Thirty Days Hath September
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Thirty Days Hath September
by CeleryThesis

Summary

Anonymous prompt: Severus and Hermione are hit by a curse. The only way to beat it is to get Hermione pregnant within a month, otherwise both will lose their magic. They can’t stand each other and wouldn’t even dream of sleeping with each other, but losing their magic is not an option for them. Will they manage to break the curse?

Notes

This story is based off a prompt I couldn't let go from Last Summer's HG/SS Smutfest on Live Journal. The prompt not taken kept invading my head, especially on a week long road trip, during which I plotted this out. If you are a magic purist, I hope you will forgive me because some of this is just ridiculous.

If you are the person who submitted this prompt for the writing fest, please let me know in comments so I can credit you by user name.
Part One: Chapter One

Hermione

Hermione Granger received the letter at eight-thirty in the morning. Outside the window of her lab, an old owl was waiting patiently for her to change her robe from her traveling cloak to her brewing robe, and to pour herself a cup of tea before she sat down at her desk to review her agenda for the day. It was only then that she saw the bird hovering at the glass.

“Sorry, boy,” she said, rushing to climb up the step and admit the messenger. She had insisted on a window in her lab; she refused to live out her professional life in a dungeon. Because the space was primarily underground, the window was at the very top. She unlatched the pane and the owl flew in and waited for her at the nearest table while she climbed back down. He dropped the letter for her, and she pulled a biscuit out of a tin for him. “Thank you,” she said, as he flew back out. She decided to leave the window open for a breeze. It had been a warm summer.

She opened the letter and began to read. It was from Belo Rycliffe, a Potion Master she had studied under during her apprentice years. He had the largest collection of academic works outside the wizarding university. His library was bigger than the one at Hogwarts. He wrote in the letter of wanting to hand books off to colleagues before he died, fearing they would be snapped up by collectors, who wouldn’t appreciate their academic merit. He told her to come to his enormous house in Northern Ireland today at ten if she was interested.

Suddenly, her agenda for the day had changed. Ten years ago, she had spent twelve hours a day, six days a week for eighteen months at Master Rycliffe’s house and had retreated to that library every second she could. It was one of her top ten places on earth. She was suddenly hit with conflicting emotions: sadness that the Master was preparing for his death; elation that some of those books could be hers.

She was a teaching professor during academic terms, but classes were out until the school year began the next week. It was perfect timing. She was ahead of schedule for all her current projects. She sipped her tea and smiled broadly at the thought of the rest of her days: seeing her old mentor and exploring that collection again.

At nine fifty-five, after bottling a case of headache potions for the university stores, Hermione put her traveling cloak on again. She had been ready to go an hour earlier, but she didn’t want to appear so eager. She passed through her lab floo. “Cloerain, Belo Rycliffe Estate,” she said as she traveled through. She landed in the familiar foyer. Master Rycliffe’s wife had died a few years ago, and he had lived alone save a staff of elves.

“Master Granger,” a squeaky voice greeted her.
“Hello, Feeley. How have you been?” she handed the elf her cloak. The institution of elves in servitude still bothered her greatly, but the Master had treated them here well.

“Master is in the library,” Feeley said, not acknowledging her question. She had always sensed her concern annoyed them, though they treated her with unflagging deference.

“Thank you, I remember the way.” The elf and her cloak disappeared with a pop. Hermione walked down the long halls. The art collection on the walls was the same and brought back fond memories of her work there. She would have been content to spend many more months in apprenticeship, but Master Rycliffe had gently nudged her out of the nest.

The library consisted of four rooms connected by large double doors so one could see the whole space for much of it, but there were hidden corners she could escape with a book and go undisturbed for hours. She had recovered emotionally from an awful break up with Ronald and had finally coming to terms with the defacto loss of her parents in these rooms.

She looked through the entrance to find her mentor but she couldn’t see him. “Master?” she called out.

“Master Granger?” the voice sounded rooms away. “We’re in the annex.”

_We’re_ was concerning. She was looking forward to free reign. Immediately her possessive, competitive hackles raised, and a list of at least ten titles she would fight tirelessly for filled her mind as she walked to the annex.

She saw Master Rycliffe first and couldn’t resist going in for an embrace, which he returned. Rycliffe looked older than the last time she had seen him nine months ago at Christmastime. He had always been small, but he was more hunched and appeared to have lost at least half a stone he couldn’t afford to be without. He seemed frail and bony against her, and a wave of sadness hit. He was at least a hundred and fifty and had lived an exciting, eventful life, but she was not ready for another goodbye. She let him go and fussed over his rumpled waistcoat. They had shared a grandfather/granddaughter relationship that she had cherished as all of her own relatives were either dead or obliviated.

“Master Snape, did you see Master Granger?” he called across the room, and her heart sank once again.

A familiar black figure emerged from behind a stack. “No,” he said acidly.

*Right back at you,* she thought. “Hello, Professor,” she said with all the faux deference she could muster.

“Granger,” he said as if her name was highly unpleasant, and he went back to the books.

She had tried, Merlin, she had tried with that man. He was alive in no small measure because she had refused to abandon him in the Shrieking Shack. She suspected that was the origin of some of the animosity although surely he was glad not to be dead. Perhaps not, though. She had testified on his behalf during his trial, feeling rightfully outraged that they put him through that indignity. She had attempted to…if not befriend him, then at least to show him courtesy and respect whenever their paths crossed. She would have been happy to be his friend. He had intrigued her their entire association. But he had responded to every gesture with pure contempt. At some point, she lost any desire to be associate with him. Still, she met his rudeness with unfailing respect always.

She had reached out to him in a professional capacity several times in the past and in each instance,
he had either ignored her or dismissed her curtly. She had wanted his input on a potions journal article she had written early in her career; he never responded or sent back the copy she had provided. She asked if he would collaborate with her on a development of a curse blocking potion, and he had responded with one syllable.

She had stopped thinking about him except the occasional dream about the Order during the war or that time in the shack. She would feel fleeting regret that he wanted nothing to do with her, and then he would go away again until her subconscious once again turned over the Snape card.

He moved to a shelf near her, and she could see him fully for the first time in years. He looked better than he had during her school days, as he had looked old beyond his years then. He must be close to fifty now, and he looked younger. His hair was still long, but it wasn’t greasy anymore. He had it partially pulled back in a band and tied off with a thin, black ribbon, but the back was longer. His clothes were the same style as always, but she had never noticed how high quality and well-tailored they were. She was not sure if that had been a change or if she had never noticed before. In any case, his perpetual scowl undid any improvements to his appearance, real or perceived.

“The obscure titles are this way,” Master Rycliffe told her, and she followed him to a small enclave of high shelves. There was a scaffolding ladder that could adjust up or down with a flick of the wand. It had been her favorite space in the collection, and she scammed up the ladder before her ex-professor could get there first. She kept her haughty glee inside and put the tiniest of smiles on her face as she started scanning the books. They were all ancient, some a thousand years old. She selected several she remembered, and then a dull blue book with a title in old wizarding English caught her eye. As she pulled it from the shelf, a loose page fell out. She watched it flutter to her feet as her world went black.

Severus Snape was finishing the last sip of tea when the owl plopped the letter on his lap. Minerva leaned over subtly his way, so he pocketed it and rose from the head table.

“Dungeon ready for the arrivals?” she said conversationally. She had chatted the whole meal with Longbottom to her right, and now she turned to him as he was trying to leave? Insufferable as usual.

“Quite.”

“Don’t forget the faculty meeting at two.”

_If only I could._ He nodded and strode back down to his space. He had been back at school a week and was already annoyed with everyone else on staff except Poppy, whom he had hardly seen. Between Filius’s welcome back cocktails, charmed to turn every hue of colour that did not occur in nature, and Rolanda’s ridiculous annual staff quidditch match, he was already longing for his quiet summer at home and abroad. He had spent most of July in Patagonia, and he was contemplating relocating there, at least for breaks and possibly for good.

And his friends were the best of this world. Headmistress Marigold McCollough and her hires were intolerable, and the faculty meetings were the worst part of every month.

He perched on a high stool beside his lab and brought the letter from his pocket. He recognized the handwriting as familiar but couldn’t quite place it. He broke the wax seal and saw immediately that it
was from Master Rycliffe.

Snape had gone to Rycliffe at his castle in Northern Ireland in the summer of 1982. Snape was already a Potion Master, but his education had been dominated by the dark arts. Dumbledore had offered him the Potions job, but he knew he must expand his knowledge considerably before he would be ready. The Headmaster did not consider Professor Slughorn to be a useful source of a well-rounded potions education.

Rycliffe had taken him in and treated him more kindly than anyone had in his life, save Madame Pomfrey, who was just doing her job, but had done it without the bias and manipulation that had characterized most of his previous associations at school. Rycliffe had been genuinely good to him, though, and so had his wife. Snape had spent time in Azkaban that year and had lost a stone. Madame Rycliffe had made it a project to fatten him up. While that hadn’t happened, he had eaten better than he had since his school days.

Rycliffe had also allowed him plenty of time to loaf in the library and whole weekends off to explore the Irish Isle, of which he took full advantage. He’d had his first genuine love affair that summer with a young woman in Dublin, who was just sowing wild oats before she settled down with her childhood sweetheart, but whose attention Snape had appreciated beyond measure.

The letter invited him to the castle that day to take some of the library collection. Snape was genuinely pleased at the prospect of seeing the old wizard again and also the chance to possess some of the rare titles, but irritated that he had to be back at school after lunch for the blasted meeting. He decided to take his chances and arrive early to make sure he had enough time.

Rycliffe’s elf met him at the door and reminded him the way to library, as if that was necessary. The old Potions Master was seated at the table in the library’s foyer, hunched over a book.

“Severus! I’m so glad you came. Would you like some tea before you begin?”

He didn’t, but he couldn’t refuse. He drank quickly and then retreated to the back annex that housed the Potions texts he remembered so well. He had pulled close to twenty when he heard voices: Rycliffe’s and a feminine one that was familiar but he couldn’t identify immediately until he heard the name Master Granger.

*Master Granger.* He physically shuddered. As if her rushed NEWTS and training were rigorous enough for anyone to claim mastery. She was what she always had been: an eager student who could memorize a book but had never had an original thought in her life. Master Cataloger, perhaps.

He ignored her and went back to studying the books in front of him, but she had hostilely invaded his mind and was making it impossible to concentrate on his task. What had been such a surprisingly pleasant day was now another irritating task to endure.

So smug she was, assuming she had saved his life. While there were days he was unconflicted about his existence—a stretch of a few of them had occurred recently in South America—most of the time he was ambivalent at best. She had done him no favour on the floor of that wretched place where he had finally been ready to be finished.

Then her display of misplaced outrage at the trial; he had never asked for any of it. He did not require a champion and now the sense that he was obligated to be grateful to the cloying, pitying, self-important chit, who dared to consider herself a colleague… There were days he found the humour in it, but mostly it irritated him to the point of bitter anger if he had to think about her, which he tried to avoid, preventing unnecessary consternation. There was enough of that in his everyday life.
Rycliffe had ushered her to the ostentatious jewels of the collection. That was fine with him. She was out of the way and had left him with the real quality material of which she would never understand the value. But the longer she was at those stacks, the more anxious he became. There were some treasures in that room, and she was preventing him from finding them. He bundled the pile of books he had already chosen and strode into the room with ladder to find her perched at the top, not going through the shelf but staring at one book.

It was so typical and so exasperating. He looked away so as not to be distracted by her tight fitting burgundy skirt that showed off her little rounded backside and ended a few inches below her knee to accentuate shapely calves that led to black high-heeled shoes. Her chestnut curls were under control for once with a decorative silver clasp, she had pinned back the top part from her face. He hadn’t seen her in person for years; the witch that lived in his mind sported a rats’ nest.

With a more careful examination, he realized she was not reading at all, but wool gathering and wasting his time—his meeting was in less than an hour.

“Miss Granger!” he called, louder than he had intended, but she ignored him. “Miss Granger!” He angrily ascended the steps and approached her. She was much smaller up close that she had appeared at the bottom and she smelled of a light, floral scented soap, violets he thought for half a second before continuing his mission. She still refused to acknowledge him, so he reached around her to take the book from her hands, and the world went black.

Hermione


“Yes,” she tried to say, but hardly any sound came out. She was so tired and couldn’t see anything.

“She’s waking. Hermione?”

“Yes?” Still a feint sound, but she could try to force her eyes open. There was light in the room. She opened her eyes for a moment, and then they fell again.

“Hermione, I am giving you a potion to drink that will help you wake. Drink it down. Don’t choke. The potion tasted like marinated cherries. It was a pepper-up variation, she could tell. It tasted too pleasant though to be bought in an apothecary. I must be in hospital, she thought before she was able to open her eyes and confirm that sure enough, she was tucked into a hospital bed.

There were three other people in the room, Master Rycliffe and two healers she didn’t recognize.

“What…” she said, stronger this time.

“You were cursed, Hermione. One of the books you looked at contained a curse.” Master Rycliffe was seated in a chair to her left.

“Am I okay?”

“You are not in immediate danger.”

That did not sound the same as okay.
“What is the curse?” She was trying to keep her emotions under control.

“May I bring in Severus? It would be easier to talk about this together.”

“Professor Snape? He’s here? I remember he was in the library…”

“He was cursed as well, but it didn’t hit him as hard; he was cursed after you. He has been awake since this morning.”

“How long was I out?”

“Twenty-six hours,” one of the healers said. “I am Healer Blalock, and this is Mr. Toombs from the Ministry.”

“You’re not a healer?” she asked the second man.

“No, I study ancient curses. They called me in last night to consult.”

“What is it?” she asked again.

“May I bring in Severus?” the old Master asked again.

“Yes, of course. Is he…okay?”

She realized it was a stupid question as soon as it was out of her mouth. He’s not in immediate danger, but some unknown horror awaited him, too. She sat up in bed, embarrassed for Professor Snape to see her so unkempt.

The healer brought her a cup of water while they waited, and she realized she was both parched and starving.

“Will I be able to leave today?”

“Yes.” He clearly wanted to reveal nothing. At least she would be able to have a meal soon.

Master Rycliffe returned followed by a furious Professor Snape. He looked weak and disheveled. He was dressed in his usual clothes, but the cravat was untied and his waistcoat was unbuttoned. “You utter bint!” he said to her through his teeth.

She ignored his declaration and looked to her mentor, who was trying to wrangle the scene.

“Severus, sit here. Would you like some water?”

“I would like to know what she unleashed!”

“Anyone could have picked up that book,” the Master said, his tone full of tension. She felt a stone at the pit of her belly.

“We are here because SHE picked it up,” Professor Snape thundered back. She was immediately transported in her mind to third year potions and the worst of the Neville days.

“What did I unleash?” She was trying to break down in tears from the stress and worry.

“It’s my fault for having it in the collection,” Rycliffe said, bringing his hand to his temple.

“There was a cursed page that someone had folded in the book Master Granger was holding.
Professor Snape, you were cursed because you were the first to touch Master Granger.”

“The last thing I remember was looking over a book—was a primer, school book, I think,” she said.

“Yes, that’s right. It appears a student put a cursed page in the book,” Rycliffe started to explain.

“That was an old book. Fifteenth century?” She was putting the pieces together of her last moments of consciousness.

“Indeed. And the curse appears to be that old as well.”

“A student from seven hundred years ago has cursed me,” Professor Snape said flatly, and Hermione had to practically clamp her mouth together to refrain from snorting. The tension abated a smidgen.

“Yes, and the student component, well, it was not a well-thought out curse,” Rycliffe said wearily.

“It’s more than losing consciousness?” Hermione had figured as much by the serious looks to faces.

“Brightest witch of her…” Snape started to sneer.

“Will someone PLEASE tell me what this curse did?” She interrupted her least favorite phrase.

“It’s a magic depleting curse, a strong one. I will work on it, but I don’t see a way to break it,” Toombs said.

“But there is a caveat,” Rycliffe added quickly as Hermione struggled to breathe. She was picturing her whole life vanishing. She looked at the Professor. He had sat in the offered chair and had closed his eyes. “This is the part that makes it fortunate that it was the two of you who found it.”

“Granger found it,” Snape said with quiet fury.

“Yes, and thank Merlin it was her and not me because we would be doomed, my boy.”

The curse breaker had turned crimson. Hermione looked at him carefully for the first time. He was short and thin, quite small, really with scant sandy hair and glasses that took over his face. “If the two of you can conceive a child…together within thirty-one days, the curse will be broken, and you will retain your magic.

“What?” she sputtered

“Bollocks,” Snape raged. “I want to see the work!” he was coming out of his chair at the poor curse breaker, who was backing up towards the door.

“Of course, of course, and if you come to a different conclusion…”

“Severus, sit down and listen. Mr. Toombs is correct. I spent all night researching the book and the parchment in it. If you had both been males or both females or if one of you were not capable of…well, then there would be no recourse. It was a badly thought-out student curse. Don’t tell me neither of you ever experimented with creative cursing as students.”

“Of course not!” Hermione said, quite affronted. Professor Snape was quiet.

“In any case, I apologize to both of you. I had no idea…”

“Oh, no, Master Rycliffe, not matter what happens, I would not blame you,” she assured him.
“I blame you. Why in Merlin’s name would you have that in your library? I came to you to get away from the Dark Arts, for Merlin’s sake!”

“I have all sorts of books. I am sorry.”

“That does me no good. In thirty-one days I will have no job or prospects for another.”

Hermione kept her mouth shut, but she had the same, painful thought.

“Not necessarily. You two should go home and recover and meet back in a few days to strategize…”

“STRATEGIZE? You cannot be serious, old man. Do you think I would consider trying to…With her?”

“Of course you should consider. You should try everything you can. You would be stupid not to, and neither of you are stupid. In fact, I would guess that between the two of you, you will find a solution. As for me, I will spend my days in research.”

“As will I,” Mr. Toombs sighed. “As absurd as the curse is, the fundamentals are sound.”

“LEAVE!” thundered Snape, and again Hermione found herself agreeing in sentiment. It was all she could handle. She brought her knees to her chest under the blanket, buried her face and began to sob.
Part One: Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Severus

The previous two days had been the worst he’d experienced since before the end of the war. In less than twenty-four hours, students would be invading the castle, and he had done nothing but wander the corridors since he returned from St. Mungo’s.

He had told no one about the curse. He had missed the faculty meeting but made up a story of collecting potions ingredients and losing track of time that he was certain Minerva and Filius did not believe, but they didn’t pry.

The Headmistress, a woman ten year his junior, a most ambitious Hufflepuff called Marigold McCullough was equal parts vexed by him and intimidated, too. She had received good marks in school except in Potions, where she had been below average. McCullough had spent the war working for the Education department in the Ministry and had been appointed headmistress despite never having taught a class. She remedied that by taking two History of Magic courses away from Professor Binns to teach herself and managing to be less inspiring than him.

McCullough had been part of the post-war reaction that Hogwarts had been too independent during the Dumbledore years, and that the Ministry needed to reign the school in. Of all conclusions that could be drawn at the end of the existential crisis, that was a creative one, Snape thought. The Old Guard, of which he was one, drew liberal vocal comparisons of the new administration to Umbridge, which deeply offended McCullough and caused a very special faculty meeting during which she treated the professors to her education philosophy and a lecture about how hurtful words could be.

“Forgive me Marigold---Headmistress,” Minerva had spoken up after an hour. “What do you want us to do?”

She wanted them to stop comparing her to a sadistic psychopath, but she could not bring herself to acknowledge that legendary Ministry failure. Therefore, the faculty continued to make subtle and not so subtle references to D. Umbridge every time the Headmistress put forward a program or policy that was clearly from the desk of a senior official at the Ministry.

Pomona had retired two years after the war. She had taken on Longbottom as an apprentice, and he had been hired to teach herbology after she left. Sinestra and Vector had left when McCollough was hired, and Ministry lackeys now taught Astronomy and Arithmancy. Trelawney had nowhere else to go. Snape, McGonagall, and Flitwick discussed moving on several times each year. They refused to say it aloud, but they lay closer to the Trelawney side. None of them felt ready for retirement; none of them wanted to start a new career.

Snape felt he had the least excuse of all of them being so much younger, but he had no other plans. He had thought about it over the years, but the risk it would take to start a business dissuaded him. So few aspects of his life had turned out at all well. He had a terrible reputation personally—neither side of the war wanted much to do with him socially. He would not work for the Ministry for all the galleons in Gringotts—not that they were offering. Moving to teach elsewhere, even university, was
a lateral move, as Hogwarts, for all its flaws, was prestigious. Anyway, Granger had beaten him to it.
He was not independently wealthy, nor did he have a patron to enable him to be an independent
Potions Master like Rycliffe.

His current situation made all those concerns pale, of course. What on earth would he do without
magic? He was qualified for exactly nothing. Manual labor, perhaps, but he feared he was too old in
the Muggle world to be hired, and if he was, he wasn’t sure if his body would be up for it.

Granger had sent him a note via owl to meet her at a neutral location, which had set off a day of
negotiations resulting in meeting at London’s central library in the reference room. He was not
supposed to leave the school without his start of term preparations completed, but he did it anyway,
dungeon still in a state of chaos and without a proper meal since before he had left for Northern
Ireland three mornings ago.

The chit was already at the table when he arrived. She had cast charms around it so no one would
see or hear them. She had a massive stack of parchment before her and looked as if she hadn’t slept
since he had seen her last, but he hadn’t either. Her hair was in a nest around her head. She gave him
an apprehensive look when she saw him.

“I’ve done some reading.”

“On curses?” he said with audible derision.

“On conceiving a child.”

He sat across from her. “I am aware of how that is accomplished,” he said and she laughed for a
moment before she straightened up her face again. He hadn’t meant it as a joke. Her reaction seemed
to be one of exhaustion rather than finding him genuinely amusing.

“Master Rycliffe told us we had a month, but that isn’t entirely true. We have one cycle.”

“If only it were February.”

She laughed again; nerves perhaps? “Yes, in most cases, but I’ve gone back through my journals for
the year, and discovered that I typically have thirty-day cycles, so September works out just as well.
Oh, and day one should be tomorrow.”

“Day one?”

“Yes, sorry, day one of the cycle is the beginning of menses.” She had one her professor voice, but it
was obviously an uncomfortable topic for her to be sharing with him. “My last one started on August
second, then July third, June third, etcetera.” She was flipping back through the pages.

“You don’t expect that we will…that we are going to…” He had dismissed the idea from the
beginning never thinking that she would even consider it. He was shocked at the direction the
meeting was heading.

