly is far more entertaining?" Severus answered.

She gave him a cute scowl.

"Trust me love, I would never cheat you in any way." He captured her lips.

After an ecstatic moment she backed away. "Do you really think some sweet words and a kiss are going to end this discussion?"

He embraced her. "I know they will."

Once again their lips were pressed together. Hermione let out a small moan.

He released her. "What were you saying about those blasted X's and O's?"

"I," she caught her breath. "I'm not sure anymore."

Severus nodded. "It appears that our discussion is over then."

"I hate you," Hermione muttered.

"Oh I sincerely doubt that," Severus replied. "Over the past few months you seem to have grown quite attached to me."

Hermione gave him a soft smile. "Maybe I don't mind your presence as much as I thought I would."

He chuckled.

Hermione opened her mouth to continue, but a yawn came out instead.

Severus gave her a small smile. "Are you tired?"

"I am, but Rose isn't," Hermione laughed. "She's more energetic when you're around. She loves you already."

"The feeling is mutual," Severus replied as he put a hand over Hermione's swollen stomach. "Although I fear she will be disappointed once she actually sees me. It's doubtful she wants a father who appears as I do."

"Rose isn't that shallow," Hermione assured him. "All she wants is someone to love and care for her, and you already do both."

Rose kicked Severus' hand, as if to confirm her mother's words. His face lit up. "You are already so precious to me, little Rose."

She kicked him again.

"You are so very loved by your mother and me," Severus crooned. "We are counting the days until you make your appearance in the world, though we don’t want you to be too eager to join us. Nobody wants you to come to harm, and you've already give us quite a scare. If you could hold off on frightening for the next decade or so I'd be very appreciative."

"Neither of us wants another scare," Hermione brushed the tears from her eyes. Never in her wildest
dreams would she have imagined Professor Severus Snape being this tender with a child, much less her child. The babe had yet to be born, and Severus was already wrapped around those little cute stubby fingers.

Severus removed his hand and stood up.

"Where are you going?" Hermione asked a little quicker than she'd intended.

Severus gazed into her eyes. They were a swirl of fear and sadness begging for Severus to stay. "I was going to use the restroom."

"Oh," she replied as she flushed. "Then where?"

He pointed to a chair on the other side of the room. "I planned on transfiguring that chair into a suitable bed, but if you'd rather I leave for home then I will."

"I need you to stay," she whispered.

"Then I shall," Severus replied before leaving for the restroom.

Once he shut the door, Hermione exhaled. What had just come over her? She wasn’t one to beg anyone to stay, yet she was practically on her knees pleading with Severus not to leave. He must think she’s the most pathetic woman on the face of the earth, unless he was flattered that someone wanted him on her side. For most of Severus’ life he had few friends. It must be nice for him to feel needed every now and then.

Fine, Severus was happy that Hermione wanted him nearby. That didn’t explain why Hermione needed Severus in the hospital room. Maybe the idea of the resurrected Death Eaters had frightened her, but she'd already faced them before. Severus was a great protector, but she was confident of her own skills. Whatever happened between them transcended the physical need to stay alive. When she'd asked Severus to stay, she had felt something deeper than fear for her physical safety. From the depths of her soul she needed him to be close, but the full implication of the reason behind that need remained unclear to her.

"Hermione?"

His voice jolted Hermione from her thoughts. “Sorry, I was just lost in my own thoughts.”

"Hopefully they were pleasant thoughts," Severus answered.

"They were," she drawled. When did his eyes become so dark and alluring?

She watched him transfigure the chair into a bed. "Is that okay with the hospital staff?"

"I frankly don't care if it is or isn't," Severus replied with a smirk. “I want to be near my wife and unborn child, yet I want to remain comfortable. This is the best option for fulfilling all my needs.”

Hermione smirked in return. “I agree. It would be barbaric to expect you to sleep in that under padded chair.”

"Indeed," Severus replied as he toed off his boots and settled into the transfigured bed. "May I extinguish the light?"

"Please do," she answered.

Once darkness had overtaken the room Hermione murmured, "Severus?"
“Yes?”

"Thank you for staying."

“There is nowhere else I would rather be.”

She settled into her bed, his words warming her heart. Closing her eyes, she listened to the sound of his breathing, comforted that he was remained by her side.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! I appreciate it all.
"Proudfoot," Lucius hissed.

The auror puffed himself up. "The one and only."

Lucius' frown deepened. "To what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you again?"

Proudfoot pushed Lucius aside. A legion of aurors followed Proudfoot into the mansion. Lucius dusted his robes off. So help him if the head auror got so much as a speck of dust on them. They had just been cleaned...

"Where is the Elder Wand?" Proudfoot demanded.

Lucius raised an eyebrow. "The Elder Wand?"

"Yes," Proudfoot answered. "The Elder Wand."

The last auror to enter the mansion shut the door.

"Why would I want the Elder Wand?" Lucius asked.

Proudfoot laughed. "You’re asking me what you’d want to use the most powerful wand in existence for?"

Lucius tapped his foot. "I suppose you have a point. It would make quite the collectable, but that’s all I could use it for. It only reaches its full potential under the person who defeats its former master, a feat I have yet to achieve."

"You’re right," Proudfoot admitted. "Your son has more use for it than you do."

"What use would Draco have for it? He has the same issue with it as I do," Lucius mused. "Unless he’s taken up wand collecting. The Elder Wand would look striking right over his sitting room fireplace..."

"Or maybe he hid it so he can use it to kill the next wizard who looks in his wife's direction,” Proudfoot replied.

"What?" Lucius shouted.

"Dear, what is going on?" Narcissa asked as she approached the crowd.

"These dunderheads are searching for the Elder Wand," he answered.

"Why ever would they believe we have it?" Narcissa asked.

A couple of the aurors gave each other sideways glances. This sweet voiced woman was Bellatrix’s sister? Nothing about her screamed ex-Death Eater. Were they at the right mansion?

"You are both aware that Harry Potter was murdered yesterday, correct?" Proudfoot asked.
"We are," Narcissa lowered her head. "Such a tragedy. He was becoming a fine young man."

Lucius nodded.

Proudfoot was rouge. "Don't act like you consider this a great loss!"

"We are not acting. Potter's senseless murder is a tragedy," Lucius answered. Especially when one considers how many rumors Draco will have to endure regarding his wife and Harry.

"Your son, Draco, is the prime suspect," Proudfoot continued.

Lucius' eyes bulged.

"Why would you consider Draco to be a suspect?" Narcissa asked with more than a hint of edge in her voice.

"Because he threatened to kill Harry Potter," Proudfoot replied.

Lucius and Narcissa stared at each other as if trying to recollect what incident he was discussing. Lucius groaned. "Are you referring to the incident at Severus' wedding reception?"

"Yes," Proudfoot replied as the Malfoys faced him.

"Draco never would've said anything to Harry if he hadn't made that tactless toast," Lucius argued.

"Are you sure Draco's anger towards Harry was limited to that incident alone?" Proudfoot asked.

"Draco held no long-lasting rage towards Harry," Narcissa answered. "Once Harry apologized for his behavior during the reception Draco considered the incident to be in the past."

"Be that as it may," Proudfoot answered. "We need to search the house."

"What are you searching for?" Narcissa asked.

"The Elder Wand," Proudfoot answered.

"The Elder Wand is missing?" Narcissa asked.

"Regrettably, yes," Proudfoot replied.

"You lost the Elder Wand?" Narcissa asked, her voice the same as a mother accusing her child of breaking a priceless vase.

"We didn't lose it as much as it was stolen from us," Proudfoot answered.

"Are you going to debate semantics with me while the Elder Wand is missing?" Narcissa scolded. Proudfoot raised his chin. "May we search your house now?"

"If it will please you, but you will only succeed in wasting valuable time and resources," Narcissa replied.

"Duly noted," Proudfoot muttered before turning to the others. "John, Achilles, you take the kitchen. Artemis, Neptune, you take the master bedroom..."

One by one the aurors received their orders and scurried to their stations.
After the last name was called Proudfoot sneered. “I’ll search your office.”

He strutted towards the hallway. Lucius clutched his wand, but thought better of using it. Instead he hissed, “These are the defenders of the Light?”

Narcissa sighed. "I'm afraid so.”

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“We’ll let you know if we have any further questions." The auror closed her notebook and put her quill in her pocket. Then she stood up swallowed. “Once again, I apologize for your loss.”

“Thank you,” Hermione whispered as the auror made her way to the door.

The auror gave her a sympathetic grin before shutting the door.

Hermione shut her eyes and rolled over, praying she could recapture her lost sleep. An hour ago, a group of aurors had burst into her hospital room and kicked Severus out of what he claimed was a comfortable bed. They then proceeded to interrogate Hermione about Harry's whereabouts on the last day of his life. Her chest ached at how little information she could provide, but she couldn't think of a single suspicious thing about that night. She had no idea who could've murdered Harry.

Murdered Harry. Those two words didn’t sound right together. Putting them together was the plot to one of Rita's more outrageous articles. "Murdered Harry" was a complete fabrication.

Maybe if Hermione closed her eyes the last few hours would disintegrate into a dream. She’d wake up in Severus’ arms. He’d hold her and whisper into her ear that the events of the last few days were all part of a horrendous nightmare. Then he'd kiss any remaining tears away.

Soft footsteps approached the bed. Hermione curled her lips into a smile. "Sorry they kicked you out."

"They needn't have been so cruel about it," Severus grumbled.

“They could’ve at least offered you a cup of tea or coffee.”

“Perhaps.”

“After the night you had they should’ve at least taken me to another room so you can rest.”

“I wasn’t asleep when they barged in. To be honest, I’ve barely slept.”

Hermione opened her eyes and rolled over. "Why didn’t you sleep last night?"

Severus stared at her. Brokenness remained in her eyes. She needed to grieve her best friend, not listen to her husband's problems. It was only a matter of time before she asked him to leave. Sooner or later she'd realize his role in all of this. She'd rightfully hate him for the rest of their lives once she understood the true reason Harry died...

Hermione’s voice pierced his reverie.

"Something's troubling you, Severus. I can see it in your eyes."

Severus swallowed. His eyes were mist, and distant, as if he were in some awful trance. “Hermione, the day has just begun and you’ve already been through too much. There is no need to be bothered by my problems.”
"I refuse to relax until you tell me what's wrong," she replied.

Severus pursed his lips. "That is less than prudent."

"It’s less than prudent to be distant with your spouse," Hermione sat up.

Severus’ eye lids quivered.

Her voice softened. "I want to know what’s troubling you, Severus. I want you to trust me enough to share your problems with me."

"I trust you more than I've ever trusted anyone else, Hermione."

"Then what is wrong?"

"I had a dream last night."

Hermione nodded.

He took a shaky breath. "I dreamt that I was back at Hogwarts, begging for Dumbledore to save Lily. I was on my knees pleading with him to protect her, and to save the child if that is what would make her happy. He agreed provided I served as a double spy. I woke up."

Hermione waited for him to continue.

Severus’ throat tightened. "I woke up with only one thought echoing in my mind."

"What?"

"The more I thought about his murder, the stolen invisibility cloak, and the killing curse, and now that the Elder Wand is gone…"

"The Elder Wand is missing?" Hermione gasped.

"It's been stolen from Dumbledore's grave," Severus confirmed.

"Oh Merlin," Hermione breathed.

"Perhaps we shouldn't be discussing this."

"I'm in the hospital. If something happens to me a horde of Healers will swarm me. Please continue."

Severus cleared his throat. "It's obvious to me that someone plans on reuniting the former Death Eaters. I don't know who this new leader will be, nor do I know what that leader’s plans are. All I know is," his voice cracked. "It doesn't matter who fired the wand at Harry. Dumbledore and I murdered him."

Hermione whispered, "Why would you even think such a thing?"

"Because it’s true! We killed him! Both of us killed him!" Tears welled in Severus’ eyes.

"Dumbledore made him out to be this hero, the savior of the Wizarding World. With all the publicity surrounding him, we made him a target for Voldemort and his followers! Neville, blasted Neville Longbottom is alive and well. Why? Because he wasn’t the boy-who-lived. No one wants to kill Neville because he isn’t the hero of the Wizarding World."

"Neville said the arsonists tied him up and taunted him. He claimed the attack on his greenhouse was
“The arsonists didn’t kill him though! They let him live. Why? Because he wasn’t the boy-who-lived. He was just some herbologist who at one point was at the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Hermione reached out to touch Severus. He waved her away. She placed the hand on her abdomen.

“I thought I was protecting him,” Severus allowed the tears to flow. “I thought we were saving him, but we made him into a sacrificial lamb. When Harry survived Voldemort, I never considered that another Death Eater could rise. It never crossed my mind that anyone would desire the Elder Wand enough to kill a man with such a promising life before him. I was arrogant in not continuing to protect Harry. I thought I’d fulfilled my promise to protect him, but all I did was make him a target for the next leader of the Death Eaters. The next leader wanted to prove that he was more powerful than Voldemort by doing what the dark lord couldn't, and I was too arrogant to stop it.”

Severus buried his face into Hermione’s mattress and sobbed. “I killed him. In the name of protecting Harry I killed him.”

Hermione reached out and embraced her husband as best she could. She whispered above his sobs, "It's not your fault. None of this is your fault. The only person who murdered Harry was the murderer, not you."

"I set him up to be murdered," Severus choked. “He never would’ve been in harm’s way if it were not for me and my incompetent arrogance.”

"No, you did not murder Harry, and you were an excellent protector,” Hermione insisted. "You did what you thought was right. No one could've foreseen this, no one."

"We never should've asked an eleven year old boy to fight the darkest wizard of all time," Severus rasped. “You should hate me for asking you to fight Voldemort. You three were too young, much too young for all that sacrifice. You should hate me for what I put you through. I was your cruelest professor, the one who could've done more but sat back and watched children fight one of the most powerful wizards to have existed. I have no idea why you would ever want to be in my presence, much less marry me."

She began to stroke his hair. It never ceased to amaze her that his hair was quite soft and contained very little grease. “The past doesn’t matter anymore. All we can be concerned with is the present.”

Severus gasped for air.

“I'm Harry Potter’s best friend, and I don't blame you for what happened to him. You tried to keep him alive, and you succeeded for a time. You couldn't stop him from dying. No one could. As for marrying you,” Hermione took a shaky breath. "You aren't half as terrible as you make yourself out to be. When you lower your guard you are one of the kindest, gentlest, smartest wizards it has my pleasure to know."

Severus looked up at her, and saw the sincerity in her eyes. She kissed his forehead before wiping his tears away.

"Hermione," he locked eyes with her. His breathing was steady. "No matter what happens, I will never allow anyone to put you in danger. I will protect you and Rose. As long as I draw breath, I will never allow you or Rose to be sacrificed the way Harry was. Rose will never be a sacrificial lamb. No one will ever do to her what Dumbledore and I did to Harry.”

"I will do my best to protect you as well.” Tears came to Hermione's eyes. "I will not allow anyone
to use you the way Dumbledore did. No matter what happens no one will guilt you into doing anything. I will be in your ear making sure you do not suffer another needless guilt trip."

"Thank you," Severus rasped.

“Please, please promise me that you won't look for opportunities to sacrifice yourself for us. We need you,” Hermione cried. “Heaven help us Severus Rose and I need you! Please be here for us, not searching for some heroic deed to make up for an already forgiven wrong.”

"I'll do my best to see that I am not put in a position where I must sacrifice myself" Severus replied.

"That will have to suffice," Hermione replied as she twirled a lock of his hair around her finger.

He captured her lips to seal the promise. She pulled him closer until he was nestled beside her on her bed.

“Let’s get some sleep,” Hermione whispered.

Severus hummed as he clung to her.

Together they closed their eyes.

"Oy! Am I interrupting anything?”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! Unfortunately I probably won't be able to update until Monday. I'm out of town for the weekend and won't be around reliable internet. So if updates are sporadic for the next few days please forgive me.

Once again, thank you!
"Hello Hagrid," Severus growled as he pulled away from his wife. What he wouldn't give to hex that grin off the giants face...

"Oy Severus, 'Mione," Hagrid strolled to the bed, his smile growing with every step. "How is everything goin'?"

"Fine," Hermione raised herself upright.

Severus slipped off the bed, his glare as dark as ever.

"Did I come at a bad time?" Hagrid asked.

Severus' expression made Hagrid feel mere inches tall.

"No," Hermione answered. "I'm surprised to see you though. How did you know I was here?"

"I read in the paper that you'd been dragged to the hospital by yer husband," Hagrid explained.

Severus' expression lightened.

Hermione blanched. "What exactly did the paper say about my hospitalization?"

"Nothin' much," Hagrid replied. "Jus' that you had been admitted but were recoverin'."

"Good," Hermione exhaled.

"After readin' it I had to make sure you were alright," Hagrid swatted a bug in the air. "How is yer little one?"

"She's fine," Hermione placed a hand on her swollen stomach. "She gave us a little scare earlier."

"Oh no," Hagrid whispered.

"But she's doing fine now," Hermione concluded. "The Healers believe she is unharmed from this incident. We expect a happy, healthy baby girl."

"Great!" Hagrid exclaimed. "You an' Severus must've been so worried 'bout her."

Severus' glare melted at the mention of the child. "I am very fortunate that my worst fears were not realized."

"Well I'm so glad to hear that everyone has recovered," Hagrid concluded.

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

"Indeed," Severus replied.

Hagrid examined Severus. Although there was an aura of peace surrounding the former headmaster, his eyes betrayed his fatigue. "How are you holdin' up Severus?"
"My wife and my daughter are well. As long as they are healthy I have no complaints," Severus answered.

"Regardless yesterday had to be rough on yeh," Hagrid continued. "Then again after facing the Dark Lord yeh mus’ be used to these kinds of things."

Severus shook his head. "There is no comparison between facing the Dark Lord and having loved ones in danger. The latter is much less preferable to the former."

Hagrid hummed. Never before had he seen that degree of vulnerability in Severus’ eyes. Could Minerva be wrong about Severus marrying Hermione solely for his inheritance?

Before Hagrid could meditate too deeply on the question a fly buzzed in Severus’ face. He pinpointed the location of the pesky insect and smirked as he captured it in his fist.

"Annoying little bugger," Hagrid commented. "Er, bug."

Hermione chuckled as Severus squeezed his fist tighter. "How long has it been following you?"

"It's been following me since I lef' Hogwarts," Hagrid continued.

"Should I kill it?" Severus asked.

"No!" a tiny voice yelled.

Severus threw the bug on the ground. As expected it transformed into Rita Skeeter.

"Rita, what a pleasure to see you again," began Hermione in a dry voice.

"Yes. To what do we owe this displeasure?" Severus asked.

"I wanted to report the latest story," Rita replied.

"So you followed Hagrid in order to harass us," Hermione replied.

"All I want is a short interview, or at least a statement," Rita protested.

"You will not cause my wife any distress," Severus warned.

"No," Hermione replied, the sadness once again evident in her eyes. "I can give you a short statement, if only to prevent you pesterling me for one in the future."

"A statement would be nice," Rita pulled out her notepad and quills. "Let’s start at the beginning. Why are you in the hospital?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, we're doing this my way. I will give you a statement on Harry's death. Nothing more."

Rita mulled it over. A statement on his death was better than none at all, and it may make a good story, especially if she could get a statement from Ron as well. "Fine, what is your statement on
Harry's death?"

Hermione took a shaky breath as the tears returned to her eyes. She cleared her throat until she was composed enough to speak. "While I am devastated over the loss of my best friend Harry Potter, I know that he is at peace. His body is at rest and his spirit is watching over us. My only hope is that we can capture the murderer and give Harry the justice he deserves."

Rita took down the quote, only to have Severus snatch the writing pad from her and scan the contents. After reading it twice he returned it to the reporter. "It's accurate."

"Yes it is, thank you very much," Rita huffed.

"If any part of it changes between here and the printing press the consequences will be dire," Severus warned.

"I know," Rita snarled. "Trust me I know."

She stomped out of the room.

"Merlin, I should be more careful nex' time I leave Hogwarts. I honestly jus' thought she was a bug," Hagrid began.

"It's an easy mistake to make," Severus answered before he turned his attention to Hermione. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes," she replied in a cracked voice. "It's just hard to believe that Harry's gone. I feel like I need to call floo Harry and tell him that I was not hurt by my ordeal." She swallowed as the determination returned to her face. "Still I meant what I said to Rita; we have to find his killer."

"Are you sure it's a good idea to be gettin' involved with this?" Hagrid asked. "I wouldn’ wan’ yer baby to be hurt."

"I have to do something. If something had happened to me, Harry wouldn't rest until the killer was captured and imprisoned."

"The case is bein’ investigated," Hagrid noted.

"Severus told me," Hermione replied. "But they have the wrong man. Draco Malfoy didn't kill Harry,"

"I wish someone would tell the aurors that," Hagrid sighed.

"What are those dunderheads doing now?" Severus asked.

"They're searchin' the Malfoy Mansion and Draco's place as we speak."

"What?" the couple asked.

"They're still convinced that Draco murdered Harry despite the fac’ that they can’ find anythin’ against the man."

"Great," Severus groaned.

"Well then we’ll need to find some leads of our own then," Hermione replied.

"Who? They aren’ lookin’ at anyone but Draco," Hagrid answered.
“Then we’ll have to conduct our own investigation,” Hermione replied.

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"This wand works amazingly well, wouldn't you say, my followers?"

Fenrir raised the Elder Wand above his twenty trembling subjects. Sneering, he swallowed his last bite of meat.

No one dared say a word. Cackling, Fenrir threw the chicken leg bone into a nearby creek

"Fenrir, may we have a word with you?" Scabior asked as he slid behind the head werewolf.

"Certainly," Fenrir answered.

Together, they made their way to a grove of trees, knowing full well that their unwilling minions would stay behind for fear of society’s stigma and the repercussions of getting caught. Once they reached a dark place in the trees and were safely away from the rest, Fenrir asked, “What is so important that you had to drag me away from my meal?”

“A few days ago you said that we needed time to get a map of Azkaban,” Scabior began.

"Yes, I’ve said as much,” Fenrir confirmed.

"I was thinking that while we’re obtaining this map we could look for the Resurrection Stone,” Scabior suggested.

Fenrir crossed his arms over his chest.

“It should be somewhere in these woods,” Scabior continued. “If it’s anything like the Invisibility Cloak and the Elder Wand it will be laughably easy to find.”

"Why would I want to waste time looking for a stone?" Fenrir asked with a hint of edge in his voice.

"If you possessed it, then you would be in charge of all three Deathly Hollows,” Scabior answered. "You would be the Master Death!"

The Chief's eyes shone with interest, "He's right. You would be an all powerful leader, the likes of which the Wizarding World has never seen."

Fenrir glowered at them, "Why would I want to be Master of Death when I can be the Master in Life!"

"Because you could live forever!” Scabior answered. “You could spend all of eternity fulfilling your goals and basking in the success of your achievement.”

"Wasn't the desire for immortality what ultimately undid Voldemort?" Fenrir asked in a controlled voice.

Scabior and the Chief blinked.

"Of course it was!" Fenrir hissed. "That moron Voldemort was so terrified of dying he couldn’t think straight. His one weakness was a fear of death. I cannot afford such weakness in my quest for power.”

"But living forever would be a strength" Scabior answered.
“Not if we’re too distracted to set our plans in motion,” Fenrir noted.

Scabior cocked his head.

“If I become obsessed with the Hollows we'll spend all of our time searching for that stupid stone. Before we know it, the aurors will close in on us. We'll be too distracted to see them coming. I may be Master over Death, but what good does that do me if I'm locked in a cage for all of eternity?”

The other two stared at him, their eyes flashing in understanding.

Fenrir smiled, a gesture which contorted his features all the more. "What I am creating, an empire of lycanthropes, will survive long after I die. I will always be known as the man who gave them their condition. I was the one who made them glorious, made them more than what they were. In short I gave them life. It is much better to be remembered for giving life than cheating death."

"I suppose you have a point," Scabior mused.

"After we have achieved our goal, I may search for the stone, but it needn't be a distraction now. I've never feared death, and I don't intend to start," Fenrir replied.

"That may be a wise attitude to have," Scabior admitted.

The Chief nodded in agreement.

"Glad you agree, not that I needed your concurrence," Fenrir replied. "Now, let's discuss our plans to infiltrate Azkaban in order to obtain the layout…"

Chapter End Notes

So sorry it's taken me forever to update. Things got very chaotic very quickly. I won't be able to update tomorrow, but I found just enough time to edit this chapter and post it now.

Thank you for all the support! I deeply appreciate it all.
Ginevra sifted through the items strewn about the room. Her silk cocktail dresses had been tossed aside as if they were discarded cleaning rags. Necklaces and rings which Draco had chosen for her with such care were tangled together. In the corner a shattered perfume bottle leaked its lilac scent.

Bile crept up Ginevra’s throat. She swallowed and winced at the burn. After taking a deep breath, she pulled out her wand, and began to cast cleaning spells. The sooner this mess was cleaned up the sooner Ginevra could begin strategizing ways to clear Draco’s name and keeps her family intact.

With a few flicks of her wand the dresses flew into their assigned places. A few more waves of her wand and the wrinkles disappeared. She shook her head. If only clearing Draco's name could be this straightforward….

"Ginevra?"

She held up one finger. The newcomer nodded. After muttering a few more incantations the last of the dresses hung in its previous place. Satisfied with her handiwork she glanced at the visitor. “Draco, I thought you were taking a walk about the grounds.”

"I was,” he replied. “But no matter how far I walked I couldn’t get the questions out of my head. What if I go to Azkaban? What if I never get to hold my child? What if I never see my child? What if I never see you again?"

Draco’s throat was too tight for him to continue.

“I’ll do whatever I can to prevent you from going to Azkaban,” Ginevra promised.

“They want an arrest. I threatened Potter. The Ministry is furious that my family and I were never tried for our crimes,” Draco’s next words were barely audible. “It’s only a matter of time, love.”

“We will find a way to clear your name,” Ginevra promised.

Draco sighed.

“I won’t let them take you from me,” Ginevra promised.

“You cannot prevent the inevitable.”

“Your arrest is not inevitable. I will fight with everything I have to keep you out of Azkaban and make sure the real killer is in there.”

Draco lowered his head. His eyes fell up a wooden dragon. Picking it up he smiled. "Remember when you gave me this?"

Ginevra beamed. "It was the first Christmas we spent together. I found it in Romania while visiting Charlie. I was so scared that you wouldn't like it. It looked so ordinary compared to all the other presents you were bound to get that year.”

"I loved it," he set the dragon on the table where it belonged. Then, he stepped over to his wife and embraced her. "It is one of the most beautiful presents I have ever received."
She buried her head into his chest.

"I'm sorry about all of this," Draco whispered "You don't deserve to have your life turned upside down."

"Don’t apologize for the idiocy of a few arrest happy aurors," Ginevra answered as she looked up at him.

"They aren’t investigating me without cause. I threatened Potter."

"Draco, if you're referring to the comment you made to Harry…it was said in anger. They shouldn't hold it against you like this," Ginevra assured him.

"I wish they saw it that way," he mused before kissing the top of her head. “If I had a time turner I would go back and leave the second you concluded your toast.”

“Regrets don’t solve anything,” Ginevra noted. “All we can do is go forward.”

“I suppose so,” Draco whispered.

She raised her head and gazed directly into his eyes. "I love you," She rubbed his back. “Nothing could ever change my love for you."

"I love you too," Draco replied before capturing her lips.

She moaned as he deepened the kiss.

"Why don't you let the house elves finish up here?" He whispered.

She shook her head. “I’d prefer to do this myself.”

“Oh?”

“Cleaning gives me some comfort, like maybe I have the power to set things right. Right now I can’t persuade the Ministry to investigate a new suspect, but I can reclaim our life together by repairing our room. Does that make sense?”

Draco nodded. “It makes all the sense in the world.”

Ginevra stepped away before giving him a half grin. “Within a half hour I'll e finished.”

"Mind if I sit on the bed and watch?" Draco asked with a spark in his eyes.

She smirked. "You just enjoy the view."

"Can you blame me?" He purred

“Personally I think there are much prettier things to look at than me. Yet who am I to deny you your heart’s desire?” Ginevra winked.

Draco’s heart fluttered. He picked up a golden necklace from on top of the bed and handed it to his wife. She glanced at it before putting it on. He stood up and centered the ruby which dangled from the chain. “There you go.”

“Thank you,” she brushed her lips against his.
Draco sat down as Ginevra resumed her cleaning. He stared at her, wondering how a man could make as many mistakes as he did yet still be blessed with a wife like Ginevra.

***

"Careful," Severus began.

Hermione wobbled as she stepped out of the floo. Severus caught her.

"Thank you," she replied.

"Are you still feeling well?" Severus asked as he dusted the ashes from her robe.

Hermione glared at him. "I swear if you ask me that one more time…"

"I want to be sure that you and Rose are not in peril," Severus argued.

"Rose and I will be fine," Hermione argued.

"You appear woozy."

"I will feel better after a bite to eat."

"Are you sure that’s all you will need? Perhaps taking the floo home was not in your best interest."

Hermione untangled herself from him. "I told you that the floo was the best option. Portkeys make me sick, you didn’t want to risk splinching me, I would’ve screamed bloody murder if we flew home, and I refuse to spend another minute in St. Mungo’s. I will be fine."

"Very well then," Severus scowled.

Hermione sighed. "I’m sorry. You’re only trying to help in your own Severusey way. I-thank you. Thank you for taking such good care of me and Rose."

"You’re quite welcome," Severus replied.

Hermione shot him a grin before making her way to the couch.

"Remember, the Healer told you to rest for the next few days," Severus began.

She grit her teeth and clenched her fists. "I will."

"Do not stress yourself with chores. I will make dinner tonight and the elves will clean up," Severus continued his eyes warning her to comply with his wishes.

Hermione collapsed onto the couch. "What are you planning to make?"

"Spaghetti," he replied. "Unless you’d prefer something else?"

"I was hoping for pizza," her lips curled up at the corners. "I haven’t had a sausage pizza in ages. Just thinking about one makes me hungry."

He raised an eyebrow.

"What?" Hermione asked. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I find it difficult to believe that you would like something as greasy as pizza."
"Why?"

"No reason I suppose. I never could stand pizza." Severus admitted.

Hermione's eyes bulged. "Why? How can you hate pizza?"

"Simple: it's greasy, the melted cheese tastes like rubber, and don't get me started on those heartburn-inducing pepperoni slices," Severus shuddered.

"I can't argue with you on the pepperoni," she conceded. "But your other objections are completely without merit. I can make you a good pizza if you'd allow me to enter the kitchen. We should still have sausage…"

“You may make your pizza for me another day," Severus cut her off, his eyes firm, but affectionate.

"Right," she grumbled. "I suppose I'm not completely opposed to spaghetti."

"Good. I can begin cooking soon," Severus replied. "I just need to check on a couple of potions I put on stasis just before I left for the Order meeting. Once that is complete I will make us dinner."

"Thank you," Hermione replied. "In the meantime I'll sit here and read a book."

Severus glanced at the book on the coffee table. "Sense and Sensibility?"

Hermione shrugged. "It's been a few years since I've read it."

"I take it you enjoyed reading it the first time," Severus replied.

"Actually I've read it more than three times."

"You have?"

"I have. It is more than satisfying to watch Marianne fall in love with Colonel Brandon. As for the nineteen ninety-five movie," she blushed. "They couldn't have picked a better actor to portray Colonel Brandon."

"Indeed," Severus muttered, remembering the movie posters he'd seen for the film. The actor playing Colonel Brandon wasn't all that handsome.

"Anyway I shouldn't hold you up any longer." Hermione removed the book from the coffee table and set it on her lap. "I am starting to get hungry, and I wouldn't want your potions to become unstable."

He kissed Hermione on the cheek. "I will call you when dinner is ready."

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

Severus strolled out of the room, robes billowing behind him.

Hermione took a deep breath as she set the book aside. Rose kicked against her. She put a hand over her abdomen and began, "I wish you could've known Harry, Little Rose." Tears came to Hermione's eyes as she continued, "He was so happy when he felt you kick. He loved you. He really wanted to meet you and be your uncle. I just wish he could have held you."

Tears spilled down her cheeks. "Harry…I suppose I should tell you the whole story. He saved me from a troll when I was eleven. It was Halloween, and I was so scared. He found me and rescued me"
along with Ron Weasley, your biological father.” She took a shaky breath. “I suppose I wouldn’t have been in that bathroom had Ron not insulted me earlier, but that’s neither here nor there. We were friends, at least I thought we were friends.”

Hermione lay down on the couch. "We were the Golden Trio," she gasped "We saved the Wizarding World. Harry and I were friends, but Ron and I, everyone said we were soulmates. I thought Ron loved me. I thought he loved me."

She wept not only for Harry, but for the shattered dream of the invincible Golden Trio.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! As always it is much appreciated!
"Morning Severus," Hermione yawned.

Severus peeked up from his morning newspaper. Hermione glanced back at him with half open eyes. Her hair was tangled from a restless night, her eyes still bloodshot from her unshed tears. She plopped into the chair across from him, as if walking to the dining room had robbed her of all her remaining energy.

Severus set the paper down. "Good morning, Hermione."

“What’s so good about it?” Hermione muttered.

Severus’ chest ached.

Tears returned to Hermione’s eyes. Before she could resume crying she sat up straighter.

"Hermione?"

"Rose is awake."

"She is?"

"Yes, I think so."

“Hello little Rose,” Severus began.

“Say hello to Daddy, Rose,” Hermione whispered as she ran her right hand over her abdomen. Her eyes lit up. “Rose is kicking. She’s saying hi back to you.”

Severus grinned. “I am more than pleased to know she is awake.”

Hermione sighed. "I'm sorry I kept you awake last night. You don’t deserve to have your wife scream in your ear every three hours because of a nightmare."

“There is no need for an apology.”

“Yes, there is a need for an apology. You didn’t sign up for a clingy shell-shocked spouse.”

“Your best friend died and you had nightmares about his death. That is hardly a reason to apologize or feel inadequate.”

Hermione deflated. “The dreams about his actual death weren’t the worst ones.”

Severus swallowed.

Hermione trembled. “The scariest dream was the one where Harry fought Voldemort, only he didn’t wake up. I tried to perform CPR or use magic to revive him, but nothing worked. Then I’d wake up.”

"That dream sounds terrifying," Severus answered as an elf began to set the table for breakfast.
"It wasn't at first since I would calm down and remember that Harry did survive Voldemort's attack," Hermione choked. "But then I remembered that Harry was dead, most likely at the hands of a madman, and there isn't anything I can say or do to change it. It was as if his death hit twice as hard."

"I wish I could expunge all of your pain," Severus answered.

"You helped me quite a bit last night just by holding me," she replied. "Thank you again for staying up with me."

"It was no trouble," Severus said with a trace of a smile before another elf popped in carrying an ornate serving dish.

"Here's the quiche you requested," the elf announced.

"Thank you," Severus replied.

"Quiche?" Hermione asked.

Severus shrugged. "You were exhausted, and I didn't think my French toast would be enough this morning."

"Quiche isn’t horrible," Hermione replied. "It just doesn't always agree with Rose."

"So she’s already deciding what she does and does not like," Severus replied.

"I fear so," Hermione rubbed her stomach again.

"I told the elves not to add carrots. I’ve noticed that the vegetable doesn't agree with you, and my life won’t be any worse without them."

"You were bossing the elves around?" Hermione asked.

"I was merely directing them dear,"

Hermione looked at the elf who was setting the dish on the table. He smiled and nodded in agreement with Severus, although Hermione suspected Severus had the idea to cook, not them. Still, when the elf served her a slice of quiche, she accepted it. "Thank you very much."

"Mistress Snape is welcome," the elf replied before serving Severus. Then it apparated away, leaving the couple alone.

"Thank you for making breakfast,' she replied with a smirk.

"The pleasure is all mine," Severus answered with a matching smirk.

They began eating in silence until Hermione set down her fork and placed a hand on her stomach.

"Is the food agreeing with you?" Severus asked.

"Yes it's wonderful," Hermione answered, her hand still over her stomach.

"Rose, she’s not injured is she?" Severus panicked.

"Trust me, she’s quite well," Hermione winced. "Rose just kicked me a little harder than I expected."

"Are you injured?" Severus asked.
"No," she replied. "But she's kicking my ribs and it's far from comfortable."

Severus directed his attention towards Hermione's abdomen. "Well Rose, you really should be much nicer to your mother. After all, she is the one who is going to select your toys as you grow older. You would not want her to buy you only dolls now would you?"

"Dolls?" Hermione asked with mock horror. "Why ever would I buy my baby girl dolls when she'd look adorable while playing with them?"

Severus shrugged as he returned his focus to Hermione. "I couldn't think of any other toy she might find undesirable."

"Why would it matter which toys she finds undesirable?"

"Threatening to replace one's toys with something undesirable is a very effective deterrent."

"Oh?"

"My mother always threatened to buy me dolls if I misbehaved in the grocery store. On days when I was particularly defiant she claimed that she'd sell all of my toys and only buy me only dolls for the rest of my life."

Hermione choked back a giggle at the image of a young Severus cowering in the face of a 1960's era Barbie doll.

"I don't know what a girl would dread her parents buying, but I suspect dolls are a good threat until I learn what she doesn't like," Severus concluded.

"You're horrible," Hermione teased.

"Perhaps," Severus replied. "But you knew that when you married me."

"That I did." Hermione winced again. She scooted the chair away from the table. "I think Rose wants your attention."

Severus raised an eyebrow.

"She calms down when you speak, but the minute you stop," Hermione flinched. "At least she didn’t hit my ribs this time."

Severus stood up from the table, unable to hide the gleam of pride and joy in his eyes. "Do you feel as if I am neglecting you?" He stepped over to Hermione and set a hand on her abdomen. "Do you feel better now?"

He felt her kick within Hermione. She exhaled. "That's it Rose, kick Daddy's hand so Mummy can have some relief."

"How are you today little Rose? Are you ready to wake up and greet the world?"

She kicked him again.

"You are such a precious child," Severus continued.

"She is," Hermione whispered.

POP! "Master Snape!"
"Yes?" Severus snapped

The elf stepped back. "Master Kingsley is at the door! He needs to speak to Hermione about Master Potter's funeral."

"Shit," Hermione muttered as she stood up and Severus removed his hand from her. "I haven’t even gotten out of my nightshirt. Please stall him!"

Hermione raced out of the dining room.

"I shall," Severus grumbled. He followed the elf out of the room and into the foyer, where Kingsley Shacklebolt awaited him.

"Hello Mr. Snape," Kingsley began. "Is Hermione available?"

"She is coming out as we speak," Severus replied.

Kingsley nodded. "Good. How has she been feeling?"

"As well as can be expected," Severus replied.

Kingsley nodded. "How is your baby?"

"Very well, and very active," Severus replied.

"Good," Kingsley drawled, unsure what to make of the affectionate spark in Severus’ eyes.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," Hermione began as she entered wearing a set of robes she'd bought a few days before Harry's death.

Severus couldn't hide his smile as he admired her figure. She needed to wear dark green more often. It brought out the natural highlights in her hair, and softened her eyes. Her appearance was enough to drive any man wild, yet she was clueless as to how much power she wielded.

Kingsley stared at Severus. For someone who was incapable of caring for others, Severus’ expression sure was tender. What was becoming of the feared potions’ master?

Severus glared at Kingsley. The Minister cleared his throat and returned his attention to Mrs. Snape. "Hello Hermione. How are you faring?"

She exhaled. "Fine, all things considering."

Kingsley nodded.

Hermione leaned onto Severus for comfort. "Life without Harry is surreal. I never imagined what living without Harry would be like. I still can’t wrap my mind around it."

"I cannot imagine how difficult his death must be for you," Kingsley replied. "I may not have known Mr. Potter as well as you did, but Harry was our best auror. His presence on the force and in the Ministry will be sorely missed."

"I know," she replied. "I’m sure he’s watching over you and the force right now."

"Indeed he is," Severus whispered.

Kingsley took a deep breath. "The least we can do is give Harry a proper burial. The Ministry plans
to give him a state funeral."

"You are?" Hermione asked.

"Yes. I will be organizing everything," Kingsley continued. "I was wondering if perhaps you would like to give a eulogy."

She gulped. "I...I would be honored to speak about Harry."

He shuffled his left foot as he looked down. Once he'd gathered his thoughts he looked up. "Since Ron was also a member of the Golden Trio, I planned on asking him to do a eulogy as well. Is that arrangement acceptable?"

Hermione’s throat went dry. A cold shill ran down her spine, but the kicking of her daughter rooted her in the present. "I suppose that would only be fair," she answered. "Ron was his best friend as well. No two other people knew Harry quite like we did."

"Agreed," Kingsley relaxed.

"Could you please assure me that the Weasleys will not harass my wife?" Severus interrupted. "I do not want the day of Harry's funeral to be more upsetting than it already is."

"I will do my best," Kingsley replied.

Hermione glanced up at Severus. "Thank you."

Kingsley cleared his throat. "That should be all I need to say for now. If either of you two can think of any leads...."

"No," Severus replied.

"We've heard nothing," Hermione confirmed. "Although we are certain that Draco is innocent."

Kingsley shook his head. "We must follow up on every lead. Right now Draco is our best one."

"Then we'll let you know if we find a better one," Hermione answered.

"Indeed we will," Severus replied.

"Thank you," Kingsley replied. "Goodbye to you both. I will see you at the funeral in a week. I'll fill you in on details as they are settled."

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

"Indeed," Severus replied.

With that, Kingsley left.

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

Hermione gazed into his eyes and gave him a small smile. "Thank you for trying to defend me against the Weasleys."

"I will always defend you," Severus replied.
Hermione embraced him, taking comfort in his lean frame. Severus smiled as he felt Rose’s kicks from within her mother’s womb.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your support! It means a lot to me!
Hermione bit the tip of her quill. A few times she lowered it as if to write on the page before her, but then she’d shake her head and raise it once more. She sighed. For the past five paragraphs the words had flowed easily from her mind to quill to parchment. Then her ideas ran dry.

She bit her lower lip. Harry was so much more than "The Boy Who Lived" or the founding member of "The Golden Trio". The world may know Harry for those roles, but to Hermione those titles didn’t begin to describe him. How could she reduce nearly a dozen years of friendship to a few thoughts on a page? How could she express who Harry was and what he meant to her without sounding maudlin or trite?

She groaned. Even in death, Harry was bigger than life.

"Mistress Snape!"

Startling at the intrusion, she dropped her quill, smearing the page with ink. She scowled before turning to the elf.

The elf trembled. "Is mistress angry with Tilly?"

Hermione pulled her wand from her pocket. "No, I'm just frustrated with this speech. Do you want to help me write it?"

“I do not think I will be much help,” Tilly answered.

Hermione nodded before pointing her wand at the spilled ink. With a few words the mess vanished.

"Tilly just came to tell Mistress that Mistress Malfoy is here."

“Oh.”

"Tilly wanted to tell Master Snape, but Master Snape is in the lab. Master Snape hates to be disturbed," Tilly continued.

“He most certainly does," Hermione stood up from her desk. She stretched until her back popped. “Thank you for telling me she's here.”

Wincing, Hermione made her way to the foyer wishing not for the first time that she could apparate to spare her swollen feet. It would also be nice if the average healthy pregnancy ended after twenty weeks instead of forty.

Ginevra turned to face her friend at the sound of her approach. She rushed to Hermione and found herself melting in the comfort of her warm embrace.

"Hello Ginevra," Hermione replied.

“Oh Hermione. I’m so sorry I wasn't there for you when you were hospitalized," Ginevra began as they separated. "I read in the Daily Prophet that you were ill, and I felt so horrible that I wasn’t there for you.”
Hermione frowned at the words *Daily Prophet*.

“The paper only stated that you'd collapsed, and that you gave your statement on Harry Potter's death while receiving treatment at St. Mungo’s,” Ginny added. "The statement was quite lovely by the way."

"Thank you," Hermione replied. "I was afraid Rita had embellished the details of my condition and may have edited parts of what I'd said."

“No, the article only stated you had been hospitalized and the statement was simply yet beautiful,” Ginny’s eyes fell upon Hermione’s stomach. "How is the baby?"

Hermione’s face glowed. "She's doing more than well."

“I’m so happy to hear that," Ginny replied.

Hermione flinched. “Mummy’s feet and back are a different story though. Let's go to the sitting room."

"Are your ankles swelling?" Ginevra asked as they strolled to their destination.

"Not at the moment, although I fear the oedema may begin soon," Hermione sighed as she caressed her stomach.

“That sounds rather unpleasant.”

“I’m sure the oedema will be, but I don’t think I’m feeling it’s effects now. Between Baby Girl gaining weight and these marble floors Mummy's feet and back have not been having an easy past couple of days."  

"The joys of pregnancy," Ginevra muttered.

Hermione massaged her abdomen, smiling when she felt a tiny kick. “The discomfort will all be worth it in the end."

“I know it will," Ginevra replied.

Ginny took Hermione’s hand once they reached the couch. Nodding, Hermione allowed Ginny to help lower her onto it. After Hermione was comfortable Ginny sat down beside her.

“As unpleasant as the last couple of days have been for me, my husband is not under investigation for murder. How are you doing?"

Ginevra took a deep breath. "The reason I did not come see you in the hospital was because the night you were hospitalized, Draco and I were interrogated by a group of aurors. The interrogation lasted for hours. By the end of it all we were exhausted."

"Severus said they were targeting you as suspects."

"It's worse than that," Ginevra squeaked. "When the Elder Wand disappeared, they stormed into our house and completely ransacked it. I spent the rest of the day tidying up and making sure everything was returned to its proper place."

"Oh my."

"I truly feel awful for not visiting you yesterday, but I didn’t want to visit first thing in the morning in
case they were running tests, so I began to put things back in order. By the time I'd finished cleaning, you had already been discharged."

"There's no need to feel guilty," Hermione replied. "You've been under enormous stress. It is perfectly understandable that you would be unable to visit me in the hospital."

Tears filled Ginny’s eyes. "I feel so helpless. I know Draco is innocent, but sometimes I feel I'm the only one."

"I believe he's innocent," Hermione replied. "As does Severus."

"Which brings the grand total to three," Ginevra replied. "Well… plus Draco's parents and maybe a few of our other friends."

"They'll find the guilty party soon," Hermione replied.

"How? They have no leads, no alternate suspects, and no clues pointing to anyone other than Draco. He is the only suspect."

“I know."

“They don't care about whether or not my family survives or if my child has a father; all they care about is making an arrest… any arrest… to satisfy the public's need for closure. It doesn’t matter if an innocent man is in jail so long as their sense of vengeance is satisfied."

Ginny broke down into sobs. Hermione embraced her and stroked her back, helpless to offer more than those small gestures of comfort.

Ginny sniffed and peeked up at Hermione. "I'm sorry; you've been through so much more than I have. Harry was your best friend. You probably don't want to hear about his murder investigation or listen to some woman whine about her husband’s innocence while he’s under investigation."

"You are much more than some woman. You are my best friend. I want to be here for you," Hermione replied. "I also want the real killer captured, not an innocent man."

"Thank you," Ginevra sniffed. After a few moments she steadied her breathing and released herself from Hermione's embrace.

“Better?” Hermione asked.

Ginny wiped her face. "No, but it was nice to release some of my emotions."

“I understand,” Hermione whispered.

Ginny looked around the room. "Where is Severus? I didn't think he'd let you out of his sight after your latest crisis."

"He's brewing in the basement."

“Brewing? How could he be brewing when his wife has only just been released from the hospital?”

"I sort of forced him into the basement," Hermione blushed.

"Why?"

"I was growing tired of having him hover over me, making sure I rested and drank enough fluids.”
Ginny smirked. “Did he threaten to deduct points from Gryffindor if you didn’t comply?”

“I’m sure he was tempted,” Hermione admitted.

Ginny giggled.

“Aside from wanting some space, I needed some solitude in order to write a eulogy for Harry,” Hermione continued.

"When is the funeral?" Ginny asked.

"Kingsley told me this morning that it's a week from today."

"I don't know if I should go, but I'd like to. I always considered Harry a friend."

"You should go if that's what you want to do."

"Thank you," Ginny replied.

"I'm only telling you the truth," Hermione answered.

Ginny nodded before her face lit up. “Anyway, back to Severus and his hovering...”

The light returned to Hermione’s eyes. "I couldn't write the eulogy with Severus counting how many glasses of water and orange juice I was drinking, so I sent him away."

Ginny laughed. "I can see him measuring out eight ounces of orange juice and staring at you until you drank every last one."

"He did that twice this morning," Hermione replied.

Ginny laughed until she couldn't sit upright. Hermione soon joined in. When they caught their breath, Ginny asked. “How did you manage to get him to go to the basement then?”

Hermione answered, "I reminded him that his apothecary was opening soon, and he needed potions to sell. We'd look foolish if our shelves were empty."

"Yes, you would," Ginny answered.

Hermione's eyes glistened.

"It sure is sweet how Severus is hovering over you," Ginny began.

"He has been sweet these last few months," Hermione admitted.

"You're lucky to have him as your husband."

"I know."

"It's almost enough to make one think he may care for you," Ginny replied.

Hermione’s heart stopped. “I’m not entirely sure of that. I think he cares more for Rose than he does me."

“Rose?” Ginny asked.

The color returned to Hermione’s face. "We named our baby Rose."
“That’s a beautiful name,”

“Thank you.”

“How did you come up with it?”

“Severus was using it as a pet name in the hospital, and I liked the sound of it. After some convincing he agreed that our daughter’s name is Rose.”

“Have you decided on a middle name?”

“Not yet,” Hermione replied. "But at least she finally has a first name. That’s a good start.”

“It is, and you still have some time to think of a middle name,” Ginny answered. "It's just so nice that you and Severus could come to an agreement."

“It is,” Hermione drawled, wondering what that gleam in her friend’s eyes meant.

“You're so fortunate to have found a husband who makes you happy,” Ginny continued.

“I am very happy with Severus. He's my best male friend.”

“Just your best male friend?”

Hermione sighed. "Yes. I don't want him to be anything more.”

Ginny raised an eyebrow. “You only want to be friends with your spouse?”

“I do,” Hermione confirmed. “Some people like you and Draco are meant to be in love. Others like me, well, we have to settle for a little less.”

“You do?”

“Yes. It’s time that I start being sensible and settle for an easygoing friendship with my partner. I like friendship. Severus and I won't hurt each other if we're friends. If we became more, then all sorts of emotions would enter into it. They might make for passionate nights, but it could also make for days where all we'd do is scream at each other. Rose deserves better than to grow up with such turmoil. Severus deserves better than to have a wife who's idea of love involves pure passion and no rationality.”

"Hermione, it wouldn't have to be that way. You two could be passionately in love without hurting each other. Love doesn’t have to hurt.”

“I know people in love don’t necessarily hurt each other. My parents never made each other cry. Draco never insults or demeans you. Ron and I hurt each other though. That’s what our relationship consisted of: a pinch of passion and a truckload of pain.”

“There’s a difference between pain and love. What you and Ron had,” Ginny swallowed. “What you and Ron had may not have been love.”

Hermione blinked. “I thought you've always supported my relationship with Ron.”

“I did until he left you alone and pregnant.”

“See, that's what I mean. I'm defective because I didn't get that relationship right. Love wasn’t enough to compensate for our mistakes. Maybe if I’d been better at love things would’ve gone better
for us.”

“No, you had too many people in your ear, and none of us were giving you good advice,” Ginny replied.

Hermione swallowed.

“When you married Severus I thought you’d gone mad. After seeing how you’re around him though I’m beginning to realize that Severus makes you much happier than Ron ever could.”

“Exactly!” Hermione exclaimed. “We are happy together because we are great friends and will never be anything more.”

“Are you sure that’s the only reason you two are happy?”

“Yes,” Hermione answered. “Look, I’ve thought long and hard about my marriage and maybe I’m just not meant to love. Perhaps there’s some deficiency in me that causes me to give too much of myself to others.”

“Giving of yourself isn’t a deficiency.”

“No, but giving too much of yourself is. I like the independence I have now. I love the idea of not handing over all of myself to a man. If I loved Severus, I'd exist only to make him happy. I'd sacrifice everything for him as I did with Ron, and then it would break my heart… again… when I discovered he didn't love me the way I loved him."

"Have you ever considered that he may have the same insecurities? We saw what happened with Lily in the pensieve.""

"No, because Severus doesn't love me, and he never will. I'm fine with that because I don't want to love him."

"You don’t want to love him?"

"No."

"But could you love him?"

"No," Hermione answered, her voice growing louder with each word. “We are not in love and never will be in love. I will never love Severus Snape and,” her voice grew quiet, “Severus Snape will never love me.”


***

Severus stirred the potion, his brow furrowed in concentration. If only he’d picked a more complex potion to brew; then his thoughts wouldn’t wander back to his spouse. It was a mistake to leave her alone. She needed to drink at least four more cups of water before evening, and someone needed to make sure she did so. The elves were of no help because she would just order them to leave her alone, or worse, she’d try to pay them extra. The elves may respect Severus, but most of them still feared Hermione and her desire to liberate them. They would be of no use.

Severus shook his head. His desire to see his wife had nothing to do with making sure she was following sound medical advice. She was grieving, and it tore at his very soul. Whether she needed a
shoulder to cry on, a listening ear, or space to process Harry's death, he hoped he could provide what she needed.

Severus heard the potion simmer. He stopped stirring and began the next phase of the brewing, pondering how and when he'd grown so fond of the witch upstairs.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry about the mistake last chapter. I honestly have no idea why it repeated itself. All I know is my computer was glitchy and I had horrible heat exhaustion yesterday. I think I've fixed it, but if not I'm really sorry.

Also updating may be iffy for the next few days. I'm traveling again and I probably won't be around internet for the most part. Things should get more consistent by Thursday, but again I can't make any promises.

If it makes anyone feel better, I truly am sorry for leaving you with Hermione's declaration of non-love.

Thank you again for sticking with me and for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
Severus crept into the dining room. Hermione sat at the table with her feet propped up on the chair across from her. As expected, her face was obscured by a book.

"Hermione?"

She startled.

“I did not mean to alarm you,” Severus began.

“No, you’re fine, Severus.” Hermione set the book on the table. "How are the potions coming along?"

"Very well." Severus approached the book and read the title. “You’re still reading Sense and Sensibility?”

She nodded. “I only have about thirty pages to go.”

“I see,” Severus drawled. “I take it you still enjoy the book.”

Hermione grinned. “It’s as great as I remember it. I almost want to go to my parents’ house and rewatch the nineteen ninety-five movie for comparison.”

Severus fought back a scowl. The last thing he needed was to hear his wife gush over all the actors, especially if the conversation turned to their physical attributes.

"If you came up here for dinner I'm afraid you'll have to wait. The elves said dinner won't be ready for another half hour,” Hermione continued.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "You let them cook for you?"

"Only because my feet hurt and I'm trying to work on my eulogy," She grumbled.

His lips curled up. “And here I thought the apocalypse was imminent.”

Hermione’s frown deepened. “If you were pregnant and you had to deal with aching feet you wouldn’t be smiling half as widely as you are now.”

Severus’ grin only grew. “A lifetime of work in elf liberation is undone by six months of pregnancy. Rose hasn’t been born yet and she is already quite the troublemaker.”

She growled, “One more wisecrack and you'll be sleeping in your potions' lab for the foreseeable future.”

The playfulness evaporated from Severus’ expression. While the spark in Hermione’s eyes would lead him to believe she was teasing, the tone of her voice warned him not to push his luck. “In all seriousness, I have a potion that can reduce oedema if you need it.”

"No, I shouldn’t need it," Hermione answered. "I think my feet are tired from walking on these hard floors. I don’t believe they’re swollen, at least not yet.”
"I have a salve which can ease foot pain," Severus offered. "I can rub it on your feet after dinner if you would like."

Hermione shook. "Oh a foot massage sounds divine." Then her face fell. "Unfortunately we don’t have time. You need to brew your potions and I need to finish this speech."

"Let me know if you change your mind," Severus replied. "In the meantime, how is your eulogy progressing?"

Hermione sighed. "Terrible."

"Oh?"

"Every time I think I’m almost done with the eulogy, I reread it and it’s horrendous. I keep getting hung up on the conclusion. My conclusion needs to be powerful, thought-provoking, but all the drafts come up short. I am beyond frustrated. That’s why I was reading Sense and Sensibility, I couldn’t think straight anymore."

"I’m sure you will find inspiration soon enough."

"I know I have a week," Hermione buried her face into her hands. "But I want to memorize the speech. Harry deserves better than to have me read from a bloody parchment."

"Harry would appreciate anything you can say about him," Severus answered as he sat down beside her.

"I know, but he deserves the best." Hermione leaned against her husband. "After the life he lived he and the friendship we shared he deserves the best eulogy I can give."

Severus pulled her closer. She gave him a soft smile. As he reveled in the sensation of her body pressed against him, his eyes fell on an empty blue cup.

"How many cups of water did you drink today?"

"I’ve had more than enough."

"The doctor says you need fluids," Severus reminded her. "How many cups have you had?"

"I’ve had three cups since Ginny left around two this afternoon," Hermione answered. "Is that enough for you?"

"Yes," Severus replied. "I was unaware that Ginevra was here though."

"She came around noon or so," Hermione answered. "She felt bad for not visiting me in the hospital, so she came to see me now."

"I’d imagine she’s under an enormous amount of stress," Severus mused.

"That’s putting it mildly," Hermione noted.

Severus exhaled. "I fear things will only become worse for Ginevra and Draco, considering the public demand for an arrest."

Hermione gulped. "You don’t think…"

"I don’t know," Severus replied. "Still I vividly remember the outcry for arrests after each of the
Wizarding Wars. Everyone was looking for a scapegoat, just as they are now.”

Hermione whispered, “It all feels like a dream. Sometimes I think Harry is going to step through the floo and tell us his disappearance is all part of an undercover sting operation. He’ll swear us to secrecy, and then he’ll be off. This isn’t a sting operation. He’s never coming back.”

Severus exhaled. "I wish he could return."

"I know he'll never be with us again," Hermione replied as tears flooded her eyes. "But it doesn't stop me from dreaming."

Hermione leaned against Severus' chest and sobbed. At a loss to comfort her, he settled for rubbing small circles on her back.

"Thank you," she choked. "I miss Harry so much."

Severus remained silent as he continued his massage.

“Harry is finally happy though. He’s finally completely happy,” Hermione sat up until she was eyes level with Severus. She brushed away a tear, but her face remained splotchy. "Harry is in a better place. He's with his mom, his dad, Dumbledore, Sirius, and Lupin. He's happier now. That's the one comfort I have; he's with the family he’s always deserved.”

Severus nodded.

"Harry told me what he experienced when he died during the battle. He talked about being at peace, about seeing Dumbledore. If there wasn't a war, if he didn’t have to defeat Voldemort, he told me he may not have returned to life."

Fresh tears came to Hermione’s eyes. She burrowed her head back into his chest and wept. After a few more moments Hermione’s breathing steadied. She returned her gaze to Severus.

“She’s kicking," Hermione whispered. "At least Harry got to feel Rose kick."

“I'm sure feeling Rose kick gave him great joy," Severus answered.

"He would've loved her," Hermione replied. "He would've spoiled her rotten."

"He would've taught her to love Quidditch," Severus muttered with a scowl.

Hermione began to giggle, which soon turned into a full belly laugh. "He would’ve taught her everything he knew about Quidditch, and she would’ve driven us crazy trying to master that ridiculous sport!"

"Perhaps she would've hated it as much as we do," Severus replied. “After all neither of us particularly enjoys riding on a broom."

She stopped laughing. "Harry would’ve taught Rose to love flying on a broom. He would’ve taught her how to fly properly. After all, it isn't like her parents can teach her any broom tricks. You haven't ridden on a broom in years and I'm afraid of flight.”

“Afraid?” Severus asked.

Hermione swallowed. “Everyone thinks I hate flying because you can't learn about it in a book. My queasiness about flying had nothing to do with that. I've always been afraid of flight."
"Why?"

Hermione took a shaky breath. "It's stupid, but then again many phobias are." She cleared her throat. "When I was six, I was on a swing set at a local park. It was a rickety old thing. Looking back I'm surprised my parents allowed me on it. Anyway, somehow the chain broke while I was in midair. I remember flying before hitting the ground. I scratched up my face pretty well, and the impact knocked a couple of my teeth out. I've been afraid of flying ever since. I do and I can fly, but it terrifies me," Hermione replied.

He kissed her on the forehead. "You were brave to even get up on a broom."

"Thanks," Hermione whispered before her eyes glowed in recognition. "I don't think I ever told anyone other than my parents that story. I was always afraid of Harry and Ron considering me a baby, and I didn't think anyone else needed to know.”

"You are not a baby," Severus answered. “You have a reasonable fear. There’s no need to be ashamed of it.”

Hermione grinned. “When you want to be, you can be quite sweet sometimes. I’m glad we’re friends.”

"That's something I don't hear often," Severus replied, not sure he'd ever heard that statement in reference to himself at all.

"I mean it," she answered. "You listen, you comfort me when I need it, and you don't push me to do anything that makes me uncomfortable. I like having you as a spouse."

"You haven't been entirely unpleasant as a spouse either," Severus replied. "I appreciate living with someone who does not judge me.”

"You're a hero Severus, not the monster you think yourself to be. You're quite caring, even if you do not often show it."

"Nor do I plan to show that side of me to anyone other than you and Rose.”

"Why?"

"I don't show my, how would you say, softer side, to those I don't consider worthy of it. I'd much prefer to be alone than to be injured and manipulated again," Severus replied.

"I can relate," Hermione replied.

"I'm sure you can," Severus answered as he began to run his fingers through her hair.

Hermione leaned closer to him, waiting for him to complete the kiss she offered. He leaned into her until they melted into one.

Chapter End Notes

Miss me? So sorry I was gone for so long. I'm back in town for awhile, so updates should be much more regular.
Thank you again for all the support, especially amidst the chaos! It is all much appreciated.
The director scanned the resume before him. After underlining a few lines he called, "Myrtle, will you please send in the next applicant?"

The secretary locked eyes with woman seated on the splintered chair. "Miss Farrah Jackson."

"Yes?"

"Mr. Smith will see you now."

"Thank you."

Miss Jackson leapt up and strolled to the office. While her smile was disarmingly sweet, there was a gritty focus in her eyes the secretary did not see often. Then again, she rarely saw blond bombshells applying to be guards in Azkaban.

Farrah stepped into Mr. Smith’s office and extended her hand, "Hello, Mr. Smith. Thank you for reviewing my application and for allowing me this interview."

Mr. Smith rose and shook her hand. "The pleasure is all mine." Upon releasing Ms. Jackson's hand, Mr. Smith gestured to the chair across from him. "Please sit down."

She took a seat.

Mr. Smith pulled out his wand and whispered a spell. The door slammed behind them. Ms. Jackson did not react. Mr. Smith smiled.

Mr. Smith sized her up. Unlike most of the applicants who attempted to be as imposing as possible, Ms. Jackson crossed her ankles when sitting, her hands folded on her lap. Still there was a hardness in her eyes that offset her ladylike demeanor. She would have no problem getting a role in one of those muggle spy movies, though it was difficult to determine if this would work in her favor or not. "Well, thank you for your interest in the position, Ms. Jackson."

"Please, call me Farrah," she replied.

"Yes, Farrah," Mr. Smith cleared his throat. "Your resume is quite impressive, as is your training. It's not every day someone comes to us from the London School of Security."

"I always fancied working at Azkaban because it would combine my two greatest loves; being near the ocean and protecting people from criminals," Farrah began. "I know I won’t be able to see much of the ocean, but just feeling the gales and hearing the waves during my breaks will be so relaxing."

"I see," Mr. Smith glanced down at the resume. "It says here that you were born in Scotland and received your education from Hogwarts."

Farrah nodded.

"Could you elaborate a little bit on your time in Scotland?"

"I was born and raised in Dundee along the coast of the North Sea. That is where I fell in love with
the ocean. I attended Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, where I was sorted into Ravenclaw. I excelled in my studies but I also developed a deep desire to help others. During my final year Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban. That event, along with a determination to ensure public safety, inspired me to go into security.”

Mr. Smith hummed. Farrah stopped, but he gestured for her to keep going.

“I attended the London School of Security, where I received top marks,” Farrah continued. “After graduation I went on to work at Nurmengard where I stayed there for five years until my father became ill. I returned home to help my mother nurse him back to health. Now that he has recovered, I am back in the market for a job. When I heard about the opening for a new guard at Azkaban, I decided to apply.”

"Well that certainly is an interesting story," he answered. "Your supervisor at Nurmengard gave you a glowing recommendation, which is always encouraging. What are your career goals here?"

"I want to acquire the skills necessary to become one of the chief guards or perhaps a supervisor," she replied.

"Where do you see yourself in five years?"

"Still here, working to protect those who cannot defend themselves from dangerous criminals."

Mr. Smith nodded. "I see." He stood up. "Would you mind coming with me for a second?"

She rose and followed him to the doorway.

He put his hand on the doorknob. “Part of our interview process involves seeing how well you interact with the prisoners. A quick tour of the facilities should be sufficient to determine your skill set in this area.”

“I understand,” she raised her chin.

He led her out of the office through a door and down a hallway. At the end of the corridor, he flicked his wrist a few times. The door creaked open.

Farrah was assaulted with the screams and jeers of those on the other side of the bars. Mr. Smith glanced back at her. Her expression was neutral. In silence, they walked beside the cells until they reached one with a greasy-haired man muttering something about a snake.

"Farrah, this is a Death Eater, Augustus Rookwood." he shouted over the din. “He was one of Voldemort’s first and most loyal followers.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet him,” Farrah muttered.

The Death Eater glared at her. "Disgusting sell outs. All of you will see! Voldemort will rise again. All of you will suffer his wrath when he comes again!"

"How is he going to return?" Farrah asked in the sweetest most patronizing voice she could muster. "Did Potter miss one of his horcruxes?"

Rookwood’s frown deepened.

“I think it’s safe to say Voldemort is in limbo crying over his inability to defeat a baby.”

"You little bitch!” he hissed.
"Back off!" she shouted.

"Merlin’s balls!"

A food cart crashed onto the floor. The prisoners screamed louder as they stuck their hands through the metal bars, desperate to grab a morsel.

"Get back!" Mr. Smith demanded. "Get your arms back in those cells right now!"

"We’ll eat you alive you little bitch," Augustus warned. "You’ll see! When Voldemort returns you and your guard friends will wish we’d killed you!"

Farrah let out a growl and bared her fangs.

Rookwood retreated into his cell.

"Yes, you’ll make a fine employee," Mr. Smith noted, turning back just in time to see the prisoner reduced to a fetal position mumbling about pureblood supremacy.

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"Severus?"

"Yes?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "How would you describe your relationship with Harry?"

Severus stared into his cup of tea. His heart slowed until he sighed. "Why would you ask me about Potter?"

"I’m still working on his eulogy, but I think I’ve made a breakthrough," Hermione began.

Severus looked at her.

"Right before I fell asleep last night I thought up an interesting angle. I was thinking of transitioning from what he has done to how other people saw him to my view of him as one of my closest friends. In order to do that though I need someone else’s opinion of him. Since you’re the closest person to me I figured I’d ask you first." Hermione took a sip of water.

Severus shifted in his chair. "I hardly consider myself an appropriate person to ask."

"I think you’re the perfect person to ask," Hermione answered. "Your feelings towards Harry have always been deep and complicated. Yet right before he died you two did have a conversation. After that conversation Harry seemed at peace, like he was finally ready to let Ginny go. Talking with you seemed to help him sort out his emotions. In order to have such a conversation you must have cared for him, at least a little."

Severus shook his head. "I’m not entirely sure you want the truth about my feelings toward Potter."

"We’re friends," Hermione answered.

Severus took a sip of tea as he examined a scratch on the table.

Hermione took his hand. "No matter what you say I promise not to think any differently of you."

Severus gazed into her eyes. He’d already heard the "I won’t think less of you if you express how
you feel” speech several times before. Every time it had been a lie. Despite his past experiences though, he believed Hermione. If his faith in her was unjustified then it might be best to know now rather than later...

"For me, Potter was little more than an unwelcome duty until the end of the war. He was a reminder of everything I believed I should have had, but did not. After the war was over I didn’t think much of him until our unanticipated marriage. Then I suppose," Severus swallowed, "I saw him as someone to be tolerated because he was one of your friends. When we last spoke, he was struggling to make his peace with Ginevra's pregnancy. I knew what that struggle was like. He, he wasn't so different than I was after all."

"He became human for you," Hermione muttered.

"One could make that claim," Severus replied. "Yes, that is a fair way of phrasing it. He wasn't an obligation anymore. He was a person."

"He was a person," Hermione muttered before exclaiming, "He was a person!"

"He wasn't a troll," Severus quipped.

"Yes, but the Wizarding world has glorified, almost deified him. At the end of the day, we are burying a man… a very good man, but nonetheless a man."

"Are you saying we should ignore his contributions to the war and remember that a man has died?"

"Yes!" Hermione answered. "Well, maybe not completely ignore everything he’s done, but we shouldn’t reduce Harry to a series of accomplishments. Harry never sought honors and accolades; he just wanted to be a regular person. Maybe he could not be one in life, but he can be one in death."

"Yes, I suppose he could."

"Oh thank you Severus! You’ve helped me more than you could possibly know!"

She rushed over and embraced him. Then she darted away, leaving him alone with his tea cup. Severus took a deep breath as he stood and prepared for another round of brewing. As he descended into his lab he smirked in satisfaction, pleased to have been able to bring a smile to Hermione's lips, even if he had no idea how he’d managed to do so.

Chapter End Notes

It's a bit embarrassing, but I just noticed that I have over 300 kudos! Thank you all so much! I deeply appreciate the encouragement as well as any and all support you give!
Chapter 63

Hermione smoothed the wrinkles from her black dress. Groaning, she cast a couple more spells until the dress draped over her abdomen without any wrinkles. She took a deep breath as she examined herself in the mirror. Before she could find another imperfection a small flutter drew her hands to her stomach. "Hello little Rose. Are you awake?"

Her answer came in the form of a lazy stretch. A tear trickled down Hermione’s cheek. "I love you Rose. Even on a day like today you can bring me joy."

Once more she tugged at the side seams until her dress hung straight. Then she pulled out her wand. Although her hand was shaking, she managed to cast a glamour spell. Her puffy eyes and the wrinkles underneath them vanished. She sighed, and put her wand away. With a gulp she stepped out of the bathroom and steeled herself for what would be one of the most difficult days of her life.

The day Harry Potter was to be laid to rest.

Severus was sitting on their bed. He was too engrossed in a speck of dust on the floor to respond to her footsteps. As was his custom, Severus wore black. Still the robes he wore today were darker than usual. They must be new. Despite his mixed feeling towards Harry, Severus was making an effort to honor him. The thought brought a small grin to Hermione's face.

"Are you ready?" She asked.

He glanced at her. “I am ready to depart when you are.”

She exhaled. "I think I'm ready to go, although how one can ever truly be ready to bury one's best friend is beyond me." She dabbed at her eyes in an effort to keep unshed tears at bay.

Severus nodded as he rose.

"Thank you for agreeing to come with me,” Hermione continued. “I know how complicated your relationship with Harry was, but it does give me some comfort to know that you’ll be by my side during,” Hermione swallowed. “During Harry’s funeral.”

"Despite appearances, I did care for Harry,” Severus whispered.

"I know," Hermione responded as she stepped into Severus' arms.

Severus kissed her on the forehead. She buried her face into his chest and sobbed. He stroked her hair as she allowed her emotions to spill out. After a few moments she looked up at him. “Did, did I ruin my glamour spells?"

Severus shook his head. “You look as beautiful as ever.”


“No one would fault you for appearing to have spent all night crying,” Severus answered.

“No, I suppose not.” Hermione sniffed. "We, we should probably leave soon."
"Yes, we should," Severus answered.

Together they walked outside and linked arms to apparate to the graveyard. Upon their arrival they made their way to a white canopy adorned with various colored lilies. Underneath the canopy were hundreds of chairs, many of which had already been filled. Kingsley had mentioned in an owl that there would be a seat in the front row reserved for Hermione, if only she could find it...

The right side of the front row was dominated by red hair. One of the red heads glanced back at her. His eyes were as hard and unwelcoming as a troll. Hermione gulped and clutched Severus’ hand.

“Let’s sit further back,” he whispered.

Hermione shook her head. “I want to be near Harry.” Her lips quivered at the sight of the tombstone. “I need to sit in the front.”

Severus led her closer to the grave.

"Hermione," Hagrid called in a soft voice. "I saved yeh a seat."

“Thank you,” she choked.

Hermione settled herself as best she could on the hard wooden chair. She moaned. Straight chairs were much less pleasant now that her stomach had expanded.

“Are you okay?” Hagrid asked.

“I’ll be fine,” Hermione replied.

“The nerve of those Snapes,” Molly whispered in a not-so-hushed tone. “They know how upsetting today is for us, yet they insist on throwing themselves and their child in our faces.”

Hermione tensed.

“Molly, not now,” Arthur grunted.

“Don’t look at me like that. I’m only looking out for Ronald’s well-being,” Molly argued. "Ron is beside himself with grief over losing his best friend, yet the Snapes parade around as if they haven’t done a thing to him."

"I know you are upset mother," Percy growled. "But don't create a scene, not now."

“No, Mum has a point,” George cut in before facing Ron. “It must kill you to see Hermione with that enormous bun in her oven.”

"Not really," Ron replied loud enough for everyone in the first three rows to hear. “It’s better for Hermione to be with Snape than with me. I don’t want to raise a baby that isn’t mine, especially if it’s the daughter of a greasy git.”

Hermione darted a glance at Severus, whose eyes had turned considerably darker. She turned away from the Weasleys, but could still hear Ron speaking.

“Besides, my mansion is dirty enough without a screeching baby. My mansion may be messy, but at least it isn’t covered in disgusting, poop filled nappies.”

"I suppose even you are cleaner than a baby," Charlie admitted. "Though just barely."
"That's enough out of all of you," Bill snapped. "For the love of Merlin have an ounce of decorum."

Hermione leaned against Severus’s shoulder. He rubbed her hand with his thumb, hoping the small gesture would be enough for her. His answer came in the form of her soft smile.

A ceremonial trumpet sounded from the rear.

All eyes turned to the source of the fanfare except for Hermione's, which sought and found a red head in the back row. She relaxed.

Ginny had come to say goodbye to Harry.

A solemn group of pall bearers approached, Harry's casket levitated between their ranks. All but one were co-workers of Harry's, the exception being Neville Longbottom. They accompanied the casket to the front on the crowd and lowered it beside two older graves. Hermione trembled as she read "James Potter" and "Lily Potter" on their markers.

Kingsley Shacklebolt cast a sonorus spell and stepped in front of the casket. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great sorrow to welcome you to the funeral of Harry James Potter, the boy who lived."

A few people wept at the name. Hermione focused on her breathing and the sensation of Rose kicking against her abdomen. The last thing she wanted to do was collapse in a fit of emotion while giving Harry’s eulogy.

Kingsley made a few brief remarks, none of which Hermione remembered two minutes later. After his speech he signaled for Ron to come forward.

Hermione bowed her head. Boiling tears came to her eyes as she listened to Ron discuss how important Harry was to him.

How dare Ronald Weasley talk about how much he loved Harry when he was incapable of claiming his own daughter? What made Ron think Harry would want to hear anything the red head wanted to say? Harry had wanted nothing more than to know his parents, yet Ron had implied his own child was disgusting. Harry had been locked in a closet for years, yet Ron was willing to allow his child forage for food on the streets. No, Harry would've hated Ron for what he'd said about Rose. Maybe he already hated Ron before he died. Ron had no business giving a eulogy for Harry after denying Rose, especially in front of Lily and James’ graves.

Hermione bit her tongue and took a deep breath. You’re taking your anger out on Ron. You need a target, and he’s the perfect one. While you have reason to be emotional, there's no point in being this angry. Ron isn't worth it. Relax and focus on honoring Harry.

Severus rubbed her forearm. Hermione sighed and whispered, “Thank you.”

The crowd applauded. Hermione raised her head as Ron returned to his chair.

Kingsley motioned for her to come forward. Hermione gulped, strolled to the front of the assembly, and faced Harry’s mourners. "Today," Hermione began. She cleared her throat as she scanned the crowd. Her eyes fell upon Severus, whose eyes were softer than usual. His expression gave her permission to continue. "Today is a day none of us thought we would ever have to endure. No one could’ve imagined Harry Potter dying so young. Harry Potter was supposed be here for us, to help and save us for many more years to come. The thought of burying him was unimaginable, yet here we are before his grave."

Even Molly’s eyes watered at Hermione’s opening statement.
“Harry Potter and I met in our first year at Hogwarts. We were both sorted into Gryffindor, but that did not ensure our friendship. I was too busy overcompensating for my blood status to be much of a friend to anyone, at least at first. Then Harry saved me from a troll. It’s a story everyone is all too aware of, and to be quite blunt the details of that incident are not important. What is important is that Harry and I began a friendship that would become more powerful than either of us could have foreseen."

Hermione’s voice was stronger now. "Harry’s life is hard to summarize because he accomplished so much. I could tell you about his acts of bravery during the Triwizard Tournament or about his persistence in hunting down the Horcruxes and the Hallows. I could regale you with some of his best escapades as an auror, but that isn't how Harry would want to be remembered. Harry Potter never sought to be the Boy-Who-Lived or even the Hero-of-the-Wizarding-World. He just wanted to be a good man, and more importantly, a good friend."

Ginny brushed a tear from her cheek. Severus’ eye twitched.

"Harry was unfailingly loyal and an excellent listener. I could tell him anything without fear of being judged. He wasn't afraid to offer advice, but he was prudent enough never to do so unless asked."

Neville wiped his face.

“Harry never wanted to be a hero; he just wanted to be loved. Perhaps that's why he was such a loyal friend...he understood that in order to receive love, one must give love. Harry loved his friends, even when they were unlovable. He had a gift for reconciling friends when they argued because he knew the value of friendship. He had a gift for embracing those shunned by the world because he knew what it was to be an outcast. He had compassion for those less fortunate because he knew what hardship was. This ability to love is what he would want us to remember. That is his greatest legacy."

Severus' eyes misted.

Hermione concluded, “The world will not be the same without Harry. It is already a much emptier place, a much darker place. We have suffered a tremendous loss."

She looked back at Harry's casket. She took one last breath. ”I love you, Harry Potter. I always will.” Her voice was softer. “Thank you for being my friend.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about not uploading over the weekend. I wanted this chapter to be as good as it could be, and it proved more time consuming then I realized. The fact that the internet kept going out wasn't helping either. Still I hope I did Harry's funeral justice.

Thank you for all the support!
Kingsley lifted his wand and uttered an incantation. At his command, the wand turned light blue. With one smooth motion, Harry's casket rose into the air and hovered above its final resting place. Muffled wails and sobs flowed through the seated crowd like a wave. Hermione bit her lower lip and pressed a tissue to her eyes. Severus bowed his head.

The coffin sank into the ground. Hermione's body was racked with sobs. A teardrop fell on Severus' leg. He reached over to lay a reassuring hand on Hermione's knee. Hermione glanced over and squeaked, “Thank you.”

"Rest in peace, Harry Potter," Kingsley whispered as his wand guided the casket into the underground vault.

With a light thud, the coffin settled into place.

Kingsley extinguished his wand and lowered his head. The crowd's grief swelled into shrieks, cries, and moans. After five minutes Kingsley held up a hand. One by one the mourners silenced themselves.

Kingsley announced in a soft but firm voice, "You are all invited to attend a reception at Universal Park, just down the road. Hagrid will lead the way." He swallowed, "Thank you again for joining us at this solemn event. I promise that the Ministry will do everything in its power to bring Harry's murderer to justice. We will work diligently to make sure a tragedy such as this does not occur again."

A few people applauded, but most just stared into space, still shell-shocked from the events of the previous week. Kingsley trudged down the aisle and made his way to the reception. A few Ministry workers followed him, but no one else so much as twitched a muscle.

With a sigh, Hagrid stood up. “There’s nothin’ left here.”

The giant beckoned the crowd to follow. A few people muttered and took their leave. Then Hagrid strolled to the back of the crowd and once more gestured for them to follow. “The reception is at Universal Park, not here.”

The remaining guests stood and followed Hagrid down the path. Severus took a few steps before realizing that Hermione was still rooted to a spot in front of Harry's casket. She did not respond to him putting a hand on her shoulder.

"Hermione?"

She stared at the casket. “Go on ahead to the reception, or go home. I’ll join you later. Right now, I want to be with Harry until the end.”

"When is the end?"

"When the final clod of dirt is laid.”

Severus took a deep breath. "No, Hermione. He wouldn’t want you to be with him during his
"Yes, he would," she argued.

"No love, he would not."

"I can’t abandon him, Severus. He needs me to be with him until the end."

"You aren’t abandoning him by continuing on with your life."

"He needs me to be there, and I need closure."

"Watching them bury him isn't going to bring closure."

"Yes, it will" Hermione answered as men with shovels marched down the aisle with focus in their eyes. "I'll be with Harry until the very end. That’s what friends do. They never abandon each other!"

Severus choked. "You are not forsaking Harry by walking away. You’re respecting his wishes."

"Wishes?" Hermione asked. "How could he wish to be alone?"

"He’d want you to have good memories of him. Harry would want you to remember him as floating towards a peaceful slumber, not being covered under a mound of dirt."

"You are probably correct," Hermione choked. Once more she turned her attention to the hole in the ground. "Goodbye Harry. I will never forget you."

Severus swallowed. "Goodbye Mr. Potter. You were greatly loved, and you will be greatly missed."

Hermione reached out to Severus. He took her hand. After one last look at the grave site they strolled toward the reception.

"I'm surprised you had the audacity to show your face!" Molly raged. "After the way you betrayed Harry by running off with Draco, I-I’m surprised you could even look Harry in the eyes."

Hermione shuddered as they drew closer to the scene.

"I needed to tell Harry goodbye. In spite of our breakup Harry was still my friend," Ginevra answered.

"Sure he was your friend! That's why you shattered his heart!" Molly yelled.

"Mother," Percy began. "Perhaps we should discuss Ginny's love life elsewhere, preferably not at a public Ministry function."

"I was going to table this conversation until I saw your sister here speaking with Hagrid as if she deserved to be counted among Harry’s friends." Molly turned to her daughter. "How can you sleep at night knowing that Harry died miserable and alone because of your actions?"

Percy blushed. Molly’s shouts were attracting more than a few onlookers.

"I didn't mean to hurt Harry," Ginevra fought back. "We weren't good for each other. I tried to tell him that, but he wouldn’t listen. Marrying him would only have made us both miserable!"

"It couldn’t have taken you anymore miserable than you’ve made this family," Molly ranted.
"What have I done to you?" Ginny yelled.

"You married that Malfoy murderer, and refused to see your sham of a marriage for what it is!" Molly screeched.

Now all the mourners were watching the confrontation.

“Well, if I'm in a sham of a marriage then I wouldn't want to know what a real one feels like,” Ginevra yelled. "I feel very loved and cared for. I am more than happy with my husband and our life together."

"Happy? Loving? You don't know the meaning of those words."

"Then enlighten me. What exactly does a loving and happy marriage look like?"

“You would know exactly what a real, happy, loving marriage looked like if you’d listened to me and married Harry! Since you didn't listen to me you're settling for scraps.”

"I'm truly happy, Mother! Why can't you accept that?"

"Because you can't possibly be happy with Draco Malfoy!" Molly yelled.

A few onlookers snickered. Ginny threw up her hands. "You know what? Talking with you isn't going to accomplish anything. It was clearly a mistake to try and have any kind of rational discourse with any of you. I'm going home!"

"So you're going to solve your problems by running away from them?" Molly demanded.

Ginny took a few deep breaths and counted to ten on her fingers. In a calm voice she answered. “I’m not running away from my problems. I’m removing myself from this situation because this stress isn't good for my baby.”

The Weasley brothers gasped. "You…you're?" Molly asked.

"That's right, I'm pregnant," Ginny announced before pointing to Ron, "And unlike Ronald here, I'm going to be a responsible adult and take care of my child."

"Ron has no child," Molly hissed.

"You're right, he doesn't anymore,” Ginevra replied before apparating away with a POP!

Molly glared at Hermione, who wilted under the weight of her disapproval. "When are you going to stop putting the idea in Ginny's head that your bastard is Ron’s?"

Ron slipped away.

"I have already declared her to be Severus’ child. He, he’s her true father,” Hermione croaked.

“It’s nice to hear you finally admit that your child is a Snape, not a Weasley,” Molly replied. “Now if you can keep your bastard child…”

"Her name is Rose," Severus interrupted.

All eyes focused on him.

His voice was lower. "My daughter's name is Rose.”
“Do you want an award for naming your child?” Molly asked.

“No,” Severus answered. “But you will refer to my daughter as Rose for the rest of your life. Is that understood?”

“Fine,” Molly huffed. “Keep Rose out of our faces.”

Hermione excused herself with a squeeze to her husband’s hand. “I need to step away for a moment, Severus.”

He glanced at her. His eyes softened. “Very well then.”

Hermione forced herself to smile before she fled.

Severus turned to his wife's attacker. His eyes became as hard as death and his scowl turned murderous. His voice was cold as steel. “Molly.”

Molly jutted her chin in a weak display of defiance.

Severus continued. “You will never again speak to my wife in that disrespectful tone, is that understood?”

Molly shuddered at the venom in his voice.

Severus took a step closer, "You will speak to and about my daughter with respect. Is that understood?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"If I find that you have hurt either of them in any way with your words or with your actions,” he crescendoed before adding in a whisper, "Then you'd better pray that I don't find you."

"I understand," she breathed.

"Good," he answered before stalking off, robes billowing behind him.

Hermione huddled beside an oak tree and gave way to her tears. Through bleary eyes she saw a lanky red-headed figure pass her by. "R-ron?"

He stopped.

"Ron?"

He spun to face her. "Yes, 'Mione?"

"Why?" she sobbed.

Ron exhaled. "I don't know why Harry died, but I miss him."

"No you git!" she cried. "Why do you continue to deny that Rose is yours? How could you turn your back on your biological daughter? It's one thing to abandon me. I understand, I wasn’t good enough for you. But to abandon your own flesh and blood…h-how could you forsake your own biological child?”
Ron studied a spot on the ground, buying time to formulate a response.

“Answer me damnit!” Hermione demanded. “How could you walk out of Rose’s life and deny having created her? How could you all but say that my beautiful daughter is nothing but a mistake?”

He pulled his head back up. "Hermione, I may as well be honest with you. I never wanted to marry and have a family with you."

"What?" she gasped.

He shrugged. "I never wanted to marry you. You were pretty great in bed, but you could never string together two sentences anyone could understand. I wanted to party at bars, but all you wanted to do was read. Bloody hell you could be so boring."

"I-I tried to be interesting, I really did," Hermione squeaked.

"Look ‘Mione, we would have been miserable together."

"I thought you were happy."

"No, I wasn’t because you kept demanding that I commit to you. Honestly I'm surprised we lasted five years. I could never see myself spending the rest of my life with you."

Hermione blinked.

"I never wanted to marry you. Hell Hermione, I don't want to be married to anyone! I love the bachelor life. I love living alone and bedding anyone I want any time I want."

"Did you…did you sleep with other women while you were with me?” Hermione asked.

Ron’s silence spoke volumes.

"How many?" Hermione growled.

Ron swallowed.

"How many women did you shag while we were together?” Hermione demanded.

"Does it matter now?" Ron asked.

She shook her head in concession. “No, it doesn’t change a thing.”

"Anyway," he answered. "I don't want to be a father, either. I've never wanted to be a father. I can't stand the sound of babies crying, the smell of dirty nappies, or the sleep deprivation that comes with an infant in the house. Can you really imagine me holding one of those things while it drools all over me? Talk about a bloody headache!"

"I used to image you holding our child," Hermione whispered.

“It was never going to happen. I do not want to be a father, and I will never change my mind. You can raise that thing, but I won’t.”

“I, I see."

Ron exhaled. "I'm really sorry ‘Mione. Looking back I should’ve told you all of this sooner.”
“I wish I’d known all of this before you impregnated me,” Hermione admitted. "Maybe then I could've provided Rose with a real father, not some arse I was stupid enough to sell my soul to."

“Look on the bright side; Severus will raise this baby! He has his heir, and I have my freedom,” Ron replied.

“Where do I fit into this equation?” Hermione asked.

“Well, uh, you have a mansion. That’s pretty cool!” Ron replied.

She snarled at him. "If Severus hadn't stepped in and agreed to raise Rose I would've had nothing."

"Yes, but he did step in, so it all worked out."

“If Severus hadn’t stepped in Rose could be in the muggle world or on the streets with me!” Hermione shouted.

Ron swallowed. “I am sorry, but it all worked out so everything is okay.”

"Ron!"

“Mum’s calling me.”

Hermione’s lips quivered

“Goodbye ‘Mione. Uh, yeah, uh see you later."

Ron darted away before she could utter another word.

Hermione curled into a ball, crying until she could no longer breathe.

"Hermione?"

She looked up at her husband. There was neither pity nor judgment, only deep concern in his eyes.

“What is wrong?” Severus asked.

"I want to go home!” she cried. “I just...I just want to go home!”

Severus scooped Hermione into his arms and held her close. With a quick turn and a whispered reassurance they apparated home.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! I appreciate all of it!
Hermione's sobbing grew softer as Severus carried her into their bedroom. She clung to his robes as he laid her on the bed, an unspoken plea for him to stay. Severus laid down beside her and massaged her back.

Hermione gazed up at him. Between gasps she asked, "What's wrong with me Severus?"

"Not a thing," Severus replied, stroking her curls.

"No," Hermione wiped her face. "There is something wrong with me. You have a defective wife."

"No, I don't," he whispered.

"Yes you do. I can't do anything right. I tried to make Ron happy, I tried to be the fiancee he wanted, but I was a stupid dunderhead. I can't even judge people properly. I should've known that Ron would leave me. I should've known that he would never love me. I should've known, but I was too stupid to figure it out."

She reburied herself in Severus' robes. He stroked her hair until she could compose herself.

"Ron never intended to marry me. He never even wanted to marry me."

Severus shook his head.

"How could I have been so stupid to think he actually cared about me?" Hermione asked. "How could I have been so wrong?"

Severus exhaled. "Sometimes we see only what we want to see. It's a common mistake to make."

"I was so wrong about Ron," Hermione whispered.

"Sometimes we love ideas, not people," Severus replied.

Hermione gave him a puzzled look, which he took as permission to continue. "I loved the idea of Lily, not Lily herself. In her I saw the love I'd never had as a boy, I saw the family I'd always wanted, and I saw the acceptance I'd yearned for my entire life."

Hermione sniffed.

"What I did not see was the truth," Severus continued. "Her love and acceptance came with conditions, conditions that were impossible for me to fulfill. I knew this, yet I still believed I loved her for who she was. I didn't realize until I lay prone on the floor of the Shrieking Shack that I had loved the idea of Lily, but not Lily, herself."

Hermione stared at him while she digested his words. She brushed aside her tears. "I-I can relate. I loved the Ron in my head, but looking back, the only times I was truly cross with Ron were the times his true nature would emerge and destroy my fantasies of him. Ron the fantasy was the man of my dreams, but Ron the reality was a nightmare."

Severus nodded.
Fresh tears flowed. “I—I’m the brightest witch of my age. My judgment is supposed to be impeccable. I thought I was smart enough to see through deception. I can’t believe I fell in love with such a complete arse and couldn’t figure it out until I was pregnant with a child only you and I want.”

"You shouldn't be too hard on yourself. The fantasy of love blinds even those with perfect vision,” Severus answered. "At least, that's what I've come to believe."

"Does true love even exist?" Hermione asked after a shaky breath. "Could two people really bare their souls to each other and not be hurt?"

Severus sighed. "I don't know."

Hermione bowed her head. "Ginny seems to know what love is. She is so certain of the love she shares with Draco that she is willing to choose him over her parents and siblings. She and Draco hardly need words to communicate with each other. They look into each other's eyes and they know what the other is trying to convey. Is that kind of love only reserved for certain people?"

"I would not know," Severus admitted. "I've never felt such a love."

"I envy Ginny and Draco. If there is such a thing as true love they have it."

"Perhaps they are simply luckier than most of us will ever be," Severus answered.

"Perhaps," Hermione replied before anger flashed in her eyes, "But then you look at people like Ron who selfishly take whatever they can get and they suffer no consequences whatsoever. Everyone loves Ron and calls me a whore. Why can’t anyone see through him?"

“I wish I could provide you with an answer,” Severus answered.

Hermione’s face reddened. Her voice grew louder with every sentence. "Everyone goes on and on about how wonderful Ron is and how sorry they feel for him while I'm being vilified by people I thought cared about me. I’m being blasted in the media, yet no one questions his character when another woman is flashing her breasts at him. The Weasleys were a second family to me, yet they can't even lay Harry to rest without berating and humiliating me. When is everyone going to realize the truth about Ron? When is everyone going to realize he’s nothing more than a selfish arse?"

"I don't know," Severus answered.

“That’s why I’m defective,” Hermione whispered. “I’m too stupid to know who does and does not care for me. I give myself over to those who don’t deserve it. If it weren’t for you,” she clung to him tighter. “Oh thank God I found you. I need you so much.”

"I need you as well," Severus whispered.

Hermione continued. "I couldn't imagine myself raising Rose without you. I'm so glad you came in the coffee shop that day. You found me at my lowest point, you gave me hope, you have supported me in every way…and most importantly you've stayed with me.”

"I promised you I'd stay as long as you needed me," Severus replied.

"I know, but it can't be easy for you to live with me, especially when I get emotional like this," she replied.

"You are not as intolerable as you'd have yourself believe," Severus answered with a smirk.
"Really?" Hermione searched his eyes. Instead of the false sympathy she expected, she saw genuine affection.

"Yes," Severus replied. "I have found marriage with you much more pleasurable than I anticipated. As far as being an excellent wife, you have exceeded expectations."

She began to laugh. Severus joined her, although his laughter was much more subdued.

"Thank you," she began after the laughter died down. "I needed a good laugh."

"You are quite welcome," Severus answered.

"You always try to make me feel better," Hermione reflected. "And most of the time you succeed."

"I am happy to hear of my success," Severus replied.

"I'm glad I married a good friend. I may be too faulty to love properly, but I can still be a good friend," Hermione answered.

"You are an outstanding friend," Severus replied.

"You know, I think that's the nicest thing I've heard you say to or about anyone," Hermione mused aloud.

Severus kissed her on the forehead. "I am simply telling the truth."

They settled into a comfortable silence. As Severus continued to stroke Hermione’s hair he considered how much his life had changed upon marrying her. Never would he have thought himself capable of giving and receiving comfort. Until now he couldn’t fathom giving so much of himself to a woman and a child. For the first time he enjoyed another person’s companionship and dreaded the possibility of returning to a life of solitude. Life was full of unexpected twists, indeed.

His musings were interrupted by the sound of soft breathing. He looked down to see a sleeping Hermione. When he tried to slide off of the bed to, Hermione reached for him. "Severus?"

"Yes?"

He settled himself beside her once more. She grinned before shutting her eyes.

Resigned to his fate, Severus spooned into her sleeping form and closed his eyes. As he drifted to sleep one thought permeated his mind:

There is nothing defective about Mrs. Snape.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It's much appreciated.
Chapter 66

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nothing.

No foreign DNA. No strange magical signature. No stray hair particles. No unusual fingerprints.

Nothing was out of the ordinary.

Kingsley reread the forensics report, hoping that he'd missed some detail. No matter how many times he scanned it, however, the results remained the same. The crime scene was as clean as they came.

"Minister Shacklebolt?"

Kingsley looked up from the report, his eyes bloodshot from the sleepless nights. "Please tell me you've found something."

"I'm afraid not," the coroner sighed.

Kingsley gestured to the leather chair across the desk from him. Nodding, the coroner sat down.

"Is that the final report?" Kingsley asked.

"It is," the coroner replied. "I apologize for handing it to you a few days after Harry's funeral, but I wanted to get it to you after I completed analyzing the magical residue on Harry's body."

Kingsley leaned back in his chair as he asked, "Did you discover anything out of the ordinary?"

The coroner shook his head. "While I did find some residual magical residue on Harry's body, I could not match it against any of the magical signatures in the data base."

"Are you sure you mapped it correctly?"

"I'm positive. I mapped out the signature three times, but it always came out the same. It didn't match any of the magical signatures on file."

"The data base began in 2001, correct?"

"Yes."

"Then in theory, our murderer could be someone who may have had connections to the Death Eaters, but was never put in the data base because he or she was released from prison before 2001," Kingsley theorized.

"Or maybe he or she was never arrested at all," the coroner proposed.

"Both are logical possibilities," Kingsley answered.

The coroner exhaled.

"You were a coroner during the Second Wizarding War, correct?"

"I was."
"You investigated many of the murders of both muggle-borns and muggles?"

"I examined a few of the corpses."

Kingsley folded his hands on his lap and locked eyes with the coroner. "In your professional opinion, do you suspect that the murderer is a Death Eater or someone associated with them?"

The coroner exhaled. "I’m not entirely sure. Contrary to popular belief a Death Eater attack is not spectacular on a forensic level. The Death Eaters may have been professional killers and for the most part left little evidence, they were prone to leave a few traces of evidence. In other words, they were like any other semi-professional killer."

"What made them unique on a forensic level?"

"If they killed a fellow wizard, it was often with an Unforgivable. Many of their victims died in this way; it was the blood traitors, muggles and muggle-borns who were killed more slowly and brutally."

"Harry was killed with an Unforgivable."

"He was."

"So it's possible that the killer was associated with the Death Eaters," Kingsley replied.

"But I can't make a solid determination of that," the coroner answered. "Many wizards can perform an Unforgivable, but most of them leave a fair amount of magical residue. There was very little to be found on Harry's body."

"Indicating the killer was a professional, a professional who may have learned his trade from Voldemort."

"I can’t comment make that determination."

"Well, thank you for your candor," Kingsley replied.

"I just wish I could've been of more service to you," the coroner replied with a hint of regret in his eyes. "It's a tough case to crack, and we have very few leads."

"We have leads," Kingsley answered. "The problem is our prime suspect has money and influence. Still even he can’t weasel out of the fact that he was trained to kill by Bellatrix and Voldemort. That combined with the fact that he threatened Harry months before his death keeps him at the top of the suspect list."

"But Draco never went through with the murder of Dumbledore," the coroner pointed out. "There’s no proof Malfoy has killed anybody, meaning he is more likely to leave evidence than an experienced killer."

Kingsley deflated. "True. We’ll have to keep looking into any and all leads. Unfortunately I fear we’re quickly running out of time."

"I understand your frustration," the coroner answered. "The public seems to think we can solve these cases in an hour like they do on those muggle crime shows. I wish people would understand that these things take time... sometimes quite a bit of time."

"Unfortunately the public wants answers," Kingsley made a chapel with his hands "But I refuse to
allow public opinion to determine this case. I want the true murderer tried, not publicly hand an innocent man.”

"Let's hope we find the real murderer then," the coroner answered as he rose to leave. "I wish I could've done more to help."

"I have an idea of where to look now at least," Kingsley mused.

“That’s always a good start.”

“Indeed it is.”

The coroner shook the Minister's hand and strode out of the room.

After taking a few minutes to plot his next move, Kingsley called, "Proudfoot!"

POP!

"Yes, Minister?"

Kingsley scribbled something on a pad before ordering, "Give this warrant to Draco Malfoy, and make sure to obtain his magical signature."

Proudfoot sneered. “With pleasure.”

***

Hermione lay on the bed with her head in a book. She kicked off the sheet covering her, only to pull it back up again upon feeling the full effect of her latest cooling spell.

She had little motivation to get out of bed, though not because of any depression regarding Harry’s death. No, today she felt the full brunt of seven months of pregnancy bearing down on her. Her ankles were swelling, she had spent half the night peeing, and to make matters worse, she was exhausted from casting cooling spells in the oppressive heat. A day spent lying naked in bed with a book sounded divine.

"Hermione?"

"Yes Severus?" she responded as she set the book down.

Rose kicked at the sound of her father's voice.

"Are you feeling well?" Severus asked.

"Yes, why?" Hermione asked as she sat up. The sheet slipped to expose her swollen breasts. She quickly grabbed the hem and covered herself once more.

Severus gulped and forced himself to focus on her soft caramel eyes. “I just wanted to make sure you and the baby were staying comfortable in this heat."

"We're doing fine," Hermione assured him. "How is the brewing coming along?"

"Very well, thank you," Severus replied as his eyes traced the figure underneath the bed. Brewing was far less appealing than it had been an hour ago.

“Are you still on schedule to open in a month?” She asked.
“Yes, it is more than feasible that the apothecary will be opened within six weeks,” he replied as his heart raced. Severus was not a spontaneous man, but that could change if that sheet would drape just a little further down her chest and she would give him even the slightest hint that she’d be receptive to his advances...

"Good. I'm happy for you," Hermione replied with a small smile. She pulled up the sheet again.

"Indeed," he cleared his throat. "Uh, what book are you reading?"

Severus cringed. It had been years since he’d used “uh.” Just because there was a sexy naked woman before him didn't mean he should forget how to speak proper English.

"Pride and Prejudice, I'm on the part where Elizabeth is visiting Mr. Darcy's estate," Hermione continued.

"I assume she was pleased with its condition," Severus replied.

"Very much so," she answered.

"That is nice to know."

"Have you ever read Pride and Prejudice?"

"I read it several years ago," Severus replied.

Hermione giggled.

"What do you find so amusing, witch?" Severus asked.

"I never pegged you for a Jane Austen fan," Hermione answered as Rose's kicking became more pronounced.

"It was a secret obsession," he replied with a twinkle in his eyes. If only that sheet would fall a little further down her torso...

"I see," Hermione drawled. Then, her eyes lit up. "Why don't we read Pride and Prejudice to Rose?"

"Excuse me?" Severus asked, now jolted from his musings.

Hermione massaged her stomach. "Babies need stimulation, and reading to them is one of the most stimulating activities parents can do with their children. The more parents read to their children, the more vocabulary the children pick up. Reading to children also introduces books as something pleasurable, a belief we both want to instill in Rose."

“That all sounds well and good, but I thought reading to her only improved her cognition after she was born,” Severus answered.

Hermione shrugged. “Reading to her now could help us bond with her. I know you two already have a strong relationship. She loves the sound of your voice, and your eyes light up every time she kicks your hand. Still, it never hurts to show her your love.”

Severus smiled. Maybe after a chapter or two he could persuade Hermione to engage in his form of stimulation. “There is no harm in taking some time away from work to read to Rose. All of the potions I'm currently brewing need to simmer a few hours before they reach the next stage, and I did not plan on starting any new projects until tomorrow.”
“I’m glad to hear it,” Hermione’s eyes danced in joy.

Severus sat on the bed beside her. Hermione scooted a little closer to him before asking, "Oh I forgot, should I put on some clothes? I mean, is it alright that I'm uh, nude. You see, it's hot and I'm cooler without anything on."

"No, you are more than welcome to remain undressed," he replied with a grin.

"Good," Hermione murmured as she leafed back through the pages. “There’s a section I want you to read because every time I read it I think of you. Ah! Here we go.” She pointed to a paragraph at the top of the page. “Start here.”

Severus placed his hand on Hermione's stomach and read, “I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of any thing than of a book! -- When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library.”

Rose pressed a tiny foot against Severus’ hand. He smiled as he continued reading, look forward to the day when Rose would rummage his library, searching for her new favorite book.

Chapter End Notes

I will do everything in my power to post a chapter tomorrow, but it may be a little late. I have an event going on tomorrow afternoon that I've been looking forward to for the last couple of weeks. So if the chapter's late I apologize.

Thank you for the support! It's deeply appreciated.
“I’m telling you it would be prudent to wear a short sleeved shirt,” Hermione began.

“And I’m telling you that I do not possess any,” Severus replied.

Hermione slid off the bed. “Then we should go shopping next week and buy you a few black t-shirts. Some shorts wouldn’t hurt either.”

Severus huffed as he threw on a long sleeved shirt. “You may buy me as many t-shirts and pairs of shorts as you’d like. They will sit at the bottom of my drawer underneath my dark green sweaters.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “You have green sweaters?”

“When I worked at Hogwarts I was asked to wear Slytherin colors from time to time,” Severus replied. “Then I reminded Dumbledore that I have only worn black and will continue to wear black always. After my fourth year he dropped the issue.”

Hermione threw up her hands. “Fine, go out in your all black clothing and die of heat stroke. When Rose refuses to wear her summer dresses I’ll remind her that Daddy perished because he was too stubborn to dress appropriately for the weather.”

“When Rose is born I will teach her that there is such a thing as proper attire.”

“She’ll learn that black is not the only color one could wear.”

“She’ll learn black is appropriate for any occasion and will look acceptable on almost anyone, especially her.”

Hermione rolled her eyes as he stepped out of the bedroom. “Will you be home in time for lunch?”

He glanced back at her. “I plan to be.”

Hermione gave him a small grin. “I’ll have a pitcher of lemonade ready.”

Severus smiled. “I’ll look forward to it.”

***

Hermione was not entirely incorrect in her assessment of the heat.

Severus strolled down the path to Malfoy Manor, his breaths deeper with every step. His greasy hair clung to the back of his neck. He wiped his brow. Then he looked down at his forearms. Would it hurt to roll up his sleeves this one time? The dark mark may be a disfiguring scar, but everyone know he had it. Short sleeves may have been in order.

Then he frowned. Hermione doesn’t have to be right about everything.

Severus grasped the knocker and rapped it against the plate on the front door. When no answer came his scow deepened. Once again he pounded the knocker against the door.
"About time," he muttered.

A house elf opened the door with a smile, although pleasantness turned to apprehension in the wake of Severus' expression. "Hello, Mr. Snape. Master Lucius is expecting you."

"So I've been told," Severus growled as he followed the elf to Lucius' sitting room.

"Hello, Severus," Lucius began.

"I don't appreciate being summoned," Severus barked.

Lucius smirked, unaffected by the outburst. "I was just about to have some tea. Would you like to join me?"

"It's too hot for tea," Severus noted.

"Good point, although those black robes of yours can't be helping the situation," Lucius mused.

"So Hermione told me," Severus mumbled.

Lucius' eyes glistened. "Hermione truly is one of the bravest witches alive, perhaps one of the bravest who has ever lived. Nobody else would dare to point out that you could wear colors aside from black."

"Am I only here to hear you crack jokes about my marriage?" Severus asked.

"No, although if you'd like to hear my observations concerning you two I'm more than happy to oblige."

"If I wanted to hear fantasy stories I would be in a bookstore selecting books for Rose."

"Would you select the stories about great wizarding heroes or would she prefer to hear about fluffy unicorns?"

Severus glared at his friend. "Are we going to have an urgent meeting or should I leave?"

Lucius' smirk only widened. "If tea does not sound appealing then could I interest you in a cup of water?"

"I wouldn't be opposed to it," Severus replied as he sat down in a chair across from Lucius.

"Excellent," Lucius replied before turning to the elf. "One glass of water and one cup of tea please."

The elf apparated away.

Severus asked, "What exactly is so urgent that you felt the need to summon me?"

All previous playfulness disappeared from Lucius' face. "The aurors refuse to drop their investigation against Draco. Last night they burst into his house and demanded that he give them his magical signature."

Severus pinched the top of his nose. "I suppose they refuse to investigate anyone else."

"Who else is there to investigate?" Lucius asked.
"Masters Lucius and Snape, I have tea and water!" the elf announced as he carried the refreshments into the room on a tray.

The men took their drinks in silence. The elf watched each of them take their first sip, eager to have pleased them. When both appeared satisfied, he once again disappeared.

“How bad do things appear for Draco?” Severus asked

“I’m afraid they may soon arrest him,” Lucius answered.

“How can they arrest him with such flimsy evidence?”

“Any arrest is better than appearing to do nothing, regardless of how justifiable the arrest is.”

"Don't you still have pull within the government?” Severus asked. “Can’t you ask one of your associates to propose an alternate suspect.”

"Usually I'd say I have quite a bit of pull,” Lucius admitted. "But not in circumstances where my son is accused of murdering the greatest hero who ever lived.”

“Fair enough, but you always seem to find some resource few others even knew existed.”

“Usually I am the only person who possesses the extensive connections that I do. Unfortunately in this case Draco's opponents are on a more level playing field.”

Severus raised an eyebrow.

Lucius continued. “Ever since Draco began his ill-advised love affair with Ginevra, the Weasleys have been waiting for a chance to be rid of him. While it is now impossible for Ginevra to divorce Draco and marry Harry, it is possible to give Draco a life sentence for murder. This is complicated by the fact that most of the Weasleys are members of the Order of the Phoenix. The Order was reassembled to deal with Harry’s murder. I think you can see where Draco’s problem lies.”

Severus nodded.

“I could attempt to use my government connections, but given the Order of the Phoenix’s influence that will prove tricky. If I tried to bribe the wrong person, he or she could tell the upper levels, which in turn would only serve to make Draco appear even more guilty.”

"Quite true," Severus replied.

“So given my dilemma I’ve decided on a new course of action, but I’ll need your help in order to achieve my goals,” Lucius replied.

“What kind of assistance do you want me to render?”

"I have a feeling a Death Eater was involved in Potter's demise and perpetrated the vandalism at Hogwarts," Lucius began.

"I've suspected that as well," Severus replied.

"Then someone must investigate that possibility. I need to discover what the Death Eaters at Azkaban know. " Lucius continued.
"They won’t share any information with us," Severus replied. “They tend to hold grudges against those who are enjoying freedom on the outside instead of sharing their accommodations.”

Lucius locked eyes with Severus. "They need not say a word if you use legilimency.”

Severus blinked.

“You are one of the few legimens left in Britain. You are also one of the few people I trust.”

Severus’ expression was unreadable.

Lucius took a deep breath. “I know I have no right to ask you to protect Draco again, but I am exhausting all my other options. This may be the only way to keep Draco out of Azkaban.”

“I would do almost anything in my power to protect Draco, but not if it puts Hermione and Rose at risk,” Severus answered.

“How would this course of action place them at risk?” Lucius asked.

“If the Death Eaters know the murderer then they will inform him or her of what I’d done. The murderer may know that I do not fear injury or death, but if anything were ever to happen to Rose and Hermione,” Severus’ throat was too tight to allow him to finish the sentence.

"Aren't Hermione and Rose already at risk of injury just because of who they are?”

“Perhaps, but I cannot allow my actions to put them in any greater danger.”

“Then perhaps you should consider a divorce since your profession as a double spy is so well-known.”

Severus swallowed.

“If the killer isn’t found he or she will kill again. There’s no guarantee the killer isn’t planning an attack on Hermione as we speak. The sooner we get this murderer in Azkaban the safer we will be,” Lucius replied.

“That is true,” Severus mused aloud.

Lucius played his trump card. "Severus, I'm not asking you to do this just for Draco, I'm also asking you to do this for his child. Draco deserves a chance to hold that child. Ginevra should not have to raise this baby alone. My grandchild deserves to have both parents in its life, not have a father in Azkaban and a mother who is an emotional wreck because of his absence. You know that I will do everything in my power to help you protect Hermione and Rose, but right now I cannot protect Draco and his child, not without your help.”

Severus sighed. "I will discuss your proposition with Hermione. As soon as we make a decision I will let you know of it.”

Lucius exhaled. “For now that will have to be sufficient.”

***

Farrah Jackson sat in a dark corner of an empty office, drawing on a notepad. It was a quirky habit she'd developed at Nurmengard. So far, nobody had objected to the pass time. A few had even commented on how realistic her doodles appeared.
With each compliment she blushed. She was no Titian. Drawing relaxed her, especially when the subject of her effort was her surroundings. Something about seeing them in another shade, in another light, was refreshing.

Or so she told the Azkaban staff.

***

"It might not be such a bad idea," Hermione replied. "Lucius is probably right in supposing that someone at Azkaban knows something, and this would be an accurate way to obtain information from them."

"Yes, but I do not care to see any of those Death Eaters again. It can't possibly turn out well. Merlin knows how much they hate me," Severus took a sip of the glass lemonade in front of him.

“But could you forgive yourself if something were to happen to Draco?” Hermione asked.

“I would never forgive myself if my actions further endangered you and Rose,” Severus replied.

“I promise you, both of us will be fine.” She kissed him on the cheek. “You will be stuck with us for the foreseeable future.”

“I cannot imagine any two people I would rather be stuck with,” Severus replied.

Hermione gave him a small smile. “Go ahead and perform legilimency on them. Rose and I will be in no greater danger than we already are.”

He kissed Hermione on the forehead. “I shall call Lucius then.”

Hermione watched his cape billow in the air as he left. She shuddered as she recalled racing through the woods after the Death Eaters attacked the Quidditch World Cup. A chill ran up her spine as she remembered the nights she stayed awake in the woods guarding Harry, her muscles tensing whenever a branch cracked. Then there was Bellatrix…oh Merlin Bellatrix…

Those days, however, were in the past. On one hand, it was nice to feel comfortable… safe. On the other hand, she missed the long hours of research trying to crack open another of Dumbledore's mysteries, duels at wand point, plotting Voldemort's demise with Harry. Never before had she felt so alive, so needed, so terrified, yet so exhilarated.

She knew well and good that she'd be on the sidelines this time while others brought Harry's killer to justice. Severus would never permit her to place herself or Rose in harm's way. He was right to protect them, of course. Hermione would never endanger Rose. Being a mother was already proving to be just as exciting and fulfilling as the long nights hiding from Death Eaters. No, Rose would have her mother. She and Severus would see to that.

Yet Hermione was more than just Rose's mum. She could duel, could solve mysteries, could research, and could take on a horde of Death Eaters. Nobody would ever put these skills to use though, not when others less pregnant than she could perform those tasks.

Hermione hung her head, wondering when she'd become useless.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for the support! It is always appreciated!
"Farrah?"

"I'll be with you shortly, George."

Farrah straightened her uniform as she strolled down the corridor. When she reached the third cell on the right she barked, "Lestrange!"

The man growled. His dark eyes and his immaculate complexion hinted that at some point in time he had been handsome. Now however, his face was shrouded by a thinning, ill-kept mass of sandy-blond hair. Perhaps with a shower he could regain his former appearance, but years in Azkaban had a way of marring one’s soul until their physical appearance lost its luster as well.

“Stupid fucking guard,” Lestrange muttered with a scowl that would frighten away most sensible people. “They’ll let anyone in a prison uniform these days.”

"Here's lunch," Farrah snarled as she slid a tray through the slot in the cell bars.

"Thank you," Lestrange grumbled as George stood beside Farrah.

"Hey! Smile!" George shouted. "You'll have a visitor soon."

Lestrange’s eyes bulged. "Who?"

"An old friend. He’s very eager to catch up with you on a few things,” George continued.

“Who, who on the outside would want to see me?” Lestrange mumbled.

“Someone very special. Now eat up and smile,” George replied.

Rodolphus stared at him, deliberating whether he was being set up as the butt of some lame joke. Then he considered how soon the guards took back meals one wasn’t eating. Rudolphus began shoving the food in his face. The alleged visitor would have to forgive the gravy stains.

Farrah and George stepped away from the prison block. When they were out of earshot, Farrah asked, “Lestrange has a point. He isn't exactly Mr. Popularity. Who would want to see him?”

"I was actually coming to talk to you about that.” George answered. “A guest is coming to speak with the Death Eaters about Potter’s death.”

“What makes this guest think that the Death Eaters will offer up any information about Potter’s death?” Farrah asked.

"Because" George answered with a gleam in his eyes. "This guest is a legilimens."

"A legilimens!" Farrah gasped.

“Yes,” George replied. “It's one of the most brilliant plans to date! The Death Eaters won’t have say a word to the legilimens. All he has to do is scan their minds and he’ll know whether or not one of them knows who killed Harry.”
“Why does he think the Death Eaters will provide any information on Harry’s death?”

George’s eyes darted around the room. “The Ministry believes Harry’s death mimics a Death Eater attack. If that’s the case then the killer will have undoubtedly found a way to communicate with one of the Death Eaters. We just have to find proof of this communication and—voila! We’ll have our murderer under arrest by tomorrow.”

"But don't the Death Eaters know how to counteract Legilimency?"

"No. Voldemort never taught most of them Occlumency because he didn't want them to be able to counteract him."

"I see."

"Anyway, we need to prepare the visiting cell. It would be nice if you could help monitor the prisoners during these visits as well,” George began.

"Sure, I'll be happy to keep an eye on things," Farrah answered.

"Good." George led Farrah to the visiting room. He muttered a spell which lit the room’s candles.

The only furniture the room contained was a metal table with two steel chairs, one on either side of it. Although the table's metal glistened in the candlelight, the chairs were scratched and covered in a sooty film. Even the strongest cleaning spells in the world wouldn’t fully restore them to their former condition.

The officers cast spells on the prisoner's chair to prevent the inmates from throwing wandless hexes. After that task was complete, they cast a spell upon the room to alarm the other guards in case of an attempted jail break.

Upon completion, they waited for their guest inside the visitor's room.

Their guest arrived minutes later. He was dressed completely in black making his skin appear all the more pale by contrast. His sneer was etched onto his face, just as it had been when Farrah was a schoolgirl. His ebony eyes bored into Farrah, as if he were trying to place her. She swallowed. "Professor Snape?"

Severus eyes flickered. "Farrah Jackson?"

"Yes," she cleared her throat. "That's me."

"Ravenclaw?"

"Yes."

"I thought your career track would lead you more in the direction of charms master than jail guard," he responded.

She smiled. "Life often takes unexpected turns, something you would know all too well."

Severus did not so much as twitch.

"I mean you're the master of taking unexpected turns. Who would’ve ever believed that you’d marry a former student, one you repeatedly referred to as an insufferable know-it-all."

His lips twitched. "Touché, Miss Jackson."
"Please, call me Farrah," she replied in a sweet voice. "We're both adults on an equal level, are we not?"

"In this situation, I suppose so," he replied. "But I did not come here to exchange pleasantries."

"No, you did not," George cut in. "Are you prepared for the first prisoner?"

"I am," Severus answered, settling into his seat.

George strode out of the room. Farrah stood over Severus, as if he were the prisoner just released from his cell for interrogation. “Why did you stop teaching potions?”

He glared at her. “What business is that of yours?”

She shrugged. "I never thought you'd leave Hogwarts. Even if you were hard on me, I could tell you loved potions."

“Apparently passion is not enough to ensure job security," Severus replied.

She raised an eyebrow. "Wait, you were terminated from your job?"

Severus folded his hands.

"That's so weird," she continued. "The records of your acquittal are public knowledge. Even in Germany the revelation that you were a double spy dominated the front page for months."

"Is there a point to this interrogation or are you babbling because you like to hear your own voice?" Severus asked.

“I apologize," she answered. “Sometimes I muse aloud.”

Severus replied. “Perhaps you should rid yourself of that habit.”

“Maybe,” Farrah muttered. “But it’s so bizarre to see you here, especially after all that’s happened in the past few months. After reading the stories about your acquittal I could never imagine you replacing Lily with anyone, much less Hermione Granger.”

Severus tensed up. Farrah backed away and withered under his glower. “Didn’t I teach you during your tenure at Hogwarts not to speak of things you do not understand?”

She trembled. “You did.”

He continued. “If you took my lesson to heart then I’d suggest you refrain from making any further comments on my spouse or my relationship with her.”

Farrah nodded.

The sounds of shrieking emanated from behind the door. Farrah straightened herself as Severus took a deep breath. In an instant his expression was neutral.

The door burst open.

“You filthy mud blood guard! Unhand me or I’ll sue you and this entire prison for police brutality!”

George yanked Alecto Carrow into the room and tossed her into the chair. She growled as he cuffed her to the table.
“There, I let you go,” George announced.

She hissed. "You bastard."

"Just talk to your guest," George ordered.

Alecto huffed before turning to the visitor. She gasped. "Severus Snape?"

He nodded.

"H-how? I, I thought you were dead."

He smirked. "The reports of my demise were grossly exaggerated."

"Well Merlin, Severus, I never thought I'd see you again," Alecto exhaled.

“I did not foresee speaking with you again either,” Severus replied.

“You, you must still be at Hogwarts, correct?” Alecto asked.

He furrowed his eyebrows.

“I’m rather unfortunate that you decided to stay. A man like you is bigger than Hogwarts, even if you are too stubborn to admit it,” she sneered. “Tell me, has my position as professor of Muggle Studies been filled?”

“Yes.”

"Does she teach the way I did?"

"He does not teach the same material or use the same disciplinary measures you used."

"That’s a shame," Alecto answered. "Those students can’t be learning anything but muggle propaganda from him."

“The lesson plans are radically different indeed,” Severus replied.

They locked eyes.

Farrah watched as Alecto turned rigid. Her mouth hung open. A few times her eyes twitched, as though she was trying to fight whatever he was doing, but soon her body relaxed. Within a few minutes Severus glanced down, releasing her from his gaze.

She lurched toward him and screeched, "You bastard! What the hell were you thinking, doing that to me?"

"You know nothing," Severus replied in an even voice.

"Know nothing? Nothing about what?"

“George,” Severus called.

The guard stepped in as Alecto spat, "Where the hell do you think you get off! I'll be sure to tell all of your former comrades what you’ve done! You-you traitor!"

Severus rolled his eyes.
“Amycus was right, you did betray us! You’re nothing but a simpering, cowardly traitor.”

“Come on,” George began uncuffing her from the table.

“I don’t know what you think you’re doing, but I’ll tell the others about it. We’ll stop you! You’ll never know what’s in our minds”

"How exactly do you plan stop me from entering your consciousness?"

Alecto fell silent as she was pulled up from her chair.

George announced "You're going to solitary now."

Alecto offered no resistance when he led her away.

When the door shut, Farrah asked, "What are you looking for?"

Severus looked up at her, “Why should a mere guard care?”

"Sheer curiosity."

"Curiosity can kill."

Severus turned back to the table. He inhaled and cleared his mind. Meanwhile, Farrah stared into space, wondering what he was looking for, and what would happen if he found it.

Chapter End Notes

Wow! This story has 200 comments! Thank you all so much! Your support is always appreciated, and makes sharing my work really fun.
Severus slumped into his kitchen chair. He glanced at the plate of meatballs and mashed potatoes before him. The aroma could not entice him to pick up his fork.

Hermione cut one of her meatballs into fourths. Then she shifted the halves to the side.

"None of them knew anything," Severus began.

Hermione set down her fork.

"Most of them were unaware Harry had died," Severus continued, "although others had heard rumors of his demise from prisoners they deemed less than credible."

"Who started the rumors?" Hermione asked.

"One of the sources was a bandit who was imprisoned shortly after news of Harry’s death was made public. Another source was a woman who was arrested for raising occamies without a permit."

"Would they have wanted to harm Harry?"

"I used legilimency on both of them. Neither of them knew Harry personally, nor were they ill-disposed towards him."

"In other words, none of the prisoners, including the Death Eaters, knew of the plan to kill Harry," Hermione replied.

"None of the Death Eaters knew anyone on the outside who would so much as look at Harry cross-eyed," Severus answered.

"I don’t doubt your proficiency in legilimency," Hermione stood up. "But it is worth considering that at least some of the alleged Azkaban Death Eaters are individuals who have been taking a polyjuice potion to hide their true identity. Mrs. Crouch was imprisoned for her son after taking a polyjuice potion, thus it isn’t impossible that someone could deceive the guards in a similar fashion."

Severus shook his head. "I searched each one of their minds to find one memory only that person would know. I can reasonably conclude that all of the Death Eaters are who they claim to be, and all are innocent of Harry's murder."

"Well," Hermione stepped across the table to be closer to her husband.. "No one necessarily expected any of them to be the murderer."

"No, but Lucius and I were hopeful that one of the Death Eaters could provide us with some type of clue. Instead I was flooded with memories of the war and the disgusting slop that passes for food in Azkaban." Severus bowed his head. "Legilimency may have been Draco’s last chance to clear his name. Now it is only a matter of time before Kingsley issues an arrest warrant. He'll be lucky if he sees the birth of his child."

Hermione sat down and wrapped her arms around him. “Oh Severus.”

“I failed him Hermione,” Severus choked as she tightened her embrace. “I couldn’t protect Harry,
and now I cannot protect Draco.”

“it was a long shot. We knew there was a possibility you’d find nothing.”

“It was Draco’s only hope.”

“Maybe not,” Hermione mused aloud.

Severus raised his head.

She released him. “Perhaps we’re looking at this problem incorrectly. Maybe there’s a possibility we aren’t exploring.”

“What new angle are you proposing?” Severus asked.

Hermione twisted her lips. "What if everyone mistakenly believes Harry's killer is dead?"

“Who would have the motive or resources to fake a death?” Severus asked. “The only people with any motive to fake their demise are the Death Eaters, and all of them are accounted for.”

“Or so the Ministry claims,” Hermione replied. "Hundreds, if not thousands, died in the Second Wizarding War. Still today there are missing persons on both sides. One of them may be our killer.”

Severus hummed. “This is the Ministry we’re discussing. They have a nasty habit of allowing certain people to slip through the cracks.”

"We believed you were dead for a few hours,” Hermione offered. “It isn’t out of the realm of possibility that someone else was thought to be dead, but is in fact quite alive.”

“Before my alleged death I had taken several potions to prevent my demise via Nagini’s poisoning. I was found to be alive within hours. Very few people had planned for their demise as thoroughly as I did, but I could not be aware of the precautions everyone took before the final battle.”

"I think this escaped Death Eater may be our culprit," Hermione suggested.

"That makes things even more complicated," Severus sighed. "How are we supposed to find someone who is allegedly dead? More importantly, how can we convince anyone that they need to be looking for him or her?"

"We'll have to go through all the deceased Death Eaters and see which one is the most likely to gain from Harry’s death," Hermione replied.

Severus’ expression lightened. “I am not opposed to that course of action.”

Hermione began, "My first suspect is Bellatrix Lestrange. Merlin knows how devoted she was to Voldemort, and how deeply she believed in pure blood supremacy."

"No," Severus replied as he leaned forward onto the table. "Bellatrix would've attempted to free the Death Eaters the second news broke of Harry’s death.

“True.”

“Besides, she was too passionate. Passion leads to sloppiness. Whoever killed Harry kept the murder clean. It was cold and calculating.”

“You have a point there.”
"I was almost thinking Evan Rosier could have had a hand in the murder, but he's been dead since the First Wizarding War," Severus replied.

Hermione’s eyes grew. “What about a Snatcher?”

“A Snatcher?” Severus asked.

“Yes,” Hermione spoke faster. “Before Trelawney died she had a prophecy concerning a grim. She had a vision concerning a grim. Now a grim means death, but it could mean a dog as well. The grim could be a wolf, more specifically a werewolf.”

“Maybe, but I’m a bit reluctant to accept that Fenrir is alive based solely on that evidence. The last time Sybil saw a grim it turned out to be nothing more than Sirius Black.” Severus exhaled. “As much as I despise Sirius it’s doubtful he faked his death and killed Harry.”

“True,” Hermione deflated. “Sybil’s prophecies tended to be inaccurate as well. For all we know the grim only represented her death, or she overreacted to something which popped into her mind.”

“She very well could have had an overreaction,” Severus noted.

Hermione inhaled. “The crime is too clean for a Snatcher to have committed it anyway. Fenrir and his friend tended to like physical attacks. There's no evidence of bite or scratch marks.”

“Indeed,” Severus replied. “If a Snatcher had committed the murder, he would've left behind at least a hair, or in Fenrir's case maybe a flea…”

Hermione smirked and snorted back a chuckle. Severus’ lips turned upwards.

"What about Pettigrew?” Hermione asked.

Severus smirked. "He'd be too stupid to commit these crimes alone. Even if he somehow increased his intelligence his malfunctioning hand would make it impossible to properly aim his wand.”

“True,” Hermione replied.

Severus’ frown returned.

Hermione forced herself to smile. "Still, if it is just one person then we have time to catch him or her. After all, it would be hard for one person to break into Azkaban."

"Very true, but if this individual already has allies, then we may not have much time left at all," Severus noted.

Hermione’s heart stopped. Rose kicked from within her.

"Hermione?” Severus asked.

"Rose is kicking," She whispered.

Severus' eyes gleamed.

Hermione's lips quivered. "What kind of world are we bringing her into?"

Severus sighed. "I don't know. All I know is that we will do whatever it takes to make it safer."

Hermione grinned. "Yes, we will."
"Severus Snape?" Fenrir hissed.

"Yes," Farrah ran her hand against a tree trunk. "He decided to take a little trip to Azkaban today."

Fenrir growled. "What exactly was he doing visiting his former companions?"

"He used Legilimency on all of the ex-Death Eaters," Farrah explained. "They were helpless before him."

Fenrir stared into the space between two spruce trees. "Severus Snape is an unexpected complication."

"Do you know why would he get involved with the investigation into Harry's death?" Scabior asked.

"He never told me," Farrah replied.

"Did you ask him?" Scabior asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Of course not. Fenrir didn't hire me to be an idiot," Farrah answered.

Fenrir muttered, "Draco."

The others turned to him.

"Severus must be trying to prevent Draco from being imprisoned. In his desperation he decided to read the minds of the Death Eaters," Fenrir muttered.

"That makes sense," Farrah replied.

"Tell me," Scabior began, "Could anyone resist him?"

"No," Farrah answered.

"Of course they wouldn't know how to fight legilimency," Fenrir piped in. "Voldemort didn't want anyone to be able to resist him when he needed information. It worked for him then, but it does not bode well for us now."

The Chief nodded.

"Should I have found a way to force him to leave?" Farrah asked.

"Of course not," Fenrir replied as he looked up at her. "You needed to maintain your cover. I am pleased at how well you stayed composed during this unforeseen complication."

"Thank you." She blushed.

"Still, it's only a matter of time before Severus Snape becomes a real threat," Fenrir continued.

"Perhaps we should divert our efforts from breaking out the Death Eaters to eliminating Severus Snape," Scabior suggested.

"How exactly would you plan to kill him?" Fenrir snapped.

"A killing curse I presume. We were able to kill Harry with one. Surely it can't be too much harder
to kill Severus Snape."

"Harry was an arrogant little boy raised by Dumbledore to believe he was better than he was. Snape is truly powerful, more powerful than even I."

"Fenrir," Farrah began. "No one could hope to be more powerful than you."

"Are you certain of that?" Fenrir asked. "I'm not a legilimens, I don't have the dueling prowess of Snape, and I do not have an extensive knowledge of potions. I can lead a pack of lycanthropes, but even with the Elder Wand I would have a difficult time defeating Snape. He knows of hexes and spells I could only imagine. He is more than a formidable foe: he is one of the biggest threats to our plans."

"Maybe you could find a way to minimize some of those advantages," Scabior proposed. "I mean you have a strong mind. You could resist Snape's legilimency with little trouble."

"Do you really think I would've fared any better under Snape's scrutiny?" Fenrir replied. "I wouldn't have been able to defend my mind any better than any of the Death Eaters. There was a reason Snape was Voldemort's second in command. He is by far the most powerful wizard alive today."

Farrah's eyes flashed. "So are we throwing everything away because Severus Snape is now involved?"

"Of course not, but we'll need to consider our next steps even more carefully." Fenrir paced back and forth. "I'm not convinced Snape is on the Ministry's side, at least not yet. He may have questioned the Death Eaters only as a favor to Lucius and Draco, in which case he is still not against us."

"Very true," Scabior replied.

"We must make sure we prevent him from turning against us, however," Fenrir continued. "The best and surest way to do this would be to find his weakness and exploit it."

All stared at him in an uncomfortable silence.

"What weakness?" Scabior asked. "Lily is dead, and his debt to her is repaid."

"He has a new wife now, does he not?" Fenrir asked.

"He is protective of Hermione, at least from what I could discern," Farrah noted. "There seems to be a trace of affection there."

"I wouldn't be so quick to assume he cares for her. If you believe the papers Hermione was a casual fling. They only married because Severus wanted his fortune, and because she was too stupid to use a contraceptive spell. There's no report that they feel any affection towards each other," Scabior argued.

Farrah laughed. "They're probably driving each other crazy. We'd be doing Snape a favor if we removed Hermione from his life."

"Which means she is not his weakness," Scabior concluded.

Fenrir sneered, "We'll just have to find another one then, won't we? Snape may be a powerful wizard, but he is not a god."

"Very true," Scabior smirked.
Fenrir looked to his left, where the Chief was smirking as well.

Farrah folded her hands. "What about Hermione's child? That baby is Severus' only blood relative. He must care for her."

"Now there's an idea." Fenrir sneered. "Yes, that could prove to be a lovely idea indeed."

"Too bad the child hasn't left the womb yet, otherwise we'd threaten to take her life now," Scabior replied.

Fenrir's eyes grew. "No, no harm can come to the child, at least not in my presence. I will not create a horcrux of her. My life will not be tied to hers!"

"A wise move," Farrah noted.

"Let's ignore the brat for now." Fenrir began. "Here's what we'll do; we'll continue forward with our plans for the breakout. We should be ready within two weeks."

"We will be," Scabior vowed.

"Good." Fenrir turned to his spy. "Farrah, your blueprints have been invaluable, but now I need you to look for landing spots for our boat."

"I will," she promised.

"Great." Fenrir replied. "I also need you to make sure this boat is cleared for landing by the proper authorities. We don't want to arouse suspicion."

"I can do that," Farrah assured him.

"Good. After the jail break we will focus on our ultimate goal of unveiling our plan for a world full of lycanthropes." Fenrir rubbed his hands together. "By the time our plan is in motion, Snape will be more than willing to submit to his new master, namely me."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It's very much appreciated!
"Hermione!"

Muriel flung open the door. Her smile covered her entire face.

"Hello Mum, Dad," Hermione began as she rushed into her mother's outstretched arms. "I've missed you two so much."

"It's been too long," Muriel sighed. She released Hermione and waved her inside.

"We've missed you too," Wilfred added as he closed the door behind them.

"I intended to see you two earlier, but these past few weeks have been chaotic," Hermione apologized as the trio made their way to the living room. "But I was determined to get here before I was too far along to safely apparate."

"When will that be unable to apparate?" Wilfred sat on the couch beside his wife.

"In a couple of weeks," Hermione sat down on a recliner.

"It's good you could make the trip then," Muriel replied.

"Indeed," Hermione answered. "To tell you the truth it was a bit of a risk to apparate today, but I consulted with my ob-gyn at yesterday’s appointment. She assured me that apparation should still be safe since I've had a relatively uneventful pregnancy. Still if I feel even the slightest hint of pain I should see a doctor immediately."

Wilford frowned. "You aren’t in pain now, are you?"

"No," Hermione placed a hand over her abdomen. Her voice softened. "All I feel is kicking."

Muriel chuckled. "You were quite the kicker yourself."

Hermione returned her attention to them. "Was I?"

"Oh yes," Muriel laughed. "I lost more than a few hours of sleep because you refused to settle down until well after midnight."

Hermione blushed. "Sorry, Mum."

Muriel grinned. "It's quite all right. Some babies are very active. You were one of them."

"At least Rose has been calmer at night, although she’s developed a penchant for resting on my bladder," Hermione replied.

Muriel nodded. "You put me through that as well."

"Mum, you said I was a good baby," Hermione gasped.

"Oh you were," Muriel answered, "when you were napping."
Wilfred chortled. "She's right. After you were born you were quite the little night owl."

Hermione’s parents gazed into each other’s eyes, both reliving the sleepless nights they endured as a result of Hermione.

Hermione sighed. "I got better, right?"

"Of course you did, but babies are never easy to raise," Muriel answered.

"No, they aren't," Wilford concurred.

Hermione rubbed her abdomen. "It sounds like raising Rose will prove quite the ordeal."

"I'm afraid raising a child isn’t always be sunshine and flowers," Muriel replied. "But Rose will also give you more joy than you could ever imagine."

"Indeed," Wilford replied.

Hermione smiled as Rose kicked against her hand. "Rose has already brought Severus and I great joy. We cannot wait to hold her."

"Speaking of Severus, where is he?" Wilford asked.

Hermione's lips curled upwards. "Severus is brewing today. He would have liked to come, but our antenatal appointment yesterday set his schedule back. He's determined to open the apothecary before Rose is born so that he can provide me with more help."

"That's quite a shame. I was looked forward to talking with him again," Wilford replied.

"You were?" Hermione asked.

Wilford nodded. "Severus is the first man you've brought home that possessed any amount of common sense at all. We like him."

Hermione turned to her mother. Muriel responded. "It’s true. Of all the men you’ve shown us Severus is our favorite."

"I would hope so, given he’s my husband and the father of my child," Hermione replied.

The gleam in Muriel’s eyes rivaled that of Dumbledore. "He makes you happy."

A wave of warmth washed over Hermione. "I am more than content with him."

"While I regret not seeing Severus, I'm glad he's working hard to provide for you and your child," Muriel replied.

"Me too. He’s done so much for Rose and me," Hermione choked. "I honestly have no idea where I’d be without him, especially after Harry…" Hermione bowed her head and wiped her eyes. "I’m sorry."

Muriel stretched out her arms once more. Hermione stood up and crawled into them. She sobbed as her mother massaged her back.

"I am so sorry baby," Muriel whispered. "I know how much Harry meant to you."

Wilford joined Muriel in massaging Hermione’s back. "Harry was a fine young man. It's a tragedy
that he was taken from us so soon."

"I know, and thank you both. Your letters of consolation touched me and helped me get through a very difficult time," Hermione hiccuped and looked up at them. She sat up straighter and wiped her face. Once the hiccups abated she continued, "Severus and I are investigating Harry's death, but so far all of our leads have proven to be dead ends."

"I'm sure something will show itself soon," Wilford replied.

"The Ministry is investigating too, aren't they?" Muriel asked.

"Yes, but they have their attention focused on the wrong person," Hermione replied.

"Oh dear," Muriel muttered.

Hermione slid off her mother's lap onto the couch cushion. "Severus and I will keep searching. We won't rest until the murderer is behind bars."

"That's my girl," Wilford patted her on the back.

Hermione deflated. "I just wish the killer had left more clues."

"Murderers tend to make a mistake somewhere down the line," Wilfred assured her.

"I pray you're right, Dad," she sighed.

Wilford took Hermione's hand and squeezed it. "I have every confidence that you will get justice for Harry."

"If anyone can find Harry’s killer it would be you," Muriel added.

"Thank you," Tears returned to Hermione’s eyes. "I've missed both of you so much. I wish I could see you more often."

"Well, you will have an opportunity to see us again soon," Muriel began.

Hermione looked up at her mother, "Oh?"

"Ginny Malfoy sent us an invitation to your baby shower. We had to reschedule a few appointments, but we will be able to make it," Muriel replied.

Hermione clasped her hands together. "That's wonderful!"

"We thought you’d be happy," Wilford replied.

"Do you need a place to stay?" Hermione asked.

"We were planning on staying at an inn in Hogsmeade which accepts muggle patrons," Wilford replied.

"Oh,” Hermione answered. “Severus and I aren’t opposed to you staying with us at the mansion if you want to save some money."

"We know," Muriel replied. “But once Rose comes you will have precious few moments alone together. You need to savor the childfree time you have together while you can.”
Rose kicked again. Hermione swallowed. Perhaps the books weren’t exaggerating when they claimed that a couple may have difficulty carving out time for intimacy after the birth of a child.

“Anyway,” Wilford interjected. “You mentioned an antenatal appointment earlier.”

“I did,” Hermione answered.

“How did it go?” He asked.

“Oh it went great,” Hermione beamed. "In fact, I have a picture of Rose right here that I’ve been eager to show you.”

"You do?” Muriel exclaimed.

"Yes," Hermione answered as she pulled it out of her pocket. "The image is a little blurry, but this is our little Rose."

Her parents scooted closer to the photo. A fetus floated upside down. Her eyes were closed but her fingers, toes, and facial features were clearly distinguishable.

“She’s beautiful,” Muriel whispered.

"Thankfully she didn't inherit Severus' nose," Wilfred began.

“Dad!” Hermione exclaimed.

"What? Even you can't deny he has a generous nose,” Wilford replied.

Hermione’s face was rouge.

“I have nothing against the man, but it's hard not to notice that particular facial feature," Wilford argued.

"I find his nose rather attractive," Hermione replied.

"Oh really?” Muriel asked.

"Yes," Hermione answered.

Her eyes grew at the realization that she’d admitted that she found Severus attractive. Granted, even as a student she hadn’t considered him unattractive, but Merlin, why was she aroused at the thought of her husband’s nose?

"Why do you look so flustered?"

Hermione turned to her mum. “It's nothing, I uh,” Hermione cleared her throat. “I've just never heard my feelings towards Severus phrased in that way.”

“Why would it surprise you to hear someone say that you find him attractive?” Wilford asked. “You made a baby with the man, so he had to have some sort of sexual appeal.”

"Yes, I did make a baby with him," Hermione shook her head. “I’ve just always been more enticed by his intellect than his physical features. I mean you two did teach me to judge people for who they are, so that’s how I’ve judged Severus.”

“Fair enough,” Wilford answered.
“Anyway,” Hermione perked up. “I have some lovely pictures of the mansion if you'd like to see them!”

"I'd love to," Muriel drawled.

What is my daughter not telling me about her relationship with Severus?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support. It is deeply appreciated!
"Tell me again why Hermione would want these," Narcissa rubbed the flat elastic blob between her fingers, "contraptions, at her baby shower?"

"Because according to Hermione most muggle celebrations involve balloons. She says that she's never been to a baby shower without a balloon floating around," Ginevra answered.

"What do balloons have to do with having a baby?" Narcissa muttered.

Ginevra shrugged. "I don't know, but the balloons do make the ballroom look more festive."

Narcissa held the rubbery object up to her face, "Are these balloons balloons always pink?"

Ginevra burst out laughing. Narcissa frowned and crossed her arms.

Ginevra calmed herself. "Sorry, but the look on your face is priceless."

Narcissa's frown deepened.

Ginevra continued, "No, balloons aren't always pink. They come in almost every color imaginable. We're just using pink balloons because Hermione's having a girl."

"I see," Narcissa drawled.

Ginevra took a deep breath and blew into hers. Narcissa's eyes grew as the flat rubber morphed into a sphere. Once it was as large as a dragon's egg Ginevra tied the bottom, and wrapped a string around it. "That should last."

"It's quite interesting how you managed to dilate that thing, but the process seems very labor intensive," Narcissa began. "Are you sure there isn't some spell we could use to inflate that, whatever it is?"

"Balloon?"

"Yes, balloon."

Ginevra's smile was too playful for Narcissa's comfort. "No, you can't use a spell to inflate these balloons. I've tried, and they tend to explode."

"They can explode?" Narcissa gasped.

"Well, not explode in a way that could harm someone, but they make quite a loud noise. Want to see?"

"No thank you." Narcissa threw down the flattened balloon as if it had spontaneously combusted. "I think it would be wise for me to help you with some other aspect of decorating this room. Perhaps I can set up the tables and chairs."

"I could use some help in that area," Ginevra admitted. "Do you remember my diagram for the room?"
"I remember it perfectly," Narcissa replied.

"Good, because the chairs need to be aligned exactly as I've specified them. Cleanup needs to be easy for the elves, and Hermione must be able to move around without feeling like a balloon herself. Everything has to be perfect. Hermione deserves as much."

"I understand," Narcissa answered.

For the fourth time that day she wondered why she'd agreed to help Ginevra prepare her house for Hermione's baby shower. When her daughter-in-law wasn't introducing her to exploding balloons she was quite the perfectionist. Narcissa had some suggestions for making the room more aesthetically pleasing, but Ginevra wouldn't so much as let her get a word in edgewise. Oh well. This was Ginevra’s party, not hers.

With a few flicks of her wand, Narcissa set the tables and chairs into their paper position. Meanwhile, Ginevra continued blowing up the balloons.

After ten silent minutes Ginevra groaned and slouched into a chair beside the window. "I forgot how difficult this can be, especially if the balloons are tight."

Narcissa moved a table to the east side of the room. "Will they explode if you don't blow them up correctly?"

"Let's find out." Ginevra smirked before pulling out a fresh balloon. She filled it about halfway with air, then released it. Narcissa gasped as she dodged the flying, buzzing missile. She flinched as it landed at her feet without further noise. Narcissa opened one eye and peeked down.

Ginevra could no longer contain her laughter. "Did you think it was going to go off like a bomb? I already told you that it wouldn't."

"I never know what to expect with you. For all I knew you'd filled the thing with some of your brother’s exploding powder!" Narcissa argued.

Ginevra laughed all the harder. "I'm sorry Narcissa, I honestly thought you'd heard of balloons and knew how they worked."

Narcissa nudged the benign object with her toe. It didn't move. She began to giggle as well.

Ginevra stopped laughing. Her mouth was agape. She sat up straighter.

"Narcissa?"

The older witch regained her composure. "Yes?"

"Please call Draco in," Ginevra asked in a soft voice.

"Are you feeling well?" Narcissa asked.

Ginevra nodded. "I need to speak with Draco."

Narcissa nodded. "I'll get Draco."

"Thank you," Ginevra whispered.

Narcissa rushed into the hallway. "Draco!"
Ginevra stared at the wall. A smile played at her lips as she placed a hand on her stomach.

“Ginevra?” Draco darted towards her. “What’s wrong love?”

"Draco, I can feel the baby move," she whispered.

"What?" Narcissa asked.

"I felt that little flutter. I think it's doing flips!" Ginevra announced.

"It is?" Draco breathed.

Tears filled Ginevra’s eyes. "I know you can't feel it, but Draco it's moving! I can feel our baby moving."

“Oh Ginevra.” He took her into his arms. “Will, will it begin kicking soon?”

"I hope so,” she answered.

"I can't wait to feel it kick," Draco choked.

Ginevra brushed her lips against his. "Soon love. Very soon our child will be in our arms."

Narcissa smiled through proud tears. She stepped out of the room, allowing her son and daughter-in-law to enjoy the tender moment in private.

***

Hermione counted to ten as she paced from the north side of the library to the south. She paused a few times and touched her abdomen. Then she resumed her walk.

"Hermione?"

She stopped and turned to the doorway. "Yes, Severus?"

He strolled towards her. "What are you doing?"

Hermione sighed. "I started feeling uncomfortable."

“What do you mean by uncomfortable?” Severus asked.

She replied. “My stomach felt tight, and then there was a mild cramping.”

“So you’re in labor?” Severus exclaimed.

Hermione shook her head. “These are Braxton-Hicks contractions. I’ve been sitting for hours, which can trigger them. I decided to walk around and see if that helped.”

“But there’s a possibility that you could be in labor,” Severus panicked.

“No, because I don’t feel as uncomfortable after walking. I'm fine,” Hermione answered.

Sweat was forming on Severus’ brow.

Hermione continued. “There is no reason to worry. The book I read said that if I walked around while I was in labor, my contractions would get worse. They’re actually getting better. Ergo I’m not in labor.”
“You’re going to entrust the health of our daughter to a book?”

"Severus, we’re fine, I promise."

“We need to call your Mediwitch just to be sure."

Hermione gave him a soft smile. “I appreciate your concern, but I am fine.”

"Is Rose fine?" he asked. “These Braxton-Hicks contractions won’t harm her in any way, will they?”

“Rose is as healthy as can be,” Hermione promised. "This is all a normal part of pregnancy."

“According to your book."

“Which was written by a trusted healthcare provider.”

"This provider could be wrong. For all we know you and Rose are in great danger."

“If you need assurance as to Rose’s health you will be comforted by the fact that she is kicking right now. Do you want to feel it?"

"Yes," Severus grumbled. He put a hand on Hermione’s abdomen and felt the baby’s kicks. His muscles relaxed. "Hello Rose. Are you getting tired of being cramped up in there?"

"It can’t be comfortable being inside of someone for seven months," Hermione noted. "Especially when you have two more to go."

"Don’t come out until you’re ready, please," Severus replied. "As much as your mother and I want to see you, we don’t want you to be injured."

Hermione tensed. "Oh Merlin, does being born hurt babies?"

"If it does cause pain most babies don’t remember it. At least I don’t remember being in pain during my birth," he replied. "Besides, I’d imagine that it would hurt more to remain in that cramped space than it would to be ejected from the womb."

"Great point," she chuckled.

Rose kicked against Severus’ hand again. His grin grew.

"I think my Braxton-Hicks are over. I am not in any great discomfort,” Hermione began.

Severus gazed into her eyes. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Indeed," Hermione replied.

Severus stepped behind Hermione and wrapped his arms around her. Pulling her close, he reached around to kiss her, reveling in the sensation as she leaned back against him and stroked his cheek. Even though her stomach was much more pronounced than when they first married, he didn’t mind. After all, he was holding his family in his arms.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for all the support! It's much appreciated!
"Here's the woman of the hour herself!" Ginevra announced. "Hermione Granger!"

The other party guests, including once fellow Hogwarts students, former fellow ministry employees, and a few friends looked up to greet the guest of honor. All of them applauded. Hermione bowed her head in an attempt to hide her blush. Severus stood beside her, his eyes transfixed on the balloons. Merlin, he hadn't seen one in years…

Hermione glanced at the host. "Ginny, this is all so beautiful."

"You deserve it," Ginny replied.

"Here's to Hermione!" Neville called from the midst of the crowd.

The guests raised their glasses and shouted, "Cheers!"

Unwanted tears trickled down Hermione's cheeks. A few guests smiled in understanding as Hermione wiped them away. "Damn pregnancy hormones."

"The crying got to me after the sixth month, too."

Hermione's tears returned. "Mum?"

Muriel approached her daughter. "I'm right here."

“I knew you were coming. This isn’t a surprise.” Hermione fell into her mother's arms. She muttered, "I need to stop being such a baby."

“Don’t be embarrassed honey,” Muriel replied. “Every mother in the room understands what you're going through."

Hermione peeked up at her mother. In Muriel’s’ eyes she saw understanding and compassion.

"She's right," Narcissa piped in as Hermione pulled away from her mother. “I was quite the mess when pregnant with Draco.”

“She was,” Lucius mumbled.

Ginny choked back her laughter.

Narcissa shot the younger woman a look. "I wouldn't be so quick to laugh Ginevra. In a few months you won't feel so perky."

Ginevra squirmed. The guests laughed.

Draco suppressed a groan as he pictured months of soggy handkerchiefs in his future. He leaned over and whispered into his godfather’s ear, “Is Hermione really that bad most days?”

“Most days she is pleasant enough.”
"That's a relief."

"But she always has been more level headed than Ginevra," Severus replied. "So you may not experience the relative peace that I have."

Draco groaned and shook his head. Severus smirked.

The other guests began forming groups and mingling amongst themselves.

"How have you been Narcissa?" Hermione asked.

"Very well, thank you," Narcissa replied "How have you been faring?"

"Aside from that minor breakdown a few moments ago, I’ve been doing quite well," Hermione answered.

"You do like decorations and the location, right?" Ginevra asked.

Hermione embraced Ginny. "I love everything! Thank you so much for organizing all of this!"

“I’m so happy to hear it,” Ginny exhaled as they drifted apart.

“Yes, Ginevra worked quite hard to put all of this together,” Narcissa replied. “I’d say she did an excellent job.”

Ginny nodded. “I blew up every one of those fifty balloons myself.”

"Really?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," Ginevra replied with a gleam in her eyes. "You should've seen the look on Narcissa's eyes when I explained to her what balloons were."

Hermione turned to Narcissa. “You didn’t know what a balloon was?”

“Malfoys have more important things to contend with than inflatable rubber,” Narcissa answered with a playful glint in her eyes.

Ginny laughed. “There’s clueless and there’s cowering in fear of a deflated balloon.”

Hermione and Muriel erupted into laughter.

Narcissa crossed her arms over her chest. "It really wasn't as entertaining as Ginevra would lead you to believe.”

“Whatever you say,” Ginny giggled.

Despite herself, Narcissa smiled.

From across the room, Severus watched Hermione. Even if the room was much too pink for his liking, Hermione’s laughter made the soiree worth attending.

“Severus!”

Lucius approached Severus with a warm smile. Severus’ stomach sank.

“Severus,” Lucius repeated. "Don't just mope around like you’re chaperoning a Yule Ball. Come join us and be social."
"I'm not in the mood to chat," Severus replied.

"Now Severus," Lucius stood before his friend. "This is your baby shower. You should be enjoying yourself."

"This is my wife's baby shower," Severus answered. "I'm simply here to support her."

Lucius shook his head. "No one would begrudge you if you showed even the slightest hint of joy at the prospect of becoming a father to a baby girl."

Severus’ eyes and voice softened. "I eagerly await Rose’s birth, but I do not feel the need to express my joy by decorating an entire room in pink."

"If it were up to you, you wouldn’t have a public celebration of Rose’s birth at all," Lucius answered.

"I never did enjoy these social gatherings," Severus admitted.

"True," Lucius replied. "But you used to be better at hiding it."

"I don’t believe I’m scowling."

"No, but you are mooning over your wife. That isn’t a significant improvement."

"I'm not mooning over my wife," Severus insisted.

"You haven’t taken your eyes off of her since you’ve entered," Lucius replied.

"I'm parched," Severus answered. "I'm going to get a refreshment."

Lucius grabbed Severus’ arm. "You aren't parched, you're avoiding me."

Severus sighed. "Why do you wish to speak with me? We both know I have nothing of value to say."

Lucius released his friend. "I am not upset that you weren’t able to ascertain anything about Harry’s killer from the Death Eaters. I honestly didn’t expect you to find anything. It was a long shot, and I knew it."

"We're still no closer to finding out who killed Potter."

"No, but we know who isn't responsible. That’s a bit of progress right there."

"Is it?"

"Yes. We know that whoever killed Potter hasn’t been in contact with the Death Eaters, at least not concerning these plans. That eliminates many of their family members and close acquaintances."

"As far as the Ministry is concerned Draco remains a suspect. Seeing as to how our goal was to exonerate Draco, I would claim that we failed."

"You tried to help Draco," Lucius replied. "That's all I was asking for."

Severus swallowed. "I wish I could've done more."

"You did what you could," Lucius replied.
“Hermione and I haven’t given up investigating this case,” Severus promised.

"Neither have I," Lucius replied with a frown.

"What are you planning on doing?" Severus asked.

Lucius scanned the room. He motioned for Severus to lean in closer. The dark wizard complied.

Lucius whispered. "I’ve hired some private investigators to investigate Harry’s life. Harry may have been a war hero, but no one is universally loved. He must have some other enemies somewhere who have more motive to kill him than my son. All I need to do is find them.’’

“That is a good strategy, but I fear it may not yield any results. I still believe Harry’s murderer is a Death Eater," Severus warned.

“As do I, but there’s no proof that any of the Death Eaters know of Harry’s fate, and less proof that one is pretending to be dead,” Lucius replied. “Until we obtain proof that a Death Eater is alive we can’t put that forward as a theory and expect the Ministry to believe us.”

Severus sighed. “You are correct. Still, the killer will resurface eventually, making his or her motives much clearer than they are now.’’

Lucius exhaled. ”I fear you may be right.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! I appreciate it all!
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The warden squinted at the parchment before him. He leaned closer and ran his finger along a groove in his desk. "No George, the records are correct. We have a prisoner ship coming in at midnight tomorrow night."

"That's odd," George mused. "Who would want to transfer prisoners at that late hour?"

"I don't know," the warden sat back in his chair and relaxed. "If I had to guess I'd assume it's some Ministry boat escorting prisoners."

“But the Ministry boats usually come around eight in the evening,” George noted.

"True," the warden conceded. "Which makes this order all the weirder."

"Perhaps this is one of those high risk shiploads, like the ones that carried the Death Eaters," George suggested.

"With Harry Potter's murderer on the loose it wouldn't surprise me if that was the case," the warden answered.

"Maybe they've found Harry's killer," George proposed.

"Perhaps," the warden replied. "Although you'd think we'd have read about the killer's capture in the papers by now."

“You'd think so, but maybe the Ministry is trying to cover it up."

"Or perhaps it's that Malfoy kid. They want him transferred in secret so he can't bribe his way out of trouble. In two days time people will be dancing in the streets because Malfoy went down."

"I still think Malfoy's capture would be covered by the newspapers."

"Not if the Ministry wanted to avoid protests from Malfoy's high ranking friends."

George shook his head. “I'll never understand how the Ministry could bow to such bastards."

"Well, it's not for us to speculate on the inner workings of the Ministry or why this boat is coming in at such a late hour," the warden replied.

“No, it’s not," George responded.

“Would you be willing to work an extra shift so you can be on duty when it arrives?” The warden asked.

"I can do that," George replied.

"Good. Would you mind working with Mark and Farrah that night?" the warden asked. “Mark is pretty good at subduing less than friendly prisoners, and I want Farrah to gain some experience with prisoner transports."
"I'd be fine with it," George replied. “Knowing Mark he shouldn't have a problem with it, either. He's always taking rookies under his wing, and he loves showing off his skills to the ladies.”

The warden rolled his eyes. "His skills will be on full display in front of Farrah."

"You know he'll be tripping over himself to impress her."

The warden straightened himself. "I'll call Farrah in after she finishes cleaning up the prisoners’ trays.”

“I’m sure she’ll be relieved to speak with someone who won’t spit on her,” George answered.

The warden chuckled. “I’m sure she will.”

***

"I still don't understand why half of Rose's gifts are nappies," Severus muttered.

Hermione jotted down a word of thanks onto her parchment. "Do you have any idea how quickly babies go through nappies?"

"It is not possible for an infant to go through this many nappies." Severus sat down beside her. He pointed to a tower of nappies on the opposite end of the dining room table. “That tower alone should last us a few months.”

Hermione poked her head up. "Mum says these will only last a week."

“A week?” Severus' arm fell to his side.

Hermione bit the tip of her quill. “Yes, one week.”

Severus gulped at the thought of every trash reciprocal in the mansion filled to the brim with nappies. If that tower was only going to last one week…his stomach lurched at how much messier his life was to become.

"I suppose it's good we have so many then," Severus mumbled.

Hermione giggled. "I thought you'd agree."

“Perhaps we should focus on writing thank you notes for the other presents,” Severus suggested.

Hermione’s eyes lit up. “I did appreciate the little mobile Ginny found. Those witches on brooms are so cute. Rose will stare at it for hours.”

"If she does not find their smiles as revolting as I do," Severus mumbled.

"Let’s not forget that adorable unicorn pillow Draco bought for her," Hermione gushed.

Severus frowned. "Yes, the pillow was adorable, much too adorable for any reasonable person's taste.”

Hermione set down her quill and glanced over at Severus. He was doing his best to imitate the professor who had once terrorized Neville’s nightmares. Still it was hard to be intimidated by a man who an hour ago was cooing to their unborn daughter. The harder Severus tried to intimidate her, the harder it was for Hermione to keep herself together.
She burst into laughter.

"What, pray tell, is so amusing," Severus growled.

"Severus. It's okay for a little girl to have cute things."

"Not if it nauseates me to look at them."

"It's okay to be cute when you're around your daughter."

"It most certainly is not okay to degrade oneself in the name of a child!"

Hermione laughed even harder. "I think deep down inside you can't wait to see Rose snuggled into that pillow."

"I most certainly do not look forward to the day when sleeps with that emetic pillow," he argued before reaching into his pocket.

"Then what do you propose she sleep on?"

"A regular white pillow fitted for infants will be sufficient."

Hermione bent over. "Oh Severus, you will be a stellar father, but you will need some lessons in the fine art of giving girls gifts."

"I am more than adept at gift giving," Severus replied. "That's why I bought her this!"

Hermione stopped laughing. With a spell he enlarged the object. She blinked. "You're going to give Rose a green and silver snake?"

He shrugged. "Why not? Rose should have something that reflects my personality."

"You aren't a snake, you're…" Her eyes grew. "You sneak!"

He smirked.

"Rose isn't even born yet and you're already trying to influence her toward Slytherin house!" Hermione exclaimed.

His smirk grew wider.

She pouted. "You could've at least bought a Gryffindor toy to go with it."

"My dear, I did search for a Gryffindor toy, but they were surprisingly out of stock," Severus answered.

Hermione glared at the offending toy. The only redeeming thing about it was its little pink tongue sticking out. If she hadn't known the giver she might have called that felt tongue cute…might have.

"You could've at least bought a snake with red and gold markings," she mumbled.

"Those were surprisingly out of stock as well," he replied.

Hermione snarled as she returned her attention to the note. Under her breath she muttered, "I can't believe I married a Slytherin and expected him to behave like a reasonable human being…"

"You're writing a thank you note for diapers?"
“I’m not talking to you anymore,” she muttered.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because you’re insufferable.”

“This morning I was the best wizard you’d ever met.”

“Pregnancy hormones are notorious for clouding one’s judgment. They can make you believe an infuriating potions’ master would behave like a regular human being around others.”

“I don’t behave like a regular human being?”

“No you do not.”

“In terms of abnormality I believe I rank fairly low on the scale.”

“Why would you ever think that.”

“I don’t write thank you notes for nappies.”

“Don't turn this around on me,” Hermione slammed down her quill. Her eyes drifted to that offensive stuffed reptile. “Although I will admit that it feels strange to write a thank you note for a bag of nappies.”

Severus smiled. "I think deep down inside you like Rose's snake."

"It's very,” she answered. “You.”

"Indeed," Severus replied in a low voice. He clasped her hands. "But you like me the way I am."

"I feel no affection for you when you're giving my daughter toy snakes," Hermione answered, trying to ignore the desire welling in her chest.

"I could have given her a toy spider," Severus teased.

"What would possess you to give her something like that?" Hermione whispered.

"No idea," Severus pulled her onto his lap.

"I don't know either," Hermione whispered as she melted into his embrace. She bridged the remaining distance between them with a kiss, which he deepened.

Hermione pulled away. "Maybe the snake isn't so bad."

Severus kissed her on the cheek. "I knew you’d come to like it."

***

The waves lapped at Fenrir's feet. He scratched his chin and hummed before baring his teeth. “Perfect.”

Fenrir's followers released a collective sigh of relief.

Fenrir turned around and announced, "My children, you have made me very happy!"

The followers nodded. "Just to be sure it's seaworthy, however, all of you will board before me."
Several of the younger lycanthropes sweat. Fenrir licked his lips and lifted the Elder Wand. He cast a spell to shackle all of the followers together. “Chief!”

The other lycanthrope grunted.

“Lead them onboard!”

The Chief pulled out his wand and directed them to the gangplank. The first newly changed lycanthrope trembled as she climbed aboard. Soon the others followed. The boat dipped lower in the water under the additional weight, but at no point was it on the verge of sinking.

Fenrir extended his hand to Scabior and the Chief. ”Shall we?"

"Let's go," Scabior replied.

The Chief nodded.

Together, the three boarded. With the flick of a wand, the boat cast away from the shore and drifted out to the open waters.

"My children, you are probably wondering what the next phase of my plan is!" Fenrir began.

Some bowed their heads, others glanced at the ocean, while a few focused on Fenrir. Not a word was spoken though.

"Well my children, if all goes according to plan, then we will soon free all of the Death Eaters from Azkaban."

His announcement was greeted with gasps and horrified whispers. Fenrir sneered. "Do not worry; they will be joining us in our quest to recreate the world in our image."

Some of the followers bit their lips, others glanced at the scars left by their transformation, while a few grinned.

“You should be proud to embark on such an endeavor. At the moment you fear being freaks, but if the new world is exactly like you…”

More lycanthropes grinned.

“You will be the first in a proud tradition of worldwide lycanthropy."

Half of the followers cheered while the other half cowered. Fenrir laughed as a breeze began to waft through his hair. Scabior saved the image in his memory. When all was said and done someone would want to paint this image of Fenrir on the sea. He could already envision the title, *Fenrir: The Great and Terrible Ruler.*

“For now I must keep you shackled because you are posing as prisoners. When I unshackle you, you shall distract the guards just long enough for me to breeze by them,” Fenrir ordered.

“Yes,” the followers answered.

Fenrir’s eyes darkened. “If I find out that a single one of you has betrayed me in any way…”

He lunged for them and chomped. They screamed.

Fenrir cackled. “I thought we’d reach an understanding!”
Fenrir whipped out a silver cloak and flung it over his shoulders, disappearing beneath it as if he were nothing but a terrifying mirage.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It's deeply appreciated!
The wind hissed against the waves. Surges of water leapt onto the dock, only to retreat. At some point the sea coughed up a fallen brach and shoved it onto the rocky island. It scraped against the stones.

Very little light shone as the clouds obscured most of the stars. Around midnight the crescent moon peeked between tufts of cumulus to give illumination, but its light was suppressed as new clouds scurried to fill the vacancy.

“I’m surprised this ship is still coming,” George muttered. “You’d think the captain would want to reschedule rather than risk capsizing.”

“Whatever is on that ship must be important if he's willing to put himself in such danger,” Farrah replied.

“Must be,” Mark muttered.

The gale tousled Farrah’s hair. Her throat grew tight as she recalled a similar night years ago. Her parents had requested that she stay indoors, to wait for Uncle Archelaus to visit. He would see her before she left for Hogwarts, they promised. In defiance she snuck out of her house to wait along the beach. The waves grew with each hour. Her eyes drooped. A bell clanged in the distance. She leapt up and cheered upon noticing floating above the waters. When it reached shore Uncle Archelaus stepped onto the rickety bow of the ship. He extended his arms in anticipation of Farrah's embrace.

"There it is!" George announced.

Farrah startled.

"Easy now," George laughed.

Farrah frowned.

“Relax. If the sound of George's voice makes you jumpy, imagine what the sight of a boatload of criminals will do to yeh,” Mark teased.

"I'll be just fine thank you," Farrah replied.

"At least as long as they don't make any sudden noises,” Mark answered.

George and Mark laughed as the boat inched closer. Mark began casting spells to illuminate the waterway.

"That's odd," George began.

"What's odd?” Farrah asked.

"That boat doesn't have any Ministry markings," George continued.

"Huh," Mark hummed. "It doesn't."
"Maybe they are leaving the ship unmarked in order to avoid detection," Farrah suggested.

"You'd think they'd just cast some sort of disillusionment charm if they wanted it invisible," Mark mused.

"Using unmarked ships could be a new Ministry policy," Farrah replied.

"Maybe," Mark muttered.

"It makes sense in light of that disillusioned American ship which was hit by that muggle speed boat off the coast of South Carolina," George answered.

"I remember that," Farrah answered. "They had to do some fast talking to explain how a speed boat could be overturned on a clear, windless day."

"Unmarked boats make more sense than covering up an incident involving magic," George replied.

"You have a point there," Mark agreed.

Farrah's heart pounded against her chest as the boat cruised to the docking station. A chill raced up her spine when it reached the pier.

Mark approached the boat and shouted, "What is your docking number?"

The boat's floorboards creaked. A shadowy figure appeared from the prow. "The mayor of Hogsmeade sent us here with a shipment of suspects accused of conspiring to overthrow the government."

"Overthrowing the government?" Mark asked.

The man nodded. "According to these miscreants, Harry Potter's death was only the beginning. A new world order is coming soon, so everyone needs to prepare."

"Wait, these men killed Harry Potter?" Mark asked.

The man barred his teeth. "Yes, they did."

George cocked his head. Why hadn't this captain given them his name or docking number? Why wasn't he lowering the plank? George had done prisoner transfers before, but he'd never seen this captain. Why?

George cleared his throat. "Why haven't we heard anything about this attempted coup or about a group claiming responsibility for Harry's murder?"

"Because the Ministry wants them interrogated here."

"Why does the Ministry want them interrogated at Azkaban?"

"This little group of murderers want to pretend to be real Death Eaters, but they don't know the first thing about the group. Shacklebolt thinks a night in solitary among real Death Eaters and a few hours of interrogation will make them more willing to talk."

Mark and George glanced over at each other. Something wasn't sitting right about this man and his story. What was wrong with it though?

"May we see your papers?" Farrah demanded.
The captain winked at her. "Certainly!"

The guards relaxed as a plank was lowered. The man stepped out, papers in hand. A sudden rogue wave assaulted the guards. When it had passed the guards wiped themselves off.

"Here are my papers, gentlemen."

"Yes, uh Mister….?"

"Scabior!" he hissed.

Mark’s eyes grew. “Wait, isn’t Scabior the name of a Snatcher?”

Scabior drew his wand, stupefied the two men, and tossed them into the water.

"Chief!" Scabior yelled.

The Chief ran onto the dock with a triumphant smile.

Scabior announced, "The boss already snuck into the prison from the other pier! Let's go!"

Farrah led them inside the jail to the warden's office. Fenrir stood before the door with a grin which would terrify any full-blooded wolf.

“Farrah, would you like to do the honors of opening the door for me?” Fenrir replied.

"With pleasure," Farrah answered.

She muttered a spell. The door clicked open.

Fenrir ran inside and scoured the room for the cell block keys. He found them behind a glass door. "Will an alarm go off if I use my wand?"

"No," she replied. “I disabled the alarm before my first shift ended.”

"Excellent," Fenrir breathed. He smashed open the container, grabbed the keys and motioned to the rest to follow.

As the quartet raced toward the prisoner cells, they heard shouting from another corridor. Fenrir pulled the cloak over himself and his companions. A group of ten guards soon came into view, all armed with wands.

“Halt!"

They stopped.

“Show yourself!"

"With pleasure," Fenrir sneered. "Accio wands!"

The guards’ wands flew into some point ten feet from them. They gasped. What kind of entity could cause their wands to float in midair?

Fenrir handed the wands to Scabior. Then he pulled out the Elder Wand and pointed it at the gawkers. "Avada Kedavra."

Three of the guards fell dead. The remaining ones scurried away.
Farrah removed the cloak. "Pity, I actually liked the guards you killed."

"Let the soon to be dead bury the dead. We have work to do," Fenrir replied.

The group raced to a large wooden door. Farrah stepped towards it. "Allow me."

"Anything you say, my dear lady," Scabior replied.

Farrah undid the wards, allowing the others access before bursting inside, herself.

"Greetings!" Fenrir shouted.

The prisoners pushed against the barred cell doors, angling for a glimpse of the intruders.

Fenrir bellowed, "Release the prisoners!"

The cell doors opened. Only a few prisoners tiptoed outside. The others stared into the doorway as if they had just been thrust into a sweet dream.

"What are you waiting for?" Farrah demanded. "The cell doors are open. You’re free!"

Alecto poked her head out and gasped. "F-Fenrir?"

Everyone inched closer to the lycanthrope.

"Yes, it is I," Fenrir replied, savoring his moment of triumph. "If you accept my leadership, I will allow you to sail away from this prison with me."

The jailhouse erupted.

"We'll do anything to leave!"

"Yes! We'll follow you! We always knew you were the supreme leader!"

"We love you Fenrir!"

"You have our complete devotion!"

"I can't wait to see Mr Fluffy again!"

"The people have spoken," Fenrir gestured to the door. "Follow me to freedom!"

The prisoners followed Fenrir outside to the boat. While most could run, a few stumbled, their muscles atrophied from years of internment. The Chief, Scabior, and a few of the already changed lycanthropes carried the stragglers aboard.

At last the vessel was full, with only Farrah left on shore to witness its departure.

"Keep the Ministry busy!" Fenrir ordered. ‘I'll deal with them on my own soon enough!'"

"I will!" she replied.

With that, the boat glowed a bright green until it faded into the night. A tear trickled down Farrah's cheek.

The new world order had begun.
Chapter End Notes

Yep, that just happened.

Thank you for the support! I appreciate everything!
Chapter 75

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Gone.

Vanished.

Escaped.

Kingsley stared into space. The words being tossed in his direction made no sense. They couldn't be real, could they? No, the voices were too distant. The room had been freezing earlier in the day, but now it was warm. Yes, this was all a dream.

Yet the candles were so bright, and he was yawning. Could one be tired while dreaming. Then there was the issue of his bedtime routine. Before going to bed Kingsley had taken a Dreamless Sleep draught, just as he had done for the past two months. The potion couldn’t have worn off already…

"The Death Eaters are gone!"

Kingsley closed his eyes. No, he must’ve forgotten to take the potion. Damn. It was always difficult to control the course of a dream. Maybe if he relaxed and the dream would play itself out.

He grinned.

Yes, if he could settle himself he'd awaken to a much more pleasant reality…

"He's asleep!"

Just close your eyes and think pleasant thoughts...

"Aguamenti."

Shacklebolt jerked upright in his chair. He wiped the cool water from his face. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"So good of you to join us," a male advisor began. "I believe we were discussing the Azkaban prison break."

"Prison break?" Kingsley gasped.

"Yes," a female advisor answered. "At approximately twelve-thirty this morning the Death Eaters escaped from Azkaban."

"The Death Eaters escaping isn't a dream then," Kingsley whispered.

"No," the warden answered. "I fear that we are all quite awake."

“How, how could they escape?” Kingsley shuddered. “We had the best guards, the best security spells, the best defenses. How could this happen?”

"From what I've been able to gather, someone used an invisibility cloak to sneak into the prison,” an advisor began.
"Harry’s killer," Kingsley breathed.

"Harry's killer?" one of the advisors asked.

Shacklebolt leaned closer to them. “When Harry died we couldn't locate his invisibility cloak. The killer stole it. Harry’s killer must have helped the Death Eaters escape. That, that was the plan the entire time. Harry didn't die because of a love triangle, he died so the killer could help the Death Eaters escape.”

“We can’t confirm anything yet,” another advisor replied.

“Oh let’s be honest,” Kingsley snapped. “Both Harry’s killer and this individual have the invisibility cloak. The Death Eaters wanted Harry dead as badly as our killer did. Harry was the defender of the light. If you kill him…”

The others leaned closer to Kingsley.

He trembled. “You’ve all but anointed yourself the leader of the Death Eaters.”

Silence suffocated the room.

“Go, go on,” Kingsley whispered. “What else occurred?”

The warden continued in a soft voice. “The suspect stupefied two guards before throwing them into the sea. Then he kidnapped a third. He did not harm her, but he did force her to do his bidding. A group of aurors tried to stop him when he burst inside.” The warden lowered his eyes. “Three of them lost their lives.”

"What about the two guards who were thrown into the sea?" Kingsley asked.

The warden shook his head. "One is suffering from water aspiration and a decreased heart rate, but there is a good chance he will survive the ordeal. The other didn't make it out alive."

"Oh Merlin," Kingsley whispered.

The silence returned.

“Certainly there are a few prisoners left behind to give us some kind of statement on what occurred,” Kingsley replied.

“No,” the warden replied. “All of the prisoners broke out of Azkaban.”

Kingsley’s eyes bulged. "All of them?"

The warden echoed, "All of them."

"Oh shit." Kingsley hyperventilated. “Oh shit. Oh shit. Oh shit! There are Death Eaters running amok, criminals on the loose, and we don’t have the foggiest clue where they could be or who is responsible for this turn of events!”

A female advisor offered, “The prisoners couldn't have gotten far. One can't apparate inside of the prison."

"They left Azkaban and apparated away with their ship," the warden snapped.

"H-how?" the female advisor asked.
"The Elder Wand," Kingsley gasped.

All attention turned to him.

Kingsley took a few deep breaths before speaking. “Harry’s killer captured the Elder Wand from Dumbledore’s grave. Its magic may have been strong enough to overcome the Azkaban wards.”

"Oh," the female advisor twisted her lips.

Kingsley’s voice was shaky. “All this time we were looking at this case like it was some sort of love triangle gone awry. On numerous occasions we were told that Draco was innocent. He had no compelling motive to harm Harry other than for a love triangle which to be blunt existed only in Harry’s head. Ginny was never going to leave Draco, and he knew it. None of the physical evidence pointed to Draco. My God, Draco is going to be a father! We almost separated a father from his child based on some ridiculous half-baked theory!”

“We can’t do anything about that now,” a female advisor noted. “All we can do is find the killer and resolve this crisis.”

“Right, right.” Kingsley sighed. "Are there any witnesses?"

"There is only Farrah Jackson, the kidnapped female guard.”

“Where is she?”

“She's here.”

“Here?”

The warden nodded. “She’s pretty shaken up, but she wanted to be available in case you want to speak with her.”

“I don't want to traumatize her any further. Merlin knows she’s just gone through the worst night of her life.” Kingsley replied.

"She stated that she wouldn't mind speaking to you now if you wanted a report from her," the warden replied.

Kingsley bit his lip.

“Sometimes it’s better to get these interviews done and over with sooner rather than later. That way the memory is still fresh,” an advisor noted.

Kingsley nodded. "Go ahead and bring her in.”

The warden nodded before opening the door. "Ms. Jackson?"

A woman stepped through the doorway. She scanned the room, as if expecting another assailant to appear from the shadows. Her back was hunched and her arms were crossed over her stomach, as if she were a fox amongst dogs. In a distant voice she began, "Hello Minister Shacklebolt.”

"Hello Ms. Jackson," Kingsley pulled out his wand and muttered an incantation. In an instant a chair flew from the back of the room to in front of his desk. "Please sit down."

"Thank you," Farrah murmured.
Kingsley cleared his throat. "Ms. Jackson…"

"Please call me Farrah," She took her seat.

"Alright, Farrah," Kingsley replied. "What do you remember about tonight's events?"

She gulped. "We were waiting for a prison transport ship to arrive. All of us thought that it was from the Ministry. We’d hoped Harry’s killer was aboard so the Wizarding World could be at peace.” She sniffed. “I believed, I believed we would just receive the prisoners, process them, and maybe lead one of them to interrogation. I-I never expected the captain to come out and stupefy the other guards. He tried to stupefy me, but I was able to dodge it. After-after he threw the others into the water…”

Farrah lowered her head and sobbed. Kingsley handed her a handkerchief. She squeaked, “Thank you.”

“Take all the time you need,” Kingsley replied.

Farrah blew her nose and continued. "The captain put a wand to my back and told me to lead him to the warden's office," Farrah continued. “If I didn’t comply he’d kill me. I, I know I should’ve resisted…”

“You were terrified,” Kingsley answered. “Nobody can blame you for acting out of fear.”

“Thank you, although it will be hard for me to live with what I’ve done,” Farrah choked.

“There’s no need to torture yourself for saving your own life,” Kingsley answered.

“Thank you,” Farrah sat up straighter. “Do, do you have any other questions for me.”

“Only if you feel you can answer them.”

“I do. I, I need to help in any way I can. I'll never live with myself it I don't help when I have the chance.”

"What did the person who put the wand to your back look like?" Kingsley asked.

"It was dark and I didn't get a good glimpse of him," she answered. “I know he was taller than me if that helps, and his voice was somewhat gravelly.”

"I see," Kingsley replied. “That is somewhat helpful. Tell me what happened next.”

"He…he forced me into the prison and ordered me to get the keys. I was so scared I complied. Then he put me under some kind of cloak…”

"The invisibility cloak," the warden noted.

Farrah glanced at him. "An invisibility cloak?"

The warden nodded. "The guards inside claimed an invisible force attacked them."

"That makes sense," Farrah choked. “Anyway the leader forced me to watch my comrades get cut down like trees, and then forced me to open the door which led to the prisoners. Maybe I should've sacrificed myself, but all I could think about were my parents and my friends and how I might never see them again.”

"No, Farrah, as I said before you were very brave. You needed to survive so we’d have some sort of
lead and a witness,” Kingsley replied.

She swallowed.

"What else happened?” Kingsley asked.

"After I opened the door, he released me. I hid in a corner until the other guards came." She buried her face in her hands and cried. "I should've been braver. I should've fought them. I was too cowardly. I disgraced my badge."

"You were human. Never fault yourself for that," Kingsley replied.

Farrah looked up. “Th-thanks. I, I can’t think of anything more to say.”

"Then you may go and get some much needed rest. Thank you for your help," Kingsley finished.

"You're welcome," she whispered.

She ran out of the room, tears flowing down her face.

Kingsley exhaled. "I suppose all of you are here to advise me on how best to break this news to the press."

"The public deserves to know that Death Eaters are roaming about," a female began.

"There's also the issue of muggle-borns…” a male advisor began.

"We will protect them!" Kingsley argued. “Whatever happens we will not allow anyone to be discriminated or harassed based on blood status.”

"The public will be happy to know that,” a male advisor smiled.

"Nevertheless we will advise all wizards not to give out their blood status. There is no need to put anyone in harm’s way unnecessarily.”

“A brilliant idea.”

"What about the Quidditch World Cup?” another advisor piped in “The Death Eaters attacked it once, perhaps they'll do so again. Perhaps we should consider cancelling it.”

"No!” Kingsley answered more forcefully than he'd intended. "I refuse to be intimidated by these bullies! That…” His face lit up. "That's what we'll tell the people. Yes, the Death Eaters are free, but we will stop at nothing to recapture them! We must show courage in a time of terror. We must face our enemies head on, and refuse to be intimidated by them. Whatever they say, whatever they do, we will not be intimidated by them!”

"That all sounds good," a female advisor smiled. “The public will be enthralled by your rousing speech.”

Kingsley deflated. “Too bad a speech can’t return a Death Eater to a jail cell.”
Sorry I didn't post yesterday. Work got chaotic and unfortunately took up most of my day. Thank you for sticking with me!
Chapter 76

Severus sipped his tea as he stared at the doorway. No one appeared. He sighed and lowered his cup. There was little hope Hermione would arrive to join him. Rose’s nocturnal gymnastics had kept her awake half the night; thus an eight o’clock wake up time was less than unlikely. Still breakfast seemed emptier without her, as if something essential was missing.

Severus snorted. There was no need to be saccharine.

"Master Snape!"

He startled

"I have your paper!" An elf announced.

"Thank you," he mumbled as he took the paper from the elf.

“Pancakes will be ready in five minutes,” the elf continued.

“Very well then,” Severus muttered.

The elf cocked his head. “You are eating alone?”

“More than likely, yes.”

“Where is Mistress?”

"In bed, Do not disturb her," Severus replied.

The elf nodded before disapparating. Severus huffed before opening the paper.

The headline was enough to stop his heart:

**Jailbreak! Death Eaters Freed!**

Severus shook his head. He couldn’t have read that headline correctly.

He had.

Severus’ throat dried. This had to be a hoax. *Daily Prophet* readership was down. This story was a publicity stunt. Yes, a stunt. Rita Skeeter couldn’t find anyone to bully today so she was resorting to outright fabrications.

Then he saw the author's name.

Betty Braithwaite wrote the article. Could Skeeter have used her identity in order to appear more trustworthy? No, this was Ms. Braithwaite’s writing style. Still, everyone was prone to exaggerate every now and then. The article was probably only about two escaped Death Eaters, not all of them.

All of them had escaped.

All of the imprisoned Death Eaters were free. There were no leads as to where they may have fled.
For all Severus knew they could be outside his door right now, ready to ambush Hermione and him the second they set foot outside. Merlin knew how much they hated Hermione and him. The fact that he’d used legillimency on them would only exacerbate the situation. Then there was the fact that Hermione was a member of the Golden Trio…

“I had that filthy mudblood begging for death!”

Even after seven years the memory of Bellatrix’s laugh sent chills down Severus’ spine.

“She tried to be so brave, so calm, but once the hexes came her way, well let’s just say she doesn’t have the composure that a real wizard has!” Bellatrix cackled. "Oh I could've listened to her screams for several more hours."

Severus’ stomach lurched. As much as the Death Eaters hated him, their hatred was even more intense towards Hermione. Severus couldn't bring himself to ponder what they would do if they ever captured her or their child.

Oh Merlin Rose! None of the Death Eaters found killing babies morally repugnant, a fact of which Severus was all too aware. In their eyes Rose was nothing more than the daughter of a mudblood and a traitor to their cause. Both of Rose's parents needed to suffer for their parts in the Second Wizarding War. What better way to punish them than to torture their precious daughter?

He gripped the handle of his tea cup. No, he would never allow his daughter and wife to be subjected to living in terror of the Death Eaters. Something needed to be done before the Death Eaters could reach the mansion. His course of action, however distasteful it may be, was becoming all too clear.

He had to take Hermione and flee Britain.

“Severus?”

He threw the paper onto the table. “Hermione, I did not expect you to be awake.”

She yawned and stretched. “I would’ve liked to have slept another hour, but when Rose is awake I’m awake too.”

“I see.”

Hermione frowned as she approached her husband. Any other day he’d start cooing at Rose. Today his eyes were distant, as if he'd been reliving the worst parts of his life. She swallowed. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Severus cleared his throat. “I was simply musing on an important matter.”

“What were you musing on?” Hermione sat down beside him.

"I was wondering how our properties in Germany were faring," Severus began.

"I'm sure they are fine," Hermione raised her eyebrow. When did he start caring about the German properties?

"Yes, but I was thinking we should check on them," Severus replied. “After all they are probably in need of upkeep. If we leave today we might be able to complete any potential repairs before Rose enters the world.”
"Today?" Hermione’s eyes bulged. “You want to leave today?"

"There is no better time to begin than the present," Severus replied.

"It’s too late in my pregnancy to apparate,” Hermione argued.

Severus scratched the table. "I would suggest that we floo, but I fear one of the repairs which must be done is reconnecting the properties to the floo network."

"Fabulous," Hermione exhaled.

"We could take the train," Severus suggested.

"Or we could wait until Rose is born before traveling to Germany," Hermione massaged her stomach. "It would be far more comfortable for me to ride on a train for hours if I don’t feel like I’m a stuffed turkey."

“You have a sound point, but there are still problems with your proposal."

"What problems would those be?"

"When we arrive in Germany where is Rose going to sleep??" Severus asked. “We might not have a nursery prepared for her if we wait until after she’s born."

"We could hire some people to set up a nursery for her in one of the properties. We have two months. That’s more than enough time to prepare a proper nursery."

"Then again, we could inspect the properties now and not have to contend with prams, car seats, or bassinets. It will be easier on us. If we’re inspecting properties, it will be difficult to change nappies and handle feedings," Severus replied.

"True," Hermione took a deep breath. "I wish you’d taken an interest in these properties before I hit my third trimester."

“Usually I do not procrastinate on such matters, but with as chaotic as the past few months have been certain matters have slipped my mind,” Severus admitted.

“The Germany properties never seemed important enough to warrant attention I suppose,” Hermione sat up straighter. "What about your apothecary? You won’t be able to open it in time if we take a vacation to Germany."

"That is a price I’m willing to pay," Severus replied, unable to hide the flash of regret in his eyes.

"What?" Hermione asked. "This apothecary is your dream. It’s only until now that you had the financial resources to make it a reality. When did you decide to throw that dream away for properties you cared nothing for until now?"

"When it became clear the properties needed some upkeep and that I needed to attend to that matter now," Severus answered.

“Who, who said you need to tend to the German properties now??"

“I need to honor my grandmother’s wishes. She willed me these German properties, and I need to respect her wishes to upkeep them."

“When did you start caring about your grandmother and her wishes?”
“I have always cared, but up until now I have not had the opportunity to demonstrate how deeply I care for my family.”

Hermione blinked. Her voice was quieter. “You’re willing to give up a lifelong dream for someone who abandoned you when you were most vulnerable?”

“There are things more important than an apothecary. Family is one of them, wouldn't you agree?”

Hermione lowered her head. Before she could formulate an answer her eyes fell on the newspaper. He folded it and set it on his lap, but not before she could read the words Jail and Death Eaters.

"Severus, what happened with the Death Eaters?" she drawled.

“Nothing. The article is only discussing their experiences in prison,” he answered.

POP!

"Master and Mistress Snape! Bud has breakfast!" an elf announced. He set the pancakes before the Snapes.

"I'm not hungry," Hermione answered in a low voice. "I'd like a copy of today's newspaper, please."

"Doesn't Mistress read Master's paper?" Bud asked.

"He won't share it with me," she growled.

"Here!" Bud snapped his fingers. A second copy of the paper appeared. He set it before her.

"Thank you Bud," Hermione replied before picking it up.

Neither noticed the elf POP away. Severus' breathing slowed as Hermione perused the offending article.

She slammed it onto the table. "So the Death Eaters are free?"

"Yes," Severus answered, feeling like his mother had just caught him sneaking out for the night.

"When did you intend to tell me?" Hermione asked. "Before or after we left for Germany?"

Severus squirmed. "I was going to tell you after Rose was born so the news wouldn't cause you any undue stress."

She furrowed her brow. "You think I'm helpless then?"

Severus took a deep breath. "No, I think…"

"You think what?" Hermione raised her voice. "You think I'm fragile? You think I'm going to shatter if you give me one piece of bad news?"

"The Death Eaters are after you," Severus argued. "You are in danger!"

"Of course I'm in danger. I'm a member of the Golden Trio," she argued. "But I defeated Voldemort's henchmen once already, and I can bloody well do it again!"

"You're carrying our baby," Severus fought back. "If you stay here you are putting her in danger."

"Are you calling me a bad mother for wanting to defend the Wizarding World?" Hermione
demanded.

“No,” Severus whispered. “You’re an excellent mother, but we need to be realistic about what you can accomplish given your condition.”

"I'm pregnant, not comatose!" Hermione argued. "I can still fight! I can still contribute to the effort to catch the Death Eaters! I'm not useless and I'm sure as hell not stupid!"

"No one said you were useless or stupid," Severus answered.

"You just did! Maybe you never stated it in words, but from the moment I’ve woken up you’ve treated me like I was the biggest idiot on the face of the earth. Merlin Severus! How dumb did you think I would have to be to follow you to Germany on such a flimsy excuse?"

"I was hoping you'd consider it a vacation…"

"Vacation! You were trying to trick me!"

“I am trying to protect you,” he snapped. “Can you not understand that?”

“Oh I’m perfectly capable of understanding that you see me as nothing more than a first year student who could blow up a cauldron at any moment. You think I'm some little girl who has nothing of any importance to contribute to the Wizarding World.”

Severus swallowed.

Hermione’s throat tightened. “You say you respect me as your wife and your friend, but then you lie to me because you find me incapable of defending myself? Instead of expressing your concerns and asking me what I'd like to do in this situation you deceive me and treat me like a dunderhead.”

Severus remained silent.

"I'm not going to Germany." She declared. "If you want to inspect your properties or run from Voldemort be my guest, but I won't join you!"

Hermione stalked out of the kitchen before shooting him a parting glare. Severus sunk in his chair. One thought echoed in his mind:

I do not want to lose you.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It's deeply appreciated!
"That man, ugh that Slytherin man!" Hermione stomped out of the master bathroom towards the bed. "He makes me so angry! What makes him think it’s acceptable to lie to people and treat them like they’re imbeciles? How can he be so arrogant as to believe I’d be stupid enough to follow him to Germany like a good little dutiful wife?"

Her only answer was a kick to the stomach.

"You don't understand, Rose," Hermione growled. “Really, I don't know why I'm surprised. I should’ve expected this out of him given how he behaved when I was a student. He, he’s…ugh!" Hermione hit the mattress. "Does he have to treat me like I'm an idiot? Does he have to act like I'm defenseless? Does he have to be so, so…so Snape?"

Rose kicked Hermione.

“Don’t tell me you’re taking his side in this," Hermione argued.

Rose kicked her mother harder.

"I always knew you'd be Daddy's girl," Hermione grumbled. "Even when Severus is at his absolute worst you're trying to break my concentration so I can't focus on what's upsetting me. Well, it won't work Rose. I am irate with your father and nothing will change that."

The force of Hermione's kick begged to differ.

Before Hermione could address her daughter, she heard a scratch from the doorway.

“Severus?”

Receding footsteps softened until they were almost inaudible. Once all was silent Hermione glanced at the door. A parchment stuck out of the threshold. She pulled out her wand and muttered, "Accio letter."

The letter leapt into her hands. She stuck her wand back into her pocket, broke the seal, and unfolded it. Then she sat on her bed and read:

Dearest Hermione,

Once again I have acted like a complete dunderhead before the woman I care so deeply about. My pride and your fury would make any rational conversation between us impossible. I pray this letter will suffice as a gesture of my regret and as an adequate first step towards reconciliation.

You were correct in stating that it was not right for me to attempt to deceive you. It was a mistake to behave as if you were a fool who would be too oblivious to discover that the Death Eaters had escaped. You were also correct in stating that you’d defeated Voldemort once and could do so again. I can't deny everything you've done for the Wizarding World, and that your role in the war is often unappreciated and overlooked. My intention was not to belittle you or insinuate that you were somehow delicate and defenseless. I have always seen you as a woman of great strength, both in magical abilities and in spirit. I have admired and will always appreciate that strength within you.
While my attempt at deception is inexcusable, I feel as if I must explain my reasoning. When I first looked upon today’s newspaper, I was more terrified for you than I had ever been for anyone else. We both know the reasons the Death Eaters have for despising you. All I could think of as I read the article was the numerous Death Eater meetings I’d endured. I could hear every slur towards muggleborns and the Golden Trio as if they were still being spoken. The laughter Bellatrix had as she recounted torturing you still nauseates me. Then my thoughts turned to their feelings regarding my role in the war. If they knew the whole truth they would stop at nothing to ensure that I spent the rest of my life in agony. The easiest way to accomplish this task would be to injure you or Rose while I was helpless to intervene. I was so consumed with this fear that I did not take your emotions or thoughts into consideration. Thus in a moment of weakness I unintentionally demeaned you.

I am truly sorry for wounding you, and I request your forgiveness. Believe me, apologizing does not come easily for me, but you are in the right. I will remain here in Britain in order to fight alongside you and the rest of the Ministry. I will not run. I only hope I have not lost your friendship.

Truly and apologetically,

Severus

Hermione’s lips quivered. She whispered. “I am such a dunderhead, Rose. Severus may have been misguided, but he never intended to hurt me. The man said family was more important than his apothecary, that we were more important than his apothecary! He’s wanted that apothecary for most of his life. He was willing to marry an obnoxious know-it-all like me in order to obtain it. Yet he was willing to delay building it in order to protect us. He, he was willing to begin life anew in Germany if it meant he could live safely with us.” Tears streamed down her cheeks. “Nobody’s ever been willing to sacrifice so much for me. Nobody.”

Hermione curled into a ball and reread the letter. “Why is it that you can be the most infuriating man in the world one hour and the most romantic man I’ve ever met in the next? Why is it that no matter how hard I try I can’t stay mad at you, Severus?”

***

Severus sat in a leather wingback chair nursing his second glass of Firewhiskey. More than once his mind wandered to Hermione and her reaction to the letter. He snorted. Knowing his lot in life she had incinerated it the second it came into view. Right now she was packing his suitcase and giving him just enough clothes and toiletries to last for the next few days, at least until he could rent an apartment or buy a more modest house.

His mouth twisted into a smile. Rita Skeeter would think Christmas had come early. He could almost see his name splattered across the Daily Prophet: Months Before Marriage Deadline, Snape Marriage Ends in Divorce. The story would be complete with Minerva angling for the fortune, and the Skeeter laughing that per his prenup, Severus had just been evicted from his own inherited home.

He slumped further into the chair. The media frenzy would be comical if walking away from Hermione and Rose wouldn’t be the worst pain he’d ever experienced. Merlin why couldn’t he have settled for a roommate with benefits? Why did he always need to muck things up with emotions and passion?

Perhaps he was too soon to declare defeat. Hermione may have compassion for him. There may be a sliver of hope yet. It was best not to become too hopeful though. Experience had proven that Severus was not an easy man to forgive. Still his luck could always change…

"Severus?"
He turned toward the sound, hoping the buzz of the alcohol and his ardent hopes of forgiveness hadn't made him delusional. "Hermione?"

"Yes," Her eyes fell upon the glass in his hand. She cringed upon inhaling the scent. "If there's one thing that's beneficial about being pregnant it's that I don't have to endure another gulp of Firewhiskey. I never could stand the stuff."

"I suppose you are going to comment upon my drinking habits now," Severus mumbled.

"No," she replied. "I, I read your letter."

Severus' eyes became vulnerable, as though one harsh word from her would destroy him. "I meant every word, Hermione. I deeply apologize for how I treated you."

Severus’ muscles tightened. Her rejection was coming...

"Thank you."

Severus set the glass onto the coffee table. In a voice only a little above a whisper he asked, “What?”

"I said 'thank you,'” Hermione continued. “Thank you for the letter and for understanding my position."

“lt was never my intention to insult you,” Severus replied.

"I know,” Hermione gulped. “I apologize as well. My behavior was indefensible. You, you were ready to give up a lifelong dream for me. Instead of appreciating the sacrifice you were willing to make I yelled at you and stormed out. I shouldn’t have become so infuriated that I ceased listening to you. Perhaps your methods were flawed, but you acted out of friendship. I, I can't say that even Ginny would've been willing to move to another country and give up her most cherished dream for me. Really I don't deserve that level of kindness.”

Severus held her hand. He gazed into Hermione's eyes. "I care for you, Hermione. I consider you one of the most important people in my life. Perhaps the most important person."

Hermione let herself be pulled into his lap. “Severus, you are the most important person in my life as well.” She wiped a tear away. “In all honesty, I couldn't imagine what I'd do if you were ever hurt in any way. Somehow I've grown attached to you."

Severus gave her a playful smirk "So I am capable of growing on people."

Hermione laughed before capturing his lips. Severus pulled her closer. When they broke apart Severus rasped, "Does this mean I am forgiven?"

"Yes," she sighed.

"Good," he recaptured her lips.

Their celebration was cut short by the loud hoot of an owl outside their window. Sensing he was being ignored, the owl pounded his beak against the glass. Hermione pulled away. "He's going to ruin the window."

"I know," Severus scowled.

Hermione stood up and sauntered over to the window. When she opened the window the owl flew to Severus. He detached the letter from its leg while Hermione stepped out to fetch it a treat. When
she returned, Severus shook his head. "I've been summoned to another Order meeting."

"Oh," Hermione extended the treat to the owl. “Please, be careful.”

He kissed her on the cheek. “I will not come to any harm. Before I leave though, I'll set my most powerful wards. If any trouble occurs I know you can defend yourself.”

Hermione embraced him. He gave her one last kiss before exiting the room. She stared at the doorway, one thought racing through her mind:

I do not want to lose you.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully I did the resolution justice.

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
For the seventh time that afternoon, Hermione reorganized the bottom shelf books. She frowned upon completion. Something still wasn’t right. Perhaps she needed to order them by the author’s death date. They’d be easier to find if she did so. She bit her bottom lip as the books flew off the shelf. Midway through the process of reorganizing the books her face fell.

"Where is he?" Hermione muttered. "Why has he been gone for so long? I know an Order meeting regarding the Death Eaters won’t last five minutes, but must it go on for over two hours?"

A cracked brown book slid into place.

“I know he's probably fine, at least I hope he is. He’s perfectly capable of defending himself.” Her heart raced. “I'd sense if something was wrong.”

Hermione shook her head as the last book squeezed between another book and the wooden shelf. "Of course I wouldn't know if he was in any danger. That privilege is only reserved for soulmates, or so I hear it is. As deeply as I care about Severus, what I feel towards him isn’t love or romance or any of those other things associated with my sappy novels.”

Rose pressed against Hermione’s abdomen.

Hermione massaged her stomach. “Please don’t misunderstand me, Little One. Your father is one of my best friends. In many ways he’s closer to me than Aunt Ginny, though I suppose that's to be expected given that we live together. Still it's just…well when you’re older you'll learn that friendship is less messy than love. I can handle friendship, but anytime I love someone the situation becomes too messy for me to handle.”

Judging from Rose’s movement Hermione guessed the baby wasn't convinced by her mother's speech.

“I'll give you an example of friendship being less messy than love. As you know your father and I had an argument this morning. If we were lovers we would've been fighting for days on end. I would’ve yelled at him for hours and he would’ve ignored me for days. Since we're friends, we resolved the issue quickly and civilly, and with a passionate kiss,” Hermione blushed. “Which on second thought, may not be how most friends resolve their arguments”

Rose kicked Hermione again.

Hermione exhaled. "Your daddy and I have a special kind of friendship. We can tell each other everything, sleep in the same bed, yet not bring any complications such as love into the mix. We like things that way. I know that we will be excellent parents because we are only friends and won’t muck things up with complicated emotions like love. We can't handle love, but we can handle being the best of friends. Once you’re born you’ll understand why it was wise of me to enter into such an arrangement.”

POP!

"Mistress Hermione!"
"Yes?"

"Master Severus has returned."

"Thank you," Hermione’s body relaxed. "Where is he?"

"In the dining room. Tilly thought Master might be hungry."

"He probably is," Hermione replied. "Thank you for tending to him."

The elf bowed. "It was Tilly’s pleasure."

Hermione raced from the study to the dining room. As she entered the room, Severus glanced back at her. His eyes betrayed his fatigue. "Hello Hermione."

"Hello Severus. How was the meeting?" Hermione stepped closer.

Severus bowed his head. "About as productive as one could expect."

"I see," Hermione whispered. She began kneading her thumbs into Severus’ back.

Severus moaned. "Thank you. That feels divine."

"You're welcome," Hermione smiled.

They took a moment to enjoy the company of the other.

Hermione broke the silence with a whispered, "Did the Order decide on a course of action?"

"We cannot so much as agree as to who’s behind the jailbreak," Severus sighed. "Much less on a course of action to stop him or her."

"Were any specific names thrown out?" Hermione asked.

Severus’ shoulders relaxed. "Molly believes someone resurrected Voldemort. A few members, mainly from her family, share her suspicions."

"Do you believe he's back?" Hermione asked.

"No. I would've felt the mark on my arm if he had returned, if I’d been lucky. If I were unlucky," he swallowed his swelling emotions. "Let's just say neither of us would still draw breath if Voldemort was alive and discovered my role in his defeat."

"Very true," Hermione whispered.

"Even if Voldemort had little interest in summoning me or in exacting revenge against us, he would've announced his return in some other manner."

"How do you think he would’ve made his presence known?"

"He would've left a clue when he killed Harry. He would've wanted the entire world to know he was behind the murder."

"You're right. He would've made sure he was tied to Harry's death."

"Harry's killer doesn't want his identity to be known, at least not yet. This was too methodical, too well-planned out to be committed by someone who’s soul is shattered beyond repair," Severus
mused. "From Voldemort's inner circle, I cannot imagine who would have had the means to murder Harry."

"We're back at square one then," Hermione answered.

“Indeed we are,” Severus replied before pulling her closer. Her ministrations ceased as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Together, their lips met, in a silent understanding that each needed to be near the other.

***

Fenrir stepped onto a two foot stump which was now serving as a podium. Behind him the waves surged onto the island. Fenrir inhaled the sea breeze, absorbing the moment. Satisfied that enough time had gone by, he cleared his throat.

“Death Eaters! Voldemort's most loyal followers!"

The conversations continued despite Fenrir’s Sonorous.

“Death Eaters! Lycanthropes! My most loyal followers!”

The voices grew louder.

Snarling, he aimed the Elder Wand into the sky. Green and silver sparks emanated from the wand, creating an eruption of fireworks in the shape of wolves.

The crowd hushed as Scabior and the Chief took their places beside Fenrir.

"Many of you are probably wondering why I have brought you to this small island instead of landing triumphantly in Britain," Fenrir began.

Mutterings from the crowd affirmed his statement.

“My reasoning is quite simple. Before you leave for Britain you will receive a new mark.”

Gasps and frantic whispers could be heard from the mob. Undeterred Fenrir continued, “Taking on a new mark only makes sense. After all I was the one who released you from bondage! I was the one who showed you the sun after years in that cage!”

A few Death Eaters nodded.

“See the moon and the stars above us! Feel the ocean breeze! Listen to the seabirds in the distance! All of these sensations are because of me… me and me alone. Voldemort could only release you for a time! I will free you from bondage forever!”

Everyone's eyes were glued to Fenrir.

Fenrir lowered his voice. “In return for what you’ve received you owe me your undivided and eternal loyalty.”

Only the waves could be heard.

“Have I made myself clear?” Fenrir asked.

Rodolphus LeStrange raised his hand. Fenrir growled and pointed to him. “Yes?
"What is your idea of a mark?" the Death Eater asked.

"I'm glad you asked," Fenrir bared his fangs. "It is the same mark I imparted upon Remus Lupin; the mark of the lycanthrope."

Many in the crowd recoiled, but none dared not backtalk the werewolf who had already given so much to them.

"I am glad we could reach an understanding," Fenrir concluded.

"I object to this plan!"

All attention was focused on Alecto.

"We fought for Voldemort because we believed in the power of the pureblood!" She shouted. "Werewolves are below pureblood wizards! Even you know that! Why would we listen to you, much less take your mark?"

"The polite answer would be in gratitude for your freedom," Fenrir began with a malicious, toothy grin. "The not-so-nice answer would be because if you refuse to become a lycanthrope, we will either drown you or strand you here, depending on our mood."

"What?" she screeched.

"You are on an island. Neither would be difficult to accomplish," Fenrir shrugged. Alecto glanced around for allies. Those standing beside her shuffled away.

"Remember that I have the Elder Wand. There isn't a single wand among you to challenge it. Even if you had a wand," He smirked. "It's doubtful you could defeat me."

A few Death Eaters murmured their agreement.

Fenrir continued, "I am going to create a world superior to the one we have now! My dream is to make you greater than you ever thought possible. Think of it; the instinct and stamina of wolves combined with the intelligence and magical prowess of pureblood wizards. You will be the first of a new race. History will record you as the elite, the dukes, duchesses, kings, and queens of our new world! Voldemort could only promise you a planet of corpses, but I promise you a planet of life! Your subjects will be loyal children thankful for the gift you have bestowed, not plotting slaves or dead muggles"

"But we killed muggles in order to cleanse the world! How will you cleanse the world if everyone is a lycanthrope?" Alecto asked.

Fenrir directed his wand to a spot on her chest. The Death Eaters in front of her parted, giving him a direct shot to her heart. She yelped.

"That is how," Fenrir growled. "Any questions?"

"When can I receive the mark?" Alecto asked in a weak voice.

"Chief! Scabior!" Fenrir called.

The two stepped down and made their way to Alecto. After grabbing each arm they dragged her to her new master. She remained quiet as she stared into his famished, feral eyes. When she pulled her eyes from his gaze, he took on his lupine form.
"The first of Fenrir's children, Alecto Carrow!" Scabior announced as Fenrir drew closer.

Alecto's screams pierced the tranquil night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It's much appreciated!
A baby’s scream pierced the room. Severus startled. The scream grew louder and more desperate. Sweat formed on Severus' brow. Judging from the echo the child was on the other side of the room, though Severus couldn’t determine the exact location. After adjusting to the darkness of the room, he crept towards the child's shrieks.

"No closer."

He spun to his right. A sliver of light shone on a group of fifty or so. Although he could not make out any of their features, their silhouettes were all too familiar.

"You remember us don't you?"

Severus stared in the direction of the voice.

"Of course you do," the voice continued. "This isn't the first time we've met."

The speaker's voice sounded like a combination of Rodolphus, Amycus, and Jugson's voices, but it was impossible to determine which one was speaking. Then again it didn't matter who was speaking. Severus' only concern was forcing them out of the room.

"Who are you and why have you come here?"

"Don't act like an idiot. It never suit you," Another voice snapped, "You know exactly who we are."

Severus’ stomach lurched.

"As for why we’re here, well, we’ve come to dispense justice to all who stood in our way," the leader answered.

The baby's cries grew softer. A shadow left the group and disappeared into the darkness.

"The first person to receive justice was the Golden Mudblood."

"Do not involve Hermione in any of this," Severus warned. "I was the one who harmed you. I spied on you. I betrayed you. I defeated you. If you want to harm me then do so, but do not hurt Hermione!"

"I fear it’s too late for that."

Severus turned and lit his wand, praying the leader was bluffing. He illuminated a small area to the left, revealing Hermione submerged in a pool of blood. Severus rushed to her. “Hermione?”

Her body was cold.

“Hermione.” Severus scooped up his wife and held her close. Behind him the Death Eaters were cackling, but it mattered little. He cradled his wife in his arms. Did she die knowing she’d been a most excellent companion? Was she aware that Severus cherished every moment with her? Why hadn't he been for her? What could've been so important to cause him to exit the room and allow this to happen?
"She went out like Lily," the leader continued. "Trying desperately to protect her baby."

Severus' breath was shaky as he ran his fingers through her hair for the final time. Then he noticed her flat stomach.

"Once again, you were too late to save the woman you claim to care so deeply for," the leader concluded.

Severus laid Hermione’s body down flat on the ground. He searched for the words to say, but none came. All he could manage was a whispered, "Hermione Snape."

"Looks like I’ve succeeded in disciplining both you and the Mudblood at the same time."

"You bastard!" Severus yelled as he lunged at the silhouettes.

"Don't try it!" a female voice from the crowd warned.

Severus pulled out his wand. Just as he opened his mouth to shout out an “Avada Kedavra” the leader yelled, "We have your baby!"

Severus dropped his wand. From the sliver of light he could see the outline of a now silent, sleeping baby in the woman's arms.

"Put Rose down," Severus growled.

"I think not," the leader replied. "I'm much more careful with my horcruxes than Voldemort was."

Severus' stomach sank as he saw the lightning scar upon the child's forehead.

"Pick up the wand,” the leader ordered.

Severus remained rooted in place.

“I said, pick up the wand. You know how to destroy a horcrux. Do it!”

Severus’ throat constricted.

"You can't kill her, can you?” a male voice shouted. from the crowd.

"He doesn't have the courage!” Another voice yelled.

“He's a coward!” a female cackled.

The leader held out the baby. Rose opened one sleepy eye and glanced at Severus.

"Do it for the greater good!" the leader taunted. "Kill your child for the good of the whole world!"

The baby screamed as the voices grew louder. Severus trembled.

“Kill Rose for the greater good!”

"Severus!"

With a jolt he awoke. He panted as his eyes darted around the room. Finally, his gazed rested upon Hermione, who was still very much alive and very much pregnant.

“Severus, what’s wrong?” she asked.
"Nothing," he lied as his heart slowed. "Did I awaken you?"

"No," she answered. "Rose did, but when I finished my business you appeared to be in distress."

"It has passed," Severus pressed her against his chest. "The nightmare has passed."

Hermione wrapped her arms around him.

"I will never let them hurt you," Severus vowed. "I will never allow anyone to lay a finger on you or Rose."

"Is that why you’re so shaken up?" Hermione asked. "Did you dream about the Death Eaters."

"My dream somewhat pertained to them."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not particularly."

Hermione kissed him on the cheek. "Okay."

He inhaled the scent of her strawberry shampooed hair before releasing her. A restless silence filled the room.

"Hermione?"

"Yes?"

"How far would you go for the greater good?"

She twirled the hem of the sheet around her fingers. "I suppose it would depend upon what was being asked of me and why I was being asked to perform said action. Why?"

"I’ve always wondered if there was a balance between the greater good and what is morally right," Severus admitted.

"Of course there is, unless you're a utilitarian," Hermione answered.

Severus smiled. "I didn’t think you engaged in muggle philosophy."

"When I said I read everything I meant it," Hermione replied.

"True," Severus ran his hand along her arm, still trying to prove to himself that she was beside him. "Still it’s doubtful that even the most distinguished Muggle Studies professor understands exactly what utilitarianism is."

"Dumbledore knew its basic tenants all too well. Maybe he never classified himself as a utilitarian, but he always looked at what would make the most people happy."

"Regardless of consequence or moral question," Severus finished.

Hermione clasped his hand into hers. "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. I won't ask you to kill anyone, no matter how much benefit it may bring others."

"You wouldn't, but the Ministry might," Severus replied.

"Then we'll leave for Germany," Hermione answered.
Severus’ eyes grew. "You said you wouldn't leave Britain."

"I won't leave because I'm scared, but I will leave if it becomes obvious that we are only tools in the hands of the Ministry. I will fight for what's right, but not at the expense of others, especially you. I will never ask you to kill or perform any other action I know you are uncomfortable with."

"Thank you," Severus breathed as he embraced Hermione again.

She brushed her lips against his. He deepened the kiss, revealing in the sensation of Hermione’s skin against his, and the feeling of Rose’s gentle kicks from within her mother's abdomen.

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Rodolphus batted his tail against the ground. Yes, I can feel it. I can feel the power within me! He raised his paw to the sky. Fenrir was right: who would choose dead subjects when it's possible to dominate in life?

Another scream interrupted his musings. The newly infected Death Eater morphed into a wolf and bowed before Fenrir, acknowledging his superiority. The Chief guided him off the rocky outcropping as Scabior announced, "I think that was the last one."

The Chief nodded.

"Is there anyone else who wishes to be changed? If not, is anyone interested in drowning?" Scabior yelled. He and the Chief laughed at the joke, neither noticing Fenrir’s transformation.

"Enough!" Fenrir shouted. "There is much work to be done! We must teach the others how to transform back into their human forms."

The Chief’s eyes widened as Scabior’s mouth hung agape.

"Is there a problem with my most recent plan?" Fenrir demanded.

Scabior swallowed. "We aren’t opposed to your plan per se, but we do question how realistic it is to master the spell to change from wolf to human at all. After all you couldn't accomplish that for years. What makes you think they can?"

“Simple,” Fenrir answered. "They are all much more powerful wizards than I was when I changed. This power will allow them to master the spell more easily."

"Perhaps," Scabior replied. "But don't you think it would be wise for them to adjust to their new forms first?"

Fenrir surveyed the island of wolves, none of whom seemed in pain. "They seem well enough adjusted already. If they could adapt to Voldemort's mark they can adapt to mine."

“Perhaps so,” the Chief mumbled.

Fenrir turned to the crowd. He howled at the moon. The lycanthropes stood at attention, carefully tuning their ears to his instruction. Once Fenrir concluded his speech they stared into space, as if concentrating on a fixed point in the distance. Soon the island was inhabited by humans, not lycanthropes.

Fenrir steepled his hands. “Perfect.”
Thank you again for everything! All support is greatly appreciated!
Quidditch World Cup to Remain in Britain! Ron Weasley Assures Safety for All!

In the center of The Daily Prophet was a huge picture of Ron in his jersey. His smile only widened as three scantily clad girls surrounded him. Two of the girls kissed him, one on each cheek, while the third wrapped herself around him. Underneath the photo in bold letters were the words: Written By Rita Skeeter.

Severus rolled his eyes. Did anyone involved in this crime against journalism have an IQ greater than their shoe size?

Beside him, Hermione rolled over and curled an arm across his chest. She hummed before her muscles relaxed. Her eyes were still squeezed shut, not yet ready to greet the first rays of morning that permeated their room. Severus stroked her hair as he resumed his reading.

He skimmed the article to ensure that his wife was not being slandered. There was no mention of her. Satisfied, he began perusing the story. After reading two short paragraphs and deducing that nothing of value was being conveyed, he flipped to the Potions section.

Hermione’s eyes fluttered open as she cooed, “Severus?”

Severus set down the paper. ”Good morning Hermione. I trust you sleep well.”

“As well as you can with a baby kicking your bladder every two hours,” she groaned.

Severus stroked her hair. “It will be all over soon enough.”

“Yes, then I'll be tending to a screaming baby. Perhaps if I’m lucky I’ll be able to sleep through the night in two years time,” Hermione yawned.

Severus chuckled. She gave him a look, but her eyes were too droopy to achieve the full effect. Hermione yawned again. “You, I thought you'd be in the kitchen by now.”

"I felt like enjoying a lie-in this morning," Severus replied.

"Oh," Hermione opened her eyes wider. "Any particular reason?"

He shrugged. “Does one need a reason to have a relaxing morning?”

“I suppose not, but you usually like to get an early start on your brewing.”

"I don't have much brewing left, just the Amortentia."

Hermione noticed his frown. "Are you still struggling with it?"

"Yes," he sighed. "No matter what I do the scent remains the same.”

“That must be frustrating.”

“It is beyond frustrating, but perhaps we can hobble along for a while without stocking it in the
apothecary."

"At least until Valentine's Day, anyway," Hermione replied with a grin.

"True," he sighed.

Hermione’s eyes fell upon the discarded newspaper. "Any good stories?"

"Not particularly," Severus answered. "Most of them are about staying calm in the face of the Death Eaters' escape. There are a few concerning the need to protect Muggleborns as well. The more interesting ones were on self-defense spells."

"It may be in my best interest to refresh myself on some of those defensive spells," Hermione replied as she sat up and took the paper from him. She turned to the front page and exhaled. "I see Ron has no shortage of women to adore him."

"You don’t need to pay attention to that dunderhead," Severus answered.

Hermione’s frown deepened. “It’s difficult when every other day his face is plastered all over the Daily Prophet. I’m sure he’s prattling on about how these women are far better than I could ever hope to be.”

Severus kissed the top of her head. “Weasley was an idiot for ever allowing you to walk out of his life. I was most fortunate to benefit from his greatest blunder.”

Hermione’s lips twisted upwards. “Thank you Severus.”

He brushed his lips against hers. “I’m only stating the truth, Hermione.”

Hermione’s eyes lit up. "Have I told you lately that marrying you was one of the best decisions I've ever made?"

Severus blinked. "Marrying me was prudent given the circumstances, but I'd be hesitant to call it one of your best decisions."

She kissed his nose. "I could not have asked for a better father for Rose, and I could not have asked for a sweeter husband."

"Now I know you are toying with me witch," Severus answered. "I am far from sweet."

Hermione smoothed out the paper. "Keep telling yourself you're nothing more than a cranky git. Rose and I will never believe you."

“I suppose you won’t,” Severus muttered.

Hermione began scanning the paper.

“Ronald was wise enough not to mention you," Severus began. "Instead he wishes to discuss how the Quidditch World Cup is going to be the safest one yet."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "You're joking, right?"

"Read for yourself,” Severus muttered.

Hermione read the headline and there the paper aside. "Did he learn nothing from the first time the Death Eaters attacked the Quidditch World Cup?”
“Apparently not.”

“How can he think this World Cup will be safer? Merlin, they didn't even have a leader in 1994. What makes him think they won't be able to launch an effective attack now?”

"Because he's a dunderhead who's more concerned with playing Quidditch than the safety of those around him." Severus replied.

"I suppose," Hermione mused as she continued reading the article. Her face hardened. “This is madness! Why are they continuing these games in light of the fact that there are dangerous criminals on the loose?”

"Kingsley must be hoping the Death Eaters are captured before the games begin.”

“But the Death Eaters may not be imprisoned before the event. He wouldn't endanger lives in order to prove he isn’t fearful, would he?”

“One would hope not," Severus answered, his skepticism palpable.

Hermione flipped to another article. Her eyes rested on a picture of a shaken up security guard under the headline: Guard Lives to Tell Horrifying Tale of Escape.

"I, I think I know her," Hermione began.

"Her name is Farrah Jackson," Severus answered. "She was a Ravenclaw who graduated at the end of your third year."

"I remember seeing her in the library a few times," Hermione commented before reading further. "Thank Merlin whoever released the Death Eaters at least let her live."

"Yes," Severus mused. "That was certainly an unusually generous gesture for a Death Eater."

"Maybe she was a good hostage who promised to never report how they appeared."

"Perhaps," Severus replied. "Although you’d think they wouldn’t chance Farrah changing her mind."

"Maybe they released her based on her blood status. She was a pureblood, correct?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, but her uncle was a lycanthrope,” Severus answered. “and a Snatcher."

"Really?" Hermione asked.

Severus nodded. "It would not surprise me if she was released without harm for that reason."

"Yes, but just to clarify, she wasn't involved with the Death Eaters or their allies, correct?” Hermione asked.

"No," Severus replied. "She was never a member of the Death Eaters or the Snatchers, at least not that I'm aware."

"But through her uncle she may know someone," Hermione tapped her chin. “That person may have saved her life.""

"True,” Severus replied. "Although it would seem strange to spare her. I doubt she was particularly
close to anyone else involved with Voldemort, and her uncle is dead. Most Death Eaters consider
dying to be a way of nullifying any kind of debt, so no one would owe anything to her uncle.”

"Still, someone may want to look into her story again, just to make sure she isn’t associated with any
Death Eaters,” Hermione answered.

"Indeed,” Severus replied, as he watched one of the spaghetti straps on Hermione's nightgown float
down her arm. He debated raising it back for her, but it looked rather inviting right where it was.

He leaned closer to nuzzle her neck. Before he could reach his destination, a voice called from the
floo, "Severus!"

Severus clenched his fists and grit his teeth. Of all the cheap timing. It was almost as if Lucius could
sense when Severus was engaging in something pleasant and took pleasure in creating an
interruption.

He dragged himself out of bed. Hermione raised her strap back onto her shoulder, not once removing
her eyes from the paper.

“What is so important that you feel the need to disturb me at this hour?” Severus demanded.

"You were at the Order meeting a few nights ago, were you not?” Lucius asked.

"Of course I was,” Severus grumbled.

"I was hoping you might come over and share with me their thoughts on who might have killed
Potter and released the Death Eaters," Lucius replied. "I need to know if they consider Draco a
suspect."

"His name only came up once, but he was quickly dismissed as a suspect. Something about a gala in
London he was attending that night..." Severus began.

"Oh yes. He and Ginevra were in London with fifty of their friends." The tension was gone from
Lucius' face. "I was hoping they were aware of his alibi."

"Indeed they were."

"Did any other names come up?"

"A few, but I don't consider any of them to be a viable suspect.”

“Perhaps we could do some brainstorming of our own,” Lucius proposed.

“I would not be opposed to that,” Severus replied.

“I will see you in one hour at my mansion then," Lucius replied.

“Yes, you shall,” Severus answered.

With that, Lucius’ face disappeared. Severus deflated. So much for that lie-in.

"Are you sure it’s a good idea to discuss suspects with Lucius?” Hermione asked, poking her head
out from the paper. “If he appears to know too much they may target him.”

“Under normal circumstances I would agree with you, but if we are to find the Death Eaters we will
need someone trustworthy and competent. I trust Lucius more than I trust the Ministry,” Severus
answered. “He’s far more competent than the Ministry as well.”

"Which is not saying much," Hermione set the paper down. "We should prepare to go to Malfoy Manor then. I need to speak to Ginny about interior decorating, anyway. This would be as good a time as any."

"Excuse me?" Severus asked.

Hermione smirked. “Didn’t I tell you? We’re going to decorate your apothecary this week."

Oh joy.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate it all!
"Thank you for coming on such short notice," Lucius began.

Severus opened his mouth to say something, but before a word could escape Hermione squealed, "Ginny!"

Ginny leapt up from the sofa. "Hermione!"

The women embraced. Severus walked over to Lucius and whispered into his ear, "I hope you don't mind Hermione's presence. Ginevra agreed to meet her here. According to my wife they want to discuss decorating my apothecary."

"It’s no problem at all. Narcissa mentioned Hermione might be coming by," Lucius replied in a voice too chipper for the occasion. "The ladies can discuss the matter in the library,"

Severus’ stomach sank. He’d seen that smirk on Lucius’ face couple with that twinkle in his eyes more times than he cared to admit. The next few moments would not be pleasant for Severus.

Lucius eyed Severus and congratulated himself for creating this opportunity. As always, his timing was impeccable. Not only could he discuss the Death Eater case, but he could watch Severus squirm at the thought of how his apothecary would appear once Ginevra and Hermione were done with it. He could already see the horror in Severus' eyes at the mere thought of crimson paint touching his apothecary walls. This would be priceless.

"Hermione, so glad you're finally here," Narcissa glided to the other women. "Hello Severus."

"Hello," Severus replied, praying Narcissa's taste in muted tones would prevail.

"I told Narcissa about our plan," Ginny smiled. "She said she'd be more than happy to help."

"Excellent! I have some ideas I'd love to run by you two," Hermione replied.

"Why don’t you run them by me first?" Severus asked.

"Because," Hermione replied. "I'm trying to surprise you."

"I hate surprises," Severus argued.

Hermione’s smile widened. "Trust me, after a few years of marriage you’ll learn to love surprises, at least the ones I have in store for you."

Severus huffed, though his eyes betrayed his growing affection for the witch.

"Let's step into the library where we can discuss our decorating plans a little more freely," Narcissa suggested.

“Great idea,” Ginevra answered.

As they exited the room, each woman gave Severus a backwards glance. While Hermione and Narcissa grinned, Ginevra giggled. Severus glared at her, though this only increased her laughter.
Hermione shook her head before dragging Ginny through the doorway.

"I'm almost afraid to ask what they're planning," Severus murmured once they were out of earshot.

Lucius chuckled. "I'm sure you'll love whatever they decide, even if it will pain you to admit it."

Severus snarled at him.

"Don't look at me like that. As much as it pains you to say it, you're happy you took my advice and complied with the will. Anyone who looks into your eyes would know that you enjoy every moment of being married to Hermione Snape."

"In spite of whatever delusions you may harbor, I do not instantly love everything Hermione does."

Lucius refused to change his impish expression.

Severus raised his voice. "Despite what you may believe there are moments where I am less than pleased with her intrusion into my life, such as when she's trying to surprise me."

"When exactly was the last time she irritated you enough to call her a 'Gryffindor know-it-all'?" Lucius asked with a knowing twinkle in his eyes.

"If you called me over here just to inquire about my love life, I'll join the ladies in the library," Severus spat. "At least then I can steer the color scheme away from Gryffindor red and gold."

"No, we need to discuss what happened at the latest Order meeting," Lucius replied, his merriment now dissipated.

"Indeed we do," Severus answered, his voice more matter-of-fact than outright hostile. Together the men sat down on the couch.

"The dominant theory is that Voldemort has returned," Severus began.

"Of course," Lucius sighed. "Most of the Order as well as the Ministry are run by Gryffindors. They are incapable of thinking outside the box."

"Do you have any theories?" Severus asked.

"I'm thinking either Rodolphus or Rabastan LeStrange," Lucius offered. "Given the power they wielded I wouldn't be surprised have contacts on the outside who are more than willing to do their bidding."

"But who are these alleged contacts?" Severus asked.

"If I knew I'd have brought them here and questioned them myself."

"I don't believe the LeStrange brother are capable of pulling off an Azkaban escape. They aren't at all subtle, plus one would think they would have made their move well before now."

"True, they always were too impatient for their own good. The fact that they are, uh were, desperate to be out of jail would only incite them to behave more rashly."

"Indeed."

Lucius exhaled and scratched his armrest.
“Hermione and I were actually beginning to wonder why the guard, Farrah Jackson, was spared,” Severus noted.

"Her name sounds familiar," Lucius replied.

"She is Archelaus Jackson's niece," Severus replied.

Lucius snapped his fingers. "That's right. Could she be the outside contact?"

"I have no idea," Severus admitted. "I remember her as a student at Hogwarts. At that time she never showed any real contempt towards muggleborns nor any special interest in aiding Voldemort. Most of her adult life has been spent in Germany. What contacts would she have aside from those of her now deceased uncle?"

"Maybe she's seeking revenge for her uncle's death?"

"Who would be the focus of her revenge? He was a Snatcher, not a true Death Eater. I would think she'd be just as angry at the Death Eaters for not protecting him as she would be at the Ministry for killing him."

“You make some great points. If Farrah wanted revenge she wouldn't have bothered going after Neville. Minerva McGonagall killed Archelaus, not Harry Potter, so you'd think she would have been one of the first targets. If she could break into Hogwarts so easily she would've killed the Headmistress not burned down a greenhouse," Lucius mused.

"She would have."

"Speaking of which, is the good headmistress still after your fortune?"

"No," Severus replied, "at least not actively. The theft of the Elder wand and Potter's murder has diverted her attention for the moment."

"Good," Lucius answered. He steepled his hands. "I have an idea how we could get some more information from Farrah Jackson."

"How?"

"In order to divert suspicion from my son and me, I was going to donate some money to the auror department and make a speech denouncing the Death Eaters … basic PR tools. What if I staged that speech during a luncheon and placed myself next to Farrah Jackson, for peace's sake?"

"Go on."

"I could ask her a few questions in the guise of wanting to help hunt down the Death Eaters. Offer myself as an informant," Lucius replied. "What do you think?"

Severus replied, "When will said luncheon take place?"

The spark returned to Lucius’ eyes. "As soon as I can get it scheduled.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much for all the support! It is much appreciated!
"Ahoy there!" The cashier called. "What brings you to the Seaside Apothecary today?"

A muscular customer with a scruffy beard strolled to the counter. He replied in a strong voice, "I'm here for some Polyjuice potion."

"Well you've come to the right place," the cashier answered. "How much do you need?"

The customer's lips curled up. He pulled out a large sackcloth bag and scooted it across the counter. "How much will this buy me?"

The cashier peeked into the bag. His eyes grew as he calculated the number of Galleons contained within. "I'd say that'll get you more than a few bottles of Polyjuice."

"Good," the customer replied.

"Just let me count these up," he murmured as he began taking galleons out of the bag and placing them in stacks of ten. The customer tapped his foot and scanned the room. A woman glanced at him. The customer gave her a smile, which she wilted under.

"If you don't mind my asking, what do you need all this Polyjuice for?" The cashier replied.

The customer returned his attention to the task at hand, "I'm throwing a masquerade ball where each guest will be disguised as another partygoer. At the stroke of twelve the Polyjuice will wear off and the guests' true identities will be exposed."

"Sounds quite fun. How many guests are you expecting?"

"More than twenty."

"Well there will be more than enough for each of your guests." The cashier scooped the galleons towards him. "I can get you fifty bottles of Polyjuice. Do you want less?"

"Fifty bottles will do just fine, at least for now," the customer replied.

"All right then. Let me box up that potion for you," the cashier offered as he took the coins from the table. Galleon by galleon he placed them in the register. After handing the customer the change he took off for the storage room.

The customer tapped his foot while bottles clanked from within the storeroom. Within moments the cashier returned with the potion and shrank the bottles for transport.

"Come back soon!"

"Don't worry, I will," the customer answered with a subtle smirk.

The customer wandered out the door and down the busy port streets until he reached a docked ship. He stepped onto the gangplank. Onboard an anxious crowd awaited him.

"I have the Polyjuice," he announced.
They released their collective breaths.

He set down the box. “Tomorrow we can begin the tasks of obtaining new wands.”

His announcement was greeted with cheers as the customer tore off his hat.

Before the cries could grow too loud, someone butted in, "But Fenrir, there are more than fifty of us!"

"Eventually we'll have to get more bottles," Fenrir admitted. "But by then we'll have wolves that are properly armed."

Once again, cheers rose from the crowd. Fenrir smirked then stretched out his hand to silence the throng. "Tonight we will go to Hogsmeade. If we happen upon anyone on our way there, well, let's just say they'll be our first polyjuiced subject."

The crowd cackled as Fenrir's smile grew.

Everything from here on out would be smooth sailing.

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“Are you ever going to tell me what color scheme you and the Malfoys decided upon?” Snape demanded.

"No," Hermione replied as she leaned back in her chair and kicked her feet onto a footrest. "It's my surprise."

"You know how much I despise surprises," Severus grunted.

"I am aware of your disdain for them," Hermione admitted. "Which is why it's enjoyable for me to have one up my sleeve."

Severus scowled as Hermione chuckled. “And here I thought a healthy marriage didn’t contain any secrets.”

“Yes, but it can contain pleasant surprises.”

“My definition of pleasant is often very different from yours.”

“Fine Mr. I-Must-Know-It-All, I'll give you a hint,” she leaned towards him and said in a soft voice. "One of the main colors is pink."

"Woman!" he exclaimed.

Hermione laughed as Severus glared at her. The longer she laughed the softer his expression became. At one point Hermione swore she saw a trace of a grin on his face.

She gasped. "I'm sorry, but I had to see the look on your face."

"If you are quite done torturing me, I shall go see for myself what colors you and your friends have chosen for my apothecary," he answered.

“No!”

He turned around.
“The painters aren't done yet,” Hermione argued. “Besides, I want to see the look on your face when it's done.”

“You truly do enjoy torturing me,” Severus muttered.

“No, I'm not only trying to torture you. I honestly think you'll be happy with the colors we've chosen. If you aren't happy, then you'll have a week to choose new colors before opening day.”

"I suppose that's true."

“In the meantime, you should be finishing up your potions, not worrying about color schemes.”

"I told you, I've finished brewing all the potions except…"

"The Amortentia.”

"Indeed," Severus' heart stopped. Are we really finishing each other’s sentences now? Merlin, please don’t let us turn into one of those obnoxious couples that cannot speak without the other present.

"I have an idea," Hermione began. "Maybe you should let me sniff the Amortentia.”

He raised an eyebrow.

"You said once that under normal circumstances you don't smell anything in the Amortentia.”

"I believe to have told you that."

"A year ago I sniffed the Amortentia and was able to discern a scent. It was quite accurate. It might work for me better than it works for you because I know what to expect,” Hermione answered.

Severus’ chest ached as he imagined his wife inhaling Weasley’s scent. What in Circe’s name she see in that ginger git? He wasn’t that attractive, had no intellectual ability, and by all accounts he had treated Hermione abhorrently. Why would she want to smell Weasley?

Then again, if Severus was honest with himself, Hermione could do worse than Weasley. She could smell her husband. His heartburn intensified. A young woman like her would be a fool to bind her soul to an old, cranky git like him. Still, he would be far from repulsed if she smelled him…

“Severus?” Hermione asked.

"Yes, Hermione,” Severus responded..

“Is something wrong?”

“No, I was simply considering our dilemma.”

“What are your thoughts on it?”

“How could the Amortentia work for you and not for me?”

"Maybe you have been smelling another potion you brewed alongside the Amortentia, or perhaps the burnt food you smell represents all the times you've been burned by love,” Hermione offered.

"Possibly,” Severus mused, Except I smell things I associate with you, not burnt food.

"It may be worth a try," Hermione replied.
“It couldn’t hurt to allow you to inhale it anyway,” he answered. “I’ll brew some more right now and see how you react.”

He kissed her on the cheek before rushing off to the basement. As Severus descended the staircase he did his best to suppress the nagging hope that perhaps this time she would smell him.

Meanwhile, Hermione set off towards the library, where she found a journal on advanced potion making. She sat down in a soft blue chair and began reading. After wading through a few articles she heard familiar footsteps approaching.

"Hermione?"

She set the journal onto the table. "Is it ready?"

"It is,” Severus replied as he brought it to her. He opened the cap, allowing the steam to rise from it. She noted the mother-of-pearl color of the potion, another sign it had been made correctly. Then, she sniffed it.

The last time she’d held a bottle of Amortentia, she smelled freshly cut grass, new parchment, and Ron Weasley’s hair. This time, however, she smelled dust. She sniffed harder to discern where the dust could’ve come from. Then she recalled the dirt-encrusted shelves of the apothecary. Before she could dwell on the memory for long the scent changed to the aroma of a hospital room. There was the distinct scent of disinfectant, but also the scent of her OBGYN’s wand mixed with the smell of herbs and other potions ingredients. The image of Severus gazing up at the image of Rose came into view. Tears welled in her eyes as the scent shifted to the smell of black roses in her wedding bouquet.

Hermione backed away from the potion.

Severus swallowed. "Once again I brewed it incorrectly.”

"I think so," Hermione replied.

"What do you smell?” He asked.

"I, I don't really know.” Her stomach knotted. “I, I smelled scrambled eggs,”

"Excuse me?"

"Scambled eggs," she answered in a weak voice. “I’ve never smelled scrambled eggs in the potion before, and there’s no one I associate with the dish.”

Severus released the breath he'd been holding. "I think the cauldron may be faulty.”

“Can you brew other potions in it?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, but the Amortentia always smells differently when brewed in that cauldron.”

“It does?”

Severus nodded. “Recently I've been smelling roses in the potion.”

"Really?"

"Yes, but I think that scent has more to do with our little daughter than any romantic attachment,” Severus’ eyes betrayed his vulnerability. “I've never given roses to any woman, save you."
Hermione swallowed. “I didn’t know that.”

"It’s the truth,” Severus answered. “I’ve always believed that roses should be given to the woman I hold in the highest regard, someone who’s truly earned my complete respect. No person had ever warranted that kind of affection, until you.”

She blushed. “Thank you Severus. I can honestly say I have never been as close to anyone as I am to you. You are a most excellent husband.”

"And you are a most excellent wife.”

Their lips met in a long, gentle kiss. When they broke away Severus rasped, "I fear I may have to give up on the Amortentia brewing for the time being."

"The world probably doesn't need more Amortentia anyway,” Hermione whispered.

"Indeed," Severus agreed. "Thank you again for your assistance."

"You're welcome,” she answered. “I'm sorry it didn't work out.”

"I am too," he replied before heading down the stairs into the basement.

Hermione leaned back in her chair and glanced at the discarded journal.

The Amortentia is wrong. There's no other explanation for it. The fragrances may have reminded me of Severus, but Merlin he's my best friend. He’s the man who has remained by my side throughout the most turbulent parts of my life and who treats me better than almost anyone else has. No, I won’t muck that up. I've tried the whole falling for a friend thing, and it didn't work.

I'm not stupid enough to fall for my best friend again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It's deeply appreciated as always!
Chapter 83

Severus sat in his library, his nose planted in a book on love potions. While Amortentia may have been the strongest love potion, it wasn't the only one. Perhaps customers could be persuaded to accept a weaker substitute. Merlin knew the world could do without Amortentia on the shelves. Severus had lost count of the number of divorces filed when a spouse realized their partner was spiking his or her tea with the love potion.

He snorted. The idea of bottling love was preposterous anyway. Natural love between two people rarely lasted for more than a few years. What made anyone think bottled love could work in the long term?

"It's ready," Hermione announced.

Severus looked up from his book. "What's ready?"

"The paint job in your apothecary," Hermione replied. "We can go in and look at it now."

"About time," Severus grumbled as he set the book down. "It's taken them all bloody day to finish up!"

"Actually, the workers finished up early yesterday afternoon. I've been waiting for the paint to dry and for the fumes to air out before showing you our handiwork," Hermione answered.

Severus swallowed. "Is it safe for you to enter given your condition?"

"Of course it's safe for me to enter. I made sure the paint they used was safe for pregnant women and their children," Hermione massaged her abdomen. "Even so, I wanted to give it some time to dry and ventilate properly, just to be on the safe side."

Severus stood up. "I do not want you or Rose to risk injury over a surprise."

"We will be perfectly fine," she assured him before taking his hand. "I think you're really going to like what we've done."

"For our marriage's sake I hope so," Severus muttered.

He followed her to the fireplace, his frown becoming more pronounced with each step. Hermione shot him a look, but bit her tongue. When they reached the fireplace connected to the floo, Hermione threw in the powder and was greeted by a green flame. As she and Severus entered, she called, "Two forty-four Broomstick Lane!"

The fire then engulfed the couple as they were transported to the desired location. Hermione jumped out first, dusting ashes from her robes. Severus stepped out from behind her, too absorbed in the scenery to remove the ashes clinging to his black robes.

The walls were a warm cream color, just as he and Hermione had discussed the day they'd selected the property. The concrete floor was swept, and gleamed in the sunlight. What attracted his attention, however, were the dark walnut shelves aligned in perfect rows. Above the shelves were signs labeling each category of potion. The background on the signs was a dark green, and the lettering
was gold.

"Do you like it?" Hermione asked in a soft voice.

Severus stepped further into the apothecary. "It's outstanding."

Hermione could not contain her smile. "So my decorating skills are outstanding."

"Yes. I could not have done much better myself," he gave her a soft grin.

"I was somewhat worried about the gold lettering," Hermione admitted. "But silver didn't show up as well as I would have liked."

"The letters are fine," Severus assured her. "With the rise of the new Death Eaters it may be in our best interests to avoid any overt reference to Slytherin connotations."

"True," Hermione replied. "Although these Death Eaters do not seem to be affiliated with any single house."

"For the moment anyway," Severus replied, sweeping his fingers over the marble counter. On top of it was a new cash register. The only way to gain access to it was through a small gate, which could be warded shut. Severus stepped behind the gate and slid onto a small padded stool behind the register. Behind him was the storeroom, a safe place for more volatile potions. He poked his head inside.

He commented, "It looks exactly like my Hogwarts storage room."

"I tried to stick with what I knew you'd like," she replied.

"You've succeeded," he replied as he stepped out behind the counter.

"Thank you. Do you want to look at the exterior?"

"Certainly."

Hermione led him out the front door. He twisted his lips. "It's white."

"I wanted the building to be distinctive, but not stick out from the other properties too much. The black trim sets off the display windows and the door," Hermione explained. "Ginny said it would look classier with the trim, so I took her word for it."

"I've never imagined my apothecary white," Severus answered.

"You didn't seem too thrilled about blue so I thought white was the next best option. Are you satisfied?" Hermione asked.

Severus stared before a smile crept across his lips. "It's more than adequate."

"I'm glad you approve," she replied.

Severus embraced her. "You did well. Thank you."

"You're welcome," she replied as Rose kicked within her.

"Rose seems to approve, as well," Severus noted.
Hermione backed away and blushed. "I consulted Rose on some of the colors."

"You did?" Severus asked.

Hermione nodded. "Ginny thought I’d lost it, but I told her Rose had helped pick out the location, so she deserved to have some input on who it appeared. It was Rose’s idea to have the gold lettering as well as the white exterior."

"She has good taste," Severus replied as he laid a hand upon Hermione’s stomach. He cooed, “Yes baby girl, you already have excellent taste. Someday you’re going to be great at decorating, just like your mummy.”

The baby pressed against her mother as if to agree.

“You will also be a great potions master like your daddy,” he continued.

Rose kicked harder.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “A potions master?”

“Indeed she will be an outstanding potions mistress,” Severus replied.

"What would give you reason to think that she is destined to follow in her daddy's footsteps?"

"She’s already spent several days helping to clean an apothecary, and she did an excellent job helping you to design it. Something tells me she already enjoys potions, at least as much as an unborn infant can."

Hermione laughed. “She doesn’t even know what magic is. How could she have already chosen a career path?”

“Because she’s intelligent and forward thinking like her parents.” He smirked. “Tell your mummy I’m right. Kick if you already like potions."

This kick was the hardest one yet.

He rubbed against Hermione's stomach. “That’s my baby girl.”

Hermione sighed, “Oh Severus. What on earth am I going to do with you?”

He locked eyes with her and purred, “Whatever you’d like.”

Hermione's stomach growled. She bowed her head. “In spite of my rather large lunch I think I’m hungry.”

Severus removed his hand from her. "I suppose we should remedy that situation. What are you interested in eating?"

“Italian. I'd kill for a bowl of tortellini," Hermione replied.

"Tortellini it is," Severus replied before taking her hand and leading her down the street into Hogsmeade.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for all the support. Have a safe and happy Halloween!
"I'm sorry, but Mella?" Hermione argued. "Even as a middle name, it doesn’t sound right."

"It is an excellent middle name," Severus replied as they made their way down the streets of Hogsmeade.

"Rose will grow up thinking we named her after a fruit."

"Then we will explain to her that she shares the name Mella with a great potions mistress. If she is still upset then we will inform her that it is only a middle name and that aside from us, no one will ever use it."

Hermione stopped. Severus raised an eyebrow. She cleared her throat and barked, "Rose Mella Snape, get down here and clean up this mess right now!"

A few onlookers cocked their heads and shrugged at the scene.

"See, it doesn’t sound right," Hermione replied.

"I'll admit that the name sounded a bit odd in the way you shouted it," Severus confessed. "But if Mella isn't satisfactory then what would you propose for a middle name?"

Hermione sighed as they resumed their trek. "I'm tempted not to give Rose a middle name at all."

"That would be stranger than naming her Mella."

"If we must give her a middle name then let’s give her one in honor of a family member. Perhaps we could call her Muriel or Eileen?"

Severus’ expression darkened "Muriel would be a fine name, but under no circumstances should our daughter bear Eileen's name."

"Eileen is out, then," she replied in a soft voice.

Severus stopped to gaze into her eyes. "Please do not think that I consider my mother to be a horrendous person, but she was not a discerning judge of character. Oftentimes she had a short temper, and could be quite distant. Those are flaws I do not want to see Rose emulate."

"That's understandable," Hermione replied.

Severus resumed walking. "Rose Muriel Snape would be an acceptable name."

Hermione stepped along beside him. "Yes, but Rose Muriel Snape is a mouthful. Plus it still sounds odd."

"Didn't you suggest the name Muriel a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, but when you said 'Rose Muriel Snape' I remembered the strange looks I'd get as a child when I told people my mum's name. Muriel is a pretty name, yet it still doesn't quite fit our daughter."
“Perhaps we should read the baby book to Rose and allow her to decide which middle name she finds the most acceptable.”

Hermione chuckled. “Now there’s a solution.”

Severus smirked. Before he could make further comment Hermione stumbled. He caught her and glowered at the pedestrian laid sprawled on the sidewalk.

Severus snapped, "Is it too much to ask that you watch where you are going?"

Hermione struggled to regain her footing.

"I'm sorry," the pedestrian replied as he picked himself up. "I wasn't paying attention.”

“Then I’d suggest you become more aware of your surroundings,” Severus replied, his voice laced with hostility.

“Severus, it’s fine,” Hermione whispered.

“It is anything but fine. You and Rose could have been injured,” Severus answered.

“We’re fine,” she stood up, wincing at the effort. “We’re both fine.”

The man stared at the couple before him. "You, you two are…”

"Leaving," Severus scowled.

Severus stormed off, but Hermione did not follow. Instead she examined the man.

"Hermione are you coming?"

“Yes,” she hobbled over to him, cursing her enlarged belly and aching back every step of the way.

The stranger listened as Severus asked, "Are you all right? He didn't hurt you or the baby, did he?"

"No," she answered.

"You appear to be in pain." 

"My back has been killing me all day, and it’s becoming more difficult to ignore.”

"Do you want to go home?"

"I want to eat.”

He opened the door for her. She gave him a nod before stepping inside. Soon he disappeared into the restaurant as well. The man stared at the spot where they’d been standing. He snarled.

How dare Severus walk away from the war decorated with the highest honors? Snape deserved to be hung from the highest gallows for betraying his comrades as he did. To add insult to injury he married a mudblood, a form of life he should've known was inferior. No, he didn't stop at marrying a mudblood: he cared for her as well! Voldemort's second in command had the gall to spit on everything the Death Eaters had worked for by loving the Golden Mudblood and deciding to sire her filthy half blood babies. The man raised his foot. Someone ought to teach Severus a lesson in loyalty...
The man paused before lowering his foot once more. Knowing how out of practice he was, his hex would either miss or not be strong enough to immobilize the pair. As much as he loathed Snape and his mudblood bride, it would be impossible to fight them both and escape unscathed. No need to make a stupid mistake like exposing himself too soon.

He glanced up at the clock tower and gasped. Only forty-five minutes left to obtain his new wand! The Snapes would have to wait for another day.

He scurried into Ollivander's shop. The associate glanced up from the counter and began, "Hello Mr. Alexander! What can I do for you?"

"I seem to have misplaced my wand," he answered.

"Oh goodness, not again," the associate replied. "Well, let's see if we can find another unicorn hair wand for you!"

The associate slipped into the back of the store. The man suppressed a gag. He would never deign to touch a unicorn heir wand, much less use one.

After returning, the cashier extended the wand to him, "Try this one, Mr. Alexander."

"Thank you," he replied. He flicked the wand to cast a spell, but nothing came of it. The associate stared in shock as the customer made attempt after attempt to cast a spell, each ending in failure.

"Maybe we should try a Dragon Heartstring," the man suggested.

"I never took you for a Heartstring kind of wizard, but we could try," the associate replied before disappearing again into the back room.

He reappeared with a new wand. "Aguamenti!" the customer began.

At his command, water appeared.

"Well I'll be damned, it worked," the associate replied.

The customer gave him a toothy grin. "Indeed it did."

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"Are you sure you are not injured?" Severus asked.

"If you ask me that one more time," Hermione growled.

"Excuse me for caring," Severus muttered before looking out the window.

Hermione exhaled. "I appreciate your concern, but I really am fine."

Severus turned to her "That dunderhead could've seriously hurt you."

Hermione put her hand over his. "I know, but you were there to catch me. That's all that matters."

He relaxed. "Perhaps."

"The man was peculiar," Hermione admitted.

"How so?" Severus asked.
“He gave me this look; nobody has looked at me like that in years. He hated me, but I haven’t the foggiest clue what I could have done to him.”

“Perhaps it isn’t anything you’ve done, but rather what you represent.”

“Do, do you think he hated me because I am a muggleborn?”

“No, but with the escape of the Death Eaters former members of the organization will be looked upon with greater suspicion,” Severus warned. "People have never been overtly friendly towards me. They will be even less willing to tolerate my existence now that the Death Eaters are free."

Hermione squeezed his hand, "But you are and always have been an invaluable asset to the Order. Nobody in their right mind would mistaken you for a devoted Death Eater."

“Don’t underestimate the power of rumors. I’m sure more than a few people suspect that I impregnated and married you in order to cover up my alleged involvement with my former compatriots.”

"It would be an odd strategy to attempt to take over a pureblood supremacy group by marrying a muggleborn."

"True," Severus admitted, "But most people do not think so strategically. In my experience once someone has decided to hate me there is little I can do influence that opinion."

"Who cares what others think? I know you're innocent. Everyone else can bugger off."

He smiled. “I am quite lucky to have you by my side. You would be a more than formidable foe if you were ever to decide to oppose me.”

“Don’t you forget it,” Hermione answered with a sparkle in her eyes.

Severus ran his thumb over her hand. “I won’t.”

Hermione grinned, though her eyes remained distant.

“Are you well?”

“Yes, but I’m still thinking.”

“About the man?”

She nodded. "The look he gave me was so personal, almost as if he despised me for something I'd done."

“You don’t believe he will try to harm you, do you?”

“Not exactly, but I wish I knew who he was so I could ask the Ministry to monitor him.”

"Speaking of monitoring," Severus answered. “Lucius did set up that public relations stunt with Farrah and Kingsley. It will be tomorrow at noon."

"Good. The PR will do him good," Hermione replied with a knowing look.

Severus slid his foot over hers. “Indeed it will.”
Happy All Hallows Day to those who celebrate it! Thank you for all the support! As always, it is much appreciated.
“It is time for all of us to set aside our differences and unite for the common good,” Lucius began amidst a barrage of camera flashes.

The crowd applauded, many of the loudest claps coming from members of the Ministry. Lucius flashed them a winning smile.

Draco’s expression remained impassive as Ginevra gave her father-in-law a standing ovation. Naïve Gryffindor idealism…

The applause ebbed, allowing Lucius to continue, "I promise here and now to dedicate my extensive resources as well as my vast fortune to aid in the capture of each and every one of the Death Eaters. I will not rest until the world is safe from the threat of Voldemort and his followers. Together, we will ensure that the Wizarding World is safe and at peace!"

The crowd erupted as he stepped away from the podium to bask in their adulation. Farrah stepped forward to shake his hand. They held onto the other's hand as the cameras almost blinded them in the quest for the money shot. Finally they released their grasp and returned to their seats at opposite edges of the stage.

"Thank you, Mister Malfoy," Kingsley began as the audience settled themselves. "We appreciate your support, and all the support of all our citizens! We will do everything in our power to capture the escape Death Eaters."

The statement elicited a few claps.

“That being said, because of security concerns, the Quidditch World Cup will be postponed until October 1.”

An unsettled murmur floated up from the crowd. Kingsley continued, "We have no intention of cancelling the games, but we will need to assemble a worldwide security force to adequately secure the premises. So far the United States, Mexico, Algeria, France, Russia, Ireland, and Bulgaria have all agreed to loan us their top law enforcement officers for the event."

Once again the room roared in applause, except for Draco who rolled his eyes. "From reading the Prophet I thought Ron Weasley was going to defend us single-handedly."

Ginevra nudged him with her elbow. "Shh."

The Minister for Magic continued, "Also, I would like to announce that the Ministry will be hosting a memorial ball for Harry Potter on September 23. This event is a black-tie benefit to aid in the rebuilding of Hogwarts."

Ginevra clenched her fists and muttered, “I suppose it's sheer coincidence that the ball is to be held the day before Hermione's due date.”

Nearby reporters fixed their gaze upon her.

"Ginevra," Draco whispered.
“Couldn’t they have waited one bloody month to hold their ball?” She hissed.

The Minister's eyes shot to Ginevra. "Do you have a question, Mrs. Malfoy?"

Lucius glared at her. Do not ruin this for me.

Draco gulped as Ginny answered, "I find it very disrespectful that the ball is scheduled right before Hermione's due date. For as close as Hermione and Harry were she deserves a chance to attend without fear of endangering her child."

Kingsley sighed. “I understand your frustration, but September 23 was the date chosen by the members of the Order.”

“You expect me to believe that Severus Snape consented to holding the ball so close to Hermione's due date?”

Kingsley swallowed.

Ginevra’s eyes bulged. “He doesn’t know a thing about this ball, does he?”

“We were unable to reach him when we were determining the date,” Kingsley replied.

“Sure you couldn't,” Ginevra replied.

Lucius bit his tongue. So help him if his twat of a daughter-in-law ruined his one chance to gather information…

Kingsley sighed. “Your mother claimed it was the only day she could gather all of her children together.”

"Of course," Ginevra answered as the press corps sharks circled about her, sensing blood in the water.

"Perhaps this is an issue best discussed elsewhere at another time," Draco interrupted.

"I agree," Kingsley replied, flashing Draco an appreciative glance. "If anyone would care for refreshments, Mr. Malfoy has been gracious enough to provide us with a light luncheon. Thank you!"

The cameras flashed in Kingsley’s face once more as the crowd erupted in final applause. Draco and Ginny broke away to claim seats for lunch in an adjacent room. Ginny seethed, "I can't believe Mum would cut Hermione out of Harry's Memorial Ball like that! Actually I can… but ugh!"

"It was rather cruel," Draco admitted.

“Cruel?” Ginevra snapped. “Cruel is sending a howler to Hermione the day after she married Severus. This…this is diabolical!”

“Agreed,” Draco replied.

"I can't believe her! She loved Hermione when she was with Ron. She considered Hermione to be a second daughter, but the second she broke up with Ron… or rather, he with her… Mum couldn't bear the sight of her! It makes me so angry!"

Draco massaged Ginevra’s back.
“Where was Dad in all of this?” Ginevra raged. “Couldn’t he have stood up for Hermione?”

Draco replied, "I believe the last time I saw your father he called Hermione 'the wench who deserved the greasy git.'"

Ginevra sighed. "I suppose that shouldn't surprise me."

"In the end they're only hurting themselves," Draco replied. "They will miss out on knowing Rose and having a say in how she is raised. The second Hermione discovers this ruse they will have lost their granddaughter forever."

"True," she replied before scanning the room. "Speaking of families, where's your father? I thought he was going to sit with us."

"He changed his mind. Now he’s sitting at the head table with Farrah Jackson. Something about a photo opportunity."

Ginevra frowned. "We can’t miss out on all that free publicity now can we?"

"You wouldn't want to sit with him anyway," Draco responded. "All he'll talk about is finances and donations. When the press leaves he will begin begging us to name the baby after him."

"He’s been quite obnoxious about the baby’s name as of late," she grinned. "If I weren’t so cross with my parents I’d tell Lucius that we are naming our child after one of them just to see his reaction."

Draco smirked. "It would be priceless."

Ginevra rubbed her stomach. "That it would."

Draco stood and kissed her on the cheek. "I'll get us some food. What would you like?"

"Please bring me the chicken, a few biscuits, and extra asparagus," Ginevra coaxed.

Draco shook his head. "How can you eat asparagus without gagging?"

"It isn’t that terrible, and I've been craving it all day," Ginevra answered. "Perhaps it has some kind of vitamins my body needs at the moment."

"And so it begins," Draco muttered before heading for the food table.

As he passed his father, he paused a moment to eavesdrop.

"Germany was nice, but I'm glad to be back in Britain," Farrah replied.

"I'm sure you are," Lucius answered. "I'm just sorry you had to come back under such horrible circumstances."

Unnoticed, Draco continued toward the food table. Farrah sniffed. "I wish my first few weeks back in Britain didn’t involve watching one of my friends die. My only small comfort is that George is recovering, but I’ll still never forgive myself for not standing up to those monsters."

"Nothing that happened was your fault," Lucius replied. "You surely must understand that."

Farrah looked up and made eye contact with him. "I try to tell myself there’s nothing I could have done, but I'm plagued by thoughts of what could've been."
"You shouldn't trouble yourself with such thinking. You were brave. I'm sure your parents are proud of your actions."

"They say that they are, but it doesn't change the fact that people died and I did nothing. I set the Death Eaters free!"

"Yes, but you were forced to do so. You can't blame yourself for what was beyond your control. All you can do is persevere and help us capture them."

"I suppose so," she exhaled. "It's like Uncle Archelaus used to say, 'sometimes all you can do is survive life.'"

"Archelaus," Lucius mused. "Now there's a name I haven't heard in quite a long time. I do remember him fondly."

She eyed him as though he'd just kissed a unicorn. "I didn't know you two were close."

"We weren't as close as I would've liked, but our interactions were always quite pleasant. He was an excellent listener."

"Is it wise to be complimenting ex-Snatchers and reminiscing on your days as a Death Eater given our present circumstances?"

"I'm only stating facts," Lucius answered. "Besides, you know as well as I do that not all the Death Eaters were evil."

"No," Farrah admitted. "Your family and Severus were good in the end. Uncle Archelaus was a great man. I miss him."

"I do too," Lucius replied. "Still, he'd be proud of you if he saw what you've become."

"I'm sure he is," Farrah replied.

"Indulge me for a moment."

"Sure."

"The men who forced you to release the Death Eaters, did they mention your uncle?"

"No, why?"

"I was curious," Lucius replied. "There would be no reason for them to know you, but I thought perhaps they released you because of your uncle. If that were the case, then it would quell the rumors."

"What rumors?" Farrah asked.

"Oh I doubt any of them mean anything. They're only whispers," Lucius replied.

"What whispers?" she demanded.

"There has been some speculation as to why you were spared. Some of it is not kind."

"I wish I knew why I was spared. All I can say is that we won't know exactly why I was allowed to live until the Death Eaters are captured."
“Best not to dwell on the past I suppose,” Lucius replied. “All one can do is look to the future.”

“I agree,” Farrah shifted her peas to the right.

“That being said, do you plan to go back to work at the prison?” Lucius asked.

“No,” Farrah answered. "Kingsley has offered me a job working security for the Ministry. He thought it would be a safer position than returning to Azkaban.”

"Are you happy with the promotion?"

There was a spark in her eyes which before had been lacking. "I wish I could go out and help capture the Death Eaters, but I must do my duty. We must all do our part for the greater good, mustn’t we?"

"Yes we must," Lucius replied. “Still I can't help but think that it would be incredibly dull to guard nattering bureaucrats all day."

She smirked. "It can't be much worse than guarding cursing prisoners."

"I agree," Lucius replied. "All that being said I wish nothing but the best for you in the future."

"Thank you. I wish the same for you Mr. Malfoy," Farrah answered.

"Please call me Lucius!" He answered. "You never minded calling me that when you were a girl."

"I didn't think you'd remember," she blushed.

"You were one of the few people brave enough to call me by my first name." he chuckled "Even now remember your begging me and your uncle to convince Severus to ease up on his potions exams. You felt there would be no other way for you to pass your NEWTS."

"I did pass my NEWTS, thank Merlin!"

"You did, quite well I may add. I remember your uncle throwing a party for you…"

"My uncle does like a good party."

Lucius grinned Farrah's eyes grew as her heart stopped. "I mean, he did. He always did like parties."

Lucius picked up his wine glass. “Indeed he did.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! I appreciate all of it!
Severus’ eyes flickered in interest. "Are you sure it wasn't merely a slip of the tongue?"

"If Archelaus had been dead for only a few weeks or months, I'd say yes, but he's supposedly been dead for years. I highly doubt Farrah forgot that little fact when she spoke to me," Lucius replied before taking a sip of his tea.

Severus leaned back in his chair. "Something doesn't seem right about this. It isn’t like Archelaus to do something as bold as to release Death Eaters from Azkaban."

Lucius took a sip of tea.

"When Voldemort was defeated the first time, he fled the country, only to return when his brother or niece needed his assistance. Archelaus did not feel comfortable living in Britain until Fenrir could assure him that none of the Snatchers would be prosecuted for their crimes. Given his previous low profile I cannot imagine him releasing the Death Eaters," Severus continued.

"The years may have hardened him," Lucius suggested.

"While that may be the case, it doesn’t answer the question of what he has to gain from releasing the Death Eaters."

"Perhaps he wanted to prove he was more cunning than either Albus or Voldemort."

"No, Archelaus never tried to make a name for himself. He was a follower, always taking orders from Fenrir." Severus raised his tea cup. "He never would’ve proposed releasing the Death Eaters, although he may have agreed to help someone else do so."

"You," Lucius leaned forward. "You don't think Fenrir is behind all this, do you?"

"It's a possibility, though one I shudder to consider," Severus admitted before taking a sip of his tea. Lucius swallowed. “Fenrir always fancied himself a great leader. He wouldn’t pass up the chance to prove he is smarter than Dumbledore and Voldemort.”

"Then again, if Fenrir is behind this, why did he take so long to enact his plans, and what does he need the Death Eaters for?" Severus asked.

“He may have released them because for a time the Snatchers were allied with the Death Eaters."

“Snatchers were considered lower than pureblood wizards." "But he was closely associated with them."

“Yet the Death Eaters did not respect or trust him. Why would he want to help the Death Eaters?” Severus mused.

“He could want a ready made army for some purpose," Lucius proposed.

“What purpose?”
“He may be waiting to make his intentions known until an opportune time.”

“That is a possibility.”

Lucius shook his head. “I haven’t the foggiest clue how to proceed if Fenrir is the one in charge.”

“We shouldn’t jump to the conclusion that Fenrir is behind the attacks. Perhaps we are following a false lead. Fenrir may be dead and Archelaus remains in hiding. Perhaps Archelaus has nothing to do with the Death Eater plot,” Severus scratched the armrest. “Though he may know who is behind it.”

“It’s worth seeking him out and asking him what he knows,” Lucius replied. “Where are we most likely to find him?”

Severus took a sip of tea. "It's doubtful that hesitated in Britain. The last time he escaped he went to France. I believe he owns some property there."

"He owns a fair share of property in Spain as well,” Lucius replied.

"Does he own property anywhere else?" Severus took another sip of tea.

"I have no idea,” Lucius sighed. "If I'm to be honest, I envision him spending more time roaming the woods than living in any particular place. I've always believed his properties were for show."

Severus frowned. “Splendid. He could be halfway across Europe for all we know."

"One of the elves on his property may know where he is," Lucius suggested. "His estates were quite large, so elves would be necessary for their upkeep."

"Is there any way to coax one into talking?" Severus asked.

"I doubt it," Lucius’ face lit up. “Though you could use legillimency on it to determine Archelaus’ whereabouts.”

“Under any other circumstance I’d oblige, but Hermione's due date is fast approaching. I am not comfortable leaving her when there are Death Eaters roaming about,” Severus replied.

"I understand completely," Lucius replied. "I may be able to go to Spain under the guise of taking Narcissa on a wine tasting trip. Using Legilimency wouldn’t be an option, but I could find some other way of interrogating his elves.”

"That could work," Severus replied with a trace of a grin.

"Then I plan to leave in two days time."

"Do you know exactly where Archelaus’ properties are?"

"We used some of his properties for safe houses during the war. I still have maps and direction for how to get there.”

"Good," Severus replied. "Thank you, Lucius."

"There is no need to thank me. I owe you after asking you to perform Legilimency on the Death Eaters,” Lucius replied.

"You do.” Severus set down his tea cup.
Lucius took a deep breath. "There was another announcement today."

"Yes?"

"The Ministry has apparently decided to throw a Memorial Ball for Potter."

“What is the date?"

“September twenty-third.”

Severus grit his teeth. "That's the day before Hermione's due date."

“I know” Lucius answered. "Ginevra kindly informed the entire Wizarding World of that fact."

Severus huffed. "At least someone said something. Perhaps they will change the date now."

"That's doubtful. Molly Weasley had a say in scheduling the ball. According to her the only time her family can gather is on September twenty-third."

"Of course that's the only time they can gather," Severus grumbled. "As we all know the world revolves around the Weasleys, Hermione's feelings be damned."

“I could see what I could do about changing the date..."

“There’s no need to use your connections to reschedule a blasted ball. Your energies would be much better spent investigating Archelaus' whereabouts. I can attempt to persuade Hermione to find a way to honor Potter which does not involve attending that ball."

“Good luck with that,” Lucius answered.

“Thank you,” Severus replied. I'll need it.

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"Severus!” Hermione exclaimed as he entered the bedroom through the fireplace.

"I apologize for staying out later than I intended," Severus replied as she shut her book. “I intended to leave at eight, but Narcissa entered and wanted to discuss how Ginevra’s pregnancy was progressing. Unfortunately time slipped away from me afterwards."

“I thought you may have gotten sidetracked,” Hermione set the book aside. “Though I wish you had flooed me explaining where you were. I do worry for you at times.”

Severus dusted himself off. “I hope my absence did not concern you too greatly.”

“No,” Hermione ran her hand over the sheets. “I know you can defend yourself, but it doesn’t stop me from worrying that the next knock on the door will be some auror reporting on an attack against you. It's irrational and ridiculous, but with everything that's happened recently I cannot help but be concerned sometimes.”

He kissed her cheek. “I’m here now, love.”

“I know,” she whispered.

Severus glanced over at the discarded book. “What were you reading?”
“It’s more like what am I rereading,” Hermione smiled.

"I see." Severus chuckled as he made his way to the closet. "What were you rereading?"

“I was rereading some of my favorite books on the first year of a baby’s life.”

"Have you memorized them yet?" Severus asked as he unbuttoned his shirt.

Hermione watched as his shirt floated down to the ground. Her heart skipped a beat. “For the most part.”

“Merlin woman,” Severus muttered. “This is the tenth time you’ve reread some of these books.”

“I know it seems obsessive to read them so often, but I want to make sure I know what I’m doing while I’m raise Rose,” Hermione replied. “I don’t want to make any major mistakes.

"You won't," Severus assured her as he removed his pants.

Hermione’s heart raced. She forced herself to look into his eyes. “I-I’ve never raised a baby in the magical world before. Neither of us were raised in the magical world.”

"I doubt raising a baby in the Wizarding World is significantly different than raising one in the muggle world," Severus answered.

"What if it is? What if there are some Wizarding norms we need to know? What if Rose isn’t developing properly and we are oblivious to it because we're comparing her to a muggle baby?" Hermione's heart was pounding. "Maybe you don’t feel as if you need guidance, but I do.”

“I doubt you need much guidance,” Severus replied. “So far you’ve done an outstanding job providing for Rose.”

Hermione lowered her eyes. “I couldn't do any of this without you.”

Severus pulled out his nightshirt. "I promised you that I will never abandon you or Rose. Somehow we will ensure that Rose gets through her childhood in one piece."

Hermione relaxed. "Thank you Severus. I know I'm being unreasonable and obsessive..."

"You're a new mother concerned for the welfare of her child," Severus answered. "That is never something for which you need to apologize."

Hermione's stomach fluttered. "Thank you."

"There is no reason to thank me for my honesty," Severus replied.

"All that being said, I think you’ll find many of these facts fascinating,” Hermione continued, finding it increasingly more difficult to ignore the desire constricting her chest. “According to the books she should be able to show the first signs of magic when she’s about six months, although it takes some wizards up to a year."

"I'm sure she will perform an act of magic much earlier than that, if only to outdo the others,” Severus smirked.

"Maybe,” Hermione’s eyes were transfixed on Severus’ long fingers buttoning his shirt.

"Speaking of our baby, Lucius says the Ministry is having a Memorial Ball for Harry,” Severus
replied.

Hermione tore her eyes from those tantalizing buttons. "Really?"

"Yes."

"When is it?"

"On September the twenty-third."

"But, but that's the day before my due date."

"I know," Severus replied as he crawled into bed beside her. "According to Lucius, Molly had a say in when it was scheduled."

"That bitch," Hermione hissed.

"If I'd known I would have stopped her," Severus began.

"Don't blame yourself," Hermione replied as she scooted closer to her husband.

"Still, it was uncouth of her to schedule it when she did."

"Uncouth or not she can’t stop me from attending."

"Excuse me?"

"Harry would want me to be there, so I'm going to attend."

"Hermione, he would not want you to endanger the baby."

"Rose will be fine."

"She won’t be fine if you go into labor while you're trying to walk the night away."

"Look Severus," Hermione began. "I know you're worried about Rose and my well-being, but I have to go to this ball!"

"Isn't there another way you can honor Potter?" He asked.

Hermione’s voice softened. "This ball is my last chance to say goodbye."

"He’d understand if you couldn’t come," Severus assured her.

"I know, but this ball is important to me," Hermione sighed.

"What about Rose?" Severus asked. "He would want Rose to be born into this world as safely as possible."

"Maybe we can wait and see how I'm doing that day," Hermione suggested. "Rose may not be ready to enter into the world yet. After all it’s difficult to accurately predict an exact due date. For all we know Rose will be born in the beginning of October, not in September."

"You are certain that attending this ball will not induce labor?" Severus asked.

"No, it should not," Hermione replied. "I should be able to honor Harry and safely have my baby."
"If that's what you want, that's what we'll do," Severus conceded.

"Thank you!" she answered, pulling him into an enthusiastic kiss.

After a long moment Hermione backed away. She blushed. Severus whispered into her ear, "Why did you stop, witch?"

Quietly, but with no less purpose, she resumed her assault on his lips as she unbuttoned that pesky nightshirt.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It is much appreciated!
Chapter 87

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hermione groaned as she pried her eyes open. She winced as Rose assaulted her bladder once more. "Go to sleep Rose."

Hermione buried her head in her pillow, but Rose was in no mood to take pity on her mother. Hermione groaned as she rolled out of bed to trudge to the bathroom.

"I cannot wait until you're on the outside," she muttered before closing the door.

A few minutes later, she stumbled back into the bedroom. A sliver of moonlight illuminated Severus’ face and upper torso. The effect gentled his features, the ravages of war all but erased in the peacefulness of sleep.

As she gazed at the man in front of her, she relived every caress and soft kiss from a few hours earlier. He was always so gentle… so respectful… so reverent. Was this what true lovemaking felt like?

Her heart stopped.

Lovemaking?

She shook her head as Rose stretched within her. What exactly was Severus’ relationship to her? Her relationship to him was unique to any other she’d experienced, and difficult to summarize. He was her spouse, which would imply that he was more than a friend. If he was more than a friend and they often made love then it seemed logical to call him a lover. Yet, could she really call someone her lover if she did not love him?

The memory of the Amortentia’s scent permeated Hermione’s mind. Her stomach sank with the mere idea that she was falling in love with him. Perhaps Severus was becoming her lover. Maybe she was beginning to fall in love with him. Would her growing affection for him doom their relationship? If she loved him would she exist solely to please him? What if Severus took advantage of her feelings for him? Worse, what if her love wasn't enough for Severus, and he decided another woman was better suited to spend the rest of his life with?

"No," she whispered, breaking the sacred silence. I'm confusing amazing sex with love. He treats me as if I were his queen, but that's only because I'm the mother of his child. Severus probably just wants to keep things amicable with me because I’m his wife, and at the end of the day that's all I am, his wife.

She stood up straighter. We’re friends. Both of us entered this arrangement rationally and refuse to muddle things with deep emotions. If my affection for him continues to grow I need to remind myself that friendship is far better than whatever romance I have cooked up inside my head. I am married to my best friend, and that is far more precious than unbridled passion.

Hermione crawled back into bed and kissed Severus on the forehead. “Goodnight Severus. Thank you for making me happy.”

He moaned as his lips curled up.
Rose settled down as Hermione once again closed her eyes. Severus placed his arm around her as she spooned into him, drifting off to sleep.

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"September 23 then?" Fenrir asked, tossing another log into the campfire.

"Yes, sir," Farrah answered.

"Hmm. That does not give much time to prepare," Fenrir mused. "We'll need someone to infiltrate the premises and create a map..."

"Not a problem," Farrah commented. "The Ministry has already asked me to help keep guard."

"I see," Fenrir sneered. "It's almost as if I planned this myself."

"In many ways you did. After all, you did choose to release me, thus rendering me traumatized," Farrah replied with a smirk.

Fenrir, Scabior, and the Chief laughed. "I suppose I did."

"Everything thus far has gone splendidly," Scabior added. "We couldn't have planned better if we'd tried."

"Yes, but do not think we are immune to error," Fenrir mused.

"What do you mean?" Scabior asked.

"Our soldiers would like to think they're powerful, but they need to be refreshed on their wand magic, since they have not held a wand in years. Compounding the problem is that some of our followers lack a wand altogether."

"That can be remedied!" Scabior replied.

"But in how much time? We only have a month, and we've already used a tenth of our Polyjuice supply."

"I could buy more," Farrah offered.

"I appreciate the offer, but no," Fenrir replied. "You are too valuable to have your position compromised."

"If we attack the ministry, won't Farrah's position already be compromised?" the Chief.

"Not if she takes a fainting potion," Fenrir replied.

"Fainting potion?" The Chief asked.

"If I use a fainting potion on her then it could be argued that I knocked her out. When Kingsley sees you he'll know that I spared her for your sake," Fenrir replied.

"I see," the Chief replied.

"Besides, I'm not opposed to allowing my men to nibble on a few of the other guards. We could make it appear as if Farrah received a dry bite, and make sure some of the other guards have not-so-dry bites."
Scabior smirked. “I’m not opposed to having a few before ball snacks.”

Farrah cleared her throat. “Which fainting potion would you suggest I take? There are a couple I know of off the top of my head, both with different degrees of effectiveness.”

“Vapulaforas,” Fenrir replied.

“I was thinking that was the best potion,” Farrah replied. "Where could I buy it without attracting attention?"

"You can weave together a good story, can you not?"

"Of course."

"Then I suggest you buy it at the new apothecary on Broomstick Lane."

All fell silent as they stared at Fenrir.

“Isn’t that Severus Snape’s new apothecary?” Scabior asked.

"Yes."

"Then why would you suggest she buy from him?"

"Because I need someone to observe him, if only for a few moments. I want to gauge how likely he is to defect to our side."

Silence fell again.

"With all due respect, I don't believe he'd defect at all," Scabior replied.

“Every man has his price,” Fenrir argued. “He has to have some weakness, something we could exploit to get him on our side.”

“His weakness died a quarter of a century ago,” Farrah argued.

“He has another weakness,” Fenrir insisted. “I just have to find it and then he will be on our side.”

"Perhaps we should focus less on convincing him to defect and more on killing him," the Chief suggested.

"I've considered killing him," Fenrir admitted, "but he is a powerful wizard. There is no guarantee I would succeed in bringing about his demise. Besides, alive he would be an invaluable asset to us all if we could properly persuade him."

“Which brings us back to the question of how,” Scabior noted.

Farrah chimed in, "What about his wife? Could she be his weakness?"

The Chief snorted. “She may be a good bed warmer, but I doubt Severus Snape would ever give his heart to another Gryffindor.”

Fenrir's eyes flickered with an idea. “Or would he?”

The others fell silent.

"Leave Mrs. Snape alive for the moment. Even if she isn’t Severus’ weakness she could lead us to
what that weakness actually is.”

“What if she is as clueless as to his weaknesses as we are?” Scabbier asked.

“Then it is still prudent to keep her alive,” Fenrir explained. “Right now it is too difficult to isolate and kill her anyway, so allow her to breathe for a few more days.”

“But she has a baby within her! If we kill her now, we won’t have to worry about the horcruxes,” Scabior argued.

"Or she could save it while it is still within her,” Fenrir argued. “At almost eight months her fetus is viable. It is not inconceivable that she spend her dying breaths giving birth to the child. Once the child is born it could easily become a horcrux.”

“That seems unlikely…” Farrah replied.

“But the fact that it’s a possibility should dissuade us from provoking that baby’s parents,” Fenrir snapped.

“Are you really afraid of a baby?” Scabior asked.

"I'm afraid of having my existence tied to another being!” Fenrir argued. "I saw what it did to Voldemort, and I do not wish to repeat his mistakes.”

“But you aren’t interested in eternal life,” Scabior replied. “Perhaps you could avoid making the baby a horcrux if your intention is merely to harm her and her parents.”

“Even if we didn’t intend to gain immortality complications would arise if we attacked the child,” Fenrir noted. “If we injure or kill Severus Snape’s child he would have a reason to go after us. The more neutral he is, the better. As long as he’s not firmly on the side of the Ministry, we have time to find his weakness and convince him to join us.”

"True,” the Chief admitted.

"Glad you agree, not that I need your consent," Fenrir replied before turning to Farrah. "You know what to do, yes?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Good, then the plan is set."

Fenrir threw another piece of wood on the fire and watched it dissolve in the hungry flames.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this has taken so long to update. It's been chaotic today to say the least. Thank you for the support! It really means a lot to me that people enjoy this story.
Chapter 88

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hermione leaned back in her recliner and propped up the latest *Potions Monthly*. She shifted until her aching back found relief. From within her, Rose kicked. At first her movements were soft flutters, but over the next few minutes they intensified.

Hermione placed a hand over her swollen abdomen. "You want to see Daddy don't you?"

Rose continued her barrage. Hermione shook her head. "We just saw him an hour ago. Daddy needs to focus on running his business, and I need to focus on this book."

Rose kicked again.

"I’m sorry Rose, but you aren’t the center of the universe," Hermione continued. This kick was harder.

Hermione shut the book. "Daddy cannot see you right now. He is too busy with his customers to take time out for us. You need to be patient until he comes home in a few hours. Then if he isn't too exhausted he'll talk to us."

Rose would not be persuaded. Hermione set her book onto a nearby side table and forced herself up. "You win little girl. We’ll go see Daddy, but don’t expect him to drop everything just to talk to you."

Hermione rubbed her back and groaned before trudging toward the fireplace. She sighed. When Severus announced he was opening his apothecary, she had this fantasy of standing beside him as the doors opened. She would ring up customers while he basked in his well-deserved success. As he explained to his customer how to properly administer each potion, she'd stand beside him, reveling in his smooth, deep voice.

Then the reality of eight months of pregnancy came crashing down on her. She lasted all of two hours before her achy feet and back demanded a reprieve. As much as she wanted to support her husband, all her body wanted to do was remain in that comfortable chair for the next month. If only Rose would cooperate with her plans…

"Two forty-four Broomstick Lane," Hermione stated before she stepped into the floo.

Upon arrival she stepped away from the fireplace and brushed off the dust. Customers milled around the selection of potions, careful to avoid those in the lengthy queue at the checkout counter. Hermione’s eyes darted to the fireplace. No one would notice if she returned home. Before Hermione could meditate on the thought for any length of time, Rose resumed her gymnastics, making her wishes clearly known.

Hermione wandered over to the register, where Severus was ringing up an order of several heliotrope vials. A woman leaned over the counter and giggled, her shirt leaving little to the imagination.

Hermione scowled. What could this woman want with so many vials? More trivially, why was she flashing her breasts in front of Severus? Was she aware that he was married and that his pregnant wife wouldn’t appreciate other women flirting with him?
Hermione winced as her bladder was punched.

"Seriously, people knock themselves out with Vapulaforas?" the woman laughed.

"Indeed they do," Severus replied as Hermione crept closer. "Some teenage wizards are beginning to view it as a sport."

"What an odd sport," the woman commented.

Hermione gasped as she recognized the woman as Farrah Jackson. Her heart stopped. What would a guard from the Ministry be doing at the apothecary? Did someone suspect Severus of something? Judging by the look on Severus' face, she guessed not. It didn’t make sense to interrogate Severus at his workplace. Even if the Ministry wanted information from Severus, they would send an auror, not a guard.

Still if Farrah wasn’t here to interrogate Severus, what was she hoping to accomplish?

“That being said," Severus continued, “Vapulaforas enters the bloodstream through the skin. You only need to sprinkle your target with a tiny amount to achieve the desired effect.”

"We used this in Germany all the time. It was useful in transporting difficult prisoners,” Farrah answered.

"Good. Then I won't bore you then with details you already know.” Severus pulled out a burlap sack. "I am curious, however, as to why you need so much Polyjuice Potion."

"Ministry secret, I'm afraid," Farrah replied.

He raised an eyebrow. "I see.”

"Severus?"

He glanced at his wife and gave her a small smile. "Hermione, what a pleasant surprise."

Hermione gave him a shy grin.

“What brings you here? I thought you wanted to rest at home,” he continued.

“Trust me, all I want to do is sit down and read a good potions journal, but Rose wants to see you.”

“She does?”

Hermione nodded. “She’s getting a bit rambunctious. I’ve tried everything, but you’re the only person who can calm her down when she gets like this.”

Severus massaged Hermione’s stomach and murmured, “How are you doing little one?”

Rose kicked against his hand.

"Have you been a good girl for Mummy and let her rest?"

Rose moved once more.

"You shouldn't be so rude to your mother. You don't want to hurt her now do you?" He continued.

Some of the customers glanced at each other. Others rubbed they eyes. On what planet did Severus
Snape, the notorious bat of the dungeons, talk soothingly to unborn children?

“She’s finally calming down,” Hermione replied.

“That’s Daddy’s precious little Rose,” he whispered.

“Is there something wrong with you?” Farrah blurted out.

Severus glared. Several of the customers exhaled. The previous scene was only a figment of their imagination… a blip on the screen. He was still as fearsome now as he was at Hogwarts.

"Why in Merlin's name would you think I was ill?" Severus demanded as he removed his hand from Hermione.

"No reason," Farrah squeaked. Now she remembered why his students called him such unflattering names.

Hermione swallowed. "I didn't mean to distract you from your work."

"You are no distraction," Severus replied. "If you like, I can get a stool from the back closet and let you sit down. I can’t promise it will be as comfortable as your recliner, but you wouldn't need to stand on these hard floors."

“I appreciate the generous offer, but I think I’d rather go home and deal with the kicking then try to sit up straight for any length of time,” Hermione replied.

Severus chuckled, prompting more uneasy glances from the crowd. "I'm sure if I was pregnant I'd understand."

A few customers squirmed. What was going on between Severus and Hermione? Given their behavior one would think the greasy git was capable of liking, perhaps even loving, another person.

Farrah cleared her throat, "Uh, Hermione?"

Hermione turned her attention to Farrah, "Yes?"

"Congrats on the wedding and the baby," Farrah began.

“Thank you,” Hermione replied.

"Does it ever feel strange to be married to your potions professor?" Farrah asked.

Hermione frowned. "He isn't my potions professor anymore."

"True, but your union still caught most of the Wizarding World by surprise. Certainly I never thought you two would wind up together."

“What is that supposed to mean?"

“I always thought Professor Snape’s taste in women would be more Slytherin than Gryffindor,” Farrah explained. "No offense, but I didn’t think you’d be his type."

Severus glared at the guard. "That will be forty-nine Galleons, twenty Sickles, and six Knuts."

“All right then," Farrah muttered.
Hermione’s snarl deepened as Farrah counted up her coins. Somehow Farrah managed to lean over in such a way that Severus got a much better look at all she had to offer. Hermione shook her head. You’d think a security guard would dress more modestly off the job.

"Here it is!" Farrah replied as she handed him the money.

"Thank you," Severus replied, checking the change, then setting the potions into the bag.

"Ginevra said at the press conference that your baby is due soon," Farrah continued. "Congratulations."

"Thank you," Hermione replied, her voice softening.

"It's odd though, I mean aren't you mad at Snape?"

"Why would I be upset with Severus?"

Farrah’s eyes bulged. “He lets you call him Severus?”

"Why wouldn’t he?" Hermione asked with an edge to her voice.

Farrah shrugged. “I don’t know, but it’s hard to imagine him being called anything other than Professor Snape or just Snape.”

“My name is Snape too now,” Hermione replied.

“True, which is still baffling to me,” Farrah replied. "How on earth did Hermione Granger become Hermione Snape?"

"Is there a point to this inquiry?" Severus barked.

“I’m just curious as to how you’ve managed to stay together given how you two began,” Farrah replied.

“I thought I made it clear that I haven’t considered Severus my professor in quite some time,” Hermione growled.

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Then what do you mean?"

“You and Severus didn't marry until you were nearly four months pregnant. According to the papers you and Severus had an affair, but when all was said and done you returned to Ron Weasley.”

Hermione bit her tongue.

“How did you and Professor Snape come back together? Was it always your plan to raise your baby as Ron's? Did Snape try to abandon you? What happened?” Farrah asked.

Hermione froze.

"This isn't Rita Skeeter's gossip column," Severus snapped, shoving the bag into Farrah's chest. "Here are your potions! Take them and leave."

“Sorry,” Farrah replied. “Sometimes I’m too curious for my own good.”
“Yes, you certainly are,” Hermione mumbled.

“Anyway, Thank you for helping me, Snape,” Farrah replied with a less than contrite smile before rushing out.

The next customer stepped forward, comforted by Severus' familiar scowl. Hermione wore a matching expression as she watched Farrah saunter down the street, looking every bit like one of the women who used to throw themselves at her ex-fiance.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Hermione was scowling.

From the moment Severus had returned home Hermione had glued her eyes to a book. When Severus attempted to make conversation with her she would give him grumbled monosyllabic answers before returning to her reading. Initially Severus believed her poor attitude was due to her sore back, or perhaps her swollen feet. Still she should be comfortable on their soft couch. Perhaps there were some discomforts the couch couldn’t alleviate. He’d be more than happy to massage away her aches, if only she’d ask.

An owl scratched at the window. Hermione grunted and slammed her book onto the coffee table. She grunted, "of all the times for the owl to come..."

"I can get it," Severus offered.

"No, I will," Hermione grumbled before standing up and stomping to the window.

She tore the letter from the owl's leg and opened the sash. As the scene played before him Severus replayed the day's events. For the life of him, he could not determine what would’ve upset Hermione to this degree. The only unpleasantry Severus could think of was her encounter with Farrah. Merlin knew the guard had been overly invasive...

"Betty Braithwaite wants to interview you," Hermione announced.

"About the opening of my store?" Severus asked.

"Yes," Hermione allowed the letter to float to the ground. "She wants to set up an interview for nine o'clock tomorrow morning at your apothecary. Is that acceptable?"

"I suppose there's no harm in speaking with her before I open," Severus mused. “Ms. Braithwaite would write a fair article, and I wouldn’t need to worry about my words being misconstrued.”

"You'll agree to this interview, then?" Hermione asked.

“Yes, I could use the publicity," Severus replied.

“It must be fabulous to have all that free publicity,” Hermione growled before turning to stalk out of the room. “As long as the spotlight is firmly on you who cares what anyone else thinks?”

Severus stood in front of her. She snarled before attempting to get around him. Once again he blocked her path.

”What in Circe's name has you so agitated?”

“Why do you care?”

“If I have to endure this nasty attitude of yours for the remainder of the evening then I at least deserve to know its origins,” Severus replied. “With some luck we could solve the underlying issue and have a peaceful night.”
“There’s nothing you can do except move out of my way,” Hermione mumbled.

“You’d be surprised what I can do,” Severus replied. "But I cannot assist you until you explain what is upsetting you."

“You want to know what is upsetting me?” Hermione demanded. “Fine! I’m the size of a whale, my back hurts, my feet are killing me, and I can’t see my toes. Isn't that reason enough to be upset?”

"I suppose so," Severus locked eyes with her. They were a caramel melting pot of emotion, threatening to boil over at any moment.

“See, there’s nothing you can do,” Hermione replied. “Nobody can do anything for me. I’m poor little stupid Hermione as always. You might as well get out of my way before you regret letting me into your life.”

Severus’ voice softened. “What happened while I was gone?”

“Why would you ask that?” Hermione barked.

Severus answered. "Something is upsetting you and I want to know what it is."

The emotion in her eyes swelled as an unspoken debate raged within her. After a minute of silence a tear trickled down her cheek. “You’ll call me an idiot if I tell you the truth.”

“That’s doubtful given how much I esteem you,” Severus answered.

Hermione’s voice cracked. "Farrah is just like the girls who threw themselves at Ron."

Severus bit his lower lip.

Hermione allowed the tears to flow. “All girls like Farrah are the same. She enters a room in a shirt that barely covers her chest, and then she leans in such a way as to give everyone a good look. Every man falls for it.”

"I was less than impressed," Severus replied.

“Oh don’t patronize me,” Hermione snapped. “I know how men work. Deep down inside you loved Farrah lavishing all that attention on you.”

“I found her to be tactless and vacuous,” Severus replied.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. Severus brushed the tears from her face with his thumbs.

“It was the voice that got me,” Hermione sniffed. “Girls like her speak in this sweet, disarming voice. Then they go in for the kill, asking inappropriate questions and taking jabs at me. By the end of the encounter I feel like the most pathetic creature on earth. All I want to do is curl up in a bathroom stall and never come out whereas everyone else finds the whole situation amusing.”

“I was less than amused.”

“You don’t need to pretend that you didn’t enjoy her flirting with you. I understand, I truly do,” Hermione took a ragged breath. “Look at me Severus. Really look at me.”

He stared at her.

Hermione continued, "I am huge and I'll only get bigger, I’m swelling in areas I didn’t even know
could retain fluid, and no matter what I try I still can’t tame my hair without putting thirty products into it.”

“You are more than attractive,” Severus replied as she buried her face into his robes. “I would go so far as to call you beautiful.”

Hermione sobbed. “Even if you think I’m attractive, you’re probably sick of me. I mean this was supposed to be the happiest day of your life, the hour where you finally achieve your lifelong dream. Instead of celebrating, you have to go home to some infuriated shrew and be yelled at for a situation you didn’t create. You must be wondering why on earth you ever thought it was wise to marry a mess like me.”

“First of all, the happiest day of my life was seeing Rose for the first time. No apothecary opening will ever compare to the moment I first laid eyes on her.” Severus kissed Hermione on the forehead. “Second of all, I was wise to marry you because you haven’t spent half my fortune on frivolities. Words cannot express how grateful I am for your self-restraint.”

Hermione smiled as he led her to the couch. Severus helped her recline until she was flat on her back. “Wha-what are you doing?”

“Keeping a promise,” Severus replied as he began to press his thumbs into her feet.

“What promise?”

“The one where I show you some appreciation after a difficult day.”

“Merlin, Severus.” Hermione shuddered. “I can’t stay mad at you.”

Severus smirked. “I'll remember you said that the next time you complain about me ordering breakfast from the house elves.”

“You can still make breakfast. We don’t need to depend on the house elves for everything.”

“Every time I try to make us breakfast Rose decides she doesn’t like it.”

“I would kill to eat one of your biscuits again without the fear of heartburn. I do like them.”

“I like them as well, but clearly Rose does not.”

Hermione sighed. “I'm sure when she's older she'll learn to love our cooking, because the second I feel better the house elves will no longer be allowed in the kitchen.”

Severus chuckled. “We'll see about that.”

Hermione closed her eyes as Severus continued to massage.

“Severus?”

“Yes?”

“I'm sorry I was so cross with you. I should've been celebrating your achievement, not throwing a temper tantrum like some toddler.”

“You had every right to be upset. Farrah was out of line in so many ways.”

“No, I needed to be the bigger person and not let her get to me.”
“You are allowed to display an emotion.”

“I suppose I've more than displayed them tonight.”

Severus smirked. "You have."

Hermione released her tension. “Nevertheless I shouldn't have let her crawl under my skin like that, but when I saw her…”

Severus continued his massage.

Hermione’s voice grew quiet. “You probably don't want to hear about it.”

“There’s no reason not to tell me what is on your mind,” Severus replied. “Right now I’m a captive audience.”

Hermione continued, "When Ron and I were together, women used to go up to him in outfits even more revealing than the one worn by Farrah. They would flirt with him, and were not the least bit subtle about it. He basked in their attention, and always reported their best features to his friends. I used to tell him how much it bothered me, but he told me I needed to relax. Looking back, I think he cheated on me with several of those girls. I don’t think anyone involved gave one thought to me or my emotions.”

“Dunderheads,” Severus whispered.

“Then again they might be right. Perhaps I am too high strung, too needy, and too clingy. At the end of the day if I'd been a better girlfriend Ron never would've given them a second thought. I guess I don't excel at everything after all,” Hermione laughed, although there was no joy in the sound.

Severus stopped kneading her feet and gazed into her eyes. "Hermione, Ron was wrong about everything.”

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You are amazing," he began. "Any wizard would be lucky to have you in his life. I've only just begun to realize how fortunate I am to have you as a companion and friend."

"I'm lucky you were willing to take a chance on a pregnant woman, and that you were willing to accept Rose as your own."

"You're more than some pregnant woman, and Rose is more than a child."

"She's ours," Hermione finished.

"Indeed she is." Severus took her hands into his. “If it gives you any comfort at all, in the beginning I did receive several letters from females asking for my hand in marriage. I couldn't tolerate the idea of being in the same room with any of them. They were all dunderheads who wouldn’t know a cauldron from a dragon’s tail.”

Hermione laughed. "I'm sorry," she gasped, “but the word, 'dunderhead' is so… you… and that metaphor is something only you could think up. You are so cute when you’re being yourself.”

Severus blinked. Why did this witch insist on calling him cute? How could someone of her intelligence fail to understand that the words "Severus" and "cute" did not belong in the same sentence without some type of negation?
She quieted herself. “I didn’t mean to interrupt you. Please go on.”

“It is wonderful to see you smile again,” he noted. “You have a lovely smile.”

Her smile widened. “Thank you.”

“Hermione,” Severus cleared his throat. “What I'm trying to say, somewhat ineloquently, is that you are superior to any of the other women who requested my hand in marriage. You are everything I wanted in a spouse, and so much more.”

"Because I'm not a dunderhead."

"Well yes, but also because it is easy to live with you. In fact, it is difficult not to form a deep attachment to someone like you. Hermione, I…"

The owl hooted, its patience for a treat all but gone.

Severus grunted. "A muggle post office is looking better by the moment."

“It has its drawbacks though,” Hermione replied as Severus stood up. “It takes forever to get a letter from one point to the other.”

"I suppose, but muggle mail carriers put the letters in a nice box and do not interrupt your day to do it."

Severus stepped into the kitchen as Hermione curled her toes. He returned, holding some bacon, a quill, and an ink container. As he wrote the letter, Hermione rolled over in his direction. What had Severus meant to say before the owl so rudely interrupted him?

She considered asking the question aloud, but decided against it.

The moment was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It's deeply appreciated.
Farrah ventured further into the woods, with only the sounds of the distant howls to guide her steps. Her eyes darted left and right as she clutched a bag in her right hand. The closer she crept towards the howls, the louder they became until it was intermixed with barking and shouting. In the distance was the soft orange glow of campfires. Before she could get a better glimpse of the flames a voice hissed, “Farrah!”

She spun around. “Yes?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Giving the Polyjuice vials to Fenrir. Where is he?”

"Training the troops."

“Good,” Farrah set down her sack. “Then I can do this!”

Farrah leapt up and embraced the man.

“Oh Farrah,” he hummed as he embraced her back.

"I've missed hugging you so much, Uncle Archelaus."

"As have I," he released her. "But you know how Fenrir feels about showing affection around the Death Eaters."

"I know, but it is a silly rule. A little familial affection won’t soften anyone up too much,” Farrah argued.

“Don’t be so sure. Remember the troops are still learning how to allow their animalistic instincts to override their human impulses. If they don't think and act like wolves they will not fight as viciously,” Archelaus explained.

“Perhaps,” Farrah sighed.

Uncle Archelaus smiled. Farrah grabbed her bag and handed it to him. “Here’s the Polyjuice potion.”

“Good. Where did you find it?”

"At the Broomstick Apothecary."

“Was Snape there?”

“Of course he was," Farrah smirked. "He was even so nice as to ring me up himself.”

Archelaus’ eyes bore down on her. “Did he ask any questions?”

Farrah shrugged. “He wanted to know what the Polyjuice was for, and I told him it was official Ministry business. His wife came in and distracted him before he could ask too many other questions.”
“Oh? How?” He asked.

“I guess her baby was acting up or she wasn't feeling well. For some reason she think Snape can calm her unborn child.”

"The kid's probably already afraid of him."

"Regardless, Hermione came in and Severus paid more attention to her than me,” She sneered. “Well, at least until I started interrogating her.”

“What do you mean by 'interrogating her?'” the Uncle drawled.

“I wanted to know exactly why she married Snape.”

“Please tell me you didn’t provoke either of them.”

“All I did was point out that Severus had been willing to abandon Hermione and her child,” Farrah replied. “Then I asked her if it was strange to be married to her potions professor, especially when Snape's type is Slytherin.”

Uncle Archelaus’ eyes lit up. "Those are very interesting questions. How did they react to them?"

"Hermione was just embarrassed, while Snape barked out the price of my items. It gets better."

"How?"

"I asked Hermione is she was mad at Snape for abandoning her and the baby," Farrah giggled. “You should’ve seen the look on her face. I thought she was going to explode like a cauldron!”

Her uncle’s eyes widened. "Farrah, you know it wasn't an appropriate question to ask. That question could've blown your cover."

“I was only curious,” Farrah tapped her foot. “Come to think of it I still am interested how they got together. I thought Hermione had more self-respect than to allow a former professor to impregnate her, especially when said professor isn’t half as hot as Ron Weasley.”

“Who cares? If you continue antagonizing them Hermione and Severus are going to suspect you aren't the perfect image you've so carefully crafted,” Archelaus warned.

“But I gained some valuable information,” Farrah protested. “Hermione and Snape actually care for each other! I think they could even be in love. Hermione Snape may be Severus Snape’s weakness after all.”

“You shouldn’t jump too conclusions based on one interaction,” Archelaus warned. "For all we know the Snapes are putting on a show for the Wizarding World so Severus doesn’t lose his fortune. In private they may be counting down the days until it is safe to file for divorce.’’

“Perhaps,” Farrah conceded.

“In the meantime you need to be more careful. The last thing we need is for either of the Snapes to suspect that you are not fully dedicated to the Ministry,” Archelaus reiterated.

"I know," Farrah frowned. "I let my emotions get the better of me. It bothers me so much though. How could Hermione Snape, the woman who helped defeat Voldemort, be so weak as to take back a man who'd dumped her?”
Her uncle asked, “Are you asking this because you’re curious, or are you projecting your experiences onto her?”

Farrah’s expression revealed all.

“Bruno was a jackass,” Archelaus whispered.

“I know, but it doesn’t stop the pain,” Farrah’s lower lip quivered. “I think about Bruno sometimes. There are times I dream of seeing him, and showing him exactly how I felt when he left me in that hospital room after he changed me.”

“It does no one any good to dwell upon revenge,” Archelaus answered.

“For years, it’s all I had to keep me going. Bruno thought he could destroy me by changing me, but I’ll show him,” Farrah’s eyes hardened. “That’s why I need to do everything I can to help the cause. If we succeed I won’t be a freak anymore. That alone means the world to me.”

Archelaus sighed as he shook his head. “I never wanted you exposed to any part of my lifestyle.”

“But I am a lycanthrope, and now I can function now that I know how to transform back from my wolf form,” Farrah sighed. “But that first year was hard for me.”

“It’s hard for everyone. Even Fenrir struggled with it.”

“Really?” Farrah gasped.

Archelaus nodded. “He did, but in his own words he learned to consider his curse a blessing, a blessing he wishes to share with others.”

“I don’t know if I’d call this a blessing, but if it’s a condition everyone will have then who cares whether or not it is a curse?”

“No one.”

Farrah opened her mouth, but the sound of Fenrir growling and others yelping interrupted her train of thought. After the commotion died down, she asked, “Have there been any new developments?”

“There has been one rather disturbing one,” Uncle Archelaus admitted.

“What?”

“Daffodil came to see me today.”

“Is she the house elf from France or Spain?”

“Spain,” Uncle Archelaus answered.

“Okay,” Farrah replied.

“She claimed that someone was sneaking around the mansion. When she asked him why he was there, he told her he was looking for me.”

“Who was he?”

“Daffodil didn’t know. She said she’d never seen him before.”
"Did she describe him?"

"You know Daffodil's half blind."

"I knew I should've asked Severus for some eye healing potion while I was picking up the Polyjuice," Farrah replied

"I don't want you around that store again," Uncle Archelaus answered. "Severus Snape is a dangerous man, and Hermione is volatile. One wrong move around them could expose your role!"

"I was fine today!"

"Unless you are correct in stating that he actually cares for Hermione, in which case he will no longer be cooperative with your efforts to extract information from him."

Farrah paled. "Sorry."

Archelaus put a hand on her shoulder. "I wouldn’t be too distressed. I find it hard to believe that he could ever love another human being. Even if he could, I doubt he’d choose another Gryffindor given his last romantic venture."

"He impregnated and married a Gryffindor," Farrah noted.

"For all we know his child is the result of a drunken one night stand, one he already regrets. He may have married her out of some sense of obligation or as some doomed attempt to start a family," Archelaus answered.

"Are you sure he’s only with Hermione out of obligation? You’d think he’d have enough of performing actions out of obligation to last a lifetime."

Archelaus sighed. "I won't pretend to understand anything Severus does. He always was an enigma, even to Voldemort."

Farrah nodded. "I'll be careful around the Snapes, I promise."

"That's all I ask," Archelaus answered.

"Speaking of which," Farrah began. "What do you plan to do about the intruder?"

"What can I do without blowing our cover?"

Farrah nodded.

"I'll tell Fenrir, but I doubt anyone can do anything either. If this unwelcome guest continues to venture onto my property then I will have to apparate to Spain and encourage him to stop."

Farrah chuckled.

"Chief! Come here! We need you to supervise Rabastan’s group," Scabior yelled from the distance.

"There would be my cue to go," the Chief replied. "Please be careful."

"I will," Farrah answered.

He embraced her one more time, ignoring Scabior's calls. Finally, they broke apart. The Chief departed into the light and Farrah snuck away into the darkness of the woods.
Thank you for the support! I appreciate all of it.
The bell chimed one last time. The final customer of the day scurried down Broomstick Lane, his purchase pressed against his chest. Severus exhaled as the tension in his shoulders eased. While he was thankful for the high volume of business his store had attracted, he couldn't deny his aching back, or his yearning for a certain sepia eyed witch. As he locked the door to his supply closet, a smile crept across his face. Who could’ve ever imagined that Severus Snape, misanthrope extraordinaire, would ever be eager to see someone at the end of a hectic workday?

Before he could dwell on the thought for any length of time, the bell chimed again. Severus scowled as the sound of approaching footsteps grew louder. Without turning around he barked, "Are you incapable of reading the store hours?"

"Now Severus, I thought your door was always open for me."

Severus spun around and deadpanned, “Lucius, what a surprise.”

Lucius chuckled. “You almost sound as if you want to leave.”

“As much as I usually enjoy your presence, I’m developing a headache.”

“Are you developing a headache or does your heart ache for a certain someone?”

Severus’ frown deepened. "You are bound and determined to socialize, aren't you?"

Lucius gave him the most innocent smile he could muster.

“Fine,” Severus sighed. "How was your wine tasting expedition?"

"It went very well," Lucius began. “We were introduced to a wide variety of vintages by a sommelier who called himself Steven Spurrier. He reminded me a bit of you.”

"How so?"

"If you squinted, there was a physical resemblance, although Narcissa denies it.”

“Poor bastard,” Severus replied.

“Oh I don’t know if I’d pity him. He was quite debonair,” Lucius answered.

Severus grunted. "Unlikely if he appeared as I do."

Lucius laughed, “At some point you should gain some confidence. You aren’t half as repulsive as you make yourself out to be.”

“Is your story at an end yet?” Severus asked.

“No, I still haven’t told you about our wine tastings,” Lucius continued. “Now Mr. Spurrier was a very lovely host. He introduced me to a lovely Chardonnay and a Riesling which I swear is good enough to go with most meals requiring white wine. It may have just become my new favorite…”
"While I’ve found this entire conversation fascinating," Severus interrupted. "Hermione will not be pleased if I arrive home an hour late because I stopped to banter and hear your wine stories."

Lucius smirked. "She has you trained well. Soon enough you'll refuse to go anywhere without her permission."

"I'm her spouse, not a teenager," Severus replied.

Lucius chortled.

"I only care about arriving home on time because I do not want to spend the rest of the night listening to her complain about my tardiness."

"Yes, she is doing a surprisingly good job of breaking you in."

"If you only came here to comment on my home life you may leave immediately so I can finish closing this store and go home."

"I did make a visit to Archelaus' villa in Spain," Lucius cut in.

"I see." Severus’ eyes lit up. "Did you learn anything?"

The playfulness evaporated from Lucius' expression. "I spent about a half hour just scanning the property. There were a few wards, but they were easy enough to disable."

"How long did it take for you to dismantle them?"

"Only about fifteen minutes. Then I was able to explore the property for a good half hour before an elf confronted me."

"Were you Polyjuiced?"

"For the first hour yes, but when I saw the way the elf squeezed her eyes just to get the slightest hint of an image, I found it unnecessary to take a second dose," Lucius replied.

"Was she the only house elf there?" Severus asked.

"There was no sign of any other elf."

"What about Archelaus? Was he there?"

"No," Lucius answered. "According to the elf, he hadn't been there in 'a long time.'"

"How long is a long time?" Severus asked.

"The elf didn't specify, but she referred to him as Señor Archelaus, which could indicate that he's still the Master of the Manor."

"Wouldn't she call him that if he were dead?"

"No," Lucius replied. "If he had died, the elf would have claimed that someone such as, Señorita Farrah, owned the mansion."

"He's alive then."

"More than likely."
"But not in Spain."

"More than likely, he is not in Spain."

Severus shook his head. "Great. Now what do we do?"

"As a gesture we should probably tell the Ministry," Lucius’ next words were grumbled, “Though I'm loathe to do so considering how they mucked things up with him before."

"They may have some resources we could use though," Severus replied.

Lucius raised an eyebrow. "Believe me, with my wealth and my connections, I have as many, if not more resources than they."

"You are probably right.” Severus sighed. “Then again resources will do us no good if Archelaus is running about in the woods collecting fleas.”

"Perhaps," Lucius answered before grinning. "Still, why use your own resources when the Ministry can do your dirty work for you?"

"I don't want any information traced back to me,” Severus warned. “I do not want Hermione and Rose in any more danger than they already are.”

Lucius' grin grew. "What if I told you there was a good chance even if the Death Eaters wanted to hang you from the highest gallows…”

“Not far from the truth.”

“They would not be able to capture you or Hermione, at least while you are at home?”

"What do you mean?" Severus asked.

"While Narcissa and I were traveling in Spain, I came across a book that discussed wards. According to the book, wizards in the Basque region have been using this ancient ward for generations to keep the muggle fighters from damaging their homes. The Basque wizards kept the ward secret, however, lest someone tinker around and discover how to disable it."

"What does this ward do?" Severus asked.

"I bribed a poor wizard in Guernica to give me the spell. With a few words, one can keep all others out if his house, with the exception of immediate blood relatives,” Lucius replied.

"I'll believe that ward when I see it," Severus replied.

"Is that a challenge?" Lucius asked.

Severus smiled. "Of course it is."

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Severus leaned against a tree and panted. He attempted to utter another incantation to break the ward, but his wand sparked and fizzled before dying. Before he could think of another spell to cast, Lucius laughed. "Have you given up yet?"

Severus caught his breath. "I've never seen anything like this ward."
"I haven't either," Lucius replied.

"How do you cast it?"

"Now do you think I'd give that information away for free?"

Severus scowled. "I've spent the better part of an hour proving your ward is all but invincible, I'm famished, and Hermione will not be happy with my late arrival."

Lucius laughed. "Good points. I will give you the incantation just as soon as you've regained your strength."

"Thank you," Severus replied.

"On another note, have you decided whether or not to tell the Ministry about our little discovery?" Lucius asked.

"I can see the benefits of speaking with them as well as keeping this information to ourselves. On the whole I'm more inclined to tell them," Severus replied. "They would see it as a good will gesture, something from which we could both benefit."

"Good point," Lucius replied as Severus straightened his back. "I believe we should pay them a visit next Monday."

"Agreed," Severus answered.

"Who knows?" Lucius replied. "Maybe if we're lucky they may get their heads out of their arses long enough to appreciate their first solid lead."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I appreciate it all!
Chapter 92

Blood.

Blood dripped from the scar on Severus’ neck and trickled onto the carpet, where it pooled into a glossy puddle. Clutching her wand, she rushed over to her husband.

“Severus?”

He did not so much as twitch a finger.

“Severus?”

She shook him. No response.

“Severus!”

A familiar, eerie laugh filled the room. Hermione shook him harder.

“Severus please, I’m begging you, wake up,” Hermione choked as her chest constricted. "Please Severus, please."

Severus Snape remained silent, his body growing colder by the second.

Hermione bowed her head in an attempt to obscure her tears from the other presence in the room. She squeezed Severus' rigid right hand. Did he understand how much she cared about him? Was he aware that she thought he was the most amazing wizard she’d ever had the fortune of befriending? Why didn’t she ever make her complex emotions towards him known?

Before Hermione could delve too deeply into her thoughts, the laughter grew louder. She searched for its source, but shadows obscured the person's face.

She stood up and tightened her grip on the wand. “Come out and show yourself!”

The cackling stopped. Hermione shuddered in the sudden stillness. A light appeared. The—the Elder Wand?

"Avada Kedavra."

Hermione awoke with a jerk. She grabbed the armrest before she could slip off the couch. As she hoisted herself up her eyes darted around the room. There wasn't a sign of death in the room. She panted as her heart slowed. As she return to reality her eyes rested on the maroon hardback tented between her hands.

"No more murder mysteries for me," Hermione muttered before opening the book and rediscovering the place where she’d paused. She grabbed a parchment beside her and stuck it inside the book. Before shutting the book she reread the writing on the parchment once more.

Dearest Hermione,

I regret to inform you that I am unable to dine with you tonight. Lucius has come across a most
interesting development which demands my immediate attention. There is not enough provided space to convey all I’ve learned, but I promise to inform you of everything when I return home. I hope to see you again around eight. Thank you in advance for your understanding.

Your sincerely apologetic husband,

Severus

The note had been delivered three hours ago.

With a groaned she stood up. She stretched her arms to ease the ache from sleeping in one position for too long.

As she made her way to the window she mused, My fears are unfounded. Severus is a powerful wizard. He is more than capable of defending himself. Soon enough he will be home and I will feel ridiculous for ever worrying for him.

A cold chill raced down her spine. Then again, he and Lucius couldn’t possibly defend themselves against a legion of Death Eaters. What if the Death Eaters have decided to attack them tonight? They know where Malfoy Manor is, and Merlin knows how badly they’d want to harm Severus. What if Severus needs me and I’m too busy reading to aid him? How could I live with myself if anything were to ever happen to him? What will become of Rose if she doesn't have her father to love her?

Hermione pressed her head against the window. In the fading light the silhouette of a man appeared in the garden. She held her breath, then released it upon recognizing Severus’ profile. Swallowing, she apparated outside.

The cool evening air filled her lungs and soothed her nerves. She opened her mouth to speak, but closed it once Severus began muttering in a foreign language. With a sweep of his wand, a bluish-green streak shot into the sky. Once it reached its apex, it showered down to form a dome over their property. Then it faded into the night.

"What was that?" Hermione whispered, her eyes fixed on the invisible dome top.

Severus replied, "That was an ancient Basque ward which Lucius was fortunate enough to stumble upon."

Hermione turned her attention to him. "That wasn't like any ward I've ever seen."

Severus nodded. "This ward is unique. It prevents entry by anyone who is not an immediate blood relative of those inhabiting the dwelling."

"How does it know who's related to us by blood?"

"I had to picture you, Rose, and me in turn while casting the ward."

"And the language you were speaking in…"

"Was basque," Severus answered, "It’s a language that dates back to the days before the Roman Empire."

"I've heard of it," Hermione replied as she rubbed her back. “It’s one of the few language isolates still widely spoken.”

“Indeed.”
"Is this ward the reason why you were so late tonight?"

"Yes," Severus answered. "Lucius wanted me to test the ward on his home before giving me spell. Despite my best efforts, I could not lift it."

"You, you couldn't?" Hermione gasped.

Severus approached her. "No, I could not."

Hermione grinned while she shifted her feet.

"As devastating to my ego as this is..." Severus began.

Hermione replied. "If you couldn't undo the ward, then odds are very good that neither can anyone else."

"No, we need not fear intruders in the foreseeable future," Severus replied.

Hermione's face fell. "But, how will our friends be able to visit?"

"Easy," Severus replied as he aimed his wand. "Simply say, 'sartu'..."

The dome reappeared, but now it contained a doorway. "Oh," Hermione breathed before Severus lowered his wand and closed it.

"What do you think?" he asked.

She smiled. "It's perfect."

"While Lucius was showing me the ward he discussed his trip to the continent. You will be pleased to learn of his findings."

She winced. "I'll probably be more please if we discuss this inside. My feet are killing me."

"Let me help you." Severus offered his arm. Hermione clung to it. With each step she said a silent prayer of thanks for her husband's continued presence in her life.

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"So the Chief Snatcher is alive?" Hermione replied, nestled on the couch in Severus' embrace.

"The evidence certainly supports that notion," Severus replied as he stroked her arm.

Hermione gulped. "Does this mean Fenrir is alive as well?"

"We don't know if any of the other Snatchers are breathing. All we know is that Archelaus is alive."

"And you plan to tell the Ministry tomorrow?"

"Yes, unless you have an objection."

She shook her head. "I don't. I only hope they have the good sense to listen to reason."

"That would be in everyone's best interest if they heeded our advice."

"Regardless of the Ministry, I feel a bit safer now with these wards."
"I feel more comfortable with them in place, as well," Severus admitted.

Hermione cleared her throat. "I've been thinking about some things, and I want to run a theory by you."

"I'm listening."

"Do you think Farrah is spying for the Death Eaters?"

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Farrah?"

"Think about it! She's his niece, and an Azkaban guard. She could easily have given them access to the jail," Hermione explained.

"But why would she jeopardize her career and risk her life for pureblood supremacy, a cause in which she does not believe?" Severus asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps she's had some life changing experience since her time at Hogwarts. Besides," Hermione swallowed. "I'm not convinced the Death Eaters are fighting for pureblood supremacy."

"Why would someone release the Death Eaters if they did not intend to fight for pureblood supremacy?"

"Perhaps the person who broke them out wanted to gain a ready-made army," Hermione replied.

"Fair enough, but why would Farrah be involved."

"I don’t know the exact details, but I strongly suspect she is the key to finding out where the Death Eaters are."

Severus twisted his lower lip

"Severus, you should tell the Ministry that Farrah needs to be watched," Hermione warned.

"Based on what? A hunch?" Severus asked.

"Based on the fact that she is the niece of a possibly not-so-dead Snatcher, and that she was spared. There are too many coincidences surrounding her to be ignored."

"Very true."

"If I'm right, proof of her involvement will come with time. Hopefully this proof will come without anyone being harmed, though if we make no attempt to watch her she could help the Death Eaters with whatever scheme they’ve cooked up."

"I will share your suspicions with the Ministry."

"You will?"

"Yes," Severus answered. "You’ve expressed some sound concerns, and any lead is appreciated at the moment."

Hermione brushed her lips against his. "Thank you for taking me seriously."

Severus pulled Hermione closer and deepened the kiss. As she clung to Severus she couldn’t help
but think that everything was going to turn out just fine.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! As always it is much appreciated!
Chapter 93

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucius leaned into the plush chair. He fiddled with the envelope in his hand, as he twisted his lips. Convincing Shacklebolt that Harry Potter had cremated someone other than Archelaus Jackson was going be a tough sell, especially when neither Lucius nor Severus had a clear theory on how the lycanthrope could’ve survived. Then again the mystery of his escape could be solved another day. Present circumstances demanded they focus exclusively on his capture.

From the corner of his eye he spotted Severus, who was reading a pamphlet on apparating with a small child. Lucius gave his friend a small grin, "Are you planning to take Rose somewhere after she's born?"

Severus shrugged. "Not at the moment, although I'm sure Hermione will have plenty of vacation ideas once Rose is older."

"I see," Lucius replied.

Severus took another look at the pamphlet. On the cover was a man more than twenty years younger than him holding a small child. The man had a wide smile which rivaled that of Gilderoy. All his teeth were straight, and his nose was in proportion to his face.

Lucius cast a muffliatio "How does it feel, knowing that in less than a month you will be a father?"

Severus' little remaining color drained. He set aside the pamphlet. "I haven't given it much thought, to be honest. Children and I have a storied history. While I desire nothing more than to be a good father to Rose, I am at a loss for how to accomplish that task."

"You haven't much time left, my friend. You don't want to wait until they place that bundle of joy in your arms before you think about how you want to parent your child."

"You are correct, but the task seems monumental given the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

Severus stared at his feet. "I feel a great affection for Rose, but I fear that affection will not be reciprocated."

Lucius asked, "Why would Rose not reciprocate your feelings?"

Severus exhaled. "When Rose opens her eyes, she will not be looking at a handsome man. She will be looking at a man who made a career of scaring children and was more than capable of making them cry with one biting comment. Her mother tolerates me, but she does not love me, which may influence Rose’s emotions towards me. One day, hopefully not for quite some time, she will learn what I've done, and ultimately, who she is. On that day she will be ashamed of me and wish she’d been raised a Weasley."

"Firstly, I do not believe babies judge by appearance, and believe me, many times even in the most loving marriage, a wife merely tolerates the husband," Lucius replied with a wry smile. "Secondly, when she learns the things you've mentioned, she will still see you as her dad, the man who raised her, and stood by her when she was most vulnerable. For that alone she will always love you."
Severus returned his focus to Lucius. “I agreed to raise her so I could obtain a fortune, not because I had some altruistic impulse to help a former student and her baby.”

“Let me ask you something,” Lucius began. “If Minister Shacklebolt announced today that you could keep your fortune provided you agree to never lay eyes on Hermione and Rose again, would you agree to those conditions?”

Severus’ eyes hardened. “I would hex him into oblivion for suggesting such a thing.”

“Would you give up your fortune for them?”

“I wouldn’t think twice about doing so.”

“Then the fortune is no longer an issue,” Lucius replied.

“No, in the past I only wanted financial stability, not a family.”

“You may have agreed to provide Rose with a mansion in order to obtain your fortune, but you are agreeing to raise Rose because you love her.”

“I do love her,” Severus choked.

“Then you are already well on your way to being an excellent father,” Lucius concluded.

“Tell that to Rose how great of a father I am after she hears about Charity Burbage and my tenure as headmaster.”

Lucius took a deep breath. “I cannot promise you that Rose will react well when she discovers who you were before she was born, nor can I promise you that she will react well when she learns of her biological origin. Yet I know that she will love you because she will know that you are her dad. Nothing will ever change that.”

“I pray you are right,” Severus replied.

Lucius flicked his wand, lifting the muffliato spell. “I know I am.”

“Mister Malfoy, Mister Snape?”

The men turned their attention to the doorway.

“Minister Shacklebolt will see you both now.”

“Thank you,” Lucius replied as the men rose from their seats.

Severus shivered upon entering the room. Someone had gone overboard on the cooling spells as well as the lavender air freshening. He suppressed a gag.

The men sat on two wooden chairs across the room from a semicircular table of wizards in more ornate oak chairs. In the center of the group, Kingsley's head was buried in a stack of documents.

“Sir,” a woman beside him whispered.

Kingsley raised his head and noticed the men across from him. “I apologize for your wait, gentlemen,” he shuffled the documents until they were in a neat pile before him. “I should keep better track of time.”
"It is quite alright. We have all day," Lucius answered.

Severus scowled. Easy for you to say when you don’t have an apothecary to run and a pregnant wife who demands your full attention.

Kingsley gave Severus an apologetic smile. "It has come to my attention that you two have something of importance to share with us."

"Indeed we do," Lucius sat up as straight as possible. "We may have discovered who killed Harry Potter and released the Death Eaters."

"Oh?" Kingsley scooted his chair forward.

"Where would you two have obtained such knowledge?" a witch asked.

"A few days ago, Narcissa and I indulged ourselves in a wine tasting tour of France and Spain. While in Spain we decided to visit a villa just outside Seville that belonged to a man named Archelaus Jackson, once known as the Chief of the Death Eaters."

Lucius paused. The ministers shifted in their seats.

"Go on," Kingsley drawled.

Lucius continued, "While we were at the villa, I noticed how well-kept the grounds were. Not only were the grounds immaculate, but the house did not appear in any disarray at all. When the house elf approached me, she told me that Señor Jackson was not home."

Most of the older Ministry members gasped, although a few of the younger ones had yet to discern the implications of the statement.

"What are you trying to say?" a younger man asked.

"If Archelaus was still alive, then the house elf would have identified her master as Señorita Farrah Jackson," Lucius explained.

Murmurs of alarm rippled through the group. Kingsley raised his hand, silencing the others. "Are you proposing that Archelaus Jackson is alive based on what an elf in a Spanish villa told you?"

"That is not our only proof," Severus cut in.

"What do you have to add?" a witch asked.

"There are some lingering questions which need to be answered," Severus continued. "For instance, why would the Death Eaters have spared Farrah Jackson's life during the Azkaban breakout if not on Archelaus' orders?"

"It was rather unusual for the Death Eaters to leave behind a surviving guard," a Cabinet member chimed in.

"But Archelaus Jackson can’t be our perpetrator. He was cremated," Kingsley insisted.

"Are you certain of that fact?" Lucius asked.

"Harry and I watched him burn!" Kingsley exclaimed. "I watched the flames consume his body. Archelaus Jackson is no more."
"His cremation could have been an elaborate illusion," Severus warned.

"Be that as it may, Archelaus was a devoted follower, not a leader," Kingsley replied. "He couldn’t have concocted a plan to fake his death and then lead the Death Eaters out of Azkaban. That isn’t in his nature."

"It may not be in Archelaus’ nature to concoct all these plans, but it is in the nature of Fenrir Greyback."

The crowd erupted.

"Fenrir?"

"How could he be alive?"

"He’s dead! I saw Ron and Neville kill him!"

"Why would a lycanthrope free the Death Eaters?"

Lucius and Severus’ faces remained impassive.

Kingsley slammed his hands against the table. "Silence!"

"Fenrir can’t be alive! He just can’t!"

"Silence!"

The others quieted themselves.

Kingsley panted. "Can either of you confirm that Fenrir is alive?"

"No," Severus admitted.

"Then it does no good to presume that he lives, especially when your evidence regarding Archelaus Jackson is circumstantial at best,” a minister replied.

Sighs of relief could be heard from around the table.

"We ignore this possibility at our peril, Minister Shacklebolt,” Severus warned. “Just because the evidence is circumstantial…"

"Does not mean we will not investigate," Kingsley interrupted.

"What?" a few ministers whispered.

"You may not have much time,” Lucius replied. “For all we know Fenrir is planning his next move as we speak.”

“These two are crazy,” another Cabinet member spoke up. “This whole theory is preposterous. If we leak this to the press it will create an unnecessary panic. We’ll waste time investigating a ghost.”

“The same way you wasted time investigating my son?” Lucius snapped.

The Cabinet member recoiled.

“My son was harassed constantly by aurors and members of this Ministry for months on end until the Death Eaters were released. Yet in spite of all that we are trying to help you. Either accept our aid or
face the dire consequences!"

“All right!” Kingsley held up his hands. “Let’s focus on the most important thing here: protecting our citizens in their everyday lives as well as during the Quidditch World Cup.”

“The Quidditch World Cup?” Severus spat.

Kingsley nodded. “My greatest desire is to have these criminals captured before the Quidditch World Cup games and to put all fear of a Death Eater uprising to rest. In order to accomplish this every possible lead will be examined. While I dread to think Fenrir Greyback or one of his followers could be leading the Death Eaters, it is a possibility worth investigating.” Kingsley turned to Severus and Lucius. “That being said tell no one of your suspicions! No one must know of this!”

"We won’t tell a soul,” Lucius answered.

"We will not," Severus confirmed.

"Good," Kingsley folded his hands. "Tell me, since you two used to work alongside both Fenrir and Archelaus, where do you believe they are?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea," Severus admitted. “The Snatchers were an autonomous unit as far as the Death Eaters were concerned. We may have aided them, but we did not keep track of their location.”

"Do you have any strategy in mind for how to find and capture them?” a wizard asked.

"No," Severus answered.

Kingsley shook his head. "I was afraid you'd say that.”

Chapter End Notes

I hadn't noticed this before, but I have over 300 comments. Wow! Thank you all so much for the support! It's amazing to have readers as supportive as all of you!

Updates may be a little more sporadic for the next couple of weeks. With work and Thanksgiving coming up I'm going to be swamped. Still I will try to post when I can. Thanks for your patience.
"Good morning, Severus," Ginevra sang as she opened the apothecary door.

Severus poked his head out from the morning newspaper. "Good morning, Ginevra. What brings you here so early in the day?"

"I need to pick up a potion, and then I’m shopping for a birthday present."

"A birthday present?"

Ginevra nodded.

"Perhaps you can save yourself a trip and simply buy said present here. Surely you can find something of interest here."

"If I see something I like I might buy it, but I'd like to think that if this friend would like a potion for her birthday her husband will provide it for her." Ginevra winked.

"What makes you certain of that?" Severus muttered.

"Let's just say he likes to dabble in potions," Ginevra winked again.

Severus snorted. "If that is the case then I'd buy your potion here. Anyone who merely dabbles in potions is liable to injure himself, making for a very unpleasant birthday."

Ginevra raised an eyebrow. "You don't know who I'm shopping for, do you?"

"I cannot presume to know the details of the lives of your long list of friends," he replied.

Ginevra bit her upper lip and shifted her feet. Severus stuck his head back into the paper.

"Is anyone else here?" Ginevra asked.

"No. I only opened the store two minutes ago," Severus flipped the page.

"Good," she replied before turning the "Open" sign to "Closed."

Severus threw the paper down. "What are you doing?"

"You'll thank me in a few minutes," Ginevra assured him.

"No I will not. Turn that sign around at once." Severus demanded.

"I'm shopping for a birthday present for your wife!" Ginevra blurted out.

Severus blinked as the color drained from his face. "Hermione's birthday is soon?"

"It's in two weeks," Ginevra replied.

"So it is," Severus mumbled
“Do you even know the date?”

“I know it’s sometime in the next two weeks.”

Ginevra clenched her teeth.

Severus scowled. “I was not unaware of the date because I do not care for my wife. Hermoine and I have been so busy preparing for the baby's birthday that we haven't taken any time to discuss our own. In addition to our child we have been attempting to solve the mystery of Potter’s death and protect ourselves from the escaped Death Eaters. Forgive me for being too preoccupied to ask Hermoine, ‘dear, what is your favorite flavor of cake?’”

"Ugh!" Ginevra stomped towards the counter "You are such a dunderhead!"

Severus’ glowered at her. She locked eyes with him, undeterred by his expression. "Look, I understand that for you a birthday is a morbid event-just another year older… life is a torrent of misery…you never get any presents… cry me a river. Whatever."

Severus crossed his arms.

“Hermoine does not think that way. For her, birthdays are joyous occasions to be celebrated with family and friends. She wants to celebrate her life, not mope because her husband couldn't be bothered to so much as sign a birthday card.”

"Fine, I'll take her out to eat," Severus grumbled. "That will make her happy."

"No!" Ginevra exclaimed.

Severus jumped back.

"Think bigger," she demanded. "Hermoine wants more than some dinner. While she may appreciate the night off, a change of scenery, and your company—only Merlin knows why—dinner as a birthday gift is lazy."

"I suppose that's just as well with the prices they charge for food nowadays..." Severus muttered.

Ginevra shook her head. "Look Severus, I know you don't understand how much this means to her, in part because Hermoine is too nice to drop hints. Let's look at it this way; for the past year all Hermoine has thought about is Rose, with an occasional thought towards you thrown in for good measure. Her main focus has been on learning to be a good mother, ensuring her and her child's future, trying to cope with Ron's abandonment and overcoming her grief towards Harry's death. You have come into her life and brought her a sliver of joy, which she is more than grateful for. Yet you come with more than a little baggage. Even you must admit that learning how to be a good wife to you is a daunting task."

“Indeed it is,” Severus admitted. “Though Hermoine has succeeded admirably.”

"Exactly," Ginevra exhaled. Her expression softened. “Hermoine is a wonderful spouse to you, and you need to acknowledge that by celebrating her birthday.”

“I already demonstrate my care for her.” Severus swallowed. "At least, I make an attempt to do so. It is far better to show a witch you cherish her every day instead of setting aside one day."

“Oh my goodness you don’t get it," Ginevra exhaled. She ran her fingers through her hair. "Let me put it to you another way. For the past year Hermoine has been thinking of everyone but herself. She
deserves one day where she feels special, one day where everything is all about her, one day where everyone’s goal is to make her happy. Hermione needs to be pampered, to be shown just how much the people in her life appreciate her.”

"I can dedicate a day to ensuring her complete and total happiness,” Severus replied.

"But you won't accomplish by sitting with her in a restaurant," She countered.

“Then what would you suggest? I fear I am not adept at gift giving.” Severus paused. “Come to think of it the last gift I gave was a bottle of gin to Lucius roughly five years ago.”

She smiled. "You're her spouse. You’ll think of something.”

Severus shook his head. I don't have the foggiest clue what she'd want. I could give her a book, but everyone gives her books. Besides we buy enough books for research on a daily basis. No, books are too mundane.

"You should give her something only you could know she would like," Ginevra suggested.

Severus tapped his fingers against the counter. That was going to be a tall order. Hermione deserved something exotic, something no one aside from her spouse would think to give her. What could meet those criteria? Why must giving birthday presents be so complicated?

"At any rate, I've just saved your arse. You should be thanking me right now,” Ginevra continued.

"Believe me, I am grateful. Still, I am at a loss as to what sort of gift she would appreciate.”

"Well, if you muck this up I'm sure Hermione will forgive you. After all it's the thought that counts. Just make sure you spoil Hermione rotten on the nineteenth.”

"Thank you for your advice, dear goddaughter-in-law.”

"You're welcome," she answered. "In the meantime, can you point me in the direction of the anti-swelling potions?"

"Are you ankles already swelling?” he asked.

"No. Draco asked me to pick some up because one of the elves was stung by a bee, and his ear is still quite swollen. I told him to call someone to move the beehive before allowing the elves into the flower beds, but sometimes he is incapable of listening to reason," She glanced at Severus "He takes after his godfather in that regard.”

Severus snarled, though there was no malice in his expression. “Your potion halfway down aisle five on the left.”

“Thank you.”

"And Ginevra?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you.”

She smirked before flipping the sign back to "Open”. "I told you you'd thank me.”

Severus rolled his eyes before returning his latest dilemma. Hermione needed an extraordinary gift…
something unique, but what was as unique as Hermione? What could adequately convey his affection for his wife without sending her running in the opposite direction? Why was selecting a present proving to be more complex than creating an antivenin potion?

As his mind sifted through the possibilities, a memory crept up. Around his eighth birthday his parents took one of their rare trips into the wealthier districts of Cokeworth. While his parents stood on the sidewalk bickering about how much money to spend on a new television, he lagged behind, entranced by a man in a storefront blowing and shaping molten glass into intricate shapes. He had pressed his head against the window and lost himself in wonder until his disgruntled parents dragged him away.

"Severus! I'm ready."

He was startled from his reverie. "No charge, Ginevra. Please return the sign to “closed.” I'm going to close shop for a few hours."

"Where are you going?" Ginevra asked.

“London. I know exactly what to give Hermione.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! As always it is appreciated!
Chapter 95

Severus watched his wife's eyes flutter open. Her pupils constricted as they adjusted to the light. She stretched and groaned, "Morning, Severus."

"Good morning, Hermione," he kissed her cheek. "I trust you slept well."

"As well as I could with as active as Rose has been," she propped up her head and gazed into his eyes. "You're smiling."

Severus ran two fingers along her arm. "You sound surprised."

"You don't usually smile in the morning," she yawned.

"I suppose that’s true enough."

"I like waking up to your smile. It's beautiful."

Severus' smile widened. "Nobody has ever considered my smile beautiful."

"That's because no one else has ever seen you give them a genuine smile," Hermione began. "Sure they may see you give them a look of amusement, but when you're relaxed, when you truly are content with the world, you have an alluring smile."

"Perhaps," Severus replied before kissing Hermione on the forehead. "It's just as well that I don't smile much though. A smile from me could cause people to question their sanity. They may believe that the world was coming to an end because the infamous Severus Snape is capable of genuine happiness."

"I suppose so," Hermione chuckled. "I guess I am one of the privileged few who know you really do have a heart, are capable of experiencing pleasure, and can be quite kind when he wants to be."

"If I were you I wouldn’t share any of those revelations with too many people. The world may think you’ve gone mad."

"No, I'll wait until Rose starts talking and let her announce them. Her testimony will be more reliable anyway. Nobody will think her insane if she compliments her dad every now and then."

"Then I must teach her to keep quiet and allow others to think that Daddy is a cold-hearted bastard. After all he has a reputation to maintain."

"I don’t think she’ll be able keep quiet about her father’s devotion to his family, not after all you do for us."

Severus placed his hand on Hermione's swollen stomach. "I'm sure Rose can keep a secret." He paused to feel a responding nudge from their daughter. "Rose, will I have to teach you how to keep a secret?"

Hermione placed over his hand. "You may have to."

Rose pressed against Snape’s palm.
Severus smirked as he looked over at Hermione. "With time Rose will develop Slytherin instincts. I will see to that."

"Perhaps she'll take after her father," Hermione replied.

Hermione’s stomach knotted at the words “her father.” Was being sorted into a certain house genetic? Different families had collective traits which led to their members being sorted into a particular house. The Weasleys were a perfect example. Off the top of her head she couldn’t name a Weasley who had not been sorted into Gryffindor. Hermione herself was a Gryffindor. If house sorting were genetic then Rose would most certainly lack any Slytherin instincts, a thought which brought on another pang of regret.

On the other hand, after being so thoroughly rejected by her "father’s" family, would the hat even acknowledge her as a Weasley? Perhaps it would consider Rose a Snape, just as her parents did. Severus had already proven himself to be much more of a father to Rose than Ron on his best day. Perhaps being nurtured by Severus would make the child more inclined to the Slytherin house than her mother was. Maybe she would make her dad proud by joining the house he once headed.

Then again, there was no point in meditating on this situation. Minerva had already sworn that Rose would not step foot inside Hogwarts. Still if she was homeschooled perhaps they could have their own sorting ceremony where they pulled out an old hat and stuck it on her head. Then she could pick her own house.

“Yes, you’re going to be a Slytherin just like Daddy, aren’t you?” Severus cooed.

Rose kicked again. Hermione’s eyes moistened, “I’m sure she will.”

Severus chuckled as the infant pushed against him. "Yes Rose, Daddy can feel you. He cares for you oh so very much."

Hermione sat up. "I’m a little surprised you aren’t up making breakfast or preparing to go to work. What’s kept you in bed for so long?"

Severus removed his hand from her stomach. "Can’t a husband wake up with his wife?"

"If he were a romantic sort I would say yes, but you have made it very clear that is not your style,” Hermione replied.

Severus smirked. "You know me too well, witch."

"Then answer my question. Why are you still in bed at this hour on a Monday morning?"

"I took the day off."

"You what?” Hermione exclaimed.

“I took the day off,” Severus repeated.

“Why?”

"It’s my store, so I can take time off when I please."

"You’ll develop a reputation for unreliability—not a great business strategy."

“True, but my present circumstances would make any and all of my absences understandable. Most of the Wizarding world knows my wife is preparing to have my child any day now. I have an
obligation to tend to her needs. No one could begrudge me for that.”

"All well and good, but…” Comprehension dawed. "You remembered!"

“What did I allegedly remember?” Severus asked with a gleam in his eye.

“You remembered my birthday, didn't you?” She blushed.

Severus reached into a drawer beside the bed and pulled out a narrow white box. "Happy birthday, Hermione."

"Oh thank you!” she gushed, accepting the gift. "I didn't think you'd know the date! I never told you.”

"Ginevra took care of that little detail,” Severus replied with a mock scowl.

"I'll remember to thank her," Hermione replied as she opened the box. She gasped as her eyes widened. "Severus, it's beautiful.”

“I am glad you approve of it.”

She pulled out the shimmering glass rose and held it up to the light. “I more than approve of it.”

“I was hoping it reflected your personality,” Severus explained. "Beautiful and exotic.”

Hermione's eyes filled with tears as she placed the rose back into its box and set it on her bedside table. "Thank you, Severus. It's perfect."

She then embraced him and allowed the tears to flow. Damned hormones.

Severus allowed his smile to widen as he savored the feel of her skin against his. "I'm yours for the rest of the day, if you want me here."

"Please stay," Hermione released him. “I know the perfect way to spend the day.”

“What would you like to do?”

"I've been doing some research on the anti-venom potion we discussed a few months ago. I have some ideas you might want to consider."

"Hermione, do you really want to spend your birthday working on my pet project?” Severus asked.

"Yes." Hermione bowed her head. "One of my biggest regrets is dropping out of college and discarding my lifelong dream of being a researcher. Up until a few months ago it felt as if I’d been frittering my life away, in large part because I haven’t been searching for solutions to serious quandaries. When I'm working to solve a problem, it feels like I'm doing what I was meant to do, like I'm being who I'm supposed to be. Does that make any sense?"

"Indeed it does. That's how I feel when I brew," Severus answered.

She rubbed his hand with her thumb. “I’m a little out of practice when it comes to academic research, but I think I have some viable solutions. I’d be honored if you'd critique my research."

“I will right after breakfast.”

Hermione felt her stomach rumble. The red returned to her face. "Good idea."
"Hermione!" Ginevra's Patronus called as it entered via the floo.

No answer.

"Hermione?"

The horse galloped through the house until it reached the library, where it heard two voices engrossed in conversation. The Patronus shook its head. Only Severus and Hermione Snape spend a birthday surrounded by books.

"Hermione!" the horse called as it entered.

She peeked an eye out from the book she’d been scanning, "Oh Ginny. I'm sorry I didn’t hear you earlier. Are you outside?"

"Yes," the horse replied.

"I'll lower the wards," Hermione answered as she stood up.

"Perhaps I should…” Severus began.

"No, it's fine," Hermione stood up. He began to rise as well. “Sit.”

Severus obeyed. Then she followed the Patronus outside.

Severus resumed rereading her notes. If she was out of practice when it came to academic research, then he could not wait to see her when she was in her element. Hermione had managed to find some articles in several journals he'd overlooked. Her research was very well thought out, and appeared quite promising. Even the somewhat incomplete theories she was proposing were superior to anything he'd read.

How on earth did he get this lucky? All he’d asked for out of the marriage was that his wife wasn’t a dunderhead. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined gaining an intellectual equal. If they could spend the rest of their lives collaborating on academic pursuits…his heart raced at the possibilities.

The sound of feminine giggling interrupted his thoughts. He glanced up from the documents to see the two friends enter.

Ginny began, "Severus, it sounds like your little shopping trip was a success."

“Indeed it was,” Severus answered.

“There’s only one problem,” Ginny replied.

Severus set down the parchments. “What would that be?”

"You forgot to give her a card," Ginevra teased.

He looked over at his wife. She shook her head. "The gift was perfect, Severus. It didn't need a card."

Severus smirked as he stood and crossed over to Mrs. Snape. "Ginevra, cards are just someone else's words on a piece of fancy paper. I prefer to express myself more personally."
With that, he pulled Hermione into his arms and gave her his most swoon-worthy kiss.

Chapter End Notes

This will probably be my last update until Thanksgiving. Between work and travel I won't have much time to edit and post this. Things should calm down after the holiday...at least until Christmas.

Regardless thank you so much for all the support! I am grateful for each and every one of you!
Lucius dipped his quill into the ink. He stared at the paper and bit his lip. His next words would need to be considered carefully, lest Minister Schaklebolt take offense at the request of a public apology to Draco for harassing him for months on end. When inspiration struck, he resumed his attack on the parchment. Then the sound of movement echoed throughout the hallway. He pressed his quill harder into the parchment, hoping the blot out the clacking of approaching high heels. If he didn’t look up from his letter they might pass him by…

"Lucius?"