“I have looked at every option. Muggle medicine has a procedure in which conception occurs out of
the body and the embryo is implanted, but it takes months of hormone therapy ahead of time and
retrieval. And success rate is low. Artificial insemination is an option, but the sample…” she
indicated him and then blushed. “Sorry. I know this is highly indelicate. The sample has to be fresh,
and I would require assistance to…insert it. We would have to meet several times a week anyway. I
have tried to think through every angle, and I can’t think of anything more effective or efficient that
the…standard.”
He put his hand to his nose and ducked his head. He’d had a headache since he had woken up from the curse, and he had exceeded the amount of headache potion to the point that he could not safely take any more until the next day.

“I am not allowed to leave school during the week,” he said, feeling defeated. It would be better worth his time to plan for what his life would inevitably be rather than to prepare for a job he would lose in thirty days. A thought had reoccurred three or four times a year resurfaced. “If you had just let me die, I wouldn’t have to worry about this!” he hissed mostly to himself.

“Well, Professor, I didn’t, and I do not relish trying to start over at age thirty…”

He snorted as loudly as he could at that.

“I realize this is worse for you. I am sorry, Professor Snape. I did not touch that book with any intention to harm you. I am sorry for all of it!” She looked as if she would cry again, which he did not want to see.

She breathed in and out and regained control. “I thought you would probably have to be at school. I can be there on the dates in question. I have one evening class I am teaching this term, but it finishes at eight. No one needs to know why I am at Hogwarts. Joint project, perhaps?”

“There is a schedule?” Never in his life had he contemplated what conceiving a child might entail aside from the obvious.

“Most guides recommend every other day from day five through day twenty-one. There are indicators of fertility, body temperature and other things, but I have never recorded or noticed them.

It was Monday This had all started Friday morning. “So the fifth is Saturday?” he wasn’t really asking her, and she didn’t react as if he were. “I have nine-thirty patrol.”

“I could come at seven-thirty? Dinner would be finished. Unless you have plans.”

Yes, many, many Saturday night plans. That is exactly who I am. “What becomes of the child?”

“Pardon?”

“What becomes of this child, if we’re successful?”

A look of panic crossed her face. She hadn’t even considered the ramifications of conception.

“You cannot tell me that through all of THAT,” he indicated the stack of parchment in front of her, “You never even considered what would happen if…it happened?”

“No,” she put her head down, defeated. “I don’t want to be a parent right now. You?”

“No.”

“No, I wouldn’t think so. It doesn’t seem ethical to go through all of this effort to conceive a child and then…discard it.”

He didn’t say anything, but he didn’t disagree,

“I suppose I would have nine months to find a family who wanted a baby and couldn’t have one. Perhaps somewhere away from here so he or she could grow up and not have an inkling about the circumstances…”
“That would seem prudent.”

She nodded and then bowed her head, looking as if she were close to tears. “What on earth, Professor? How did we…of all people…how did this…”

“There is always a risk with old objects, Granger.” It was as gracious as he was capable of being, but she looked grateful of the effort.

He had been berating himself for not spending time over the years studying fertility. Such potions were not on the Hogwarts curriculum, and he hadn’t worked with them since his apprenticeship with Rycliffe. He had thought very little about reproduction beyond brewing cauldrons full of contraceptive potions for the school stores. That thought triggered a realization. “The effects of magical contraceptives can linger in the body for months. We don’t advertise that because we want people to be responsible, but…” It dawned on him that as a Potions Master she was well-aware of this, and he stopped mid-sentence waiting for her to answer back haughtily. She didn’t though. She remained slumped in her seat.

“I haven’t taken the potion in years,” she said.

He mulled over this declaration and concluded it meant she was likely neither a virgin nor in a committed relationship. He wasn’t sure why he cared that much about the latter, except that it would make the whole sordid business less complicated.

“Have you worked at all on matters of fertility?” he asked.

“Never. I am kicking myself for this over site.”

He declined to commiserate. There was a silence that stretched into uncomfortable minutes until she broke it, speaking more softly than before and with an air of defeat.

“What a mess,” She indicated the parchment in front of her and then her disheveled state, but he understood she meant all of it. “So…seven-thirty Saturday? Apperation will cause less attention than using the floo?”

He nodded slightly. The closest floo to him was in the Slytherin common room. “Yes. There is an entrance in the east wing, near the stairs to the dungeon. Do you know it?”

“Yes,” it was barely a whisper. He threw up a wall of indifference. He had enough misery himself.

“I will send you instructions for the wards. Meet me at the Potions classroom.”

Her eyes widened.

“We won’t stay there.” You imbecile.

She shook her head in self-reprimand and began rifling through her parchments. He took the opportunity to exit quickly.

Hermione

As awful as the meeting had been, it had gone better than she anticipated. He had maintained a silent fury, but he hadn’t berated her or ridiculed her. She had expected him to refuse the whole business
and to express disgust at the mere thought of it.

Perhaps he was afraid she felt that way. While she wasn’t looking forward to it, she didn’t find him so repulsive that she would refuse to consider this. She was not attracted to him, really, but she wasn’t utterly repelled either.

She had not been one of the girls who had Snape fantasies. She had listened to a few in wizarding pubs over the years, and while she hadn’t been shocked to hear them, she had never considered him in that way.

She had to chuckle at his sweeping departure: *I Am More Dramatic than You!* He had made her laugh in her head several times. He was dry as Tunisia but rather witty. She had never noticed that. She suspected it had flown over her head as a student.

She placed her work in her bag and walked through the library to exit. It had been one of her favorite places in childhood, and she had suggested it because she knew she would find it comforting. Instead, it just reminded her how foreign her life was from the one she had as a girl.

She walked down the steps and quickened her pace to arrive at the wizarding streets and a place to discretely apparate. She lived in her childhood home in the suburbs, and her father had built a little garden shed that, while not perfect, was the best option for arrivals. The neighbors were not particularly nosy, but she had received the odd confused look in the summer when she exited the shed in her work clothes.

There was no one outside that evening, though. She entered her home through the kitchen door and was met by Crookshanks. She tended to him in a friendly way; she had not confided her current disaster; she really had no desire to discuss it at all. She was glad that the whole business would take place at Hogwarts so that she would not have to explain visits from Professor Snape to the creature.

*You have finally gone completely mental.*

She had been cataloging her finances the night before, and the accordion folder was still on the kitchen table with its contents spread out. She had calculated that she could start over, even if it took ten years. If she sold the house and lived very frugally, she could go to Muggle university and be ready to start a new life before the age of forty. It was both terrifying and stimulating.

She had not found her inspiration yet at work. She had not enjoyed teaching as much as she had hoped, and the potions research part of the position, which was supposed to be the cornerstone, had not played out the way she imagined it as an apprentice. She had yet to find something that grabbed her and motivated her to pour hours into it, forgetting to eat and abandoning everything else. That was what she had dreamed of. Instead, she had taken on almost ten years of varied subjects and not found any of them that moved her. She felt like a disappointing fraud.

And her social life was not any better. She had her small group of friends whom she loved, but she found herself less able to relate to them as the years went on. Despite almost twenty years of effort, she could not muster interest in quidditch when her friends were not playing. (And even then, now that the stakes were not tied into a struggle between good and evil, it was hard to pretend she cared if Ginny grabbed the snitch before Harry.)

They had all intermarried and had moved into the *settle down and start a family* era of their lives. She could not be less interested in this. She had never dated any of them aside from Ron, and that had only lasted a few months after the war when they had imploded, tearfully and furiously over the undeniable truth that they were not right for each other.
She had been set up repeatedly over the years, and no one had interested her beyond one or two dates. Occasionally, she thought she had met someone whom she could connect with, but for one reason or another, it never worked out that way.

Her longest relationship had been during her first year as a professor. She had dated a wizard in the Charms department. He was older and seemed to be a confirmed bachelor, which she thought she could work with, but it turned out he wanted to get married and have children before he turned fifty.

She’d had surprisingly hot long weekend with Viktor Krum during a Potions conference in Bulgaria. He’d been there as local celebrity to dazzle the visiting professors. They had flirted the first two nights and then almost rutted in the cloak room before he apparated them away to his flat where they spent the next two and a half days in his bed and in the shower and on the floor. She had never been more sexually satisfied or intellectually unstimulated by an encounter in her life. He seemed to think of it as just a fun weekend, too, and they both parted happy.

There had been other potions conference one night stands the most recent one about eighteen months ago. None of them had been worth the trouble in the end and it had put her off the practice.

And now…she had no idea what to expect except her period, which made her achy and weepy on her best days was here with a vengeance. She swallowed a pain potion with a mild sedative and tried to clear her head to sleep.
The first week of school was always exhausting and fraught, and this year was exponentially worse. He had finally faced reality at ten in the morning on the thirty-first that no matter what personal crisis was raging, the dungeon would be full of students the next day and his classroom looked exactly as it had the day he put it up in early July.

Fifteen hours of work had been sufficient. He had dragged himself through the festivities of September first, his twenty-seventh as a faculty member. Slytherin was on a small upswing since the bad post-war years when only three or four students were sorted into his house during the ceremony at the Great Hall. They had stabilized, and while it was still the smallest in the school, there had been twenty first years sorted to the Dungeon that night. He had gone through the orientation, conscious that it might be his last. It caused him to feel more maudlin than was at all appropriate. That feeling had not held over for the first day of classes and was replaced by a more familiar friend: intense annoyance.

Were the first years always this hopeless? He suspected so, but it was always a shock when those walking infants tiptoed into the dungeon and looked at the open flames. This cannot end well. The second years were so cocksure, trying to convince themselves and everyone around them that they had never been that pathetic. His first goal in the second years’ lessons was to knock them right back down. He almost enjoyed the older students at the end of the day. They gave him a wide-berth and knew what to expect. This profession had chosen him, and he never felt any joy connected with it, but his time with the sixth and seventh years was not loathsome daily.

He was biding his time until September fifth, and in a larger sense the end of the month. When Saturday arrived, he tried not to vary his habits. He walked through the grounds and into the forest to collect items for the stores. He spent as much time as he could, fearing he would be too anxious in his quarters with nothing to do. He returned in the late afternoon and bathed more thoroughly than he would on a typical Saturday night before dinner at six in the Great Hall. He was too unsettled to eat much and apprehensive about drinking too much.

He had been with a woman earlier in the summer while on holiday. He’d met a lovely witch who spoke almost no English, and with his awful Spanish, it had been an ideally quiet week. They had parted on friendly terms with no plans for a reunion. This was his ideal relationship, and the horror show in his immediate future was about as far from it as possible.

He left the Great Hall as soon as it was possible to excuse himself. He had neglected to inform anyone that he would be indisposed for a while, which left to chance that he would have some Slytherin emergency knocking on his office door. He had an alert in his quarters if that happened, and he would have to attend to it. He hoped his luck would hold and he could take care of this thing.
without anyone noticing a change in his habits.

He made it back to the classroom at six forty-five. He sat at the desk in front and tried to mark some essays the fourth years had written, but he was unable to concentrate sufficiently. At exactly seven o’clock, there was a knock at the door. He rose and strode over, opening it. She was there in a travel cloak. He looked right and left before ushering her in.

“Hello,” she said. He stayed quiet.

Assuming she would follow, he walked back through the classroom and then stores and to his office where there was a passage to his private quarters. He could hear her footsteps. He unwarded the entrance and led her in. He had a small sitting room that was attached to the larger library. It was there he had charmed a table to be high enough and had cushioned it, so she would not have to lie on the hard wood with treacherous corners. He put his hand out to indicate that was where she was to be.

She was distracted by his floor to ceiling bookshelves, and he had a momentary flush of pride before he redirected his attention. “I have brewed something for each of us,” he indicated four phials on a little side table.”

“Lubrication and a fertility boost? I have my own, thank you. Where should I hang my…”

He felt stupid that he hadn’t taken her cloak already and irritated at her chirpiness. With a flick of his wand, he sent it to the wooden stand in the corner.

“May I use your lav before…”

He nodded and showed her to the door of the small bath at the back of the room. While she was gone, he downed his potions and unbuttoned the bottom of his waistcoat. He planned to undress as little as possible but wasn’t sure what she had in mind. Moments later, she returned and hopped up on the table. She had removed her shoes and he couldn’t remember if she had been wearing tights. He could see her bare legs under her skirt.

“I’m ready when you are. No rush,” she added quickly.

He closed his eyes and felt a flood of arousal in his groin. He wasn’t sure how much was potion-induced and how much was the bare-legged witch on his table, but the level of annoyance settling in behind his temple indicated it was more the former. He made a move to unbutton his placket, and she responded by lifting her skirt so it gathered at her hips and exposed her naked lower half. He looked away, but not before he saw neatly groomed sparse brown pubic hair at the apex of her thighs.

He braced himself with his hand on the back of a chair, closed his eyes, and breathed in deeply to steady himself. He continued to free his cock, fully hard now and staining against the cotton and wool. Her presence did not alleviate the indignity of it all. He felt an overwhelming urge to seize control of the situation but was lost as of how to do it.

She was observing him closely, he realized with mortification, and as he turned back to her, she scooted her bottom as close to the edge of the table as possible and opened her legs. He took his member in hand and stepped forward so he was between her legs. The height of the table was not quite right; he had forgotten to account for the presence of her body when he had measured earlier, and he wandlessly adjusted it slightly higher with a muttered incantation. Being careful not to touch her, he leaned over her, steadying himself with one arm. She had coated herself with a shiny, filmy substance and he could see the entrance to her vagina clearly. He felt another wave of irritation that she had not taken an arousal potion, but had just lubricated herself to a degree that he was
momentarily apprehensive that he might just slip out. The annoyance left quickly. There was no reason for her to be aroused, and she surely just wanted him to proceed. He thrust in with one motion, and the hand that had been holding his cock came down at his side.

She took in a sharp breath as he entered her, and he looked up. She seemed to be trying to reassure him.

“I’m fine. You can… It’s okay,” she said.

He looked away. She felt tight and hot, and although he didn’t like the viscous substance coating her, he knew this could easily be a very short act. It had been weeks since he had been in bed with Esperanza, and he hadn’t felt the urge to wank since before this calamity had befallen him. He wasn’t sure if he should try to finish very quickly as it might give the impression that he was enjoying this madness or try to last and prolong the humiliation. He decided to risk the former. He pushed in hard one, two, three, four, five times and came, squeezing his eyes tight and trying to block out the world. It was perhaps not his least satisfying orgasm of his life, years under the thumb of the sadistic dark lord had provided worse sexual experiences than this, but it was not pleasurable in any real way.

He pulled out and turned around to refasten himself. He heard her move behind him, and by the time he was back in order, she was already striding toward the cloak tree.

“Monday evening?” she said quietly as she swung the garment around her shoulders. He couldn’t read her thoughts at all; she looked and sounded as if she were planning a potions consultation. He nodded in response and tried to stand as straight as possible.

“I can see myself out,” she said.

“No. The wards.” He followed her and silently allowed her to pass through the outside of his quarters to his office to the corridor that led to the east entrance. She didn’t look at him again. As soon as she had disappeared out the door, he retreated into his home and straight into his shower.

Hermione

She had prepared for the school year the same way she had the eight previous years of her career. She had studied last year’s curriculum for all the courses she taught. She evaluated each unit to determine what needed to be augmented, what needed adjustment, and what needed to be chucked. Her overall dissatisfaction with the previous year—no doubt in part a manifestation of her disappointment in her lack of professional inspiration—led her to discard most of her lessons. She started fresh, spending sixteen-hour days on new lesson plans. She wasn’t truly inspired, but she at least exhausted herself enough for good sleep.

The first week of classes played out the way they usually did. She left nothing to chance, writing out every comment and instruction. The students listened respectfully, asked few questions and demonstrated no deep understanding when it was time for the lab work.

On Saturday morning, she brewed a lubricant potion with properties that would not work against traveling semen. She had researched this for the last few days both in potions journals and also Muggle reproductive theory and practice, of which there were more articles than she would have ever imagined. She bottled the lubricant—enough for the whole month—in individual phials. They
consistency was thicker than she had pictured in her head as she was developing the procedure.

She brewed a fertility potion, designed to perfect the conditions for fertilization, the science of which seemed dubious, but it didn’t seem as if it could hurt. She took it the morning of the fifth; it would remain effective for the month.

She showered and put on a new bra and knickers set. It was not deliberately sexy, more utilitarian, really, and somewhat less personal than her old stand-bys. She had tried to prepare for every scenario from being swept off her feet and into his bed chambers to being met at the door with a phial of his sperm and no further assistance, and every possibility in between. She decided to let him take the lead at least for the first time since she would be in his space, but she also was prepared to stand up and refuse anything that made her more uncomfortable than the basic unpleasantness this was bound to be.

She had no appetite for meals and didn’t force it. She was not in danger of withering away any time soon and could stand to lose half a stone or so. She worked at her home lab that she had converted from the laundry space until it was time to apparate to Hogwarts. She stepped into the gardening shed and through the apparition point to the front gate. From her student days, she knew how to approach the castle without drawing attention to herself, and using the east-side entrance near the dungeons, established her path just outside the boundary of the Forbidden Forest. The weather was still warm, and she wore a light traveling cloak over her blouse and skirt, chosen because it wasn’t so tight that it would limit her ability to fold it around her waist if she did not undress. Her legs were bare, and she wore light canvas slip-ons she could walk in.

The door was just where he said it would be, and once inside, she recognized the corridor as the one to the Potions classroom. The corridor was deserted, which was a relief. She had her cover story ready to go, but she was nervous enough for this first time that she was happy to knock unobserved. He answered in less than a minute and led her silently through the classroom and stores—so many memories rushed at her that it made her slightly less nervous. He continued into his office. She had been there a handful of times, the last one when he had confunded Luna and her the night Dumbledore died. It had not changed since then. His prodigious desk took up most of the space, and the walls were lined with full bookshelves. There was a worn looking couch in the corner. A soft looking cotton blanket was folded on the back of it, and it was large enough for naps. She tried to picture him reclined on it, wearing his teaching robes. He led her to a door in the back that she had never seen before and realized it had been hidden to her. There was a short corridor behind it and another door, which was ajar.

He walked through and opened it wider for her to enter. There was a formal sitting room, which looked immaculately clean and unused. There was a high quality set of furniture: and old fashioned settee and three arm chairs with small tables between and a tea service. There was an ancient looking mantle and fire place. He didn’t tarry, though, leading her through another door and into the library, which was the opposite in style to the sitting room. This reminded her of the Gryffindor common room though she imagined he would be horrified by the comparison. It was large with fireplaces at two of the walls. There were bookshelves everywhere both built in and stand alone. She could sense that there were hidden objects and swaths of walls with hidden paintings. She assumed he had not wanted to reveal much of himself to her, but he had. There were several large work tables, tidy but clearly set aside for specific projects. She loved the space immediately and began to mentally transform the sitting room in her parents’ house similarly.

One table had been raised to be higher than the other and was covered with tawny coloured cushion. This was apparently going to be the place for their coupling. There was a little table with four phials beside it.
“Where should I hang my cloak?” she removed it as she was speaking. He took it and hung it in the corner.

“I brewed something for you…” he said very low and quiet.

“I brewed my own but thank you. May I use your lav?” she said, wanting to move the purpose along before she became lost in his library.

He showed her the way; the door had been hidden. It was either not his primary bath or he had altered it to have no personal touches. She felt for a hidden potion cupboard above the sink; there was none. There was nothing around the small, footed tub. There was one unused bar of soap at the sink and one hand towel hanging from a bar at the wall, both white. There was a toilet in the corner. She used it, just to be safe and then stepped out of her knickers and secured them in her bag. She withdrew the phial and applied the lubricant to her inner labia and generously around the entrance to her vagina. It felt squishy and not terribly comfortable, but she tried to ignore this as she washed her hands thoroughly and then reemerged into the library, mortified that he would hear the presence of the lubricant as she walked although that was thankfully unfounded.

He had removed his robe and frockcoat and was there in his trousers, shirt and waistcoat. She walked directly to the table, removed her shoes and kicked them just under the edge of the table, and suspended herself over it as she hitched up her skirt. He turned away, which gave her a moment to adjust herself on the table. She was afraid the lubricant was going to leave a stain on the cushion, and she tried to keep the critical bits from touching it.

“I’m ready when you are. There’s no rush,” she said.

He turned back to her, and she was aware of male genitalia, but she turned her head discretely. He approached, looking away from her and adjusted the table higher just a bit. She opened her knees wider and he paused…disgust? She heard him take a breath and then guided his penis inside her with his hand. She took in a breath. He was larger than she had anticipated, and while it did not hurt, she felt very full. The thick lubricant was more uncomfortable and made a noise as he began to move back and forth in her. She thought sure he would pause to offer a critique at her obviously awful brewing skills, but he closed his eyes and looked miserable.

He had the more difficult task here, having to perform under obvious duress, and she felt a small wave of compassion for him as he tried to finish. After about two minutes of movement that became somewhat erratic towards the end, he pushed in farther than he had before and sighed, almost inaudibly. She couldn’t feel him come through the lubricant, but he clearly had. He withdrew immediately and began to button himself up, and she was again rueful that she had subjected him to that mess.

She hopped off the table and retrieved her knickers from her bag, shoving them up as she slipped her shoes back on.

“I’ll grab my cloak and see myself out,”

“The wards,” he said quietly and followed her.

“I’ll see you Monday,” she said and scurried out his office to the exit not expecting him to answer. She walked briskly toward the apparition point. It was dark now, and she was slightly on edge, she realized, more likely due to her past encounters here than from any present danger.

She felt emotionally numb and physically uncomfortable with the current swampy state of her knickers. Not just the lubricant now but also his issue. She wanted to wallow for the rest of the
evening in a warm bath, but she knew she shouldn’t.

She didn’t feel violated; she had never had a sexual encounter against her will although she knew she had been moments away from it at Malfoy Manor that night. This had been consensual. She had not felt aroused at all, but it had only been mildly uncomfortable; it was more so now. She reached the point and apparated quickly home to the shed. She was hungry finally and decided to eat and work for the next hour and then go to bed with her book. Crooks met her at the door and the crinkled his little nose in disgust, presumably at the smell of her.

“Oh, Boy, you have no idea,” she said as she prepared his dinner and then then heated up some leftovers for herself. She cooked two or three times a week and ate off those meals the other days. This was the last night for some chicken pie that was dry and not terribly appetizing. She discarded the whole thing and made some eggs and chips instead, as she decided she was worth a better dinner.

After she had eaten and washed up, she retreated to the lab and emptied the phials of lubricant into a small cauldron and added heat. She worked on thinning it out while trying to retain its sticking qualities. She worked for about half an hour before she bottled the substance back up.

She took a hot shower, resisting the urge to scrub herself thoroughly. It would probably be fine; it was early in the cycle anyway, but she didn’t want to give away even the slightest chance. She settled in with her book, but her thoughts were too scattered. She took a sleeping potion that she usually reserved for the worst dreams and slept in Sunday morning. She awoke to a brighter outlook of hiding in hours of work to prepare for the coming week.
Chapter Two

Hermione

She woke early Monday and prepared carefully for the day. She would have to leave from her lab at university to Hogwarts this evening. She only taught one class on Monday, so she tried to work diligently on her own project throughout the day and mostly succeeded. She taught straight from her volume of parchment she had completed on Sunday. The students took notes and asked few questions, and she could not muster any feeling about that.