No such luck.

Perhaps if he kept writing… pretended not to hear…

"Lucius!"

Lucius sighed as he set the quill back in the inkwell. "Yes, Ginevra?"

"Remember when a few months ago when I remarked on how Severus couldn't take his eyes off Hermione?" Ginevra began.

"Barely, but go on."

"Well, you made me promise to tell you when I believed Hermione had begun to reciprocate his feelings."

"I vaguely remember a conversation to that extent," Lucius replied with a gleam in his eyes. "I take it you’ve found proof of her love?"

Ginevra smiled. "I have."

Lucius leaned back in his chair. "Fine, I'll indulge you. Tell me what you saw."

"This afternoon I went to give Hermione her birthday present. She and Severus were in the library discussing their potions research," Ginevra began.

Lucius laughed. "Only Hermione would find it pleasant to spend her birthday in academic pursuit."

"Severus wasn’t protesting, either. They were in there together discussing a new type of antivenin."

"Severus wasn’t at work?"

"No, he took the day off so he could spend it with Hermione," Ginevra squealed. "Isn't that one of the sweetest things he's ever done."

Lucius shook his head. "At heart Severus always was too much of a closeted hopeless romantic."

"But Hermione was touched that he'd want to spend the day with her. She told me as much."

"I see."
"When I entered the library and saw them together, I teased Severus about not giving his wife a birthday card. He made some comment to the effect that words are cheap and then proceeded to snog her senseless!"

Lucius' eyes widened. "He kissed her in front of you?"

"Yes, he snogged her senseless right in front of me."

"What was Hermione's reaction?"

"You should've seen it! She was blushing, to be sure, but she also had a rare sparkle in her eyes. I haven't seen that look on her since she first started dating my brother."

"Are you sure she wasn't merely reacting to the kiss? She may only be desperate for any type of affectionate display."

"No, Hermione isn't artificial like that. She wants something deeper in a relationship than a few good kisses."

Lucius hummed.

"Even after the kiss, when they were discussing the potions, they could finish each other’s sentences. Severus even complimented her twice. Hermione used this tone of voice that I’d never heard before. It was laced with love!"

"Or laced with pregnancy hormones," Lucius muttered.

"Lucius, I've seen Hermione in love before. What I saw today is how she acts when she is in love," Ginevra argued. “Hermione and Severus Snape have a real marriage, with hearts, flowers, and most importantly, love!"

"Believe me, it is my deepest desire that Severus finds love and if he finds it with his wife, all the better. While I had my reservations about his marriage to Hermione, I must admit that Severus is more content with his life. He seems different these days. He's more at peace with the world. Having a wife and child has been much better for him than anyone could’ve imagined."

"Wouldn't it be great if Rose had two parents who loved her… and each other?"

"If Hermione truly does love him."

Ginevra glared at him. "Do you doubt my word?"

"No. But Gryffindor idealism often clouds perceptions," Lucius warned. “Even if you're correct that Hermione has fallen for Severus, it will be difficult to convince them that this is something they can trust. They've each been hurt too deeply in the past to jump into a love affair without analyzing the decision to death. Severus could easily be married to Hermione for fifty years before so much as considering revealing his feelings for her. I’d imagine it would take Hermione sixty to admit to her feelings to herself."

"You have a point," Ginevra mused. "But maybe with a little Gryffindor courage and a little Slytherin cunning we can help them see what they have."

"We?"

"If I could convince you that Hermione loves Severus we may be able to cook up a plan so they can
Lucius replied. "If they decide to attend, I will observe them myself and form my own opinion."

"And if you agree…"

"Then we'll talk," Lucius winked.

"Thank you," she replied before embracing her father-in-law.

Lucius exhaled with great exaggeration before returning the embrace.

***

Hermione stroked a lock of hair out of Severus eyes as she whispered, “Severus?”

"Yes?" he asked before rolling over placing a kiss on her cheek.

“Thank you,” She nuzzled into him. "This has been one of the happiest birthdays I've ever had.”

"I will admit it has been a most pleasant day," Severus replied as he threaded his fingers through her hair.

Hermione propped herself up on the pillow. "I'm sure there will be more pleasant birthdays to come; only next year Rose will be here to share in our joy."

His heart stopped. "She will."

Hermione swallowed. "What’s wrong?"

"Nothing," he replied, forcing himself to smile.

She gazed into his eyes. “I can see it in your eyes, something’s wrong.”

“You needn’t be troubled with it.”

“Severus please. This has been such a pleasant birthday. Please don’t end it by shutting me out.”

Severus took a shaky breath. "What if I'm not a good enough father for Rose? What if I do something that causes her to hate me?"

"How could she ever hate you?" Hermione whispered.

"We both know how cruel I could be towards children and the sadistic glee I took in their misery. What if I slip back into that persona even for one moment and hurt my daughter?"

"Severus, you had an image to project. Any kindness you showed to us could have gotten us killed, and you as well. You protected us, and I know you'll do the same for Rose."

“I will always protect Rose, but I am unsure how to express my affection. I was not raised by doting parents, and out of habit I suppress my emotions. What if, despite my best efforts, I cannot be the overtly affectionate father Rose deserves? What if she grows up to hate me because I’m too different from the fathers one reads about in storybooks or sees on those informational pamphlets?”

“How could you even question yourself? I've seen you with Rose. You are sweet and loving with
her already. I know without a doubt that she loves you now, and she'll love you even more once she's born. If I thought otherwise, I wouldn't be in the same bed, let alone the same house, with you."

He kissed her on the forehead. "Thank you for your confidence."

"I’m only stating the truth," Hermione bowed her head. "And to be honest, sometimes I'm afraid I'm not quite up to motherhood, myself. I haven’t witnessed anyone raise a magical child from infancy. I am so frightened that I will do something wrong and not realize my mistake until it is too late to correct it."

Severus held her closer. "You are a stellar mother already. Rose is lucky to be your daughter."

"Thank you, but I'm well aware that I've never been a popular person. I'm not always the best at keeping my opinions to myself even when the situation demands that I do so. I can be quite pushy as well."

"Having opinions and insisting upon a certain kind of behavior are traits to be emulated, not disparaged," Severus replied. "As for popularity, it is highly overrated. As she grows Rose will understand that. Besides, if we raise her well, she will learn to appreciate more important things."

"Like?"

He smirked. "Reading and brewing potions."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "I appreciate the reading, but potions brewing?"

"She will find it to be very enjoyable."

Hermione raised her eyebrow higher.

"Don't worry, I will teach her to be an outstanding potions mistress."

"And if she is more interested in charms?"

"I am more than willing to teach her every charm I know. As long as she's happy, she can be a Divination professor for all I care."

"I draw the line at Divination," Hermione grinned.

Severus chuckled. "I will do my best to steer her in another direction then."

Together, they laughed, unaware of Rose stretching within her confined space, thinking as only a baby can that it was time she had a bigger room.

Chapter End Notes

I finally found the time to tend to this story. Happy Thanksgiving to all who celebrate the holiday! Hopefully it is a relaxing and joyful day. I am thankful for all of you who support this story through reading, giving kudos, and of course leaving comments!
Murmurs from the crowd greeted Fenrir as he stepped onto the stone platform. He held up his right hand, hushing the crowd. After clearing his throat he cast a sonorus. “My children, you have all become quite obedient in the past few weeks. You have responded well to your training, and your strength has only increased. This level of discipline and might will be required when we invade the Ministry tonight.”

The crowd howled and cheered. Fenrir’s smile grew more predatory as he absorbed their adulation.

The Chief and Scabior joined him on the dais, poised to carry out their next order. They grinned at each other. After all these years of waiting their arduous preparation was about to pay off.

Fenrir raised his hand once more. After a few moments the lycanthropes grew silent. “Tonight we have two main objectives. Our first objective is simple enough; by crashing the Harry Potter Memorial Ball in a unified demonstration of power, we will forever link ourselves to the Light's complete and utter defeat. The myth of the boy-who-lived will be reduced to a grand hoax!”

The Death Eaters roared their approval. Some teared up as they reflected on the sacrifices made to bring them to this point. After so many years of humiliation the Death Eaters would now achieve the victory denied to them for so many years.

“Silence my followers!”

The crowd quieted.

"Our second objective is to enact vengeance on all those who played a part in our previous defeat. Ideally, Tom Riddle would be first on the list, seeing as how his inflated ego and ineptitude placed all our lives at risk.” Fenrir snarled. "It should not have taken any great effort to slaughter an infant, yet he couldn’t even manage that. No, for that failure alone he would deserve to be punished. But since our not-so illustrious former leader has expired, we will have to make do with terrorizing that poor excuse for a Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and the other two members of the so-called Golden Trio.” His eyes lit up. “By this time tomorrow the Golden Trio will be no more!”

"Actually, only one member of the trio will be present," Scabior interrupted.

Fenrir turned to him and replied in a low voice, "I beg your pardon?"

"Ron Weasley is not coming to the ball."

"Who told you that?"

“I read about his absence in The Daily Prophet.”

"Why isn’t he coming? Wasn’t Potter his best friend?"

“Apparently the coach of the Chudley Cannons refused to give Weasley time off to participate in the Memorial Ball. He claims to regret it deeply, but that he’ll win the Quidditch World Cup in Harry’s name,” Scabior answered.
"Pity," Fenrir replied. "We’ll just have to meet up with him at the Quidditch World Cup then."

"We're going to crash the Quidditch World Cup?" Alecto Carrow asked from the middle of crowd.

Fenrir chuckled as he spun towards his audience. "I had intended to save that surprise for later, but yes, I think the Quidditch World Cup would be the perfect opportunity to introduce ourselves to the international wizarding community.

“Who knows? Perhaps we will even gain a few international brethren,” Scabior added.

“Indeed we shall,” Fenrir replied.

Again the crowd roared its approval.

"But let us not get ahead of ourselves!" Fenrir warned.

The shouting stopped.

“We must focus on the task at hand before we make preparations for a new mission. Right now, we must focus on our current objective; crippling the ministry.”

“Why are we crippling the Ministry instead of destroying it, or better yet, taking it over?” Rodolphus LeStrange shouted. “If we run it we can force everyone to become a lycanthrope by law.”

A few mumbled their agreement.

“Have you learned nothing from Voldemort’s defeat?” Fenrir snapped. “That no-nose idiot spent so much time running the government he had no time to focus on securing his victory. Instead of discussing his ideas with others he forced wizards to violate their own consciences. We all saw how well his subjects reacted to being told to ignore their consciences.”

Rudolphus nodded.

"Conversion is a better means to achieving our goals than coercion. Placing ourselves in charge of the government and coercing wizards to accept lycanthropy would lead to certain revolt. As a government we would become a target, a lightning rod for wizarding wrath, an object of hatred. Plots and intrigues would ensue, prompting a civil war. Instead of creating a family of lycanthropes we would be attempting to subjugate an entire population. All of those would only serve to distract us from our ultimate goal: creating a new world order of lycanthropes!”

A few of the lycanthropes nodded.

“That being said there is still the need to intimidate the Ministry. No, we want them to know our names so they will live in terror us. If they are terrified of us then they are less likely to interfere with our mission” Fenrir replied, his voice crescendoing with each phrase. “By revealing ourselves tonight, we will inspire new nightmares… and if we have an opportunity to nibble on a few of our enemies in the process, all the better. Tonight, there will be no doubt that the Snatchers and Death Eaters are untied. Tonight, we will demonstrate that we live!”

The crowd erupted. Fenrir basked in their approval until a translucent wolf appeared. The Chief addressed it in a loud voice, "Is everything ready?"

The wolf replied in Farrah's voice, "Yes. Go to the cabin by the stream. The floo there should deliver you directly to where I am."
"Have you tested it?" Fenrir asked.

"I will as soon as the guests stop arriving," she replied.

"We will wait for you inside the cabin then."

"I will join you as soon as it is safe," Farrah promised before the Patronus evaporated.

Fenrir flashed his teeth. "Perfect."

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Hermione turned around and examined herself in the mirror. For the third time, she pulled out her wand and adjusted the sapphire dress around her abdomen. Although it looked much better than on her previous attempts, she still looked like a balloon ready to pop at any moment. She shook her head. Although she was proud of her pregnant body, the last thing she wanted was for the Weasleys to spend the entire night pointing at and demeaning her unborn child. The best way to avoid such a scene may be to stand beside Severus for a majority of the night, yet he wouldn’t appreciate an overly clingy wife.

A soft pressure interrupted her thoughts. She placed a hand over her stomach and whispered, "You're going to stay in Mummy's belly tonight, aren't you Rose?"

The baby kicked.

"Yes you're being a good girl so Mummy and Daddy can go to Harry's Memorial Ball." She massaged her abdomen. "And don't listen to anyone if they say awful things about you. You are very special, and you are so very wanted. Your daddy and mummy love you very much, and we always will. Don't ever forget that."

Rose stretched once more. Hermione exhaled. "Let's go find your daddy before he concocts an excuse not to go to this ball."

Hermione opened the door and stepped into the bedroom, catching Severus with his nose in a brochure. She craned her neck and tiptoed her way towards him, but she still couldn’t make out the words.

Hermione lowered herself. "What are you reading?"

Severus looked up and forgot to breathe. Hermione's dress was the perfect color and shape for her, and Merlin did that hue bring out the softness of her eyes. How did he get so lucky to have her in his life?

He swallowed as he stood up straighter. "I found a pamphlet at the Ministry concerning apparating with a small child. I know we don’t have any vacation plans at the moment, but one never knows."

"I suppose not," Hermione replied as he set the pamphlet on the table. Her eyes widened. "Wait, didn’t you receive that pamphlet last week?"

"I did."

"I've seen you read it before."

"Perhaps I have read it a few times."

Hermione laughed "And you tease me about rereading the same material over and over again."
“Rereading a pamphlet because you are bored and rereading a hundred page baby book because you are nervous are entirely different activities,” Severus teased.

“Sure,” Hermione drawled. She examined Severus’ figure. The new scented shampoo he’d used made his hair less greasy, and he’d found robes that did justice to his muscular figure. If this ball wasn’t for Harry she would stay home in a heartbeat.

“Yes, well… Hermione you look stunning.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she replied. "I like the dress, but I feel like it should cover my belly a little more…”

“No, it's perfect," he answered before kissing her on the lips. “You look perfect.”

Hermione sank into his arms and reciprocated the kiss. He rasped, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

“You know that I have to go.”

“You haven't felt any contractions today, have you?”

“No," Hermione answered. "I've felt nothing. I think Rose will be content to stay inside me for the rest of the night."

"I suppose we should get on with our evening, then,” Severus sighed.

Hermione pulled away from him. “I suppose we should.”

Severus took her hand and led her to the fireplace. He cringed at the thought of soiling her dress with floo powder, but that's what cleaning spells were for. With a toss of the floo powder he stepped into the fireplace and ordered, "Ministry building."

Together they stumbled out of the Ministry fireplace and were met with a cheery, "Good evening."

Hermione growled as she dusted herself off. "Hello, Farrah. I see you drew floo duty tonight."

“I did,” Farrah answered.

“Sounds thrilling,” Severus replied, avoiding eye contact with her. Instead her muttered a few cleaning spells, eliminating the dust from his wife’s dress.

"How are you two this evening?" Farrah asked in a sweet voice.

Hermione growled. “Both of us are more than fine.”

Farrah’s shuffled her feet. "I'm sorry if I offended you the other day. I just get so curious about what I read in the papers, but I don't always think about what I'm saying. I wasn’t trying to upset you though.”

"Well, there no use in holding a grudge. It's done and over with,” Hermione replied.

"We're no worse for it," Severus added before dusting one last bit of dust. Then he turned to Hermione. "Ready?"

"I am,” she replied.
Severus took Hermione's hand and turned to Farrah. "Have a pleasant evening, Ms. Jackson."

As she watched the Snapes disappear into the ballroom, Farrah muttered with a contorted smile. "Don't worry. I will."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It means a lot to me to know people like this story!
“It’s such a shame Ronald could not make it,” Molly dabbed her cheeks with a handkerchief. “I'm sure he's beside himself right now with regret.”

Arthur straightened out his dress robes. “The coach was quite unreasonable in forcing him to stay. Ron tried speaking with him about how important this ball is, but to no avail.”

"He says, however, if he wins the Quidditch World Cup for Harry, then his sacrifice will have been worth it,” Molly replied.

"Harry would've loved to have seen Ron win the Quidditch World Cup," Arthur mused.

"Indeed he would have," Kingsley replied in a soft voice. "Let's hope Ron can win it for him."

"Yes," Arthur sniffed.

"We miss Harry dearly," Molly choked. "There isn't a day that goes by where we don't think about him."

Kingsley wiped a tear from his eyes. “We all wish he was here with us.”

"How is the search for his killer going?” Arthur asked.

"We have a lead, but so far it has not panned out," Kingsley replied.

Arthur raised an eyebrow. “What kind of lead?”

“Let’s just say we’ve spent quite a bit of time scouring the woods,” Kingsley explained.

“Why would the new leader of the Death Eaters be in the woods?” Charlie asked as he approached the group.

“Because he’s spent most of his life there,” Kingsley answered.

Charlie shook his head. “Who would someone spend a majority of his life as a woodsman yet try to take over the Death Eaters?”

Kingsley bit his lower lip.

“Please tell us who you suspect is behind the attacks,” Arthur began.

"The investigation is on-going, and I don't want to create unnecessary panic until we find this individual.”

"We’re Order Members, and Harry was like a son to us. We want help in any way we can to catch this murderer.”

“Yes,” Charlie cut in. "We can better help you find the killer if we know who you're looking for.”

“I suppose you make some great points,” Kingsley gestured for the Weasleys to come forward. They
complied. Kingsley lowered his voice. “We suspect the killer is Fenrir Greyback.”

The Weasleys gasped.

“Fenrir!” Molly exclaimed. “No, that isn’t possible. My Ronnikins received a medal of honor for killing him.”

“We think his death was staged,” Kingsley replied.

“That's ridiculous. Who would think of such an idea?” Molly asked.

“Lucius and Severus set forth the theory, and it makes a certain amount of sense…”

Molly threw up her hands. “Of course those two snakes would propose this nonsense. All they want to do is undermine and diminish my son’s achievements. Merlin knows they hate him enough to concoct this story.”

"I highly doubt Severus and Lucius want to demean your son's achievements during the war," Kingsley began.

“Perhaps instead of digging up corpses you should be investigating Severus and Lucius,” Arthur added. “Lucius’ connection to the Death Eaters is well-known. As for Severus, well, it sure is convenient that he impregnated and married a member of the Golden Trio a few months before the Death Eaters were freed. Maybe he’s the one frolicking around the woods with his old friends, not Fenrir.”

Kingsley glared at Arthur. "With all due respect, it would be idiotic to go after Severus Snape when all I have for evidence is the half-baked theory of a family who is still bitter toward their son's former girlfriend. Severus Snape has been nothing but cooperative and helpful. There is no reason to suspect him of any wrongdoing.”

“But he has the means and the motive,” Arthur argued.

“According to you, Draco also had the means and the motive,” Kingsley argued.

Arthur swallowed.

Kingsley pointed to Molly. “I lost valuable time investigating Draco Malfoy because of your wife's insistence that he wanted Harry dead. In the meantime, the real killer's trail grew cold, giving him time to plan the breakout at Azkaban. I will not allow that to happen again.”

"How do you know Draco is not behind the Death Eaters' escape?” Molly snapped.

Kingsley put his head in his hands and groaned. “Because he was at a party with fifty other people.”

“I see,” Molly muttered.

Kingsley locked eyes with the Weasley matriarch. “Give it up, Molly. There is no evidence linking the your son-in-law to Harry's murder or any other crime committed in the last five years. I am finished investigating the Malfoys, and I do not intend to begin investigating Severus Snape until I find some hard evidence linking him to anything.”

"Speaking of the git," Charlie muttered as he gestured to the doorway.

Severus and Hermione breezed through the entrance, ignoring the eyes which fell upon them. Hermione leaned against her husband for support, one arm nestled in his. Her free hand caressed her
stomach. She mouthed a few words of comfort to her unborn child as Severus led her further into the ballroom.

"I can't believe she had the nerve to show up here," Charlie spat.

"You'd think she and Severus would have more decency than to come here and throw her condition in our faces," Arthur growled.

"It's even more revolting when you realize Ron could've been here and would've had to endure watching the very pregnant love of his life clinging onto their former professor," Molly replied.

"Enough!"

The Weasleys jumped.

"I will not allow this sort of petty drama tonight," Kingsley hissed. "If you want to fight with Severus and Hermione Snape, I suggest you choose a different venue. I will not allow anyone to distract us from the main goal of this event: honoring Harry and his life."

Molly bowed her head while Charlie blushed. Arthur replied, "You're right. This evening is about Harry and what he would want. Despite Hermione's actions she was one of his best friends, meaning she has a right to be here."

"I'm glad you agree," Kingsley replied. "It was very pleasant to speak with all of you, but I must attend to my other guests."

"It was pleasant speaking with you as well," Arthur answered.

Kingsley nodded before slipping into the growing crowd.

Once Kingsley was out of earshot the Weasleys returned their attention to the Snapes.

"The nerve of that dungeon bat!" Charlie exclaimed. "He could barely tolerate Harry, yet here he is throwing his wife and child in all of our faces!"

"And not only does Hermione allow him to escort her knowing his relationship with Harry, but she has the audacity to appear happy!" Molly raged. "Here I thought Hermione was capable of being a decent woman and had a modicum of self-respect, but I was wrong."

"I can't believe we ever supported Ron and Hermione's relationship." Charlie sniped.

Molly replied, "That was a mistake on our part, but her love life is no longer our concern. She and her baby are Severus' problems now."

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As Hermione entered the ballroom, she could not help but admire the immaculate white marble floor and the golden chandeliers dangling from the dove gray ceiling. If she focused on the decor and her daughter she wouldn't feel the Weasleys' stares bearing down on her. A few times she muttered soothing words to Rose. Although the child's kicking lessened it did not ease the churning of Hermione's stomach.

"Are you well?" Severus asked.

She turned to him and nodded. "For the most part I'm fine, but I'll admit to being more nervous about being near the Weasleys than I initially thought I would be."
He whispered, “If you want to leave we can.”

“No, I need to stay,” Hermione replied. “At some point I need to learn to face them. Now is as good a time to start as any.”

"Hermione! Severus!” a voice exclaimed, breaking free from the crowd.

Hermione disentangled herself from her husband. "Neville! I've missed you!"

They embraced. "I missed you too. I would visit more often, but I've been so busy overseeing the construction of my new greenhouse I haven't had much time for anything else."

"How is the construction coming along?" Severus asked

"It's coming along splendidly.” Neville beamed. “The foundation has been laid and the curtain walls are complete. Within the next week they’ll start putting in the side walls and we'll begin casting the spells for climate control. We'll have cacti and pine trees growing next to each other within a few months!”

“I am glad to hear it,” Severus replied.

“I only wish there was some way I could repay you,” Neville answered.

"Don't churn out dunderheads and we'll call it even," Severus replied.

Neville laughed. "Deal."

"Severus, Hermione, I'm so glad you could make it," Kingsley began as he approached them.

Hermione and Severus each shook hands with the Minister.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world,” Hermione replied.

"I do apologize for the poor timing, so close to your due date. I will not allow a conflict such as this to occur again,” Kingsley promised.

“‘There was no great harm in scheduling it now,” Hermione replied. "Rose is being patient so far. There’s no reason to think she will be born within the next few hours.”

"Well, when she does decide to come, we'll pray that it's a safe and uneventful delivery,” Kingsley replied.

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

Kingsley flashed a warm grin.

"Has there been any word on the Death Eaters?” Severus asked.

"None I'm afraid," Kingsley replied. "My men have searched every place we think Greyback could possibly hide, but we've come back with empty hands."

“You’ve been searching for Fenrir Greyback?” Neville asked.

"Yes, why?" Kingsley replied.

“It…it all makes sense now,” Neville mumbled.
“What makes sense?” Kingsley asked.

"When my greenhouse was attacked, I remember the arsonist claiming that it was personal,” Neville gulped. “I…I thought I killed Fenrir during the Final Battle. What if I didn't and he's still alive?"

"Then we'll find him," Kingsley vowed. “We have aurors working at all hours of the day to recapture the escaped convicts. Whoever is leading the Death Eaters can not avoid detection much longer."

"What if Fenrir has help from someone embedded in the Ministry?" Neville asked. Kingsley raised an eyebrow.

Neville continued, “Severus Snape can attest to the fact that spies weren’t uncommon during the Second Wizarding War. What if Fenrir has decided to borrow that tactic from Voldemort and has a spy in the Ministry?”

"I can assure you that I have the full loyalty of all Ministry workers."

"I just remember the last time we thought we had everyone’s undivided loyalty, and it turned out to be far from the truth."

"They'll find the Death Eaters before anything can happen," Hermione assured Neville.

Neville glanced at Severus. It was clear from his expression that Mr. Snape did not share his wife’s optimism. Then Neville returned his attention to Hermione, “I hope you’re right.”

“Let's try to focus on something more pleasant” Hermione replied. “Tell me, how are your classes going?"

Neville’s face lit up. "The students are great this year. They really seem to be taking to the new greenhouse."

"That's so wonderful to hear."

As Neville and Hermione continued to converse, Severus watched a flurry of movement in the far corner. Men in tuxedos and women in long black dresses raced from the entrance to the far right corner. His heart banged against his chest as he extended his hand to grab Hermione should the need to escape arise.

“Oh good, the musicians are here," Kingsley commented.

"Musicians?" Severus asked as he relaxed.

Kingsley nodded. "They apparated here, but somehow they wound up in the Ministry building in France. I received an owl an hour ago telling me the French Ministry was detaining them for questioning as suspected spies. I hoped my response would clear things up in a timely manner."

Kingsley chuckled while Severus lowered his hand. "It appears as though it has. Where are these musicians from?"

"Vienna."

“Interesting.”

"Minister Shacklebolt," Lucius began as he entered, his hands intertwined with Narcissa's.
"Severus."

"Lucius? I didn't know you planned to attend this little soiree," Severus began.

"I wanted to represent my family in a show of respect for Potter," Lucius replied. "I hope that is not considered tactless."

"Not at all. We are more than happy to have you here," Kingsley replied.

"Thank you," Narcissa responded.

"That being said, where are your son and daughter-in-law?" Kingsley asked.

Lucius took a deep breath. "Ginevra did not want to deal with her family or with the rumors surrounding Potter's continued infatuation with her. As for Draco, well, he was never particularly fond of Potter to begin with, and for a time he was the prime suspect in Mr. Potter's murder. It would have seemed hypocritical for him to attend."

Kingsley shook his head. "I am preparing my public apology to Draco as well speak. We should not have acted so aggressively on such a flimsy lead."

"All is forgiven," Lucius assured him.

"Severus," Narcissa began in a soft voice as she released herself from Lucius. "Is it wise for Hermione to be here so late in her pregnancy?"

Hermione burst out laughing at one of Neville’s comments.

"She insisted upon coming. Despite my best efforts I could not convince her to stay home," Severus answered.

"Gryffindors do have a reputation for being stubborn."

"Indeed they do."

"How is Hermione doing?" Lucius asked.

"For the most part well," Severus answered, "She is eager to meet our little daughter."

"I'm sure you're very excited to meet her as well," Narcissa replied.

"I am," Severus replied with a smile that lit up his entire face.

Kingsley took a step back. He'd never seen a genuine smile grace the potion master's face. Surreal.

"Minister Shacklebolt!"

"Excuse me," The Minister replied. "I-I will speak with you later."

"Very well then," Narcissa replied. "It was a pleasure to speak with you."

"Indeed," Severus replied.

Kingsley nodded before making his exit. "Hello, Ruby. How are you?"

Severus twisted his lips. Why did Kingsley become so flustered?
“Back onto the subject of your baby,” Narcissa began. “I remember you mentioning that selecting a middle name had been a point of contention between you and your wife. Have you reached an agreement yet?”

“We've agreed that it will not be Dunderhead,” Severus smirked. “That is the only compromise we can reach at the moment.”

“Well, at least it's a start,” Lucius replied.

Severus stole another peek at Hermione, who was laughing at one of Neville’s stories concerning a particularly idiotic student. Lucius suppressed a gasp. Never before had he seen that gleam in Severus’ eyes.

Severus muttered, “Indeed, it is a very good start.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took so long to update. I let some things go over the holidays that I shouldn't have, and ran out of time to update last night. Thank you for your patience and support!
Chapter 99

Hermione plopped down on one of the upholstered chairs in the corner. She sighed as she leaned into the cushioning. Of all the times to develop a raging backache…

"How are you feeling?"

She startled.

“I apologize for frightening you.”

“No, you’re fine Severus,” Hermione turned to her spouse. “I just wasn’t expecting you to join me. You were so engrossed in your conversation with the Malfoys I didn’t think you had noticed me slip away.”

“Your absence did not go unnoticed,” Severus replied, "but I thought you were speaking with friends. It didn’t seem polite to hover over you, especially while Narcissa was gushing over potential presents for her grandchild."

Hermione gave him a small grin. "Did you get any ideas from her?"

"Let's just say Narcissa and I have very different ideas on what types of gifts are appropriate for an infant," Severus answered.

Hermione gave him a small grin. "That is probably very true."

She then winced. Severus scooted closer to the chair, his eyes focused on her. She adjusted her position. "It's only a back ache. These hard floors have been killer on my feet."

"I'll brew you a potion for the pain when we return home," Severus replied. "Unless you want to leave now."

Hermione shook her head. "There are a few people here I haven't conversed with who I would like to see. Also I want to hear Kingsley's statements on Harry."

"Very well then."

“In the meantime feel free to enjoy yourself. You are more than free to return to the Malfoys if you're growing restless. Please don’t let me distract you from having a good time.”

Severus replied. “Our conversation is over. Narcissa insisted on sharing a dance with Lucius, and I have no interest in twirling the night away so to speak.”

Hermione glanced at the elegant couple gracefully maneuvering across the dance floor. A few other couples had joined them, including Kingsley Shacklebolt and Minerva McGonagall. The Minister held the Headmistress close as she stumbled around his feet. Hermione giggled at the spectacle.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "What, dear, do you find so entertaining?"

She snorted back her giggles. "Minister Shacklebolt is dancing with Headmistress McGonagall."
Severus shook his head as he spotted the couple. "I've told Minerva on numerous occasions that she had no rhythm."

"How would you know whether or not one has rhythm?" Hermione asked with a sly smile.

"I've witnessed enough mediocre dancing in my lifetime to be able to tell when someone is off the beat." Severus smirked. "Besides, I know for a fact that Minerva has indulged in at least three Bloody Mary's tonight. The witch has enough trouble dancing sober. She's hopeless under the influence."

Minerva tripped over her robes. Before she could smack against the ground Kingsley pulled her up. She slurred a few words of gratitude.

Hermione covered her mouth and laughed. Severus’ eyes softened. Once Mrs. Snape composed herself she asked, “How do you believe you’d rate as a dancer?”

“Even inebriated I waltz better than Minerva can sober.”

“How would you know? Do you make a habit of dancing under the influence?”

"I prefer other methods of humiliating myself, such as drunkenly singing off-key."

Hermione hummed. "I never pictured you as a singer."

Severus drew closer to her. "There are many talents of mine I haven't shared with you."

"So now you are a talented singer?"

"Indeed I am."

"Well then," Hermione replied. "We've established that you can sing, but you still haven't demonstrated your proficiency on the dance floor."

"Do you really want to dance with an aching back?" He asked.

Hermione flinched. "No, I can ascertain your proficiency verbally."

"Very well then."

"Have you ever taken dance lessons?"

“No, although I was forced to feign an interest in dance,” Severus replied.

“Oh?” She asked.

"My mum was interested in ballet and would sometimes force me to watch it with her on the television. Ballet never captivated me, but it was pleasant to spend time with Mum when she wasn’t going on about how inadequate of a son I was."

Hermione fidgeted.

“Of course, being forced to chaperone numerous Yule Balls and school parties didn't help matters. If I never see another teenager attempt a samba to screechy guitar music I will die a very happy man,” Severus concluded.

"I suppose being forced to watch others dance poorly would sour me to the activity as well,"
Hermione mused as a server glided past them. She opened her mouth to say something, but closed it upon noticing the contents of the tray.

"Do you need something?" Severus asked.

"I'm parched, but all of the trays contain wine," Hermione replied.

"I see," Severus replied as he caught the eye of another server approaching with an empty tray.

"Excuse me."

She turned to him. "Yes?"

"My wife needs a glass of water," Severus ordered.

The waitress took note of Hermione's condition and nodded. "I'll get right on that, Sir."

"Thank you," Severus replied before she slipped away.

Hermione exhaled. "Thank you. I didn't know how to approach them with my request. At this late stage, the alcohol may not affect Rose..."

"But why risk it?"

"Exactly!"

They sat in a companionable silence, with only the muted chattering of distant conversation and soft music from the orchestra between them. The musicians hit their final note, eliciting polite applause from the dancers and spectators.

"I was just thinking about dancing," Hermione began as the waitress returned with her glass of water. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," she responded, handing Hermione the glass. Then she scurried away.

"What about dancing?" Severus asked.

Hermione took a sip of water. "I don't mind the act of dancing in and of itself, but I detest dances."

Severus quirked an eyebrow. "Really now?"

"Yes. There is always so much drama surrounding dances. A great example of this is the Yule Ball. I had a wonderful time, but Ron and Harry spent the entire evening sulking."

"How were their pissy attitudes your problem?"

"After the ball was over we proceeded to get into an argument about how either of them could've invited me. Actually, it was more like Ron and I fought and Harry sat in the corner. Regardless I cried myself to sleep that night."

"Dunderheads," Severus muttered.

"That wasn't even the worst dance I attended. When Ron and I were engaged, he insisted on hosting an enormous ball filled with people neither of us knew well. He proceeded to get wasted. When we finally did dance, he kept stepping on my toes. Of course, we fought again. After the fight he pinched my bottom in front of his Quidditch teammates." Hermione choked. "It was the most mortifying moment of my life. All I could do was rush to the ladies room and cry until there were no
more tears left in me. I nearly broke up with him that night, perhaps I should've left him that night, but I talked myself into giving our future one more chance.”

"I remember reading about that little episode in the Daily Prophet," Severus replied in a tender voice.

"You never struck me as the kind to read the gossip in the Daily Prophet."

"Trust me, I am not. I must have been bored that particular day."

"I suppose you thought Ron and I were being petty and immature."

"Actually, it was something more like 'why would a brilliant witch such as Hermione stay with a dolt like Ronald,'" Severus replied.

"Because I was stupid," Hermione answered.

“No,” Seveurs replied. “It was because you loved him even though he wasn't capable of appreciating it.”

Hermione searched his eyes but found no judgment there. Why didn't he allow more people see that side of him? How had she become so privileged? Perhaps she was unwise enough to fall for her best friend. Perhaps he was unwise enough to fall for her. If this was the case, then was it possible that they could be more than dear friends-souses in every sense of the word? Well, first she would need to determine how to be a spouse. Did it involve snogging each other senseless at every opportunity, flaunting their feelings in front of everyone they met, and panicking at the thought of being separated from each other for a few short hours? Or could they be a different kind of couple? Could they be a couple with a silent understanding that required no public displays as proof of their devotion; a couple with something deeper, more secure, less obvious, but no less real? Was it foolish to hope that she and Severus could love each other without losing their identities?

Severus gazed into Hermione's eyes, wondering how anyone could take her for granted. While he may have initially married her because he believed she could tolerate him and stay out of his hair, he'd come to find so much more in her than a roommate. It was now impossible to deny that he admired and appreciated her intelligence, her ferocity in protecting those she loved, and most of all, her compassion and willingness not only to look past his fortune, but also look past the façade he'd been forced to assume during her days as a student. Perhaps she could be trusted with his heart and soul. Perhaps she wanted to share the rest of her life with him. Had he finally found the loving family he'd yearned for his entire life? Was it too much to hope that Hermione and he could find a way to love each other without destroying each other?

Neither noticed they had attracted the attention of a couple nearby.

"Look at them," Lucius whispered. "It's as if they are the only two people who exist."

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Narcissa asked.

Lucius smiled as he pulled Narcissa closer. "I suppose it is, although I now have the unpleasant task of admitting that Ginevra was right about Hermione and Severus."

Narcissa chuckled.

“That being said,” Lucius sighed. “I hope the Snapes can cherish the beauty of what they have and not muck it up.”

Narcissa smiled. “I wouldn’t worry about them. Severus has learned from his previous romantic
debacle, and Hermione has learned from hers. It's only a matter of time before they realize what they have.”

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"When are we going inside?” Scabior grumbled.

"Soon,” Fenrir hissed.

“How soon is soon?”

"Be patient, I'm observing something.”

“What is so interesting that we can’t just go in right now?”

Fenrir sneered. "I've just figured out Severus' weakness. It should serve us well in seducing him to our side.”

Scabior's eyes bulged. “I didn’t think he had a weakness.”

“I was mistaken. Now he has a weakness we can exploit.”

“How do you plan on exploiting it?” Scabior asked while the other Death Eaters took their positions.

"I do I have a fully formed plan at the moment. My course of action, now, however, is to persuade Severus to join our side the same way Dumbledore convinced Severus to join his side,” Fenrir barred his teeth. "All I have to do is change the name from Lily to Hermione.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support, especially for helping this story to reach over 400 kudos! All of you are amazing!
"Hermione," Severus rasped.

“Yes,” Hermione breathed.

As if on cue, the candles illuminating the room were simultaneously snuffed out. A few in the crowd gasped while others murmured amongst themselves. Severus grasped Hermione's hand in one hand and reached into his pocket for his wand with the other. As he was pulling the wand out, however, the light returned.

“Hello again.”

A man stood in the middle of the room, flanked by two bodyguards, one on each side. A group of familiar wizards stood behind him, wands drawn and poised for battle.

"Fenrir," Kingsley drawled, the statement more of an admission than an exclamation of shock.

"You do not sound surprised to see me," Fenrir commented.

Kingsley thrust out his chest. "I've suspected you were alive for some time now."

“That’s a shame. I had so hoped for my appearance to be an unanticipated treat,” Fenrir sneered.

From within the crowd a woman sobbed.

“What tipped you off?” Fenrir asked. “Did I shed on Harry's dead body? Did I leave behind a flea in Dumbledore's tomb?”

Kingsley remained silent.

Fenrir glared into the crowd of onlookers. “Or maybe someone told you I was alive.”

The onlookers recoiled.

Fenrir turned to his followers. "Who would have spoiled our surprise by informing the Minister that I lived?"

The crowd of Death Eaters began to grumble, the only distinguishable words among them being the occasional, "Not I." The more time that passed, the louder their insistences became until accusations of treason rang out.

As they continued to debate the identity of the traitor, Kingsley cast a Patronus and whispered instructions to it. The lynx sprinted from the room.

“Enough! I trust you all," Fenrir shouted. “I know none of you would ever betray me! All of you proudly bear my mark, and would never so much as dream of betraying me.”

The Death Eaters ceased their discussion.

Fenrir locked eyes with Severus. “You see my dear duplicitous professor, it is much more difficult to
betray my mark than the Dark Mark. With my mark, the Death Eaters became children, not merely followers. I am not their overlord, but rather their father. It’s a bond one never fully understands until he begets a child, either by creating one the traditional way or if one is less than orthodox...”

Fenrir chomped in Severus’ direction.

A few in the crowd screamed. Severus wrapped an arm around Hermione and braced himself for an attack.

Fenrir continued. "Then again, maybe you already understand the bond between father and son. I mean I've never seen anyone use another human being the way Dumbledore used you, yet you still loved him. You always were weak that way."

"Why are you here?" Severus growled as Hermione shifted in the chair.

"Glad you asked," Fenrir replied before turning to the other wizards. He raised his arms. "I crave the loyalty of everyone in this room! I want to become your father, the one who reincarnates each one of you into a superior form of life!"

"We will never submit to you," Minerva argued.

Fenrir put a hand over his heart. "I'm chastened. Here I am offering you the deal of a lifetime, yet you refuse to so much as hear me out."

"There is nothing you could offer me that I would accept," Minerva argued.

"Is that so?" Fenrir muttered.

"We will fight to the death to prevent you from carrying out your nefarious plan!" Minerva shouted.

"I'm sure you’ll make a gallant effort, but given how ineffective you and your school were at thwarting me in the past I do not believe you will so much as succeed in slowing me down."

Minerva gasped.

Fenrir turned a predatory eye to Neville. "She did protect you and your greenhouse, didn't she, Mr. Longbottom?"

Hermione whined as she shifted position once more.

"I'm not afraid of you!" Neville fired back.

In a flash, Fenrir transformed into a wolf and lunged at him. Neville yelped and disappeared behind the Weasley clan. The wolf returned to his human form and cackled. "To think, Voldemort could've made you the boy-who-lived. Well, the war would've ended much sooner if he had."

"You won't be able to revel in your freedom much longer," Kingsley interrupted.

"Oh?"

"A regiment of aurors is on the way to take you into custody."

"You mean the regiment of aurors just outside this building? The same regiment of aurors my lycanthropes defeated mere minutes ago?"

Kingsley furrowed his eyebrows. "You're lying."
From the crowd of Death Eaters, someone threw a badge which landed at Kingsley's feet. His heart skipped a beat as he recognized the name of the head Auror.

"If I were you, I'd have your people tested," Fenrir suggested. "I think Amycus may have had a snack or two."

Kingsley stuck out his chin. "More will come. My Patronus won't rest until it finds help."

Scabior laughed. "It may take a while for them to arrive. They'll have to walk."

"Excuse me?" Kingsley asked.

Fenrir smirked. "The moment we arrived we dismantled the floo system, and cast a few spells which prevent apparation. As of right now I decide who enters and who exits."

"How long do you plan to keep us?" Molly whimpered.

"Until I get what I want." From the corner of his eye he spied Lucius Malfoy clutching his wife's hand. He pointed to him. "Did this man recently pay a visit to your villa in Spain, Archelaus?"

"I haven't the foggiest clue," The Chief replied.

"I believe he did!" Fenrir exclaimed. "I think he and Professor Snape worked out that you... and by extension, I, were alive. How could that be?"

Lucius straightened his posture. "You spared Farrah. A Death Eater would've killed her, but you let her live."

"Note to self," Fenrir mused. "Next time, spare no one."

"We'll give you whatever you want, just please let us go!" Molly begged.

Fenrir gave her a sideways glance. "Would you give me a bite of your sons?"

Molly stifled a sob.

"That appears to be a 'no'," Scabior noted.

"She may live to regret her decision," Fenrir replied. His eyes scanned the crowd. "I have an offer for all of you gathered here! Are you listening?"

The room was silent.

"Good! We can make this whole exchange pleasant for you: just a little nip on the leg and we can all call it a night."

"And if we refuse?" Kingsley asked.

"We'll do it the hard way," Fenrir warned before turning to Severus and Hermione. "What do you think, Severus? Would you like to take another mark?"

"I'd rather die than serve another master," Severus growled.

Fenrir approached him, with the Chief and Scabior in tow. When a few of the Death Eaters fell in behind, Fenrir raised his hand and waved them back. "Let the others look at you. Let them see the possibilities of our new world order."
Rodolphus gave a curt nod before he and the others returned to formation. "Severus," Fenrir began in the sweetest voice he could muster. "Voldemort was an idiot for trying to control you, but I've always known you are a man who craves power. Most of the events in your life have been out of your hands. It's time for you to take charge of your destiny."

"By becoming your lackey?"

"No, I'd never insult you by thinking for one moment that you'd submit to anyone," Fenrir answered. "I'm not trying to become your master. I want to become your friend, your confidant, your creator. I want to offer you the universe on a silver platter!"

"I do not need anything you have to offer," Severus answered.

"Perhaps you don't fully grasp what I'm trying to say," Fenrir continued. "I do not plan to use you, but rather, to empower you. You will be my equal, a partner in every sense of the word. Have you ever before received such an offer?"

Severus swallowed and lowered his head. Before he could contemplate the grain of truth in Fenrir's speech he felt Hermione rub his hand with her thumb. His face hardened as he returned his gaze to Fenrir. "Who says I have not already received such an offer?"

"From whom, the mudblood?" Scabior snickered.

"Do not call her that," Severus warned.

"I'm sorry… your wife," Scabior corrected himself. "The one who likes to spew about house elves."

Archelaus burst out laughing, as did several of the Death Eaters. Severus clutched his wand and shouted an incantation. Scabior flew across the room and landed onto a timpani. The laughter stopped.

"So you care for the little wench! I cannot blame you," Fenrir began as he crept towards the squirming Hermione. Severus pointed his wand at Fenrir, but before he could cast a spell Fenrir pulled out his own wand. "Remember this?"

Severus’ heart stopped. Beads of sweat formed on his brow.

Fenrir flicked his wrist, sending Severus’ wand across the room. "Unlike you I've managed to become it's master. I'd strongly suggest you not provoke me into demonstrating its power."

"Get away from my wife," Severus growled.

"Now why wouldn't you want me to be near your precious Princess of Gryffindor?" Fenrir purred. "I only want to inspect her, to see if she's a worthy princess for the Half Blood Prince."

Fenrir reached out his hand and stroked Hermione’s hair. She grit her teeth as she attempted to pull away. "I will admit that you chose your wife well, Severus. She is delectable, don't you agree?"

Severus raised his hand. Fenrir point the Elder Wand at Hermione's womb. Severus and sneered, "Be patient. I know you want your wife back, but we have to take turns. Don't worry, I'm almost done with her."

Hermione pushed Fenrir away. He yanked her arm and shoved her head into his chest. Then he grinned at the scent of her jasmine perfume intermixed with another scent that was oh so familiar in the warmth of the springtime. She continued to struggle as his smile grew.
“Yes, you've chosen well. She has such a feisty spirit,” Fenrir hissed. “I imagine you're never bored when she's around.”

Hermione whipped out her wand and threw Fenrir into the far wall. Fenrir took a moment to right himself, then cackled. "Yes Severus, this one is much feistier than your last Gryffindor!"

Fenrir motioned to Scabior, who limped across the room to join him in front of the Snapes. Severus glanced at Hermione, who now had tears in her eyes. She pointed to the seat of her chair. Before he could ascertain what she was trying to convey, Fenrir shouted, "I like Hermione and I like you, Severus. Let me make you a special offer. I'll turn your entire family into lycanthropes myself: you, your wife, and when she's born, your baby girl. You'll become lycanthrope royalty!"

"Go to hell," Hermione growled as she clutched her stomach.

Across the room, Neville spotted a pool of liquid pouring down Hermione’s dress. With a gulp, he broke from the crowd and fired a hex at Fenrir.

Yowling in pain, Fenrir spun around. "That was a mistake!"

Chapter End Notes

This would probably be a really bad time to tell everyone that I have guests coming tomorrow and I won't be able to update until Monday...

Thank you for all the support! It is very much appreciated.
Hermione didn't hear a word of Fenrir's speech.

The instant the werewolf had started stroking her hair, her water broke. Her cramps increased in intensity as her heart began to race. She had prayed that slamming Fenrir into a wall would render him unconscious, but they went unanswered.

When Fenrir stood up her breaths deepened. What would he do if he discovered her situation? Surely he had smelled the moisture seeping onto the floor. A thousand scenarios played in her head, each one less pleasant and more painful than the last. Despite her attempts to remain calm while Fenrir uttered his next words, she could not stop trembling.

"That was a mistake!"

A chill raced down Hermione's spine.

"I'm not afraid of you," Neville began as he pointed his wand at Fenrir's heart. "I defeated you once and I can do it again!"

"Accio wand," Severus muttered.

"Is that so?" Fenrir crept closer to Neville. "Are you willing to stake your life on it?"

Severus wand flew into his hand.

"Yes," Neville answered.

Scabior and the Chief joined their leader. Both of them barred their teeth, enhancing the predatory gleam in their eyes.

Fenrir cackled. "The best aurors in Britain have already fallen to me. What makes you think you could do better?"

Severus stuck the wand into his pocket.

"You aren't the boy-who-lived! Even he didn't stand a chance against me!"

"I'm not afraid of you."

The Death Eaters faced him. Fenrir continued, "Well, at the very least it will be amusing to watch my lycanthropes tear you to shreds."

"He won't be alone!" Kingsley piped in as he slid beside Neville. "I will fight alongside him."

"As will I," Minerva added.

A growing number of voices threw their support behind Neville, giving Severus the opportunity to glance over at Hermione. She looked at him and winced. His heart stopped.

"Are you?"
She nodded while a tear trickled down her cheek.

Severus took a shaky breath while Hermione bit back a moan.

Severus looked over at Neville, who locked eyes with him and winked. Without hesitation, Severus grabbed Hermione's hand and pulled her up. They ran towards a rear exit.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Fenrir demanded. “I’m not finished with either of you yet.”

Neville hexed him again. Fenrir roared and turned to him. “Fine, you want a fight?” He pointed to Neville. “Get him!”

The sounds of shouts and exploding hexes boomed through the room. Lycanthropes pounced onto guests. Guests hexed lycanthropes. With all the noise it grew difficult to discern whose yells were whose, or whether a hex had hit its intended target.

Meanwhile Severus and Hermione raced down the hallway. Upon seeing an empty office Severus dragged Hermione into it and slammed the door. He released her and began casting every ward he knew.

"Severus, Neville may need help,” Hermione squeaked.

Severus locked the door. “Are you seriously suggesting we go back and help him?”

Hermione stepped closer to the door. "We have to help him."

Severus cast a muffliato spell. “There isn't any time. We need to leave now!”

"But maybe I can fight between contractions if I stay at a safe distance," Hermione argued. "I know some hexes which can travel several meters. My aim is still accurate. I can still fight."

Severus began casting wards. "You will risk Fenrir knowing that you are in labour."

"The baby won't be born for some time yet."

"Put your Gryffindor loyalty aside for one minute and think about our daughter."

"I am thinking about our daughter!"

Severus pointed to a wooden chair across the room. "Then sit down while I think of a way to exit this death trap!"

"I can't just sit and do nothing!” Hermione yelled.

"Yes, you can."

“No, I can't, not if I want to set a good example for Rose," Hermione argued.

"How is endangering our lives setting a good example for her?” Severus demanded.

"I don’t want her to think you run away from threats. I want to set a good example, show her what it means to stand up for what is right!” Hermione argued. "I can't accomplish that task if I'm holed up in some office terrified out of my mind that Fenrir is going to kill us!"

“Part of fighting is knowing when to retreat,” Severus' expression softened. “It's a lesson I’m all too familiar with.”
“I know,” Hermione replied in a softer voice. “But I’m a member of the Golden Trio, the only one present. Everyone is depending on me.”

"I know the feeling of everyone depending upon you, yet feeling as if you are helpless to change your circumstances," Severus admitted. "But sometimes emotions must be set aside, especially if they contradict reason."

"People call me a hero," Hermione choked. "They depend on me."

"Nobody expects you to fight during labour."

"I don’t want to appear as if I’m running away."

"You won’t, especially when the intention of starting this fight was for you to flee."

"What do you mean?"

"Neville started that brawl for your sake."

"He did?"

"Yes," Severus replied. "Before we left, he caught my eye and winked. His diversion was for your benefit."

"Bloody hell," she muttered. "He must've seen the stain. It's a wonder Fenrir didn't notice."

"Fenrir would have noticed your condition if we'd given him any more time," Severus pointed his wand in the air and shouted a spell. Sparks sputtered from atop his wand. “The spell preventing apparation is still active.”

Hermione clutched her abdomen. “Then what are we going to do? Fenrir shut down the floo!”

"I may be able to repair it," Severus mused, examining the extent of the damage.

"Really?"

"I have no idea, but it's worth a try."

"Okay," she murmured.

He grabbed a bucket of floo powder and threw some into the fireplace. Then he pointed his wand and shouted a few incantations.

Hermione sat in the wooden chair and bit her lip as she felt another, stronger contraction escalate. She grunted, "Of all the times Rose could've chosen to be born…"

"Hermione, are you well?"

"I'm preparing to push something the size of a dragon egg through a tiny little hole! I'm peachy!"

"If you are content, then…"

"Severus!" she yelled as the contraction subsided.

Severus smirked as he shot her a look. He gulped under the weight of her glare. “I was only joking.”

“Save your comedy act for someone who isn't ruining one of her favorite dresses by popping out
your baby," she growled.

"I shall," Severus promised before muttering one final Latin phrase. He threw in some powder and watched the fireplace ignite. Hermione’s face lit up. The floo flames extinguished as quickly as they had flared.

"Shit," Severus muttered.

"What's going to happen now?" Hermione asked. "I can't have my baby in some office while there are lycanthropes running amok."

Severus eyed her. "If we use the floo right now, chances are good we will become trapped within the network.

"Agreed."

"I have another idea, but you will not like it."

"What would that be?" Hermione asked.

"Do you think they went this way?" an outside voice asked.

"This is the only way they could have gone," another answered.

Severus crept over to the huge office window, thanked God for the Ministry's excess, and threw it open.

"You're crazy!" Hermione exclaimed. "I am not jumping out of that window."

"Good, because no one is asking you to," Severus crouched low on the ground. "Mount me the way you would a broom."

"What?" she gasped.

"Well boys, what do we have here?" Fenrir called. "I detect a ward!"

"Meaning Severus and his little bride may be nearby!" Scabior answered.

"Exactly," Fenrir growled.

Hermione’s eyes widened as the wards protecting them from the outside began to disintegrate.

"Hermione, listen to me," Severus began. "I was Voldemort's closest advisor. He taught me how to fly. I can get us out of here, but only if you mount me right now."

"I…I hate flying," she whispered.

"I know," Severus replied in a soft voice. "But I need you to trust me. I can get us out of here, but only if you mount me right now."

"I…I hate flying," she whispered.

"I know," Severus replied in a soft voice. "But I need you to trust me. I can get us out of here, but only if you mount me right now."

"This should be the last one," Fenrir replied.

"Fenrir is coming," Severus continued. "We have to leave now."

Hermione stood up. "What if I fall off?"

"I promise I will not drop you. Trust me," Severus replied.
Hermione swallowed before setting herself upon his back. "I won't fall?"

"No," he promised.

The lycanthropes pounded on the door.


With that, Severus dove into the air. Fenrir burst open the door with one final kick and stormed in with his two generals. They darted to the open window and stopped at the threshold. Fenrir snarled once he saw a speck flying towards the full moon.

"He, he didn't just…” Scabior asked.

“He did,” Fenrir growled.

"I thought only Voldemort could fly!” Scabior exclaimed.

"Apparently not," Fenrir seethed before stomping out of the room.

***

"How are you feeling, Hermione?" Severus asked.

"Scared out of my mind," she admitted.

"I apologize for the method of travel, but I saw no other way."

"No, it's not you. The flight is not actually as bad as I thought it would be."

“I am glad to hear it,” Severus answered.

Hermione massaged his back. “The flight isn't what's scaring me. I'm scared because Fenrir is alive, and at large, and Rose is going to be living in a world where he is a dangerous threat.”

Severus hummed.

There was a catch in Hermione’s voice. “When I found out I was pregnant with her, I hoped she'd have a better life than I did. I didn't want her to live through the fear and uncertainty of another war, nor did I want her to grow up thinking that she must fight regardless of her feelings on the matter. I wanted… I wanted better for her than what we had."

"I had hoped for better as well," Severus admitted.

"I suppose it cannot be helped," Hermione sighed.

“Perhaps if we’d rounded up the Death Eaters more effectively seven years ago this could have been prevented,” Severus answered. “Perhaps if I’d done a better job of ascertaining their locations immediately after the war this would not have occurred.”

“How could you have done any more than you did?” Hermione asked. “It was the Ministry’s duty to track down the Death Eaters, not yours.”

“I could have done more,” Severus mused.

Hermione massaged his back more forcefully. “Don’t talk that way. You’ve given over two decades
to the side of the Light. Helping us almost cost you your life. I refuse to allow you to beat yourself up over something nobody could’ve prevented.”

“Perhaps you are correct.”

“I know I am.”

Severus released a small chuckle.

Silence fell between them as they flew over a cluster of houses. Once they were over an open field Hermione began, ”Thank you, Severus. Thank you for saving our lives.”

“Do not thank me for doing what I had to do,” Severus answered.

“You didn’t have to save us.”

"How could I have done anything differently? You and Rose are the two people I care most about in this world.”

“Regardless, thank you. I will always be grateful for you putting you life on the line for us.”

“I will always be grateful for you tolerating me over an extended period of time.”

“Usually that isn’t a hard feat to accomplish,” Hermione replied. “Although I am becoming quite irritated with your reliance on the house elves for our meals. They’ve warranted more than a few days off.”

“Perhaps they have,” Severus pointed to a distant brick building. “Here’s St. Mungo’s.”

He began his descent.

Hermione gripped her abdomen. Pain tore through her body. ”Not a moment too soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully this chapter was worth the wait. Thank you for your patience and support!
Fenrir scowled as he stalked into the ballroom. After all the times he’d drilled into his children’s heads that they could not underestimate Severus Snape, he’d gone and done it himself. It made all the sense in the world for Voldemort to teach Snape how to fly. Snape was the closest anyone had been to Voldemort, save perhaps Bellatrix LeStrange. Snape was Voldemort’s one competent follower. As such Snape need to know how to fly in order to instill fear in others and demonstrate his own power. The man was called the dungeon bat for a reason! Why hadn’t Fenrir considered that Severus Snape would fly into the night with his little princesses?

That error would not have occurred had he not made an even greater blunder earlier. Every instinct in his body had screamed for him to bite Hermione the instant his nostrils detected the scent of birth. Had he not been hexed by that simpering fool all three of the Snapes would be members of his family, not somewhere recouping and preparing to fight another day. Stupid pride. He should have exerted better self-control. Now it would be months before he could get close enough to change them. No matter. He’d find them again soon enough…

Neville locked eyes with Fenrir and smirked. ”They escaped, didn't they?"

Despite the gash on his leg, Neville Longbottom stood defiant. His arms were caked with dried blood, his clothes torn from the battle, yet his eyes glistened with the knowledge that he’d been triumphant.

"I may have miscalculated Severus Snape's magical abilities," Fenrir admitted.

Neville’s smile widened.

Fenrir surveyed the room. Although no one could claim the side of the light had been victorious, his followers were not unscathed. Many were tearing their clothes in order to bandage their wounds, some were panting, and a few had collapsed onto the floor.

"What do you mean miscalculated?” Alecto asked as she pulled herself towards him. "Did the greasy git defeat you?"

“No," Fenrir answered. “But he and his family are beyond our grasp at the moment.”

“What do you mean?” Rudolphus asked.

“Let’s just say I forgot one of Voldemort’s tricks,” Fenrir admitted. “But don’t fret; it will not happen again.”

Neville cocked his head. "What trick?"

Fenrir flashed his teeth. "Perhaps Minerva can share that information with you in the morning."

From across the room a wolf in a pointed, crooked hat growled at Fenrir, eliciting a laugh from Scabior.

Neville stood as straight as possible. “Don’t think for a moment that you’ve won. Come tomorrow morning we will begin planning how to bring you down!”
"I'm counting on it," Fenrir replied before turning to the crowd and letting out a howl. The Death Eaters snapped to attention.

"My followers!" Fenrir announced. He raised the elder wand and muttered a phrase. A red light flashed throughout the room.

"You have all fought well! We have succeeded in displaying our strength to the magical world. Our mission has been accomplished. Let us now depart."

The Death Eaters apparated along with their leader.

Lucius shook his head. "This is one night I won't soon forget."

"Indeed," Narcissa straightened her bloodied and mutilated dress. "I thought the Weasleys were to be our greatest fear."

Lucius burst out laughing, as did Neville.

After a few moments Neville asked, "Where do you think they're going?"

"Merlin only knows," Lucius replied. "But if we hurry we can cast a few tracking spells…"

A growl from across the room interrupted his train of thought. Neville gulped. "That may be inadvisable until we confer with Kingsley and regroup."

"You're right," Lucius answered. "We should table this discussion until tomorrow. In the meantime, I suggest we apparate away."

"Great idea," Neville replied.

With a CRACK the trio disappeared, along with the few others who were still healthy enough to escape the den of freshly-changed lycanthropes.

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"Are you comfortable, Mrs. Snape?" the male Healer asked.

Hermione glowered at him. "Sure! This is the most comfortable I've ever been! I'm having contractions approximately every four minutes, this mattress is flimsy, and oh God!"

She writhed as another contraction ratcheted through her body. Severus swallowed. "As you can tell she's been through a bit of an ordeal tonight."

The healer grinned. "Don't apologize for her. I actually get quite a few responses like that."

"Then why do you ask that question if you already know the bloody answer?" Hermione grunted.

"I usually work with patients who have not yet gone into labor, so I suppose I'm just used to asking it," he admitted.

Hermione glowered at him. If he didn’t wipe that goofy grin off his face she was going to hex him into oblivion.

"Anyway Mrs. Snape, at the moment you are six centimeters dilated, meaning you're in active labor," he continued.
"I never would have guessed that," Severus deadpanned.

Hermione relaxed and curled up her lips.

The OBGYN shook his head. "Well, I'll go ahead and call Dr. Branigan and tell her the baby should be here within a few hours. Until then, you can try the breathing exercises you learned in your antenatal classes, or you may request a potion for the pain."

"No potions," Hermione answered. "I want Rose to be born naturally."

"The potions wouldn't affect her," Severus began.

"I said no potions," Hermione snapped.

"All righty then," the healer replied.

Severus took a deep breath and asked in a low voice, "May I speak to you in private?"

"You're leaving me?" Hermione squeaked.

Severus squeezed her hand. "No. We're just going to talk outside for a minute. I will return shortly."

She squeezed his hand in return. "Fine."

Severus released her hand. Then he and the healer stepped into the hallway. "What's the problem?"

"Recently I inherited a substantial fortune."

"I read about that in the Daily Prophet. Congratulations."

"Thank you."

A Mediwitch scurried down the hallway.

"Because of my inheritance, I have several enemies. This problem is only compounded by our histories. I was a double agent in the Second Wizarding War, my wife was a member of the Golden Trio, and the Death Eaters are still at large."

"Oh dear."

"I doubt anyone would be foolish enough to enter the hospital and harm my wife, but it will bring her comfort to have hospital security stationed outside her door." Severus leaned in closer. "I will make it worth the hospital's trouble."

"I will see what I can do about the situation," the healer replied. "St. Mungo's security is certainly up to the task of defending your wife and your newborn child."

"I pray you're right," Severus replied before gliding back into the room. Inside, Hermione gripped the bars on the bed and bit back a groan. Once the contraction subsided she exhaled. "I am really starting to hate labor."

Severus answered, "At least you will no longer be waking up to use the restroom every two hours."

"True," she muttered. "Now I can wake up every two hours to breastfeed."

Severus sat beside her and rubbed her shoulder. "You are doing remarkably well."
"Thank you," she whispered. "What were you and the healer discussing?"

“I was requesting increased security for this room,” he answered.

Hermione's eyes were wide.

"It is doubtful that anyone will attack St. Mungo’s, but I thought it would comfort you to know there were guards outside."

"Could the guards really stop Fenrir and his men?"

"If he is weakened from the battle, then yes it's possible."

Hermione closed her eyes as another wave of contractions flowed through her. When it was over, she whispered, “Thank you.”

He kissed her on the forehead. "It's almost over, love."

Hermione inhaled. "I hope so."

They sat in silence until she squealed from the next contraction. Severus' heart stopped. If only there were some way to alleviate her agony…

His eyes lit up. "Hermione!"

"What?"

"How do you make Polyjuice potion?"

She gave him an odd look. "You're kidding me, right? I'm trying to pop out your baby and your mind is on work?"

“I assure you this is no joke.,” Severus replied. “I want you to tell me how to make a Polyjuice potion.”

“You're the potions' master. You know bloody well how to make one.”

“I know I can brew a Polyjuice potion, but no self-respecting potions' master would be wed to a woman who couldn't brew a Polyjuice potion."

"I could not think of a worse time to reevaluate your decision to marry me!"

"I won't need to reevaluate my decision to marry you if you prove to me that you can brew a Polyjuice potion."

“"You know I can make that potion with my eyes closed!”

"Do I know that?"

She frowned until her eyes lit up. He gave her a soft smile.

"There are several ways to make Polyjuice potion," she began. "You found a way to shorten the time it takes to brew, so I'll recite your recipe…"

That's it, Severus thought as she rattled off the ingredients until the contractions prevented her from speaking. Just focus on the potion and ignore everything else.
"Push Hermione! Just a few more!"

Hermione bore down and groaned. She released her breath once the contraction abated.

"I can see her head!" Dr. Branigan announced. "She's going to be out soon."

"Thank Merlin!" Hermione exclaimed before feeling another onset of pain and an accompanying impulse to push.

"Push!" a Mediwitch ordered. "Push, push, push, push…"

"Her head is out! She's almost here!"

Hermione resumed pushing as soon as the next contraction arrived to help.

"It's a girl! You have a baby girl!"

"Oh my!" Hermione replied as they held up her crying baby.

Severus blinked. He'd always had this image of a pink, perfectly shaped baby, but Rose was splotted with blood and a white crusty substance. Her head was somewhat misshapen from the labor as well. Still, when she opened one big blue eye and looked directly at him, Severus was awash with love for her.

"Would you like to cut the cord?" Dr. Branigan asked while Severus stared at Rose.

"I'd be honored," he answered.

The infant kept her gaze on him and began to quiet herself.

“Okay, just stand here,” A mediwitch instructed as the healer gave Hermione the child.

"She's beautiful," Hermione gushed as she held her baby for the first time. She patted Rose's back in an effort to soothe her remaining tears.

Once the cord was cut, Severus slipped around the side of the bed to hover over Hermione and the baby. Rose opened her blue eyes again and stared directly at him.

"Say hello to your baby girl, Severus."

"Hello Rose."

The baby hiccuped and continued to keep her eyes on him. Hermione's eyes moistened. "I told you she'd love you."

Severus’ throat constricted. "The feeling is quite mutual."

Chapter End Notes

Here she is, world! Here's Rose!
Thank you for all the support. It really brightens my day!
Severus tapped his fingers against the chair, his eyes fixed on the doorway. The guard on the right bent down to tie his shoe while the one on the left stood at attention. Their eyes trailed a mediwitch scurrying down the hallway. Severus couldn't help but note the lack of an infant in her arms.

Severus grumbled. “What is taking them so long?”

"They've only had Rose for five minutes," Hermione replied with an amused smile.

“It cannot possibly take them five minutes to clean up a baby.”

“True, but they’re also performing some tests on her. You know how long those can take.”

Severus’ frown deepened.

“Don’t worry,” Hermione continued. “Rose will be with us soon enough.”

“She should be with us now,” Severus replied.

"Do you miss her?” Hermione asked.

"Somewhat,” Severus admitted. “But my main motivation for wanting her close by is to ensure her safety. Surely Fenrir has recovered by now and given our celebrity status there could be a horde of reporters surrounding her. Then there is the fact that she is less than an hour old. Until now we’ve been the only constants in her existence. She could be frightened by our absence…”

Hermione smirked. "You're already being protective of her."

"She's a baby,” Severus stopped tapping the chair. “One is supposed to protect a baby."

“Yes, but worrying about whether or not she’s scared is taking things to a whole new level. One might actually believe that you have a heart," Hermione teased.

Severus shook his head. "Witch, I only want to make sure Rose is safe and content. Once I am assured of her well-being..."

"Mr. and Mrs. Snape?"

The pair looked up at the Mediwitch. A wide eyed Rose was cradled in her arms. "We're done with the testing."

"Good," Severus exhaled.

Hermione stifled a giggle.

The Mediwitch glanced over at Severus. "Would you like to hold her?"

"Certainly. Show me what to do,” Severus replied.

The Mediwitch drew closer to him. "Hold your arms like I'm doing right now and we'll just let her
After Severus obeyed her instructions, the Mediwitch settled Rose into his arms.

“There you go,” the Mediwitch whispered.

Severus could not help but smile as Rose stared up at him. "Hello again,"

"Good job," the Mediwitch commented. "That's perfect."

Rose continued to examine her father. Severus’ eyes glistened. "I know you probably envisioned me to be much more handsome, but that cannot be helped at the moment."

In response, Rose yawned and closed her eyes.

"Awww!" Hermione cooed. "She likes you already. She probably thinks you're handsome, too!"

"She can barely see two inches in front of her," Severus protested, never once taking his eyes off the baby. He lowered his head and whispered, "You're a very sleepy baby aren't you? You've had a big day, and it’s unclear what exactly is happening around you.” He kissed her forehead. “Don’t worry little one, I will guide you through all this.”

"While he's holding Rose,” the Mediwitch continued, "We need to complete her birth certificate"

"That we do," Hermione answered.

The Mediwitch summoned a writing tray, quill, ink, and a partially completed parchment document. "First of all, what is the baby's full name?"

"Rose Severa Snape," Hermione answered.

"Severa?" Severus asked.

Rose’s eyes fluttered open.

Hermione nodded. "Yes, Severa. I want her to share your name."

"Why?" Severus asked as Rose made a fist.

“Because I want to name her after a family member and you want to name her after a great potions’ master. This is the best way to honor both of our wishes,” Hermione explained.

“While that may be true, surely it would be better to name her after someone who,” Severus fidgeted. “Well… wasn't known as a traitor to two causes."

“You've saved her life more than once," Hermione replied. "I will never forget that. Please, let me name her after you as a token of my appreciation."

“I promised her that she wouldn’t bear my name,” Severus noted. “I do not believe the best way to start a father-daughter relationship is for the parent to break a promise to his child.”

“You aren’t breaking your promise. I decided to name her Severa and for the sake of your family’s happiness you went along with it.” Hermione winked. “Surely she’ll understand how those sorts of things happen as she grows older.”

"I suppose Severa is only a middle name," Severus mused. "And she is my heir, so it would be in
keeping with tradition if she took a form of my name."

"It just… fits." Hermione finished.

Rose pat her fist against Severus' chest.

"Very well then," Severus conceded. "Name her Rose Severa Snape."

"That's a beautiful name," the Mediwitch replied as she wrote it on the parchment. "Now I'll just need you and your husband to sign your names on the dotted lines and we should be done."

"Good," Hermione reached over and grabbed the quill, "Although I fear my husband is otherwise occupied."

"I guess I can share her for a little while," Severus replied as Hermione signed her name on the form. "Rose probably needs to eat soon, anyway."

As if on cue, Rose began fussing in her father's arms. Severus' smile faded as the Mediwitch took Rose from him and placed her on Hermione's chest. "Don't worry," Hermione assured him. "You can have her back when I'm done."

"I'd better," he grumbled as the Mediwitch gave him a quill and the parchment to sign. As he jotted down his signature the Mediwitch helped position Rose to breastfeed.

"How does it feel?" The Mediwitch asked once Rose began to suckle.

Hermione flinched. "It hurts a little."

"It will get better. Just call me back when you're ready to put her down for a nap. It will do both you and your husband good to get a nap in before taking her home," the Mediwitch noted.

"I will call you if I need anything," Hermione promised as the Mediwitch took the parchment and the quill from Severus. Then she left the room.

Severus stood over the nursing baby. "She has the shape of your nose."

"She also has my hair," Hermione commented.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Don't all babies have dark hair?"

"Ron and Ginny didn't," Hermione answered. "Their hair was red the second they left the womb."

"Why does that not surprise me?" Severus deadpanned.

Hermione chuckled. "It wouldn't have mattered if she did have red hair and freckles. I still would've named her after you. You're her father, and nothing will ever change that."

"I am her father," Severus replied before stroking Rose's cheek. His voice was softer. "Is that milk good?"

Rose darted one eye in his direction before resuming her suckling. He chuckled. "I'll take that as a yes."

A soft knock interrupted the moment. "I swear if this is another healer…"

"Severus? Hermione?"
Hermione's eyes widened. "Neville?"

The guards parted. Neville beamed as he strolled into the room. "I was hoping you had a baby in your arms..."

Hermione's eyes watered. "I wish I could hug you right now! I was so scared for you."

"I came out all right," Neville replied. "A few cuts and bruises are nothing I haven't faced before."

Severus twisted his lips. "What happened?"

Neville crept closer to the bed. He leaned over and cooed, "Rose is so beautiful."

"She is beautiful," Severus replied. "But I need to know what happened after we escaped."

Neville stared at Hermione, who wore the same concerned expression as her husband. "What happened after we left? Did Fenrir kill anyone?"

"He didn't kill anyone," Neville answered. "He wasn't merciful enough for that."

"Then what happened?" Severus asked.

Neville looked at his former professor. "Kingsley said when Hermione is released from the hospital, he needs to see you."

"About what?"

"He wants you to brew him a batch of Wolfsbane."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! As always it is deeply appreciated!
Kingsley rocked back and forth in his chair. He glanced at the documents before him, but the elegant handwriting was mere chicken scratch. Despite his best efforts, his mind kept returning to last night's attack. Alecto had hexed him from his right and Amycus had hexed him from his left. Right when Kingsley was getting the upper hand a pain shot through his left thigh.

He indulged the memory until it took him to the excruciating pain as he morphed into a woff. At that point he resisted any more images, banishing them with a toss of his head. With renewed determination he set quill to parchment to complete the forms. Only a few lines were written until the memories seeped once again into his conscious thought.

Reprieve came in the form of a pound on his office door. Kingsley groaned, a burning ache bubbling in his chest. Where was a heartburn relieving potion when you needed one?

"Minister Shacklebolt!" a female voice called out.

Kingsley was still.

"Minister Shacklebolt! I know you're in there."

Kingsley slumped in his chair. "What do you want?"

"I'm here for the scoop on Harry’s ball," she replied.

"I told you, no interviews," he moaned.

"But Minister Shacklebolt, you promised to give us an exclusive!" the reporter protested.

"I know," Kingsley sighed, "But we've had a development which I must attend to at the moment."

There was a pause.

"What kind of development?"

Kingsley could already picture her salivating at the chance for a story. "Please, Rita; just let me recover from my hangover in peace."

"Ooh! Did last night's ball take a wild turn?" Rita asked.

"Now Ms. Skeeter, is that really any of your business?" another voice admonished.

Kingsley sighed in relief. Thank Merlin he'd hired Farrah.

"It most certainly is my business! The people of Britain are dying to know what occurred at the ball. It’s been the talk of the town so to speak. Surely you wouldn’t want to deny Wizarding Britain this valuable information?" Rita argued.

"I hardly think anyone wants to read your latest fabrications. Let's go," Farrah ordered.

Rita protested, "But the people of Britain…"
"Are probably more interested in the Snape heir anyway," Farrah interrupted.

Rita gave her an odd look. "Snape heir?"

"Yes, Snape heir," Farrah pulled Rita away from the door. "Hermione Snape had her baby last night."

“How would you know that?"

“Mrs. Snape was experiencing some pain last night, so she and her husband left the ball early. One of my close friends is a medwitch, so out of concern I asked her how Hermione was doing. She told me that Hermione had her baby.”

“Oh how interesting.”

“If I were you, I'd run over to St. Mungo's before someone else writes that story."

Rita chuckled. "Let Betty take the Snape heir story. I'm more interested in Ron Weasley's reaction. I already know what the headline will be: Baby Snape: a permanent reminder of a tragic betrayal!"

“You’d better get on with finding Ron Weasley then,” Farrah replied.

"I think I will as soon, as soon as I get all the details of Baby Snape’s appearance. The story will twice as juicy if the child has a huge nose,” Rita paused. “Your friend wouldn’t have told you how the baby appeared by any chance, would she?”

“No, I only know that Hermione had her baby.”

“Well it should be easy enough to find someone who will talk. Oh this will be the story of the year!” Rita replied before disapparating away.

Farrah shook her head before returning to Shacklebolt's office. She tapped on the door.

“"Yes?"

"Rita is gone."

"Thank you."

"Would you like me to keep an eye out for any other reporters?"

"Only if you're feeling up to it."

“I’m feeling fine," she opened the door.

Farrah stepped inside a little more, allowing him to inspect her. Although her arms and legs were bruised, there were no deep cuts, at least none which were visible.

Kingsley exhaled. "I suppose I'll have to trust your judgment. I'm so sorry they turned your own Vapulaforas on you."

She bowed her head. "It was my fault. I should've been more cautious. I heard them charging down the hall, but I wasn't quick enough."

"At least they left you alive."
"Thank Merlin for small favors," Farrah’s throat constricted. “Of course now I must face the fact that Fenrir has attacked twice on my watch, and there was little I could do to stop him."

"We were woefully understaffed. Realistically you could not have fended them off." Kingsley sighed. “There is nothing more you can do now except live to fight another day. That is, assuming Fenrir will spare us.”

“Spare us?”

Kingsley put his head in his hand. "Let's just say Fenrir has indicated that next time, there will be no survivors."

"Don't worry," Farrah jutted out her chin. "I can take care of myself as well as defend others. I promise never to be caught off guard by Fenrir again."

"I hope that is a promise you can keep," Kingsley exhaled.

The sound of approaching footsteps echoed down the hallway.

"Do you need anything else while I'm here?" Farrah asked.

"Can you capture Fenrir?" Kingsley joked.

"Now why would she want to do that?"

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"Kingsley was turned into a lycanthrope?" Hermione gasped.

Neville nodded as his eyes brimmed with tears. "I tried to block him from Fenrir, but Scabior jumped me. By the time I broke free there was nothing I could do."

"Oh Merlin," Hermione whispered.

“Indeed,” Severus muttered.

Rose broke away from her mother’s breast. Peering down at her daughter, she grinned. "Are you full now?"

Rose stared at her, wide-eyed, as if she was surprised that she was able to obtain nutrition by suckling. Then Rose’s eyes watered and she let out a grunt. Hermione placed Rose over her shoulder and patted her on the back. Then she adjusted her hospital gown so as not to embarrass their guest.

"Did Fenrir turn you, Neville?" Severus asked as Rose let out a quiet burp.

"No," Neville replied. "He scratched me up good and then told me I wasn't worthy to join his ranks. Once he was finished he told me he'd focus instead on making my life so hellish, I'd beg for death."

"Oh my," Hermione answered.

Rose let out a dainty burp.

"I'm not afraid of him. I've fought the Death Eaters once and survived, and I can do it again. Besides," Neville continued with a catch in his voice, "Someone has to fight Fenrir, even if it costs everything they have."
"Neville, you aren't alone," Hermione assured him.

"No, you are not," Severus added.

"I know," Neville took a deep breath. "I'm just a little emotional. After they healed my leg, I went upstairs to visit my parents. That's where I got the call from Kingsley."

"Oh Neville," Hermione whispered before Rose burped again.

"I will be fine, I promise," Neville’s expression lightened. "Enough of this depressing talk. We should be celebrating Rose's birth!"

Rose was silent.

"All done?" Hermione asked.

Rose yawned.

Hermione turned her attention to Neville. "Would you like to hold her?"

"I don't know if that's such a good idea," Neville blushed. "I'm really not experienced at holding babies."

"Severus wasn't experienced either, but he caught on very quickly," Hermione replied.

Neville glanced at Severus. Severus scowled. If Neville didn’t wipe that goofy grin off his face Severus was going to hex him to oblivion.

"She did not drool on me," Severus growled. "If she had I would have promptly returned her to her mother."

"Severus," Hermione laughed. "She could drown you in slobber and you wouldn't complain."

Severus tried to appear more intimidating, but the light in his eyes ruined the effect.

"It's really not so horrible to let people know you have a heart," Hermione continued as she repositioned Rose.

Severus glanced over at the infant and gave her a small smile. Rose stared at him in return. Severus cleared his throat. "Who would you prefer to have hold you: Neville or me?"

Rose blinked.

"How about you show me how to hold her?" Neville suggested.

"Sounds like a reasonable proposition," Severus replied before taking Rose from Hermione.

Neville watched Severus' face light up as he wrapped his daughter in his arms. Rose relaxed into his embrace.

"Hello Rose," He cooed. "I trust that lunch was to your satisfaction."

She held up an arm towards him. Severus' face glowed. "I know, you're probably still trying to figure out where you are and what is going on around you. It isn't as dark here as it was in your mother's belly. There's an awful lot to see."
Neville’s chest warmed at the interaction between his former professor and the tiny newborn. Who knew the feared dungeon bat would be such a nurturing father?

"Yes, the world can be overwhelming at times, but do not fret. You'll adjust to everything soon enough," Severus whispered.

Hermione beamed as her husband rocked their daughter.

Why couldn’t he let more people see this side of him?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I appreciate it all!
“Why don’t you be a dear and run along so I can speak with Minister Shacklebolt?” Fenrir began.

Farrah didn’t budge.

Fenrir hissed, “Now.”

Farrah whipped out her wand and aimed it at him. "You may have defeated me twice, but I will not allow it to happen again! You are under arrest, Fenrir Greyback!"

Fenrir laughed. "Do you think your toys intimidate me?”

He pulled out the Elder Wand. Farrah's eyes widened and she gasped.

"Go away, little girl,” Fenrir purred before his voice became more sinister, “before my tolerance reaches its limit."

Farrah gave Kingsley a sideways glance.

"Call it a day little girl," Fenrir warned.

"I can handle myself," Kingsley began.

"But Minister..."

"Don't endanger yourself. Get out of here."

Farrah nodded and scurried away.

Fenrir smirked as he entered the room. "Farrah Jackson is very loyal to you. You are lucky to have an employee such as her.”

“I know,” Kingsley replied.

Fenrir shut the door. “Lucius was right though: I have spared her one too more times.”

“You will not lay a finger on her,” Kingsley snapped.

Fenrir exhaled. “Don’t get your robes in a twist. Even if I wanted to kill her I’d never hear the end of it from Archelaus if she received so much as a scratch."

“I’m surprised he hasn’t said anything to you considering how much she’s suffered at your hands,” Kingsley answered.

"She is alive. No doubt she would prefer the temporary discomfort of emotional suffering over the eternal vacuum of nothingness."

"Is that what you felt when you died?"

Fenrir snorted. "I never died. My loyal Snatchers gave me shelter before I could expire. I thank my generals for that act of kindness every day, just as you thanked Potter for saving you from that idiot
Voldemort. Why exactly was the Ministry so ineffective against the Dark Lord again? I mean a teenager could obliterate him. What is your excuse for not subduing him sooner?"

"Is that why you are here?" Kingsley asked. "Do you have nothing better to do than reminisce about the Second Wizarding War?"

“I only thought it would be kind to remind you of your past ineptitude so you don’t make any future mistakes.”

“We defeated Voldemort, and we can defeat you as well.”

“Somehow I doubt that.”

“State your business and leave! I have better things to do than listen to you gloat.”

“My, my aren’t we cranky today,” Fenrir chuckled. “You must’ve stayed up too late last night.”

Kingsley clenched his fists.

Fenrir leaned over the table until he was inches from Kingsley. "I’ve come here to offer you a deal.”

“You know where to shove it,” Kingsley muttered.

“You have guts. I like that,” Fenrir replied. “Too bad you aren’t so gutsy when it comes to facing your public.”

Kingsley didn’t move.

“Now I have it on good authority that you’ve been turning away reporters all morning. Whyever would you not want them to know about Potter's Memorial Ball?” Fenrir purred.

Kingsley glared at him.

Fenrir continued, "I suppose it could be because the Light was taken by surprise, again, and as a result suffered another devastating defeat at the hands of the Death Eaters."

"Rest assured, we will soon find a way to capture and imprison you."

"Not likely!"

"What could you do to stop me?" Kingsley raised his wand.

Fenrir pointed the Elder Wand at Kingsley. “Verto.”

Kingsley screamed in pain as his body was lupine once more. Once the metamorphosis was complete, Fenrir smirked. "Verto."

Kingsley yowled as he returned to his human form. The Minister bowed his head as Fenrir approached, although the lycanthrope noticed his grin.

"I'll bet you think I just gave you the spell to return to your human form at will."

"It seemed rather silly on your part to show me the spell."

"It wasn't silly at all," Fenrir sneered. "Only the leader of the pack can use it, and the spell is taxing without a powerful wand. The Elder Wand is the only wand I've found powerful enough to perform
the spell without draining my energy.”

Kingsley stared at his wand.

“Go ahead and try it,” Fenrir replied. “Yell Verto!”

“Verto!” Kingsley yelled.

Nothing.

Fenrir cackled. “I told you.”

“Is this the spell you use on your followers? Is that how they can transform to and from their wolf forms?”

"I taught them how to transform on their own, a skill I refuse to teach you. If you try to discover it on your own...well even strong lycanthropes have perished from their inability to transform properly.”

Kingsley sank into his chair.

“Now tell me, where are your precious aurors now?”

"What the hell do you want?".

"Simple. I want free rein to do whatever I want."

"You know I can't do allow you to terrorize Britain."

"Of course not!" Fenrir replied as he recoiled. "I would never ask you to do make it appear as though I controlled everything. If you appeared too incompetent they'd appoint a new Minister and I would have to change someone else in order to have any control!"

Kingsley’s heart stopped.

“No, what I want is for you to continue to keep quiet about my recent activities, at least until you can no longer hide my existence."

"What do you mean ‘can no longer hide my existence?’"

"Do you really want to know?"

"No," Kingsley admitted.

“Good, I thought you could be reasoned with,” Fenrir replied. "Now, I need you to maintain the appearance of normalcy. All activities are to continue as scheduled, including Ministry functions and especially sporting events."

"You wouldn't dare crash the Quidditch World Cup!"

"Would you like to be able to plead ignorance if put under Veritaserum?"

Kingsley trembled.

"Now," Fenrir continued. "If I find out that things are getting canceled or if you are becoming too effective in rounding up my family members, well, I have no problem exposing all of your dirty little secrets."
"But you'll lose your leverage over the government."

"Who says I will? I'll just transform the next Minister… and if necessary, the one after him. Sure, it'll be inconvenient to hunt down and bite a new person every week when I can bite one person and control him, but if deposing you achieves my goals then so be it."

Kingsley gulped.

"While I'm in firm control, you will be ostracized by society, forced to live on its outskirts. You'll be lucky if anyone even considers you for a janitorial job, although I hear Hogwarts can be quite lenient in their hiring policies. I mean," he burst out laughing. "They hired Neville Longbottom!"

"You bastard," Kingsley growled.

"I take it this means we understand each other."

"You will be stopped. Even if I can't do anything to you at the moment I will make it my life's mission to take you down!"

"I'd like to see you try," Fenrir strolled halfway to the door before stopping, "Oh, one more thing: there will be no teenaged wonder who can save you."

"What makes you so sure of that?" Kingsley asked.

"Because Hogwarts is under my control as well," Fenrir answered.

Kingsley watched Fenrir continue towards the doorway. Just as Fenrir's hands touched the doorknob, he added, "I almost forgot, I will be back to give you further instructions when the time is right. Also, do not think about doing things behind my back. I have more loyal followers than you could possibly fathom."

Kingsley's body temperature rose.

Fenrir turned the doorknob before smacking his head. "I can't believe I almost forgot this as well; do send Severus Snape my congratulations when you next see him. Tell him that it's never too late to start planning his daughter's future. After all one wrong move could turn a promising young life into one filled with pain."

Fenrir flung open the door and strutted out.

Kingsley buried his face in his hands. How on earth can I clean up this mess?

The door slammed shut

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It means a lot to me.
"Hello little Rose. I'm Neville."

Rose stared at Neville wide-eyed, as if she didn’t quite know what to make of the man whose arms she currently found herself in.

"Do not worry Rose," Severus assured her. "Although his brewing skills leave much to be desired, he can be trusted to hold you without dropping you."

Rose squirmed. Neville chuckled. "It's true, your father was not impressed with me as a student, but I've changed quite a bit since my school days. Working with plants all day has a way of making one less clumsy. I promise to be as careful with you as I am with my prized mandrakes."

Rose blinked before settling into his embrace. Then she closed her eyes.

"She's so adorable Hermione," Neville gushed. "She has your hair color and the shape of your nose."

"Rose is quite lucky in that regard," Severus muttered.

Neville glanced at Severus. "I imagine Rose has your mind, even if she does not have your looks. I'll bet she'll be a brilliant potion master like you someday!"

"As long as she does not blow up a cauldron in my lab I will consider her a success" Severus teased.

That goofy grin returned to Neville's face. "Well, if she ever wants to learn how to blow up a cauldron, all she has to do is ask me."

"Oh Merlin," Hermione groaned.

The Gryffindors laughed while Severus looked at his daughter. If he wanted to preserve his lab, then Rose and Neville would never be left alone together unattended. God help him if his daughter destroyed his lab and people discovered that he had forgiven her without question. He'd be ruined forever.

His musings were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Hermione!"

“Ginny?”

“Yes,” the voice on the other end called. “Are you ready for visitors?”

Rose pried open one eye.

“I am,” Hermione called.

The door flung open. Ginevra, Draco, Narcissa, and Lucius rushed into the room.

"Hermione!" Ginny squealed as she rushed over to her friend. “I am so happy to see you alive!”
Hermione leaned across the bed and embraced the red head. She took a shaky breath. "Thank Merlin you weren't at the ball. I know you want to honor Harry’s memory, but I am so grateful you were wiser than I was and decided to skip it."

"Oh the ball wouldn't have been that much fun with my family there harassing me about my relationship with Harry. Then there’s the issue of my aching feet," Ginny winced as she pulled away from Hermione. "You never told me how uncomfortable high heels are after the third month."

"I tried, but you claimed I was only whining."

"I know better now."

Draco drew closer to Neville and inspected the bundle in his arms. The infant opened her other eye.

"Hello Rose," Draco whispered. "I’m Draco, Uncle Severus’ godson."

Rose made a fist and raised it in his direction.

"She's a quiet baby,” Neville noted.

Draco stuck out his finger. She grasped it.

Neville asked, “Do you want to hold her?”

Draco glanced over at Severus, who nodded. Draco removed his finger from her fist and outstretched his arms. Severus walked over to the men and watched as Neville transferred the infant to Draco. The blond looked at Severus, who made a few slight adjustments to his arms. After Draco was positioned correctly Severus whispered, “There you go.”

Draco turned his focus to the infant. “Hello Little Rose.”

The baby raised her hand in Severus' direction. His eyes glistened. "You are fine Little One. Draco is doing an excellent job of holding you."

She didn't lower her arm.

"Don't worry," Severus promised. "Daddy won't be far away, and Draco won't allow any harm to befall you."

Rose's eyes darted to Draco’s face. Then she lowered her arm.

After Rose settled into Draco's embrace, Severus snuck over to Lucius. "Are you and Narcissa well?"

Lucius’ lips curled up. "Of course we are. We didn't receive so much as a scratch."

Severus raised an eyebrow.

“Fenrir's soldiers are only Death Eaters, Severus. They could not throw any fighting tactic at me I hadn't already seen or performed myself,” Lucius paused. “To be honest I was more concerned for your and Hermione’s safety than I was for my own.”

“Indeed we were," Narcissa cut in. "When I saw Fenrir, Scabior, and Archelaus break away from the group, I'd only hoped you'd already escaped."

“We managed to evade capture,” Severus answered.
Narcissa exhaled. “Thank goodness.”

“Ooh,” Ginny squealed. "Draco you look so cute holding Rose!"

Lucius turned his attention to his son. Draco beamed as he rocked the now sleeping child.

"You're doing great, son,” Lucius replied.

"Thank you," he answered as Ginevra drew closer to him. "She is so beautiful! She's got Hermione’s hair and ooh," She rubbed Rose’s thumb. “Her fingers are adorable. They're so long, almost like Severus’.”

Rose pried open her eyes, only to have fatigue force them shut again. Severus whispered, “She is quite lovely.”

"I should be going," Neville began. “There are several exams which need grading, but I am so glad you two and Rose are okay!”

“We are glad you made it out okay as well,” Hermione answered.

“When does Kingsley want to meet with me?” Severus asked.

"As soon as you can find a safe place for Hermione and Rose.”

“They'll be safe in my mansion. The wards should be more than sufficient to protect them.”

“Good. You need to take care of them. They need you.” He paused. “And you need them.”

“I do,” Severus admitted.

Neville gave him that nauseating grin again before taking his leave.

“May I hold Rose?” Ginny asked.

Severus glanced at Hermione. She nodded.

“Here you go,” Draco whispered as he turned the babe over to his wife. “She doesn’t fuss much.”

Rose woke up. She whined as Ginny took her into her arms. The red head’s eyes lit up. “She is the cutest little thing.”

“We think so anyway,” Hermione replied.

“What middle name did you decide on?” Ginny asked.

"Severa," Hermione answered. "Her name is Rose Severa Snape.”

"That's beautiful," Narcissa answered.

"It is an adequate name anyway,” Severus agreed.

“It’s more than adequate, and you know it,” Lucius replied.

Hermione blushed as Severus rolled his eyes.

“Yes,” Ginny squeaked. “Rose Severa Snape is the perfect name for you.”
"Ginevra, Draco, we have something to request of you two," Severus began.

"Yes?" they asked in unison.

"Since Rose and Ginny have a connection," Hermione began, "We thought it would be best if you two were Rose's godparents."

"I'd love to be her godmother," Ginny choked before kissing the child’s forehead.

"I would be honored to," Draco began, "But won't it be weird for me to be Rose’s godfather considering that Uncle Severus is my godfather?"

"Perhaps a bit unconventional, yes, but entirely logical," Severus answered.

Draco raised an eyebrow.

"Rose will need protection," Severus continued. "If something were to happen to me, I could not think of putting her in more capable hands than yours."

Draco gulped. "Nothing is going to happen to you, Uncle Severus…"

"But if it does, Draco…"

"Then I will be there. I will be her godfather, but I hope that I will not have to become a father to her because you could no longer perform that function."

Severus’ eyes fell on his daughter. “I hope that as well.”

Narcissa crept closer to Rose. She rubbed Rose’s stomach with her thumb. "Hello little Rose, are you happy to finally see your family?"

Rose yawned and put her hands over her eyes, wondering why all these people were fussing over her.

***

"Ronald Weasley!"

Ron leapt up from the couch and opened the door. "Hello Rita."

"Is this a good time for an interview?" she asked.

"It’s always a good time to discuss the Chudley Cannons!" He exclaimed.

Rita frowned. "I uh, didn’t come here to discuss Quidditch."

Ron’s face fell. “You didn’t?”

“No, I came here to offer my condolences."

"Condolences?"

"Yes," Rita entered.

Ron pointed to the black leather sofa. Rita made her way over to it. "Hermione Snape had her baby last night."
Ron's heart stopped. “She did?”

Rita sat down. “Yes, she did.”

Sweat formed on his brow. "What…what does it look like?"

"Well, I haven't been able to get past security to get a glimpse of the baby myself," Rita leaned forward. "But according to a nurse I pulled aside, she claims the baby has brown hair and Hermione's nose."

The tension left Ron's body. Oh thank God. If it had red hair there'd be a scandal.

"I'm not surprised Severus and Hermione would not allow you to see the kid," Ron replied. "They do not appreciate your services as much as I do."

"You are too kind," Rita replied. “Would you like to say a few words about the birth of your ex’s child?"

"Certainly," Ron replied. “May I ask what its name is though?"

“Her name is Rose Severa Snape,” Rita replied.

Ron flashed his teeth. Perfect! Snape was going along with this farce! Things couldn't have gone any better if he’d planned them himself.

Rita pulled out her supplies and began scribbling a few words onto the paper. "How do you feel about Hermione giving birth to your ex-professor's baby?"

"Well," Ron bowed his head. "I wanted a family with Hermione, but all she wanted was Snape. She cheated on me, broke my heart, and decide to have a kid with the person who spent our school years torturing us."

"Are you saying Snape won't be a good father?"

"I don't know. That's Hermione's problem, not mine."

"I see."

"I am happy she has a baby with Snape, because it's obviously what she wanted. In the meantime, I will be nursing my broken heart and hoping someone who will treat me right walks into my life."

"Do you still believe in true love?"

"Of course I do, but I never found it with Hermione."

“You didn’t?”

“No,” Ron replied. “I mean if Hermione truly loved me she would have stayed with me and never thought about sleeping with the greasy git. I thought I'd found love, but I was wrong. I'm sure I'll find the real thing soon."

"Do you regret not being Rose's father?"

"No," Ron replied. "I don't want children right now. A child will only distract me from my career, so I'm happy that I'm not Rose’s father."
"Do you have anything to say to your traitorous ex and her husband?"

Ron beamed. "Have fun changing nappies."

Rita purred. "Perfect."

Chapter End Notes

So sorry I haven't updated in the last couple of days. I wasn't feeling well, and couldn't find the time to update until now. Thank you for your patience and as always, your support!
Chapter 107

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first thing Hermione heard was a soft baritone voice. Although the words were muddled the tone was soothing, almost hypnotic. It was a much different timbre than she remembered from her school days. Then again, she couldn't remember the last time she'd heard Severus bark at anyone. Rose truly did have an amazing impact on her parents.

As she drifted towards consciousness the words became clearer.

"You are a precious little princess, don’t you ever forget that."

There was a pause.

"I love you little Rose. I love you so very much. Do not ever forget that either."

Hermione groaned as her eyes fluttered open.

"Did you have a nice nap?" Severus asked.

"How long was I asleep?"

Severus gave Rose a soft smile. She squirmed until she grasped one of his buttons.

"After the Malfoys left, the Mediwitches decided to set Rose in the nursery and put her down for a nap. You were unconscious soon after."

"I was exhausted."

"You had every right to be."

"Roughly three hours," Severus replied.

"Crap," Hermione was not wide awake. "Did you get any sleep?"

Severus shook his head. "I rested for roughly an hour, but I was unable to stop thinking of Fenrir and his attack."

"I take it you saw Kingsley then?" Hermione replied.

"Not yet," Severus admitted. "I did not want to leave and have something happen to you or Rose in my absence."

Hermione grinned. "You really do care."

"I've never not cared," Severus replied before looking down at the baby in his arms. "I simply choose my timing to show how much I care."

He then kissed Rose on the forehead. Hermione whispered, "You really are sweet with Rose."

Severus gave her a playful scowl before muttering, "Tell your mother I am not a sweet man."
Rose yawned. 

"Perhaps I am somewhat kinder around Rose than I am around others," Severus returned his attention to Hermione, "But do not feel the need to tell your friends."

"I won't," Hermione teased. "I'll only tell Ginny, Draco, and maybe Neville. There are a few other acquaintances who will be pleased to know my husband is a soft creampuff as well."

"Witch, you're going to be the end of me!"

"Oh good, Mrs. Snape is awake."

The couple turned their attention to the approaching Mediwitch. "How was your nap?"

"It was very restful, although I did not mean to sleep for so long," Hermione replied.

"That's fine. You'll need your rest in the coming months," the Mediwitch began. "Besides, it gave us a great opportunity to show your husband how to change a nappy."

Hermione burst out laughing as Severus, Rose, and the Mediwitch stared on. "I'm sorry, but I cannot imagine my husband changing nappies with a group of people leering over his shoulder."

"I did quite well, did I not Rose?"

Rose popped her lips together.

"Baby appears to be hungry," the Mediwitch noted.

Severus sighed and handed her over to her mother, who began to position her to breastfeed.

"That's good," the Mediwitch hummed. "Very good."

Soon Rose began suckling. Hermione beamed. "She's getting good at latching on."

"She is," the Mediwitch replied. "Now, when she's done I will leave you with a few parting instructions, but I do believe that within the hour, you may be safely discharged."

Hermione’s eyes bulged. "You mean we're on our own?"

"Yep, within a few minutes you can start your new life as a family," the Mediwitch announced.

"Are you certain we’re ready to be discharged?" Hermione asked. "I mean, there may be a few key pieces of information we’re missing. Surely Rose would be happier if she had some professionals tending to her needs and not two people who have never had a baby before. What if she needs something and we'll have no clue how to provide it because we don't know what her different cries mean?"

"Don't worry, you'll do fine," the Mediwitch assured her. "If you have any questions, you may contact us. I can also give you a reading list..."

"I guarantee you Hermione has read everything on the list," Severus cut in.

Hermione smirked. "He's right. I must've read every book I could find on parenting at least three times."

"I suppose you're set then," the Mediwitch replied.
Hermione gulped.

“It’s normal for first time parents to be intimidated by the idea of bringing home a baby for the first time, but you don't have any reason to fear. You will be fine.”

"Thank you. I…I hope we'll be fine.”

“You are already a stellar mother,” Severus chimed in. “You are ready to take her home.”

“We’re ready to take her home,” Hermione corrected him.

Severus rubbed Rose’s back with his index finger. “Indeed we are.”

"Mrs. Weasley!"

Hermione jerked upwards. Rose whined before she resumed nursing. Severus scowled as he left the room, his hand gripping his wand. If Molly uttered one derogatory word about his wife he would make sure she lived to regret it.

Once he reached the end of the hallway, his grip on his wand loosened. Mrs. Weasley was rushing for the door with Charlie beside her. Both attempted to duck the onslaught of reporters and clicking cameras, but the barrage of questions only grew louder.

"Mrs. Weasley, why were your husband and your son Bill in the lycanthropy ward?"

"Were you only visiting your brother in the lycanthropy ward, Charlie?"

"Are you aware of the rumors surrounding a Death Eater attack on Harry's Memorial Ball? Is there any truth to them?"

"What is your opinion of the birth of the Snape heir?"

Molly and Charlie both turned around. Instead of outrage their eyes betrayed fear and uncertainty.

Above the clatter of the press Molly yelled, "As long as Hermione keeps Severus' spawn away from Ronald, we do not care about their child!"

Severus pointed his wand at Mrs. Weasley, but thought better of hexing her when he realized the reporters could just as easily swarm him. Instead, he placed his wand in his pocket and snuck back to the safety of the hospital room.

"What did Molly say about me?” Hermione asked as the Mediwitch snuck out.

“Nothing.”

“Then why was she being hounded by the press?”

“Arthur, Bill, and Charlie may have been changed by Fenrir,” Severus replied.

Hermione sighed. "I was wondering if they'd escaped."

"Apparently not,” Severus answered.

Hermione took another shaky breath. "I hope they can find a way to cope. Merlin knows how hard it must be on them. Ginny will be heartbroken when she finds out.”
Severus nodded. No matter how hard he tried, it was difficult to feel anything remotely resembling sympathy for any of the Weasleys, save Ginevra.

Hermione’s eyes watered. “I wonder what Harry would do if he were here.”

Severus’ voice and expression softened. “I don’t know.”

“I miss Harry,” Hermione choked. ”He would’ve loved Rose, and spoiled her rotten. Harry would’ve been an amazing ‘uncle’ to her.”

Tears began to trickle down Hermione’s face.

Severus exhaled. "I wish Potter had been able to meet Rose as well. They would’ve loved each other at first sight.”

"He would've loved watching you hold her.” Hermione’s lips curled up. “Deep down inside, he always did want you to be happy, and you are happy when you hold her. It…it would’ve brought him peace to know that you’d finally found some joy in your life. He would’ve been so thrilled if he knew you were happy because of a child.”

"I'm happy with you," Severus answered. "Not just with Rose."

"Thank you, Severus. I'm happy with you, too,” Hermione’s eyes glistened. “We’re a family. I don't know how we did it, but we're a family.”

"Thank you for my family," he whispered before capturing her lips.

***

Pop!

"Well here we are Rose. This is your new home,” Hermione announced.

Rose’s eyes darted around. Severus rubbed his finger against her arm. “Do not panic if you cannot make out your surroundings. Your eyesight will come with time.”

Pop!

Rose squeaked.

"Mistress Hermione! Is that the Snape heir?"

"It is," Hermione replied. "Say hello to Hans, Rose."

Hans beamed as Rose glanced at the odd creature. "She is a beautiful heir. Yes, she will look just like her mother when she grows up!”

“She is very fortunate in that regard,” Severus answered.

“Do you want me to take her to the cradle?” Hans asked.

"I can do that," Hermione replied. “At the moment I would like some time alone with her, but I will let you know if I need anything.”

“Yes Mistress,” Hans replied before popping away.
Rose wailed and screeched. Hermione rocked her and whispered, "It's fine, Rose. Everything is going to be fine."

"The noises will not hurt you, I promise," Severus added. "Nothing is going to hurt you while we are present."

After a few moments, Rose grew quieter. She hiccuped and glanced up at her parents as if the past few moments had never occurred. Hermione laughed as Severus kissed his daughter on the cheek. "Perhaps we are better at parenting than I gave us credit for."

"We made it through our first tantrum unscathed anyway," he noted. He brushed his lips against Hermione’s. "Do you and Rose need me to stay with you?"

"We'll manage," Hermione answered. "You need to see Kingsley before dark, though."

"I need to ensure that you will not become overwhelmed by my absence," Severus replied.

"We will manage just fine, but the Wizarding World needs you now," Hermione continued. "We’ll be here for you when you return."

"Very well then," Severus planted a kiss on Rose’s forehead. Then he kissed Hermione's lips once more. "Goodbye, my witches."

"Goodbye Severus," Hermione replied.

With a POP he vanished.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I deeply appreciate it!
"Severus Snape?" Farrah asked, wearing the most sugary sweet smile she could muster.

"Hello, Ms. Jackson." Severus tipped his head. "I believe Minister Shacklebolt is expecting me."

Farrah forced herself to maintain eye contact with him despite her impulse to shrink. There was an edge to Severus' voice, the one she remembered from her school days. His robes wafted in the slight breeze floating in from an open window nearby. Although his hair was greasier than normal, his eyes maintained that air of determination.

"He actually expects you to meet with him right after your wife had your daughter?" Farrah asked.

"Indeed he does." There was a flash of annoyance in his eyes.

"That's a bit inconsiderate."

"If he summoned me he has good reason to do so."

"I suppose so," Farrah answered. "It's such a relief that you escaped though. I mean, you must've been terrified for your wife and child."

"I certainly wouldn't want to repeat last night's experience," Severus admitted.

"Tell me about your little girl. What does she look like?"

"Thankfully she takes after Hermione."

"I'll bet she's a cutie."

"She is adorable in her own way," Severus replied, his eyes softening at the memory of holding a sleeping Rose in his arms.

"Babies really are adorable," Farrah mused. "They're so sweet, so trusting, yet so helpless. It's hard not to fall in love with them and want to do everything in your power to protect them."

His eyes hardened. "I did not come to discuss my offspring with you. Is Minister Shacklebolt in his office?"

"Yes, I'll tell him you're here," Farrah replied. She rapped on the Minister's office door. "Minister Shacklebolt! Severus Snape is here to see you!"

"Thank Merlin," the Minister muttered before clearing his throat. "Send him on in."

She turned to Severus "He will see you now."

"Thank you, Ms. Jackson." He glided past her and closed the door behind him.

Farrah smirked and she pulled out a pair of extendable ears. As much as she despised the idea of using inventions from the Light, she had to admit that George and his late brother Fred had created quite a useful contraption. She pressed her own ear against the door, waiting for the sound of
Severus’ footsteps to silence. Once they did and she heard muffled voices, she slid the device under the door, put the string in her ear, and waited for them to begin speaking.

"May I offer you a cup of tea?" Kingsley asked.

"No thank you," Severus answered.

"I truly am sorry to call you here today. If there was any other way around it I would’ve waited a few days for you to get settled in with your daughter,” Kingsley began.

“Hermione claims I will serve my family better strategizing how to defeat Fenrir with you than I would changing nappies," Severus smirked. "Apparently my nappie changing skills don't meet my wife's standards at the moment."

Kingsley chuckled. “How is your baby?”

“She is well.”

"Did you agree on a name?"

Severus did not smile, but there was a gleam in his eyes. "We named her Rose Severa Snape. The middle name was Hermione's idea, not mine."

Kingsley hummed. "That's a beautiful name."

“It fits her anyway.”

“I take it Neville visited.”

"Yes," Severus pulled out a vial from his pocket. "He told me to give you this."

Kingsley exhaled. “Thank you.”

“I can brew more soon, although I have plenty in stock at the moment.”

"You may not have much for long."

"I can only imagine how many were bitten. I already know the Weasleys have fallen prey to Fenrir.”

"Who told you?"

"No one. They were being chased by a horde of reporters, thus it was difficult not to hear them from the maternity ward. I initially thought they had come to harass Hermione, so I stepped out to confront them. That's when I heard the questions the reporters were asking and put the pieces together."

"Great, so the media is becoming suspicious," Kingsley groaned. "I will have to give them something else to discuss I suppose."

"The media is the least of your worries," Severus replied.

"I know, but they are the easiest to deal with."

"If you say so."

Silence fell between them.

“I know this is quite a bit to ask of a new father, but are you willing to brew me a few of the
other victims Wolfsbane in secret?” Kingsley asked.

“Yes,” Severus answered. “My only condition is that if I brew for the Weasleys, they are to keep their distance from my wife and our child. The last thing Hermione needs is for them to continually harass her and question her every parenting choice.”

"That can be arranged," Kingsley answered.

“Good.”

"I know you can be trusted to keep our secrets, so I have no doubt you will tell no one of our condition."

"You have my word," Severus vowed.

"I’m glad to hear it.” Kingsley bit his lip. “There is another favor the Ministry asks of you."

“What would that be?"

Kingsley swallowed. "I need you to create a cure for lycanthropy."

Severus shook his head. "That will not be easy."

"I know, but it may be our only true defense against Fenrir. He is blackmailing me for control of the Ministry, and allegedly he has Minerva under his control as well."

"She was bitten?"

"Yes."

"I see."

Silence fell between the men again.

"Creating an antidote will consume a considerable amount of my time,” Severus began. “While I desire nothing more than to help the Wizarding World, I refuse to ignore Rose’s need for my affection, and Hermione's need for my support. I have sacrificed enough for Britain; I will not sacrifice my family as well."

"While the task is daunting, you may not need to sacrifice as much as you believe.”

"How do you propose that I tend to my wife and daughter while creating a potion which until now has proven impossible to create?"

"You can ask Hermione to help you."

Severus blinked.

"Hermione would make a fine addition to any potions team. Even you must acknowledge her brilliance."

"I have no doubt that she will be a great help to me," Severus replied. "Nor do I doubt how valuable her research skills are. Still, she has just delivered a child and sleep deprivation will soon become an issue. I do not want to burden her with a research project."

"I suppose you have a point,” Kingsley answered. “But Hermione is fiercely loyal to her friends. If
she catches wind of what I'm asking you to do, she'll move heaven and earth to help you."

"You know her too well," Severus stifled a grin.

“If she helped you then it would shoulder some of the burden. You could both work on the project while tending to Rose. It would be a family affair so to speak,” Kingsley offered.

“It would address my main concerns,” Severus mused aloud.

Kingsley scratched his desk.

“Very well, then,” Severus announced. “Researching your antidote and cure will become our new priority. If it becomes too taxing though I reserve the right to recuse myself from the project.”

“That is more than fair.”

“I am glad we could reach an understanding.”

"Good, and thank you for the Wolfsbane."

"I only wish I could do more."

"Just the knowledge you will be working on a cure is enough to give me comfort. Thank you."

"You are welcome."

Farrah heard the men shuffling about the room. She retrieved the extendable ear and jammed it into her pocket.

"Give my regards to Hermione and Rose," Kingsley called as Severus opened the door and stepped outside.

"I will," Severus replied before turning to Farrah. "Farewell, Ms. Jackson."

"Goodbye," Farrah answered, wondering how Fenrir would react to this tidbit of news.

***

"Wilford, it happened!" Muriel announced.

“What happened?” He asked.

"We're grandparents!"

“We are?”

“Yes! Hermione had her baby!”

“Well, I'll be darned!”

The pair embraced.

“Well tell me more. What exactly did Hermione say?” Wilford asked.

“Her letter was somewhat short, but our granddaughter’s name is Rose Severa Snape. Both mother and child are perfectly healthy,” Muriel answered.
"That's wonderful news!"

"Hermione even sent us a picture!"

Muriel pulled out a picture from the envelope and positioned it so both she and her husband could see. In the photo Severus was standing over Hermione, who was laying down on her hospital bed. Severus glanced down at Rose and whispered something in her ear. Hermione beamed as she held her baby close.

Tears trickled down Muriel's cheeks. "That's so beautiful."

"It is," Wilford choked.

"Rose looks just like Hermione did when she was born," Muriel whispered.

Wilford nodded. "Thank God Rose doesn't have Severus' nose."

"Wilford," she hissed.

"Well, I’m sure Severus and Hermione would agree that his nose would be a little big for any baby’s face."

Muriel shook her head.

"Regardless of her nose," Wilford’s throat constricted. “I cannot wait to meet our granddaughter.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is greatly appreciated!
Severus peeked into the nursery. Within a few seconds his eyes adjusted to the dim lighting. A smile crept across his face as the figures across the room grew clearer. In a padded chair, Hermione held a small bundle in her arms. She rocked and hummed a familiar tune.

Severus asked, "Somewhere over the Rainbow?"

Hermione looked in his direction and nodded.

"It’s been years since I’ve heard that particular song."

"It was one of the few songs I enjoyed as a child which I thought would make an appropriate lullaby. Hopefully Rose will develop an appreciation for it."

He crept inside the room and sat on a wooden stool beside her. "I’m sure she will."

Rose pried open her eyes and glanced at him. Then they drooped down once more. "Rose appeared tired. I’m hoping that if I put her in the crib she’ll be out for the next few hours."

"I cannot blame her for being exhausted. She’s had an exciting day," Severus replied, "Although she must be wondering what is going on. After all, this is her first night, and it isn’t as bright here as it was in the hospital. She must be confused as to why everything has gone dark."

"I’d never considered that she might be confused," Hermione replied. "Everything is so different from her than it was a few hours ago. Then again," She exhaled. "Our lives were very different a day ago."

Severus kissed the child on her forehead. Rose stirred but her eyes remained closed. "I’m sure within a week she will become accustomed to the cycle of days and nights, just as we will adjust to parenthood."

"Maybe if we’re lucky she will adjust to this cycle quickly and allow us a few hours of sleep," Hermione answered.

Severus chuckled. "One can only hope."

Rose yawned and whined. She blinked and gave her parents one last look. Then her eyes shut. Severus and Hermione watched her breathing slow.

Satisfied that their daughter was asleep, Hermione whispered. "What did Kingsley have to say?"

Severus took a deep breath. "He wants me to cure lycanthropy."

"Excuse me?"

"Apparently he believes I’m the only one who is skilled enough to cure lycanthropy."

"I don’t doubt that," Hermione ceased rocking. "But it will be difficult to research with this little one demanding our attention at all hours of the day."
"I am aware of that, as is Kingsley. Still, he remains confident in my abilities."

"I am too, but sleep deprivation will become an issue. If you need to sleep in another room…"

"That isn’t an option," Severus interrupted. "As Rose’s father it is my responsibility to care for her, a task that will prove difficult if I’m asleep in a room across the mansion."

Hermione beamed. "Indeed it would."

"Besides, we agreed to raise Rose together. I will not renege on my promise, nor will I neglect my wife whom I've develop a strange attachment towards," Severus promised.

Hermione's eyes glistened. "Thank you. That, that means everything to me."

"I am only being honest," He cleared his throat. "All that being said, Kingsley has suggested a solution to our dilemma which could work out quite nicely for both of us."

"What would that be?"

"He suggested that I hire an assistant," Severus replied.

Hermione bit her lower lip. "You’ve never had an assistant before."

"No, I have not."

"If I may be blunt I cannot envision you working with anyone."

"I would along quite well with someone who has earned my respect and who I felt could offer anything of value to my research. In fact, I have such a person in mind."

"Who?"

"You."

Hermione’s eyes widened. "Me?"

"Yes," he replied.

"W..what makes you think I’m up to the task of curing lycanthropy?"

"You have already provided brilliant ideas for my anti-venom potion, and you are quite skilled at brewing…"

"No, I couldn’t brew, not on this level," Hermione cut him off. "I didn't even finish my studies in the University."

"A university degree is not always a reflection of one’s skills and abilities."

"It isn’t just the fact that I don’t have a university degree, but also why I don’t have one. I dropped out of the university for the stupidest reason imaginable. I...I lacked the foresight to make the most sensible decision," Hermione bowed her head.

"Why would you think that?" Severus asked.

Hermione’s voice was barely audible. "I dropped out of the university because it was causing too many fights between me and Ron. I thought maybe the secretary job would ease the tension, and
allow me to be in a position to aid in the creation of new bills. Looking back, it was a stupid idea. I was miserable at the Ministry, and I was miserable with Ron.”

“You acted out of love. Everyone is prone to doing ridiculous things in the name of love.”

“Maybe,” Hermione muttered.

Severus kissed her on the cheek. "Someday you will finish your studies at the University."

"It won't be for a while,” Hermione sighed. “I want to spend a few years at home with Rose."

“Perhaps you won’t have to leave the house to complete your education.”

“How would you suggest I do that?”

"If you helped me on this project, I could give you lessons in potions. Granted, the entire endeavor will be a series of potions experiments, but for some that is the best way to learn. If you feel there are any other gaps in your education I am more than happy to teach you advanced charms and defense against the dark arts. I fear I cannot aid you in divination, but I doubt you have much interest in the topic.”

“You know me too well.”

“Then we can forget about divination, but I am more than qualified enough to teach you advanced charms and some defensive spells of which even Dumbledore wasn't aware.”

"I'll consider your tutorage, if I'm awake enough to learn," There was a gleam in Hermione’s eyes. "It all sounds very tempting."

"You can take a few days to consider it," Severus replied before staring down at his daughter. "In all honesty, I wish Kingsley had chosen Slughorn or someone else to work on a cure. I would love nothing more than to spend more time with Rose. I am terrified that if I become too involved with this project then I will be some stranger who works in her basement and sleeps in her mother's bed."

"Trust me; you are not a stranger to Rose. She knows and loves you already."

"I just want to be a good father for her,” Severus’ throat tightened. “I’m afraid she won't know me if I'm locked away in the basement brewing all day." 

"Perhaps when she's old enough we can build her a playpen and set it in a safe corner while we brew,” Hermione suggested. “She’ll learn to appreciate potions not only as a science and an art, but as a way for our family to bond.”

“That is an excellent idea,” Severus replied. "Does this also mean you will be my assistant?"

"Yes," Hermione answered. "I'd love to be your assistant."

"Good," Severus replied.

Hermione stood up. "I need to put this one in the crib and get some sleep. Are you coming to bed with me?"

"Yes," Severus answered as he stood up and followed her to the crib. “It would be prudent to get some sleep while I can.”

“Very true,” Hermione replied as she set Rose into the crib. then she wrapped the blankets around
"Goodnight Rose. Sleep tight."

"Good night," Severus whispered into the crib. "I love you."

***

"He did what?" Fenrir barked.

"Kingsley hired Severus Snape to cure lycanthropy," Farrah repeated.

Fenrir snarled while Archelaus threw another log onto the fire. "I suppose I should have expected Kingsley to do something of the like. Still I thought he’d wait a few days to consider all his options before contacting Snape."

"Perhaps he thinks he can defeat you before the Quidditch World Cup," Farrah replied.

Fenrir smirked. "He truly is delusional if that's the case."

Archelaus nodded.

"Has Severus Snape agreed to brew the potion?" Fenrir asked.

"Yes," Farrah replied. "Kingsley also suggested that Hermione help as well."

Fenrir furrowed his eyebrows and clenched his fists. "I knew I should have bitten them when I had the chance. If I’d been more focused they’d be among the Death Eaters tending to their pup, not actively fighting against us."

"Why didn't you bite them?" Farrah asked.

"Longbottom hexed me and I was too proud to ignore the assault," Fenrir admitted. "It will not happen again."

"If we knew where Severus' house was, we could change him and his family tonight," Scabior suggested.

"That will only give him one more reason to plot our destruction," Fenrir replied. "We cannot just go in and bite Severus and his little family, for if we do Severus will only destroy us from the inside. No, when I bite Severus Snape, I want to be sure his loyalties lie with me and only me."

"How?" Archelaus asked.

The silence of the night was pierced by the crackling of the blazing fire. Fenrir scratched his chin. "My first choice would be for him to join our cause willingly and then accept the mark."

"How would you convince him to do that?" Scabior asked.

Fenrir's lips twisted upwards. "Through Hermione, of course. If she were changed first he would want to share in her fate, if only for the sake of their daughter."

"So in order to get to Snape we need to get to Hermione and the baby," Scabior replied.

"Yes, although if Hermione were to somehow break his heart we could appeal to his desire for vengeance."

"Do you think she would betray him?"
"Not knowingly, but Gryffindors often lack perspective, leaving them vulnerable to impulsive decisions."

“So all we need to do is convince him that Hermione will break his heart and he’ll change her in order to keep her by his side,” Farrah replied.

“Yes.”

“How would we go about accomplishing that?”

“Right now I am not entirely sure,” Fenrir answered. “But destroying the Snapes is a plot for another day. In the meantime we need to focus our attention on the Quidditch World Cup.”

"But if the Snapes are working on a potion…” Farrah began.

"It will not be ready for months, at best,” Fenrir replied. “Even Severus Snape cannot perform the impossible in a matter of weeks.”

“True,” Scabior drawled.

“Right now the Quidditch World Cup must be our main focus. It will be our chance to demonstrate our strength before the entire world. We have only one chance to get this right. Our plan must be perfectly coordinated.”

“Agreed,” the other responded.

“Now,” Fenrir began. “I already have a few formations and ideas for entry in mind…”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! As always it is deeply appreciated!
Severus had lost count the number of times he'd stayed awake all night for one of Voldemort's Death Eater meetings. He did not want to dwell on the numerous times he'd entered a classroom operating on nothing but a Pepper Up potion. Then there were all the times he'd brew well into the night in order to meet the demands for various potions. Compared to Voldemort and the war effort, a baby crying two or three times a night would not be a burden.

Then Rose woke up the fourth time.

The wailing tugged at every string in his cold heart, impossible to ignore. With as loud as she screeched one would think she'd quickly fulfill her need and resume her slumber. This was not the case. Once picked up she would take forever to suckle and burp.

Perhaps the most distressing cry occurred at roughly four in the morning. Rose screamed and flailed in her crib. After five agonizing minutes of attempting to determine what was troubling the child, Hermione placed her in Severus' arms. Only then did Rose settle herself. Another half hour passed before she fell asleep. The silence only lasted for two hours, making the next wakeup call even more difficult to heed. It would've been enough to drive Severus to insanity had he not felt such a deep affection for the girl.

Severus opened one of his dark eyes as he battled the grogginess and fatigue threatening to overtake his body. Hermione looked down with half open eyes and muttered, "Morning Severus."

Severus focused on the tiny bundle attached to her breast. "I take it she woke up again?"

"Yes, about ten minutes ago."

Severus propped himself up.

Hermione rubbed Rose's back. "I didn't have the heart to wake you up, so I took care of her myself."

Severus yawned. "It appears Rose here is a bit of a night person."

Hermione gave him a lopsided grin. "She takes after her father brewing potions until one in the morning."

"At least I do not scream while I brew."

"True, but she's heard me scold you more than a few times for staying downstairs so obnoxiously late."

Rose then turned an eye to Severus. His expression softened. "Good morning Rose. I trust you slept as well as your parents did."

Severus chuckled as she continued to look at him with an innocent expression, almost as though she did not understand how rude it was to awaken her parents at all hours of the night. "Someday, you will need to learn to sleep through the night."

Rose blinked.
“If sleep does not sound appealing, you should learn to spend your time more productively than crying. Might I suggest brewing?” Severus continued.

Hermione laughed. Rose whined upon losing her grip. Hermione repositioned her. "Severus, the poor dear cannot even hold her head up yet. How do you expect her to brew?"

“Rose is an intelligent young witch. She will find a way.”

“What if she does not want to brew potions?”

"Then she can engage in perfecting her charms."

"What if she does not want to do that either?"

"She may take up some other quiet activity, such as crossword puzzles. As long as I can sleep and she does not injure herself, I will approve of her new activity."

"Same here," Hermione laughed.

Rose stopped feeding and looked at both of her parents as though they were mad. They laughed harder.

"We love you, Rose," Hermione gasped.

"We simply do not love waking up at night," Severus concluded.

"Speak for yourself. I've been waking up at night for months now," Hermione replied. “Granted, a bathroom trip is different from feeding a baby, but,” She kissed the baby’s cheek. “You’re worth it, Rose.”

"Yes, Rose is more than worth a few sleepless nights," Severus agreed as Hermione positioned the baby to burp.

"Speaking of people who believe Rose is worth a few sleepless nights, my parents wrote me. They want to see her soon."

"I take it a trip to Australia is in our near future?"

“If it is at all possible I would like to spend a few days with my parents so they can be properly introduced to Rose.”

“I am not opposed to staying in Australia for a few days,” Severus replied. “I could bring a few potions journals and begin my research. Since childcare would be provided I would not feel guilty for getting lost in my research, or at least not as guilty as I would under normal circumstances.”

“It will be nice to have some help from people who know what they’re doing,” Hermione sighed. He kissed her cheek. “You are doing a fine job as a mother so far.”

“Thank you,” Hermione replied.

Rose burped.

“My parents said from the picture they’ve already fallen in love with Rose, and cannot wait to meet their first granddaughter."
Severus’ stomach sank. *First?*

"Obviously we will not go today," Hermione continued as Rose burped.

Severus’ heart was racing. Sweat formed on his brows. *First granddaughter?*

"But maybe once we get settled into some kind of routine we can visit them," Hermione continued.

“Perhaps,” Severus mumbled, the words *first granddaughter* still echoing in his mind.

“Or they could visit us here,” Hermione pat Rose’s back. “Then again, I do not want them anywhere near Fenrir and his cronies. It may be best to pack up our belongings and meet them in Australia.”

“That may be for the best,” Severus took a deep breath. His heart slowed. "Perhaps once we are used to the sleep deprivation we can apparate to Australia."

Hermione smirked. "Mum told me you never get used to the sleep deprivation; you simply learn to deal with being tired all the time. She also told me to sleep when Rose does, although I don't know how I can do that and accomplish anything else…"

"I suppose we'll figure it out as we go along," Severus replied.

"We will." She swallowed. "I know you can't learn everything about a baby from a book..."

Rose burped again.

Hermione shook her head. “But I hope we don't make any major mistakes."

"If we do, Rose will learn to forgive us," Severus replied before kissing his daughter on the cheek.

***

"Charlie's a lycanthrope?" Ginny gasped.

“A lycanthrope?” Ron echoed as his sister collapsed onto the Burrow’s orange couch.

"Did you not just hear what I said?" Molly snapped. "You father, Bill, and Charlie are lycanthropes."

"How?" Ron asked.

Ginevra set her hand over her swollen stomach, trying to comfort herself by rubbing it with soft circular strokes.

Tears came to Molly’s eyes. "Fenrir and the Death Eaters attacked Harry's Memorial Ball. They ambushed us. I… I tried to save them, but I was too late."

"Why didn't I read about this?" Ron asked.

"Kingsley does not want it in the news," Molly answered, "Nor does your father for that matter."

“Of course Kingsley would cover this up,” Ginevra mumbled.

“Oh Merlin, Bill and Charlie are going to lose their jobs!” Molly shouted.

Ginevra swallowed. "Where would that leave Victiore and Fleur?"
"I don't know," Molly sniffed. "They'll be disgraced."

"They could always use some of my Quidditch money to support themselves. I have plenty," Ron replied.

"Because you're oh so gracious with your cash when it comes to your other family members," Ginevra sniped.

"I am generous!"

"Tell that to the Snapes!"

"Really? You want to go on about them again?"

"Now seems to be as good a time as any to discuss what you put Hermione and Rose through."

"She married the greasy git! What more do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stop acting like the victim and own up to what you’ve done."

"I did own up to what I’ve done. I never slept with Hermione…"

"That’s a load of bollocks and you know it!"

"You just can't accept the truth about Hermione! She's a tart who was too stupid to use protection. She got caught, so accept that."

"Oh shut it, you two! Bill and Charlie don't want a handout," Molly snapped. "They want a cure for lycanthropy!.

"But there is none," Ginny commented.
"Would you suggest someone else as her godparents?"

"As a matter of fact I have much better candidates for Rose's godfather in mind than Draco bloody Malfoy."

"Who cares who you think Rose's godparents should be?" Molly snapped. "The point is that you and I do not like the husband Ginny chose, and Ginny does not like how you and Hermione broke up. None of that matters. We need to come together and be a family. We need to support Arthur, Bill, and Charlie, and stop these petty squabbles. If you two are willing to stop fighting, I will set aside all of my issues with both of you in order to unify this family."

Silence fell between the siblings.

Two intense minutes passed. Ginny cleared her throat. "I can put my differences aside."

"I can do likewise," Ron replied.

"Good. Now, I'm going to begin making breakfast. Your father would like to see you both."

"Yes Mum," they both answered.

Together they stood up and followed her into the kitchen, neither entirely sure how best to handle their new reality.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It really keeps me going!
Severus rolled over and pressed his eyes shut. No matter how fatigued his body was or how desperately his mind screamed for rest, sleep eluded him. Every time he closed his eyes, his mind raced, calculating the amount of work ahead of him. He needed to begin research on the lycanthropy cure, start brewing another batch of Wolfsbane, and stock his apothecary shelves. Yet how could he focus on brewing even the simplest potion when his mind was becoming foggier with each fresh awakening? The night Rose slept for even six hours straight could not come soon enough for either Severus or his wife, and they were only going on day four…

A cry emanated from Rose's room. Severus groaned and turned towards his wife. Her head was buried in her pillow, her eyes squeezed shut. He sighed and crawled out of bed, cursing his insomnia and Rose for denying him a much-needed afternoon nap.

When he entered the room, he picked up the screaming baby. "You left a nice stinky one for Daddy, didn't you?"

Rose's reddening face and her putrid scent confirmed his suspicions. He shook his head as he set her on the changing table. Then he began to undo her nappy. Once the offending garment was removed, Rose grew quieter.

"It's your mother's turn," Severus grumbled above Rose's whimpers, "But she is currently slumbering peacefully, whereas I was half awake going over a list of potions I need to either brew or research."

Rose looked at him with sheer fascination as he continued the process of changing her. "The task of researching a lycanthropy cure would not be so difficult if I had any clue as to where to start. I suppose Wolfsbane would be the most logical place to begin, but it cannot prevent a transformation, only help one maintain his faculties during a transformation. Perhaps I should examine potions which turn one into an animal and see if it's possible to reverse the process. That's as good a place to start as any."

Severus looked at Rose. "Do you have any suggestions?"

Rose remained silent while Severus adjusted her nappy. "I did not think so. Perhaps when you're older you can help me with another project." Then he chuckled. "I cannot believe I've spent this much time discussing potions with an infant. Perhaps even more shocking is the fact that you have understood more of my musings than most of my seventh year students ever did."

Rose smiled. Although Severus' lips curled up, he got a whiff of her. He suppressed a gag. "You reek. What am I going to do with such a smelly baby?"

Rose did not seem to have an answer. Severus picked her up as her smile faded. He walked towards her crib, never removing his eyes from the infant. Before he could set her down, he thought aloud, "Since we are both awake, I suppose I should introduce you to the finer points of magical living, starting with the Daily Prophet. Would you like that?"

The baby simply stared at him in wonder. "I'll take that as a yes."

Severus carried Rose into the sitting room, where a stack of unread papers were piled beside the couch. He picked up the one on the top. "Normally your mother and I read these in bed or at the
kitchen table, but since you've been waking us up at all hours of the night we've been asking the elves to set them in here. Perhaps we will have the mental stamina to read them at some point in the future, but we will need to get a good night's rest first."

Severus positioned Rose against his legs so that her neck and back were supported. Then he opened the paper.

"This is the paper from the day after you were born," he began in his best professor voice. "We read the paper on the day you were born while we were in the hospital. There was nothing of interest in it, except for a short article on Harry Potter's Memorial Ball, and how Kingsley refused to release statements concerning it. At the moment he does not want the Wizarding World to know of the latest Death Eater attack. While I understand his reasoning I think the decision will lead to disaster. The last time the Death Eaters attacked and people were unaware of their existence almost ended with Voldemort gaining complete control of Britain. Then again, Kingsley may be wise in avoiding a panic. I am not a politician, so perhaps Kingsley is right to remain silent on the resurrection of the Death Eaters and Snatchers."

Severus opened the paper, revealing its contents. Rose's eyes widened as she noticed the red headed man on the front page. The man was sitting on the couch discussing something in the direction of the camera. While he spoke, his head would move to one side or the other and his hands would wave in all directions. Although he frowned, his eyes were glistening as if he was quite pleased. Rose did not notice the disconnect. All she saw was that he, like her parents, could move.

"That's Ronald Weasley," Severus began, the tension evident in his voice. "He did only one thing well in his life, and that was to help create you."

Rose turned her attention to Severus, clinging to his every word. He swallowed. "I suppose you won't remember much of this discussion in a few years, or even in a few hours. Still, I feel as if you deserve to know certain truths about our connection."

Rose blinked.

“I am not the man who created you,” Severus confessed. “Ron Weasley donated the genetic material required to create you. I am only the man who agreed to raise you. Your mother begged me to help her when she was carrying you, and I agreed.”

The baby puckered her lips.

"Do not consider me altruistic, Rose. I needed an heir and a wife in order to inherit the house we currently live in and the fortune we currently possess. I wanted an apothecary and your mother wanted to save you from disgrace. When you're older you may find our arrangement appalling, but there was another reason I married your mother, one I may not express very eloquently over the years."

Rose remained focused on his voice.

“Little Rose,” he choked, "I was not wanted as a child. I was viewed as a mistake by both my mother and my father. They never said it in so many words, but one always knows. For that reason, among many others, I did not have the best childhood. There are very few moments from my youth that I cherish, especially when I consider how my friends from my youth turned against me… but then you needn't be concerned with those stories."

Rose reached up. He lowered his hand until she could grasp his index finger. She grabbed it and lowered it until Severus was touching her chest.
“When your mother told me about you, and how Ron had abandoned you,” Severus continued. “I did not know what to do. As I meditated on the situation all I could think of was you growing up in the same poverty I had to endure, and facing the stigma not only of being a bastard, but also of being unwanted. You would grow up hearing your father openly reject you as he announced to everyone who would listen how little he loved you. You would grow up believing you were a mistake. I do not have much of a heart, Rose, but I have enough of one to know that you should not have had to endure the kind of life I did, especially because you are not a mistake by any means. That is why I married your mother. I wanted you to know exactly how precious and wanted you truly are.”

Severus gazed at Rose. A tear came to his eye. "I love you, little girl. Even if you cry all night I have never felt affection for another little being the way I do for you. As far as I'm concerned, you are my daughter."

He set down the newspaper and held Rose closer to him. She squeezed his finger. "In light of my affection for you, however, you must understand that I have a reputation as a man who is nearly incapable of any positive emotion. I request that you not tell anyone about my newfound ability to love children and screaming babies. People may believe I am capable of kindness. I do not want such a misconception to circulate. I am very selective of whom I bestow my affection. Aside from you, only your mother and the Malfoys suspect I have a tender heart."

Rose puckered her face, and released his finger. “Do we have an understanding? Do you promise not to proclaim too loudly that I do in fact have a soul?”

Rose squirmed, but her expression was indecipherable. Severus exhaled. "I've had enough of pouring out my heart to you. What do you suggest we do about Ronald Weasley's article? He is not very kind to your mother, and does little other than annoy me."

Rose yawned, before staring back up at her father.

"I suppose the kind thing to do would be to throw the paper away." Severus then shifted Rose around until he could support her and turn the page. He scowled as he read a section of the article. "He wants me to have fun changing nappies."

Severus smirked as he glanced down at Rose. "Do me a favor. If you ever see Ronald, give him a nice dirty nappy to change."

Then, Severus pulled out his wand and muttered a spell. The paper burst into flames and disappeared. Rose’s eyes bulged.

"Trust me," Severus replied. "I will teach you that spell and much more before you ever set foot inside a Wizarding school."

“Severus!”

He looked in the direction of the doorway.

“You remember the rules on magic,” Hermione scolded as she entered the room, her eyes half open.

"How long have you been observing us?” Severus asked.

She yawned and ran her hand against her silk lingerie. "I only just woke up. I thought I heard Rose cry, but I felt you leave the bed so I figured you were taking care of her. When I finally awoke I saw Rose and you were gone, so I decided to see what you were up to."

"I apologize for awakening you," Severus replied as she sat down beside him.
"No, you two are fine," she gave him a small grin. "Rose needs some time with her father, even if that time consists of destroying newspapers."

Severus purred. “My dear, I simply want Rose to be prepared once she enters Hogwarts. Since she's too young to speak out an incantation or set foot in my lab, I decided showing her some charms would be a good start."

Hermione shook her head. "Your dad is weird, Rose."

Rose yawned and closed her eyes, comforted by the sounds of her parents' banter and love.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is greatly appreciated!
"I, for one, am very excited about the Quidditch World Cup! The security will be excellent, and the matches will be exciting. Of course, I still believe Britain will win!" Ron boasted. "Then again I am a little biased."

Two others joined in his laughter. A woman gasped, "We'll just have to see how you and Britain's team fare."

"In the meantime," another man began, "Live coverage of the tournament begins tomorrow at six...."

"Turn it off Severus," Hermione muttered. "I've heard enough."

Severus flicked his wand, silencing the radio. His frown deepened. "It's difficult to find good programming these days."

Hermione pressed her head against his chest. "Thank Merlin we're leaving for Australia tomorrow. I don't have the slightest interest in hearing or reading about Quidditch for the next two weeks."

"A few days away from dunderheads will be nice," Severus commented as a smile graced his face.

"Indeed," Hermione laced her fingers between his. "It will be nice to ignore the reporters and the lycanthropes, if only for a few short days."

Severus smile faded. "Are you sure you are fine with my returning to England while you stay with your parents?"

Hermione sighed and gazed into his eyes. "It's rather selfish, but I'd rather you not go."

"I can find a way to remain in Australia with you and Rose."

"That isn't feasible and we both know it. If you're ever going to begin researching this lycanthropy cure you'll need a few full nights of sleep and access to your lab, neither of which you will get in Australia."

Severus shook his head. "You are correct."

She squeezed his hand. "At least we get a few days in Australia with you. That will be pleasant."

"I will miss you and Rose," Severus replied.

Hermione gave him a small grin. "Really?"

Severus ran his thumb along her thigh. "Heaven help me witch, but you've ruined me. I have grown accustomed to conversation and the sounds of an infant."

Hermione leaned into him, her eyes flickering in mischief. "I think you like me."

"We have already established that we are friends. Friendship does imply that both parties like each other on some level."
"I know, but I never considered you’d actually miss me if I was away."

"I’m just accustomed to your presence. Do not read anymore into it."

“But you just said you liked me.”

He gave her an exaggerated sigh, though his eyes remained soft. “Fine, I do feel some affection towards you. Given my sentiments it seems only natural to miss you.”

Hermione kissed his jaw. “Rose and I will miss you too.”

Before Severus could respond, Rose began crying in the next room. Hermione untangled herself from her spouse. "I think Rose wants her dinner."

"Right on schedule," Severus mumbled as Hermione rushed out of the room.

He repositioned himself and glanced at the old Grandfather clock across the room. His eyes widened when he realized how late the evening had become. Before he could rue the loss of time, a small scratch sounded at the window.

“Severus?”

“T’ll handle it,” he called as he stood from the sofa to admit the owl into the parlor.

Severus untied the letter from the bird’s foot and read its message. His shoulders relaxed, although that relief was soon interrupted by an impatient hoot. Severus glared at the feathery creature, then stalked to the kitchen to retrieve a treat, cursing the owl under his breath with each step. As he passed by his office, he stepped inside and grabbed a piece of parchment, an ink well, and a quill. He scribbled a note, spelled it dry, and rolled it up.

When he returned to the sitting room, he found the owl glowering at him, as though the ten minute wait was of extraordinary inconvenience. Severus returned the expression as he bound the note to the owl’s leg. Then he fed the bird. Once it had finished chewing Severus ordered. "Take the note to Kingsley."

Severus opened the window, allowing the cool autumn breeze to waft into the room. The owl hooted, then soared off above the frost-burnt grass and the half-leafless trees. Severus shut the window against the draft, then headed toward Rose’s room.

"Severus!"

He paused and bit his tongue.

“Severus! Hermione!”

Severus strode towards the fireplace. “What, Ginevra?"

From the outline of her face in the ashes, he could see a smile and a sparkle in her eyes he had not seen since the day she married Draco. His expression softened.

"I have to tell Hermione something."

“What would that be?”

“It’s a surprise.”
“Does it concern the baby?”

"Yes!" she squealed.

“Is there any chance it could wait?” Severus asked. “Hermione and I leave for Australia tomorrow, and she needs to be well-rested before the trip.”

"I know you two are leaving for Australia tomorrow, but this is so important and exciting that I can’t wait until you return to tell her this!”

"Do you know your baby’s gender?"

"No. Draco and I decided not to find out until the birth. We want to be as surprised as everyone else,” she replied. “Still, I have to see Hermione. Oh, and I suppose you can know what my exciting news is as well.”

Severus shook his head. "Fine, Ginevra, you may enter. Sartu."

Ginevra darted out of the fireplace and into the room. She ran her hands along her robes, though very little dust was removed. "Where's Hermione?"

"She's in Rose's room," Severus replied. "Rose is eating dinner as we speak."

"Oh," Ginevra’s face fell. “I never considered Rose’s schedule. Is this a bad time?"

"If I thought it was, I would not have allowed you entry."

"Good. I don't want to bother her. I got so excited I forgot to consider what she may be up to."

"Do not worry," Severus began as he led her towards Rose's bedroom, "You will obviously explode if you do not tell her what you came here to say, so you may as well make your announcement now."

"True," Ginevra replied as the smile and the sparkle returned to her face.

Together they entered Rose's room. Hermione was sitting in a rocking chair, nursing a tiny figure in a bundle of blankets.

"Hermione," Severus began in a quiet, almost reverent voice.

Hermione glanced up at them. “Ginny?”

The red headed nodded.

“What brings you here?”

“First of all, I needed to see my goddaughter,” Ginny cooed.

Rose’s eyes darted in her godmother’s direction.

"Hello little Rosie," Ginevra began as she crept closer to the babe. "How are you doing?"

“She’s doing fairly well for a two week old,” Hermione replied. “At least I think she is.”

“She seems fine to me,” Severus answered.

Rose looked in his direction, but did not remove herself from Hermione's breast.
“What was the owl about?” Hermione asked.

"The Ministry contacted me. They have the floo connection set up in your parents' home. We'll be able to floo back and forth until October 25," Severus began.

"Thank Merlin. I thought they'd never get back to us," Hermione replied before peering down at Rose and cooing, "You hear that Baby Girl? We're going to Australia to see your grandparents. They'll be so happy to meet you."

Rose continued to suckle, never once taking note of what her mother was saying.

"Hermione," Ginny began in a soft voice.

"Yes?"

"My baby kicked today."

"It what?" Hermione gasped.

Severus’ eyes glowed as his mind wandered back to his wedding day. He recalled the first time Rose pressed her tiny foot against his hand and the various emotions which still welled up inside him when he looked into her pale blue eyes.

"Yes, the baby kicked," Ginny whispered. "I didn't know what it was at first, but after it happened a few more times I realized Baby was kicking."

"That's wonderful," Hermione replied.

"Indeed," Severus answered.

"Draco almost cried when he felt it. I've never seen him so happy. We can’t wait to be parents. Oh, I don’t think either of us has ever been this excited about anything."

Hermione stroked Rose’s back. "I remember feeling the same way when I'd feel Rose kick. Everything was so real after I felt her pressing against me. I was so eager to meet her and be her mother."

"I was eager to be her father as well," Severus whispered.

“Ooh, but Rose’s first kick was so sweet. After all she kicked during your wedding. It was so romantic.”

“Indeed,” Severus mumbled. Though I fear the term romance is more appropriately applied to people who are in love with each other, not two friendly co-parents.

"What were you doing when your baby kicked?” Hermione asked.

"I was eating," Ginny replied before laughing. "I thought my stomach was reacting to something at first. Nope. My baby just liked ham."

Severus and Hermione chuckled as Rose broke away from her mother. "I'm very happy for you, Ginny."

"Thank you," Ginny replied.

Rose whimpered.
“I should probably be going since you two will be leaving for Australia soon,” Ginny replied.  
“Thank you for your time though. I just couldn't keep the news to myself.”

"I'm glad you told us. Please keep in touch if anything else develops,” Hermione answered.

"I will. Goodbye Hermione, Severus, and of course," Ginny kissed Rose on the cheek, “Goodbye my precious little goddaughter!"

Rose stared at Ginevra before Hermione positioned her to burp. Ginny smiled and bounced out of the room, leaving Severus and Hermione alone with Rose. Severus watched as Hermione patted Rose's back, wishing not for the first time that Fenrir had never resurfaced so he could spend more time with his family.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It means a lot to me.
"Are you sure we've packed everything?" Hermione asked.

"No, I think we're forgetting Rose's crib," Severus deadpanned as he pressed a sleeping Rose closer to him.

Hermione glared at him. Within a few moments her eyes widened. "What if Mum and Dad don’t have a crib?"

"Then I suppose we'll have to go with them to buy one," Severus answered.

“Even if they have a crib Rose may only be comfortable in her own. The new mattress may be too hard or too soft. There may be something wrong with the cribs in Australia. We’ll be up all night with a screeching baby and we won’t even know what we’re doing wrong. Mum and Dad won't get ah tour's worth of sleep because I was too stupid to pack a crib.”

“If Rose is too uncomfortable, we'll floo back here and get her crib. Regardless of her comfort level we do not need to pack her crib at the moment.”

"I know, but perhaps we should open our bags and check everything again, just to make sure we didn’t lose or forget anything.”

"The last time I checked, Australia had a few stores. If we’ve forgotten something we can purchase it there or floo back here to retrieve it.”

"Severus! I don't want to forget anything and appear incompetent!”

Severus kissed her on the cheek. "I know you’re concerned about taking Rose out for the first time, but we have everything, I promise. If we do not, I will go back and get it myself. You may blame me for any oversights.”

“No, I won’t blame you,” Hermione exhaled. “I know I’m being difficult and sound completely hysterical. I’m just so nervous.”

“I understand,” Severus swallowed. “I am a little uneasy about taking Rose out of the house myself. The last thing I want is for Rose to feel anxious in her new surroundings, especially if she decides to make her anxiety known.”

“It isn’t just that,” Hermione shook her head. “This is selfish, but I'm worried about how my parents will perceive me. I don't want to look like a horrible mother in front of them. I want them to think I'm halfway capable of raising their granddaughter.”

"Have they been critical of you?" Severus asked.

"No," Hermione answered. "I just don't want to give them a reason to be. They’ve wanted a grandchild for so long, even if they’ve never said it aloud. I don’t want to disappoint them by making them think Rose is in terrible hands.”

Severus brushed her lips with a kiss. "You are an excellent mother. Your parents will see that. By the
time we leave Australia they will know their granddaughter is in the best hands possible.”

“Thank you,” Hermione replied before embracing him.

Rose opened her eyes and squealed as her parents pressed against each other. Severus looked down and smiled, "Sorry, Rose."

Rose settled herself, but not before giving them a dirty look. Hermione laughed. "I think she's trying to scowl like you."

"Is she now?" Severus purred.

Rose kept her eyes on Severus.

"Who knows? With a little practice you can scare all the Gryffindors and hand out detentions, just like I once did."

"Maybe you can even wear all black as well."

"Now there’s an idea," Severus mused as he pictured Rose wrapped in a black cape similar to his.

Rose stared at her parents as though they had lost their marbles. Severus chuckled. "She'll understand when she's older."

Rose yawned and closed her eyes.

"She will," Hermione replied before shrinking their bags and placing them in her pocket. "In the meantime, we should probably leave before she decides she's hungry."

"Agreed," Severus answered. He reached down and fumbled for the floo powder.

Hermione stretched out her arms. "I can hold her while you manage the floo powder."

Severus shrugged. "I do not mind holding her."

"I know, but she's my daughter, too," Hermione replied.

"I suppose so," Severus frowned as he handed her over.

Rose opened one eye. Her parents held their breath as she looked up. Once she recognized Hermione, her eye closed again.

"Thank Merlin," Hermione exhaled.

"Let's leave before she decides to wake up."

"Great idea."

The couple strolled to the fireplace, where Severus threw in the powder and called out the address. Then they stepped inside and felt the floo pulling them towards their destination. Severus watched the other fireplaces connected to the floo blur by as Hermione gazed down at Rose. Both prayed she would not wake up or soil her diaper mid journey. Before either could fret for long, they stepped onto the rough stone mantle of her parents' fireplace.

Muriel leap up from the couch. "Hermione!"
"Is she here?" Wilford called from down the hallway.

“Yes, she’s here, just like I told you she’d be” Muriel replied.

“Great! I’ll be right out,” Wilford answered.

Muriel shook her head. "Of all the times to use the restroom."

"That's dad," Hermione replied while Severus dusted the soot from her. She swallowed. "I'm sorry if we're making a mess of things…"

"Oh no! It's fine, that's what vacuums and cleaning spells are for," Muriel replied.

Severus pulled out his wand and muttered a few cleaning spells. The dust disappeared. "Hello Muriel. I am glad to see you again."

"I am happy to see you as well," Muriel replied. "I see you brought someone new."

The footsteps from the end of the hall grew louder until Wilford entered the room

Rose began sneezing from under her blankets. Winford began, “Sorry I was occupied. How are my baby girl and her reasonably intelligent husband doing?"

Severus grinned. "Very well."

"Yes, especially because we have someone new in the family," Hermione loosened the blankets from around Rose. The baby pried open her eyes. "Mum, Dad, I'd like to introduce you to Rose Severa Snape."

Muriel crept closer to Rose. Her eyes watered. "She's beautiful."

Rose stared at Muriel as though she were trying to determine who this individual was and if she could be trusted. She shifted in the blankets before smacking her lips together."

Muriel chuckled. “Hello Rose. I’m your grandmother. I am so pleased to finally meet you.”

Rose's relaxed at the sound of her grandmother’s voice.

"Would you like to hold her?" Hermione asked.

"Of course I would," Muriel replied.

Hermione helped Muriel hold Rose as Wilford commented, "She's beautiful, Hermione; she looks just like you."

"She is very lucky in that regard," Severus replied.

"She's a beautiful baby," Muriel answered before cooing to Rose, "Yes you are a beautiful little baby. You are our little princess Rose."

"Yes you are," Wilford added before turning to Hermione with misty eyes. "She reminds me so much of you when you were a baby. She has your hair color and her mouth looks just like yours."

"Yes," Muriel replied. “She is an adorable baby.”

Rose yawned.
"Thank you," Hermione answered. "I can tell that she likes you both already."

Rose closed her eyes and resumed napping in her grandmother's arms. "Let's put her in the nursery so she can sleep."

"Sounds like a plan," Hermione whispered.

"I just hope she doesn't get too confused with the time change," Wilford began. "I was just thinking about that yesterday morning. It's the middle of the night in Britain whereas now it's a little past noon."

"Trust me, Rose doesn't sleep through the night yet. I doubt she'll notice any difference," Severus replied.

Muriel laughed. "Good point." She glanced down at the babe. "Come on Rose, let's put you down for a nap."

Muriel strolled off with Rose, with Wilford close behind, cooing sweet nothings into the infant's ear. Hermione wiped a tear from her eyes. "My parents have always wanted a grandchild. I'm glad they finally have their wish."

"They are good grandparents," Severus observed. "They will spoil her rotten as she grows up."

"As if you weren't already wrapped around her finger," Hermione replied.

"Excuse me?" Severus asked.

"Admit it," Hermione beamed. "If Rose could talk and she asked for a pony, you'd be in Kentucky at this very moment buying her the finest one money could provide."

"Do not be ridiculous." Severus scoffed. "First I would give her riding lessons, and when she was old enough, I'd buy her a real horse, not a little pony."

"A real horse?"

"Yes, a real horse. Our yard is big enough for one."

"It could probably support several horses."

"Indeed it could, and Rose could ride as many as she wanted once properly trained."

"What if I wanted a horse at this moment?"

"If you wanted one I would buy you one now."

"But wouldn't that be spoiling me?"

"I'm not opposed to spoiling my wife every once in a while."

"Oh really?" Hermione asked as she snaked her arms around his neck.

"Really," Severus breathed before capturing her lips.

Wilford and Muriel stopped at the edge of the hallway.

"Well I was going to show them their room," Wilford began, "but I'm afraid they'll never come out if
I do."

Muriel shook her head. "You are such a man."

Wilford raised an eyebrow.

"No woman in her right mind hops into bed with a man two weeks after giving birth," Muriel explained.

"Tell that to those people who have children ten months apart," he grumbled.

Muriel gave him one last look before clearing her throat.

Hermione and Severus pulled away from each other. Severus bowed his head as Hermione's face turned beat red.

"Hello Mr. and Mrs. Granger," Severus began in a weak voice.

“Yes, hello,” Muriel replied.

Hermione wrung her hands as Severus backed away from her.

“I have to congratulate you two; your marriage still has a spark," Wilford replied with a grin. “It’s hard to keep up that spark immediately after the birth of a child. You should do whatever you can to uh, engage in some adult activities every once in a while. It does wonders for a marriage.”

“Thank you for the advice,” Hermione muttered.

"Why don't I show you to your room so you can get settled in?” Muriel cut in.

Severus made eye contact with his in-laws. “Thank you, Mrs. Granger.”

"Yes, thank you, Mum," Hermione replied as the couple followed her mother to the guest room across from the nursery.

Once they were out of view Wilford's lips curled up. It was about time his baby girl found someone who would love her for the amazing woman she was.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It means a lot to me!
"How do you like Australia?" Severus cooed as he straightened out Rose’s onesie. "Do you appreciate the warmth?"

Rose blinked four times. For a moment Severus swore she was trying to respond. He continued. "So you like the warmth?"

She blinked again.

"I would not become too accustomed to the heat and the abundant sunshine if I were you. When we return to Britain it will be no more than five degrees, not that the number means anything to you. Trust me though, there is a difference between five degrees and twenty-eight degrees."

Rose squirmed, but kept her thoughts to herself. Severus stopped adjusting her outfit. "There we go. You're all taken care of."

He scooped Rose from the confines of the changing table and held her in the crook of his elbow. "I don't know why Grandpa Wilford and Grandma Muriel refused to change your nappy. It isn't as if they had never done it before. You think they'd appreciate another chance to bond with you, but I suppose their loss is my putrid gain."

Rose raised one hand until it was in front of her eyes. Her mouth opened while she gazed at her wriggling fingers and dimpled knuckles. Severus burst out laughing. "Yes, Rose, those are your hands."

Rose flung her hand away from her. Her eyes widened when it was out of view. She stared at her father, desperate for some type of guidance. Severus' laughter only grew. "You can be such a silly girl."

"What is she doing?"

Severus looked up at Muriel who was standing in the doorway watching the pair. "Rose is discovering she has hands."

Rose put the hand back in front of her. She exhaled and wiggled her fingers.

Muriel chuckled. "I suppose babies do need to figure those things out."

"Indeed, although I have never witnessed it myself."

"Oh?"

"I have not had much contact with babies," Severus kissed his daughter on the forehead. "Actually, Rose is the first child I’ve known who does not scream or cry when I enter the room."

"Oh now that can't be true," Muriel answered as she approached them. "You are a natural with Rose."

"I only do well with her because she is not a difficult baby most days."
"She does not seem to be, but I think that even if she was the most colicky, rambunctious baby in the world you would be just as gentle a father."

"I would like to think so."

Muriel continued. "I was surprised she slept as long as she did this afternoon."

"If only she'd sleep this well at night," Severus muttered.

Muriel chuckled anew, with Severus joining her soon after. When Muriel stopped laughing, she gazed at Rose and Severus. Although some children resemble one parent more than the other, Rose was a strange case. There wasn't a trace of Severus to be found in her face, or from what Muriel could tell, her body. She did not have Severus' nose, his eyes, or his build. Then again it could take years for some children to take on their parents' traits. Perhaps Rose was one of those children. Besides, she may have Severus' feet. Muriel hadn't seen Severus shoeless, nor did she have any true desire to do so. That privilege she'd reserve for her daughter.

"Mrs. Granger?"

Muriel broke from her trance. "I'm sorry, I was just thinking about something."

"What would that be?" Severus asked.

"I was remembering how Hermione was as a baby, how she was so cute, a little like Rose."

"I hear babies do bring up memories, though I wouldn't know."

"Well, when she’s older you’ll start to see yourself and your own childhood in her."

"I hope not," Severus answered in a quiet voice. "I do not want her to repeat my mistakes or endure the heartaches I did."

"Oh?"

He nodded. "Very few things in my childhood brought me joy. My fondest hope is that she will know happiness."

"You already make her happy." Muriel replied. "When you're a grandfather I'm sure you'll see her childhood in your grandchildren. I know those will be much happier memories."

"I'm almost old enough to be her grandfather," Severus noted.

Muriel smiled. "There's nothing wrong with having an older parent. As long as you love Rose, she'll be fine."

"I hope that is the case," Severus replied.

Rose flung her hand back and forth. Her eyes followed the motions.

"From what I've seen you're an excellent father. Both my daughter and my granddaughter are lucky to have you in their lives."

"Thank you Mrs. Granger."

"You may call me Muriel if you'd like. There's no need to be formal with family."
“Very well then, Muriel.”

Her face lit up. “Now may I hold her? Ever since she’s woken up I’ve been wanting to spend time with her.”

"Actually, you only wanted to hold her if her nappy was clean," Severus replied with a glimmer in his eyes.

Muriel laughed. "True, but I've had enough nappy changing for one lifetime."

Severus handed Rose over to her. "I suppose I can grant you that point."

Rose grunted before settling into her grandmother's embrace. Severus stuck out a finger to his daughter. She wrapped her hand around it, as if to assure him that she was already quite pleased with how her life was progressing.

***

You cannot escape us forever.

-Fenrir

"I still don't understand why you won't let us destroy the shop!" Alecto argued. "It would be a blow to the Order and would prevent that filthy traitor from distributing Wolfsbane!"

Fenrir set the note on the counter and glared at her. "If this plan is to succeed, then everything must be kept hidden. Vandalism of an apothecary would attract unwanted attention, something we cannot afford right now."

A few of the other Death Eaters collected vials of Polyjuice and put them in a wicker basket.

"Besides," Fenrir continued. "He probably has a place to brew and stock potions inside his house, meaning an attack on his apothecary would not affect his ability to brew and distribute Wolfsbane. All it would do is provoke him into coming back from his Australian excursion early and finding us, thus giving away our position."

"I see your point about the potions lab in his house, but won't the disrupting the Quidditch World Cup already expose us to the world?" Rodolphus asked.

"Crashing the Quidditch World Cup will draw attention, but all in good time," Fenrir replied. "Remember, we have to get inside first. That will require stealth and more than a little deceit."

"As well as Polyjuice," Scabior added.

"But of course," Fenrir answered with a smirk. "Who better to unwittingly brew Polyjuice for us than Mr. Severus Snape?"

"You're sure he won't be back today?" Alecto asked.

"Trust me, his wife wants nothing to do with her ex-lover's greatest accomplishments, especially when all the press will be talking about is how she's the whore who ruined his chance of a fairytale ending. If only for Hermione, Severus will stay in Australia for the next few days."

"He will certainly come back to a rude awakening," Rabastan sneered.

"Yes, he will," Fenrir replied.
Wilford could hear the muffled sound of his son-in-law’s voice from within the guest bedroom. Then he heard his daughter's giggle. Shaking his head, he continued across the hall and entered Rose’s nursery. His wife stood over the crib and hummed a lullaby to the half-asleep infant.

"Is Rose asleep?" Wilford asked.

"She's resisting it," Muriel replied.

Rose yawned and kept her eyes open.

“Rock a bye, and good night. Go to sleep little baby,” Muriel sang softly.

Rose’s eyes drooped shut.

"We'll have fun, when you wake. We will laugh and talk and play."

Rose's breathing slowed.

"She's beautiful," Wilford whispered. "She looks just like Hermione."

"She does," Muriel muttered.

Wilford looked over at Muriel. She twisted her lips.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

“Nothing?”

“It doesn’t look like nothing.”

“It isn't, but it's…it's just a thought I can't let go of. Really it's nothing.”

"What is your thought?"

Muriel sighed. "Do you think Rose looks like Severus?"

Wilford glanced back down at the baby. He replied in a deep voice, "No. I do not."

"I can't find a single physical characteristic they share. It may not bother me so much if Severus and Hermione had dated for any substantial amount of time before Rose's conception…"

"But they just got married out of the blue," Wilford concluded.

"I was never comfortable with the idea that Hermione cheated on Ron with Severus and could be so confident her husband was Rose's father. What if?"

“No,” Wilford hissed. “Our daughter would never deceive anyone like that, especially if the man in question cared for her the way Severus does.”

"Maybe she doesn't know who the father is,” Muriel replied. “Perhaps it’s more likely that Severus is the father, so she’s told everyone that Rose is his hoping that is the case.”

Wilford exhaled. "I'll admit that something odd is going on. Maybe, maybe Hermione doesn't know who the father is. If that’s the case I can’t blame her for saying Severus is Rose’s father. The nicest thing anyone can say about Ron is that he’s an ares-pardon the language-but Severus has been
amazing to her. Perhaps she’s desperate to keep Severus in her life, so she’s told him that Rose is his without knowing whether or not that’s true.“

"Didn't we raise her better than to make statements without obtaining all the facts?" Muriel asked.

"I'd like to think so, but her culture is so very different than ours," Wilford replied. "Maybe her culture demands that pregnant women marry, or that cheaters must marry those they cheat with regardless of whether or not the child is his, or maybe they don’t believe in DNA tests."

"Even if those were the case Hermione knows better than to withhold such vital information from someone who has no intention of ever hurting her."

"I know, but I can't fathom what would possess her to tell a man he is her child’s father when she doesn’t know for sure who the father is."

"I'd hate to destroy the bond between Rose and Severus. He’s so attached to her, and she already loves him. Yet how can we stand by and watch him give his heart and soul to a child who may not be his?"

"I never thought a man dressed in all black could be this great with my daughter and her child, but he truly makes them happy," Wilford buried his face in his hands. "I don't want to destroy my daughter's happiness, or the happiness of my granddaughter, but there comes a point to where someone has to step in and do the right thing."

"Maybe we won’t have to destroy anyone's happiness," Muriel suggested.

"How?"

"Severus is leaving in a few days so he can resume working on his potion. We can talk to Hermione then, and if she doesn't know who Rose's father is we'll encourage her to find out. If Severus learns the truth sooner rather than later they may be able to salvage their marriage, and do the least amount of damage to Rose."

"Fine, we'll say a few words to her once Severus leaves," Wilford replied before peeking down at his sleeping granddaughter.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for all the support. Merry Christmas to all who celebrate it, and a happy day to those who don't!
“Sweet dreams Little One.”

Hermione set a slumbering Rose back into the crib. After kissing her daughter on the forehead, she returned across the hallway to her room. The moonlight illuminating the room accentuated Severus' features, making his dark eyes appear all the more haunting.

She crawled in bed beside him and whispered, "Severus?"

He stretched. "Hello Hermione."

Hermione whispered, "I didn't mean to wake you up."

"You did not," Severus scooted closer to her. "When Rose began crying, I awoke and could not get back to sleep."

"Is it because of the moonlight?" Hermione asked. "It is rather bright in here."

"No," Severus began running his fingers through her hair. "The moonlight isn't bothering me."

Hermione gazed into his troubled eyes. "Severus, what's wrong?"

"I honestly do not know."

"You can be honest. Is it me or Rose? Are my parents annoying you?"

"No," Severus replied. "You and Rose are perfect, and your parents are tolerable, almost likable."

Hermione giggled. Severus' expression lightened. "Considering your initial meeting with my parents I'm glad you grew to like them."

"I said they were almost likable. Do not put words in my mouth," Severus teased.

"For the record, they do like you," Hermione replied. "I think they're starting to view you as their son."

Severus smirked. "They only like me because I change Rose's nappies. It's nothing more than that, I assure you."

Hermione stroked his cheekbone. "Do you really believe you are inherently unlikeable?"

"Let's just say I have never been on top of anyone's invite list, and friends have been few and far between," Severus admitted.

Hermione kissed him on the cheek. "It does not have to be that way forever. You are not spying anymore, leaving you free to make a few acquaintances and forge a few new friendships. If you're the man around others that you are around me then you could have dozens of friends by now."

"How much longer can we afford to view others without suspicion, Hermione?" Severus asked. "How much longer before this conflict with Fenrir gets out of hand? How much longer before we
are forced to make the difficult decisions we made when Voldemort was alive? How much longer before we have to take on the same roles and wear the same masks we did a decade ago?"

"You'll cure lycanthropy…"

"If I can in the little time I have.” The tension was audible in his voice. "But we could be on a futile mission. Lycanthropy may be impossible to cure with a simple potion."

"If healing potions fail in development then we'll try charms, or perhaps even muggle medicine,” Hermione insisted. “We will think of something."

Severus massaged her back. "You sound so confident."

"I have faith in you," she answered. “I always have and I always will.”

"Merlin, Hermione, you have no idea what that means to me,” Severus answered before crashing his lips into hers.

She reveled in the sensation of her body pressing against his. Never before had she felt so secure, so desirable, so wanted. As she wrapped her arms around him to lose herself in the moment, she felt fluid drip from her chest.

Hermione gasped and backed away. "I am so sorry."

"Don't apologize," Severus wrapped a tendril of her hair around his finger. "You're a nursing mother."

"I know, but,” she lowered her head. “Oh God I am so sorry.”

Severus tilted his head so he could gaze into her eyes. "You are perfect."

“Trust me, I’m far from perfect.”

“Perhaps, but you’re perfect for me, and your body,” he brushed her lips with his. “Everything about your body is perfect.”

She blushed.

“What happened was perfectly natural.” Severus kissed her collarbone. “There is no need to apologize."

"Thank you," she whispered. “Y-you’re perfect for me as well. I couldn’t imagine being as happy with another man as I am with you.”

He kissed her on the forehead. She lowered her head and kissed the scar on his neck.

A comfortable silence fell between them as they lay beside each other.

"I couldn't sleep because of a feeling,” Severus admitted.

"What feeling?” Hermione asked.

"Something isn't right. I don’t have the foggiest idea of what it is, but something is just not right.”

"Do we need to leave?"
"No," Severus answered. "I'd venture to say that we’re much safer here than we would be in Britain."

"Is there a reason you’d say this aside from the usual threat of Fenrir?" She asked.

"No," He exhaled. "It’s probably just a silly notion, anyway. I just have this sense of foreboding… that something is going to go horribly wrong."

"The Quidditch World Cup has begun," Hermione noted. "I believe tonight is the opening ceremony. Perhaps that's where your sense of foreboding originates."

"Perhaps. All I know is that I feel safer in Australia than I would anywhere else."

"I'm happy to be here as well."

He moaned as he pressed her against his chest.

"Thank you for agreeing to come with me," Hermione answered.

Severus held her hand in his. "I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

Hermione whispered in his ear, "Neither would I."

***

Kingsley Shacklebolt watched as the last of the fireworks faded into the night. By now the electric guitars had died down and fans were streaming out of the stands, most too tipsy to apparate. A few pieces of trash wafted in the breeze, only to disappear into the moonless abyss. Slowly, the lights were dimming, except for the bright patches surrounding the reporters still interviewing their subjects.

In line to be interviewed, Ron Weasley laughed as he stood beside Alicia Spinnet. Alicia clung to Ron, and flashed her latest ring. Ron beamed before reassuring the reporter that all was well with the games as well as with his love life. As Alicia clung to Ron, Kingsley wondered if Miss Spinnet would become just one more in a long line of admirers or "the one" who would put Ron's memories of Hermione to rest.

Speaking of Hermione, were she and Severus enjoying Australia? Merlin knew it had to be warmer over there...

"Minister Shacklebolt!" a voice yelled.

Kingsley spun around to see a reporter from the local radio station approach him. "Yes?"

"How does it feel to know that the Death Eaters were not able to infiltrate or disturb the events tonight?" the reporter asked.

"I am very relieved, although not surprised," Kingsley replied. "We have a very dedicated and vigilant international security force in place. It is through their hard work that we are able to keep these games safe."

From a dilapidated log cabin, Fenrir laughed as he listened to the radio. "While we know we must remain on alert," Kingsley’s grainy voice continued. "Voldemort's followers did attack during the opening ceremony the first time they were freed, but did not attack this time. This already proves that our security measures are a success."
Fenrir laughed all the more. "Oh Kingsley! What makes you think I am anything like my predecessor?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate it all.
"I honestly don't see what all the fuss is about," a guard with an American accent began. He slumped down onto a park bench and opened his brown paper bag. From it he removed a bologna and cheese sandwich as well as a can of Coke. He set the soda on the bench beside him. “If you ask me, this whole Death Eater thing seems like one huge overreaction to a jail break."

"But the Death Eaters are one of the most notorious terrorist cells in Wizarding History,” a female guard replied before taking a sip of coffee from her canister. "Any event where they could attack demands the strictest security."

"Yes, but think about it for a minute," the first guard replied as she sat down beside him. "They've been loose for a few months now and so far they haven't attacked anyone or disrupted anything. Right now they're probably in some wooded area more interested in evading capture than in attacking the Quidditch World Cup."

"They may be in another country for all we know," the third guard added.

"Exactly," the first one replied. "So this assignment may be nothing more than some glorified vacation due to some Minister's overreaction to a fringe group."

"But why would the British Minister of Magic call for international help if he did not feel the Death Eaters were a threat?" the second guard asked.

"Probably to be safe and avoid a lawsuit," the first guard took a bite of his sandwich.

“There’s probably a PR component to it as well,” the third noted as he removed an apple from his black lunchbox. “Attendance would be in the toilet if there was the appearance of no protection from escaped dangerous convicts. They'd want all hands on deck to make everyone feel safe."

"True," the second guard mused before taking another sip of coffee.

The group ate in silence.

The third guard coughed. "What do you think of all the fuss surrounding Ron Weasley?"

"I feel sorry for the guy," the second answered. "It can't be easy knowing the love of your life just had a baby with one of your least favorite professors."

“Having a baby with your former professor is so creepy,” the first guard agreed. “It doesn't make any sense either. I mean, why on earth would you choose a man twice your age over the second person in the Golden Trio?"

“From what I understand Hermione is a bit of a geek. Intellect can be quite seductive,” the second guard answered.

“I’ve heard of going for brains, but they’ve known each other since she was ten. I mean, how much of a perv must Professor Snape be in order to get in bed with a former student?” The first asked.

“It takes two to tango. Hermione was in that bed too,” the third replied.
“Very true, but I can’t see what would draw those two together,” the first argued.

“Maybe he makes her happy,” the second replied.

“How could he do that?”

“Well, for starters he isn’t completely terrible on the eyes.”

"Please!" the third guard laughed. "He is not handsome enough to seduce someone twice his age, much less steal a girl half his age from an international Quidditch star."

"Actually," the second guard blushed and bit her lip. "I think Professor Snape is hot, in a rugged bad boy way."

The first guard’s eyes bulged. “Really?”

“Yeah, really,” she answered. “The black washes out his face, but at the same time it makes him look dangerous. There’s also the way he walks. He’s imposing, which can really turn a certain type of woman on. Then there’s the fact that Hermione is known for liking to take on challenges.”

“Challenges?”

“Severus Snape is known as the greasy git, the bat of the dungeons. Even those who admire his intellect admit he’s an asshole. Maybe Hermione wanted the challenge of making him kinder, the reward of becoming the woman who tamed him.”

"Because you'd take up that challenge, wouldn't you?" the first guard asked.

She burst out giggling. “No!”

“Oh come on!” the third laughed. “I see how your face is getting red.”

“Okay fine,” she admitted. “I wouldn’t want him now because I don’t do married men. If he was single and still rich though,” her lips curled up. “Yeah I’d be up for the challenge.”

The other two shook their heads before they all resumed their meal.

"Enjoying your lunch?"

The guards looked up and nodded.

"Good," the man purred. He pulled out his wand and pointed it at the heart of the first guard. Then the stranger muttered a spell.

After the guard slumped over, the other two pulled out their wands. Before they could muster an incantation they too were under the effects of the spell. The man sneered as he approached the bodies.

***

"Ginevra, are you positive that it's a good idea for you to go to this game tonight?" Draco asked.

Ginevra scooted across the couch until her head was on Draco’s shoulder. "Honestly, I've been going back and forth all day as to whether or not I should go. Part of me does not want to go because it's still too hard to look at Ron and know what he's done to his own daughter. Yet he won't be in every game, and I would like to watch some of the other teams.”
"I don't like the idea of you going somewhere so crowded unprotected, especially with Fenrir and his lycanthropes on the loose," Draco replied.

"I don't like going out when they're around either, but I'm not putting my life on hold because of them."

"Is there no way you could listen to the game over the radio?"

Ginevra sighed. "It isn't the same as seeing it live. There isn’t any atmosphere or energy in most radio broadcasts, although I suppose it is the safest option, not to mention the warmest."

"It has been a bit chilly outside these past couple of days," Draco noted.

"Yes, and I do not know if I should expose our child to such cold," Ginevra frowned. "Damn Hermione and her warm vacation. If the Quidditch World Cup was in Australia we wouldn't have to worry about Fenrir and the cold."

"We'll have to write a letter to the International Confederation of Wizards' Quidditch Committee asking for a change in venue, or at the very least a future Australian tournament."

"Do you want to start writing them now? With a little luck we could have the tournament moved before sundown."

Before Draco could answer, the fireplace across the room burst into a green flame. "Ginny!"

Ginevra shook her head. She slipped off the couch and strolled over to the fireplace. After taking a deep breath she called, "Yes Mum?"

"Ginny, we have tickets for Ronald's game tonight! We were wondering if you'd want to come along with us," Molly exclaimed.

"I'm still debating on going…»" Ginny began.

"Why would there be any debate in your mind?" Molly snapped. "Don't you think you should support your brother during his moment of triumph?"

"I guess, but I don't know if going would be the safest idea with the Death Eaters on the loose," Ginevra answered.

Molly frowned, although her eyes flickered in understanding. "Perhaps in your condition you should not be exposed to the elements. Still, if you decide to go, we have a seat for you right next to Alicia Spinnet."

"Who?"

"Ronald's new girlfriend!"

Ginny shook her head and groaned.

"Oh she's such a lovely person, much better for your brother than that bushy haired wench! Alicia the only one I've met who loves Quidditch more than Ron. They can go on for hours about the sport. It's so romantic."

Draco rolled his eyes. Ginevra cleared her throat. "I'll see how things go tonight. I may or may not come."
Molly’s frown deepened. “Do not tell me you won’t go now because of some perverse loyalty to Hermione.”

“I won’t go because the cold might endanger my baby,” Ginny growled.

"Fine then dear. If you change your mind let me know. Do give Alicia a chance though. She’ll make a much better sister than some cheating tart.” Molly’s image dissipated.

Ginevra turned around and grinned. "Radio it is then."

***

The first guard opened his eyes. He blinked before scanning the room. The walls were spotted with chipped paint, the floors made of concrete. "Whe-where are we?"

"You are in the base of those non-threatening Death Eaters," Fenrir replied as he and two others stepped closer to the security personnel.

The female guard tried to keep a stoic face, but she couldn’t help trembling. "What do you want from us?"

"Only you hair," he replied.

"Our hair?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, and then shall we see about making you new recruits?” Fenrir asked. “We’re always open to new members.”

"You’ll never brainwash us into your Pureblood beliefs!” the third guard yelled. "We will never harm muggles or carry out your sick plans."

"Who said I wanted to harm muggles?” Fenrir asked. “Why would I want to harm anyone when I can make you all greater than you are right now?”

"How would you do that?” the second guard asked.

Scabior plucked off the guard's hair. She winced, but bit her tongue.

Fenrir barred his teeth. "You will soon see."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! I appreciate all of it!
"Tickets! Tickets! Get your tickets here for the Quidditch World Cup! Only fifty Galleons!"

The voice was drowned out by the cacophony of those entering the arena. The scalper coughed and recast the sonorus spell. "Tickets! Get your tickets right here!"

A young man ran towards the scalper. "I'll take two!"

"One hundred Galleons, please."

Others scurried past the pair, trying to reach their seats before the game began.

The man reached into his pocket and pulled out several golden coins. He counted the money until he calculated the correct amount. Then he twisted his lips. "These are real, aren't they?"

"As real as the tournament," the scalper replied. "Great seats too, right in the middle."

"Knowing my luck I'll get stuck behind a giant, or worse, a woman in one of those puffy hats who is refuses to take it off," he muttered as he set the coins into the scalper's hand.

The scalper laughed. "Always happens to me, too."

The man nodded. "Tell me, why are you giving up your tickets?"

"My mum is ill, and I need to take care of her."

“Oh, I’m so sorry."

“Thank you. I’m sure she’ll be fine, but it would give her some comfort to have me there.”

“I understand.”

”Anyway, thank you again for your patronage and goodnight!"

The scalper rushed off into the crowd. The man sighed, shook his head, and ran into the stadium, praying the tickets were indeed genuine.

***

"Alicia Spinnet."

"Hmm?"

Hermione poked her head out of the paper as Severus sat up and rearranged the sheets around his bare chest.

"Alicia Spinnet is Ron's big Quidditch date," Hermione sighed.

“I see.”

"I suppose it should not surprise me, considering how big of a Quidditch fan she was at Hogwarts. It
makes sense for them to be a couple, more sense than Ron and I ever made.”

"It still hurts though," Severus noted.

Hermione shrugged. "Maybe it's because I'm so sleep deprived or because I'm halfway across the world, but I don't feel any pain. Besides," she set the paper down and draped herself across his torso. "I have a wonderful husband and a beautiful daughter. Who cares about Ronald and his dating life?"

"Nobody important," Severus replied before capturing Hermione’s lips. "Save Ginevra."

Hermione bit her lip. "I wonder how she's doing right now."

"She's probably happily enjoying the games."

"On the radio no doubt."

Severus quirked an eyebrow. "Wouldn't she want to see the games in person?"

"Not at this point in her pregnancy," Hermione answered. "She probably feels like she's carrying around a small pumpkin. I know from experience how uncomfortable that can be."

"You would."

"Then there's the weather. If Ginevra doesn’t stay home because she feels uncomfortable, she’ll stay home in order to stay warm. Getting chilled can’t be healthy for her baby."

Severus pressed Hermione closer to himself. "Draco could always warm her."

Hermione huffed. "Does he look like the kind of person who would do something like that in public, especially under the scrutiny of in-laws who despise him?"

"He doesn't have to touch her to warm her. Warming spells are always an option."

"Severus!" She laughed. "That's so impersonal! There's nothing romantic in casting a warming spell, not when you can snuggle."

"Warming spells are perfectly acceptable if your goal is to actually warm someone and not to sicken those around you."

"Sometimes I think you lack any sense of romance."

"You've just now realized that?"

Hermione gazed into his eyes. "You can be romantic with me."

"In private I do not mind showing affection," he admitted. "In public I find such displays as snogging and snuggling distasteful. They remind me more of wild animals staking a claim than actual human affection."

"I suppose you have a point," Hermione answered. "Ron loved kissing me in front of reporters. I was flattered the first few times he did it, but after a while," Hermione shifted into a more comfortable position. "I don't know, I felt like a piece of property. I doubt it was intentional, but it ate at me after awhile."

"I hope you have never felt that I've degraded you in such a way."
“No, I’ve never felt like a piece of property with you.”

Severus kissed her on the forehead. “Good, because you are so much more than just a wife to me.”

Hermione flushed. Before she could respond, a soft cry emanated from across the hall. She exhaled. "Rose is ready for breakfast."

Severus shook his head. "It would appear so."

Hermione brushed her lips against his before leaving to tend to their child.

***

"I am so disappointed in Ginny," Molly began. She crossed her arms as she sat in the stands between George and Alicia. "I truly expected her to come."

"Really?" George asked. "I knew she wouldn't come the second you told me Alicia would be here."

"Now George give your sister a little more credit," Molly replied. "Ginny and Ron agreed to put their differences aside and be more accepting of the other’s lifestyle."

"That doesn’t mean that she’s instantly going to accept Ron’s new girlfriend."

"I'm sure she’ll pout about Ron’s breakup with Hermione for a few more months, but once she realizes what a lying bitch Hermione truly is she’ll grow to accept Alicia."

If Alicia stays with Ron for longer than one month, George thought.

"I’m surprised they aren’t gabbing at each other right now. Both girls love Quidditch. They could talk about it for hours!"

"Along with Ron!" Alicia piped in.

"Of course." Molly replied. "Ron would be more than happy to discuss Quidditch with both of you."

"Oh dating your son is a dream come true. He is such a fabulous man! I'm so happy he finally noticed me!" Alicia exclaimed.

"Just heal his heart. Hermione has done a number on it," Molly replied.

"Yes," George answered. "Please help him recover from Hermione’s betrayal. Ron still hasn’t fully recovered from her running off with that greasy git."

"I still don’t understand how she ever could’ve looked in Professor Snape’s direction,” Alicia commented. "He was so nasty to us as students. Even the idea of dating him is gross."

"Who knows why Hermione left Ron for him?" Molly replied. "All I know is that Ron is much better off with you."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" a voice echoed from the field. "Boys and girls!"

The audience quieted.

“Let the games begin!”

The crowd erupted in applause and shouts as the players took the field. Alicia screeched extra loud
when Ron appeared. The person beside her covered his ears and winced. Perhaps the seats he’d just purchased were a little too good...

The players mounted their brooms, then floated into position. With a smile the referee threw the quaffle into the air and released the snitch. Players scattered across the field.

The game had begun.

Ron kept an eye on the quaffle, preparing to block it the second it came too close to the goal. It sprang up above the players, as if it were under its own power. A few of the players stopped and muttered while others continued to chase it, oblivious to the change. Ron felt his heart skip a beat as the quaffle approached. He darted up to catch it, but the quaffle evaded him. Then it dove for his head. Ron screamed. He darted away from the quaffle, provoking laughter and chuckles from the uncomprehending crowd.

Ron gripped his broom. He weaved in and out of other players. They skittered out of his path. He was breaking so many rules right now, but he did not care. At the end of the day, breathing was more important than winning.

A force knocked him off his broom, sending him careening to the ground, face up, bracing for the inevitable impact.

He hit the ground with a sickening crack and a collective gasp from the crowd.

“Ronniekins!” Molly screeched.

Alicia and George stood up. Alicia screamed while George motioned those in his row to stand up and allow him to leave the stands.

"Don't worry, he is not dead!" a voice announced on the field.

Dead silence.

The figure approached Ron and glared down at him. "At least, he’s not dead yet."

"Fenrir?" Ron squeaked.

The lycanthrope sneered.

Chapter End Notes

At long last, Ron has been knocked off his high broom.

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
The crowd murmured as the man on the field loomed over Ron Weasley. The red head squirmed while Fenrir’s smirk grew. The lycanthrope purred, “Having fun yet?”

Molly stood up and yelled, "Don't just stand there! Call the officials!

Nobody came on the field.

She pointed to the lycanthrope. "Arrest him!"

Not a muscle moved.

"Don't just sit there! Do something!"

Fenrir locked eyes with her. "What makes you think anyone is coming to your son's aid?"

Ten shadowy figures emerged onto the field, each wearing an official's uniform. George released the breath he'd been holding. “Oh thank Merlin."

Gasps resounded through the audience as the figures stepped into the spotlight, revealing their true forms.

Molly’s eyes bulged. "D-death Eaters?"

"Security!" Kingsley shouted.

Seven security guards then took the field. All of them exposed themsleves as Death Eaters.

“W-what?” Aliclia screeched.

Fenrir's teeth gleamed. "It's amazing what a few stunning spells and a few bottles of Polyjuice can do. One minute you're an escaped convict, and the next you're an American security guard."

"Oh Merlin," Kingsley muttered.

Ron lifted his head. His vision was blurred from the throbbing in his skull. After blinking a few times he made out Fenrir's silhouette. Somehow he needed to apparate away.

He moved his arms, but doing so radiated pain through his body. He bit back a scream.

Shit, they're broken.

He tried to move his legs.

Nothing.

He tried again.

Nothing.

His face paled upon realizing that his legs were the only part of his body he could neither move or
feel. He tried moving them once more. No matter what he did or how hard he tried to focus on his movements, they refused to respond.

"Having fun?" Fenrir asked, looking down at his latest victim.

Ron panted.

Fenrir purred. "Isn't it troubling to be at the mercy of the lycanthrope you almost killed?"

"That was all a huge misunderstanding, I swear," Ron replied as Fenrir drew closer.

"You seemed pretty clear on what happened when you bragged about it for months and accepted that cheap medal."

"I'm sorry, Fenrir. It was obviously a mistake to try to kill you, but maybe we can uh, talk things out. I'm sure we can reach some type of agreement."

Fenrir raised an eyebrow. "What do you have that I could possibly want?"

"Uhm," Ron began in a weak voice. "Do you like Crudely Cannon posters?"

"Don't you dare hurt him!" a Cannon player shouted while diving towards Fenrir.

Fenrir whipped out his wand and bellowed, "Avada Kedavra!"

The player tumbled off his broom and crashed to the ground. The spectators erupted into a cacophony of screams and shouts as they scrambled to flee the stadium.

A green light filled the sky, attracting curious stares from those who had not yet deserted their seats. The light took the form of a wolf leaping into the moon.

"Now, my friends!" Fenrir shouted. "Attack!"

Spectators scattered throughout the stadium threw off their coats and hats, revealing themselves to be Death Eaters.

"Show everyone your true power!"

Molly screamed when she recognized the man beside her as Rodolphus LeStrange. He grabbed her arm. "Hello, Molly."

She whimpered.

"Did you really think you could kill my wife, bitch!"

Molly screeched as he transformed into a wolf and clamped his jaws firmly onto her forearm. George punched at the wolf's head in a vain attempt to free her. Rodolphus snarled and clawed at her face. Again George tried to pull him off, but to no avail. When he turned to Alicia for help, he heard a POP and found nothing but an empty seat where she had been seconds ago. "

"Shit," he muttered, turning to the wolf with renewed frenzy.

Rodolphus released Molly and turned on George, the wolf's mouth contorted into a sadistic smile. George screamed, then grabbed his mother and apparated away. Rodolphus growled, but soon found another, more vulnerable victim.
From the field, Fenrir basked in the sounds of apparition and screaming. For the most part, his werewolf army was doing an excellent job of holding its ground. Then again, if the drinking at some of the pregame festivities he had seen on his way in were any indication, the crowd may have been at less than their peak magical ability. No matter. A changed lycanthrope was a changed lycanthrope regardless of sobriety or lack thereof.

"Fenrir!" Scabior warned.

From the corner of his eye, Fenrir noticed the broom heading towards him. He pulled out the Elder Wand and flung the rider across the field. Then he looked down at Ron and cackled, "You are not worthy to be made a lycanthrope."

Tears streamed down Ron’s eyes. “Wh-what are you going to do to me then?”

“You’ll just have to wait and see, Ronniekins.”

Fenrir raced off to help his followers before Ron could respond. Ron stared up at the sky as the sounds of the battle and the smell of the dying grass filled his senses.

Ron twitched his arms and whined. This was not the way a hero of his caliber was supposed to die. For crying out loud he was the second member of the Golden Trio! He was meant to die of old age surrounded by adoring fans, not on some God forsaken field surrounded by lycanthropes. There had to be some way to summon his magic and apparate away. Unfortunately, he could not stand. He lifted his pinky. Pain coursed through his body.

All was lost.

POP!

"Let's go, Ronald!"

A familiar twist of his stomach and Ron felt himself apparate away.

***

Across the stadium, Kingsley escaped to a corner behind the stands with a few of his bodyguards. They huddled together as wolves howled from above.

"I'm never going to live this down," Kingsley muttered over and over, as if it had become his new mantra. “I’m never going to live this down.”

"How could Fenrir have pulled this off?" one of his guards asked.

Another poked his head outside to check for Death Eaters.

"Who knows?" Kingsley answered. “All we can hope for is that he didn’t change too many people into lycanthropes. Otherwise…we are done…we’re going to be so overwhelmed we’ll be done."

Another of his guards shook his head. "We weren't ready. He not only overtook our security, but he also planted lycanthropes in the stands.”

“How could he do this?” Another of the guards asked. “That took some much preparation, so much time to carry out. Voldemort never could've pulled this off.”

Kingsley pushed the guards away and peeked out of his hiding place. He gazed at the grassy stadium from which a steady stream of people mixed with wolves continued to pour.
"Simple,” Kingsley replied. "We've been comparing him to Voldemort this whole time, but he's not Voldemort. He is a very different threat altogether.”

***

Severus awoke bathed in a cool sweat. He remembered voices screaming, but he could not discern to whom they belonged. All around him people were darting in every direction, but he didn’t know what they were running to or from. All he knew was that he needed to find Hermione and Rose.

His heart pounded against his ribcage.

Severus glanced beside him, where Hermione continued sleeping, oblivious to his distress. As he watched her breathe, his heart rate fell and his breathing evened out. He placed a hand on her shoulder and rubbed it. Yes, this was the warm, soft skin he’d become so familiar with these past few months.

After taking a deep breath he lay back down. Before he could close his eyes a soft cry emanated from the nursery. Severus sighed, crawled out of bed, and trudged towards his daughter.

Picking her up, he felt her nappy. He muttered, "Your mother always leaves me to do the dirty work.”

Rose glared at him as she continued to express her discomfort. Once he set her on the changing table and removed the offending garment, she calmed herself. After the changing was done, he gazed into her eyes and smiled.

"I love you Little Rose," he whispered before kissing her on the cheek.

Rose blinked, then yawned. Severus picked her up and hummed a tune he'd learned as a child, though he'd long forgotten the words. Soon her eyes were closed.

Severus made his way towards the crib, but after gazing for a long moment at her sweet face he decided against putting her in it. Instead, he settled into the rocking chair with her nestled in his arms, clinging to whatever peace he could find amidst the tumult in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It's all deeply appreciated.
Severus pried open one lazy eye. He winced as the ache in his back ushered his brain into consciousness. Then he felt a pressure on his arms. He glanced down and smiled. "Good morning, my little Rose."

A bright light flashed.

Rose screeched. Severus' head snapped in the direction of the hallway. Hermione stood holding a camera. Her smile could only be described as mischievous; an expression Severus did not appreciate so early in the morning. He snarled. "Why in Merlin’s name did you do that?"

"I'm sorry, but you just looked so cute with Rose on your lap. I couldn’t let the moment pass without memorializing it somehow," she answered.

"I take it putting the memory in a pensieve was out of the question."

"I want something tangible; something our family could look at whenever we pleased. A picture seemed to be the best way of accomplishing that goal."

"I'm sure it was," Severus grumbled.

Rose continued to wail. Severus shushed her and patted her back. Within a few seconds her cries softened.

"How long were you standing in the hallway?" Severus asked.

"I woke up about ten minutes ago," Hermione answered. "I knew Rose would be hungry soon, so I looked for her in her bedroom. That's where I saw you all cuddled up with her. It was too sweet not to take a picture."

"Rose clearly disagrees," Severus muttered as Rose whimpered.

Hermione set the camera on the dresser. "Perhaps she’ll feel better about the situation after breakfast."

"Perhaps," Severus muttered. He stood up with her and flinched. Then he handed the baby over to Hermione and scooted away from the chair.

"Are you hungry Rose?" Hermione cooed as she sat down in the chair. "Does Baby need breakfast now?"

Rose waved her hands in the air.

Severus groaned and he stretched his back. It popped. His frown deepened. This was the absolute last time he ever fell asleep in a chair.

Hermione positioned Rose to nurse. When the babe latched on and quieted herself, Hermione asked. "Why did you fall asleep in the chair?"

"I changed her nappy and thought I'd hold her until she fell asleep," Severus answered. "Exhaustion
must have gotten the better of me."
"You don't usually cuddle Rose for that long."
"I know."
"Did you have another bad dream?"
"It was more like an premonition than a dream."
"Oh?"
Severus nodded. "I was in some public area, though I cannot remember the details of the place. People were running and screaming, but I couldn't discern what they escaping to or from. All I knew was that I needed to find you and Rose, but I was unable to do so."
"We're here now," Hermione replied.
"For which I am grateful." Severus exhaled. "Upon waking up, I couldn't calm myself. Holding Rose brought me a sense of peace. Apparently it brought me such peace that I fell asleep with her."
Hermione grinned. "You looked very much at peace with her. It was a beautiful sight."
Rose suckled and gave her father a sideways glance.
Severus stretched his back until he heard it pop. "I just wish we'd fallen asleep on furniture that wouldn't throw my back out. Never would I have suspected that holding a baby could lead to such pain."
Hermione huffed. "Try carrying her in your body for nine months. Then we can discuss back pain."
Severus chuckled. "Point taken."
"Good morning," Muriel poked her head into the room. Her face lit up. "Is it Rose's breakfast time?"
"Yes," Hermione answered before cooing to her daughter. "You're very hungry today, aren't you, Rose?"
Rose answered by nursing harder.
Muriel turned to Severus. "I trust you slept well."
"Very well, thank you," He answered.
Hermione’s eyes gleamed. "He fell asleep holding Rose in the rocker."
Muriel raised an eyebrow. "Really?"
"It was late and Rose needed to be calmed. Your chair is quite comfortable, so I fell asleep with her," Severus replied.
"I wouldn't think that chair would be comfortable enough to sleep in, though," Muriel mused. "But enough on that. Do you two want eggs and bacon for breakfast?"
"I would love some, but I'm not sure how advisable it would be to have them. After all Dad supposed to be watching his cholesterol," Hermione replied.
"He is, but for the last week and a half he's been begging for eggs and bacon. I agreed to fix it for him if he ate a Cesar salad for lunch."

Hermione shook her head. "You know he'll just sneak in some leftover pizza come lunchtime."

Muriel smirked. "We'll see about that."

"Indeed we will," Severus mused.

"That being said," Muriel replied. "How do you like your eggs, Severus?"

"Sunny side up."

"How many would you like?"

"Two would be sufficient."

"Thank you. Breakfast will be ready shortly," Muriel replied before taking off to the kitchen.

Severus stretched and yawned. "I suppose I should get dressed."

"Are you going to be all right?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," Severus kissed her on the cheek "I feel better already."

"Severus!"

After kissing Rose on the cheek he called, "Yes Wilford?"

"Someone in the fireplace wants to talk to you!" Wilford answered before asking Muriel in a softer voice, "Did I really just say that?"

She burst out laughing. "I believe you did."

Severus grunted and headed towards the floo. Unless it was Ginevra with a message about their baby or Lucius announcing someone had found a cure for lycanthropy, the visitor would be ignored.

"Severus?"

The dark wizard’s stomach sank upon recognizing the face. He choked out, "Minister Shacklebolt?"

"We need you here now, Severus! The Death Eaters have attacked the Quidditch World Cup. Early estimates claim that thousands have been turned. We need you to brew more Wolfsbane and formulate lycanthropy cure immediately!"

Severus stared into the fireplace.

"Can you hear me?" Kingsley asked.

Severus swallowed. "How exactly did Fenrir and the Death Eaters break in to the Quidditch World Cup?"

"They captured a few security guards along with some referees and Polyjuiced themselves to appear as they did. Some of the Death Eaters were disguised as spectators as well."

Severus put his head in his hands.
“The Wizarding World needs you. Please, please help us this one more time,” Kingsley answered.

Severus looked up. “I'll see what I can do. There should be fifty vials of Wolfsbane in my apothecary. It’s not much, but I suppose it’s better than nothing.”

“Oh thank you!” Kingsley exclaimed. "We'll also have to call together a meeting of the Order sometime this week, assuming there are enough members in shape to attend."

"Fine," Severus answered. “All I ask is that the Weasleys do not harass my wife and daughter.”

“Trust me when I say they will be too indebted to you to so much as consider insulting your family.”

“For their sake I hope you are correct.”

“Thank you again Severus. We truly owe you a debt we could never repay.”

Severus’ expression remained impassive.

The connection died. As Severus walked back towards the nursery, he tried to wrap his head around what Kingsley had just told him. Fenrir was ruthless and under the right circumstances, cunning. Still Severus never suspected him of being able to crash the Quidditch World Cup and infect so many people in such short order. For months they’d underestimated him. What if in the time they’d wasted he’d become unstoppable? What if this was a hopeless mission?

He stood in the doorway and watched Hermione burp Rose. Something had finally gone right in his life. For the first time he had a family, people who accepted him as he was. How could he leave them in Australia so he could attempt to create a cure which had eluded even the best potions’ masters for millennia?

Then again, how could he refuse to help Kingsley if doing so put Rose at risk of becoming infected with lycanthropy? He’d seen the struggles Lupin had endured with the condition. He could never live with himself if she endured the pain of a transformation or the loss of her humanity? Even if his family was never changed, how could he look his daughter in the eyes and tell her when he was needed, he did nothing?

"Severus?" Hermione asked. "What happened?"

Severus took a deep breath. "My time in Australia has been cut short."

***

Hermione stood in front of the fireplace, a squirming Rose in her arms. "Please be careful."

"I will take care of myself." Severus kissed her on the lips. "I promise to visit or call you on the floo every night."

"Good," Hermione choked.

Rose reached for her father. He kissed her on the cheek. “Daddy loves you very much Rose. Even if he isn’t present he will be with you in your heart, and you will always be in his."

She gurgled.

“Please be safe,” Hermione squeaked. “Rose and I do need you in our lives, not simply in our hearts.”
Severus smiled. "There is no need to worry about me."

Hermione bit her lower lip.

Severus turned to his in-laws. "Goodbye Muriel, Wilford. I appreciate your hospitality."

"It was a pleasure to have you." Muriel replied. "Please feel free to pop in any time,"

"I will," Severus promised before picking up his bags.

"Good luck on the potions project," Wilford added.

"Thank you." Severus took one last look at Rose before kissing her on the cheek. "While I am gone, be good to your mother. Let her sleep once in a while."

Rose blinked.

“Goodbye Severus,” Hermione whispered.

He answered in a quiet voice, “Goodbye Hermione.”

Severus gave Hermione one last parting glance before stepping into the fireplace and flooing away.

Hermione forced her lips to curl up. "He'll be fine, I'm certain of it."

Her parents nodded, knowing she was speaking to herself rather than them.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Years! I hope it's a great year for us all.

As always, thank you so much for all the support!
"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," Kingsley began, his somber voice resonant despite the static of the radio. "It is with deep regret that I inform you that Britain is once again under threat."

The radio buzzed.

"At approximately eight thirty yesterday evening the Death Eaters mounted an attack on the Quidditch World Cup."

A few collective gasps could be heard over the crackles.

"We did everything within our power to prevent this attack…"

"But not enough," Severus muttered as he hung the last of his shirts in the closet.

"What we did not anticipate was the new leadership of the Death Eaters and the new focus of their goals, namely to infect the world with lycanthropy. Fenrir Greyback, a former Snatcher once thought to be dead, has assumed control of the group. We do not know how exactly he survived the Second War, or how he broke the Death Eaters out of prison. All we know is that he is their leader and has turned most, if not all, of his followers into lycanthropes."

The crowd erupted into gasps and shouts.

Severus shook his head. "What did you think he'd do, give everyone a cherry popsicle and open an ice cream store?"

"Silence!" Kingsley pleaded above the cries of the audience.

The voices died down until static was the only noise that could be heard over the airwaves. "At this moment the Ministry has a team of potions masters working on Wolfsbane, as well as a cure for lycanthropy."

Severus exhaled. And by team he means two sleep deprived parents.

"Although it may be tempting to blame the lycanthrope community as a whole for this catastrophe, we must remember that not all lycanthropes are evil or even members of Fenrir's Death Eaters. Remus Lupin is a famous example of a lycanthrope who fought for the Light until the bitter end. This is not the time to treat those with lycanthropy with suspicion and hatred. Rather, it is a time for vigilance, when we must protect ourselves and the ones we love."

Severus’ stomach churned.

"We ask that the citizens of Wizarding Britain watch for any suspicious behavior or sign of imminent attack. If you suspect something is amiss, please contact the Ministry, but only do so with prudence. This is a time when we should be uniting against the Death Eaters, not fighting amongst ourselves. If we remain united, we will defeat Fenrir and his crew once and for all. Thank you."

The audience erupted into applause. Meanwhile Severus stared at the radio across the room, wondering where to even begin with his brewing. Wolfsbane would be the logical choice, now that
so many more wizards would be in need of it, but the lycanthropy cure was just as urgent. There was no guarantee that altering Wolfsbane would lead to a cure, so he may be brewing two entirely different potions. Perhaps if he returned to his store and took stock of his Wolfsbane supply he’d have a better idea where to begin, or at least have an idea of how much would need to be done.

"I will now take your questions," Kingsley announced. “Yes, Ms. Skeeter?"

"Do you have any news on Ronald Weasley?"

Severus wandlessly turned off the radio.

Given the tragedy which had just occurred, why would anyone care about Ron Weasley?

***

George slumped in the waiting room chair, his eyes only half open. No matter how much his head pounded or his eyes drooped down, he could not afford to sleep. If something happened to Ron or his mother while he was asleep…Merlin he could not even imagine losing either of the two.

"George?"

George looked up and smiled. "Hello, Ginny."

Ginevra embraced George and cried into his shoulder. "I came here as soon as I heard the news last night, but they had both already been wheeled into surgery. I thought about waiting out here, but it was getting late and the Mediwitch told me they probably wouldn't have any news until morning. Lack of sleep may have harmed my baby, so I went home and tried to get some rest."

"That's all right," George answered. "You did the right thing in putting your child first. I would have called you if something had developed."

"I'm so worried about them," Ginny wiped the tears from her eyes. "I know Mum and I haven't gotten along these past few years, and I'm still furious with Ron for what he did to Hermione, but that doesn't mean I ever stopped loving them."

"I know," George cried. He embraced her and allowed his tears to join hers.

"Mr. Weasley?" a Healer began as he entered the room.

"Here!" he replied as he and Ginny separated.

"Could I see you in another room to discuss your relatives' condition?" the Healer asked.

"You bet," George answered before he noticed the Healer glance over at Ginny. "This is my sister, Ginny Malfoy."

The Healer smiled as he extended a hand. "I'm Abraham Green. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

Ginny shook his hand. "Likewise."

"If you would like, Mrs. Malfoy, you may join us in the room."

"I would like that very much."

Healer Green led them to an office with only a padded blue chair, an examining table, and a stool on
rollers. Ginny sat on the padded chair and George stood in the corner. The Healer then closed the door.

Ginny took a shaky breath. "How bad are they?"

"We'll start with your mother," the Healer began. "She has what we call a dry bite, meaning she did not become infected with lycanthropy."

"Thank Merlin," George sighed.

"Given the location of her wounds I would guess that the lycanthrope who bit her was more interested in killing than in changing her," Healer Green continued.

"But she will survive, right?" Ginny asked.

"She lost several milliliters of blood, and needed a transfusion. We've healed most of her wounds, but there will still be severe scarring on her face and arms. We could not undo that," the Healer replied.

"We don't care how she appears, just as long as she's alive," George replied.

"Yes," the Healer replied. "She should make a full recovery."

"Good," Ginny exhaled.

"Your brother is alive as well, although he's in much more critical condition," the Healer continued.

The siblings stared at him.

Healer Green took a deep breath. "Your brother sustained a concussion, but it should not cause any permanent damage. He broke his back also, but we were able to undo most of the physical damage from his injury. With special therapy, he should be able to walk again."

"I'm glad to hear that," Ginny replied.

"His other injuries include a shattered left humerus, and a compound fracture in his right ulna. We were able to heal those, but he will need to be careful not to lift more than five kilos for the next few months. Finally, he shattered both of his femurs. We did the best we could to heal those."

"Are they fully healed?" George asked.

"No," the Healer admitted. "We will need to put his legs in a cast and monitor them for the next few weeks. With luck, they will heal enough for him to be able to walk again soon."

"What about his Quidditch career?" George asked. "He loves playing Quidditch."

"At the moment, playing Quidditch is completely out of the question."

"But in the future?"

The Healer shook his head. "I fear his Quidditch career is over."

***

You cannot escape us forever.
Severus’ body grew numb as he reread the note. With each reading the extent of Fenrir’s grasp became clear. Not only had he been in the apothecary, but he had done it without Severus suspecting a thing. Just the thought of him contaminating all those potions sent bile up Severus’ throat.

Furious, he tore through the aisles, pointing his wand at each and every vial and casting a diagnostic spell to determine whether or not tampering had occurred.

None of them appeared to have been contaminated save the Wolfsbane. Anyone who drank it would die within seconds.

With a shout he threw four vials of Wolfsbane on the floor and stomped them. Then he noticed the empty shelf which once contained Polyjuice. He scowled as he added brewing more Polyjuice to his mental checklist. While he was at it, he’d ask Kingsley to propose a law aimed at regulating the usage and sale of the potion. Merlin knew how much trouble it was causing.

He shoved the idea of legislation out of his mind as his attention returned to the shattered vials of Wolfsbane. As he took stock of the potion, a terrifying thought came to his mind.

Hermione could have been in the store. She may have needed some ointment for Rose and wandered in just as Fenrir and his goons had begun their raid. When they saw her, they may have bitten her, or oh God, he couldn’t even fathom what else they might have done to her.

When he’d entered this marriage, Hermione had simply been a roommate, a partner with whom to cohabitate in an arrangement of convenience. The idea, however, of never seeing her smile again when he woke up, of never hearing her coo at Rose, never hearing her shoo the elves from the kitchen, or never again holding her at night was unthinkable. He could no longer picture being completely happy in a world that didn’t include her, something up until now he’d never thought possible.

He loved her.

Severus was in love with Hermione.

The word love exploded in his brain. He knew all too well where she stood on the matter of loving and being loved.

*I don’t want you ever to love me.*

He crumpled onto the floor. All Severus wanted to do was love Hermione. The only thing in the world he desired was her love.

*If I never loved again, I would be the happiest woman alive*

All Severus wanted to do was make Hermione happy. Perhaps it was selfish, but he wanted nothing more than for her to be happy with him. He wanted to be the one who made her laugh regardless of the circumstance, the man she was eager to see come home from a long day at his apothecary, the man she wanted at her side for all eternity. He wanted all the joy people had assured him marriage could bring.

*I told you, I’m through with love.*

Perhaps she was just hurt from Weasley’s rejection when she’d stated those words, but if he could fall in love again then so could she. In a few years she would be recovered enough to accept love
from someone. When that day came, it was highly unlikely that she'd look in his direction. She would find love with someone more handsome, someone younger, someone who could actually read Rose one of those nauseatingly sweet fairy tales instead of reciting potions formulas to her. They would make the perfect family while he was once again on the outside looking in, heartbroken beyond repair.

He collected the remaining vials of Wolfsbane and retreated to the fireplace.

How could Severus be stupid enough to fall in love with a woman who would never return his affection?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! As always it is much appreciated.
Hermione dipped her fork onto the syrup filled plate and raised it. Then she drizzled the syrup globs onto the pancakes, hoping the allure of the sugary sweetness would spark her appetite. So far, she felt nothing but a knot in her stomach.

Muriel finished chewing and set down her silverware. "Honey, are you all right?"

Hermione glanced up at her parents.

"She probably just needs some bacon," Wilford began. "You can't have pancakes without bacon."
Muriel glared at him. "Yes you can."

"I'm fine, but I just don't have much of an appetite right now," Hermione dropped her fork onto the plate.

"Are you feeling sick?" Wilford asked.

"No, I'm probably just exhausted from listening to Rose cry all night."

"Or maybe you miss your husband," Muriel suggested.

Hermione sighed. "I do miss chatting with Severus and watching him play with Rose, but he needs to get some work done. It’s for the best that he remains in Britain."

"Are you sure you don't want to join him? We wouldn't mind watching Rose for a few days," Muriel offered.

"Oh no. I wouldn't want to impose on you like that. Besides, we'd miss Rose after a few hours." Hermione's face lit up. "I honestly wonder if Severus is getting a little antsy himself. Those two have been inseparable since the day she was born."

Hermione did not notice the uncomfortable glance her parents exchanged. "I suppose it's nice for him to have a child in his life," Muriel began. “From what you’ve described he’s experienced very little happiness until now. I’m glad he could find joy with his daughter."

“Indeed,” Wilford replied. "He is a great father."

Both stared at her, trying to gauge her reaction. Hermione gave them a sad smile. "He sometimes considers himself a horrid parent, but I think he is quite sweet with Rose. He really loves her."

"That much is obvious," Muriel agreed. "I'm sure Rose loves him very much as well."

"She does," Hermione replied. "She cried a little louder and longer than usual last night, but I suppose I should’ve expected that. She’s used to Severus’ voice and how he holds her. It must be distressing for her to lose that consistency."

"I'm sure it is,” Muriel replied.

Hermione blushed. “Severus was worried that Rose would be scared of the Healers after she was
born since they were strangers. As a mother I’m beginning to think he was correct, but my books claim he’s worrying too much. I mean, Rose cries longer when he isn’t around, but at the same time she probably doesn’t even realize her hand is attached to her arm.”

Muriel chuckled. "Severus was watching Rose figure out what her hand was the other day. It was adorable."

Hermione relaxed until a soft cry came from the other room. She exhaled. "Rose probably needs changing."

Hermione got up from her chair, but before she could leave, Muriel began, "Call Severus."

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"Call Severus. It's obvious that you miss him."

"He's probably busy right now…"

"Too busy for his wife and daughter?"

"Good point," Hermione mused as the crying from Rose's room grew louder. "I'm coming, Rose, just hold on."

***

Severus hated himself when he gave in to the temptation to drink.

The instant alcohol slipped down his throat his thoughts flashed to earlier days when he could smell it on his father's breath as he ranted about life's latest injustice. Even so, shame and self-loathing continued to fill his third glass, despite the efforts of an inner voice that warned him he should know better. Still he was who he was. When push came to shove, he was a spineless bastard, with few other available coping mechanisms. After a few more sips the annoying voice would be silenced, anyway, leaving an empty void in its wake.

As Severus swigged down Mr. Ogden's Finest, he thanked whoever was listening that Rose was not there to witness this little pity party. His stomach churned at the thought of Rose following in his alcohol laden footsteps. He would have to polish his very best "drowning your sorrows only multiplies them" lecture should the occasion require it and pray he sounded convincing.

He took another gulp before smirking. Although Rose was now the Snape…or was it Prince?… heir, she did not have his genes. In this particular matter he was grateful. The Weasleys did not seem to engage in alcohol therapy so perhaps she'd never feel compelled to drown her sorrows as Severus had so many times before. Unless drinking behaviors were obtained through observation: nature or nurture? In either case, Severus would be sure Rose never saw him drink, no matter how painfully he had to endure another unrequited love.

His mind then turned to Hermione and the sound of her laughter. He took another agonized gulp. The desire to jump through the floo, carry her to their bed and show her, if not tell her exactly how much she meant to him was overwhelming. His track record with such displays of affection, however, was abysmal. Knowing his luck she would not consider him romantic, but rather a lecherous old man. It was one thing to have intercourse in the context of keeping up the appearance of a real marriage, but bringing love into the equation was a whole different matter altogether. One wrong word… one misstep, no matter how well-intentioned… could quite possibly end their domestic arrangement, leaving him irretrievably broken. A life without Hermione and Rose in it was not worth any such risk.
Why did he allow himself to get so close to his wife?

"Because you're stupid," he muttered before gulping down the rest of the Firewhiskey. "You were stupid to fall in love with her, and you're stupid to care for her as much as you do now."

He grabbed the bottle and refilled his glass. "You're a moron. All you're going to do is grow more attached to her, then do something idiotic. She'll leave you just like everyone else has. Everyone knows she'll be gone in a few years. Even you know that, yet you still allowed yourself to fall in love with her. For a bright wizard you make the most moronic decisions imaginable."

He took another gulp.

"Severus?"

His heart skipped a beat as he noticed the tell-tale green flames.

"Severus?"

"Shit," he muttered as he threw the glass and the bottle onto the coffee table.

"Severus? Are you there?"

"I'm coming!" he slurred as he stumbled across the room and rummaged for a sober up potion. Upon finding it he poured the liquid into his mouth and swallowed, flinching at the bitter aftertaste. Then Severus attempted to straighten his robes as he strode to the fireplace. "Hello, Hermione."

"Hello, Severus. Are you well?" she asked.

"As well as can be expected given the circumstances." Severus answered as the room ceased spinning.

"You look like you’ve been through ten rounds with a centaur and got the worse end of the deal," Hermione noted.

Severus took a deep breath. "Fenrir broke into the apothecary."

"What?" Hermione exclaimed.

Severus could hear Rose fuss in the background, Hermione turned to the side and mumbled, "Not now Rose, Mummy is talking to Daddy."

The child’s cries grew louder.

"Is Rose with you?" Severus asked.

The baby continued to whimper.

"Yes. I think she misses hearing her daddy's voice," Hermione replied before cooing, "Do you want to say 'hi' to Daddy, Rose?"

There was no answer, but Severus could see the child's face. He beamed as he cooed, "Hello Rose. Are you being good for Mummy?"

Rose quieted herself.

"She's doing fairly well, except at night. She's inconsolable at bedtime."
"Well Rose, you ought to sleep more. You'll feel better as will your mother."

Hermione laughed as Rose stared in wonder at the flame. How on earth did Daddy’s voice get in there?

"Mummy will feel better if you sleep, Rose. Speaking of which, Grandma wants to hold you. Say goodbye to Daddy!"

"Goodbye Rose," Severus replied.

"Bye Daddy," Hermione squeaked before leaving just long enough to hand Rose over to Muriel. Then, she returned. "What were you saying about Fenrir and the store?"

"Fenrir and his followers broke in and left me a lovely note stating I could not escape them. They only stole Polyjuice and contaminated the Wolfsbane. Nothing else was harmed."

"Merlin, Severus. Should Rose and I come back home where we have a ward to protect us?"

"No. I doubt Fenrir is going to lead his Death Eaters halfway across the world just to antagonize me, especially when they have new recruits to train."

Hermione bit her lower lip. "Things are getting bad there aren't they?"

"Things look worse for the Ministry every day," Severus confirmed.

Hermione gave him a soft smile. "I have faith in you. We'll get through this somehow."

"Yes, we will."

"Please come visit sometime tomorrow. Rose and I miss you."

"I miss both of you as well," Severus replied.

"Will I see you tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

"I'll stop by sometime tomorrow evening. Goodbye, Hermione."

"Goodbye, Severus."

The connection died. Hermione turned around, her expression much more serene. Her smile, however, wilted under her parents' gaze.

"Hermione, what is going on between you and Severus?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate it all.
"What do you mean, 'What's going on between you and Severus'?" Hermione asked as the colour drained from her face.

Rose yawned and settled herself into her grandmother's arms. Muriel glanced at Wilford, who nodded in her direction. She cleared her throat. "I'm going to set Rose down for a nap."

"Okay," Hermione squeaked, feeling as if she was once again a teenager, awaiting a lecture for a broken curfew.

Muriel strolled out of the room as Wilford’s frown deepened. Hermione squirmed under his gaze.

"Hermione," Wilford began, choosing each word carefully. "Have you ever truly looked at Rose and Severus together?"

"Of course I have," she answered with a shy smile. "Rose spends as much time with him as she does with me."

"Has it ever occurred to you that they do not look alike?"

Hermione's body went numb. "I suppose Rose does take after me more than him."

"She looks much more like you than Severus, doesn't she?" Wilford asked as Muriel emerged from the hallway with a somber expression.

"Yes, but genetics is an interesting thing. Some children look like their mothers, some like their fathers, and others a combination of both. Rose just takes after me," Hermione answered.

"Dear, what I think your father is trying to say is that the story of Rose's conception never quite made sense," Muriel interjected.

"What about it doesn't make sense?" Hermione retreated towards the couch.

"You were so in love with Ron," Muriel began.

Hermione stumbled into the sofa.

"You were preparing yourself to marry him. All you wanted was to be with him. Then you announced you were pregnant," Muriel continued.

Hermione gulped and sat upright.

"According to you, for the past few months before your marriage you'd been carrying on a relationship with your husband, Severus. Allegedly, he's Rose's father because you and Ron wanted to wait to enjoy marital relations until…well, marriage," Wilford chimed in.

"We did," Hermione choked. Bile crawled up her throat. Must they throw her past stupidity in her face?

"What exactly attracted you to Severus if you were planning on spending the remainder of your life
with Ron?” Wilford asked.

“You know, sometimes things just happen,” Hermione squeaked. “Severus and I have a deep connection, and we can talk for hours. He appreciates my intellect, and accepts me for who I am. It is hard not to be attracted to him given those facts.”

“Were you planning on breaking up with Ron once you and Severus began, uh, attempting to conceive Rose?” He asked.

Hermione bowed her head.

“Did you ever consider leaving Ron for Severus?”

“Severus was supposed to be a fling.”

"He treated you better than Ron yet you only considered a fling?"

"I, I didn't think he wanted more."

"Well apparently he did if he was willing to marry you."

"I..." Hermione gulped.

"Honey, that isn't like you,” Muriel replied. “It was clear to everyone how desperately you loved Ron, and how badly you wanted him to be the only man you were with. How could you throw away your virginity for a fling with an ex-professor?”


“Getting stuck in a thunderstorm just happens. A car battery dying just happens. Two consenting adults creating a baby isn’t something that just happens without both parties performing actions which would lead to said conception,” Wilford replied.

“No, I guess it doesn’t,” Hermione admitted.

“You were so in love with Ron… to betray the man you considered the love of your life for someone with whom you'd only recently reconnected doesn't make sense,” Muriel concluded.

Boiling tears filled Hermione's eyes. "I wish Rose was a biological Snape! I wish she'd been conceived in some fling with Severus instead of with Ron!"

Muriel took a step back, as if she’d been hit by a semi. "So Severus is not the biological father?"

"No," Hermione choked. “But please, you can't tell anyone."

"What the hell are you thinking?" Wilford roared.

Hermione’s heart stopped. New tears filled her eyes as the vein in her father's neck bulged through his red skin.

“Wilford, let’s try to remain rational,” Muriel began.

“Rational!” He snapped. “Our daughter admitted that she lied to a man who cares deeply for her about being the father of her child, and you expect me to stay rational?”

Muriel’s frown deepened.
Wilford turned to and pointed at Hermione. “You led this man on, convinced him he was Rose’s father, and then married him! What the hell has gotten into you? Are you even the same person we raised?”

"It wasn't like that," Hermione cried.

Muriel glared at her husband before sitting down beside Hermione. "What was it like then, Hermione?"

"Severus knew Rose wasn't his the day we met in that stupid coffee shop!" She shouted.

Wilford deflated. "What?"

"Severus knew Rose wasn't his because I never slept with him until our wedding night. I didn't even reconnect with him until I was almost four months along!" Hermione cried between gasps.

Wilford sat beside her and began massaging her back. "Hermione, what happened?"

Hermione buried her head in her mother's chest. Muriel whispered, “It’s all right sweetie. Everything is going to be okay.”

When Hermione emerged she wiped her eyes and inhaled as best she could, "Ron and I had been sexually active for years. Around Christmastime I stopped using protection. At first it was an accident, but he told me that casting the spell and drinking the potion killed the mood. He wanted excitement and spontaneity and like a fool I went along with it. I found out I was pregnant with Rose two months after he returned to his team.”

“Oh Hermione,” Muriel whispered.

Hermione hiccupped and sat up straighter. Still her voice cracked. “I told Ron about Rose when he came home on a break, but he denied that she was his. There was never anyone else but him, but he denied being her father.”

"How could he?" Muriel asked.

"I don't know. I think he just didn't want Rose, and was done with me. He left me that night and announced he had a new girlfriend. From the papers it sounds like he’d had a series of girlfriends even while we were together. I spent the next two weeks crying my eyes out and trying to figure out what to do. The day I met up with Severus was the day I was going to write you and ask to come home. The Wizarding World…they would never accept a bastard child into their society. I needed to give Rose some kind of life. Marrying Severus seemed to be the best way to provide for Rose and allow me to remain in the Wizarding World without disgrace.”

"Why would Severus agree to raise a child that wasn't his?" Wilford asked.

Hermione swallowed. "His grandmother had died and left him a large sum of money. All he needed to do to inherit it was marry and one day produce an heir. When he met me, he tried flirting with me." Hermione smirked. "He was horrendous at trying to strike up a conversation, but when he finally came clean and told me of his situation I realized it could be the best thing for Rose: she would have a name and we would be able to remain in the Wizarding World. I asked him to consider me for his wife.”

“When did he find out about Rose?” Wilford asked.

“I told him about Rose at the end of our first date. He was initially less than enthused at the prospect
of becoming a father so soon, but decided rather quickly that if he married me he'd have his wife and heir, thus fulfilling the stipulations of his grandmother's will. He needed the money fairly quickly too. If he didn’t find a wife within six months the entire fortune would go to Hogwarts. The sooner he had his family the sooner he could secure his fortune. So within two weeks of reconnecting we were married in a courthouse.”

"So this is all a business arrangement for him?" Muriel asked.

"No," Hermione replied as her eyes became misty. "He fell in love with Rose somewhere along the way. He's an excellent father to her, and does not care that she is another man's child. Honestly, I think he sees a part of himself in her."

"How so?" Muriel asked.

"Severus never felt wanted or loved by his family, or really anyone for that matter. He did not want Rose to grow up experiencing those same feelings. I think he's done a fabulous job of making her feel wanted and loved."

"Indeed he has," Muriel replied.

"Severus is an amazing father. I couldn’t have asked for a better dad to my grandchild than him,” Then Wilfords eyes flickered in rage. “Ron on the other hand,” He made a fist, "Ooh…when I see Ronald, I'm going to castrate him with my bare hands!"

Hermione sighed. “Don’t bother. He’s happy with his Quidditch career, and I’m happy with my baby. Things are better this way.”

“His career won't last forever,” Wilford answered, "And really, what kind of man denies his own daughter? Does he not have even an iota of humanity?"

"Who knows?" Hermione replied. "It's his loss in the end. Severus will be the father Rose needs, and I'll have a husband who treats me with respect. As odd as it sounds, I know I got the better end of the deal. I finally have the kind of relationship I've always wanted. It may not be a fairy tale romance, but for the first time in my adult life I can say that I'm completely happy with my partner.”

“Does this mean that you love Severus?” Muriel asked.

Hermione’s eyes widened. "Excuse me?"

Muriel smiled. "You made your marriage sound like a contract, but you two are quite affectionate with each other. It begs the question: do you love Severus?"

Hermione paused. "Severus makes sure the marriage is pleasurable for me, and I try to make it pleasurable for him."

"So this is still just a business contract for you?"

Hermione took a shaky breath. “No.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
Chapter 123

Chapter Summary

Sorry about not uploading last Friday. I was doing something with a friend and things ran longer than I intended. Still thank you for the support! It is deeply appreciated!

Severus stirred a cauldron of Wolfsbane, wishing not for the first time that the potion required fifty rather than five hundred turns. Upon completion, it would need to set for two days before he could commence the final phase of brewing. Only then could he bottle it. If he was lucky he’d have them all bottled about ten days before the next full moon, though this may be an optimistic time frame.

This was the second batch he’d made today, but the two cauldrons combined would treat at most one hundred people. If reports of the number of those turned were an accurate indication, much more Wolfsbane would be required. Several other potions masters were also on the task, but at the rate Fenrir was churning out lycanthropes they would all soon be overwhelmed.

Just as fatigue and a touch of stress-induced heartburn threatened his concentration, he shook himself. The last thing he wanted was to make a mistake which would render the potion useless, or worse, lethal. He needed to calm himself without succumbing to his body’s demands for a reprieve.

His thoughts wandered to Rose and how she had slept so peacefully in his arms a few nights before. What Severus had done to earn such complete and total trust was a mystery to him. Nevertheless he was grateful for it. No matter what happened with Fenrir, he was going to be the father Rose deserved. He would combat every last Death Eater to protect her and would spare no resource to provide for her. Most importantly though, he was going to give her the attention and time his own parents had so often denied him. Severus smirked as he pictured himself and Hermione debating potions ingredients and procedures while Rose looked on from her playpen. He let out a soft chuckle, imagining her answering every single question on her first day of potions class. Slughorn would run out of questions before she shared even a quarter of what she knew. Then again, that assumed Minerva would allow her to set foot inside the school.

If Rose was excluded from Hogwarts then it was their loss. After all they would miss the chance to teach the next great potions’ mistress. Severus could already sense her potential. Given the proper training and encouragement her achievements in the field of potions could rival his own. Then again she may show more of an interest in charms. It wasn’t out of the realm of possibility that she could create some useful spells as well. Of course she would master every defensive spell known to a seventh year by the time she was seven. It was only fair to share his knowledge with her.

Severus burst out laughing. If Rose expected a normal childhood, she was doomed to disappointment.

Three hundred ninety-nine… four hundred…

If there was one thing he wanted to teach Rose before she left the house it would be penmanship. There was nothing more frustrating than spending half the night trying to decipher a student’s handwriting. How many times had he squinted himself blind trying to tell the difference between words like “the,” “Thames,” “thyme,” and “Thailand”? No daughter of his would create such atrocious script.
He shook his head at four hundred and fifty stirs. The child had yet to lift her head or smile of her own volition, and he was already formulating lesson plans for her. When the war was over, he should allow her to enjoy her childhood, to relish her youth...

Then his thoughts wandered to the dunderheads who had earned so many detentions for their mischief-making and late night shenanigans.

Yes, Rose could enjoy being a child, but she would be a well-behaved child. He would not be as stifling or as strict as Lucius, but by Merlin he would instill in her all the manners, tact and courtesy her biological father lacked.

Speaking of Ron, he wondered what happened to him at the Quidditch World Cup? He almost regretted turning off that radio interview...almost being the operative word.

Before he could continue with that train of thought, he reached his five hundredth stir. The color seemed right and a flick of the wand to check consistency proved that, too, was perfect.

Satisfied, Severus set the cauldron beside the one previously completed and began to tidy up his workspace. As he collected his materials his thoughts turned to Hermione. He could almost hear her calling his name, and see that adorable little grin she gave him every morning. Gods, did she have any idea how stunning she was?

His stomach clenched. While he had a good idea of how to be a good father to Rose, he hadn’t the foggiest clue of how to deal with his feelings for Hermione. It had been years since he’d had such close contact with a woman he loved, and his last experience had been a catastrophe. Some would suggest that he explain his feelings to his wife so they could work out some sort of understanding, but how could he even begin to tell her how much he needed, desired, and loved her? Words are delicate, fickle things. Say the wrong thing at the wrong time and risk the sudden death of something beautiful. Say nothing at all, however, and risk a much slower death from perceived apathy. Words left unsaid are much easier to remedy than words uttered and regretted; better to keep his emotions in check. Perhaps if he was patient, her feelings will develop; if not, at least he would still have his best friend by his side.

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"Rose, look! Daddy's back!"

Rose grunted and squirmed in her mother’s arms.

Severus stepped through the fireplace and dusted himself off. "Hello Hermione, Rose. How have you been faring?"

“I’ve done well all things considered, but Rose wants to see her daddy,” Hermione replied before handing the child to her husband.

Severus took Rose in his arms and breathed in her baby scent. "I'm here now, Rose, and I'll visit as often as I can. Daddy will never leave you, and he will always love you."

He then kissed Rose on the forehead. Her eyes widened and flickered in recognition.

“She’s missed you.”

“I’ve missed her as well.”

"I don't think she likes the way I change her nappies," Hermione continued. "She keeps glaring at
me as if I'm doing it all wrong."

"I'm sure your mum is changing you just fine. She'd just like to wiggle out of that particular duty when I'm here," Severus replied, glancing at Hermione.

Hermione smirked. "No, I think she just likes the sound of your voice better than mine."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Why would any child want to hear my voice?"

"It's smooth, almost soothing when you speak a certain way," Hermione walked over to the couch. Severus followed. "She responds instantly to that deep, rich tone of yours."

Hermione sat on the couch. Severus adjusted Rose until he could sit and keep her balanced. "Perhaps she simply responds well to those who do not show outright hostility towards her."

“Oh no, it’s your specific voice she responds well to," Hermione replied. "When I try to calm her, she just complains even louder. I think she's actually asking for you."

“Perhaps she's afraid of me,” Severus mused. “She knows that I am a very intimidating man, and is afraid that if she makes any further noise I will demonstrate why I was so unaffectionately known as the dungeon bat.”

"That's ludicrous and you know it," Hermione replied. "If Rose was afraid of you she'd never fall asleep in your arms. Rose adores you."

Severus peered down at the baby, who gazed up at him as if she were memorizing his every little facial movement. "She does seem rather attached to me."

"We both are," Hermione mumbled.

Severus’ heart fluttered at the words. Part of him screamed to ask her how attached she was to him, but any further discussion would mar the beauty and joy of the moment. It was best to leave things as they were.

He cleared his throat. “Other than Rose's increased fussiness, has anything of note happened in my absence?”

Hermione sighed. "My parents cornered me about Rose's paternity. They know she's biologically Ron's daughter."

Severus' heart skipped a beat. "What did they say?"

"Aside from wanting to castrate Ron and thinking you are the most gracious man in the world, nothing," Hermione replied. "They are continuing to spoil Rose rotten, and don't seem at all bothered by the fact that her biological father is a man they cannot stand."

"Do they intend to tell anyone?" Severus asked.

"No," Hermione replied. "They understand why we did what we did, and why they need to be quiet about her true paternity."

“I am glad to hear it."

"As far as they're concerned you are her father. You're the one waking up at night to change her nappies and loving her like the princess she is, not Ron."
Rose yawned. Her eyes bulged, as though she did not know her mouth could open that wide. Severus smiled before cooing to her. "You are a most precious child."

Hermione saw a gleam in Rose's eyes... just a quick flash... that mirrored the one in Severus' when he was laughing. If Severus noticed it, he didn't comment on it. Hermione leaned closer to Severus. "I think Rose is pretty happy with her life, especially now that you're here."

"I am happy when she is happy," Severus replied, stroking Rose's cheek before turning his attention to his wife. They sat in comfortable silence for a few moments before Severus whispered, "I've missed you two."

"We've missed you, as well."

Hermione leaned in for a chaste kiss that quickly deepened. Rose watched the display in wonder, thinking that parents were quite odd creatures, indeed.
Severus had always been a light sleeper. In his youth, it had been an early warning mechanism for those occasions when his intoxicated father would stumble in from the pub in a less than agreeable mood. During the War it had been a matter of survival to be ready to answer Voldemort's call at a moment's notice. After the war his gift for hearing nighttime noises had been less in demand. It was divine to have a few years of uninterrupted slumber.

Rose's birth changed everything. A few jabs and mutters from Hermione of "Your turn to change her," had once again tuned his ear to the subtleties of nighttime noises. His return to Britain while Rose and Hermione remained with the Grangers provided a welcome respite from that unsettling state of "alert-sleep."

Tonight, however, held no such respite. Just as he had settled into bed after the floo journey from Australia he was startled awake by something decidedly un-subtle: a distant, but distinct thud. He sat up and waited a few moments, his heart pounding harder with every beat.

There was another muffled thud, soon joined by a barrage of sound, increasingly louder and more frequent. His pupils dilated as his muscles tensed.

The thudding culminated in a crash and a familiar scream. Fully awake, wand at the ready, he scowled, dressed himself, and stepped outside to find the source of the nocturnal disturbance.

As he slipped through the open door another scream pierced the night. Severus whipped around to find a silhouette scrambling off the ground, wand in hand, muttering a string of obscenities. He furrowed his eyebrows and barked, "Ms. Skeeter! Isn't it a little early in the month and a bit late in the evening for trick or treating?"

Rita crawled backwards as Severus approached her. "Hello, Mr. Snape. I was just wondering if you might be interested in granting me an interview."

Severus' expression darkened. "I hardly think two o'clock in the morning is an appropriate time to make such a request."

"It's not at all unusual for households with newborns to be wide awake at this hour," Rita began.

Severus loomed over her.

"By the way, how is the little dear? Would it be all right if I took a picture of her? All of Wizarding Britain is dying to know what the newest Prince heir looks like," Rita continued while wringing her hands.

Severus smirked. "I might consider allowing you to photograph her, but it would come at a substantial price, say, sixth months of nappy duty?"

Rita suppressed a gag. "Perhaps the photo can wait. Babies are cuter when they're older, anyway."

Rita stood up as Severus warned, "Do not take me for an idiot, Ms. Skeeter. We both know you did not come here to take pictures of my daughter."
Rita swallowed. "No, I actually came here on a far more important manner."

"And that would be…?"

"Well, Minister Shacklebolt mentioned a team of Potions Masters working on a cure for lycanthropy. I figured you had to be one of them."

"So you were going to sneak into my house to steal my research notes?"

"It was more like look them over and inform the public of your progress," she replied. When she saw this answer had not appeased him, she crossed her arms on her chest. "I plead ‘freedom of the press’. I wanted to write my article free from your wife’s coercion tactics."

"If I didn't find my knowledge of your status as an unregistered animagus so useful, the Ministry would be on my doorstep right now," Severus warned.

"Please don’t get them involved! I just wanted to know your plans, but now that I know you are awake we can have an interview!"

"I think not. As you might well suspect, I need my beauty rest."

Rita laughed with no small bit of hysteria. Severus glowered. Her good humor died in the face of his expression. "I'm sorry. I thought you were joking."

"Goodnight Ms. Skeeter," Severus answered, his robe billowing in the night air as he turned to leave.

He stalked back through the front door,

"Wait!"

Severus spun around. "What?"

Rita’s lips were curled up in a predatory grin. “Do you have any comment on Ron Weasley?”

"Why should I care about Ron Weasley?" Severus snapped.

"Someone seems defensive," Rita needled. “It’s almost as if you consider him your competition for your wife’s affections."

"Weasley is no threat to me."

"Is he now?" Rita asked.

Severus rolled his eyes. He reached for the doorknob.

“I wouldn’t be so cavalier about Ron’s condition," Rita warned. "After all he could use his predicament to woo your wife back to his side."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "What exactly has Ron Weasley gotten himself into?"

Rita's face lit up. "Did you not hear? Fenrir almost killed him! The werewolf knocked Ron from his broom while it was still in mid-air."

Severus released the doorknob.

“Ron could be paralyzed. Fans everywhere have been crying and praying for his swift recovery."
Severus, where have you been?"

"Brewing potions," he muttered as a mélange of emotions overtook him. On the one hand he felt pity that the boy was hurt, but he also felt anger that so many people continued to adore him, oblivious to his betrayal of Hermione and Rose. Still, he was Rose's biological father, and if he died it would rob her of the opportunity to know him. Ron may be an arse, but in all fairness Hermione, not fate, should be the one to determine what role, if any, the ginger git would play in Rose's life. Then it would be Rose’s decision as to whether or not she’d form a relationship with him.

An even less commendable though came to Severus: With the Weasley prat out of the way, Hermione would be better able to focus on building a future with him. Maybe then Severus would be able to win her heart.

Bile raced up Severus’ throat as his stomach churned. Hadn't he become a better man than one who would take any joy in another’s demise? His reaction to Ron’s injury wasn't so different from his gut reaction the night Voldemort planned the demise of James Potter. Merlin you think he’d have learned something over the years. Still if Ron’s death could lead to Severus finally having the family he’d always wanted…

"You don't seem too upset about Mr. Weasley’s fate."

Severus was jolted back to reality. “I do not see why I should react by weeping. My issues with Mr. Weasley are well-known. There is no love lost between us.”

“That’s an understatement.

“That being said I am sorry that misfortune has befallen him. He may be a dunderhead who is clueless as to how to appreciate a beautiful woman, but Ginevra is undoubtedly upset about his injuries. For her sake I hope he makes a speedy recovery.”

“Yes, let's discuss your wife for a minute. Does she know about her ex-lover’s injuries?"

"What business is that of yours?"

“Ooh, are you hiding all this from her?"

"Of course not," Severus replied.

Rita frowned. By the expression on his face Severus was being truthful. "When Hermione does have a statement to make, please ask her to call me. This could make for an interesting story."

"Why would she want to discuss Weasley with you, of all people?" Severus snapped.

“I just thought she’d like to make a statement concerning his condition. It would be only fitting considering that Ron has discussed her on numerous occasions. Perhaps she could use this opportunity to tell her side of the story, or at least reach out to him and make amends.”

“There is no reason for Hermione to apologize to anyone, nor is there any reason for her to give an interview only for her words to be twisted and used against her later by you and Ronald.”

Rita's smile widened. "You seem oddly protective of her, almost as protective as you were of the memory of your former lover."

Severus’ body went cold.
“Tell me, is Hermione your replacement for Lily?”

Rita screeched as a wave of pain coursed up her leg through her body and out her fingertips. When it stopped she tumbled to the ground. Severus stood over her and answered in a very dark tone, "Hermione is her own woman; an incomparable witch. She is a replacement for no one. Never forget that when speaking to or about her, especially in my presence."

"I won’t," Rita squeaked.

Severus marched back inside the house. Rita huffed and dragged herself up off the ground. She tried to follow him inside, but was once again impeded by the invisible ward.

She let out another scream.

Severus pulled his nightshirt back on and slid into bed. He muttered a few choice words about Rita as he rolled over. His muttering stopped, however, as he stared at the empty place in his bed beside him.

He closed his eyes and whispered, “Hermione.”

Chapter End Notes

It may be a couple of days before I can update again. I'm going to be traveling and don't quite know when I'll have time to update. By next week everything should return to normal.

All that being said thank you for the support! As always it is deeply appreciated.
Hermione eased herself into the tub until warm water covered her entire body. She exhaled as her muscles relaxed. Rose had just nursed and Hermione’s parents had assured her that they could handle anything that came their way for the next hour. A quiet, decadent soak sounded like a slice of heaven.

If she was honest with herself, she would have to admit to ulterior motives for the luxury. A good look in the mirror earlier in the day had proved a bit shocking. Her hair was badly in need of the products that had once tamed it into submission. It would take at least a quarter of a bottle of Sleekazy’s Hair Potion to eliminate even half of its frizz. Her skin was showing the effects of inattention as well. It was nothing a bit of exfoliation and moisturizer couldn't improve, but it would still require putting more products on her body. A year ago all of this was another part of her day, but since becoming a mother her time was allocated differently. It was time to reclaim some of her old routines before her looks actually frightened someone.

Hermione bent her knees and scooted forward until her hair was submerged. When was the last time she'd had a half hour to herself? Anymore most of her time was spent attending to Rose, sleeping, or trying to steal a few precious moments with Severus. As precious as the time spent with her family was, it didn’t change the fact that she was still Hermione Snape, a woman who at one point her life had varying interests and hobbies. If she could get through Rose’s infancy in one piece Hermione vowed never to take down time for granted again.

Popping back up, she worked her favorite shampoo into her scalp, then submerged herself again until all the shampoo had wafted into the water. While her hair was by no means subdued, it did not feel as grimy to the touch as before. The tension had escaped her body too. When Severus came, she prayed he’d notice the difference. She would be tempted to hex him if he did not.

She sighed as she worked conditioner into her long tangles. No matter how sleek her hair looked or how well she dressed, there was still a lot of work ahead to remedy what pregnancy had done to her body. Although she’d been applying a salve to her abdomen, stretch marks were still visible. She had lost quite a bit of her pregnancy weight, but there remained a stubborn little pouch below her stomach that only exercise would cure.

Hermione groaned. How was she going to find time to exercise when she didn't even have time to sleep? How was she supposed to reclaim her old habits with an infant crying at all hours of the day? Of all the things she had read or been told about having a baby, the one thing she wished she’d understood more clearly was just how little time she would have to herself. Of course, if she had known, she might have had second thoughts about becoming a mother.

"No," she whispered. "Rose has been worth it all."

Hermione slid back down into the water. Once she was finished with her bath she’d slip into a nice shirt and her best jeans. She wanted to put some extra effort into looking attractive for Severus. Maybe she'd even have a little fun, letting him think he had forgotten an important occasion. Hermione smirked at the thought of him squirming to remember if it was her birthday, their anniversary, or some other special day that would have warranted her extra efforts. She had a few nice dresses, but that may be too formal. Perhaps a shirt which brought out the color of her eyes would do...
From the other room Rose began to whimper.

"I've got it!" Muriel yelled.

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

Whatever she decided to wear, Severus would need to arrive fairly quickly after she put it on. Merlin only knew that the minute she decided to put on anything halfway attractive was the minute Rose chose to spit up… or worse.

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Severus stood frozen in front of the fireplace, floo powder in hand, his mind sorting through the options for telling Hermione about Ronald and his untimely accident. Part of him wanted to just hand her a copy of the Daily Prophet and leave, but that approach was too cold. Another internal voice advised him to keep his silence. After all, she was his wife, not Weasley’s. Why should she care about her former lover’s bad luck? Before he could get too far into that train of thought, he remembered how poorly she had reacted to his hiding the Death Eater escape from Azkaban. He’d do almost anything to avoid another row like that.

Severus shook his head. Who was he kidding anyway? Deep down inside she still loved Weasley, though he could not for the life of him understand why. Even on the off chance her feelings for the ginger prat had changed, the man was still Rose's biological father. For that reason alone Hermione deserved to know what had happened. Breaking it to her would be difficult, though. Perhaps if he tried for a little sensitivity…

Severus chuckled. Sensitivity had never been his strong suit. It was doubtful that he would ever be the type of man who knew how to break less than pleasant news to a woman he loved, at least not without tripping over himself. Knowing him any attempt at sensitivity would only exacerbate the situation because he’d either come off as patronizing or just start blubbing. The last thing he needed was to humiliate himself in front of his wife and in-laws.

Severus stared at the fireplace. Perhaps he should just step into the floo and see where their conversation led. At some point in the conversation he would find an appropriate opening. After all, he’d faced Voldemort with news of devastating defeats. How much more difficult could it be to face his wife with the news of her ex-lover's injuries?

As difficult as it was to watch her weep, hear her admit that she’d never fallen out of love with Weasley, and see her rush right back into his arms.

After taking a deep breath, Severus cast the floo powder and recited her parents' Australian address. Then he stepped inside, bracing himself for whatever would come.

"Severus!" Hermione exclaimed as he stumbled across the threshold. She turned to their daughter and smiled. “Look Rose, Daddy’s here!”

Rose watched Severus brush soot from his robes. Her eyes widened as the fabric swished with each stroke of his hand, then billowed as he turned to greet her. Someday, she wanted to have robes like that so she could brush off dust and make them swish and billow, too. If she could just figure out how to stand… and brush… and twirl.

"Hermione," Severus breathed. Her deep red blouse and dark washed jeans clung perfectly to her body, accentuating all of her best features. Her hair appeared a bit more subdued, although he had never minded her wild curls, especially first thing in the morning, when they were at their most
alluring. Still, Hermione had obviously put a lot of effort into her appearance tonight, something he couldn't help but appreciate.

"Hermione," he repeated. "You look stunning."

"Thank you," she replied with a slight flush. "Grandma and Grandpa babysat so I could take a real bath this afternoon."

"You look radiant," Severus answered before wincing. Why couldn't he say anything other than the bloody obvious? There was no need to behave as if he'd never spoken to a woman before, even if he hadn't laid eyes on anyone as desirable as his wife.

“I'm glad you approve,” Hermione grinned. "It's amazing what a relaxing soak can do for the spirits. I didn't realize how tired and stressed I was until I stepped into that hot water. It made me remember how much I love baths."

"I'll have to remember your fondness for them when you return home," Severus replied, wondering if any of their tubs could accommodate two.

Rose began to fuss. Hermione leaned down and cooed, "Do you want to see Daddy?"

Rose’s cries grew louder.

Hermione handed the infant to her husband. Severus took the child and smiled down at her, offering her a finger to grasp. "Hello, Rose. Daddy missed you."

Rose hiccuped.

"It sounds like you were very good to Mummy today. Did you let her take a nap as we'd discussed earlier?" Severus asked.

Rose stared up at him. How on earth was she supposed to get a billowy robe of her own. Crying only resulted in feedings or nappy changes, neither of which she wanted. Maybe if she tried that talking thing he always did, but how the heck did that work?

"Something's going on in that head of yours," Severus muttered. "You're thinking about something."

"What do you believe she's thinking about?" Hermione asked.

Severus glanced up at his wife. “She’s probably wondering how to make that potion I told her about last night.”

Hermione laughed. "She probably had no idea what you were talking about. If she's thinking about your potion, she's probably wondering about something a little more basic, like what a cauldron is."

Severus kissed the child on the forehead. "I'll have to take her on a tour of the lab sometime then."

"It would be a good way to teach her language skills and enhance her vocabulary,” Hermione answered “When she finally gets a vocabulary that is."

"It will," Severus replied. "Perhaps if I'm lucky her first word will be dunderhead."

"Severus! That's horrible!"

"What's so horrible about it?"
"She'll grow up wearing black and scaring the other children. She won't have any friends if she calls them dunderheads and deducts points from them."

"I think she'd look quite good in black," Severus replied as he pictured Rose in a robe like his. "Besides, I'd teach her what a dunderhead was so she'd only apply the term to someone when it was appropriate."

"Rose is doomed," Hermione muttered.

"Most assuredly," Severus replied.

"But she'll have her father's love," Hermione continued, "and in that she will be a lucky girl, indeed."

"Nothing will ever shake my love for this child," Severus answered before returning his attention to the infant in his arms.

Hermione bit her lip as Severus rocked the child in his arms. "Severus?"

He glanced up at her and swallowed.

"What's troubling you?" Hermione whispered.

Severus tensed. "Since you brought up fathers, I feel that we should discuss Rose's sperm donor."

Hermione shuddered. "What about Ron?"

Severus gazed at her as if to memorize her every facial feature. "Fenrir nearly killed him."

Chapter End Notes

So sorry it took so long to update. Everything got so hectic last week between being out of town and work that I didn't have time to post. Thank you for sticking with me!
Severus watched varying emotions play across Hermione's face. At first her eyes grew large, then there was a flash of anger. Afterwards her lower lip quivered. She blinked. “What, what exactly happened?”

Severus released the breath he'd been holding. "Let's sit down on the couch."

"Yes, let's," Hermione murmured.

Together they sat. Severus peeked down at Rose, who had closed her eyes. He kissed her on the forehead before looking up at Hermione. "Fenrir attacked the Quidditch World Cup. Apparently he specifically targeted Mr. Weasley in the course of that attack."

“How, how did he hurt Ron?” Hermione asked.

Severus' tone remained neutral, "From what I read in the paper, Fenrir charmed a Quaffle to chase after Ronald. The Quaffle hit him and knocked him off his broom. He fell quite some distance and landed on his back, unable to move off the field. The paper reported that George apparated him away to safety."

"What type of injuries did he sustain?"

"He had a concussion, a broken back, and numerous broken bones. The Healers placed him in a medically induced coma in order to give his body time to mend, especially his back."

"Will he be able to walk?"

Severus could see tears welling in her eyes. His heart sank. "With therapy, he may be able to walk. The Healers are not yet sure. What they are sure of is that Ronald's Quidditch career is over."

"Under the circumstances, I'm not surprised," Hermione replied.

Severus sighed and lowered his head. “If you want to see him, I won’t prevent you from doing so. I’ll understand if you need to be with him.”

"What?"

"If seeing Ron will make you feel better…"

"Why would I want to see him?” Hermione asked with more than a hint of anger in her voice.

Severus glanced up at his wife.

"He abandoned me, he refused to acknowledge Rose as his own, and he continues to blast us all in the papers. I have no desire to see him ever again."

“At one point he was your best friend.”

"Was being the operative word.”
"I just thought you might want to pay him a visit in the hospital."

"I don’t," Hermione answered.

"Very well then," Severus averted his eyes to Rose's sleeping form and gave the infant a small grin. Moments of strained silence passed.

"I do not want Rose to see who I am around him."

Severus returned his attention to his wife. "What do you mean?"

Hermione's voice cracked, "He never appreciated me, not even when we were first years. I wouldn’t have been in that bathroom crying my eyes out if Ron hadn’t said, and I quote, 'she's a nightmare honestly. No wonder she hasn't got any friends.' I know, I forgave him for those words, but they’ve stuck with me throughout my life. Still I was the problem, never him."

Hermione paused. Severus said nothing, but remained focused on her.

"Even after we became friends it took him forever to realize I was a girl. He saw how hurt I was to see him with Lavender, yet he continued to throw their relationship in my face. Throughout my time at Hogwarts, I was the one pathetically waiting for him like some sort of lost puppy waiting for its owner. When we finally got together, I thought all my dreams had come true. They soon turned into nightmares, though I did not want to admit it."

"It wasn't all horrendous," Severus muttered. "You got Rose out of it."

Tears came to Hermione's eyes. "I know, and I thank God every day for her. I just wish she didn't have to learn some day that her biological father didn't want her… that her mother created her with a man who couldn't even envision holding her."

“Ronald couldn’t envision holding her?” Severus asked.

“Yes,” Hermione whispered.

Severus held Rose closer to his chest. The child did not stir.

Hermione wiped her eyes. "Do you remember when I was crying after Harry's funeral?"

"I do. You were upset because Ron said he never wanted to marry you," Severus replied, fighting to keep his expression neutral.

"That upset me at the time, but now I'm more upset about the things he said about Rose,” Hermione answered.

"What did he say about Rose?” Severus asked, his voice darkening.

"He said he never wanted a baby, that he couldn't envision waking up at all hours of the night for her, or tending to her during the day. He claimed that all she’d do was give him a headache. Then he said he couldn't imagine holding one of those 'things' while it drooled all over him," Hermione replied.

"Rose is not a thing," Severus growled.

"I know," Hermione replied as she smiled down at her sleeping daughter. "I was too humiliated for those words to make their full impact at the time. Looking back now, though, I realize Rose deserves
a father who sees her as the beautiful little person she is, not an insensitive twat like Ron.” Hermione then glanced up at Severus. "That's why I'm glad you are her dad, not Ron."

Severus twitched a smile, then shifted his gaze to the bundle in his arms. "Would you like to hold her?"

"She's comfortable with you,” Hermione choked. “She loves you, and you love her. Nothing could ever change that.”

“I do indeed love Rose,” Severus whispered. “More than I thought I was capable of loving any child.”

Hermione hummed.

Severus shifted in place. He bit his lower lip until he tasted blood. Perhaps he shouldn't ask this question, but if he knew the answer now he may save himself heartache later on. "Hermione?"

"Yes?"

"What if Ron had said something else at Harry's funeral?"

"What do you mean?"

Severus took a deep breath. His muscles tensed "What if Ronald had said he wanted to marry you? What if he had said he wanted Rose? What would you have done?"

Hermione ran her hand along the seam of the couch cushion while she took a few moments to formulate an answer. "I don't know. To be honest I really never expected him to take me back. I only wanted answers from him."

"Would you have divorced me to be with him?" Severus asked.

"No,” she answered in a soft voice.

Severus locked eyes with her. “You would not have divorced me?"

“No,” Hermione answered in a stronger voice. “I would not have divorced you.”

"Why?" he asked. "Ronald was the love of your life, the man with whom you were to spend an eternity. You only married me when I offered to help you clean up his mess. Why would you have stayed with me, a man you do not want or love?"

"Because you saved Rose's life,” she replied.

"I would never have left you alone to fend for yourself against Fenrir and his soldiers."

"True, but you saved Rose's life even before we suspected Fenrir was alive."

Severus raised an eyebrow.

"When Rose's heart rate was decreasing you were the one who spoke to her and brought her back. She lived because you begged her to,” Hermione answered. “I, I couldn’t imagine what I would’ve done if I’d lost her. I will always be grateful to you for saving her life.”

"So you would have stayed with me out of gratitude?" Severus pressed.
"Not just that. I promised to help you obtain your fortune," Hermione answered. "If I divorced you, Minerva would've swooped in like a vulture and dashed your dreams of an apothecary chain. Of course, I suppose you could still have had a little time to find another wife, but on such short notice you might have ended up with a dunderhead." She smirked. "That would have been tragic, now, wouldn't it?"

"Indeed it would have been."

"Besides, if you married some vapid gold digger it might appear that only dunderheads would marry you. Now how would that make me look? I do have my pride to consider, after all."

Severus chuckled. "So you would've stayed with me for the sake of your pride?"

"Well… maybe a little more than that," Her smile faded, but her eyes softened. "I consider you a friend, perhaps the best friend I'll ever have. I agreed to this marriage to help you, for better or worse, and true friends don't break promises."

"I suppose not," Severus muttered, trying to remember the last time anyone cared whether they'd broken a promise made to him.

Hermione put a hand on his knee. "Ron had already abandoned Rose and me once. I could not risk that happening again. You have been nothing but supportive and steadfast since you learned I was carrying Rose. The choice was a no-brainer, really."

Severus felt his heart warm. At the very least, he had Hermione's unwavering loyalty, which was more than he had ever obtained from anyone else. His lips curled up. "You do know that in a couple of weeks the deadline for my getting married will have passed."

"I honestly hadn't thought about that," Hermione admitted, then laughed. "Of course, I haven't thought about much beyond feedings and sleep schedules the past few weeks."

He laughed with her. "I never would've thought that I'd want to spend more time holding an infant than I would reading a potions' journal."

"Rose really has taken over our lives, hasn't she?"

"I fear so."

"Yet we love every moment of it."

"That we do."

They gazed into each other's eyes.

Hermione swallowed. "Do you regret marrying me?"

"No," Severus answered. "Not at all."

"I don't regret marrying you, either," Hermione replied.

With that, Severus leaned in for a kiss. Hermione responded emphatically, leaving no doubt that she was happy with her husband.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Chapter 127

Hermione tossed onto her right side, pressing her eyes shut in a desperate attempt to invite sleep. A noise from the hallway aborted her efforts. She rolled over in the direction of the noise. Was Rose awake? No, her stomach was full, and her nappy was fresh. If Rose stayed on schedule she wouldn't wake for another two hours or so.

What could the noise be then? Sometimes Dad was up at this hour, usually trying to sneak a morsel of what Mum considered junk food. Hermione grinned. It was probably just Dad, sneaking into the kitchen for a leftover slice of pizza. Leave it to him to chance heartburn for the taste of Italian sausage. Hermione exhaled, then rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling.

"Why would you have stayed with me, a man you do not want or love?"

Her stomach churned. The truth was that Hermione would've stayed with Severus even if Ron had declared his love for her. Of that much Hermione was certain. Yet her reasons for staying were unclear even to her. Although she listed several, none of them seemed quite adequate or completely honest; in fact, they sounded more like excuses. But if they were excuses, then what was her true motivation?

Better yet, why did he even ask that question? What did he hope to gain from her answer? Nothing. There was nothing for Severus to gain from knowing that she never intended to divorce him. It was a stupid question. Hermione smiled. Yes, it was a stupid question and the sooner she pushed it out of her head, the better. Humming, she closed her eyes again.

"Ronald was the love of your life, the man with whom you were to spend an eternity. You only married me when I offered to help you clean up his mess. Why would you have stayed with me, a man you do not want or love?"

Hermione pried open her eyes. Severus’ voice had been so soft, so vulnerable. Nobody had ever spoken to her like that, had ever been so desperate to have her on their side. Perhaps he truly needed her. Maybe he cared for her more than just a wife or the mother of his child…

Hermione snarled. What was she thinking? Severus Snape was the epitome of misanthropy. While ironing out the details of their marriage, Severus made it clear that he was not interested in love. Even if he did decide to love again, why would he fall in love with a woman who’d proven to be as defective in the field of love as Hermione had? From all the eligible witches in Britain, why would Severus decide Hermione was worthy of his heart, soul, and devotion?

She clutched the hem of her sheets. Why did she care whether or not her husband, who had married her out of sheer convenience, could fall in love with her? Was Hermione really stupid enough to being love into a perfectly amicable friendship?

She glared at a tiny spider in the corner as she considered her options: continue this irritating meditation or indulge in a shot of brandy to help her sleep. Resolving in favor of the brandy, she sat up only to slump back down. Alcohol and breast feeding didn't mix. She threw her head into her pillow and groaned.

"Hermione?"
Hermione glanced into the hallway. "Mum? What are you doing up?"

Muriel stepped into the room. "I was checking to see that the doors were locked. On the way back to bed I saw you sitting up, wide awake. What's wrong?"

Hermione moaned. "I can't sleep. I'd kill for a glass of wine or a shot of brandy, but that wouldn't be good for Rose."

"You're right," Muriel replied before motioning for Hermione to scoot over. "I overheard you and Severus talking about Ronald and his injury. Are you worried about Ron?"

"No," Hermione moved over, allowing Muriel to sit beside her. "I don't wish him ill, but I'm not invested in what happens to him any more. There's nothing I can do for him, and there’s nothing left to say. I'm done with Ron, for good this time."

"That's a good attitude to have," Muriel replied. "Which only raises the question of what's keeping you awake?"

"I don't know," Hermione admitted with a shrug. "I guess I'm just thinking about something Severus said."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me if I would've run off with Ron after Harry's funeral if he had wanted me back."

"Would you have?" Muriel asked.

"No," Hermione answered. "I wouldn’t so much as considered it."

"Did you tell Severus that?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you still thinking about it?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "Because I'm not sure why I'm so confident I would've stayed with Severus and it puzzles me, too, why he even asked the question."

Muriel shook her head. "You really don't know the answer?"

"No, I think I know," Hermione replied. "He probably just wants to make sure his position as Rose's father is secure."

Muriel raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Severus only wants to make sure his position as Rose’s father is secure," Hermione noted. "He and Rose have always had a special bond, even before she was born. Severus loves Rose, and a huge part of him would die if she were taken away from him. That's probably where the question came from."

"Do you really believe that's the only reason he asked?" Muriel inquired with a twinkle in her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Honey, what if he cares about where he stands with you?"
Hermione shot up. "What do you mean?"

"I think he cares very deeply for you," Muriel answered.

"No, I think you’re misreading things between us."

"How am I misreading things?"

"I…I," Hermione swallowed. “Severus is a very complicated person. It’s easy to misunderstand him.”

"Are you sure? That isn’t exactly my impression of him."

"What is your impression of him?"

"I see him as a kind man who takes excellent care of my daughter and granddaughter."

Hermione twisted her lower lip.

"He has treated you with nothing but respect and affection since we’ve met him. When he looks at you it’s as if you’re the only person in the world, as if you’re the only person aside from Rose who matters to him. It’s quite touching."

Hermione shook her head. "He likes me because I’m one of his few friends. There’s nothing more to it."

"What if there is more to it?"

Hermione stared at her mother. "Mum, why would you say such a thing?"

"Whenever Ron spoke about his future it was clear you had no part in it. When Severus speaks about his future you and Rose are at the center of it. The day he left, goodness Hermione I thought his heart and soul were being ripped out. It was clear that he hated the idea of spending days away from you. Every day he visits for hours, and he isn’t coming here just to spend time with Rose. If that were the case he’d leave the second she was placed in her crib, but he stays to chat with you. It’s clear to everyone that he considers you his partner."

"His lab partner, yes. His life partner, probably not."

"Oh Hermione."

"Look Mum, I know you want the best for me, but we need to be realistic. Severus doesn’t open his heart to other people. Rose is the exception to the rule. Besides," Hermione looked down and fiddled with a lose thread on the sheet. "I don’t know why he’d feel anything more towards me."

"Why wouldn’t he feel something more? Are you so convinced you’re impossible to love?"

"Love?" she exclaimed

"Keep your voice down. You don’t want to wake Rose," her mother scolded.

Lowering her voice, Hermione continued. "I’m sorry, but love? Severus Snape does not love anyone except Rose."

"Has he ever said that?"
"He does not need to," Hermione replied.

Her mother’s expression did not change.

“Look Mum, Severus no longer sees me as a student, which I appreciate, but he could not possibly see me as a lover.”

“Why not?”

“All one needs to do is look at me to know why he would never consider me as the woman he loves. I’m needy, especially when I’m hormonal or when the Prophet splatters Ron's latest insults on the front page. I chase his house elves out of the kitchen, I am too independent, too chatty, and I make him try new foods.”

"Your father does not always like to try new foods, either, but that does not keep him from loving me. The other things you mention seem quite minor, if not admirable."

"An independent woman who speaks her mind might sometimes be helpful in the lab, but she can be pretty irritating outside of it. There is no way Severus is in love with me."

“Why are you so certain of that?”

"Because he likes his independence, too. He has spent most of his life alone. It's inevitable that one day he will get tired of hearing my opinions and start telling me to shut up."

"Would Severus really do that, or are you thinking about your relationship with Ron?" Muriel asked.

Hermione bowed her head. "Ron never wanted to hear what I had to say. Severus always listens to me, no matter how foolish I'm being. It’s one of the things I appreciate most about him.”

Muriel lifted Hermione's chin until she met her eyes. "From what I can tell, Severus cares a deal for both you and Rose. I also think I know why you would have stayed with him."

"Why?"

"Because you love him."

Hermione gave her a blank stare. “Love?"

“Love,” Muriel repeated.

Hermione blinked.

"Hermione, I haven't seen you this happy in a long time. You light up every time he walks out of the fireplace, you've laughed more in the past few months than you have in years, and you aren't afraid to display your affection for him."

"Why, why would I fall in love with someone I married to save myself from disgrace?"

"It makes all the sense in the world why you’d fall in love with him. You and Severus are intellectually compatible and you seem to enjoy the same things. You have forged a strong friendship, you're amazing co-parents, and he's treated you with more respect than any man other than your father. From that viewpoint falling in love with him was inevitable."

"You're right," Hermione replied softly. "But love is a strong word."
"It's also a scary word," Muriel answered.

"That it is," Hermione choked.

Muriel released Hermione's chin. "It is hard to love and to be loved."

Hermione nodded.

“You and Severus have each been hurt before, but neither of you is damaged beyond repair. I'm not suggesting you tell him how you feel tonight or even tomorrow morning, but I would not wait until your dying breath to tell him how you feel either."

"What if he does not return my feelings?"

"What if he does?"

Muriel left her daughter with a kiss on the forehead and much to think about.

Hermione sat on her bed, staring into space as she contemplated the possibility of once again loving a man who might not love her back. Then she contemplated the equally terrifying possibility of loving a man who did love her back. What if Mum was right? What if Severus did love her? What if she proved inadequate and unworthy of that love? What if he abandoned her after he realized she wasn’t the perfect wife he’d always wanted?

Sighing, Hermione resigned herself to a sleepless night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It means a lot to me!
"How is he?" Molly asked as she entered Ron's hospital room clad in a faded yellow dress.

George's stomach churned. Half of his mother's face was swathed in a large bandage; the other half was marked with scratches stitched and glued together. George tried not to shudder, but the pained expression on his mother's face revealed that he was not successful.

George looked at his brother and cleared his throat. "Ron is still comatose, but the doctors are planning to wake him up this morning."

"Good," Molly replied, glancing over at her youngest son. “It’s hard to believe it’s only been two weeks since he," she wiped her eye. “Since he first came here.”

George nodded while Molly kissed Ron’s cheek. His brother's head was the only part of him not encased in the full body cast. The cast was yellowing, but then again that could be an effect of the lighting. He'd have to ask the Healer to cast a spell to make the cast appear less tattered and faded.

"He has lost weight," Molly thought aloud.

"He has," George answered, taking stock of his brother’s sunken eyes and cheeks. It had to be hot in that cast. The pain from his wounds must be excruciating despite all the potions he'd been forced to ingest.. Maybe it's a good thing Ron wasn't awake to feel the discomfort. A cooling spell and a pain relief potion would be helpful when he regained consciousness.

"Is he awake yet?"

George glared at the intruder. "What the bloody hell are you doing here?"

The woman glared right back at him. "I'm his girlfriend. Why shouldn't I be here?"

"I don't know, Alicia. Where have you been the past two weeks?" George snapped.

"Trying to convince the Healers to let me see Ron," she argued. "Until today his visitors were restricted to immediate family members. Since we aren’t exactly husband and wife yet I wasn’t allowed in. Today I managed to sneak past them so, am I allowed in?"

"No, you bloody well aren’t allowed in, and you’d best leave," George argued.

"Ron would want me to be there when he woke up!" Alicia retorted.

"Why would he want to see you?" George demanded. “You disappeared when the werewolves attacked. There is no reason Ron would ever want to see the person who left him for dead.”

"I wasn’t trying to run out on Ron," Alicia insisted.

"The hell you weren’t trying to save your skin by ditching Ron."

"I didn’t abandon him."

"If you weren’t abandoning Ron then where did you go?" Molly asked.
"I apparated onto the field and grabbed a broom from one of the injured players. Then I dove at Fenrir to keep him from hexing Ron. He knocked me out of the sky, but a cushioning charm saved my life. When I looked up to check on Ron, George already had him. The next thing I knew, they apparated away and I had two lycanthropes charging towards me. I barely escaped with my life."

"Oh," Molly blushed. "We didn't realize you were in so much trouble. Everything happened so fast. LeStrange had attacked me and it was all I could do to get away and to safety myself. Once I escaped I realized how badly mangled my face was, so I was sent to St. Mungo's. Meanwhile George was saving me and later Ron. If we'd known, we would have asked the staff to let you see him," Molly answered.

"Mother," George hissed. "Are you certain she’s telling the truth?"

"The story is plausible enough for me," Molly replied before giving him a pointed look. "She stays."

George muttered a few curse words under his breath.

"Once again I apologize for George's rude behavior as well as for ever doubting your loyalty to my son."

"There’s no need to apologize," Alicia replied. "I'm with Ron now, that's all that matters. I needed to be here when he woke up, to make sure he was okay."

"Well we’re glad you could come," Molly answered. "It’s good for Ron to have a woman in his life who would never betray him."

"Thank you Mrs. Weasley."

"Oh please, call me Molly."

"Okay Molly," Alicia answered. "So, when are they bringing Ron out of the coma?"

"They plan to bring him out of the coma this morning," George replied.

"Thank Merlin."

All eyes turned to the doorway. Ginny barged into the room.

George grinned. "So glad you could make it."

Ginny panted. "Sorry if I'm late. I came as soon as Dad told me there’d been a change in Ron’s condition."

"Where is Dad?"

"He'll be here with Bill and Charlie soon. Kingsley flooed them about an Order meeting just as we were leaving."

"Did they say when it would be?" George asked.

"I didn't hear because I'm still not a member," Ginevra replied. "I just apparated here when they gathered around the fireplace. I know the rules."

"If you'd like, we could ask to have you inducted," George offered.

"I would like to be a member," Ginevra glared at her mother. "But I don't think they'd trust me now
"I'm a Malfoy."

"Water under the bridge, Ginny. No one had a clue that Fenrir Greyback was still alive. Draco and Harry were at odds. It wasn't a stretch to suspect him," Molly argued.

"I told you my husband was innocent."

"You aren't exactly unbiased."

"Severus Snape, a fellow order member, tried to tell you Draco was innocent."

"He also led us to believe he wasn't sleeping with Hermione," George answered.

Ginevra shot him a look that could kill. Before she could respond, Arthur announced, "We're here. Sorry we're late."

"Thank goodness!" Molly replied as she embraced her husband and her sons. "Ginevra said Kingsley called."

Arthur nodded. "He wants to have an Order meeting in three days."

"Well we'll be there, assuming Ronald is out of the woods," Molly replied.

Arthur turned to his resting son. "Yes, assuming Ron is out of the woods."

"Hello," the Healer began as he strolled into the room. "How is everyone today?"

"As well as can be expected," Arthur replied.

"Great to hear," the Healer began. He pulled out his wand, placed it on Ron’s chest, and began muttering a spell. His wand changed a light green. He hummed before moving the wand to Ron’s abdomen casting another spell. This time the wand was blue. Four more times he moved the wand along Ron’s body and cast a spell. Each time the wand changed a different color.

"Well, Ron's vitals are good. According to our tests, his back should be strong enough to endure minimal movement. It may be another week before he's out of the cast, but the healing spells seem to be doing their job just fine," the Healer announced.

"Thank you so much for helping him," Molly answered.

"My pleasure," the Healer responded before giving his attention to his patient. He uttered an incarnation that caused Ron's face to softly glow. Within moment he let out a groan. His eyelids fluttered.

"Ronald!" his mother cried.

Ron moaned, "Where am I? Why am I so hot?"

"You're in a body cast, son," Arthur replied.

"B-body cast?" he moaned.

"Yes, we’re at St. Mungo’s." Arthur continued as the others crowded around the hospital bed.

"I am?" Ron replied. "Why?"
"You were in a Quidditch accident," George explained. "Fenrir Greyback attacked and nearly killed you."

"What?" Ronald asked. "No, he's dead. I killed him. They gave me a medal for it."

"He may not remember anything surrounding the time of his accident due to the concussion," the Healer stated.

"I had a concussion?" Ron asked.

"Yes," Arthur answered.

"I was stupid enough to fall off my broom?" Ron saw the confirmation in their eyes. "Oy, the boys back on the team won't let me live that down."

"You didn't just fall, Ron. You were knocked off your broom by Fenrir Greyback," Ginevra replied.

"Oh," Ron replied. "Wait, Fenrir's dead."

"Ron, what's the last thing you remember?" the Healer asked.

Ron grimaced. "My team and I were riding out into the field. I had just taken my place for the game, then nothing."

"What was your position?"

"Keeper." he answered with confidence.

The Healer nodded. "Typical concussion symptoms. He should be fine, except he won't remember the events surrounding his injury."

"Great. Now, when will I be able to get back onto the field?" Ron asked.

The Healer frowned. "Perhaps we should discuss that when your injuries are a little better healed."

"Oh, a few broken bones won't keep me off the Cannons."

Nobody answered.

Ron snarled. "It's the Quidditch World Cup! I can't lay in bed all day. Give me some Skele-Gro so I can get back and play!"

"You, you're season's over," Ginny replied. "The coach has said as much."

"Damnit," Ron smiled. "Well there's always next season. I'll be good as new by then."

The Healer sighed. "Mr. Weasley, that would be most unwise. Along with breaking your legs and arms, you also broke your back."

Ron blinked.

"Skele-Gro cannot fully heal a broken back due to possible spinal damage. Your vertebrae and spine will need to heal naturally on their own."

"Spinal damage?" Ron's face paled. "C-can I walk? Will I be able to walk again?"

"More than likely yes, but you will need intensive therapy," the Healer explained.
Ron gulped. "After the therapy can I maybe play Quidditch the following season?"

"One more fall… one more injury to your back and the damage could be far more severe… and more permanent.”

“What are you saying?”

“If I were you, I'd consider my Quidditch career over."

Tears flooded Ron’s eyes.

Why didn't Fenrir just kill me?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
"Look, Rose! It's Daddy!" Hermione exclaimed.

Rose stretched and yawned in Hermione's arms.

"Hello little one," Severus began. "I trust you've had a good day."

Catching her mother's gaze, and then her father's, her tiny mouth twisted, then stretched upwards.

"Is she?" Severus asked, taking in the little girl's expression.

"I'm not sure," Hermione replied, squinting at her daughter's mouth. "My books say it's only gas when babies are this young, but she genuinely looks happy to see you, not just ready to burp, or something else."

Severus moved closer. Rose's gummy grin widened. "Are you happy to see me?"

Rose maintained her expression.

"Here, hold her while I get my parents." Hermione handed the baby to Severus and bolted towards her parents' bedroom "Mum! Dad!"

Severus tucked Rose into the crook of his arm. "You've made Mummy and Daddy very happy today. You have a very beautiful smile. I promise that in the future you will have many more opportunities to use it."

The girl yawned and snuggled into her father's embrace. Severus began rocking her. "I deeply apologize for coming in a bit late tonight. The Minister was talking to me through the fireplace. I thought he'd never let me leave."

Rose stared gravely... possibly even sympathetically... into his eyes. Severus gave her a kiss on the cheek before sitting on the couch with a swish of his robes. Rose let out a squeak as her eyes widened. How did he get his robes to move like that? Could she learn to do it, too? If she turned up her mouth some more, would Daddy get her black clothes of her very own?

"She smiled!" Hermione exclaimed as she led her bleary eyed parents to the living room.

Lifting his gaze as his wife approached, Severus couldn't help but notice how her royal blue blouse was perfectly cut for her figure and how that particular color brought out the highlights in her hair. Merlin, if Hermione only knew how attractive she was...

Rose squirmed in Severus' arms, grasping for something just out of her reach. He sighed and suspected he was doing the same.

"Come on Rose," Hermione cooed as she and her parents drew closer to Rose. "Show Grandma and Grandpa how you can smile."

Rose looked up at Severus, as if asking for directions. His eyes softened. "Go ahead Rose. Make Mummy's day and smile for Grandma and Grandpa."
Rose lips quirked into a lopsided grin at the sound of his voice. Hermione burst out laughing, “That's it, Rose. Smile just like that.”

Rose blinked before twisting her body and reaching out for Severus' cape with her tiny hands.

Severus observed her curious behavior and asked, "Do you want to see my robe? Is that what you want, Rose?"

She continued to reach out, her face reddening. Severus fingered the hem of the robe and handed it to her. "Is this what you want?"

Her face lit up as she grasped it. With a few clucks she moved the fabric back and forth, watching with fascination as light played across the rippling folds.

"Oh, that's so cute!" Muriel gushed.

"She is beyond adorable!" Wilford agreed.

Hermione nodded before sniffing. "It, that's one of the sweetest things I've ever seen."

Wilford put a hand on her shoulder. "We'll miss you two when you leave tomorrow."

"There's always the post, and I'll be sure to floo you every week," Hermione reassured them, not once removing her eyes from her daughter's antics.

"Agreed," Muriel answered.

"Having fun?" Severus chuckled.

Rose squealed.

“Very well then,” Severus replied. “Just don't put it in your mouth.”

Rose looked up at her dad as if to ask him what the robe would taste like, then seemed to think better of it. She returned to her earlier game. Maybe she could not yet make the robes billow like her father could, but she could still pretend, at least for now.

The adults watched in amusement until Rose yawned, pulled the fabric up to her cheek, and closed her eyes. "We should probably head to bed. Goodnight Severus, Hermione."

"Goodnight," Hermione replied.

Her parents gave their daughter and their granddaughter one last look before exiting.

Severus shook his head and peered down at his daughter. "Poor thing tired herself out before I could show her my present."

"Present?" Hermione asked.

Severus smirked and motioned for his wife to sit beside him. Once she was seated he asked, "Have you forgotten what day it is?"

Hermione hummed while raising an eyebrow. Then she gasped. "She's a month old today."

"Yes," Severus replied as he shifted Rose in his arms to pull something out of his pocket. "Yesterday I needed a break from my research. Even the most distinguished potions' journals could not provide
me with inspiration for the lycanthropy cure. Thus I took a walk around Hogsmeade. I saw this in a store window and thought she might enjoy it.

He enlarged the object until Hermione could make out the distinctly equine shape. "A little horse."

Rose opened her eyes and reached out to finger the plush toy. The hem of Severus' robe fell from her grasp before she hugged the horse to her chest. Then she closed her eyes again.

Severus whispered, "We talked once about buying her a horse. It's not from Kentucky but…"

"It's just fine for now," Hermione replied. "I'd even go so far as to say it's perfect."

Severus gazed into Hermione's eyes. "You look amazing in that outfit."

"Thank you," she blushed. "Mum watched Rose again while I made myself presentable."

"Hermione, you are always presentable."

"Please don't feel the need to say things you think I want to hear."

"You know that I care little for flattery. If I say something I mean it. In my eyes, you are always more than presentable."

"Thank you," Hermione lowered her head. "Still, I always feel better after taking a bath."

Severus responded. "When you return home I promise to watch Rose so you can indulge in a long, hot bath whenever you feel the urge to do so."

"Oh that would be divine," Hermione looked up at him. "Perhaps if we’re lucky she may sleep long enough for us both to indulge in a bath."

"Perhaps." Severus replied before kissing his wife’s cheek. "I am eager for you to return home. I've missed you and Rose."

"We've missed you too," Hermione whispered. "Life isn’t half as interesting when you aren’t around."

Rose whined as the toy slipped from her fingers. Severus picked it up and gave it back to her. She grabbed it before grunting. Then she focused her attention on her parents.

Severus replied, "You just miss having me there for nappy duty and 2:00 AM feedings."

"Well, I did marry you so I wouldn’t have to change nappies alone," Hermione teased.

"You witch," Severus growled with a gleam in his eyes.

Hermione giggled. "Okay, maybe I need you around for more than just nappy changes."

"Of course you do. Someone needs to give Rose her bottle every few hours or so."

"Severus."

"I’m only stating the obvious, dear."

Rose gurgled.

"You know that I see you as more than a glorified babysitter." Hermione’s expression grew serious.
“In truth, I've missed having you around to talk to.”

"You're the first to accuse me of being a good conversationalist," Severus replied.

"I enjoy our conversations," Hermione protested. "I've truly missed them."

“I’ve missed our talks as well.” Severus kissed her cheek. “The mansion feels empty without you.”

"Really?"

"Yes. Merlin help me, but I've grown accustomed to your company."

"I've enjoyed my stay with my parents, but I'm ready to step back into our life together. I miss waking up together in our own bed, I miss researching potions with you, I miss using magic every day and I even miss the house elves," Hermione replied.

"We have a quite pleasant life together," Severus ventured.

“That we do,” Hermione answered.

"I cannot imagine being married to anyone else." 

"Neither can I."

As Rose's eyes slid shut, she could feel her parents shifting towards each other in that thing they call kissing. Confusing people, they are. When they kiss her they use that funny word, "love". Why won't they use it with each other?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so very much for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
Chapter 130

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Just a few more minutes.

Severus stared into the fireplace, his heart racing. Truth be told, being separated from Hermione and Rose had been pure torture. Short floo visits were no substitute for their companionship. For the first time in his life, he wanted someone to contribute to his research and challenge him with new ideas and theories. He desired someone who would encourage him even when his frustration threatened to overwhelm him. More importantly needed a reminder of why he had embarked on this endeavor. At the end of the day, he was creating this cure to protect Hermione and Rose. That fact alone would carry him through the sleepless nights.

On a more personal note, he needed understanding. Regardless of how ungrateful the Wizarding World would undoubtedly be once a cure was discovered, he knew that Hermione and Rose would understand what he'd sacrificed and appreciate it. Of course he'd give Hermione proper credit once all was said and done. After all she was sacrificing just as much to help her husband achieve a goal which until now had been considered unattainable...

The mere thought of Hermione caused his stomach to tighten. Living and working with Hermione once again would make it more difficult to maintain the façade of desiring only friendship. Even the strongest occlumency shields could only suppress amorous sentiments for so long. How could he continue to enjoy a marriage of convenience when he yearned for a real marriage? When had this simple arrangement become so complicated?

"Severus!"

His heart skipped a beat.

"Severus, are you there?"

He frowned upon seeing the caller’s face. "Hello, Minister Shacklebolt. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"I’m just confirming our meeting at seven tomorrow night."

"Yes Minister, I will be present at the meeting" Severus replied. As if I have a choice.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Kingsley exhaled. "That's a relief. Glad to know the time frame still works."

"Was there ever a reason to believe we would not be having a meeting at the time we all agreed upon?"

“Between you and me it’s amazing we’re able to have this meeting at all. The Weasleys have been a bit tied up at the hospital as of late, so we were unsure if we might have to change time or place.”

“I see."

“Fortunately things are improving for them. Ronald has awakened from his coma and should have a fairly smooth recovery."
"Good for him," Severus grumbled.

Kingsley raised an eyebrow. Bad things happened when Severus used that tone. How productive was this meeting going to be if he’d need to spend half of it refereeing the feud between Snape and the Weasleys?

"I do not wish to be rude, but I fear this floo call may need to end soon. I’m expecting my wife and daughter to arrive from Australia within the next half hour," Severus continued.

"Then I shall not keep you. Tomorrow night at seven o’clock. Remember to bring the fifty vials of Wolfsbane with you."

"I will," Severus replied.

With that, Kingsley's face disappeared.

Severus continued to stare at the floo, wondering how best to navigate between his feelings for Hermione and the need to protect himself from further heartbreak.

***

Just a few more minutes.

Hermione stared into the fireplace, her heart racing. Truth be told, the minute she reunited with Severus couldn’t come soon enough. She missed analyzing the news from the Daily Prophet with him, she missed brainstorming ideas to improve their potions recipes, and most importantly she missed falling asleep in his embrace.

The mere thought of Severus caused her stomach to tighten. Once home she would be at a greater risk of revealing her true feelings for her husband. Although she had considered her mother’s words, Hermione had determined that if was unwise to tell him how she felt. If he didn’t feel the same way it would slice her very soul. While on a few occasion she swore she could see deep affection in his eyes, she couldn't be sure it wasn't wishful thinking. Perhaps he only wanted friendly companionship with the added benefit of love making. Lustful looks had fooled her once already with Ron. She needed to proceed with caution, lest her marriage implode.

"Little Rosie's all ready to go," Muriel cooed as she entered the living room, her granddaughter in her arms. "We even put on that new dress we bought yesterday so she looks extra pretty for Daddy."

Hermione smiled at the sight of Rose dolled up in a little white eyelet dress with a red bow around her waist. Hermione cooed. "She looks adorable."

Rose glared at her mother, as if to chastise her for encouraging grandmother's fashion choices. Muriel chuckled. "I think she likes it about as much as you liked your first dress."

"At least she has kept it clean," Hermione mused as Rose reached for her. “So far at least.”

"Don't give her any ideas,” Muriel teased.

Hermione groaned. The last thing she needed was to spend her first hour at home cleaning her daughter’s soiled dress. Worse, she could spend her first hour at home arguing with Severus over whether or not she should allow the elves to wash Rose's dress.

"Okay girls," Wilford announced as he walked into the room carrying several bags. "I think I have all of your things."
"Let me help you with that," Hermione replied. She pulled out her wand and shrunk the suitcases.

"Thank you," Wilford answered before collecting the tiny packages for her.

"No, thank you, Dad," Hermione placed the shrunken bags in her pocket. "Are you sure we have everything?"

"If you forgot something, then you can just come back and pay us another visit." Wilford grinned

"Or we can mail it to you if Severus can't be parted with you anytime soon," Muriel added with a wink.

"Thank you," Hermione’s eyes began to water. "Thanks so much for everything you've done."

"Thank you for letting us get to know our granddaughter," Muriel answered before kissing Rose, then Hermione on the cheek. "We'll miss you both."

"We'll miss you too."

"Write to us often."

"I will," Hermione promised.

"Goodbye, sweetie," Wilford replied before embracing Hermione. "The house won't be the same without you."

"Things won't feel the same without you two either."

"If you ever need a break or a babysitter for an evening out, you know where to turn."

"I know." Hermione wiped her eyes and took a shaky breath. "I should probably go before I start crying. Damn hormones."

Muriel smiled. "There's no harm in showing someone how you feel, love."

The double meaning of her mother's words was not lost. "I'll remember that," Hermione replied in a soft voice. Then she took Rose from Muriel. "Goodbye Mum and Dad."

"Goodbye," they answered.

Hermione stepped towards the fireplace with Rose, threw in the floo powder, announced their address, and felt herself transported back home.

Rose began to fuss as they stumbled out of the hearth into Severus' arms.

"Hello again," Severus began.

Hermione's eyes lit up when she gazed into his. "Hello, Severus."

Rose sneezed.

Hermione looked down at Rose's dress, which was now covered in soot. "Oh no. This dress was white and really quite lovely when we left."

"I apologize. I should've cleaned out the floo before you came," Severus answered.

Rose sneezed again.
Severus' face lit up. "Bless you, Rose. I apologize for your soiled dress."

Rose glanced up at her father. She did not look at all sorry that her dress was now black. Severus chuckled.

"No, I should've thought about the soot before flooing." Hermione began to brush off the dress. After muttering a few windless cleaning spells the dress was white again. Rose frowned.

"Sooty dresses aside," Severus wrapped his arms around the witches. "It's great to have you home again."

"It's great to be home again," Hermione answered, tucking her head under her husband's chin.

Rose smiled as she basked in her parents' embrace, feeling quite at home, herself.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! As always it is much appreciated!
Severus smiled. "I warned her not to get used to the Australian climate."

"I'm sure she'll adjust to Britain just fine as soon as her mother figures out how many blankets to put on without overheating her," Hermione replied. "I'd use a warming charm, but I've read that they can be too strong for babies."

"Then I suppose it's wise to cocoon her in blankets for now," Severus kissed Rose on the forehead. "Be good for your mother. I will return within a few hours."

Rose looked up at her father with obvious adoration. He smiled in return. "I love you, Rose."

"She loves you too," Hermione replied.

"I know," Severus answered before looking up at Hermione. "I hope to be home before nine, but I cannot guarantee it."

"Whenever you get home is fine," Hermione yawned. "I'll probably head to bed soon."

He kissed his wife on the cheek. "Between returning from Australia and Rose's nocturnal antics you must be exhausted."

"True, but I'm also trying to adjust to the time change," she laughed. "Not that I've been on any real schedule since Rose was born. It seems that we're all on Rose's time now."

Severus chuckled. "Yes, we most certainly are."

He ducked his head to meet her lips, then lingered there until Rose whined. Hermione broke away and whispered, "Good luck."

"Thank you," Severus took a deep breath. "Goodbye, Hermione. Farewell Rose."

Severus then took a handful of floo powder and threw it into the fireplace. After giving Hermione one last look he muttered the Ministry's address and billowed away. Rose's eyes tracked his dramatic
"Goodbye, Severus," Hermione whispered. “I love you.”

***

"Professor Snape," Farrah purred as he stepped out of the hearth. "Long time no see."

"Indeed," Severus answered, dusting floo powder from his shoulders.

Farrah asked, "How's your daughter?"

Severus glanced up at her. Although she was ostensibly grinning, there was a predatory gleam in her eyes. Severus' eyes hardened. "She is doing very well, thank you."

“I’d love to see her sometime. I love babies, and I'll bet Rose is so adorable,” Farrah gushed.

“Indeed she is,” Severus mumbled.

“Where’s your wife?” Farrah asked. “Wasn’t she a member of the Order?"

"She still is," Severus answered. "But the antics of her ex-boyfriend's family are not conducive to her peace of mind."

"I heard about Ron's injury. How is she taking it?" Farrah asked.

"As well as can be expected."

"Has she visited him yet?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"She does not feel she has anything of value to say to him."

"Maybe there's too much to say," Farrah offered.

Severus' heart skipped a beat.

"Hermione and Ron dated for several years. At one point she tried to pass off your baby as his. She may still be sorting out some lingering feelings for him. A visit might clarify things for her, such as where she now stands. Certainly she wouldn't want to destroy what's left of the Golden Trio by heartlessly abandoning her ex-fiancee."

"As amazing as the Golden Trio was, there is a reason it ended," Severus retorted. "The past is best left in the past."

"True, but not everyone thinks in such a way, especially when intense emotions are involved. It would be unnatural for a woman to leave behind someone she has loved for years and not feel even a shred of concern for his well-being."

"Perhaps, unless the man proved unworthy of her affection."

"Maybe," Farrah conceded. "Then again, she may yearn for closure, or even for a second chance. Certainly you understand those emotions."
“I did not come here to discuss the psychology of lost loves with you,” Severus snapped. "Where is this Order meeting being held?"

"Down the hall, first door to the left," Farrah replied with a smile.

Severus nodded before stepping through the door. His mind wandered to the memory of Hermione beside Ron’s bedside during their days as sixth year students. Every spare moment was devoted to the red-headed bastard. Hadn’t they fought beforehand? Yes, they had been fighting, just as they always had. The second Ron was injured though Hermione forgave everything. Granted abandoning your daughter is a bigger offense than being an adolescent twat, and hadn’t she said that she hated who she was around Ron? Perhaps there was a chance that she was fully free of the ginger git. Yet even if Ron no longer possessed her heart it was doubtful that Severus would ever obtain it, though if she wanted a spouse who desired her happiness above all else he was more than happy to oblige.

He pushed the thoughts out of his mind. There was no point in dwelling on his situation with Hermione at the moment, not when Fenrir and his army were poised for an attack.

Weasley voices drifted into the hallway from the conference room. Severus took a deep breath and donned a mask of self control before entering, praying he could get through the evening without shedding Weasley blood.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
"Severus!" Hagrid bellowed as he raced towards Severus. "Good to see yeh again!"

Severus flinched as the half-giant hugged him. Somehow he managed to squeak, "Hello Hagrid."

Hagrid's grip tightened. "I was so worried 'bout you and 'Mione when I heard 'bout the memorial ball."

Severus swore he heard something pop in his back.

"I would've visited yeh at the hospital, but I had just hatched a dragon egg. It needed constant supervision."

"I understand," Severus rasped.

"How is yer little girl?"

"Yes, how is your child," Molly sniped.

Hagrid released Severus. After catching his breath again Severus replied, "Rose is doing just fine."

"Rose is such a beautiful name," Hagrid gushed. "I'll bet she's beautiful like her mother."

"Fortunately Rose did inherit her mother's looks," Severus replied with a half grin.

"Did she inherit your nose?" Bill asked.

"No," Severus answered while he turned around to face Bill. "She was fortunate enough to inherit her mother's nose."

Bill recoiled under Severus' glare and nodded. "T-that's good to know."

"It would have been most unfortunate if Rose had inherited your nose," Molly continued. "After all, if Ron had married Hermione it would have been very difficult to explain away that particular feature."

Severus glowered at the Weasley matriarch. "Hermione had no intention of keeping Rose from her father."

"But she almost did keep you from Rose," Molly argued. "And my son almost had to raise a child that wasn't his."

"Ron stay home and play daddy? Shake loose a few knuts for nappies and bibs? Stagger the imagination, whether the child was his or not," Severus muttered.

Hagrid stifled a chuckle as Molly huffed.

George cocked his head. "Doesn't it bother you that Hermione was planning to raise Rose without you? Aren't you a little upset that Rose almost called Ron 'Daddy?'"
Severus’ eyes and voice softened. “To be quite blunt I do not meditate on the events surrounding Rose’s conception. The only thing that matters is that Rose is my daughter and with Hermione we now form a family. Everything else is secondary.”

“It must bother you on some level though,” Arthur cut in, his voice more curious than outright hostile. “I would never allow anyone to separate me from my children, yet Hermione attempted to do just that. How can you forgive her?”

“As stated previously, it matters little how Hermione and I behaved in the time period surrounding Rose’s conception,” Severus answered in an even tone. "She did what she believed was best, as did I. I was fortunate enough that she agreed to become my wife despite my past indiscretions. Now my only concern is building a future with my wife and child.”

“You’re a much more forgiving man than me,” George answered, almost as if he could not believe the words escaping his mouth.

“My decision has little to do with forgiveness,” Severus answered, his voice growing stronger with each word. “I simply understand how precious my family is.”

George opened his mouth to speak, but before he could utter a word Kingsley burst into the room.

"Hello, everyone!" he announced. "I'm sorry I'm late. Got lost in the shuffle of paperwork, I'm afraid. Please take your seats."

As Kingsley sat next to Hagrid near one end of the conference table, Severus took a moment to glance at Minerva at the other end. Her robes, which had once fit quite snugly, now hung like a sheet on her near-skeletal frame. Even her hat seemed to overwhelm her. His mind wandered to all the sleepless nights he’d endured as headmaster as the weight of protecting his charges bore down on him. He shook his head and took his seat.

"As many of you know," Kingsley began in an authoritative voice. "Fenrir Greyback and his men have launched two attacks on us since the last Order meeting, each of which has inflicted heavy losses on our side."

"At least most of us are alive," Molly cut in "Thank God Ronald pulled through."

"Thank God," the Weasleys echoed.

"Indeed," Severus mumbled.

"Yes," Kingsley replied. "We are all thankful for your son's recovery."

It took every ounce of self-control for Severus not to roll his eyes.

"Nevertheless, there is much work left to be done. We need to come up with a strategy to defeat Fenrir and halt the spread of lycanthropy,” Kingsley continued.

"Don't you have a team of Potions Masters researching a cure?” Minerva asked in a fragile voice.

"Yes,” Kingsley answered. “One of the key members is present at the moment.”

All eyes turned to Severus. He nodded.

“Could you please report on your progress, Professor Snape?”

Severus took a deep breath as he reached into his pocket. He took out the box of vials, set it on the
table and enlarged it. "First of all, here is the Wolfsbane you requested."

The Order members mumbled their gratitude.

"Most of our energies so far have been devoted to creating a stockpile to treat those who have been changed. We should have enough Wolfsbane to treat most of those afflicted with lycanthropy within the next week."

"Thank you," Kingsley replied before distributing the vials to those who needed them.

"We are still in the preliminary stages of researching a cure. There are some promising theories, but creating and testing the potion itself will be time-consuming," Severus continued.

"Do you have an estimation of when you will develop a cure?" Arthur asked.

"No," Severus replied. "All of this is quite experimental, and it’s difficult to determine where to begin. It could take months, or…"

Arthur lowered his head. Molly put her arms around him while Bill sniffed back a tear.

"We appreciate your efforts, Severus." Kingsley sighed. "Thank you again for the potions."

"You're most welcome," Severus answered. "I only wish things could progress more quickly."

"Yeh’re workin’ as fast as yeh can," Hagrid replied. "That’s all any of us can ask."

"Indeed," Minerva replied.

"All that said," Kingsley cleared his throat. "Let’s move onto the business of capturing Fenrir, and minimizing the damage he’s causing."

"I believe we should form an Auror task force to assemble, analyze, and research leads then prepare a group of commandoes to implement an assault on Fenrir's camp," George suggested.

"Fenrir has an army of werewolves. They would overpower a commando team and turn them all within minutes," Hagrid argued.

"I agree," Arthur replied. "We saw how coordinated the attacks on the Ministry and the Quidditch World Cup were. Fenrir is organized and he knows exactly how to fight us."

"Perhaps then we’ll need something more covert, like muggle snipers or ninjas," Charlie suggested.

"Muggle snipers and ninjas?" Kingsley asked.

"Yes, snipers and ninjas. They hide in buildings, or disguise themselves as ordinary townspeople. Then, when the target least expects, they attack and kill. If someone could isolate Fenrir and cast an Avada Kedavra, then we would have no more Fenrir," Charlie explained.

"But one of his generals would take over," Severus replied.

"Then we'd kill the generals, too."

"Are you suggesting that a single person kill every soldier loyal to Fenrir? Do you honestly believe that one witch or one wizard could accomplish such a feat?"

"Under the correct set of circumstances, yes."
“Thanks to the World Cup nightmare, we now have a worldwide epidemic of lycanthropy and we have no idea how loyal those recruits are to him. Do you expect someone to travel all around the world and kill lycanthropes who refuse to be cured?”

"We, we may have to launch an international effort,” Charlie conceded.

"It would take many resources,” Kingsley noted. "Perhaps more resources than we have.”

“I don’t know if any country has enough resources to launch an international effort to eliminate every lycanthrope loyal to Fenrir’s cause,” Bill admitted.

“There is another consideration,” Kingsley noted. “There are innocent wizards afflicted with lycanthropy who are sympathetic to our side. The last thing anyone would want would be for them to be caught in the crossfire. If we launched an international effort, how could we determine who was loyal to Fenrir and who was not?”

Silence engulfed the room.

"Perhaps we should prepare for war," Molly suggested.

"War?” Hagrid asked.

"We can't reason with Fenrir and his men and we cannot easily dismantle their organization. Perhaps we should consider a declaration of war,” Molly suggested.

"Fenrir does not fight like Voldemort,” Kingsley replied. "He is much more subtle, much more sneaky. He appears somewhere in disguise, raids the premises, attacks his victims, and then leaves. His goal is to create lycanthropes, not to kill his opponents.”

“Then perhaps we should send in a double agent to infiltrate Fenrir's base and inform us of an attack,” Molly suggested.

"Who would you suggest?” Kingsley asked.

"Someone who's done it before," Molly replied.

All eye turned to Severus. He growled, “No.”

“Mum's right. You were an excellent spy during the Second Wizarding War” George began.

He slammed his fist on the table. “I refuse to spy for anyone again.”


“They can bloody well get someone else,” Severus snapped.

"There is no one else," Arthur argued.

"Find someone," Severus demanded.

"But it's your duty to the Wizarding World,” George argued.

"My duty is to help combat Fenrir through my potions,” Severus retorted. “I will gladly create a cure for lycanthropy and use my apothecary to distribute it. Spying is out of the question.”

“This may be the best way to be informed of Fenrir’s attacks,” Charlie argued.
"What did I just say about the need to find another spy?" Severus snapped.

"Who else is better for the job?" Charlie asked. "You were an ex-Death Eater. You know how they think. You've always felt as though the Wizarding World has given you a raw deal, so you have reason to dislike the current social order. It wouldn't be a stretch for you to want to join Fenrir's group."

"I will not sacrifice my family!"

Everyone stared at him.

Severus lowered his voice. "None of you understands the emotions which must be suppressed night after night, the events a spy must witness, the constant paranoia of being discovered, and the isolation of serving two masters, both of whom only use you to further their own ends. I refuse to put myself through that again. More importantly though, I refuse to put Hermione and Rose through the experience of living with someone who must endure working as a double agent. They will never watch me suppress my affection for them in the name of perpetuating a facade, nor will they ever live with the fear of what would become of them if my true allegiance was discovered. I will never, and I mean never, allow them to suffer because I put myself at the mercy of two masters once more."

For two tense minutes the room was soundless.

"I," Hagrid whispered. "I had no idea. It never occurred to me how it affected you, or what being a spy would do to 'Mione."

"We, we're," Kingsley buried his head into his hands. "I never really considered what it took to be a double agent."

Severus opened his mouth to tell them where to stick their sympathy, but stopped when he heard a faint scratching noise. He glanced toward the door and noticed a familiar pink object on the ground. Immediately, Severus cast a muffliato on the entire group.

"What was that for?" Molly snapped.

"Look," he answered, indicating the pink object.

Heads turned toward the doorway and eyes squinted to identify the object. George gasped. "It's an extendable ear!"

"Exactly," Severus replied. "An uninvited guest is listening."

Kingsley sighed. "I suspected as much."

Severus raised an eyebrow.

"Fenrir told me he had placed a spy here and threatened to expose my secret if I fired them," Kingsley explained.

"Who is the spy?" Minerva asked.

"I do not know," Kingsley replied.

Severus cut in. "Might I suggest Farrah Jackson?"

Everyone gasped.
"Severus! How could you?" Molly scolded. "That woman has been through hell! Fenrir has tortured her as much as any of us…"

"Has he tortured her?" Severus asked.

“Oh course he has,” Arthur argued.

“Somehow I doubt it,” Severus argued.

“Look I understand that you are upset with us for suggesting you spy for the Order again, but you don’t need to take your frustrations out on an innocent guard,” George argued.

“Innocent guard?” Severus asked. “She was the only guard uninjured in the Azkaban prison break. She was also present at the Ministry, guarding the floo the night Fenrir broke in. To top it off, she is also Archelaus Jackson’s niece. Archelaus is Fenrir’s third in command.”

Kingsley swallowed. "It would certainly stand to reason that she could be a spy,"

“Are, are we really listening to Snape right now?” Bill sputtered. “He just told us he wouldn’t spy for us, and now we’re accepting everything he says as the undisputed truth?”

“Do you have any better suggestions for who our spy might be?” Kingsley demanded.

Bill gulped.

“I suspected as much,” Kingsley replied before turning to Severus. "What would you suggest I do with Farrah?"

"Reassign her to a position where it will be difficult for her to obtain any kind of secret information,” Severus replied. “Might I suggest monitoring the Ministry of Magical Games and Sports?”

"That may keep her out of trouble," Kingsley replied with a smirk. "And keep Fenrir from raising too big a fuss."

Although the Weasleys remained silent, Minerva and Hagrid muttered their assent.

"Then it's settled," Kingsley replied with a gleam in his eyes. "Perhaps we should devote the rest of the meeting to preventing Fenrir's followers from discovering our secrets."

The Order members agreed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It really keeps me going.
Severus trudged down the hallway, not bothering to dust the soot from his robes. He didn't have any more energy left, and the house elves would be more than happy to clean the floors in the morning, anyway. They had been feeling a bit underutilized since Hermione had burst into their lives, not that any had openly complained. Still it was always good for an elf to feel needed, so a few menial chores would be much appreciated.

Severus’ shoulders sagged. Between explaining the perils of spying and interacting with the Weasleys for an extended period of time, he was an exhausted, empty shell. All he wanted to do was fall into bed, hold Hermione, and forget half the members of the Order existed.

First things first, though. He crept into Rose's nursery and peered over the top of the crib, watching the infant's chest rise and fall. Her sweet face was so peaceful in repose, not unlike that of a porcelain doll. Severus leaned in to kiss her, but thought better of it. One sneeze courtesy of the soot on his robes would mar the peaceful scene. Better to let sleeping babies lie.

"Goodnight Rose," Severus whispered. "I love you."

He slipped out the door without a sound, oblivious to the blue eye that had just fluttered open.

Rose smiled upon feeling the movement of air from the billowing fabric. Her daddy was home and all was well. She contemplated crying so he'd pick her up for a proper hello, but sleep overtook her with a yawn and a lingering blink of the eye before she could execute her plan.

She'd get Daddy’s attention when it was time for a nappy change.

Leaving Rose's room, Severus stepped across the hall into the master bedroom. Hermione’s face was buried in a pillow, her eyes shut. Severus smiled at the sight, then grabbed his nightshirt and headed for the bathroom to change. When he emerged, he lay down beside his wife and pulled her into his arms. Even if his love was unrequited, he needed the illusion of a real marriage tonight.

"Severus?" Hermione whispered as she snuggled into his embrace.

"Yes?" he moaned.

She yawned and turned to face him. "Sorry. I tried to stay awake, but I couldn't keep my eyes open. I fell asleep less than an hour after you left."

"It's fine," he replied, kissing her on the forehead. “I did not expect you to stay up for me.”

“I know,” Hermione sighed. “Still I did want to give you a proper greeting.”

Severus grinned. “I’d consider waking up for me a proper enough greeting.”

She tuck her head under his chin and moaned. "How was the Order meeting?"

“It went as well as one could expect," Severus answered, stroking her hair.

"That well?"
"I'm afraid so."

"Please tell me something was resolved."

"You know I do not wish to deceive you."

Hermione exhaled. "I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised at the lack of progress. Still I wish the meeting hadn’t been such a waste of time."

"I wouldn’t call it a complete waste of time."

"Oh?"

"Someone tried to spy on us with an extendable ear. Fortunately I noticed the device and cast a muffliato spell before the individual could hear any concrete plans."

Hermione chuckled. "That's the professor in you. You always had a great radar for mischief."

"Or maybe it's the spy in me that was trained to be aware of his surroundings. 'Constant vigilance' and all those niceties," Severus replied in a distant voice.

Hermione tilted her head until she could make eye contact with him. "Severus?"

He didn't respond.

"Severus, I know something is troubling you. What are you not telling me?"

Severus stiffened. "I was asked to spy for the Order."

"What?" Hermione gasped.

He nodded. "They want me to become a double agent."

"How dare they," Hermione hissed. "You’ve given them so much, and are sacrificing time with your daughter to create a cure. How dare they ask for anything more out of you?"

"Since I’d done it once so successfully they thought I could do it again."

"Spying on Fenrir would require you to be changed into a lycanthrope. You, you’d lose a part of your humanity."

"That was one of my fears as well. My other fear was losing you and Rose."

"Losing me and Rose?" Hermione asked.

"If I was changed then I would be threat to both of you come the full moon. Even if I was not changed," his voice tightened. "I’d have to suppress so many emotions, withhold so much information from you. Ultimately I would need to convince Fenrir that I cared nothing for you. That way if my treachery was ever to be discovered they would not target you and Rose. I," He shook. "I can’t do it Hermione. I will not be the kind of man my father was. I will not allow you and Rose to feel as if you were nuisances or obstacles to an endeavor I never wished to embark upon. You, I will always care for you both. Our future will always take precedence over some ridiculous scheme concocted by a few dunderheads in the Order."

She brushed his lips with hers. "Thank you for putting us first. Thank you for caring so much."
“Why would you thank me for doing what comes naturally?” Severus asked.

“There’s no need to flatter me. Rose may be easy to love, but her mother is an entirely different matter. You understand better than anyone how emotional and bossy I can become. Then there’s the fact that a proper wife could’ve stayed up for a couple of hours, but me, I fear these days I’m a bit boring.”

He twirled a tendril of her hair around his finger. “You are the most fascinating woman I have ever met, Mrs. Snape. You are also the kindest, most compassionate, and most intelligent woman I have ever met as well. There is nothing undesirable about you.”

She blushed. “Thank you.”

He gave her a soft smile. “There is no need to thank me for my honesty.”

She hummed as he kissed her forehead. "Severus."

"Yes?"

Hermione melted into him. She gazed into his eyes. "Severus I..."

Severus’ heart fluttered. There was so much vulnerability in her eyes, so much compassion. Was there really a chance for them? Could this be the moment he’d been dreaming of, the moment their marriage became real?

"I am really curious what became of the extendable ear you mentioned earlier," Hermione blurted out.

Severus deflated. "I suppose I did mention one."

Hermione bowed her head. "What became of it?"

"Discovering the extendable ear was enough to convince Kingsley to make some changes in his security detail."

"Did you tell him about your suspicions regarding Farrah?"

"Yes I shared my suspicions. Of course, the Weasleys were less than willing to listen to reason, but in the end, Kingsley chose to heed my advice. As of tomorrow, Farrah has been transferred to the Ministry of Magical Games and Sports."

"Why not fire her and launch an investigation into her activities?"

"Because Fenrir threatened to tell the Wizarding World of Kingsley’s condition if the spy in the Ministry was exposed," Severus replied.

"Oh," Hermione answered, once again looking into his eyes.

A comfortable silence fell between them. Severus stopped playing with Hermione’s hair.

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"Do you think the Weasleys would give me a hard time if I decided to start attending Order meetings once Rose is older?"
"I don't know," Severus answered. "And quite frankly, I don't care. You have as much right to attend the meetings as they do. If you want to go then I will support you."

"I don't want to create drama," Hermione whispered.

Severus planted a kiss on her lips. "The Weasleys create drama wherever they go. You are stronger than all of them put together, and an invaluable asset to the Order. They should be of no concern to you."

"Thank you," Hermione whispered before twisting her lips into a smile. "I am glad you're home."

"I am glad to be home with you," Severus replied, pressing his lips to hers as he found his second wind.

***

"My fellow lycanthropes!" Fenrir called out.

The werewolf beside him yelled, "Meine Kollegen Werwölfe!"

In turn, several other lycanthrope officials served as interpreters in Romanian, Swahili, French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, silencing the crowd which had snapped to attention.

"We have worked very hard these past few weeks. I can now officially say that we are ready to launch our next operation."

"Wir haben sehr hart..." the translator shouted over the cheers of the English speaking werewolves.

Behind the crowd a figure darted from tree to tree. Then it charged towards a distant bonfire.

"Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Uncle Archelaus."

He embraced her. "I'm always happy to see you love. What's wrong?"

"There was an Order meeting tonight," Farrah began.

"Oh?" he released her. "What did you learn?"

She bowed her head. "It's more like what didn't I learn."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Professor Snape is making Wolfsbane and searching for a cure just as we suspected."

"Yes?"

"And they were discussing plans on how to capture Fenrir. They suggested forming a commando task force, hiring assassins, and even declaring war on us."

"Did they decide on anything?"

"They discarded those ideas before asking Snape to spy on us."

Archelaus’ voice lowered an octave. "What did he say?"

"At the moment he refuses to do it. He’s afraid spying will put his wife and daughter at risk," Farrah answered.
“Indeed going up against Fenrir would be hazardous to their health.”

“Still we should be suspicious if he declares an intention to join us.”

“If he decides to join us he will have to pay an entrance fee,” Archelaus sneered. “A nip of his wife and daughter’s legs should do the trick.”

Farrah’s eyes lit up. “That’s positively diabolic.”

“But it will deter him from spying.”

“Yes, well at the moment he has no interest in becoming a double agent.”

“Then how does the Ministry plan to combat Fenrir?”

“I do not know.”

Archelaus’ eyes grew. "What do you mean you do not know?"

Farrah swallowed. "They cast a muffliato spell before deciding on a course of action."

"What?" Archelaus asked.

Farrah bit her lower lip. "I think one of them may have seen the extendable ear."

"Shit," the Chief muttered. "Has anyone said anything to you?"

"No. Kingsley simply wished me a goodnight. Professor Snape glowered at me on the way out, but that's nothing new. The Weasleys pretty much ignored me, except Bill who almost looked sympathetic."

"Are you sure it was a look of sympathy?"

"Nearly positive."

"Good. If the Weasleys are on your side you may still have some influence in the Ministry. At the very least they may advocate for you should an investigation pop up," Archelaus mused.

"Merlin, I hope they don't investigate."

"If they do we'll find a way around it. In the meantime, keep a low profile, appear loyal to the Ministry, and for Merlin's sake leave Severus Snape alone."

"But we have such enlightening conversations," Farrah grinned.

"I mean it." Archelaus warned. "He won't come to our side willingly if you taunt him."

"I'm just planting a few doubts about his wench of a wife," Farrah replied in an innocent voice.

"Allow us to do that," Archelaus replied. "Hermione is bound to screw up sooner or later. When she does, we will pounce on the opportunity by exploiting every insecurity Severus has. When all is said and done Severus will feel he has no choice but to change his wife and daughter.”

"What if she doesn't mess up?" Farrah asked.

“Hermione is an idealistic Gryffindor,” the Chief smirked. "She can't help but to step right into our plans.”
I apologize if I botched the German. I've taken a few courses in the language, but I'm far from fluent.

Thank you so much for the support! It is much appreciated.
"Morning, Severus."

"Good morning Hermione."

Severus yawned as he struggled to focus his eyes on Hermione and the bundle in her arms. Once his vision cleared, he reached out and stroked Rose's back. "Hello little one. How are you this morning?"

Rose shifted her eyes toward her dad while remaining firmly latched onto her mother's breast. Severus grinned. "I see you're busy."

"At least she slept better than she did the night before," Hermione noted.

"Thank Merlin," Severus muttered, propping himself up to look into Hermione's eyes. "I would've tended to her earlier, but I suspected she was hungry."

"You were right," Hermione replied with a smile. "Thankfully Rose is developing a predictable schedule."

"And knowing how children can be, she'll change it tomorrow just to keep us on our toes," Severus noted.

Hermione laughed. Rose glanced up at her in shock, struggling to maintain her grip.

Severus leaned over and kissed Hermione on the cheek. "I have missed waking up to you and Rose."

"I have missed lying in your arms," Hermione admitted.

"I just wish we could wake up in each other's arms with a little less interruption," Severus teased with a pointed look at Rose.

Rose stared at him. Why did parents make such a big deal about sleeping all night? Sleeping in the daytime was every bit as good. Perhaps if they learned to sleep during the day they’d have more time to do what parents do.

Wait, aside from taking care of me, what exactly do Mummy and Daddy do?

Before Rose could meditate on the question, she was startled by a faint scratching at the window. She detached herself from her mother. Her eyes darted around the room in a vain attempt to ascertain the source of the sound.

Severus sighed. "I'll let in the owl."

"Thank you," Hermione replied before turning to Rose and cooing, "Do you want some more breakfast? Or are you full?"

Although Rose was far from full, she was far more interested in her father and the strange creature perched on the window sill than she was in finishing breakfast.
Severus untied the parchment from the owl's leg and broke the seal. "It's from your healer."

"Oh, it’s probably a reminder for my postpartum appointment."

"When is it?"

"Next Thursday, I believe."

Severus examined the letter while Rose reattached herself to her mother. "That’s exactly what the letter states."

"Good," Hermione answered.

Severus looked at the child. "Are we taking Rose with us?"

"I haven’t considered whether or not to take her. I suppose we could, but if she began to fuss it would make the appointment difficult." Then she smirked. "Speaking of which, who said you were invited?"

"I was there for every ante-natal appointment. It would only make sense that I accompany you to the final check up."

"I suppose I have no real issue with your coming," Hermione replied. "Besides, Ginny has been dying to see her goddaughter. It would be good practice for her own baby if she took care of Rose for an hour or two."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "You'd allow Rose to be Ginevra’s practice infant?"

"Ginny will be fine. If I start today I should have enough milk in reserve to take care of any feedings Rose would miss."

"Are you sure this is the best thing for Rose?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"To my knowledge Ginevra has never taken care of a baby for longer than ten minutes. Rose is only one month old. It may be traumatic enough for us to leave her for an extended period of time. We cannot afford to compound that feeling of abandonment by leaving her in the hands of a less than adequate caregiver."

Hermione’s smile widened. "Feeling a little over-protective?"

"I’m being reasonable. The last thing I want is to come home to a crying baby and a hysterical goddaughter-in-law. Besides," Severus scowled. "Ginevra is a notorious shopper. For all I know she'd cover Rose head-to-toe in pink lace and ruffles. I cannot allow such an event to occur."

Hermione laughed, startling Rose once again. "Severus, Ginny grew up in a large extended family. I'm sure she is up to keeping a baby for a little while."

"For Rose’s sake she’d better be," Severus growled.

"As for pink clothing… well… you have a daughter, Severus. You may have to let that color grow on you."

Severus scowled, unwilling to concede her point. Before he could formulate a counterargument, the owl interrupted with an impatient hoot.
Rose began wailing.

Hermione shushed the babe. "It will be fine. Everything will be fine, I promise. Don’t fuss…"

Severus leaned over and whispered into Rose's ear, "I don't like owls, either."

Rose gazed at him and hiccuped. Once she'd calmed herself, she gave him a toothless grin, secure in the knowledge her daddy had her back… and if Aunt Ginny dressed her in pink, she had no doubt he would fix it with a wave of that stick of his.

***

"Good morning Ron!" Molly trilled as she entered the hospital room with a box of chocolates. "The doctors said you could have some chocolate frogs today as long as you save them for dessert."

"What's the use?" Ron sulked. "Once I get out of here I'll be lucky to afford a crust of dry bread."

"Losing your job is not the end of the world; you'll just have to start a new career," Molly replied.

"What career?" Ron moaned.

"Why, you could be an auror! You used to talk about that all the time when you were at Hogwarts."

"I've never wanted to be anything but a professional Quidditch player, Mum. Harry is the one who wanted to be an auror."

"Yes, but at times you expressed an interest in it."

"Maybe, but being an auror can be just as physical as playing Quidditch. It might not be an option."

"I hadn't thought of that," Molly replied before her eyes lit up again. "Well… you could always be one of those aurors who does crime scene investigations and performs tests in the lab."

"Please!" Ron argued. "I've never been book smart. Sitting in a lab would be boring. I need to be out and about where I can see others and visit new places. Quidditch was the perfect career for that, but now it’s gone."

"Well you need to think of something, Ronald. You're too young to retire," Molly answered.

"I have the pension from the war," Ron suggested.

"Hardly enough to keep you comfortable the rest of your life…" Molly mused. "Still you should have some money saved up. Where did you store your Quidditch earnings?"

Ron swallowed as tears filled his eyes. "Most of the money went to pay for my mansion and my broom collection. Oh Merlin! Will I have to sell my mansion? There's no way I can pay all my bills. I...I might have to downsize!"

"You could move back home," Molly suggested.

"No!" Ron exclaimed. "I'd look like a complete failure! I need my independence."

"Yes, but sometimes you have to make sacrifices to survive… and eat."

Ron's stomach growled at the word, "eat." His brow furrowed. "Maybe I could give up the mansion, but my broom collection?" His eyes widened in horror. "After the Quidditch World Cup I was going
to buy a Twigger 9000! I needed it to complete the series!"

"Maybe when you get a new job…”

"I can't wait that long! They're probably already drawing designs for the 9050! I have to get the new Twigger now!"

Ron began to cry bitter tears, but his body cast prevented him from wiping away the soggy mess. Molly pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and dabbed at his face. "I know things look bad now…”

"I don't want to be poor again!"

"Ronald Weasley!" Molly yelled. "You don't need every new broom that hits the market! There is nothing wrong with working hard for a living."

His sobs grew louder.

"I know things look bleak now, but if you persevere you will pull through."

Ron continued to weep.

“Summon some Weasley pride. There are worse things than work, and things could be worse for you.”

“How could things possibly be worse for me?”

“Well, you could’ve stayed with that wench Hermione and been forced to raise that dungeon bat’s daughter.”

Ron gagged. "You're right. I could have her nagging in my ear right now and that baby crying in my face."

“See? Things could be worse. She's married to someone who is as unpleasant as she is, and you're better for it.”

“You're right. Hermione is in a much worse position than I am,” Ron's tears subsided. "Severus and Hermione will drive each other mad. They won't last a year, and then she'll be back on the street without a knut to her name."

"Not necessarily," Molly replied.

“Huh?”

“The Snapes signed a prenuptial agreement. Hermione comes out pretty well if they divorce."

"How well?"

"Close to two hundred million Galleons, if I remember correctly. She might also get the mansion as well, though I may have misread that part.”

Ron's head spun as he considered the possibilities. Two hundred million Galleons would keep him in brooms for quite a long time… plus he would still be able to afford his mansion. No, better yet, he could live in Snape’s mansion! It was bigger anyway, and would have plenty of places to store his brooms. The yard was big enough to turn into a Quidditch pitch, so he could watch his old buddies play while Hermione read books or something inside.
"But we don't need to talk about Hermione right now," Molly continued.

Ron’s mind honed in on the image of Hermione standing beside his new Quidditch pitch with the baby in her arms.

“Hermione’s baby is name Rose, correct?”

“Yes, why?”

“Just curious,” Ron replied.

“Right, well then…” Molly began.

"Does Rose have a trust fund?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Why would you ask?"

"I'm curious."

"I believe she has forty million Galleons, although Severus will surely add on as the child grows. He does seem to care for her, at least as much as he’s able to care for anyone. Enough gossip. Let's talk about your rehabilitation and the steps you'll need to take once the casts are removed…"

Forty million Galleons! It was made even sweeter by the fact that Snape owned a business with great potential for growth. No, even better, Snape owed Ron that very business. After all if Ron had wanted to marry Hermione then the greasy git wouldn’t have gotten married, meaning there would be no fortune. Ron created Snape’s heir, meaning his fortune was only secure because Ron was allowing Snape to raise his child. Snape had borrowed Ron's family for long enough. It was time to take back what was rightfully his!

A twinge of guilt pricked at his conscience. Could he really so carelessly use his former lover and his own child, just to maintain a certain lifestyle? He really had no compelling interest in either of them. Honestly he was still sorta glad Snape took them off his hands. Was it fair to use them to further his own ends?

Hah! He wouldn't be using them; he'd be rescuing them. Certainly they didn't love Severus Snape! Nobody could! They'd thank Ron for bailing them out of that awful loveless arrangement.

"Mum!"

"Yes?"

"I have a confession to make"

"What?"

"I am Rose's father."

Chapter End Notes
I hope everyone has a great weekend!

Thank you so much for all the support.
Molly’s eyes bulged. "Excuse me?"

Ron took a deep breath. "I'm Rose's father."

"You're Rose’s father?"

"Yes, Rose is my daughter."

"Rose?" Molly asked. "As in Hermione Snape's daughter?"

Ron hummed.

"As in the child you claim was conceived during an ill-advised romp between your ex-fiancée and your former potions professor?"

Ron hummed louder.

"As in the child you once called a symbol of your betrayal? Is this the Rose you’re referring to?"

"Yep," Ron answered. "She's mine."

Molly’s eyes darkened. "Ginevra's been here, hasn't she? She's been putting all sorts of ideas in your head. You probably don't even remember what Hermione looks like and yet she's convinced you that you are the father of that wench’s spawn."

"No," Ron answered with uncharacteristic patience. "I know exactly what Hermione looks like. She has brown hair that's a bushy mess unless she remembers to use products on it, which she rarely does. Also she has a small mole on her backside, just above her arse."

Molly raised an eyebrow. "How would you know about the mole?"

"Because we shagged more times than I can count!" Ron exclaimed.

"B-but you said you were waiting until marriage! You-you wanted to be chaste so your first time would be special! Both of you were supposed the wholesome couple who did everything according to Wizarding customs, at least you did until that greasy git entered the picture. You-you were the Golden Couple meant to set a good example for the rest of the Wizarding World."

"That was a load of bullocks, Mum! I said all that for the PR, although we did wait for a year or so before having sex."

“Only a year?”

“Yes, on her twentieth birthday she finally gave it up. We used contraceptive spells at first, but later on we stopped because they were taking too long to cast and killed the mood.”

Molly shook her head as if doing so would clear his words from her ears. "Fine. What about Severus Snape? You said he was Rose's father. According to you, Hermione was sleeping with him while she was supposed to be out Christmas shopping. How can you be sure he isn’t the father?"
Ron burst out laughing. “Do you really think that dungeon bat stood a chance against me?”

Molly swallowed.

“Hermione worshipped the ground I walked on! She never would've given the greasy git a second look if I hadn't given her the boot. He never so much as snogged her until they were married.”

"Apparently he did more than snog her if their marriage was declared valid."

"Maybe later, but that was long after Rose was on the way. And I imagine she gagged through the entire process. Who could enjoy… that… with him?"

"I really don't want to dwell on the image of Severus and Hermione Snape consummating their marriage."

"Neither do I because it’s too painful," Ron agreed as bile crawled up his throat. Then his eyes softened. "But that does not matter now. I'm ready to reclaim my family. I will not have my daughter raised by a dungeon bat."

"Okay, let's step back for a minute," Molly said in a slow, calm voice. "Why would Severus Snape take on a child that was not his? Why would he marry Hermione instead of someone less, uh, scandalous?"

"Severus wanted that inheritance money as soon as possible and Hermione was desperate to give Rose a proper paternity after I dumped her."

"Severus Snape is a former Death Eater who is obsessed with blood lines. Why would he declare someone his heir who he knew was unrelated to him? What would possess him to mess up his bloodline by giving the inheritance he cherished to a former student’s daughter?"

"Would you marry Severus Snape even if you were offered hundreds of millions of galleons?"

Molly drawled, "I suppose most decent women would be turned off by the idea of marrying someone with his sour attitude."

"Exactly, Hermione was probably the only woman desperate enough to want to be his wife. Severus was a money hungry git and Hermione was in a bad situation. Those are the only reasons they’re together. Heck, she may not have even told him about the baby until well after they were married.” Ron snorted "I would’ve loved to have seen the look on Snape’s face when he realized he was now ‘Daddy.’"

"Trust me, he’s made his peace with fatherhood,” Molly replied.

"It doesn’t matter anymore,” Ron answered. “All that matters is I want Hermione and Rose back. I-I admit that I’ve been selfish. I wasn't ready to settle down with a wife and kid when Hermione became pregnant, but nearly losing my life has made me realize what's important. I need to take responsibility for my actions and save my daughter from that bastard."

"I see," Molly drawled. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to call your Healer now."

Ron asked, "Why?"

Molly turned toward the door. "You've obviously hit your head much harder than anyone suspected. Nothing about that story makes sense, and quite frankly, I find it appalling. It can't be true."
"But it is!" Ron whined. "Every word of it! Rose Snape is really Rose Weasley!"

"No," Molly answered. "You have been listening to Ginny's stories."

"Ginny didn't tell me any of this," Ron protested. "It's the truth."

Molly gripped the doorknob tighter. "I knew I shouldn't have allowed her to visit you a few days back! She's convinced you that you fathered that child just so she would not have to admit that her best friend's a tart."

"But Mum!"

"Don't worry! We'll soon have you right as rain." Molly stepped into the hallway and called out, "We need a Healer in here. Something's wrong with my son!"

"Be right there," a Mediwitch replied.

Ron groaned.

It would not be easy coming clean about Rose's paternity.

***

"Draco?"

"Yes?" He looked up from the business letter he was composing, set down his quill, and spun his chair around.

"I just received a letter from Hermione," Ginevra answered with a grin.

"Oh? What does it say?"

"She had a question concerning a certain baby."

"Has she convinced you to allow the Mediwitch to tell us the baby's gender?" Draco asked, reaching over to place an affectionate hand on his wife's enlarged stomach.

"No," Ginevra replied, caressing his hand with hers.

The baby pressed against her abdomen.

Draco looked up at her. "Did you already find out the baby's gender and tell her?"

"No," Ginny giggled as her baby kicked again.

Draco thought for a moment before groaning. "Please don't tell me Uncle Severus put a bun in her oven."

Ginevra laughed even harder. "Hermione isn't quite ready to go through what she calls 'the joys of labor' again. The news does, however, relate to baby Rose."

"Oh?"

"Hermione has a postpartum appointment next Thursday. She was wondering if we'd be interested in watching Rose while she and Severus are at the Healer's office."

"Sure," Draco grinned, removing his hand from Ginny's stomach. "I'd love to see my goddaughter
"Good, because Severus specifically asked for you to help. Something about keeping me from buying gaudy pink outfits."

Draco chuckled at the idea of Severus doting on a pink-clad Rose. "It would certainly put a dent in Uncle Snape's reputation as a heartless git if people saw him carrying around a baby girl dressed from head to toe in pink."

"Trust me, when people witness him kissing Rose's boo-boo's or buying her the latest baby doll his reputation as a git will be forever shattered," Ginevra remarked. "Personally I don't think that would be such a bad thing. It wouldn't kill him to show his softer side."

"Perhaps you're right," Draco replied. As hard as he tried he could not picture Uncle Severus kissing anyone's boo-boo's. Actually, he couldn't even imagine the potions' master using the word "boo-boo".

"So are you up for babysitting Rose?"

"Of course I am."

"Good," Ginevra replied as she beamed. "I'll shop for toys and clothes tomorrow. Knowing Severus, the poor child has only ever worn black."

"Oh Ginevra," Draco sighed. He had better plan to accompany his wife tomorrow or he would be in a world of trouble with his godfather.

POP! "Mistress and Master Malfoy!"

"Yes?" they asked.

"Molly Weasley sent a letter."

"She did?" Ginevra asked before taking the parchment from the elf.

Draco leaned over and glanced at the letter. The elf exited the room.

Ginny noted in a flat voice. "It's a howler."

"A what?" Draco asked.

"A howler," Ginevra replied as she set a hand on her stomach and braced herself for her mother's scream.

"Why would she send a howler?" Draco asked.

"I have no idea," Ginevra answered as she broke the seal.

"GINEVRA MALFOY! I CANNOT BELIEVE YOUR LATEST STUNT! YOU'VE SUNKEN PRETTY LOW YOUNG LADY, BUT NEVER LIKE THIS! RON BELIEVES ROSE IS HIS! YES! RON BELIEVES THAT SNAPE SPAWN IS HIS! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'D CONVINCE HIM OF SUCH A LIE! HERMIONE IS NOTHING BUT A SELFISH BITCH! JUST ACCEPT THAT SHE WAS TOO STUPID TO CAST A CONTRACEPTIVE SPELL WHEN SHE WAS MESSING AROUND WITH SEVERUS SNAPE! STOP DEFENDING THAT SLUT AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY! JUST ACCEPT THE FACTS AND TELL YOUR BROTHER HE IS NOT ROSE'S FATHER!"
The letter exploded. Draco and Ginevra stared at the pile of ashes.

“Shit.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for not crucifying me after Ron’s latest stunt! That is always very deeply appreciated.
Ron frowned as the Healers levitated him back to his hospital room. Each test they had performed had been more painful and tedious than the last. If he had to tell one more person what his name was, guess how many fingers said person was holding up, or drink another headache-inducing potion he was going to scream.

"How is he?" Molly asked, dabbing at the tears in her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Not all of the results are back, but as of right now, his brain appears to be fine. We don't see any lasting damage," the Head Healer replied as a group of Mediwitches lowered Ron onto the bed.

"But he believes that he fathered a child who is not his," Molly argued.

"I know," the Healer scratched his chin. "I have no definitive answer for you."

Molly sniffed and stuffed the handkerchief into her pants pocket.

"The only explanation which makes any amount of sense is that it is purely psychological."

"What do you mean?"

"If there is nothing physically wrong with your son, then his delusion of fathering this child is a coping mechanism for his painful breakup with Hermione."

"But before today he was just fine with the breakup."

"Perhaps on the surface he was, but subconsciously he is still torn up about the affair."

"How could he be torn up about kicking that conniving witch out of his life?"

"Hermione didn't cheat with just anyone; she cheated with a former professor whose class even I dreaded."

"You had Professor Snape?" Ron asked.

"He was hired on during my fourth year," The Healer answered.

"I see," Ron drawled.

"As I was saying, from what I understand Severus Snape has changed little since I was a student. He remains ill-tempered, sharp, and refuses to wear any color but black. It would be quite traumatic to discover your fiancee has been sleeping with such a man."

"Yes, my ex-fiancee married the greasy git and now he's raising my child! I have to reclaim them before he poisons them against me!"

The Healer shook his head.

"That all makes a certain amount of sense, but Ron has recovered from Hermione's rejection. In fact he already has a girlfriend." Molly's eyes suddenly widened. "Oh dear! How should I break the news..."
of Ron’s delusion to Alicia?"

Shit, Ron winced. I hadn't considered Alicia in all of this.

“You can tell her the breakup with Hermione is only part of the equation,” the Healer answered. “Your son is also coping with his injuries and the loss of his former lifestyle. The delusion of having fathered a child may give him a new sense of purpose, something to live for."

"Yes, but why Hermione's child?” Molly asked, her frown deepening.

"Because Hermione represents for him a simpler time, and from what I understand, it’s the longest relationship he had. He feels secure with her, and is trying to avoid facing the pain of his current situation,” the Healer explained.

"What if I’m telling the truth?” Ron asked. “Has anyone considered that Snape is stealing my child and my mum’s granddaughter?"

The Head Healer sighed. “As stated I knew him as a student, so I speak from experience. I seriously doubt Mr. Snape would declare someone his heir if the child’s paternity was in question, and I cannot imagine him doing so at all if he knew for certain she was not his child."

"But he did!” Ron argued.

Molly exhaled. "Is there anything we can do for him?"

"All we can do is talk to him until he feels psychologically ready to let go of his delusion."

"How long will that take?"

The Healer looked over at Ron and shook his head. "It could take anywhere from a few days to a few years."

“My son doesn’t have years! He needs to get over Hermione now."

“Well some therapy could speed things along.”

Ron let out a loud groan.

“Perhaps that is in his best interests,” Molly mused.

“I’m not seeing a shrink,” Ron retorted. “I’m telling you that Rose is my daughter and your granddaughter. I can prove it. I, I'll have a DNA spell performed. Yeah! Even Snape won't be able to explain away the results!"

Molly’s lip quivered.

“I wouldn’t give this too much thought,” the Healer began. “As long as Ron does not act upon his delusion, I cannot see too many problems arising from this."

"But I want a DNA spell performed right now," Ron protested. "Bring Hermione, Rose, and Snape in here and I'll prove that I'm Rose's father."

Molly buried her face in her hands. The Healer exhaled.

"Ronald?" Alicia peeked her head inside the door.
"Alicia," Ron replied with a smile. "I missed you so much, baby."

Alicia stepped inside. "I missed you too, Ron."

"I'll give you the names of some therapists who can work with Ron," the Healer concluded as Alicia ran to the man in the body cast.

"Thank you," Molly whispered.

Alicia and Ron’s lips met in a kiss. Molly released the breath she’d been holding. Perhaps Alicia could cure Ron's delusion and free his life of Hermione Snape for good.

"Alicia," Ron whispered in her ear.

"Yes love," she cooed.

"Do me a favor and take down a letter for me when everyone leaves."

***

"Uncle Severus!" Draco called from the floo.

Severus scowled and set his book onto the coffee table. For the first time in weeks he'd finally found the time and energy to do some research. Of course it was bound to be interrupted…

"Yes, Draco," Severus grumbled as he walked over to the fireplace.

"Ginevra needs to speak to Hermione."

"About what?"

"She needs to talk to Hermione about Rose."

"Can she still baby sit for us?"

"Of course she can still baby sit," Draco replied with a smile. "We’re both looking forward to spending time with our goddaughter."

Severus' eyes lit up. "I’m glad to hear it."

"I wouldn’t be too relieved just yet," Draco warned. "My wife’s already planned an entire shopping trip just so little Rose will have new toys and clothes that are not black."

Visions of Rose in horrendously frilly pink outfits flashed before Severus' eyes.

"Don't worry," Draco assured him. "I will do my best to make sure she keeps the pink ruffles and bows to a minimum."

"Thank you," Severus answered, finding little comfort in the fact that Draco was a pushover when it came to his wife. It may be prudent to brush up on his color changing charms.

"Now, are you going to allow me to floo?" Draco asked.

"Sartu," Severus answered.

Soon Draco and Ginevra materialized before them. Both of them dusted themselves off before Ginevra asked, "Where's Hermione?"
"Taking a nap. Why?" Severus asked.

Ginny took a deep breath. "We need to speak with her about Ron."

"Is he dead?" Severus asked in the most neutral voice he could muster.

"Not yet," Ginevra answered.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean, ‘not yet?’ Has he had some sort of setback?"

"No."

"Then what is the problem?"

"Ron is telling people that Rose is his daughter."

Severus felt his world come to a screeching halt. His limbs became numb and an involuntary shiver coursed through his spine. The little color in his face was drained. In an almost inaudible voice he asked, "What do you mean Ron is telling people Rose is his daughter?"

"Mum sent us a howler today, blasting me for putting ideas about Rose in Ron's head," Ginevra explained. "According to her, Ron announced this morning that Rose was his daughter."

"Did she say anything else?" Severus' stomach churned.

"Just that I needed to make it clear to him that Rose is not his daughter," Ginevra answered

Severus’ expression darkened. "Molly's right. Rose isn't his daughter. She's my daughter, and I won't allow anyone to say otherwise."

"This may be a non-event," Draco piped in.

Severus startled.

"I don't know what happened, but maybe Ron just woke up after being sedated for a test and started rambling about Rose. He may not even remember claiming to be her father," Draco proposed.

"That's right," Ginevra answered. "If there's one thing I know about my mother, it's how badly she overreacts."

“She is well-known for her histrionics,” Severus noted.

“It was clear from the howler that Mum doesn't believe Ron's story,” Ginevra continued. “For all she knows, he bumped his head and has gone a bit 'round the bend."

"That's not far from the truth," Severus muttered.

"I should probably take a trip to St. Mungo's today and see Ron anyway," Ginevra suggested. "While I'm there, I can investigate how much he remembers and what he plans to do with that information."

"Great idea," Draco replied. "We can decide what to do based on what he says."

"That sounds reasonable," Severus answered. "You have my blessing."

"Good. We'll probably floo you again sometime this evening, unless that's inconvenient for you,"
Ginevra replied.  

"No," Severus replied. "Rose is usually awake in the evenings, which means we are, too."

Ginevra smiled. "Is she becoming a night owl like you, Severus?"

"I fear so," he answered with a hint of pride in his eyes.

"Maybe someday I'll buy her a toy potions kit," Ginevra suggested. "Then she'll have something to do when she can't sleep."

"I would not be opposed to that," Severus replied with a hint of a grin. "It will be a few more years before it's safe for her to touch real vials, and it would give her some practice before stepping inside a real lab."

"I'll see what I can find," Ginevra turned to the fireplace. "In the meantime, I should probably be going. Hopefully I can catch Ron when Mum isn't around."

Draco noticed a flicker of terror in Severus' eyes when Ginevra said Ron’s name, something Draco had never seen before. Was Ron on the cusp of accomplishing what Voldemort could not, namely destroying Severus Snape?

"Do, do you need anything from us before we go?" Draco whispered.

"No," Severus answered in a weak voice. "I just need some time alone with my family."

"Okay," Draco answered.

"Thank you for informing me about Ronald. I pray this is all some delusion he chooses never to act upon," Severus replied.

"I do too," Ginevra answered.

Draco followed his wife to the floo and throwing a handful of powder into the fireplace. Mumbling their address, they disappeared.

Severus’ chest ached. He glanced over to his book. How could he continue researching when Ron may be trying to lay claim to Rose?

Leaving the room, Severus crept into Rose's nursery and gazed into her crib, taking comfort in her easy rhythmic breathing. A year ago the idea of having a baby was impossible to fathom. Now, he wanted nothing more than to devote every spare moment of his time to his daughter and her mother, to remain at Hermione's side while they watched Rose grow and develop. Merlin, how had two witches captured his heart so quickly?

Rose opened one of her blue eyes and curled her lips. The smile only grew as she recognized who was standing in front of her. Severus grinned in return and kissed her forehead. "I love you so much, Little Rose."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! All of it is deeply appreciated.
Ginevra took a deep breath as she placed her hand on the doorknob to Ron's hospital room. She closed her eyes and cleared her mind. It never did anyone good to get excited in these situations. Her focus needed to be on extracting information from Ronald, assuming he even remembered mentioning Rose.

After counting to ten Ginny opened the door, only for her stomach churn at the sound of sloppy wet kisses.

"Hello," she forced a cheery voice before retreating into the hallway, out of sight.

"Ginny!" Ron cheered. "Come on in!"

Ginny stepped into the room with a sheepish smile. "I'm sorry. I had no idea you two were, uh, busy."

"Oh don't worry," Ron joked as Alicia blushed. "Wasn't much happening. I'm still a little laid up."

"It’s fine. I mean, I guess everyone deserves a little joy in their lives,” Ginevra bit her lower lip. Should she ask Alicia to leave? Was she even aware of Ron's "delusion"?

"What did you come here for?" Ron asked.

"Nothing in particular," Ginny began. It's been a few days since I've seen my brother, so I thought I’d stop by."

"You came at a good time," Alicia answered as her self-conscious blush subsided. "Ron's been in testing most of the morning. He got done with it an hour ago."

"That does not surprise me in light of Mum's howler," Ginny replied.

"Howler?" Alicia asked.

Ron's eyes lit up. "Alicia, I need to speak to Ginny."

"Oh please let me stay," Alicia kissed Ron's cheek. "I promise not to interrupt."

"I know babe, and I’d love for you to stay," Ron replied. "But I think Ginny wants to speak with me alone."

Alicia turned to Ginny. The red headed woman answered, “Please don’t take this personally, but sometimes a sister just wants to spend time alone with her brother.”

"No, I understand," Alicia answered. "But what about…"

"She won’t be here for another hour. Go ahead and have a cup of tea or something."

"I will," she replied, planting one last sloppy kiss on him for good measure, then sauntering out the door.
Ginny shut the door behind her. "I see you're feeling well."

"Yes," Ron replied. "I'm doing much better now that those obnoxious tests are done."

"What kind of tests did they run on you?" Ginny asked.

"They mainly ran brain injury tests. They were horrid," Ron answered before smirking. "You didn't come here to discuss that with me, though, did you?"

"No," Ginny answered in a flat tone. "I didn't."

"What did Mum say in the howler?"

"Something about you having a daughter."

"Yes," Ron replied with a grin. "I've decided to claim Rose as my own."

Ginny stared at him, stone-faced.

"Aren't you happy?" Ron asked. "You wanted me to acknowledge that Rose is my daughter, and now I am."

Ginny betrayed no emotion. "Now that you've claimed Rose, what do you intend to do?"

"I'm going to do what you've always wanted me to do," Ron replied. "I'm going to claim Rose as my own. Then I'll help Hermione get a divorce and marry her. She, Rose and I will be one happy family."

"You want to marry Hermione now?" Ginny exclaimed.

"Yes," Ron frowned.

Ginevra's face was as red as her hair.

"Why are you looking at me like that? You wanted me to marry Hermione. Now I am," Ron replied.

"No," Ginny drawled. "I wanted you to marry Hermione before she married Severus and fell in love with him."

Ron burst out laughing. "That's a good one, Ginny. Hermione in love with Snape…"

"She is deeply in love with Snape," Ginny insisted.