At six-fifty she checked her bag for her phial, put on her travelling cloak, and apparated once again. She was wearing the same skirt as she had Saturday because it was the only one that was cut the right way to be comfortable pulled up and bunched around her waist. The scene repeated itself from Saturday; he let her in without a word, she followed him back, she hung up her own cloak this time and excused herself to his little bathroom. She cast a cleansing charm since she had been at work all day and then applied the lubricant that was thinner and she hoped less obtrusive.

He was leaning against another table with his back to her, allowing her to arrange herself on the table and pull up her skirt before he turned around. He had clearly taken the potion already and entered her again in one motion. She sucked in breath hard at the impact. It wasn’t painful, but she needed time to adjust.

“It’s okay,” she whispered, and he began to move. It followed the same pattern and she recognized the signals that he was close to completion when sounds enveloped the room: loud knocking.

“Merlin’s white fucking beard,” he said through his teeth and became very still. The knocking persisted. “I must go; I’ll be back.”

He pulled out and refastened his placket. His frock coat and robe were hanging on the tree next to her cloak, and he swept them on and strode quickly out of the room. Hermione covered herself with her skirt but remained reclined on the table. It had been a long day; she was tired, and the cushion felt nice.

Beside her head was a bookcase that she thought had been hidden on Saturday as she had no memory of it, but perhaps she had just been preoccupied. It was fully visible now, though, and filled with travel books from throughout the world and small shells, stones, birds’ nests, and other finds in the front of the books.

There were many volumes of Oceania, North and South America, Africa, and all parts of Asia. She wondered if there was a collection of Europe somewhere. Had he been to all these places? She had not traveled for pleasure since before she had lost her parents. She had only been out of the UK on potions conferences.

There were no framed photographs of him in the rain forest, at the shore, in the mountains, so she supplied her own. Professor Snape in his full black regalia with a white nose on the beach. She giggled and tried to imagine him in more appropriate clothing. Had he ever worn shorts in his life?
Jeans? As casual pull-over or a straw hat? It seemed preposterous, but those books and objects had to represent some aspect of him.

She was lost in her thoughts when he swept back in. He went straight to the loo and slammed the door behind him without a word. He was in there for several minutes before he strode out quickly with a look of desperate urgency on his face. She brushed her skirt up just in time for him to enter her and then he stalled.

“Merlin’s damn fucking shite bollocks,” he muttered. He breathed in and closed his eyes, looking as if he were summoning his thoughts. He started thrusting into her, harder than he had before. She turned her face away toward the bookcase and counted the volumes in time with his movement. When she had reached the bottom shelf, he came with a relieved sigh and once again pulled out in the next motion.

She sat up and retrieved her knickers from her bag, and pulled them up. “Wednesday, then?” she said into the room as she walked over for her cloak. She could hear him behind her through the rooms and corridor and office. She left without a word into the bathroom; she suspected he had been wanking and then got too close to the edge and then rushed in and lost the feeling once he was inside her again. He had the more difficult road here, at least until they were successful and she had to carry the baby for nine months. Then she would have her trial.

The next three sessions were uneventful. They were not interrupted, and he was able to finish without so much effort. He spoke to her, finally, as she was leaving on the thirteenth.

“I won’t be available until nine Tuesday.”

“That’s fine.” It was better even. She had a class that lasted until seven; she wouldn’t have to rush.

**Severus**

Tuesday the fifteenth, the long-awaited faculty meeting was finally set. They had rescheduled instead of proceeding ahead without him when he was indisposed in August. He suspected this was not good news for him.

They met in the Muggle Studies classroom. It was large and airy and the most like an office building. During the Dumbledore era, meetings of the full-faculty were highly infrequent. He tended to meet with small groups in his office and provided copious refreshments. In the McCollough era, though, the staff had to meet once a month. There was tea and birthday cake for the celebrants of that month. Severus abstained on principle as he usually did with Dumbledore as well. You can require my attendance, but you can’t make me enjoy it.

He arrived in the middle of the pack and sought out a place by himself. Minerva was behind him, though, and sat next to him, and then Filius was beside her. Longbottom arrived and choose a seat near the old guard. Despite his disdain for his young colleague, Severus couldn’t question his taste level.

There was a good deal of indignity having to sit in student desks, as he was confident the Headmistress realized. He and Minerva had both brought a stack of parchment to mark during the proceedings, Filius would attempt to catch a few winks, but Snape noticed that Longbottom had brought with him a journal with which to take notes. He caught Minerva’s eye and directed her
towards it, and she nodded in agreement. It would be more agreeable to consult Longbottom’s notes if they missed some vital detail than having to go to the Headmistress.

“Are we all here?” she called out from the teacher’s desk in the front. “Do I see Rolanda?”

“Present,” called Hooch, scooting in from the door. The Headmistress checked her wand for the time. Subtle. Snape heard Minerva sigh derisively.

“Alright then. Let’s begin with the procedure of exiting after meals?”

Sigh. Groan. The never-ending quest to control the uncontrollable. Somehow, they had all managed to exit the Great Hall before her reign without losing a single student, but now there had to be an elaborate, rotating schedule by year. Snape had ordered his prefects to memorize it and never involve him in any of it.

“Second years exit first on TUESDAYS except the third one of the month when it’s third years. Yet, I watched closely tonight, and half of fourth year had exited before the last second year had left. What is the problem?”

The problem is no one gives a fat, wet toss, you insufferable bint.

“What can we do to ensure the proper procedure?” she reiterated.

“Ravenclaws exit first; they’re closest to the door. I will remind them to stand at six forty-five and signal to the Slytherins.” Filius fell on his sword as usual.

“And Professor Snape, will you ensure your last Slytherin, signals the Hufflepuffs?”

He snorted quietly in reply.

“Yes, and then we will follow,” Minerva said with all the ire he felt.

“Thank you. If everyone does his or her part, we will have a smooth transition.”

“Glory bleedin’ days,” Minerva said under her breath.

“Our next item is house points,” McCollough ventured on, trying to fake bravado; failing. Severus realized immediately why this meeting had been put off when he hadn’t been able to attend last time.

“Because when you look at the data? It becomes clear that not all professors are using the same protocol?”

Snape breathed out a primordial sigh from the depths of his being. He checked his wand. Granger would be arriving in just over an hour. His cock twitched involuntarily. Stop that. Still the thought that he would actually be having some that night unlike...he scanned the room...almost anyone else in here, gave him a sustaining air.

“For example, I would hold Professor Harwell as a model of a teacher who understands balance?”

“Of course you would,” Minerva muttered. Amelia Harwell was a McCollough hire and contemporary.

McCollough flicked her wand and revealed a virtual chart that showed how the Muggle Studies professor had awarded close to the same number of points that she detracted, and that there was
hardly a difference between the houses, although Snape saw immediately that Slytherin was on the bottom even here, and Hufflepuff was on the top.

“I don’t want to single any one out for individual criticism...in front of the group?” McCollough flicked her wand again and another chart appeared. “But this professor clearly favored Gryffindor when awarding points?” She drew her wand down the column, “And this professor is quite unbalanced here as well?” She pointed to the points taken column. “See how the points taken are almost twice what were awarded?”

Minerva was seething beside him, and he concluded they were looking at her data.

“Well done,” he muttered out of the side of his mouth.

“Of all the ridiculous wastes of time...”

The Rs were rolling up and down the hills; a sure sign Minerva was about to blow.

“Then we have this side-by-side comparison,” McCollough flicked again, and two charts appeared. “As you see Professor A granted 1460 points, that was the most of any faculty member—and I will commend this professor for fairly distributing them among all four houses—while taking zero points, and Professor B,” she used her wand as a pointer, “Deducted 1390, and awarded, well, five points here to Ravenclaw.”

“Oh, good on you, Severus!” Filius said with delight.

“There are no names mentioned here?” the Headmistress sputtered.

“Sorry, dear,” Filius said to his technical superior, still chuckling in Snape’s direction. “How did my student achieve such an honour?”

“I have no idea.” It had to have been at a Gryffindor’s expense, but he couldn’t remember the specific incident.

“Neville, you have to toughen up, boy, and start demanding more. They will respect you for it!” Minerva called out to Longbottom, whose ears went scarlet.

“I know. It’s just...even the ones that struggle are trying so hard...”

Severus, Minerva, and Filius snorted in unison.

“If I could direct your attention up here?” McCollough raised her voice another octave, a seriously impressive feat. “The point of this was not to call attention to individual...”

“Perhaps if you told us the point, Marigold,” Minerva said with more venom than Snape had heard in her voice since the bad years.

“The point is that we all? Should aim for a balanced approach?”

“We shall endeavor to try. Is there anything else?” Minerva boomed beside him.

A clearly flustered McCollough flipped through her notes. “Well? I think there was...”

The blood in the water was palpable. “Patrol begins in five minutes,” Snape said. It wasn’t even his night.

“Well, I think we all have something to think about?”
Minerva and Severus started gathering up their parchment. Filius was too courteous to follow them but he was chuckling to himself, and Longbottom had turned around in his chair and was grinning at them.

“Minerva,” Snape said as he swept toward the door.

“Goodnight, Severus,” she replied just a few paces behind him.

“Yes, well that concludes the meeting?”

Snape continued his pace to the dungeon. He walked straight through his office to the library where he had several bottles of robust red wine he had brought back with him from Argentina. He uncorked a bottle and poured it into a carafe, and decided a hot shower would be the ideal way to wait on the wine to breathe and Miss Granger to arrive. Despite his admonishments to his rogue member, he was still aroused, certainly more than he had been during their previous encounters. He washed his whole body thoroughly, and his thoughts kept drifting to what it would be like to take her naked, for both of them to be naked.

During each previous encounter, she had worn blouses that buttoned up the front and ended in a high V-neck. He couldn’t see any cleavage, but her breasts bounced as he thrust in and out. He speculated what they looked like unclothed. They weren’t overly large; the perfect size, really, small apples he could grip in each hand…

He had a full hard-on now, and he willed it down before he rinsed off and wrapped a towel around his waist. He used his wand to dry his hair and put it back into a plait, his holiday routine, until he thought better of it, and returned it to its usual style on the sides of his face. He put on his work clothes, too, trousers, white button-down, waistcoat, and hung the frock and robe on the rack in case there was another disruption.

He had reminded the Slytherins with as much patience as he could summon to see the prefects first, and to only come to him in cases of dire emergencies, and that second year girls being mean to each other met no category of dire emergency.

He poured a glass of the Malbec, and drank three or four sips in one gulp. Heaven. He tipped the rest just as the knock sounded. He needed no potion tonight; anyway, he suspected the blasted stuff interfered with his performance. Still, he didn’t want her to realize he was flying unaided. He fetched a mild pain relief from a hidden panel near the door to the lav and set it on the little table before he swept through to let her in.

“Evening,” she said cordially. It was a chilly night, one of the first, and her cheeks were rosy. She smelled wonderful. It was certainly an effect of his heightened arousal, but a pleasant one. She hung her cloak and went straight to the lav with her bag. He downed the pain relief and pictured her in there removing her knickers and oiling herself up. She had worked on the formula from the first pasty abomination, but it still felt unnatural and not exactly right.

She was out in moments; this was clearly becoming rote although he didn’t feel like it that night. She hopped on to the table as he placed the empty phial on little table behind him. He was straining his trousers, and he wondered if she noticed. He turned to prepare himself and unbuttoned slowly to give the impression that the potion needed time to take effect. He breathed consciously, in and out, and then turned.

She was ready, her ubiquitous grey skirt folded at her hips, her legs spread, her neat little minge pointing down to that cunt. He would have to exert extreme control not to cry out as he entered her. His cock was aching, weeping for the contact. He settled in and allowed himself to feel every
sensation as he pushed in to the hilt. He always avoided eye-contact, but he could see her turn her face slightly to the side to study his bookcase he forgot to hide during their second encounter, so he figured it wasn’t worth the effort now.

She focused on the object in his quarters that displayed his life at its richest. He used magic when he traveled; he tended to stay in magical places and interact with fellow wizards and witches. If they were unsuccessful here, he had thought about perhaps living his life away. There were plenty of places to lose himself; he would adapt to the life outside magic. At the end of the school days, it was close to a welcome relief.

He had never touched her except for the critical contact. Tonight, he longed to grip her hips and pound himself in. He longed to palm her breasts; to move her hair aside and bury his face in her neck. He wanted to explore her body, to discover what would make her snap her head forward and look at him. He wanted to make her pant, moan, cry out. To come with him. These thoughts hurtled him through, and he came hard with a muffled cry.

He corrected himself quickly with a cough and withdrew, but it was impossible to miss the twinkle in her eye. Fine. He was the one doing all the work; he deserved a little gratification anyway.

She hopped down from the table and put her knickers on before he could turn away Without trying he was treated to a full view of her bottom, which was as lovely has he had imagined it to be.

“I am free Thursday at the same time, but Saturday is tricky,” she said.

“I am on duty all day Saturday until ten.” He spoke more words to her than he had in weeks.

“Yes. Thank you.” She sounded relieved. Did she think he would chastise her? Probably. “See you Thursday.”

He felt utterly insane as he resisted the urge to do…something. Kiss her or at least take her hand. She walked away without a second thought of him.
Chapter Three

Hermione

She couldn’t take the smile off her face. What brought that on? He had enjoyed himself; it was clear from the start. By the time he came with vocalization no less, she was starting to feel something. Not exactly arousal, but curiosity maybe. He had looked at her as if he were starving.

She was hoping perhaps he couldn’t accommodate her Saturday schedule, and she would have to cancel her plans, but no such luck. It would be delaying the inevitable anyway, she would be dragged to a pub eventually to acknowledge her birthday. Neville and Hannah were going to be there, and they hardly ever came to anything. Harry and Ginny, and Ron and Susan, too, she supposed, were depositing the children at the Burrow so they could throw down. She would pay anything to skip it.

She didn’t care about turning thirty, time marched on and all that, but she found it disconcerting how little she had in common with her friends of twenty years—her only true friends, really. She had some colleagues at work she was perfectly cordial with. She respected her mentors, but she had no one in her life she felt intimately comfortable enough with to share her current calamity. And as her life would change completely if she didn’t manage to conceive this month, and significantly even if she did, that was a problem. If she had to veer into a new existence, would any of them continue with her? If she had to explain that she was knocked up but placing the baby for adoption? Her bond with Harry and Ron was lifelong and unbreakable; she knew that they would be there if she every truly needed them, but would they be able to relate to her daily struggles as a Muggle?

She put it out of her head and hurried home. Wednesday and Thursday were her busy days at work, and she had no time or extra mental space for anything not related to her research and teaching. She was almost late for their Thursday session. She walked briskly down the hill. She was getting into the best shape she had been in since her student days with all the walking.

For the first time since she had been making her trek down the grounds, she encountered someone she knew. Neville was working late in the greenhouses across the expanse.

“Hermione?” He shouted at her.

“Hi, Neville! I am so late—I’ll talk to you Saturday?”

He had stalled in his tracks, but she waved and moved on, hoping he would get back to work and not pursue why she was there. Her cover story was ready to go, but she could only imagine what a Longbottom induced interruption would do to her partner.

She needn’t have worried. The session played out as they had: trip to the lav, lube up, fold skirt, release the kraken, plunge in. He seemed to be trying to go the opposite way from Tuesday by showing as little outwardly passion as possible, but she was beginning to pick up on small signs. His breath would start to hitch, his teeth would clench, his upper body pressed into hers, and of course his rate of thrusting told its own story. She had woken up slightly on Tuesday, and she was still awake, not aroused in a way that would cause her to lose control even slightly, but it was pleasant in a way the early encounters had not been. Her mind started to wander. What if he grabbed her arse
when he was about to come? She bit her bottom lip as he pushed in for the final act and shuddered against her chest.

“See you late Saturday?” she threw out as her parting words; his lack of response was acquiescence.

Friday was light on purpose. She had a lie-in on Saturday. She had reached the point in which her parents’ absence didn’t plague her daily, but her birthdays were tough. She traveled into town to buy a croissant and coffee at her favorite little patisserie, and then she browsed the shops, picking up a new outfit for the festivities: a body conscious black dress that came to her knees and high-heeled pumps that she would probably only wear once. She would only turn thirty once, too.

She returned home and bathed, mentally preparing herself for the evening. These are your best friends. It will be so much fun.

The party was in Hogsmeade to accommodate the Longbottoms, who had the smallest child, a six-month-old girl. They wanted to be close by in case they were needed back at Hogwarts. She flooed into the Three Broomsticks. She hadn’t been there since the annual Christmas gathering last year when they exchanged little gifts and flirted under the mistletoe. Harry had been quite drunk and their Christmas kiss had lingered about half a moment too long. She didn’t think anyone else had noticed, and it had been the same as always with Harry since, but a tiny button had been clicked inside her, and reuniting with the group had her slightly on edge.

She had straightened her hair and spent a bit more time of her face. The shoes had ankle straps, and open toes, and she carefully buckled them while being pleased at the results of her pedicure. She so rarely took time on her appearance that she had a small measure of pride as she stepped into the fireplace in the sitting room.

The crowd was already there; apparently her arrival time and theirs was not quite the same, and the effort made her feel lovely, as did the small gift table with her favorite sweets, two very nice bottles of wine, a lovely garnet necklace from Harry and Ginny, and a potted herb garden from Neville and Hannah. There were birthday kisses all-around and a bevy of old lady jokes, as well as a cocktail waiting for her.

They ordered their favorites and settled in with their drinks.

“Hermione, that was you I saw blazing down the grounds Thursday?” Neville asked from across the table.

“You at Hogwarts, ‘Mione?” Ron followed up before she could answer.

“Yes. I am in the middle of a project with Professor Snape, if you can believe it.” She had the story ready to go.

“Yeah?” Harry asked. “What are you working on?”

“Molecular acceleration and design, very boring. Turns out we share a mentor, who had us both his house late summer. It turned into this collaboration.”

“Really?” Ginny said. “I wouldn’t think the old bat would be willing to share his toys.”

“Ginny,” Harry lightly admonished her. Ginny rolled her eyes and turned to Ron’s wife Susan, seated to her to her right.

“Now that you mention it,” Neville continued from across the table, “Professor Snape has seemed slightly…different lately.”
“Really?” Hermione asked casually.

“Well, he…hmmmm, not laughed exactly, but chuckled perhaps.”

“He did not!” Hannah had popped her head to face her husband.

“He did. And he nodded to me at the faculty meeting.”

“Oy, Neville, that is some convincing evidence;” George seemed to be getting bored by the behavior analysis of their former professor, so Hermione did not press on, and the conversation drifted, as it always did, to babies, quidditch, and Ministry gossip. She moved to sit by Luna, who had come in special from South America to see her dad but also for this. Hermione adored her, but conversation was usually one-sided, and throughout Luna’s narrative, Hermione was never quite sure what was literal and what was allegorical. There were certainly some unique creatures in Brazil, that she could ascertain.

The food arrived and they all indulged. Hannah had arranged for a birthday cake to be delivered. It was black forest gateau, Hermione’s favorite and every bite delicious. There was a small dance floor transfigured for the occasion, and she danced with them all, Harry last as the music slowed down.

“If you want to take Ginny instead, I understand,” Hermione said quietly. But Ginny looked to be engrossed in conversation with Hannah and Susan, the other mums.

“Miss my dance with the birthday girl?” he said with such affection. “So Professor Snape? How is he?”

“The same. I do think there is quite a bit there, though.”

“Yeah?”

“Not that he would ever…he is very private…obviously.” She felt an odd pang of disloyalty even broaching the subject. “He is not terrible to work with.”

“That’s good. You alright? You and Crooks in that house?” Alone was the word he didn’t say.

“Of course, Harry. I have been meaning to have you over. You and Ginny and the kids, for dinner. The garden is nice for a tumble. Not too many decent weekends left.”

“We’d love that.”

It was probably idol talk, but she meant it then. The song ended and George brought out a bottle of champagne for one last toast and more rounds of how old is our Hermione? She rather loved it all and these folks, too. Lots of kisses as they gathered round the floo to depart. Harry had stayed close after the dance was finished and he took her hand and squeezed lightly before it was her turn to leave. Hannah and Susan had packaged all her gifts, and she used her wand so they fit nicely in her bag. She flooed home into the sitting room and dropped them off and then walked immediately to the garden shed.

She was afraid that Neville and Hannah might be taking a turn around the grounds, but they had seemed quite cozy at the end of the night, and she suspected they were already back in quarters and engaging in a way she would rather not picture.

She entered the castle cautiously, not sure if there were late night stragglers near the dungeons. Her own upper years at school had not provided much time or opportunity for Saturday night revelry, but it was different now. The halls were empty, though, and she entered the potions classroom and
straight to his office. He had adjusted the wards the week before so she could meet him there. She knocked on Snape’s office door.

He answered immediately; he had clearly been working at his desk. There was a collection of candles of all sizes, and the flat surface was filled with parchment. She had also marked student work on many a Saturday night, but she refrained from comment. He looked weary; his hooded eyes drooping more than they usually did.

“Sorry for the hour,” she said as he led her back silently.

She stopped off at the lav and used the loo, calculating the number of drinks she had imbibed over the course of the evening. It was not more than six and not less than four, she figured. She was not drunk, not even tipsy, but she did feel slightly lighter than usual. The skirt on this dress was dramatically tighter than then one she worn every time before, and it would not pool around her hips with a nod to modesty, but it’s wasn’t as if he hadn’t seen the goods before. She applied the lubrication and secured her knickers in her bag.

He was leaning against the table with an air of impatience when she emerged. He had a hand on his placket already, presumably not turning to unbutton this time. This left her in a predicament. She usually hopped onto the table and then arranged her skirt, but this dress would not allow for that.

“Erm…” she gave him a look in which she tried to convey acknowledgment of the awkwardness of this, and then she lifted her skirt above her waist where it stayed easily, and using her hands behind her for leverage, hopped up on the table with her bare bum on the cushion. He didn’t divert his eyes quickly enough, and judging from his expression, was treated to rather a show in the process. She lay back and felt her face redden, which was ridiculous, she chided herself. He must have taken his potion while she was in the lav because he was ready, and she spread her legs. He looked at her face and then away as he entered her.

It had never been painful. The first few times she had been oiled up enough it was hard to feel much of anything although he was rather gifted under all those layers, something she had never even speculated about before, but there it was. Then it had been neither unpleasant nor pleasurable. In her past sexual life, she had enjoyed all the other activities as much or more so than intercourse. She had very rarely had an orgasm during the actual fucking and only if she or her partner were making deliberate actions toward that end.