Ron stopped when he saw the seriousness of her expression. "I'm sure Hermione is making the most of her union with Severus Snape. Maybe I could even see them bonding over potions or some other intellectual subject, but please! You had Professor Snape at Hogwarts. He hates children, especially bushy haired know-it-alls. He’s made that much clear. You cannot really think Hermione is happy in her marriage."

Ginny pursed her lips.

"Look, if this is about the sanctity of marriage I understand. I know you believe that marriage is forever, as do I. Still you need to think about the bigger picture. Do you really want your best friend married to a man who despises Gryffindors? Do you want your goddaughter raised by that greasy git?"
"Actually, I would like both of those scenarios just fine."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

"Severus is a fantastic husband and father. Hermione is happy with him, as is Rose. I refuse to help you tear his family away from him," Ginny answered.

"It's not his family," Ron replied, "It's mine."

"Yours? You abandoned Hermione and Rose. You called Hermione a wench in front of all of Wizarding Britain and you called Rose a symbol of Hermione's betrayal. When Rose's birth was announced, all you could say was, 'I hope Snape has fun changing nappies.'"

Ron's lips twisted. Apparently his sister was not as on-board with this plan as he'd hoped. "Ginny, between then and now, I've had an epiphany."

"Really?" Ginny asked as she glared at him.

"Yes," Ron replied in a softer voice. "Since Fenrir attacked me I’ve been rethinking my life. All that fame and fortune distracted me until I couldn’t appreciate what was really important—the people in my life. Lying in this bed, I've realized that all I've ever wanted was a family, but I was too scared to hold onto Hermione. I was afraid of being a father, so I pushed her away."

"You dumped her and plastered a lie all over The Daily Prophet."

"I may have done that, but I've seen how selfish I was. Now I only want the chance to be a father and a husband."

"Tell me, does Alicia know about these plans?"

"I was hoping she'd still be my friend..." Ron answered with an insincere gleam in his eyes.

Ginny shook her head. "Merlin, I can't believe I never saw it before."

"I know my love for Hermione and Rose has remained hidden for all these months..."

"No! I can't believe what a selfish arse you are!"

"What?" Ron asked, his eyes widening.

"You don't care a thing about Alicia, Hermione, or Rose. All you care about is your own happiness," Ginny snapped. "I don't know where this sudden epiphany came from, and I quite frankly don't care! You don't deserve to be with anyone! I-I can't believe I ever wanted you and Hermione together. You don't even deserve to inhale the same air she does!"

"I’ve changed," Ron argued

"How?" Ginny asked. "If you've changed so much then how do you plan on correcting your mistakes?"

"I don’t know, but I’ll think of something. All I know is that I need Hermione. She's the only one who can get me through my rehabilitation and life after Quidditch."

Ginevra's eyes flickered with understanding. "Good God."

"What?"
"You just want Hermione for her money don't you?"

The truth was in his eyes.

"You do!" Ginny continued. "You do only want Hermione for her alimony payments and Rose for her trust fund. You'd actually rip a child away from the father who loves her just to make a galleon!"

"Severus is not Rose's father…"

"Yes he is!" Ginny argued. "Severus has stepped up and taken care of Rose since the day he learned she existed. He attended every one of her antenatal appointments, and was the first person she saw when she was born. Severus knows how she likes to be held and what calms her down when she's upset. Severus Snape is Rose's father. You're nothing more than a sperm donor."

"So you won't help me get my family back then?" Ron asked with a pathetic expression.

"Rose and Hermione are not part of your family," Ginny argued.

Before Ron could respond, the door opened.

"Why did you owl me?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It's deeply appreciated!
Rose stared at her father. Something had changed in him, but it wasn't quite clear what it was. When she smiled, his lips curled up in response, but his eyes didn't sparkle. Instead, they looked... sad? Not exactly watery, like hers when she was hungry or needed a nappy change, but definitely not twinkly, either, like they usually were when he looked at her or at Mum.

Most of the time when the sun was outside, Daddy's full focus was on her, but today he was distracted. Maybe she needed to grab him. That always made him feel happy!

Rose wrapped her tiny digits around his index finger and drew it to her cheek. He allowed her to do so, but the unhappy expression remained.

What was wrong?

"I really do not think Ron will pursue custody of Rose," Hermione began as she sat down on the couch alongside Severus. "He was quite clear when he said he wanted nothing to do with her, or with me."

"What if he's had some sort of epiphany?" Severus asked in a quiet voice. "What if he's decided he's ready for a family?"

"Then he and Alicia can start one together."

"Hermione, you don't need to protect me from the truth. I know you love Ron."

"No," Hermione answered. "I don't love Ron."

Severus searched her eyes for a long moment and found sincerity there. Breaking the gaze, he shifted his focus to Rose. "You don't love Ron?"

"No," Hermione repeated. "I don't love Ron."

Severus twisted his lips, but did not utter a word.

"I'm not quite sure why you're so shocked. I already told you I would not run away with him."

“It’s very different to say you cannot be with someone and that you do not love him,” Severus noted. "You said you did not want to be around Ronald because you didn't like the kind of person you were when you were with him. You said you didn't like how he talked about Rose before she was born. Then you said you felt obligated to help me obtain my fortune because of our friendship. Never have you said that you didn’t love Mr. Weasley.”

"Those were all excuses," Hermione admitted. "I didn't want to tell you the real reason I wouldn't see Ron in the hospital."

"What is the real reason?" Severus asked, now gazing down at his daughter.

Hermione could see him trying and failing not to cling to her words. Her heart screamed for her to declare her feelings, but this was not one of her romance novels where saying "I love you" resolves every problem. Just because Severus feared abandonment didn’t mean he loved her as anything more
than a close friend. It was best to respect the status quo, lest her emotions destroy what they have.

"I started to see him for who he really was," Hermione whispered. "I stopped loving him a long time ago but I didn't want to say it out loud because I was afraid to admit it to myself."

Severus turned to her. "Why were you afraid to admit to yourself that you did not love Ron?"

Hermione felt her cheeks flush. She swallowed a few times and fidgeted. After a few tense moments she replied, "Because if I continued to love Ron, I wouldn't have to imagine a life that didn't include him, even if it was a better one. I didn't have to move forward with my life, to venture out on my own. If I stayed with him I would know what to expect, which gave me a small source of comfort. I could hide from the rest of the world and shield myself from another man's rejection."

"Similar to the way I hid behind the memory of Lily in order to avoid further heartache."

Hermione gave him a wistful smile. "Yes, something like that."

"Obviously I can relate to your situation, but you don't strike me as the sort of person who can live your life without sharing your love with someone. Don't you feel like something is missing?"

"Excuse me?" she asked.

Rose began to squirm and grunt.

He sighed. "I've come to know you fairly well, Hermione. You cannot help but care for others. I know you care for Rose and for whatever reason, me, but the affection you feel towards us is not the same as what you felt towards Ron. Don't you miss loving someone beyond all reason? Don't you wish you were waking up next to a husband who had wooed you for months before working up the courage to ask you to become his wife? Don't you want to be in love?"

"Severus, what we share is different than anything I’ve experienced or read about, but it isn't any less precious to me. I am truly happy with you."

"I am happy with you as well," he whispered.

They locked eyes for a long, uncomfortable moment.

"Would," Hermione coughed. "Would you like to know how I feel about you and this marriage?"

"I would," Severus whispered.

"As I've said before I am happy, much happier than I ever expected to be."

"Hermione! Severus!"

Hermione startled and Severus scowled. He really needed to come up with a way to block floo calls and owl posts… and throw a Patronus silencer in for good measure.

Hermione rushed to the fireplace. "Yes, Ginny?"

"May I please enter?" Ginevra asked.

Hermione's stomach churned at the tone of her friend’s voice. "Sartu."

Ginny stepped through the fireplace and dusted off the soot. "Thank you."
"What did Ron say?" Hermione asked.

Severus stood up from the couch and paced in the shadows with Rose on his shoulder. The babe whined and clutched her father’s cape.

Ginny took a shaky breath. "Ron was fully aware of what he was saying when he admitted that Rose was his daughter. He wants to reconcile with you. He’s claiming that he understands how badly he messed up by allowing you to leave his life, so he’ll do everything in his power to win you back."

"No way in hell am I ever going to consider reconciling with that arse," Hermione replied in a low voice.

"He thinks you and Rose should be a part of his family."

"I already have a family. If he wants one he can form his own."


"What does the rest of your family think?" Hermione asked.

Ginevra's smile widened. "They are convinced he has gone right off his rocker. Mum even had the healers run extra tests on him today to see if he suffered additional head trauma."

"That could work in our favor," Hermione mused.

"Indeed it could," Severus replied as he handed Rose to Hermione. "If you ladies will excuse me, I need to write a letter to Lucius."

"Oh?" Ginevra asked.

Rose burst out crying and reached for her dad.

"Yes. I'd like to know my legal options before Ron goes public with this news," Severus continued in a raised voice.

Ginevra lowered her head. "It's a little late for that."

"Excuse me?"

"Rita Skeeter is in his room interviewing him as we speak."

Severus' stomach clenched.

***

"I was surprised when I received your owl," Rita began, fighting to hide her disappointment at losing an interview with Ginevra Malfoy. She had wanted to ask her if the new Malfoy heir would be accepted by the Weasleys or would the child be declared an outcast like his or her mother. Unfortunately, Ginevra had rushed out before Rita could say one word. Oh well. Rita would snag an interview later.

"Yes," Ron replied. "Well, I’m somewhat surprised that I sent you the owl, but I can’t think of anyone I’d rather see than you."

"Why would that be?"
"I have a very important announcement to make."

"Really?" Rita’s eyes lit up. Before Ron could continue, she’d already whipped out a notebook and a quill, and had placed a bottle of ink on his bedside table. "What is it?"

"You're fast," Ron gasped.

She smirked. "Years of practice. Now, what is this announcement?"

Ron smiled as Rita prepared to jot down some notes. "I am reclaiming Rose Snape as my daughter."

Rita stared up at him, pen hovering in mid-air. "Excuse me? I think I misheard you."

"What do you think I said?"

"I think you just declared yourself to be Rose Snape's father."

"That's exactly what I said."

Rita lowered the quill. She drawled, “How could you be Rose Snape’s father?"

Ron began, "Hermione and I slept together…"

"No, no you did not," Rita replied. "You have been telling me and the Wizarding world for over six months now that you hadn't so much as seen your former fiancee naked. Now, you expect me to believe that you created a baby without…performing the proper procedures necessary for creating another life?"

Ron bowed his head. "I may have stretched the truth a bit for the sake of PR."

Rita thought before shaking her head. "No. You claimed you were chaste with Hermione. You claimed the child was Severus Snape's. He never contradicted you. Why would he go along with this lie?"

"He wanted an heir," Ron began. “So he took my child.”

"Why would he want your child?" Rita asked. "Severus Snape is a former Death Eater. If there's one thing Death Eaters obsess over, it's blood lines. Severus Snape would not screw up his blood line by declaring as his heir someone completely unrelated to him." "Hermione forced Snape to adopt her child because I left her."

"How on earth did she accomplish that?" Rita asked. "An Imperius curse? A mind altering potion? Blackmail? I don't think so. There is no way Severus Snape was coerced into declaring Rose his heir."

"Severus Snape is a liar!" Ron exclaimed. "I made a mistake in abandoning Hermione and he's taking advantage of it! Snape is raising my daughter and I want her back!"

"Are you claiming that you were under mind control when you stated that you and Hermione had remained chaste and so Rose could not possibly be your daughter? You seemed very sure of your story at the time and more than willing to allow Severus to raise that baby."

"Rose is not his!"

Rita sighed. "I think I see what is happening.'
Ron recognized the look in her eyes. "Don't tell me you think I'm crazy, too."

"If I were you, I'd hope people thought I was crazy," Rita replied. "Abandoning your own child when you know full well how bastards are treated in this culture is an unthinkable thing to do. No one would confess to such an egregious act unless he was insane."

"I made a mistake and now I'm fighting for my daughter," Ron replied. "I want to raise Rose because she’s mine."

"Good luck," Rita replied. "You'll need it."

"I can take on Severus' lawyers," Ron scoffed.

"You can't take on any lawyer at all unless Severus Snape consents to take a DNA spell."

"Then I'll force him to take one."

"On what grounds?"

"The grounds where I say I'm Rose’s father and he needs to bugger off."

"It doesn’t work that way," Rita replied.

Ron blinked.

"Severus Snape’s name is on the birth certificate, meaning he has full custodial rights over Rose. Given that fact it's unlikely that he'd perform a DNA spell of his own volition. Unless a judge determines that there is sufficient evidence to perform a DNA spell, Severus is not compelled to perform one either. Now you knew about the child before their marriage, and you publicly claimed you did not even perform the act necessary to create her. I'm no lawyer but even I can tell that you have no case."

Still…” Rita mused as she began jotting in her notebook. "A tragic former Quidditch superstar driven insane by his career-ending injury is a great story."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
Former Quidditch Star Ron Weasley Goes Insane After Career-Ending Injury

Lucius raised an eyebrow before scanning the article. Under normal circumstances he would have skipped ahead to the Politics section, but after Severus had requested legal advice concerning custody of Rose, he had a feeling this article's contents might prove useful.

Ronald Weasley, Quidditch Star Extraordinaire and second member of the Golden Trio, has recently declared that he is the father of Rose Severa Snape. Despite his earlier claims of celibacy, Ron now claims that he and his former fiancee, Hermione Snape nee Granger, had an ongoing sexual relationship. He goes so far as to assert that Hermione's illicit affair with her now husband, Severus Snape, was fictitious.

“Rose Snape is my daughter!” Ron repeatedly exclaimed while giving an exclusive interview. “I want her back!”

These claims are outrageous in light of the former professor's past. Many will remember Severus Snape as the Death Eater turned double spy. Others will remember that the Death Eaters were a group obsessed with blood lines, meaning that any one of a nonbiological relation would never be declared an heir. A few will also remember how maligned Mr. Snape was after his disastrous tenure as Headmaster of Hogwarts. It is insane to believe anyone who's undergone such disgrace would unnecessarily soil his name again by claiming to be party to an imaginary, high-profile liaison.

At this point it could be argued that Severus was coerced by his current wife to raise their daughter Rose (whose photo we are still unable to obtain in spite of our readers' ardent wishes). This is simply untrue. As strong a witch as Hermione Snape is, it is impossible to believe that she could ever coerce Severus into marrying her. It is also impossible to believe that Mr. Snape would ever accept a child if he had doubts concerning her paternity. In fact, he would be the first to perform a DNA spell, especially if he used legillimency to determine that he may not be the father.

Hence there is only one explanation for Ron’s claims:

Ronald Weasley has gone insane.

Perhaps such tragedy is to be expected in light of Fenrir’s surprise attack, especially given that Mr. Weasley was believed to have killed him. The shock of seeing the werewolf again must have undone his mind…

Lucius burst out laughing. Of course no one would believe the ginger git was a father after spending months declaring himself a chaste virgin. How could he have expected anything else?

A rap on the door interrupted his thoughts. Lucius folded the paper and let out a couple more chuckles, "Come in!"

Severus opened the door and stepped inside. Lucius' smile faded when he saw his friend's appearance. Severus' hair was unkempt and his eyes were rimmed with dark circles. His entire body sagged, making his clothes appear two sizes too big for him.

Severus collapsed into an ivory colored chair. “Hello Lucius.”
“Hello,” Lucius began. “You appear more sleep deprived than usual.”

“That is not surprised given I slept even less so than usual,” Severus admitted.

“You don’t look well.”

“Trust me, I feel far worse than I appear.”

“I knew when you contacted me last night your situation was serious. What's happening?” Lucius asked.

Severus exhaled and he shook his head. "Ron Weasley wants custody of Rose."

"You told me that,” Lucius grabbed the *Daily Prophet*. I also read about it in the paper this morning."

“Great,” Severus slumped further into the chair. “How bad is the damage?”

“Oh, I guess that depends on your perspective,” Lucius replied.

“Lucius, don’t play games with me. I’m in no mood.”

“Rita reported that Ron has gone insane.”

Severus looked up. "Excuse me?"

Lucius smirked as he nudged the paper towards Severus. "Read for yourself."

Severus glanced at the headline, then relaxed as his eyes traveled down the page. Even so, he could not bring himself to smile.

"We both know he is not insane,” Severus concluded as he set the paper down. "It cannot hurt, however, that the public perceives him that way."

"I agree," Lucius replied.

"Still, I want to know what my legal options are regarding Rose, just in case he does decide to sue for custody,” Severus replied.

Lucius gave Severus a reassuring look. "If Ron had either been unaware of Hermione's pregnancy or had claimed paternity before your marriage, you would be in a precarious position. But Ron has publicly denied paternity or even once having relations with Hermione. Your name is on the birth certificate and you were legally married to Hermione at the time of the birth. Those facts alone give you sole power to request a DNA test."

"But I do not want a DNA test."

"Exactly," Lucius replied. "No one can perform a DNA test without your consent, and no one can overturn Rose's birth certificate without a DNA test."

"So legally I remain her father."

“Yes.”

“That is great to know.” Severus rubbed his face. “That only begs off the more important question though.”
"What would that be?" Lucius asked.

"What if Hermione and I divorce?" Severus asked in a quiet voice.

"What?" Lucius leaned back into his chair.

"If Hermione divorces me and marries Ron, do I have any rights regarding Rose?"

"Why would Hermione divorce you?"

"Because Hermione should be married to someone better than me, and deep inside she knows it."

"Does she?"

"She is an astute witch. How could she not?"

"Severus, in spite of your intelligence, you can really act like a dunderhead at times. It never ceases to amaze me that you can be the most brilliant mind of your age, yet the most dense person I've ever met."

"Excuse me," Severus snapped.

Lucius replied. "Have you seen the way Hermione looks at you?"

Severus sat up straighter.

"How many women do you think would tolerate you even when you're being a snarky bastard, or listen to you when you're rattling on about some potion?"

"She likes academic conversations."

"Severus, she likes talking to you!"

"…Because I'm such a great conversationalist."

Lucius glared at him. "Get your head out of your arse and see what's right in front of you. She loves you, and what's more, you love her."

Severus swallowed and scratched the arm of his chair. "I will admit to feeling much more than friendship for Hermione, and her feelings towards me seem to transcend friendship as well. Love, however, is a strong word."

"Yet it fits how you feel towards her, does it not?" Lucius asked.

Severus swallowed. "Yes. I do love Hermione Snape."

"And if Ginevra's observations are any indication, then Hermione feels the same way about you," Lucius noted.

"If she does love me, then that will most assuredly change when she has lived with me long enough," Severus answered.

"You mean she'll see the nominally decent man under the git, the man who treats her like she’s the brightest witch he's ever met?" Lucius asked. "Yes, I'd imagine being treated like an intelligent witch would get tiring after the fiftieth year or so."
Severus glared at him. "You know I have no difficulty being cruel when the situation warrants."

"Yet you still attended every one of Hermione's ante-natal appointments, you still wake up at two in morning to change Rose's nappies and you have allowed Hermione to chase the house elves out of the kitchen when she gets the urge to cook. You also manage to treat her with more respect than I've seen you muster for anyone else in your life with the possible exception of my family."

"She's earned my respect," Severus replied before exhaling and putting his head in his hands, "And I suppose it was only inevitable that I fell in love with her."

Lucius gave him a small smile. "It is not wrong to fall in love with someone, Severus. Nor is it wrong to let her know how you feel."

"Let's assume she does love me," Severus replied. "What will become of us? What happens when I say the wrong thing at the most inopportune time? What if we grow too comfortable with each other and slowly wither away from boredom? What if I am not what she thought she wanted or needed?"

"Only Hermione can answer those questions, Severus," Lucius replied. "But I can almost guarantee you she has very similar questions to yours."

Severus shook.

"If I were you," Lucius replied. "I'd fix her a nice dinner, snuggle up in your library or take her into your potions lab or go wherever you two go to be romantic. Then I would gaze into her eyes and tell her how you feel. Let her answer your questions in her own time. I find it hard to believe, though, that she would ever grow bored with you or suddenly decide that you are not what she wanted or needed. Yes, you will say something stupid at some point in your marriage. It's inevitable, trust me. If she loves you, she will simply roll her eyes and try to find a way to forgive you."

Severus let the words sink in for a moment. In a soft voice he answered, "I'll consider telling her."

"Do it sooner rather than later, my friend," Lucius answered. "If you tell her now, you will set to rest your fears of divorce. That is my final advice on the matter."

"Thank you for the advice Lucius."

"Anytime."

As Severus stood up Lucius shook his head and exhaled.

Nobody but Hermione and Severus Snape could turn loving their spouse into a crisis.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It's deeply appreciated.
Hermione rocked in one of the sitting room chairs while she cradled Rose in her arms. The mother's eyes were fixed on the fireplace as she crooned, "Dada will be home soon. He'll be back very soon."

Rose stared at her mother and hiccuped. Dada had kissed her before he disappeared, but something felt off. The sadness from the previous day only seemed to intensify. Was he going away again? If so, why couldn’t he stay with her and Muma? Couldn’t he see how much she and Muma loved him?

"Hermione," Severus called.

Hermione startled as the fireplace lit up. Severus stepped out and dusted himself off. Rose’s began to squirm.

"Hello, Severus," Hermione gulped. "How did your meeting go?"

"Very well," Severus replied before approaching the rocking chair.

"What did Lucius say about your rights?"

"As long as you or I do not request a DNA test, I will maintain full custodial rights over Rose."

"Thank God," Hermione sighed.

Rose began grunting as tears formed in her eyes.

"Here, I think Rose wants to see you," Hermione began. "She's been fussier than usual today."

"What do you have to fuss about?" Severus asked as he picked up the baby and held her in his arms. "There is no reason at all for you to be upset."

Rose calmed herself. Daddy appeared much more at ease then he had earlier. Maybe he'd decided not to leave after all.

Severus kissed her on the forehead before whispering, "I love you baby girl."

Rose clucked and raised her left hand. She clumsily, but determinedly pawed the air. Severus chuckled and handed her the hem of his cape.

"She loves your robes," Hermione mused.

"I have no idea why she is so fascinated by them," Severus replied, before chuckling at Rose’s antics. Then he sat on the couch.

Hermione joined them and laid her head on Severus' shoulder. "You were at Lucius' for a long time."

"I was actually with him for just short of an hour," Severus replied. "There wasn't much to discuss, considering that my name is on Rose's birth certificate. A majority of my time was spent inspecting the apothecary."
"How are things?"

"Fine. Fenrir has not been pawing around lately, and the potions are still in good order."

"Are you planning to go back to work soon?"

Severus exhaled. "I need to resume my research into the lycanthropy cure, but I do not want to leave the store unattended for too long. It would be wise of me to hire an assistant for the days I cannot be at the apothecary. In order to do so though I will have to reopen the store and get it running again. Then I will need to resume brewing the various potions I sell and conducting interviews. All of this will take quite a bit of time, more than I would like to spend away from you and Rose. Still it must be done..."

"You miss working with potions," Hermione cut in. "It's vastly more interesting than changing nappies and sleeping all day."

"It has been no trouble at all to be away from my apothecary and my lab," Severus answered. "I could not in good conscience resume work until I knew you were physically recovered from the birth. I wanted to be available for you in case you required extra assistance, and I needed sufficient time to introduce myself properly to Rose."

"You’ve certainly left quite the impression on your daughter,” Hermione replied.

Rose drooled as she waved the cloth back and forth.

"I suppose I have,” Severus answered. "Yet if you are overwhelmed in any way I can wait to resume work."

"Thank you for the offer, but I will manage just fine,” Hermione replied. "My doctor's appointment should confirm that I am physically recovered from birth, meaning you could resume work the Monday after next."

"I could," Severus replied before glancing back down at Rose. She yawned and closed her eyes.

"Rose is sleeping a little better at night. I may be able to help with the research in my spare time,” Hermione offered. "I cannot leave Rose alone long enough to brew, but I can scour the potions journals for a few helpful articles."

"I'd love for you to assist me if you are feeling up to it,” Severus replied.

"As much as I love being a Mum, I am eager to engage in more academically oriented pursuits.”

Severus smirked. "I cannot fault you for that."

Hermione rubbed the top of Severus’ shoulder blades. He moaned as the tension in his muscles evaporated. "Thank you, that feels divine."

"No problem," She whispered. "It's the least I can do for you after the stress of the past few days."

"You don't need to do anything for me, but Merlin Hermione that feels amazing," he breathed. "You are amazing."

She massaged him for a few more minutes. Once he was relaxed she whispered, "You appear tired."

"I did not sleep well last night,” Severus admitted. "All I could think of was the first time I felt Rose kick, and the first time saw her at the ante-natal appointment. I-I never knew I was capable of loving
a little being that much. I kept thinking about the day she was born, and how she opened those blue eyes and stared straight at me. Then I thought…”

Hermione released him.

“I thought about how foolish I’d been when ironing out the details of our marriage, how I ever thought I could consider Rose some baby who would live in my house. I know,” Severus’ throat constricted, “I know what I said about not fighting for her in the case of divorce, and I would never drag her through a nasty custody battle or force her to choose between us. Still I… I am asking you, pleading with you, don’t ever take Rose from me. Please let me remain in her life as her father.”

“Oh Severus,” Hermione choked. “I will never remove you from Rose’s life. You are her dad; nothing can change that. I would never separate you two.”

“Thank you,” Severus answered as a tear fell from his cheek.

She kissed him. “There’s no need to thank me for ensuring that a child is never separated from her father. You are the best daddy she could ever have. I’m glad you are raising her.”

"I just hope I don't make too many mistakes during the course of my parenting," Severus whispered.

"We aren't perfect," Hermione replied. "No one is, but if we do our best, well, Rose is resilient. She will get through her childhood in one piece."

Severus chuckled.

Rose opened her eyes and cooed. Then she held the edge of his robes close to her chest and yawned.

“You are so very precious,” Severus whispered.

Rose closed her eyes.

“I almost neglected to tell you what I did after visiting the apothecary.”

"Oh?"

Severus shifted so that Rose's head was supported by his thigh. With his free hand he pulled a velvet box out of his pocket. "I saw something I thought you might like."

Hermione took the box and enlarged it. She opened the box and gasped, "Severus! It's beautiful!"

She pulled out a necklace and held it up. The chain was pure silver. From it dangled a medium sized emerald in the shape of a heart. She placed it around her neck and asked, "How does it look?"

"Stunning." Severus replied while she centered the emerald. A smile crept across his face before remembering Lucius' words. He swallowed and began to shake.

"I love it Severus," Hermione replied. "Thank you."

She leaned in to kiss him. His lips did their best to express what they couldn't yet say. As Hermione backed away, she whispered, "You are the best husband I could have asked for."

"I could not have asked for a better wife," Severus replied.

Rose squeaked in Severus' arms, but settled herself.
"I think we should put this one back in the crib," Severus suggested.

"Perhaps," Hermione mused.

They stood up, but Rose did not stir. Severus brushed his lips against Hermione’s. “I am so grateful that you and Rose are my family.”

She grinned. “We are thankful you are a part of ours too.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is greatly appreciated!
What if Ron was telling the truth?

Arthur stared out the window into the starless night. He twisted his lower lip as he ran his finger across the dusty windowsill. It was silly to think for one moment that Rose was his granddaughter. It was an impossibility, right?

Perhaps not. Muggles were not as scandalized by bastards as wizards were. Given that Hermione was a muggleborn she may not have understood the full implications of having a magical child out of wedlock. Ronald, well Ronald was impulsive and impatient. If Hermione suggested making love he would’ve gone right along with it. Both of them were Gryffindors, the house of loyalty. Loyal Gryffindors don’t cheat on each other, so when did Hermione become so treacherous?

Better question: was Ron capable of abandoning his own child? Was Ron willing to subject Rose to the humiliation of being a bastard, and Hermione to the embarrassment of being an out of wedlock mother?

"No," Arthur muttered. "I raised him better than that. Ron would never turn his back on a fellow Weasley, never."

Severus’ voice echoed, “It matters little how Hermione and I behaved in the time period surrounding Rose’s conception…”

Arthur’s stomach lurched.

He could only imagine Severus’ reaction to the possibility of another man fathering his daughter. On a good day Severus was surly and aloof, but when outraged...Arthur shuddered.

Severus would never physically hurt Hermione or Rose, of that much Arthur was certain. Yet he could be frigid towards Hermione, refusing to so much as look at her until he was satisfied that she was remorseful. Just as bad, if not worse, Severus could have spent half the evening yelling at and berating her. He could be slurring insults at his wife with a bottle of Firewhisky in his hand at this very moment.

Worse yet, his granddaughter may be witnessing the meltdown of her mother’s marriage. Despite Severus’ best efforts, his foul mood would affect his daughter. The loving father who’d been present a week ago would be gone, and in his place would be the potions’ master who lived to torment children. Rose may need someone to love and support her now more than ever.

Arthur shook his head. No, he couldn’t think like that. Hermione cheated on Ron with Severus. Snape never contradicted that story. Rose Severa Snape’s father was Severus Tobias Snape, not Ronald Bilius Weasley.

“Dear, are you coming to bed?” Molly asked.

“In a moment,” Arthur called before taking a deep breath.

Something wasn't right about the circumstances surrounding Rose's conception. Hermione loved Ron. Snape accepted Rose as his own. Ron recanted his earlier denials. Nothing about this situation
was right.

Am I a grandfather?

***

"I always knew there was something wrong with the story of Rose Snape's conception," Farrah began as Scabior stoked the fire.

"What do you mean?" the Chief asked. He crept closer to the blaze.

"Isn't it obvious? Ron Weasley really is Rose's father! That's why Hermione was not upset with Severus for abandoning her and why he was never upset that she'd tried to pass his child off as someone else's. It was all some lie they concocted in order to save Hermione from disgrace and give Snape his fortune," Farrah explained.

"Or maybe you are projecting your own breakup onto this," Fenrir replied as the flames flared.

"I'm not projecting anything," Farrah argued. "I'm looking at the facts. Snape would never tolerate an unfaithful partner, and Hermione was too enamored with Ron to ever cheat on him. Rose is Ron's daughter."

"Have you ever heard of the Half Blood Prince?" Fenrir asked.

Farrah thought before shaking her head. "Is that some book or a muggle movie?"

"No," Fenrir snapped. "It's a name Severus Snape went by in his days as a student. His mother's last name was Prince, and he was a half blood. Half Blood Prince."

"I suppose that makes sense," Farrah drawled.

"Despite his grandmother disowning him, he cherished his bloodline. It gave him the power to join the original Death Eaters, who I may remind you, were also obsessed with bloodlines. Why would he muck up the one thing he cherished by soiling it with an heir he knew full well was not his?"

"I don't know," Farrah admitted. "Maybe he didn't know Hermione cheated on him?"

"Severus was the greatest double agent the Wizarding World has ever known. He would have no problem determining whether or not his future bride had slept with another man."

"I suppose so," Farrah admitted. "I just never thought the story of Rose's conception made sense."

"I can see why you'd think that," Fenrir replied. "I cannot say I would have minded if the child was Ron's, but that is not the reality."

"If the child was Ron's we could have used her to punish him," Scabior mused.

"I would have changed her and Hermione by now if the child had been Ron's…if I had been in a merciful mood" Fenrir replied with a wistful smile. "Not that going insane is not punishment enough for Mr. Weasley. I could not have done better had I tried."

"Could we not still punish Ron through the child?" Scabior asked. "We could encourage Ron's delusion that he fathered Hermione's child and use him to drive Severus mad. If we were lucky we might be able to capture Rose somehow and change her, giving Severus no choice but to join our ranks."
Fenrir glared at Scabior. "Has Voldemort's defeat taught you nothing? Changing Rose would only encourage Snape to join and betray us. Besides," Fenrir exhaled, "Severus is not negligent. He and Hermione would be in the mansion when we attacked. James and Lily Potter were lucky to save Harry. Severus and Hermione would not only have the ability to save Rose without killing themselves, but they would also train her to avenge herself."

"If we made her a Horcrux…"

"My existence would then be dependent on a traitor's daughter!" Fenrir argued. "We would be locked in an endless combat with no way for either of us to win! I would become more insane with each passing day while Rose would grow into a witch with power beyond our comprehension. Given enough time Severus and Hermione could train their daughter to be nearly invincible, and could find a way to remove the fragment of my soul without killing her."

Fenrir closed his eyes and exhaled. "I like having my soul in one piece. I like the idea of building a new reality instead of destroying everything around me. I may kill, but I would never kill to gain immortality. There are very few muggle phrases I believe, but while I was living in hiding amongst the muggles searching for prey, I heard a man dressed in black say something like this: ‘Whoever loses his life will gain it, but whoever tries to preserve his life will lose it.’ I believe in very few muggle sayings, but that one always resonated with me, especially in light of Voldemort's defeat."

The crackling of the fire was the only sound as they pondered his words.

The Chief spoke up, "I understand your point. You are wise not to pursue immortality."

"Thank you," Fenrir replied before lowering his head. When he raised it again, he was sneering. "Still, just because Rose Snape is not Ronald's biological daughter does not mean we cannot use her to convince Severus that being a lycanthrope would not be such a bad thing."

"How?" Farrah asked.

"Simple. What better way to keep Hermione close than to be the one who turned her into a lycanthrope?"

The group laughed, oblivious to the snowflakes melting in the fire's glow.

***

"See that outside?" Severus held Rose up to the window. "Those things falling down from the sky are called snowflakes."

Rose's eyes widened as she watched the flakes waft onto the window pane. She gasped as they dissolved as soon as they landed. Severus chuckled. "The snowflakes are made of water. When they are warm, they melt, which means they return to water. When it gets colder, the snow will make the ground white, but tonight it's too warm for that."

Rose continued to stare in fascination as the flakes whirled by, ignoring the draft from the cold glass. Severus, however felt it. "As pretty as snow is, it comes with freezing temperatures. I suppose that could be considered a fair exchange."

He carried Rose across the nursery to the rocking chair. Rose glared at him when he blocked her view of the snowflakes. Severus laughed. "No one would accuse you of being a Weasley if they saw your scowl. Granted, it's not exactly like my scowl; you don't quite have the mouth to pull that off... and you are much too friendly to maintain it for very long... but maybe with a little practice I could help you perfect it so long as you promise to only use it on dunderheads."
Rose's scowl morphed into a smile. Whatever had bothered him the morning before had resolved itself. He was back to being the happy Daddy she'd come to know and love.

"Now Rose," Severus began. "Your mum has been telling me that I need to tell you more fairy tales. Apparently I'm corrupting you with my recitation of potions ingredients. Still, I do not trust happy endings. I have never yet experienced one and although life with you and your mother is quite... adequate... a happy ending to our marriage is far from certain."

Rose stared at him.

"I could bore us both with a one-sided conversation, but Mum says you need some sort of story and I need to get to bed before she suspects that I've taken you into the basement to brew potions with me." He smiled at Rose. "Do not worry Little Rose, one day we will brew potions together."

Rose gave him a gummy grin. Severus sighed. "I only know one very good fairytale. It is quite long, but I will attempt to be succinct. Maybe when you're older I will elaborate. Perhaps by then there will even be a happy ending. This, Rose, is the story of the Half Blood Prince."

The baby hiccuped. Mummy had never mentioned this story.

"Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived an angry prince. He was angry because no one cared for him and he was very alone. Then one day, he met a princess. He used to watch her through the bushes playing with the other princesses. Then one day she came up to him and asked him to join her. From then on they always played together, and it seemed as though they'd be friends forever. The prince even considered marrying her.

Unfortunately, there was a group of evil red knights who used to attack the prince. The evil knights used to call the prince names and shoot hexes at him. They were real dunderheads, although the prince and the princess were the only ones who could see that. Others believed the red knights to be good and noble. In some respects they were, but hanging someone upside down from a tree is not noble, and that is exactly what the red knights did to the prince."

Rose cooed.

"The princess came to the prince's defense. She scolded them, but the humiliated prince became a dunderhead, too, and called her a very bad name. The princess stormed off and refused to forgive him. Once again the prince was alone. The red knights stepped up their attacks on him until an evil knight promised him protection if he'd join his group of black knights who wished to rule the world. These black knights were even worse than the red knights, but the prince was desperate. Against his better judgment, he joined the black knights."

Her jaw dropped open.

"It gets worse," Severus continued, "The red knights and the black knights eventually went to war. Soon afterwards, the princess married one of the red knights. Enraged, the prince decided the red knight must be punished. The prince told the black leader a secret that would cost the red knight his life. When the prince told the secret, however, he did not think of the princess. The leader of the black knights attacked...and killed the princess, too, leaving only her son alive."

Severus hung his head. Rose to reach for his hair. This story was much more interesting than Cinderella.

Severus sighed. "The halfblood prince had tried to protect her. He had gone to the leader of the red knights and asked him to save the princess, but alas even the leader could do nothing. After the
princess died, the prince dedicated his life to protecting her son. He did not see him until many years later when he came to his kingdom to learn the way of princes. It was on that day that a new princess also came to the kingdom, The Princess of Gryffindor.”

She placed a hand on her dad's heart.

“No now the prince did not think much of the Princess of Gryffindor at first. Truth be told, he found her quite annoying. But the leader of the black knights returned after a long absence and the kingdom was in danger. By now the prince had joined the side of the red knights in order to protect the new red prince and the Princess of Gryffindor. There was a ginger git involved too, but his role is not important. What is important is that the prince and young friends fought gallantly against the black knights, and ultimately defeated them.”

Severus paused for a few moments.

“Once the black knight was defeated, the Halfblood Prince returned to his kingdom to live in bitterness and seclusion. He still had not found love, and he still did not know happiness. Then one day, his grandmother the empress died. She had long ago severed relations with the prince's mother but she had compassion on him. Do you know what the empress said?”

Rose's eyes bulged.

"The empress left him with a decree. If he wanted to inherit her kingdom, he would have to marry. The prince was very angry, because no one would want to marry him. No one even thought he was a good person. No one except the Princess of Gryffindor.”

Her eyes lit up. She knew the prince would find his princess at some point.

“The Princess needed his help. She had been abandoned, along with her unborn child. She was afraid her child could not become a princess unless her mother married a prince. The prince agreed to marry her for the sake of her child and in order to comply with his grandmother's decree. It was then that he began to find happiness.

Unlike his childhood friend, the Princess of Gryffindor was patient and tolerant of the prince's missteps. While she still did things to irritate the prince, she was also quite kind and caring. For the first time, the prince came to know happiness, and when he gazed into his newborn daughter's eyes, he came to know love.”

The infant smiled. Severus concluded, "I suppose I should end this story on a happy note, for the ending is true enough. Besides, you are far too young to be troubled with sad stories."

Severus kissed Rose on the cheek. "Goodnight, my Rose. I love you very much."

Rose closed her eyes. Severus stepped out of the room, only to find Hermione standing in the doorway.

"And you thought you couldn't tell a fairy tale," she accused with a smirk.

"I can't." He pulled her close and whispered, "I told the truth."

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for the support! As always it is deeply appreciated.
Ron sighed as he contemplated the ceiling tiles for the fiftieth time that day. Hermione should be here any moment. The second 'Mione heard that Ron was ready to make her Mrs. Weasley and claim Rose should've been the second she divorced the greasy git. Perhaps she was busy too packing Severus' belongings to visit. When 'Mione came then they could start discussing moving him into the Snape mansion. Perhaps they could sell Ron's old place to Snape. Now there was an idea…

“Ronald?”

Ron’s eyes lit up. “Dad?”

“Yes,” Arthur sat down on the chair beside his bed. “I decided to stop by to see how you were doing.”

“Well I still have a few aches, the cast is itchy, and I’m hot, but otherwise I’m fine,” Ron quipped.

Arthur sighed. “I’m so sorry son. I wish I could take the pain away.”

“It’s fine,” Ron replied. “Just having you here make things a little better.”

“Good,” Arthur swallowed. “How is your head feeling?”

Ron frowned. "Please don't start Dad. I'm not in the mood.”

"Please answer the question."

“I haven't gone crazy.”

“Does your head hurt?”

“No.”

“Do you still believe Rose is your daughter?”

“Yes,” Ron snapped. “I still believe Rose is my daughter because I am the only man 'Mione was with last Christmas.”

"Okay." Arthur took a deep breath. “Can you tell me about the events surrounding Rose Snape's conception?”

“I won’t get too graphic with the details,” Ron answered. “But when I came home from my break Hermione was so excited to see me. I was thrilled to see her. We just, you know, did it.”

“Did you do it more than once?”

Ron snorted. “More like once a day.”

Arthur shook his head.

“Let me guess, you’re going to tell a therapist about my delusions?” Ron snapped.
“No,” Arthur replied. “I’m trying to get the whole story because none of this makes sense.”

“Look, I know I should’ve married Hermione when she got pregnant…”

“Why would you marry her if you thought she was carrying another man’s child?”

“She and Snape were never together,” Ron confessed. “I made all that up after she married the git. Honestly I’m surprised they went along with it, but I suppose they needed that fortune.”

Arthur lowered his head. “So in other words, you left Hermione when she was pregnant with your child. When she announced she was marrying Severus you sat back and allowed it to happen never giving a single thought to what kind of father he’d be?”

Ron gulped. “I, I was really scared of becoming a father. I wasn’t ready. It wasn’t until my accident when I realized how huge my mistake was.”

“Severus Snape tortured you and your friends during his tenure as a professor!” Arthur snapped. “He tormented you and every Gryffindor he came across! Even Hermione faced his wrath from time to time! Now, now you’re saying my granddaughter is being raised by him?”

“I,” Ron squeaked. “I wasn’t sure what to do when Hermione said she was pregnant. I freaked out. It wasn’t until my accident when I realized what a huge mistake I’d made.”

“Do you have any idea what your daughter must be going through right now?”

"I don't know."

“I’d imagine that the second Severus found out about your claim to Rose’s paternity he exploded. There’s no doubt in my mind that Severus loves the child, but he also loves the idea of a Snape heir. A week ago he was devoted to Rose because he thought she was his. Now she may be lucky if he looks in her direction. I'd imagine he's closed himself off from Rose and Hermione. The rest of their marriage will consist of a few curt comments and frigid silence. Rose could very well be raised by a man who's resentful that she is not his.”

“That’s why we have to save her!” Ron cut in. "I have to keep Snape from hurting her."

“Yet,” Arthur paused. “Yet if you’re claiming that Hermione only slept with you then this news won’t affect Severus’ affections for the girl in the slightest. Life for him will continue as if nothing occurred. The only thing which would change is that he’d be speaking with a lawyer on how best to keep Rose away from us. I'd imagine Lucius has a few suggestions as well.”

“He can't keep us away forever, can he?” Ron asked.

“If his name's on the birth certificate he sure can!” Arthur retorted. "He could deny me access to my granddaughter, and there’s nothing I could do to stop him. I could spend the next eighteen years watching Severus and Hermione raising my granddaughter, yet I'd have no say in the matter. Merlin they could turn her against us, and there's little we could do to stop them."

“That won't happen," Ron promised. "I'll convince Hermione to leave the greasy git and she'll marry me. Then that git won't have any say in whether or not we interact with her.”

“Are you certain you could win her back?”

Ron smirked. “’Mione can’t resist me. She’ll be back in my arms by the week’s end.”
“If Rose is your daughter then I hope so,” Arthur answered. “She deserves to know her real family.”

"Ronald Weasley!"

Shit!

The door ricochet off the wall.

“Alicia calm down,” Arthur began.

“No, I refuse to calm down! Ron Weasley how could you?” Alicia yelled before throwing the previous day's newspaper onto his rigid chest. "How could you just lie to everyone like that?"

Ron sighed. "I told Rita Skeeter I was afraid to be a father…”

"Afraid to be a father? Then why are you claiming Rose Snape of all people as your daughter?"

“I, uh…”

“Why are they saying you were in love with Hermione? Why didn't you tell me you still had feelings for her?”

"Because I don't, at least not the way that I love you," Ron answered. "I simply want my daughter back. In order to do that I have to say whatever 'Mione wants to hear. Certainly you understand that."

"No I don't because I don't understand why you want Hermione back period," Alicia raged.

"She has my daughter," Ron argued.

"How? How could you say Rose is your daughter when you told me that I was your first time?" Alicia demanded.

Arthur's stomach sank.

Ron bit his lip. "I may have been less than honest with you about my virginity."

Alicia's face began to redden.

"If it makes you feel better, 'Mione wasn't my first time either," Ron added.

Arthur buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"You lied to me!" Alicia shouted. "You lied to me and to everyone else!"

"Look Alicia, you understand public relations as well as anyone. I had to maintain a wholesome image. That's why I lied to the media."

"But you lied to me when you told me you were a virgin! I understand grooming an image, but why didn't you trust me to keep your little secret?"

"In my defense, we'd only been together for two weeks," Ron replied.

"You have no defense," Alicia growled before her eyes widened. "Merlin, Rose really could be yours, couldn't she?"

"She is mine! That's why I need your help getting her back!"
“How can I help you win her back? Better yet, why would I want to?”

“You could offer me emotional support in my fight for her.”

“Emotional support? You don’t deserve any! You were ready to abandon your unborn child. You-you told everyone she wasn't yours. She could’ve been raised a bastard! She could've been raised in poverty and exposed to disgrace! You…you jackass!”

Alicia then turned and stormed out of the room, fighting back tears.

“Alicia, wait,” Arthur called before chasing after her. "Please calm down.”

"I take it this means we're over," Ron muttered.

"Don't listen to her," a breezy woman's voice floated in the door. "She just doesn't appreciate everything you've been through."

Ron stared at the woman, struggling to place her face. Recognition came when his eyes descended to her low cut shirt. "Farrah Jackson? The guard who survived the Azkaban jailbreak?"

"Yes," she replied with a small smile.

"What are you doing here?" Ron asked.

"Well, I always have enjoyed Quidditch, and you were one of my favorite players. Today is my day off, so I decided to bribe a few doctors and try to visit you." She glanced down at his arms. "I'd ask for your autograph, but that may have to wait."

"Damn, Ms. Jackson…"

"Please, call me Farrah."

"Fine… Farrah," Ron replied. "But I should be asking for your autograph. After the way you survived Fenrir's attacks…well it was just amazing!"

"Oh I just got lucky," she replied. "Just like you. We're both survivors."

"Yes, but what good has it done me?" Ron asked.

"I read that newspaper article on you yesterday. I could not believe that Rita Skeeter had the nerve to claim you were crazy," Farrah answered.

Ron blinked. "You don't think I'm crazy?"

"No," Farrah replied. "I believe you're a dad who made a mistake and who deserves a chance to be with his child."

"You're the only person who believes that. My own mother doesn't believe me, and my dad just chewed me out for being a bum," Ron answered.

"That's just terrible," Farrah replied sympathetically. "They should’ve been more supportive of your quest for redemption."

"Yes," Ron replied before looking up at her in suspicion. "Wait, if you believe that I'm Rose's father, why aren't you yelling at me about what a scumbag I am?"
"Because you're trying to fix a mistake. Who am I to judge someone who's reforming his life?"

"Wow, I finally have someone completely on my side," Ron replied.

Farrah's lips curled into a smile. "Yes you do."

"Hey, are you busy right now? I could really use some help."

"What kind of help?"

"I need someone to help me write a letter to ‘Mione. I want to tell her how sorry I am."

"You didn't think to write her before telling the media about your connection to Rose?" Farrah asked as she raised an eyebrow.

"No. I thought if I told the media first she'd see it as my way of reaching out to her and taking responsibility for my actions. I wanted to show her I was serious about my parental duties before I took them on," Ron answered.

"Fair enough," Farrah replied before pulling up a chair. "Do you have any parchment? I have a quill and ink container with me."

"It should be on the table to the right of my bed," Ron replied.

"I see it," Farrah answered as she retrieved the paper.

"Why do you have a quill and ink container with you?"

"Just in case of an emergency like this," Farrah answered.


Farrah adjusted her skirt, sat down, and pulled out her quill and ink. "Now, what do you want to say?"

Ron smiled. "Dear Hermione…"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Severus stretched his legs, cat-like, before once again curling into the covers. He squeezed his eyes shut, but deep sleep continued to elude him. With a groan he scowled and rolled over. Perhaps he’d have better luck sleeping if he wasn’t facing the window. The irritating light, however, had already permeated the room. Where was a cloudy morning when you needed it?

Yawning, he opened his eyes and reached out to greet Hermione… but found only a pillow there. He remembered something about a nappy change, but that had been at least twenty minutes ago. Where could she be?

Severus sat upright, his heart pounding against his chest. He leapt out of bed and rushed to the nursery. Empty. He peered into the crib. Empty. His thoughts raced as he flew into the hall. Certainly they were somewhere in the mansion; the wards were still in place. Nobody could’ve broken through them, at least he didn't think they could. Hermione would mention leaving, or at least leave some kind of note. Where could she be?

"Master Snape!"

Oh what now?

Severus glared at the fidgety elf and barked, "What?"

"Mistress Snape shooed elves from kitchen again," It pouted.

His muscles released their tension. Thank Merlin.

"She need to learn boundaries."

"She is the Mistress of this house. You must respect that even if her ways are unorthodox," Severus replied before exhaling. "Where is Rose?"

"The little Snape is with Mistress in kitchen," the elf answered.

"Good," Severus’ heart began to return to its normal rhythm. "Thank you."

“Tilly knows that Master Snape loves Mistress, but Mistress still need to stay out of kitchen…” the elf began.

“You act as if I have any control over my wife.”

“Mistress will listen to you…”

Severus strode toward the kitchen, leaving the ranting elf alone in the hallway. Peeking inside the door, he was greeted by the sight of Hermione, hair pulled back in a careless knot, cracking eggs into a pan. Rose was a safe distance away in a playpen filled with stuffed animals and other gadgets Hermione swore would be good for her intellectual stimulation. In spite of all that "stimulation", the babe's eyes were firmly fixed on her mother.

"Your father actually likes omelets, although he will only admit to finding them adequate," Hermione began as the eggs sizzled in the pan. “You will learn that for your father, ‘adequate’ is one of the
highest complements imaginable. He rarely admits outright to liking anything, which is actually quite amusing at times. I love watching him struggle to find fault with things and dance around his true feelings. Under the right circumstances he can be very cute, though he'll never admit to that either.”

Rose grunted and reached for her toy snake.

Severus rolled his eyes. When would his beloved wife learn he was far from cute?

Hermione began tossing other ingredients on top of the eggs. "I honestly do not know how your father survived before we were married. He claims to be one of the pickiest eaters alive. It seems as if every other meal contains something he’s never tasted. I can't imagine how he ate before we wed.”

"I ate quite well," Severus began as he stepped into the kitchen.

Hermione spun around. "Severus? I didn't know you were awake."

"I just woke up," he replied.

"Well, that's good. Now I won't have to send a house elf to wake you," she answered before adding the last ingredient and allowing the eggs to solidify.

"I suppose not," Severus answered.

Hermione gave him a small smile. Then she slipped the omelet into a half-moon and setting it on a plate. "This one's for you. I added onions, cheese, green peppers, bacon, and some diced tomatoes."

She then cast a quick cleansing spell to clear the pan.

"You did not have to cook."

"I know, but I woke up in the mood for a real omelet. Rose was awake so she and I have been having a little cooking lesson. I was hoping when I was done cooking we could sit down as a family and eat. We haven't shared a meal together since she Rose born."

"We haven't," Severus replied, his eyes widening. Were they that out of routine, or had they gotten so used to parenting that they’d created an entirely new one without ever realizing it?

Rose began to fuss, interrupting his musings. Severus grinned as he looked into the playpen. "Good morning, little one. Are you feeling left out?"

Rose’s lip quivered as tears rolled down her eyes.

He picked her up and held her close. "Better?"

Rose made a satisfied noise, which Severus interpreted as a yes. Hermione cracked three more eggs into the pan for her own omelet.

"I think we'll set Rose and her playpen in the dining room while we eat. She's too young to sit in a high chair… unless you want to put her in that car seat my dad bought."

"I honestly have no clue when he thought we would have need of that."

"I suppose it's more for visits there than for our use here."

“True,” Severus mused. “Then again given our upbringings it feels weird to think that for Rose riding in a car will be a near exotic experience.”
“I suppose it is weird to think that car rides will be only for special occasions, and something most of her friends won’t experience,” Hermione answered. “Then again her muggle peers won’t understand the sensation of flying on a broom either.”

“Neither will Rose,” Severus replied.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

Severus kissed Rose on the cheek. “I’m going to teach her how to fly without a broom.”

Hermione gave him a look. “How?”

“I know the spell for flying. It’ll be easy enough to teach it to a brilliant witch like our daughter” Severus winked at Rose. She burst out into giggles.

“Isn’t it exhausting to fly?” Hermione asked.

“Not necessarily,” Severus replied. “It all depends on how high and far one wants to go. For distances under a hundred kilometers it’s pleasant enough.”

“You’ve flown over a hundred kilometers?”

“Lucius invited me to his villa in Marseilles a few summers ago. The floo was being repaired and it was too late to give me a portkey. So I asked him for the address and I flew. I was somewhat winded towards the end of my journey, but otherwise it was an enjoyable experience.”

“I see.”

“If you want I can teach you how to fly.”

“No thank you,” Hermione replied. “I’ve had enough of flying for one lifetime.”

“Then I will focus my efforts on teaching Rose,” Severus replied.

Rose cheered. She had no idea what flying was, but if it had anything to do with wearing black robes like Daddy’s she was more than happy to learn how to do it.

“What on earth am I going to do with you?” Hermione sighed.

“I haven’t the foggiest clue,” Severus purred.

Before Hermione could respond, an owl tapped at the window. Rose recoiled.

"It's all right, Rose," Severus began as he approached the bird. "Owls aren't scary, just incredibly annoying. Perhaps if we read his message very quickly he will go away."

The baby stared at him for a moment before blinking. He kissed her on the forehead.

Once the baby was relaxed, Severus opened the window, allowing the bird to enter. Balancing Rose in one arm, he fumbled with the knot before freeing the parchment from the owl's leg. "Let's see who it's from," he muttered.

He glowered at the note when he read the name of the sender: Ronald Weasley.

He was even less impressed when he saw to whom it was addressed.
"Who’s it from?" Hermione asked as she flipped her omelet and transferred it to a plate.

Severus glanced at Rose, briefly debating the advantages of having her help him render the note unreadable. Ron would undoubtedly persist, however, until he achieved some sort of satisfaction… or definitive rejection.

"It’s from Ronald," Severus replied, handing her the parchment on his way to the dining room.

"Your omelet is on the right, Severus. I'll join you in a few moments. If you could take the playpen into the kitchen I’d appreciate that as well."

"Fine," Severus growled. “Join us when you can.”

“Thanks. I will,” Hermione muttered as she broke the seal and opened the letter.

**Dearest Hermione,**

I am sorry for being such an arse. I should've been there for you when you told me about being pregnant with Rose. You were so excited about having a baby, and all I wanted to do was play Quidditch. I know it was wrong of me to deny her and claim that you were unfaithful. Even at the time I knew you would never cheat on me. Having a baby is scary though. I wasn’t ready for Rose (by the way, nice name. Did you pick it out because it had my first initial?)

"Severus picked it out, you dunderhead," Hermione muttered.

Anyway, after the accident I’ve had some time to rethink my life. I've realized that I had a chance to have a family, and I mucked it up. You're probably still angry with me for denying Rose as my daughter, and you're probably more upset still that you had to marry and live with the greasy git. He's probably driving you and Rose crazy. I'm so sorry you had to marry him. Don't worry though, you can get a divorce and marry me soon. I love you and I want you back. I will write it again: I love you Hermione! I love Rose, too! Please come back and let us have a go at being a family.

Love always,

Ronald

Hermione shook her head. She stormed into her office and grabbed a quill The owl glided behind her, hoping for a treat.

Slamming the parchment against the desk, she jammed a quill into the inkwell and began to write. Under normal circumstances she'd take more time to collect her thoughts before composing a response, but she did not need to think about writing this particular letter.

**Dear Ronald,**

I am very sorry about your Quidditch accident, and am glad you will make a full recovery. Yet I am not impressed with your delayed concern for Rose or for my well-being. You lost the right to claim Rose as your child the minute you walked out on us, publicly denied us, and smeared our names for all of Wizarding society to see. Rose now has a perfectly wonderful father and I have a perfectly wonderful husband. I am happy with my life and my family. Hopefully one day you will have a family of your own, but do not expect it to include us.

-Hermione

PS: Severus chose the name "Rose," not me.
Hermione reread her letter before rolling it up and sealing it. Then she attached it to the owl's leg and opened the window. The owl glared at her for denying him the customary treat, but she shooed it away.

Hermione sighed and returned to the kitchen. From the dining room she heard Severus say in his best professor voice, "Now the snake is the symbol of Slytherin, as are the colors green and silver. If you are lucky, you will be sorted into Slytherin. You'll have to work for it, though. You'll have to be intelligent and cunning. Still I can sense your potential. Yes, you will make a fine addition to the Slytherin house."

Rose smiled and grasped for the toy snake he held just above her head. Snagging it, she squealed and gave it a hug as he continued, "Your mother may insist on turning you into a Gryffindor, but all the great potioners were Slytherins. You want to be a potions mistress don't you?"

Her eyes lit up as she held her snake closer to her chest.

"Rose can't even crawl yet," Hermione laughed as she entered the room. "What makes you think she's already settled on a career?"

"It's never too early to look to the future," Severus replied as Rose scowled at her mother for interrupting.

Hermione shook her head. "Whatever you say."

Severus' expression then became serious. "What did Mr. Weasley say?"

Hermione stepped beside him and rubbed Rose's back. "He wants me back. He's had an epiphany. He loves me more than any woman he’s ever slept with. He wants a family. You know, the same song and dance he did for the media. None of it matters."

"It doesn't?" Severus questioned.

"I told you, I'm through with Ron." Hermione then glanced down at Rose, whose scowl had become a grin. "If I’m being honest though I’m at a loss for what to do next.

"What do you mean?"

"As much as I dislike it, the Weasleys are her biological family. Someday she may have questions about them. Still Rose doesn’t need people in her life who would forsake her, call her a bastard, and treat her as if she was nothing. I’m not entirely sure what to do when it comes time to tell her who she is."

“You don’t need to make a decision about how much contact she should have with her biological family right now,” Severus replied. "I know, but I will need to make it soon. Eventually they will come at me with questions, and accusations, and more than likely insults," Hermione’s voice softened. “Perhaps that’s my answer right there. I don’t want people in Rose’s life who will only serve to upset us.”

“She doesn’t need that kind of stress,” Severus answered. “Nor do we.”

“No, we don’t.” Hermione’s expression lightened. "In the meantime, she has a wonderful father, and she knows it. She loves you, and she's very happy."

"Are you happy?" Severus asked.
Hermione leaned in to him as her eyes sparkled with mischief. "Very much so."

Rose watched as her parents' lips met. No matter how often they did that kissing on the lips thing, she did not understand its purpose.

Slimy, she thought, as she turned her attention to something far more fascinating, her toy Slytherin snake.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! I appreciate all of it!
“You got exactly what you deserved.”

Ron moaned as Ginny’s words echoed in his brain. Looking back it was a mistake to ask her to read Hermione’s response. Still he couldn’t think of anyone else he trusted enough to read it without commentary. For all of her faults, Ginny did care for Hermione. If it became clear that 'Mione wanted Ron back then his sister would see to it that the former lovers were reunited. As Ginny read the letter though it was clear that Hermione was still a bit upset with him.

The second Ginny finished the letter she burst out laughing.

"This isn't funny."

Ginny snorted and struggled to compose herself.

"Stop laughing. I don't deserve to watch the love of my life marry a greasy git."

“You got exactly what you deserved.”

Ron snarled. “Are you saying that I deserve to have my daughter taken from me?”

“Nobody took your daughter from you,” Ginny argued. “You tossed Rose on the streets and claimed you played no role in creating her. Until you saw your hospital bill you couldn't have cared less about her.”

“I've changed,” Rona argued.

Ginny stood up. “The only thing that’s changed is your financial state.”

“Oh come on Gin,” Ron began. “You cannot honestly say that Rose is better off with Snape raising her.”

“Severus always has Hermione and Rose’s best interests at heart. He doesn’t love them for their money.”

“Probably because he doesn’t love them at all.”

“Actually he loves them both very much.”

"Snape is incapable of love."

"How certain are you of that?"

“Okay,” Ron replied. "Let's say he does love 'Mione. Does she love him back, or is she settling for him?”

There was a gleam in Ginny’s eyes. “The deadline for when Severus needed to be married has passed. Both he and Hermione got everything out of the marriage they’d wanted. His fortune is secure, and Rose isn't considered a bastard. Given all those facts, if Hermione didn't love Severus, do you think she'd stay with him?”
Ginny breezed out of the room.

Ron’s face reddened. “You’ll see! This is just a bump in the road for us! ‘Mione will come back! She always does!”

A week later, there was still no sign of ‘Mione.

Her lack of responsiveness puzzled him. He had handed her a perfect opportunity to escape that dungeon bat and be reunited with the love of her life. She should be in his arms by now, unless Hermione was staying with Snape as an act of revenge. No, she wasn’t the vengeful type. Even if she was, staying with Snape would only punish her, not him. Perhaps she had a lover on the side. Hmmm… a lover would explain her decision to shun Ron. Yet, didn't Hermione say in her letter Severus had chosen the name” Rose”? Hadn’t he read somewhere that Rose’s middle name was Severa?

Bile rushed up Ron’s throat. Severa, what a horrid name! When he and Hermione reunited, the first order of business would be to change Rose's middle name to Rona.

"Rose Rona Weasley," Ron whispered “Yeah, that sounds nice. I like it.”

"Hello Ron!" his mother called as she pounded on the door.

“Mum! It’s so great to see you again!” Ron replied.

His mother, father, and brothers entered the room and gathered around him.

“How are you feeling?” Arthur asked.

“Wonderful,” Ron replied.

"Are you ready to have the arm casts taken off today, Mr. Weasley?”

All attention turned to the Healer in the doorway.

"Am I ever,” Ron answered with a huge grin.

The Healer stepped towards Ron. He hummed while examining the patient. "The other casts will need to wait a week, but I think you’re ready to have your arms free.”

"Finally,” Ron sighed. He scanned the people around him. Each of his brother was present, but where was his sister?

"Where’s Ginny?"

Molly shifted her feet as Arthur looked down at a speck on the floor. Ron then turned to Bill, who took a deep breath, and Charlie, who shook his head. His eyes finally rested on George.

"She's babysitting her goddaughter," George admitted.

"What? She gets to spend time with my daughter but I can’t?” Ron asked as the Healer inspected his leg casts.

"You really need to let go of this delusion," Charlie replied. “It isn’t healthy to be this fixated on a baby which isn’t yours.”

“But she is mine,” Ron protested.
"Please," Molly pleaded. "Your newfound obsession with this baby has already cost you Alicia. How much more are you willing to risk?"

"My selfishness cost me Hermione and Rose. I have to show them that I've changed and that I can be a good husband and father."

"Let’s, let’s talk about this some other time,” Arthur suggested.

“What’s there to talk about?” Molly snapped. “There is no way Rose Snape is Ron’s daughter. The sooner he lets go of this delusion the better.”

“This isn’t the time to discuss this,” Arthur argued.

“Oh don’t tell me you’re starting to believe him!” Molly exclaimed.

Arthur swallowed.

"You do believe him, don’t you?” George gasped.

"I don't want to get into this right now," Arthur answered. "We need to focus on Ron's recovery, not on Hermione's baby."

“Damnit Arthur don’t start encouraging your son in his delusion!” Molly exclaimed. "He needs to focus on having a successful life away from that tart and her spawn.”

Ron grunted. How can I have a successful life without Rose’s inheritance and Hermione’s alimony payments?

The Healer cleared his throat. All eyes turned to him.

“Are you ready to be rid of those arm casts?” the Healer asked.

"You bet!” Ron exclaimed.

With the flick of a wand, the casts disintegrated. Ron raised his arms, although his eyes betrayed the effort it cost him.

"Your muscles will be a bit weak for the next few days,” The Healer warned. “If you are faithful with your physical therapy exercises, though, they should soon be as good as new.”

"I'll start to work on them right now,” Ron answered as he enjoyed the simple pleasure of raising his arms. “I’ve gotten a few fan letters that I’d like to answer personally so maybe I can start small and do some writing.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea,” Molly replied.

“Writing would be a good way to get used to using your arm muscles again,” the Healer replied. “Just don’t overdo it. You’re going to be weak for a few days, so be patient with the process.

“Oh I will be,” Ron promised as he waved his arms around.

"How does it feel to have your arms free again?” Molly asked, dabbing at her eyes.

"Great, Mum! Just great!” Ron replied.

His family cheered him on as he continued to gingerly flex his muscles. Ron turned to his father and
grinned.

Perhaps he wasn’t as alone in his quest to win back Hermione as he’d believed…

***

"Here is where I keep the bottles," Hermione continued as she toured the pantry with Ginevra. "I’ve cast a cooling spell to keep them fresh. Just use a little heating spell to warm them up, but be sure to test the temperature so she doesn’t burn her tongue. The milk should be just above room temperature. If you have any doubts as to whether or not it's too hot all you need to do is squirt a little on your hand…”

Draco glanced at Severus, biting back a comment about neurotic first-time mothers. His godfather’s attention was elsewhere though.

"You be very good for your godparents unless they try to dress you in something nauseatingly girly,” Severus muttered. “Then and only then do you have my permission to scream bloody murder. "

Rose gazed at her father and grinned, earning a smirk in return. She began contorting her mouth until she made something which somewhat resembled her father’s expression. Draco watched the scene with fascination. He had never before seen his godfather’s eyes glisten the way they did with Rose. Even the tone of Severus' voice was softer when he spoke to the child. If Severus did not start intimidating some unsuspecting Hufflepuffs soon his reputation as a greasy git was in serious peril….

"Now we need to tour Rose's nursery. Let me show you where her nappies are," Hermione continued, interrupting Draco’s meditation. "You do know how to change a nappy, don't you?"

"No," Ginevra teased.

"Ginny! She's probably going to poo at least once while we're away! Here Severus, give Rose to me for a second..."

Severus began to readjust Rose.

"Relax! I was kidding! I used to change Teddy's nappies all the time," Ginny motioned for Severus to keep Rose. He nodded and drew the baby closer to his chest.

"You remember how to do it, right?" Hermione asked.

"I do," Ginevra assured her. "We'll be fine, I promise."

"Thank Merlin," Hermione uttered before leading Ginevra to the nursery. "Here is her changing table and across the room is her crib. Wrap her in the black blanket; she does not like the yellow one, probably because it is not as warm."

“Or maybe she likes it because it's black."

"Black?"

"Anyone who's seen her with Severus knows she's a daddy's girl. She may like the black blanket because when she's snuggled up inside of it she looks just like Daddy."


Ginevra giggled.
"Now here are the nappies..."

Severus cooed, "Try not to soil your nappies too much while Ginevra and Draco are here. Draco can be squeamish."

"I am not," Draco protested.

Severus turned to his godson. "You can barely stomach the sight of a paper cut."

Draco squirmed. "The sight of blood just makes me uncomfortable. Surely a soiled nappie pales by comparison."

"I'm sure Ginevra will be glad to hear that. Few mothers want to change every dirty nappy which comes her way," Severus noted.

Draco gulped. "I can help her after the baby is born."

Severus returned his attention to Rose. He kissed her on the forehead and whispered, "Daddy will miss you. He'll be home very soon just to see you."

Rose cooed and reached for his cape. Severus chuckled. "I need my cape to be clean for now. When I return home though you may play with it to your heart’s content."

Rose’s lip quivered. Severus burst out laughing. "I see you took our talk a week ago seriously. You are already practicing your Slytherin tactics."

"Anyway, you know who the emergency contacts are, and the name of her Healer. You know where the list is, right?"

"Yes," Ginevra laughed as she put a hand over her own stomach. "I think Rose, Draco and I are going to be fine. In the meantime, you need to get moving or you'll be late for your appointment."

"I know." Hermione took a deep breath before fixing her gaze on Rose, who was now batting at a strand of Severus' hair. She reached for her daughter. With some reluctance Severus handed the babe over to her mother.

"You be a good girl Rose," Hermione began "Mummy will miss you! She will be home before you know it."

Rose smiled. Hermione kissed her daughter on the cheek before handing her over to Ginevra. Then Hermione took a shaky breath.

"We'll be fine, I promise," Ginevra replied in a reassuring voice.

"I know. I've just never left her alone before," Hermione answered. "You are more than capable of tending to her needs, but it doesn’t make it any easier to leave her."

"Rose will be fine," Severus promised his wife. "But in the meantime, we need to get to the Healer's appointment."

Hermione exhaled. "Yes, we do."

With that, Severus and Hermione approached the fireplace. Severus muttered the hospital's address as he threw in the floo powder. Then they stepped inside and vanished.

"Please tell me I won't be as high strung as Hermione once this little one's born," Draco began,
shaking his head.

"Are you kidding?" Ginny laughed. “You'll be far worse!”

Draco stared at Ginevra's swollen abdomen, fearing she just might be right.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It's deeply appreciated!
These women took too much pleasure in his discomfort.

Severus’ scowl deepened as Healer Branigan giggled. Hermione muttered a few words to her, which only elicited more laughter. Severus grunted and stared into his latest potions journal.

"Let me know if you feel any discomfort," Healer Branigan began.

"Don't worry, I will," Hermione promised.

Severus ran his finger along a sentence and did his best to comprehend the author's arguments. Every few lines though he would overhear Healer Branigan mutter something under her breath, or a medical instrument would clank. Then his stomach would churn.

By no means was Severus a squeamish man. He could handle bandaging up Death Eaters after their horrendous beatings, he wasn’t fazed by the effects of the many illnesses which had ravaged Hogwarts, he didn’t blink at spit ups, and nappie duty was a part of daily life. Still knowing what his wife was undergoing at the hands of Healer Branigan was enough to make him regret eating breakfast. How in Merlin's name did Hermione get through these appointments?

Healer Branigan hummed, then completed her examination. She announced, "Everything looks great down there. You’ve healed quite nicely."

"Thank you," Hermione replied as she struggled to sit upright.

Severus poked his head out of the journal and glanced at them.

"You should be able to resume your normal activities,” Healer Branigan looked at Severus and winked, “Including sexual activities.”

Severus feigned indifference, but Hermione caught a brief twitch of his lips at the Healer's words. She blushed and lowered her head. Before pregnancy, Hermione had never felt as attractive as most women, but afterwards she felt even less so. Would Severus still find her desirable, or would he find inadequate?

"How is Rose?" the Healer asked, interrupting Hermione’s musings.

"Quite well, thank you," Hermione answered, returning her attention to the Healer. "She's a very happy newborn."

"Good. Healthy, I presume?"

"She seems to be. It seems like she’s growing bigger and more intelligent by the day."

“Indeed,” Severus cut in. "She is becoming quite the young witch."

“Great, I’m so glad to hear it. I think we're finished here," the Healer answered before extending his hand. "You've been a model patient, Mrs. Snape. Best of luck to you, your husband, and Baby Rose!"
She took his hand and shook it. "Thank you for all you've done. We've really appreciated it."

The women turned to Severus, who nodded. “Thank you for taking care of my wife and daughter.”

"You're most welcome," she replied. "Don't hesitate to call on me again if you two decide to have another child."

Hermione chuckled. "I don't think that will happen any time soon. I'm very happy with my husband and Rose for now."

The Healer turned to Severus.

"Rose may have spoiled us for any future children," he added. "We may be wise to quit while we're ahead."

The image of a child with curly black hair, dark brown eyes, and a mischievous smirk crossed Hermione's thoughts. If she was honest with herself she’d never given serious thought to having one more than one child. She'd grown up as an only child, so it seemed natural that she only have a single child as well. Now that the subject of a sibling for Rose came up, Hermione realized she wasn’t opposed to it in the slightest. It would be wonderful to have a child with a man whom she loved and had proven his loyalty to her on numerous occasions. Then again Severus had such mixed emotions about his own upbringing and his parents. Perhaps he was fearful of passing on his genetic material, or maybe he’d see too much of his parents in a biological child.

Hermione exhaled. Why I thinking about this? Severus and I need a good night’s sleep before contemplating another child. Besides, having another child implies he’s still attracted to me, which is far from guaranteed. I should set realistic expectations before considering which spare room will become a new nursery.

"Yes, well, I suppose I will leave you two then. If you have any more questions, don't hesitate to call me," the Healer replied before extending her hand to Severus.

"Thank you," Severus answered as the Healer shook his hand and stepped out of the room.

Upon stepping out Healer Branigan smiled. No matter how hard the Snapes tried to suppress their affection for each other, they were one of the most playful and loving couples who had ever graced her examining room. Neither had so much as inquired about the latest contraceptive spells, and Hermione’s eyes had lit up at the mere mention of another child.

Healer Branigan gave the Snapes no more than a year before they were back in her office.

A few moments after Healer Branigan exited, Hermione slid off the table and sighed. "It's strange to think all those ante-natal appointments have come to an end. From now on, Rose will probably go to a Healer more than we will."

"Hopefully for checkups, not emergencies," Severus added as he stood and stretched.

“Yes, hopefully,” Hermione replied.

“In the meantime may need to read up on some more cushioning charms,” Severus shook his head. “I cannot believe in a few months she will be crawling on her own.”

"Indeed," Hermione replied with a distant look in her eyes. "Where does the time go?"

"I wish I knew," Severus replied.
Hermione hummed.

Severus approached his wife. “Hermione, is there something troubling you?”

"Nothing is wrong," Hermione replied as she bowed her head. "I just feel guilty about something."

"What?"

"As much as I love being a mother to Rose and as much as I miss her, part of me doesn't want to go home just yet."

"What do you want to do instead?"

"I don't know. Maybe go somewhere for a bite to eat. I didn't have a very big lunch, and I'm feeling a little hungry."

"I would be happy to take you out to eat," Severus replied. "Do you think Ginevra and Draco could handle another couple of hours with Rose?"

"Something tells me they'll be just fine," Hermione replied, offering her hand to Severus.

"I'm sure they'll manage," Severus replied before placing her hand in his.

Fingers intertwined, they left the healer's office together.

***

"Oh Merlin," Draco choked.

Ginevra ripped off the other tab of Rose's diaper, exposing the infant's nasty surprise. Rose wailed and kicked her feet into the air. Ginevra shrugged. "I've seen worse."

Draco gagged. The room began to spin.

Ginevra removed the nappy and cleaned Rose's bottom with a disposable wipe.

Draco squeaked, "How on earth does Uncle Severus do this every day?"

"In the beginning he remembered how much he loves his daughter and went from there," Ginevra replied. "After a few days he was probably so used to nappy changes that he didn’t give them a second thought."

Draco placed his hands over his mouth.

"I'm sure when our child arrives we'll become quite used to this," Ginevra continued, her complete focus on the task at hand.

"Here's an idea," Draco replied as Rose's sobs diminished into sniffltes. "How about I wash our baby and you change the nappies?"

Ginevra quirked an eyebrow as she finished wiping Rose. "Feed and change our baby? I don't think so. You are going to have to help with something other than bath time and cuddling."

"Perhaps we could train an elf to clean the baby's nappies," Draco suggested. "Sometimes the elves cared for me as a child. I'm sure I can find a few who can learn how to change a nappy."
"Nope," Ginevra replied. "Babies bond to the person who spends the most time caring for them. You don't want our child to bond more with an elf than with you, do you?"


Ginevra fitted Rose with the new nappy. "As disgusting as this may seem now, it will become second nature by the first week of our baby's life. In fact, I bet you'll come to love our baby so much you won't even give their dirty nappies a second thought."

Draco gazed at the offending article with disgust. "I somehow doubt it."

"Draco really is a priss, isn't he Rose?" Ginevra cooed as she removed Rose's soiled clothing.

Rose stared with interest at the blond. He really was wussier than Daddy. Still if Mummy and Daddy liked him then he must be adequate.

Then Rose's gaze returned to Ginevra, only to discover that the red headed witch had disappeared! Rose's eyes widened and her mouth opened.

When Ginevra returned, she was carrying a large brown shopping bag. "Now, which of your new outfits would you like to wear?"

She pulled out a red and gold onesie with a strange creature in the center. Although the clothing was not too awful, it would not billow like Daddy's robes. Rose puckered her lips.

Draco commented, "I don't think she likes it."

"Probably not," Ginevra replied before peering into her bag.

Then she pulled out a light pink onesie with the word, "spoiled" in the center.

"Do you like this one better?"

Rose reached for the fabric, but Draco held up his hand, blocking her view of the outfit.

"Severus will kill you if he sees his daughter in that," Draco warned. "He'll think you're turning Rose into a dunderhead."

Ginevra stared at the outfit. "I don't see how an article of clothing could turn a baby into a dunderhead, although you're probably right that he won't like it. I'll just put it in one of Rose's clothes drawers so when Hermione finds it, she can put it on her."

"Uncle Severus will file for divorce if Hermione so much as considers dressing his daughter in that," Draco replied.

"No he won't," Ginevra smirked. "He'll demand that Hermione not take Rose wearing that Then he'll cuddle his daughter, ignoring her clothing altogether."

Draco's queasiness returned. He didn't know which was worse: the dirty nappie or Uncle Severus holding Rose while she was wearing that gaudy pink outfit.

After tossing the pink onesie aside, Ginevra dove back into her bag. Rose wriggled on the changing table and raised her arms.. Draco picked her up and held her close before whispering, "You have to be getting cold."

She cooed as if to thank him.
"Here's something!" Ginevra announced as she pulled out another onesie.

Rose's eyes widened in pleasure. This one was black with the word "Princess" embroidered in green. Nearly beside herself, she shrieked and reached for the outfit.

"I think she likes it," Draco replied.

"Good," Ginevra answered. "Help me put it on her."

Draco laid Rose back on the changing table as Ginevra undid the snaps. They began to dress Rose, while the infant beamed.

Maybe she had yet to master the art of her father's billow, but at least she could wear black.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I am grateful for it.
"I had never considered studying the properties of liquid silver," Severus admitted.

"I hadn't either, really, until I was at my parents’ house," Hermione replied. "My father mentioned an old legend that werewolves were vulnerable to silver, but I told him I thought that was just an invention of fiction. Still I couldn't quite shake the feeling that there may be some truth behind the legends. What if silver can help cure lycanthropy?"

"What is your theory?" Severus asked as the waitress collected their dishes.

"Don't laugh, but I decided to delve into some, uh, less orthodox resources, one of which was a grocery store tabloid entitled The Global Enquirer. A few months ago it ran an account of a man confronted by a werewolf in his home. According to the would-be victim, he threw a piece of his grandmother's silver at the creature. For a moment its face appeared to transform into something more human, but the effect didn't last. Now, modern muggle literature would have us believe that silver, especially a silver bullet, could kill a werewolf. Yet what if it's possible that silver could also affect its ability to transform without killing it?" Hermione proposed.

Severus hummed and nodded.

"From what I've read so far it seems to be necessary to have direct physical contact with the metal... and it's not exactly feasible to have a bunch of lycanthropes walking around in silver body suits, is it?" Hermione exhaled.

Severus leaned back in his chair, his eyes darkening in concentration. "But if the lycanthrope could ingest the silver in liquid or powdered form, it would have direct physical contact with every part of the body, only from the inside."

"It would. Perhaps they could drink liquid silver to stop a transformation."

"Has anyone tested the effects of drinking liquid silver?"

"In the Middle Ages silver was hard to come by and was more often used for crowns and currency than medicine, so for practical reasons it was never considered. Silver is much more prevalent now, however, meaning there's room for experimentation. Some Muggles today swear by the healing properties of liquid silver... but we also know that ingesting large quantities of it can have undesirable side effects, so dosage is a concern. It hasn't been tested on wizards, let alone lycanthropes, so that is one big question mark as well."

"Well, it's an interesting lead," Severus replied with a small smile as the waitress brought the bill. He took it from her and muttered his thanks.

"What if we added liquid silver to Wolfsbane?" Hermione asked. "Could that work?"

"It's possible," Severus answered. "Except that Wolfsbane only treats the lycanthrope's ability to reason. It has no effect on its physical transformation."

"It’s volatile too,” Hermione noted. “If we add the wrong ingredient it could prove lethal.”
"Exactly."

"We may need to discard the notion of using Wolfsbane all together then," Hermione replied. "Or select just a few of its ingredients for our base. Of course the main ingredient is aconite, which is a potent poison. Still we might be able to find some other ingredients to counteract its poisonous effects, or with the right spells the silver itself could accomplish that task."

"We should see how aconite interacts with silver and go from there" Severus answered.

"That’s what I’m thinking."

"Now, however, we are faced with another dilemma."

"What would that be?"

"Where are we going to obtain liquid silver?"

"It's sold at some of the quirkier Muggle apothecaries."

"And how do you propose we obtain a large volume of it without arousing suspicion?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "You were once a double spy and you're asking me how to sneak around?"

Severus shot her a playful glare and was rewarded with a smirk.

Hermione continued in the sweetest voice possible, "I was just stating the obvious, dear."

"Don't call me ‘dear’."

Hermione’s stomach sank.

“It makes us sound like we've been married for fifty years," Severus continued.

She asked in a soft voice, "Is there something wrong with sounding like we've been married for fifty years?"

"No, but it makes me feel old,” Severus admitted.

The smirk returned to Hermione's face. "I didn't know you were concerned about your age."

"I'm not overly concerned with my age," Severus replied. "But I am very aware that my wife is twenty years my junior and how unusual it is for a man of my age to only now become a father to his first child."

Hermione’s expression softened. "If it makes you feel any better, it sometimes feels a bit odd for me to be a mother as well."

"How so?"

"During the war I never thought about having children. I suppose it seemed pointless to look that far into the future when we weren't sure we'd live to see the next day. After the war, I did fantasize about it, but…well, let's just say in my mind, Rose would have been born after the house elf bill of rights was passed."

"Things did not turn out as either of us had planned."
"No," Hermione admitted, "They did not."

A reflective silence ensued. Finally, Severus pulled out his wallet to pay for their meal.

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you for taking me out to dinner, and for allowing me to help you with this project," Hermione began as Severus counted out the proper amount of money. "It's complicated because I love Rose…"

Severus set the coins on the table. "But you're more than just a mother, important as that role may be."

"Exactly," Hermione replied. "Sometimes, I'm honestly surprised you understand me as well as you do."

"You aren't difficult to read," Severus folded his wallet and put it away.

"You're the first person to claim that," Hermione answered. "Then again I think you're the only person who has ever taken the trouble to try and understand me."

"You deserved so much better than Krum and Weasley."

"Perhaps."

"It's the truth. You deserve to have someone who wants to spend his life understanding you, who wants to take time each day to comprehend your every nuance. It is regretful you haven't had a man who will do that…"

"Until now."

Severus' lips curled up. "Yes, until now."

She lowered her gaze, then looked up, eyes sparkling in mischief. "Do you know me because you pay attention or because you use Legilimency on me?"

Severus chuckled. "I am not stupid enough to use Legilimency on you without your knowledge. You can be quite intimidating when you're upset."

"You mean to tell me that I'm capable of terrifying the man who lied to Voldemort's face for years on end?"

"Yes, you can be infinitely more terrifying than Voldemort."

"How so?"

"To begin you have the ability to castrate me in my sleep."

Hermione burst out laughing, oblivious to the servers who had stopped in their tracks to observe the spectacle.

"If it's any source of comfort," she gasped. "I never stay mad at you for long."

"And why would that be?" Severus asked.
The servers resumed their duties.

"Because you know how to comfort me."

"No, I know how to bribe you."

Hermione laughed louder than she intended, attracting the attention of the other customers. Covering her mouth, she leaned forward and whispered, "The chocolates you bring when you stay in the lab past midnight may qualify as a bribe, but the letter you wrote after the Azkaban jail break..."

"...was me being honest," Severus’ eyes betrayed his vulnerability. "Hermione, I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Nor I, you, Severus," Hermione replied as she brushed her foot against his.

"Sir," the waitress began. "May I take your bill?"

"Certainly," he answered.

"Thank you," Hermione said through gritted teeth. Why must every tender moment between her and her husband be interrupted?

The waitress took their bill and wandered towards another table.

"We should probably head for home," Hermione sighed. "Rose must be wondering where we are."

"Undoubtedly," Severus replied. "Draco has most likely had his fill of nappy practice for one day."

Hermione chuckled as they stood to leave. "Let's go rescue the poor dears."

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately I will be unable to update tomorrow since I won't be near a computer.

In the meantime, thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
"Look who's here, Rose!" Ginevra cooed as two figures stepped through the threshold of the fireplace. "It's Mummy and Daddy."

Rose gasped and her eyes widened.

"Hello, Rose," Hermione gushed as she brushed herself off.

Rose squealed as her parents approached her. Hermione took Rose from Ginny. "Has she been a good girl?"

"She's been an angel," Ginny replied.

"You weren't overwhelmed?" Severus asked.

"No," Draco replied with a proud smile.

"For the most part we weren't, although Draco did not handle the nappy changes well," Ginevra replied with a smirk.

Draco’s face turned a light shade of green. "I did very well with the nappy changes, thank you."

"You appear as if you’re ready to faint," Severus replied with a half grin.

Draco swallowed. "You never told me so much filth could come out of such a small body."

Severus chuckled.

“How on earth do you change her nappy several times day without passing out?” Draco asked.

“After the first day it became second nature,” Severus replied.

Rose turned her head towards her father and reached out her arms.

“I’m sure you’ll get used to it," Ginevra massaged her stomach. "Before you know it this little baby will be born and you'll be on full time nappy duty."

Draco shook his head. "I think we should keep that open for further negotiation."

"It's quite simple," Ginevra replied. "The more nappies you change, the more sleep I get. You know what I'm like when I'm sleep deprived, don't you?"

His eyes grew huge as he considered the implications. "Merlin, this isn't fair."

"Nope, but that's life," Ginevra answered with a sweet smile.

While the couple bantered, Severus looked at Rose and gave her a playful scowl. Rose tried to mimic the expression, but her eyes were much too happy to achieve Severus’ trademark glare. He changed his expression to a smirk. After staring at him blankly, Rose curled one lip into a lopsided grin. Hermione glanced at her husband, whose eyes were sparkling, and then at her daughter, who was
struggling to match her father's expression.

"Severus, did you see Rose's onesie?"

Severus stepped back to inspect the black outfit with "Princess" lettered in green on the front. Turning his attention to the suddenly quiet Malfoys he asked, "Where did you find this, Draco, Ginevra?"

Draco gulped. "We found it at an infant clothing store in Wizarding London."

Severus’ expression softened. "It suits her perfectly. Well done."

Ginevra watched as Rose glanced up at her mother before turning to her father for a new expression to imitate. Severus gave her a warm smile, which she returned.

"Yes," Ginevra answered. "I think that outfit suits her quite nicely."

***

"I'm so happy Ginny and Draco could watch Rose today," Hermione began before tossing her black, satin nightgown over her head.

"Rose seems to be in one piece and none the worse for wear anyway," came Severus' muffled reply from inside the bathroom.

"Ginny bought her quite a few more outfits, too."

Silence.

"She left them in Rose’s drawer," Hermione continued.

"How many outfits did she buy Rose?" Severus asked.

"From what I could tell there were at least ten."

"Ten?"

"Yes."

"Please tell me at least a majority of them were a respectable such as black."

"There were two more black outfits, but most of them were a different color. There was one which was a lovely shade of pink."

"Snipes don’t wear pink."

"Yes, but Grangers do," Hermione answered.

Severus poked his head out of the bathroom and purred. "Do they now?"

"Yes," Hermione answered with a spark in her eyes. "My mother wore a charming powder pink bathrobe during our visit."

Severus approached her. "Bathrobes do not count."

"They do too count!" Hermione quipped
Severus opened his mouth, but shut it when the words escaped him. His eyes swept over his wife, radiant with mischief and laughter. He yearned to touch her, to show through his actions what he was still too afraid to say. But was this too soon? Just because the Healer had given them the green light didn’t mean she was ready for intimacy. What if after all was said and done she regretted making love to him? Could he live with the heartache of her ultimate rejection?

Hermione gazed into her husband’s eyes. Severus’ look of desire was unmistakable. Her chest ached while her heart beat faster. She physically ached to make love to Severus, but now that Rose had arrived intimacy felt different. They were no longer justifying a relationship for the sake of an unborn child, but creating something new. What if this was simply sex for him? Could she live with the heartache of his ultimate rejection?

They stared at each other in uncertain silence. Finally, Severus approached Hermione and grasped her hands. Leaning into her ear, he whispered, "You are beautiful."

Hermione took a shaky breath. "I've looked better."

Severus kissed her near her collarbone. "You've never looked more beautiful. So intelligent," He kissed her where her neck met her shoulder. "So creative." He kissed her a little higher on the neck. "So patient… so kind." Finally he reached her jawline. "What did I ever do to deserve you?"

He felt her relax into his ministrations. "You proposed."

"What a smart move," Severus answered before capturing her lips.

Hermione leaned into the kiss, then broke away with a sigh. "Severus, you may say those things now, but what about in ten years? What happens when you decide I'm not the woman you wanted after all?"

Severus pulled her close and leaned down, until their eyes met and they could feel the warmth of the other's breath. "I will always want you, Hermione. You are more than I could have imagined in a wife and I mean it when I say you've made me happier than I ever thought possible."

"Rose has more to do with your happiness than I do," she answered softly.

"I love Rose," Severus whispered. "But you are the woman who makes me happy, the woman with whom I want to spend a majority of my time. You are the woman I will cherish until the day she decides she's had enough of me. Even then I will always hold a place for you in my heart. Nothing will ever change my affection for you, nothing."

"What if I told you that I intend to stay with you for the rest of my life?" Hermione asked. "What if I told you that you make me happy, and that I cannot see myself married to anyone else? What would you say?"

"I'd say that I'd love nothing more than for you to be my wife for all of eternity."

"Even in thirty years when I'm overweight and nagging at you to come out of your potions lab and collect your laundry?"

Severus laughed. "First of all, you don't nag. You simply glare at me, say a few words, and I capitulate to your demand. But supposing your scenario did happen," he kissed her forehead. "I'd snarl at you, shake my head and collect the laundry like a good husband, not regretting one moment of our marriage."

Tears filled Hermione's eyes. "I love being your wife, Severus."
He captured her lips again. "I love being your husband, Hermione."

Hermione yelped as Severus picked her up and set her on the bed, relieving her of her nightgown with an excruciating lack of speed. Once Hermione was naked her breaths deepened. Her heart pounded against her chest.

Sitting back to examine his handiwork Severus whispered, "I told you that you are beautiful."

Hermione’s eyes glistened. There was a spark in Severus’ eyes she’d never seen in anyone else’s. Her expression was so vulnerable, so serene, and dare she think it, so loving?

She took a deep breath before crashing into her husband’s lips. Then she sent up a silent prayer that her body could express what she still feared to put into words.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience. I hope this chapter was worth the wait!

Happy Belated Valentines Day, and for those who celebrate it, Happy Belated Ash Wednesday as well! As always, thank you for your support!
“Severus?”

He moaned, but did not open his eyes.

With a smile, Hermione kissed Severus on the cheek. Then she snuggled into her husband, clinging to the last precious moments of sleep before Rose decided it was time for breakfast. The past few nights Rose had woken up just twice, a vast improvement over the usual four times. Perhaps soon she’d even sleep seven or eight hours straight. Just the idea of such a luxury made Hermione sigh.

Thud! Thud!

"Severus," Hermione groaned.

No answer.

"Severus, love? Can you get that?"

Thud! Thud!

She pried open her eyes and looked to see if he was asleep or just trying to ignore the sound. His eyes were closed, his mouth curled into a hint of a serene smile. The sight made her grin in spite of her growing annoyance.

Thud! Thud!

Persistent bird.

"Severus," Hermione whispered.

No answer.

Hermione considered awakening her husband, but succumbed to a flash of pity for the exhausted man.

The owl began to hoot louder Hermione yawned, stretched, and rolled out of bed. She trudged to the window and opened it, allowing the noisy messenger to enter. Loosening the note from its leg, she unfurled the parchment to see who it was from. Her eyes widened as she read the name of the sender.

Ron Weasley.

Hermione darted a look at Severus, who hadn’t moved a muscle. She crept out of the room, motioning the owl to follow her. Together they snuck into the study. Once there, she sat in a chair near the desk and read the letter.

Dearest Hermione,

How long has it been since I've touched you, since we've held each other? How long has it been since you could say that you've made love? You must want what we had, for that one time in your
life when you understood what love really was. Wizards and witches spend their entire lives searching for what we had. Can you really let our love go because you're angry with me?
Hermione, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left you. Is there any way to make you come back now?

I think about Rose every day. I wonder if she's talking or crawling or doing some other cute thing. I'll bet she'll make a great Quidditch player. I can't wait to teach her how to be a keeper. I can't wait to see her. Hermione, I haven't seen my daughter yet. Even if you're angry with me you must know that this is wrong. I want to see her, Hermione! I want to hold her and be her father! Don't you see? I can't be with another family because my family is you and Rose!

I've been thinking in these past few days that you've been staying with Snape out of loyalty to him because he married you and gave Rose her name. I say do not worry about hurting his feelings. He has his inheritance and his potions shop. He doesn't need you anymore, and he's probably planning on leaving you soon anyway. I will never leave you again! Please come back!

Love always,
Ron

Hermione reread the letter, focusing her attention on the last paragraph. After a few moments she set it on the desk. Tears filled her eyes as she remembered the previous night, how Severus had caressed her and kissed her with such love. No one had ever been as gentle and reverent with her body as he had; no one had looked at her with as much devotion as he had. She had made love to him last night, and in her heart she was convinced that he had made love to her as well. But would that gentleness and respect last another fifty years? Ten years? Hell, even one year? If the answer was no…hot tears rolled down her cheeks. She would be destroyed if it turned out Severus only considered her a good fuck. It would kill her to watch her husband turn away and abandon her, especially in light of his promise to cherish her always.

"Hermione?"

She turned around and took a deep breath. Severus stood in the doorway holding a squirming Rose. "Severus, I didn't know you were up."

“To be honest I would’ve loved a few more minutes of rest,” he gave his daughter a pointed look. “But someone had other ideas.”

Rose blinked before sniffing. His expression softened.

Hermione chuckled. “I see.”

“I think our daughter wants to see her mum,” Severus replied as he approached his wife. Hermione scooped Rose into her arms. "Hey little girl. Are you hungry?"

Rose whimpered. A little.

Severus kissed Hermione on the lips. "Good morning, Hermione."

"Morning Severus," She replied as he dried the tears from her cheeks with his thumbs.

“Are you feeling well?” Severus asked.

Hermione nodded. "I'm only feeling a little emotional this morning."
Severus gulped. "I hope it's not a result of anything that happened last night."

"No," Hermione replied as her eyes glistened. "These tears have nothing to do with you. Last night was amazing. I have never felt so cherished in my life, and my deepest hope is that you felt the same way. . ."

Severus’ throat constricted. “Last night was amazing for me as well, and I did feel cherished.”

"I'm glad to hear it," Hermione whispered.

"That being said I would like to know what is upsetting you," Severus replied.

Rose began fussing in her mother’s arms. Hermione handed Severus the letter as she readied herself to nurse. As he read the letter she noted the nuances of his every facial expression. Finally, his eyes darkened as he handed the letter back to her. “What are your thoughts on the matter?”

Rose began suckling.

"I don't want to go back to him,” Hermione answered.

Severus asked in a quiet voice. "Do you believe what he said about me?"

"No," Hermione answered more confidently than she felt. "I know you, Severus, and you keep your promises. You promised that you'd cherish me and stay with me until we grew tired of each other."

"I will," Severus replied.

Fresh tears trickled down Hermione's cheeks at the vulnerability in his eyes. "I know you will. I trust you."

He kissed her tears away. "I will never betray your trust."

"I know you won't," Hermione sat up straighter and cleared her throat. "Let's forget about this letter. It's ruining what should be a very lovely morning. The last thing we need is for Ronald to complicate our lives by driving a wedge between us."

"What shall we do with the letter then?" Severus asked.

Hermione's lips curled into a grin. "Why don't you burn it the way you burned that newspaper after Rose was born? I'll send the owl back to Ron and we'll forget this ever happened."

"If he sends another letter…”

"I'll ignore and ignite that one as well. We don't need him creating drama for us."

Severus nodded.

Hermione looked him directly into the eyes. “I am more than happy with you, and Rose adores you. We do not need him."

"I am glad to hear it," Severus replied. "For the record, I am grateful that you have remained by my side. There's nobody I would rather share my life with than you."

Hermione's face lit up. "The feeling is quite mutual."

Rose grunted. Why wouldn't Mummy and Daddy use the word "love" already? It was clear that they
felt love towards each other. They would feel so much better if they would just say, "I love you" to each other.

Ron’s letter spontaneously combusted.

***

"With any luck Mr. Weasley, the rest of your casts should be off by this time next week," a Mediwitch began.

"That would be great!" Ron exclaimed.

"Yes, but you do remember that you’ll need intense physical therapy if you want to walk again,” the Mediwitch warned.

"I know," Ron answered. "I'll be an ideal patient and do everything the physical therapist asks of me."

The Mediwitch smiled. "Good. Glad to hear that. Now…"

Before she could finish, an owl began pecking at the window. The Mediwitch rushed over and opened it. The bird flew inside, but there was no parchment attached to its leg.

"Ron, what is this owl doing here?" she asked.

"I wrote a letter to someone," Ron answered with a forced smile.

“I see,” she hummed as she examined the bird. “I can’t find any letter.”

“Okay then,” the Mediwitch answered. “Now, let’s see you raise those arms.”

Ron grit his teeth as he obeyed the Mediwitch’s command.

Hermione will come around. She loves me! She always takes me back! I mean, who would be crazy enough to choose that greasy git over me?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It is greatly appreciated!
Severus had almost forgotten how much he hated dunderheaded customers.

Within one hour of opening the apothecary, at least twenty people had demanded Amortentia despite the large sign in the love potions aisle stating it was out of stock. He’d lost track of how many times he had to explain to a customer that putting sugar in the Wolfsbane would render it ineffective. For the sake of the Wizarding World he prayed they’d listened. The last thing anyone needed was for Fenrir to gain a legion of unwitting minions. To further add to his annoyance, nobody knew how to form a single-file line, making it impossible to determine who was next. The verbal spars which ensured were enough to give him a splitting headache.

Yet all of these paled in comparison to the twenty minute lectures on how best to raise a baby. Despite his insistence to the contrary, his customers were convinced that Severus was unable to change a nappy, hold a bottle, or cuddle a baby properly. One customer claimed he needed to let Rose cry herself out while another insisted that he needed to cuddle her the second she began to whimper. Breast feeding was the best route. No wait! It was formula.

Severus’ tongue ached from how many times he’d bitten it.

In addition to parenting advice, each customer had at least one long-winded baby story and several baby pictures just waiting to be shared. If he had a dollar for every photo he’d been shown he would’ve doubled his fortune within the first two hours of his grand reopening. After showing off their baby pictures they would demand to see one of Rose. It was a huge offense that refused to produce them, as if he could only display his love for his daughter by plastering her photographs everywhere. To top off his irritation he suspected some of the customers were reporters fishing for their next from page story. Rose’s image would be revealed to the public in due time, but it would be on his and Hermione’s terms, not theirs.

Still all of this was less obnoxious than customers who couldn’t put potions back on the proper place. Was it too great an inconvenience to put the potions back in their original locations?

“Severus?”

He spun around as his lips curled up. Beside the fireplace stood Hermione, who was clutching a car seat by the handle.

“What brings you here?” Severus asked.

Hermione gave him a soft smile. “I wanted to offer you my help in cleaning up.”

“I appreciate the offer.” Severus approached her. “I could use someone to help count the money in the register.”

Hermione glanced down at the car seat. “I think this little one will be quiet long enough for me to do that.”

A baby poked her head out from underneath the blankets and stretched. Severus rubbed his thumb against her cheek. “Hello Little Rose.”
Rose yawned and opened her eyes.

“I would’ve come in sooner,” Hermione began. “But she’s been fussy all day.”

“Why would you be so fussy?” Severus asked.

Rose’s eyes widened. Had Daddy been here all day?

“I don’t think she likes Daddy going back to work,” Hermione replied.

Rose frowned. Why was Daddy here instead of at home with her and Mummy? Didn’t he understand how rude it was to leave for hours on end?

Severus chuckled. “Are you upset with me?”

Rose’s frown deepened. She attempted to scowl, but her lips were still somewhat lopsided.

Hermione burst out laughing. “She looks just like you when you’re cross about something.”

“There is an uncanny resemblance,” Severus admitted.

Hermione caught her breath. “There certainly is.”

Severus bent down. “You are a most adorable child.”

Rose’s expression softened. If Mummy could forgive Daddy for being here for such a long time then so could she. He’d better not go to this work place again, though.

“I considered bringing her in earlier, but I was afraid she’d begin crying and create a distraction,” Hermione began.

Severus began to unbuckle the straps. “Trust me, Rose would’ve been a welcome distraction from many of the customers I was forced to interact with today.”

“How bad were things?”

He exhaled. “Let’s just say I never thought I’d want to spend more time with a crying baby than I would most adults. Rose is a far more pleasurable companion than someone who cannot understand how to properly administer a Pepperup Potion.”

“Well, Rose is a very special baby,” Hermione replied.

“Indeed she is.” Severus scooped Rose into his arms and looked down at her. “So Little One, do you want a tour of the apothecary?”

Rose grabbed the edge of his cape and stared at it. While a tour of whatever this place was sounded nice, at some points needed to figure out how these robes worked. How did she get clothes to move like Daddy’s? How could she make Mummy and Daddy understand that she wanted a black cape, not a nappy change?

“There’s that spark in her eyes,” Severus noted. “She’s up to something.”

“I’d love to know what it is,” Hermione mused.

He kissed Rose on the cheek. “I would too.”
“Couldn’t you use Legillimency on her?” Hermione asked.

Severus shook his head. “The process of exploring her memories could overwhelm her and potentially cause serious injury. It’s best to ascertain her needs through trial and error like most parents do.”

“I suppose so,” Hermione answered.

The bell above the door rang. Rose glanced at Daddy, but his attention was no longer on her.

Severus barked, “We’re closed for the day.”

“I’m not here to buy a potion.”

Severus’ muscles tensed. Rose squeaked.

“What do you want, Arthur?” Hermione asked.

He took a deep breath. “I, I need to speak with you about Rose.”

“What about Rose?” Severus growled.

“I,” Arthur cleared his throat. “I want you to request a DNA test.”

“No,” Severus snapped.

“Listen Severus, I understand your reluctance…”

“We are not discussing Rose’s paternity with you or anyone else. Now leave,” Severus demanded.

Arthur continued in a louder voice, “My son believes he fathered Rose.”

“I’m all too aware of Ronald’s delusion,” Severus replied.

“Then please take the DNA test,” Arthur answered. “We can put everything to rest right now.”

“I told you I will not undergo one,” Severus argued.

“You have your answer,” Hermione added. “Now please go.”

Rose whined.

Severus loosened his grip. He whispered into her ear. “I’m sorry baby girl. I did not mean to injure you.”

Rose twisted her lips before holding up the cape and waving it in the air.

Arthur suppressed a gasp. He’d never seen that gleam in Severus’ eyes.

"Please Arthur," Hermione began. "Please leave."

Arthur asked, “Is Severus holding Rose?”

Hermione stood in front of Mr. Weasley, blocking his view of the infant. “Rose wanted to see her father so I brought her here. As you can see they are spending father-daughter time together. We would appreciate it if you did not interfere.”
“Can I please see Rose?” Arthur asked.

“No,” Hermione answered. “You may not.”

Rose cooed as she waved the fabric back and forth.

“Please Hermione, I only want to say hi to her,” Arthur begged. “I promise to be out of here in five minutes if you just let me see her.”

Severus glanced at Hermione. She shook her head. “I’m sorry, but there is no reason for you to interact with her.”

Arthur sighed.

“Our positions are clear,” Severus began. “We are not taking a DNA test, and we are not allowing you to see Rose. Goodbye.”

“Hermione please. I understand that things did end well between you and Ron…” Arthur began.

“That’s an understatement,” she mumbled.

“And he’s been an arse to you.”

“That’s putting it mildly.”

“Still this delusion has taken a hold of him. He won’t get a moment’s peace until he knows whether or not he is Rose’s father. You can give him that peace right now if you and your husband agree to take a DNA spell.”

“Peace?” Hermione asked. “I’m supposed to care whether or not Ron is at peace?”

“You were once friends, and then lovers…”

“That time has come and gone.”

“I know,” Arthur answered. “If, if you can’t do this for Ron then do it for Rose.”

“Rose?” Severus spat.

The baby dropped the fabric.

“How in Circe’s name is a DNA test going to benefit Rose?” Severus demanded.

“She will know beyond a shadow of a doubt who her true biological relations are,” Arthur replied. “Wouldn’t you agree that the truth is always worth pursuing?”

“There is no truth to pursue. She already knows who her biological relations are. Nothing further needs to be said.”

“I’m only asking for the test to confirm what we already know.”

“The only thing this will confirm is that I consider Hermione to be an untrustworthy strumpet.”

Arthur stepped back.

“When I married Hermione I agreed to be Rose’s father without reservation. I trust that if Hermione has doubts to Rose’s paternity she will tell me. Up to this moment she hasn’t indicated that there’s
any chance of Ron Weasley being Rose’s dad. Given that I have no reason to disbelieve her and I have every reason to think your son hit his head too hard on the Quidditch patch, I won’t take a test,” Severus explained.

“Don’t view this test as discerning how honest Hermione is. Consider it a way for Rose to know beyond a shadow of a doubt who her father is"

"Rose already knows her father trusts her mother. She also knows I won’t be swayed by the ramblings of a madman. Hence I will not take a DNA test.”

Rose cooed and reached for his cape again.

Arthur turned to Hermione. “I’m not trying to call your character into question. I’m simply asking you to help me resolve this issue.”

“Well you could’ve fooled me,” Hermione snapped. “From the moment you’ve entered my husband’s apothecary you’ve done nothing but imply I'm a promiscuous liar.”


“Take him to a therapist. It isn’t our responsibility to appease Ron.”

“Listen…”

“No, you listen,” Hermione retorted. “For the last fourteen years your son has bullied me in one form or another. He threw his girlfriends in my face, demeaned my intelligence, shunned me if I did not please him, and blasted me in the papers when I was at my most vulnerable. The last thing in the world I want is to teach my daughter that it is acceptable to capitulate to the demands of a man who has been nothing but abusive. I refuse to take a DNA test.”

Arthur bit his lower lip. “I know Ron did not always treat you will. He is very immature…”

“Immature!”

Rose gasped.

“Ron cheated on me multiple times while we were together and constantly belittled me in front of others, including you.”

Arthur bowed his head.

“Through all the insults and the silence I tried to make our relationship work. Really I cannot think of anything more I could’ve done. Still, it was broken beyond repair, a fact I should've acknowledged sooner.”

“So you slept with Severus?”

“Yes.”


Hermione answered in a quiet voice. “Severus respects and supports me. He values my intelligence and listens to what I have to say. That’s why I cheated on Ron with Severus. I need an equal partner, not a petulant child. I finally have one.”

Arthur turned to Severus.
“Indeed, it’s all true,” Severus added. “I cherish my wife and daughter. Nothing will ever prevent me from acting in their best interests.”

Arthur sniffed. “I…I can see how much you two care for each other. But why didn't you break things off with Ron after you began your affair with Seveurs?”

Hermione paled. “I...I'd never felt for anyone the way I feel towards Severus. I didn't know what to make of it...”

"Neither did I," Severus cut in. "I've never felt worthy of Hermione. It is my honest opinion that she can do much better than me. Due to my insecurities I abandoned her."

"And Rose?"

"Several times Hermione tried to contact me after we broke off the affair, but I refused to accept her owl or answer her floo calls. Little did I know I had impregnated her. Had I known she was carrying this precious little child I never would've behaved as I did."

The color returned to Hermione's face. "Neither of us behaved ideally, but that matters little now. All that matters is that we have created a wonderful life for ourselves and our child."

Rose squirmed. Severus glanced down at her. “Do you want my cape back?"

She grunted and reached for his robes. Severus put the edge of this cape in her hand. “Do not drop it again."

Her eyes lit up as she grabbed it. She resumed waving it around.

Although Arthur couldn’t get a good view of her face, he could hear her happy “uhs” and “oohs.”

“Please Arthur, for you sanity let this go,” Hermione suggested. “Rose has a father, and he loves her. Don’t disrupt her happy family with unnecessary tests.”

“I understand,” Arthur choked. “Please though, if there’s any doubt whatsoever, know that we will love her if she is Ronald’s.”

Hermione snorted. “Do you really expect me to believe Molly would accept any child whose name she cannot say without derision?”

“No,” Arthur admitted. “I suppose you have no reason to believe that.”

Hermione turned and began rubbing her daughter’s back. “Rose isn’t your granddaughter. For your sake, let this go.”

Arthur rushed out of the apothecary, the full weight of what his wife and son may have cost him weighing on his chest with every step.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
"So, little Rose," Severus began as he carried his daughter into the dining room. "Do you want to help your father sift through these cashier applications while your mother takes a nap?"

Rose blinked. What on earth was an application? What was a cashier? How could she help her father if she didn’t know what was going on?

Severus smiled, earning him a smile in return. "You're over two months old now. It's about time you learned the difference between a dunderhead and an intelligent, decent human being."

Severus set her in the playpen beside his seat at the dining room table. Then he pulled some papers from his pocket and enlarged them. "I apologize for not being home as much as usual these past few weeks. Your mum says my increased absences have caused you a fair amount of stress."

She frowned as if to scold him for leaving her each weekday morning and returning so late in the evening.

Severus grinned and continued, "Believe me, my absences are warranted. See, I had to go back to work making and selling potions. Do you want to make and sell potions someday, too?"

Rose's eyes lit up. Severus chuckled. "Your mother's running out of pepperup potion. Maybe she'll take you to my apothecary when she picks up some more so you can see what all the fuss is about."

Rose clucked, as if to agree with his plan.

Severus began to sort through the applications, smirking at some of the names. "Only ten people applied for this job. I suspect the low turnout is due to the fact that I am not considered the most pleasant man to work for." Severus shook his head before turning his attention to Rose. "Teaching dunderheads who have the potential to blow the school to kingdom come can make a person ornery."

Rose reached for her toy snake and examined it before putting it in her mouth. Surmising that the toy was not edible, she cuddled it instead. Severus watched in amusement before returning his attention to the applications.

"David McCoy," Severus muttered to himself.

Rose looked up at him.

"The dunderhead could not even brew a boil-cure potion correctly. What makes him think that he could work in an apothecary?"

Rose made a noise that sounded like a snort of derision before returning her attention to the snake.

"His mathematical skills are questionable as well," Severus continued. "I highly doubt he could independently run the apothecary should an emergency arise."

Severus set the application aside before examining another one. "Sylvia Darling. Very sweet student, but she was much too Hufflepuff for my linking." Severus looked down at Rose, who was
preoccupied with her snake. "Rose!"

The infant startled.

"If you are educated at Hogwarts, do not let that abominable hat sort you into Hufflepuff. Hufflepuffs are very friendly, but not particularly well-known for their intelligence or cunning." His voice softened. "It would be a complete waste of your talent."

Rose twisted her lips. I promise I won’t be sorted into a Hufflepuff, although I wish I knew what a Hufflepuff was so I could prevent that from happening. Wait, what’s a Hogwarts?

Rose whined, but Severus had already resumed his work. The questions concerning sorting would have to wait for another day.

She reached for another toy, this time a stuffed puppy dog. Grasping both the dog and the snake against her chest, she flipped onto her back and smiled at the accomplishment. Her pride was short-lived when she realized she was stuck. She began to whimper.

Severus beamed at his daughter. "So you've finally figured out how to roll over?"

Rose’s frustration escalated as she contorted her body in a vain attempt to resume her position. Severus fought to hide his amusement as he picked her up, cuddled her, and planted a kiss on her cheek. Rose exhaled and calmed herself. "Don't be too upset," Severus began in a soothing voice. "Some things take time to master."

Rose hiccupsed and grinned.

"Take a look at this application, Rose. It's from a woman named Raquel Garcia. I never had her as a student, but that may be a good thing."

Rose stared at the piece of paper.

"She has high marks in potions, and claims to want to further her studies at the university. She may be just the kind of cashier we're looking for."

"Who is?" Hermione asked as she stepped into the room.

There was a noticeable spark in Severus' eyes. “Hello love. How was your nap?”

"Very refreshing," Hermione replied as she joined them, glancing at the papers on the table. "Are those the applications for your cashier?"

"Yes," Severus answered. "Only ten people applied."

Hermione laughed. "What did you expect? You probably scared half of the potential applicants away by deducting points from them in school."

Severus snorted. "They deserved every point deduction I gave them."

"I'm sure they did," Hermione answered as she picked up Rose and sat down beside Severus. "And they still tremble in fear of your wrath."

Severus slid the application over to Hermione."That's probably why so far the only good potential applicant is a woman from Spain."

She reviewed it and nodded. "Appears promising."
"I'll interview her next week, assuming she still has interest in the position," Severus replied.

"Good idea," Hermione answered before turning her attention to Rose. "Have you been helping Daddy pick a good cashier?"

"She has been a great help," Severus replied. "She's also learned to roll over."

"She did!" Hermione gushed. "Oh! I wish I could have seen it!"

"It was quite adorable," Severus admitted. "Although she soon discovered that she could not roll back over onto her stomach."

Hermione laughed. "Poor Rose. That will come in another month or two if you keep trying, little one."

Hermione tickled Rose on the belly, eliciting a few happy squeals… and perhaps something else.

"Did she just try to laugh?" Severus asked.

"She-she did!" Hermione gasped. "I think she's trying to laugh."

Rose basked in her parents' pride. She didn't know what exactly she'd accomplished by making the happy noise, but it made her parents proud. She'd have to remember to make more noises like that when the occasion warranted.

"That's my baby girl," Severus whispered before kissing his daughter on the cheek.

***

How dare Hermione ignore my letters!

Ron glared at the window. Outside was another owl he'd sent, returning yet again without a response.

She has my baby girl! She can't keep Rose from me!

Or is she? Maybe that greasy git is keeping me from them. Oh it would be so Slytherin of him to do so!

Ron's face turned red at the thought Severus cackling and burning the letters. The Healer bills weren't getting any cheaper, and Ron's fortune was not growing. He needed Hermione's divorce settlement and Rose's trust fund, and he needed them now.

Ron ran his left index finger across the metal bed rail. There's no way Severus is a better father than I am. He hates children. Hermione knows how cruel our potions professor was at Hogwarts. She must know how terrible of a father and husband he is. She has to know I'm better than him.

Ron glanced at the quill protruding from his ink well. He had a few pieces of parchment remaining, but writing Hermione was obviously a waste of his time. Every letter he sent was being confiscated by Severus.

He needed to find someone the dungeon bat couldn't ignore.

“Good afternoon son.”

“Dad,” Ron began. “It’s so great to see you again.”
“It’s nice to see you up and about without all those casts on,” Arthur replied.

“It’s nice to have them off.” Ron bowed his head.

Arthur’s stomach sank. “Is something troubling you son?”

“Yes,” he admitted.

Arthur approached the hospital bed. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Well.” Ron swallowed. “I, I keep writing Hermione asking to see Rose, but Snape keeps taking the letters and destroying them.”

Arthur gulped.

“I’m trying to take your advice Dad. I’m really trying to be nice to Hermione, but Snape is making it impossible.”

“I warned you that Snape is very attached to Rose and Hermione,” Arthur replied. “I’ve also warned you that they are very attached to him. They have no interest in interacting with our family.”

“But it isn’t fair for him to act like Rose’s father and make decisions about her future, not when I made her,” Ron argued.

Arthur exhaled. “You need to consider that Rose has formed an attachment with Severus. You could cause her great psychological harm if you permanently rip them apart.”

“She’s a baby. If Hermione and I get back together Rose will forget all about Snape and know I’m her father. I’m sure the greasy git will go get a new heir, and everyone will be happy.”

“We need to consider what’s best for Rose.”

“Being with her actual father is what’s best for her.”

“Like it or not Severus Snape is her dad now. We need to respect his position in her life.”

“He’s only her dad because Hermione is angry with me and married him out of revenge.”

"Hermione has every reason to be angry with you," Arthur snapped.

Ron raised an eyebrow.

"You never appreciated Hermione, you cheated on her, and lied about potentially fathering Rose. From where I'm standing she has every right to be angry with you." He bowed his head. "And she has every right to be angry with me for never calling you out on your atrocious behavior."

"I...I know I've treated Hermione like dirt, but I'm really sorry now. Shouldn't I get another chance?" Ron sniffed.

"That's out of our hands now," Arthur answered.

“I know I really screwed up, and I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to Hermione. Still we both know how loving our family is. I only want to show Rose my love and give you an opportunity to be her grandfather.”

Arthur’s chest ached.
“Please Dad, you need to help me,” Ron pleaded. “Please help me get back into my child's life.”

“I’ve tried speaking with them,” Arthur sighed. “They aren’t open to negotiating with us.”

“Then we need to find someone who will force them to see reason,” Ron replied.

“Who do you have in mind?”

“A custody attorney.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I truly appreciate it!
“Thank you again for helping me, Dad,” Ron began.


“And I appreciate it.” With a snap of his fingers the head of Ron’s bed rose.

"Mr. Weasley?"

Ron straightened in his bed, smoothed the covers over his legs and called, “Come in!”

Arthur stood up.

A woman in fine beige robes carrying a dark leather briefcase stepped inside. Her eyes widened upon seeing the man in the bed. Her mouth dried. “Is, is this Ronald Weasley?”

Ron nodded.

"My name is Florence Turner.” She swallowed. “I-I'm a huge fan of the Chudley Cannons.”

"Well,” Ron replied with a smile and a warm grasp of her hand. "It's always a pleasure to meet a fan. Thank you for coming on such short notice.”

“Yes, thank you,” Arthur cut in.

Ron pointed to Arthur. “This is my dad. He wanted to be here with us.”

Florence blushed before shaking Arthur’s hand as well. “Yes, well it’s great to meet you too.”

Arthur grinned.

Florence cleared her throat. “I was a bit surprised to be summoned. I wasn’t aware you were in any kind of legal trouble.”

Arthur gestured towards a padded chair beside the bed. She muttered her gratitude before taking a seat.

"Trust me; I really did not want to resort to such drastic measures,” Ron began. “I had hoped to work this issue out privately with my ex-girlfriend but that doesn't seem possible.”

“I see,” Florence unlocked her briefcase with a flick of the wand, but left it closed. "How can I help you?"

"You've been keeping up with the papers, right?” Ron asked.

Florence shifted in her seat. "Yes, I've read a bit about your accident, and your ensuing, eh, ideas concerning your ex-fiancée.”

"Those aren't delusions and I am not crazy,” Ron argued.

Florence shook her head. "Mr. Weasley, I admire your career greatly, I truly do. From the battlefield
to the Quidditch pitch you have always been a hero to me. Yet, if I'm honest with you, very little
rings true in this story about Rose Snape being your daughter."

"But I am her father! Hermione knows it. Heck, even Snape knows the child is mine."

Florence turned to Arthur. He took a deep breath. "There is reason to believe that Rose Snape is in
fact Rose Weasley."

Florence raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"Initially Ron’s sister, Ginevra, claimed Ron and Hermione had slept together. She insisted that Rose
was Ron’s daughter."

"Is she still claiming that?"

"No," Arthur admitted.

"When did she stop claiming Hermione had fathered Rose?" Florence asked.

"Around the time Hermione married Severus."

"So in other words, Hermione could have lied to Ginevra about the potential father, and after the
Snapes’ marriage your daughter may have been forced to admit the truth."

"It’s possible," Arthur replied. "But it does call into question whether or not Hermione can be
completely certain that Severus fathered her child."

"I’ll grant you that Ginevra’s behavior is suspicious," the lawyer replied. "But it’s hardly enough
evidence to request a DNA spell, especially if Ginevra has since recanted her story."

"I do have other proof," Ron insisted.

“What other proof?” Florence asked.

Ron reached into his bedside drawer and pulled out the only letter Hermione had sent him. Florence
took a moment to read the document. "How does this letter prove that Rose Snape is your daughter?"

"Hermione said something along the lines of me losing the right to claim Rose after the way I treated
her."

"True," Florence tapped her finger on the bedrail. "That may not mean anything though."

"How could it not?" Arthur asked.

Florence looked at Ron. "I assume Hermione told you about the pregnancy before you broke up with
her."

"She did," Ron answered.

"Did she offer you a chance to claim her child at that time?"

"Maybe."

Florence gave him a look.

"All right, she may have asked me if I wanted to help her raise Rose."
"Then that's more than likely what she was alluding to."

“I don’t understand,” Ron asked. "How can that not imply I'm Rose's father?"

"You had a chance to claim Rose when Hermione announced her pregnancy to you and at any time prior to her wedding to Mr. Snape. You failed to do so," Florence argued. "Mr. Snape, however, has claimed the child and has cemented that claim by marrying the child's mother, so you have now technically lost the right to claim Rose."

“My son behaved immaturity when he dumped Hermione,” Arthur replied. “I won’t excuse his behavior because it cannot be excused. Still he wants to correct his mistake. Doesn’t that mean anything?”

“In this case,” there was a flash of sympathy in Florence’s eyes. “No.”

“But the letter says I lost the right to claim Rose,” Ron argued. “Hermione says I once had the right to Rose, and now I don’t.”

Florence sighed. "All Hermione is saying in this letter is that she wanted to start a family with you and the little Snape. When that fell through, she married Severus Snape. Interestingly enough, she has declared him the father in this letter, unless I'm somehow misinterpreting the phrase, 'Rose now has a perfectly wonderful father.'"

"But Rose is my daughter!" Ron argued.

“Letters aside, isn’t there any way you can help?” Arthur asked.

“This is going to be a difficult case to sell to a judge.” The attorney turned to Ron. "For one, you publicly stated that you did not have relations with the mother of this child. Obviously that casts doubt on your claim to paternity. Two, you did not made any effort to assert your claim of paternity until a month after another man put his name on the birth certificate. Three, it doesn't help your case that your revelation has suddenly come on the cusp of an expensive, career-ending accident. Now Rose is the heir to a vast fortune. One might conclude that this custody suit is a misguided get-rich-quick scheme and not a father trying to correct a horrendous mistake.”

“I assure you we are not after money,” Arthur argued. “We only want to be in Rose’s life in some capacity.”

Ron put on the most sincere expression he could muster.

“I know you want access to her, and I cannot imagine the pain you must be in,” Florence replied. “But we have to look at this the way a judge would. To be quite blunt, your current pain would matter little to a judge, especially given your disinterest in Rose’s well-being up until now.”

“Shouldn't the present be the only thing which matters?” Arthur exclaimed.

Florence asked, “Ron, have you attempted to visit this child?”

“No.”

"Have you even asked to see the child?"

"Maybe once."

“There is no maybe. You either did or you did not ask to see Rose,” Florence argued.
“Okay I haven’t asked to see her yet,” Ron began before quickly adding, “But there’s a reason.”

“What reason could you possibly have for not seeing your daughter?”

“I was going to see Rose after I finished with my physical rehab. I don't want Hermione and Rose to see me like this. When I first see her I want to appear strong and healthy. I want my daughter to remember me for who I'm supposed to be, not who I am now.”

“You weren’t injured when Rose was born, were you?”

“No.”

“Given that you were healthy, did you try to make contact with the mother when you learned of Rose's birth and ask that your name be put on the birth certificate, or did you in fact tell the media that you hoped, 'Severus Snape has fun changing nappies.'”

"I was a dunderhead! I'll admit it! I want my daughter back, though!”

“It’s too late. Another man has claimed her, and you haven't so much as laid eyes on her.”

“I’ve seen her,” Arthur argued.

“You went to see Rose?” Florence turned her attention to Arthur.

“I went to ask Severus and Hermione to take a DNA test. Rose was with them,” Arthur continued.

Florence’s face softened. “How did she appear?”

“I didn’t get a good look at her, but she sounded happy,” Arthur choked.

“So in your opinion, Severus is taking care of her?”

“Yes.”

Florence exhaled. "Unless both Hermione and Severus consent to a DNA test, there is nothing I can legally do.”

"Can't you order them to have a DNA test?"

"No,” Florence replied. "For a child under eighteen years of age, the parents on the birth certificate must both consent to allowing the child to undergo a DNA test. Without their consent, no DNA test may be performed. If one is performed without the consent of one or both parents, then the test will be considered illegally performed and not admissible as evidence in a custody trial. The only exception to this rule is in the matter of a criminal proceeding, such as proving a rape.”

“Ron is no rapist,” Arthur gasped.

“Exactly,” Florence answered. “From a criminal standpoint there’s no reason to take a DNA test.”

“Maybe there is a case,” Ron argued.

The others looked at him.

“Severus Snape needed a wife and a kid to gain his fortune. What if he's lied to the court about the validity of his marriage by claiming someone as his heir who is unrelated to him?”
"Are you accusing Severus Snape of committing fraud?" Florence asked.

"He may be claiming as his heir someone who does not share his blood. Wouldn't that violate the terms of his grandmother's will?" Ron asked.

"From what I understand of the situation… and mind you, I only know what I've read in the Daily Prophet, no," Florence answered. "The stipulation in his grandmother's will was that he was to be married within six months of her death. His marriage with Hermione has been declared valid and was entered into within the prescribed time frame, thus the will stands."

“But if he is lying about his heir,” Arthur began.

“That may be irrelevant,” she interrupted. “The will never specifically stated that Snape’s heir had to be related to him by blood. It doesn’t even specify a time frame within which his wife was to bear this heir. Even if Rose Snape is biologically yours, Hermione could later on conceive a blood heir, thus fulfilling the terms of the grandmother's will."

"Bottom line, you can't help me get a DNA test," Ron replied.

"No," Florence replied with a sympathetic smile. "There's nothing I can legally do. “

“What about me?” Arthur asked. “Don’t grandparents have rights?”

“Are you claiming to be Severus or Hermione Snape’s father?” She asked.

“No,” Arthur squeaked. “I’m only claiming to be someone who wants to have some sort of relationship with his granddaughter, even if it’s only a few short visits per year.”

Florence glanced at Ron. “If you truly believe that Hermione's child is yours, then I would try to make contact with her and convince her and Severus to take a DNA test with you. I warn you though, it is unlikely that they will consent."

"No, they probably won't," Ron sighed.

“Still if there’s any doubt…” Arthur began.

“Then Lucius Malfoy will do everything in his power to make sure the judge focuses on it,” Florence finished.

“Malfoy?” Ron spat.

“We need to be realistic for a moment,” Florence answered. “Almost every judge in Britain owes their position to Lucius Malfoy. Either Lucius gave them the funds to run their campaign, or he’s keeping a secret which he knows will ruin them, or in many cases both. The second Lucius gets wind that his best friend is in a custody dispute is the second he’ll start throwing his weight around. If you’re lucky the case will be dismissed with no further incident. If not, well, from what I understand he isn’t too fond of your family despite his daughter-in-law's heritage. If you go up against the Snapes then your case must be so airtight Lucius’ interference would be too noticeable to ignore. Otherwise he will fight back, and he will fight back hard.”

Arthur’s face reddened. “Of course that pureblood bastard has everyone on his payroll! It would be just like him to keep a grandfather from his granddaughter with no thought to anyone’s well-being, save that of his git friend!”

“Mr. Weasley I understand that you’re upset…”
“Don’t you see? I’m not asking for full custody! I don’t want to separate Rose from Severus! I just want to know my granddaughter! I just want a role in her life no matter how small!” A hot tear rolled down his face. “Why can’t the courts understand that?”

Florence glanced at Ron, whose eyes were wide. Still there was an unnerving lack of remorse or anguish.

"If your goal is to… enrich yourself… by gaining access to Rose’s trust fund, Mr. Weasley, I’d think again,” Florence warned. “If a DNA test proved Rose was your daughter, as you claim, it is possible that Mr. Snape would disinherit her. He could also file a suit asking you to refund all the money he spent on her, meaning you’d be in a worse off financial situation than you are in now.”

Ron gulped.

“If your goal is to divest Mr. Snape of his fortune, you would still be thwarted, as Mr. Snape has legally married and is presumably capable of producing another heir. He could either find another wife or, if he stays with Hermione, produce a blood heir who will receive his entire fortune while Rose inherits nothing. Either way, you are on precarious ground, sir. Your only real option would be to convince Mr. and Mrs. Snape to undergo a DNA test, and judging from that letter, your chance of accomplishing that is very slim.”

“I see,” Ron replied.

“If you wish to claim Rose as your daughter, your intentions had better be pure. It will be costly and the monetary reward would not be great,” Florence concluded.

“Who gives a crap about the money?” Arthur asked. “I only want to know if Severus is raising my grand baby, and if he is, I want to be in her life.”

“I…I want to be in her life too,” Ron sniveled.

Florence furrowed her eyebrows. “So you do.”

"Thank you for your advice, Ms. Turner. If I did persuade Snape and Hermione to consent to a DNA test, would you represent me?” Ron asked.

“I would,” Florence replied as she stood up. They shook hands again. “But you need to consider your case carefully. The odds are not in your favor.”

“I understand,” Ron replied.

“Thank you again,” Arthur wiped his eyes. “I apologize for getting emotional.”

Florence gave him a soft smile. “There is never any reason to apologize for loving a child.”

Florence strolled out of the room.

“Now what do we do?” Ron asked.

Arthur took a shaky breath. “I really wish I knew.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much for all the support! As always, it is appreciated!
"I am displeased with your recent lack of useful information."

A shiver ran down Farrah's spine. "Kingsley has restricted me to the Ministry of Magical Games and Sports. I don't have the access I used to enjoy."

A cold breeze wafted in from the shot-out windows of the abandoned farmhouse that served as tonight's meeting place, chilling Farrah's body as Fenrir's disapproval chilled her soul.

"Have you attempted to enter his office to check for pertinent documents?"

"I've tried on several occasions, but his office is usually monitored. When no one is around his wards are too powerful to undo without detection."

"Have you even spoken with him since October?" Fenrir asked.

"He disappears before I can so much as say ‘hi’," Farrah answered.

Fenrir snarled.

"Shacklebolt is a dead end. He's doing everything in his power to avoid me, and he isn't the least bit concerned as to how you'll react to my lack of information. I'm not sure we can control the Ministry anymore."

Fenrir glowered at her. "You know that the success of our mission depends on our ability to throw the aurors off guard. You saw how tight security was at the Hogsmeade Christmas tree lighting. We were lucky to infect thirty-four people before escaping. Thirty-four out of nearly a thousand…does that seem like a high percentage to you?"

Farrah cowered and squeaked, "No."

Fenrir towered over her, "I expect to see better results by New Year's Eve. Otherwise, I may have to expose you as one of us and let your fate rest with the members of the Order."

"Wh-what if I told you that I have been growing closer to certain members of the Order as part of a plan to convince Severus Snape to join our side?" Farrah countered.

Fenrir's eyes flickered in interest. "I'd say that I'd like to learn more about that plan."

Her muscles relaxed. "As you and the rest of the Wizarding World well know, Ron Weasley is still claiming Rose Snape as his daughter."

"I thought we agreed that he was one broomstick short of a Quidditch match," Fenrir snapped.

"He is," Farrah agreed. "But he is convinced that Hermione will take him back and allow him to claim Rose. It is irrelevant whether or not he could actually accomplish that goal. What matters is whether or not Severus Snape believes he could be successful."

"Go on.” Fenrir's mouth curled into a smile. "I'm listening.”
"I've visited Ron a few times in the hospital and helped him write a few letters to Hermione. So far, she has either responded negatively or not at all. Even so, the possibility that Hermione would leave him for Ron has to be weighing on Snape's mind," Farrah replied.

"She and Ron were the golden couple. Severus has already tried to come between the dazzling Quidditch hero and the object of said hero's affection once, and it ended in disaster. Severus' previous romantic misadventures must be weighing heavily on him," Fenrir mused before snarling, 'But how is Severus' insecurity supposed to bring him to our side?"

"Because Snape will not want to let his wife go so easily. Hanging on to her would either mean forcibly containing her or somehow making her undesirable to Ron. What better way to accomplish that goal than to become a werewolf and then turn Hermione, thus forever binding them together?"

Fenrir stood in contemplative thoughtfulness before noting, "If we could convince him that Hermione was going to leave him the way Lily did, it may be enough to bring him over to our side."

"He could also be persuaded to spy for our side."

"Indeed," Fenrir purred. "But if Hermione does not even respond to Ron's letters, then it will be difficult to convince Severus that Hermione is leaving him."

Farrah smiled. "That's why I plan to help Ron win Hermione back. After all, who better to help a man seduce a woman than another woman?"

"Very true," Fenrir replied. "You have accomplished more in these past few months than I have given you credit for. Well done!"

"Thank you!" Farrah answered.

"I'd still like you to regain access to Shacklebolt's office. We cannot afford to lose momentum now."

"I will do my best. The closer I get to Ron, the more information I should be able to obtain from the Order, seeing as he and his family are so involved in the Order's plans."

"Quite true," Fenrir answered. "Quite true."

"It's only a matter of time before we regain complete control of the Ministry and Severus Snape is on our side," Farrah assured Fenrir.

Fenrir barred his teeth. "Indeed it is."

***

Severus exhaled while he dusted the soot from his robes. The next dunderhead who placed an order for Amortentia was going to send him over the edge. Why was it so difficult to read a sign stating at the moment, it wasn't in stock? Was it mandatory that every dunderhead who so much as looked at a sprig of mistletoe buy the potion?

"Severus?" Hermione called, entering the sitting room with Rose in her arms.

"Yes love," Severus sighed.

Seeing the fatigue in his eyes, her tone softened. "Long day?"

"Very," Severus admitted before slumping into a chair.
Hermione stood by his side. Rose glanced down at Severus and gave him a small grin. Severus’ lips curled up. After staring at Daddy for a long moment, Rose stuck her fingers into Mummy’s long, thick hair.

"Is there anything I can do to make things a little better?"

"Can you make Friday come a little sooner?"

Hermione chuckled. "I'm afraid not."

He exhaled. "Things should ease up when I finally hire a cashier."

"Hopefully Raquel will be as promising in person as she is on paper."

"Indeed," Severus sat up straighter. "She'll be here Thursday evening for the interview. I've already completed a preliminary background check. She has no apparent ties to Fenrir."

"That's a relief," Hermione replied.

Rose graduated from batting Hermione’s hair to grasping… and tugging. "Ouch!"

Severus looked up at Rose, whose mouth was wide open.

"Don't pull my hair," Hermione chided as she disentangled Rose's fingers from her locks. "It hurts when you touch Mummy’s hair like that."

“Yes,” Severus began in a gentle voice. “You wouldn’t want to injure your mother now would you?”

Rose whimpered. She didn’t mean to make Mummy shout.

"It's OK, Rose," Hermione whispered before kissing her daughter's cheek. "You didn't know any better."

Rose tucked her head into the crook of her mother's neck and sucked on her fist.

"Is this the first time she's pulled your hair?" Severus asked.

"Yes. She's been playing with my hair for several days, even fingering it when she was sleepy, but she hasn't actually pulled it until just now." Hermione replied. "But pulling hair is part of what babies do."

"That it is," Severus drawled before Rose turned her head, pulled her fist out of her mouth and gave him a toothless grin. He smiled in return. “You’re okay Rose. You were only being curious. Please do not make a habit of harming your mother though.”

Rose grunted before taking her free hand and reaching out for him.

"Would you like to hold her?" Hermione asked.

"Certainly," he replied, taking Rose into his arms. "How was your day, little one?"

Rose put a hand on his chest.

"Have you been good for Mummy?"
"She's been a very good girl, but I think she misses her daddy. She keeps looking at the fireplace as if she expects you to come through at any moment."

"When you start walking, we'll have to put you to work in the apothecary so we can spend more time together," Severus cooed as he tickled Rose's belly.

Rose made an attempt to chuckle, though a few times the noise came out more like a squeal. Hermione shook her head. "I think they have laws against that sort of thing, Severus."

"It's not work, it's educational experience in a work setting," Severus replied.

"If you say so," Hermione teased.

Severus stopped tickling the child. Then he kissed her on the cheek. "Daddy is so happy to be home with you and Mummy."

"Rose and I are happy to have you home with us as well, aren't we?" Hermione asked.

Rose wrapped her fingers around Severus thumb. His face lit up.

"Um… Severus?"

"Hmm."

"I was thinking about looking for a Christmas tree this weekend."

"You were?"

Hermione nodded. "I know Rose won't remember her first Christmas, but I'd still like to make it special."

Severus frowned. "How would you propose going about that?"

Hermione shrugged. "The usual I suppose. We can decorate a Christmas tree, bake Christmas cookies, sing a few Christmas carols, and maybe read a few Christmas stories from some books I had as a child."

Rose squeezed Severus' thumb.

"You don’t look enthused," Hermione noted.

"Christmas was never my favorite holiday," Severus admitted. "But I suppose I could endure it for you and Rose."

"Endure? Severus, Christmas is for celebrating, not enduring."

"Not when you have potions to brew, people to spy on, and no one with whom to celebrate."

"Is that what Christmas was like for you?" she whispered.

"My parents spent most of my Christmas break drinking and arguing. When I was on my own I couldn't think of any reason to celebrate tacky light displays and obnoxious music." He then looked down at Rose. "But Rose deserves better than a father who scowls through the entire holiday."

Rose released Severus’ thumb.
Hermione swallowed. "She will probably prefer playing with the wrapping paper to playing with anything under the tree, but I’d still like for her to have a few presents to open come Christmas morning."

Severus answered, “It wouldn’t be too much of a hassle to buy a few toys for her.”

“Maybe in the process of celebrating Rose’s first Christmas we can build some new, happier memories.”

"I'd like that," Severus answered. "Perhaps now that I have a family with whom to celebrate Christmas, the holiday will be more tolerable."

"Who knows?” Hermione’s eyes glistened. “Maybe you'll even enjoy it.”

Rose began to bat Severus’ hair. He grinned. "Perhaps I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
A woman stood before the apothecary. She pulled out a crumpled piece of paper from her coat pocket. After glancing at it for a moment, she looked up at the door. Her eyes darted between the paper and the doorway. Then she hummed.

The Leaky Cauldron patrons had given her the impression that Mr. Snape's apothecary was black. It only made sense given Mr. Snape's known affection of the color. Yet this building was white with black trim. Mrs. Snape must've had a say in the paint job.

The woman jammed the paper back into her coat pocket. Mrs. Snape was the only person as, if not more, interesting than her husband. There were so many questions the woman would love to ask Mrs. Snape. How could the third member of the Golden Trio marry Voldemort's second-in-command? Granted Mr. Snape was a double agent for the Light, so Mrs. Snape may never take his Death Eater status into consideration when accepting his proposal. Still Mr. Snape was his wife's professor at one point. How did they navigate their age difference and previous connection? What exactly had drawn Mrs. Snape to Mr. Snape?

Mr. Snape. The thought of him constricted her throat. The words of the Leaky Cauldron patrons still rang in her ears. Was Mr. Snape truly the biggest git who had ever walked the halls of Hogwarts? Would he really glare at her until she was a puddle on the floor? Did he seriously wash his hair only once a month?

She shook her head as another cold burst of air whipped down the street. Standing outside wasn’t going to help her get a job. She could handle this interview. Mr. Snape couldn't be any worse than the nuns at her muggle elementary school...

She opened the door and peeked inside.

"The store closes in fifteen minutes," a deep velvety voice warned.

"That's fine," she responded, sneaking a glance at the man tending the register. He was dressed entirely in black, which only emphasized the contrast between his pale skin and his black hair. The hair was not greasy though and his nose was not as huge as one of the patrons had claimed.

"May I help you?" Severus asked.

The woman cleared her throat. "I'm here for an interview."

"You must be Raquel Garcia," Severus answered as a customer wandered towards the checkout.

"Yes," she replied, extending her hand.

His face softened as he accepted her grasp. "You're early."

"Better early than late," Raquel answered.

"Indeed." Severus’ eyes flickered in approval. “If you wish, you may wander around the apothecary, or wait in my office, whichever you prefer.”
“I think I’ll wait in your office. That way I know I’ll be ready for the interview,” she answered as she released his hand.

“Very well,” Severus gestured her around the counter and through the access door. "My office is this way. The doorway is between the Veritaserum shelf and the vials of Polyjuice. It should not be warded. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Thank you," she replied, ducking between the shelves.

Severus’ muscles relax as he turned to the waiting customer. "Will that be all for you?"

The customer set the potions on the counter. “Yes.”

"That will be twenty sickles and four knuts."

The customer pulled out his coin purse and began sifting through the coins. Severus tapped his finger against the table, his frown deepening with each passing second.

"Here's two Galleons. Can you make change?" the man asked.

“Certainly," Severus muttered as two more customers filed in line behind the man.

***

Stark. Bare.

Those were the first words that came to mind when Raquel entered Severus Snape's office. The walls were painted a dark cream, but no wall hangings relieved the austerity of the blank canvas. A dark oak desk piled high with papers held court in the center of the room. There was a modest black rolling chair was tucked behind the desk while two thinly padded green chairs were placed in front for guests. Raquel took off her burgundy winter coat and sat in one of the green seats.

As she mentally reviewed the best answers to give an interviewer, she noticed something from the corner of her eye. Two photos on the desk featured moving pictures. She leaned closer to them. One photograph was of a woman with an enlarged belly, reaching out to block the camera from capturing her image. The other was of Snape in a rocking chair cradling a tiny newborn. Although no sound came from the photograph, she could almost hear him singing to the infant as the child's eyes drooped closed. Then the Snape in the photograph leaned down to kiss the baby.

The sound of the door opening broke her reverie. She jerked up. Severus glanced at her. “I apologize for startling you.”

"No, it's fine," she began as she rubbed her hands on her skirt.

“You’ll need to be more conscientious in the future. A customer can shoplifting a shelf’s worth of vials within a few seconds,” Snape warned.

“I know,” Raquel gulped. “I don’t tend to daydream, especially not on the job.”

Severus’ expression did not change.

“Honestly, I was just looking at the pictures on your desk. You looked so happy holding that baby, and she looked so happy to be with you.”

Although his mouth was drawn into his customary scowl, Severus could not conceal the pride in his eyes. "The baby in the photograph is my daughter, Rose."
"She's adorable. How old is she?"

"She'll be three months old on Christmas Eve."

"So she's still pretty young," Raquel noted.

"Quite," Severus replied as he took his seat behind the desk.

"Is the woman in the other picture her mother?" Raquel asked.

Severus nodded. "That's my wife, Hermione."

"I take it she was pregnant with Rose when the photograph was taken."

"She is."

"She looks playful in that picture," Raquel began.

Severus raised an eyebrow.

"In all the newspaper clippings I’ve seen of her, she always appeared so serious, almost sad. In that picture though, she looks free, like she isn't afraid to be who she really is. It’s a side of her I don’t think most people see."

"I suppose the photo was taken during one of her less guarded moments." Then his face became more serious and his voice more stringent. "But you are not here to discuss my family."

"Please forgive my curiosity concerning your daughter and wife. Where I come from, family is important."

"Unfortunately, when you have a family, you have fewer hours in the day to tend to such things as brewing and conducting interviews, which is why I want to conclude this as quickly as possible."

Raquel shifted in her seat and took a few inconspicuous deep breaths. "Sure, yes. That sounds great."

Severus leaned back in his chair and began, "This interview is not going to be conducted in a traditional manner, and you may find it a bit disconcerting." He began.

Raquel swallowed. Her hours of job preparation and practice interviews may have just gone out the window.

"Have you ever heard of Legilimency?"

Raquel gave him a blank stare.

"I'll take that as a no," Severus noted. "Legillimency is a way of delving into someone's mind to detect emotions and memories, among other things, It is an extremely accurate method of checking someone's qualifications."

"Does it hurt?" Raquel asked. Why had no one at the Leaky Cauldron or anyone at her job training seminar warned her of this?

"You may find it a little uncomfortable, but it should not be painful. I am only looking for memories pertaining to your work experience and your affiliations. I will not actively search for embarrassing memories, nor will I do anything to your mind beyond searching your memories. You have my
word,” Severus replied.

She gulped. "Is this safe?"

"I have done it thousands of times. For the most part everyone has escaped unscathed."

She exhaled. "I suppose it's fine with me, then."

“Good,” Severus replied. “Now look me in the eyes."

She locked eyes with him. A shock ran down her spine. She began to feel woozy. Part of her wanted to blink in order to make the sensations stop, but her eyes were transfixed by those of her prospective employer.

She jerked back after the exercise ended. "You do not appear to be a lycanthrope."

"I'm not a lycanthrope," she promised.

"Sadly, one cannot be sure these days," Severus replied.

"Too true," Raquel sighed. "My sister says the lycanthropy problem is getting worse in Spain."

"I found it interesting that you decided to attend an English University instead of one in Spain," Severus noted. “Then again the scholarship you were offered covers your expenses quite well. I’d imagine you were pleased with your decision to take English as a second language.”

“I was,” Raquel answered.

"Well," Severus replied, "if you still want the job, it's yours."

"Really?"

“Yes, you will be an adequate enough employee. I expect to see you here next Monday at eight.”

"Oh thank you!" she jumped out of the chair "Thank you! I will not disappoint you!"

"Be here by eight o'clock sharp," Severus repeated with a slight grin.

"I will! I will," Raquel cheered. “Thank you! You won’t regret this, I promise.”

Raquel grabbed her coat and ran out of the office. She couldn’t wait to tell her friends at the Leaky Cauldron that she’d gotten a job, and that she now had photographic evidence that Severus Snape was indeed capable of holding a baby.

Severus stood up. He took a moment to gaze at the pictures of Hermione and Rose before locking up and returning home.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is greatly appreciated!
"Are you sure it's a good idea to take Rose out in this weather?" Severus asked.

"Rose will be just fine," Hermione zipped their daughter into the bright green Christmas tree bunting Ginny had purchased for her. "It's just a few flurries, not a blizzard."

Rose glanced at the reflection of the foil gold and red circles littering her outfit. She opened her mouth and oohed.

"Is she dressed warmly enough?" Severus asked.

"Of course she is. She's wearing her special bunting and her cute little mittens," Hermione gushed. "She'll be all nice and toasty warm while we shop for our first Christmas tree."

"We shouldn't risk her getting ill," Severus replied. "It is the better part of wisdom to leave her with Draco and Ginevra. I'm sure they would not be opposed to babysitting her again."

"They wouldn't mind seeing her again, except that they're at an antenatal appointment," Hermione replied before tucking Rose's hair into the bright yellow star that served as the bunting's hood.

Severus suppressed a gag. Who on earth thought any self-respecting infant would want to be dressed in something so garish?

"If it makes you feel better, my parents took me Christmas tree shopping every year from the time I was a newborn. They just bundled me up and I was quite fine." Hermione turned her focus to her husband. "Although if you want to hedge that bet, you're welcome to hold her and make sure she's warm."

"I wouldn't be at all opposed to holding her, except that it might cause a sensation among the other patrons to see the erstwhile dungeon bat appear so." He twisted his lips. "Nurturing."

"Since when did you care what anyone else thought?" Hermione replied with a gleam in her eye.

Severus peered at Rose, whose face was nearly obscured by the gaudy fleece. The baby cooed and held out her arms to him.

"I don't care what others think of me, but you knew going into this marriage that it would be difficult for me to publicly display my affection for Rose."

"I also warned you before entering into this marriage that Rose would need a father who could show her affection. Imagine how confusing it would be for Rose to have a father who privately treats her like a princess, but publicly refuses to so much as hold her hand."

Rose gave him a gummy grin.

Severus sighed. "You know how deeply my love for our daughter runs. Still there needs to be an appropriate sense of decorum when displaying one's emotions."

Rose hiccuped. Her arms remained outstretched.
“Then again, decorum is rather a moot point today, I’d say, dressed as she is,” Severus shook his head. “Fortunately she has a father who is incapable of abandoning her in her time of need. If she is destined to shop for her first Christmas tree dressed as a baubled-up fir, the least I can do is hold her with as much dignity as I can muster. If she has an accident, however, you are the one responsible for divesting her of all that wrapping and cleaning her.”

“Deal,” Hermione replied, handing Rose to Severus.

As Hermione donned her coat and gloves, Severus gazed at the infant, who reached for his robes. He gave Rose the edge of his cape. Her face lit up as she began waving the black fabric back and forth.

“You like my robes, don't you?” Severus smirked.

Rose laughed.

"Do you want to walk about in black robes like mine someday so you can terrify dunderheads, too?” Severus asked.

Rose's smile widened. Severus chuckled before kissing her on the cheek. "Maybe we'll ask Father Christmas to place some billowing black robes under the tree for you. That might make this trip worth the indignity."

"Do they even make black robes with capes for babies?” Hermione asked.

"If not, I can transfigure some of mine to fit her,” Severus answered.

"Oh Merlin," she muttered as she pulled her hood over her curls.

“She'll look beautiful in black,” Severus noted.

“Black will make her appear too sullen.”

“No it will not. She will look like a young lady in black robes.”

"She'll look like your clone."

"You make it sound so problematic," Severus purred. "Listening to your tirade against my robes, one would think you find me completely repulsive.”

“People wear black robes out in public without shame,” Severus replied. "Yet even during this time of the year there is only one infant unfortunate enough to be stuck in a Christmas tree costume.”

“People wear black robes out in public without shame,” Severus replied. "Yet even during this time of the year there is only one infant unfortunate enough to be stuck in a Christmas tree costume.”

“No, you wear black robes without shame. The average wizard tends to experiment with other colors once in a while,” Hermione noted.

“It's to their detriment, I assure you,” Severus replied. "Life is so much simpler if one only wears black, wouldn't you agree Little One?”

Rose pulled his cape closer to her chest.

"See? She already has an appreciation for good fashion. I believe black robes would look absolutely stunning on her.”
Hermione shook her head. “We should probably get going before you come up with even more odd gift ideas.”

Rose blinked. Why do you think that's an odd gift idea? Black robes are the one thing I’ve always wanted!

Severus took his place beside Hermione and gave her a small grin. Linking Severus' arm with hers, Hermione apparated them away.

Rose felt herself being squeezed through a tiny tube; it almost felt like the time she emerged from that dark place and into all those bright lights. Merlin, the squeezing wasn't any more comfortable the second time around!

The instant they reached their destination, Rose screeched and cried tears of indignation at her sudden and unexpected discomfort. Severus glared at the few onlookers who had the audacity to dart looks of disapproval while Hermione whispered, "It's fine Rose; the apparation is over. It hurts a little, doesn't it?"

A few of the onlookers cowered under Severus’ expression. Most scurried away though, the memories of their school days all too vivid.

Once the onlookers' attention returned to their own affairs, Severus looked down and whispered, "I hate apparition, too, but you need to stop crying now. It's all over."

“It’s okay Rose,” Hermione whispered. “You’re going to be fine now.”

Rose's wails only crescendoed.

"Merlin don't tell me she's hungry," Severus moaned.

"I fed her before we left," Hermione assured him as she rubbed Rose's back.

“She doesn’t feel wet,” Severus noted.

Hermione took a deep breath. “I read that babies didn’t like apparation, but nobody told me it would be this bad. Do-do you think I hurt her?”

Severus shook his head. “She wouldn't be flailing around like this if she were injured. I believe she is simply uncomfortable.”

Rose screamed.

"Little Rose, you need to calm down,” Severus whispered. "See the beautiful Christmas trees?"

Within a few moments, Rose began to quiet. Once she caught her breath she was able to take in the scent of the pines, new, but so fresh and inviting. She then turned her head to see fat white fluff wafting from the sky. It was the same kind of flakes Daddy had shown her when he told her that wonderful story about the Half Blood Prince. She reached out to grab some of the white stuff, but it dissolved on her mitten. She gasped.

"Good little Rose," Severus whispered as the family wandered among the trees.

Rose began batting at the air, doing her best to grasp those white things.

"Do you like the snow?” Severus whispered.
She cheered as snowflakes landed on her mittens yet did not melt.

“When you're older we can play in the snow together. Maybe we'll even make a snow-wizard.”

"I thought she was going to get sick if she was exposed to the cold for longer than ten seconds," Hermione teased.

Severus frowned. "When I said older, I meant no longer a newborn. Perhaps when she’s two or three she can play in the snow.”

Before Hermione could reply, a man clad in a well-worn toboggan and a plaid cloak approached them. “Hello. I'm Reginald, the owner of this fine Christmas tree farm! What may I do for you today?”

"We're looking for a tree…” Hermione began.

Reginald's eyes had a twinkle which reminded Severus of Dumbledore. "Say no more! I will help you find the perfect tree."

"We want something sturdy, but not too heavy,” Severus began. “I also do not want to spend half the winter picking pine needles off the floor. The needles need to be short so Rose won't choke on…”

"Mister, uh…”

“Snape.”

"Mister Snape, we don't find the perfect tree by creating a list of the traits you desire,” Reginald began.

"You don’t?" Severus asked.

"No! We choose it by feeling its energy!” Reginald gushed.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Energy?"

“Yes, energy!” Reginald exclaimed.

Severus and Hermione darted each other a skeptical glance.

“Somewhere in this park there is a tree with the perfect energy for your family,” Reginald continued. "It is my job to help you sense it."

"How, how exactly do you sense this energy?” Hermione asked.

"It's a gift that develops over time in those who have a true affinity for it. I guarantee that I can find the perfect tree for your family,” Reginald answered.

Severus’s frown deepened. "Sure you can.”

Reginald glared at him. "Oh ye of little faith. Just watch me.”

Reginald's eyes took on a dreamy quality and he began to lightly hum as he wove among the trees, occasionally resting a hand on a trunk. Hermione and Severus followed behind, wondering if they dared cut their losses and apparate to saner surroundings. Finally, Reginald flashed a bright smile and made a bee-line to a statuesque Fraser. "This is the perfect tree for your family!"
Severus scowled. "It's too tall for my taste."

"That's what makes it perfect," Reginald answered. "It has grown and expanded, just like your family!"

"It's going to be impossible to put a star on top of that tree," Severus argued.

"I'm confident a brilliant wizard like yourself can easily solve that challenge," Reginald answered before turning to Hermione. "What do you think, Mrs. Snape?"

"I think it's beautiful," she breathed. "It's different from what I'm used to, but something about it just feels right."

Severus suppressed the urge to roll his eyes.

"The energy of this tree is already bonding with your family," Reginald answered.

Severus glanced down at the child in his arms. "Rose, what do you think?"

She stared at the tree before smiling and reaching in its direction. "The baby seems to agree."

"Fine, we'll take it, but if I find out this tree is defective I'm exchanging it for a new one of my choice," Severus answered.

"Done!" Reginald replied.

***

"It was brilliant of you to fly up and place the star on top," Hermione began while she and Severus basked in the dim multicolored light of the Christmas tree.

"I'll be plucking needles from my robes until New Year's," Severus grumbled as Rose settled herself on Severus' lap and closed her eyes.

Hermione kissed him on the cheek. "Yet you did it anyway."

"I did it for you and Rose. There is no one else I would risk ruining my robes for."

"Your robes are perfectly fine and you know it."

He plucked out a pine needle from his sleeve.

Hermione hummed. "There's just something magical about a fully lit Christmas tree, even if it is a bit bare."

"Indeed," Severus murmured as he watched the light reflect off scattered ornaments.

"Perhaps we should've bought more glass balls," Hermione mused.

"I prefer ornaments that carry some sort of meaning."

"I suppose I could floo to Australia and ask Mum and Dad for some of the ones they gave me as a child…"

"That's one possibility," Severus answered as he reached into his pocket. "…but I have another solution."
With a casual flick of his wand, he enlarged the two round baubles he'd pulled from his pocket. Hermione gasped as she read the writing on the pink one, "Baby's First Christmas."

"I thought Rose should have her own ornament."

Sentimental tears sprang to Hermione's eyes as she read the silver inscription on the delicate white ball, "Our First Christmas Together."

"I thought we deserved an ornament as well."

Hermione choked. "Severus Snape, you really can be sweet when you want to be."

"I'm not sweet," Severus argued before his expression softened. "But I do enjoy making you happy."

She pulled him into an embrace, careful not to awaken Rose from her nap. "The ornaments are beautiful, Severus! Thank you!"

"Thank you for making this Christmas special," Severus answered.

"Thank you for sharing Christmas with me," Hermione whispered before capturing his lips.

Chapter End Notes

A little note on Reginald: he's an actual character from General Hospital. One of my favorite scenes was of him finding a Christmas tree for a cranky old man. Sadly he was written off around 2001, but I couldn't pass up the chance to put my own spin on the Christmas tree hunting scene.

Thank you for all the support! I am grateful for all of you!
"You haven't the slightest idea what to give Severus for Christmas, do you?" Ginevra exclaimed.

Hermione lowered her head as they maneuvered through the crowds of Diagon Alley. “Up until now I really hadn't given Christmas gifts much thought. It seems like anything I do anymore has to do with tending to Rose, getting sleep, or squeezing out a few moments of Mummy and Daddy time.”

“Mummy and Daddy time?” Ginny asked while making her way around a group of window shoppers.

Hermione followed her friend and nodded.

“Good Merlin 'Mummy and Daddy time' sounds like something only a mother would say,” Ginevra replied.

Hermione gave her a sheepish grin. “It's amazing how much your speech patterns change after a child is born. I used to cringe when I heard parents refer to themselves in the third person, but now when I speak to Rose I call myself 'Mummy.'”

“Does Severus call himself Daddy?”

“Not yet, but it wouldn’t surprise me if one day he referred to himself as such. Really it wouldn't kill him to act like a more stereotypical father every once in a while. He always speaks so formally to Rose, like she’s a young adult.”

"Could you imagine Severus speaking to her the way most people speak to babies?"

"I suppose not. He'd be too afraid of turning her into a dunderhead," Hermione noted. "Right now he swears Rose is more intelligent than most of his former students."

Ginny giggled. “I don’t know whether to find that adorable or be offended. On the one hand it’s wonderful to know Severus cares so deeply for his daughter, but on the other it’s insulting to think my intelligence is less than that of an infant.”

Hermione smirked. “Well, Rose is a very clever baby.”

“Indeed she is,” Ginny replied. “But enough about babies. Our focus needs to be on getting your husband a Christmas present. I mean, do you know how late in the season it is?"

"I've had plenty of gift ideas," Hermione replied as they passed some carolers unintentionally inflicting polytonality on Joy to the World. "But everything I think of is something he already has, doesn't need, or isn't special enough for our first Christmas together."

"You're in a bit of a mess then," Ginny noted as they broke from the crowd and headed towards a department store. "His birthday is coming up in a few weeks as well."

"Don't remind me," Hermione muttered as they passed through the door with a jingling of bells. "I swear, he's the hardest man to shop for. I have no clue what he wants. Every time I ask him what he wants he mutters something about eliminating the scourge of obnoxious customers.”
Ginny shook her head. “Of course he'd say that.”

"That's Severus, and why he's so difficult to shop for," Hermione groaned. “I don't want to get him something he'll only pretend to like in order to humor me."

"If it makes you feel better, I've given Draco gifts he's only used once. It doesn't destroy a marriage to do so."

"True, but Draco knows what having a wonderful Christmas is like. Severus claims this is the first Christmas season he's actually enjoying. I don't want to ruin Christmas morning for him by giving him some tacky sweater he won't even wear once."

“Hermione,” Ginny answered in a gentle voice. “I think he believes Christmas is special because of you and Rose. As long as he spends Christmas with you two he will consider it to be the best holiday he's ever had. One gift is not going to ruin his holiday.”

“Maybe, but I want Christmas to be special for us. In my heart, I know he wouldn’t consider Christmas to be ruined by a less than ideal gift. Still I want him to feel as if he has a family who loves him, a family who tries to attend to his needs.”

“I think he already feels that way.”

Hermione sighed. “I hope so anyway. He doesn’t have too many pleasant memories of Christmas. It’s my mission to change that.”

“Something tells my you’ve provided him with more than a few pleasant memories,” Ginevra replied.

“I hope so anyway,” Hermione grinned. “Then again maybe a special Christmas for us will be getting eight good hours of sleep. Oh that sounds divine.”

Ginny laughed, then stopped in front of a Christmas tree full of ornaments. She placed a hand over her stomach and mused aloud, "I wonder if I should buy a 'Baby's First Christmas' ornament this year. I mean baby may not be out of me, but his or her presence is definitely felt. It isn't like you can't see Baby Malfoy."

"I'd hold off on it," Hermione replied. "You wouldn't want to buy a pink ornament if your child is a boy."

Ginny laughed. "Probably not." She then looked down and patted her abdomen. "I suppose you'll have to wait until next year."

Hermione smiled. "Maybe Severus would like an ornament. He mentioned wanting to decorate our tree with things that meant something to us."

"Sure, but you should think of something else to go along with it," Ginny suggested.

Hermione gave her a look before examining the ornaments on the tree. “True… but at least it's a start..."

Ginny shook her head. "I could not believe all the presents for Rose under your tree."

"Severus bought most of them. He often goes shopping during his lunch break or immediately after work," Hermione answered. "I wish I could join him, but my shopping days have been numbered since Rose was born. Honestly, this is the first time I've gone out on my own without Severus or
"Rose."

"Wow, you really are a mum."

"I am."

"Still, I'm sure having Rose has been worth all the sacrifices. She is such an adorable baby," Ginny replied as they headed towards an aisle full of candles.

"She is. She's my and Daddy's Little Princess."

"She's so cute with Severus, even if he still won’t refer to himself as Daddy. Who could have imagined that the intimidating potions professor we dreaded at Hogwarts would be changing nappies one day?"

Hermione couldn't hide her smile. "I honestly didn't know what kind of father he'd be when we married. I knew he'd never hurt my baby, but I didn't expect him to be so hands on with her. I certainly never imagined them as being nearly inseparable. Did you know he's been teaching her how to scowl?"

Ginny burst out laughing, attracting the attention of more than a few other patrons. "I'm sorry, but the thought of Rose scowling is just priceless. I'll have to see that for myself."

"Perhaps Severus will convince her to oblige when we return home," Hermione answered.

"I'd like that." Then Ginny's eyes widened. "Hermione! Look! You should get this for Severus!"

Hermione glanced at the black candle in Ginny's hand. The scent was labeled 'vanilla and cinnamon, magicked to have the added effect of increasing arousal and desire'. Hermione shook her head. "I'm not interested in having more children anytime soon. Rose is more than enough for now."

"Yes, but someday Severus may want another child," Ginny noted.

Hermione sighed as she imagined a black haired baby in Severus' arms. Hermione’s voice was soft. "Severus would do great with another child, and he deserves a child who is biologically his, assuming we can have one. Yet I’m not sure where he stands on the issue. We’ve never discussed having another child, and I’m not sure how keen he is on passing along his genes. One of the reasons I think he’s so attached to Rose is because she doesn’t have the baggage of reminding him of his parents. What if he couldn’t get passed his biological child’s appearance?"

"Honestly Hermione for the brightest witch of your generation you can be a real dunderhead at times."

"How is having a legitimate fear being a dunderhead?"

"Any biological child would have your genes as well. I honestly believe he’d see more of you in his child than he would himself."

"True," Hermione mused.

"I say get the candle. Even if you want to spend a few years discussing children that doesn't mean you can't still practice for when the time comes-and trust me it will come. In the meantime, there are such things as contraceptive spells."

"I don't want to come off as too desperate."
"How is wanting to act like a husband and wife coming off as desperate?"

"It's not," Hermione admitted. "But I…I don't know."

"You're afraid it may be just sex to him, aren't you?" Ginevra asked.

"Yes," Hermione whispered.

Ginny put a hand on Hermione's shoulder. "I've seen the way Severus looks at you. He loves you, Hermione. Severus Snape is in love with you. While he may be afraid to admit it, well, maybe your Christmas gift could tell him how you feel."

"That's it!" Hermione exclaimed.

"So glad you like my advice. Now let's hope you take it."

"I mean yes, I'll tell him how I feel soon, maybe, but in the meantime, I know what to give him for Christmas."

"What?"

"Is Charles O'Hara still coming to your home for a photo session?"

"Yes, he's coming next Tuesday to take the annual Malfoy family Christmas picture, why?"

"Because I'll need his help with Severus' gift!"

Ginevra then grasped her meaning. "I'll book him for another hour."

Hermione hugged Ginny. "Thank you."

"Werewolf!"

Hermione pulled away from Ginny as the crowd fell silent. "Werewolves are attacking Knockturn Alley and Diagon Alley!" a man at the front of the store shouted.

Shouts from the street and the unmistakable sound of Rodolphus LeStrange yelling, "Come here you filthy whore!" confirmed his warning.

Panic swept through the store as customers and salespeople raced for the floo. Hermione glanced at Ginny and asked, "Should we apparate, instead? Shit, we can't!"

"The floo is hopeless. I can apparate if you help me." Ginny argued.

"But your baby…"

"Will be safer if we get the hell out of this store!"

Hermione froze before Ginny yelled, "I'm going to apparate with or without you, now let's get out of here before one of the werewolves finds us!"

Hermione linked arms with Ginny and closed her eyes as chaos swirled around them.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much for all the support! I deeply appreciate all of it!
Chapter 156

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ron loathed physical therapy.

From the amount of exertion necessary to take a single step to the obnoxiously optimistic and overly friendly demeanor of the Mediwitches, everything about it grated on his last nerve.

“There you go Mr. Weasley,” the Mediwitch cheered. “Just move your legs like so…”

Ron gritted his teeth and stepped forward. After only twenty or so steps the room began spinning. Pain shot from his heel and up into his back. Why couldn't walking be less painful?

“Just a couple more meters and we’ll be done for the day.”

Ron groaned and advanced. He would never take another pain free day for granted again.

“Almost there…”

Ron grabbed a yellow padded chair. He winced as he turned it around. Panting, he plopped down into the seat. He bit his tongue to keep from screaming as pain radiated throughout his torso.

The Mediwitch clapped. “Great job, Mr. Weasley! That was excellent.”

Ron gave her a small grin before catching his breath.

“You are making so much progress it’s amazing,” she gushed.

“Does this mean I’ll be allowed to go home before Christmas?” Ron asked as she helped him into his wheelchair.

"It all depends on how your tests look next week, but at this rate I don't see why not," answered the Mediwitch. “Your mansion will need to be made wheelchair accessible though.”

“Mum said she has people working on that,” Ron replied. All of whom will be handsomely reimbursed once I gain control of the Snape fortune.

“That’s great the hear,” the Mediwitch began pushing him down the hallway.

Ron sighed. "I cannot wait to go home. As much as I appreciate all of your help, I miss sleeping in my own bed.”

The Mediwitch replied, “Most patients feel the same way.”

She rolled him to the doorway of his room, but paused upon seeing the door ajar. Ron grinned. "I forgot to tell you, I'm expecting a guest."

"Oh really?” There was a twinkle in the Mediwitch’s eyes. “Is this guest a witch or a member of the family?”

Ron’s grin grew as she wheeled him in. "A witch."
Farrah was sitting in a chair near the bed, her nose in the Quidditch magazine Ron had convinced Molly to buy at the gift shop downstairs. The Mediwitch stared at the other woman before shrugging. "Well, it's nice to see your support system is still in tact."

"Indeed it is," Ron replied.

Farrah poked up her head from the magazine.

The Mediwitch gasped. "Farrah Jackson, the guard from Azkaban prison?"

"That's me," she replied as she stood to greet the Mediwitch. "Pleased to meet you, Ms.…"

"Mrs. Kenwood," The Mediwitch answered as she lifted Ron and helped him into bed.

"It's nice to make your acquaintance Mrs. Kenwood," Farrah responded.

"Indeed," the Mediwitch removed her hands from Ron. "Comfortable?"

"Very," Ron answered.

Mrs. Kenwood put the sheets over his legs. "Good. You know to call me if you need anything. "I will."

"Very good."

"Goodbye and thank you," Ron replied as he settled back against the pillows.

"Goodbye Mr. Weasley, and do remember to try those exercises we discussed when you’re feeling up to them that is," the Mediwitch replied.

"I will," he answered.

The Mediwitch left the room. Farrah snorted. "If I didn’t know any better I’d say she has a small crush on you."

Ron growled, "She’s hardly my type."

"I thought your type was woman."

"My type is Mrs. Hermione Snape."

"Ah yes," Farrah nodded. "The one who got away."

Ron huffed. "I didn’t ask you to come here so we could discuss my bloody love life."

"No, you didn’t," Farrah replied.

Ron lowered his voice. "Did you buy the presents?"

"Of course I did," Farrah answered as she pulled two items from her pocket.

She enlarged the first object, a toy Quidditch broom. She then enlarged the second, a tiny red onesie with the words, "Daddy's Little Girl," spelled in gold.

"Perfect!" Ron exclaimed. "Thank you so much!"
"It was my pleasure," she replied before setting them down on the bed. "It's always so nice to spread joy around Christmastime."

"Indeed it is," Ron inspected the gifts. "I couldn't have picked out better gifts if I tried."

"Well I've always had a knack for knowing what to give others," Farrah replied.

"You really do," Ron picked up the onesie. "Hermione will have to know how serious I am about being a father now. Once she realizes how dedicated I'll be to Rose she'll take me back for sure."

"Sure she will. I mean, who could resist you?" Farrah answered.

Ron blushed. "It's easy to resist a cripple in a wheelchair."

"Oh I don’t know," Farrah replied. "You still have that rugged Quidditch star thing going for you, and nobody’s forgotten how you saved the Wizarding World from Voldemort."

"I guess so," Ron set down the present. "I’m glad you see the good in me, even when everyone else thinks I’m off my rocker."

"You're a changed man," Farrah replied. "You deserve a second chance."

"I'm glad someone believes in me," Ron answered. "Do-do you think you could wrap these?"

"I couldn't wrap a package if my life depended on it," Farrah laughed. "That's why I put all my gifts in bags. I saw some people downstairs advertising a service to wrap presents for ten Knuts apiece, though. I'll see if they can do the job."

"You're an angel."

"Just trying to make the world a better place."

"You’re very successful," Ron replied before looking down.

"What is it?" Farrah asked.

"I was just thinking," Ron drawled. "How we are going to deliver the present to Rose. It's not as if Snape or Hermione would accept anything from either of us."

"Good point," Farrah muttered. She scratched her chin. "Maybe your sister could give them the gifts."

"Ginny barely speaks to me anymore. I don't think she'd help me with this."

"Is there anyone else who would take these presents to Snape and Hermione, someone they might listen to and accept them from?"

There was a knock on the door. "Ronald?"

Ron’s lips curled up. "I may have someone in mind."

***

Draco watched Severus rock Rose as she nursed from a bottle. The infant gazed up at her father as if to catalogue every nuance of his facial expressions. Severus murmured, "I honestly do not know what you find so fascinating about me."
Rose was a too busy to share her thoughts so Draco spoke for her, "I think she likes the way you talk."

"She has always responded well to the sound of my voice," Severus noted. "Hermione claims it calms Rose although how, I haven't the foggiest clue."

"Your voice can be soothing," Draco replied. "When you're in the right mood, that is."

"Or so Rose seems to think," Severus muttered while he helped Rose steady the bottle.

"Uncle Severus?"

"Yes?"

"Were," Draco gulped. "Were you ever nervous about being Rose's father?"

"I was terrified at the prospect of becoming a father," Severus answered.

"Really?" Draco asked.

Severus nodded. "Up until Rose there wasn't a single child who enjoyed my presence, you excepted. I'd never felt a particular urge to have a child, and even I could admit to my unkindness. I had every reason to doubt my ability to parent a child."

"How did you overcome your fears?" Draco asked.

"Rose needed a father, and perhaps," There was a catch in his voice. "Perhaps I needed her as a daughter."

"I just did not know if being afraid was natural," Draco replied.

"Fear was a part of my experience anyway."

"It's so confusing. I want to be a dad. I'm excited about the baby. I cannot wait to meet Baby Malfoy, but what if I'm not a good father?" Draco asked.

"Why would you not be a good father?" Severus asked. "You treat Ginevra very well, you are capable of patience, and you have a great capacity to love. You meet all the requirements to be a good parent."

"I can't stand the sight of poo," Draco answered. "I can't even stand the thought of someone changing a nappy. I almost fainted when Ginevra changed Rose’s nappy, and just thinking about it makes me queasy. How can I be an effective father if I can't handle a messy baby?"

Severus chuckled. "You and Ginevra will find a way to work around that, I'm sure. After all there’s more to parenting than nappy changes."

Draco blinked.

"You'll still hold and play with the baby, will you not?"

"Of course I will."

"And you aren't afraid to be affectionate, are you?"

"Not with other Malfoys."
"Then you'll be a fine father."

"I hope so," Draco exhaled.

POP!

Rose dropped her bottle and screamed. Severus retrieved it and began patting her on the back whispering, "Everything's fine Rose, it's just a noise."

"I'm so sorry!" Hermione began as she rushed to her daughter. "I didn't mean to scare her."

"Ginevra?" Draco asked as Hermione rubbed Rose's back. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," she choked.

"It's fine Rose," Hermione whispered. "Everything is fine now."

"You, you are not supposed to be apparating this late in your pregnancy!" Draco exclaimed.

"I didn't have much of a choice!" Ginevra argued.

"Why?"

"Fenrir and his men attacked Knockturn Alley. Rodolphus LeStrange was just outside the store we were in, although I doubt he saw us."

"Merlin, Ginevra, did he hurt you?" Draco rushed over and held her close to his chest.

She sobbed. "No, but I had to get out of there right away. Oh Draco I was so terrified. I, I didn't know what to do."

"You did the right thing by getting out of there."

"I hope I didn't hurt the baby, but we were in more danger there than we would be apparating."

"You were right to leave."

"But the baby. What if I hurt the baby by going into labor too soon?"

"We'll just monitor you for symptoms of early labor, and if it happens we'll take things from there."

Ginevra buried her head into Draco's shoulder.

Severus glanced at Hermione. "Did any of the lycanthropes see you?"

"No," Hermione answered. "They did not even enter the store we were in, at least not to my knowledge."

"Oh thank God," Severus exhaled

Rose calmed herself and turned to her mother. Hermione gave the baby back her bottle. With a cluck the baby resumed her feeding.

"Is your abdomen hurting right now?" Draco asked.

"No, it isn't. Baby seems to be fine." Her eyes lit up. "In fact, Baby Malfoy is kicking!"
Draco smiled as he looked down and placed a hand on her stomach. "That's it, baby. You just stay in there a little longer. You stay where it's nice and safe, inside your mummy."

"I'm just so glad Baby doesn't seem to be hurt," Ginevra breathed while Draco ran his fingers through her hair.

"You and the baby are safe now. That's all that matters," Draco replied.

Ginevra sniffed.

He took her face in his hands. "I love you Ginevra. I don't know what I would have done if something had happened to you."

"I love you too Draco," Ginevra replied, before kissing him on the lips.

Severus looked up at Hermione. "I'm glad you are safe, Hermione. I would've been devastated had something happened to you."

She wrapped her arms around his neck and whispered into his ear. "I'm just happy to be home."

"I am happy you are home as well," Severus replied.

Rose continued to suckle, quite pleased to have both of her parents home as well.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry for not updating sooner. Things got chaotic at work, and I was rushing to get things done on time. This next week looks like pure mayhem as well. I will try to update as usual, but I apologize in advance if I can't.

As always, thank you so much for your patience and support! It really keeps me going.
He was anything but inconspicuous.

Raquel observed the apothecary's latest newcomer. He wrung his hands as he meandered further into the store. Midway between the doorway and the counter he paused to scan the ceiling.

“Excuse me, Ms?”

Raquel startled.

“Oh, I didn’t mean to frighten you,” the customer answered.

“No, you’re fine.” Raquel grinned. "I've always been easily surprised."

“Still I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it."

"Very well then." The customer set five vials onto the counter.

“Will that be all for you?”

“Yes.”

Raquel grabbed one of the vials and turned it until she could see the price sticker. She squinted before entering the number into the cash register. Then she did likewise for the other four vials.

“All right then,” she drawled upon completing her task. “That will be forty sickles and twenty-eight knuts.”

“Thank you,” the customer muttered.

While the customer removed the coins from a coat pocket, Raquel's eyes darted around the room. After a few moments they rested upon the man. He was creeping towards the medical potions aisle, his head still hung low.

“Here you go. Forty sickles and twenty-eight knuts.”

“Thank you,” Raquel replied before counting the coins on the counter. Every few seconds she glanced up and took note of the man’s location. Step by step he inched away from the shelves and towards the counter. By the time the last knut had been placed in the register he was behind the other customer.

“Thank you so much,” the customer replied.

Raquel waved. “Have a nice day.”

“You too.”

The customer strolled out of the store.
“Next!”

The man stepped forward.

“What can I do for you Sir?”

He took a deep breath. “I need to see Professor Snape.”

Raquel frowned. “I’m sorry, but Mr. Snape is unavailable.”

“Please,” the man began. “This is important.”

“I’m sorry, but Mr. Snape does not wish to be disturbed at this time.”

“You don’t understand,” the man’s ears grew red. “This is about his daughter.”

Raquel furrowed her brow. “You’re from the Daily Prophet, aren’t you?”

The man cocked his head.

“Mr. Snape has made it very clear that he will not allow any photographs of Rose to be taken at this time. If you do not respect his request he is liable to hex you,” Raquel warned.

“I don’t want a picture of Rose,” the man shifted his eyes to the ground. “Well, maybe I would like one, but I wouldn’t publish it in the paper.”

“Then why do you want to see Mr. Snape about his daughter?”

“I…” the man swallowed. “I don’t want to get into the details.”

"Then the answer remains no."

“Please Ms…”

“Raquel.”

“Raquel,” he answered. “I don’t want to cause any trouble. I just need to speak to Mr. Snape for a moment.”

“Mr. Snape does not wish to speak with you,” she repeated.

“I know he doesn’t!”

Raquel jumped back.

“Look, I know Professor Snape wants nothing to do with me or my family, but there is something he and I need to discuss now,” the man replied. “Please, I’m pleading with you, let me see him.”

“Arthur.”

Raquel spun around. “Mr. Snape. I, I didn’t mean to allow this man to bother you. I, I’m really sorry if he did.”

Severus’ tone of voice was even. “You’ve done nothing wrong, Raquel. Mr. Weasley is very persistent and will not leave until he gains an audience with me.”

“Please Severus,” Arthur began in a soft voice. “Please let me speak with you.”
Severus looked at Raquel. “Would you excuse us for a moment?”

She relaxed. “I need a glass of water.”

“You know where to find the paper cups,” Severus replied.

Raquel nodded before stepping away from the register and scurrying towards the back of the apothecary.

Severus began in a low voice, “I do not appreciate being interrupted from my valuable research by people harassing my employees.”

“Thank you so much for working on a lycanthropy cure,” Arthur began. “I appreciate it, as does my family.”

“Yes,” Severus replied. “Well, it would be easier to complete my research if I wasn’t being interrupted every twenty seconds by your son finding new ways to harass my wife.”

“I promise not to take up too much of your time,” Arthur answered.

Severus grunted.

Arthur pulled a box out of his pants pocket along with his wand. With a flick of his wand the box grew. Shaking, Arthur looked at Snape.

Severus’ expression was that of pure boredom.

Arthur slid the box onto the counter. “My family wanted to give Rose a Christmas present.”

Severus’ eyes darkened. “Do you take some perverse delight in torturing my family?”

“I'm not trying to upset you,” Arthur replied.

“Then why are you going out of your way to provoke me?”

“Ron wanted to apologize to Hermione for how he’s treated her. He thought a Christmas present for Rose would be a great first step.”

“He truly is delusional if he thinks one present is going to erase fourteen years of emotional abuse.”

“I know it won't undo what he's done.”

Severus growled. “If you know that giving him these gifts is futile then why are you in my apothecary?”

“Because I wanted to give Rose something as well,” Arthur answered.

“What could you possibly have for her that would interest me in the slightest?” Severus snapped.

Arthur pulled out what appeared to be a handkerchief from his coat pocket. With another snap of his wand the item was enlarged.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “You want me to give her an old orange blanket?”

Arthur replied. “It was Ronald’s baby blanket.”

Severus made a fist and bit his tongue.
“I wanted to give this to Rose since she may be the only person who could inherit it.”

“What the bloody hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Ronald cannot have children.”

What little color Severus had drained from his face.

“The accident rendered him sterile.”

“When did you learn this?” Severus whispered.

“The day before Ron woke up,” Arthur answered.

Severus huffed.

“That’s one of the reasons the doctors think he’s latched onto the idea that Rose is his daughter. He’ll never have one of his own,” Arthur choked.

Severus glanced down at the blanket.

“Even if Rose isn’t Ron’s daughter, his blanket deserves to be held by another child. Given how much Ron cared for Hermione, Rose is the perfect candidate for its next owner,” Arthur replied.

Severus blinked.

“I should tell you the history behind it,” Arthur continued. “My mother made it for Ronald out of some old fabric she found. It’s not the warmest thing in the world, but I think she intended for it to be a family heirloom.”

“Rose is a Snape.” The words came out more as a warning than a statement.

“I know,” Arthur answered. “But Ron does care for Rose. I think she’d be the perfect person to pass along his blanket to.”

“If he cared so much for Rose then why did he throw Hermione out into the streets?”

“That was a horrible mistake Ron is desperate to make up for.”

“Considering the interviews he gave after Rose’s birth I’d say he’s made several serious blunders.”

“Yes he has,” Arthur replied. “Still he wants to be a better man. He’s trying to become a better man. Surely you can respect that.”

Severus’ eyes bore into Arthur. “Are you trying to make me feel guilty about raising my daughter?”

Arthur bit his lip.

Severus’ voice was low. “Am I supposed to weep at you story? Should I regret fathering Rose? Am I to abandon her and Hermione because your son now wants a family?”

Arthur trembled.

Severus grabbed the blanket and the box. “When I come home tonight I will present these gifts to Hermione. She will determine what to do with them.”

“Okay,” Arthur answered.
“If I had my way, you would take all of your gifts home with you right now,” Severus continued. “But if I gave them back to you now Hermione would have no say in their fate. As Rose's mother, she would appreciate the chance to voice her opinions. Merlin knew she could never get a word in edgewise with your son.”

“Thank you,” Arthur replied.

“I would expect an owl to come before dawn tomorrow carrying the packages. I’d imagine she shares my opinion.”

“I understand.”

“Personally,” Severus pulled out his wand and shrunk the packages. “I fail to understand why you’re obsessing over a child unrelated to you, especially when another one of your grandchildren was in mortal danger less than forty-eight hours ago.”


Severus grabbed the items and placed them in his pocket, “Ginevra was almost attacked by lycanthropes last Saturday. In order to escape she needed to apparate.”

“But she's in her third trimester! She could've gone into early labor.”

“That was Hermione’s concern as well.”

“Is, is Ginny okay?”

“Ginevra called Hermione yesterday. She does not seem to have suffered any ill effects. Still I felt it was my duty to let you know considering how much you enjoy doting on your grandchildren.”

“I,” Arthur breathed. “Th-thank you Severus. I…I didn't know she was in danger.”

“Of course you didn’t know,” Severus replied. “You’ve been so focused on my daughter that you’ve completely neglected your own.”

Arthur stood up straighter. “I'm trying to keep my family together.”

“If you want your family together then I’d strongly suggest reconciling with Ginevra. There is still a chance she will allow you into her child’s life,” Severus replied.

“What do you mean ‘still a chance?’” Arthur snapped. "I am already in my grandchild's life."

Severus asked. “Are you certain that Ginevra will want Baby Malfoy to have contact with the people who pushed for her husband's arrest?”

“Baby Malfoy?”

Severus shrugged. “That’s what they’ve been calling the child. Ginevra doesn’t want to know the gender, and the last name will be Malfoy.”

“That baby is a Weasley too.”

“You wouldn’t know it given how you treat Ginevra.”

Arthur’s throat tightened. “No, I suppose not.”
The former professor took a step back, but Arthur did not move. Severus growled, “You may leave any time you please.”

Arthur took a deep breath. “I want you to know that I am grateful for all you’ve done for my family, especially in attempting to find the lycanthropy cure. We will never be able to repay the debt we owe you.”

“If you are so grateful to me then leave my wife, my daughter, and me alone,” Severus suggested.

“I… I don’t mean to harass you. I only want to know the truth.”

“If you want the truth then stop listening to your son.”

“It isn’t that simple,” Arthur argued. “So much has gone wrong in his life.”

“Oh yes, the trials and tribulations of Ronald Bilius Weasley,” Severus interrupted. “One only needs to point to Ronald’s role in the Horcrux Hunt to know exactly how difficult his life has been.”

“He’s made several mistakes,” Arthur admitted.

“Yet you continue to lavish praise on him and denounce anyone who so much as considers him to be less than perfect.”

“Maybe, maybe I haven’t been the best parent as of late, but it doesn’t change the fact that I need to make up for Ron's difficult childhood. We didn’t have much. Most of his clothes were hand me downs, as were most of his toys. Really the only thing possession that was fully his is that blanket.”

“You act as if he’s the only wizard who has ever grown up in poverty.”

“Maybe others have grown up in similar circumstances, but it was always hard for him to see other children get new toys and clothes while we could not afford them.”

Severus replied, “Ginevra grew up in the same circumstances. She is not half as self-entitled as your son.”

“True,” Arthur admitted.

Severus tapped his finger on the counter. "Does this litany of woes have a point?"

“I guess what I’m saying is that if there is any doubt as to who Rose’s father is, please search for the truth. Ron has given so much for the Wizarding World and endured so much. He deserves a chance to be a father, to be loved by his daughter. If you are taking that from him,” Arthur paused. “Don’t be the man we thought you were during the war.”

Severus hissed, “Get out.”

Arthur did not need to be told to leave twice.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It's truly amazing to have readers like you who care and enjoy this story. As stated earlier updates will be sporadic this week, but
hopefully things will calm down...eventually.
Ginevra sipped the last few drops of her peppermint tea while turning the page of her magazine. She set the tea cup down and grinned. “What do you think Baby Malfoy? Do you want one of those strollers shaped like a muggle car?”

Ginevra couldn’t feel anything.

"You'd look adorable in it," Ginevra cooed. "I can almost see myself pushing you around Hogsmeade. You'd look just like a muggle racer car driver. It would be absolutely adorable!"

Nothing.

She rubbed her abdomen. “I could get it in black. That way it won’t matter if you’re a boy or a girl.”

Still no motion.

“Oh come on! Let me have a little fun. Your grandfather have a cow if he saw you in this stroller. He’d claim I’m making you a muggle. Poor dear may almost give himself a heart attack after seeing you in one of these. Isn’t Grandfather Lucius' reaction worth getting the car stroller?”

Baby Malfoy kicked.

Ginevra laughed. “I can already tell you have a sense of mischief. You’re going to be a handful, yet you'll be so much fun.”

Baby Malfoy kicked against Ginevra harder.

CRACK!

Ginevra leapt up. The magazine tumbled to the floor.

Conk!

Ginevra took a deep breath.

Conk!

“Patrick will get the door!” a voice shouted.

Ginevra stood up. “No, I can answer it myself.”

An elf poked its head into the sitting room. “But Mistress, Master said you need to lie down.”

“I’m well aware that Draco would love nothing more than to tie me to a bed for the remainder of my pregnancy,” Ginevra began making her way towards the hallway. “But I am certain that no harm will come to me or my baby if I answer the door.”

“Master gave strict orders to make sure you stay rested.”

“And I gave you strict orders to let me answer the door.”
Sweat ran down Patrick’s face. He crouched and pulled a cracked leather belt from behind his back.

“Patrick,” Ginevra began in a sweet voice. “Do you like chocolate?”

Patrick licked his lips. He dropped the belt.

“If you let me go to the door I’ll give you some when my guest leaves. Draco will never have to know I was walking around the mansion, nor will he ever know you ate chocolate. Deal?”

“Patrick never heard anyone at the door.”

"No, you didn't."

The elf snapped his fingers and apparated away.

Conk! Conk!

“I’m coming,” Ginevra called. She rubbed her back as she plodded into the foyer. Her feet ached more with each step. To say her third trimester was less than pleasant than her second was an understatement. Despite her earlier worries surrounding the birthing process, she was now eager for Baby Malfoy to see the outside world.

Once she reached the door she stretched. Her back popped. After letting out a groan, Ginevra opened the door.

“Ginevra?”

Her heart stopped. “Dad?”

Arthur swallowed. “It’s, it’s so good to see you again, Ginny.”

“Yes, it’s good to see you too,” Ginevra replied. “I wasn’t expecting you.”

“Well I was in the neighborhood and thought I’d drop by.”

“Oh.”

“Perhaps I should have sent an owl before coming, but I needed to see you.”

“Has something happened?” Ginny asked. “Is somebody hurt?”

Arthur shook his head. “No, nothing’s wrong. Nobody is hurt.”

“That’s good.”

“Can, can I come in?”

Ginevra moved aside. Arthur stepped inside. He gasped as he took in his surroundings. Holly dangled from the glass chandelier. A wreath almost as tall as him was placed between the ceiling and the doorway to the hallway. Scattered throughout the foyer were marble tables with red and white candles on top.

Ginevra closed the door behind him. “I almost forgot, you’ve never seen this place around Christmas.”
Arthur blushed. “No, I have not.”

A two meter tall crystal snowman glistened in the far corner.

“The mansion, it’s very festive,” Arthur noted.

“Things are actually a little low-key this year,” Ginevra answered. “With the baby coming I didn’t have much time to lay out where I wanted each Christmas decoration.”

Arthur turned to her. “These aren’t all your Christmas decorations?”

“No, some are still in storage,” Ginny admitted. “Next year though we are going to put every single one of them up, and we’ll add a few new ones. Baby Malfoy is going to have the most wonderful first Christmas imaginable!”

Arthur grinned. “I’m sure it will be very memorable.”

Ginevra smiled. “Indeed it will be.”

Arthur cleared his throat. “Well, this all looks lovely anyway.”

“Thank you,” Ginevra pointed to the hallway. “Would you like to sit down in the sitting room? Our main Christmas tree is there.”

Arthur and his daughter began strolling down the hallway. “Main Christmas tree?”

She nodded.

“I thought most people only had one Christmas tree,” Arthur answered.

“Draco and I have three big trees and at least eighteen smaller ones scattered about the house. Some nights we like to wander around the house trying to see if we can find each one. The elves always make it a little adventure. The first year we were married, Patrick went so far as to throw cotton on the ground so it would appear as if it was snowing.”

“That sounds like it was very fun.”

“It was.”

They entered the sitting room. Ginevra pointed to a leather chair next to the sofa. Arthur nodded and sat down. Then she took her place on the couch.

“I’m so glad to see you doing so well. When Severus told me about what happened on Saturday,” he took a shaky breath. “I wish I’d been there for you.”

“What were you doing around Severus?” Ginevra asked with an edge in her voice.

“I needed to give him some things.”

“What things?”

“Ron and I wanted to give Rose some Christmas presents.”

Ginevra furrowed her eyebrows. “Why did you think it was a good idea to give Rose gifts?”

“We didn’t want Rose to think we didn't care about her.”
“Now why would Rose ever feel as if you didn’t care for her? You only called her a spawn and demeaned her parents at every opportunity. The only time you gave Rose a moment’s notice when Ron bumped his head and announced he might be her father.”

“If she’s my granddaughter I have a right to know her.”

“She isn’t your granddaughter!”

“That isn’t what you said when Hermione first announced her pregnancy.”

“I,” Ginevra bit her lower lip. “I didn’t know about Hermione’s affair with Severus.”

“You didn’t?” Arthur asked.

Ginevra readjusted her position on the couch. “It was just as shocking for me to find out that Hermione was pregnant as it was for you. Hermione and I told each other everything. I couldn’t fathom her loving anyone other than Ron, but I was wrong. She loves Severus, and Severus loves her. Both of them love Baby Rose and are excellent parents to her. That’s all that matters.”

“No, that child’s biology matters a great deal,” Arthur argued.

"Why?"

"Because if she is a Weasley then she is a part of this family and should be treated as such. Certainly you can agree to that."

Ginny pursed her lips.

“I need to know, did Hermione sleep with Ron while she was having her affair with Snape? Is there any doubt that Rose is a true Snape?”

“No. There is no doubt that Rose is truly a Snape."

“Are you sure about that?”

Ginevra stood up. “If you just came here to pry into Hermione’s love life then,” she pointed to the doorway, “leave!”

“Okay,” Arthur sighed. “Okay, I’ll get off of this topic. There are more important things to discuss.”

Ginevra put her hand down. “Like what?”

Arthur replied, “We could talk about you and your baby.”

Ginny slumped into the couch. “Baby Malfoy is doing fine.”

“You haven’t felt any pain since last Friday?” Arthur asked.

Ginny sighed. “You sound like Draco now.”

“Well Draco is trying to be cautious, as he should be,” Arthur replied.

Ginny snorted. “You mean you believe Draco is capable of doing the right thing?”

“At times, yes,” Arthur replied.

She gave him a half smile. “You know, I think that’s the kindest thing you’ve ever said about him.”
“Perhaps it’s time I practice a little more kindness,” Arthur answered.

“We could all use that.”

“Indeed.”

“So, uh,” she tilted her head to her right. “Here’s the main Christmas tree. It’s fourteen meters tall, not counting the half meter angel. It’s a blue spruce taken from the backyard. We’ve charmed it so that when Christmas is over we’ll return it to its place. This is the third year we’ve done it. So far the tree hasn’t suffered any damage. If anything it’s grown a little taller.”

Arthur turned his focus to the tree. Gold and silver ornaments reflected the light from the rows of candles. Interspersed among the branches were wooden toy soldiers, glass blown serpents, and a few feathery angels. What captured Arthur’s attention though was a white porcelain bell with red stenciling. He squinted, but could not decipher the words.

“Honey, what does it say on the white bell?” Arthur asked.

Ginny’s eyes took on a dream like quality. “That’s the first ornament Draco ever gave me, back when we were first dating.”

Arthur hummed.

“Every year he’s given me a different colored bell,” she continued. “Last year the bell was blue, and the year before that it was brown.”

Arthur examined the tree. Sure enough there were five bells, all differently colored.

“The year we were married he gave me a red bell with white stenciling,” Ginevra’s eyes lit up. “I honestly don’t know if I prefer the red or the white bell. Both of them are so meaningful.”

Arthur replied, “They both look beautiful.”

“Thank you,” Ginny replied.

Arthur choked, “Sweetie I am so sorry I haven’t come to see your mansion around Christmastime. I should’ve done so much earlier.”

Ginevra did not answer.

Arthur turned to her. Her attention was focused on the tea cup.

“Ginny, is there something wrong?”

She ran her hand along the couch cushion seam. “Draco almost didn’t get the chance to give me a bell this year. We almost spent Christmas apart.”

“I can’t imagine how terrifying Fenrir’s attack must have been…”

She glared at him. “Do you think I’m talking about what happened last Saturday?”

“I assumed you were. After all Fenrir could’ve killed you.”

“And Draco could’ve been imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit.”

Arthur said nothing.
“I pleaded with you, I begged you to believe in Draco’s innocence. I told you that he loved me too much to jeopardize our future with a stupid stunt like killing Harry Potter,” Ginny raised her voice. "Thanks to that stupid investigation people were insinuating my baby was Harry’s. Do you realize how humiliating that was for Draco and me?"

“I didn’t know what to think at the time. Draco was the only person we knew of who had motive to kill Harry.”

“Lucius and Severus tried telling you there were be alternate suspects out there, suspects who would’ve come out of the woodwork had the Ministry actually investigated the crime instead of doing everything in their power to pin it on my husband! No matter what anyone said though, you and Mum kept pushing the Ministry to investigate Draco.”

“Sweetie we were emotional…”

“What kind of excuse is that?”

Arthur shut his mouth.

Ginevra continued, “If you wanted justice for Harry you should’ve focused on obtaining hard evidence. You should’ve pushed for the aurors to develop an airtight case so that once the right person was found, he would spend the rest of his days in Azkaban. Instead you allowed the Ministry to tear up our home, interrogate us for hours on end, and plot Draco’s arrest based on the flimsiest evidence imaginable.”

Arthur folded his hands.

“Maybe I could understand you investigating him initially. It’s no secret that he and Harry despised each other. Fine. But after everything turned up empty you should’ve backed off. If the lack of evidence wouldn’t deter you from going after Draco then my baby should have!”

Arthur bowed his head.

Tears came to Ginevra’s eyes. “My baby could’ve spent the first years of his or her life without a father. I might have had to raise my child alone because my parents were holding a grudge. Draco may have been denied his chance to be a father because you hate the Malfoys so much that you were willing to sacrifice justice in order to get back at them.”

Arthur’s lips quivered. “I, we only wanted justice.”

“No, you wanted revenge,” Ginevra replied. “You only wanted revenge.”

Arthur sniffed.

“Harry was an auror! His entire life was dedicated to solving crimes and protecting the innocent. He would’ve been disgusted if he’d seen how his murder investigation was handled. It would’ve horrified Harry to think that in his name, a child could’ve been ripped from his or her father. If you couldn’t demand a fair investigation because of my baby, you should’ve demanded one in order to honor Harry's memory.”

“We got caught up in the moment.”

“No, you got caught up in punishing Draco for marrying me.”

“What?” Arthur raised his head
“You heard me,” Ginevra retorted. “You’ve spent the last five years tormenting Draco for falling in love with me. The fact that Draco isn’t Harry Potter is an unforgivable crime, much worse than anything his father ever did.”

“Harry was like family to us…”

“I know Harry was like a son to you! It would’ve been great for him to be a Weasley by marriage. Honestly, I wish I had a sister so they could’ve been married. I couldn’t do it though. The longer we were together the more miserable I became.”

“Miserable?”

Ginny wiped her eyes. “Harry was a good man. I never stopped caring for him. Still he wanted children immediately after becoming an auror. I was nineteen Dad. Nineteen! I'd barely gotten out of school. I wasn’t ready to be a mother. No matter how many times I expressed my concerns to Harry, he wouldn’t listen. He wanted to fill the void in his life left by his parents. He needed the perfect family he’d always yearned for. There was so much pressure to be the perfect girlfriend, to provide all of his emotional needs. Harry was never stifling or possessive, but it became clear to me that he needed more than I could provide.”

“I know things with Harry weren’t always easy…”

“You don’t understand! You’ve never listened to me! No matter what I say you never listen to me!”

Arthur fell silent.

“I needed to break things off with Harry before we grew to hate each other.” Ginevra wiped her eyes. "I couldn’t support him emotionally. I was too young, and he expected so much of me. At times I would wake up completely depressed, but I knew I couldn't express myself because Harry needed an emotionally stable girlfriend. So much was being stuffed down, and I was beginning to resent it.”

"I had no idea."

“Don’t you see? I was trying to preserve my friendship with Harry, not destroy him. I'm so sorry he got hurt, but he would've been more hurt had I stayed and tried to be someone I wasn’t. We would've destroyed each other. Walking away was an act of friendship, not of enmity.”

“Honey it was all so confusing at the time,” Arthur choked. “You’d been in love with Harry for years. Then one day you broke up with Harry and were madly in love with Draco. It made no sense.”

“It made all the sense in the world to me. I had a schoolgirl crush on Harry. Still the more I got to know him the more I realized he needed someone other than me. I tried to explain that to him on numerous occasions, but he wouldn’t listen.” Ginevra sat up straighter. “Neither would you.”

“No, I suppose I didn’t,” Arthur admitted.

“After I broke up with Harry it felt like you saw me as nothing more than an extension of him. Because I’m not with Harry, it’s like you think I’m nothing.”

“You think we believe you’re nothing?”

“Yes! The second I broke up with Harry I was berated by all of you. It was if I’d betrayed the entire family by refusing to marry him. Even when I tried to explain my viewpoint I was shut down. Family events were scheduled but I wasn’t invited, or if I was it was clear that my husband wasn’t to
join me. That’s why I stopped going to dinners at the Burrow, and why I stopped inviting you to the mansion,” Ginevra’s voice was quieter. “You asked me to choose between Harry and Draco, my biological family or my happiness. I choose to be happy with the man I love, and I’ve been punished every day for it.”

Arthur hung his head.

“There’s something else you should know,” Ginevra’s throat constricted. “Four days before Fenrir released the prisoners from Azkaban, Lucius called me and Draco to Malfoy Manor. He had made plans for us to escape Britain. We were to leave the next week.”

“And you would’ve left with Draco,” Arthur answered.

“He’s my husband and the father of my child. His Patronus is a stallion, the true companion to my mare. How could I not spend the rest of my life with him, even if we were on the run?”

“I never should’ve asked you to choose between us and Draco.”

“No, you shouldn’t not have.”

Arthur took a deep breath. “I really haven’t listened to you much in the last few years, have I?”

Ginevra shook her head. “No, you have not.”

“I’m going to listen now,” Arthur promised. “Please tell me why you decided to marry Draco. I promise to make no judgments.”

She sniffed. “Things with Draco were easy. He can be a deep thinker, but he is also quite playful. While he had his own scars from the war, he didn’t expect me to heal all of them. I could be myself around him, imperfections and all. It was okay to express myself because he wouldn’t break at the thought of something being wrong. I didn’t have to adjust my goals for him. I was free to live the life I wanted with someone to support me through it. Even if Draco had never chased off those bandits, I still would’ve chosen him over Harry.”

“I see.”

“When I wanted to become a mother I did it on my own terms. There was nobody pressuring me or trying to make up for his own horrendous childhood. It was simply about two people who wanted to be parents coming together and making a child. Isn’t that what you wanted motherhood to be for me?”

Arthur whispered, “It is.”

The tears returned to Ginevra’s eyes. “I really wanted you to be happy for me when I announced that I was expecting. I wanted you involved in this pregnancy. Yet I knew the family’s reaction would be so violent that I didn’t invite any of you to my announcement party. Then when it became clear you hated Draco so much you were willing to sacrifice justice for revenge, I realized I couldn’t allow you in this baby’s life. I cannot allow anyone in Baby Malfoy’s life who would hold Draco against him or her.”

“Oh Ginny!” Arthur gasped.

“It’s hard though! Even though I call my child ‘Baby Malfoy,’ I know there’s still Weasley blood in there. I’d love for you to accept my baby. In order for you to do that though you need to accept my husband. Can you do that? Can you accept Draco and the Malfoys as part of my child’s family? Can
you ensure that no matter what happens you won’t cut the Malfoys out of my child’s life?” Ginevra asked.

Arthur burst into tears. “I promise you Ginny. I promise that I will never forget your child again, or prevent Draco from being a father.”

“Thank you,” Ginny answered with tears streaming down her eyes.

Arthur stood up and held out his arms. Ginny shook her head. “It, it’s still a little soon.”

Arthur deflated. “I see.”

“Still,” Ginevra began ”I have some pictures from the Mediwitch appointments if you’d like to see them.”

Arthur grinned. “I’d like that very much.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! I appreciate it deeply!
Why was Daddy so sad?

All evening long Daddy had been looking at her as if he’d done something bad. Yet Rose couldn’t think of anything he had done wrong. Mummy was still doing that nauseating kissing thing with Daddy, so she wasn’t mad at him. While it was still wrong for Daddy to go to that work place for hours at a time, he always made it up to Rose by playing with her when he got home. No, Rose loved Daddy, and wasn’t angry with him. Mummy loved Daddy too, and wasn’t angry with him either.

So if nobody was angry with Daddy, why was he acting as if he’d done something wrong?

“Lacewing flies were grounded down and mixed in with the dittany. The resulting powder was thrown into the cauldron,” Severus’ voice was softer than usual.

Rose cooed.

“He should not have done that,” Severus continued in the kindest professor voice he could muster. “The ingredients nullify each other. Any competent potions master would know that.”

"Oh," Rose mumbled.

“Upon realizing this blunder,” Severus snorted. “Blunder is putting it mildly-the potion was brewed again. In place of the lacewing fly powder, dragon liver was added. Two minutes after its inclusion the concoction took on a light gray hue. Steam arose from the potion. This gas was quickly bottled. Spells were run to test its magical properties.”

Rose’s eyes drooped shut.

“As expected the vapors contained certain healing properties. Although it is too early to determine if these fumes can help treat asthma, the preliminary results are promising. Still further tests needed to be run to ensure that it was safe for use on human subjects.”

Rose opened her eyes and gasped.

Severus set down the journal and grinned. “Do not fret, Little One. When you awaken I will read to you what became of the tests.”

Rose blinked. No, I want to finish the article now. It's very interesting, even if I have no idea what’s going on.

Severus kissed her forehead. “Good night, my precious Rose.”

The child yawned and closed her eyes.

Severus stood over the crib, watching the infant’s chest rise and fall. Right now Rose was so innocent, so trusting. To her there was no such thing as a Death Eater, nothing as ugly as a Dark Mark. For all she knew Daddy had no existence prior to fatherhood. In her mind the two Wizarding Wars had never occurred.
A child of six formed in his mind. Her glacier blue eyes pierced his very soul.

“You’re nothing but a Death Eater!” she shouted.

Severus shook.

“My real Daddy is a war hero. He worked with Harry Potter to save people. Everyone loves him. Nobody likes you. You’re nothing more than some thief who used to kill people and say mean things to students. You liked Voldemort, and you were happy to serve him.”

His heart stopped.

“Mummy shouldn’t have made you my daddy. She needed to choose someone else! I wish she’d worked things out with my real Daddy instead of leaving me with you!” The child took a deep breath. “You kept me away from my real daddy, you, you horrible man. I’m so angry that I’m with you and not my real family. Mummy was stupid to marry you.”

Severus’ chest burned.

“I hate you Daddy!” the six-year old shrieked. “I hate you!”

“Severus?”

He startled.

“Severus.”

He spun around. “Hermione, I didn’t hear you come in.”

"Severus, what is bothering you?"

"Why would you think anything is bothering me?"

She approached him. “You’ve been distant this evening.”

“I apologize,” Severus replied.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Yes,” Severus answered, “Nothing is troubling me.”

“Most nights we talk for hours about the potential lycanthropy cure. Tonight you’ve barely said two words to me since you’ve come home,” Hermione replied. “Something is bothering you.”

“Nothing is bothering me.”

“If that’s true then why were you so deep in thought you couldn't hear me enter?”

Severus sighed. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a box and a handkerchief. Hermione cocked her head.

“Arthur paid me a visit in my apothecary,” Severus began.
“He did?” Hermione asked.

Severus pulled out his wand and muttered a spell. The box and the blanket grew. “He wants me to give these to Rose for Christmas.”

Hermione drew closer and inspected them. “What are they?”

“According to the spell I cast, inside the box are a broom and a onesie. This,” He handed her the blanket. “Is Ron’s old baby blanket.”

Hermione’s eyes grew. “I thought Ron threw this out.”

“So this is his actual baby blanket?” Severus asked.

“Yes, it is. Molly showed it to me a few times when she was discussing the joys of motherhood and demanding that I marry Ron,” Hermione choked back her laughter. “Ironic, isn’t it?”

Severus nodded. “Indeed it is.”

Hermione took the blanket in her hands. “Anyway, Ron wanted his old blanket burned. He said it reminded him too much of growing up poor. Molly couldn’t bear the thought of what she considered a family heirloom being destroyed, so she kept it in a chest for safe keeping.”

“Now Arthur wants Rose to have it,” Severus replied.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Why?”

“Because Ronald cannot have any further children.”

“He can’t?”

“No.”

“I see,” Hermione mumbled.

Severus threw down the box. “Of all the crimes Voldemort asked me to commit kidnapping wasn’t one of them. I’d never fancied myself a kidnapper, but I suppose when you get in the right sort of situation you can become anything you bloody well please.”

“Kidnapper?” Hermione exclaimed. “You think you’re a kidnapper?”

Rose opened an eye.

“Where on earth did you get the idea that idea from?” Hermione asked.

“My name is on the birth certificate of a baby who does not share a single strand of DNA with me,” Severus argued. “I have gone out of my way to keep Rose from the Weasleys, her biological family. I’d say that qualifies as kidnapping.”

Hermione’s eyes watered. “Are you saying that you regret putting your name on Rose’s birth certificate?”

“No,” Severus answered, his voice much more tender. “I will never regret agreeing to help raise Rose.”

“Then why are you bringing up her birth certificate and the Weasleys?” Hermione choked.
Rose closed her eyes.

Severus took a deep breath and glanced over at his daughter. “When Arthur came into the store he proceeded to remind me of how tragic Ron’s sterility was. When I indicated my lack of sympathy he pleaded with me to take a DNA test if there was any doubt as to who Rose’s father was. I believe his exact words were, ‘don’t be the man we believed you to be during the war.’”

Hermione furrowed her brow. She made a fist and growled, “How dare he bring up your past?”

“He was merely pointing out the truth,” Severus replied.

“No, nothing about what he said was right,” Hermione fumed. “There was no reason whatsoever to say something so atrocious.”

“Was he wrong about who I was?” Severus asked.

“Yes,” Hermione answered. “You were a spy for the Order. Every single day you lived under the threat of discovery. Arthur was a bureaucrat. He wouldn’t know the first thing about how much you sacrificed for us. How-how dare he even think to bring up the mask you were forced to wear?”

“I was not always a spy. I did not join the Death Eaters for the sole purpose of defeating them.”

“You saved the world.”

“Would you look at me?” Severus demanded.

“I am looking at you,” Hermione argued.

Severus tore off his left sleeve, exposing the scar left by his dark mark. “Do you not see this?”

“Yes.”

“I took this mark willingly.”

“You were an angry young man when you took that mark. You have changed a great deal since then.”

“I was an angry young man who killed muggles for sport.”

“Then you helped defeat Voldemort.”

“My repentance doesn't change what I’ve done.”

Hermione wiped her face.

“Do you want to know how I spent this entire afternoon?” Severus snapped.

“How did you spend this afternoon?”

“I cast every detection spell I could think of on these gifts to ensure these items weren’t cursed. Voldemort taught me every curse I tested for. In Voldemort’s name I brewed poisons, cast unmentionables, invented hexes, and even on occasion insulted you.”

“You were playing a role,” Hermione answered. "It was too dangerous to show kindness."

“I did not start out as playing a role,” Severus answered. "I was initially. I am cruel! I am a heartless
Hermione put a finger on his lips. “I will have no more of this nonsense in our home.”

Rose opened her eyes again.

“You are not a kidnapper, and you have sufficiently atoned for your past mistakes,” she continued. “I will never allow you to say otherwise.”

Severus backed away. His voice was almost inaudible. “In a few years Rose will hear about the war and my role in it. She will hear that I tortured muggles, that I believed in pureblood supremacy, and that I allowed one of my colleagues to die right before my eyes. What will become of our family then?”

“Nothing, because Rose will understand that after the war you took on a new role, namely that of her loving, doting father. She will see the man who loved her when she was being difficult, who read potions journals to her each night, and who stood by her when most people had abandoned her. Rose will see that vulnerable, kind man you try so desperately to hide from the world, yet we’ve been so privileged to see,” Hermione answered.

Severus’ throat constricted. “How certain are you of that?”

“If I wasn’t certain of those facts then I would not have allowed Rose to choose you as her father,” Hermione answered.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “Rose chose me?”

Hermione grasped his hands. “After we met at that coffee house and I demanded we go on a date, I stepped outside and nearly had a panic attack. I considered myself the craziest with alive. I told myself that my plan to marry you would never work, that I was only setting myself up for heartache. I was convinced you would never accept me or my child. Then I felt Rose move within me.”

“You did?” Severus asked.

She squeezed his hands. “It was the first time I’d ever felt her move.”

Severus rubbed his thumb along her fingers.

“In that moment I realized Rose had faith in you. She had faith in us. Even when we were doubtful that a marriage between us could work, she held out hope. I’d say her instincts were correct.”

Rose shut her eyes and smiled.

“Rose chose you to be her father. From the beginning she wanted you to raise her. I believe she made an excellent choice.”

“I am proud to be her father,” Severus whispered. “And I will never regret agreeing to raise her and putting my name on her birth certificate. She will always be my precious baby girl. Still, when she finds out that I am not biologically related to her…”

“I’m not sure that day will ever come,” Hermione cut in.

“What?”

“I don’t think I’m going to tell Rose the truth about her paternity.”
Severus released her hands. “You aren’t?”

“No,” Hermione’s voice was stronger. “I’m beginning to believe she is better off believing you to be her biological parent and having no contact with any of the Weasleys whatsoever. Things will be simpler that way, and she will have far less drama in her life.”

“I take it that means we’re returning the gifts to Ronald then.”

“Well, not all of them.” Hermione pulled out her wand and began running it along the blanket’s surface.

“What are you doing?” Severus asked.

“Checking for a DNA detection spell,” Hermione answered. “The last thing we need is for Rose to gain a mark which will expose her as a Weasley.”

“Agreed,” Severus answered.

Hermione grinned. “All clear.”

“Thank you,” Severus replied.

With a snap the blanket was emerald. “I think it will irritate the Weasleys more to know their blanket is now emerald than it will to simply give it back.”

Severus’ lips curled up. “You are wicked, witch.”

She put her wand away. “I’m only doing what I feel is best for my family.”

He scooped her into his arms and captured her lips. She held onto him until her lungs screamed for air.

Rose yawned again.

“As far as Rose will know,” Hermione whispered. “We met in a cafe on a crisp autumn day. I was upset about some dunderheaded think Ron did, and you were trying to enjoy your time away from staring at the walls of your run down shack.”

“No, I was trying to avoid the reality that I had a very promising potions project which would never be completed due to lack of resources,” Severus answered.

“Regardless,” Hermione continued. “I was quite clumsy and bumped into you. Thankfully neither of us was carrying a hot beverage.”

“It didn’t stop me from snapping at you,” Severus added.

“Indeed you gave me quite the tongue lashing,” Hermione laughed. “And I gave you one in return. The poor barista didn’t know what to make of us. She gave us our coffee, but just our luck it was during the afternoon rush.”

“How I hated being forced to share a table with you,” Severus replied.

“Indeed, but you needed to sit, as did I. After a few moments of silence I began attempting small talk with you.”

“You annoyed me greatly, but eventually I caved, if only to stop your incessant chatter.”
“Yet you liked my chatter so much we discussed potions for three hours.”

“It was three and a half hours.”

“My mistake.”

“But I wish it had been four.”

“Really?” Hermione asked.

Severus shrugged. “You were the only pleasurable companion I’d had in years outside of the Malfoys.”

“And you were the only pleasurable companion I had aside from Ginny.”

“We both craved companionship, and somehow we found it in each other.”

“Indeed. The day after our initial meeting, I owled you asking for another coffee,” Hermione replied. “You waited two days to get back to me, but you did agree to it.”

“It was the most pleasant invitation I’d received in years,” Severus admitted. “Which is why I continued accepting you increasingly frequent invitations.”

“But we were becoming too obvious,” Hermione noted. “I suggested that we start meeting in muggle bookstores, which we did.”

“Then one night we stayed out too late, and I didn’t want to go home,” Severus began stroking her back. “You suggested a hotel room so we could continue our conversation.”

“It was rather forward of me,” Hermione purred before brushing her lips against his.

“I was hoping you were being forward, but I didn’t want to pressure you. Then you ordered a bottle of the finest Riesling from room service.”

“I transfigured a couple of those pads into wine glasses and we began to drink.”

“I still remember that little bit of wine on your upper lip,” Severus kissed her in the lips. “I went to wipe it off….”

“And something came over me,” Hermione breathed. “I’d been lonely for so long, and I needed a true companion, someone who was my equal. You were so intelligent, so caring, so perfect for me.”

“You were the first person to look beyond the facade I’d worn for so long. For the first time I was fully myself. In that moment I wanted to give you all of me. I,” He pulled her closer. “I still do.”

“I want you to have all of me as well,” Hermione breathed.

Severus leaned in and whispered in her ear, “Rose will be asleep for the next two hours, will she not?”

“I believe she will,” Hermione rasped.

“Excellent,” Severus purred.

He lifted Hermione up. She giggled before planting a trail of kisses along his neck. He carried her to the bedroom and shut the door behind him.
Rose opened her eyes and scowled. Daddy was supposed to finish reading his potions article to her, not play with Mummy. Still, Daddy was happy again. For that Rose was grateful. Besides he did tell her a bedtime story, even if he hadn’t meant to.

She curled her toes. As nice as the coffee shop story was, she couldn’t help but prefer the story of the Half Blood Prince. It struck her as far more romantic.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It's deeply appreciated.
Dust leapt out of the wooden chest. Molly wheezed and coughed. After taking a few moments to clear her lungs, she began shifting through the chest's contents.

“Is something wrong, dear?” Arthur called.

Without looking up, Molly pulled out a blue blanket and set it on the ground. “I don’t know.”

Arthur stepped into the bedroom. “What do you mean you don’t know? Shouldn’t you know if something’s the matter?”

"Probably," Molly admitted. "Though I'm honestly confused more than anything right now."

"Confused about what?"

Molly poked her head up. “I think someone’s been rummaging through this chest, though for the life of me I don't know why anyone would want to do such a thing.”

Arthur’s heart stopped.

An owl pecked on the window.

“I’ll get it,” he began.

“Fine,” Molly stuck her head back into the chest.

While Molly continued placing toys and blankets outside the chest, Arthur allowed the owl inside. It perched on a dresser.

“You have taken your Wolfsbane tonight, correct?” She called.

“Yes,” He replied

“Yes,” he muttered.

Arthur glanced at the owl’s leg. His stomach sank.

“Arthur, do you have any idea where Ron’s baby blanket is?” Molly asked.

“No,” He detached the package and parchment from the owl. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, I want to give Ron the blanket tomorrow when he returns home,” Molly removed a teddy bear and a stuffed dragon from the chest and placed them on her left.

“Why do you think he needs his old blanket?” Arthur asked.

“I thought it would be nice for him to have something familiar around, something which reminds him of happier times,” Molly replied.

“Dear, I don’t know if he wants his old baby blanket back. It might be best to about it and focus on making his transition to life outside the hospital as smooth as possible.” Arthur jammed the box in his
“Would you listen to yourself?” Molly argued. “His old baby blanket is just the thing he needs to feel right at home.”

Arthur bowed his head.

“Oh Ron will never say it aloud, but his blanket has always been a source of comfort for him. Ron loved his baby blanket so much growing up. I still remember him running around this house with his thumb in his mouth and his blanket in his hand. He couldn’t go anywhere without it. It will bring him such joy for him to hold it in his arms again.”

Arthur glanced in Molly’s direction. She hadn’t looked up yet.

“I suppose Ron may appreciate having his old blanket back,” Arthur drawled.

“I knew you’d see things me way,” Molly answered.

With a sigh Arthur tore open the package. His stomach churned upon seeing only the broom and the onesie inside.

“Who was that owl from?” Molly asked.

Arthur turned the box upside down. The onesie and the broom fell out, but no blanket. He held the box up to his eyes. Still no blanket. He poked around in the box.

No blanket.

“Arthur, who is the owl from?” Molly asked.

“Uh, it’s related to work,” Arthur answered. "Nothing which you would take the slightest interest in."

"Very well then."

He picked up the miniature objects and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he ripped the seal from the parchment.

_Dear Arthur,_

_Thank you for the blanket. Severus had been wanting some emerald fabric in order to make Rose a Slytherin wall banner for Christmas. We had a devil of a time finding anything of the appropriate length, but this will serve our purposes perfectly. We appreciate your donation._

_The room spun around Arthur_

_What I do not appreciate is your constant defamation of my husband’s character. Think what you will of me, but Severus is nothing short of a hero who is sacrificing time away from his family to brew Wolfsbane for ungrateful wizards such as you. If you ever insult my husband again, you will answer to me. Between my contributions to winning the Second Wizarding War and my fortune, I will have little trouble procuring an excellent defense attorney who will ensure that I am cleared of all charges, whatever they may be._

_-Hermione Snape_

“Where is it?” Molly hummed. “Where is Ronald's blanket?”
Sweat formed on Arthur’s brows. “M-maybe Ron threw it away.”

“No, he would never do that,” Molly poked her head up. “Besides he’s have to get in the trunk in order to reach it. How could he have done that?”

The owl let out a hoot.

“I, I don’t know,” Arthur answered.

Molly stood up. “Do you have any idea of where the blanket could be?”

He could hear Severus laughing while Hermione etched a silver snake onto the now emerald blanket.

“Arthur?”

He leapt up.

“What does that letter say?”

“Uh, nothing.”

Molly crossed her arms over her chest.

Arthur stiffened. “Ron’s blanket isn’t in the chest.”

Molly cocked her head. “Where on earth could it be then?”

“It,” Arthur swallowed. “It’s under the Snapes’ Christmas tree.”

“What?” Molly screeched.

Arthur stepped back.

“Why ever would it be within ten kilometers of the bloody Snapes?”

“I gave it to Severus to give to Rose.”

“You did what?”

“I gave it to the Snapes to give to Rose.”

“What possessed you to give the Snapes Ron’s baby blanket?” Molly snapped.

“Ronald cannot have children anymore. He is destined to be childless like his uncle before him. Rose means something to him though. She seemed like the perfect person to receive his blanket,” Arthur explained.

“Rose is not related to him!”

“We don’t know that for sure!”.

“W-what?”

Arthur put his hands behind his back and paced around the room. “I’ve given Rose’s paternity a great deal of thought these past few weeks. Hermione was loyal to Ron, almost to her own detriment.”
“She strung Harry and Viktor along in one of her twisted mind games.”

“She was a teenager. Teenagers are liable to behave immaturely from time to time.”

“Well now I’m beginning to think she grew up believing that kind of behavior was acceptable. I-I never should’ve allowed Hermione back into our lives,” Molly shouted. “I should’ve protected Ron from that wench!”

“Ronald didn't always need protecting from Hermione. For a time she made him very happy,” Arthur continued. “There was nothing Hermione wanted more than to be Mrs. Ron Weasley. Now, now we’re supposed to believe that she was sleeping with Severus Snape the entire time?”

“Yes!” Molly exclaimed.

“What if,” Arthur stood still. “Ron, he might’ve been frightened by the responsibility of a child. He was so focused on his career and enjoying his youth. A child may have been too much for him, so he left Hermione. It may have taken him almost dying to realize what a huge mistake he’d made.”

Molly shook her head. “No, we raised Ron better than that. I raised Ron better than that. He is a virgin who’s never so much as seen a woman naked. He’s told me on numerous occasions that Rose is not his and I believe him.”

"Ronald may have been too scared to tell us the truth. He may have feared the potential disgrace of fathering a child outside of marriage," Arthur answered.

"How dare you call our son a liar!" Molly shouted. "The only liar around here is Hermione Snape."

"Indeed, Snape," Arthur resumed pacing. “Snape needed the Prince fortune, and he needed it quickly. Minerva was closing in on it fast, and he needed help to keep her away. His inheritance would be secure if he married Hermione. Perhaps, perhaps Snape doesn’t care as much about bloodlines as he’s led everyone to believe. Maybe he would go into a marriage with a woman facing disgrace and willingly raise a child he knew was of no biological relation to him.”

“Snape is a dirty old man who took advantage of Hermione,” Molly snarled. “No, forget that. Hermione wanted experience so she seduced Snape.”

Arthur stopped. “Experience?”

“Yes, experience,” Molly huffed. “She wanted to pleasure Ron when they consummated their marriage, so instead of reading magazines like a normal witch, she decided to get some more hands on training.”

“Are you sure she’d cheat on Ron for the sole purpose of, uh, pleasing him on their wedding night?”

“Ron wasn’t supposed to find out. It was only because Hermione forgot to take her blasted contraceptive potion that she was caught.”

“How could Hermione, one of the most careful people I’ve ever met, forget something like a contraceptive potion?”

“Who knows? Maybe Snape convinced her not to take it.”

"Why would he do that?"
"Who knows how Snape thinks? All I know is that Rose is a Snape! She is the spawn of an ill-advised affair between Hermione and her former potions' professor. The sooner everyone goes back to believing Rose is a Snape, the sooner we can all find peace!"

"I only want us to know who Rose's father is for sure," Arthur argued. "I want hard proof that our son is truly deluded. If we knew the truth we could being to help Ron."

"I don’t need proof!" Molly yelled. "Rose isn’t Ron’s child!"

"What if she is?" Arthur asked.

"Well then I guess she has her first heirloom," Molly’s eyes widened "What, what exactly have the Snapes done with that blanket?"

Arthur gulped and gave her the letter. Halfway through the note Molly burst into tears and wailed, "My poor Ronniekins. When he finds out Rose has his baby blanket he’s going to be devastated!"

"I-I didn’t know they do something like that."

"When will it end for poor Ronald? Those, those monsters! How could you put that blanket in their hands?"

Arthur approached her. "It was never my intention to hurt anyone."

Molly’s eyes hardened. "I’m going to march right over to the Snape Mansion and demand they give us back the blanket right now! By the time I’m done with them they’ll wish they’d never seen it."

"I don’t think that’s advisable," Arthur answered.

"Why not?" Molly demanded.

"Do you really want to spend Christmas in Azkaban because of a baby blanket?" He asked.

Molly burst into tears again. "I want my son healthy again. I want him to be sane and forget the stupid Snapes. I want you to be healthy, for Fenrir and his werewolves to disappear, and for everything to be normal again!"

"I want that to," Arthur sighed.

"What I want most of all is a time turner. I want a time turner to prevent Hermione Snape from ever having contact with my family. I want to go back and time and tell myself that Hermione is a horrible bitch who will only bring misery to this family. I want…I just want everything back to normal."

Arthur embraced his wife. "I know dear, I know."

"It’s not fair," Molly sobbed. "Ron shouldn’t be in the state he’s in. He should be starting his life with a wonderful witch and Hermione should be rotting in hell."

"I know," Arthur whispered.

"Ron’s delusional, the medical bills are piling up, and the repairs to his mansion aren’t cheap. It’s getting difficult to pay for everything. How, how can we prevent him from going broke? How do we get rid of this delusion?"

"I don’t know," Arthur admitted while he rubbed her back.
Molly sniveled. Somehow, everything was going to turn out all right.

She’d make sure of it.

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“Thus one can definitely concluded that cheddar cheese made in Racine, Wisconsin has the most healing properties of any magical cheese,” Severus replied.

“Ooh,” Rose mumbled.

Severus stared at her. “You aren’t fatigued in the slightest, are you?”

She squeaked and grabbed Severus’ cape.

Severus exhaled. “Despite the fact that I am not working tomorrow, I would like some sleep within the next few hours.”

Rose held his cape closer to her chest. She looked up at her father, as if to ask him what game they were going to play now.

“Reading has not made you drowsy, and I do not know many appropriate lullabies for an infant. So I will have to get creative,” Severus mused aloud.

Rose lifted up Severus cape.

Severus pulled out his wand and muttered “Colloportus.”

Rose gasped after the door shut. She dropped the cape. Severus smirked. “No, that is not my plan for getting you to sleep. I only wish for your mother not to see what I am about to do.”

Rose’s lips curled up. What secret are you going to share with me now?

“Expecto Patronum.”

Rose stared at the mist floated from her father’s wand. It was a little like snow, except it was gas, not flaky. Snow wasn't blue either, but this mist was.

“This is a patronus,” Severus began as the mist began to take on a shape. “It is the best defense against many types of dark magic.”

Rose stared at the figure.

“A patronus can be almost any animal or magical creature. Some don’t take on any particular shape,” His voice lowered. “My patrouns is now an otter.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. Why did he sound so disappointed?

“I suppose it only makes sense for my patronus to change. My old patronus was a doe, but it would be disrespectful to your mother if that were still its form. Anymore when I cast the spell I think of her and you. Perhaps that is the reason for its current shape.”

Rose reached for the glimmering otter.

“Still an otter seems too playful for me. It’s too innocent,” Severus mused. “Then again I’m unclear what patronus would suit me.”
Rose glanced up at him again.

“Regardless, at some point I should tell your mother my patronus has changed. Then again if I did so she’d begin barraging me with questions about it, the foremost of which would be as to what its new form was. No, there are certain questions I do not want to answer. The last thing my marriage needs is for my unrequited romantic sentiments to destroy my friendship with your mother.”

Rose waved at the mist. What was Daddy’s problem with telling Mummy about the part-partru-uh, whatever he called this thing? The mist was beautiful. Rose was very certain Mummy would love it as much as she did.

“Here is what I will do,” Severus replied. “If you promise to be quiet and not tell your mother about my new patronus, I will make the otter dance. In theory this will tire you out. If not, then it is never harmful for one to practice a powerful defensive charm.”

“Ooh,” Rose cooed. 

With a few waves of the wand the otter began darting around the room. Rose laughed as her eyes trailed it.

Severus chuckled at his daughter’s antics. Sometimes even he was surprised at the affection which bubbled up every time he interacted with the girl. He could never thank Hermione enough for granting him the privilege of raising Rose.

“I’d been lonely for so long, and I needed a true companion, someone who was my equal. You were so intelligent, so caring, so perfect for me.”

Severus stared at a speck on the wall. What if Hermione and he had met in that coffee shop in October, not early April? Would they have conversed with each other for four hours, or would they have walked out wishing to never lay eyes on each other again? Could Severus have stayed out of his way long enough to deepen their newfound friendship, or would he have said something which drove her away? Would she have left Ron for him? Unlikely, but perhaps if he could’ve proven to her that he was the man she seemed to believe he was, then perhaps he would possess her heart.

Rose’s giggles interrupted his musings.

“Do you like my otter?” He asked.

Rose’s laughter intensified.

There was no point in dwelling on what may have happened had their coffee shop story been true. What was important was he was holding his daughter, his wife was asleep in their bed, and none of his former students were aware that his new Patronus was a playful, dancing otter.

It was as close as to perfection as Severus had ever come.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It’s deeply appreciated!
"Mum! Dad!" Hermione exclaimed as her parents ducked through the floo. "Happy Christmas!"

"Happy Christmas!" Muriel cheered, embracing her daughter.

Wilford set down their bag full of presents and dusted the soot from his clothes. "Happy Christmas baby girl."

"Happy Christmas to you as well." Hermione hugged him. "Oh it’s so great to see you two again."

"Likewise," Wilford replied.

"Happy Christmas," Severus greeted as he appeared from the hallway with Rose in his arms.

"Happy Christmas to you as well," Wilford replied.

"Oh my! Rose has gotten so big!" Muriel exclaimed. She walked over to Rose and reached for the child. "Yes, you're much bigger than when I last saw you."

Rose sneezed.

"Oh dear! I forgot about the soot," Muriel apologized as she lowered her arms.

"There is nothing to apologize for," Severus replied.

"You'd think wizards would be capable of finding a cleaner way to travel," Wilford grumbled. He ran over to Muriel and began dusting her off. "We are so sorry for dirtying up your floors like this."

"It's no big deal," Hermione soothed as she flicked soot off her dark green sweater. "The elves will clean it up."

Muriel gave a her a look. "You have the elves clear up after you?"

Severus answered, "Their only desire for Christmas was not to feel useless; thus we’ve been giving them menial chores and having them to cook all day."

Mr. and Mrs. Granger turned to their daughter.

Hermione exhaled. "They aren’t in favor of being freed, nor are they in favor of not doing menial chores. Hence we had to reach a compromise."

"Okay," Wilford drawled.

"Enough about elves," Muriel replied. "Rose looks adorable in that little red dress with the holly trim!"

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

"But black, Severus? On Christmas?" Muriel asked.

"My red and green robes are at the cleaner's."
"It's a good thing, then, that I bought you a nice holiday jumper!"

Severus’ eyes grew. Muriel burst out laughing.

“I was hoping we would skip the tradition of tacky sweaters,” Severus began in a weak voice.

“Oh come on Severus,” Muriel replied. “Tacky sweaters are one of the great joys of Christmas.”

“I’d beg to differ,” he grumbled.

"Please don't scare my husband away," Hermione winked. "He's the only one I have."

"I'll try not to torment him too much,” Muriel promised.

Severus leaned down and muttered into Rose’s ear, "You have very strange grandparents."

Rose just grinned.

"She's three months old now, isn't she?" Wilford asked.

"Yes, she is," Hermione answered.

"She's growing up so fast," Muriel marveled.

“A little too fast for our liking,” Hermione admitted.

"May I please hold my granddaughter now, Severus? I’ve been looking forward to doing so all day,” Muriel answered.

Severus smirked. "Only if you promise not to make me wear the holiday sweater."

Muriel chuckled. "Deal."

Severus handed Rose to her grandmother. Wilford leaned over the baby and cooed, "Hello little girl. How have you been?"

Rose giggled as Wilford began to tickle her tummy.

While Wilford played with his granddaughter, Muriel glanced out the window. "Is that snow I see?"

"Yes, we've already had several centimeters this year," Hermione replied.

Muriel’s eyes glistened. “It’s so good to see snow in December again. As much as I love Australia it isn’t quite Christmas without snow.”

"I don't miss shoveling snow every Christmas," Wilford demurred, "But the snow does add atmosphere."

Severus remarked. "It looks beautiful so long as it stays outside."

Hermione choked back her laughter. “Must you be such a grump on Christmas?”

“You act as if you expected me to act differently than usual.”

“No, I suppose I should not expect you to be anything other than your grumpy yet somehow endearing self.”
"Endearing?"

"Master! Mistress!"

All eyes fell onto the elf who had appeared in the threshold of the hallway.

"Dinner is ready."

Hermione turned to her parents. "Are you two hungry?"

"Very much so," Wilford answered.

"Good," Hermione replied. "Because the elves have quite the feast planned."

Muriel looked down at her granddaughter. "Where should we put Rose? Surely she isn't using a high chair yet."

"No, she usually plays in her playpen while we eat," Hermione took Rose from Muriel. "She doesn't like to feel left out."

"You were exactly the same way as a baby," Muriel replied. "If you were awake, you were with us. Otherwise you threw quite the tantrum."

Hermione fidgeted. "Good thing I grew out of it."

Severus’s lips curled up. "Indeed. This marriage would be quite miserable if you spent half of it crying for your parents."

She nudged him in the arm and gave him a playful huff.

Severus teased, "And here I thought Christmas was a time of peace on Earth, a time free of violence."

"You deserved that and you know it," Hermione argued.

Now it was Severus who was laughing.

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"I’m still impressed with how well those elves can cook," Muriel began as she followed Hermione down the hallway. "That was some of the best turkey I’ve ever tasted."

"They certainly outdid themselves this evening," Hermione stopped before pointing into a room. "Here’s Rose’s nursery."

Muriel stepped inside and took a moment to scan the room. "It’s lovely dear. I especially like the emerald carpet. It’s quite unique."

Hermione replied, "I honestly would’ve preferred scarlet."

"Because of Gryffindor?" Muriel asked.

Hermione nodded. "It’s almost as if the mansion itself is pushing Rose into the Slytherin house. Before I knew it she’ll be running around yelling about how she must be a Slytherin just like Daddy."
Muriel chuckled as she walked over to the golden crib. “Would it be so awful if Rose took after her father?”

“She already has in many ways,” Hermione replied. “She can mimic his facial expressions almost perfectly, she loves her black onesies, and she is obsessed with his cape.”

“Oh?” Muriel asked. “What is it about his cape that she likes?”

Hermione stepped closer to the crib. “I don’t know, but one of her favorite activities is to wave it around as if she’s pretending to wear it. It’s beyond adorable.”

“I’d imagine so,” Muriel replied.

Hermione bent over and repositioned Rose's pillow.

Muriel cleared her throat. “Have you taken to heart what we discussed before you left?”

“What are you referring to?”

“You know exactly what I’m referring to.”

Hermione released the pillow. “I’ve considered revealing my feelings to Severus, but the timing is never right.”

“When is exactly is the timing going to be right?” Muriel asked. “When he’s over a hundred and he can barely hear you?”

“That’s a possibility.”

“Hermione!”

“What, this…what Severus and I have isn’t like what you and Dad have. I didn’t marry Severus for love, and he’s never claimed to want anything more than friendship.”

“I’ve seen the way he looks at you. He absolutely adores you.”

“Maybe he’ll adore me for the next few months, or years if I’m lucky,” Hermione argued. “But marriage lasts a lifetime. We could easily live to be over a hundred, perhaps two hundred. Eventually he is going to find me an obnoxious know-it-all and a pushy partner. He’ll wonder why he ever married me.”

“Of course he’ll find you obnoxious,” Muriel answered.

Hermione frowned.

“Just like I often find your father to be the most obnoxious man on the face of the earth. Some days I still want to throttle him, but then I take a deep breath and remember why I fell in love with him.”

“I’m sure Dad doesn’t do anything too obnoxious, at least not like me.”

“Don’t be so sure. Some days he can be a crotchety old man who has a bit of a temper,” Muriel couldn’t suppress her grin. “Yet he is also compassionate towards others, especially his younger patients. He knows how to stand up for what is right, and isn’t afraid to stand up for those in need. Occasionally he buys me flowers, just to show he cares. Those are the things I remember when I’m upset with him.”
Hermione gulped.

Muriel put a hand on her daughter’s shoulder. “Severus will behave the same way towards you. When he grows irritated with you he will remember how intelligent you are, how wonderful a mother you are to Rose, and how you’ve stood by him when the rest of the world tossed him aside. He will remember how much you love him, and how much he loves you.”

“I suppose he might,” Hermione whispered.

“No honey, he will,” Muriel promised. She embraced her daughter. “You are worthy of love. Never forget that.”

“No,” Hermione whispered. “I won’t ever forget that again.”

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Rose giggled as she waved Severus’ cape back and forth. He shook his head. “I know most babies take more of an interest in the boxes than in the toys they receive, but I fear the most pleasant part of Rose’s day will be playing with my cape.”

“Ah.” She raised the cape as high up as she could.

At the edge of the kitchen table, the elves continued to collect the plates and sort out the leftovers.

Wilford scooted his wooden chair closer to the infant. “It’s beautiful to see Rose with a father who loves her so much.”

“I am very fortunate that Hermione entrusted me to raise Rose,” Severus replied.

“Don’t you ever forget how lucky you are,” Wilford warned.

“I will not,” Severus vowed.

Wilford tickled Rose’s stomach. She burst out laughing, but still held onto the robe.

Wilford glanced up from his game with Rose. “Thank you so much for taking such good care of my daughter and granddaughter.”

“There is no need to thank me for doing what comes naturally,” Severus answered.

Wilford removed his hands for Rose and locked eyes with Severus. “I don’t think you understand how good you’ve been for Hermione.”

“Believe me,” Severus replied. “I’ve benefited far more from our arrangement than she has.”

Wilford sat up straighter. “I wouldn’t be so sure of that.”

Severus raised an eyebrow.

“One year ago I barely recognized my daughter. She was frazzled, making excuses for everything that bum fiancé of hers did, and almost never smiled,” Wilford began.

Severus twisted his lips. “Hermione didn’t smile?”

Wilford shook his head. “Every time she grinned it didn’t reach her eyes. It was like she was half dead. The only dream she had left was to be a wife and a mother.”
“At least she accomplished that,” Severus noted. “However unconventional the journey may have been.”

“Yeah, and that eh,” he gave Rose a quick glance, “Jerk, almost ruined that for her. What should’ve been the happiest time in Hermione’s life was almost destroyed by some buffoon who wouldn’t understand personal responsibility is it came up and bit him in the...uh, head.”

“It is beyond me how anyone could ever consider running out on a child, especially one as precious as Rose.”

“Ronald Weasley is an overgrown toddler who needs to get his head out of his, uh, butt,” Wilford replied. “Honestly when Hermione wrote us and said you were the father of her child, I won’t lie, part of me was relieved. Perhaps you weren’t the nicest professor on the face of the earth, but at least you were an actual adult.”

Severus smirked.

“Granted, I don’t approve of your teaching methods, and I think you went a little overboard on the greasy git thing,” Wilford gave his granddaughter a smile. “But it’s clear you’re much gentler with Rose than you were with any of your students. I couldn’t have asked for a better father or my granddaughter.”

“I just hope I am not making any major mistakes,” Severus admitted.

“Well,” Wilford began. “There is one way to improve upon your parenting.”

“How?”

“Tell my baby girl that you love her.”

“I tell Rose I love her every day.”

“Not your baby girl, my baby girl.”

Severus’ heart raced. “I do not think that would be advisable.”

“Why not?” Wilford asked. “When a man and a woman are in love with each other the way you and Hermione are, they tend to declare their feelings out loud.”

“Hermione does not love me,” Severus replied.

“Have you not been listening to a thing I’ve been saying?” Wilford asked. “Until the day she married you, Hermione was miserable. Now, she’s glowing. When she laughs her eyes sparkle. When she talks about you her entire face lights up. When she’s with you she’s relaxed, and not worried about the next idiotic thing which will come out of your mouth. The only thing that would make her happier than she is now is to know that her husband is in love with her.”

“I do not think she would appreciate my affection.”

“Why would you think that?”

“I was her professor.”

“Do you think she forgot that fact the day she married you?”

“I say and do idiotic things when I become emotional.”
“So does everyone else. That doesn’t make you special.”

“I,” Severus bit his lower lip. “I am a git.”

“If you’re such a git then why is Rose so content to be in your arms?” Wilford asked.

Rose cooed.

“Babies are excellent judges of character.” Wilford continued. “If you were as horrible as you claim to be she would be wailing her head off right now, not playing with your cape.”

“Perhaps,” Severus admitted.

Rose giggled before pulling the fabric closer to her body.

“Please Severus,” Wilford asked. “Please consider giving my baby girl a husband she knows loves her, and my granddaughter two parents who aren’t afraid to express their emotions. It would be the best Christmas present either of them will ever receive.”

Severus opened his mouth.

“Severus! Dad!”

The men turned to the doorway.

“Is Rose still awake?” Hermione asked.

“Ooh!” Rose called

Hermione laughed. Severus couldn’t help but smile.

“Well then let’s get to opening her presents, shall we?” Hermione asked.

Rose stuck Severus’ cape in her mouth.

“Yes,” Severus replied. “Let’s do so before she ruins my cape.”

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Rose lay next to the Christmas tree surrounded by a mountain of new toys, several articles of clothing, and a Slytherin house banner. Blissfully clad in her very own onesie—which came complete with a tiny black cape—she held her toy snake and the new toy unicorn Daddy had bought her.

"Severus, I'm trying to picture you going into the toy store to buy that unicorn," Hermione began.

"I polyjuiced myself to look like Draco," Severus deadpanned.

"You're kidding," Hermione gasped.

"I would not joke about a matter so serious," Severus replied. "The last thing I needed was to run into former students twittering on about how sweet it was that I was in the girly section of a toy store looking for a stuffed animal; thus I polyjuiced myself to look like Draco.

"Where did you get the hair from?"

"He gave me the hair, himself."
"Severus!" Hermione scolded.

"Do not look at me like that," Severus replied. "I bought her the unicorn, did I not?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "You'll never let go of your reputation as an intimidating git, will you?"

"No," he admitted.

Wilford and Muriel chuckled as they remembered having a similar conversation over twenty years ago.

"We've opened all of Rose's presents, haven't we?" asked Hermione.

"I believe so," Severus answered.

"Then why don't the parents open some of our presents," Muriel suggested.

"Great idea," Hermione answered as she ducked under the tree to retrieve a flat package. "Happy Christmas, Severus."

"Thank you," he replied before carefully removing the paper. He grew quiet when he unveiled the moving image of his daughter squirming in her mother's arms. "Hermione…"

"The Malfoys let us borrow their photographer after their annual Christmas photo shoot. We thought you might enjoy some real pictures of Rose and me," Hermione explained.

Severus pulled out a second photo of Hermione holding Rose in front of a fire place decorated with garland and ornaments. They were smiling as the fire crackled behind them. "They're beautiful. Thank you Hermione."

She kissed him on the lips. "Thank you, Severus. Thank you for allowing me the honor of being your wife and for adopting Rose as your daughter."

"Trust me, you two have given me far more joy than I ever could've imagined," Severus answered before returning her kiss. "It's been a great joy to have you two in my life."

"Who wants to hand out another present?" Wilford interrupted. Perhaps he should've told Severus to reveal his emotions after the in-laws left…

Severus handed Hermione a package. "This is for you."

"Thank you." She turned to Rose. "Want to help Mummy unwrap this?"

Rose reached for the paper, but could not tear it off. "That's OK, I'll get it started," Hermione whispered before taking over the process. She unwrapped the package and gasped. "Severus! It's just what I wanted!"

"What is it?" Wilford asked, leaning in to get a closer look.

"It's a photo album!" she answered as she passed along the dark green book with gold trim. "It's beautiful! Thank you Severus!"

"Happy Christmas, Hermione."

"Happy Christmas, Severus," Hermione replied. "May this be the first of many more together."

"Happy Christmas, Hermione."
“Indeed,” Severus whispered.

Rose grinned, knowing full well they would all spend many more Christmases together.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It is greatly appreciated!
“Do you like the Christmas lights?” Hermione whispered as she positioned Rose to nurse.

"Uh," Rose responded before latching onto her mother.

Hermione hummed. “If we’re lucky we’ll persuade Daddy to keep the tree up for another week or so. Contrary to what he might say, there’s no law that says a Christmas tree has to come down the second the clock strikes midnight on New Year’s Day. It won't kill him to allow it to stay up for at least a few more days.”

Rose began to suckle.

Hermione gazed down at her daughter and began stroking the soft strands of hair on her forehead. Rose took a moment to look up at her mother before returning her attention to her midnight snack.

"Hermione?"

"Severus," she answered in a soft voice.

He approached them.

"Are you finished with your brewing?” She asked.

"Yes," Severus sat beside her on the couch. "I checked the bedroom, but you were not there. I suspected you would be here with Rose seeing as to how much you love that tree.”

"What can I say?” Hermione replied. "The salesperson was right: the tree has bonded with our family."

"Sure it has," Severus muttered, though there was a gleam in his eye.

Hermione grinned. “There’s something peaceful about the glistening ornaments and the soft lights, wouldn't you agree?”

“Despite my newfound appreciation for Christmas, I believe the tree should come down sometime before December of the next year.”

“Would that be so terrible of we kept it up year round?” Hermione asked.

“Perhaps not,” Severus admitted. “Although I still think the tree itself should be placed in the backyard sometime before the Summer Solstice.”

“You're right,” Hermione replied. "I know a few good spots where we could put it. If you want I can go out with you tomorrow and show you what I have in mind."

"I am in favor of that," Severus replied. "Although tomorrow will be quite chilly. Perhaps next week would be a better time to transplant the tree."

"I would think so," Hermione answered.
The room fell silent for a few moments.

"We're usually in bed at this hour," Severus noted.

Hermione sighed. "Yes. I was actually planning to sleep through the New Year's Eve countdown for the first time in…Merlin, it has to be at least fifteen years. Still Rose got hungry, so here we are. What time is it?"

"Eleven forty-five," Severus answered.

Hermione chuckled. "We may make it to midnight yet."

"Perhaps we will," Severus whispered as he placed an arm around her shoulders.

A comfortable silence ensued, only occasionally broken by the sound of Rose's nursing.

"You appear to be lost in thought."

Hermione looked up with a wistful smile. "I was just thinking about how many changes this year has brought."

Severus tilted his head back. "I never would've imagined this time last year that I'd be married."

"You've enjoyed our marriage though, haven't you?" Hermione asked with a tremor in her voice.

He kissed her on the cheek. "I can honestly say that this has been the best year of my life, thanks in large part to you and Rose."

"This has been a very pleasurable year for me as well," Hermione answered.

"I am glad to hear it," He replied.

"It's odd though, because this time last year I never would've pictured myself sitting on a couch in front of a Christmas tree with you and our daughter." Her voice lowered. "In fact, it was probably about this time last year that Rose was conceived."

Severus stiffened. For the most part he didn’t dwell on Rose’s conception; yet he was all too aware that most fathers reveled in the memory of how they created their child. While Rose’s biology was irrelevant to him, if she were to ever learn of her true origins her biological family's rejection would wound her. Perhaps his love may be enough to make up for Ronald’s abandonment, or so he hoped…

"Don't get me wrong, I have no regrets," Hermione continued, interrupting his musings. "But when I think about who I was last year, it's almost as though I'm thinking about a different person. I had let so many of my dreams go by the wayside and I was expecting so little of myself. I was pathetic. My dream of being a transfiguration professor had all but died, as well as my dream of ever completing my university degree. The only accomplishable goal I had left was to pass elf rights legislation. I'm still determined to do it, but after living with our house elves, I've begun to see things differently. Before, I never took into account that perhaps they were happy in their line of work, and that all they really want is a little respect. Perhaps when I get the chance to bring up the issue of elf rights again, I should include Bud, Tilly, and some of the other elves in the drafting of the proposal."

"That would be wise," Severus agreed, relaxing once more.

"I also feel like a different person because last year I was under the illusion that Ron actually loved
me, in spite of the fact that we would engage in the pettiest of arguments. I can't tell you how many times I ran to Harry just to calm myself down after one of our rows." Hermione's eyes welled with tears. "Then there was the fact that I could see and talk to Harry anytime I wanted."

Severus pulled her closer. "I wish Mr. Potter was still among us, as well. He was a good man who perished much too soon."

"He would've loved Rose," Hermione answered, glancing down at her baby, who was still nursing. "I sometimes imagine him telling Rose stories about the war, Hogwarts, and the various cases he solved. He would've tried to teach her about Quidditch as well, much to our chagrin."

Severus smirked. "I'll bet he would've eventually given her the Marauder's Map and the Invisibility Cloak, just to see how much trouble she could get into at school, maybe even at home."

Hermione laughed. "Could you imagine Rose roaming around the school pulling the same types of stunts I did?"

Severus shook her head. "Potter would've taught her every single trick he knew, if only to spite me for being such a git to him."

Hermione laughed harder.

Rose whined and clung tighter to her mother.

Hermione took a deep breath and calmed herself. "I know the Invisibility Cloak was stolen, but what about the Marauder's Map?"

"I read somewhere that it was donated to a museum with other memorabilia from the war."

"That probably was not the fate James and Sirius intended for it when they created it."

"No, it was not."

Hermione shook her head. "I wonder if that's what Harry would've wanted."

"I doubt it," Severus admitted.

"I suppose it doesn't matter what he would've wanted now," Her throat constricted. "There isn't a day that goes by where I don't miss Harry."

"I know," Severus replied.

Her lips curled into a smile as the tears flowed from her eyes. "He would've been amazed, seeing what a great father you are. He thought I was insane for marrying you, and entrusting you with my child. Still, if he saw you with Rose today, I know he'd feel differently."

"I would hope so."

"I know he would."

Severus swallowed. "I'd like to think that somewhere Potter can see us, and that he's watching over Rose in his own way."

"You think he is?" Hermione asked.

"I know he is," Severus replied.
Rose detached herself from Hermione's breast and hiccuped.

"All done?" Hermione cooed.

Rose frowned as her stomach began to bubble. Hermione patted her on the back, eliciting a healthy burp. Severus watched the scene unfold before him. "If there is one thing I've done right in my life, it was agreeing to marry you and raise Rose."

"Thank you," Hermione whispered.

The clock from across the room began to chime.

Hermione whispered, "It's midnight."

"It is," Severus replied before leaning in to capture her lips.

"Happy New Year, Severus."

"Happy New Year, Hermione. May the New Year bring happiness and peace."

"Indeed."

Rose let out a whimper.

Severus chuckled. "Happy New Year, Rose."

He kissed her on the cheek as Hermione added, "Happy New Year. I love you, baby girl."

Rose grinned, satisfied that she was once again the center of her parents' universe.

"I love you so much, Little Rose," Severus whispered.

Rose let out a rather large yawn. Her eyes began to droop. Hermione repositioned her. "I'll put her in her crib."

"I'll meet you in the bedroom," Severus replied as he stood to leave.

"It's funny, but I'm not all that tired anymore," Hermione began as she gave Severus a mischievous look.

He smirked as he sauntered towards the door, favoring her with a backwards glance. "Neither am I."

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately I'll be traveling tomorrow, so I won't be able to post another chapter. I should be able to get one up on Friday, but if not I apologize.

Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
"Ms. Jackson!"

"Yes Mr. Bosworth?" Farrah asked before stepping into the Minister of Magical Games and Sports' office.

"I believe that I have finally done it," he announced.

"Done what?" She asked.

Mr. Bosworth's smile grew. "I have just completed the finishing touches on an advertising proposal for the International Gobstones Tournament. With any luck, I'll be able to convince Minister Shacklebolt to approve and help promote it. Finally, Gobstones will get the recognition it deserves!"

"With all due respect," Farrah tapped her foot a few times before continuing, "Do you really think the Ministry will promote another tournament while Fenrir is still at large?"

"Of course they will," Mr. Bosworth answered.

Farrah raised her eyebrow.

"People are tired of looking over their shoulders. They need something to take their minds off of Fenrir's latest string of attacks."

"I suppose they might."

"During the Great War, Quidditch provided a much-needed distraction, but Fenrir's attack last October has soured their appetite for that sport. The International Gobstones tournament, however, will be held in Romania, where lycanthropy is still rare. It will be the perfect distraction from all the recent drama!"

"That makes sense," Farrah mused. Fenrir would need to begin planning for his next major attack immediately...

"All I have to do is take these papers to Kingsley…” Mr. Bosworth began.

"I'd be happy to deliver them," Farrah volunteered.

"Although I appreciate the sentiment, I need to deliver these personally. He may have questions which only I can answer."

"But the Minister may be in the middle of a meeting, and may not have time to answer your questions. He may also consider it too presumptuous for you to go by yourself when an assistant could do it just as well."

"True."

"Mr. Bosworth," a secretary cut in. "Your wife is on the floo."

Mr. Bosworth glared at the intruder. "Can it wait?"
"She insists it's an emergency," the secretary replied.

"What could be more important than the International Gobstones Tournament?"

"Apparently she splinched the cat's tail when she apparated from the vet's this morning. They want to operate now, but she's afraid he's too old to undergo surgery. She needs to know what to do."

"I knew I should have taken the cat, myself," he grumbled before looking in Farrah's direction. "Go ahead and take the files down to his office. He knows how to contact me if he has any questions."

"Thank you," Farrah replied, with a smile on her face.

Mr. Bosworth sighed. "Please ask Minister Shacklebolt to contact me as soon as he looks over the material. We'll need to start planning our fliers soon."

"I will," Farrah promised.

Mr. Bosworth followed the secretary to the floo, cursing his wife under his breath. Farrah collected the documents and skipped down the stairs to Shacklebolt's office. Once she reached the door she paused and placed her ear on the doorway. Upon hearing a familiar voice, her face lit up.

"Hermione is convinced that liquid silver is the key ingredient."

Farrah rubbed her hands together. Perfect!

"Liquid silver?"

Farrah checked the hallway for signs of life. Seeing none, she took out an extendable ear and slid it under the door.

"I thought silver was ineffective against lycanthropes," Kingsley continued.

"That's what was previously believed, but further research indicates that silver can temporarily reverse the transformation process on those parts of the body with which it makes direct contact," Severus explained.

"Huh."

"Liquid silver alone cannot prevent a full transformation, but mixed with a few other ingredients there’s a good chance it could at least allow the creature to be more human than lupine. Under the right circumstances, liquid silver has the potential to cure lycanthropy altogether."

"It sounds promising," Kingsley replied. "Do you have any idea what you would combine with it?"

"No," Severus admitted. "Although Hermione and I do have some possible candidates."

"Like?"

"Aconite looks promising. Dragon’s tongue could be useful as well."

"Well stay on it," Minister Shacklebolt replied.

"I will."

"Thank you again for all your aid, Severus. It sounds like things are progressing quite well."
"They are progressing much quicker than I expected thanks to Hermione's assistance," Snape answered. "She was the one who researched the properties of liquid silver."

“She is a brilliant witch,” Kingsley noted.

“That she is,” Severus answered.

They fell silent. Farrah took out her earpiece and shook it. Just then she heard Minister Shacklebolt say, "The Ministry is not asking too much of you, is it?"

"Why would you ask such a question?"

"You're trying to raise an infant daughter so sleep is undoubtedly at a premium in your house. You're also trying to brew for your new business in addition to brewing large quantities of Wolfsbane for those who have already been changed. Then of course there's adjusting to married life… Merlin you haven't even been married for a year and you're spending hours on end in your laboratory. This is supposed to be the honeymoon stage of your marriage, not the point where you barely speak to each other."

"Hermione, Rose, and I are doing quite well given the circumstances."

"Still this cannot be easy. If you need to scale back on your duties I would understand."

"Although I appreciate your concern, it is not warranted. As mentioned before, Hermione has been aiding me in my research. I have also hired a cashier to work in the store. As for Rose's sleep patterns, let’s just say she’s finally sleeping for longer than four hours at night."

Kingsley chuckled. "Thank Merlin for large favors, but I'm all too aware that we’re placing no small amount of pressure on you."

"Honestly, nothing you require could compare to what Dumbledore and the Dark Lord demanded of me,” Severus replied.

"Ah, well, at any rate I thank you for all that you've done. The Wizarding World will owe an even greater debt to you and Hermione when all is said and done."

"We are happy to be of service."

Farrah heard chairs scrape and footsteps approach. She yanked on the earpiece and hid it before the door opened.

"Ms. Jackson," Severus scowled. "Why am I not surprised to see you skulking about here?"

“Hello again Professor Snape. It's great to see you again,” she replied with a grin much too wide for Severus’ liking.

“Indeed,” he drawled.

“You’ll be very interested in my latest delivery to Kingsley," she began. “Mr. Bosworth is trying to promote the Gobstones tournament in Romania."

"How riveting," Severus deadpanned.

“Your mother played Gobstones, did she not?” Farrah asked.

Severus’ expression did not change.
“Anyway, preparing this tournament is far more interesting than speculating about whether or not next year's Quidditch season will be canceled,” Farrah replied.

“Indeed,” Severus muttered.

"Speaking of Quidditch,” Farrah continued, “Is Ron Weasley still claiming custody of Rose?”

Severus’ eyes flashed in rage. "Ronald Weasley is insane. The sooner he gets help, the better."

"I'm sure it must be hard on Hermione though,” Farrah answered. “The love of her life wants her back, but she is bound by loyalty to the adopted father of her child. It's romantic in a twisted sort of way."

Severus fought the urge to hex the wench into oblivion. “Rose is my daughter, not Ronald’s.”

“Oh right, your affair,” she answered. “I almost forgot about that. You did such a great job of hiding it that if not for Rose, no one would ever suspect it had happened.”

Severus gripped his wand.

“Tell me, does Hermione ever feel guilty about cheating on Ron?” Farrah asked. "His life went downhill so soon after their breakup. Surely she feels some responsibility towards him and wonders if she could do more to help him through this difficult time."

Before he could say anything, Kingsley interjected, "Do you have something for me, Farrah?"

"Yes. It's from Mr. Bosworth," she began in the most professional voice she could manage.

“Let me see what it is then,” Kingsley replied.

She glided past Severus. He turned and strode down the hallway, robes billowing behind him.

Gods what he wouldn't do to be free of Farrah, Ron, the Weasleys, and Fenrir once and for all! Maybe if he gave them each a Portkey to Irkutsk he’d have a moment’s peace.

Chapter End Notes

So I found some time to update (it's amazing what you can get done on an airplane).

Thank you for all the support! As always it is deeply appreciated.
Raquel sat behind the counter, her eyes fixed on the customer creeping down aisle three. Although he was dressed in a fashionable golden robe, he continued to throw glances her way. After his fifth glance he exhaled, selected two potions, and made his way to the checkout.

"Is there any way you could cut me a break on the sober up potion?" he asked. "I can barely afford one vial, but I really need it now."

"Sorry. I don't have the authority to reduce prices," Raquel answered as she heard the floo flare behind her.

"Can you give me a discount now and make me pay more for another potion later?"

"Sorry, but I can't do that."

The man sighed as he took out his wallet. "I had to give it a try."

Raquel took the potions and examined the price tags. "That will be eighteen sickles."

"Damn," he muttered.

After digging for change in his pockets, the man paid for his potions, collected the vials, and turned to leave.

"Have a nice day," Raquel called after him.

"I'll try," he muttered.

"Excuse me."

"Yes?"

A woman holding a bundle of blankets approached the counter. "Is Severus here?"

"No," Raquel answered. "He went out for the morning."

"Do you have any idea when he'll return?" the woman asked.


"There's nothing to apologize for. I'll just wait for him here," the woman responded.

Where had Raquel seen this woman before? At the Leaky Cauldron? Was she a relative of her landlord? One of her brother's ex-girlfriends? Merlin knew he had exes everywhere...

The bundle of blankets shifted.

"Could I get you something while you're waiting?" Raquel asked.

"Thank you for the offer, but I'm..."
A soft noise emanated from the blankets, which shifted to expose a tiny hand. Within a few moments a head poked out.

Raquel gushed, "Oh, your baby is so adorable!"

"Thank you," the woman answered. "Her name is Rose."

Raquel gasped. "You-you're Hermione Snape!"

The woman grinned.

"I-I saw some pictures of you in your husband's office when I interviewed for this job."

Hermione attempted to settle a squirming Rose. "Hopefully they showed my good side."

"You looked very lovely in them," Raquel replied.

"Good to know," Hermione muttered while Rose continued to twist her body. "I take it you're Raquel Garcia."

"I am," Raquel replied as Hermione positioned Rose on her shoulder to shake the woman's hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"The pleasure is all mine," Hermione replied.

"You, you're a legend even in Spain. I cannot believe I am meeting the same Hermione Snape who helped defeat Voldemort!"

Hermione shrugged. "There's nothing that special about me. To be quite blunt I feel more indebted to you then you must feel to me."

"H-how?"

"My husband was working himself ragged before you came. Now that someone can mind the store he can focus his attention on other things."

Rose squeaked and grew still.

"You have been an absolute god-send," Hermione concluded.

"Well thank you," Raquel replied.

Rose let out a whine and moved her arm towards the door. Hermione chuckled. "I know you’re impatient to see Daddy, but he isn’t here yet."

Rose frowned.

"Don't worry," Hermione whispered. "He'll be here soon enough."

"Your daughter is so cute," Raquel commented. "She looks just like you, too."

"Thank you," Hermione answered.

"She's three months old, right?"

"That's correct."
“She’s very curious for a baby her age.”

“Rose can be a handful,” Hermione replied as the child began to finger her mother's hair. “But she’s usually a pretty good baby.”

“Eeh,” Rose replied.

"She seems like a very good baby,” Raquel noted.

Rose stared at the vials on the shelves. Although she’d been in this place before, she’d never gotten this good a view of anything beyond the counter. Those objects on the shelves…their colors were all so pretty! She wondered if Daddy or Mummy would allow her to play with any of them...

"Is Mr. Snape expecting you soon?” Raquel asked.

“Yes,” Hermione answered. “We were supposed to go out for lunch at a new muggle Chinese restaurant ten minutes ago, but he’s clearly running late from whatever errand he's running.”

“He said something about going to a Ministry meeting,” Raquel replied.

“I see,” Hermione mumbled.

Rose began reaching for the shelves.

Hermione's lips curled up. “Well, I’m sure whatever mood he may be in will be made better once he lays eyes on this little one. She has a way of brightening his day.”

Rose grunted. Grabbing the pretty objects from here was out of the question, and she didn’t have the slightest clue how to move over towards them. Mummy and Daddy still didn't understand that she wanted more in life than love, a bottle, and a fresh nappy, so they would be of no help. She needed to get those colorful objects, but how? Maybe if she tried waving her finger a certain way Mummy would finally understand her needs...

“I’m sure he’ll be very happy to see her,” Raquel answered as she called into question the rumors she had heard about Severus Snape being a cold husband and a distant father.

"Ahh,” Rose began as she pointed to the potions on the shelf.

"Yes," Hermione cooed. "Those are potions. That's what Daddy makes."

Rose stopped and looked at her mum. Daddy made these potions? These were the things he kept encouraging her to create when she was older? A smile lit up her face. Of course she'd brew potions! She could almost see herself twirling around in her black robes with a purple vial of her very own freshly-brewed potion in her hand.

Wait a minute. How did one go about brewing a potion?

"Are you enjoying your job so far?” Hermione asked.

"Very much, thank you," Raquel answered.

"Severus hasn't been working you too hard, has he?”

"I enjoy a challenge. So far he hasn't given me anything I couldn't handle. He really is a good and fair employer."
"I'm glad to hear it. My husband can sometimes be very particular, which puts more than a few people off. Still if you're willing to learn from him and do things his way, you should get along famously. He seems pleased with your service so far, so it's nice to know you seem content with your job as well."

Raquel nodded. Were these the same Snipes everyone believed were on the verge of divorce? Mrs. Snape spoke of her husband with obvious affection, and Rose was more than content with life. Maybe the patrons at the Leaky Cauldron didn't know her boss as well as they thought they did.

"Severus mentioned that you were taking classes at the university," Hermione began.

"I am," Raquel answered.

"What are you concentrating in?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know yet exactly," she answered. "I was thinking potions or arithmancy."

"I loved arithmancy," Hermione replied. "I was quite good at it a few years ago."

"Do you still dabble in it?" Raquel asked.

Hermione gave her a wistful look. "If I had more time I would. Having a baby is much more time consuming than I'd anticipated though."

"But I'm sure she's worth every minute," Raquel replied.

"She is," Hermione answered before the chime on the door rang.

Rose turned to the source of the noise and crowed, "Ooh!"

"Severus! There you are," Hermione began.

"I apologize for my tardiness," Severus replied. "I ran into an unforeseen complication."

Hermione cocked her head.

"Ms. Jackson finagled her way into the Minister's office this morning. Before she left, she offered a slice of commentary on our marriage," Severus replied.

"Ignore her," Hermione replied, planting a kiss on his cheek. "We both know she has nothing better to do than stir up poo."

Severus laughed. Rose raised an eyebrow. What was so funny about poo?

Severus took Rose from Hermione and held her up so she could see him eye to eye. "I see you're staring at the potions. Do you like them?"

She smiled and cooed, "Ahh."

He chuckled and kissed her on the forehead. "Someday I'll teach you how to brew everything in this store."

Rose beamed. Let's start now, Daddy!

Hermione shook her head. "Rose will go to school knowing more than her potions professor if you have anything to say about it, won't she?"
“Of course she will,” Severus replied with a spark of pride in his eyes.

Hermione sighed. She pulled out the car seat and enlarged it. "I'm hungry. We should probably head off to lunch before you decide to take Rose into your laboratory."

"Perhaps Rose wants to be in my potions' lab," Severus replied.

Hermione shook her head.

"What would you rather do Rose? Would you rather eat or go into my lab and brew a potion?" Severus asked.

Rose squealed and giggled the second the word, "potion" was uttered.

Hermione chuckled. "What am I going to do with you two?"

"I haven't the foggiest clue," he admitted.

"Let's go and have lunch," Hermione suggested.

Severus turned to Raquel. "Please keep an eye on things while we're gone, Ms. Garcia. You may take a lunch break when we return. My absence should be no longer than one hour."

"Okay," she answered.

With that, the couple left. Raquel bit her lower lip, wondering what the patrons at the Leaky Cauldron would say if they saw the same Severus Snape she had just witnessed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It's deeply appreciated.
“You did such a great job of fooling Daddy,” Hermione began. She pointed her wand at the ground. “He genuinely believed we only left the house to have lunch with him.”

Rose smirked while Hermione enlarged the tiny gray stroller on the ground.

“Now onto our actual reason for leaving the house.” Hermione set Rose into the stroller. “Today, you’re going to learn one of most important skills in life; how to be a great shopper.”

“Oh,” Rose replied with wide eyes. Maybe this shopping thing would be the first step in brewing a potion.

“Your father hates shopping. He’s going to tell you that,” Hermione frowned and lowered her voice until it was the same pitch as Severus’, “Rose, shopping is one of the greatest irritations in life. It involves interacting with dunderheads, who are pressing up against you in a line or demanding you buy some object you do not need. I cannot stand such people in the least. Therefore shopping should only be done on the occasions when it is completely necessary, and never done purely for pleasure.”

Rose burst into a fit of giggles.

Hermione’s voice returned to normal. “Your daddy, though a great man, is a grump about many things, shopping being one of them. If he wasn’t such a grump he’d realize that shopping is a very enjoyable activity. There’s nothing quite like the rush of finding that one item you’ve spent all day searching for, or discovering that perfect gift to give your overly cantankerous yet somehow endearing spouse.”

“Ah,” Rose muttered. It didn’t sound like this shopping thing involved potions, but if Mummy liked it Rose supposed she could give it a try.

Hermione began pushing the stroller down the road. “The first step of shopping is to ascertain what one needs and desires. Daddy’s birthday is in three days. I need a birthday present for him, but I’m clueless as to what he desires. He’s very cagy about these sorts of things. I’d say his most ardent birthday wish is that we forget he is another year older. That is completely unacceptable. It will confuse you to no end if we celebrate my birthday, lavish gifts upon you on yours, yet Daddy’s goes by without so much as a card. No, he is going to celebrate his birthday and enjoy every moment of it, even if it kills him to admit he’s having a good time.”

“Eh,” Rose answered.

“Glad you agree.” Hermione tapped her finger on the handle of the stroller. “Still I wish I had some clue of what to give him.”

Rose grabbed her black blanket and pulled it closer to her chest. Daddy would like a potion, or maybe one of your kisses. Maybe you could tell him you love him. He’d really like that since he loves you a lot too.

Hermione groaned and stopped the stroller. “I’m a terrible wife, Rose. I fall asleep next to Severus every night, wake up next to him each morning, have long conversations with him throughout the day, yet I’m clueless as to what he would like for his birthday. I’m madly in love with a man I can’t
even shop for properly. What kind of wife doesn’t know what to get her husband for his birthday?”

Rose frowned. Maybe Daddy was right about this shopping thing. So far it had only caused confusion and sad feelings. Perhaps they should return home and forget about his birthday. If Mummy asked Daddy nicely, he may let her play with his otter. The otter was so pretty...

Oh wait, Daddy didn't want Mummy to know about the otter. Why was that again?

“I know his feelings for me won't change if he receives a lousy gift, but he's gotten such a rotten deal in life and deserves a few nice things every once in a while. Severus doesn't value me for what I can give him, but I would love to set aside a day which is all about him, a day where he can feel special and know how deeply we care for him. He deserves something exquisite, something only I would know to give him. He gave me such a beautiful glass rose for my birthday. How could anything be as special as that glass,” Hermione’s eyes lit up. “Glass!”

Rose startled.

“There’s hope for your daddy's birthday yet!” Hermione cheered.

"Oh?” Rose muttered.

Hermione continued, “Rose, we’re going to go to a fun store, one even Daddy likes.”

Rose smiled. Maybe this shopping thing would be fun after all.

Hermione resumed pushing the stroller down the avenue. “Daddy has almost everything, but one object has eluded him. He might only use this as a decoration, but he could find it quite useful in his line of work…”

“I don’t think Ron needs another blanket.”

Hermione stopped dead in her tracks.

“Nonsense,” another voice trilled. “He is disconsolate after your father so foolishly gave away his old blanket. I know we can never fully replace it, but we can give him one which looks similar to it.”

“I think he was more upset about the Snapes turning it into a Slytherin banner than he was about losing the blanket itself.”

“No, he would’ve been devastated even if the Snapes had used the blanket properly. Your father though, ooh your father! I have no idea why he thought Snape’s bastard baby would deserve to even look at that blanket.”

Hermione looked to her left. There were four people huddled in the center. There was no way to push a stroller around them.

“The Snapes only use others until there’s nothing left to give. They’ll get their comeuppance though. People like them always do.”

To her right the street was clear.

Hermione charged to her right.

She made it less than five meters before the wheels hit a pothole. The stroller jerked up. Rose screeched. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Hermione halted.
“There, there baby girl,” she whispered. “It’s okay.”

Rose continued wailing.

Hermione walked over to Rose and bent down. “Mummy’s very sorry little Rose. She should have been more careful and not run so fast.”

Rose continued to scream. Hermione unfastened Rose and held her against her chest. “Shh, shhh. Mummy’s here. She won’t let anyone hurt you.”

Roe sniffed and began quieting herself.

“I am so sorry Rose. I am so sorry for almost hurting you.”

“You wench!”

A chill ran down Hermione’s spine.

“You! You, you hussy.”

Hermione turned around. In a quiet voice she answered, “Hello Molly.”

“Don’t you dare ‘hello’ me!” Molly retorted.

Molly’s son glared at Hermione and Rose.

“You, I ought to hex you for what you’ve done to my son. It’s one thing to break his heart, but to run off with your potions’ professor. You, you bitch!” Molly shouted.

Hermione gripped Rose tighter. “What did you just call me?”

“A bitch,” Molly repeated.

As calmly as possible, Hermione set Rose inside her stroller. She fastened Rose into it before rising.

“I should’ve known you were nothing but trouble the second you walked into Ronald’s life. All you’ve done is ruin his life, you bitch!” Molly retorted.

“Don’t you dare call me the same name you called Bellatrix,” Hermione hissed.

“Well if the shoe fits you should be forced to wear it,” Molly growled.

Rose stared at the red-headed man who was approaching her. He gave her a look she’d never seen before. It was like he was trying to determine who she was, and whether or not he should like her. Rose gave him a lopsided grin, though she didn’t quite know if the gesture was appropriate.

“I am a lot of things Molly, but a bitch is not one of them,” Hermione retorted.

“You slept with Severus behind my son’s back, then you asked him to raise your bastard child. I’d say that qualifies you as a bitch.”

“You have yet to see bitchy behavior out of me.”

“Oh I think you’ve surpassed almost every woman in the Wizarding World in terms of terrible behavior No decent woman would think to pass off Professor Snape’s child off as that of a Quidditch star.”
Hermione put her hand on her wand.

"What on earth made you think you could get away with it?" Molly pushed her son out of the way. "Look at Rose! She doesn’t look a thing like Ronald."

Rose shook. This woman’s expression wasn’t like anything she’d ever seen before. She’d seen Daddy when he discussed being irritated with a customer, and she’d seen Mummy when she was annoyed with Daddy because he was being a grump. Still there was always love in their eyes, always some indication that they were happy with each other and with life. This woman though, it was as if she only knew anger.

"Don't shout at my daughter," Hermione warned.

"Don't you dare try to change the subject! Do you see a strand of red-hair on her?" Molly shouted.

Rose recoiled. This woman’s expression was one of pure hatred. Rose didn’t know why this woman was so hateful, but she wanted Mummy to make her go away and for Daddy to keep her away.

"She doesn’t look a thing like Ron! She-she has Severus’ hands and fingers. She has his mouth. There’s no way she’s a Weasley. She’s nothing more than the child Snape tried to throw away!"

"Don't you dare imply that my husband didn't want his daughter!" Hermione retorted. "Severus has loved his little girl since the moment he learned of his existence. He has been nothing short of an amazing father to her!"

"If he's such an amazing father why did you try to keep him from his precious daughter?"

Rose sobbed. Why did this woman not like her? What had she done to upset her? Why wouldn't she go away?

"Honestly Severus must be so sickened by you. How could he not find you revolting given how you almost kept him from his child?"

"That’s enough!" Hermione growled as she pulled out her wand.

"That poor girl is going to grow up hating you. She’ll know that she should’ve had a wonderful dad like Ron, not some greasy git who used to torment children!"

"Taci dracului!"

Molly lips fused together. She placed her hands over where he mouth should be, but felt only skin. The red headed woman’s eyes bulged.

"What have you done to her?" Mr. Weasley shouted.

Hermione eyes were fixed on Molly. "I am done listening to you."

Molly jumped up and down.

"You are going to listen to me now," Hermione continued.
Molly glowered at her before darting towards the stroller.

“Petrificus Totalus!”

Molly crashed to the ground.

“Oh Circe!” Mr. Weasley shouted.

Rose’s tears dried.

Hermione loomed over Molly. “For fourteen long years I have endured nothing but emotional abuse at your hands. You pretended to be a mother figure to me, when in reality your love came with conditions almost impossible to fulfill. I listened to many of your antiquated wizarding views on house elves and a woman’s role in the house. I was scoffed at when I disagreed with them. At the slightest hint of disloyalty I was tossed aside like so much garbage. I mean when I was a fourth year, Rita Skeeter told you I was stringing along Harry and Viktor. Rita bloody Skeeter gave you this news! In what universe is she a reliable source of information?”

Mr. Weasley trembled.

“Yet you still shunned me and insulted me behind my back. You cut yourself off from me, and only deigned to speak with me when Harry demanded you to do so. Not once-not once-did you ever show any real remorse for what you’d put me through.”

Rose’s breathing evened out.

“As terrible as that transgression was, I could forgive you for that. After all you were only standing up for your son.” The last word was spat out. “Oh isn’t that a rich excuse, standing up for your son instead of, you know, disciplining him when he was clearly in the wrong.”

Mr. Weasley took two steps backwards.

Rose gasped. Mummy may make these bad people go away yet.

“Yet you stood by and allowed Ronald to abuse me,” Hermione faced the other Weasley. “You both heard the way he talked down to me, the way he insulted me in front of his Quidditch teammates, and the way he flirted with other women in front of clicking cameras. You heard the rumors of his various other women, yet you did nothing.”

Mr. Weasley bowed his head.

“You knew about his affairs too, didn’t you?” Hermione asked.

“I, I had my suspicions that he may have gone too far with a few of his groupies.”

“Yet you never shared them with me.”

“I, I thought he’d grow out of it.”

“His affairs went on for seven years. Seven long years!” Hermione yelled. “When was he supposed to grow out of it? When we got married, when we had our fifth child, when he was on his death bed, when?”

“I don’t know,” Mr. Weasley admitted.

“For seven torturous years he made an absolute fool of me. He spat on our so-called love at every
opportunity. I, I could’ve gotten sick from some disease his lovers passed on. One could have gone crazy and hexed me. I could've been in serious danger, yet you said nothing!”

Mr. Weasley shook his head.

“You two,” Hermione choked. “You claimed to love me. You claimed to love me, yet I've seen you treat dishrags better than you've treated me.”

Rose scowled.

“You allowed me to think love was getting your heart stomped on at every opportunity. You allowed me to think love was allowing yourself to be demeaned at every opportunity because eventually, things will work out. You allowed me to think it was normal for my partner to run out to bars every night because I was too boring for him. You allowed me to think behaving atrociously when with one’s potential in-laws was acceptable since once the marriage occurred everything would change. Once I was married everything was going to be perfect even when all evidence pointed to the contrary. You claimed to love me, yet watched the light die in my eyes. You watched Ron slowly grind me into dust, and you told me you loved me.”

Mr. Weasley took a few more steps back.

“I only have one regret in life,” Hermione began. “And that is not running into Severus’ arms sooner.”

Mr. Weasley raised his head.

“I am through being intimidated by you,” Hermione concluded. “Say what you want about me. Go to the papers and tell them what I’ve done. I don’t care anymore. I. Don’t. Care.”

Rose huffed.

“You cannot hurt me anymore. I won’t let you. I will never allow you to hurt my daughter and my husband, not again. If you so much as look at them cross-eyed, you will answer to me. Is that understood?” Hermione demanded.

Mr. Weasley nodded.

Hermione glanced down at Molly. “I’ll assume you said yes as well.”

Molly didn’t move.

“That’s probably about as good as I’m going to get out of you. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to continue my shopping,” Hermione replied.

“Oh right, your mum. The body binding curse should wear off within the hour. Molly’s mouth will return in two hours. Make sure she doesn’t eat or drink until later on in the evening. She’s liable to bite her tongue off if she does,” Hermione explained.

“Yes,” Mr. Weasley squeaked.

Head held high, Hermione strolled along the street with her daughter.

Rose cheered and waved her arms in the air. The bad people were finally gone!
Hermione paused and stepped in front of Rose. She bent down until they were at eye level. Then she placed three fingers on her daughter’s shoulder. “I am so sorry you had to be witness to all of that. Molly and George are bullies. They make people feel bad because they are not happy with their lives.”

“Oh,” Rose cooed.

“Right now they are angry with Mummy, and because of that they may try to make you feel bad.” Hermione kissed Rose on the cheek. “Don’t let them do that. You are so loved Rose. Your daddy and I love you so much. We know you are very special. If you ever doubt yourself come and talk to us. We promise to listen and show you why you are worthy of love.”

“Ah,” Rose replied. She grabbed onto her mother’s arm.

If you and Daddy ever feel as if you are not special, please talk to me. I’ll make sure you two know that you are the best Mummy and Daddy in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I deeply appreciate it!
“Hermione Snape got Mum pretty good,” Bill hummed as he ran his wand across Molly’s face.

Molly sunk further into the faded orange couch cushions.

“Is there any way to give your mother her mouth back within the next few minutes?” Arthur asked.

She tilted her head upwards and raised her fist.

“NOPE. The only counter curse is time,” Bill frowned. “The half Blood Prince made sure of that.”

Arthur’s eyes grew. “This is one of Snape’s hexes.”

Bill put his wand back into his pants pocket and nodded.

Molly's arm fell until her hand brushed the carpet.

“Bastard,” Ron hissed.

Bill readjusted the flat pillows underneath Molly. “There’s not much we can do other than wait for Mum’s mouth to return. It shouldn't take more than four hours for her to return to her old self.”

She rolled over until she could no longer see her family.

Ron squeezed the handgrips of his walker. “We have to do something. We can’t just let Hermione get away with this.”

“How exactly do you plan to fight her?” Arthur asked.

“We, we’re going to call the aurors and have Hermione arrested!” Ron sat up straighter in his chair. "Yes, we'll call the aurors. That will teach her not to mess with us.”

“Don’t bother.”

The group turned to George, who was sitting in a leather recliner.

“It won’t do any good to go after Hermione Snape. She’ll only receive a warning, if that,” George replied.

“Then we’ll call the media and tell them what she’s done. Rita will make Hermione’s life a living hell if she finds out about this,” Ron argued.

“Hermione just gave birth to Snape’s child. She’s used to the media circling around her and waiting for her next misstep. A few *Daily Prophet* reporters will be nothing more than a minor nuisance,” George replied.

“Are you sure about that?” Bill stood up. "Knowing her, she'd be horrified if the Wizarding World found out she wasn't the wholesome, perfect woman she's portrayed herself to be.”

George choked back his laughter. “Do you really think anyone considers her perfect now? Everyone
knows she cheated on Ron with the surliest man alive and tried to pass her baby off as a Weasley. How much more scandalous could she be?"

Molly rolled over and looked at Arthur.

Arthur shook his head. “George is right. It wouldn’t do us any good to arrest her.”

“The heck it won’t,” Bill growled. “I have connections in the Ministry. We can make these charges stick.”

“Can any of your contacts brew Wolfsbane?” Arthur asked.

Bill closed his mouth and sat down.

“She, she wouldn’t dare deny any of us Wolfsbane, would she?” Ron asked.

George answered, “Hermione wouldn’t think to do it, but if Snape wanted to protect his wife he would do it in a heartbeat.”

Ron snarled. “It isn’t fair.”

“What isn’t fair is Mum running up to a woman with a baby stroller and verbally harassing her,” George replied.

Arthur whispered, “Is that what really happened?”

“Yes,” George answered.

Bill shook his head.

“We were walking down the street when Mum spotted Hermione and Rose. She approached them and began shouting. Then she started mocking Snape and calling Rose a bastard. When Mum made a move towards the stroller, Hermione’s maternal instincts kicked in. That’s how we got to this point.”

Molly sat up and began pointing at George. Her face turned redder by the second.

“Nobody is going to punish a woman for defending her child,” George continued. “We’re going to have to let this go.”

Molly bounced on the couch.

“So we’re going to let Hermione and Severus Snape bully us?” Ron demanded.

“We’re actually going to let them get off scot free for what they did to Mum?” Bill asked.

George swallowed. “It’s in everyone’s best interest if we forget any of this ever happened.”

“I agree.”

All eyes fell on Arthur.

Arthur reiterated, “George is right. We need to leave the Snapes alone.”

Molly threw up her arms and began waving them around.

“So what, are we cowards now?” Bill hissed. “We didn’t cower in fear of the Dark Lord, but the
second we run into a man carrying a batch of Wolfsbane we cower in fear?

“We’ve spent our entire school career terrified of that greasy git,” Ron argued. “We can’t let him intimidate us anymore! We have to fight back!”

“I’m not saying we should be intimidated by Snape,” George argued. “But there may be much more at stake than a few mouth fusing curses.”

“What do you mean?” Bill asked.

George exhaled. “While Mum was insulting Hermione, I got a good look at Rose.”

“You did?” Arthur asked.

George locked eyes with Ron. “Rose’s feet are huge, just like yours. Her eyes are the same color and shape as yours too.”

“See,” Ron replied. “See I told you! Rose is mine!”

“Having blue eyes doesn’t necessarily mean anything given that a baby’s eye color doesn’t change until about six months of age,” George warned. “Still there was a noticeable resemblance between you and her.”

“Oh not you too!” Bill exclaimed.

George glanced over at him.

“Rose is not Ron’s baby. If she were a Weasley, then Snape would’ve kicked her to the curb,” Bill argued.

“Snape might be in denial,” George stated. “He may be so desperate for his fortune and a family he’s willing to ignore facts.”

“Snape? Family?” Bill snorted. “You think Snape, the dungeon bat, the greasy git, the loner extraordinaire, wants a family?”

“Doesn’t everyone want love?” George asked.

“Sure, I mean I guess,” Bill stuttered. “But Snape isn’t some average person. He hates children. He hates people. Where would this sudden desire for a family come from?”

George ran his finger along a crack in the leather. “When Snape began his affair with Hermione he may have only wanted one thing: sex. As time went on though, he began to see Hermione as more than a bedroom partner. He began seeing the love Lily denied him, he began feeling that need for love he’d suppressed so long ago, he began dreaming of a family.”

“Oh please,” Ron groaned. "Snape is incapable of those emotions.”

“Hermione offered him the second chance he’d been so desperate for,” George continued. “Unfortunately, Hermione was still in love with Ron, so she kicked Severus to the curb. When Ron dumped her though, she ran back to Snape, and lied about ever being with Ron. He wants so desperately to believe her that he’s ignoring facts.”

“Snape once told me he has no reason to doubt Hermione’s loyalty,” Arthur replied. “It would make sense if she never told him that she and Ron had slept together. Snape was desperate for a family, and Hermione was desperate not to face disgrace. From that standpoint, their sudden union makes
makes sense."

"Oh please," Bill groaned. "Don’t make the Snapes’ marriage into a love story."

"I'm not trying to romanticize their marriage," George replied. "I'm simply trying to understand it and how Rose fits into the larger picture."

"Rose?" Bill spat. "Rose is nothing more than a baby with big feet."

"How many babies do you know who have huge feet?" George asked.

"Look, all babies are similar in appearance," Bill noted. "We could be seeing a resemblance where there is none."

"Rose’s fingers looked a little like Severus’," George admitted. "And her mouth looks like his as well. She definitely has his smile."

"See, she’s a Snape," Bill argued.

"No she isn’t," Ron argued. "She’s mine!"

Molly pounded on the couch cushions, tears streaming down her eyes.

"No Ron," Bill argued. "Rose isn't yours. You hit your head too hard on the Quidditch patch. You’re upset about being sterile, and for some reason you miss your ex-girlfriend. None of that changes the fact that Rose is not your child. She is a Snape!"

"Rose is my child!" Ron argued.

"Quiet!"

Everyone stared at Arthur.

Molly stopped moving.

"I want this resolved and I want it resolved now," He turned to George. "In your opinion, what is the best way to go about getting Severus Snape to take that bloody DNA test?"

"Well, I know the worst way to go about doing so would be to arrest his wife," George began.

"No, no it could work," Ron's eyes lit up. "We'll have her arrested..."

"And Snape will promptly stop brewing Wolfsbane for us," George interrupted.

Ron huffed.


Ron nodded his head. Bill scowled but muttered his assent. Molly crossed her arms over her chest.

"That being said," George replied. "I have no idea what to do."

"We can try leaving the Snapes alone and moving on with our lives," Bill suggested.

"What if Rose is your niece? Could you really turn your back on her?" Arthur asked.

"I’m not turning my back on anyone," Bill replied. "I’m just trying to be realistic. It is far more likely
that Rose is a Snape and not a Weasley.”

“But she is a Weasley,” Ron whined. “I keep telling people that, but no one believes me.”

“Six months ago you hadn’t so much as seen Hermione without her shirt off, but now you expect us to believe you were having a torrid sexual relationship with her,” Bill replied. “Forgive our skepticism.”

“I made a lot of mistakes, but they don’t matter. All I want is for Hermione and Rose to be back in my life right now,” Ron argued.

“You called her a whore in front of the entire Wizarding World,” Bill argued.

“That was a mistake. When I see Hermione again I’ll apologize and this whole Snape thing will be behind us.”

George glared at Ron. “You have no idea how badly you’ve messed up.”

“I know Hermione isn’t speaking to me,” Ron replied.

“Hermione feels used,” George argued. “She feels as if you’ve taken everything and tossed her aside. From where I’m standing, she’s right.”

“I love Hermione. Everyone knows that.”

“Well apparently Hermione and Snape don’t know that,” George replied. “Right now she feels as if none of us ever loved her, and Snape is making sure she continues to believe that.”

“Which isn’t true,” Bill interrupted. “We’ve always loved and cared for Hermione.”

“Really? Because for the last few months we haven’t said two kind words to her. We didn’t stand up for her when Ron was behaving poorly,” George replied. “And we didn’t ask her why she and Ron broke up so suddenly or listen to her side of the story.”

“How is she supposed to justify crawling in Snape’s bed?” Bill asked.

“She can’t,” George replied. “But had we given her any support whatsoever, she may have taken the DNA test before getting married. As if stands now though, she’s with Snape, and they will hex us into oblivion the second we’re within firing range.”

“So there’s no hope of getting a DNA test?” Arthur choked.

“With time, there may be,” George answered. “But it could take a few years. By then, she may be so in love with Snape she wouldn’t dare disrupt their happy marriage.”

Arthur buried his head in his hands.

“In love with Snape?” Ron shouted. “How could anyone be in love with Snape? H-how could she ever love Snape after loving me?”

“Simple,” George replied. “Snape provides for her and her child. Most women actually find a hint of personal responsibility to be sexy.”

Arthur shook his head and moaned.

“If,” George swallowed “If it will make anyone feel better, I have the memory of seeing Rose. If
you’d like I can put it in Dad’s Pensieve and let everyone see it.”

Arthur raised his head, exposing his moist eyes. “I’d like that very much.”

George turned to Ron.

Ron rubbed his lower back. “I think I need to rest for now. Maybe I can see her later.”

George glowered at his brother. “You know, for someone who is so desperate to see his daughter you certainly are lazy.”

“I’m not lazy. My back hurts,” Ron argued.

George leapt up. “From what Hermione told Mum and me, Snape would drag himself through glass shards just to get a glimpse of his daughter.”

“Good for him, but I’m in a lot of pain right now,” Ron argued.

“I don’t think your backache is comparable to the pain Severus would feel if you ever succeeded in yanking Rose from his arms,” George snapped.

“I’m not trying to yank Rose from Severus’ arms,” Ron whined. “I’m trying to reunite her with her real father.”

“She already is with her real father,” George muttered.

With that, he strolled down the hallway. Arthur followed close behind. Once they reached a back bedroom Arthur shut the door.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” George asked.

“I need to,” Arthur answered. “I need to look at her.”

“You shouldn’t get too attached to this image. She may not be your grandchild,” George warned. “Even if she is, it’s unlikely either of the Snapes will allow us to have any contact with her. This memory could hurt you more than it will give you comfort.”

“Even if she isn’t my granddaughter, even if the Snapes won’t allow me near her, I need to see her,” Arthur choked.

George sighed and removed the pensieve from the closet. Then he put his wand to his temple. A mist wafted from his head into the bowl-shaped object. Arthur rushed over and peered inside.

For four long minutes George watched his father gaze into the silvery liquid.

“She’s so beautiful,” Arthur whispered.

“Yes,” George’s chest ached. “She is.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! I appreciate all of it!
"What do you mean he's close to a cure?" Fenrir demanded.

A cold wind howled outside the austere stone hideout. "Snape believes that liquid silver might help prevent a transformation. According to him, if silver makes contact with a lycanthrope's body, then that part of their body will transform back into its human form, at least temporarily. If the silver is liquid then it will touch every part of the body, thus preventing a transformation."

Scabbier growled, "Where did he get this idea from?"

Farrah shuddered. "I do not know."

"How close is he to a cure?" Archelaus asked.

Another gust of wind chilled Farrah to the bone. "Right now, Snape is searching for ingredients to combine with the liquid silver to create a lycanthropy cure."

Fenrir and his generals exchanged looks.

Archelaus cleared his throat. "I don’t quite know what to make of this news. He could be on the verge of discovering a cure, or he could still be years away."

"Denial won't serve us well. Severus is brilliant, too brilliant for our good. We need to act on the premise that a cure is imminent," Fenrir replied.

"Then what should we do?" Farrah asked.

Scabior growled, "Perhaps we should simply kill him…"

"No!" Fenrir interrupted. "We don't want to create an opportunity for the child and her mother to nurse a vendetta."

"If Hermione ran off with Ron it would separate Snape from his child. We could kill him without the fear of a vendetta and/or creating a horcrux," Farrah suggested.

"Or we could botch the killing. Hermione would come to her senses, and reunite with Severus. Then they’d devote every spare moment to defeating us," Fenrir replied. “Or perhaps Rose won’t appreciate being raised by a dunderhead. She would see the life she could have had with Severus, and decide to avenge her father in order to carry on his legacy of doing the impossible. Either way, the child is still a threat."

“The only way Rose isn’t a danger is if Severus changes her and her mother willingly,” Scabior concluded.

“Exactly,” Fenrir replied. “This latest development puts us in a bind though. We may not have time to convince Snape that changing Hermione is in his best interest. It’s better to stop him from creating this potion altogether and ensure that others will not take his place.”

“Others?” Farrah asked.
“Severus is brilliant, but he is not the only potions’ master in Britain. If we kill him his notes may still exist, meaning someone else could take up the task of curing lycanthropy,” Fenrir began.

“Like Hermione or in a few years, her child,” Archelaus replied.

Fenrir replied, “Exactly. When we eliminate Snape we must eliminate the means of creating this potion. This cure must be wiped out of existence.”

A branch tapped against the stone wall.

Fenrir’s eyes lit up. ”I know exactly how to deal with him.”

"How?" the Chief asked.

Fenrir's lips curled into a sinister smile. "We need to convince him that curing lycanthropy is not in his or his family's best interests."

"How?" Farrah asked.

"Farrah, you told me once that Severus' lab was in his home, correct?"

"Yes."

"Perfect! I'll send some lycanthropes to monitor the premises."

"What then?"

"We will wait for the Snape family to leave their home, then we will break into his lab. We will confiscate his supply of liquid silver and any pertinent research documents. Then we will throw a few toys around the nursery and destroy a few family photos. If there's time we'll tear up his bedroom as well. When we are finished with him, Snape will know exactly how vulnerable he and his family are… and what he will need to do to keep them safe."

The others stood silent as they absorbed Fenrir's words.

Finally, Scabior spoke, “There are only two problems with your reasoning. First, Severus Snape is not a man who responds well to intimidation. Such a violation could possibly serve to provoke, rather than dissuade him.”

Archelaus and Farrah nodded.

“Second, what if he simply hands off the project to another potions master? We’ve already stated this is a possibility, so how can we prevent it from happening?”

"Simple,” Fenrir answered. “We'll begin a campaign to either change or intimidate every other potions' master in Britain. After the first few attacks people will understand what becomes of those who do not immediately give into our demands.”

“The fact that Snape, a man who spied on Voldemort, would be the first to capitulate could only work in our favor,” Archelaus replied.

"True,” Scabior mused.

“Admittedly, this isn’t a perfect solution, and it will not work in the long run,” Fenrir replied. “Still it should buy us time to think of a more permanent solution.”
“That makes sense,” Archelaus replied.

Fenrir turned to Farrah. “It will be your responsibility to dig up information on this potion and who is brewing it.”

“Yes sir.”

"As for Snape's aversion to intimidation… you are correct in thinking that he will not respond well to seeing his lab destroyed. If he were single, he would most certainly avenge himself swiftly and without hesitation, but now that he has a family to consider…well, he may think better of going up against us alone. Besides," Fenrir steepled his hands. "He wouldn't do anything to jeopardize the welfare of his little baby daughter. We will be sure to remind him of just how much danger she will find herself in if he unwisely decides to cross us.”

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“I do not like that smile on your face.”

Hermione laughed. “And here I thought you liked my smile.”

“Usually I find your smile to be quite lovely,” Severus replied. “But when it’s coupled with that spark in your eyes, I know you are about to give me an unpleasant surprise.”

“Now Severus,” she purred before leaning against the headboard of Rose’s crib. “Have I ever given you a less than pleasant surprise?”

Rose cooed.

“As of late your surprises have been agreeable,” Severus reached into the crib and slid Rose’s toy snake closer to her. “Yet I’ve known you for over a decade, and I can safely say that most of your surprises have resulted in a headache.”

Rose squealed before grasping her toy.

Hermione smirked. Her eyes glistened.

“That look,” Severus pointed to her.

Hermione put on the most innocent expression she could muster.

“I do not like it in the slightest. You have something planned, and I know I’m going to despise it.”

“Have you ever considered seeing someone about your rampant bouts of paranoia?” Hermione asked. "I hear they can lead to terrible heart problems."

“I am not paranoid if I am correct,” Severus argued.

“In this case you are incorrect,” Hermione replied. "If I were up to something, you would enjoy it immensely, even if it pained you to admit so.”

“Mrs. Snape,” he growled. “Tell me what you have planned.”

She stepped towards him. “I have nothing planned.”

Rose clucked and waved the snake in the air.
“Witch,” he purred. “Tell me what you have planned before I force it out of you.”

She hummed, “How do you plan on doing that?”

“I have methods,” Severus replied.

“Whatever do you mean?”

“For one I am a legilimens.”

Hermione’s face fell.

Severus pressed her against his chest. “You are hiding something.”

Hermione bowed her head.

Severus twirled a tendril of her hair around his finger. He whispered, “Oh the secrets which must be in that head of yours. What secrets could I learn if I were to spend one minute inside of your mind?”

She stiffened. “You said you’d never use legilimency on me.”

“You’re correct. I respect you too much to violate your mind in such a way,” Severus stopped playing with her hair.

She exhaled.

“Besides,” Severus cupped her chin in his hand and raised it. “I have other, more effective methods of obtaining information from you.”

“What could be more effective than reading someone’s mind?” She asked.

Severus captured her lips. She melted into his embrace. He released her and whispered in her ear. “What is going on in that mind of yours, Mrs. Snape?”

“Nothing you need to know about,” Hermione breathed.

Rose stuck out her tongue. Could they take this disgusting behavior somewhere else? It was enough to make a baby’s stomach ache.

“But I want to know what you have planned,” Severus kissed her lips again. “Surely you won’t deny me.”

“I could never deny you,” Hermione replied before unbuttoning the top buttons of his shirt.

Severus groaned.

“Soon enough you’ll know everything you need to know,” Hermione promised. She ran her finger along his chest.

He moaned, "Hermione."

Tell her that you love her.

Severus’ heart raced.

She continued unbuttoning his shirt.
Tell her that you love her more than you thought it was possible to love a woman.

She undid the last button.

Tell her you can’t imagine life without her.

The shirt was on the floor.

Tell her you need her more than you’ve ever needed anyone else.

Severus pressed his lips against hers, hoping it would silence the voices in his head.

Tell her you love her!

Hermione pulled away. Severus took a deep breath.

“I’d love to continue this interrogation,” she breathed. “But we need to say goodnight to Rose first.”

“Indeed we should,” Severus rasped. “It is her bedtime after all.”

“Then we should go to bed ourselves.”

“I love the way you think.”

A putrid scent filled the room.

“Rose,” Severus wheezed.

Hermione gagged.

"Good gods Rose," Severus muttered.

The baby hiccuped and began to sob. As much as she didn’t like Mummy and Daddy kissing each other, she hadn’t meant to interrupt them.

“You pick the darnedest times to poo,” Severus choked before lifting her up.

Rose whined. I’m sorry Daddy. I didn’t mean to upset you.

Severus kissed her on the cheek. “There is no need to cry. I love you very much, even if you interrupt romantic time with Mummy.”

Rose sniffed.

He looked back at Hermione and rasped, “I’m not finished interrogating you.”

Hermione grinned. “Good, because I’m enjoying being interrogated very much.”

He purred, “And I’m enjoying employing my latest interrogation tactics.”

Severus carried a sniveling Rose over to the changing table. He cleared his throat. “Why are you so stinky tonight? Did you eat a liver jelly bean when your mother and I weren't looking?”

Rose blinked and twisted her lips.

“Oh you do not believe liver jellybeans exist do you?” Severus continued as he stripped Rose of her onesie. “Unfortunately they do. I was forced to eat them on numerous occasions. Granted I never
smelled half as stinky as you do after ingesting one, but if one had a jar full of them nearby...let's just say your nappy smells like fine perfume in comparison.”

“Ah,” Rose muttered.

“While we're on the subject of jellybeans, your mother will disagree with me, but bubblegum is the best flavor,” Severus replied.

“Bubblegum?” Hermione burst out.

“Yes, bubblegum,” Severus replied.

Rose erupted into giggles.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “What is so amusing about liking bubblegum jellybeans? They are quite delicious.”

“I know they are, but I could never imagine you liking something considered so, uh,” Hermione tapped her foot. “So un-Severus Snape-like.”

“Just because I wear black does not mean I cannot like bubblegum,” he replied.

Hermione snorted. “Whatever you say.”

Severus pulled out a new nappie. “I swear Rose, your mother is the most beautiful yet most baffling woman I’ve ever met.”

“Eh,” Rose replied.

“Yes Rose, your mother can be quite the handful, but she never ceases to amuse me,” Severus replied before turning to Hermione. “Surprises aside, my life has improved dramatically since our wedding.”

Hermione blushed. “I could say the same of you.”

Severus picked Rose up. “Are you going to let Daddy interrogate Mummy now? He does need to extract that information after all, unless you have some information you'd like to share with me?”

Rose yawned.

"Rose will never talk," Hermione replied.

The babe stared at him as Severus tucked her into the crib. "No, I suppose she is not talkative at the moment."

Hermione replied, "I just you'll have to return to your plan of interrogating me."  

Severus' eyes lit up. "There is a plan of which I am very much in favor."

Rose closed her eyes and pulled her toy snake up to her chest. Her parents may be disgusting, but there was no place she'd rather be than in the mansion with them.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
This day could not end soon enough.

Severus trudged toward the floo. He had given Raquel the day off in order to give her more time to study for an exam. Within minutes he regretted his act of kindness. During the course of the day, four customers had come in demanding a refund for a potion which they claimed was ineffective. Within minutes it was clear they had not bothered to read the instructions. One muttered a halfhearted apology, two stormed away in a huff, while the fourth gave him a vacant look before exiting the apothecary.

Yet all these annoyances paled in comparison to the onslaught of baby pictures. Even after almost two months in business, people still hadn’t tired of telling him stories concerning their little pride and joy. One person went so far as to imply that Rose should meet her son so they could become “great friends.”

He told her that Rose did not need any boys who were "great friends" in her life until the age of fifty.

As exhausting as his day had been, it was nothing compared to the tasks which awaited him at home. He had mountains of paperwork to fill out and bills to pay. It would take at least an hour just to sort through everything. Then there was potion stock to replenish, which meant another four hours locked in the lab away from his family.

Severus sighed. The only bright spot was that no one had entered the store singing that infernal song or bearing ridiculous gifts. The only people who seemed to remember his blasted birthday were Hermione and Rose.

A smile tugged at his lips as he remembered waking up next to his family. Hermione had handed him their daughter. Then she reached over to the bedside table to retrieve his birthday present, a small chocolate cupcake, allegedly from Rose. Hermione had sung softly to him, then pressed a kiss to his lips. It had been a most pleasant morning.

His only regret was running out of time to eat the cupcake.

Mind back in the present, he threw in the floo powder and was whisked back home.

"Happy birthday Severus!" Hermione exclaimed as he stepped across the hearth.

"Ahh," Rose cooed as she watched her father dust off his robes.

"Thank you," he groaned.

Hermione’s glanced down at her daughter, "Do you want to sing 'Happy Birthday' to Daddy, Rose?"
Rose stared at her. What was a birthday again? Why did it warrant its own song? How did one sing a song anyway?
Severus grinned. "I doubt Rose would want to sing such an obnoxious song."
"The birthday song isn't obnoxious," Hermione replied. "It's fun to hear everyone sing a song in your
"You and I have very different opinions on what constitutes fun," Severus mumbled.

"Oh there are plenty activities we both consider fun," Hermione purred.

Severus' heart skipped a beat. "Oh really?"

Rose reached for her father.

"Yes," Hermione continued. "We have done many fun things together, and will continue to do fun things in the future."

"Let's hope so," Severus replied in a low voice.

"One of these fun things will involve singing the happy birthday song," Hermione answered.

Severus face fell.

"I think deep down inside you want someone to sing you the birthday song. You're just too much of a grump to admit it."

"I'm not a grump."

"Of course you are," Hermione answered. "It's one of your more endearing traits; at least until it isn't."

Severus took Rose from Hermione. The baby reached over for his cape. He grabbed the edge and placed it in Rose’s hands. She squealed as she waved the fabric around.

"Have you had a long day?" Hermione asked.

"Very," Severus breathed. "And I have yet more work to do."

"No you don't," Hermione replied.

"Of course I do, love. I have to brew twelve vials of boil-healing potion, seven vials of pepper up potion, ten vials of sober up potion..."

"It's your birthday, Severus! You should spend it celebrating, not working."

"I've always spent my birthday working."

"But birthdays are supposed to be a special day set aside for relaxation."

Severus snorted. "Fellow professors bursting into your room and singing off-key while you're trying to grade papers is something I hardly consider relaxing."

"I'm not a professor," Hermione smirked.

"Not yet anyway. Give yourself a few more years," Severus replied.

Hermione blushed. "Thank you."

He kissed her on the cheek. "There is no need to thank me for being honest."

She pressed herself against him and bushed her lips against his.
Rose squeaked.

“Sorry,” Severus muttered.

Rose scowled before resuming her game.

Hermione took a step back. “Anyway, tonight is all about you. Whatever you want to do, we’ll do it.”

“It matters little what I want to do,” Severus replied. “It’s about what needs to be done.”

“What we need to do is celebrate your birthday.”

“I appreciate your enthusiasm, but January 9 is a day like any other.”

“It doesn’t have to be a day like any other. It can be a meaningful day dedicated to those around you expressing their gratitude for your existence and for all the ways you’ve helped them throughout the year.”

Severus bit his lower lip.

“You made my birthday so special. Please allow me to return the favor,” Hermione replied.

Severus looked at Hermione. He’d never seen anyone so dedicated to celebrating a day where one eats cake. Yet she was so sincere in her desire to make Severus feel cherished. It truly was more one of the most heartwarming things he’d experienced.

Then he glanced down at his daughter, who had stuffed part of his cape in her mouth. Rose gave him a lopsided grin. She seemed enthused about his birthday too; well at least as enthused as a three month old could be about anything other than playing with clothing.

"I suppose the paperwork and the bills can wait until tomorrow. That would allow me to celebrate my birthday for an hour,” Severus answered.

"Great,” Hermione replied.

"I will still need to spend a few hours in the lab,” Severus warned.

“That’s fine. I could help you brew,” Hermione answered.

“While I know you are more than capable of assisting me, I am not comfortable asking you to help me brew.”

“You aren’t asking me to do anything. I’m offering to help.”

“You should be resting in the evenings, not stressing yourself with more work.”

“I rest as well as any new mother can during the day. I want to help out.”

“Who will watch Rose?”

“We can.”

Severus raised an eyebrow.

“We can bring her playpen down and she can watch us from there,” Hermione suggested. “Since we
will both be downstairs, one of us can tend to her while the other continues brewing.”

“I shouldn’t need to brew any volatile potions tonight,” Severus mused. “One of us could prepare the ingredients while the other watches Rose.”

“See, she’ll be fine,” Hermione promised.

"What if she gets cold?"

"We have plenty of blankets."

"If we brew pepper up and sober up potion, there should not be any harmful fumes." Severus glanced down at his daughter. "Besides, little Rose, it's about time you saw how a potion is brewed."

Rose's face lit up. She let out an "Ooh!"

Severus then kissed her on the forehead. "I love you baby girl. You will always be my precious little princess."

"Uh," Rose replied.

Hermione drew closer and leaned into Severus' side. She whispered in his ear, "Happy birthday, Severus."

He brushed her lips and whispered, "Thank you."

They stood in silence, enjoying the moment.

"Is there a special dinner you'd like?"

Severus twisted his lips. "I wouldn't mind going to La Hacienda and having a burrito."

Hermione smirked. "You gave me hell for eating those during my pregnancy."

“Upon first glance they appeared revolting, but looks can be deceiving,” Severus admitted.

"I'll remind you of that comment when I start making new recipes again,” Hermione replied as she reached out her arms for the baby.

Rose stuffed more of Severus' robe into her mouth.

"If you want to go out to eat with Daddy, you'll need to let his cape go," Hermione told her daughter.

Rose took Severus’ robe out of her mouth.

He nodded. "I should probably change my clothes as well."

Hermione laughed as she took Rose, who protested when Daddy’s robes fell from her hand. "Imagine if all of your former students knew that you let an infant drool on your robes."

"I suppose I'll have to make sure the word never gets out, then,” Severus answered

"How do you plan to do that?" Hermione tease.

Severus swept her into a kiss that curled her toes.

He whispered, "That's how,".
"It's like they're barricaded in there," Alecto snapped. "Hermione hasn't used the bloody floo since the day we came! Are you sure the charm you put on it will detect when they leave?"

"Of course it will," Amycus argued. "Fenrir himself showed me how to do it. You just need to be patient."

"I hate being patient," Alecto grumbled.

"This we know…" Amycus muttered.

Alecto glowered at him and opened her mouth to say something, but stopped when they both saw his wand glow green.

"Finally!" they cheered.

Amycus raised his wand to the sky and muttered an incantation. Immediately, a green flare shot up and exploded into the night. A wolf howled in the distance.

"Fenrir's on his way."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I truly appreciate it all!
"Arrogant fool!" Fenrir shouted as he pulled out the Elder Wand. "He thinks he can keep us at bay with a single ward."

"You're kidding," Scabior replied.

"No," Fenrir answered as he aimed the Elder Wand at Snape's mansion. "Our dear professor truly believes one single ward prevent us from entering Prince Manor."

The Death Eaters-turned-lycanthropes laughed behind them.

"I knew Snape was stupid," Amycus gasped, "But even I never would've imagined he could be this dense."

“How could he be idiotic enough to put up only one ward?” Archelaus drawled.

“I don’t know,” Fenrir replied. “Yet his arrogance will be his undoing.”

“Or maybe this is a trap,” Archelaus warned.

Fenrir held the wand midair but did not utter a word.

Archelaus continued, “For all we know Severus could have cast a fainto duri. He could be waiting for us to step across a certain point, leading to our disintegration.”

"He would do something like that," Fenrir snarled.

"No, he couldn't have cast a fainto duri," Scabior replied. "We've only detected one ward. In order for him to have cast a fainto duri he would've needed at least two."

"Multiple wards take quite a bit of power to maintain," Fenrir mused. "Power nobody could muster with a screeching newborn. Whatever he cast is something simple which requires very little magic or focus to be effective."

"What if he cast another kind of disintegrating spell?" Archelaus asked.

"Like what?" Scabior asked.

Archelaus shrugged. "I don't know, but he could have discovered a ward which will kill upon impact."

"So, what? Are we just going to give up now?" Scabior asked.

"If this mission puts us in danger then we need to reassess the situation," Archelaus suggested.

"We could send a few lycanthropes into the ward to see if it kills upon impact," Scabior replied.

“No,” Fenrir snapped. “My lycanthropes are my children, not dispensable underlings. They will not be used as fodder.”
The crowd of lycanthropes cheered.

Archelaus shook his head. People shouldn’t rejoice over common decency prevailing.

Fenrir’s sneer returned. “The Elder Wand should be more than sufficient to detect the presence of a killing ward.”

Fenrir lowered the wand to the ground and muttered, “Apparent tenebris.”

With held breaths, the lycanthropes stared at the wand. It remained colorless. Fenrir announced, “Whatever ward he has is meant to repel, not kill!”

All the lycanthropes cheered.

Fenrir shouted a Latin phrase. Red sparks emanated from the wand. Several lycanthropes were sent flying when the hex ricocheted back on them. Alecto’s scream of pain was the loudest.

"My apologies," Fenrir began before shouting another incantation. This time, the laser dispersed as it hit the invisible wall. Fenrir stepped forward, only to crash to the ground. The werewolf tried another spell, but the ward held firm.

"This may take longer than I’d planned, but do not fear! No ward can hold against us forever," Fenrir clutched the Elder Wand tighter. "I'll make sure of that."

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"If you so much as mention to those mariachi singers that today is my birthday, I will see to it that you regret your lapse in judgment for the duration of our marriage,” Severus warned.

Hermione replied, “I highly doubt you’re going to spend the rest of your life stewing over mariachi singers.”

“You would be surprised how long I can nurse a grievance,” Severus answered.

Hermione smirked. “You’ll nurse your little grievance until I put on that long, black, satin nightgown you love so much.”

In spite of himself, he gave her a half grin.

"Come on, Severus. Go ahead and call them over. It would be fun to let them sing for you,” Hermione insisted.

“No, it will not be entertaining in the slightest,” he protested.

“But it’s a tradition for mariachi singers to perform for someone celebrating his birthday,” she answered.

Severus scowled. "The idea of men singing off-key and drawing attention to the fact that I am another year older does not appeal to me in the least. Perhaps on your birthday they may sing to you…while I am in the restroom.”

Beside Severus, Rose released her bottle. Without diverting his gaze from Hermione, Severus grabbed it. Rose cheered.

Hermione laughed. "You are such a grouch."
"You knew I was a grouch when you married me."

"I know, but sometimes you can be really cute about it."

Severus quirked an eyebrow. "I thought we agreed early on that I was not cute in any way, shape, or form."

"You can claim not to be cute all you want, but there are moments where you are just so grouchy, and so difficult that it's just plain endearing."

Severus rolled his eyes and placed the bottle to his side.

Hermione pointed to him. "See like that! Your expression is so cute right now."

"How is rolling my eyes being cute?"

"Because you're doing your best not to appear cute, which only makes you all the cuter!"

Severus shook his head before turning to Rose. "I think your mom has had one too many margaritas."

Rose looked up at him with a smile as if to agree. Hermione laughed louder, "These are virgin margaritas. There is nothing in them to cloud my judgment."

"Well, whatever I'm doing to amuse you, remind me not to do it anymore. I do have a reputation to maintain," Severus replied.

The light in Hermione's eyes dimmed. "You don't have to be a git anymore. You can allow people to see your heart."

"Love, I've spent over four decades creating and maintaining my reputation as a git. It would be a shame for all that work to go to waste," Severus purred.

"You're incorrigible," Hermione replied.

"Now there a term which describes me," Severus replied.

"That it does."

"A term such as 'cute' is much better suited to describe babies, like our precious Little Rose."

Severus tickled Rose's stomach, eliciting a happy squeal from the child. Hermione grinned as she watched them. She truly was a lucky witch to have Severus and Rose in her life.

Without warning Rose's face turned red. She began to whine.

"Yes I forgot, you cannot burp yourself yet," Severus muttered before unbuckling her from the car seat.

"Are you sure she isn't still hungry?" Hermione asked.

Severus shook his head before repositioning her. Then he began patting her back. "The bottle was still half full when she ceased nursing. I believe she's full."

Rose let out a small burp.
"Good girl," Severus whispered.

Hermione’s stomach growled. She looked at the table. The plastic basket of chips had been reduced to crumbs and it would still be a good ten minutes before their dinner arrived. She glanced over her shoulder to see if a nearby waiter might replenish the empty basket. Across the room she spied a young boy digging into a sticky frozen treat. "If you won't let them sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to you, Severus, then at least try some fried ice cream."

Severus stared at her as though she’d just announced that she was a Nargle. "I hardly eat anything fried. Why would I want to have fried ice cream?"

"Because it's a yummy dessert, perfect for a birthday celebration."

"I think not," Severus answered.

Hermione leaned closer to him. "Remember, Severus, Rose will be eating soon and we'll need to teach her to try new things. Now seems like an excellent time to start."

Rose burped once more.

Severus gave Hermione a playful glare. "We should also be teaching Rose about nutrition. Fried ice cream cannot be the least bit nutritious."

"It has calcium in it, and she needs that for growing bones,” Hermione argued.

Severus twisted his lower lip.

"If you want, we can share a bowl," Hermione coaxed.

"We'll see," Severus answered.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It's deeply appreciated.
“Shit!” Fenrir yelled as his latest spell bounced off of the ward.

"I don't understand it," Rodolphus began. "What sort of ward could be strong enough to withstand magic from the Elder Wand?"

“I don’t know,” Fenrir hissed. “But no ward is invincible. There has to be a counter-spell. I just haven't figured it out yet."

“Maybe the way to break the ward is non-magical,” Scabior suggested.

“How could the counter to a magical ward not involve magic?” Fenrir demanded.

The Chief's eyes widened. “I know of a ward immune to magic."

"What is it?" Fenrir asked.

"It's an old Basque ward, used in both France and Spain. It's almost impossible to penetrate,” Archelaus explained.

"When you say almost impossible, does that mean you know its weakness?" Fenrir asked.

The Chief shifted his feet. "It's not exactly a weakness as much as it is a way of ensuring the right people can enter and the wrong cannot.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Fenrir asked.

“Unless you are a blood relation to anyone living in the mansion, you will be unable to enter,” Archelaus explained. “At least not without permission.”

"Brilliant," Fenrir muttered before glowering at the mansion.

"What should we do?" Alecto asked. “We’ve gone too far to just give up now!’”

"Simple, we'll find someone related by blood or marriage to one of the Snapes. That person will be able to help us break this ward,” Fenrir replied.

"But Severus and Hermione Snape have no immediate relatives who are still alive, save her muggle parents," Scabior argued.

“Where are they?” Fenrir asked.

“Nobody knows,” Scabior answered.

Fenrir glanced back at his followers. Mutter of, "No, I don't know where they are," and "I didn't know Hermione's parents were alive," could be heard.

Fenrir snarled, "There has to be someone besides the two lovebirds who can get through that ward.”

“Who?” Archelaus asked.
“I don’t know,” Fenrir replied. "All I know is that I will find that person before Snape finishes his potion, even if I have to search the entire world!”

With that, Fenrir transformed once again into his lupine form and raced off into the night with a blood-curdling howl. The others followed suit, eager to plot a way around this setback.

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“So tell me Rose, am I going to like what’s in this box?” Severus asked.

Rose betrayed no emotion.

“That’s not very comforting,” Severus mumbled.

Rose grabbed her toy snake and slid it closer to her.

Hermione stepped closer to him. “Are you going to open your present sometime before your next birthday?"

"That depends," Severus replied. "Will I like what's in the box?"

Hermione shrugged. "Maybe you will, or maybe you won't."

"That is of little comfort," Severus replied.

"There's no need to be so paranoid. You’re acting as if I’m giving you a bluebell flame.”

“If I remember right there was a Quidditch game where you surprised me with one of those.”

Hermione burst out laughing.

Severus sighed and shook his head.

She gasped for air. “I can’t believe you remember that.”

"How could I ever forgive that nasty surprise?” Severus argued. “You destroyed my best pair of robes.”

Rose flipped herself on her back and began cuddling the toy serpent.

“Yet you still forgave your little arsonist.”

"It is much easier to spend an eternity with someone if you can forgive their transgressions.”

Hermione put her hand on his shoulder. "Thank you."

Severus smirked. "If you are grateful to me then tell me what is in this box."

She released him. "I'm not that grateful to you."

Severus frowned.

Hermione replied, “Love, we are in a laboratory filled with volatile potions ingredients. Our daughter is in a playpen behind us. I am not going to risk our lives by gifting you with a bluebell flame or anything which would explode.”

“I know,” Severus admitted. “Yet you must understand my misgivings. I’ve never received a
pleasant gift before. Most of my past gifts have either been disgusting gags, a book I’d long since
read, or in the case of the Dark Lord, a happy birthday beating. It is difficult to forget such
experiences, even if I know the person before me only has my best interests at heart.”

Hermione kissed him on the cheek. “You deserve only nice presents. Don’t ever let anyone tell you
otherwise.”

Severus exhaled. “I know, but I fear I am not great at this whole birthday thing.”

“You'll get better as the years progress,” Hermione promised. “Now open the bloody present.”

Severus turned back to Rose. “Do you want to watch me open my present?”

She kicked her legs in the air.

Hermione picked her up. “I think your father could use your support.”

Rose cooed before reaching out to him.

Severus kissed Rose on the forehead before untying the bow on the top of the present. Then he
snapped off the tape and undid the wrapping paper. Once the paper was removed he opened the
plain, brown box. His eyes widened. “Oh Hermione.”

Rose set her arms down.

Severus removed a crystal cauldron from the box.

“Ooh,” Rose began. The cauldron was even prettier than she remembered.

Severus stared at the gift.

“I don’t know if this will be useful to you at all or if you’ll only use it for decoration, but I remember
you discussing once how different cauldrons allow for different potions, and that you wished you
had one made of crystal. Your poverty prevented you from getting one earlier, but now there’s no
reason you should not own one,” Hermione explained.

“Those were off-handed comments,” Severus gazed into his wife’s eyes. “I never expected you to
pay attention to, much less remember, them.”

“Of course I was paying attention,” Hermione answered. “I always pay attention to you.”

He scooped her into his arms and captured her lips.

Rose squeaked.

“Thank you,” Severus whispered. “It is the best surprise I have ever received.”

"You're welcome," Hermione whispered. "Happy birthday."

"Thank you for making it wonderful."

"As I've stated before, you deserve a day when people celebrate how special you are," Hermione
answered.

"Thank you," Severus breathed.
Once more their lips met. Rose squirmed and grunted. Were they too busy to remember she was there?

Hermione broke away. "If you want to finish by your deadline then we need to begin brewing soon."

Severus smirked. I can think of other things I'd rather be doing.

“Eh,” Rose muttered. Were they ever going to start brewing their potion, or was kissing a part of brewing a potion? The potions were pretty, so maybe one needed love to make them right.

Severus took Rose from Hermione. "We probably should begin brewing before this little one decides she’s hungry or needs a new nappy."

Rose clapped and cheered. What kind of baby could even think about food when she was about to see her first potion being brewed?

Severus kissed her on the cheek before setting her in the playpen. “I want you to watch and learn. Within a few years you’ll be able to brew your very own potion. You want to learn how to be a great potions mistress, don't you?"

“Ooh!” Rose exclaimed.

Severus chuckled. “Your enthusiasm is refreshing. Most of my dunderheaded students had no passion or talent for the art of potions, your mother excepted.”

Hermione blushed.

“If you’re very lucky I can help you perfect potions even seventh years struggle to create before they so much as consider writing your Hogwarts acceptance letter,” Severus replied.

“Are you comfortable allowing her near explosive ingredients?” Hermione asked.

Severus shrugged. “I allowed Neville near them, and Rose has already proven herself to possess much more common sense than he did as a student.”

"You're never going to let Neville live down his ability to blow up any cauldron he could get his hands on, are you?"

"Never."

"Eh," Rose replied, as if to agree.

"Neville aside, we should begin making those potions," Hermione answered. "Why don't I brew the pepper-up potion?"

“I will brew the sober-up potion then,” Severus answered as he approached the work table.

He set the crystal cauldron under the table. Then couple then set to work collecting the necessary ingredients.

Rose watched as her parents diced ingredients, placed them in their cauldrons, and stirred with precision. How can I start brewing my own potion? Mummy and Daddy are standing, and stirring, and a bunch of other things I can’t do yet. How can I learn to use my body so I can always wear black robes and make my own potions?
Severus glanced back at Rose. The babe’s eyes had not strayed from him once since he'd begun. She had the concentration, the intelligence, and the eagerness he'd always searched for in his students, but rarely ever found. It was already clear to Severus that someday his daughter would be an excellent potions mistress.

He then glanced at Hermione, who was engrossed in counting her stirrs. If he was honest with himself he would have to admit he enjoyed brewing with her more than brewing alone. A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth as he mused how much his life had improved with the addition of these two remarkable women.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately this will probably be the last chapter I post for the week. I'm traveling tomorrow and probably won't have time to edit a chapter. Normal updates should resume on Tuesday.

Thank you so much for the continued support! I appreciate all of it!
Severus dropped careful increments of liquid silver from a dropper into a golden cauldron. Once the proper amount was administered he backed away. If there was one thing he'd learned these past few weeks about mixing silver with aconite, it was that if there was too much or too little of either ingredient, the cauldron was liable to explode.

He held his breath and watched the solution simmer until it turned dark purple. Severus exhaled before stepping towards the cauldron and sprinkling in a mixture of crushed belladonna and asphodel. The potion hissed like a child's balloon freed from its knot, then settled back into a docile simmer. He stirred it fifty times before removing his wand. For four minutes he watched the liquid turn from purple to magenta. Then he dipped his wand into the concoction and muttered an incantation. If all had gone according to plan the wand would turn green.

It turned dark blue.

Severus let out a loud groan. If anyone consumed this, it would be akin to drinking bleach!

He stared into the cauldron contemplating ways to lower the alkalinity without negating the effects of each ingredient, but nothing would make the potion safe for consumption. With a scowl he dumped the liquid into a nearby sink, pulled out a brush, and scrubbed the cauldron.

Any other time he'd document his work in an article for a potions journal so others could benefit from his failure. Now, however, he was not interested in announcing his setback to Fenrir. The last thing anyone needed was another reason for Fenrir to feel emboldened. If Severus' suspicions were correct, Fenrir had been messing with his wards. The second Fenrir learned that Severus' attempts had ended in failure could be the second the lycanthrope attacked. Severus didn't know how he'd live with himself if Hermione and Rose were changed...or if a worse fate befell them.

The cauldron had been long since cleaned when he shoved it aside and stormed upstairs. Upon entering the sitting room he relaxed and took in the sight of his wife nursing their infant daughter.

Hermione looked up at the sound of his footsteps but frowned when she saw his expression.

"Aconite won't work as an ingredient," Severus began.

"I'm sorry," Hermione answered as Rose glanced up at her father.

Severus trudged towards the couch. "I've tried everything I could think of. Nothing can eliminate the alkalinity."

Hermione replied, "Aconite is a potent poison. It's a wonder anyone could use it to create Wolfsbane. I suppose it isn't surprising that it has only a few other magical uses."

"Indeed," Severus sighed.

"I wish things had worked out better, for your sake," Hermione replied.

"As do I," Severus slumped onto the couch and tilted his head upwards. "For once in my life I would love not to have the fate of the Wizarding World in my hands."
Rose clucked.

“I would love not to feel as if a regular setback is a colossal failure. I would love not to listen to ungrateful people prattle on about how miserable they are by my existence. I would love not to sacrifice my time with Rose working on a task which may prove impossible. I would love,” He gazed into Hermione's eyes. “I would love not to be some man who works in a basement, but to be the affectionate husband you need.”

“Severus, you already are the affectionate husband I need,” Hermione replied.

“Am I?” Severus asked. "Yesterday I spent three hours brewing a potential cure which only served as an explosive. The day before I spent two hours reorganizing the shelves in my apothecary. The weekend before was dedicated to brewing. The only times I came upstairs was to eat and spend a couple of hours playing with Rose. Those are not the actions of an affectionate husband.”

“I know you care for me,” Hermione replied. “I know you’re working so Rose and I can have a better future.

"It doesn't change the fact that for a majority of the time we are apart."

"When you are with me you’re attentive and make me smile. That’s all I need."

“Let me decide what I do and do not deserve. Contrary to popular belief I am more than capable of determining what I want."

He released the tension in his shoulders. "Nobody would ever accuse you of making uninformed decisions."

“No, they could not," Hermione replied. "As for the stress of saving the world, you aren’t alone anymore. I may not be able to do much, but I can be a listening ear and throw out a few ideas."

“Any ideas would be appreciated at the moment,” Severus replied.

Hermione hummed. "Have you considered using lavender? Its scent is quite soothing, and it allegedly has the properties of a muscle relaxant when ingested. Maybe if it was consumed, it could relax the lycanthrope's body to the point where it would not transform. Toad’s tongue is supposed to have relaxing properties as well."

Severus nodded. “I could try using lavender and toad’s tongue.”

“Thank you,” Hermione replied.

“For what?” Severus asked.

“For taking me seriously and not laughing off my ideas. It is nice to be taken seriously every once in a while.”

“Since the day we were married I’ve taken you seriously. There’s never been any reason not to do so.”

“Still, I’m grateful,” Hermione replied.

"There's no need to be grateful for honesty." Severus scooted closer to her. "That being said, I’ve finished brewing for the day. I’m becoming too frustrated to focus, and it is unwise to brew on days
such as Friday the 13th.”

Hermione chuckled as Rose clung tighter to her. "I didn't know you were superstitious."


“What patterns?”

“When I was a teacher at Hogwarts I couldn't help but notice an increase in cauldron explosions on Friday the 13th." "

Hermione chuckled. "You'd think the Friday the 13th before Valentine's Day would be luckier than most Fridays."

Severus snorted. "On the contrary. Coming before an inane, obnoxious holiday such as Valentine's Day makes it even more insufferable."

“How so?”

“In the days preceding Valentines’ Day, every student was so focused on writing love notes they failed to pay attention to the lecture. During one particularly nasty year, I could've sworn someone had cloned Neville and transfigured said clones to appear as my students. The dungeons were almost razed to the ground.”

Hermione laughed.

Severus snorted. "Things only deteriorated once the month of February dragged on."

"How so?"

"Less than a week after Valentine's Day half the students were crying because their perfect day had gone disastrously."

Hermione's face fell.

"Throughout the years it's become exceedingly cleat that Valentine’s Day is a total waste of a holiday."

"Valentine's Day isn't a waste of a holiday. It's a chance to dedicate time to be with the one you love."

"Yes, to be with the one you love while spending an enormous sum on an overcrowded and overpriced restaurant and gaudy gifts she will only throw away when she leaves you, which almost always occurs the next day. It is a chance for couples to kiss in public as if we all want to see their animalistic behavior. Then there’s the increase of love potion overdoses and people realizing within a few weeks that they’d been drugged. Those cases are always enjoyable to sort out,” Severus ranted.

Hermione stared at him.

“Valentine’s Day is highly overrated and I, for one, would not mind in the least if the blasted holiday were outlawed,” Severus concluded.

The only sound which could be heard were those of Rose nursing.

Hermione mumbled, "Someone's bitter."
"No, I'm only realistic. Valentine's Day is a sham. It's merely a ploy to sell greeting cards, candy and flowers, and a poor excuse to squander twenty-four precious hours of one's life."

Hermione looked down at Rose. "It was a nice holiday when I thought it meant something to the man I loved."

Severus buried his head in his hands. Why couldn't he go two bloody seconds without making an arse of himself before his wife?

"I suppose the holiday loses its luster if you've only been lied to and taken advantage of. If you’re an idiot like me I suppose you can try to create new, better memories, but really it is only a day," Hermione replied. “We’re best off forgetting about it.”

Severus took a deep breath. “I apologize for my earlier tirade. It was unfair to trample upon your enjoyment of the holiday.”

“No, no,” she answered. “You’re only being honest. There's no need to feel guilty for having an opinion.”

“If Valentine’s Day is a significant holiday for you, we can celebrate it,” Severus replied.

"No, we don’t need to celebrate it," she answered as Rose pulled away from her breast. "You're right, it's just a dumb holiday.”

“No, it’s a holiday which you find important,” Severus replied.

“I don't even know why it should be important to me,” Hermione answered as the positioned Rose over her shoulder. “I spent Valentine's Day last year alone, wondering if I should take a pregnancy test. Ron was off playing a game, and was probably with a groupie that night. It’s stupid I’d even want to acknowledge the day.”

"You want to feel special, Hermione," Severus answered. "That's why this is important to you."

“It isn’t that I want to feel special as much as I want to acknowledge how special our marriage is," Hermione replied.

Severus leaned closer to her.

Hermione began patting Rose on the back. “I want to celebrate our marriage, as unconventional as it is. I know that's what our anniversary is for, but I thought it would be nice to have a Valentine's Day where I could just enjoy being with the man I married. Still, I don’t want you to be miserable, so we can skip the day altogether.”

“I won’t be miserable in the slightest.” Severus stood up and kissed Hermione on the lips. “We are going to celebrate Valentine's Day, even if I pretend to despise every moment of it."

Hermione laughed.

"Where would you like to go?" Severus asked.

"I don't know," Hermione answered before Rose stretched her hand in her father's direction.

Severus smiled and kissed Rose on the forehead.

"Eh," Rose grunted.
"Do you want me to cook something for you?" Severus asked.

"You'd do that?"

"Of course I would. The restaurants will be crowded tomorrow, especially for two parents with a baby."

"Very true."

"I could cook whatever you'd like."

"Even pizza?"

"Yes, even pizza."

"Thank you, Severus," she replied.

Rose burped.

"You're welcome," Severus answered. "You're worth it."

Before Hermione could respond, the floo fired up. "Hermione! Severus!"

Severus grumbled a few choice words before stepping over to the floo. "Yes, Ginevra?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but I just wanted you and Hermione to know that I'm in labor!" she announced.

"You're what?" Hermione called.

"I am in labor," Ginny replied before wincing.

"Are you in a hospital?" Severus asked.

"I'm heading there soon. I just had to get in contact with everyone first," she replied.

"For the love of Merlin Ginevra, go to St. Mungo’s," Severus snapped.

"I will soon," she promised. "In the meantime, would you like to be one of the first people to see Baby Malfoy?"

"Of course we would," Hermione answered.

Rose let out a soft belch.

"Good," Ginevra replied. "I'll be sure to let you know as soon as Baby Malfoy makes an entrance into this world."

"That's all very well and good," Severus answered. "Now go to the hospital."

"I told you, I will as soon as I finish contacting everyone."

Hermione called. "What do you mean by everyone?"

"All my friends and my in-laws," she answered.

"Oh," Hermione replied.
Ginevra moaned and grit her teeth. After the moment had passed she stated, "Draco will floo you when this little one makes an appearance."

"Thank you," Severus replied.

"I'll see you in a few hours."

The line then cut out.

"I hope Ginevra's going to be fine," Hermione answered.

"She will be if she gets to St. Mungo's soon." Severus shook his head. "Only Ginevra would call all her friends before seeking medical attention."

Hermione laughed. "Trust me, she has hours of labor to look forward to. Calling her friends probably won't harm her or the baby at all."

Severus sighed. "For her and Draco's sake, I hope so."

Chapter End Notes

Happy belated Easter and happy belated April Fool's Day!

Thank you for patiently sticking with me. As always it is much appreciated!
“Take care of yourself,” Neville replied.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be fine,” Ginevra answered.

“Good,” Neville replied. ”Let me know when Baby Malfoy comes into the world.”

“Thank you," Ginevra answered. ”You’ll be one of the first to know when Baby Malfoy is born.”

“Good luck then,” Neville answered.

Ginevra winced. She managed to squeak out, “Thanks”

“For Merlin’s sake, go to the hospital!” Neville ordered.

Ginevra moaned and nodded. Before she could properly respond, the floo died.

After a few moments, Ginevra exhaled and picked up another handful of floo powder. She placed her hand above the threshold of the fireplace, but said nothing. Instead she allowed the floo powder to slip from her hands onto the mauve carpet.

“Are you finished with those floo calls yet?” Draco called from down the hallway.

Ginevra brushed the powder from her hands. Then she placed a hand on her swollen abdomen.

“Ginevra, are you doing all right?” Draco asked.

No answer.

Draco raced to his wife’s side. “Ginevra?”

She didn’t turn around.

Draco placed a hand on her shoulder. “Honey, is there something wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Ginevra answered.

Draco’s heart began racing. “What do you mean you don’t know?”

Ginevra’s eyes were moist.

“Is, is it the baby?” Draco exclaimed.

Ginevra removed her hand from her stomach.

“Are you in a great amount of pain? Is there an excessive amount of blood coming out? Are you and our baby safe?” Draco panicked.

“The baby’s fine,” Ginevra answered with a small grin. “Baby Malfoy is perfectly wonderful.”

“Yes, our baby is wonderful,” Draco replied.
Ginevra trembled.

“Ginevra, whatever is going on we will work through it together,” Draco promised. “I need to know how you’re feeling though.”

Ginevra’s throat constricted. “Guilty.”

“Guilty?” Draco asked.

“Yes, guilty,” Ginevra croaked.

“What reason could you possibly have to feel guilty?” Draco asked.

Ginevra flinched and wheezed. She curled her hands into fists. Within a few moments she exhaled.

“Ginevra, let’s get you to the hospital,” Draco replied.

“I don’t know if I want to go to the hospital yet,” Ginevra answered.

“What do you mean you don’t want to go to the hospital?”

“I don't think I want to go.”

“Why don't you want to go?” Draco's eyes bulged. “Do you want to have the baby here?”

“No,” Ginevra answered with a gleam in her eyes. “I don’t know if I’d ever be able to revive you if I stained one of your couches.”

“I…I can handle blood,” Draco argued.

“Sure you can,” Ginevra teased.

“No, I can do it,” Draco argued. “Somehow I will get through the birthing process.”

“Excuse me?” Ginevra exclaimed. “What do you have to get through? You aren’t the one popping out a baby!”

“True, but it’s very distressing to see you in such pain, and just the thought of watching that baby come out of you,” he shuddered.

The spark in Ginevra’s eyes was extinguished. “Yes, labor isn’t fun.”

Draco kissed her on the cheek. “I was only teasing. I’m going to be with you every step of the way.”

“I just wonder who else is going to be at my side,” Ginevra whispered.

“What do you mean?” Draco asked.

“I don’t know who I want in the room with me when I deliver Baby Malfoy.”

“Well, you’ve already said you wanted my mum and me to be there…”

“But I’ve never said anything about my mum.”

Draco’s heart stopped. “You, you want your mum to be in the room with you?”

Ginevra buried her head into his chest. “No, I don’t. I don’t want her anywhere near Baby Malfoy,
and I feel so guilty about it.”

Draco massaged her back as she sobbed.

“I feel so guilty,” Ginevra rasped, “Most girls dream about their mothers coaching them through the birthing process. They take comfort in their mother’s presence, but not me. I don’t want her there. I don’t want her anywhere near Baby Malfoy!”

“Then she won’t be there,” Draco replied.

“You’re happy about that, aren’t you?” Ginevra sniffed.

“I’m willing to do whatever makes you happy,” Draco answered.

“There’s no need to pretend like you’re disappointed.” Ginevra locked eyes with him. “I know you’re relieved that Mum won’t be there. I know how little you want her around.”

“Honey, I didn’t mean it like…”

“Don’t bother explaining your emotions to me! I already know how you feel because I feel the same way.”

Draco stopped rubbing his wife’s back.

“When we announced my pregnancy we did it at a party where nobody in my family was invited. Why? Because I insisted upon it. Neither of us wanted the drama associated with my family, and we had a pleasant party because of it. I didn’t tell my family about my pregnancy until we were in the middle of a heated argument where they blasted me for not marrying Harry Bloody Potter. Nobody in my family has offered me any support during my pregnancy, nor has anyone made any significant effort to be a part of Baby Malfoy’s life. Sure Dad’s visited a few times, but he acts like his visits are a dirty little secret,” Ginevra sobbed. “I know he’s afraid of telling Mum about his visits because he’s trying to accept us, and Mum never will. No matter what you do she will never get her head out of her butt long enough give you a chance.”