Perhaps it was the hour. Perhaps it was the drinks, or her bare bum with no skirt pooling around it, or the effect of seeing her friends coupled up, or the dance with Harry and their little elicit spark, or maybe it was the talk of Snape and having a secret. For these or perhaps other reasons, she found herself enjoying this more than she had in their previous sessions. She felt her natural arousal spread slowly through her lower half, and for the first time, she had the urge to touch herself.

She didn’t; it would probably horrify him, but she felt herself growing wetter as his thrusts grew more intense and the sounds reflected it. There was considerably more sloshing going on. Her body took over, and whether motivated to make that embarrassing noise stop or to participate more in the fucking, she quite involuntarily clamped down on his cock.

“Ahahahahahaaaaa!” he burst out close to her ear and then came. His vocalizations changed to a loud “Raaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
to put them back on in the tube dress. Her cloak was billowy, so no one would know. She practically sprinted for the cloak tree.

“Monday, then Wednesday is our last session,” she said as she swung it around her shoulders.

“Session?” It was the first word he had spoken since she arrived.

“Erm…yeah. What do you call these…meetings?”

“I don’t call them anything.”

“Great. Well, see you on Monday.” She had no idea why she was so embarrassed, but she wanted out of there immediately. She swept up the pitch-black grounds in transfigured shoes she could run in to the apparition site. Crooks was nowhere to be seen when she arrived home; he had a neighborhood patrol he conducted while she slept. She took a shower and readied for bed, burying herself in the bedclothes only to be unable to relax due to her persistent arousal. She sighed deeply and put her hand in her knickers. She could smell his issue, a smell she was becoming accustomed to. She hadn’t fancied a wank since before this all began, but she needed one now.

She started swirling her fingers around her clit, dipping them inside and then slowly dragging them out and back around. She was on the edge in moments. Her mind went to Harry’s body pressed against hers and Professor Snape’s generous cock thrusting in and out of her. She dipped in again, feeling around her walls, and clamped down on her fingers as she had on him. She slipped one finger out and swirled her clit with exactly the right amount of pressure, and that was all it took. She pitched her head back and came hard on her hand, seizing her fingers inside herself. She slipped one finger out and swirled her clit with exactly the right amount of pressure, and that was all it took. She pitched her head back and came hard on her hand, seizing her fingers inside herself. She cried out and heard Crooks run down the stairs. He must have been having a kip in her parents’ room. She put her other hand on her mouth and laughed against it. She cast a quick cleansing spell on her right hand and was asleep in moments.

Severus

He managed not to mortify himself during the last two sessions—he couldn’t un-label them now. It was a low bar, but one he passed. He no longer needed the potion, and on session days had to put up with his errant cock all day. He found himself needing a wank in the shower most mornings, too. Some fuse had been lit.

He doubted it had specifically to do with her, although it was her cunt that he felt as he stroked himself: four fingers on the underside, thumb on top, frequently swirling around the tip, and then stroking again, no grabbing or pulling, just increasingly intense stroking, the same way he had done it since he was thirteen. In the last few years, it had become rather infrequent during the school terms. He would have a pleasant dream occasionally and wake up with the urge, but there was little inspiring about his life. Summers were different, but when he had a witch in his bed, his need for extra alone time hadn’t manifested like this.

It had not been the awful predicament he had feared. It had, if fact, been a pleasant way to spend his last month as a wizard. He had written his resignation letter to the headmistress, who would probably never decipher that if she took the last letter of every sentence it spelled out “KINDLY FUCK OFF?” with a specially crafted question at the end as a tribute to her unendurably irritating up-talking.

During their last session when the old grey skirt was back and not the black dress of all fuckery, he had lasted a good five minutes, taking time to savour his temporary pleasure. She didn’t play along
this time, which was unfortunate, but it was delightful, nevertheless.

She had hopped down and put on her knickers—the night she left with them in her handbag would remain one of the highlights—and as she had done each time, cheerfully donned her cloak as if she had visited for tea. She shook out her curls so they lay on the wide black collar. “I thought I would come here to test. Seems more appropriate than sending an owl.”

He nodded.

“The thirtieth then? A week from tonight, same time okay?”

“Yes, Miss Granger…” It seemed an inappropriate moniker for the relationship, but he didn’t know what else to call her. Professor? Master? It would sound ridiculous coming from his mouth.

“Goodbye…Professor.” She seemed to be having a similar inner struggle, but she smiled pleasantly at him before she left. He turned his head but then turned back when she was leaving to watch her exit.

He spent the next week as if he were facing exams again. It was hard to eat and sleep. He was distracted in class; several times he caught students giving each other bewildered looks as he lost his place in the lesson. He had done this long enough to pick it up quickly.

Wednesday arrived and he couldn’t eat a bite. He sent a note to Minerva that he was under the weather and retiring early. He camped out at his office, waiting for her knock, which came promptly at seven-fifteen. He opened the door and knew immediately.

“You tested already?” he asked her. Her face was furrowed with stress and she looked a little as she did those last days of war.

She sighed and sank onto his little office sofa. “No. I’ve read enough to know what early pregnancy symptoms feel like, and I am well-aware of what the day before my period starts feels like.”

“Still,” he said quietly. He was leaning back against his desk across from her.

“Still,” she said and sat up straight. She drew her wand and whispered the incantation in front of her belly. He waited for a puff of white smoke, patronus like, that did not come.

That was that. The letter was signed and ready. He had read about flats available in Manchester, a good place to start to determine what his life would be. He made a move to walk around his desk to begin his preparations, when she reached into her bag and pulled out two small, brown phials of potion. They were labeled in handwriting that he immediately recognized as Master Rycliffe’s.
The Sorting Hat had outdone itself in awfulness this year. Having to endure this twice in just a few weeks was beyond his sensibilities. Rhyming orange with Blorenge was not only a stretch, it is a crime against language. He looked at the delighted faces around him and felt alone as always.

The sorting began, and he realized that once any mystery was taken out of the proceedings, it stretched on forever.

“Gryffindor,” he muttered as Margaret Newman was sorted. After a month of having the girl in his first year class, she was already a thorn in his side with her self confidence in contrast to any talent he could perceive in his brief association with her.

“Not bad, Severus,” Minerva replied from the side of her mouth when the hat made its pronouncement.

“Hufflepuff,” he replied as Alfred Nixon had his turn. This time Minerva turned to look at him.

“What?” he asked innocently.

“How are you doing that?”

“Gryffindor,” he said as Phineas Oppengard sat on the stool. “Look at his face. A round at the Broomsticks says I can guess nine out of ten.”

“I’d like to see it,” her brogue emerging with strength.

He continued, missing a few on purpose but keeping his percentage strong. By the time Nicholas Wurst was sorted into Ravenclaw, he was sitting at ninety-three percent.

“Well done! How about Saturday night for the Broomsticks?”

That was his first session with Granger this cycle. A pint or pints after sounded more than tempting.

“I don’t turn down free drinks. Eight?”

“Splendid. I’ll invite Filius and Rolanda. And poor Sybil.”

He rolled his eyes.

“I know, but what can we do? I’ll bring a shiny object to engross her.”

He nodded, trying to keep the smirk from showing. He was much better rested than the first time
through. He had arrived at eight o’clock this morning to a clean lab ready to go for the year. He had slept all day and planned to sleep another eight hours when this was finished. It was the first banquet he had attended since his school days that he hadn’t spent the last twenty-four hours furiously trying to prepare.

When she had pulled out the phials and showed him the spell that Rycliffe had found for them, Snape went through his usual reaction cycle: irritation, impatience, incredulity, rage, resignation. It was not as if the alternative was terribly appealing. The cold-water walk-up in Manchester would still be available in thirty more days. Through it all, she had sat on his sofa and let him rant without comment.

When he finally came around, he had suggested they go to straight to the fifth to eliminate extra days wasted, but she explained that her body thought it was October first and needed the five days to complete its process. He surprised himself by feeling a measure of sympathy for the woman.

The first week of class continued to be easy. No matter how long he had been teaching in the dungeon, there was always a certain degree of nerves to contend with at the start of term. That was gone for him, but still delightfully present in the students who would be as quiet as they would be the entire year. Plus he already had the number of every first year, so there was no getting away with nonsense.

He was more than ready for the fifth to arrive. Having been celibate for two weeks except for his individual attention, he anticipated her return to his library table. She surprised him with a new skirt, black this time, but serving the same purpose of modesty of its grey counterpart.

He slid in, trying to keep as neutral an expression as possible. After the first month’s experience, he was certain she wouldn’t judge him in any case, but it helped him to keep his composure as much as possible. It wasn’t like she was an active participant most of the time, and it made him feel uncomfortable to be the one deriving all the pleasure from the sessions. She had continued to work on her lubrication formula. It still felt unnatural, but she had improved it. He paused for a moment before he began moving.

Once he started in earnest, it went fast. He supposed that was ideal for her. He had the urge that night to slow down and draw it out, but again, it didn’t seem fair to her. He came within a couple of minutes and pulled out per his usual routine.

She covered herself with her skirt and started to rise and then stayed on the table leaning back on her elbows. “I should have said something earlier, but it slipped my mind. I read an article that cited the benefits of not moving much for fifteen minutes after. I brought a little cushion to put under myself and, you know, well, anyway, do you mind if I lie here for fifteen minutes? If you have plans, I can…”

“Fine.” He had plenty of time to meet his colleagues at the Broomsticks.

“Thank you. Would you hand me my bag?”

He scooped it up and gave it to her. She brought out a small cushion and started rifling through the contents.

“Oh for Merlin’s sake—I forgot my book.” She sighed deeply like that was the biggest inconvenience of her day, placed the cushion under her bum, and lay back with her arms folded across her chest. She was obviously aggravated.

He crossed to the shelf that had his collection of novels and grabbed a gothic wizarding tome that
had been his mother’s. He thought it would amuse her if nothing else. He lay it beside her and returned to his office to wait.

Hermione

She had spent the second half of September looking for a loophole. A time-turner wouldn’t work, even if there were any left. She was racing through old spell books in the library trying to find anything that would give them a second chance. Hope arrived via owl on September twenty-second.

Master Rycliffe had found a spell and corresponding potion that would allow the two of them to travel back and replace themselves in the previous month. There was no evidence that the spell had ever been used, but the Master pointed out there was nothing to prove it hadn’t. Perhaps magical folks had been having do-overs all around her. A quick inventory of her friends and their experiences pointed to no, but the idea consumed her for the next week.

She had brought out the phials and then the letters and papers, and he had been off on a rant involving every aspect of wizarding life from the Ministry to the elves in charge of laundry at Hogwarts. She sat quietly, absorbed in a liquor cart in the near corner of the room that held dozens of bottles, mostly of the Muggle variety, but some very good Ogden’s too. She had a tension headache heralding her impending period, and she fantasised momentarily of taking a generous shot of whiskey and then whacking him over the head with the bottle.

The wrath winded down and concluded with melancholy acquiescence. She only spoke up when he was clearly finished.

“Chances are it won’t work anyway.”

It was very possible that they would wake up the next morning without magic; that the curse was iron-clad: one cycle, not dependent on the calendar. Before she left, though, they had taken the contents of their phials and spoken the words of the spell.

She thought she would be up all night casting simple spells to see if there was evidence of fade, but she crashed and woke muttering *lumos* before she remembered the crisis. The lamps lit immediately.

If they had lost their magic, Professor Snape had eventually agreed that it was worth an attempt to buy themselves an extra month to figure out what they would do with their lives. But it looked as if they had a second chance.

She decided to spend the rest of the day in the library researching the science and practices of conception. She had done very little Internet research over the years, and it was time to explore there, as well as scientific and medical journals. She felt as if she had been in a bit of denial for the first cycle and resigned to their fate. She was now ready to fight.

She stationed herself at the library at the same table she had met Professor Snape in the beginning. She lay the journals and articles in front of her, as orderly as possible, and then as she began to read was hit with such a barrage of conflicting advice, she had to check the publishing data to determine whether she was reading a serious study.

She noted a page of practical tips, but it was clear that having sex every other day in the fertility window was the key, and that’s what they had done.
She returned the references to the librarian and then treated herself to a dirty martini at the pub next door. Her period had arrived in the middle of the night and was being especially brutal for a psychological fuck you. You are not pregnant; you are SO not pregnant. She tossed back her drink, sternly rejected her inner longing for another, decided to hit the shops for a different skirt this month. She could transfigure old grey, but the thought of all the fluid and matter it had been subjected to in the last month made her more comfortable with disposing of it and finding something new. She found grey’s dowdier older sister, longer and black in the back of the shop. Perfect.

It was probably her imagination, but the professor had a new bounce to his step when he admitted her to the outer office. She wondered how his first week of classes had gone. She had examined her notes closely for the first week, trying to find places to make her lectures livelier. She had emerged from behind the lectern and had taught moving about the room, trying to connect with individual students, and she had been met with the same respectful but uninspired reactions.

She could at least use the time in the lab. She was still unhappy with her lubricant potion, so she decided to study texture. No one really cared about this if the potion served its purpose but perhaps she could determine when texture mattered and how to improve it. Diluting the lubricant made it thinner but not more pleasant or natural. She would start there. Until she found something better, though, she had phials of a functional if not terribly inspirational supply.

In his lav, she spread it around herself, careful to keep her fingers off areas that would just lead to frustration. He was ready for her when she entered. He was in his trousers and shirtsleeves; he had hung up his waistcoat next to his frock coat and robe on the tree in the corner. This made his cock much more visible as he unfastened himself, and she diverted her eyes to maintain her neutral expression. It was the clearest view she’s had of the organ, and it was as visually impressive as it was filling.

He sank in, and a look of pleasure filled his eyes that he quickly shaded with his eyelids. She made a small, contented sigh in response. She wanted him to drop some of the propriety. The whole point was him getting off, which was supposed to feel good. She hoped he did think she was judging him. He kept his eyes closed, so she turned her attention to his left hand, which was stationed by her right hip. The fingers were caressing the cushion gently in time with his thrusts. They became more urgent as his breath sped up, and when he came with a barely audible moan, they splayed out taught and raised and then relaxed gradually as his body came down.

Then the fingers were busy again, back at work containing him into his trousers, brushing his hair away from the side of his flushed face. She was so enraptured with the vision, she forgot the new strategy she was going to try.

“Oh!” she said as she started to rise. “I’m supposed to…Would it be all right if I stayed a few minutes here? There is evidence that we may have a greater chance of success if I am still for fifteen minutes are so. If you have plans…”

“You may,” he answered brusquely, his former, relaxed mien gone.

“Thank you. Would you hand me my bag?”

He brought it up to the table, and she pulled out the cushion she brought, expanded it with her wand and then placed it awkwardly under her bum. She rifled through her bag for her book—she was reading a new translation of a Chinese Master’s Essential Potions. It was obviously still sitting on the little table by her bathtub where she had left it that afternoon. Merlin’s balls.

“I forgot my book. Could I borrow one?”
He grunted and crossed quickly to a shelf in the corner. He pulled a title with hardly a look and brought it back to her, practically throwing it on top of her.

“Thanks.”

He left without a word. She set the timer on her wand and looked at the giant volume resting on her belly. *Sanchrist Castle* was printed on the top of the ancient green cover with V. Banovskaya at the bottom. There was no book jacket or summary on the back, of course. She opened the cover and saw the initials ESP. Eileen Prince Snape. It was an interesting choice of something to share.

She started in on the first chapter. The language was stilted and old fashioned, but she got the atmosphere and gist right away.

“Fucking vampires,” she muttered in derision with an expressive eye-roll as her wand rang out the quarter hour time.
Chapter Two

Severus

He met with all female Slytherin second years on the sixth to try to head-off the incident that had interrupted last month’s September seventh session. He cleared the common room after dinner except for the eighteen girls. Audrey Holdscloth, who had knocked on his door just as he was about to complete the act in his library was near the back with her head down.

“Here is a list of problems that if they occur you should consult your head of house,” he brought up his wand in a flourish and a large scroll of parchment appeared midair and unfurled itself. It listed ten items including accidental decapitation and prolonged projectile vomiting. “And here,” the first scroll disappeared and one with a much longer list replaced it, “Are items for which I should not be contacted.” This one was comprehensive and had taken him most of the afternoon to compile. Homework dilemmas was at the top and it ended with threatening wand wagging, the very offense that caused Audrey to pound on his door.

“That is precisely why we have prefects.” He pointed to the group of six upperclassmen he had compelled to be present for this. “Are…there…any…questions?” He stared them down as menacingly as possible but could never manage to catch Miss Holdscloth’s eye. “Good,” he said to the silent room. “That…is…all.”

He swept out of the common room, using his robe to great effect and felt quite clever about the whole operation. He had a pleasant day on the seventh; classes had never been easier. He remembered a mishap in fifth year involving an open flame and Iris Wentworth’s eyebrows when she crouched too close to the cauldron to determine the colour of the fire. He arrived at her station just in time to urge her to back away. He saved her from two weeks of restoration treatment. No need to thank me.

He was looking forward to the session all day and walking from the Great Hall back to his office, it was hard to control a pronounced giddiness. He arrived with about fifteen minutes to spare before her knock, so he treated himself to an Old Ogden’s neat and settled on the settee by the fire, casually stroking himself through his trousers, ready and eager for her arrival.

He was not disappointed. He was slightly nervous as he approached crescendo that Audrey would be back, but it was blissfully silent from his office. He came with a pleasant full-body shudder and pulled out as Master Granger began to arrange the cushion under her derriere. He saw she did not pull out a book, and he fetched the novel he had given her on the fifth. She had marked the page with a charm.

She snorted when she saw it. “Have you read this, Professor?”

“I’ve not had the pleasure,” he said with a tiny smirk. She had the upper hand in all of this; they both knew it, and it was amusing to take the piss just a bit.

“Well, if you ever wake up and realize you won’t be able to sleep unless you read a wizarding gothic vampire romance, this is the book for you.”
“I will keep that in mind, Miss Granger.”

“You should,” she said with a barely suppressed chuckle as she adjusted into a comfortable position. “This cushion-top is fantastic, by the way. Very well done, thank you.”

He was just slightly touched by her words. “It shouldn’t be…miserable.”

“No. It’s not been miserable.” She said it so lightly, and then found her place and began to read with the look of someone who was indulging in food they shouldn’t. He left her to her book and took his own to return to his settee.

Her wand timer went off, and she bustled out cheerily. He took a long shower and then enjoyed a fantastic night’s sleep. He was still in a pleasant mood in the morning though he wore his regular breakfast at the head table sneer throughout the meal.

The week continued to be wholly pleasant. He could teach his lessons by rote and have time to pay attention to matters he remembered from the first time through. He had suspected the fourth year Hufflepuffs had a fairly organized cheating ring, and he nailed them in the beginning of the third week of class when he caught four of them at the back corner table casting a replicating spell over an almost completed vulnus sántitatum potion.

“But sir…”

He was not listening as he escorted the whole class to the Headmistress’s office. His mind was occupied with a new seating chart for them. He had rolls of parchment that were suspiciously similar but just frustrating pieces of evidence before he had the smoking wand.

The other classes were doing too miserably for them to be cheating, he decided. If they really were sharing work, the dupe completing it was awful. It was punishment enough.

The month continued to breeze by with increasingly pleasant interludes every other day. He was becoming immune to the embarrassment he should feel, having these clinical encounters in his library, but instead they were giving him life. He felt years younger—he finally felt his true age rather than an old man.

That awful faculty meeting was waiting for him on the fifteenth, but even that didn’t dampen his spirits. He packed parchment to grade and reminded Rolanda at dinner not to be late. He walked with her to the Muggle Studies classroom and settled behind Longbottom where he could conceal his schoolwork during the drudgery.

“Isn’t that right, Severus?” Filius said as Snape was just finishing a scathing comment on a fifth-year essay about Polyjuice.

“Yes, we’ll exit after Ravenclaw,” he said, hardly looking up. He graded two more before Minerva hissed his name.

“Just tell her to sod off,” he whispered to his colleague, glancing up to see Minerva’s point stats on display in the front of the room. The Headmistress flicked them away and put up Longbottom’s and his own.

“Professor Longbottom and I will work toward a golden mean, would that be satisfactory?” he called out.

“Severus!” Minerva whispered at his side.
“I think… I think I could work on that, Headmistress McCullough,” Longbottom said meekly and then looked back at him in gratitude. Snape shocked himself by nodding at the boy.

“There are no names on these!” Headmistress sputtered.

“We don’t need names, McCullough.” It came out more disrespectful than he had intended. “Headmistress.”

He could feel Minerva’s wide-eyes on him. She didn’t know that he sometimes thought of the way he had spoken to Headmaster Dumbledore and cringed. He didn’t respect this one really as he had her long-standing predecessor, still, he had grown tired of his own rubbish. And he wanted nothing more than to conclude this meeting and proceed to the part of his evening he had been looking forward to all day.

“Perhaps if you could send us copies of Professor Harwell’s points balance, we could benefit from that model,” he said in his least intimidating tone.

“Why yes, Professor Snape. Thank you,” the Headmistress was overtly grateful. “I will send them around in the morning.”

“Oh, for the love of…” Minerva groused beside him. He immediately turned back to his grading until it was time to leave.

He floated down the corridor back to his chamber engrossed in memories of a lovely shower and glass of Malbec he had enjoyed the first time through. He had failed to cut the meeting off in time for the shower tonight, but he could still enjoy the wine, magically restored through Ryclyffe’s potion and spell.

He swept through his office to the library and uncorked the bottle, pouring it into the crystal carafe and putting a few sips into a glass. He could drink this now, and then after she left, it would have had sufficient time to breathe and be ready to truly enjoy. The warmth fell down his throat, and he had to restrain his face from breaking into a wide grin.

She was at his door, just after eight in her comically Minerva-esque skirt that she paired with a deep red V-neck jumper. Her robe was open, and her hair was piled on her head; it looked like a hectic workday afterthought. She was flushed and so pretty, he turned away so he wouldn’t stare.

She excused herself to the loo, and he settled into their corner, rubbing himself through his trousers, trying not to moan. He was painfully hard and could feel the end of his cock dripping already.

She emerged just then. She had taken down her hair and shaken it out. He had just been thinking about putting his face into her neck and kissing her just under her ear whilst he inhaled her scent. The adjustment had been prudent on her part.

She hopped on the table and pulled up the skirt, but not far enough. She seemed distracted, and he wondered what her day had been like. He unfastened his placket and drew out his cock, finally touching it skin to skin. He bit his bottom lip. He had to draw up her skirt with one hand, gently, barely touching her, but she turned her head and looked at him for the first time.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

“No,” she said, and spread her legs wider.

He stepped close to the end of the table between them and carefully eased his way in, bracing his hand on the side. She had continued to work on the lubricant; he couldn’t feel it except for its desired
effect. He thought of mentioning it, but he was more compelled to begin to move in her.