“I…” Draco gulped.

Ginevra cried louder. “I’m being such a dunderhead right now. I should be in the hospital, but instead I’m carrying on about my family.”

“Ginevra,” Draco took a ragged breath. “If you need me out of the room in order to ensure you have a drama free delivery I can leave. Just say the word and I’ll be gone.”

“No!” Ginevra argued. “You aren’t getting out of this that easily.”

Draco cocked his head.

“You are going to see the birth of your child no matter how many potions you have to take to prevent yourself from fainting,” Ginevra replied, her eyes now drier.

Draco replied in a flat voice, “Damn.”

Ginevra gave him a small smile. "It was a nice try though."

Draco grinned.

Her smile evaporated. “in all seriousness, you need to be in that hospital room more than anyone
else. You shouldn’t miss a moment as special as the birth of your child because of my mother. You shouldn’t…oh God!”

Ginevra panted as pain coursed through her body.

Draco backed away from her. “We need to go to St. Mungo’s. Let me get the bag and we’ll….”

“You shouldn’t be kicked out because some people who couldn’t care less about me want to pretend to care about my baby.”

Draco stopped.

“My family’s barely paid any attention to me during this pregnancy, and I’m happy about it,” Ginevra announced.

“Happy?” Draco asked.

“I didn’t want my family involved in my pregnancy, and I’m glad they’ve stayed out of it,” Ginevra continued.

Draco kept his gaze on his wife.

“All they would’ve talked about during the pregnancy is how Baby Malfoy should be Baby Potter, how Baby Malfoy’s life is going to be miserable because you’re in it, and how Baby Malfoy should grow to despise your family. They hate your family due to some bureaucratic maneuverings and a Horcrux,” Ginevra raised her voice. “Guess what? Lucius was the one who gave me that stupid diary! I’ve made my peace with him, and on certain occasions can even tolerate him. If I can learn to coexist with him then so can they!”

“True,” Draco replied.

“My family feels Baby Malfoy is defective due to you, which isn’t true. Baby Malfoy is so loved by us. Baby Malfoy deserves to be loved as he or she is, not told to be someone else.”

"I agree."

"My family shouldn’t be in the room with me but, but they’re my family!” Ginevra cried before falling into Draco’s arms. “They used to love and protect me. Now though, now they only cause me stress. How can the very people who are supposed to care the most about you cause such pain?”

Draco kissed her on the cheek. Ginevra hissed and squeezed his hand until she could’ve sworn she heard a bone crack.

“Baby Malfoy will always be loved and will always know exactly how loved he or she is,” Draco began. “I will make sure of that.”

Ginevra looked up at him.

“As for your family,” Draco continued. “I wish every day I could change how your family perceives our child, but it’s their loss. Because of their pissy attitudes they will miss out on the chance to meet one of the most amazing Malfoys who will ever live.”

“One of?” Ginevra squeaked.

Draco smirked.
“What do you mean by ’one of’?”

“Well, I have to be fair to any siblings Baby Malfoy may have.”

“You want more children?” Ginevra replied.

“Someday,” Draco answered.

“You’ll be lucky if I can get through this labor without hexing your balls off! I wouldn’t press your luck for one more,” Ginevra warned before musing, “Then again Baby Malfoy may get lonely and want a playmate. It might be nice to break the mold and have more than one Malfoy heir. That hasn’t happened in what, ten generations?”

“Thirteen.”

“Right, thirteen.”

“Who knows? We may even have twins someday.”

“Twins?” Ginevra shouted.

Draco shrugged. “You never know.”

Another shot of pain overtook her body. Ginevra gritted her teeth. “No, I’ll hex you if you so much as mention the possibility of another baby. The women in your family were wise to only have one child. Very, very wise.”

Draco replied, “Fine, we’ll stick to one.”

Ginevra released the breath she’d been holding. “Thank you.”

“Ginevra,” Draco began. “If you need your family there I’m more than happy to accommodate. If not then don’t let anyone judge your decision. Your first priority has always been this baby, so I trust you will act in Baby Malfoy’s best interests.”

“Thank you,” Ginevra replied. “I… I think we’re going to wait to tell my parents about Baby Malfoy’s birth. If they are upset at my decision, that’s on them, not us.”

Draco kissed her forehead. “I respect your wishes.”

“Thanks,” she whispered.

“In the meantime you need to get to St. Mungo’s,” Draco replied. “If we don’t hurry our poor child is going to be born on the couch.”

Ginevra laughed. “Well we can’t have our furniture getting messy now can we?”

“I would prefer they remain as clean as possible,” Draco replied.

Ginevra grabbed the floo powder, threw it into the fireplace, and called out the address for St. Mungo’s. The flames erupted. Together, she and her husband stepped inside, eager to lay eyes on Baby Malfoy.
Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
Tonight was different.

Rose stared at the ceiling as her parents scurried around the room. On most nights, Mummy and Daddy aren't awake at this hour. If they are awake, they are begging me to go back to sleep. Tonight they woke me up though. While I don't mind being up at this hour, I'm not sure why they don't want me to be asleep.

What is going on?

"Of course Ginevra would deliver her baby in the dead of night," Severus grumbled before jamming an empty bottle into Rose’s baby bag.

“Well, we did want to be among the first to know when Baby Malfoy came into the world,” Hermione replied.

Severus zipped up the baby bag. “When I made that request I was under the impression that Ginevra would be in labor for the duration of the night, not for a mere few hours.”

"It doesn't surprise me that her labor was relatively short," Hermione replied. "After all, she is a Weasley and a Prewett. There has to be some biological incentive for the women in those families to have multiple babies."

“I suppose so.” Severus raised Rose from the crib, “Though I cannot imagine Draco being able to handle an entire brood of children.”

"The poor dear. Multiple children would run him ragged." Hermione shook her head. “I don’t know how he’ll handle the mess create by one child, much less one created by three or more.”

“Indeed,” Severus replied.

“Although it would be fun to watch him try to navigate having more than one child,” Hermione mused. “In the right state of mind he can be quite diplomatic, so he would be able mediate disputes quite well. Nobody could deny the intense loyalty he has to his family either. He already dotes on Baby Malfoy, so perhaps he get along fine with multiple children.”

“Perhaps,” Severus replied.

Hermione gazed into her husband’s eyes. How exactly did Severus feel about having more than one child?

“Eh,” Rose grunted as she reached down for her toy snake.

Severus handed Rose over to Hermione. “I apologize little Rose, but this isn’t the time to play with Mr. Snake. Right now have to go to the hospital.”

Rose whined.

Hermione set Rose on the changing table. Then she began to dress her daughter in a light blue bunting. "Merlin, a few months ago she would have been wide awake and screeching at this hour."
Severus replied, "I am thankful she has been quiet thus far. Hopefully she won’t raise too much of a fuss when she meets her newest friend."

Rose glanced up at her father. Who is my new friend? Why do I have to meet this person now? Can Mr. Snake come with me?

Severus took her into his arms and whispered, "Are you ready, little Rose?"

She nestled against him. He kissed Rose on the forehead and massaged her back. “I love you Little One.”

“Oh,” she mumbled before yawning and closing her eyes. Surely her new friend wouldn't mind if she got a little bit of rest before they were introduced.

"Ready?" Hermione asked as she picked up the baby bag.

"As ready as I'll ever be at this hour," Severus replied.

Rose heard her mother call out an address, then felt herself whisked away. Once they'd reached their destination, she yawned. Then she inhaled the scent of the antibacterial potions.

She opened her eyes. Her heart pounded against her chest.

Rose knew this place very well. Healers came in and forced her to drink nasty potions to ward off diseases. They pressed a very cold circle against her chest. Sometimes they even put a stick up her bottom.

Nobody from this place would ever be her friend!

Hermione and Severus approached the front desk as Rose began to squirm in Severus' arms.

"Excuse me," Hermione began.

The receptionist glanced up from the latest issue of Witch’s Weekly.

"We're here to see Ginevra Malfoy. She's just given birth,” Hermione continued.

Rose struggled and fussed in Severus' arms. There was no way she was ever going to allow those healers near her body again!

“Rose, Rose,” Severus whispered.

Her fussing grew louder.

“Rose, please calm down,” Severus shushed.

She wasn’t listening.

“Mrs. Malfoy is in room 613," the receptionist answered before pointing to a hallway. “It’s down there, the third door on your left.”

"Thank you," Hermione responded over the sound of Rose's rising tantrum.

They stepped away from the receptionist. Rose’s face reddened and she began flailing.

"Rose, we're going to see Aunt Ginny, Uncle Draco, and their new baby. Do you really want them
to see you when you're so angry?” Severus asked in a gentle voice.

She screamed. I want out of this building and back in my crib right now!

"Do you think she's hungry?” Hermione asked.

"No, and she isn't wet,” Severus answered. “She’s probably tired and none too pleased that we’ve taken her to the hospital.”

"Probably,” Hermione muttered.

A few of the Mediwitches looked at the couple, but they turned away under the weight of Severus’ glare.

“You will be fine, Rose,” Severus whispered once the onlookers scattered. ”No one is going to do anything to you tonight. You are safe with us.”

Hermione stopped in front of a sign which read 613. “Here we are.”

"Good, just let me take a moment to calm Rose down,” Severus answered before humming something.

At first, Rose could only feel the vibration of the tune in his chest. Then she began hearing the noise. It was so happy, so calm, so loving. The longer Rose listened the less inclined she was to continue crying.

“There you go,” Severus whispered. “Very good girl.”

"What is the name of that song?” Hermione asked.

“It’s a muggle tune I heard a few years ago,” Severus answered.

"It sounds familiar.”

"It was popular around the time you were born.”

"Oh,” Hermione answered before placing her hand on the doorknob. She spun around and asked, "Bette Midler's The Rose?”

"Yes,” he replied.

Her eyes widened. "I'm surprised you know that song.”

“Why would you be surprised? I've never claimed to hate muggle music.”

“True, but I never pictured you as a Bette Midler fan." 

"It's one of my best kept secrets.”

"I see,” Hermione drawled.

"Tell a soul…” Severus warned.

"We can discuss silencing strategies at home,” Hermione answered with a gleam in her eyes.

"I'm looking forward to it,” Severus smirked as Hermione opened the door.
"Severus!" Lucius called as they entered. "You finally made it."

"Finally?" Hermione asked.

"It’s been a little over an hour since Baby Malfoy was born," Lucius replied.

"Really?" Hermione asked.

Narcissa nodded.

Hermione deflated. “And here I thought we made good time.”

"Regardless of one’s best efforts, babies do slow things down," Severus answered.

Rose eyed everyone with interest. Although she recognized her godparents, there were two other people who were only somewhat familiar. She reached for the woman with long, blond hair. The lady gave her a small wave. “Hello Rose. How are you tonight?”

Rose smiled. These two people were friendly enough, much friendlier than those awful redheads anyway.

“Late or not, I’m so happy you could bring Rose with you,” Ginevra answered as she pressed a bundle of blankets against her chest. “We didn’t want her to feel left out.”

“Wherever we go, Rose goes,” Severus replied.

"I'm sure you wouldn't have it any other way," Lucius noted.

"No," Severus admitted. "I would not."

From underneath the blankets came a soft cry. Ginevra shifted them, until a tiny face appeared.

"Severus, Hermione, and Rose," Ginny began, "I would like to introduce you to Scorpius Aquila Malfoy."

The baby pried open his eyes and looked in the direction of the newcomers.

"He's beautiful," Hermione gasped.

"He does cut a handsome figure," Severus replied.

Draco beamed. "He just had to arrive before Valentine's Day."

Ginevra sighed. “It would’ve been nice to have a Valentine’s Day baby, but I suppose a Friday the 13th baby isn’t terrible either.”

“I’m just happy he’s here,” Draco replied.

Ginevra glanced at her husband. "Me too."

“Ooh,” Rose cooed.

"Here, set Rose down so she can see him better," Ginny suggested.

Hermione sat Rose on the bed. She stared at the newborn, then lost interest and turned toward the older people.
“Hello there Rose,” Lucius approached the child and stuck out his thumb. “Do you remember me?”

“Oh?” Rose mumbled. He was so familiar. Where had she met him before?

Ginevra exhaled. "Well, maybe Rose will be more interested in being Scorpius' friend later."

Hermione chuckled. "Give Rose and Scorpius a few years. I'm sure by the time they go to Hogwarts they'll be best friends."

Ginevra rubbed Scorpius' shoulder. "I'm sure they will be."

Rose reached out for Lucius. He made an exaggerated pout. The child burst into giggles.

Narcissa laughed. “Rose is so adorable, Severus. She looks just like you.”

Rose raised an eyebrow. How can I look like Daddy if I'm not wearing black?

Severus raised an eyebrow. “In what way does she look like me?”

Lucius smirked. “You two have the same facial expressions.”

Severus glanced down at Rose, whose eyebrow was still up. Severus chuckled. “I suppose she does look a bit like me.”

“She looks identical to you,” Lucius replied.

"I would hope she doesn't look identical to me," Severus replied. "I wouldn't wish my appearance on Sirius Black, much less my own daughter."

"Oh?” Rose asked. Why wouldn't she want to look like Daddy?

Severus glanced at Lucius. “At this juncture, Rose, you can touch his fingers, but I would not grasp them in a few months.”

“Ah,” Rose answered before grasping Lucius’ thumb.

Severus ran two of his fingers along her spine. “Good girl.”

The child’s face lit up.

Hermione grinned. “She really is her father’s daughter.”

“That she is,” Narcissa replied.

Rose released Lucius’ thumb.

"Speaking of parents and children, Draco and I want you two to serve as Scorpius' godparents,” Ginevra looked up at Hermione. "Would you be willing to, Hermione?"

"I'd be honored to be Scorpius' godmother," she answered.

"Severus?"

"Of course."

"Good," Ginevra replied as she gazed down at her baby, now fast asleep. Rose looked to her dad, who picked her up and held her close. "Do you like your god sibling Scorpius?"
Rose simply yawned and closed her eyes as well, content to be in her father's arms, even in the evil hospital.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Severus kissed Rose on the cheek before setting her into her crib. She opened one eye and made a soft noise. Severus reached over and handed her Mr. Snake. After grasping it and giving him a quick smile, she returned to her slumber.

"Goodnight Rose. I love you," Severus whispered before creeping out of her room and into his own.

"Is she still asleep?" Hermione asked as she crawled under the sheets.

"Yes," Severus replied. "She didn't so much as make a sound when I put her in the crib."

"Hopefully that means she'll be asleep for the next few hours," Hermione answered while Severus began unbuttoning his shirt

"Hopefully," he muttered.

Hermione's lips curled up. "Scorpius is adorable."

"He is very much so, but has a set of lungs on him," Severus removed his shirt and began taking off his pants. "He won't be afraid to demand what he wants."

"I wouldn't expect anything less from a Malfoy," Hermione answered.

"True," Severus took out his nightshirt and threw it on. "I doubt Draco knows what he's in for though. If Scorpius is anything like him he will be loud."

"Were you around Draco much when he was an infant?" Hermione asked.

"I did not spend much time alone with him," Severus answered. "Still, I visited Lucius and Narcissa often enough to witness the toll he took on them. Headache potion became a precautionary necessity."

"I see," Hermione replied.

"Do not misunderstand me," Severus joined Hermione in the bed. "I cared for Draco even then, but it was easier to be in the same room as him when he was asleep."

"Maybe Scorpius will be an easy baby, like Molly claimed Ginevra was," Hermione replied.

Severus smirked. "If Scorpius is an easy baby they are likely to have another, and I've heard the second child is rarely as peaceful as the first."

"I've heard that, as well," Hermione replied.

Severus pulled the sheets closer to his body.

"Do you think Rose would be considered an easy baby?" Hermione asked.

"She has her occasional tantrums and sleepless nights," Severus answered. "But overall she is a very agreeable infant."
"We could have done worse," Hermione replied.

"Yes," Severus answered. "Much worse."

Hermione looked over at her spouse. Her heart slowed. "Severus?"

"Yes?"

"What," she swallowed. "What do you think about having more children?"


She nodded.

He exhaled. "I thought you were satisfied with only one child."

"Don't misunderstand me; if Rose is the only child we have I will be perfectly happy.," Hermione admitted. "But you're so brilliant with Rose, and, well, I don't know, I just thought our family could expand someday."

Severus rubbed his face. "The idea of a biological child is complicated for me."

Hermione took a deep breath.

"I was not joking when I mentioned that I wouldn't wish my looks on anyone," Severus began.

"Our children wouldn't look ugly," Hermione interrupted. "They'd have my genes too. You don't think I'm ugly, do you?"

He brushed his lips against hers. "No, not at all."

"So why are you doubting yourself?" Hermione asked.

"When I agreed to raise Rose, there was initially a distance between us. If I had so desired I could have treated her like a roommate's child."

Severus chuckled. "Looking back I realize how ridiculous that idea was. From the moment I learned of her existence I formed a deep attachment to her. It may have taken me a few weeks to admit it to myself, but from the moment I learned of her existence I wanted to be her father."

Hermione replied, "It's so beautiful to see you and Rose. It's so obvious that you two deeply love each other."

"Loving Rose was never a duty for me. It came so naturally. With my own child though," Severus gulped. "What if we don't have that instant bond? What if I allowed my insecurities regarding my own childhood to cloud my perception of my child?"

"They didn't cloud your perception of Rose," Hermione replied.

"True, but as stated earlier she was easy to love. What if another child isn't as easy to love?" Severus asked. "If I feel unable to form a bond with my child, then he or she would grow up to feel like nothing more than an obligation. No child should have to live like that."

"Did you feel like you were only an obligation?" Hermione asked.

"No," Severus replied. "I felt like I was only a nuisance."
Hermione scooted closer to her husband.

“I do not want to squelch your dreams of another child, and I cannot say that I find the idea completely terrifying,” Severus replied. “Still, I would need time to prepare myself for another child. I would need time to ensure that I could love another child as much as I love Rose.”

“I understand.” Hermione replied. “If we ever decide to have another child, we will be sure to discuss it thoroughly before taking any measures to conceive.”

“That’s all I ask,” Severus answered.

“Personally, I don’t think we need to worry about another baby for a few more years. Once I start weaning Rose it should be safe for me to start using contraceptive potions again. I’d start taking them now, but it’s unclear whether or not the magic contained in them could overwhelm a baby.”

“We wouldn’t want to risk Rose’s health.”

“No, we wouldn’t,” Hermione answered. “Spells shouldn’t be necessary at this juncture either given that Rose is under six months old and I’m still breastfeeding. In a few months I’ll start casting them again.”

“You do what you feel is best,” Severus replied.

“Thank you,” Hermione answered with a grin. “Rose was surprising enough. We don’t need any more unexpected pregnancies.”

“No, we do not,” Severus replied.

Hermione draped herself over Severus. He ran his fingers through her hair.

"Hermione?"

"Hmmm?"

"It is technically Valentine's Day, is it not?"

"It is."

"Good." He reached into the drawer and pulled something out. "I didn't know exactly when I was going to give this to you, but now is as good a time as any."

"Thank you," Hermione answered as she sat up.

Severus handed her a box. She untied the ribbon and loosened the paper, then gasped when she read the title, "Advanced Arithmancy for the University Student."

"Raquel mentioned speaking with you about Arithmancy,” Severus replied. “I was perusing a university book store the other day in search of additional books or journal articles on lycanthropy. I saw that on the shelves and thought that you might like it. Allegedly it's new."

"Oh thank you!" Hermione answered before wrapping her arms around Severus. "I absolutely love it."

Severus returned the embrace and kissed her on the cheek. "If Rose ever decides to sleep through the night, you can try to work some of the problems."
"I'd love to," Hermione answered. "I'm almost tempted to start right away."

Severus replied as they released each other. "I won't stand in your way, but I had other plans."

"Oh? Why don't you tell me about them?" Hermione purred.

“That my dear, is a surprise for later on in the day,” Severus replied.

“What?” Hermione snapped.

“You heard me,” Severus answered. “You will need to wait a few more hours before I reveal what further plans I have for the day.”

“I,” Hermione began. “I didn’t think you liked surprises.”

“Oh I despise them,” Severus replied. “Unless I’m the one behind them. Then they are quite amusing.”

“I see,” Hermione drawled.

Severus gave her a small grin, kissed her on the forehead, and closed his eyes.

“Can you give me a hint of what is to come?” Hermione asked.

“Goodnight Mrs. Snape.” Severus mumbled.

“Severus,” Hermione answered. “What do you have planned for today?”

He rolled over. “Goodnight love.”

“Severus.”

He didn’t respond.

Hermione exhaled and put the book on the table beside her. Then she slid out of bed.

Now was as good a time as any to create a surprise of her own.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It's appreciated greatly!
If I were a Valentine’s Day hating former double agent, what surprise would I have in store for my wife?

Hermione watched as Severus poured water from a plastic cup over Rose’s back. The child giggled and began splashing around in the sink. A gob of soap landed on Hermione’s shoulder.

For ten hours Severus had been mum on any possible surprise. Had he said her only Valentine’s Day present would be a book, she wouldn’t have suspected anything was amiss. Other than the gift of his presence, what did he have in store for her?

“So you enjoy baths now, do you?” Severus asked.

Rose squealed and splashed more water onto her parents.

Severus poured more water onto the child. “When you get older we’ll have to teach you how to swim.”

“Oh,” Rose uttered while Severus set the cup down.

Hermione brushed the soap off of her shoulder. “Perhaps if you’re lucky, Daddy will buy you a swimming pool.”

“Oh!” Rose exclaimed. A pool sounded fun, even if she had no idea what it was or what one did in it.

“She’ll need swimming lessons first,” Severus replied as he picked up a bottle of baby soap. “But the yard is more than big enough big enough for a decent sized pool. Buying one for her is certainly not out of the question.”

“True, I think she’d enjoy a pool very much.” Hermione grinned. “While she’s away on one of her playdates with Scorpius perhaps we could get some enjoyment out of it as well.”

Severus glanced back at her and smirked. “Indeed we could.”

Rose cooed. How did Mummy and Daddy plan on enjoying the pool? Did she really want to know?

“Before we give her the pool we should probably talk to her about it first,” Hermione replied.

“Or it could remain a surprise until we’re ready to unveil it,” Severus answered.

“Yes, but I wouldn’t want to catch her off guard,” Hermione replied.

Severus’ smirk grew. “But don’t you want to see the look in Rose’s eyes when she realizes she’s gotten something she’s desired?”

“Yes,” Hermione admitted as Severus returned his attention to Rose. “I suppose there’s something to be said for surprising your daughter.”

“There is,” Severus replied. “Especially when she’s as curious as her mother.”
Rose kicked around the bathwater, splashing it onto her parents.

“Then again, sometimes it’s best to set your curiosity aside and enjoy the moment,” Hermione replied. “Especially if in the moment, you’re with your family.”

Severus lathered soap onto Rose’s body. “I’ve told you, Mrs. Snape, you need to wait a few more hours for your present.”

Rose grunted.

“Maybe I already have my present,” Hermione replied.

Severus huffed. “Let me guess, my presence is enough for you.”

“Yes,” Hermione replied.

Severus snorted. “This tactic is ineffective. I will not reveal my surprise to you until I am ready to do so.”

Hermione put a hand over his shoulder. “I’m not trying to trick you into revealing anything. I mean it when I say this day has been wonderful because I’ve spent a majority of it with you.”

A bubble floated in front of Rose. Mouth agape, she watched it float in the air.

Severus glanced back at his wife. “You are the first person to claim my presence is pleasurable.”

“I’m only being honest,” Hermione replied. “Despite your caginess regarding my present, which I will admit has been obnoxious at times…”

Severus chuckled.

“It has been wonderful to spend the day with you,” Hermione continued.

Severus swallowed.

“I’ve enjoyed just being husband and wife. It’s been great to have a day where we don’t discuss lycanthropes, the potions to be brewed for the apothecary, or the Weasleys’ latest scheme to get a DNA test. Our time together means more than some trinket you still refuse to tell me about.”

“Who said my surprise involved a trinket?” Severus asked.

“You aren’t giving me an object?”

“I’ve already given you something material, namely the Arithmancy book. The actual surprise is intangible.”

Hermione’s eyes grew. “What exactly do you have planned for me?”

Rose raised her hand to grasp the bubble.

Severus kissed his wife on the cheek. “You’ll need to wait, my love.”

Rose grabbed the bubble, but it disappeared!

“Severus,” she moaned.

“What?” he rasped.
“You are completely incorrigible.”

“I would advise you never to forget that.”

Rose screeched. Where did that shiny circle go?

Severus spun around and examined his whimpering daughter.

“Rose, what’s wrong?” Hermione asked.

Rose sniffled and slapped the water.

Severus asked, “Did you get soap in your eyes?”

Rose opened them just enough for him to see there wasn’t a trace of redness in them.

“Did she have an accident?” Hermione asked.

Severus glanced into the bathwater. “It does not appear so.”

Rose screamed until another bubble appeared. She hiccuped and observed it.

“Yes, that’s a bubble,” Severus replied.

“Ooh,” Rose murmured. She reached out for it.

“I would not touch it if I were you,” Severus warned. “It is liable to pop.”

Rose grasped the bubble. What’s popping?

The bubble disappeared again!

Rose blinked. Where could the bubble have gone?

“See, now you’ve popped the bubble,” Severus noted.

Rose burst out crying again. Why couldn’t she play with the bubble? How could she grab it without popping it?

“There, there Rose,” Hermione cooed. She motioned for Severus to step aside. He did so. “Do you want to make some bubbles?”

Rose continued wailing.

“Here,” Hermione wetted her right hand in the soapy water. Then she raised it and made an O with her thumb and pointer finger. Once Rose's attention was fixed on her mother, Hermione blew into the O.

Rose clapped as the bubble formed. Once it wafted into the air, Rose cheered.

“You may not be able to hold onto the bubbles, but they can be quite fun to make,” Hermione explained.

“Indeed they can be,” Severus replied.

Rose smiled. Thank Merlin for parents who could make pretty objects like bubbles.
“Is the pizza ready?” Hermione called.

“In a few moments it will be,” Severus answered.

Hermione leaned against the kitchen table, ignoring the rumblings of her stomach. She heard Severus’ footsteps grow quieter, as if he’d left the kitchen. She stood up and began to walk, only to step on a stuffed unicorn.

Hermione picked up the toy. Should she chance putting it back in her daughter’s bedroom? Rose was fast asleep, but the toy shouldn’t remain on the ground. If Hermione snuck in she might be able to return it to Rose without too much disruption. Of course if she failed the consequences would be dire...

“Why are you sitting at the kitchen table?” Severus asked.

Hermione set the unicorn on the chair to her right. “We always eat at the table.”

“Not tonight,” Severus replied.

“Okay,” Hermione drawled. “Where do you plan to eat then?”

Severus motioned for her to follow. She crept behind him down the hallway to a room two doors down from the entrance of the basement. He opened the door.

The first thing which stuck out was the dark oak bed with five pillows. There was no evidence that anyone had ever laid a head on any of the pillows, nor was there a thread out of place on the sterile, white duvet. Her eyes trailed across the room until they landed on a mahogany desk. Atop the desk was a dark green unplugged muggle reading lamp. Where would Severus have gotten a muggle reading lamp, and why would it be necessary in this room?

Before Hermione could meditate on those questions, she inhaled the scent of sausage pizza. She glanced down. About a meter in front of her was the pizza, along with two empty glasses, and a bottle of Riesling.

“I don’t understand,” Hermione drawled. “Why are we eating in a spare bedroom?”

“Oh Hermione,” Severus purred. “Does this room remind you of nothing?”

“It doesn’t stick out to me in any way at all,” she admitted. “If anything, it reminds me of a muggle hotel room.”

Severus grinned.

Hermione’s gasped. “The alleged muggle hotel room.”

”Indeed,” Severus replied.

”You recreated a muggle hotel room in our mansion because of some story we told each other?”

”It would appear so.”

”Why?”

“I know Rose was not conceived in some secret tryst,” Severus began. “But I thought for tonight it
may be amusing to pretend that we were two lovers meeting clandestinely away from the prying eyes of the Wizarding World.”

“Oh Severus,” she breathed.

“I know you have been storing up milk, so it will cause Rose no harm if you indulge in a glass of wine or two. I cast the spell to ensure we will be alerted when she is awake, which shouldn’t be for another few hours,” Severus replied. “If there are any other precautions I should take then please let me know.”

Hermione captured his lips. He pulled her closer to his chest and moaned.

“What did I do to deserve a husband as wonderful and romantic as you?” She whispered.

“You saved me from a pack of gold-digging dunderheads,” he answered before kissing her on the neck. “Then you tolerated me even during my foulest moods.” He kissed her on the cheek. “Then, and most importantly, you allowed me into your and Rose’s lives. That, my dear, was the most precious gift of all.” He kissed her on the lips.

"There's nobody I would rather spend my life with than you," she whispered.

"Funny, because I cannot foresee being content in a life which did not include you," Severus rasped before brushing her lips with his.

Hermione groaned before pulling away. “We, we have to stop.”

“Why?” Severus asked.

“Because if we’re going to act this hotel scene out we’d better do it properly,” Hermione answered.

Severus frowned. ‘We don’t have to act out anything.’

“I know but,” Hermione replied. “Please play along with me. You won’t regret it.”

“Very well then,” Severus mumbled.

Hermione plopped onto the floor. She grabbed wine bottle and held it closer to her. “I see you spared no expense on the Riesling.”

Severus sat down beside her. “Lucius gave it to me a few years ago. Allegedly the Riesling is forty-four years old.”

Hermione squinted. “Yes, it’s forty-four years old.”

Hermione popped off the cork. She reached over and poured the Riesling into Severus’ glass. Then she poured some into her own. After she set down the bottle Severus raised his glass. “To us.”

Hermione raised hers. “To us.”

The glasses clanked together. Then both Severus and Hermione took a gulp of Riesling.

“Now onto the real reason I wanted us to stop and sip some wine,” Hermione began.

“What would that be?” Severus asked.

Hermione took a deep breath. “I asked us to stop because was afraid of crushing your Valentine’s
Day present."

"You gave me a present."

"Yes, I did."

Severus took another sip of wine. "You did not need to give me anything."

Hermione reached into her pocket. "You actually do need this."

She pulled out fourteen small vials and placed them in Severus' hands. He twisted his lower lip.

"I knew how guilty you feel about leaving Rose and me alone for such long stretches of time," Hermione replied. "So while you were asleep I took out some of my memories of the past couple of weeks to share with you."

Severus stared at the vials.

"None of the memories would be significant to anyone outside of our family. Ten of them are little moments with Rose such as her babbling or attempting to sit up. The other four are memories of you and me," Hermione put a hand on his thigh. "I wanted you to see for yourself how happy I am with you. Even if you are gone for hours at a time, you’re in my heart, and I know I’m in yours."

"I don’t know what to say." There was a catch in Severus’ throat. "I could not think of a more thoughtful gift."

"You could simply say, ‘Happy Valentine’s Day,’" Hermione suggested before finishing her glass of Riesling.

Severus smiled. "You have some wine on your lips."

"I do?" Hermione purred.

"Yes," Severus breathed before recapturing her lips and pulling her closer to his chest.

Perhaps there was value to Valentine’s Day after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Chapter 176

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Wizarding Britain Welcomes Newest Malfoy Heir!**

At approximately 11:30 last night, Ginevra Malfoy gave birth to a son, whom she has named Scorpius Aquila Malfoy. Her husband Draco was present for the delivery, and her in-laws, Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy, were also on hand should any medical emergency occur. It appears as if none of the Weasleys were present for the birth, though this information cannot be confirmed. One speculates that little Scorpius has already been disowned by his mother's side of the family. If true, this would be a sad, yet not wholly unexpected, turn of events.

Although Mrs. Malfoy’s pregnancy was uneventful, Scorpius has already proven to be an unusual child. Sources report that unlike any other known Weasley or Prewett, Scorpius has blond hair. It is said that for the moment at least, his eyes are a hazy shade of blue. The presence of these traits eliminates Harry Potter as Scorpius’ potential father. It is bittersweet to know that while the Malfoy line lives on, the Potter line has died off completely.

**Photographs of Scorpius Aquila Malfoy will be obtained as soon as we are able to do so. In the meantime all of us at the Daily Prophet wish Ginevra, Draco, and Scorpius Malfoy the best of luck in their new life together!**

The paper quivered in Arthur’s hands. His face grew paler by the second.

Ginny had her baby. His baby girl had her son.

He wasn’t with her in the delivery room. He didn’t so much as know she was in labor. He discovered this information in the same manner as a complete stranger would.

“Dad?”

The paper floated to the ground. “Yes, George.”

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

Arthur shuddered. “Ginny gave birth last night.”

“What?” George exclaimed.

“Oh isn’t Victoire so cute!” Molly trilled as she glided into the sitting room. “It’s so disappointing that she and Bill couldn’t stay longer, but nap time is important for a girl her age.”

George picked up the paper and straightened it out.

“You can’t fault Victoire from leaving. Sleep is very important, especially for newborns,” Arthur muttered.

“Newborns?” Molly asked. “Why are we discussing newborns?”

George buried his head into the paper.

“Because we have one in the family,” Arthur replied.
The clanking of Ron’s walker could be heard from down the hallway.

Molly rolled her eyes. “Are we really going to bring up the Snape spawn at a time like this?”

“Rose isn’t the only baby in our family,” Arthur replied.

“What’s going on?” Charlie asked as he strolled into the room.

Molly threw her hands in the air. “I can’t believe you, Arthur! We have a nice Valentine’s Day celebration with our children, and all you can think about is Rose Snape.”

“He isn’t talking about Rose Snape,” George interjected.

“What’s all the yelling about?” Ron asked upon entering the room.

“Ginny just gave birth,” George announced.

“What?” Molly asked.

“Ginny gave birth?” Charlie exclaimed.

“Who gave birth?” Percy asked upon entering the room.

“Ginny,” George answered.

“No, that’s impossible,” Molly replied. “She would’ve let us known if she had.”

“No she wouldn’t,” George answered. “She gave birth last night and allowed us to find out via The Daily Prophet.”

George tossed the paper to Molly. She grabbed it and read the front page. Charlie and Percy inched closer. She shifted the paper until all had a decent view of the article.

“Are you sure this isn’t another one of Rita’s sensationalist stories?” Ron asked.

"No, this is real," George replied. "We are uncles once more."

Molly threw down the paper. “That ungrateful child! How dare she not tell us about her newborn son!”

“Let me read,” Ron cut in.

Percy picked up the paper and handed it to Ron. Wincing, Ron held the paper and hobbled towards a marmalade recliner.

“I…I can’t believe she didn’t ask for me to be there,” Molly stuttered.

“Well I suppose we shouldn’t be surprised,” Charlie answered. “She’s already turned her back on this family by marrying a Malfoy.”

“I warned everyone,” Percy interjected. “I warned everyone that she was becoming too rebellious. We should’ve intervened sooner. A sense of responsibility should’ve been drilled into Ginevra’s head as a child, not a love of jokes.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” George snapped.

“It means you’ve set a horrible example for her, and now we’re paying the price,” Percy argued.
“Do you think I wanted her to marry Malfoy?” George retorted. “I tried talking her out of it, but she wouldn’t listen to me.”

“How...how could she turn her back on her own family?” Molly’s eyes filled with tears.

“Malfoy probably talked her out of inviting us.” Ron sat down in the recliner. “He probably threatened to take the baby away if she let us around her.”

“The same way we threatened to take Draco’s baby away when we demanded he be arrested for Harry Potter’s murder,” Arthur replied in a soft voice.

George hung his head. “Yeah, a little like that.”

Ron began reading the front page.

“Oh don’t tell me you regret investigating Malfoy,” Charlie snapped.

“Malfoy needs to move on from that investigation,” Molly huffed. “We were under a lot of stress, and he seemed to be a viable suspect. Who could blame us for wanting him investigated?”

“It was a witch hunt,” Arthur argued. “We never proposed any other suspects, or heard Ginevra out when she tried to defend her husband.”

“Are we really supposed to feel sympathy for Malfoy?” Ron set the paper on a nearby table. “He tormented me at Hogwarts, took the dark mark, and hates the Crudely Cannons. There’s no need to apologize to him for anything.”

“Of course there’s a need to apologize,” George snapped.

All eyes turned to him.

“We need to apologize to Ginny for not accepting her marriage, as well as for exiling her from the family,” George argued.

“We didn’t exile her,” Charlie replied. “She chose to leave.”

“We pushed her away,” George answered. “It didn’t matter how well Draco treated her or how happy she was. Everything he did was pure evil in our eyes. Ginny had to choose between her husband and us.”

“And she chose him,” Ron hissed.

“Why wouldn’t she?” George replied. “Draco renounced his hatred of muggles, donated millions of galleons to charities supporting those displaced by the war, and genuinely loves his wife. In the meantime we were unable to leave the past behind...”

“Oh don’t you start up with the whole ‘Draco is an innocent victim’ speech,” Molly interrupted. “Just because he puts on a good front doesn’t undo the damage he’s caused.”

“Don’t you get it?” Arthur yelled.

Everyone turned to him.

“Our family is falling apart at the seams and we’re doing nothing about it,” Arthur replied.

“How can you say that?” Molly asked. “We just had a lovely Valentine’s Day together. I made my
famous cookies. Everyone enjoyed them. We’re fine.”

“We should’ve been in the hospital visiting Ginny, not eating cookies at home,” Arthur argued. “We, we didn’t even bother to invite her to our Valentine’s Day celebration.”

“She wouldn’t have come because Draco isn’t allowed to step foot in this house,” Charlie argued.

"For good reason,” Ron cut in.

“We could’ve at least made an effort,” Arthur replied.

“There’s no need to make an effort to kiss Malfoy’s butt,” Ron argued.

“It was one afternoon. One freaking afternoon,” Arthur replied. “We could’ve tolerated his existence for a few hours.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter because she was in the hospital anyway,” Percy answered.

“We would’ve been with her if she’d told us about the birth,” Charlie replied.

“No we wouldn't have!” Arthur shouted.


“Is it not true? Ginny didn't tell us about her delivery because she didn’t want us to judge her. She asked Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy of all people to be with her in the hospital.” Arthur burst out laughing, though there was little joy in the sound. “Don’t you see how far we’ve fallen? Ginny would rather have the man who gave her a cursed diary holding her son than her biological family.”

A tear came to George’s eye. “Yes, that is very sad.”

“I,” Percy swallowed. “I suppose it is quite telling that Lucius Malfoy was with her and not us.”

“The Malfoys have brainwashed her. It isn’t our fault that she refused to invite us,” Ron began.

“Oh would you shut up and take some responsibility for your actions?” Arthur demanded.

Ron gulped.

“Did you not read what the most unusual thing about Scorpius was?” Arthur asked.

“He’s a Malfoy/Weasley hybrid?” Ron asked.

“No,” Arthur snapped. “His hair color isn’t red.”

Ron’s eyes lit up. “So a Weasley can have a hair color other than red.”

“Yes, a Weasley can,” Arthur pointed to Ron. “So right now Severus Snape may be raising you child, and your sitting on your arse instead of fighting for her.”

“I told you,” Ron replied. “I don’t want Rose and Hermione to see me this way. I want them to see how strong I am, not how much I need this stupid walker.”

“Is that all you care about?” Arthur asked. “I just told you there’s proof Rose might be your daughter and all you can think about is whether or not you’re using a walker?”

“I was a Quidditch star,” Ron argued. “I’m supposed to be a symbol of strength, not a cripple.”
“Forget what you were six months go! You might be a father right now!” Arthur shouted. “You, you should be visiting Snape’s apothecary each day demanding to see Rose. You should be knocking on their door every night. You should be demanding to see that baby girl. You should be looking at the memory I have of her every evening, trying to establish some closeness to her. Instead, you can’t be bothered to approach the pensieve. Are you really that lacking in paternal instinct?”

“Arthur that’s enough!” Molly snapped.

“No, that’s enough from you!” Arthur shouted.

Molly jumped back.

“For years I have watched you bully and cow people into doing what you want. You pushed Ginny away and sent Hermione fleeing into the arms of her former professor. You, you’re the main reason this family has fallen apart,” Arthur replied.

“Don’t you dare blame this on me!” Molly screeched.

“Shut up Mum!” George yelled.

Molly gasped. “Don’t you dare speak to me that way. I’m still your mother!”

“Dad’s right,” George replied. “He’s right about everything. He’s right about you, about Ron, about me, and about this whole family. We are a mess, and we have no one to blame but ourselves.”

“Fine, we’re a wreck. What do you expect me to do about it?” Molly retorted.

Arthur burst out crying. “I don’t know. Gods, I just don’t know anymore.”

The Weasleys looked on as Arthur crumpled to the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Dear Ginny,

I hope you are doing well. Earlier this evening I read in the Daily Prophet that you had your baby. Don’t worry; I am not going to criticize your reasoning for not telling me about your delivery. I have a good idea of why you didn’t say anything, and I cannot say I would have behaved any differently if I were in your shoes.

This brings me to the main point of my letter: I apologize for the way I’ve behaved over the years. It was wrong of me to question your decision to marry Draco. While I will always be your protective older brother, I insulted and shunned Draco instead of accepting him as my brother-in-law. When Harry Potter died I should’ve taken the fact that he was the father of your child into consideration before jumping to conclusions about his guilt. I cannot apologize enough for my actions.

I know a simple note cannot undo all I’ve said and done. Still I wanted you to know that I do love you, and I am very happy for you and Draco. Scorpius is an amazing name for a son. I’m very proud to call him my nephew.

Love always,

George

***

Hermione brushed her lips against Severus’. “Thank you.”

“For what?” Severus rasped as he ran his fingers through her hair.

“For today,” Hermione pulled the sheets closer to her body. “I cannot think of a more pleasant way to spend Valentine’s Day.”

“So you enjoyed my surprise,” Severus purred.

“Immensely,” Hermione captured his lips again. “This is the best Valentine’s Day I’ve ever experienced.”

Severus smirked. “Even better than the one where you received a box of Curly Wurlys from your third grade crush.”

“Oh much better than that,” Hermione whispered. “Though I could go for a box of chocolate right about now.”

“I would have bought some assorted chocolates, but I did not think chocolate and pizza went well together.”

“Everything goes well with chocolate.”

“Even vomit flavored jellybeans?”

Hermione looked up and hummed. She tapped her finger against the pillow. “Yes, I think with some
dark chocolate you could overcome the vile taste of vomit jellybeans.”

“I’ll remember to buy you chocolate and roses when I come home from work on Monday then,” Severus chuckled.

“You don’t need to do that,” Hermione replied.

“No, but perhaps I want to.”

“Feel free to do so, but in all honesty I’d prefer you simply come home and brew potions with me.”

Severus raised an eyebrow. “You want to brew potions with me again?”

“I do,” Hermione purred.

“Why?”

“Because I enjoy brewing potions with you very much.”

“Oh you do?” Severus rasped.

Hermione whispered in his ear, “Yes.”

He moaned as she kissed his cheek.

Severus’ eyes glistened. “Hermione Snape, I believe you are the sexiest woman I have ever laid eyes upon.”

“Because I like to brew potions?”

“That, and for other reasons which are far too numerous to list.”

A red light filled the room. Severus shielded his eyes while Hermione buried her head into the pillows.

He grabbed his wand and flicked it. “Rose is awake.”

Hermione sighed. “I suppose it is about time for her dinner.”

He gave her one last lingering kiss before stepping out of the bed.

“You know Severus,” Hermione began before sitting up. “This is a rather nice room. Perhaps we should spend more time in it.”

“Are you suggesting another hotel date?” Severus asked.

The sheet fell down, exposing Hermione’s bare chest. “Only if you feel up to it.”

Severus gave her a small smile. “I’m free next weekend.”

Hermione grinned. “So am I.”

***

Dear George,

Thank you for the lovely letter, and for understanding why I made the decision I did. I agonized over
whether or not to tell you and the rest of our family about Scorpius’ birth, but I believe I made the right decision. The last thing Scorpius needed was for his first few hours in the world to be full of turmoil. While I know you are reasonable and wouldn’t do anything to upset me, I was afraid that Mum and Ron would not be so kind.

I would love nothing more than for you to be involved with Scorpius’ life at some point in the future. That time may not come for awhile though.

As I write this letter, Draco is across the room singing Scorpius a lullaby. I have only heard him sing a handful of times in my life, but he has a beautiful voice. He told me that as a child he was not allowed to display too much of his emotions for fear of appearing weak. As a loving husband and father, however, Draco can finally relax and expose his heart to those he loves. If you would allow him to demonstrate the kind of man he is, then you would understand why I am so in love with him. Yet that argument is best left for another day.

If I may be blunt, it is difficult for me not to cry at the moment. As I watch Draco rock our son to sleep, my thoughts turn to the idea of this moment happening on some remote island halfway across the world. You see, a week before the Azkaban jailbreak, Lucius called Draco and me. He told us he was arranging for us to go to a secluded place out of the Ministry’s reach. If my husband was leaving Britain, then I was determined to go with him. Had things worked out differently, Draco and I may be in hiding at this moment. We could be staring out a window at foreign scenery, hoping for some word from Lucius that the charges had been dropped. It is not a pleasant thought to think that Scorpius may have grown up on the run, nor is it pleasant to think he would’ve only known my side of the family as the people who were trying to put Daddy in jail.

Another, much less pleasant thought comes to mind: this moment may not have happened at all. Draco could be in Azkaban right now. I may have needed to beg a guard to let him catch a glimpse of his son. Scorpius may have grown up without a father. All the love he’s experiencing at the moment may have been stolen from him thanks to a group of people more interested in punishment than in justice.

I do not say this for the sole purpose of guilting you. My main point is that before I allow you into Scorpius’ life, I need time to recover from what occurred a few months ago. Right now, I need time to process the miracle of Scorpius’ birth, especially in light of the hell I went through after Harry’s death.

I’d like to leave you with a more pleasant image. Right now Draco has set Scorpius into the crib. Draco is asking me if I would like some rest. Personally I think he’s heading to bed so quickly because he fears his first nappy change. So far he’s been able to persuade the nurses to change Scorpius’ nappies, but his turn will come soon enough. I will see to that.

Thank you again for writing me. I do love you and everyone else. I know you will be a great uncle to Scorpius when the time comes. For the moment, know that I am happy and at peace.

Love always,

Ginevra

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support! As always I appreciate it very much!
Perhaps it was time for Rose to rethink her strategy.

The solution to all her problems was right in front of her. If only she could figure out how to take the steps needed to accomplish her goals.

“Eh,” Rose huffed as she reached for her father.

Daddy gave her a glance, smiled, then returned his attention to the morning paper.

Rose twisted her body towards her mother. She cooed and reached out for Mummy.

Mum grinned. “How are you doing, Little One?”

Rose frowned. I felt better when I was wearing my black onesie. Can you give me it back?

“I’m sorry, but Mummy can’t play with you right now,” Mum replied. "Mummy's eating."

Rose's frown deepened.

“After breakfast we can maybe we can play with your stuffed animals. Would you like that?”

Rose kicked the air. I want to wear black and brew potions, not cuddle my stuffed animals.

Hermione turned away and resumed eating her cereal.

Rose grunted. So far all of her efforts to create potions, and twirl around in her own black robes were failing. No matter how hard she tried, she could not make her parents understand what she wanted. Maybe if she could walk she could walk and grab the objects she wanted, she might be able to get her way. So far though, her legs had proven useless. She needed to find another way to move her body the way an adult would, even though she didn’t have a clue where to begin.

Rose opened her mouth. Right now her parents were doing something called sitting. Maybe Rose could sit too. That way he parents would see that she was big enough to make a potion. They still may not understand exactly what she needed, but at it would be a start.

The only question was, how does one go about sitting?

Rose wiggled her body until her head was raised, as was the top of her chest. It was a great start. Now she just needed to keep going...

She plopped down.

Rose scowled. She tried sitting again, only to have the same result.

How was she going to master sitting if she kept going down?

“Severus?”

“Hmmm?”
Hermione set down her spoon. “I was thinking about last night.”

Severus lowered the paper. There was a gleam in his eyes. “What about last night?”

“It was amazing,” Hermione replied.

Rose grunted. If Mummy and Daddy’s bodies could go up then hers could as well. She just needed to try harder.

“It was amazing for me as well,” Severus answered.

“Still, it got me thinking,” Hermione replied.

Severus set the paper aside. “About what?”

“Why did we fake break up?”

“Fake break up?”

Rose returned to lying on her back. Sitting was harder than she thought. Maybe she should lie down for a couple of moments and get her strength back.

“You heard me correctly,” Hermione replied.

Severus froze.

“We need to build on our hotel room rendezvous story,” Hermione explained. “Allegedly we broke up before Ron returned for the holidays, which is why I was with him when I discovered that I was pregnant with Rose.”

The tension left Severus’ body. ”I suppose we do need an account of why you returned to Weasley.”

Rose blinked. Was this another story? Would it be as good as the Half Blood Prince?

“I’m having a difficult time piecing one together though,” Hermione replied. “Why would we have broken up if we were so content in each other’s company?”

Severus took a deep breath. “I can think of a few reasons on my end.”

“You can?” Hermione asked. Her chest went cold.

“I left you because you terrified me,” Severus answered.

"I terrified you?"

"Yes."

"Are you saying that your little former Gryffindor student was able to terrorize her big bad potions professor?"

"It would seem so."

Hermione smirked. “I thought we agreed that so long as you respect me I will not castrate you in your sleep.”

Severus gave her a half smile. “Duly noted.”
“In all seriousness,” Hermione’s voice grew softer. “Why do I terrify you?”

“I have never been as emotionally intimate with anyone as I have been with you. Today that fact is comforting, but a few months ago.” Severus swallowed. “It would have been terrifying. I would’ve realized that I was losing control over my life. As someone who has served two masters, I am determined to maintain whatever sense of power I have, regardless of the potential costs.”

“I can understand that,” Hermione replied.

“When I realized that I was losing control of myself to you, when I realized how important you had become to me, I panicked. In my fear I broke your heart in the worst way possible,” Severus replied. Rose whimpered. This wasn’t a happy story. Maybe Mummy and Daddy should start telling a different one.

“In mid-December, we were enjoying post-coital bliss,” Severus replied. “You gazed into my eyes and told me you were leaving Ron for me. I had never been so frightened in my life. You were asking me for a commitment, for me to hand over control of my life to you. I felt as if I could not do it.”

“That’s my problem,” Hermione replied. “I never would've let you go. I would've asked you to tell me how you were feeling, and I would've tried to assuage your fears. Somehow we would've worked through it.”

“You had no choice but to release me,” Severus replied. “I told you that you were nothing more than a casual fling to me. I told you that I could never share my life with someone like you. When you pleaded for me to change my mind, I pointed to the doorway. You ran out.”

“I felt like such a dunderhead,” Hermione answered. “I knew that I didn’t love Ron, but I couldn’t be with you. That’s why it was heartbreaking to discover I was pregnant with Rose. I didn’t want my daughter to suffer for my mistakes.”

“I was so ashamed of how I’d behaved,” Severus replied. “You sent me letters trying to inform me of your situation, but I sent them away. Floo calls went unanswered, and my wards wouldn’t permit you entry. Despite my best attempts to distract myself, I did miss you. Every day I regretted treating you as I did, but I couldn’t bring myself to say the words aloud. Admitting that I was wrong was out of the question, so I cut myself off from you.”

“It was a miracle that we met up again at the same cafe,” Hermione noted.

“At that juncture I’d missed you so desperately, and I needed a wife,” Severus replied. ”Marrying you was the perfect solution to both of my problems.”

“Rose needed a father, and I needed you.”

“Everyone knows the rest.”

“Indeed they do.”

Rose quirked an eyebrow. What kind of story was that? Mummy and Daddy would never act that way. They’d be too busy kissing to ever think about leaving each other. Nope, not even a baby would believe this awful story.

“When I found out I was Rose’s father,” Severus scooped the baby in his arms. “I could not have been happier. All I want to do is devote every spare moment to her, and to you as well.”
Rose giggled.

“Rose and I are quite lucky then, because all we want to do is spend every spare moment with you,” Hermione noted.

“Indeed.” Severus kissed Rose on the cheek.

Rose squealed.

Hermione took a shaky breath. “Severus?”

“Yes?” he asked.

“Do, do you feel as if I’m suffocating you?” Hermione asked. “Do you look on me more as a master than as a friend?”

“I am not going to deceive you,” Severus answered. “One of the reasons I despised the marriage clause was because I knew it would involve someone else inhabiting my life. Already I had sworn that no one would ever possess the power to manipulate me again. I was determined to cut myself off emotionally from whomever was unfortunate enough to take the position of my wife. The marriage would be amicable, but far from affectionate.”

“I don’t consider us to have a marriage lacking in affection,” Hermione replied.

“Showing you affection was far easier than I ever envisioned it to be. For the first time in my life I do not fear being manipulated,” Severus answered. “What we had developed organically, and not from coercion or guilt. I found myself wanting to share myself with you. Never once did I feel as if you were a master to be feared.”

“I never want to be your master.”

“That, love, is why I will always cherish you.”

Rose hiccuped.

“You on the other hand.” Severus tickled Rose’s chest. “You came into my world screaming and crying for attention. Every minute of my time is dedicated to filling your needs.”

She gasped for air between laughs.

He stopped tickling her, “And I would not have it any other way.”

Rose grabbed the edge of his cape and held it against her chest.

As her father took another sip of tea, Rose resumed her former train of thought. That sitting thing was proving more difficult than she’d envisioned. It was time for a new plan. If she couldn’t raise her muscles through the power of her body, she would need to find another way.

Rose watched as her dad made a motion with his hand. The newspaper hung in midair without any effort on his part.

"Oh," Rose mumbled. This must be another one of those magical things Daddy keeps talking about. According to Daddy, every witch and wizard is born with magic. Through hard work one can control that magic to brew potions and lift things.

A surge of energy rushed through Rose. She beamed.
Magic is the perfect solution to my problem!

Okay,” Draco took a deep breath. “I, I can do this.”

Scorpius screeched and flailed.

Draco stepped closer to the changing table. “It’s just a nappy, and he’s only a day old. He, he couldn’t have made that much poo, right?”

His mind flashed to Rose’s dirty nappy. So much filth. So much nauseating fecal matter.

“Draco,” Ginevra called.

“Yes?” he groaned.

“Is there a serious problem?”

“No,” he answered, knowing full well she did not consider squeamishness to be a serious problem. “I’m fine.”

The closer Draco got to the changing table, the more noxious the smell became. He gagged and covered his mouth. I can do this if I try hard enough.

One by one, Draco undid the buttons of Scorpius’ onesie. Upon removing the garment, he noticed the color of Scorpius’ nappy.

“Oh Merlin!” Draco shouted.

Scorpius cried louder.

“Draco?” Ginevra called. “Is Scorpius okay?”

“He, he’s fine,” Draco called back.

If she answered, Draco couldn’t hear it.

“Okay,” Draco mumbled. ”Here we go little Scorpius. Daddy’s going to change your nappy now.”

Scorpius kicked the air.

Draco took off the nappy. He swallowed down bile and set it aside.

Scorpius grew quiet.

Draco grabbed a baby wipe from a nearby table and cleaned his son’s bottom. Somehow he managed to stay focused on the task, even as his brain pleaded with him to look away from all that filth.

“See, I told you that you could do it.”

Draco flicked his wrist. The baby wipe disappeared. Then Draco spun around. “How long have you been standing there?”
Ginevra shrugged. “Long enough to witness you overcoming your aversion to poo.”

Draco glared at her while he pulled out a new nappy from a nearby box.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Ginevra laughed. “You did just fine, even if I was afraid you’d pass out at a couple of points.”

“I never want to see that much filth again,” Draco groaned before placing a new nappy onto Scorpius.

“Get used to it,” Ginevra warned. “Scorpius is going to poop a few more times between now and when he turns eighteen. Then there will be the times where he eats too much candy or has accidents in the bed…”

Draco looked into his son’s eyes. “You’re going to be very messy, aren’t you?”

Scorpius yawned.

Draco’s lips curled up. “You’ll be worth every disgusting moment though.”

Scorpius blinked.

Draco kissed his son. “That being said, we’re putting on one of your green onesies. That will teach your mother not to force me to do this.”

“Dress him in all the green onesies you want,” Ginevra approached them. “It won’t change the fact that he’s a born Gryffindor.”

Draco pulled out an emerald onesie. “Keep telling yourself that.”

Ginevra embraced her husband and gave him a kiss. “I love you so much, you know that.”

Draco returned the kiss. “Yes, yes I do.”

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, I won't be around tomorrow due to a business trip. I'll try to resume regular updates on Monday.

In the meantime, thank you for the support! It is much appreciated.
Farrah stepped into the living room with a tea cup in each hand. A couple of times she paused until the liquid within them no longer threatened to overflow. Finally, she bent down and offered a cup to the red-head in front of her. "So, I read in the Daily Prophet that your sister gave birth two weeks ago."

“She did,” Ron replied.

“How is she doing?” Farrah asked

“Fine I guess,” Ron accepted the cup in her left hand.

Farrah stood up. “Have you seen baby, uh…”

“Scorpius,” Ron replied. “And no, I haven’t seen him. Nobody in my family has.”

“Oh?”

“She won’t let us near him.”

“Why not?”

Ron took a sip of tea before setting the cup on the side table. “She says she needs her space.”

Farrah sat down on a nearby recliner. “She’s probably just exhausted. I’m sure within a few more weeks she’ll let you see her baby.”

"No, I'm pretty sure she just hates us," Ron replied.

"I seriously doubt that," Farrah replied. "She probably wants to adjust to motherhood before she has the whole family swarming around her."

"She let Lucius and Narcissa see her baby the day he was born," Ron answered. "We didn't know she'd given birth until we read about it in The Daily Prophet."

“Ooh,” Farrah answered in a low voice. "That had to hurt."

"It absolutely destroyed George and Dad, but she continues to ignore us."

"That has to be tough."

"It's more than tough, it's almost impossible to bear."

"I'm sure Ginny will come around eventually and let you see her child."

“I'd agree with you, except she's been so brainwashed by the Malfoys she can't think for herself anymore."

"Sometimes love does blind one to realities such as how much one's family loves her," Farrah replied in a soft voice.
"I don't get it," Ron whined. "When Ginny got with Draco it's like our family didn't matter to her anymore. It's like she was born a Malfoy, not a Weasley."

"Well her last name is Malfoy, so I suppose she should hold some loyalty to her husband's family."

"There's loyalty and then there's blindness."

"True."

"It's so bad that, if you believe the newspaper, her baby doesn't even look like a Weasley."

“What do you mean?"

“Scorpius has blond hair, not red.”

Farrah raised an eyebrow. "Has there ever been a Weasley without red hair?"

"Not to my knowledge," Ron replied.

“Wow,” Farrah whispered. “The Malfoys must have some strong genes.”

“Well apparently Hermione does too because Rose’s hair isn’t red either, or so I hear. I don’t know, I’ve never seen my daughter because Snape won't let me within ten kilometers of her!” Ron snapped.

Farrah answered, "At least Rose looks like Hermione. If Rose's hair were black there's be no hope that you were the father, but since it's brown, there's still a chance.”

“That’s what Dad said too,” Ron replied.

"So he thinks you could be Rose's father?"

"Yes, he does."

"Well, it's good to have someone in your family who believes you."

"It is, except now he's angry with me for not claiming Rose in the first place,” Ron's throat constricted. "He got so angry with me on Valentine's Day that he collapsed on the floor crying."

"Oh dear," Farrah leaned in closer to Ron. "Is he okay?"

"He is now." Ron took a shaky breath. “But it was heartbreaking to see him like that. My dad, he never gets excited about anything. I've never seen him that upset though. He was always so supportive of me, but now he thinks I’m a disappointment. I, I know I messed up, but I’m trying to do the right thing. Doesn’t that mean anything to anyone?”

“I’m sure he appreciates your efforts to better yourself and regain your family,” Farrah answered.

"It's still so unfair!” Ron ranted. "Snape is doing everything in his power to keep me from my daughter and it's working! My family is falling apart, I might be poor soon, but all Snape cares about is his fortune."

“He never was the nicest professor,” Farrah noted.

“It’s not just that. He’s really selfish, far more than anyone realizes. If he had any kind of heart he would give Rose back to me. All he cares about is himself though. He'll never let me see her because then he’d have to admit that he's nothing more than a kidnapper!”
“That’s so rough,” Farrah whispered.

“My only hope is to convince Hermione that I still love her, and that Rose is better off with me,” Ron replied. “But I can't do that until I'm free of this stupid walker!”

"Why do you need to be free of the walker?" Farrah asked. "Can't you come to her right now and tell her how desperately you want her back?"

"Hermione wants a man, not a cripple,” Ron answered. "She won't accept me unless I look and act like I used to."

"Well then, when do they plan to take you off the walker?" Farrah asked.

Ron flashed her a small smile. "In about two weeks."

"Are you going to talk to Hermione then?"

"Of course. I want my daughter back. The only way to do that is to remind Hermione of why we fell in love and get her away from that greasy git forever.”

"It won't be easy," Farrah warned.

“Why not?” Ron asked. "I seduced her once. I can do it again.”

"Yes, but she wasn't married the first time you two were together."

"You actually think she'd stay with Snape when she could have me?"

"Up to this point, she's been living under his roof, not yours.”

“Snape’s been destroying the letters I’ve sent her. She’s probably thinking about how much she misses me right now.”

“Maybe, but I wouldn’t underestimate Snape’s appeal.”

“Appeal?” Ron retorted. “Farrah, you had him in potions class. Surely you remember his crooked teeth, his enormous nose, and his overall pissy attitude. What is appealing about any of that?"

Farrah smirked, "For starters, do you know what they say about the size of a man's nose, right?"

Ron rolled his eyes. "I am not having a cock fight with someone almost twice my age. Besides, I doubt he knows the first thing about what makes women beg for more in the bedroom.”

"Yet Hermione's still with him.”

"I cannot understand for the life of me why."

“Maybe it’s because he likes books,” Farrah answered as she raised her tea cup. "Next to Hermione, he's probably the biggest lover of books in Great Britain." 

"So, what?"

"Hermione loves books. They have something in common, something intrinsic to their natures. That creates a bond, one which isn’t always easily broken.”

Ron lowered his head while Farrah took a sip of tea. After a few moments he raised it again. “You
may have a point about all that intellectual stuff. I never could understand what 'Mione was talking about half the time, and I never got why she liked reading so much. Snape might understand her better though since he likes reading too.”

“Exactly,” Farrah replied. "You couldn’t understand Hermione on an intellectual level, but Severus Snape does. She wants to be able to talk with someone about her interests, which is something you were unable to do. That’s in part why she’s staying with her husband instead of trying to reunite with you.”

“I've never thought about it that way," Ron huffed. "But that doesn't matter because you can't build an entire relationship off of books."

"There's another reason she may stay with him," Farrah continued.

"What would that be?"

"Snape has never abandoned her, but you have."

Ron shook his head

"It will not be easy to regain her trust after what you've done."

Ron sighed. “I already know that.”

"Hermione won't be quick to trust you again. Even if she does leave Snape, there's no guarantee that she'll run back into your arms,” Farrah warned.

“Please, this man was a spy. How could she trust a former double agent?” Ron replied.

"Snape took her into his home when you wouldn't. He gave her child a name. She won't forget that when she's choosing between the two of you."

"You're right." Ron shook his head. “I hate it, but you’re right.”

Farrah took one last sip of tea before setting her cup down on the coffee table.

"What do I do, Farrah? I need to win Hermione back, but I don’t know how to do it,” Ron groaned.

Farrah smiled. "That's why I'm here. After all, who better to help you seduce a woman than another woman?"

"I don't mean to be offensive, but you aren't like Hermione at all," Ron replied.

"I know," Farrah answered. "But don't underestimate the things most all women have in common."

"Like?"

"We need a sense of excitement, a man who is interesting, exciting, daring…”

"I am those things."

"To a Quidditch groupie, yes, but not to a woman like Hermione. When you go speak to her, you'll need to make an entrance she won't forget, something that will make her take notice and say, 'This is an exciting man! I can't imagine my life without him!'"

“An exciting man,” Ron tapped the arm rest of his chair.

“He’d need to be one who would easily intimidate Snape, someone the git would stand no chance against.”

“Exactly.”

Ron’s lips curled up. “Someone like Sirius Black.”

“Sirius Black?” Farrah asked.

“Yes,” Ron replied. “Sirius Black was one of the coolest people I’d ever met. He had a flying motorcycle, a killer hairstyle, and a wicked sense of humor. Snape couldn’t stand Sirius, but Hermione liked him well enough.”

Farrah hummed.

Ron’s eyes lit up. “When Harry died, Dad got Sirius’ motorcycle back. He, he still has it in his garage. I’ll bet he’d let me borrow it if he knew I was going to use it to win back ‘Mione.”

"How could a motorcycle win back a bookworm?"

"I could use it to make a grand entrance, one which 'Mione would never forget!"

Farrah nodded. “That might be crazy enough to work.”

“Of course it will work,” Ron answered. “All I need to do is get a hold of the bike, learn how to ride it, and then I’ll sweep ‘Mione off her feet. In two months she'll be my wife, not Snape's.”

“All of that might work,” Farrah replied. “I could even help you pick out a wardrobe so you look your most dashing.”

“You’d do that for me?”

“Of course I would. We’re friends, are we not?”

“Yeah,” Ron drawled.

"Then it shouldn't surprise you that I'd want to help you reclaim your family,” Farrah answered.

“Wow,” Ron replied "Th-thank you. You’re the first person who’s really gone out of her way to help me recently, so thank you.”

“You deserve to have someone in your corner,” Farrah replied.

“Thanks,” Ron grinned. “I appreciate that.”

Farrah purred, “Trust me, the pleasure of helping you is all mine.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience and support! It is much appreciated!
“Come on Rose,” Hermione cooed. "Open up for the choo choo train."

Rose stared at the flat sliver object before her. There was a gooey substance on top of it. She sniffed it. The smell was reminiscent of something Mum and Dad had eaten at that Chinese restaurant a while back. Still, it looked substantially different. What exactly did Mummy want her to do with it?

“Here comes the choo choo train,” Hermione continued.

Rose blinked. What is a choo choo train?

"Come on Rose, open your mouth for Mummy," Hermione coaxed.

Rose pursed her lips. Mummy had to be kidding. That gooey mush looks gross! It will never pass through my lips.

Hermione sighed. "Come on, baby. Just give it a try."

Rose huffed. Never!

The door to the basement slammed shut. Rose gasped. Hermione took full advantage of the opportunity and stuck the spoon in her daughter’s mouth. Rose gummed the icky stuff now pasted to the roof of her mouth. Not offensive… but not very tasty, either. The things she did for her parents.

"Good girl!" Hermione exclaimed.

Rose's expression turned thoughtful as her tongue played with the substance. She gurgled some of it back through her lips, which Hermione caught with a spoon. The rest went down her throat.

Rose's eyes widened. Wait, I can swallow more things than milk? Well that’s new…

"Want another bite?" Hermione asked.

Rose raised an eyebrow. You expect me to eat more?

Hermione laughed. "I wish your daddy could see you right now. You look just like him."

“What do you wish I could see?” Severus asked as he trudged into the dining room.

Hermione replied, "Look at our daughter’s expression."

Severus glanced at Rose, whose eyebrow was still suspended in a mirror image of his own. A chuckle bubbled up from Severus’ throat. "That's my baby girl."

"She didn't learn that from me anyway," Hermione grinned before dipping the spoon into a small dish for more rice cereal.

Severus inhaled the scent of the baby food. "Are we putting Rose on solids now?"

“I thought we should try,” Hermione replied. “Rose has been drinking more milk lately, and she’s
been putting more things in her mouth. Now that she's getting better about sitting up on her own, I thought now would be as good a time as any to try and feed her solid foods.”

Severus sank into a chair and nodded. “I trust your judgment then.”

Hermione lowered the spoon and set the baby food aside. She asked in a quiet voice, "How did your experiment go?"

"The potion turned to ash.”

"It exploded?"

"No," Severus sighed. "It bubbled up when I added the final ingredient and spewed an alarmingly red steam. When it finally settled down I found that the potion had evaporated, leaving only ashes.”

“Could the ashes have some type of magical property?”

“No, they were simply useless black, crispy flakes. I had a devil of a time scrubbing them out of the cauldron.”

"I'm sorry." "It's not your fault. This is a normal setback at a time when we cannot afford any." Hermione kissed Severus on the cheek. “This is a minor bump in the road. We'll find a way around it.”

"I know," Severus sighed. "Right now I need a break. I’m running out of ideas, and my frustration is mounting with each explosion.”

"Then a little time away from the lab might be a good thing," Hermione noted.

Hermione returned her attention to Rose, who was more interested in the pattern of the tile on the floor than in her food.

"Come on Rose, let's try another bite," Hermione cooed before picking up the spoon.

Rose looked up at her mother, but kept her lips firmly closed.

"Rose,” Severus rumbled.

Rose turned her focus to him.

"Be a good girl and open your mouth, just like this,” Severus instructed.

“Severus,” Hermione began. “She can't understand…”

Rose formed a slight "o" with her lips in imitation of her father. Hermione slipped the spoon back into the child’s mouth. Rose’s eyes widened, but once again accepted the rice. Severus flashed her a grin, and she responded with one of her own.

"Thank you." "Anytime."

"It may be slow going, but at least she's being a pretty good sport about it."
"Of course she's a good sport about it." Severus winked at Rose. "She's an exceptional child who learns new skills rather quickly."

Hermione dipped the spoon for another go. Rose looked to her dad for reassurance. When he opened his mouth, so did she. Once again, Hermione put food into Rose’s mouth. The process was repeated until there was no more food left.

"All done!" Hermione cheered.

Rose squeaked. Thank Merlin it’s done. I’m full.

Severus took Rose out of her safety seat and kissed her on the cheek. "You did a good job today. Daddy is very proud of you."

Rose squealed as her mother kissed her on the other cheek. "Thank you for eating for Mummy. That was a very big girl thing to do."

Rose basked in their praise until she noticed that her parents' lips were no longer focused on her, but on each other’s. Her face twisted into a scowl, but before she could pitch a proper fuss, a loud mechanical roar sounded outside the house.

"What is that?" Hermione exclaimed.

"I have no idea," Severus answered as he handed Rose to her and ran to the door.

Hermione paused. She glanced at the doorway, and then at her screeching daughter. Finally, she grabbed her wand and crept within sight of the foyer, a distraught Rose clutched protectively in her arms.

Severus stared out the front window. His heart began racing. How could anyone have broken through these wards? Was this individual associated with Fenrir? What did this person want?

"A motorcycle?" Hermione asked.

Severus drew closer to the door as the machine sputtered closer. His body went cold as the motorcycle sputtered into view. He would know that blasted machine anywhere.

The word, "Snivellus," reverberated through his brain.

Severus trembled. Could Sirius Black have come back from the veil? Certainly not. Even a dead man should not have been able to penetrate that ward. Then again, Sirius would never allow Severus to be happy for longer than ten minutes, especially if that happiness had been found with someone the dog considered to be a friend. Could Sirius have found a way to return to the land of the living for the sole purpose of harassing him? Was there a chance he could lure Hermione away by exposing how pathetic a man Severus actually was?

Why couldn't Severus be left in peace for longer than ten minutes?

Rose's cries pierced his reverie. He straightened and gripped his wand tighter. It didn't matter whether or not Sirius had returned from the dead. Severus was going to fight for his family, regardless of the cost.

The motorcycle came to a halt and the rider stepped off. Swaggering to the front door, the driver paused to acknowledge the pair staring at him through the window. Then he took off his helmet, revealing a smirk and an unruly mop of red hair.
"Hey, 'Mione!"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Chapter 181

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hermione’s pupils were dilated. Her mouth was agape. Never would she have expected Ron to appear on her doorstep on a motorcycle. What was he trying to accomplish?

Rose’s screams jolted Hermione from her reverie.

"The ward," Severus muttered.

"The ward," Hermione echoed. "Why isn't it working?"

"It is working," Severus answered.

“How?” Hermione demanded.

Ron began pounding on the door.

"The ward works by only admitting those who are of a direct blood relation to a person living in this mansion. Ron is directly related to Rose by blood, which is how he managed to break through."

"Shit," Hermione whispered. "I hadn't considered Ron's connection to Rose and how it would affect the ward."

Severus shook his head. "I didn't consider their connection when I created this ward. It never occurred to me that one of the Weasleys would be fool enough to trespass on my property and demand to see Rose."

Severus slammed his fist into the wall.

Hermione put a hand on Severus’ shoulder. "When you cast the ward, the Weasleys didn’t want Rose. Ginny never tried to break through the ward, so it slipped our minds that any of the other Weasleys could break through."

"No," Severus' lace was filled with venom. "It’s simply another oversight for which I should’ve been better prepared!"

Before Severus could hit the wall again, Hermione grabbed his arm. His eyes fell on her as he took a deep breath. She lowered his arm and released it.

"'Mione! Open up 'Mione!" Ron shouted.

Rose screeched over the knocking. What was going on? Why were Mummy and Daddy so upset? Who was banging on the door?

Hermione swayed side to side and whispered into Rose's ear, “you’re going to be fine. Mummy and Daddy will protect you."

Rose wailed. Protect me from what? What is going on?

Ron continued to pound on the door. “'Mione! Open up! I’m here for you!”
Hermione scowled. "My parents were right; he is annoying when he's trying to convince someone to let him in."

"Indeed," Severus grumbled. "I suppose we should greet him before he destroys our door."

Severus stormed towards the foyer.

"Wait!"

He spun around. "Yes?"

She handed Rose to him. "Hold her, please. You're better at comforting her than I am."

Severus stared at the crying infant.

"Ron needs to see that you two have a bond," Hermione continued. "It’ll be easier to persuade him to leave if he sees that Rose wants to be with you and not him."

Severus took Rose in his arms. Rose focused on him. He kissed her on the cheek before resuming his trek to the front door. He began in a gentle voice, "Daddy is not going to let this dunderhead harm you. Nothing terrible will befall you."

Once they reached the doorway Rose quieted and buried herself in Severus’ robes. Maybe if she hid from this stranger he’d go away sooner.

Severus took a deep breath before opening the door. In the most controlled voice possible, he began, "Hello Mr. Weasley. How may we help you?"

"I need to speak to 'Mione," Ron began with the sweetest smile he could muster.

"No one named, 'Mione lives here," Hermione retorted as she stood beside her husband.

"Fine, I'll call you Hermione," Ron replied.

Hermione’s expression did not change.

“Sorry if the name 'Mione offended you. I just thought you'd like hearing your old nickname again,” Ron continued.

"I've never cared for that nickname, and you know it," Hermione answered.

Ron gulped as he gazed into her eyes. He searched for a sliver of affection, but came up empty. The only emotions she betrayed were pain and fury. Getting ‘Mione to come around was going to take more work than he’d anticipated. Perhaps if he showed his gentler side she’d at least step away from the dungeon bat…

His eyes rested upon the baby in Severus' arms. “Is that my daughter?”

“No,” Severus growled. “She is my daughter.”

Ron crossed his arms over his chest. “I believe I was the one who slept with ‘Mione, not you.”

“Being a father is about more than donating sperm,” Hermione cut in.

“It doesn’t change the fact that I created Rose, which means Rose has more of me in her than she does Snape," Ron replied.
Severus squeezed Rose tighter. “I see very little of you in Rose.”

"You mean you don't see me when you look into her blue eyes?" Ron asked.

Severus' muscles tensed.

Rose extracted herself from Severus' robes and glanced up at his face. She gasped. Daddy's eyes were wide, and much darker than usual. His mouth was drawn into the deepest frown she’d ever seen on him, and she could feel his rapidly increasing heartbeat against her own chest. Rose glanced over at her Mummy, who was frowning as well. Mummy’s face was very red, and there were beads of sweat forming on her face.

What on earth was going on?

“Hey there Rose,” the man cooed.

Rose studied the face of the stranger. Her heart banged against her chest. This man looked very much like that awful red-headed lady she’d seen earlier. His eyes lacked any kind of friendliness, and his smile sent chills up her spine.

Rose did not like this red-headed man one bit.

Ron leapt over the threshold and pushed past Severus. Hermione pointed her wand at him. “Take one more step inside and I will hex you into tomorrow!”

“You wouldn’t really hurt me in front of our daughter, would you?” Ron asked.

“She’s not your daughter!” Hermione yelled.

Rose whimpered.

"There, there Rose," Ron made his way towards Severus. "I know your step daddy is really mean..."

“So help me if you take one step closer I will hex you until there's nothing left,” Hermione warned.

"Eh!" Rose cried.

Hermione's body went cold. As much as she wanted Ron gone, she couldn’t risk creating a swarm of hexes around Rose. With a sigh, Hermione lowered the wand and asked, "What do you want, Ron?"

"I want to see my daughter!" he answered. "I also wanted to tell you how I felt about you."

"You've made your feelings toward me perfectly clear over the years," Hermione argued.

"Is that you talking, or Snape?"

"Severus doesn't tell me what to say or do."

"Then why did he throw away the letters you sent me?"

"I threw those letters away on my own!"

"What?" Ron took a step back. “You destroyed them?”

“I did,” Hermione replied. “I didn’t even open most of them. The second I saw the sender I
disintegrated them.”

“But…but,” Ron stuttered.

"Why is this so hard to comprehend?” Hermione asked. "I do not love you. I do not want to go back with you. I want you out of my life forever so I can be happy with my family.”

Ron replied. “But Snape, he, he's so...

"He's so what?” Hermione demanded.

Ron stopped. Insulting Snape might not help in this situation. As much as he'd love to go on a tirade about the evils of the greasy git, 'Mione may not appreciate that. For some reason, she might actually care about him, though Ron couldn’t for the life of him figure out why. No, right now he needed to prove he was the bigger man, if only to prove his maturity.

Ron asked in a weak voice, "Can I hold my daughter?"

Severus recoiled. “You don’t have a daughter.”

“No! She's mine and you both know it!” Ron argued. “Let me hold her.”

"First of all, I would appreciate if you did not talk about Rose as if she were a toy,” Severus snapped. “Secondly, have you ever held an infant before?”

"How hard can it be?” Ron asked.

Severus gave Hermione a sideways glance. She shook her head. "Ron, you gave up your rights to her the second you walked out on us. I see no reason why you should be allowed to hold her.”

"I created her. I was in that bedroom, too. That gives me more than enough of a right to take part in Rose's life!” Ron argued.

"Being a sperm donor does not entitle you to walk in here and turn our lives upside down,” Hermione hissed.

"She deserves to be held by her real father,” Ron argued.

"Her real father is holding her right now,” Hermione answered.

Ron glared at Snape. "You know what I mean.”

Rose squirmed in Severus' arms until her head was once again buried in his robes. She did not want to see or hear any more of this red-haired man, or see how upset he was making her parents. All she wanted was for him to go away so she could resume playing with her parents.

Severus swayed with her in his arms and rubbed her back. “No harm will befall you, Little One. I won’t let anyone injure you.”

“I'm not going to hurt her,” Ron argued. “I want to get to know her.”

Rose sniffed and clung more tightly to Severus’ robes. Daddy said nothing would happen to her. Daddy promised she’d be safe. Daddy had never been wrong before. She just had to trust him.

Ron turned to Hermione and looked at her with watery eyes. "Please 'Mione, I just want to hold my daughter. Can you please do that for me?”
"Will you leave if we allow you to hold her?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," he lied.

She turned to Severus, who snarled, "Set him on the couch. At least there he's less likely to drop Rose."

"I won't drop her," Ron promised.

“We’ll keep our wands on him as well,” Hermione replied.

“Not a bad idea,” Severus answered.

“I won’t do anything, I promise,” Ron replied as Hermione led him to the sitting room.

Severus followed behind the pair, unable to shake the feeling that handing Rose over to Ron constituted a deep betrayal.

Once they reached the sitting room, Ron sat down and grinned as Severus approached him. Rose gazed up at her father as Hermione showed Ron how to position his arms. Severus pulled Rose away from his robes. His heart broke when he saw the fear and uncertainty in her eyes.

"I won't let him do anything to you," Severus whispered. "It will all be over soon."

Severus then placed Rose in Ron’s arms. Rose glowered at the red-head.

"Hello. I'm your daddy," Ron began.

Rose snarled. You're not my daddy. You’re just some mean red-head who nobody wants around.

"Can you say ‘Dada?’" Ron asked.

Rose reached for Severus and squeaked. He was backing away, with his wand pointed at the red head’s body.

“Come on, say Dada.”

Rose’s stomach constrict until it ached.

““You’re a good little girl, aren’t you,” Ron continued. “I’ll bet you’ll grow up to play Quidditch. You’d make a great chaser.”

Rose let out a whine.

"Oh Merlin! She reeks!" Ron yelled.

Severus rushed over and reclaimed his child.

Rose screamed.

"Do you want to help us change her nappy?" Hermione asked. "It would be one way to get involved with her life."

"No! Those things are disgusting!" Ron answered.

"Well, I suppose I should change her nappy then," Severus replied. "After all, you once wished me that particular pleasure in abundance."
Rose buried herself in her daddy’s robes. Severus gave Ron one last parting glare before stalking out.

"I…I barely got to hold her,” Ron began.

"You need to go now!” Hermione demanded.

"No! I need to be with you!”

“I don’t want you in my life anymore!”

“You can’t say that you haven’t missed me or thought of me!” Ron answered. "You can’t say that you’ve loved anyone with half the passion that you had for me!"

"Actually, I haven’t missed you in the slightest, and I have quite the loving marriage," Hermione replied.

“You,” Ron burst out laughing. “You actually mean to tell me that you’re in love with Professor Snape?”

Hermione’s frown deepened.

"I know you are angry with me, but you can't honestly expect me to believe you're in love with Snape,” Ron replied.

"I am," she growled.

"Come on ‘Mione,” Ron laughed. "I know you're desperate to make the best of your situation, but even you couldn't be desperate enough to fall in love with Snape.”

Light leapt from Hermione’s wand. Ron yelped.

“Get out or I’ll cast a sectumsempra!”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Just try me!”

“You’ll get arrested.”

“No auror would arrest a mother who was trying to protect her child from a trespasser.”

Ron’s lower lip quivered.

“Sec…”

Ron darted off before Hermione could utter another syllable.
"Everything going to be fine Rose," Severus whispered as he entered her nursery.

Rose whimpered and buried her face deeper into her father's black robes.

"You're safe with me" Severus continued. "No Weasley is ever going to so much as lay eyes on you ever again."

She sobbed.

Severus sniffed, then gagged. "You certainly left him a stinky one."

Rose made a noise but it was muffled by his robes. Severus tried to pry Rose away from him, but she only clung to him tighter.

"Rose, you can release me now," Severus began. "The red-headed menace will be leaving soon. You will never be forced to endure his presence again."

Rose looked up at him. Was he sure that awful man was gone?

Severus sighed. "I apologize for ever letting him near you. It was an error in judgment. I assure you that it will never happen again."

She grunted before releasing his robes.

"Perhaps your distress is my doing," Severus mused aloud as he set her onto the changing table and removed her onesie. "I may have overreacted to seeing Mr. Weasley on the motorcycle, which only added to your anxiety. Perhaps I should have tried to hide my fears from you and your mother better. I may have only made the situation worse."

Rose cooed.

"You'll learn throughout the years that my actions rarely improve tense situations. It seems that all I have accomplished today is making one blunder after another," Severus replied. "I've only made things worse for you and your mother."

Rose reached for his finger. Daddy never made things worse. He always made them better for her and Mummy. Why couldn't he understand that?

Severus then opened the nappie and smirked. "You certainly made a big one while you were sitting on him, didn't you?"

"Ah," Rose answered.

Severus chuckled while he set to work cleaning her up. "Yes, Rose. I'd say after smelling you, Mr. Weasley will not show his face around here for quite some time."

Rose’s smile widened. Good. I never want to see that redhead again.

"Severus?" Hermione asked from inside the doorway.
"Hello Hermione," Severus turned to her. "Has Mr. Weasley left?"

“Yes,” Hermione replied. “He was quite eager to leave after I threatened him with a few of your hexes.”

There was a gleam in Severus’ eyes.

"I'm sorry Ron ruined our evening," Hermione stepped into the room. "I should have hexed him the moment I saw him on that stupid motorbike."

"You did nothing wrong. The fault is all mine," Severus answered. "I should not have become so upset."

“You had more than a right to be upset once you discovered that Ron could break through our wards.”

“True, but my emotions ran deeper than that.”

Hermione drew closer to him.

Severus swallowed. “When I saw Mr. Weasley on that motorcycle, all I could think about was Sirius Black and his past taunts. I became distressed, and Rose picked up on my emotional state. If I'd been calmer she may not have become quite so upset. If she were not so upset, then perhaps you could have dealt with Mr. Weasley in a more productive manner.”

"Severus, he was trying to take your daughter away. Anyone in your position would've reacted as you did."

He put on Rose's new nappy. "I suppose so. Still, it doesn’t change the fact that my presence escalated the situation. Perhaps I should have left and allowed you to discuss things with Ronald.”

“What exactly were Ron and I supposed to discuss? He doesn't love me or Rose, and he has no business taking her away from the father who does love her," Hermione answered.

“Yet you did love him at one time,” Severus replied. “Before this marriage, you were prepared to start a life with him and Rose. Had things worked out as you intended, you would be with him at the moment, not with me.”

“I am thankful every day that things did not work out as I planned. You make me much happier than he ever could,” Hermione replied.

"You make me happy as well," Severus muttered.

Hermione rushed over to the drawers near the changing table. "Here, let me get another onesie out for you."

"Thank you," Severus answered.

Hermione pulled out a small set of black robes and held them up. Rose squealed in delight.

Severus gave her a small smile. "Rose seems to approve."

"Of course Rose approves. She looks just like her daddy in these robes."

"Indeed she does."
Hermione began dressing Rose in her robes. "Rose knows who her father is. She adores you."

"She is rather attached to me," Severus answered as he gazed at the baby dressed in black.

Hermione stared at Severus. Although his lips were curled up, his smile didn't reach his eyes. Behind the obvious love he showed for their daughter she could also see a glimmer of fear and a hint of sadness. Hermione shook her head. What more could she say to convince him that Rose would always be his daughter? Didn't he trust her?

"Are you doing well?" Severus asked as he picked up Rose.

"Yes, why?" Hermione replied.

"You appear frustrated," Severus noted before setting Rose down into her crib.

"I am frustrated with the entire situation. Ronald won't leave me alone and you won't trust that no one is going to take Rose away from you…"

"I do trust you not to take Rose from me."

Hermione exhaled. “Then why are you looking at me like I’m about to destroy your world?”

"Hermione, I know that you won't take Rose from me," Severus replied before a lump formed in his throat.

Rose babbled and picked up her toy snake.

Severus gazed into his wife’s eyes. Did he dare tell Hermione his true secret fear? Did he dare put into words his deepest emotions? Did he dare say aloud his true feelings for the witch?

Hermione searched his eyes. In them she could see the child he once was, afraid of being rejected… abandoned. Whatever was happening within him went deeper than Rose.

“Severus,” she began in the gentlest voice possible. “Please tell me what is troubling you.”

He stood rooted in silence.

“Severus?”

In a voice barely above a whisper he answered, "Rose isn't the only person Ron could take away from me."

Hermione stepped closer.

“I know you say that you don't love Ronald, but that doesn’t change the fact that it cannot be easy being my spouse. It cannot be easy being married for convenience when you have a chance at love. Even," Severus gulped. "Even if you no longer desire Ronald, there are other men whom you could love and would love you just as ardently. You could have a real marriage if you so desired."

“Who said I don’t already have a real marriage?” Hermione asked.

Severus’ eyes grew. Only the vulnerability in his wife's eyes convinced him that he had not imagined her words. His heart raced as his body temperature increased. He asked, "Are you saying that this has become a real marriage for you?"

"I'm saying that I love you," Hermione choked.
She watched his eyes light up, then go dark again. "No, Hermione, you cannot love me."

"But I do love you," Hermione argued.

"No," Severus insisted. "You are grateful to me. You think I’m a good father. You enjoy our intimacy. That does not mean you love me."

"Are you trying to tell me that I’m incapable of deciphering my own emotions?" Hermione asked.

"No," Severus choked. "You are a very intuitive witch, so I suppose you would know if you loved someone."

"Then believe me when I say, 'I love you.'"

"No," Severus argued. "Even if you do love me, you shouldn’t."

"Why not?" Hermione asked.

Severus replied, "You are beautiful, intelligent, patient, and kind. Right now, you could be with any man you wanted. Why would you choose me?"

"Because you understand me! You know what it means to love even when it hurts," Hermione began.

"I hurt people," Severus argued. "You know my history quite well, and you’ve witnessed my foul moods."

"Yet you’ve been nothing but respectful to me throughout this entire marriage."

"Some things do not change, such as my propensity for obliterating every good thing in my life."

"You've learned from your mistakes. I trust you're intelligent enough not to repeat them."

"Yes, but that bitter experience came with time, which brings me to my next issue."

"Which would be?"

"I am almost twice your age. You could be with someone younger and more attractive than me. Why would you want to be with a man almost two decades your senior?"

"I’m tired of dating boys whose only topic of conversation is some sport which bores me past the point of tears," Hermione replied. "I want a man, Severus, a real man. I want someone I can discuss potions and other academic topics with. I want someone who would rather spend his time reading books with me beside a fireplace than sitting out in the rain watching people flying around on broomsticks. I want you! I love you!"

"There are better men out there…"

"Point them out to me then," Hermione argued. "Tell me who is so much better than you that I should be in his arms instead of in yours."

Severus shifted his foot.

"My God, Severus, look at yourself! How could I not love you, as a person, as a friend, as a husband, and as the father of my child?" Hermione continued. "You are raising a child no one else would accept and you're absolutely brilliant with her! When I revealed my pregnancy, you didn't treat
me as a whore; instead you respected me and have encouraged me. Why wouldn't I choose you over every other dunderhead on earth?"

Severus cracked a smile.

"Severus, I want a real marriage with you. I want to raise children with you. I want to discuss potions with you until you've shared with me everything you know. I want to spend all night brewing with you and then I want to collapse in your arms until Rose or one of her siblings wakes us up. Severus, I want to be Hermione Snape for the rest of my life."

Severus blinked.

Hermione’s chest went cold. Tears welled in her eyes. Perhaps she'd misread the situation. Maybe he did not love her after all and was trying to find a kind way to reject her. In her stupidity, she may have destroyed any intimacy and friendship they had. She'd be lucky if he said two words to her tomorrow. Why could she never keep her mouth shut?

Severus clasped his wife’s hands. "Hermione, I want a real marriage, as well. I want to listen to you as you complain about your bushy hair, even though I find it absolutely delightful. I want to scowl at ministry functions while you try to make me laugh. It would be a game for our amusement alone. No one else would need to understand."

Hermione laughed. "It would be quite amusing to see the reactions of those around us."

He then held her close "What I want most of all, my love, is to wake up every morning with you, and whisper, 'I love you' into your ear. I want to make love to you until you have no doubt of my affection for you. Hermione Snape, I love you. I love everything about you."

A tear escaped Hermione’s eye. “I love everything about you too, Severus Snape. There is nobody I would rather go through eternity with than you.”

Their lips met. At first the kiss was gentle, but as the seconds ticked by it became more passionate, more real.

"Ooh!"

Severus broke away and turned to Rose. "Yes, Rose, we love you too."

Hermione gasped. "Severus! Look at the box of baby wipes."

The box was hovering above Rose’s dresser, across the room from where he had set it down. "Rose…is she?"

"She is!" Hermione exclaimed. "It's her first sign of magic!"

"Oh Rose!" Severus cheered as he picked her up from the crib.

Rose scowled as the box fell to the floor. Still, when she saw the pride in her parents' faces, she couldn't help but grin. She didn't understand all the fuss though. She’d been levitating her toy snake for quite some time now. Hadn’t they been paying attention?

"I love you witches," Severus whispered. “I could not have asked for a better family.”

"We love you too, and we always will," Hermione answered, nestling her head in the crook of his shoulder.
Ron snarled. If Hermione thought she could threaten to hex him, she had another thing coming. She was going to hear him out whether she liked it or not. Once she calmed down, then they could begin their reunion. With any luck, the night would end with a discussion of how best to procure her alimony.

Ron looked about. After a few moments he noticed a light in a window. He sneaked toward it. If he knocked on it, then Hermione would have to answer and hear him out.

When he peeked inside, he saw Severus holding Rose, with Hermione standing beside them. Both were looking down at Rose. Hermione’s lips were moving, but Ron couldn’t make out the words. Finally, the couple looked up at each other.

Ron’s jaw dropped upon seeing the sparkle in Hermione’s eyes. There was so much devotion, so much vulnerability. It was as if her soul was naked before the git, and she did not mind one bit.

She'd never looked at him like that.

The look on Snape's face was just as nauseating. He was smiling, an already unusual phenomenon. Snape was relaxed, as if he’d never experienced the trauma of war or the sting of rejection. He appeared to be a man in love, and not afraid of displaying those emotions.

Rose’s attention was focused on her parents. Her face was glowing, her lips curled up into a gummy grin. Together, the three of them were the very image of blissful domesticity.

Ron stepped away from the window and shook his head. Hermione was not leaving Snape, and he was not getting her alimony. As far as Hermione was concerned, Rose was Severus’ and always would be. Ron could not count on her to help him out of his dire financial situation.

Ron trudged back to his motorcycle and shook his head. He needed a good stiff drink.

Chapter End Notes

Well, they finally admitted their feelings for each other (it only took the 182 chapters). Hopefully this chapter has been worth the wait!

Thank you so much for all the support. As always, it is deeply appreciated!
Farrah glanced to her right, and then to her left. There was no sign of him. Once more she looked around. Nothing.

A woman collided into Farrah. Farrah growled. The woman muttered a “sorry” before stumbling towards the pool table.

Farrah stood on her tiptoes. A smile came to her face. She’d recognize that tuft of red-hair anywhere.

Now running, she pushed through a crush of tipsy patrons, eyes watering and lungs aching from the thick smoke until she reached an empty barstool next to her target. Then, she plopped down, earning the focus on the patron beside her.

“Thanks for coming,” Ron slurred.

“I was worried about you when you called,” Farrah began. “How badly did things go with Hermione?”

Ron gulped down a shot of Firewhiskey. From the look of his bloodshot eyes, Farrah had a suspicion this was not his first drink. From his frown and his slumped posture, she also suspected it would not be his last.

"That great, eh?” Farrah asked.

“Stupid Snape,” Ron muttered. “All he ever does is ruin things.”

“How did Snape ruin things?” Farrah asked.

Ron held up his right hand and shouted, “Hey bartender!”

"Coming,” the bartender called.

"Hey toots.”

Farrah turned to the man beside her.

"Why don't you leave your boyfriend to his drink? I can show you a better time,” he began.

She glared at him. "Why don't you finish your drink and pretend I don't exist while I talk to my friend?"

"He's drinking over another woman. Surely you deserve better than that.”

“I deserve to be left in peace.”

“Oh c'mon baby. Go upstairs with me. I promise you’ll have the time of your life.”

She sneered. “I think I’ll have a better time watching you squirm while my friends at the Ministry charge you with harassment.”
He swiveled away from the couple and struck up a conversation with the patron to his left. Farrah returned her attention to Ron, who was watching the bartender refill his glass of Firewhiskey. "Merlin, how badly did she reject you?"

"Pretty bad," Ron admitted.

"Ooh," Farrah replied.

"She wants nothing to do with me, Farrah."

"I told you she might be upset…"

"No, you don’t understand," he snapped. "She dumped me for Snape. She loves him. I saw the way she looked at him. It’s like…I don’t know…she was happier with him than she ever was with me."

"I see," she replied.

"How could I lose to Snape? He’s so disgusting. He made my life a living hell at Hogwarts. He hates Gryffindors. He hates children. He hates happiness. Yet she’d rather be with him than me! I don’t understand it!"

"She’s still angry with you. Give her some time to cool down and she’ll come around."

"You aren’t listening to me! She isn’t coming around. She is with Snape, and they are in love. It, it’s so disgusting!"

"Okay, okay," Farrah answered, all too aware of the attention they were attracting from their fellow patrons. "At least you got to see Rose. That’s something positive."

"I saw her for two minutes," Ron snorted. "She pooed on me! It was disgusting!"

"Ew," Farrah muttered. He burst out laughing. "Snape can just keep changing nappies! I sure as hell don’t want to!"

"Nappies are disgusting," Farrah admitted.

"They are, and I hate them," Ron replied. "Smelling her poo really ruined my evening."

"I’m so sorry."

"It isn’t fair! I learned how to ride a motorcycle for Hermione! She should’ve been swept off her feet when I rode up to her door. Why didn’t she ride off with me? Why is she with Snape right now and not me?"

"Let’s focus on the positives for a moment."

"What positives?"

Farrah replied. "Well, as much as Hermione may dislike you at the moment, she did lower the ward for you."

Ron’s voice was softer. "What ward?"

"The ward no one can get past."
"Shit, there was no ward. I just rode right on in."

"No ward?" Farrah exclaimed.

Ron took another sip of his drink.

"There wasn't a ward?" Farrah asked.

"Nope," Ron slammed his glass onto the table. “There was no ward.”

“So did they have them down?”

“They must have, although they looked pretty shocked when I arrived. It was like I shouldn't have been able to ride on up to the house. It was weird. They were weird, and they wouldn't let me see Rose when she wasn’t pooping and Hermione won’t come back to me!”

The words, “no ward” reverberated in Farrah’s brain.

“If I don’t get that alimony I’m screwed. I’m in so much debt, I need more brooms, and only Hermione can help me out.”

“You are in a bad situation,” Farrah muttered.

“I don't want to be poor again, Farrah! I don’t!” Ron shouted.

"You won't be poor," Farrah mumbled.

“The ward is Basque,” Uncle Archelaus' voice was as clear as it had been almost a month ago. "Only those related by blood to one of the house’s inhabitants can gain entry.”

Farrah tapped the bar top. If Ron was Rose's father, then their biological connection would allow him to pass through the ward. Someone could get around the ward!

A smile curled her lips. Fenrir would be most pleased to learn this information

"I need Hermione! I don't want to sell my mansion, and I want my broom collection!" Ron yelled as tears flooded his eyes.

More onlookers stared at the lycanthrope and the fallen Quidditch star. Farrah lowered her head and bit her lower lip. Years ago she’d promised herself she wouldn’t be caught dead with another pathetic drunk. She prayed Fenrir appreciated the emotional sacrifice she was making for their cause.

"Can you help me, Farrah?” he asked. “I, I really need you right now.”

"Of course I can. I just need to rethink a few things,” Farrah replied, standing up. "Before I do that, though, we need to get you home."

"I wanna 'nother drink," Ron protested.

"Ron, I really think you need to go home,” Farrah replied. “You've clearly had enough alcohol, and it's getting late. You don't want to be hung over when your mother visits you tomorrow."

"She's visiting me tomorrow?” Ron asked.

"She visits you almost every day,” Farrah replied.
"She does," Ron slurred before glancing up at Farrah. "I never noticed before, but you've got a nice body. Would you ever, you know... have you ever dreamed of being with a Quidditch player?"

"Can't say I have," Farrah answered. "But maybe I'll change my mind when you're sober."

"Yeah, I don't perform well when I'm drunk!" Ron began before bursting out into laughter once more.

Farrah eased him off the barstool, dragging him through the pub and out the door with no little difficulty. Part of her wanted to apparate to Fenrir right away, but Ron could barely stand up, and his face was beginning to turn green. She sighed and led him off to his house. Maybe after he threw up a few times he'd feel well enough to go to sleep. It seemed like a good idea, as long as he didn't vomit on her robes. She'd just bought them a week ago, and she'd promised herself long ago that she'd never let another drunk ruin her clean robes.

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Severus crept into the bedroom. He gazed at his wife and whispered. "Rose is finally asleep."

"Good," Hermione replied. She stretched out, allowing Severus to catch a glimpse of every one of his curves underneath an oversized gray nightshirt.

"Hermione, who said you could wear my clothing?" he teased.

"Your clothing?" Hermione pointed to the closet behind him. "I thought everything in there was marital property."

"Perhaps, but I believe you have nightshirts of your own," he replied. "Why would you wear one of mine?"

"I was cold," she purred.

He lay down beside her on the bed. "There is a terrible draft in this room. I should call someone tomorrow and have them repair it."

"Are you sure that’s necessary?" Hermione asked. "I can think of a less expensive and far more satisfying solution."

Severus caught her eye and smiled in response. He ran his thumb along his cheek. "Ten months ago I would not have dared to imagine being this happy."

Hermione draped herself over him.

Severus stroked her hair and separated out a lock to twirl around his finger. "There was so much I didn't know about family and love until the day I married you. I think perhaps you have taught me far more than I ever taught you."

Hermione sighed. "I have to admit, I didn't know what this thing between us was at first. I always thought love was supposed to be turbulent, maybe even a competition to prove oneself worthy day in and day out. I thought love had to be earned. I'd never experienced it as a gift, at least not until I met you."

"I'd never known love at all until I married you. Merlin Hermione, I couldn't fathom someone like you finding anything redeemable in me. Even when I married you, I couldn't imagine us lasting very long. You are such a spectacular woman and I am such a git."
"You aren't a git, at least not most days," Hermione grinned, nuzzling against his neck.

"I choose to be a better man around you. Still, I am prone to my moods."

"As am I."

He kissed her forehead.

“It's a trade-off, Severus,” Hermione continued. “We just can't be moody at the same time, that's all.”

"I love you, Hermione," Severus whispered.

"I love you too, Severus," Hermione whispered back.

Severus caressed the buttons on her nightshirt and looked to her for permission. Her 'yes' came in the form of a trail of kisses up his neck. With an excruciating lack of speed, Severus freed Hermione from the garment, sealing each bit of progress with a reverent kiss. Hermione then rolled him onto his back so she could return the favor.

Slipping the garment from her shoulders, Severus stared at her and breathed, "Beautiful."

"Oh Severus," she whispered, melting into him as she renewed her determination to show him how deeply her love ran.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It really keeps me going!
The first sensation Severus registered was Hermione's murmuring. The second sensation he registered was Rose's quieting sobs. The third, and most peculiar, sensation he registered was a ray of sunshine. Why would the sun be out? Hadn't he fallen asleep a few hours ago?

"Hermione?" he rasped.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," she smiled. "I was wondering when you'd wake up."

He turned and stretched to kiss her on the cheek. "What time is it?"

Hermione replied, "Eight in the morning."

Severus sat upright, allowing the sheet to float down and expose his bare chest. "Does that mean Rose…?"

Hermione shook her head. "She woke up once last night, but it was my turn to tend to her. She woke up again just ten minutes ago."

Severus looked down at Rose and kissed her on the cheek. "You're finally learning to sleep."

"She is," Hermione cooed. “According to my books she should begin sleeping through the night anytime now."

"Thank Merlin."

"Indeed."

Severus caressed Hermione's cheek. "I love you, Mrs. Snape."

Hermione flushed at the sound of the words she had waited so long to hear. "I love you too, Mr. Snape."

Rose’s lips curled up. At long last, Mummy and Daddy had started using the L-word with each other. It didn't matter anymore that they could've saved themselves a lot of hurt feelings if they’d said, "I love you" sooner. All that mattered was that Mummy and Daddy were happy, and that she now had two very loving parents.

"Hermione?"

"Yes?"

"Does it bother you that we didn't have a traditional wedding?"

"Why would I be bothered by our wedding?"

“Because you deserved better,” Severus replied.

“Why would you say that?” Hermione asked.
"Your parents weren't at the ceremony, and Minerva was watching your every move as if she were a vulture. At one point before the wedding you'd mentioned that you'd envisioned being married in a grand cathedral, not a tiny courthouse room. Anyone could tell that you did not have the wedding of your dreams, yet you endured the ceremony."

"Severus, we became a family that day. That's all I care about."

"You deserved better."

Hermione asked, "Why are we discussing our wedding?"

Severus exhaled. "For most people a wedding is a chance to demonstrate their love. For us it was a business contract, and the ceremony reflected that. Now that we've admitted our feelings for each other, it seems only natural to reevaluate our wedding."

"To be quite honest," Hermione admitted. "I was pleased with our wedding because it was so subdued."

"You were?" Severus asked.

Hermione nodded and glanced down at Rose. "Planning a wedding while trying to hide a pregnancy would have been taxing at best, impossible at worst. Now that we have a daughter and we're attempting to cure lycanthropy, well, planning a huge wedding sounds even less enticing."

"I cannot disagree with that logic," Severus admitted.

Rose continued to suckle.

"Besides," there was a gleam in Hermione's eyes. "I would rather celebrate our marriage with a honeymoon."

"I suppose that makes sense enough; after all we did not have a proper honeymoon," Severus answered. "Unless you count staying with your parents in Australia a honeymoon."

Hermione laughed. "I hardly think a vacation shared with parents or in-laws could be considered a respectable honeymoon, especially when your husband spent most of his time trying to research a cure for lycanthropy and changing dirty nappies."

"My sentiments exactly."

Rose broke away from Hermione.

"All done?" Hermione cooed.

Rose grunted.

Hermione positioned Rose's chin on her shoulder. Then she began to pat the child's back. "Rose is getting old enough to travel. Unfortunately, current circumstances don't seem to favor an extended vacation any time soon."

Severs answered, "When we've finished saving the world one lycanthrope at a time, we need to pack up Rose and vacation somewhere. I do not care where, although someplace warm might be nice. That's assuming, of course, that we can still tolerate being in the same room with each other."

Hermione smirked. "If I can handle being Lavender Brown's roommate all through Hogwarts, I can handle living with you for the rest of my life."
"So I am more tolerable than Lavender Brown."

"Infinitely so."

Severus brushed his lips against hers. Rose squeaked before letting out a burp.

He kissed his daughter on the cheek. “My apologies, Little One.”

Rose gave him a small frown before burping again.

"If you could vacation anywhere in the world, where would you want to go?” Severus asked.

Hermione patted Rose on the back and glanced up at her husband. "I've always wanted to see the States. I've never had a particular one in mind, but it might be nice to be near a beach."

“Do Florida or California sound appealing?”

"Yes, but they sound so crowded. I'd like to rent a house or a hotel room with a beach view, but not at a time when you're tripping over people."

“I agree.”

“It would be fun to help Rose build sand castles and watch you fret about sunburn. Perhaps I could even introduce you to sunscreen,” There was a mischievous spark in Hermione's eyes. "Then we could settle down with a good book, or… make up for missing our honeymoon."

"I like the sound of that second option," Severus replied with a bit of heat in his gaze.

"We may need to rent a room connected to the floo network. That way we can drop Rose off with my parents or the Malfoys when we decide to engage in some adult time."

"That should be easy enough to arrange."

Hermione shook her head. "But it's a little difficult to dream about beach vacations while Fenrir is still wreaking havoc. Then there's the issue with Ron and the insanity he brings along with him.”

Severus took her hand. "It will all be over soon, Hermione."

She sighed and gazed down at Rose. "I hope so anyway."

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"He did what?” Fenrir barked.

"Ronald Weasley managed to break through Severus Snape's ward,” Farrah answered.

"How?” Fenrir asked.

Farrah shrugged. "According to him, he just rode his motorcycle through. He didn't need a wand or anything."

"Severus Snape wouldn't have been dumb enough to lower the ward for him."

"Maybe Hermione lowered it."

"If Hermione had lowered the ward for Ron she would’ve run off with him.” Fenrir shook his head. "No, something's missing! There is no reason Weasley should've been able to get through that ward.
when I couldn’t!”

“Not unless he was biologically related to one of the Snapes.”

“The Princes have no ties to the Weasleys, nor do the Grangers.”

"He may have ties to Rose."

"Excuse me?"

"Perhaps Ron Weasley is not crazy. Maybe he is truly Rose’s biological father," Farrah suggested. Fenrir glowered at her.

"Think about it,” Farrah argued. “Uncle Archelaus says that the ward only allows blood relatives inside the house! If Rose and Ron were related by blood…”

"Snape would be packing Hermione's things right now and Weasley would have the brat under his roof already," Fenrir answered. "No, Ron had to have done something which triggered the ward to shut off."

"But he just rode his motorcycle right on through!” Farrah exclaimed.

"According to him he rode his motorcycle through, but you said yourself that he was heavily intoxicated when you last spoke with him. How do we know if his account is accurate? Maybe there is some magical property in Sirius’ motorcycle that makes it able to penetrate wards, or maybe one of the Snapes lowered the wards to allow another visitor entry, or perhaps the conversation really took place outside.”

“Of maybe Ron is Rose’s father,” Farrah grumbled.

"If Ron Weasley could break past the ward though, it would certainly help our cause." Fenrir snarled, "Yes, go ahead and keep questioning him about it. See if he can break through the ward again. If so, then perhaps we've finally found a way to stop Severus Snape once and for all.”

"I'll stay on it,” Farrah replied.

"Report back to me when you've seen him break the ward for yourself," Fenrir replied.

Farrah nodded before taking off.

Once she was hidden beyond the trees, Fenrir groaned.

The last thing he wanted to hear was that stopping Severus Snape might depend on a complete and total moron.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I deeply appreciate it!
“He penetrated my ward.”

Lucius frowned. “Who penetrated your wards?”

“Ronald Weasley,” Severus gripped the armrest of the white leather chair. “He rode Sirius’ blasted motorcycle right up to my doorstep. The ward didn't so much as slow him down.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow. “Ron Weasley knows how to ride a motorcycle?”

“Apparently,” Severus replied.

Lucius hummed. “I never would’ve suspected him to be the type of person brave enough to mount a motorbike, much less be someone intelligent enough to drive one.”

“Forget the fact that he can ride a blasted motorbike!” Severus snapped. “I need stronger wards in order to keep him away from my mansion.”

Lucius locked eyes with Severus. “Do you feel as if Rose and Hermione are in danger at this very moment? Should we move this meeting to your mansion?”

“There is no need to do so,” Severus answered. “Hermione decided that Rose needed some time to see her grandparents, so they plan to spend the day in Australia. I suspect she may also want to share with her parents that she officially has a loving husband.”

Lucius' face lit up. "So you did confess your feelings for the witch."

Severus' expression softened. "Yes, I did."

"It must be a great relief to know that she is as in love with you as you are with her."

"I will admit, it's a relief to know that this time, my affections are reciprocated."

Lucius' grin grew. "I told you that you'd feel better after confessing your emotions."

Severus scowled, though his eyes betrayed his joy. "I did not come here to discuss my love life or praise you for your halfway decent advice. I came here to discuss obtaining stronger wards."

"Indeed you did," Lucius replied, his playful expression evaporating.

"Hermione and Rose will not return until evening," Severus continued. "Which gives me just enough time to conjure up more powerful wards in addition to what I currently have. Perhaps if I am lucky I could find an even more powerful ward than what I currently have."

“You already know some powerful wards,” Lucius noted. “Surely you can use one of those.”

“Nothing is as strong as that Basque ward and now that's been penetrated,” Severus replied. "How can I protect Hermione and Rose if the Weasleys can wander in whenever they please?"

“Well it certainly would be unfortunate if Arthur ever discovered the ward's weakness,” Lucius
leaned back in his chair. “He could make life quite miserable for you if he knew he could come and go at will. Even worse, he could find all the necessary materials needed to conduct a DNA spell.”

“Hence my dilemma. I need a way to ensure that they will never enter my mansion without my knowledge or permission.”

“Indeed.”

Severus shook his head. “I’d never looked upon Rose as a Weasley. From the minute I first saw her imagine at the Healer’s office she was mine, biology be damned. How could I have overlooked such a key component of her safety and cast a ward which would admit anyone sharing her genetic structure?”

Lucius scratched his chin. “There is one way to correct your oversight of Rose’s paternity.”

“How?”

“Change it.”

Severus sighed. “We both know I cannot do that. Magically changing someone’s DNA is too tricky of a process. It's risky enough when one is only changing a single organ, but to change someone's biology so thoroughly, to change every cell in her body, it's too much for even the most powerful wizard. One miscast spell, one mistaken flick of the wand could kill Rose. I’m not willing to risk my daughter’s life by performing such a risky procedure, especially if there is no medical necessity for doing so.”

Lucius nodded. “Your concern if valid. There are only a few known cases of genetic changing spells being successful, and even then a few patients reported serious long-term complications.”

“It would be far safer for all involved if we simply found a stronger ward,” Severus answered. “Assuming we can find one.”

“I wish I could be of more service, but I was lucky to find that Basque ward,” Lucius replied. “I’m not sure there are many which are stronger, at least no wards of which you aren’t already aware.”

“Lovely,” Severus muttered. ”I could cast every ward I know, and my family could still be in danger from red headed menaces.”

Lucius dug his foot into the carpet. “I do apologize. I wish I could be of more service.”

"There is no need to apologize. You are not the one who is making my life difficult."

"Still, I wish there was something I could do to alleviate your anxieties," Lucius answered.

Severus growled, “I do not even know why Weasley is so obsessed with Hermione and Rose. Ever since his life-changing accident he’s been demanding they return to him. He had no interest in them when Hermione married me, he had no interest in them when Rose was born, and he had no interest in them while he was gallivanting around with his tarts. What changed so drastically that he needed them in his life?”

“I have one theory,” Lucius replied.

“What would that be?” Severus asked.

Lucius leaned in closer and lowered his voice. “According to Ginevra, Ronald’s finances have taken
“Quite a hit since his accident. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that he has no source of income at the moment.”

"His medical bills much cost a fortune."

"Indeed they do."

"My fortune." Severus’ eyes grew. "That bastard wants my fortune."

Lucius nodded.

Severus snarled, “Why can nobody allow me to enjoy my inheritance in peace?”

Lucius shrugged. “I wish I had an answer for you.”

“When I return home, Hermione and I will discuss putting more limits upon Rose’s trust fund. If I’m having this much difficulty with gold diggers I cannot imagine the hassle she will face as an adult, especially in light of the fact that my fortune is growing.”

“So the apothecary is turning a profit.”

“It’s increasing by the day.”

“When you create your lycanthropy cure, your wealth will be almost unimaginable.”

“Assuming such a cure could ever be created.”

“I have total confidence that you will find it.”

"If there is a cure I would find it much quicker if I didn't have the Weasleys in my face every waking moment. There has to be some way of getting them out of my hair and back in their Burrow. Perhaps if I..."

Severus grew quiet. Lucius shifted in place.

Severus folded his hands. “If we are correct in our assessment of Ronald then we need to go about proving his motives.”

“Why would you say that?” Lucius asked.

Severus shifted in his chair. “If we can prove Ronald is only after Rose for the money, then it will be easier to persuade Arthur that his son was a virgin, and that I created Rose. We could also use it to expose Ron as a money-hungry malefactor before all of Wizarding Britain. The hit on his reputation alone should go quite far in rehabilitating Hermione's image.”

Lucius’ lips curled up. “If Merlin forbid a custody dispute were to ever arise, a recording of Ron’s money-hungry ways would be quite helpful in aiding your case.”

Severus buried his head in his hands. “I haven’t the foggiest clue how to go about getting one though.”

Lucius’ smile grew. “I do.”

Severus raised his head.

“Ginevra’s family hasn’t so much as laid eyes on Scorpius yet. If there was a family gathering
though, and Ronald just happened to ingest some Veritaserum..."

Severus shook his head. “No, that plan would never work.”

"Why would you think that?"

"To begin, the Ministry controls the use of Veritaserum.”

“The person who monitors such things has a mistress who is a close friend of Narcissa. It would be horrible if news of his torrid affair was to leak to the Daily Prophet, especially when Kingsley has been promising to clean up the Ministry.”

“Fine, you can extort the person who could fine you. It doesn't change the fact that Ronald will never talk to you.”

“He’ll speak with Ginevra.”

"Ginevra?" Severus asked. "You think this plan should hinge on Ginevra?"

"I think she could make it work anyway."

“You’re going to put Rose’s fate in the hands of a Gryffindor?”

“I’m putting Rose's fate in the hands of her loving godmother.”

Severus tapped his foot. “Ginevra can be quite cunning under the right circumstances.”

Lucius answered, “If she could talk my son into falling in love and subsequently marrying her, then she can extract information from a dolt like Ronald.”

“Are you certain that she’ll consent to this plan?”

“She’ll wonder why she didn’t come up with it herself.”

Severus exhaled. “At the moment I’m at a loss for a better idea, aside from casting more powerful wards.”

“Cast all the wards you know and then a few you’ve only read of. Leave everything else to Ginevra and me.”

“You are certain this will work?”

Lucius chuckled. “Once we’re through with the Weasleys, they’ll wish they’d never considered that Rose could be one of them.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It is much appreciated.
Ron gazed at the steam rising from the cup of black liquid. The scent churned his stomach. One of his many lovers had sworn by coffee, claiming it could cure even the most painful of hangovers. At the moment though, he couldn't imagine how something this stinky could ease anyone's suffering. He shook his head. Why hadn't he stocked on Sober-Up potions when he had the chance?

The image of ‘Mione in Snape’s arms flashed into his brain. He snarled. That's why he didn't buy a Sober-Up potion; doing so might involve interacting with the git. True, there were apothecaries other than Snape’s which sold Sober-Up potions. Even so, Ron didn’t want the publicity of entering one and stocking up on a potion which could lead people to believe he had a drinking problem. Besides, if everything had gone well last night he wouldn't have needed a drink. Hermione would be in his arms, and he'd be preparing to receive one of the biggest divorce settlements in Wizarding history.

Why did she have to fall in love with that greasy git?

With that question in his mind, Ron gulped and took a sip of the coffee. He shuddered as it crawled down his throat.

How can people drink this stuff?

Bang! Bang!

He groaned before calling, "I'm coming. Just wait a minute."

He took another quick sip and swallowed the drink. He suppressed a gag. The only positive thing he could say about coffee was that it did taste better than a Sober-Up potion, very faint praise indeed.

Ron stood up and trudged towards the door, wincing every time his unwanted guest pounded on it.

He opened the door and moaned, "Hello Farrah."

"Hello," she began before entering. "You look cheery today."

Ron glared at her. "I feel like shit."

"No offense, but you look like shit," Farrah commented.

Ron sighed. "I wish I could be better company, but right now all I want to do is go back to bed."

"More sleep may not be the worst idea," Farrah replied.

"Do, do you need anything from me right now?"

"I was wondering if you could give me my helmet back."

Ron smacked his head. "Of course! I was in such a hurry to leave Snape's house I didn't even think about the helmet. I must have left it somewhere in his yard."

"There’s no need to apologize. I'm just glad you didn't get hurt riding the bike from the Snapes’ back without it," Farrah answered.
"Thanks," Ron groaned before sitting back down at the table and taking another sip of coffee. "I'll go back for it soon."

"No worries," Farrah replied as Ron set the cup down. She then smelled the scent of the fluid in his cup. "Coffee?"

Ron nodded.

"I never took you for a coffee man."

"Trust me, I'm not, but an American once told me that coffee cures hangovers."

"Is it any good?"

"Not really," Ron answered before his eyes grew wide with hope. "You wouldn't happen to have a hangover potion on you, would you?"

"I thought you might need one," Farrah answered before pulling out a vial from her pocket. "Here you go."

"Thank you," Ron replied before popping open the cap and chugging the liquid. He winced at the strong sour aftertaste, but soon his eyes were clearer and the pounding in his head had stopped. His lips curled up into a smile.

"Feel better?" Farrah asked.

"Much better," Ron replied.

"Good. Maybe we can go get my helmet now."

"Why now?"

"Because there’s a small chance Severus hasn’t put up any additional wards yet. If we wait too long he’ll start casting every ward he knows, and it will be impossible to get my helmet back."

"Good point," Ron replied.

Farrah stood up and offered Ron an arm. "I'll apparate, since you may not be feeling your best yet."

"That's probably wise," Ron answered before linking arms with her.

Farrah focused her thoughts then apparated alongside Ron to the Snapes' house. When they reappeared, Ron stumbled and put his hand over his mouth.

"Are you okay?" Farrah asked.

"I hate apparating after a hangover," Ron whined before spilling the contents of his stomach.

"Sorry," Farrah muttered.

He looked back up at her and attempted to smile. "It isn't your fault. I just need a moment before we get the helmet."

“Okay,” Farrah answered.

Ron took a deep breath. “Okay, I think I’m ready.”
"Great," Farrah muttered. "Where is the helmet?"

Ron scanned the yard. After a few moments, he grinned and pointed to the object. "It’s right there, a few meters in front of us."

"Good," Farrah replied. She held out her hand and pounded on the air. "Crap, he’s already cast more wards."

“What are we going to do?” Ron asked.

“I know a few counter spells from working at the prison. They should be able to take down most, if not all, the wards."

“What if he catches us taking down his wards?”

"We’ll ask him for the helmet and hope he gives it to us without firing any hexes our way."

Ron gulped. "Maybe he won’t be home and we can grab it without bothering him."

"Hopefully," Farrah muttered.

She aimed her wand at the house and mumbled a few phrases. Green light radiated from an invisible dome. She muttered a few more spells. The once green dome turned blue, and then disintegrated.

Farrah announced, “I think I have them all.”

“Thanks,” Ron replied. Then he began humming a tune as he sauntered towards the discarded helmet.

"Ron!” Farrah called.

“What?” Ron asked before spinning around. "What are you doing back there?"

"I can't get through the ward," she argued.

“Really?” Ron rushed back to her side.

"No. I can't get past this ward," Farrah answered, demonstrating the boundary by bumping against it once again.

"I didn't even know a ward was there," Ron answered. "I couldn't feel it against me or anything."

"Really?" Farrah asked.

"No, I felt nothing," Ron replied. "I wonder why."

"I don't know," Farrah answered. "But you may not have much more time to get the helmet. You'd better hurry up and grab it before Snape discovers us."

"Oh right," Ron darted towards the helmet.

Farrah grinned as she watched Ron pick up the helmet. He had just walked through the Snapes’ security system when the ward was completely functional. How fascinating. Heck, if she wanted, she could place an Imperius curse on him right now, and have him destroy Snape’s lab.

No, Hermione and Severus would hex him into oblivion him before he so much as opened the front
door. Even if by some miracle they weren't home, the Ministry keeps track of Unforgiveables. It’s much better to lay low and not cast any curses without Fenrir’s approval. There’s a reason that patience is a virtue.

"I have the helmet," Ron called as he held it above his head.

“Good,” Farrah rubbed her hands together. “Very good.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It really keeps me going.
“Oh Little Rose, you’ve gotten so big since the last time I saw you,” Muriel cooed. Rose gave her a gummy smile.

"Yes Rose, you are such a big girl," Muriel continued. Hermione positioned Rose into her grandmother’s arms. "There you go."

Rose let out an "eh" before relaxing.

“It’s hard to believe how much she’s grown in half a year,” Muriel continued. "It seems like only yesterday since she was a tiny one month old."

Hermione commented, "She really is growing too quickly for my liking."

Muriel leaned back into the couch cushions. “If you think time is flying by now, just wait until her eighteenth birthday. You'll hardly know where the years went.”

"Oh please," Hermione groaned. "I don't want to think of her as an adult, at least not yet."

"I can't blame you," Wilford scooted closer to Muriel. "When I saw you with Severus on our doorstep, I could barely believe my baby girl had become a woman who was starting her own family."

“It’s weird,” Hermione sat down in the leather recliner to the right of them “I’ve only had Rose in my life for roughly a year and a half, yet I can barely imagine my life without her. She’s been such a joy for Severus and me.”

“Of course she’s been a joy,” Wilford leaned down and began tickling Rose. “She’s the sweetest granddaughter on the face of the earth. Only a heartless bastard would find no joy in her.”

Rose giggled and flailed her arms.

“I’m sure any additional grandchildren you have will be just as sweet.” Muriel winked.

Hermione blushed. “We’ll just have to see I suppose.”

"Indeed we will," Muriel replied.

“Speaking of family," Wilford cut in. "How has your husband been faring as of late?"

“On a professional level not so well,” Hermione admitted. “Severus is getting increasingly frustrated with the lycanthropy cure. So far none of his theories have panned out, and we’re running out of time.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that,” Wilford replied.

“On a personal level though,” Hermione continued. “I believe he’s extremely happy, or so I hope he is.”
“Is there any particular reason why?” Muriel asked.

Rose stuck her thumb in her mouth.

“I finally admitted my feelings for Severus.”

“And?”

“He reciprocates my love!” Hermione exclaimed.

“Oh baby,” Muriel gasped. “That’s so wonderful.”

“But not surprising,” Wilford answered. “I mean, how could he not be completely in love with you?”

“There are plenty of reasons for him not to love me,” Hermione admitted, “But he doesn’t seem to care about any of them. He wants a real marriage with me, and I want a real marriage with him.”

“Oh honey, I’m so happy for you,” Muriel replied.

Rose popped her thumb out of her mouth. It really didn’t have any taste, but the sensation of sucking on it was peaceful. Maybe she’d try it again sometime,

“Thank you,” Hermione answered.

“Have you sufficiently celebrated the moment?” Muriel asked.

Hermione lowered her head. “Mum, you know I’m not the type to kiss and tell.”

Rose looked around. Where was Daddy?

“I know,” Muriel replied, “Still, something tells me you could use more time with your husband, at least to acclimate to saying, ‘I love you’ as often as possible.”

“That’s going to be a little difficult with a baby crying every few hours.”

“We’re always happy to watch Rose for you.”

“Oh no,” Hermione answered. “We couldn’t impose on you like that.”

“You aren’t imposing if we’re the ones making the offer,” Muriel noted.

“Fair enough,” Hermione noted.

“Don’t be afraid to leave Rose with us anytime you please,” Wilford answered. “After seven years of dating that dunderhead Ron, you deserve a few moments of happiness with a man who truly loves you.”

“We’re happy when Rose is with us.”

“You know what I mean.”

Hermione swallowed. “I know.”

Rose turned in the direction of the fireplace. Daddy wasn’t here yet, and she missed him. How could she make him appear so they could play together?

“Honestly, it’s all too real though right now,” Hermione continued.
"How so?" Muriel asked.

“I know it's stupid, but I keep wondering how long it's going to last," Hermione explained. "I know Severus says he wants to spend an eternity with me, but will he feel the same way in ten years? What if this marriage fails? Where would I be then?"

Rose grunted. She needed to make it clear that she wanted Daddy to come, not that she needed a nappy change or a bottle. How could she do that? Could moving her mouth help in some way?

“I don’t think you’re marriage is going to fail,” Muriel replied.

“What makes you so confident of that?” Hermione asked.

“We knew from the minute you brought Ron home, you two were wrong for each other,” Wilford began. “We knew that while you may have loved Ron, his feelings towards you could at best be described as lust. Severus is a different though.”

"Ah, ah," Rose murmured.

“I’m not going to lie, I was not impressed when I first laid eyes on him. The idea of an overgrown goth as a son-in-law was not appealing in the least,” Wilford continued.

Hermione burst out laughing.

“Yet the more I talked to him, the more I realized that in his own way he cared for you. By the time our first meeting had concluded, I was cautiously optimistic that perhaps this time you’d found someone worthy of your affections. The more I saw you two together, the more I realized you were in a loving marriage. The only frustrating thing was that you and your husband were too stubborn and insecure to admit it.”

“We did take our own sweet time confessing our feelings for each other.”

"You took far too long," Muriel cut in.

Hermione gave her a sheepish smile. "I suppose we could've gotten around to admitting our feelings sooner than we did."

"Indeed," Wilford replied. "Unfortunately, as far as having a successful marriage goes, falling in love with each other was the easy part."

Hermione gulped.

“Look I’m not going to lie and say that marriage is easy. Even with love you will find a way to dance on each other’s last nerve,” Wilford brushed his finger across Rose’s forehead. “Yet I know that when things get difficult, you will remember what is important, namely your family. If you keep that in mind, you will get through most anything.”

Hermione’s eyes glistened. “Thank you Dad.”

“Also remember to give the man a colored t-shirt every once in a while,” Wilford suggested.

Hermione put her hand over her mouth. "Dad."

"I mean it," Wilford replied. "His wardrobe is far too monotonous. It wouldn't kill him to wear gray, green, or even white once in a blue moon."
"I'll be sure to discuss it with him," Hermione replied.

The fireplace erupted.

Rose gasped. The others turned around just in time to see Severus stumble into the room.

“Hermione,” he began. “I apologize for not joining you earlier, but I was required to cast more wards than I’d initially believed would be necessary.”

“Dada!”

Severus’ eyes grew. His heart pounded against his chest. “W-what did she just say?”

“Dada!” Rose repeated.

Tears came to Hermione’s eyes. “Oh Severus, she knows who her daddy is.”

Severus’ throat constricted. “She, she does. She knows who I am.”

Rose reached for him and smiled. He rushed over to her. Muriel held Rose up, allowing him to scoop the infant into his arms.

"Dada," she murmured.

“Yes, I’m Dada," Severus whispered. "I'm here, and I will always love you.”

“Dada,” Rose mumbled once more before grabbing his cape, pleased that for the first time, she’d managed to say exactly what she meant.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! As always, it is deeply appreciated!
Chapter 188

Hermione moistened her lips before turning the page. She stretched until her feet could feel the warmth of the crackling fire.

“Are you warm enough?” Severus asked.

Hermione poked her head up from her book. “Yes.”

Severus gave her a small grin.

Hermione reached over and placed her hand on his. “I’ve always wanted an evening like this.”

Severus raised an eyebrow.

Hermione set her book down on the coffee table. Then, she leaned over the armrest of Severus’ chair. “I’ve always wanted to spend an evening reading books with my husband beside a fireplace. In my dreams, we didn’t need to speak to each other; all we needed was the comfort of each other’s presence.”

Severus’ lips curled up. “This evening has been rather pleasant.”

“Indeed it has been,” Hermione’s voice was softer. “Which surprises me, perhaps more than it should.”

“Why would that be?”

“For so long, I was told anything less than going to a bar or a Quidditch game was deathly dull. I thought perhaps I was a boring person if I believed a romantic evening could involve reading by a fireplace.”

"Reading by a fireplace is a perfectly acceptable way to spend an evening."  

"I've always thought so, but it's been difficult to find others who share my opinions."  

"Most people are dunderheads about these kids of things."  

"Perhaps," Hermione retreated back to her chair. "But I doubt they were wrong about my excitement level. At my core, I am not a very interesting person.

"That is simply untrue," Severus stood up. "You’re the most fascinating witch I’ve ever met."

Hermione lowered her head. “I don’t know if I’d call myself fascinating.”

“Oh but you are,” Severus bent down and whispered. “You are absolutely bewitching.”

Hermione looked at him. “You are quite captivating yourself.”

Severus brushed his lips against hers. “I cannot say that I’ve ever envisioned a moment such as this, in large part because I couldn’t envision sharing my life with a witch. Still, I can say with absolute certainty that this has been one of the most peaceful, enjoyable evenings in my life.”
Hermione captured his lips. “I am happy to hear it.”

"That being said, I am curious as to how this evening is meant to end.’’

“What do you mean?”

“When you fantasized about reading with your lover,” Severus ran his fingers through her hair. “Were you reading the entire time, or did you pause every so often for nonliterary pleasures?”

“I thought I’d want to continue reading well into the night,” Hermione whispered. “But now I’m beginning to reconsider my position.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Severus breathed.

Before he could resume his assault on her lips, Severus’ wand emanated a red light which filled the entire room. He grit his teeth. “Rose is awake.”

Hermione rose. “I can take care of her.”

Severus put his hands on her shoulders. “I will tend to Rose.”

“No, you should relax. I can attend to Rose.”

Hermione replied. “Thank you.”

He kissed her on the forehead. “I promise to return shortly.”

Hermione nodded.

Severus glided out of the library. Hermione picked up her book and opened it to the previous section. After taking a few moments to refocus her mind on academic research, she resumed reading.

**Lupines.**

She gasped.

_The lupine plant takes its name from the Latin for wolf. Because it often grows in soil of poor quality, it was thought that the plant depleted soil of nutrients, leaving nothing for other plants. The ancients compared it to the wolf, which would often come into pastures to devour sheep, leaving none for the shepherd._

There was nothing more. Still, it was the first promising ingredient she’d come across since they’d discarded the idea of using aconite.

“Have you discovered something of value?” Severus asked.

Rose gurgled.

Hermione pointed to the page, “Look at this entry. It, it may be the key ingredient we’ve been searching for.”

Severus leaned down, only for Rose to pull the bottle from her mouth and let out a whine.

“Shall we make an exchange?” Severus asked.
“Certainly,” Hermione answered.

Severus placed Rose in her mother’s arms. In return, Hermione handed him the book.

“I apologize for disrupting your fantasy of a quiet evening reading together,” Severus began. “But Rose decided that now would be an excellent time for a midnight snack. I did not feel comfortable leaving her alone in the crib with her bottle, especially when she began calling for me by name.”

Rose continued to suclkle on the bottle.

“It’s not a problem,” Hermione replied. “There’s no reason Rose cannot join us.”

“Very well then,” Severus muttered.

Hermione turned to Rose. “You must have felt left out. Your father and I were having a peaceful evening, but you were in your room sleeping. It didn’t seem fair, did it?”

Rose put on the most innocent expression she could muster.

Hermione kissed her daughter’s cheek. “I love you so much.”

Rose grunted.

Severus’ face lit up as he tagged the page. “This is perhaps the most promising lead we have yet.”

“I think so too,” Hermione replied.

“I only wish there was more in this entry.”

“I do too, but I just know there’s more to lupine than this book would have us believe.”

“I agree.”

“Our next step would be to look more into the properties of obscure magical plants, but I wouldn’t know where to begin.”

“Hogwarts has some excellent books on herbology,” Severus answered.

Hermione exhaled. “Yes, but thanks to Minerva’s antics we don’t have access to them.”

“Neville is still speaking to us.”

“Yes, but aiding us could put his job in jeopardy.”

“The future of Hogwarts may be in jeopardy if we don’t gain more information on this plant.”

“Eh,” Rose mumbled before setting down her bottle on Hermione’s lap.

Without looking away from Severus, Hermione placed the bottle on the side table. “True.”

“At the very least, owling him would do no harm,” Severus replied.

“I’ll write the letter in the morning,” Hermione answered.

“Then it’s settled,” Severus replied.

“Oh,” Rose moaned.
Hermione pressed Rose against her. “Are you finished with your dinner?”

Rose glanced over at Severus and muttered, “Dada.”

“Little one,” Severus began. “I know you do not understand this right now, but you are revenge for every kissing dunderheaded student couple I ever separated. Nobody interrupts peaceful romantic moments quite like you do.”

Rose mumbled a few syllables.

”Yet I can never remain upset with you,” Severus concluded.

”Oh,” Rose replied.

Hermione laughed. “Perhaps we cannot resume our previous activities, but we can still read to Rose.”

“Are you certain that’s what you want to do?” Severus asked.

“I’m positive,” Hermione answered. “Reading to my child may not be exactly what I’d initially imagined as part of my peaceful evening, but fantasies do change.”

”That is fair enough,” Severus admitted.

Hermione wagged her finger. Severus leaned in closer. “Besides, we have an eternity to sit in this room and read until the sexual tension between us becomes too much to bear.”

Severus grinned. “How very true.”

Rose huffed. She didn't quite know what Mummy and Daddy were going to do before she woke up, but whatever it was, it sounded very weird.

***

“Are you sure you want to go through with this?”

Ginevra stared at the baby in her arms and whispered, "I have to."

“No, you don’t,” Draco leaned against the crib. “You can tell my father that he needs to find a better way to coax information from Ron.”

Scorpius' eyes drooped down.

“What better way would you suggest?” Ginevra asked.

Draco shrugged. “I don’t know. You could have Hermione pretend to be in love with Ron, bribe a reporter to interview him, or anything else which doesn’t involve you going to the Burrow.”

Ginevra shook her head. “There's too much that can go wrong with the plans you've mentioned.”

Draco bit his tongue.

"I know that I can prove that Ron is only interested in Rose for the money and that he doesn’t have a paternal instinct in his body,” Ginevra continued. "I know what's at stake if I fail, and I know that I can succeed."
“You aren’t the only person who could coax a confession from him,” Draco commented.

“Who else could get a confession out of Ron then?”

“I-I don’t know. Just somebody else.”

Ginevra kissed Scorpius on the forehead. Then, she set him in the crib. “I’m Rose’s godmother. I need to protect her. Lucius isn’t wrong about this being one of the surest ways of doing so.”

“There are other ways of protecting Rose,” Draco answered.

“Please tell me one of them then,” Ginevra replied in a gentle voice.

Draco watched Ginevra put a blanket over the sleeping child.

“Draco please,” Ginevra whispered. “Tell me what you think we should do.”

Draco did not turn away from Scorpius.

“Please, I promise not to judge you,” Ginevra promised. “I will hear you out, but I need to know what is going through your mind.”

Draco took a shaky breath. “I don’t want your family anywhere near my son.”

Ginevra swallowed.

“I know I’m being blunt, but I don’t want them anywhere near Scorpius.”

"I see.”

Draco held Ginevra’s hands. “I’ve tried to forgive them, I really have. Yet every time I think of them, all I can think of is how they almost took my family away from me. I can still hear them screaming for me to go to jail, not caring if I ever saw you or my son ever again. Sometimes I still have nightmares about what could have been had they succeeded in imprisoning me.”

“I think of those things too,” Ginevra admitted. "It infuriates me to think that you could be in prison right now and not with us."

“I,” Draco released her. “I can’t imagine allowing Scorpius near people who are so open in their hatred of me. I can’t fathom allowing Scorpius near the people who almost destroyed our lives.”

Ginevra leaned in closer.

“I can’t do it,” Draco whispered. “I can’t do it anymore. I’ve done everything I can think of to appease your family, but they will never accept me. I’m finished trying to win their trust.”

“I understand,” Ginevra replied. “Because I feel the same way. I’m tired of defending us to them, and I refuse to allow my son to interact with people who despise his father.”

Draco locked eyes with her. “Then why are you consenting to my father’s plan when you know it involves interacting with your family?”

“Because Rose needs protection from them as much as Scorpius does,” Ginevra replied.

Draco sighed.
“Ron is going to use Rose only to toss her aside. Dad has developed an unhealthy obsession with proving that Rose is a Weasley. Mum is, well Mum. George is the only family member I trust to make the right decision, but he still has issues with the way Severus treated him at school. Rose needs to be kept away from all that chaos.”

“You aren’t wrong,” Draco replied.

“This plan isn’t ideal,” Ginevra admitted. “Still, I believe it has to be done. I truly think that I need to take Scorpius to the Burrow, engage in a conversation with Ronald, force him to admit out loud his true intentions, and use my memories to blackmail him into leaving Hermione alone.”

Draco nodded.

“But if you are opposed to me going to the Burrow then I’ll back out,” Ginevra replied.

Draco embraced his wife. “You always stand up for those you love, even when people question your sanity. It’s one of the many things I love about you.”

“Thanks,” she replied.

“I’m not going to lie, I’m terrified that your family will insult and humiliate you,” Draco answered. “But I also know you’ll never forgive yourself if you don’t do this.”

“I won’t forgive myself for doing nothing if this plan hurts you,” Ginevra answered. “My first loyalties are to you and Scorpius, not Lucius, Severus, Hermione, or even Rose.”

He kissed her forehead. “I know, and my first loyalty is to you and Scorpius as well.”

“Then should we tell Lucius I’m backing out?”

“You should tell him that you’re going to the Burrow, and I’ll remain at home, eagerly awaiting your return.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.”

They sealed their pact with a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the support! It is deeply appreciated.
Severus crept through the field of Sopophorous beans. A few times he poked up his head, but saw no one. He paused upon reaching a cluster of meter tall palm trees. Now he saw someone. Hermione stepped in front of him, but he pulled her to his side.

From inside the sling across Hermione’s chest, Rose sneezed.

The man across the greenhouse glanced backwards. His eyes glistened. "Severus! Hermione!"

Severus frowned. So much for a quiet entry.

Neville gasped and pointed to Hermione's sling. "Is that baby Rose?"

“It is,” Hermione cooed.

Rose turned her head in the direction of the stranger. She couldn't remember seeing him, yet his voice was somewhat familiar.

Neville tiptoed towards them and whispered, "Hi Rose."

Rose squirmed.

"Do you remember me? I saw you on the day you were born."

Rose blinked. This man appeared friendly enough. Perhaps she should give him a chance.

“Can you say ‘hi’ to Neville?” Hermione whispered.

“Uh,” Rose muttered.

Severus replied, “Can you say, ‘don’t blow up my daddy’s cauldrons?’”

“Uh eh Dada, dada,” Rose began.

Neville burst out laughing.

Rose broke into a gummy smile.

Neville took a deep breath "She sure has grown since I've last seen her."

"She has."

"Thank you for bringing her along. It's so lovely to see Rose happy and healthy."

“It was no problem,” Hermione answered. “We thought you’d enjoy seeing her again.”

"Oh I do very much." Neville contorted his face.

Rose’s eyes bulged. What was this man doing?

Severus rolled his eyes. “Rose is above laughing at funny faces.”
"I suppose she would be, given that you probably don't make too many around her," Neville replied before relaxing.

"I prefer to treat her like an intelligent witch, not like a dunderhead in the making," Severus replied.

Now Hermione was rolling her eyes. "There is no harm in making a funny face every once in a while and allowing your more playful side to shine through."

"I do not have a playful side," Severus replied.

"That's a load of bullocks and you know it," Hermione answered.

"Uh," Rose replied.

"Well, maybe your playful side involves brewing potions," Neville cut in.

"Brewing potions is not a playful activity," Severus snapped.

"No, but in the right hands it could be considered fun," Neville offered.

Severus snarled, but there was no hostility in his eyes.

Neville looked at Rose and lowered his voice, "Has your daddy taught you how to brew any potions?"

Rose's face lit up. "Ah."

"I've shown her a few," Severus replied.

"How has she liked it so far?"

"She pays very close attention, and already has a love of the subject. One day, she will make a superb potions’ mistress."

Neville glanced up at the unmistakable pride in Severus' voice. Even though his former professor had retained his intimidating bearing, his eyes were much softer than Neville remembered. Family life was definitely agreeing with the man.

Rose stuck her fist in her mouth.

"I keep telling you that fists aren't for chewing. They taste completely horrid," Severus teased, his stern façade now faded.

Neville couldn’t help but smile. If I had known Professor Snape could be this gentle, he never would've been my boggart.

"As pleasant as spending time with Rose is," Hermione cut in. "We came here for advice on another important matter."

Neville raised an eyebrow. "You two need my advice?"

"Shocking I know," Severus drawled

"It is but uh, I'll try to help," Neville stammered. "What do you need my help with?"

"We need some books on the ancient uses of plants," Hermione answered.
"Is it for your lycanthropy research?" Neville asked.

"Yes," Severus replied. "We believe that we have one of the key ingredients, but we need something to stabilize it and to strengthen its suppression of the transformation process."

"I see," Neville hummed. "What plant did you have in mind?"

"We were wondering if you had any books on the lupine plant and its use in the ancient Wizarding world," Hermione replied.

"Lupine," Neville scratched his chin. "I'll admit that it's not a commonly used magical plant. In fact, I don't believe it's even grown in most magical communities."

"Is it rare?" Hermione asked.

"Far from it," Neville answered. "Lupine is quite common around the Mediterranean, the Andes, and in southern and western North America. It shouldn't be difficult to locate, although finding the exact species you want may prove tricky, since there are over two hundred and eighty known to exist."

"Oh joy," Severus muttered, envisioning the months it would take to sort through every species of lupine.

"Don't worry," Neville replied. "There are already some species of lupine known to be magical, although their use has fallen out of favor."

"What do you mean ‘fallen out of favor’?" Hermione asked.

"Well, we know that a certain species of lupine found in Italy was once used as a medicine by certain Wizarding communities. Allegedly, it was supposed to help ease the pain of animagi transformations."

"Did it work?"

"Let's just say that other potion ingredients became more popular," Neville tapped his foot. "There was, however, an odd muggle use for lupine."

"What would that be?" Severus asked.

"According to a few books I've read, muggles once used lupine to fend off wolves. Apparently, the ancients believed that only a wolf could safely consume those species, whereas livestock would die upon eating it. If the wolf ate the lupine, he would be satisfied and would consequently leave the herds alone," Neville explained.

"How odd," Hermione answered.

"Did they truly believe that the wolf was satisfied, or did they think that the lupine transformed him back into his human form?" Severus asked.

Neville’s eyes widened. "I… I honestly don't know. No one's ever looked into it. It was always assumed that those lupine species were toxic, and no man could safely eat them."

"What species of lupine did the ancients use to lure the wolves away from the herds?"

"I honestly don't know, but I have some excellent books which go more in depth with the ancient uses of plants. I could even get you in touch with a fellow herbologist who studies muggle plants in addition to magical ones. She'd know more about the different species of lupine than I would."
"We would love that very much," Hermione cheered before embracing him.

Rose squealed. Neville backed away and blushed. "Sorry Rose."

Rose glared at him. Neville chuckled. She was already transforming into a miniature version of Severus.

"Thank you for your assistance Neville," Severus replied. "Hopefully this resource will prove invaluable."

Neville nodded. "I'm happy to help, even in some small way. I just hope this is the breakthrough you've been looking for."

"As do we," Severus answered.

"Professor Longbottom?"

The door opened. The woman who trudged through appeared too small for her robes. Her sunken eyes and crooked hat betrayed the many sleepless nights she'd endured.

"Headmistress McGonagall," Neville began. "What brings you here?"

Hermione and Severus ducked under the mandrakes.

"I need to speak with you about…" Minerva began before catching a glimpse of Neville's visitors. "What are these two doing here?"

"They're consulting me on an idea concerning the lycanthropy cure," Neville answered, his eyes warning her not to protest their presence.

Minerva locked eyes with Severus. "Are you close to a cure?"

"We don't know," Severus towered over her. "It all depends on whether our latest lead is as effective as we hope it is."

"Indeed," Minerva answered before hearing the soft cooing of an infant. Her eyes fell upon Hermione's sling. "I take it that's Rose."

"Yes," Hermione replied before standing up straighter.

Minerva smiled. "She's a beautiful infant."

"She's been expelled from this school," Severus snapped.

"Perhaps I was a little hasty in expelling her before she had a chance to step foot on the grounds," Minerva sighed. "And perhaps I also owe her parents an apology for all the grief I put them through."

Hermione's eyes softened, but Severus' expression was unchanged.

Minerva took a deep breath. "Priscilla Prince's fortune was never mine to possess, nor was it mine to seek. You were her grandson Severus, a blood relative. I should have respected that."

"Indeed," Severus growled.

"I was so frightened for the school, though. Enrollment had reached a record low, and I thought the
money might help stem the decline.” She bowed her head. "Now I realize that my blindness not only put the school in jeopardy by allowing Fenrir to kidnap a student and murder a professor, but it also cost me two of my dearest friends.”

Severus’ hardened expression remained.

“I am deeply sorry for the pain I caused you at the beginning of your marriage, and I hope that perhaps someday you can find it within your hearts to forgive me,” Minerva replied.

“Had you not been so hasty to obtain the money, Severus may not have decide to reconnect and subsequently marry me. Had that not happened, I would not know the joy I feel at the moment,” Hermione answered. “For that reason alone, I can forgive you.”

All eyes turned to Severus, whose hostility remained.

"Severus?” Minerva asked in a small voice.

Severus began in a low voice, “I more than anyone understand the desire and the pressure to protect Hogwarts at all costs.”

"You would,” Minerva admitted.

"While I cannot condone the trouble you have caused," he continued. "I cannot deny that if you had not been so insistent on obtaining my fortune, I would not have been so eager to reconnect with Hermione. Had I not reconnected with my current wife, I would not have had the privilege of raising my daughter. Out of gratitude for my family then, I will forgive your actions, though I will never forget them.”

"Thank you," she whispered.

Rose reached out for Severus and cried, “Dada.”

Severus gave her a half grin.

For the first time in his life, things had actually worked out quite well for him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
Arthur’s eyes glistened as he choked back his tears. He held out his arms and whispered, “Oh Ginny, he’s so beautiful.”

Ginny sat down on the sofa beside him. “Thank you.”

“M-may I hold him?” Arthur asked.

Ginny kissed her son on the forehead. “Of course you may.”

She transferred Scorpius into Arthur’s arms. The baby squeaked, but soon settled himself.

“Hello little Scorpius. I’m your grandfather,” Arthur cooed.

Scorpius stared at him, as though trying to determine the proper response to this situation.

Molly stood over the pair. “His hair is very blond.”

Arthur glared at her.

“But,” Molly’s expression softened. “He’s very handsome.”

“Indeed he is,” George added.

“I’m proud to call him my grandson,” Molly continued.

“Thank you,” Ginny replied.

“Can I get a better view of him?” George asked.

Ginevra stood up, allowing George to move closer to his nephew. He reached over and tickled Scorpius on the belly. Scorpius grunted and waved his arms.

Ron strolled over to the group. “His eyes are bluish gray.”

“Is there a problem with that?” George asked, taking his hands away from Scorpius.

“N-no,” Ron stuttered. “It’s uh, just, uh an observation.”

“Scorpius is perfect just the way he is,” Arthur replied.

“Yes, he is,” Molly smiled. “Oh he is going to be such a wonderful grandson. When he gets older I’m going to have so much fun baking him cookies, going to the park with him, and spoiling him rotten.”

“Between us and the Malfoys I think he’ll grow up to be the most spoiled child in Britain,” George commented.

Bill laughed from across the room. “Try the most spoiled child in the world.”

Ginevra chuckled. “He is very much loved, that’s for certain.”
“Yes,” Arthur cooed. “He is loved very much.”

Scorpius yawned before closing his eyes.

“He seems to be a very laid back baby,” George noted.

“He is until he wants something,” Ginevra replied. “Then he screams bloody murder until he gets it.”

Arthur laughed. “You could be quite the demanding child yourself.”

Ginny wrung her hands. “I thought you said I was an easy child.”

“Oh you could be under the right circumstances,” Arthur winked. "Like when you were asleep."

"Oh," Ginny frowned.

"Don't get all pouty. You were much more easygoing than Ron was,” George cut in.

"Really?” Ginny asked.

George nodded.

“I wasn’t too bad, was I?” Ron asked.

“Oh you were terrible,” George answered. “I could barely get in an hour of sleep from the time you were born to the time you were two.”

“I’m sorry for keeping you awake,” Ron answered.

“There’s nothing to apologize for. We all got through it in one piece,” Molly reached over and pinched his cheek. “Now you are a very respectable, wonderful young man.”

Ginevra swallowed her bile.

“Thank you,” Ron replied.

“Uh speaking of fussy babies,” Ginevra stood up. “I should probably warm up a bottle for Scorpius. He may appear to be falling asleep, but it’s about time for his lunch.”

Scorpius opened one eye.

“Does anyone want a drink or something when I come back?” Ginny asked.

“I’ll take a water,” Ron replied.

“I’ll have some water as well,” George answered.

Ginevra turned to Bill.

“I’m fine.”

“Dad?”

“Oh, I’ll be fine.”

“Mum?”
“Yes, I could use a glass.”

"Okay," Ginny strolled towards the kitchen. "I will return shortly."

Molly glanced at Ron. “Why don’t you go help your sister carry the water?”

“Why me?” Ron asked.

“Because you aren’t fawning over Scorpius,” Molly replied.

"But Mum..."

Molly glared at him.

“Fine,” Ron muttered.

He plodded out of the room and into the kitchen. “Ginny?”

She startled.

“Mum wants me to help you carry the water,” Ron replied.

“Oh uh, sure,” Ginevra answered before returning her attention to the glass in front of her. “Aguamenti.”

Ron gave her a small grin. “Scorpius sure is adorable.”

“Thank you,” Ginevra replied.

“It’s still weird to think of him having blond hair though,” Ron continued. “I mean, for generations Weasleys have only had red hair.”

“True, but for generations the Malfoys have only had blond hair. There was no reason the next generation shouldn’t share in the same hair color.”

“Still, it’s a little odd to think of my nephew not having a strand of red hair.”

Ginevra shrugged. “It was only a matter of time before a Weasley didn’t inherit red hair. Perhaps my next child will be a red-head.”

“Maybe,” Ron muttered.

Ginevra handed him the glass of water. “Here’s your glass.”

“Thank you,” Ron replied before gulping it down.

Ginevra smirked. “Impatient as always, I see.”

Ron shrugged. “I was thirsty.”

“Indeed you were.” Ginny raised her wand above one of the glasses. “Aguamenti.”

“Here,” Ron set the glass next to her. “Could you please get me more?”

“Certainly,” Ginny grabbed it and set it on the table. “Aguamenti.”

Ron exhaled.
“I really hope Scorpius isn’t causing too much trauma for you,” Ginevra began.

“Well he does look too much like Draco for my liking,” Ron admitted.

Ginny groaned.

“I’m just saying he’d look much better with green eyes than he does with gray.”

“I suppose he’d look much better with black hair too.”

“Yes.”

Ginny shook her head.

“If I can say what I really think,” Ron continued. “Scorpius is an insult to Harry’s memory.”

“How so?” Ginny gritted her teeth

“You should be married to Harry. Your baby’s name should be James, not Scorpius,” Ron continued. “Draco should be married to somebody else. I don't know who, but just someone else.”

“I should hex you for saying all that,” Ginny her voice grew softer. “Then again, I suppose you're suffering enough.”

“Why would you say that?”

“It must be difficult to look at a baby after losing Rose.”

“Rose?” Ron asked.

“Yes,” Ginny replied. “You must be devastated over not being with her.”

Ron rubbed his upper arm.

“Indeed,” Ginny put a hand on Ron’s shoulder. “I can scarcely imagine the pain you’re going through. I know that if someone was keeping Scorpius from me, I would be in sheer agony until we were reunited.”

"You would be."

"Then there's the fact that you didn't just lose Rose, you lost Hermione as well."

"I did."

"Really, I cannot imagine being in your position. The love of you life is married to your former potions’ professor, your baby is being raised by the cruelest teacher who's ever walked the halls of Hogwarts, and there’s little you can do about it. It must be upsetting to say the least.”

“Really, I’m not that upset about it,” Ron replied. “Snape can keep Rose for all I care.”

“Ron,” Ginny gasped as she removed her hand from him. “How could you say such a thing?”

“Babies are annoying. They scream and keep you up at night. I’m sorta happy that Rose is in Snape's mansion and not mine,” Ron admitted.

“You, you’re happy Rose isn’t in your life?”
“Yes,” Ron admitted.

“Wow,” Ginny mumbled. "I can't imagine any caring father ever saying that about his child."

“Look Ginny,” Ron continued. “We both know I’m not father material.”

“And Severus Snape is?”

“I mean, I guess not, but he seems to be getting along fine with Rose.”

“So you don’t care that he’s raising Rose?”

“I care,” Ron protested. “But not because I want a screeching baby in my life.”

“So you don’t want a baby?” Ginny asked.

“No,” Ron answered. “I’ve never wanted a baby in my life.”

“If you don’t want a baby in your life then why are you telling everyone that Rose is your daughter?”

“Because I need money.”

Ron put his hands over his mouth. Where did that come from?

Ginevra sneered. “You need money?”

“The-the hospital bills aren’t cheap, and I can’t play Quidditch anymore,” Ron replied in a quieter voice. “I can’t financially sustain myself much longer. I really need some galleons.”

“Why not get a job then?” Ginny asked.

“I uh, don’t want to learn any skills other than Quidditch. I hate school, so I'm not going back there, but all the jobs you can get with a Hogwarts diploma alone don't pay well.”

“If you are financially unstable and you don’t want a child in your life, then why are you claiming that Rose is yours?”

“Because Hermione is loaded.”

“Hermione’s loaded?”

"Yes, loaded." Ron replied. “Hermione’s alimony alone could pay off all my medical bills for the rest of my life. Rose’s trust fund would keep me afloat, and Snape’s mansion is very nice. I could either sell my mansion and move into his, or I could sell his mansion for another fortune. I would be living like a king.”

“Where do Hermione and Rose fit into your perfect life?” Ginevra hissed.

“I mean, Hermione will take care of Rose. They’ll be happy with all their money.”

"Would they be happy with you?"

"Hermione was happy with me before. Once we reunite she'll remember that happiness and decide Snape isn't worth her time.”

"How exactly are you going to make up your abandonment to her?"
“I mean,” Ron twisted his foot. “I mean I'll think of something.”

“What kind of something?” Ginny asked.

“I don't know,” Ron replied. “Maybe I'll take her out to dinner a few times or hire a nanny for Rose. It'll be something like that.”

“Do you plan on not seeing other women behind Hermione's back?” Ginny asked.

“I mean, I guess I'll try,” Ron answered. “Sometimes things just happen. You can't always control when the next with will come and demand to be swept off her feet.”

“You pile of hippogriff dung,” Ginny growled.

“Why am I telling you all this? It's like every time I open my mouth more stuff comes out and I,” Ron’s eyes bulged. “You, you've poisoned me.”

“Why would you accuse me of poisoning you?” Ginny asked.

Ron made a fist. “You’ve poisoned me! I would never say any of this stuff without being poisoned!”

“How does you being honest indicate you being poisoned?” Ginny drawled.

“I wouldn’t admit to any of this stuff unless,” Ron’s face turned red. “Veritaserum. You’ve poisoned me with Veritaserum.”

“I did not,” Ginevra answered.

“Of course you did!”

“I did not. All we’re doing is having a conversation. It's not my fault if you’re coming off like a louse.”

“You can't use Veritaserum. It's restricted! I-I’m calling the Ministry!”

Ginevra crossed her arms over her chest. “What good would that do?”

“They'll arrest you and make you pay for ever crossing me,” Ron replied.

“Good luck obtaining proof that I’ve dosed you with Veritaserum,” Ginevra answered. “You’ll need it.”

“You bitch!” Ron shouted.

“Now if we could get back to the topic at hand…”

Ron fled the kitchen. “Mum! Dad!”

They looked up at him. Scorpius began to fuss.

“Ginny just poisoned me with Veritaserum!” Ron announced.

“Excuse me?” Arthur spat.

Ginevra shook her head and strolled into the sitting room. “All we did was have a nice conversation about Hermione and Rose. He admitted a few things he didn’t want anyone to hear, and now he thinks he’s been poisoned.”
“I have been poisoned!” Ron shouted.

Scorpius burst out crying.

“What exactly did you say about Rose?” Arthur asked.

Ginny locked eyes with Ron. “He was just about to tell me who he considered to be Rose’s father.”

“Who, who do you consider Rose’s dad to be?” Arthur asked.

Ron mumbled something.


Ron gulped. “Severus Snape.”

The wind left Arthur’s lungs.

“Severus Snape is Rose’s dad.”

Arthur recoiled.

“Look Dad, I, I was really with Hermione before Rose was born, but I sent her away.”

“Don’t say another word,” Molly warned.

“No, let him finish,” Arthur replied.

“I,” Ron swallowed. “I don’t want a kid right now. That’s why I told Hermione I didn’t think Rose was mine and let her run off with Snape. Really, I don’t want to raise a baby. I'm not interested in taking care of Rose.”

“Get out,” Arthur hissed.

“Dad, I…”

“Get out,” Arthur repeated.

Ron and Ginny stood frozen in place.

“Get out both of you!” Arthur roared.

Scorpius wailed.

Ginny walked over and removed Scorpius from his lap. “Goodbye everyone.”

“Goodbye,” George replied.

Ginny grabbed her baby bag and rushed over to the fireplace. She stated her address before throwing in the floo powder.

Then she was gone.
Thank you for all the support! As always it is much appreciated!
Hermione poked her head out of the pensieve. Her smile lit up her face. “You were absolutely brilliant, Ginny. Absolutely brilliant. No custody judge will ever take Ron’s request for a DNA test seriously after watching this.”

Ginny smirked. “No, they won't. Ron can't sue for custody now, and he knows it.”

“Unless…”

“Unless what?”

Hermione's smile faded. “You didn't have a permit to use Veritaserum when you administered it. For that reason alone his confession may be inadmissible in court.”

“First of all, who said I used Veritaserum?” Ginevra replied. “Ron suspected I used it, but he was never able to prove it.”

“I suppose that's accurate enough.”

“Even if he could prove that I gave him a dose of Veritaserum, I still didn’t tamper with the memory of his confession. If they want to replicate his confession they can administer their own dosage of Veritaserum. We both know they'll get the same result.”

“Very true.” Hermione sat down on her bed. “Still, you could find yourself in some serious legal trouble for using Veritaserum without a permit.”

Ginny shrugged. “At most I’ll pay a fine, one which would be very affordable.”

“Are you sure that’s the only punishment you’d potentially face?”

“With Lucius’ connections, yes.”

“Fair enough.”

Ginevra took her friend's hands, “Even if I was facing twenty years in Azkaban, I’d do it all again. Rose is my goddaughter, and you're the sister I've always wanted. It's my duty to look out for you and Rose.”

Tears filled Hermione’s eyes. “Thank you.”

Ginevra released Hermione’s hands. “There is never a need to thank me for helping out”

“Rose can never see this.”

The women turned to Severus.

Severus pointed to the pensieve. “Rose can never be aware of the existence of this memory.”

“Severus, we may need it for a court hearing,” Hermione began.
“Use it there, but once a judge denies Ron’s request for a DNA spell discard this memory and forget it ever existed,” Severus demanded.

Hermione replied, "Nobody planned on showing it to her."

"Then ensure she can not discover it on her own," Severus replied. "The second Ron exits our lives for good, destroy it."

"We may still want leverage..."

"Destroy it."

Hermione closed her mouth.

“As far as Rose is concerned, Ginevra never spoke with Ron. The conversation we're engaging in right now didn't occur either,” Severus continued.

Hermione replied, "Fine."

He turned to Ginevra. “Thank you for your assistance. Words cannot express how appreciative I am that you were so willing to defend Rose.”

“No thanks are necessary,” Ginevra replied. "I'm only acting as any good godparent would."

"Indeed you are," Severus answered. “Now, if you will excuse me, I should check in on Rose. Sometimes she wakes up around this time eager for attention.”

He glided out of the room, robes billowing behind him.

Ginevra blinked. “That wasn’t exactly the reaction from him I was expecting.

“Indeed,” Hermione muttered. “I didn’t think he’d react so violently to that memory.”

“Neither did I,” Ginevra replied. “I wonder where it came from.”

“Severus is so protective of Rose. He's always gone out of his way to ensure that she knows how much she's loved. To hear Ron denigrate Rose like that," Hermione's stomach lurched. "It must have affected him more viscerally than even he thought it would."

“Maybe,” Ginevra cleared her throat. “Lucius said it would be prudent to store the memory at Malfoy Manor. That way, Ron couldn't break through the wards.”

“I’m inclined to agree with him,” Hermione replied. “The memory needs to remain as hidden as possible.”

Ginevra began collecting the memory into a vial. “Then it’s settled.”

“Indeed,” Hermione stood up. “How are you faring Ginny?”

“Very well,” Ginevra answered. “Why would you ask?”

"Because I am somewhat concerned for you,” Hermione replied.

Ginevra popped the stopper onto the vial. "Concerned."

“You don’t need to pretend that helping Rose cost you nothing," Hermione replied. "You defied
your family for us. All the Weasleys know that if there is a battle for Rose you are on our side. They are infuriated with you. That must affect you on some level."

“They’ll either forgive me, or they won’t.”

“Ginny…”

She held up her hand. “Whatever they think or say about me, I will find a way to move past it.”

“Still,” Hermione replied. "I wish things could improve between you and your family.”

“I've made my choices and they've made theirs.” Ginevra put the vial in her pocket. “To be quite blunt, you and Severus have been more like a family to me in the past seven years then most of my biological relatives. That's why I will never regret protecting Rose, even if it meant hurting them.”

“If you say so,” Hermione replied.

Ginny hugged Hermione. “Give Rose a kiss for me. Tell her to expect a few new outfits in her drawer within the next few days.”

Hermione returned the embrace. “I will, and thank you so much.”

Ginevra released her. “You can properly thank me by sending me a picture of Rose in the pink dress I plan to buy for her.”

Hermione gulped. "You actually expect me to remain married after taking a picture of Severus' child in pink."

Ginevra laughed. "I suppose Severus would consider that inexcusable, wouldn't he?"

"Very much so," Hermione replied.

"I may take pity then and buy her some black outfits then."

"That would be much appreciated."

Ginevra squeezed Hermione's hand. “Goodbye.”

“Yes, goodbye and thank you again for everything,” Hermione answered.

Ginevra walked over to the fireplace and grabbed the floo powder. After calling out her address, she waved and stepped into the flames.

Hermione exhaled. She glanced at the pensieve beside her before creeping towards Rose’s room.

“Once the Amortentia turns a mother-of-pearl sheen, you will know that you have brewed it correctly,” Severus began. “To be certain that you’ve been successful though, you will need to inhale its scent.”

“Oh,” Rose replied.

“Now in my case,” Severus replied. “The three scents I associate with Amortentia are omelets, roses, and hair care products. All of these aromas remind me of your mother. Given my devotion to her, this is to be expected.”

Rose grabbed his cape and held it close to her chest.
“I do not know what you will smell in the Amortentia,” Severus continued. “As your father though, I would prefer you not smell anything until you are well past a century old. Things would be easier for us both if that was the case.”

“Uh,” Rose replied.

Severus kissed Rose on the forehead. “Anyone who ever says you aren’t worthy of love is a dunderhead of the highest degree. Always ignore such people, Little One. You are very much loved, Rose. Do not ever forget that.”

“Dada,” she answered.

“Severus?”

He turned around. “I was wondering when you would make your presence known.”

Hermione approached him and put her head on his shoulder. “Are you doing all right?”

“I am quite well.”

“Then what was that outburst in our bedroom all about?”

Severus swallowed. “It is of no importance.”

“I vehemently disagree,” Hermione argued. “Something in that pensieve upset you. If you are willing to talk, I would like to know exactly what troubled you.”

“My emotions ran away from me,” Severus replied. “I will do my best to prevent it from happening again.”

“Severus,” Hermione whispered.

Severus replied in a quiet voice, “I saw too much of my father in Ronald.”

“Your father?” Hermione asked.

Severus nodded.

“How does Ron remind you of your father?” Hermione asked.

Severus gazed at Rose. “I suppose the best place to begin would be to explain my family’s history. Some would say you should have known it before moving into this mansion, but there are certain things I did not wish to relive.”

“We don’t need to discuss this if you don’t want to,” Hermione replied.

“No,” Severus answered. “You deserve to know what my concerns are surrounding the memory and why I’m behaving as I am.”

“Ohay,” Hermione mouthed.

“My grandmother was not like Arthur Weasley,” Severus looked into Hermione’s eyes. “Like him, she had a fascination with muggles, but instead of simply tinkering with their inventions, she wanted to learn about their culture. Of course, the best way to learn about muggle culture is to live amongst them, which is why she had a summer cottage in London. According to my mother, my grandfather bought it for my grandmother as gift for their tenth anniversary, but I could never confirm this.”
Rose cooed.

“I suppose it matters little. My grandfather died in a broom accident while my mum was still quite young. Looking back, all of our lives would have been better if he had survived.”

Rose reached up for one of Severus' buttons and grabbed it.

“You have seen photographs of my mother. She was far from beautiful. In addition to that fault, she lacked the good sense my grandmother possessed. Grandmother knew that she needed to downplay her wealth so others would not take advantage of her. My mother, however, flaunted their wealth whenever possible in order to make up for her homeliness. According to my mother, she and Grandmother had several fights about wearing flashy jewelry in public. Grandmother feared someone would take advantage of her daughter, but Mum was an impulsive and strong-willed teenager. It was in London while wearing a diamond and emerald necklace that she met a factory worker by the name of Tobias Snape.”

Severus smirked. “If there were two things my father could not tolerate, they were hard work and poverty. My mother was his ticket to avoiding both prospects. Mum claimed that he first saw her as he was walking to work. She was just outside the cottage discussing the wonders of television with my grandmother. When he passed her on the sidewalk he was immediately smitten by her extravagant necklace, if not by her beauty. That night, he found an excuse to pay them a visit, leaving quite an impression on Mum, but not so much on Grandmother. Still, Grandmother never forbade Mum from talking to Tobias, hoping that it was just a passing infatuation.”

“But it wasn’t,” Hermione cut in.

“No,” Severus replied. “It was far from it. By the time summer drew to a close, Grandmother was ready to return to this mansion and help Mum further her studies at the university. Mum refused to leave the cottage, declaring her love for Tobias. Mum told me she had never heard Grandmother scream that loudly in her life. Grandmother tried to warn her that Tobias was only interested in her fortune, tried to tell her that their relationship could never work out, but Mum refused to listen.”

“Uh,” Rose grunted.

“Things only escalated when Tobias was fired from the factory for drinking on the job. Grandmother hoped Mum would see him for who he truly was, but Mum was too infatuated to see reality. Sensing that my grandmother was growing weary of him, Tobias visited her in secret and agreed to leave Mum alone if Grandmother would pay him fifty thousand pounds. My grandmother agreed and gave him the money, hoping this would be the end of her ordeal. She and my mum went back to the mansion, Tobias took off somewhere, and it should have ended there.”

"But it didn't," Hermione answered.

"No," Severus sighed. "The next summer Grandmother and a still broken-hearted Mum returned to the cottage, and who should appear but Tobias Snape, who had already spent every last shilling Grandmother had given him. Mum and he reunited, and Grandmother was horrified. Nearly two months later, Mum ran away. Grandmother frantically searched for her. She finally found Mum in Scotland with a marriage license and a positive pregnancy test.”

“Oh Merlin,” Hermione breathed.

“Dad thought Grandmother would be forced to give Mum access to the fortune now. He thought his troubles were over. Surely she couldn't ignore a grandchild, could she?” Severus shook his head. “Grandmother was not the kind of woman one crossed. The next day she returned to the
Wizarding World and demanded to see her attorney. The day after that, it was announced that Eileen had been disinherited. Mum never spoke to or saw Grandmother again.”