He was on the edge in seconds, and he realized he wanted to extend this a little bit. He hoped she wouldn’t mind terribly. He slowed a bit and tried to divert his mind to mundane topics. He saw Longbottom’s face at the meeting, full of gratitude. He thought of Minerva, bewildered at his behaviour that evening. He thought of the Headmistress, and he started mentally undressing her. She had ample tits that her robes covered most of the time, but occasionally on the weekend, she would be in the staffroom in simpler attire.

He shook off those thoughts with disgust and started thrusting with more vigor, causing the tits in front of him to bounce, a much less disturbing image. He hurtled towards orgasm and plunged in as deeply as possible when he came, clinching his eyes shut. He was distracted at the last second and cheated himself out of the full experience, but his body was relaxed immediately and was clearly satisfied. He breathed in and out a few times and then pulled out and turned his back to button himself back up.

He heard her adjusting on the table and pulling out the pillow to put under her backside. He had an image of her from the last time and handed her the novel. He thought briefly of offering her a glass of wine, but he didn’t.

**Hermione**

The book was awful, perhaps one of the worst she had ever read, and it made no sense that she looked forward to updates all day. Ylena was a complete dunderhead who hadn’t put together why her husband Anton slept all day and was never around at night. It was an arranged marriage; Ylena didn’t even realize how lucky she was that Anton had a heart of gold and was plagued with guilt that he would turn his bride in a fit of passion. Not that there had been any passionate fits thus far; they had been married four months, and Ylena was just as virginal as she had been the day she arrived at Sanchrist Castle.

Tonight, Anton had come into Ylena’s bedchamber at dawn, and had taken her into his arms. She stirred but settled back into his chest while she was only partially awake, but he felt so real, yet when she awoke fully with the bright, morning sun, only traces of his scent remained, and he was locked away in his own chamber for the day.

Her wand chimed quietly, and she hopped off the table, straightening her skirt and stowing the little pillow. He was reading in a comfortable looking armchair in a corner, looking as carefree as she had ever seen him. He was almost smiling.

“I’ll will see you Thursday,” she said, as she donned her cloak. “Saturday is the night I won’t be able to be here until late,” she reminded him. He nodded and returned to his book. “Night,” she said, but she didn’t wait for an answer.

She was anxious to get home. She was hungry and tired and over the day. Her days were drudgery, teaching the same lessons. Her lubrication project had stalled. She had read an article in a Muggle science journal about a specialized lube for conception. She had purchased a tube at the chemist’s and found it better than anything she had concocted, which made her feel rather useless.

She was left with too much time to ponder her life. She had started to feel a physical longing to become pregnant. That moment as she walked up the hill to the apparition point, she was concentrating on the sperm he had left in her, picturing it making its journey. She could see her egg, too, pearly and expectant, waiting to be penetrated. She blamed her weariness that her curly-headed
egg was now propped up on a table while a spermatozoon with long, black hair plunged in. She giggled and rolled her eyes at her own silliness.

This had to be purely biology, some spark set off in her. She had no similar desire to care for a baby. She was obsessed with conception only. She looked for ways to get out of her head and started attending Muggle cinema on the even nights. The fertility potion she took made her cry at everything, but it was cathartic and saved her from tears over more consequential subjects, for example, her utter failure to have a fulfilling professional life or a social life not tied to an ancient curse.

At least he seemed to be enjoying himself this month. She had tried to take herself away from the experience physically as much as possible. She did not feel violated; she had vowed to herself that she would stop the whole effort immediately if she ever did, but she tried not to become aroused. It was too frustrating and made her feel sadder than she usually did.

Crooks was waiting for her impatiently when she entered the back door. She cleaned his dishes and then filled them. She had made a stir-fry the evening before, and she heated it up without much relish. It was healthy but not very exciting. There was nothing sweet for afters, not even some digestive biscuits. She resolved to do better with her shopping. She had seen a film about Julia Child and an American woman cooking her way through Child’s cookbook. Hermione didn’t have the drive or commitment for a project like that, but she could be more careful in selecting ingredients and preparing meals worthy of her time. She decided she would pick up a nice bottle of wine or two as well. There had been one open in Professor Snape’s library, and he had smelled faintly of red wine during the session. She washed up and retired to her bed, trying to stave off sadness with hope.
Chapter Three

She had forgotten about her encounter with Neville as she descended the hill Thursday evening, and he took her by surprise again as he called to her. What did I say to cause him not to follow me? She wracked her brain quickly.

“Hello! I have a meeting in here—see you Saturday?”

He waved in response but looked confused. Was that how he had looked last time? Again she feared he might interrupt them. It was on her mind as she knocked on the door and Snape answered it and let her in without a hint of a sneer.

“Hello. I just saw Neville on the grounds; I saw him last month, too, but I am not sure I said the right thing to keep him from following me in here this time.”

He snorted and locked the door to his office. He waited for her to walk through to his quarters, and then he locked that door, too. He seemed utterly unconcerned by an impending visit, so she put it out of her mind as she ducked into his bathroom once again. This was starting to be surreal as she went through the motions once again of removing her knickers and applying the lubricant from the tube.

She was distracted by the events of the day—she had forgotten about a faculty meeting because it had seemed she had just attended it, and she had. She had chastised herself and resolved to take more careful notes in her journal—if anyone else read it, they would probably conclude she was mentally ill.

She emerged, lubed up, knickers in bag and made herself comfortable on the table while he prepared himself. Seeing Neville made her thoughts drift to her birthday celebration. Last time, she remembered she was dreading it, but that was not the case this time. She was looking forward to drinking with her friends, and she was looking forward to seeing Harry.

This last thought was especially prominent as Professor Snape entered her and began to move. She thought of the dance she had shared with Harry and that he had seemed sad and apart from Ginny. She thought about that night later with Snape, how she had let her thoughts take her away and how she had felt something for once. That had been Harry, she thought.

What kind of awful person thinks about seducing her married best friend—and not just married to anyone but another of her closest friends?

Hermione, apparently. She had lived near Harry, especially the year of the war when they were camping all about. She had seen him without a shirt loads of times, but she had never seen him naked. She allowed her mind to go there as Snape thrust back and forth. What did Harry look like? What would he feel like? She pictured him fucking her as Snape was and found her body responding. Shut it down. It was not worth the frustration. She forced herself to think of potion ingredients and hoped he would finish soon.

He did, and he pulled out as usual, buttoning and fixing, while she put the pillow under her. He handed her the novel and then left the room.

She had marked it magically and picked it up with a sigh. Ylena was still clueless as the evidence
mounted. The servants were behaving suspiciously, Anton was in deep with a vampire plot she could hardly bother to keep up with.

She sat up a minute or two early this time. She was ready to get home and curl up in front of the television. She moved with a purpose through the grounds, to the apparition point, into her house. She looked aside the results of a mindful shopping trip and took her dinner—a bacon sandwich, apple, and cup of tea—into the sitting room where she fell asleep on the couch with the program on in the background.

Friday passed quickly, and she awoke on the morning of her second birthday in weeks not as motivated. Going for breakfast was less special. She thought about seeing another film, but she felt too restless. She did decide she would shop for a dress for her party. The black tube was there, and she reached for it before deciding to find a different one for that night. There was a rust coloured dress with a autumn themed botanical print—late flowers and vines. She had a worn in denim jacket that would pair well for a less vampy look. Canvas tie-ons would be ideal for comfort and her usual walk through school but were not really appropriate for the party. She found some exquisite western-style boots that she would have never considered her style and realised they were perfect. You only turn thirty twice.

She let her curls be free and warmed up her make-up for a complete contrast to her previous birthday look but was just as satisfied with the results as she flooed away to the party. It made her feel loved all over again to witness the effort her friends had made as she joined the group.

“Was that you I saw blazing down the hill, Hermione?” Neville asked. “You said you were working on a project?”

“Yes. With Professor Snape.”

“Really?” Harry asked incredulously.

“Yes, it turns out we share a mentor.”

“What are you working on?” Neville asked.

“We’re studying friction and velocity as it relates to accuracy of results.”

“I’m surprised the old bat is willing to share his toys,” Ginny snorted.

“Ginny,” Harry reprimanded her gently. Hermione watched her closely, trying to interpret what was going on between them. Ginny rolled her eyes again and turned away from her husband with dismissal…contempt? Hermione’s eyes flicked back to Harry. He seemed resigned rather than hurt.

She searched through her memory of signs of trouble in the Potter-Weasley union. They had married too young in her opinion. She had still been working in Northern Ireland with Rycliffe the summer they were married. Ginny had never held a job aside from playing a few seasons of semi-professional quidditch. Harry had breezed through Auror training and established his career before the rest of them had. They settled into Grimmauld Place and became the symbol in their group of peers that had it together.

Ron floundered a bit before ending up at the shop with George and falling in love with Susan, Neville was tucked away back at school. The romance with Hannah had been a delightful surprise for them all of two people most deserving of happiness finding it together. Luna had left the country for her travels very quickly after the war aftermath. Hermione slogged away with her career training and trying to settle her parents’ financial affairs. She planned to sell their house early on to ensure
they had enough money to start their new lives, but they had opened a practice in an under-served community in western Australia and had become successful almost immediately.

By the time Hermione had accepted a position as Potions Master at the wizarding university, Ginny and Harry had a toddler and another baby on the way. They were the adults of the bunch. Hermione had spent some time with them during that era—it was easier to gather at Grimmauld with the babies—and the Potter Weasleys had seemed...at least content. Hermione had not kept in touch quite as closely as the years went on and the demands of her job occupied her time. There was a third baby, a girl this time. Hermione had attended the party at the Burrow to introduce Lily, and then the next time she had seen Harry and Ginny had been at the Christmas party. She had few memories of Ginny that night, but Harry had been across from her for hours, drinking and talking about work and the Ministry. Harry had hardly mentioned his home life.

The group was standing around chatting with their drinks in their hands as Hermione contemplated. She was trying a heavier red wine this time, and she had consumed a whole glass as she stood there. She walked across the bar for a refill and met Hannah, who was bringing out menus.

“Hermione, wow, you look fantastic.”

“Thank you, Hannah. You do, too.” And she did. She was more voluptuous than she had been pre-baby, but she looked sexier than she ever had.

“I’m huge,” she sighed.

“You are not, and Neville can’t keep his eyes off you.”

“Thanks, ‘Mione,” Hannah said warmly.

“I think he doesn’t hate me,” Neville was saying as they rejoined the group.

“Who doesn’t hate you, Darling?” Hannah asked.

“Professor Snape. He...well, he rather rescued me at the faculty meeting last week. Then he looked at me as if he didn’t hate me.”

“That’s some convincing evidence, there, Longbottom. Can we go order already?” George called out.

“Whenever you’re ready, Sir,” Hannah said right back at George.

“Cheeky; I like it!”

They took seats at the table and ordered. Hermione decided to try something new for kicks. The conversation once again turned to babies and quidditch and Ministry office politics. She looked across the table at Luna and smiled, but she wasn’t up for another round of just how absurd can this conversation be. Instead she looked at Harry. He was quiet; not really joining in the banter unless he was pressed directly.

He looked slightly melancholy. She turned her head to Ron and Susan so she wouldn’t stare. They were talking to Hannah and Neville about average daily nappy quotas. The cake arrived just then, and Hermione decided that another glass of that fantastic wine would be the best accompaniment to the bitter-sweet cake. They sang to her, and Hannah cut her the largest slice, and it was all highly enjoyable.

The dancing began again, and it was fun to recall what tunes would be next. Knowing that in
advance somehow made her freer on the dance floor. Perhaps it was the wine. The slower song came on, and again Harry asked her to dance.

“Are you sure you wouldn’t rather Ginny?”

“And miss my dance with the birthday girl?”

Once again, the women had retreated with drinks, but this time Neville took Hannah’s hand and led her out. Hermione thought that Ginny would look up at Harry and of course she would hand him over. Ginny was suddenly very absorbed in her conversation with Susan. Ron and George and Luna were holding court across the room, so Hermione sunk into Harry chest with a pang of guilt.

“Professor Snape, then?”

“Yes. It has been something.”

“He’s well?”

“He seems it. He’s not terribly forthcoming.”

“I imagine not. I am shocked he was willing to take on a joint-project.”

“M-hmm.”

“You okay? You and Crooks?”

“Oh, yes; we are fine. How are you, Harry?” She said it so quietly, right in his ear. She suspected he would have brushed it off had she not been so close to him.

“I’m…” He was clenching her right hand in his left as they danced. He breathed in for a moment, and then his head fell on her shoulder. They danced like that for several measures. She held him close and tried to transmit comfort through her body. After about a minute, he lifted his head from her shoulder and seemed to shake something off. He smiled at her. “I’m fine, old girl.” He dipped her and then swung her around. She kissed his cheek and then dropped his hand.

George was bringing around the champagne, and they had a last toast. She positioned herself across from Harry this time so there would be no lingering hand squeezes. Then she flooed away to take her bundles home, dropping them off on the table, and heading back out, rubbing Crooks between the ears in passing.

She looked out for Neville and Hannah, but the grounds were deserted as was the corridor by the dungeon.

Professor Snape answered the door at the first knock. He opened the door and then backed up to look at her without comment.

“Sorry to be so late…again.”

He ignored her, and she followed him as always. She was flushed with the dancing and wine and travel, so she hung her jacket on the coat tree next to her cloak. She wasn’t sure if she should take off her boots. She was wearing mismatched socks under, and she was suddenly rather exhausted. She decided to leave them on so she could make a quicker exit. She stopped off at the lav to lube up and silently willed him to be quick with this. There was not lingering desire from the party this time, only a bit of sadness that Harry and Ginny were so unhappy mixed with resolve to stay away.
She walked knickerless to the table and hoisted herself up. This outfit was much better suited for the purpose than the last time, and it was nice to lie back without being self-conscious, so she was surprised when he approached her with a smirk. It was the boots, she realised, and she gave a little kick as to be in on the joke. She raised her skirt a bit more. *Please, let's get on with this, I am so tired.*

He plunged in, and within moments her feet felt uncomfortably heavy. The discomfort turned into pain as he moved. It inched up her legs and settled in a knot in her lower back. She looked at him, but he was in his own world and was enjoying a leisurely pace. She bent her legs, trying to rest her heels on the edge of the table to take the strain off her back, but the cushion prevented them from hooking on. In the meantime, he had plunged in deeper and closer, allowed by her knees bent almost to her chest. She had few options, and the best was rather mortifying. She hooked the boots around his waist and sighed. *Please finish,* she implored him silently.

The new position did seem to move things along. His face was practically touching the side of her neck and he was gasping as he moved in her. He was whispering oh, oh, oh, breathily in her ear, and if she'd had any energy remaining, she probably would have found it sexy. Playing on that, she gripped him more tightly against her with her legs and moved in sharply and came with a long groan. *Thank Merlin.*

She was so tempted to bolt to home and bed, but she pulled out the pillow as he fetched her book. She was in the middle of a long section in which the vampire horde was traveling through the Bulgarian forests. There were long, detailed descriptions of flora and fauna and wardrobe choices of the key players, and she felt her eyelids twitching to close. She shut the book and cradled it into herself. Her wand would go off soon, and nothing felt better than to close her eyes in the meantime.

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**Severus**

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He looked up from his drink and book when her wand chirped softly at the end of fifteen minutes. She was curled up on the cushioned table, fast asleep. She flicked her thumb without waking and stopped the wand and then curled deeper into herself.

He wondered about the contrast of looks from last cycle. She was Tess of the West tonight instead of 30s era femme fatal. She had clearly been drinking, too, and the change of behaviour had been exciting. When she had gripped him around the waist with those boots, she had unwittingly handed him days of further wanking material. It was marred slightly because she was obviously not into it and just trying to hurry him along, which it had. He could edit the scene. She could pitch her head back and squeeze down on him as she had before. She could come with him and shatter around his cock as he was.

She was so deeply asleep, he wasn’t sure whether to cover her with a blanket or to wake her. “Miss Granger…Miss Granger,” he said quietly. She did not stir. She was curled up to one side with her hair tumbling down the table. He moved it aside and touched her shoulder gently. “Hermione.”

She woke with a start and there was a mix of curls and elbows and book and wand as she sat up quickly. “Did my wand go off? It did, didn’t it? I am so sorry.” She was stowing the pillow under her back in her bag and trying to make her legs work all at once and started to tumble down. He caught her, and she grabbed on to him. He hoisted her upright.

“Oh my, I am such a mess—sorry.”
“It is fine.”

“No, it’s not. I… I am just going to get my jacket and cloak. She staggered at first but had righted herself by the time she reached the cloak tree. She put on both wraps and shook out her hair.

He wondered if he ought to walk her at least to the apparition point, and he began to put on his own cloak.

“No, Professor. I am fine. I can make it. Thank you, though.” She looked at him with both humiliation and appreciation. “Really. I will see you Monday.”

“Yes,” he said as she left his office. He drained the last of his drink and began preparing for bed, wishing there was a way for him to know that she had arrived at her own home safely. Sleep came slowly to him, but he eventually drifted off and woke refreshed mid-morning Sunday. He decided to have a lab day and spent it productively, checking off research goals he had set for the year.

She looked her old self in her Minerva skirt on Monday, and they were back to business as it had been. She took more pleasure in that awful novel than she did the act, but he couldn’t really blame her.

Then it was done for the month and the waiting began. He was torn about the results. He’d had the best month he had ever experienced at school. It was close to summer level of pleasure and delight. Still, he couldn’t live in September 2009 forever; he had decided that six months of this was his limit. He had no idea what she would think about that time-table. This existence was obviously not nearly as pleasant for Master Granger. His thoughts turned to her often. She was inscrutable, and he did not know how to broach personal topics with her. She seemed devoted to keeping the sessions on task and as efficient as possible. For her benefit, success this month would be ideal.

Life had always been so uncontrollable for him, but here he was caught up on all work with seven sets of ordered classes and a pleasant enough professional relationship with all colleagues, including the damned administration. He looked at his Slytherin table the morning of the thirtieth and began to contemplate how to grow the house in the future—how they could become just as valued as the other three. The Slytherin students were all tucked into their breakfast and chatting pleasantly, no different than any other house. His eyes landed on Miss Holdscloth, the interrupter he had subverted this month. She was sporting a highly unflattering hairstyle—almost a shaved head. She had turned her body away from her classmates and was chewing on a piece of toast whilst reading from a large text book. He made a mental note to have a conversation with the girl at some point. He was then distracted by a group of fourth year boys looking suspiciously like they were trying to shoot eggs at each other using the bowl of their spoons. He fixed his glare that could freeze water, and they stopped immediately, which made him chuckle internally.

Last time, he had been beside himself with stress waiting for Master Granger to arrive, but this time, while not an afterthought, was more intriguing than worrying.

She looked also looked less tense when she arrived than she had the month before. He ushered her in and took her cloak before she landed in the chair in front of his desk. He thought of offering her a drink, but she appeared ready to commence business.

“Any predictions?” he asked quietly.

“None this month. I interpret every twinge. I had to hide my wand for the last twenty-four hours so I wouldn’t test ahead of time.”

He nodded.
“Ready?” she said, but she began the spell before he could answer. The space in front of her where the white cloud would materialize remained empty. Her face crumpled for a moment before she quickly adjusted it. She sighed and drew the familiar brown phials out of her bag.

“Do you want to continue?” she asked warily.

“Yes.”

She nodded. “Do you have a limit in mind? Because I am certainly willing to give it another go, but I am concerned…I am concerned about becoming trapped.”

His expression must have conveyed the confusion he felt because she hurried on.

“I don’t mean actually trapped, but clinging to hope after…”

“It’s only been two months,” he said as gently as he could.

“Right. I feel as if…I think I could go for six cycles. But that may be my…ceiling.”

He nodded. “I think so.” He was startled that her time frame and his were the same.

She looked relieved. “All right then. On to three?” She handed him a phial.

“To three.”

She was holding hers up, and she was smiling for the first time that evening, so he clinked her phial with his before he downed it.
He awoke on round three of September fourth with a languid stretch and a smile. He had been dreaming about Patagonia and Esperanza, and he had an impressive display of morning wood. He enjoyed a slow, leisurely wank in bed that started as a continuation of that dream but soon morphed into Master Granger in his bed in real time. She was wearing one his white button-down shirts, open, and nothing else, and her chestnut curls were cascading everywhere as she rode him slowly up and down, squeezing down on his cock. He imagined palming her breasts as she began to reach her peak, her nipples hardening into little points on his fingertips. He imagined her coming, her head slightly back, her mouth open, a look of pure abandon on her face This set him off too, and he came on his hand and belly with a full body shudder. He closed his eyes and breathed a moment before making his way to the shower to clean himself and prepare for a delightful Friday—one more sleep until the fifth.

The shower was another sensual pleasure as the water flowed down on the top of his head. He stood still under it for a few minutes enjoying the sensation of the water hitting his body. It was hard not to be smug. On Tuesday, Peeves had locked the Sorting Hat in a little used supply closet deep in the East Wing where even Filch hardly went. By the time the Hat was rescued, it was too late to do the sorting at the banquet. The Hat was too traumatized to go ahead with the ceremony the next night as planned, so instead, the Headmistress brought the first-years into her office one by one for individual sorting while the rest of the school had an extra day off. The best part was that Snape had planned it so carefully through so many ghostly sources, the original plot could never be traced back to him. He could not remember being prouder of a professional accomplishment, which was rather sad, he mused as the water continued to flow down his back.

He had contemplated what to do about the cheating Hufflepuffs this month—whether to lay the trap and let them fall into it or to prevent it from occurring. He had decided on the latter and had asked Professor Flitwick down to the dungeon to teach Snape how to cast anti-copying charms on all the cauldrons. Filius seemed both delighted and touched at the request. People were baffling.

He had to be vigilant so far because it was difficult to repeat the same lessons for the third time. What had he said already this month? It was a minor problem against smooth days.

He spent a late night Friday in the lab continuing his personal projects, mostly research at this point. He expected he would have time and energy to devote to the project with the goal of submitting an article to the Potions Journal. He contemplated asking Master Granger to collaborate on something; he was fascinated by fertility and suspected she was as well, but he had no idea how to initiate such a conversation. He imagined her looking at him with pity and declining ever so kindly.

He had a lie-in Saturday and spent his usual day in the forest before a leisurely bath. He skipped dinner; the colleagues were meeting at the Broomsticks, and he would eat then. Visions of Rosmerta in her laced top filled his head and he couldn’t repress a smile at the evening that lay ahead of him.

Master Granger did not appear at his door at her regular time. He walked through his office and
found her dallying in the classroom. *Does she need to borrow something?* As soon as he appeared, though, she snapped to and walked toward him with a purpose. Woolgathering, perhaps.

She seemed in a lighter mood than she had the last time she had been here, but then again, she did not have to worry about test results that night. She went on through to his quarters ahead of him, and instead of seeming presumptuous, it was rather charming. She removed her cloak to reveal a different skirt. This one was knee-length and full and looked to have been charmed sky blue—the colour had an iridescent quality that indicated magic. She had paired it with a white cardigan and white lace-up canvas shoes. She looked as if she was on her way to the tennis courts.

She smiled and pointed with two cocked fingers to the lav before disappearing behind the door. He had to suppress a chuckle. He took his fertility booster—he was dubious that it was effective at all after just a few days research in his lab. If this cycle did not take, perhaps he would have something better for next. His cock needed very little encouragement, and by the time she emerged shoeless and certainly knickerless, it was straining against his trousers.

She smiled at him as she reclined on the table and drew her skirt up. *Merlin.* He entered her and braced both hands on either side of her hips. He supposed it was possible for this to become rote eventually, but he could hardly imagine it. He closed his eyes and imagined pleasuring her with his hands. Quickly his thoughts morphed into her on top of him the way she had been in his thoughts the other morning. *UNNNGHHHH.* It was going fast but it felt so wonderful he didn’t care. He stretched out on his back in his mind and suddenly Rosmerta was straddling his face, and he was eating out her glistening pussy as she fondled Hermione’s tits. That was entirely too much, and he exploded with an extended groan. Amazing. It only improved.

He opened his eyes and found his face quite close to Hermione’s neck. He had to push up using his bicep muscles, which he did with regret. What he wanted was to snuggle in next to her, which was not acceptable. *She is enduring a great deal,* he thought with a start and righted himself immediately.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

“Nonsense,” she said quietly as she reached for the pillow to place under her.

He refastened himself and handed her the novel. Would she consider going to drinks with him? *Of course not, don’t be ridiculous, Snape.*

“Thanks—I left off at a bit of a cliff hanger. It’s out of print by the way. Not in any of the shops,” she laughed at herself.

“You did not try to find this book.”

“I did! Anton was about to lose control and deflower his wife…of a year! It has been a two-week wait to find out…” She laughed again and made a motion for him to hush, that she was going to read undisturbed. There was a sparkle in her eyes he had not seen since that morning at Mater’s Rycliffe’s library before they had stumbled onto the curse. He motioned with his fingers across his lips that he would stay silent.

She was immediately absorbed in the book, and he could observe her without detection. Her face changed to deep, amused concentration until the little chime on her wand activated. She finished the page and marked the book before stowing the pillow and tying her shoes back on.

*I am meeting some colleagues for drinks at the Broomsticks. Professor McGonagall, Flitwick…I am sure they would love to see you if you wanted to join…*
“You are welcome to take the book with you.”

“No…thank you. I’ll be here Monday.” She twirled her cloak around and tossed her curls over it in a move he was becoming familiar with. “Night, Professor.” She left before he could decide how he wanted to respond.

Hermione

She woke up the morning of the third September first determined to snap out of it already. She cast a lumos which lit the room beautifully. Another chance.

She could not face one more class with the same lessons and the same methods. She would throw her notes out the window if she had to. The first-year university students were waiting for her with quiet anticipation as they had twice before. She swept into the room and started passing out parchment with borrowed swagger.

“This is Introduction to Potions, and I am Master Hermione Granger,” she said commandingly. She typically talked to them as if they were peers. “I would like to know why you chose to enroll in this course. It is as rigorous as any you will encounter in university, so convince me that you belong in this class.”

Quills started moving furiously throughout the room. There were pained expressions on most of the faces, and a sense of pure stress had enveloped the room. She almost relented. That’s fine. Let’s turn our attention to organic potionery, which will make up the majority…NO. Done that before. Time for a change.

“When you have finished, leave the parchment on my desk, and you are excused for today. Be here Wednesday ready to work. I will inform you at that time which of you have been approved for the class.” That was pure bluff, but she sold it as well as she could. One by one the young witches and wizards dropped off their parchments and departed the room. She could hardly wait for the last to finish so she could dive in.

The first one she read belonged to a witch with lovely handwriting. Loena LeVall was written at the top. Loena was interested primarily in herbology, and potions was a requirement, but her number one reason for taking the class was that Potions had been her favorite subject at school.

Slytherin?

She chose another parchment, this time with the name William Wright at the top. William also loved Potions at Hogwarts. As did Cynthia and Natasha and Jorge and Joshua. Every student mentioned how much they had enjoyed Potions at Hogwarts except for the two international ones.

*Professor Snape spent six weeks on matter transforming potions; six weeks on healing potions; six weeks on dark arts; Professor Snape had used his lecture time efficiently; Professor Snape had been an excellent lab instructor; Professor Snape had allowed them to go beyond the text; to truly experiment; to make mistakes and find correction; to improvise. Professor Snape had left constructive comments in the margins of essays.*

It was too much.

Snape? Severus Snape? The man in the frockcoat with the sneer?
She decided to postpone lecturing until she had figured out a new plan and had her intermediate and advanced classes work in the lab for their first class. She waited impatiently for Wednesday to arrive and for the intro class to return.

“Congratulations,” she said as she entered. “You all qualified.” There was palpable relief. She breezed past the podium and hopped up on the teacher’s desk, facing them slightly elevated.

“Just out of curiosity, how many of you are from Slytherin House?”

Three identical scowls and three hands raised.

“No judgement—I know some lovely Slytherins.” I know one. He’s growing on me. “Ravenclaw?”

About ten. Interesting. “Hufflepuff?” Two hands. “Gryffindor?” Six hands shot up. Wow. “It seems universal that Professor Snape was an inspiring teacher?” She tried to keep the incredulity out of her voice. One of the Gryffindor males spoke up.

“Nobody worries about the house thing after second year,” he said with an edge of scorn.

“Really. That is refreshing to hear. It was different when I…”

Her words were met with poorly concealed eye-rolls.

“Anyway…” she cleared her throat. “It’s good to know where to start. I was struck by how many of you are in herbology as well, so let’s begin the year with Potions for and with botanicals.”

She started with a lab and let the class dictate when she would stop and teach. She had already tried the method with her upper level classes to favorable effect so far. When they arrived at a point that required further instruction, she asked them to hit a stasis on their Potions and come back to the classroom.

The week breezed by in a wholly pleasant way.

She had made a list for her nonprofessional life as well:

- Continue to shop for food to make non-depressing meals.
- Try at least four varieties of wine.
- Contact Harry and find out what was going on between him and Ginny and try to help them in some way.
- Go through the boxes of Mum and Dad’s belongings to donate what can be and eliminate the rest.
- Find something not so dour and matronly to wear to the sessions this cycle.

She spent Saturday at the shops. She found a swingy circle skirt she could transfigure into any colour. It was so different from the first two, she was drawn to it immediately. It would still serve the purpose of being reasonably modest, but it would not double as a funeral look. It was perfect.

September fifth was warm and summery—she had memorized her journal of facts and points to remember this month and had copied it down again in the journal as soon as she woke on the first. The weather changed on the eighth and brought a tension headache. She was going to treat herself ahead of time this cycle.

She charmed her skirt a medium blue and paired it with a white jumper and canvas trainers. She felt quite appropriate for a late summer Saturday night. She had no plans for after the session, but she looked as if she did. She had already picked up a take-away curry and there was a favorite old film ready to pop in while she ate. She planned on roasting a chicken and vegetables Sunday to eat on
during the week. She was in a light, optimistic mood when she apparated away.

The grounds were in full summer bloom with fruit pulling the limbs of the trees down, and she took her time on the walk down to the castle. He now allowed her to enter the classroom and meet him at the door to his quarters. She paused for a few minutes to take in the space where she had first studied Potions, and that had been the site of so much inspiration of the students. She had few good memories although she had learned sound fundamentals here. The year with Slughorn had been significantly less rigorous. She had taught herself NEWT level Potions before she Rycliffe invited her to study with him. She imagined herself as a contemporary student of Professor Snape’s. She suspected she would feel the same as her Introduction class did.

As if he could sense her, he met her at the door to his office.

“Hello,” she said as he moved aside so she could pass. She didn’t know what else to say; she suspected strongly that he wanted to get this part of the evening over with. She made a goofy gesture to indicate that she was going to duck into the lav and cringed internally at what he must think of her.

He was coping with this far better than she ever could have anticipated. Far better than she was, it seemed. He wasn’t friendly, but he not been awful. It could be so much worse. She removed her knickers and shoes and applied the lube.

He seemed far away during the act, probably a good thing for him. It gave her a chance to observe him more closely than when he had his eyes open. He smelled wonderful; he had clearly just bathed as seemed to be his habit before sessions. His hair was slightly damp. It was mostly black, but the sides, which were stretched into a band in the back, were tinged a bit with grey. It gave his face contour, and it made him look, if not exactly handsome, rather sexy.

Oh Merlin, I am objectifying Snape. Sexy? She willed herself not to giggle, as that would not be appropriate. He was close to finishing; she could tell by his breath and movement. She hitched her knee up slightly so he could go deeper, and suddenly she could feel a whole lot, just as he was coming with a loud groan. She joined him inwardly because now she was aroused, and it was over. Of course. He stayed inside her for a few moments as he came down; this was a diversion from his regular behavior. And she had to stop herself from grabbing his arse and holding him in place for a moment. The he was moving out with an apologetic air.

Nonsense. She could feel that her face was flushed and she had to breathe in and out to regain some composure.

She fussed around trying to hide her state as she pulled out the little pillow while he buttoned back up. Then he handed her the novel, and she practically squealed in delight.

“Ooooh, I missed you!” she addressed the old volume.  It’s out of print, you know.”

An amused look passed over his face. “You are welcome to take it with you.”

“No…no,” she laughed. “I was tempted during the wait—the wait is something else, you know.”

She realized he didn’t really. Or perhaps he did, but it was a dissimilar experience. He wasn’t tempted to run the pregnancy diagnostic charm again and again. He didn’t analyze every twitch. He wasn’t constantly feeling himself up to check for breast tenderness. He wasn’t scrutinizing loo paper to determine if his period was early. But he was surely tense during it and completely in the dark. “I looked for it in the shops and had the clerk run a search. It’s been out of print since the early sixties. And Anton and Ylena—the vampire and his bride were finally going to consummate their marriage after a year!”
She opened it and relaxed on her side to read. Anton had stayed in Ylena’s bedchamber for the first time. Ylena was frightened by a noise she had hear. Anton had promised to stay until she fell asleep, but then they started talking about their childhoods, and Ylena had so many questions about Sanchrist Castle—at least ten pages worth. Hermione could picture the cold larder, for Merlin’s sake, get on with it!

Anton was reclining on the bed, and Ylena took his hand to examine it—it was so pale and smooth—it’s not as if he was doing manual labor on the grounds, Leni, he sleeps all day. Anton had started to move in for more contact—FINALLY! And then a servant was beating on the chamber door because Anton’s closest vampire mate David was there to discuss a superfluous side plot that Hermione skimmed as much as possible. And her wand went off.

“Successfully deflowered?”

“Of course not I swear, she’s still going to have her maidenhead through the final chapter.”

“Again, you are welcome to take it…”

“I’ll be back Monday.” She lay the book on the table and put on her cloak. She was ready to eat the curry but the film didn’t sound quite as fun. She wondered what it would be like to share a meal with him. As if he would ever…

“Good night,” she said over her shoulder as she passed through the office.
Chapter Two

Severus

He remembered just in time to give his lecture to the second-year girls. He tried to recreate the original performance, but it did not feel as authentic. It was, however; effective, and Miss Holdscloth did not interrupt the September seventh session. Master Granger arrived in her skirt charmed bright pink this time, and activities proceeded quite favorably, at least for him. Hermione was impeccably pleasant but seemingly remained unmoved.

It was irksome, but he did not know how to fix it. He took his own pleasure, which was the object anyway, and enjoyed the benefits that went beyond sexual gratification. He had never slept better, he was more fastidious about his appearance, his mind was more focused than it had ever been. It made him wonder how everything would change if they were successful. He was becoming accustomed to having good days. How could he sink back into safe drudgery?

The next morning at breakfast in the Great Hall, he was pouring a second cup of tea when he saw the side of the Slytherin table where the younger students sat. Audrey Holdscloth was sitting two seats down from the rest of the group. She had her head down and turned away, but it was obvious that her hair had very recently been cut very close to her head. It was not done in a neat, even way, but jaggedly, with patches of scalp completely exposed and longer sections as well. She was staring at her food but not touching it.

He looked down the table. At first glance it was a typical scene of twelve-year-old girls talking and laughing more than they were eating breakfast. Then he spotted the first set of eyes that cut over to Miss Holdscloth. The owner promptly whispered to her neighbor, who let out a loud stream of giggles. Then there was another set of eyes followed by whispering and laughter, and then another. He realized he was gripping the table linen so tightly he might rip it off the head table with the breakfast and the china still on it.

“Severus?” Minerva said quietly beside him.

He thought quickly through his morning schedule.

“There is something I must address this morning. You have fourth years first?” He knew she did. They had the fourth years on alternating days at the same time. Today she had Slytherin and Gryffindor for Transfiguration; while he had the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs in the dungeon. Tomorrow would be the opposite.

“Yes?”

“Could you take them all this morning?”

“Of course. Could we meet in the dungeon, it’s larger than…”

“Yes. Thank you, Minerva.”
“You’re welcome. We are working on oversized items. I assume you have some cauldrons in the back you wouldn’t care become baby elephants for a few minutes?”

He nodded to her and tried to convey gratitude in his eyes. She patted his arm, and he rose from the table and walked to the Slytherin section of the Great Hall. The students stopped talking, straightened their posture, and immediately became engrossed in their breakfasts. He walked to the end of the table where Miss Holdscloth was sitting.

“If you are finished eating would you please meet me in my office? I will speak to Professor Flitwick to explain your absence from Charms and meet you there.”

She nodded and rose from her seat clutching at her school bag.

“Don’t even look at them,” he said in the same tone. “Put your head up and walk past them.”

He watched her do as he instructed. The girls at the table stared at him with faces that betrayed many reactions from guilt, to defiance, to fear. He said nothing but turned back to the head table and strode over to where Filius was perched.

“Miss Holdscloth will be late to class, and would you please ask the rest of the second-year girls to report to my office directly after?”

“Yes, Severus, of course,” Filius said sympathetically.

“Thank you.”

He swept out of the hall and back to the dungeon, composing his thoughts as he walked.

She was seated across from his desk with her head down when he entered the office. She had drawn his attention before; she was the smartest of her year. She was a pureblood, from an old Slytherin family, and her parents, whom he also knew, had probably expected her to be sorted here. She would have been better off in Ravenclaw, but even there, she would probably be a target. She reminded him a bit of himself but more of Hermione at that age. She was precocious and attention seeking. She lacked Hermione’s social skills and his own survival instincts. She annoyed her peers and, regrettably, her teachers as well.

He sat down behind his desk. “This was not your fault.”

She wouldn’t raise her eyes, and he couldn’t tell what her reaction to his words were. It should be I’m well-aware of that, you git, but he doubted it was. “Miss Holdscloth, please look at me.”

She did, and he could see she was crying silently, tears flowing down her cheeks.

“I should not have discouraged you from seeking me out when you needed help. I am at fault, and I am very sorry, Miss Holdscloth…Audrey.”

“They all hate me,” she whispered through a suppressed sob.

He wished they were here to witness the destruction they had caused and then changed his mind. The little sociopaths would probably enjoy this part. Dumbledore’s sweets stash and Minerva’s biscuit tin would come in very handy. “First of all, that is not true. Many of them just follow blindly. The ones who instigated this are not worth your time, Miss Holdscloth. You…you are immensely talented. You are aware of this.”

She ducked her head again.
“I know that you are. You have probably spent your life having your school experience built up as the pinnacle of wonders, correct? These will be the best days? Rubbish. Your best days are waiting for you in the future. You have all you need to succeed in what you want to do. You should not let small people drag you down.”

“But I must stay here for years,” a tiny sob escaped. She had sandy-coloured hair in little tufts around her head. Her face was red and puffy.

“I will be back in a moment,” he said and swept away to his quarters. He walked to the back bathroom off his bedroom, retrieved a phial and returned to his office. The cream-textured inside was his own creation during the bad years and was the best healing salve he had ever tried. He kept it around now for Potions accident and holiday sunburn. He handed it to her. “This is for your face. It will feel cool against your skin but not unpleasant.” He could fix the mess of her hair, but he wasn’t sure it was appropriate. There was a seventh year Slytherin who was beautiful and wore her hair very short. He would persuade her to help.

“There is nothing wrong with you, Miss Holdscloth. But I can help you play the game.”

She looked intrigued. It was progress.

“Yes, there is a game to this. Here is your first lesson. I would be willing to sign you out of classes for the day, but don’t do that. Put on the salve. It’s feels good, doesn’t it?”

She nodded.

“It is already restoring your face. You should walk in Professor Flitwick’s class with your head up. Do not even look at those…girls. When Professor asks a question, put your hand up, and when he calls on you, answer it completely with nothing extra. Don’t raise your hand again, but every time he asks a question, write the correct answer on your parchment. Give the rest of them a chance. You don’t need them. You must stay here, Miss Holdscloth, for another six years, but you do not have to acknowledge them ever again. You will find others who are a better fit for you.”

She nodded and gripped her bag determinedly. “Thank you, sir.”

“No need. If others in and out of your house offer to help you or extend a hand in friendship, accept it.”

“And you will help me some more? About how to play the game?”

“Yes. Please meet me here twice a week—Tuesdays and Fridays fifteen minutes after dinner, and we will go over the game. I predict you will need only a few lessons. If ANYONE continues this behaviour toward you, please come see me immediately. I have patrol on Mondays, Thursdays, and Sundays, otherwise knock at my office door, and I will arrive directly.”

“Thank you,” she said, and appeared to be ready to cry again.

“Head up, Miss Holdscloth.”

She practically marched out of his office.

He scrambled to find Frances Mitchell, the seventh year in question. She was in arithmancy, and he called her out of class.

“You know the second year, Audrey Holdscloth?”
Frances sighed heavily. *Oh dear.*

“Have you seen her this morning?”

Frances nodded, her eyes softening.

“She needs assistance with her hair. Could you please help her without making a show of it?”

“Yes sir.”

“Thank you, Miss Mitchell. You may return to class.”

“Yes sir,” she smiled at him and turned back.

The fifth years were in Trelawney’s tower, so he would speak to the prefects later. He planned a meeting with all of them for before dinner, but the fifth years were closer to her age and would most likely be the key. He swept back down to the dungeon with about five minutes to spare before the second year girls would arrive. They did so with a variety of airs: defiance, terror, regret, confusion. There were clearly two or three who had been in bed and had no idea what was going on. The guilty parties could have had red paint splashed across their foreheads.

“Expulsion is an option,” he said in most terrifying bat of the dungeon voice. “The year after the war, there were four students sorted into our house. We survived. Miss Collins, Miss Nguyen, Miss Engram, Miss Hollingsworth, you are excused. I would advise you to pay more attention to what is going on in front of your noses.”

The four baffled girls left looking quite relieved.

“Our house has never been a refuge for cowards, and it will not be one now. Miss Fraley, Miss Jonstone, Miss Sparks, if you stand by and allow something untenable to take place, you share in the culpability. The outcome next time will be far different. Leave my office. I will be observing you closely in the future.”

The bystanders skulked out, trying not to look at the three remaining students, who were all still trying to maintain bravado, but their eyes betrayed them.

“Miss Avalos, Miss Stager, Miss Norton, these,” he flicked his wand and unrolled a parchment, “are your expulsion papers.” They were not close enough to see the charmed tallies of items he had purchased for the stores and the discounts he had received. “All they require is the Headmistress’s signature, and you will be on the train home. If there is a hint of another incident involving anyone here, they will be signed, and your trunks will be packed in a moment. Am I clear?”

There was a chorus of quiet “Yes sirs.”

“I do hope so. You may think you can continue to quietly torment a fellow Slytherin and without my knowing. Let me assure you that you will not.”

“Yes sir,” Miss Stager was clearly the leader and the only one that still had a certain glint in her eye. The others had cowed. Valuable information.

“You will leave now, and you will not mention this again. Do not bother to apologize to Miss Holdscloth. It would be unwanted, and it would be meaningless.” Two scooted out the door, and Miss Stager left with her head up.

He made a mental note to pick up a bottle of Balvenie for Minerva the next time he went to town,
and then swept into the dungeon just as the fourth years were filing in for the second class of the day.

A dark cloud hovered over him from the rest of the week; he could not forgive himself for being so short-sighted. He knew what could happen both from his student days and his years on the faculty and that awful year he was Headmaster.

Hermione arrived the evening of the ninth as jaunty as she had the first two sessions of this cycle. For the first time since they had begun this, he wondered if he would need a potion to be able to perform. She ducked into the lav as always, and he hardly had to think about what would happen next before he was right in the game. The eleventh followed similarly. She was transfiguring the skirt different colours each time.

He slumped into the faculty meeting on the fifteenth intending to be as invisible as possible. He was not in the mood for another round of McCollough, of course, but he was also not in the mood for banter with the colleagues. She started in on the Great Hall exit procedure, he tried to tune her out.

“Good on you, Severus!” Filius called out. He snapped his head to the side. Had he fallen asleep and landed in the middle of the points discussion?

“Pardon?”

“Your Slytherins can leave a room without prompting,” Minerva said dryly.

“Oh, yes.” They had been on their best behaviour the last few days.

“So if we can all take a page from Professor Snape and his Slytherins, we could have an orderly dismissal every time.”

He smirked just a bit at Minerva. It was rather amusing.

Then the Headmistress brought out the points, and he tuned out until his chart and Longbottom’s were placed side by side. The boy was not completely wrong, he thought. It was not as if the reluctant Potions students really improved after having points deducted day after day. When Minerva lightly chastised Longbottom, he ducked his head and turned to Snape, perhaps in an act of self-punishment. Snape nodded his head at him, in as much of a reassuring gesture as he was capable of. The boy smiled at him and turned back around. Snape became engrossed in the parchment in front of him.

The meeting began to break-up as he was writing as constructive a comment as he was capable of on a fourth year’s essay on veritus serum.

“Severus, are you quite well?” Minerva asked him.

“I am fine.”

“You seem distracted.”

“Perhaps.”

“You need to sleep, I think. See you at breakfast.”

“Yes.” He gathered up his things and walked back to the dungeon. He was looking forward to Hermione’s visit, but not in the urgent way he had been after the previous two faculty meetings. He opened the bottle of Malbec, a lovely unintended consequence of this madness was the repeat enjoyment of that bottle. He let it rest and decided to take a shower. He stoked himself slowly this
time; he would certainly be ready for her when she arrived. He redressed more casually and poured the wine. He had finished the glass when she knocked.