Hermione took a shaky breath. "Merlin, Severus, couldn't your grandmother have shown a little compassion? If she'd known how you were raised…"

"She saw me the same way my parents did; a mistake. To her, I was someone who never should've drawn breath. The only reason she willed me her fortune was because I fought Voldemort and proved I wasn't the man my father was. My father saw me as a plan that blew up in his face. My mother saw me as the loss of her fortune, her jewels, and ultimately, her mother. I was nothing more than an unwanted child who everyone believed was best off not existing.” He stroked Rose’s back.

“I am so sorry Severus,” Hermione whispered. “You never should’ve grown up under those conditions.”

“It matters little what I should and should not have grown up as, but Rose,” Severus’ throat constricted. “I know you would’ve loved Rose regardless of your circumstances. She would’ve always felt wanted because you would have always provided for her needs. Still, I could not bare the thought of Rose having a father who rejected her so completely. I couldn’t bare the idea of standing idly by while you two were exiled to the muggle world, or if you two were blasted in the papers for merely existing. Perhaps I am a less than traditional father and husband, but I do love both of you.”

“We love you too Severus," Hermione replied. "And we know that you love us."

“Dada,” Rose mumbled as her eyes drooped down.

Severus kissed her on the forehead. “Yes, Rose, I’m Dada, and I will always want and love you.”

Rose fell asleep, believing every word he said.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the support. Unfortunately, updates are going to be sporadic for the next week or so. Work is piling up and I have a business trip next week. I'm hoping things will calm down by next Thursday, but I can't guarantee anything.

In the meantime thank you for sticking with me!
He was completely at the mercy of Severus Snape.

Arthur stared out the window, his hands behind his back. The greasy git determined his entire future, and there wasn't a thing he could say or do about it. How could Arthur have allowed that to happen?

“Really, I don’t want to raise a baby. I'm not interested in taking care of Rose.”

Arthur's stomach churned as his son's voice reverberated throughout his mind. How could I have raised such an irresponsible, heartless son? Have I done such a horrible job of instilling family loyalty into Ronald that he thinks abandoning his child is acceptable? What kind of father does that make me?

A tear came to Arthur’s eyes as the answer became clear.

I’m a terrible father.

“I for one cannot believe they are raising the price of beef again,” Molly trilled. “How am I to make a decent pot roast when I have to pay out of my nose for one?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Arthur muttered.

“Neither do I,” Molly replied.

Arthur heard the bed creak under her weight, but he did not look at her.

No judge would ever consider handing Rose over to Ron after viewing that memory, and Ginevra would do everything in her power to ensure that he or she got a hold of it. Ron’s case would be over before it had even begun. Seeing Rose is hopeless. Spending time with my granddaughter is hopeless….

“Arthur?” Molly asked.

Severus will never allow me within a meter of Rose. The unfeeling bastard won’t care how much pain I’m in, so long as he can keep his happy little family! He will never let me lay eyes on my granddaughter!

“You are more than free to fall asleep,” Arthur answered.

She gave him the most seductive smile she could manage. “I don’t want to sleep alone.”

“Then stay up and wait for me,” Arthur answered. "I couldn't care less what you decide to do."

“I need some help staying awake, if you know what I mean,” Molly murmured.
Arthur sagged.

She frowned. “You aren’t still upset about Ronald, are you?”

“How could I not be upset about our son?” Arthur asked. “He just blurted out that he has no interest in raising his daughter.”

“No,” Molly replied. “He has no interest in raising the Snape spawn. There is a key difference.”

“No, there isn’t. Rose Snape is really Rose Weasley.”

“No, she is not.”

Arthur threw up his hands. “When are we going to face reality? Ron fathered Rose…”

“No he didn’t,” Molly barked.

“Yes he did!” Arthur snapped. “Ron fathered Rose, but has no interest in raising her.”

Molly groaned.

“Don’t you get it?” Arthur approached her. “We’ve raised an irresponsible arse who just cost us our granddaughter.”

“Ronald didn’t mean a thing he said today about not wanting a child, and you know it.”

“How do I know it?”

“Because Ginny forced him to say those things.”

“Ginny forced him?” Arthur sputtered. “Ginny forced him?”

“I don’t know why you’re acting so surprised,” Molly continued. “Ginny’s so devoted to the Malfoys…”

“Stop blaming everyone for Ron’s atrocious behavior!” Arthur retorted.

Molly closed her mouth.

“We have blamed everyone in the universe for Ron’s actions except for him. Enough is enough. We have to face the fact that we’ve raised a man who hasn’t lost a wink of sleep over abandoning his own flesh and blood.”

“Ron doesn’t mean a thing he’s saying right now. He is emotionally wounded from Hermione’s actions,” Molly argued. “We need to help him through this dark time, not encourage his delusional fantasies.”

“Fantasies? Fantasies?” Arthur spat. “Do you want to hear about fantasies?”

Molly swallowed.

Arthur took a shaky breath. “When Ron announced his engagement to Hermione I had a dream about their children. I envisioned two gorgeous red heads, one girl and one boy, at our knees. They would call me ‘Grandpa.’ They’d play Quidditch and cheer for the Crudely Cannons. They were so real, so loved by me already.”
Molly thought better of interrupting.

“The firstborn was a girl. She was so beautiful and so intelligent. She was going to be the best chaser the Quidditch world had ever seen. Now,” Arthur let the tears flow. “Now she’ll grow up thinking that Quidditch is a waste of time. She’ll see Quidditch players as nothing more than useless dunderheads.”

Molly swallowed.

Arthur burst out laughing. “I’ll bet that will be her first word, ‘dunderhead.’ Severus must be so proud of himself for molding a Weasley into a Snape. It’s by far his greatest achievement.”

“Arthur, the real Rose doesn’t even have red hair,” Molly began. “She was never going to be the granddaughter of your dreams.”

“Perhaps not,” Arthur admitted. “Still if Severus would just give me one glimpse of her, let me spend an hour with her…Merlin I’d be in his debt forever.”

“We already owe him enough thanks to his Wolfsbane supply,” Molly replied. “We don’t need to owe him anything more.”

Arthur deflated. “I need to take my Wolfsbane soon, don’t I?”

“It would be wise to do so,” Molly replied.

Arthur trudged towards the kitchen. Molly threw off the blankets, but Arthur raised his hand.

“Please don’t get up on my account,” Arthur began. “I need a few moments to myself, just to wrap my mind around everything that’s happened in the last few months.”

“Fine,” Molly answered.

Once Arthur left, Molly buried her head into a pillow and screamed.

Why couldn’t he leave the bloody Snapes alone?

***

“Ginevra?”

She readjusted her pillows. “Yes?”

“Are you going to sleep?” Draco asked.

She sat up straighter. “I’ll go to sleep soon.”

Draco pried open his eyes “What is bothering you?”

“Nothing,” she answered. “I’m just waiting for Scorpius to wake up.”

"We just fed him."

"You never know when he'll need us again. It's better to be safe than sorry."

“Are you thinking about Scorpius, or are you thinking about the other members of your family?”

"Why would I be thinking about my family?"
Draco sat up. “You don't need to pretend that today has been easy for you. I know how difficult it was to expose your brother.”

"There was nothing difficult about what I did," Ginevra answered. “I needed to expose him and I did. There's nothing more to say.”

“You upset your family.”

“I did what was best.”

“It doesn’t change how you feel though.”

“How am I supposed to feel?”

"Guilty."

"Guilty?"

"Yes," Draco replied. "I think you feel rather guilty about what occurred today."

Ginevra deflated, “Am I that obvious?”

Draco kissed her cheek. “Only to someone who knows you well.”

Ginevra turned to him. “I shouldn’t feel guilty. I, I did the right thing. I know I did the right thing.”

Draco ran his index finger along her shoulder.

“But to see my dad so torn up, to see him crushed like that. Then he asked me to leave…. ” her voice trailed off.

“I cannot imagine how devastated you must have been once all was said and done,” Draco replied.

Ginevra sniffed. “I never meant to hurt Dad. I wish there was some way I could’ve exposed the truth without breaking his heart, but I couldn’t. There was no other way to expose Ronald.”

“You didn’t hurt Arthur," Draco replied. “Ron did.”

Ginevra wiped her eyes.

“It was Ron who denied his daughter, not you," Draco continued. "It was Ron who only claimed to have fathered Rose in order to gain the Snape fortune, not you. It was Ron who broke Arthur’s heart by telling the truth, not you.”

“Dad told me to leave…. ” Ginevra squeaked.

“He was taking his anger out on you," Draco replied. “He was hurt, upset, and looking for a target. You were there.”

She sniffed.

“The reality is though that he should be grateful to you for telling him the truth now before he raised his hopes of seeing Rose again too high," Draco replied.

“True,” Ginevra admitted.

Draco kissed her cheek. “I’m sorry you needed to go against your family on so many things. I wish I
could help repair those relationships.”

Ginevra caressed his cheek with her thumb. “You don’t need to do anything other than help me raise Scorpius and be the loving husband you have been.”

“I can do both of those things,” Draco promised.

Ginevra pressed her body against his. “I know you can.”

He moaned before kissing her neck.

“And thank you,” Ginevra continued.

“For what?”

“For listening without judging me.”

“After all the times you’ve given me the benefit of the doubt, it’s the least I can do.”

“I love you, Draco,” she whispered.

Draco ran his fingers through her hair. “I love you too, Ginevra.”

***

Rose pointed to the master bedroom. “Dada.”

“Yes,” Hermione whispered. “Dada’s asleep. He’s going to look for lupines tomorrow, so he needs his rest.”

"Ah," Rose answered before reaching towards the door. "Dada."

Hermione chuckled. "You're funny, Rose."

Rose smiled before muttering, "Dada."

Hermione stroked her daughter's hair and stared out into the moonlit night. While Rose babbled, Hermione allowed her thoughts to wander.

Severus is such a marvelous father to Rose. Is there enough room in his heart for another child, one which is biologically his?

Hermione shook her head. I don't want another child, at least not one now.

She envisioned a boy with curly black hair and dark eyes holding out his arms to her.

Hermione pushed the fantasy out of her mind. Severus needs time, as do I. We need to sleep for a few uninterrupted nights before we even think about having another child. Still, I wouldn't mind expanding our family within the next two to five years, provided Severus is willing to have another child. There are deep considerations on his end. How would his own difficult childhood come into play when he looked in his child's eyes and saw his mother? Or perhaps his father?

Perhaps just as important a question is how I would react to another child. If I have a child with Severus, that child would grow up with his or her biological father, whereas Rose would not. If Rose ever discovered her true paternity, would it create friction between her and our other child? Was it even wise to tell Rose who her biological father truly was? She loves Severus with her entire heart,
but is it fair to withhold such vital information from her? What if Rose looks nothing like her siblings? Would Severus and I be forced to tell her the truth then regardless of whether we want to tell her anything or not?

Why am I even thinking about any of this? Severus, Rose and I are happy as we are. If Severus does not want another child I would be perfectly content with Rose being our only child. We're both only children. Perhaps we should stop at having only one child....

"Muma," Rose began in a soft voice.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"Muma."

“Yes,” Hermione choked. “I’m Muma.”

Rose grinned and held out her hands. “Muma.”

Hermione kissed her daughter on the forehead. "Mummy loves you Rose. She loves you so very much.”

Rose squeaked. Parents were funny people; the smallest things and the simplest sounds could bring them such joy. Now all she needed to do was figure out how to make Mum just as happy in the future.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry I have not updated sooner! Life got way more hectic after my trip than I’d anticipated. This is the first time I’ve had to edit and subsequently post a chapter in over a week. I won't be able to post on Wednesday, but I'm hoping afterwards I'll be back to a more regular schedule.

Thank you so much for your continued patience and support! It is very much appreciated.
Lupinus Albus.

Severus removed the plant from its container and set it on the cutting table. The white flowers had already dried and hairy green seed pods had developed. With care, he removed the beans from the pods, then took a knife and diced the roots. He glanced at his crystal cauldron, where the liquid silver was already simmering. One by one Severus placed the beans in the cauldron. His muscles tensed and beads of sweat formed on his brow. After placing the final pod into the cauldron he backed away.

Please, for the love of all that is good, do not let this cauldron be damaged beyond repair.

Bubbles foamed to the rim, a few breaking free to hover above the brew while the liquid below turned bright red. Severus gripped his wand, but the concoction turned purple and settled back into the container. Soon, it appeared tranquil, as if it had never been on the brink of an eruption.

Severus tiptoed closer to the cauldron to inspect the results. The solution appeared stable. Did he dare test his luck by adding the roots? Two months of testing had indicated that they contained the greatest concentration of healing properties in the plant, but they reacted badly with the silver without the ameliorating effects of the beans. With a little luck though, this time may prove to be different.

He returned to the table to collect the diced roots. Then he swept them into the cauldron. A plume of magenta steam rose from the potion, but it quickly dissipated.

Severus pulled out his wand and muttered an incantation. The wand turned a dark green, indicating a pH level safe for consumption. He muttered another spell. This time the wand turned purple, indicating that the magic would not prove too overwhelming for most wizards.

Severus' heart skipped a beat. He went through his list of diagnostic spells, each of which seemed to weigh in the potion's favor.

Could he have finally succeeded?

***

Clack!

The toy snake skittered across the floor.

"Rose," Hermione groaned.

Rose clapped as Hermione bent over to retrieve the stuffed animal. "Could we please play 'pick up the toy' another time?"

Rose grow still. Her face grew serious. "Muma?"

"I'm sorry," Hermione sighed as she returned the snake to Rose. “Muma is more tired than usual today.”

“Oh,” Rose answered.
"Perhaps after a nap Muma will feel better." Hermione yawned. "In the meantime, why don't we try to finish our bananas?"

Rose's eyes gleamed at the mention of her favorite food.

"Good," Hermione answered before returning to her chair and spooning out another bite. "Open wide, Rose."

The baby opened her mouth, accepting the spoonful with relish. "Good job, Rose. You like bananas, don't you?"

"Ah," she answered, allowing a bit to dribble out.

"You're a very messy eater, aren't you?" Hermione wiped the drip from Rose's bib. "We'll have to teach you some table manners soon."

Rose swallowed the next bite when she heard footsteps approach. Her eyes lit up. "Dada!"

"Hello, Rose," Severus entered the kitchen, his expression noticeably lighter than usual. "Hermione, I have wonderful news."

"What?" Hermione asked.

"You were correct in suggesting that I brew my potion in the crystal cauldron. Things went much more pleasantly for me this time."

"Does that mean?"

Severus grinned. "I have finally developed our prototype lycanthropy potion."

Hermione rushed into Severus' arms. "That's wonderful!"

"I couldn't have done it without you or Neville." Severus frowned. "Did I just admit that Neville Longbottom helped me brew a potion?"

Hermione laughed. "I believe you did."

"I suppose I will have to make it worth your while to keep silent about that little detail then." He dipped her for a toe-curling kiss, leaving her breathless.

"I suppose that might buy you a few moments of silence," Hermione purred.

Rose grunted and held out her arms for Severus. He lifted her up and kissed her on the forehead. "Daddy loves you too, Rose."

She giggled as he rocked her back and forth.

"Out of curiosity, what species of lupine did you use in the potion?" Hermione asked.

"Lupinus Albus," Severus replied.

Hermione's eyes grew wide. "Really?"

Severus nodded. "The significance of the name is not lost on me."

"Indeed," Hermione hummed. "What happens now?"
“We need to report back to Kingsley and begin enlisting test subjects.”

“How are we going to contact him without Farrah catching wind of it?”

Severus stopped rocking Rose. He twisted his lips. "I suppose we should send him a Patronus and ask him to meet with us. I'd send him an owl…”

"But Farrah could easily intercept it," Hermione finished. "Whereas you could order a Patronus to avoid contact with her."

"Exactly,” Severus replied as Rose batted at a strand of his hair. "I want to keep this as quiet as possible. There’s no sense in giving anyone false hope. For all I know I have invented the cure for hair loss."

“True,” Hermione admitted.

“Still,” Severus allowed his lips to curl up. “I am optimistic.”

“As am I,” Hermione replied. “Where should we meet with him?”

"Here," Severus replied.

"Here?” Hermione asked.

"Yes," Severus answered. "The new wards should be strong enough to keep out Fenrir's spies. If one were to infiltrate the mansion, we could immediately apprehend that individual."

"True,” Hermione exhaled. "Still, the house is in no shape to entertain visitors."

"The elves can have it clean within a half hour,” Severus replied.

"I suppose so,” Hermione sagged. "I don't like asking them to do things on such short notice, but we need to see Kingsley, and I am in no condition to clean myself."

“Are you feeling well?”

Hermione shook her head. "I've been exhausted and nauseated all day."

"Would you like a potion to settle your stomach?” Severus asked.

"I would love one,” Hermione replied.

"It's as good as yours," Severus answered.

Hermione's eyes widened. "You don't think what I have is contagious, do you?"

"I feel fine at the moment."

"But Rose could become infected. Do you think I should quarantine myself from her?"

"I do not think such a measure will be necessary," Severus glanced down at his babbling daughter. "For the moment she seems quite healthy."

"True,” Hermione answered.

"If you want to stay on the safe side though, I can feed her until you feel more like yourself,” Severus offered.
"Thank you," Hermione replied. "I'm know I'm only being overprotective of her. What I have is probably just one of those twenty-four hour bugs. I'll be right as rain by tomorrow I'm sure."

"I hope so," Severus replied before kissing her on the cheek. "If there's anything I can do, just say the word."

"Don't worry," she replied with a smirk. "I will."

Severus had a gleam in his eyes. "Are you feeling well enough to see Kingsley, or should I ask him to come tomorrow?"

"There's no need to delay our meeting with him. Once I have that stomach settling potion, I should be fine," Hermione replied.

"I hope so anyway," Severus answered before turning to Rose. "Little One, would you like to help me cast a Patronus?"

"Ooh, Dada," she squealed as he carried her out the door.

Hermione watched them leave. Her eyes then fell on the high chair. She gasped. "Severus! Rose’s bib!"

"Expecto patronum."

"Severus, you need to take off Rose's bib. I need to wash it."

Hermione stopped and stared at the wispy figure before her. Severus' heart stopped.

"An otter?" she whispered.

Severus gulped.

Hermione’s eyes filled with tears. "Severus Snape, I truly do love you."

"Clearly I love you too," Severus replied with a frown.

Hermione wiped her eyes and laughed. "You don’t have to look so cross about it. Married people tend to love each other after all."

"I'm not cross about our feelings for each other. This otter on the other hand..."

"What's wrong with an otter?"

"An otter is too playful for a potions master who is accustomed to instilling fear into the hearts of dunderheads everywhere," Severus noted.

Hermione choked. "When you say it like that, I suppose an otter is ill-suited for a potions master of your temperament."

Severus’ eyes softened. "That being said, an otter is very well-suited for a husband who loves his wife beyond reason."

Hermione embraced him and pressed her lips against his.

Rose held her snake close and let out an "ah."
She knew Mummy would love the otter.

Chapter End Notes

Sadly, I won't be able to post tomorrow, but starting Thursday I should be getting back to posting every weekday.

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
Kingsley peeked outside his doorway, first to his right and then to his left. After releasing the breath he’d been holding, he posted a sign.

"Out until further notice."

After locking the door, he rushed over to the fireplace and grabbed a handful of floo powder. As the green flames erupted, he whispered, "The Prince Manor." When he tried to step into the fireplace, however, he could not enter.

Kingsley frowned and tapped his foot. Damn wards.

Two faces soon appeared in the embers. The first was the face of Severus Snape while the other was that of an infant.

"Minister Shacklebolt," Snape drawled.

"Yes," Kingsley answered.

"Ay," Rose cooed.

"I do apologize for keeping up my wards. Due to the nature of this meeting, I added some extra security measures," Severus replied.

"No, that’s understandable," Kingsley answered. "I appreciate your discretion."

"All that being said, could you please present your auror badge to me, as well as your muggle driver's license?" Severus asked.

Kingsley smirked. "I’d imagine the license has expired. I haven't used it since I guarded the Prime Minister."

"That makes no difference to me," Severus answered.

"Ooh," Rose muttered. No matter how many times she gazed into the fireplace she couldn’t figure out how people got in there. Someday Daddy would need to explain it to her. Granted she’d need to ask about it first, but she was getting better at making sounds. Maybe if she made enough of them he’d explain the fireplace to her.

Kingsley reached into his pocket and pulled out the requested items. He put them up to the flames. Severus nodded and answered, "Your driver's license is expired."

Kingsley chuckled. "I suspected it had."

Severus flicked his wand. "Sartu."

Kingsley stepped into the fire, and found himself in the Snapes' living room. Rose sneezed as a cloud of soot wafted toward her. Severus chuckled. "Bless you, Rose."

"Dada," she muttered before letting out another sneeze.
"Bless you again," he replied.

"How about we move Rose away from the fireplace so Kingsley can dust himself off without her sneezing all over him?" Hermione suggested as she stood to greet their guest.

"Actually," Kingsley brushed the soot from his robes. "I was just thinking how curious and perhaps even charming it was to see your husband hold your baby. When I first met Severus Snape I would never have thought it was possible for him to be so tender towards a child. I never thought he'd have an otter for a Patronus either."

Severus glowered at the Minister. "I am still the man you met that day. I just choose to be less of a complete git around my family."

"You look happy," Kingsley noted. "There's no shame in that."

"Ah," Rose muttered as she reached for her father's cape.

"I am very content with life at the moment," Severus replied, giving Rose the edge of his robes. "But we have not asked you here to discuss my personal life."

"Agreed," Kingsley answered in a much more somber voice. Then he turned his attention to Hermione. "How are you doing, Hermione?"

"Very well, thank you," she answered.

Severus asked. "Are you feeling less…?"

She nodded. "The potion worked. Thank you."

"I'm glad to hear it," Severus replied.

Kingsley's eyes softened. "We miss you down at the Ministry. It hasn't been the same since you left nearly a year ago."

"Has it been that long?" Hermione asked.

Kingsley nodded.

"Wow," Hermione replied. "It seems like I haven't worked at the Ministry in years."

"We would welcome you back in a heartbeat," Kingsley replied.

"Thank you, Minister. I'll consider it," Hermione answered before turning to Severus. "Would you like me to take Rose to the nursery?"

Severus looked down at Rose, who was sucking her thumb while holding his robes next to her cheek. "Perhaps if she begins to fuss we can place her in the crib. Right now she seems content, and it's doubtful she would tell anyone about this meeting."

"Eh," Rose mumbled.

Kingsley's eyes twinkled. "She's such an adorable little baby."

"She is," Severus replied. "Unfortunately this is no time to fawn over her."

"Agreed," Kingsley answered.
"Please make yourself comfortable," Hermione began.

"Thank you," Kingsley settled into one of the big chairs.

"We wanted to update you on the status of the lycanthropy potion," Severus began as he and Hermione sat on the couch.

"What have you found?" Kingsley asked.

"We think we finally have a prototype ready for testing."

"Thank Merlin!"

"Indeed."

"Out of curiosity, were the ingredients you used rare?"

Severus replied. "The main ingredients used are liquid silver and a plant by the name of Lupinus Albus."

"I've never heard of that plant," Kingsley mused.

"It grows in the Mediterranean Region. In ancient times, it may have been given to werewolves to help them revert back to their human form."

"Is it safe to eat?"

"Some muggles eat lupin beans; the seeds are soaked in water, boiled and served," Hermione answered.

Kingsley smiled. "Well, the irony of its name is not lost on me. Has it passed inspection?"

"It has passed every test I could perform with a wand or a spell," Severus replied. "The only thing left to do is test it on an actual lycanthrope."

"I see," Kingsley answered.

"We were hoping you'd give us the authority to proceed with a volunteer test group," Hermione inserted.

Kingsley took a slow, deep breath "Why don't you try your potion on me first?"

"What?" the Snapes asked.

"I'm a lycanthrope, as you well know…" Kingsley began. "… and I would like to be cured."

"But you're the Minister of Magic…" Hermione began.

"That position means nothing to me right now," Kingsley cut in. "Fenrir holds my condition over my head as blackmail material. I'm tired of cowing to him."

"Oh," Rose mumbled before waving her father's cape in the air.

Kingsley scratched the chair. "If I'm going to lead Wizarding Britain, then I need to have the courage to do what I ask of our people. If this potion is dangerous, I would rather be harmed then have an innocent citizen harmed on my behalf."
"But you fill such an important role," Hermione argued.

"No one is indispensable; there are others who can take up the mantle of Minister of Magic," Kingsley concluded. "Please test your potion on me."

Silence filled the room.

"So be it," Severus drawled. "When would you like the testing to begin?"

"There should be a full moon tonight. One floo call and the Wizarding Research Hospital of Britain will find a room for us. I have no doubt they'll want to participate in this historic moment," Kingsley answered.

"Thank you, Minister," Hermione replied. "I wish you the best of luck.

“Thank you,” Kingsley answered, hoping he wouldn't need any luck.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience and support! It's deeply appreciated!
“Hermione.”

She buried her head deeper into her pillow.

“Hermione.”

She threw the covers over her head and moaned.

Hermione felt her husband's hand massaging her back. She mumbled, “What do you need?”

“I've received an owl from the research hospital,” Severus whispered.

Hermione’s eyes opened. She sat up. "What did they say?"

Severus grinned. "Our potion succeeded."

"It did?” Hermione gasped.

“Yes.” Severus replied. “Kingsley retained his human form the entire night in spite of direct exposure to the full moon.”

“Oh my,” Hermione breathed.

“We'll still need to run more tests before we can claim we have a cure and we'll need to see how long the effects last…” Severus began.

"But it worked!” Hermione cried. “It worked.”

“Indeed it did,” Severus answered.

Hermione threw her arms over him. "You did it, Severus!"

"We did it, Hermione," Severus answered.

“What do you mean 'we did it'? You did all the work.”

“You were the one who discovered the lupine plant, and the one who supported me throughout this endeavor.”

"I really didn't do that much."

"You have done more for me than you could ever imagine. Thank you for your invaluable assistance."

“Thank you for saving the Wizarding World again.”

Severus placed his forehead against hers and closed his eyes. "I love you. I could not imagine living my life with anyone but you."

"I love you, too, Severus," she whispered.
A smile played at his lips as Severus dipped his head to kiss her. Just as she moved to deepen the kiss, they heard a tapping on the window.

"I could just hex it away…" Severus growled.

"If you do, it will only find another window to scratch up," Hermione groaned.

"I suppose you are right." Severus tore himself from his wife's embrace and opened the window. An elegant caramel-colored owl flew in and perched itself on the dresser. With a malevolent scowl, Severus removed the parchment from its leg and rolled his eyes. "It's from Rita Skeeter."

"What does she want?" Hermione asked.

Severus unfolded the parchment and held it up to his face. “Apparently the media has caught wind of our success.”

“Oh?” Hermione asked.

Severus lowered the parchment. “Rita wants to interview us about the lycanthropy cure.”

Hermione stretched. "When?"

"As soon as possible," Severus replied.

"What?" Hermione’s face turned crimson. "Shit, I'm not dressed, my hair is a mess, and Rose will need her breakfast soon."

"We can wait to speak with her until afternoon," Severus suggested.

"No," Hermione groaned. "By then Rose will have flung her carrots all over my clothes and in my hair."

Severus's lips curled up. "She really has taken quite a dislike to carrots."

Hermione shook her head. "I know she doesn’t like them, but they have the valuable nutrients a growing child needs."

“They are also orange,” Severus noted, “And she’s taken quite a disliking to all things orange.”

"I wonder where she got that particular distaste from?" Hermione asked.

Severus smirked. "I wouldn't have the foggiest clue."

"Merging Severus," Hermione sighed. “Just once I'd like to look as if I had everything together, and not like some poor soul who can barely dress herself and feed a baby properly."

"Hermione, we don't have to give an interview. We could just give them a written statement and be done with it,” Severus suggested.

"No," Hermione answered. "We worked so hard for this moment and the Wizarding World has waited far too long for even a glimmer of hope that Fenrir could be defeated. We need to give this interview."

"What time should I tell Rita to arrive then?" Severus asked.

"Maybe around ten? That would give Rose time to eat breakfast and me time to shower and make
myself presentable," Hermione answered. "Rose should be ready for her morning nap by then, so hopefully she'll sleep through the entire interview."

“One can only hope. The last thing I need is her face plastered all over The Daily Prophet.”

“We cannot hide her from the Wizarding World forever.”

“We can certainly try though.”

Hermione chuckled. “I suppose we can.”

“Rose’s potential photograph aside,” Severus began. ”Would you like me to write the message?”

"Yes, please. Where should we tell her to come?"

"Let's meet her here. That way, we won't have to worry about taking Rose out in public, and we will have a better chance of keeping her blasted camera away from our daughter.”

"It's settled, then," Hermione answered.

As if on cue, Rose began whimpering in the other room.

"I'll write that note," Severus replied.

"Thank you," Hermione answered before brushing her lips against his. "Perhaps after Rose's lunch, we can actually celebrate our accomplishment."

Severus' eyes glittered in anticipation. "I would like that very much."

Hermione scooted off the bed. When her feet hit the ground, the room spun around. A wave of nausea flared up within her. She gagged.

"Hermione!" Severus exclaimed as her face drain of color.

"I'm fine," Hermione whispered as her lightheadedness subsided. "My blood sugar is probably just low."

“Do you feel as if you need to eat?”

“Maybe,” Hermione swallowed her bile. “Although food sounds like the least appealing thing in the world at the moment."

"I take it you are still not feeling like yourself then," Severus replied.

"Sadly I am not," Hermione answered. "But you shouldn't worry. I'm sure whatever this is will pass within the next day or two."

Severus stared at her.

“I will be fine, I promise,” Hermione insistent.

"If you say so," Severus drawled.

Hermione gave him a reassuring smile before making her way to Rose's room. Severus followed her as far as the nursery, then continued on to the library. With each step he hoped that Hermione's health would return soon. For once in his life, he wanted to be happy without the threat of tragedy
"Twelve hundred people changed," Scabior set the newspaper on the ground. "We changed twelve hundred people at that Quidditch match last night."

"Pity, I thought we'd change more," Fenrir cackled. "Though I suppose I shouldn't have expected any differently. Quidditch attendance has been down a bit lately."

"According to last week's paper, we are single-handedly making Quidditch obsolete," Scabior answered. "No one wants to go to the games anymore; both the players and the fans are too afraid of an attack."

"Quidditch is an insipid game. While I do appreciate the convenient venue it provides for mass changings, I cannot say that the decline of the game upsets me," Fenrir sneered. "Who knows? One day they may even thank me for exposing just how stupid the sport is!"

Scabior and Fenrir laughed.

"Fenrir!"

They quieted.

"Fenrir!"

Fenrir turned to the interloper. "Yes, Archelaus?"

"I just received the evening paper! You need to read it!" the Chief panted.

Fenrir took the paper and began to read. He clenched his teeth and his face reddened in rage. "Go fetch your miserable niece, Archelaus! We need to take care of this problem once and for all!"

"Yes, sir!" Archelaus answered before darting off.

"What's going on?" Scabior asked.

"Severus Snape thinks he's found a cure for lycanthropy," Fenrir snarled.


“He’s Severus Snape! What other explanation does one need?” Fenrir asked.

“Shit,” Scabior hissed.

Fenrir barred his teeth. "The games are over. It's time to take care of Snape and his little wife once and for all."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It's deeply appreciated as always.
Farrah yanked open the door to the dilapidated cabin. "I came as soon as I could!"

Fenrir and his generals turned to her.

"W-what’s the emergency?" she panted before shutting it.

"Apparently you haven't read the evening paper," Fenrir answered.

"No," Farrah took a deep breath. "I haven't."

"Then I’d strongly suggest you do so now," Fenrir ordered.

Fenrir tossed the paper over to Farrah.

Farrah gasped. "He-he found a cure?"

"It would appear so," Fenrir replied.

"I, I can't believe it. I thought it would take him at least a year or two more."

"Apparently not."

Farrah scanned the article and snorted. "I should've known he'd use mainly muggle ingredients. His wife must've had a hand in that."

"I really don't care what his ingredients are or who inspired him to use them. I'm only interested in destroying that potion!" Fenrir snarled.

"How?" Scabior asked. "He isn't interested in joining us, and we have nothing to hold over him. He's untouchable."

Fenrir's lips curled up. "Perhaps to us he is untouchable, but Mr. Weasley can enter and leave his mansion at will."

"He can," Farrah replied.

"And if I understand correctly, Mr. Weasley is not a huge fan of Severus Snape," Fenrir continued.

"He isn't," Farrah answered. "But I don't think he can harm Snape."

"There is no conceivable universe in which Ron Weasley would stand a chance in a duel against Severus Snape," Scabior replied. "Ron would be obliterated before he even pulled out his wand."

The Chief suppressed a snicker.

Fenrir silenced them with a glare. "I do not want Ron Weasley to hurt Severus Snape. I want him to take something Snape cannot live without."

"The only thing Ron could take from Severus is his wife, and she’s made it clear that she’s happily married," Farrah answered.
“Hermione is not the only person Snape cares for,” Fenrir replied.

The others stared at him.

Fenrir continued, "Snape has a daughter."

"I thought you said we were going to leave Rose alone,” Scabior exclaimed.

Fenrir answered. “I was more than content to leave his daughter alone, but now he’s forced my hand.”

"How do you plan to get a hold of Rose?” Farrah asked.

"Sooner or later, Snape and his delectable wife will have to appear in public to celebrate their unfortunate achievement. It's doubtful Rose would accompany them to that event. At home with just a babysitter, she would be easy prey,” Fenrir replied. “All we’d need to do is persuade Ron to go in there and take her from them.”

"Ron wouldn't just hand Rose over to us,” Farrah replied. "He may not like the Snapes, but he is by no means a supporter of universal lycanthropy."

“Ron would never hand Rose over to me,” Fenrir answered. “But he would hand her over to you.”

"Me?"

Fenrir nodded.

"I suppose I could come up with some pretense to persuade him to kidnap her,” Farrah mused. “Then at the very most I'd be one dirty diaper away from having her in my possession.”

“There’s one major problem with this plan,” Scabior cut in.

“What would that be?” Fenrir asked.

“Severus Snape has dedicated his life to the greater good,” Scabior answered. “If someone told him the Wizarding World needs this potion more than he needs his daughter...”

"Severus Snape would never sacrifice his daughter for the greater good,” Fenrir interrupted. “He’d rather submit to lycanthropy himself than to risk that little girl’s welfare.”

The Chief nodded. “Snape may not be a kind man, but by all accounts he loves that little girl. His paternal instincts will override any impulse he'd have towards the greater good.”

“Okay, so we’ve kidnapped Rose. What's next?”

“W'e'll tell Snape to destroy the potion along with all his research notes or we will change Rose, take her out of the country, and raise her as a lycanthrope."

"What would prevent him from reconstructing his research or telling someone else how to make the potion once Rose is returned to him?"

Fenrir smirked. "We won't return Rose until he has agreed to be obliviated.”

“But he’s an occlumens,” the Chief argued. “He could pretend to be obliviated without having lost a single memory.”
"I know of an ancient spell that can pierce even the strongest of Occlumency shields," Fenrir replied. "He'll be lucky if he so much as remembers his name once we're done with him."

"What if Snape comes ready to fight with aurors in tow?" Farrah asked.

"Our forces will be ready for him. If it comes to hand-to-hand combat, however," Fenrir turned to Scabior, "You must do everything within your power to make sure that baby is nowhere near me. Put her in the middle of the woods for all I care, but do not allow her to take a piece of my soul."

"I won't," Scabior promised.

"Very well, then," Fenrir answered. "Farrah, you're aware of what needs to be done?"

"Yes," she replied.

"You have until the first featured public event to convince Ron to kidnap Rose. Once he agrees, make sure he follows through," Fenrir ordered.

"I will," Farrah promised.

"Good. We will meet again as soon as the press announces a public event featuring the Snapes," Fenrir steepled his hands. "He won't stand a chance against us."

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A patient gagged upon ingesting the lycanthropy potion. He knew it was medicine, but Merlin, couldn't they have at least added a little cherry flavoring?

The Mediwitch smiled as she led him into the observation room where he joined forty-nine other people beside as many beds. Some patients lay down with their eyes closed, some stared at the wall, while a few mumbled amongst themselves.

"If you need anything, just look up at the observation area above the ceiling window and raise your hand. Otherwise, have a nice night," the Mediwitch began.

A few muttered their thanks before she closed and locked the door. The room then fell silent as the lycanthropes waited for moonrise.

Within a half hour a sliver of moonlight entered the room. The test subjects braced themselves for the inevitable pain of transformation.

Such a transformation never occurred.

Some craned their necks toward the window to make sure the moon truly was full and unobscured; others succumbed to sleep while still others stayed awake until dawn. When the first rays of sunlight appeared, cheers erupted from every corner of the room.

They were cured.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
"Ron!"

No answer.

Farrah pounded on his front door. "Ron!"

"Hold on," a muffled voice answered from within.

Farrah stepped back. After waiting two minutes, she resumed her assault on the door. "Ronald Bilius Weasley!"

"Ugh!" he yelled. "I'm coming, Farrah."

Farrah crossed her arms over her chest and tapped her foot. "I need to speak with you!"

"Merlin woman, at least let me get a hangover potion first!" Ron complained.

"Fine," Farrah shouted.

She could hear the faint sound of rummaging in the kitchen, footsteps clomping down the hall, then silence. Just as she was about to strike the door a third time, the footsteps returned. She stepped aside as the door finally swung open.

Ron yawned. "What's got your knickers in such a twist?"

"I thought I'd better check on you to see how you were doing this morning, she began in a sweet voice.

"I'm just brilliant," Ron stepped aside, allowing Farrah to enter. "My ex-fiancée was featured in the news last night holding my daughter, smiling and prattling on about how she helped cure lycanthropy. Snape was standing right beside her with a huge smirk on his face. It really made my week."

Farrah wandered towards the sitting room. "I have to give them a little credit, nobody thought lycanthropy could be cured. They really did accomplish the impossible."

"I honestly thought trying to cure lycanthropy was crazy. Now though," Ron smacked his head. "Merlin, I'll never have a smart woman like that come my way again."

"I didn't think you were into smart women," Farrah replied.

"I wasn't when we were together," Ron answered, slumping into a sad brown excuse for a chair. "It was honestly quite annoying to hear her chatter on about things I didn't understand. Now that she's out curing lycanthropy and helping with a successful apothecary, all while caring for a baby, well, I guess I really messed up by letting her get away from me."

"She could've been a real asset to you."

"Exactly," Ron answered as Farrah took a seat on the couch. "Instead of letting me bask in the glow
of her accomplishments, she’s going to tell the entire Wizarding World how much of a gold digger she thinks I am.”

“"It was rather cruel of your sister to spike your drink with Veritaserum and trick you as she did,” Farrah replied.

“It was treasonous!” Ron argued. “It hurts all the more because we were so close growing up, but then she stabbed me in the back!”

“I’m so sorry for what she did,” Farrah replied.

“It isn’t fair!” Ron shouted. “Hermione gets to live a life of luxury while I’m on the brink of financial ruin. I’m going to go broke soon, and she doesn’t care.”

"What if I told you there may be a way to gain a fortune?"

“I told you, I can’t get another job.”

“You wouldn’t have to.”

“I wouldn’t have to?”

“No, you could obtain a fortune without lifting a finger. You could also get a little revenge on your ex-lover as well.”

“How so?”

Farrah smirked. “All you need to do is kidnap Rose Snape and then pretend to rescue her.”

Ron’s jaw dropped. "What?"

"Kidnap Rose and pretend to save her," Farrah suggested. "The Snapes will be so grateful to you they will give you any amount of money you ask for.”

"No," Ron began. "I-I couldn't."

"Why not?" Farrah asked.

"Because I'm not a monster. I may not like the kid, but I never want to hurt her,” Ron replied.

"How would you be hurting Rose?" Farrah asked. "She wouldn't be in any real danger, and you'd get to spend some quality time with her."

“Look,” Ron replied. “I may hate Hermione, but putting her through the pain of losing a child is just too much.”

“Did she care about your pain at losing a child when she married Snape?” Farrah asked.

“No,” Ron admitted. “But that’s because I didn’t want a child then.”

“But you want Rose now, don’t you?” Farrah asked.

“I mean I don’t know, but Dad,” Ron’s eyes grew. “Dad would love to spend some time with Rose.”

"She's denying your father access to his grandchild,” Farrah replied. “Don’t you think your father deserves to spend a few hours with his grandchild?”
“He would love nothing more than to see Rose,” Ron admitted. “But he wouldn’t want me to kidnap her.”

“Hasn’t Snape already kidnapped Rose? Didn’t he steal her away when he signed that birth certificate?”

“I guess he did.”

“See, you aren’t kidnapping Rose. You’re reuniting her with her real family.”

“Hermione is her real mother though.”

“But Snape isn’t her real father.”

“No, he isn’t.”

“Thank about it. You’ll be reuniting your father with his grandchild. It will make him so happy. Isn’t that what you want?”

"I suppose so."

“Then what is stopping you?” Farrah asked.

“If I’m the one who finds Rose then won't they suspect that I was the one who took her?” Ron asked.

“Not if we pin it on someone else.”

"Who?"

"One of Fenrir's followers."

Ron gasped. "No, Hermione would go after the lycanthropes, then. She'd be killed or worse, turned into one of them! I'd go to Azkaban for life, while Snape will throw it in Dad’s face that he has full custody of Rose.”

"Relax," Farrah answered. "There are several fairly innocuous lycanthropes to choose from. For instance, Pansy Parkinson could barely avoid getting caught during the last raid, and she's horrible at transforming from wolf to human. She’d be the perfect candidate to kidnap Rose.”

Ron cocked his head. "How would you know how well Pansy can transform into a wolf?"

"One of the other aurors was telling me about a raid. He mentioned her specifically," Farrah answered.

"Sure," Ron drawled.

"Look, we'll claim that Pansy polyjuiced herself to look like you and broke through Snape's wards. You overheard her bragging about it at the pub, fought her off, and retrieved Rose. You then call a press conference, and BAM!” Farrah clapped her hands. “Instant hero!”

"Are you sure Rose will be safe through this entire thing?” Ron asked.

"Of course she will be. You and your dad will be the ones caring for her after all."

“True, but how will I even get to her? Snape and Hermione will kill me the second I walk onto their
“You’ll just have to wait until they’re gone.”

“When would that be?”

“Snape and Hermione will almost certainly give a press conference on their lycanthropy cure, maybe in the next few days.”


"You can grab Rose then," Farrah replied.

"Yeah, I suppose I could," Ron answered.

“Now, do you want to hear my plan?” Farrah asked.


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Rose pushed herself up on her hands and knees, taking a moment to enjoy the view.

Severus poked his head out of his potions journal. "Do you want to come sit on the sofa with me?"

"Dada," she answered.

"You can crawl over to me, Rose,” he assured her in a gentle voice.

"Ah," she answered. She dragged herself forward with nothing but elbows and sheer determination. Rose grinned after she succeeded in pulling herself forward a few more centimeters.

“Keep going,” Severus began. “You are almost there.”

Rose stopped. The carpet was itchy and she was starting to comprehend the meaning of "rug burn". She looked up at her father for technical assistance.

“Keep crawling Little One. I know you can come over to me,” he cooed.

Rose blinked. Dada and Muma use their legs to move, but I still can’t stand like they do. I wonder if legs can do other things though.

She lifted one knee and pushed it forward. When she straightened it again, it propelled her so far that she landed face-down.

Severus set down the journal, wondering if he’d pushed her too far.

Rose pushed herself up again and smiled, having discovered the wonders of propulsion. She coordinated her arms and legs until she was crawling towards her goal.

"Well done, Rose," Severus replied. “You’re doing a wonderful job.”

Hermione entered the room. “What is Rose doing now?”

"Watch," Severus pointed to Rose, who was just a meter away.
"She's crawling," Hermione gasped. "She's finally crawling!"

"Yes," Severus replied as Rose finally reached his shoes. He scooped her up and kissed her. "She did it all by herself!"

"Dada!" she cheered.

Severus kissed her again before turning his attention to Hermione. "Have you heard anything from the research center?"

"Only that there's been no change. Not a one has reverted back to his werewolf form," Hermione replied.

"Then there's hope yet," Severus replied.

Hermione sat beside him on the couch. "There's more than just hope."

Severus put his arm around her. "Are you feeling better than you were this morning?"

"A little," she answered.

"Do you think you need to see a Mediwitch or a Healer?" Severus asked.

"No, I don't think I have anything serious," Hermione replied. "I think I'm just stressed about the potion, Ron, and all the other chaos going on in our lives."

"Are you certain you are merely stressed, or do you think what you have is more serious?" Severus asked.

Hermione nodded. "I really do feel better in the afternoon. I just need to take it easy in the mornings and I'll be fine."

"I will trust your judgment then" Severus replied.

"Muma," Rose held her arms out towards her mother.

"Yes, you're crawling now!" Hermione exclaimed before pulling the baby onto her lap. "You're getting to be such a big girl."

Rose relaxed. Maybe she couldn't have black robes that billow quite yet, but by Merlin, she could go places! Rose yawned and closed her eyes.

It had been a very busy day.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for all the support! It's deeply appreciated!
"Severus?"

No answer.

Hermione rolled over and reached over to his side of the bed. There was only a cool sheet.

Her eyes fluttered open. She yawned before scanning the room.

She saw no sign of Severus.

Before she could whisper his name once more a soft baritone wafted from the nursery.

"You are quite hungry this morning, aren't you?"

Hermione crept out of bed, reached for her wand, and darted into the bathroom. After locking the door, she placed her wand over her pelvis.

“Sunt iscarcin…”

She stopped and lowered her wand.

Hermione stood with her back against the wall. This is stupid. I can’t be pregnant! My books said that I shouldn’t be fertile while I’m breastfeeding. My symptoms are nothing more than a sign of stress.

A wave of nausea overtook her. Hermione threw her wand down and bent over the toilet, retching until there was nothing left to lose. She groaned and shook her head.

Once again, Hermione picked up her wand. At the very least, it can’t hurt to rule out pregnancy as the source of my discomfort.

“Sunt iscarcinata, va rog spune-mi.”

The wand gave off a yellow glow. Hermione’s heart raced.

I can't be pregnant. Severus and I were supposed to discuss having another child. Our next child was supposed to be planned; no more surprises. We were supposed to actually get used to sleeping a full night before we considered having another child. We were supposed to have conversations about what having another child would mean to us. We were supposed to defeat Fenrir before we even considered having another child.

Hermione glanced down at the wand, which had now turned blue. A lump formed in her throat.

She was pregnant.

"So you've been making me sick," Hermione put a hand over her pelvis. "Well, you don't have the best timing, and like your sister, you're a bit of a surprise. Still," Hermione’s eyes misted, “Hello little baby. I'm Mummy. I love you."
Hermione’s heart skipped a beat. Severus had stated that he needed a few years to adjust to the idea of having another child, but now he had less than nine months. Would Severus believe that she’d tricked him into fathering a biological child? Could he find joy in her pregnancy, or would his own complicated child preclude him from loving any child other than Rose? What if she’d made another mistake in having a baby with a man who did not want biological children?

Hermione took a deep breath and wiped her eyes. There is no point in speculating about the future now. I need to summon some Gryffindor courage and find a way to break this news to Severus and Rose.

After composing herself, Hermione stepped into the bedroom. Severus’ voice was still coming from Rose’s nursery. She glided down the hall and listened from the doorway.

“You are almost there Rose. Keep trying to stand.”

Rose grabbed onto the bars of the crib and pulled herself up. Then she adjusted her legs until they were under her.

“Do not be afraid to put your weight on the bars. I have the crib charmed so they won't break.”

Rose gave him a smile before reaching up towards the top. Once her hands finally gripped the top of the crib railing, she straightened her legs to stand. She shot him a triumphant look and crowed, “Ooh!”

I'm finally standing up, just like Mummy and Daddy!

"Very good Rose!" Severus exclaimed. "You're standing all by yourself.”

"She is?" Hermione rushed inside.

Rose smiled.

"Yes, she's finally pulled herself up for the first time," Severus answered.

"Very good Rose!" Hermione cheered before going over and rubbing the baby's back. "Mummy is so proud of you!"

"Muma!" Rose replied before removing one hand from the railing. Hermione gasped as Rose began to wobble. She grabbed her daughter and held her close.

"You aren't ready to stand without support quite yet," Hermione cooed before kissing the infant on the forehead. “But you'll get there soon enough.”

"Oh," she replied before sticking her thumb in her mouth.

Hermione then turned to Severus. "I was surprised to see you up already."

"I barely slept last night," Severus answered. “I could not focus on anything other than those test results.”

"We'll know soon enough if the potion lasted the patients all week,” Hermione assured him.

"True," Severus answered. "But then we will have to see if it can last a month, a year, or even longer…”

Hermione put a hand on his shoulder. "Let's just see if it can last a week first. We can always
improve upon it."

"Very true," Severus exhaled.

Hermione rubbed his back. "All of this will be over soon enough."

"I pray you are right," Severus answered. "I would love to have a few years where I did not need to fret about some dunderhead trying to destroy the world."

Hermione kissed him on the cheek. "Whatever happens, we'll get through it."

"Indeed we will," Severus replied.

She looked down at Rose. "Has she eaten yet?"

Severus smirked. "She drank the entire bottle in less than ten minutes. She was very hungry."

"Ah," Rose pointed towards her crib.

Severus retrieved her toy snake. "Do you want this?"

"Ah," she replied before reaching for it.

Severus chuckled and handed her the toy. "There you go, Little One."

"Dada," she muttered before squeezing the snake.

"You are so good with her," Hermione began. "I love watching you two together."

"I enjoy every moment I spend with her," Severus answered.

Hermione hummed as her eyes moistened.

"Are you feeling well?" Severus asked

"Yes," Hermione replied.

"Have you experienced any nausea this morning?"

"Yes."

"Do you need to see a Mediwitch?"

"I will eventually."

"What do you mean, 'you will eventually?'" Severus asked. "How serious do you believe your condition to be?"

Before Hermione could answer, an owl tapped on the window. Severus snarled at it.

"Go ahead and let it in. It's probably about the lycanthropy potion," Hermione replied.

Rose stared transfixed as her father strode to the window, robes billowing behind him. Her eyes lit up as her jaw dropped open.

I can't wait to walk!
Severus opened the window to admit a snowy white owl. It flew in and landed on the crib. Severus scowled and shooed it onto the window ledge. The last thing he needed was to clean owl feces off of his daughter’s crib.

Severus removed the letter and tore it open. For three minutes, silence filled the room.

“What does it say?” Hermione asked.

“We did it,” Severus announced. “They went an entire week without a transformation. For this month at least, they are cured.”

“We did it!” she cheered before embracing him, sandwiching Rose between them. Rose let out a cry until they shifted her more carefully between them.

Severus captured Hermione's lips. "I love you."

"I love you too," she answered.

Severus returned his attention to the letter. After a moment he continued, "Kingsley wants us to present our findings at a special banquet on Friday."

"That's only four days away."

"Shall we ask them to postpone it?"

"No," Hermione replied. "We can get ourselves together by then. I'm sure we can find someone to look after Rose for those few short hours."

"Good. I'll write him back and prepare my notes,” Severus replied.

Severus kissed Hermione once more and added a kiss on the cheek for Rose. He strolled out of the room, but stopped upon reaching the doorway. Then he turned around. “What exactly do you believe is the cause of your nausea?”

“It’s nothing that will not pass,” Hermione assured him.

“You spoke about seeing a Mediwitch earlier…” Severus began.

She waved him off. “It’s not important right now. Go write your letter.”

Severus nodded before exiting the room.

Hermione stared at the spot where her husband had been standing.

Severus doesn't need to learn about the pregnancy today. I should wait to tell him until the chaos dies down. Then perhaps we’ll have the emotional stamina to work through what another child means for us.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, I won't be able to post until Monday at the earliest. I'm going out of town for Memorial Day, and won't be back until then. In the meantime, have a great weekend!
Thank you for your support and patience! I appreciate all of it!
Severus paced from one end of the master bedroom to the other. He glanced over at the closed door. It remained closed. His frown deepened. Why must Hermione always take so long in the bathroom?

"Eh."

Severus stepped towards his daughter. His expression softened as he watched his daughter form spit bubbles. "Are you having fun, Little One?"

"Ah," Rose reached for his robes.

"No Rose," Severus caught her hand just before they could touch his robes. "Not tonight."

Rose scowled. "Dada."

Severus chuckled. She really was a younger version of himself.

Rose raised her hand again. "Dada."

"No Rose," Severus began. "You may not play with my robes. Tonight they need to be clean, dry, and free from… extra decoration."

"Ah," Rose answered before grasping at them again.

Severus smirked. "You're a persistent little girl, aren't you?"

"Eh," Rose answered.

He began to tickle her. "Yes, you are such a persistent little girl, just like your mother."

The infant erupted in giggles.

"What are you two doing?" Hermione asked as she stepped out of the bathroom.

Severus' heart skipped a beat. "I was distracting her from my robes. She wants to play with them."

"I see," Hermione answered with a sly smile. "Are you sure you weren't simply looking for an excuse to play with your daughter?"

"Perhaps we were playing," Severus admitted.

Hermione hummed. "I never pictured you as a tickler."

"Any dunderhead can tickle," Severus scoffed. "I just choose not to most of the time."

Hermione stepped forward, her royal purple dress swaying behind her. "It's nice to see you so relaxed and happy with her."

"I cherish every moment I spend with her," Severus replied.

"I know you do," Hermione answered.
Severus approached Hermione and kissed her on the lips. "You look radiant."

"Thank you," she whispered. "The pearl necklace isn't too much?"

"No, it draws attention to your eyes."

"I'm glad to hear it. Mum gave it to me for Christmas a couple years back. I've always wanted to wear it, but hadn't found the right occasion until now."

"Remind me to create an occasion for you to wear that outfit again," Severus purred before kissing her once more.

"Severus," Hermione laughed. "We have to leave soon."

"I wish we didn't," he growled. "I would much rather spend the evening with you than answer questions from reporters who couldn't tell a lily from a tulip."

"I wish we were spending the evening at home as well," she admitted. "But we do have to leave soon."

"Then perhaps we should steal whatever enjoyment we can before we must leave," Severus kissed her on the collarbone.

"Severus," Hermione breathed. "Rose is on the bed watching us."

Severus turned his attention to the bed, where Rose had turned away from her parents and was playing with her toy horse.

"So she is," Severus muttered.

The fireplace erupted into green flames. "Severus? Hermione?"

"Pomona?" Severus called before rushing over towards the face in the ashes.

"Yes, it's me," she replied.

"How long does a Snargaluff live?" Severus asked.

"Depends on how well it's handled or if it's wild," Professor Sprout answered. "On average it lives for twenty years, although some grown in the wild…"

"Sartu," Severus answered.

Pomona stepped onto the threshold of the fireplace. "Hello Severus, Hermione."

"Hello," Severus answered.

"Yes, hello," Hermione replied. "It is great to see you again."

"It's lovely to see both of you as well," Pomona answered.

"Thank you for agreeing to come on such short notice," Hermione began. "My parents truly feel horrible that they cannot watch Rose, but Mum doesn't want to pass on her cold."

"That's quite all right. I've been very eager to meet the young dear." She then glanced at the baby on the bed. "This must be little Rose."
"It is," Severus answered.

Rose turned to the visitor.

"Oh! She's so adorable," Pomona gushed.

"Thank you," Hermione replied.

"We're going to have so much fun tonight, aren't we, Rose?" Pomona asked.

Pomona picked up the baby. Rose looked over at her dad. Daddy's lips were turned downwards did not seem overly upset by this visitor. Mummy was grinning, and her eyes were sparkling. Rose stared at Professor Sprout and relaxed.

"She seems to like me," Pomona replied.

"Indeed she does," Severus answered.

Hermione began, "I should probably show you where Rose's things are."

"Certainly," Pomona replied before handing Rose to Snape.

"This is the nursery," Hermione began. "Rose has a changing table and a crib in there, along with her toys. Here are a few of her favorites…"

Severus shook his head before turning his attention to Rose. "Are you going to be a good girl for Professor Sprout?"

Rose grunted. Where was Daddy going?

Severus kissed her on the forehead. "Your mother and I must leave soon, but I'm sure you'll have fun with Professor Sprout. Remember though, she is a Hufflepuff. She may be a lovely woman, but you don't want to be in her house."

"Oh," Rose answered as though she were taking notes.

Severus chuckled. "I love you, Little Rose. You are the best daughter I could have asked for."

"Uh Dada," she replied.

"Now you know how to contact us if there's an emergency," Hermione finished.

"Yes," Pomona laughed. "You've told me at least twenty times, dear."

Hermione exhaled. "I know, but we aren’t used to leaving Rose alone."

"Go ahead and relax. We'll be fine, I promise," Pomona answered.

Hermione kissed Rose on the right cheek. "Mummy loves you. Be good for Professor Sprout."

"Ah Muma," she answered.

Hermione kissed Rose on the other cheek before taking her from Severus' arms and giving her to Pomona.

“Goodbye,” Pomona began.
"Goodbye," the couple replied in unison before stepping toward the fireplace. Severus threw in the floo powder and gave the address. The fire ignited, and they both stepped through.

Pomona sighed. "It's funny, Rose. I've known your daddy for a long time, but I never thought I'd see him hold a baby with half the joy he has when he holds you. Heck, I never even thought he'd want children."

Rose raised her eyebrow. Daddy had always seemed happy to be her father. Hadn't he always wanted to be a daddy?

"Never mind all that," Pomona replied before setting Rose on the bed, setting wards to keep her from falling off the edges. She then reached into her pocket for something. "I have a big book of magical plants I think you'll really like."

"Ooh," Rose replied. She heard that some plants were potions ingredients. Maybe if she remembered the plant names, Daddy would finally let her stick a wand into a cauldron and brew her own potion. It was worth a shot anyway.

***

Farrah’s wand turned green. "They're gone."

“Great. Does this mean we can undo the wards now?” Ron asked.

"Of course," Farrah answered.

She began shouting some Latin phrases. Ten minutes passed before she declared, "That should be the last of them. You should be able to enter now."

Ron stepped through the wards and smiled. "I'm in."

"Good. Remember how to use the Vapulaforas?"

"Yes."

“Good. Now get going!"

Ron scurried towards the door. Farrah’s grin widened as she watched his figure fade into the night.

If Ron could get his part of the plan correct, then Severus Snape would no longer be any threat to Fenrir.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Memorial Day to all who are celebrating it! May it be safe yet restful.

Thank you for all the support! As always it is deeply appreciated.
"This is a gillyweed," Pomona pointed to a green leafed plant with roots like seaweed.

"Ooh," Rose mumbled as she put her hand on the page.

"If you eat this plant, you will grow gills like a fish, have webbed feet and hands, and be able to swim underwater," Pomona replied.

Rose glanced up at her babysitter. Could this gillyweed give me robes that billow like Daddy’s?

"Harry Potter used it in the Triwizard Tournament," Pomona continued.

“Oh?” Rose asked.

Pomona shook her head. “Unfortunately, Mr. Potter is no longer with us.”

“Ah,” Rose replied.

“You would have loved Harry," Pomona sniffed. "He was so full of life and he had a great sense of justice. He was the perfect auror. Perhaps more importantly, he was an amazing friend to your mother."

"Ah," Rose answered. Mummy and Daddy have mentioned Harry Potter before, but I've never seen him. Where is he hiding?

Thud.

Rose’s eyes widened.

Pomona sat up straighter. "Hello?"

There was no response.

Pomona turned the page, “Now this is…”

Thud.

Pomona held Rose closer to her. Could Severus and Hermione be home already? No, they'd only been gone for a half hour. Could a house elf be wandering about? No, the noise was too loud.

A door creaked.

"Who's there?" Pomona snapped.

The noises grew louder.

Pomona whispered, "Stay here, Rose, and don't move."

Professor Sprout jumped from the bed and darted into the hallway. Rose stared at the plant swaying in the water until she heard Pomona yell, "Ronald Weasley? What in blue blazes are you doing here?"
Rose gasped.

How did that evil red-head get inside?

***

Something is wrong.

Severus stared out into the audience. Lucius, Narcissa, Draco, and Ginny were seated in the front row while a sea of nearby reporters vied for the perfect picture. Aurors barked orders and brandished wands to keep the crowd at bay but the reporters were quite persistent. By all appearances this was a typical press conference.

Yet something was terribly wrong!

Hermione leaned over and asked. "Are you all right?"

"No," Severus answered. "Something is wrong."

"What's wrong?" Hermione asked.

Severus’ heart sank. "The wards."

"The wards?"

"The wards to the mansion," Severus stood up. "Someone is attacking the mansion’s wards."

"Are, are you sure?"

"I’m positive."

A chill ran down Hermione’s spine.

Severus ran towards the fireplace.

"Witches and Wizards!" an auror boomed from atop the stage.

The room grew quiet. "Please welcome Minister Shacklebolt!"

Hermione darted after Severus, almost bumping into Kingsley. The minister’s smile did not fade though.

Severus threw the floo powder into the fireplace. The flames sputtered out. He blinked.

"Can you get into the mansion?" Hermione asked.

"No," Severus answered.

Hermione trembled. "What exactly does that mean?"

"Somebody cast wards to keep us out."

"Oh Merlin!"

Kingsley cast a sonorous spell. "Thank you, everyone! It is my greatest pleasure to announce to you
that the reign of Fenrir's tyranny has officially ended.”

The crowd erupted into cheers.

Severus began shouting Latin phrases. Little by little the flames grew.

“After millennia of failed efforts, we have finally found a cure for lycanthropy!” Kingsley continued.

Applause engulfed the building.

“Did you get the last ward?” Hermione shouted.

“Yes, I did,” Severus answered.

Quieting the crowd with the palm of his hand, Kingsley continued, "No longer will Fenrir be able to threaten us with his horrible curse. Beginning today, we can live in peace and assurance that the streets will once again be safe. Anyone bitten by a lycanthrope can now receive treatment at their local clinic. One need not fear the transformation from man to beast any longer."

"Oh God Severus, we never should've left Rose alone. We never should've left her alone," Hermione panicked.

Severus locked eyes with her. "There is little point in blaming ourselves. All that matters is that we reach Rose in time to prevent a tragedy from befalling her."

"Agreed," Hermione squeaked.

“Of course, such a cure would not be possible without the hard work and genius of Hermione and Severus Snape. The Wizarding World owes them a debt of gratitude we can never repay.”

Severus threw in the floo powder.

“I will now turn the stage over to Severus Snape, who will explain the cure in more detail,” Kingsley concluded.

Severus could not shout the address above the crowd’s cries.

“Severus? Hermione?” Kingsley called.

Hermione shouted out their address into the fireplace.

“Severus? Hermione?” Kingsley repeated.

The flames didn't appear.

"Severus? Hermione?"

Severus grabbed another handful of floo powder and threw it inside.

Please dear God let Rose be safe!

***

Ron stepped outside and took a deep breath. "Isn't it great to spend some time with your real Daddy?"
Rose squirmed in his arms. Why did this man keep calling himself Daddy? Daddy is nice, strong, loving, and wears black. This man isn't like that at all. He isn't my daddy!

"You must be thrilled to be away from that greasy git. I'll bet you can't stand the sight of him," Ron continued.

Rose graduated to flailing her limbs.

"Rosie, sit still," Ron ordered.

She kicked Ron in the jaw. My name isn't Rosie.

"Ouch!" he yelled. "Don't do that!"

She connected once again.

Ron raised his voice, "Be a good baby for Daddy and stop hitting."

Rose punched his chin. You aren't Daddy!

"What's wrong?" Farrah asked as Ron stepped past the ward.

"Rose won't stop kicking me," he muttered.

"Well, we'll put her in a crib soon. She won't be able to kick you there."

Ron dodged another punch. "How long before we announce that we have her?"

"I'd say a day or so. Let it hit the press and get everyone riled up. Then, you can come forward and play the triumphant hero," Farrah answered.

Rose stopped writhing and looked up at the lady Ron was talking to. The lady did not look very nice either, and wasn't going to help her reunite with her parents.

“How soon before we call my Dad?” Ron asked.

“Oh, I'd wait about a half hour at least,” Farrah answered.

"You, you think he'll be proud of me, right?" Ron asked.

"Why wouldn't he be?" Farrah asked. "You're the hero who saved his granddaughter and reunited them."

"Yeah," there was a gleam in Ron's eyes. "I guess I am."

Rose paused. Mummy and Daddy always come when I cry. If I can scream loud enough, they will hear me and make this evil red head go away.

Rose began wailing and screaming in Ron's arms.

"What's wrong with her now?" Ron moaned.

"She may be hungry or need a new nappy," Farrah suggested. “Did you buy any formula or nappies for her?”

"No," Ron answered with a slight blush.
Farrah scowled. "I'm sure your dad will take care of it."

"Yes, he will," Ron replied.

Rose felt herself being squeezed through a tube, but she continued to scream. Even when they entered a strange mansion, Rose refused to stop crying.

Mummy and Daddy will come soon! They always come when I need them!

After screaming until her throat was raw, Rose began to have a dreadful feeling. She tried to hide it, even as the ginger git checked her nappy and told her to shut up. It was becoming quite clear, though.

Mummy and Daddy might not be coming.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Severus burst into his sitting room and raced towards the master bedroom. Hermione cast a lumos and followed close behind.

"Professor Sprout!" Hermione called.

No answer.

Severus charged towards the bed. There was a book open to a page on gillyweed, and a discarded toy horse. A cold chill coursed through him.

Hermione squeezed past Severus. Her heart sank upon seeing the book. "Professor Sprout!"

"Pomona!" Severus barked.

He listened for the sound of his former coworker's voice or Rose's cry, but heard neither. He and Hermione flashed each other a look of pure panic before dashing into the hallway. They pulled up when they saw the outline of a body propped against the wall.

"Professor Sprout!" Hermione shouted.

She groaned.

"Oh dear Merlin," Severus muttered.

Hermione shook Pomona, then recoiled at the stiffness of her limbs.

"Step back," Severus ordered. "There's something on her clothes."

Hermione focused the lumos on a strange white powder dusting her robes. He gestured for Hermione to step back, then leaned in for a better look. He muttered, "Someone's used Vapulaforas on her."

"How?" Hermione asked. "Shouldn't only aurors and other government agents be able to access that?"

"In theory," Severus scowled.

"I-is there an antidote for Vapulaforas?"

"Yes, I just brewed a batch of it today. The vials are labeled on the workbench," Severus replied.

"I'll take care of Professor Sprout then," Hermione raced off towards the basement before calling, "Go check to see if Rose is in the nursery."

Severus took one last look at Pomona before casting a lumos and darting to the nursery. "Rose!"

Not so much as a whimper from the crib. The lumos revealed it to be empty. Severus pointed his wand toward the changing table. Nothing. He flashed the lumos into every corner of the room, praying for some sign of Rose.
He found none.

Severus choked out one more, “Rose?”

Hermione rushed into the nursery. "Severus! Where's Rose?"

The tears in his eyes said it all.

***

"Is it against the law to cast a silencing spell on a baby?" Ron snarled as Rose wailed in a makeshift crib.

"I don't know," Farrah replied.

"Damnit I hope it isn't," Ron whined. "She hasn't shut up in the past half hour. I can't even think with all her crying."

"Have you checked to see if she's hungry or in need of a nappy change?" Farrah asked.

"I've checked her nappy twenty times, and it's clean. I've tried giving her formula, but she refuses it."

"Maybe she wants you to hold her."

"I've tried that. Every time I pick her up she tries to kick me," Ron replied. "It's getting annoying and her crying is giving me a headache. Can we tell people that we've rescued Rose already?"

"Hermione and Severus may not even know that she was kidnapped yet," Farrah replied.

"Crap," Ron sighed as Rose's screams escalated.

"Muma! Dada!" Rose screamed.

“You know Farrah; I thought having kids would be fun. I thought Rose was going to look at me with nonjudgmental eyes, love me, and help me get my money without making too much noise," Ron replied. "She's really not half as fun as I thought she'd be."

"Being a father is supposed to be hard work," Farrah answered. "Babies are rarely easy."

"Not easy is an understatement," Ron replied. "Merlin, I've only had Rose for two hours and I already want to take a nap. I want her to be quiet. I want to take a ride on one of my brooms. How the hell do Snape and Hermione tolerate hearing this all day and all night?"

Before Farrah could answer, there was a knock on the front door.

Ron sprinted towards the noise. “Oh thank Merlin.”

Farrah made a funny face at Rose. In return, Rose glowered at her. Farrah yelped as a shock ran up her body. Rose then resumed crying.

“I came as soon as you called me. What do you need?"

“I have a surprise for you,” Ron began.

The newcomer peered into the crib. He trembled, “Is, is that…?"
“Dad,” Ron announced. “I’d like to introduce you to baby Rose.”

Rose screamed.

“Rose,” Arthur squeaked. "It's really her?"

"It is."

“May, may I hold her?"

“You may,” Ron replied.

Arthur scooped the screeching infant in his arms. “H-how did you convince Hermione to let you have her?"

“Well, Farrah and I were walking and we saw her with some lycanthropes. We managed to overtake them and rescue her,” Ron replied.

Arthur gave him a look. "Does Hermione know you have her?"

"Uh, not yet," Ron admitted. "But that's only because I wanted to show her to you first."

"Ron, you need to let Hermione know you have her," Arthur snapped.

"Not yet," Ron argued.

“Dada!” Rose shouted.

“She considers me Dada,” Ron replied. “Why don’t you focus on that?"

Arthur glanced down at the child. “Hello there Rosie. My name is Arthur, and I think I’m your grandfather.”

Rose glared at him. She had a grandfather, and he didn’t have red hair. This red headed man may be nicer than the other ones she'd met, but he was still not someone she wanted to be with. Rose wanted to go home, and she wanted to go home now!

“She’s beautiful Ron,” Arthur choked. “Absolutely beautiful.”

Rose pointed to the fireplace. “Dada!”

Arthur’s chest ached.

“Muma! Dada!” Rose shouted. "Muma! Dada!"

Arthur sniffed. “You aren’t her dad.”

“No, I am her dad,” Ron insisted. “I can perform a DNA spell on her and prove it.”

“No,” Arthur replied. “It doesn’t matter what the DNA spell says. Rose’s dad is Severus Snape. He’s raised her, clothed her, fed her, and loved her. She needs him, not us.”

“She doesn’t need Snape,” Ron argued. “She needs us.”

"No, she needs to be with him," Arthur argued.

"You're wrong," Ron retorted. "You'll see. I'll hang out with her for awhile. I'll win Hermione back."
Once that happens, Rose won't even remember what Severus bloody Snape looked like."

“She’ll remember his love,” Arthur argued. “Rose will know that we stole that relationship from her, and she will never forgive us for it.”

“Dada!” Rose cried, pointing to the fireplace.

“Please Ron, take her home,” Arthur answered.

“Don’t you want to hold her for a little longer?” Ron asked.

“Of course I do,” Tears filled Arthur’s eyes. “But Rose needs her daddy. She needs Severus.”

“We can do a DNA spell…” Ron replied.

Arthur set her down. “It doesn’t change anything, Ronald. You aren't her dad, and I'm not her grandpa.”

“Muma! Dada!” Rose screamed.

“You really don’t want to hold her anymore?” Ron asked.

“Of course I do,” Arthur allowed the tears to fall. “But I have to think of what's best for her. I can’t deny what she needs. I can’t do this. I just can’t do this anymore!”

"But Dad...” Ron whined.

"You have a half hour," Arthur's expression hardened. "If you haven't told Hermione and Severus that you have her within a half hour then I will."

"But Dad..."

"For the love of Merlin don't make this any harder than it is!"

Before Ron could say another word, Arthur tore out of the house, weeping.

Ron sighed. “Great, now Dad’s even more upset with me than ever, and I still have a screeching baby on my hands.”

"Muma! Dada!" Rose shouted.

"Stop crying," Ron groaned.

“Why don’t you let me take her for a walk?” Farrah suggested.

“A walk?”

“Yes, it calms some babies down.”

Ron shrugged. “I suppose it couldn’t hurt.”

Farrah took a blanket and transfigured it into a pram. Then she put Rose into it. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Thank you,” Ron replied.

Rose pointed to the fireplace. “Muma! Dada!”
"If you are very good, we'll let you see Muma and Dada," Farrah replied.

"Muma! Dada!" Rose screamed.

Farrah pushed the pram outside.

Ron collapsed on his couch.

He never wanted a crying baby in his house again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Chapter 202

Pomona curled in a ball on the floor. Between gasps she managed to cry out, "Oh Merlin... I'm sorry! I'm so... so... terribly sorry! I should've protected her. I should've done more. I... I should've... saved her."

Hermione massaged Pomona's back. "Professor, there was nothing you could've done to prevent this. You were taken off guard. No one could've ever foreseen or prevented this."

"You asked me to protect her... and I couldn't do it," Pomona wailed.

"There's no point in crying at the moment," Severus cut in. "The only thing which matters is finding who took Rose."

"Ronald Weasley took her!" Pomona exclaimed.

Severus' eyes bulged. "Ronald Weasley?"

"Yes, Ronald Weasley," Pomona dried her eyes.

"D-did he mention why he kidnapped her?" Severus asked.

"No," Pomona answered. "The only explanation I can think of is that the man has gone completely insane!"

Severus' heart stopped. What in Merlin's name was Ronald thinking? Could he be in the process of performing a DNA spell? Did the Weasleys have plans to hide her somewhere?

What on earth was Ronald planning to do with Rose?

"Where did he take her?" Hermione asked.

"I-I don't know. I just saw him carry Rose down the hall. The baby was struggling. I-I wanted to move. I tried to move, but I couldn't. I couldn't do a thing to stop him," Pomona's tears returned. "Oh Merlin I'm sorry! I'm so terribly sorry!"

"Oh God!" Hermione cried as tears streamed down her cheeks.

Severus could feel the weight of Rose's kidnapping pressing down on his composure until it was ready to crack. He managed to choke out, "We need to find Mr. Weasley."

"Where do you think he is?" Hermione asked.

"His mansion would be the obvious place to start," Severus answered.

"I could help you fight him if he refuses to give back the child," Pomona chimed in.

"We couldn't ask that of you," Hermione replied.

"You aren't asking me to do anything," Pomona answered. "I'm offering you my help."
"You've been through enough already," Hermione began.

"No," Pomona stood up. "I need to help, if only for my own sanity. I need to know that Rose is safely back with you."

"I doubt Mr. Weasley is going to hurt Rose," Severus replied.

"Please Severus. Please let me help," Pomona pleaded.

Severus exhaled "It would do us well to go in with backup. Thank you for your assistance."

"Thank you for allowing me to help," Pomona replied.

Hermione stood up and wiped her face. The fire of determination had once again returned to her eyes. "There’s no time to waste. We need to get over to that mansion and get back our Little Rose."

Severus nodded, "Let's go."

***

"So he just gave her to you?" Fenrir asked, holding Rose close to his chest.

Rose trembled and silenced herself. She had only known this man for two minutes, and he already scared her far more than any of the red-headed menaces. If she ever wanted to see Mummy and Daddy again, she'd need to make sure this man didn't become angry with her.

"He handed her right over to me," Farrah answered.

"How did you manage that?" Scabior asked.

Farrah shrugged. "Apparently Rose's crying was too much for him, so he agreed that I should take Rose for a walk. He didn’t want to come with me, so I brought her right here."

"And here I thought I'd have to fight Ronald for her," Fenrir replied as the cool night breeze blew in from one of the gaps in the wall boards. "Well, I suppose sometimes things can go along easier than expected."

"What do we do now?" Scabior asked.

"You can relax for now," Fenrir sneered as he stepped toward the fireplace. "I need to make a very important floo call."

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is a little short, but I thought the last chapter was getting too long. Tomorrow I have several appointments planned, so there's no guarantee I'll post. If there is no posting tomorrow, then I wish everyone a nice weekend!

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated.
Ron lay on the couch with his eyes closed. After a half hour of silence, his headache had subsided. If Ron was lucky, Rose would be asleep when she returned. If Ron was unlucky, perhaps he could convince Farrah to stay and help him care for the child until the Snapes arrived.

The fireplace erupted into flames. Ron sprang from the couch, wand at the ready.

Three figures emerged from the floo. Before Ron could point his wand at the intruders, it flew from his fingers into Hermione's grasp. His body levitated.

"Where is she?" Severus demanded.

"Where's who?" Ron asked as he struggled to counteract the curse.

"Where is Rose?" Severus barked.

“How should I know? You’re supposedly her father, not me,” Ron asked.

“You know exactly where she is,” Madame Sprout retorted as she stepped closer to him.

“I have no idea what you’re going on about,” Ron argued.

“You lying bastard. I watched you take her!” Madame Sprout yelled.

“Now let’s be reasonable here. I’ve been home all night…”

"Liar!" Professor Sprout yelled. "You took her!"

"No I didn’t!" Ron argued. “I didn’t even know that Rose was missing until a few minutes ago.”

"That's a lie and you know it,” Hermione replied in a low voice.

“Come on ‘Mione. We’ve known each other for years. Why do you think I’d kidnap your daughter?”

"You're one of the very few people who can breach our wards.”

“That doesn’t mean anything. Someone else could’ve figured out how to get through them.”

"You'e been going on for months about how she's your daughter, and how you'll do anything to get her back. You finally acted on that belief, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't."

“Stop lying to me,” Hermione demanded. “We know you took Rose. Where is she?”

"I don't know,” Ron protested. “All I know is that if you had let me be a father to her, she would be safe in the Burrow right now instead of Merlin knows where."

"Liar!” Hermione screamed before flinging him against the wall with a flick of her wand.
Ron slumped to the ground like a rag doll as the room spun around him. He groaned and closed his mouth, lest any of the bile racing up his throat escape.

"Stop," Professor Sprout ordered. "This isn't getting us anywhere."

"Allow me to interrogate him then," Severus intoned as hovered over the cowering man.

Ron gathered all the courage he could muster to look up into his former professor's eyes. They had turned dark… fathomless… and menacing. Now he knew what kind of man was behind that Death Eater mask.

Snape's voice was cold and detached. "What do you want from us? Money? A hero's accolades? My mansion? Name your price and I will pay it."

"Uh, I uh, don't want anything from you," Ron replied, not sure any amount would be worth what he anticipated this stunt was going to cost him.

"I will give you whatever you ask. All I ask for is my daughter."

"I don't have her."

"Who does?" Severus hissed, aiming his wand at Ron's throat.

Ron trembled under the ferocity of Snape's glare. With a thick gulp he willed himself not to pee his pants.

"Who has Rose?" Severus demanded.

"I-I…" Ron stuttered.

"Don't even think about lying to me," Snape ordered.

The front door burst open.

Ron recoiled. "I-I don't…"

"They have her, Ron! Merlin, they have her!" a woman's voice screamed.

"Who do they have?" Hermione asked with a tremor in her voice.

Farrah swallowed as she processed the scene in front of her. This was not good. The Snapes had not been expected until morning and she had not expected Professor Sprout at all. This plan was going downhill quickly.

"Hello, Professors Snape and Sprout," she said in a small voice. "Hello, Hermione."

"Ms. Jackson, I believe you were just about to tell Mr. Weasley something important. Would you care to share your news with the rest of us?" Severus asked.

"It, it wasn't important," she answered.

"Give them Rose! Just give her back to them now!" Ron panicked. "They're going to kill me if they don't get her back!"

Hermione trembled. "Do you have her?"
"I did have her but," Farrah answered, praying for the presence of mind to pull off the biggest performance of her life.

"But what?" Snape growled.

Farrah took a deep breath. "You see, Ron and I were at a pub tonight and in walked Pansy Parkinson carrying a basket. We didn't think much of it until she sat down and started bragging to her companions about kidnapping the Snape baby. Well, Pansy is a lycanthrope and we just couldn't let her take Rose...but Ron has been a little short of money lately and we thought, 'What if we rescued Rose from Pansy, but then kept her until a reward was posted?' Rose would be safe, you'd have your baby, and Ron would be able to pay his hospital bills."

Severus’ expression did not change.

Farrah spoke faster, “I won't bore you with the details, but long story short we were able to get Rose away from Pansy and bring her here but she wouldn't stop crying, so I decided to take her for a walk outside."

"Dunderhead," Severus hissed.

"It was there that Fenrir jumped me," Farrah replied.

A chill ran up Severus’ spine. "Did you just say Fenrir jumped you?"

“Yes,” Farrah burst into tears. “Fenrir has Rose.”

"Oh Merlin," Ron whispered. Rose may be an annoying baby, but she didn’t deserve to be in Fenrir’s clutches.

"I'm sorry, Ron,” Farrah cried. “I tried to save her, but I couldn’t.”

Severus clenched his jaw. Gripping his wand tightly, he pointed it at Farrah and murmured a spell. Her eyes widened as she felt her chest constrict and her breathing become labored. "This is your one opportunity to tell me the truth. You gave Rose to Fenrir, didn’t you?"

Farrah shook under the intensity of his glare and the power of the constriction spell. At this one moment in time she had no difficulty picturing him as the Death Eater he once was. "I didn't…"

"Don't play dumb with me," Snape barked. "I know you work for Fenrir. I know you're his double agent. You gave her to him!"

"Farrah would never work for Fenrir!" Ron argued.

Severus turned on the redhead and hit him square in the chest with a hex that flung him to the wall and pinned him there. "I should kill you right now."

Farrah edged toward the door, only to be hit with a full body bind. "I should do away with both of you. You deserve it after what you did to Rose."

Ron whined.

“I can fully understand why you'd hate me. I was not the kindest professor, nor was I one who always treated his students fairly. Still, Rose had nothing to do with my past behavior," Severus raised his voice. "How could you harm a baby for the actions of her father?"

Farrah was levitated and then flung against the wall next to Ron. She sagged to the ground,
unconscious.

Hermione grasped his hand. "Severus, that's enough."

"It will never be enough," he argued. "They deserve to die for what they’ve done!"

"Severus listen to me," Hermione pleaded. "This isn't going to bring Rose back. It will only land you in prison."

Severus' expression remained unchanged.

"Rose needs her father to be with her, not rotting in Azkaban."

"I will tell the courts I acted under severe emotional distress. Any parent would understand my position."

"Even if you are acquitted, you will endure a long, lengthy court battle. Their blood isn’t worth time the time you'd spend away from Rose."

Severus lowered the wand.

"When this is over, we will do everything in our power to put them away for life, but you can't help Rose if you're in Azkaban," Hermione continued. "Let's find our baby girl; we'll deal with these two later."

Severus glanced at Farrah, who was still unconscious, and Ron, who was wide eyed with terror. "Rest assured I will return. I will deal with you then."

With a flourish of floo powder he was gone, taking Hermione and Pomona with him.

Ron shook off the effects of his hex, checked Farrah's pulse, and curled into a fetal position on the floor.

He had just made the biggest mistake of his life.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
Severus sat in a rocking chair. He clutched Rose's black robes in his hands as three questions echoed in his mind.

Is Rose crying out for Hermione and me at this moment? Does she know how much I love her? Can she sense how desperate I am to hold her in my arms again?

"Severus?"

Severus stood up and set the outfit onto the chair. Hermione approached him, her eyes pleading for comfort. He pulled her to his chest, muffling her sobs.

Within a few moments, Hermione collected herself. "Professor Sprout is with Minister Shacklebolt right now. She wants him to alert the aurors to Rose's disappearance."

Severus swallowed.

"I know you don’t want anyone involved, but we cannot fight Fenrir and his army by ourselves,” Hermione whispered.

"I know, but to them this is another kidnapping case, but to us,” Severus' throat constricted. “We need our baby girl back.”

Hermione sniffed.

"There is no room for error," Severus continued. “They need to understand that."

"I’m sure they do,” Hermione answered.

"I created this cure to protect Rose," Severus whispered. "I wanted her to live in a world free of fear. If I had known she may be sacrificed..."

"Just stop," Hermione cried. "Please, just stop."

They lingered in silence for a long while.

Severus stroked Hermione’s hair. "I never wanted you to see the side of me I showed to Ron tonight.

"Severus, you were protecting our daughter," Hermione replied.

"I was acting like a Death Eater.”

“No, a Death Eater would have killed them without a second thought. You restrained yourself, probably better than anyone else in your situation would have.”

“Everything inside of me wanted them dead. I have never wanted to kill anyone as badly as I wanted to kill Farrah and Ron tonight. If Professor Sprout and you had not been there,” Severus took a shaky breath. “I do not know what I would have done."
"You're a father, Severus. Fathers protect their families. They took our little girl and handed her over to our enemy; they deserved that beating and far more," she replied.

Severus held Hermione closer. "I never wanted to feel that kind of fear and hatred ever again."

"I hate Ron and Farrah too," Hermione answered. "But that hatred will not bring Rose back. At the moment we need to focus on the task of getting her back. Everything will fall into place after that."

Severus whispered, "I feel so powerless, Hermione. I promised myself after the war that I would take control of my life, that I would never be put in a position where I would feel helpless. Now, my daughter needs me, and there is not a thing I can do for her."

Hermione trembled. "I never wanted to feel at the mercy of another megalomaniac again either. After Voldemort died, I thought there would be peace. Never in my wildest dreams did I envision Fenrir holding my daughter hostage."

"I only wish there was more we could do."

"All we can do right now is wait. When the time comes for action, we'll know what to do."

"I pray you are right."

The anguished silence that descended was interrupted by the roar of the fireplace in the sitting room. Severus and Hermione dashed down the hall to the floo to find a menacing face leering at them from the embers.

"Third time's the charm. You people are difficult to find at home," Fenrir began. "Or have you been screening your floo calls?"

"Where is she, Fenrir?" Severus demanded.

"Where is who?" he asked with mock innocence.

"Don't toy with us," Hermione demanded. "Farrah told us you took Rose."

"How… chatty… of her to do so," Fenrir purred.

Severus growled. "Merlin help you have so much as plucked a hair on her head."

"You wound me, Severus," Fenrir answered before picking something up.

Rose's face appeared in the embers. Her eyes lit up upon seeing her parents.

Tears flooded Hermione’s eyes. "Hello Rose."

"Dada! Muma!" Rose cheered. I knew you’d come for me!

"As you can see, she's perfectly fine," Fenrir replied.

"Thank God," Hermione choked.

Rose struggled in Fenrir’s arms. "Muma! Dada!"

"Hello Little Rose," Severus replied in a gentle voice, doing his best to project a calm and a confidence he didn't feel. His first impulse was to reach through the fireplace and yank Rose from Fenrir's arms. Yet, Fenrir may have warded his side to prevent Severus from such an action, and
might consider it threatening. The last thing Severus wanted to do was to provoke the werewolf into violence.

"I will keep her safe and return her to you shortly, provided you follow my directions to the letter," Fenrir stated before setting Rose down out of sight.

Severus’ heart sank. "What do you want?"

"I want your lycanthropy potion," Fenrir began. "You will bring every vial, every trace of the cure to me, along with every one of your research notes. You will allow three of my soldiers to search your laboratory and your home until I am satisfied you have held nothing back from me. Then you will allow me to oblivate you and your wife so you will not be able to reproduce your work. Only then will I consider returning Rose to you."

Severus gave him a blank stare.

“If you fail to meet even one of these demands, Rose will be lost to you forever. If I discover that you have withheld information from me… that you are once again working on a cure… you can be assured that I will not rest until Rose meets a premature and painful death. Oh, and if you so foolish as to involve your incompetent aurors,” Fenrir’s voice was low. “prepare for the fight of your life. My army is more than ready for them."

Severus and Hermione gazed into the fire.

“Have I made myself clear, or shall I explain it all again?” Fenrir asked.

“No, you have been made perfectly clear,” Severus replied. "Where shall we meet to hand you the cure?"

"In the Forbidden Forest. Just listen for the sound of our howls."

“We will be there within the hour.”

“Excellent,” Fenrir purred. "I only want to meet with you two. The consequences will be dire for Rosie if I so much as sense another being's presence."

"As you wish," Severus replied.

With that, the flames flared and died.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, I'm going to be away from my computer tomorrow. Sorry to leave you on such a cliffhanger.

Thank you for the support! It's deeply appreciated!
"Fenrir has three demands: he wants every single vial of the lycanthropy cure collected and destroyed; he wants all the notes and documentation from our research; and he wants us to open our mansion to three of his lycanthropes so they can ascertain that we have complied with his conditions. His intention is to oblivate us and destroy any chance we may have of recreating this cure," Severus explained.

Kingsley bit his lower lip.

Severus’ throat constricted. "He also stated that if we attempt to share our notes or the potion itself with anyone else, he will kill Rose."

"Oh Merlin," Kingsley muttered from the other side of the floo. "We’ll have to act quickly then."

"We have an hour," Severus answered.

"Several aurors are already on standby. I'll work to pull as many others as possible on board unless you think that would place Rose in even more danger," Kingsley answered.

"No, we need your help. Hermione and I cannot combat them alone," Severus replied. "You must understand though that we cannot afford to lose Rose."

"Understood," Kingsley answered.

"Good."

"I may need to contact some heavily armed civilians in addition to the aurors. Every little bit helps."

"Just make sure that whoever comes is competent enough to hold their own against a lycanthrope," Severus answered.

"That, I can do," Kingsley replied.

"I'll bring some of the cure to hide in the woods for safe keeping, but there are only so many vials in existence. I cannot set aside too many without raising suspicion," Severus answered.

"The only thing you should concern yourself with is Rose's safety. You created the potion once; you can do it again, if necessary."

"Indeed I can."

Kingsley hummed and scratched his chin."Do you want to meet with me in person before you leave?"

"There is no time for such a meeting. I'm leaving for the Forbidden Forest in forty-five minutes. Hold off your aurors for fifty minutes from now, then follow the sound of the howls," Severus answered.

"Sounds like a plan," Kingsley replied.

Severus exhaled.
"We will get your daughter back, Severus. She'll be safe in your arms before you know it."

"I truly hope so."

The floo connection died.

"Do you think the aurors can take on Fenrir's werewolves and win?" Hermione asked from her place on the couch.

"I do not know," Severus replied as he turned around to face her. "But they're our best hope."

"At least they know what they're up against," Hermione answered.

"Unfortunately, they do," Severus muttered before joining her on the couch.

"I left a copy of the formula in my parents' house. Hopefully Fenrir does not know where they live, or if he does he will not think to interrogate them," Hermione replied.

He pulled her into an embrace, kissed her cheek, and stroked her hair. "Thank you, love."

Hermione's eyes clouded. "We…we're going to have to fight him, aren't we?"

"Yes," Severus whispered.

Tears welled and spilled down her cheeks. "I don't know if I can do it."

"Oh Hermione," Severus kissed the top of her head. "You must be exhausted beyond all belief."

"I'm so terrified that Fenrir will do something to Rose," Hermione answered. "I'm trying to keep it together, but it's getting to be more difficult by the minute. What if we can't get her back? What kind of mother would I be then?"

"You are a wonderful mother to her."

"I truly hope I am."

"Rose has learned how to be strong from you. She will find a way to survive Fenrir."

Hermione buried her head in Severus' shoulder. I have to save Rose, but if I fight Fenrir I'll be placing our new baby in danger. I can't protect them both, and I can't bear the thought of sacrificing one for the other. How can I live with myself if either one is harmed?

Severus took Hermione's face in his hands and brushed away her tears with his thumbs. "I love you," he whispered with a kiss to her lips. "We'll get through this somehow."

"I know," she choked.

Silence overtook the room.

"Y-you'd better get the potion and the notes," Hermione whispered. "We don't have much time left."

"No, we do not," he answered before standing up. He gave her one last look. "We will get Rose back."

"I know," she replied.

Severus then left for the basement. When he was out of earshot, Hermione put her hand on her
stomach and whispered, "I love you so much, little baby. I'll do everything I can to protect you."

She then gazed up into the sky and continued, "If you can hear me Harry, please protect my children."

***

Kingsley examined the four hundred wizards standing before him. "Aurors!"

They stood at attention.

Kingsley began. "I would like to first and foremost thank you for agreeing to come here tonight to assist in this mission. The fate of our Wizarding World depends in no small part on the outcome of this battle. We must fight hard, but we must also be careful not to harm any innocents, especially the child thrown into the middle of this. I trust each of you understands the plan?"

"Yes sir!" their response thundered.

“Good,” Kingsley answered. “We will be leaving shortly. You have the coordinates of the rendezvous point. Once we take to the woods, there will be no turning back. Stay close to one another, stay alert, and above all, remember what’s at stake. For the Wizarding World!"

"For the Wizarding World!" they repeated.

With that, Kingsley and the aurors apparated to Hogwarts where they reorganized and retreated into the Forbidden Forest.

***

Fenrir’s eyes lit up at the sound of the twig cracking. He glanced down at Rose, who was sitting in a cardboard box.

"I think your Mummy and Daddy have arrived,” Fenrir began.

“Ah,” Rose poked her head over the top of the box.

“Let’s hope they had the good sense to follow instructions,” Fenrir replied.

Rose turned away from Fenrir. She let out a whine. Two familiar silhouettes were approaching the camp. For the first time since she was taken, Rose grinned.

"Do you have the potion?" Fenrir asked.

"Right here," Severus replied before handing him a vial.

"Dada!" Rose cried. "Muma!"

Severus' lips curled up. "Hello, Little One. I am more than happy to see you again."

"Dada," Rose replied.

"That's it?" Fenrir asked. "Only one vial?"
"No, I have the rest," Hermione replied, pulling the rest of the vials from the pockets of her robes.
She then looked down at Rose and gave her a wink.

Rose giggled. Finally, I'm safe from all these evil people.

Scabior emerged from the trees and stood over Rose's box. Fenrir did not acknowledge his presence;
instead he examined the vials. "I suppose it was too soon for you to mass produce your concoction.
Even so, Amycus, Alecto, and Rodolphus will check your house. You will key your wards to admit
them."

Three more figures then appeared beside Fenrir.

"I do not trust them not to ransack my house," Hermione argued.

"And I don't trust that what you've given me is your entire stock," Fenrir replied.

A muffled yowl followed by the sound of a scuffle broke the tension. Within a few seconds, the
forest erupted in the sounds of crashing tree limbs and muffled grunts. Fenrir's eyes grew, "What on
earth..."

The Chief broke through the brush. "The aurors are here! They're attacking the guards!"

"So you thought it was wise to double cross me," Fenrir snarled as Scabior put his hands on Rose.

Chapter End Notes

So I actually did find some time to get near a computer. I'm posting a little earlier than
usual, but I thought it would be better than nothing.

Thank you for the support! As always it is deeply appreciated.
Hermione pointed her wand at Scabior’s heart. "Don't you dare touch her."

"Were the terms of our agreement unclear?" Fenrir barked. "You knew not to involve the aurors."

Rodolphus and the Carrow siblings inched closer until Severus could feel the warmth of their breath against his skin.

"Still, I suppose I could modify the conditions of our deal if you don't want to be separated from the child," Fenrir replied. "You can join her as one of my lycanthropes, or as another soul in hell. Choose now."

A hex lifted Alecto and flung her into a tree.

"I don't think either option is all that appealing," a smooth male voice rang out.

All eyes turned to Lucius Malfoy, who was standing just a few feet away with Narcissa, Draco, and Ginevra at his side.

"How did you get here?" Scabior exclaimed.

"We're wizards," Draco deadpanned. "How do you think we got here?"

Taking advantage of the momentary distraction, Hermione snatched Rose from her prison and held her close. The baby reacted with a happy squeal. Scabior, lunged at her, only to be frozen in place by Severus.

"Don't even think about touching her," he growled.

Hermione pulled out her wand and pointed it at Fenrir. He fired a hex at her ankle. She stumbled, but managed to twist onto her back to prevent Rose from taking the brunt of the fall.

"This is my territory, and we will do things my way," Fenrir replied.

“Sectumsepmra!” Hermione shouted, slicing the lycanthrope’s right shoulder.

The werewolf roared in pain. His generals lunged at Severus, only to be blocked by the Malfoys and struck by a few hexes from Hermione. Soon, the air was filled with the sounds of hexes rebounding against blocking spells and occasionally finding their mark.

Taking advantage of Fenrir’s distraction, Hermione cast a protego and dragged herself into the bushes, still holding Rose in one arm. Her head was throbbing and Rose was wailing, but at least they were together. A subtle lumos revealed a few small cuts and bruises on Rose, but nothing serious enough to warrant immediate medical attention.

Hermione attempted to stand up. The pain in her right ankle caused her leg to buckle. She grabbed a nearby sapling for support. Just as she was ready to test her weight again, someone grabbed her wrist.

“Severus always did have the most delectable choice in brides,” Scabior licked his lips.
Hermione yanked her arm away from him, but she stumbled backwards. Scabior grabbed her again. Hermione pulled out her wand, but he knocked it away.

"Avada Kedavra!"

Hermione closed her eyes and braced herself for the flash of green. Instead, she felt Scabior's grip loosen as he crumpled to the ground. She pulled herself away from the werewolf's body and turned to face her rescuer.

"Here, get under this!" Ginny ordered as she covered them with an invisibility cloak. "We brought it to help sneak Rose away from here, but it looks like you could use it at the moment."

"But Scabior…"

"Is dead."

Hermione covered her mouth and gasped.

"I couldn't think of any other way to stop him without hurting you or Rose. I know it was wrong to use an Unforgivable, but what the hell else was I supposed to do?" Ginny panicked.

"Thank you, Ginny," Hermione answered in a soft voice as tears welled in her eyes. She embraced her friend. "You saved our lives."

"That's what friends are for, Hermione," Ginny answered as she massaged Rose's back.

Under the protection of the cloak, Hermione turned her attention to the battle. Lucius had pinned Rodolphus to the ground while Draco and Narcissa dueled the Carrows. Her eyes searched for Severus, who at the moment seemed to have the upper hand over Fenrir.

Fenrir watched another one of his hexes bounce off of Severus' shield. He snarled. I can't defeat him like this. It would be one thing if he was only using his wand, but he's using wandless hexes as well, ones much more powerful than I anticipated. I'm going to get hit soon unless I can draw him into a type of combat I can more easily win.

Fenrir cast another defensive spell while assessing his opponent. A smile crept across his face.

"Kill her, Scabior!"

Severus glanced in Hermione's direction, giving the werewolf just enough time to transform. Fenrir pounced on Severus, knocking his wand out of his hand. The Malfoys rushed to Severus' defense, working desperately to pull the wolf off of him. Fenrir only gripped Severus' flesh with more determination.

Drool trickled down Fenrir's chops as he lowered his head to Severus' neck, his eyes ablaze in triumph. Then, Fenrir chomped on the fallen wizard's shoulder. Severus felt around on the ground for his errant wand, but it was just beyond his grasp.

Fenrir rose up and clawed through Severus' shirt, eliciting painful screams as ribbons of blood seeped from the wounds.

"Severus!" Hermione screamed.

She grabbed her wand and attempted once again to raise herself, but faltered under her useless ankle. As he felt his senses dull, Severus' thoughts turned to the things that had brought him such comfort
these past months: Rose wrapping herself in his robes, murmuring "Dada" as she snuggled into his chest; Hermione sleeping next to him, so at peace in the comfort of his arms; the smiles he was able to elicit from both of them with such little effort.

He had to fight for his family. Somehow he had to muster his strength and fight the lycanthrope...

Fenrir was levitated in the air.

"Uh Dada," Rose muttered, her entire focus on Fenrir.

Severus grabbed his wand and hexed Fenrir. The lycanthrope hit a tree, killing him upon impact.

Severus could feel the wolf-like hairs cropping up on his arms. He pulled out the vial of antidote he had secured in his robes and downed it in one gulp. The hairs receded but the world began to spin.

Voices became softer, more distant. Was that Kingsley Shacklebolt he heard? Everything was so blurry. Was that Hermione running towards him? Was Rose with her?

Severus felt a great peace come over him as his world faded away.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, this time I really am going to be away from a computer tomorrow. I'm very sorry to leave you with this cliffhanger. All that being said, have a great weekend!

Thank you for the support! It is deeply appreciated!
"Severus!" Hermione screamed.

Ignoring her pain, she charged ahead. Ginny grabbed her arm and pulled her back. Hermione yelped as she fell back onto the ground.

"It's too dangerous to go out there," Ginny warned.

"I have to help him," Hermione cried. "I can't just sit here while he bleeds to death."

"He wants you to be safe."

"He needs me to help him."

"You're too injured to be of any use to him at the moment," Ginny argued. "Wait until Kingsley, Lucius, and Draco can secure the area; then you can go over and see him."

"I can help him! I know a few coagulant spells, and I can encourage him to live. What I cannot do is sit and watch him die right before my eyes."

"What about Rose? Wouldn't he want to know that she's in a safe area?"

"You can watch Rose. Right now I need to be with Severus."

As the women argued, a man stumbled amidst the shadows, his right leg bleeding. He scanned the battlefield, gasping when he saw Fenrir's contorted body lying on the ground. The man slunk past the Aurors to join the fallen wolf.

The back of Fenrir's head had been bloodied, chips of skull littering the ground. A tear trickled down the man's cheek as he closed Fenrir's unseeing eyes. He turned to scan the battlefield for signs of Scabior, flinching when he located the corpse.

Suddenly, he felt himself being raised into the air and thrown against a tree. A broken branch pierced his chest, spearing his heart as he joined his comrades in death.

"That's for my greenhouse," Neville muttered as the branch tore under the man's weight, dropping the Chief's body to the ground. Then he noticed the black cape to his right. "P-professor Snape?"

Severus opened his eyes. "Where are Hermione and Rose?"

"I don't know," Neville answered.

"I need to see them," Severus wheezed. "Assuming it's safe for them to be near me."

"It should be safe enough for them to come out of hiding," Neville answered.

Severus groaned.

Neville continued. "Scabior, Fenrir, and the Chief are all dead. The aurors are rounding up the remaining Death Eaters as we speak. There's no reason Hermione and Rose cannot be near you."
“If you can locate Hermione and Rose, please tell them I need to see them.” Severus ground out as the pain in his chest intensified.

A tiny hand touched his shoulder. “Dada.”

“Rose.” Severus asked. “How did you get here?”

"Dada,” she answered before crawling into the crook of his arm.

Severus smiled. “Everything is going to be fine, Rose. Nobody is ever going to hurt you again.”

"Uh,” she answered.

Hermione's eyes widened when she saw Rose with her father. Hadn't she just been holding her?

Ginevra chuckled. "One of my first spells was a transporting spell."

"You mean apparation?” Hermione asked in shock.

“Something to that degree.”

“I thought you needed to learn apparation.”

“When you’re an adult, yes, but babies seem to have an innate sense of how to do it.”

“How is that possible?”

"No one knows exactly. All we know is that babies tend to teleport only if they are heading toward someone they love, and even then they can't travel much farther than a few feet.”

Hermione blinked.

“If it gives you any comfort, they usually lose the ability by the time they're two,” Ginny replied.

"Brilliant," Hermione muttered.

"Hermione!” Neville shouted above the din of approaching footsteps. "Hermione!”

The Aurors, along with the Malfoys, had subdued the Death Eaters, and were rounding them up for transportation. Hermione looked to Ginny, her eyes begging permission to leave their sanctuary. Ginevra stood up and offered her friend a hand. Hermione rose and accepted Ginny's help as she limped her way to Severus.

"You are all under arrest for aiding in a rebellion," Kingsley began as the Aurors placed magical restraining cuffs on their charges. He then acknowledged the corpses of the three leaders and let out a sigh. "The rebellion's finally over."

"Severus," Hermione began in a shaky voice.

“Hermione,” Severus exhaled, wincing in pain. "Oh Merlin, am I happy to see you. Are you injured?"

“Not severely,” she replied, kneeling beside him. "My ankle hurts, but it's nothing a little ice won't fix."

"Thank Merlin," Severus replied.
Hermione brushed his lips with hers. "I love you, Severus."

"I love you too, Hermione," he whispered.

"Muma! Dada!" Rose cheered.

"Rose, don't teleport away like that again," Hermione replied before embracing her.

Severus smirked. "She's becoming quite the little witch."

"Yes, but she's already pretty headstrong. I can already tell she's going to be a handful," Hermione answered.

"Indeed," Severus replied as the pain intensified once more. He tried to smile as he whispered, "I love you, little Rose."

"Dada," she answered.

Severus gazed into Hermione’s eyes. After a few moments, he was unconscious.

"Severus?" Hermione asked.

No answer.

"Severus!" Hermione yelled.

"What's wrong?" Neville asked.

"He's not moving!" Hermione yelled. "He's not responding to me anymore!"

"I'll apparate him to St. Mungo’s," Neville replied. “Then I’ll come back for you.”

Hermione nodded, tears filling her eyes.

***

Hermione held Rose close, rocking as she sat in the waiting room chair. The Mediwitch had already examined them. Rose had some minor cuts and bruises, but Hermione had torn some ligaments. The Mediwitch had given her a potion for the pain, but Hermione refused to ingest it. As long as she stayed off her ankle and used her crutches, the pain was manageable.

"Mrs. Snape?" a Healer called from the hallway.

"Yes?" Hermione answered as Rose opened one eye.

"We have the results of your tests," he replied.

"And?"

"You are pregnant."

Hermione’s lips quivered. “How is the baby?”

The Healer gave her a soft smile. “Your child appears to be doing just fine. Baby should have no long term effects from your ordeal.”
"Oh thank God," Hermione exhaled.

The Healer smiled. "Both of your babies appear to be doing just fine."

"Thank you," she breathed.

"Mrs. Snape?" A Mediwitch emerged next to the Healer.

"Yes?" Hermione asked.

"We’ve finished examining your husband," she began.

“How is he?”

The Mediwitch swallowed. "Your husband has internal bleeding. We've tried a number of spells, but we're having difficulty bringing it under control. I'm afraid there isn't much more we can do."

"So…so…" she shook.

"Would you like to see him?" the Mediwitch asked.

Hermione’s heart raced. Severus can't leave us now. He needs to know we're having a child together. He needs to see the white of Rose's first tooth. He needs to come home with us and help us build this life we've been dreaming of for so long!

"Mrs. Snape?" The Mediwitch asked.

"I-I'll see him," Hermione answered. "Just, please help me carry Rose."

Rose was now wide awake and staring at the Healer and the Mediwitch. I’ve had more than enough of strangers holding me today. I would really like to go home with Mummy and Daddy now.

"Are you sure it's advisable to bring an infant into your husband's room?" the Mediwitch asked.

“Yes.”

“She could prove very disruptive…”

“Severus is her father! She needs to see him!"

The Mediwitch nodded as the Healer took Rose. The infant began to fuss. Hermione stood up on her crutches and hobbled towards Severus' room. Once inside, she fought to keep from bursting into tears.

Severus' eyes were closed; his dark lashes a stark contrast to his white skin. His breaths were becoming shallower by the minute. Still, he looked peaceful, as if he was just taking a well-deserved rest secure in the knowledge that his family was finally safe.

Hermione took a deep breath before making her way over to the chair beside his bed. The Healer returned Rose to her before leaving with the Mediwitch. Rose stared at her father before squirming to climb the bedrail and join him.

"No," Hermione whispered.

Rose stopped and stared up at her mother. Mummy usually looked so happy with Daddy, and Daddy usually was awake when they saw him. Why was he sleeping now? Better question, why was he in
this light blue gown instead of in his black robes? What was happening?

Rose grunted. Well whatever was happening, Daddy needed to put a stop to it and set everything right. The first step would be waking him up.

“Dada,” Rose began.

Nothing.

“Dada!” Rose shouted

Why isn't Dada responding? Why isn't he getting up to play with me? What is wrong with him?

"It's not fair," Hermione choked. "We waited our entire lives for each other, and pulled through so many obstacles together. We really only got to live as a real married couple for two months. Wouldn't you like some more time?"

He didn’t move a muscle.

"I know you're tired and weak, but you've become a real pro at cheating death. Can't you please cheat death just one more time for us? Please Severus, please come back to me and Rose."

Severus didn’t so much as twitch.

“I love you. I truly love you, and I know you love me too. You've shown me that love in so many different ways even before you had the courage to say the words. Please, Severus, I don't want to live without your love in my life. I don't want Rose to lose the father she loves so much. And there's more, Severus… we have another child, one you haven't yet been introduced to yet who needs a father as well. Please Severus; please fight death one more time for us.”

"Dada," Rose muttered as Hermione's words dissolved into sobs.

Severus could hear Hermione's voice, but it was so faint. He tried calling out to her, but his tongue wouldn't obey.

He felt himself begin to float. At first all was darkness, but then he saw his own body lying in the bed, Hermione and Rose at his side. Severus tried to reach for them, but the curious floating sensation carried him away before he could make contact.

Now he found himself surrounded by the night sky. He seemed to be traveling somewhere but he wasn't sure of the destination, just that the direction of his progress seemed familiar and somehow right. Suddenly he saw it, a bright tunnel of light amidst the darkness, beckoning him to enter in. A man, features still indistinct, seemed to be waiting for him, perhaps to guide him. As Severus neared the tunnel, the man’s features pulled into focus.

“Potter?"

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, Happy Monday.

Thank you for all of your support! As always it is deeply appreciated!
Severus gaped at the figure. He blinked, half expecting it to disappear. Still, the person’s features became clearer with each passing moment.

"Potter," Severus whispered again.

Harry was dressed in a pure white robe, his hand outstretched in greeting.

Severus' thoughts were racing. Where am I? How can I be looking at Potter?

Harry touched Severus' hand.

If Potter is here, does that mean am I…?

"Hello, Severus," Harry began.

“Potter,” Severus began. “Why are you here?”

"I'm here to escort you to paradise," Harry answered.

"Are you taking me back to Hermione and Rose?" Severus asked, his voice full of hope.

Harry's voice was quiet. "I'm afraid not."

Severus lowered his head. "I'm dead."

"Not quite," Harry replied. “You aren’t considered dead until you enter the tunnel."

"Can I not have a little more time amongst the living?" Severus asked.

"I don't determine the time of death, Professor," Harry answered in a soft voice. "I've only been asked to escort you where you belong."

"That's just it," Severus locked eyes with him. "I don't belong here, at least not now."

Harry’s glow brightened.

“Oh God,” Severus continued. “I spent so much of my life praying for death, and now that it's here, it's the last thing I want. I want to be alive. I want to be a husband to Hermione. I want to be Rose's father. I know they can live without me. Maybe they'd even be better off without me, but I have so much more love to give them. I have to live for them."

"I wish I could send you back," Harry answered, his eyes full of sympathy. "But I can only do as I'm asked."

Severus shook his head. "Merlin, Harry, you aren't supposed to be here, either. I caused you to be here."

"How?"

"I never should've supported Dumbledore's plans for you."
"You saved my life."

"Only to fulfill my debt to your mother. I never considered that you might have still been in danger all those years later."

Harry put his hand on Severus' shoulder and looked him in the eye. "No one up here blames you for what happened to me."

Severus began to glow.

"I don't blame you for what happened to me. In fact, I'd like to thank you for everything you've done, not just for me, but for Hermione and Rose as well," Harry continued.

"I love them. Nothing I did for them ever felt like a sacrifice," Severus whispered.

"I know you love them," Harry replied before giving him a playfully disgusted look. "Trust me, I know."

Severus cocked his head. "What do you mean you know?"

Harry removed his hand from Severus' shoulder. "Let's just say that as Rose's guardian angel, I've witnessed that love first hand."

Severus backed away from Harry. "You-you've been watching us?"

Harry laughed. "Well, only to ensure Rose's safety. But it's clear that you're quite taken with both of the women in your life."

"I am very content with them," Severus replied.

"I know," Harry whispered. "I'm happy for you, Severus. You deserved to find peace and experience love."

"C-can you beg with whoever is up there to allow me to return to my family?" Severus asked.

"Death doesn't listen to our pleas," Harry answered. "The only thing I can do is make sure your transition into the afterlife is as smooth as possible."

"Then tell me," Severus turned his attention to the tunnel. "What is it like beyond that tunnel?"

Harry's expression became wistful. "The first and most overwhelming thing one feels is love. There is love everywhere, love like you couldn't begin to imagine. That's why we keep an eye on the living. Even if they don't know we're there, we just want to share that love with them."

Severus stepped towards the tunnel. "What does it look like?"

Harry's eyes flickered. "It seems to be different for everyone. I see it as a huge castle full of loved ones, but my mother has told me that to her it looks like a field of lilies."

"Is everyone happy?" Severus asked.

"Yes," Harry replied. "We have each other, and the hope that our loved ones below will one day join us."

Severus nodded. Harry grinned and took Severus' hand.
"Thank you for protecting Rose," Severus began "I know you had a hand in her safe return. Still, I do not belong up there."

"Do you feel unworthy?" Harry asked.

"Partially," Severus answered.

Harry squeezed his hand.

"The only time in my life I've felt any true degree of happiness has been with Hermione and Rose," Severus continued in a low voice. "I finally have a family, the family I’ve desired since I was a child. I finally found the love with which you defeated Voldemort. I need to have a chance to share that love. It's too soon for me to leave them."

The light in the tunnel grew brighter.

"Please Harry, please ask whoever is in charge to send me back. I need to be with my family," Severus replied.

Harry squeezed Severus’ hand. "You're an excellent husband and father. I'm sorry that I ever doubted Hermione's decision to marry you."

"I gave you no reason to believe I'd be a good husband or father."

"You've always known how to love, Professor Snape. It's just that you've only now found someone to return that love."

Severus released Harry’s hand. "And now it's over."

An unfamiliar man emerged from the tunnel. "Harry, thank goodness you and Severus are still here."

"What’s wrong?" Harry asked.

"There’s been a clerical error," he answered. "Severus needs to return. Now!"

Severus raised an eyebrow. "God makes errors?"

"No," Harry chuckled. "This happens every now and then. Sometimes, the undead get a glimpse of paradise. No one is ever quite sure why, but I’m sure there’s a greater purpose."

"Does this mean that I am returning home?"

"Go take care of Hermione and your children."

"Children?" Severus asked.

"I may have said too much," Harry answered as Severus began his descent.

"Harry!" Severus yelled, fighting for a final word.

"Yes?"

"You are a great man."

"It takes one to know one," Harry answered.

Keeping his eyes fixed on Harry until both he and the tunnel were out of sight, Severus felt himself
sink back into his body.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!
The first sensation Severus felt was a dull ache in his chest. Next he became aware of the sound of sobbing. Then, he felt a curious energy flow through his veins. His eyes fluttered open. Rose's face lit up as she watched her father turn to her. "Dada!"

Severus' lips curled into a smile. "Hello, baby girl."

Hermione raised her head. She blinked. "You’re alive?"

Severus smirked. "It would appear so."

"Oh Severus!" Hermione cried, tears of joy replacing tears of sorrow. "I was so afraid you'd never wake up."

"I am quite awake at the moment," Severus answered.

"Thank God," Hermione replied.

Rose reached for Severus. "Dada."

"Yes, I am here," Severus rasped. "And I will never leave you again."

Rose clapped. "Thank goodness Daddy finally woke up from his nap!"

Hermione noted. "We should probably call in a Mediwitch."

Severus frowned. "Must I allow Healers to prod me so soon?"

"I suppose we could put off the prodding for another few minutes," Hermione mused.

Rose waved her hands. "Uh, Dada."

Hermione glanced down at Rose. "I'd let you cuddle Daddy, but I think he's in a bit of pain right now."

"Actually I feel more groggy than in pain," Severus answered.

"I suppose the pain relieving potions they gave you were quite strong," Hermione replied.

"I'd imagine they were," Severus' eyes rested on the crutches beside Hermione's chair. "Are those yours?"

"Yes."

"How severe are your injuries?"

She shrugged. "I have a few torn ligaments in the area of my ankle. It's nothing I haven’t endured before."

"You need to be careful though," Severus replied. "I would not want you to suffer any long term
“At the moment I couldn't care less about my pain,” Hermione answered. “The only thing that matters is that you are alive and we can resume our life together.”

"Indeed we can,” Severus answered. “Our first order of business should be going on that honeymoon we’ve discussed for so long.”

"There will be plenty of time to talk about that later," Hermione replied.

Rose grunted and struggled in her mother’s arms. I’ve been screaming for Dada all night. Now that he’s done sleeping I want him to hold me!

Hermione shifted Rose in her lap so she could reach under the rail to touch Severus' hand. "Let's just focus on getting everyone healthy and making sure that Rose suffers no lasting effects from our ordeal."

Severus swallowed. “Is Rose injured?”

"She has nothing more than a few cuts and bruises,” Hermione replied. "There is nothing which will affect her in the long run."

Severus touched Rose’s hand. “I am very relieved to hear that.”

Rose grabbed Severus’ thumb and squeezed it.

"Mrs. Snape?” a Mediwitch called.

“Yes?” Hermione asked.

The Mediwitch peeked inside, only to gasp when she saw Severus awake and playing with Rose's fingers. "Mr. Snape?"

"Yes?"

"You're awake."

"Your observation skills are impeccable."

"I’ll get a Healer! We need to run some tests!"

"Oh," Rose muttered.

The Mediwitch scurried away. “He’s conscious! Severus Snape regained consciousness!”

Severus smirked.

It was good to be alive.

***

"Farrah?” Ron asked.

She groaned. “Ron?”
"Yes." Ron touched her face. "It's me."

Farrah pried her eyes open. "What happened?"

The only sound between them was the soft hum of a radio.

"Ron, what happened?"

"Rose was kidnapped by Fenrir. Hermione and Snape found him. Some aurors followed them and battled the werewolves. From what the radio says, the Snapes rescued Rose and killed Fenrir."

Farrah jerked forward. "Fenrir's dead?"

Ron nodded.

"Oh my God," Farrah whispered.

"They also killed his two generals, Scabior and Archelaus."

"Archelaus?" Farrah’s eyes watered.

"Yes," Ron replied.

Farrah’s lower lip quivered.

"Do you know Archelaus?" Ron asked.

"No, I just know his name," Farrah replied as her body grew rigid.

"Oh. Anyway, that isn't the only piece of news I have."

"What else do you have to say?"

"I got an offer a couple of weeks ago to manage a Quidditch team in Peru," Ron replied. "At first I didn’t want to take it because Peru is too far from my family. Now, I think I should take it, considering that my only other option is a trip to Azkaban."

"I never should've proposed this stupid idea," Farrah whispered.

"It made Dad happy to see Rose," Ron replied. "For that alone, it was worth it."

Farrah stood up. "No it wasn’t. We put everyone’s lives in danger for no reason."

"But everything turned out okay," Ron replied.

"No it didn’t," Farrah argued.

"Well, maybe it still can work out okay," Ron suggested.

"How?" she asked.

"You can come with me to Peru, and we can begin a new life together."

"Why would you want to share your life with me?"

"Because you're the closest thing I have to a true friend. You listened to me when no one else would, and you’ve always believed in me," Ron replied.
Farrah blinked back her tears.

“Please Farrah, come to Peru with me,” Ron pleaded.

Farrah looked into Ron's eyes. Her chest constricted. All she had done was use him and lie to him. How could he still want her?

"I can't," Farrah whispered, rushing out the door.

Ron stared at the closed doorway. Then he shrugged. I'm sure Farrah will be back soon.

Ron stood up, Before Farrah comes back, I need to write a letter.

***

"What are you doing?" Severus asked as Hermione set her wand on the edge of Severus' cot.

“I’m making this bed large enough for both of us,” Hermione replied.

Severus watched the bed enlarge until it was king sized, “Surely there is a bed in the mansion which is more comfortable than this hospital cot.”

“After everything that’s happened, I cannot bear the thought of going home alone.” She answered before transfiguring the bedside chair into a playpen.

“The idea of being separated from you is not appealing to me in the slightest either,” He admitted.

"I've left enough room for the Healers to access you quickly, if necessary,” Hermione continued. “Not that you should require their attention now that your internal bleeding has stopped.”

"Sounds prudent enough," Severus gestured to his daughter. “Do you believe Rose will be comfortable in that playpen?"

“She’ll be much more comfortable in a room with her parents than she will be anywhere else,” Hermione replied.

“That is very true,” Severus replied.

Hermione placed Rose in the playpen and laid her black blanket over her little form. "There you go, Rose."

"Muma," she muttered before curling up and pulling the blanket next to her cheek.

Rose watched as her mother slid into bed beside her father, spooning into his back and closing her eyes with a sigh. She continued to watch as the first rays of sunlight peeked over the window sill, bathing the room in a pink glow. Finally she yawned a very satisfying yawn and succumbed to a peaceful, dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! As always it is deeply appreciated!
Dearest Rose,

I hope this letter finds you well. I deeply apologize for my actions during your kidnapping. There is no excuse for my behavior. I should not have trusted my son to do the right thing. Looking back, I should have known how dangerous the situation was. I should have returned you to your parents myself. Instead, I behaved selfishly, and you almost paid the price.

I am still not convinced you are biologically a Snape, but that doesn't matter now. What matters is that when I held you, you cried for Severus Snape. When you were in danger, Severus took on a pack of werewolves to save you. Those facts, and not a DNA spell, make him your dad.

I wish I could tell you that I will always be there for you, but I will be lucky if your parents ever allow me to get a glimpse of you. Perhaps this is for the best. I know Severus will be the father you deserve, and Hermione will love you with her dying breath. You are lucky to have them in your life, something of which you are all too aware.

I wish you all the love and happiness in the world. You are a special young witch, a fact I promise never to forget.

Love always,

Arthur

Arthur took the letter and folded it. After shedding a few tears, he set the parchment in a drawer and locked it.

The letter would never be sent.

***

Hermione yawned as Severus' fingers glided through her hair. She opened her eyes and gave him a weak smile. "Morning, Severus."

"Good afternoon," he replied.

"What?" she yawned

"It is one in the afternoon," Severus replied.

"You're kidding," Hermione gasped as she sprang up.

Severus laughed, which elicited a very pretty scowl.

"I didn't intend to sleep in that late," Hermione began. "Merlin Severus, how long have you been awake?"

"I've been awake for roughly one hour," the joy in Severus' eyes was extinguished. "The Healers
don't care how much sleep you have… or haven't… had when it comes time to draw blood tests."

"I suppose they have a schedule to keep," Hermione mused.

"Indeed they do." There was a gleam in Severus' eyes. "At least Rose was kind enough to vindicate me with a parting gift for them."

Hermione looked down at the infant, who was holding a children's book and staring at the moving pictures. "They didn't wake me to take care of her?"

"They didn't have the heart, not after everything you went through last night," Severus answered before kissing her on the cheek. "So I watched them as they changed Rose's nappy and gave her a bottle."

Hermione sighed. "I hope we never go through anything like last night ever again."

"As do I," Severus answered. "I am simply grateful that Fenrir is dead and his lycanthropes are receiving their treatments as we speak."

"Thank God," Hermione whispered.

Severus kissed her on the cheek. "I love you."

She looked deep into his eyes. "I love you too, Severus."

"Muma! Dada!" Rose exclaimed, extending her arms upward.

"Just a moment, Rose," Hermione cooed. She slid to the edge of the bed, then dangled her feet over the side as she gently lowered herself onto her good ankle. Then she hobbled to Rose and picked her up before returning to sit on the bed next to her husband.

"Hello little one," Severus smiled, extending a finger for her to grasp. "Did you enjoy the book the Healers gave you?"

She cocked her head. "No."

Hermione laughed. "You don't like the book?"

"No," Rose replied with a huge smile.

"Oh Merlin," Severus groaned. "Isn't she a little young to hit the 'no' stage?"

"She doesn't even know what the word means yet," Hermione laughed.

Rose frowned. Of course I know what “no” means. It means I didn’t like that book. There were too many people on were brooms and no one was brewing potions. It was a bad book.

Rose's sour expression evaporated when Severus began to tickle her belly. She burst out laughing, and her parents joined in.

Hermione grew silent when she felt a fluttering in her abdomen.

Severus stopped. "Is something the matter?"

"I…I’m fine. I just felt really hungry," Hermione answered.
Severus stared at her.

“How about I get us something from the cafeteria?” Hermione suggested.

“Absolutely not.”

“You need to eat at some point.”

“You need off your ankle.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Why don't you ask a Mediwitch to bring something to us? That way you could rest and eat.”

Hermione replied. "I don't want to burden them with something I can do for myself."

Severus shook his head. “You need stay off your ankle and allow it to heal.”

'I'll be fine, I promise," Hermione replied before handing Rose to him.

He looked down at Rose with a very stern expression. "Your mother can be very stubborn."

"Eh,” Rose replied.

"You aren't any better most days,” Hermione replied before lowering her weight onto her crutches.

"I suppose not," Severus admitted.

“What would you like from the cafeteria?" Hermione asked.

“I could go for some tea and a little soup," Severus answered as Rose reached for his hair.

"I'll see what I can do," Hermione replied before hobbling off on her crutches.

Severus glanced down at Rose and kissed her forehead. "I suppose that gives us some time alone then."

"Muma?"

"She'll be back," Severus assured her. "Now, would you like to hear a good story?"

"Uh," she replied.

"Good. This story isn't very old so I don't know if it has made it into a book yet, but it's quite a tale. It's called, 'How Harry Potter Saved Hogwarts from a Basilisk'."

"Ooh!" Rose cooed.

"Mister Snape?"

He looked up from his daughter and glowered at the newcomer. "What do you want?"

The Mediwitch poked her head inside. "There's an owl here for Mrs. Snape."

“She is not here at the moment," Severus replied. “Against everyone’s better judgment she went to the cafeteria to fetch us some lunch.”
“Thank you,” The Mediwitch answered before closing the door and scurrying away.

"Now, on to the story of Harry Potter and the basilisk.”

“Oh,” Rose placed a hand on his heart.

“It all started during Mr. Potter's second year, with an enchanted diary…”

***

Hermione put a lid on the cup of tea before levitating it along with the bowl of soup for Severus, a turkey bacon sandwich for her, and a glass of orange juice. She said a silent prayer of thanksgiving for magic. Carrying all this stuff would be impossible without it.

"Mrs. Snape!" A Mediwitch called.

Hermione’s heart skipped. "Yes?"

"You have a letter," the Mediwitch began as she headed towards Hermione.

Hermione set down the items. “Thank you.”

The Mediwitch handed her the letter. Hermione broke the seal. She grit her teeth.

“Ron.”

What does the ginger git want now? Is he going to plead for mercy, or is he going to make some pathetic excuse for his behavior?

Hermione broke the seal. I should burn this letter, but if it can be used as evidence in a kidnapping case I should preserve it.

Dear Hermione,

I know that I really screwed up when I did not immediately return Rose to you. I am sorry. I never should have tried to take care of her. It was much harder than I expected. In fact, I did not like taking care of her at all. She was too loud, and her crying gave me a headache.

I can't believe I'm writing this, but Severus Snape should raise her. He's a much better father than I am because he can tolerate Rose screaming at all hours of the day. She seems happier with you and him anyway. Severus Snape is her father and I won't deny that anymore.

I'm going to manage a Quidditch team in Peru. I think it will be great fun, and I can continue to live the lifestyle I want to. Take care of yourself and be happy. I don't regret what we had, but I also don't regret letting Snape raise my child. I just can't be a father!

-Ron Weasley

Hermione’s face reddened. as her muscles tensed. The bastard thinks he can go to Peru? Well, two can play at this game. I’m going to assemble a legion of aurors to intercept him. I’ll testify against him, and won't rest until he spends the rest of his miserable life in Azkaban. I'll…

She felt a flutter in her stomach.
Tears filled her eyes. Within the hour she would call the aurors, but for now there was a more pressing matter.

Hermione rubbed her abdomen. Severus is a wonderful father, but what if he doesn’t want this child? What if he resents this child because he feels as if it was forced upon him? Can he love any child as much as he loves Rose?

What does this child mean for our marriage? Severus wanted more time to grow accustomed to the idea of fathering a biological child. I thought we had more time. What if he thinks I purposefully became pregnant? Will he resent me? He would never turn his back on his children, but would he emotionally abandon me?

Hermione dried her eyes and took a shaky breath. The only way to answer these questions is to tell Severus about my pregnancy. This isn’t exactly the time or the place I would have chosen, but given the circumstances, I have little other choice.

“I love you, little baby,” she whispered as she rubbed her abdomen. “Let’s go tell Daddy about you.”

Then she positioned herself on her crutches, levitated the food and drinks, and made her way back to the hospital room.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! I deeply appreciate it!
"And that, my dear Rose, is how Mr. Potter defeated the basilisk."

"Ooh," Rose clapped her hands.

Severus chuckled and held Rose closer. "I take it you liked that story?"

"Uh," she answered.

"Well, I suppose it is a pretty good story," Severus kissed Rose on the forehead. "I am so happy to hold you in my arms again. I don't know what I would have done if anything had happened to you."

"Eh," Rose replied. I am happy to be back in your arms. I don't know what I would have done if you had never woken up from your nap.

"Yes, you had a strong guardian on your side."

"Oh?"

"Indeed, you did. Harry Potter, the same person who defeated the basilisk, was watching over you."

Hermione approached the hospital room, but stopped when she heard Severus' voice.

"I saw Mr. Potter last night." His throat tightened. "Mr. Potter was going to escort me to heaven, but I politely declined his invitation. He sends us his love though."

Rose reached up and wiped a tear from Severus' eyes. He gave her a small smile. "Thank you Rose, but I am fine. I do miss Harry Potter, and wish he was still here among us. Still, he assured me that he will always watch over you. Considering that you are here with me right now, I would say he has done an excellent job thus far."

"Ah," she answered.

Severus sighed. "Rose, I apologize for what happened to you last night. I wish I had been able to reach the mansion sooner. I've made several mistakes in my life, but two of the biggest ones were allowing Ronald Weasley to hold you, and not bringing you to the press conference where I could have protected you myself."

"Dada," Rose muttered.

"I'm not perfect Rose, as you well know by now," Severus continued. "All I can do is be the best father possible for you. I love you, baby girl."

"Dada," she cooed.

He kissed her on the cheek.

"Severus," Hermione choked.

Severus raised an eyebrow as she entered. Hermione's eyes were misty, but she was smiling.
He drawled, "Were you eavesdropping?"

"A little," Hermione admitted. "You seemed to be having such a tender moment with Rose; I didn’t have the heart to interrupt."

"I see," Severus replied as Hermione sat beside him on the bed. "Is your ankle hurting?"

Hermione shook her head while Severus pulled around a bedside table for her. She set the food down. "I heard what you said about Harry."

"You did?" Severus asked.

Hermione nodded. "Did you really see Harry?"

"I think I did," Severus replied before passing the juice and the sandwich to Hermione. "I am not entirely sure given some of the statements he made."

"What types of statements?"

"He claimed that I had more than one child."

Hermione's swallowed a lump in her throat. "He did?"

"Indeed he did," Severus answered. "That inaccuracy alone calls into question whether or not I was speaking to him."

"It's true though, Severus," Hermione replied. "You do have two children."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Rose is the only child of which I am aware."

"I'm pregnant," Hermione whispered.

Severus stared at her with an unreadable expression.

"Muma! Dada!" Rose chanted as she peeked into Severus' soup bowl.

"I, I know we agreed to discuss having a baby before I became pregnant, but I didn't plan this. I thought since I was breastfeeding I could not get pregnant. I was wrong," Hermione began.

"I did not think you wanted more children just yet," Severus began as he scooted his daughter away from the bowl.

"I mean," Hermione gulped. "I want this baby."

Severus blinked.

"I know you wanted time to acclimate to the idea of having a child, and nine months isn’t a long time. Still, I know this baby will be loved. I have every confidence that you will be an amazing father of two," Hermione continued.

Severus' eyes softened. "Have you confirmed this pregnancy with a Mediwitch?"

"Yes."

"I take it your earlier illness was in large part due to your pregnancy."

"Yes."
Severus then glanced over at Rose, who was playing with his soup spoon. "So I'm going to be a father again?"

"Yes," Hermione answered.

"Oh Merlin!" Severus exclaimed before embracing his wife.

Rose squeaked.

"Are you happy?" Hermione asked.

"I…I don't think I've ever been more happy in my life! It's," Severus took a deep breath. "Hermione… you're having our baby!"

Tears fell down from Hermione’s eyes. He wiped them away.

"What is troubling you?" Severus asked.

"I was so scared you'd be angry because you believed that I had deceived you," Hermione replied.

"I would never think such a thing," Severus answered.

"D-do you feel ready for a child? I mean, I know this is all so sudden..."

"Everything I said earlier about having another child was idiotic. I love this baby. I already love my child."

"I love this baby too," Hermione cried.

Severus then released Hermione and turned to Rose. "Do you hear that, Rose? You're going to be a big sister soon!"

"No," she answered.

Severus and Hermione chuckled.

"No?" Severus asked. "What do you mean, 'no'?"

Rose stared at him. I quite enjoy having you to myself and I'm not interested in sharing you right now. I think I'll wait until I'm a few years older before I consider becoming a sister.

"Unfortunately Rose, you don't get much of a say in the matter," Hermione laughed before taking her child and holding her close. "You're going to enjoy being an older sister. You and the baby will have so much fun when you're older."

Rose scowled. Where is this other baby? There are no other babies here.

"Don't worry Rose, we'll always love you," Severus replied.

"Oh," Rose answered. "Dada."

"Oh Merlin," Hermione groaned. "We're both only children."

"And?" Severus drawled.

"Neither of us knows how to deal with sibling issues, you know, rivalries and all that. Our children may grow up to hate each other all because we have no idea what we're doing."
“Hermione, you and I have dealt with dunderheads all of our lives. Rose is very intelligent, and I assume with this child's lineage that he or she will be intelligent as well. If we can deal with bickering dunderheads, we can deal with two very intelligent children having a few quarrels.”

"You think so?"

"I know so," Severus replied. "I also know that you will be an excellent mother to both of our children. If we make a few mistakes, we are only human."

"Agreed," Hermione replied before pausing. "One mistake we shouldn't make again is waiting until the last second to give our child a middle name."

Severus chuckled. "Agreed, although certainly naming the baby can wait until we know the gender."

"I suppose it could," Hermione replied.

"You're having another baby?"

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if I'll be able to post on Monday since I'll have quite a bit to do that day. If I can't update then I hope I've left everyone on a happy enough note.

Thank you for all the support! I appreciate all of it!
Chapter 212

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Severus scowled at the intruder. Of all the times to barge in, why would he choose now?

The newcomer dug his foot into the ground and blushed. "I'm sorry, but I couldn't help but overhear your conversation."

"There's no need to apologize Neville," Hermione replied.

"Are you really expecting again?"

“Yes, there's another little Snape on the way."

"Congratulations," Neville stepped inside the room. "You must be so excited.”

"We are eagerly awaiting our newest arrival," Severus replied, his eyes softening.

"Dada," Rose picked up Severus' soup spoon and waved it in the air. It wasn’t a wand, but for the moment it would do.

"It's a spoon, Rose, not a wand," Severus explained. "It only serves as an eating utensil, not as a way of performing magical spells."

“Oh,” Rose replied.

Severus turned Rose in Neville’s direction. "Do you see Mr. Longbottom?"

“Eh.”

“Would you like to give him a proper greeting?"

"Ay," she complied before focusing once again on the spoon. She waved it in Severus' face. “Dada.”

Severus couldn’t suppress his smile. “Yes Rose, one day you will have your own wand. Perhaps if you are lucky it will be made of dragon heartstring like your mother’s and mine.”

“Ooh,” Rose cooed.

Neville chuckled. "Is she excited about becoming a big sister?"

Severus smirked. “She is currently in denial."

Neville cocked his head.

"When we told her that she was going to be a big sister, she simply said, 'no','" Hermione explained.

Neville laughed. "You two will certainly have your hands full when the next one comes along."

"I think we're up to the task," Severus replied as he pulled Rose close. She dangled the spoon in front of his nose. “May I have the spoon now?"
“Eh,” Rose handed the spoon to her father.

"I hope I didn't interrupt your mealtime," Neville replied..

"You didn't," Hermione assured him. "We slept late and missed lunch. Neither of us was all that hungry, but it seemed like a good idea to try to eat something,"

“You're probably right,” Neville noted. “I won't take up too much of your time, but there are some recent developments of which you should be aware. Kingsley would've stopped by to tell you about them himself, but he's processing the Death Eaters for incarceration and administering them the cure. He did want me to tell you that he’s happy you are safe though.”

“Tell him we said, ‘thank you,’” Hermione answered.

“I will,” Neville answered.

"What recent developments brought you here?" Severus asked.

"First of all, Headmistress McGonagall resigned," Neville announced.

"What?" Hermione and Severus exclaimed.

"She resigned," Neville reiterated. "She claims that her reign as headmistress has been fraught with scandal and incompetence, most of it her own doing. In her own words, if she had reported that student missing and had been less focused on winning your inheritance, Fenrir may have been caught much sooner. Harry may even still be alive."

"Who is replacing her?" Hermione asked.

Neville pointed to his chest. "Me."

Hermione blinked.

Severus shook her head, Of all the people Minerva could’ve chosen to take her place, she chose the person most likely to destroy the dungeons.

Neville continued, “I was surprised by the appointment myself.”

“What exactly was her reasoning?” Severus asked.

Neville continued. "The Headmistress said that it was time for a different perspective, perhaps a more youthful one. She also mentioned that I'd fought against both Voldemort and Fenrir, so I understood what was at stake if another war broke out. The Headmistress believes that I will do what is best for the students, not simply what is best for the school or for its image."

"Have you accepted the position?" Hermione asked.

"I have," Neville answered. "I only hope that I can build on Hogwarts' tradition of excellence."

Severus took a deep breath. "Provided you do not agree to be a substitute teacher for a potions class, you will make a fine Headmaster."

"That means a lot coming from you, sir," Neville answered.

"I won't lie," Severus continued, "Being Headmaster is a difficult job, and you are bound to make a few decisions that prove unpopular. Still, I know you will put the needs of your students first among
your priorities. You have a sense of fairness and compassion that some recent Headmasters have lacked. I am confident that you will do just fine as Headmaster."

"Thank you for that vote of confidence," Neville replied. "Since you know very well what it is like to be a Headmaster, could I ask you for advice from time to time?"

"Certainly," Severus replied with a spark in his eyes. "Although I trust in your ability to lead quite well on your own. When all is said and done, your reign as Headmaster will undoubtedly be remembered much more fondly than mine."

"You were an exceptional Headmaster under the circumstances, sir," Neville answered. "It's just that no one knew at the time what it cost you to keep us safe."

"Thank you," Severus replied.

Neville removed something from underneath his arm. "Kingsley actually did send me here to talk to you about one other thing."

Checking the hallway, he closed and locked the door before casting a few wards.

"Why all the security measures?" Hermione asked.

"Because we need to discuss two of the Deathly Hollows."

"I see."

Neville set the package down on the bed and began unwrapping it. "We were able to locate and retrieve both the Elder Wand and the Invisibility Cloak from Fenrir and his lycanthropes. Kingsley debated on keeping them at the Ministry, but the Elder Wand belongs to you, Severus. Because you have demonstrated your loyalty and integrity so many times, the Minister would like you to take the Invisibility Cloak, as well. The Hallows could not be in better hands."

Severus stared at the Elder Wand before asking, "I suppose I'm the only one who can use this since I was the one who killed Fenrir."

"That would appear to be true," Neville replied."

"Excellent," Severus answered. "Take it into one of your gardens and bury it as deeply as possible. Let your plants grow above it. I don't care if it dissolves into pulp; do not allow it near me or my family. Ever."

"Don't you want to keep it in a safe place, lest another threat appears?" Neville asked.

"If we ever have need of it, you will be able to retrieve it for me," Severus answered. "But I do not want that thing near me or my family. It has caused enough destruction in my lifetime. It does not need to cause more."

Neville turned to Hermione.

"I agree," she answered. "We do not want it anywhere near us."

"As you wish. I'll bury the Elder Wand in my personal gardens," Neville replied. "What about the Invisibility Cloak?""

"I would like to keep that because it holds sentimental value for my wife," Severus looked down at Rose and grinned. "Besides, Harry would want it to be handed down to the next generation of
Hogwarts troublemakers."

"Excuse me?" Hermione teased. "I was not a troublemaker."

Severus gave her a pointed look. "I'm simply telling the truth, love. I can only imagine the number of stunts you and Potter were able to perform courtesy of that cloak. Do you want to deny Rose and our other child that same pleasure?"

Hermione glared at him, trying to protest her innocence, but she knew it was all in vain. "Our children should be encouraged to follow the rules, not to break them."

"Agreed," Severus answered, "Yet it may come in handy if she ever needs to roam the grounds after hours, plot with her friends, or confuse a deserving professor or two."

"Plus," Hermione replied with a smirk. "She can sneak out of her dorm to visit boys."

The color drained from Severus’ face. Hermione burst out in laughter, as did Neville. Even Rose joined in, though she had no idea what was so funny. Severus shook his head and folded the cloak away. He might have to create a ward to raise an alarm should it enter the boys' dormitory...

Then he closed his eyes and pictured Harry leaning out of a castle window, smiling in approval.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the support! It is deeply appreciated!

This note contains spoilers, so if you don't want any skip the rest of it.

So, if it hasn't become obvious, the story is wrapping up. If I counted right, there's about a week's worth of updates left. This leads me in a bit of a bind, because Ron Weasley needs to suffer and be brought to justice. Unfortunately to write a manhunt, a capture, a court trial, and deal with Molly's endless ranting, I would need about forty more chapters. The last thing I want is for ending fatigue to set in.

When I first wrote this story, my solution was going to be a sequel. Then, real life got in the way and it never got off the ground. Now that a few years have passed though, I actually have one written, and it does include justice for the Snapes. It'll be a bumpy ride, and nothing comes easy, but hopefully it'll be worth the payoff!

Long story short, I haven't forgotten the Weasleys, they will get what they deserve, but I also don't want this particular story to wear out its welcome. Stay tuned for more details!
Chapter 213

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Rose,” Severus called.

Rose glanced up from the pile of shimmering wrapping paper which had accumulated on the sitting room floor.

"What did Aunt Ginevra give you for your birthday?” Severus asked.

Rose clutched the stuffed monkey to her chest. Severus chuckled. "I do not want to take your toy from you. All I want is to be properly introduced to it."

Rose glanced at the monkey, and then back at her father.

"You know you can trust your Daddy, Rose,” Hermione began. "He'll give it back."

After a few moments' debate, Rose handed the toy over to Severus. “Dada.”

"Thank you, Rose," Severus replied before inspecting it. "Hello, Mr. Monkey. I hope you'll be a good friend to Rose and all her other toys… especially Mr. Snake."

Rose giggled.

Severus handed the toy back to her. “You will need to thank Ginevra when you next see her. Can you say ‘thank you Aunt Ginevra?’”

“Ank, we, an…” Rose shook her head. “An, in…huh.”

“Do not worry Little One,” Severus kissed her forehead. “We will work on it later.”

“Oh ay,” Rose replied.

Hermione pulled out another box. "All right, Rose. Here's another present from your father and me."

"Pwenet," she repeated.

"Yes, ‘present,’” Severus repeated as Hermione handed her daughter the package.

“Elp?” Rose asked.

“Sure,” Hermione bent down as best as she was able given her swollen abdomen. She grasped Rose’s hands, “Here, just put your fingers on it like so…”

With a little help from her mum, Rose dug her fingers into the seam of the wrapping paper and pulled it off. Her eyes gleamed with pride as the paper drifted to the ground.

"Do you know what it is?” Hermione asked.

Rose stared at the package. ”No."

"Maybe that's because you have the box turned upside down," Hermione replied, turning it right side up.
Rose's eyes grew wide in recognition. She yelled, "Powon! Powon!"

"Yes," Severus replied. "It's a kit to make pretend potions. Practice with this one and some day you'll be ready to help daddy in his lab."

"Wuv Dada! Wuv Muma!" Rose cheered. She leapt up and rushed over to give her dad a hug, black robes billowing behind her. She faltered when the robes got caught up in her legs, but Severus reached out for her before she could take a tumble.

"We love you too, Rose," he whispered. "Happy first birthday."

"Wuv Dada," she replied with a fierce hug.

Hermione's eyes grew misty. "Happy birthday, Rose."

Rose turned to her with outstretched arms. "Muma!"

Hermione embraced her daughter. Rose's eyes widened when she felt something in Muma's belly press back against her. What could be inside Muma?

"Can you feel the baby kick?" Hermione asked.

"Baby?" Rose asked.

"Yes," Hermione cooed. "Your little brother is in there."

Rose raised an eyebrow.

Severus burst out laughing. She was becoming more like him with each passing day, something he couldn't help but find endearing.

"Powon!" Rose cheered.

"Do you want to play with the potion kit?" Hermione asked.

"Powon!" She began clapping.

Hermione laughed as she helped Rose open the box and remove the plastic cauldron, vials and stirring rods. "Here you go, Rose."

"Powon!" she replied as she took the pieces from her mother and sat them on the ground. She then took a stirring rod and placed it in the cauldron, pretending to mix up an imaginary concoction.

Hermione sat down on the sofa next to Severus. "I suppose we know what her favorite toy is now."

"I don't know, she still seems rather fond of Mr. Snake," Severus mused.

Hermione put her head on Severus' shoulder and hummed, "I think she's had a very happy first birthday."

"I believe so," Severus answered before kissing the top of his wife's head. "Are you glad we decided to celebrate quietly, just us?"

"I am," Hermione replied. "I'm just too drained, both physically and emotionally to throw a big party. Besides, we'll still have that 'brunch' with Ginny next Saturday."
"Oh Merlin," Severus muttered. Knowing Ginevra and Draco, half the Wizarding World would be present to celebrate Rose’s birthday.

Hermione nuzzled into his neck. "I love you, Severus. I'm glad we had a small first birthday for Rose."

"Indeed," Severus smiled as he watched Rose pour the imaginary contents of a vial into the cauldron. Her eyes grew wide as she peeked down into the nonexistent mixture, but she soon smiled and began to stir.

"Severus?"

"Hmm?"

"Remember when Rose was born?"

"Very well. Why?"

"Rose was almost an hour old before we agreed on her middle name."

Severus glanced at his wife. “What are you trying to say?”

"We still don't have a name for our son,” Hermione replied. “I think it would be wise to have a name picked out for him before he’s born.”

"Well, my love," Severus began. "Perhaps this time I can pick the middle name and you can pick the first name."

"Sounds fair enough," Hermione sat up straighter. "I've always liked the name 'Hugo'."

Severus twisted his lips. "Isn't that a bit of an odd name for a child?"

"And we don't have odd names?" Hermione replied.

Severus laughed. "Fine. Hugo it is."

"That's settled," Hermione answered. "What was your idea for a middle name?"

Severus' eyes softened. "I was thinking 'Harry'."

"Harry?" Hermione choked.

"Yes. I want to honor him. Naming our child after him seemed to be a perfect way to do so," Severus replied. “Still, if you do not share my opinion…”

"No, I love the name ‘Harry’," Hermione interrupted. "I think Harry would be honored to have our child named after him too, but now that I think about it, 'Hugo Harry' seems a bit clumsy."

"Hermione, we don't have to decide anything tonight…" Severus began.

"But I'd rather name him after Harry than a French writer, even though I love his work." Her face lit up. "Unless we compromise. What about Victor?"

"Victor?"

"Yes!"
“Please tell me you intend to spell his name with a c and not a k.”

“Of course he’ll spell his name with a c.” Hermione blushed. "Oh Merlin, you don't think I was trying to name him after Krum, do you?"

"I was hoping that was not the case," Severus admitted.

"Oh no," Hermione replied. “I want to name him ‘Victor’ after Victor Hugo, and also because of everything’s he’s already survived.”

Severus hummed.

Hermione rubbed her stomach. "This baby was there when Fenrir was defeated and in a way he has become a symbol of our victory. That’s why I was to name him Victor, though if you have any objections we can pick another name."

"Victor Harry Snape," Severus answered. "I like that name."

"So it's decided?" Hermione asked.

"I believe so," Severus replied.

Hermione smiled as she felt the baby move within her. "I think Victor approves, as well."

Severus grinned as he placed a hand over Hermione's abdomen. "Hello, Victor. How are you doing in there?"

He pressed against his mother’s abdomen.

"Muma? Dada?" Rose called out.

"Yes Rose?" Severus replied as he turned to her.

"Powon," Rose answered as she beckoned them to come see. "Powon!"

Severus glanced into the cauldron. "Yes, Rose that is a fine potion. You made it perfectly."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for the overwhelming support! It is very, very deeply appreciated!
Hermione gritted her teeth as another labor pain coursed through her body. When it subsided, she took a deep breath. “I can’t wait for this all to be over.”

"It shouldn't be much longer now," Healer Branigan replied as she examined Hermione once more.

Severus burst through the door, panting.

"Oh thank Merlin," Hermione released the breath she'd been holding. "I was afraid you wouldn’t make it here in time."

"I apologize for the delay," Severus replied, "When I checked in on Rose at the Malfoys, she insisted on showing me the latest potion she and Mr. Snake had created. There were at least thirty steps to the procedure and she would not allow me to leave until I had observed each one."

"She picks the worst times to demand attention," Hermione grunted as the pain returned, this time accompanied by a defined urge. "I need to push."

"Good," the Healer answered. "Go ahead and push through the next contraction."

"Push?" Severus asked. “Isn’t it too early for that?"

“Too early?” Hermione hissed.

Severus stepped closer to Hermione, “You’ve only been in labor for six hours.”

"That's six hours too long," Hermione ground out with a pointed glare.

“True, but with Rose you were in labor much longer,” Severus took Hermione's hand. “Couldn’t Victor be hurt if he’s pushed out into the world too early?”

“There’s no need to worry,” Healer Branigan laughed. "Second babies often come more quickly than firstborns."

"Thank Merlin," Hermione muttered before the pain seized her once again. She gripped Severus' hand and bore down.

"Good, good, good, good," Healer Branigan cheered as she watched the monitoring spells. “Keep on pushing! You're doing wonderfully. Just a few more pushes and he'll be out."

"Oh God," Severus muttered. I am beyond eager to meet my son, but I do not know how eager he is to see me. Rose loved me from the moment she was born. What if Victor does not take to me as easily?

Hermione's shriek broke his chain of thought.

"Keep pushing!" Healer Branigan ordered.

"Oh God," she squeaked before pausing a moment to rest.
"Good, I can see the head," The Mediwitch answered. "You'll see your son in one, maybe two more pushes."

Tears of exertion rolled down Hermione's cheeks.

The Healer turned to Severus. "Would you like to cut the cord?"

"I would love to," he answered in a distant voice. This is happening too soon. What if Victor isn’t ready to see me? What if he hates me? Who can I be a good father to a son?

Healer Branigan handed him the scissors, and directed him to where he should stand.

Hermione felt another contraction ripple through her and she took advantage of the opportunity to give another healthy push. The Healer held out her hands, ready to catch the child.

"Almost there. You can do it, Hermione."

She gave one last push and felt a slight release as the baby's head eased into Healer Branigan's hands. With a bit of gentle pressure the child was free and clear, his shrill cries filling the room.

"Hello, little Victor," Hermione cooed as the Healer held Victor up for her to see.

The Healer turned to Severus and handed him the scissors. "Just cut right here, Mr. Snape…"

He obeyed.

"Well done," she whispered before whisking the child away for a quick weigh in and cleaning.

Severus took Hermione's hand and kissed her cheek, brushing damp tendrils of hair from her face.

"There you go, Mrs. Snape." Healer Branigan announced, placing the swaddled child on Hermione's chest.

"Thank you," Hermione whispered before turning to her son. "Hello there little Victor. It's me, Mummy. I love you."

The child hiccupped and gazed at the face of the woman whose voice was so familiar. He eyed her a bit unsteadily.

She smiled. "You have your father's eyes."

"He does?" Severus leaned in to look for himself.

"Yes, see?" Hermione replied.

"He does have my eyes," Severus choked.

Victor looked up at Severus.

"Hello, there. I'm your Daddy," Severus cooed. "I love you."

Victor gazed at Severus before yawning and closing his eyes.

"Would you like to hold him?" Hermione asked.

“It would be my pleasure," he replied as he gathered the child into his arms.
Victor opened his eyes.

"Hello, little baby," Severus whispered. "Have you had a long day?"

Victor yawned before looking back up at his father.

"Yes, it is very different here than it was inside your mother," Severus cooed. "Do not worry though. Your mother, your sister, and I are here to love and support you every step of the way."

Soothed by the sound of his daddy's voice, he drifted off to sleep.

Tears came to Severus’ eyes. "I believe my son likes me."

"What's not to like?" Hermione asked with a grin.

"Plenty," Severus replied. "But at the moment he does not need a list of reasons."

Victor put a hand over Severus' heart.

"I love you, Hermione."

"I love you too, Severus."

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Hermione cradled Victor in her arms, encouraging him to stay awake long enough to suckle. It was best to feed Victor without a crowd pressing around them.

"You need to be very calm and quiet when you enter," she heard Severus say outside the door.

"Uh huh," came a tiny soprano reply.

Speaking of a crowd...

"The baby is very fragile, so we mustn't try to play with him just yet."

"'Kay. Aun' Inny?"

"Aunt Ginny and Uncle Draco will join us soon but they wanted you to have a chance to meet your brother first," Severus finished before the doorknob clicked.

"Kay," Rose answered.

"That's my girl," Severus said as Rose opened the door. She glanced back at her godparents for reassurance.

Ginevra motioned Rose forward. "Go on."

Rose stretched her hand out to Severus. He smiled and grasped it. "Come, little Rose. Let's meet Victor."

"Ickor," she repeated.

Severus chuckled. "Close enough."
Hermione sat up a little straighter as Severus lifted Rose onto the bed. The child blinked.

"This is Victor," he began. "He's the one who's been pushing back at you when you put your hand on your mother's belly."

"Oh," she answered. How did a baby get inside Mummy?

Victor stopped feeding long enough to gaze at his sister. Rose's face lit up, "Ickor!"

"Yes," Hermione laughed, "That's Victor, your little brother."

Victor stared at Rose. Finally, there was someone almost his size!

Hermione added, "Victor, this is your sister Rose."

Victor gazed a moment longer before returning to his feeding. Rose seems pretty trustworthy. Maybe I'll get to know her after a bit more lunch and a nap.

"I think they like each other," Hermione replied. "At least as much as children that age are capable."

Severus beamed. "It would seem then, that we are off to an excellent start."

Chapter End Notes

Well here we are at the second to last chapter. It's hard to believe this started almost a year ago! I suppose all good things must end though, especially if you're trying to set up for a sequel...

Thank you all so much for the support! It is very deeply appreciated!
Rose stared at the chess board, her brow furrowed. Victor sat in the seat opposite of her, hoping against hope that she would fail to notice his most recent misstep.

"Would anyone like to play dinner party with me?" their pyjama-clad sister asked as she bounced into the sitting room. Not quite four, her hair was straight, silky and black, her eyes a deep shade of brown. Her mischievous grin revealed her mother's prodigious incisors in baby tooth guise.

"Not now, Violet," Rose muttered.

"Oh come on. It will be fun," Violet replied.

"Aren’t you supposed to be in bed?" Rose asked.

She giggled. "Maybe."

Rose turned her attention to the board. "Black queen to B-3."

The queen glided forward and decapitated a white knight.

"Check," Rose announced.

"Ugh," Victor groaned, his eyes scanning the board for some type of escape.

"Maybe you should move your king across the board," Violet suggested.

"I'd love to," Victor replied. "But the king can't move that far."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because he is lazy and can only move one space at a time," Victor answered.

"Hey," the white king protested. "I resent that."

"Well, it's true," the black queen snickered.

Victor shook his head and ordered the king to retreat one space.

"Rook, A-7," Rose responded.

The castle lumbered into place.

"Checkmate," Rose announced.

The king bowed in submission as the queen and the rook finished him off.

"Nargles," Victor muttered. "How did you beat me again?"

Rose shrugged. "I've practiced quite a bit with Dad and with a few of my friends."

He exhaled.
"Don't worry. You'll get better as you play more games," Rose replied. "At least that's what Dad says every time I lose."

"Have you ever beaten Dad?" Violet asked.

"No," Rose replied with a twinge of regret. "He outsmarts me every time."

"I bet you'll beat him someday," Victor answered as he stood up to put the chess set away.

"Perhaps," Rose returned the pieces she'd captured from him.

"There you are," Hermione called, eying Violet. "You were supposed to be in bed an hour ago."

"I was," Violet responded. "But I needed a drink of water."

Hermione gave her a pointed look. "And the sitting room is the logical place to find it, I suppose."

"No," Violet answered, suppressing a fit of laughter. "But I thought maybe Rose and Victor would tuck me in."

"Unfortunately, Rose needs to finish packing her things."

"I can wait for her to tuck me in."

"Violet, we have a very busy day tomorrow. You don't want to be sleepy when we put Rose on the Hogwarts Express now, do you?" Hermione asked.

"If I oversleep, can Rose stay home with us?" Violet asked.

"No, falling asleep will just mean you'll miss telling her goodbye," Hermione replied before turning to Victor and Rose. "You two should probably get ready for bed as well."

"Fine," Victor muttered as he put the chess board back in the box. He handed it to his older sister, "I suppose this is yours now."

"I'll bring it home with me on holidays," Rose promised.

"I know," Victor embraced her.

Violet tried to hug each of them from the outside before giving up and squeezing herself between them. Hermione smiled. This was a perfect memory for the pensieve.

"I call dibs on the bathroom!" Victor announced before releasing his sisters and racing down the hallway.

"Come back here, you little weasel!" Rose exclaimed.

Victor called, "You'll have to run if you want to catch me!"

Rose shouted, "You dunderhead!"

He slammed the bathroom door behind him.

"Come now Violet," Hermione coaxed. "It's bedtime."

"Kay," she yawned. "Good night, Rose."
“Good night,” Rose replied as she watched her mother herd Violet back to bed. She stared at the chess box before taking it to her room and setting it in her school trunk.

"Rose?" Severus called peeking into her room.

She looked up from the trunk and gave him a small smile. "Hello, Dad."

Severus looked deep into Rose's blue eyes. "What's wrong, love?"

She gulped. "I was just thinking…"

“Yes,” he drawled.

“Why do I need to go to Hogwarts?” she asked. “I have plenty of friends here, and you and Mum can teach me everything I need to know.”

Severus sat on the edge of her bed, gesturing for her to sit beside him. She obeyed.

"Do you not want to attend Hogwarts anymore?" Severus asked.

"Not really," Rose admitted.

"Why not?" Severus asked. “You know that Headmaster Longbottom will take excellent care of you, and the professors are stellar.”

"But the potions professor can't be as good as you. At best, he will be adequate,” Rose argued.

Severus chuckled. "Professor Daniels is a good man, and from what I hear, the Potions program has grown quite well these past five years under his direction."

"But he's still not you, Daddy. I want to stay here and learn from you and from Mom." Tears trickled down Rose's cheeks. “I don’t want to stop brewing potions with you.”

He pulled her into an embrace. She burrowed her head into his chest.

"Rose, we can continue our lessons when you come home on break and during the summer," he whispered.

"No Daddy, I want to stay with you," she cried. "Otherwise you'll forget about me."

“You think I will forget about you?” Severus asked.

She nodded.

"What on earth would give you an idea like that?"

Rose looked up and hiccupped. "You'll still have Victor and Violet here, and sometimes I overhear you and Mum talking about having another baby."

“If we do have another child, he or she will never replace you.”

“I know my fears are stupid, Dad, and I know that you love me. I'm just afraid that you'll get so used to not having me around that one day I'll come home and you'll look at me like I'm a stranger."

"Oh Merlin, Rose," Severus whispered before kissing her on the forehead. "Do you think I won't miss you every time I brew downstairs? You've been my laboratory buddy since before you could
properly say "potion". How could I ever forget you?"

"You'd better not," Rose answered.

"Rose, one of the most difficult things I will ever do is watch you board that train, but it is time for you to start a new chapter in your life. I promise we will see each other soon."

"I know," Rose sobbed. "I just don't want you to become too accustomed to me being gone."

"Rose," Severus whispered. "You are my firstborn child, the one who taught me how to be a father, the one who taught me how to love, and how to accept love. You are precious to me in your own unique way."

Rose took a shaky breath.

"Your mother and I will write you every day, and we'll be just a floo call away."

"Can I fly home to see you sometimes?"

"Only if you want to get in trouble with Headmaster Longbottom."

Rose smirked. "I could use the Invisibility Cloak."

Severus raised his eyebrow. "You know that is only for emergencies."

"Well certainly needing a hug from you and Mum would qualify as an emergency sometimes," Rose replied as Severus wiped away her tears.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, Little One," Severus smiled as he kissed her on the cheek.

"I'm not little," Rose argued.

"No," Severus whispered. "I suppose you are not."

"Rose? Severus?"

They turned to her

"What are you two discussing?" Hermione asked.

"Rose is a little nervous about her first day," Severus answered.

Hermione joined them on the bed and pressed Rose to her chest. "Oh baby, you won't be alone. Scorpius will be going to Hogwarts too, and you already know Headmaster Longbottom quite well."

"Can I still call him Neville?" Rose asked.

"Yes, but not in front of the other students," Hermione answered.

"Will you miss me when I'm gone?" Rose asked.

"Of course I will," Hermione replied. "Rose, you're my baby girl. I'll miss you every day, but that's what floo calls and owls are for."

"I suppose," Rose replied.
"You'll make lots of new friends, and you'll have such a good time learning all those new things that your break will be here before you'll know it," Hermione answered.

"Thanks, Mum," Rose replied as she basked in the comfort of her parents' embrace.

***

"Now you'll remember to write us when you get sorted, right?" Hermione asked as the train crawled into the station.

"Yes, Mum," Rose replied.

"You're going to remember to feed your owl, right?" Victor asked.

"Yes," Rose rolled her eyes. "You won't have to do it for me anymore."

"Are you going to buy a cat like Mummy did?" Violet asked.

"We'll see," Severus answered. "If she does get a cat it will have to be a shorthaired one that does not shed too much."

"Oh, Severus," Hermione shook her head.

"Dad's right, hairy robes are gross," Rose replied.

"Who has hairy robes?" Scorpius asked as he and his parents approached them.

"No one, thankfully," Severus replied.

"Oh," Scorpius answered.

"Now remember Scorpius," Ginevra began. "Be nice to the people on the train, and don't accept any journals from strangers."

Scorpius gave her an odd look. "Why would anyone try to give me a journal?"

"You'd be surprised," Draco replied.

Suddenly a set of brown eyed, tow-headed twins burst on the scene. "Mummy! That mean man won't let us get on the train!" one shouted.

"Maybe he would've if you hadn't tried to take his whistle," the other admonished.

"Antlia, Carina, that's enough," Ginevra scolded. "You know you aren't allowed on that train until you're eleven and ready for school."

"But we want to see it now," Antlia cried.

"Please let us get on," Carina pleaded.

"All aboard!" The conductor announced.

"In about five more years," Ginevra replied.

"We should go, Rose, before all the good seats are taken," Scorpius suggested.
"Good idea," Rose replied before turning to her family. "Goodbye, everyone."

"Goodbye, Rose," Victor and Violet replied, each giving her a quick hug.

Hermione embraced Rose and pressed her nose into her daughter's hair, breathing in her scent one more time. "Goodbye, baby girl. I love you. Have fun at Hogwarts."

"I will, Mum. I love you too," Rose replied before releasing her mother.

She then looked up at Severus. Her lip quivered. "Goodbye, Dad."

"Goodbye, Rose," he answered with glistening eyes.

Rose rushed into his arms and held him tightly. Leaning back to take his face in both hands, she kissed each cheek. "I love you, Dad."

"I love you too, Rose," Severus replied before releasing her and smoothing an errant lock of hair behind her ear. Then he kissed the top of her head.

She and Scorpius then collected their bags and dashed off to board the train. Severus and Hermione watched with Victor and Violet as the train filled, hissed, and then slowly chugged forward, Rose peeked out one of the windows and waved. They waved in return, until the train was out of sight.

***

Severus sat in his favorite chair with the small parchment in hand. He undid the seal and grinned when he recognized the handwriting.

Dear Dad and Mum,

I've made it to Hogwarts safe and sound, and am writing this to you after the sorting and welcoming feast. The train ride was much longer than I expected, but Hogwarts was even more beautiful than I imagined. I can see why you two were so impressed with the sorting feast; I've never seen such amazing floating candles in my life!

You probably care more about the sorting though than the actual feast. I was one of the first students sorted, and I can now safely say that I do not like the sorting hat one bit. When it touched my head it told me that I had many Gryffindor traits. I told it that my mother was Gryffindor but my father was Slytherin. I proceeded to tell the hat I'd wanted to be in Slytherin since I was three years old, and requested that I be sorted into that house. It then said, "You have more Gryffindor in you than you realize. Your father would be quite pleased if you were sorted into Gryffindor."

I answered, "I am sure my father will love me regardless of which house I am sorted into, but I would prefer to be a Slytherin just as he was."

He then said, "Are you sure he truly was a Slytherin?"

I will admit to becoming a bit testy and replying, "My father was sorted into Slytherin, and it was the right house for him. Dumbledore lied when he told him he'd been sorted too early. I want to be in Slytherin, just like my dad!"

The hat grew silent before finally saying, "You're right, there is more of Severus Snape in you than I initially thought." He then announced, "Slytherin!"
I was so happy that I almost cried as I got off the chair. Scorpius was next, and he was instantly sorted into Slytherin. He says he actually would’ve preferred Ravenclaw since both sides of his family would then have been equally disappointed, but Slytherin was his second choice.

I'm currently in the girls' dorm. My roommates seem to be friendly enough. At least they aren’t as gossipy as you said Lavender Brown was, Mum. As Dad would say, they are adequate companions.

I have potions tomorrow, and I hope the professor asks questions like Dad did. I can't wait to see the look on his face when I answer them all correctly. I also have flying lessons tomorrow. I can't wait to see the look on Professor Vane's face when she sees me levitating two meters in the air without a broom.

I love you and miss you very much! I can't wait to see you all again! Tell Victor that I've bought some chocolate frogs on the train, and I'll be sending them his way soon!

Love,

Rose

Severus exhaled. Aside from wanting to incinerate the sorting hat for its insinuations regarding Rose's paternity, he felt at peace and happy for his daughter.

"Severus?"

"Yes, Hermione?"

Hermione entered the sitting room and looked over his shoulder. "Are you finished with Rose's letter?"

"Yes, I am." Severus handed it over.

Hermione looked over the page until tears came to her eyes. "I'm glad she was sorted into the house she wanted."

"I am as well, although this only solidifies my hatred for that hat," Severus replied.

"Rose handled herself well, even if she didn't know exactly what it meant," Hermione noted.

"Do you think we should've told her the truth about Ronald?" Severus asked.

"Why? She knows who her true father is. That's all that matters," Hermione replied.

"Indeed," Severus replied as Hermione settled onto his lap. "She knows exactly who her dad is."

Hermione hummed and brushed her lips against his.

Severus pulled his wife into his arms. "If anyone had told me twelve years ago that I'd have a daughter who would be sorted into Slytherin, I would have thought that individual was insane. I never even thought I would marry, nor did I believe myself to be capable of loving a child. I was perfectly content to live the life of a hermit in my tiny run-down shack. I had no idea what happiness could be until you and the children came into my life."

"It's all because of Rose," Hermione answered. "When Ron left me, I thought our lives was over. She didn't stand a chance in the Wizarding World with the label 'bastard' hanging over her head. I couldn't have asked for a better father for her, Severus. You took us in when no one else would and you did more than provide for us. You chose to give yourself to us, and we're so much better for it."
"Rose taught me to love. She accepted me unconditionally when I thought it impossible," Severus replied. “And you, you looked beyond who I was to who I could become. You loved me when most people would’ve given up on me. I would never have known love if it weren't for you and Rose.”

“We would not have understood what love was without you either,” Hermione noted.

“Thank you, Hermione. Thank you for choosing to be with me,” Severus answered.

She placed a tender kiss on his lips. "I love you, Severus Snape."

"I love you too, Hermione Snape."

They snuggled in the warmth of the fire and marveled at the turn their lives had taken. They had started out alone… abandoned… but had finally found love thanks to the interference of a meddling estranged grandmother… and a kiss from a rose.

Chapter End Notes

Well, here it is everyone: the last chapter in our odyssey! It has been a blast writing for you. I know it sounds cliched, but when I began posting this story I thought maybe two people would read it, and everyone else would wonder why I thought I was good enough to post on this site. Still, I needed a project to recover from a bad breakup, so I decided to go ahead and see what happened.

Almost a year later, and I can honestly say I am overwhelmed by the support I have received from all of you! Thank you for allowing my story into your consciousness for a few minutes each day. Thank you for the comments, the kudos, the bookmarks, and just plain old reading! Really, I could go on all day about how much this has meant to me, but I do have a meeting to attend in the not so distant future. If only real life didn't catch up to me....

As for the future, I have two projects I plan to post. Next Tuesday, I will begin posting the sequel for this story. The week after that I will being posting Objection, an older work which I've gotten a few requests for. I'm going to alternate every other week between them, so next week the sequel, the week after Objection, then back to the sequel. Hopefully it won't be too confusing.

For the final time this story: thank you for all the support! It is and always has been deeply appreciated!

End Notes

So a little history on this. I originally posted this on fanfiction.net and it ran from 2010-2011. At the time I had just graduated from college. Unfortunately life got busy and I left fan fiction for a time. Between Alan Rickman's death and Emma Watson starring in Beauty and the Beast my interest in it was rekindled. The fact that I was tired of only reading people who
make long confusing arguments with highly technical terms made reading and writing fiction more appealing as well.

I've written some stories between the time this was written and now, but nothing I feel is ready to post. Still I looked back on this story, and a couple of people asked me to repost it here. I don't have anything to lose, so why not? Since it's already written I will try to post daily, but there's no guarantee I'll be able to do so.

Wow that was long. Trust me these notes won't be nearly this long winded in the future. I hope everyone enjoyed the chapter!

Oh and for the record I don't own Harry Potter. It's still JK Rowling's baby, and I am no JK Rowling.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!