The skirt was green this time, a darker shade that the Slytherin colour, but still lovely. Her hair was pinned at the top of her head and her cheeks were rosy from her walk through the grounds.

“Come in,” he said, rather cordially. The tiny effort seemed to delight her, and she smiled at him as she ducked into the lav for her part of the ritual. The wine had warmed his insides so pleasantly. He unbuttoned his placket and stroked his cock with a purpose. It cooperated immediately, and by the time she had walked over to the table and hoisted herself up, he was having to divert his mind not to spill prematurely all over his hand. She spread her legs, and he couldn’t look at her little, pink cunt as he slid in. Oh FUCK.

His hand was resting right by her right thigh. He moved it over, hardly at all but enough so that he was lightly touching the outside of it. He caressed it lightly with his fingers as he drove in and out. Her skin was so soft. He was tracing circles on her thigh, and she gasped. He looked up suddenly, and… it seemed as if she were turned on. Her face was flushed, her eyes were rolled back a bit, she was breathing shallowly.

He had no idea what to do about this. His instincts were to touch her; to bring his hand to her center and caress her there, to rub and tease her and try to make her come. He could not possibly take such liberties without permission, and he couldn’t find the words. Instead he suddenly had a vision of her touching herself, of her drawing out her clitoris, that he could hardly see. He came suddenly with a little wail, driving in as deeply as possible. She clinched around him as if she wanted him to go in even deeper.

He composed himself quickly and withdrew, but instead of bringing her legs together and her skirt down, she lay there as she was with her eyes closed. Her chest was heaving up and down. He left her quietly. He poured two glasses of the wine and took the book off the shelf. When he walked back to the table, she was covered but still flushed. He handed her the glass of wine and then the book.

“Thank you,” she said breathlessly.

He left her to her reading but observed her again, as casually as possible in case she glanced over. She seemed distracted at first, sipping her wine and staring into space, but she eventually settled in with the book and appeared fully engrossed when the little chime sounded indicating that her sedentary period was over. She hopped down from the table and handed him the book and empty wine glass.

“Any progress with the consummation?”

“Of course not—we’re mired in Vampire politics and poor Leni is still clueless. The horde is trying to make Anton a vassal, so maybe that will move things along. His awful mates are attempting to convince him to turn her…” Her laughter took over. “Sorry. It’s so ridiculous I don’t know why I keep reading it.”

This was the part where he responded with some witty banter, but he was at a loss. “Would you like another glass?” It was the best he could do.

“I had better not. Early morning. Thank you, though, it was lovely.” She wrapped her cloak around her and walked toward the door. “Good night Professor.”

“Good night Master.”
Hermione

This was becoming a problem. She scooted up the hill to the apparition point, every nerve in her body focused on her groin which was crying out for relief. It hadn’t helped that she had been thinking of him, more specifically of his cock all day. She had considered a wank after her last class to take the edge off, but there had been lingering students with too many questions, and there had not been time.

She had used the lubricant meticulously, careful not to touch any critical bits, but then he had plunged himself in and touched her leg, her thigh, rhythmically, in time with his…fucking. Was he trying drive her insane? Perhaps so. Perhaps he was tired of being the only one that had to reveal himself so intimately again and again. Perhaps he thought that it was time for turnabout.

But he had been so accommodating, so kind that night, so respectful. Master? It made her feel legitimate to hear it from him. She longed to inquire about his week, his month, what it was like for him to repeat it all; had he gone through the motions again? Had he sought out little changes he could make to improve his days?

Her classes were a new universe. They were engaged and responsive in a way she had never experienced. She was gratified by the change, but she felt guilty that she had done so poorly in the past. She thought about her upper-level students especially Had they learned anything? She knew of several in apprenticeships and she had to control the urge to owl them immediately with apologies.

Snape seemed more reflective this month, too. She suspected something had happened at school. There was something behind his eyes was different. Sadness had replaced impatience, frustration, disdain. It wasn’t there during the act, but before and just after, his eyes fell to the floor quite differently than the air he’d had previously.

He had seemed appalled tonight when she had not been able to hide her arousal. His reaction should have made her recover from it, but it heightened it. She jogged the last few paces to the apparition point and landed in her shed. She strode across the garden to the door, dropped some food in Crook’s bowl, “Sorry, boy,” and barely made it to the bath before her skirt was hitched up, her knickers were off and she was going at herself with her whole right hand. She was almost too wet with the lube and her own arousal and him…she kept sliding off. It didn’t take much, though, her fingers in the right spots and her mind recalling how full he had made her and she was coming in waves, almost tripping into the tub. Oh FUCK.

She scooped her ruined knickers into the hamper and washed her hands before she returned to the kitchen. Crooks was eating and not paying her a bit of attention. She opened the refrigerator and pondered her new bounty of choices. She chose some summer vegetables and some pasta. She thought she could manage a white wine sauce. She was humming a song that George had played at her birthday party as she chopped and sautéed. She poured herself some of the wine and wished she had stayed at school for another glass with him. She had been so anxious to get out of there, but now that she was reasonably satisfied and not so on edge, she chided herself for not letting the possibilities play out. Most likely, it would have been another glass and no other change, but who was to know? A vision of him splaying her on the table with his face between her legs rose to the surface. Stop that. She laughed at herself.

She had owled Harry at work earlier in the week to see if he was free for lunch, and they had met the day before. She had pondered endlessly how to bring up the topic, but he looked so down, trying to
put on a face for her, she had blurted out before the salads had even arrived, “What is going on with you?”

He had tried to deflect, but she wouldn’t let him. He and Ginny had been out of sorts since before they had even conceived Lily. Harry had been convinced that once they had the third baby, all would be right, but of course that had not happened. Ginny was unhappy with just about everything in her life, but Harry perceived mostly about him.

“What is going on with you?”

“No, she brushes me off. She says nothing’s wrong.”

“Have you had any time just the two of you?”

“None. Not for talk or anything else. I am fairly certain the last time we had sex was the night Lily was conceived.”

She tried not to let the shock show on her face. It was certainly not what she envisioned of married life, and it was crushing to see her best friend so unhappy. “Are either of you thinking of…”

“I don’t know. What a mess it would be with three little kids. She hasn’t said anything along those lines. I’m just not sure… I’m not sure how miserable two people can be together before they have to face… the inevitable.”

“Is it, though? Inevitable?” This was hitting notes of surrender that she couldn’t stand. She had to stop herself from going on a crusade-like rant here. You do not know what it’s like to be married. She flipped a switch in her head. “Harry, I want to help. If I came over one night, you know, a weekend night, and stayed with the children, and you and Ginny could have the whole night to talk and to listen to each other… I would love to do it.”

“I’m not sure Ginny would go for it at this point.”

“Would you ask her? Tell her I am dying to spend some time with your children.” She realized it was true as she said it. She would love nothing more than to have a night with the boys and with the sweet baby, who must be just at the stage when she was trying to walk. She felt a bath of hormones wash over her as she thought about it. Oh, for the love of...

He had seemed skeptical when they parted, but he had owled her that night that Ginny had agreed to let Hermione stay over with the children. Harry had already arranged a night away in a little rental cottage at the shore.

Hermione dished up her rather delicious looking dinner. She was going to Grimmauld the next night, and she wanted to make some lists in her journal of what to shop for the next day, so there would be plenty of treats for the little Potter-Weasleys. Perhaps if it went well, Harry and Ginny would let her do this regularly.

I might be losing my mind. She added Baby’s First Potion Set to the list.
Chapter Three

Hermione

She was heading down the grounds for the Thursday the seventeenth session when Neville surprised her again. There was really no excuse for it—how many times would he be at the greenhouses before it would register in time to say something useful?

She blamed the weather. It was gorgeous and still warm, so rare in Scotland. She had charmed her skirt a blueish lilac, her absolute favorite colour, and she was anticipating an easy Friday and then her night with the Potter-Weasley children and then her party on Saturday with—she hoped dearly—a Harry and Ginny on the mend.

So she was surprised again when Neville called out for the third time in sixty days, “Hermione?!”

“Oh, Hi! Neville! I am late for…Will I see you Saturday? I’ll see you Saturday night! Birthday party!” She kept walking briskly as she spoke, and she could tell she had thoroughly confused him.

“Hermione?”

“Neville, I’m late for a meeting in here. I’ll see you!” She was behind the door and headed down the hall, expecting him to follow her. She stopped and breathed. Neville. I am working on a project with Professor Snape and really late. Looking forward to chatting to you Saturday. Tell Hannah I said hi. Kiss Rosamund for me! How hard was that? She didn’t smack herself on the head, but she considered it. She was quite out of breath at Professor Snape’s office door as he let her in.

“I think I have done it this time with Neville. I didn’t say the right thing at all, and he is most likely on his way down.” The words tumbled out of mouth. You are mental.

Snape chuckled. She decided she could not think of a more shocking reaction. “Would you care for a drink while we wait him out?”


“I still have half a bottle of the Malbec—what we had the other night—would that be all right?”

“Oh, yes, it’s lovely. Where did you…I mean where do you buy wine?”

He bored his eyes into her as if he were trying to ascertain why she was asking this.

“I prefer the Muggle vintages,” she tried to explain.

He nodded but didn’t answer her question. She tried again after he handed her a glass. She took a drink. “This is…what is this?”

“Malbec.”

“French?”
“It’s from Argentina.”

“Ah.” She sipped it and thought of his bookcase full of travel guides and trinkets. She pictured him in Argentina. It wasn’t as difficult as it had been those first few nights. They sat in silence that was not completely comfortable. He finished his drink before she did, and she shot the rest of it down so as not to hold them up. “I guess…”

“No Professor Longbottom,” he completed her sentence, but she was again shocked at honorific Professor Snape used. It made her think back to the parties and Neville trying to explain something he had perceived as different about Professor Snape.

“No. No Neville.”

He stood and began walking toward the library, and she followed. She had already taken off her cloak; she draped it over her arm and hung it on the tree as she passed it. She walked into the lav without conferring with him. She used the loo, deposited her knickers in the bag, applied the lube, careful again not to touch herself. She decided to try to stay neutral this time, to put her mind far away. She did not relish another round of frustrated arousal and lonely wank.

She was mostly successful. She felt the familiar rush when he entered her, but she spent the whole time making an inventory of the ingredients in her stores. It seemed to take him longer to finish, but maybe it was just herself not paying attention. He finally came with a grunt, and she silently congratulated herself for staying detached. He handed her the book and then sat down at a little desk in the corner where he was marking papers.

Anton had the horde in the parlor, holding off their insistence that he take Ylena to his chamber that night and turn her in the throes of ignited passion. Even David, who was supposed to be his ally in all of this was agreeing with the consensus. No one realized that Ylena had finally picked up the four-thousandth hint a servant had dropped and was hiding in the west alcove, hearing it all.

RUN. Run, girl, run. Get out! Get out of there! Run before someone smells you!

She did not run. She stayed in the alcove, practically passing out from the intrigue of it all. She waited them out through a blood-letting and subsequent vampire feast. She waited until they all left and dawn was minutes away at which time she emerged from the alcove and implored Anton to take her right there on the stairs. “Take my body; take my soul; I am yours forever…”

“Fuck this.” She slammed the book shut and pounded it too hard on the table—thank Merlin for the cushioned top or she might have broken his mother’s book.

“No conjugal union tonight?”

“So much worse. I should have seen it coming. Vampires with a heart of gold,” she sneered as she stowed the pillow. “Saturday is my late night,” she reminded him as she fetched her cloak.

“Yes.”

The temperature outside had dropped dramatically, so she pulled the cloak tightly around her. She was rewriting the story in her head as she bustled up the grounds. Ylena runs to the nearest village and...a kind older couple lets her into their cottage. Anton is close behind her and almost dies as the sun rises. She is not going to let him inside, but she realizes she cannot let him burn...she opens the door, and he collapses. And dies immediately because the cottage has windows.

She rolled her eyes at herself and apparated home.
She had her desired easy Friday and arrived at Twelve Grimmauld Place by early afternoon. Ginny was apprehensive about leaving her babies in a childless single woman’s care, but Hermione put on her best reassuring tone. Ginny had over-prepared—there was a plan for every unlikely scenario—but it made it easier on Hermione. Dinner was already set out for the boys. Hermione had taken Lily into her arms and did not put her down until she was fast asleep and the boys needed baths.

Lily had a portable cot, and Hermione slept next to it, ready for night feedings, but Lily slept until almost six. She woke up cooing and curious, and Hermione changed her and then settled down to feed her. They had fifteen quiet minutes before the boys sounded as if they were razing the whole third floor. They were happily diverted by breakfast and then play in the garden.

It was a lot; there was no denying it, and Hermione could understand how it could be overwhelming and perhaps a bit claustrophobic for Ginny to have this life everyday as Harry was able to enjoy all the fun bits but not share in the drudgery. But there was so much joy in this as James showed Albus the little corner of ladybugs he found, and Lily used the garden chairs to pull up and totter around using them for balance.

They were still in the garden when Harry and Ginny arrived home. Hermione tried to interpret every word and gesture. Ginny seemed to be in a better mood than she had been recently, but there were no moments of revelation. Hermione kissed the three children and headed out to prepare herself for the party.

At the dress shop, she mulled over her choices from the last two cycles and decided on another change. There was a mostly black dress hanging next to the tight one she had worn the first cycle. This one had a bold print in white whorls around a full skirt. The top of the dress was tightly fitted and slightly low-cut. She tried it on, and it fit perfectly. She paid for it and decided to treat herself this time to a pedicure for the open-toed strappy high-heels that would complement the dress.

She stopped off at Boots for Muggle toiletries and more lubricant. She had squeezed out the last of the old tube Thursday. She lingered in the cosmetic department and ended up spending more that she would ever find sensible, but realizing that she would likely have all the money restored in eleven days, she enjoyed the splurge.

She bathed and dressed again with care and apparated to the Broomsticks to find her friends and the gifts and old lady quips. She thanked them effusively, perhaps going overboard judging on their faces, but she it was what she felt.

She went with a martini this time to switch things up but also because she thought a martini glass would complement her look delightfully. She wondered if Professor Snape enjoyed a martini. She pictured him glass in hand, pulling the olive off the little spear with his mouth. *It would be fun if he were here. I wonder what he would think of it all?*

“Hermione, I tried to find you Thursday but you were quite a little blaze up the grounds,” Neville called out from across the table.

“You at Hogwarts, ‘Mione?” Ron followed up, giving her a chance to get a story ready.

“Sorry, Neville. I was so late! I am working on a project with Professor Snape; I’ve been there several times.”

“Did you say you are working with Professor Snape? What on?” Harry was farther down the table than he had been the last times.

“Chemical attraction theory. Very boring. Our mutual mentor connected us.”
“Really?” Ginny asked. “I wouldn’t think the old bat would be willing to share his toys.”

“Miss Weasley,” Harry mock-admonished her.

“Sorry,” she said and bumped her side into his and lay her head on his shoulder for an instant. “But you know what I mean!” she said to Hermione.

“Professor Snape has changed,” Hannah said with a little bit of mockery and a lot of affection towards Neville.

“Really?” Hermione asked casually.

“Oh, yes. He has become rather lovely apparently.”

“I did NOT say lovely!” Neville snorted. “He has been in a more pleasant mood so far this year.”

“Oy, like that would take much!” George called from the end of the table, eager to move on to something more fascinating, like quidditch statistics. Hermione rolled her eyes at him good naturedly.

She switched to red wine when the food arrived in anticipation of that cake that was no less delicious that night. She’d had the birthday playlist in her head for the last thirty days, and instead of being sick of the songs, it made her freer on the dance floor. She danced with George most of the night as he was the person having the second-most fun. She planned a strategic trip to the loo before the last song began and when she returned was very pleased to see Harry and Ginny dancing together. George was there with an arm extended, and she fell into him gladly.

“Woah, birthday girl. Steady on them sexy shoes.”

She giggled against his chest. He smelled very good, and she indulged in naughty thoughts she had never really pondered in connection with George. He was currently on the outs with Angelina; they had been on and off for years. It wasn’t a serious thought because Angelina could easily kill her, but it was a fun fantasy leading with her mind a bit ahead of that evening’s activity in the library. Don’t forget to take your shoes off, flashed into her head. Kill joy, she replied.

She hugged and kissed them all goodbye, lingering a for a few moments with a rather besotted looking Harry and Ginny. Neville and Hannah were cozy, too.

She went in for a cheek kiss with George, but he had his arm around her back and he dipped her down and planted on right on the mouth.

“Cheeky!” she said at once in unison with at least half the other guests.

She flooed home with her things and then went immediately to the garden shed. She had to transfigure her shoes as there was no way she could make it through the grounds in almost stilettos. She transfigured them back, though, as soon as she was in the dungeon. Her ensemble required them. She clicked her way through the classroom feeling butterflies for the first time since the beginning.

He met her at the door and took her cloak. He was wearing only his white button-down shirt and black trousers that night, but his hair was very neat as if he had just pulled it back. He paused for a moment before he hung her cloak, just looking at her. Then he snapped to, and walked toward their table, so she headed to the lav. She opened her bag as a little pang of failure hit her before she was aware of just how she had failed. The box that contained the tube of lubricant was not visible. Did I drop it in? She could see it in the Boots bag with the cosmetics. She had emptied the bag in the bathroom, taking the products out of their packages and placing them in the bathroom drawer. She
meant to put the Pre-seed in her bag but had no memory of doing so. She searched it thoroughly. Nothing. Stress panic hit her hard in the gut. Breathe.

She lifted her skirt and put her thumbs in the waistband of her knickers, easing them down, thinking. The martini and wine were still warm in her body. She could still feel George pressed against her. Snape had smelled lovely as she walked in the room. Like his library and his whiskey, but like him, too. She felt the beginning of true arousal begin to settle in her belly, straight to her groin. She brushed herself with her fingers, dipping one inside and spreading the wetness around. She put one foot on the ledge of the tub as she had when she had gotten herself off at home the last time. She thought of him in the next room, taking his potion, his cock extending out from his body. She massaged her clit gently and felt herself grow wetter. She applied a bit more pressure and had to clamp her mouth shut to avoid moaning. There it was. She was plenty ready.

She walked in and hitched herself onto the table. Her dress had a thin layer of tulle as an underskirt that bunched around her hips, but she laid it as flat as she could. She was afraid her nerves would dry her right up, but looking at him, ready with his eyes betraying eagerness made her desire sharper. She spread her legs and looked into his eyes as he braced himself and approached her in the same way he always did, with one hand beside her and one at the base of his cock.

There was a small bit of resistance at her entrance, but she pushed her hips forward to help guide him in, and he exhaled.

“Did you not?” he seemed to struggle for the words.

“I forgot it. Is this okay?”

“Yes,” he gasped.

It was not as easy for him to glide in and out. She hitched up one leg slightly to aid him, which resulted in him hitting places he never had before. This was all very real for the first time in any of the sessions. Hermione was tempted to stop and discuss it except it felt so good, and she wanted him so much. Acting on impulse she lay her hands on the front of him, near his hips as he moved, feeling his skin through his shirt.

“Sorry!” she said, pulling back her hands, horrified. She was afraid it was a violation of his person.

“No, god, no, Hermione, fuck,” he gasped. “Do you like this? Can you feel…”

“Yes, Merlin…god, yes, I can, fuck…” He was hitting her close to the right spot, but she needed more pressure on her clit. Without a thought, she brought her fingers to her mouth and then shoved them down again over an armful of skirt and rubbed herself as he thrust. Immediately, she was right on the edge, and made a quick decision to wait for him, and to come when he did. She realized she forgot to take off her shoes, but they were not weighing her down this time. She curled one leg around him, so the heel was abutting his arse as he moved in and out.

“Fuck, Severus,” she hissed out. “I am going to come so hard when you do.”

He moaned and thrust all the way in. He arched his back up and closed his eyes, and she could feel him coming inside her. He had put his hand on top of hers at her clit and she rode it out, tipping over into orgasm before he was finished with his. She cried out and let loose, feeling everything, mostly her own sensations, but his body, too at every point where they connected.

He was lowering himself down so his chest was pressed against hers and breathing hard. She matched those breaths, and they stayed like that for a few moments before he pulled out and began
his normal routine of re-buttoning. This time, though, he walked toward the little drink cart by the stacks and poured two short glasses of fire whiskey. She straightened her underskirt and then smoothed the dress down and sat up as he handed her a glass, forgoing the pillow. He tapped her glass with his cordially before he threw back the whole thing, mimicking (she suspected unintentionally) the way he had with the phials at the end of the last cycle.

She couldn’t take whiskey all at once like that, so she sipped hers and looked down. “I...I had come from a party, and I drank quite a bit there,” she started in an apologetic tone.

“Hermione,” he said fiercely, and her eyes widened. He looked momentarily abashed and softened his speech. “Don’t. You were…it is supposed to be like. It is supposed to be…pleasurable.”

“You are always so dignified, and…”

He snorted. “None of this has been dignified. It is insanity, the lot of it, but it is somewhat less mortifying not to be the one continually debasing…”

“You have NOT...do you feel that way? That’s not how I have viewed it.” She put her drink down beside her, being still so it wouldn’t tip over on the cushion top. “Severus, you have been so kind with me.”

He looked at her incredulously. “It is you that have been kind, Hermione. You have made this…not wholly unpleasant.” He looked down at his glass and walked over again to refill it.

“I’m glad of that but forgetting the lube and losing control when you have been so disciplined.”

He let out a short laugh. “What do you mean? Disciplined?”

“Taking your potion in time to be ready for me, and...handling yourself with such dignity.”

He shot back his drink again and on a wry half-smile. “I have not needed a potion since the first session. I look forward to...this, Miss Granger...Master,” he corrected himself.

“Stop it with the Master business. It makes me feel like I should have leather and whips.”

“Would you like that?” his eyebrows shot up.

“Not really,” she laughed now. “You haven’t taken the potion? You were ready...just because…”

“Yes, Hermione. And at many other inconvenient times, too, in the last few weeks. I have not had the privilege of this kind of...habit...many times in...” he broke off, clearly self-conscious at how much he was revealing. He took a visible breath. “It was a relief that you felt something.”

“It was a relief for me to...well, to finish here rather than running home and having to...wank.” She could not sound more ridiculous as the words poured out. She felt her face turn scarlet. “I fear I have scandalized my cat.”

“Have you really...finished yourself at home?”

“Of course, Severus. It has been hard to maintain control lately.”

“Why have you, then?”

“I wasn’t sure how you would feel about it.”

“How could I be anything but relieved that I was not the only one...feeling anything?” He glanced at
her still almost full glass. “Would you prefer some wine?”

“No, thank you. I’ve had enough to drink tonight.”

“Where were you? What do you do this day?”

“It’s my birthday. My third thirtieth birthday. There’s a party at the Broomsticks.”

He looked mortified at the news, and she regretted telling him. They had avoided personal matters for so long. “Happy birthday,” he said quietly.

“Thank you,” she smiled at him.

“I hope it is a good party…”

“Quite. Hannah Longbottom organizes it and George is DJ/master of ceremonies. The food is gorgeous and the cake—black forest gateau—my absolute favorite. It’s all so lovely and more than a little sad.” She stopped and took a small sip. “Sorry. I do tend to go on.”

He leaned back in his chair, took another drink and shrugged. What better do I have to do?

“I feel very…apart from them. I am not a mum or a lover of quidditch. I live a straddled existence…one foot in the Muggle world…”

“How so?” he broke into her monologue.

“I live in Putney at my parents’ house; it’s mine now, but it’s where I grew up. My parents are gone.” She had no idea how much he knew of her war story. He nodded slightly with an air of sympathy.

“I tried to live a more typical life of a Potions Master at…you know…wizarding university and all, but I kept being pulled back…not by anything…but by myself, really, and they—my friends—grew in another way. They are all paired up, and…” Merlin could I go on. “I suppose if we are successful, I’ll be able to join in the joys of pregnancy conversations.” She tried to rein herself in.

“And if we are not…what would happen to your friendships?”

“I’ll be friends with Harry forever…and Ron to a lesser extent.” She had leaned back on the cushions, which he raised and expanded wandlessly, so she was propped up. Her shoes were beginning to pinch, or perhaps they had been pinching a while, and she was just feeling it now. She unbuckled them and let them fall. She had her canvas trainers in her bag for the walk up to the apparition point so she wouldn’t have to put her heels back on and transfigure them again.

“You were together…you and Weasley were a couple at one point?”

“At the end of the war and for about a week after. He’s married to Susan Bones now. They have a little one and another on the way. They seem happy.”

“No regrets there?”

“None.”

He nodded.

“What about you, Severus? I know nothing about your life outside school, except…” she indicated the travel shelf.
“Summer life. Nothing long-term. Short-term companionship if I am especially lucky.”

“Yes. That has been my habit as well. Not during summers, but Potions conferences. What a cliché, right?”

He shrugged.

She put her glass up to her mouth to take a drink but yawned instead. She had not slept terribly well the night before; Lily was fascinating to watch sleep. “I should go.” She took another sip and then put the glass on the drink cart and tied on her trainers. He was very busy arranging things on the cart. She walked over to the cloak tree and wrapped her cloak around her.

“Good night. See you Monday.”

“Good night, Hermione,” he called quietly from across the room.

“Good night, Severus.”

**Severus**

He apparated into London Sunday and walked briskly to the library where he had met her just after they were cursed. He had never done any research there, but he spent the day in the reference section where she had been. There were large machines he could put coins in and make photocopies, and he did so with three relevant studies, suppressing chuckles the whole time.

He took his bundle back with him, arriving at school in time for dinner and patrol and an early bedtime to begin the next week. His tutorials on surviving adolescence with Miss Holdscloth were as emotionally draining as his sessions with Hermione were sustaining. He was remembering details about his student life he had buried deep inside. Her stubborn nature was dragging them back as if via pensive.

“So I will be fine as long as I change everything about myself,” she had said rather impetuously.

“No. What I am suggesting you change, or rather improve, is your ability to be aware enough of your surroundings and fellow humans to know what to say and what merely to think.”

She had sighed heavily.

**Precisely.**

But Miss Holdscloth was a Tuesday commitment and it was Monday, delightful Monday the twenty-first, the session after the glorious nineteenth, which he could now at least put in context. He had decided it was some event, but he would not have guessed it was her thirtieth birthday. The changed wardrobe was still a mystery, but she had once again been a vision her 1950s style cocktail dress and shoes that he suspected would be the subject of many future wank fantasies.

He skipped dinner Monday night so he would have time to prepare for her arrival. He showered and redressed carefully. He had the stack of pages, organized into three bundles, magically bound. He had chosen a different drink and had lime wedges prepared beside sparkling glasses. She had not seemed overly fond of the whiskey.
She was at his office promptly, and he let her in, trying not to betray his nerves or how anxiously he had been awaiting her. He took her cloak and hung it over one arm. She had transfigured the skirt into a dark, rusty red, which she had paired with a grey jumper with a deep V-neck on top of a black vest. She was wearing tall black leather boots. He wondered if she had been teaching that day, and if she had if any student male or female could have concentrated on anything besides how fuckable she was. *Teaching robes, Snape. Hold it together, imbecile.*

“Could we have a drink first?” he asked quietly to calm himself internally.

“Great!” She sank into his office couch and crossed her legs.

He hung her cloak on the tree in his office. “I thought gin and tonic—if you would prefer something else…”

“No, that’s perfect, thank you.”

He mixed the drinks, backing off the gin slightly. He wanted them to be relaxed but still maintain clear heads.

“Would you sit at the desk? I would like to show you something.” He put her drink down at the desk across from his chair, not waiting for her agreement, and she was up and moving immediately.

“Of course.”

“I did some research at the Muggle library.” He pushed the three bundles toward her and then took his own seat behind the desk and sipped his drink patiently. She could read.

She took a drink. “Mmm, this is divine,” before she pulled the papers toward her and started reading down the page. She appeared to be about half way through the first page of the first study before she started to laugh. She flipped through the pages of that one quickly and then moved on to the next and then the next, speed reading some of the section titles.

“Have you seen these?” he asked.

“No!” she continued to look at them.

“So you were unaware…”

“Yes, I didn’t find this research. Brilliant, though. Truly.”

“In light of…”

“Have you read them all?”

“Yes.”

“Then by all means, please summarize.” She had a grin that was taking over her face, and she took a generous pull from her drink.

*Yes, much preferred to the whiskey,* he noted quickly.

“It is just as the titles suggest. In three studies, female orgasm was found to be beneficial to conception. Not complicated.”

“It can be rather complicated, I have found in the past, although not with present company.” Her face was red, and she was giggling behind her glass.
“Ah, well. It need not be.” If he had ever been tempted to waggle his eyebrows, that would be the moment. He controlled himself. *Thank Merlin.* “So, I suggest that we change things slightly these last two sessions.”

“Yes?”

“Yes.”

“Ah. Well…” Hermione Granger was at a loss for words, and he was there to witness it.

“For one, I wonder if you would allow me to apply the lubrication? It is, by the way, very much improved. I have been meaning to say…”

“Oh, yes, it’s from a tube I bought at Boots, the Muggle apothe…”

“I know what Boots is.”

“Of course. It’s brewed…formulated to help conception. It’s not my work. I gave up after the first cycle.”

“In any case, it is quite good. Would it be acceptable if I…”

“Yes. That would be acceptable.”

An awkward air had settled between them. *Merlin’s pants.*

“Are you ready…”

“Yes, yes,” she said hastily and drained the last of her drink. “Let me….erm…use the loo quickly and then…”

“Yes! That is fine,” he said entirely too emphatically. This was quickly going pear-shaped. But she emerged with no boots and he assumed no knickers, confirmed when she hopped up on the table and pulled her skirt up. She handed him a dark coloured tube labeled “Pre-Seed”. *Subtle.* Not that any of this business was.

He put one hand on her leg and caressed her thigh the way he had wanted to for so long. He could feel her shiver slightly under his touch, and he looked to see if she was finding him repellent. She did not seem to be, so he continued stroking her lightly up and down the tops of her thighs, then moving his hands down, closer and closer to where her legs were joined. He moved one hand up, touching her on top of her small mound, feeling her silky, close pubic hair. She spread her legs wider, which was the invitation he needed to touch her down closer to her opening and to her little hooded clit.

She was already quite wet, he noted with pleasure, and his cock strained uncomfortably in his trousers.

“Yes, right there,” she breathed as he started moving his fingers from her entrance up and then back. He swirled her clitoris gently at first, and she moved her hips down and bore into his fingers. He quickly removed the cap of the tube and squeezed some of the substance on his fingers and then went back in, swirling it around the entrance of her vagina, slightly more clinically than before though his cock did not receive that message. When he had applied it all, he brushed his fingers around her clit again, and she moaned. He continued the little dance with that hand as he freed himself clumsily from his placket with the other.

“Is it all right…are you ready?” he breathed.
“Yes,” she moaned emphatically, and he lined his cock up as he had done so many times before, but not with his other hand so wonderfully employed. He sank in with a sigh that grew to match her moan.

“Oh, yes,” he managed and began to move slowly.

“Fuuuuuuuck,” she gasped, and her voice had the same effect on him it had Saturday night. He was already hurtling towards orgasm. He had to slow down. He closed his eyes and put more pressure on her clit with his fingers as he drove deeply with his cock. “Yes, Severus, yes. Right there. Do that. Fuck!”

She had brought her leg around him again as she had before, and he realized he was not slowing down sufficiently. He opened his eyes and realized she was on the cusp of orgasm herself. Thank Merlin. He caught a little bit of lube and bore down on her clit as he fucked her hard ride out his pleasure until he came as hard as he ever had. She tipped over the edge as soon as he started filling her, and that added even more sensation, if that were possible. He might have roared, or she did, or both, but when he was capable of any kind of thought, he was collapsed on her and she had her legs wound tightly around him and she was panting almost.

“That was…”

“It was,” he gasped back at her. Her neck was right there, and his impulse was to wrap his arms around her and kiss her behind her ear, but he could not summon the courage. He pulled out and adjusted himself. She looked blissful. It was enough.

She was slow to sit, but she eventually pulled out the little cushion to prop up her backside.

“I don’t suppose you want the book.”

“No, I have brought my own.” She looked as if she wanted to say something else, but the moment passed, and she buried herself into the much less frivolous selection she had brought. Her wand went off far too quickly and she was putting on shoes and knickers, not at all self-consciously.

“One more if we have any luck,” she said as she was donning her cloak, and her words hit him as painfully as a rock to his gut would. Of course she is hoping we were successful this month, you dunderhead. What else is the point?

“Yes,” he said and watched her depart.

The last session was just as pleasurable but not as awkward, and then the wait began. This time, though, when she waved her wand in front of her and nothing appeared, he had to stop himself from rejoicing out loud.

“Four,” she said as she clinked his phial this time.

“Four,” he said and hoped the brown tinted glass hid his grin.
Part Five: Chapter One

Part Five

Chapter One

Severus

It was time for less worry and more planning. He had sixty days to prepare for a new life without magic. If they were successful he had one month or two to determine what he wanted from this life. He could not imagine anything more miserable than having a taste of contentment of joy and of hope and then living without for the rest of his life, save a few weeks in the summer.

He had lived frugally and saved his money since he was eighteen. He could live off his savings for a few years, but he felt it unwise to waste time when he was able-bodied. He worried that the loss of magic would hasten the aging process; a wizard of fifty was a different physical being than a Muggle of the same age.

He liked the library in London. He could see himself working there. A job in the reference section required a diploma from Muggle university, and there was no time for that. He could charm some credentials though, and he had plenty of people who would be willing to provide references for him. He was tuning out the sorting and making these mental notes. He looked to his right and left. There were five people not counting Poppy, who was not there, that would be happy to help him. Hermione surely would, too.

Minerva shuddered beside him when Jacob Chulski was sorted into Gryffindor. Jacob was the third of three brothers, and the questionable vintage did not improve this year. Unlike Minerva, Snape knew that Chulski was a disaster his first month of school, too. He gave her a sympathetic snort.

He did not need to wheedle this time for free drinks. He knew Minerva would invite him to the Broomsticks for Saturday night. He was going to pass the invitation along to Professor Longbottom and his wife. The couple rarely socialized with the faculty. They had an infant daughter, Rosamund, who Snape had previously regarded as merely a noisy bundle, but last week during the wait, he had passed Hannah with baby in pram on the grounds, and he had really looked at her. She had huge blue eyes and favoured her grandmother Alice, who had been a few years ahead of Snape in school.

He had not said anything to Hannah—what would he say? But he had observed the baby and nodded to the mother. He would suggest that Longbottom bring his wife along. If they could not find childcare at Hogwarts, they were not trying hard enough.

He had met with the sixth-year prefects before the dinner. He would meet with the whole house after and the then finally the fifth-year prefects. He was not going to leave the first and especially second years alone without prefects until he was assured that they would all be safe.

He was not thinking of leaving the days to fate and chance this month. The Hufflepuffs would learn that cheating has consequences, but perhaps not in his class, charmed to prevent it. Audrey was going to learn the game without being tortured. He was going to appoint her to be a mentor for the first-years’ academic progress, which would require some training with him. Iris Wentworth could
learn to keep a safe distance from flame without burning her eyebrows off. If he ever made it to October, life would be back to its largely uncontrollable form, but until then, he wanted minimal suffering for himself and others.

He expected the days to drag on, but it was quite the opposite. He kept seeing details that he overlooked before, like the way Filius was struggling on the stairs more than Snape had ever noticed. He sent a terse thank note to the tower for Filius’s charm work in the dungeon and included a small phial of joint healing salve. The weather was unusually lovely for September in Scotland. He could be stuck in cold, rainy grey, which would be more typical. Instead, he was reliving the most beautiful September he could ever remember.

The fifth arrived, and he made quick work of the forest collection. He knew exactly where to find everything. He spent most of the day reading with a little lab work close to the end. He had decided that the fertility potion he had been taking was rubbish, both magically and chemically. He needed something to increase the life of his sperm outside his body so if their timing was off, they would still have a chance of success. It was an overwhelming project for someone whose training in biology was limited to the magical realm, but he felt as if he were on the right track.

He cleaned the lab at five, giving him plenty of time to prepare for her. He was nervous and excited to see her. He had missed her not only sexually (which, oh Merlin, he had) but also, he had missed her presence. She was a light in the dungeon. He knew it was temporary, so he wanted to enjoy the moments they would have and try not to hope for anything else. He was also dead curious about what she was going to wear this month. He had considered every possibility from a pencil skirt to a tutu, and he was anxious to see what she had settled on.

Of all the ensembles he imagined, he did not expect her to show up without her cloak in Muggle blue jeans. She looked like the perfect embodiment of a casual Saturday evening. She was wearing a dark violet jumper and her white canvas trainers. Her hair was in natural curls around her face and down her back. He was baffled by this ability of hers to always look creatively appropriate for every occasion. His wardrobe contained seven pairs of black wool trousers and a dozen or so white button-down shirts of different weights. She was smiling at him and carrying a green glass bottle.

“Hi!” she said and held out the bottle. “I was wondering if we could talk and have a drink first.”

“Yes,” he took the bottle from her outstretched hands.

“It’s Pellegrino. I like it straight or mixed with pumpkin juice. I am laying off the alcohol this month.”

“Really.”

“Yeah. Feel free to have whatever you like, of course. It’s probably lovely cut into whiskey.”

He walked around to the office drink cart while she sunk into the chair across from his desk. He put three ice cubes in each glass, squeezed in some lime, and carefully poured in the sparkling water. He walked back to the desk and handed her a drink before sitting down with his own.

“How have you been?” she asked with a tone that indicated she was really inquiring about how his week had gone rather than making small talk.

“I have been well. You?”

“It has been a struggle the last week, since we tested. I was very sure we would be successful. I had every symptom. I was so confident, and then it was a clear negative. I cast the charm ten more times.
after I left—I just couldn’t believe it, but then my period started about twenty minutes later, and it was awful. I’m fine now.”

He was at a complete loss of how to respond, so he just looked at her, allowing her to go on uninterrupted.

“I have been going through every detail and trying to figure out what we can do. I went to a Muggle doctor, and while they can’t test for fertility, she couldn’t find anything wrong. I also visited a healer; that was a waste of time.” She rolled her eyes. “So I am looking for little changes. I am taking some vitamin supplements. I am cutting down on alcohol—just trying to be a bit healthier. Job stress is not really a problem.”

“No.”

“How are you doing with that? Are you going out of your mind with the tedium?”

“No.” Say something, you idiot. “No, I am not.”

“Good. I’m not either. If nothing else, I am a better teacher through this experience.”

He nodded. He wished he had slipped some vodka in his drink. He was failing miserably at this.

“I don’t know if any of these changes will help. I also have a list of supplements recommended for the male partner—don’t feel obligated.” She pulled a list of about six items written on a small parchment and slid it over. “You can chuck it in the bin if you want.” She took a moment and seemed to be choosing her words carefully. “There is one other topic; one other change. I was wondering if we could switch up the routine. The table in the library was perfect for the first few cycles, but now, and considering your research,” she smiled at him warmly, “I think I would be more comfortable not splayed out on that table. It makes me feel a bit clinical.”

This was not where he anticipated this going. He immediately pictured her in his bed.

“Where did you have in mind?” He did not want to be presumptuous.

“I assume you have a bed, I was thinking. If you don’t want me in your private…”

“Yes, I have a bed. We can go back to my chamber.”

“Great. Thank you. That is all I wanted to discuss.” She was suddenly busy finishing her drink and searching around in her bag. He waited until she looked up at him again.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes, thank you.” She seemed relieved.

He walked them through the sitting room and the library. There was a bank of shelves at the back wall that covered the entrance to his bed chamber. He opened it wandlessly and led her in.

His bedroom was not fancy. It used to be filled with Slytherin excesses, a holdover from the Slughorn era. Then he had moved into the Headmaster’s suite, which had been embarrassing in its opulence. When he had moved back here, he had discarded all the furniture that had predated him. He found a simple four-poster with steel-coloured curtains and linens. He had a sturdy wardrobe with a built-in chest of drawers. He had a bookshelf that held what he was currently reading on one shelf and special favorites on the others. There was no art, and certainly no portraits. It looked like the chamber of a monk of a certain age, and that was not far off the mark.
It was the first time he had ever had a woman in the space. He had not been completely celibate during the bad years, but it was close. Summers had always been his time away from school that he found companionship if he was lucky. That, the occasional Christmas holiday when he was not stuck at school, and a few Death Eater related horrors had been the extent of his experience with sex. He had stagnated over the years, he supposed, and now when it was perfectly acceptable for him to have a social life during the terms, he never had.

She looked around his room and said nothing. He revealed the door to the bathroom, which focused her attention there.

“May I?” She pointed toward the room. He nodded, and she walked in.

He tried to maintain his composure, but unlike their previous sessions, he had no idea how this would play out. He was not aroused at that moment either, and he started to worry that he would not be able to perform. Just then, she walked out of his bath with bare legs. She walked over to his bed, sat down and looked up at him. She held out that dark tube, which he took from her, and then removed her black, cotton knickers and lay back on the pillows that bolstered the headboard.

He was no longer concerned about his state of arousal. She smiled at him encouragingly. He removed the cap from the lube and put some on his fingers. She spread her legs, and he began spreading it on her. She did not seem to be feeling as much or to be as interested as she had been the previous other times, and he wasn’t sure what to do about it. If this was not a session with a clear goal, if she were just a witch, just a woman in his bed, what would he do? He would take the rest of her clothes off and kiss her, not necessarily in that order. He did not know if either was appropriate or on the table. What else?

“I have missed this,” he murmured at her.

“This? What have you missed?” she was playing right along, and he appreciated it.

“You, Miss Granger. I have missed you. I have missed you and your delightful little cunt.”

“Really?” she purred.

Yes! It is working!

He swirled his fingers around her, and she pressed into them, clearly wanting more. It was much more comfortable on the bed, except now he didn’t know what to do about his trousers. Without thinking much, he decided to follow her lead and remove them, leaving him naked from the waist down.

“May I touch it?”

“What would you like to touch?” Please say my cock.

“Your cock.” Thank you, Merlin and every god.

“If you wish,” he said and then immediately worried that he was being too coy. I wish. I WISH. Thankfully, she paid his ridiculousness no mind and she reached between them and started stroking him.

Filus. Filus in the dungeon. Filius crouched over a cauldron. Filius saying incantations. Do not come on her hand like a fifteen-year-old, Snape.

“Show me how. Show me what you like,” she said and she backed up against the pillow behind her, so she could see in the low light better and also gave him a perfect view of the destination.
He kept the fingers of one hand on her, alternating swirling in and around her opening and on and around her clitoris. He tried to maintain eye contact as he took his cock in the other hand stroked himself his way with only the thumb on top. There was pre-cum at the tip immediately and he circled around it, collecting it and using it to continue stroking both. She growled and put her head back and spread her legs wider, which was fortunate because he felt his orgasm already gathering force.

“I need to…”

“Yes,” she practically wailed.

**FUUUUCCCCKKKK.** He plunged in. He fucked her hard and came in about five thrusts. He made some terribly humiliating noise that he didn’t care a whit about in that moment and then realized she was still on the edge. He drove in again and sped his fingers up.

“I’m so close. I am right there.”

“Come on my hand, Hermione,” he said. He was pitched forward, and his mouth was almost in her ear.

“Yes!” she groaned out and came, her lower half twitching around him.

He eased his hand away from her as she came down. She started trying to put on her knickers without soiling his bedclothes.

“Do not worry about that,” he put on his trousers. She propped her bum under the pillow and pulled out her book. As she was setting the time, she offered to scorgify the bed. He did not mention that there would be a crew of house elves in there to take care of it as soon as he left for the pub.

By the time he settled down into the armchair across from the bed with his own book, her timer was sounding, and she was putting her jeans back on and tying up her shoes.

“Don’t forget your bottle,” he said as he followed her back into his office.

“Oh no, you keep it. I may have more later, and it really is nice mixed with things. Thank you,” she said and his face must have shown his confusion. “For being so accommodating. I appreciate it. See you Monday?”

“Yes.”

She left through the classroom.

**Hermione**

She had been shocked when nothing happen as she cast that charm. Everything pointed to a positive result. She was numb as she went through the motions of taking Rycliffe’s potion and saying the spell.

*Please don’t cry. Please don’t cry. He will be mortified.*

She kept it together until she made it into the Potions classroom and then broke down in sobs. She cast the spell again and then again with the same results. About half way through, she felt her period
start, heavily and awful, which is how it remained for the next three days. She called out sick for the first time in her career and had a good wallow for the first day and kicked herself in the arse for the second.

All her parents’ things that she had donated and thrown out were back in the house. With military efficiency, she went through them all again, not second guessing any of the choices she had made the first time around.

She made appointments with a gynecologist and a healer for the next day. She went back to the library and researched less scientific sources for ones written for couples trying to conceive. Within an hour, she had filled two journal pages of tips for him and her. She hit Boots again on the way home for her monthly supply of lube, and this time she spent extra time in the department with the vitamin supplements, filling her basket.

She returned to school two days into the term and began the student led model without having to take a day of essay and writing and without insulting the Slytherin intro students, who had still been giving her the side-eye at the end of the month.

She still felt bad. It was nothing she could pin-point, and she was done with the wallow, so she sat down to her extremely healthy wine-free dinner with journal and pen and tried to record everything about her life and current situation that could be the source of her angst.

About halfway down the page, she wrote:

- Feel like a side of meat during the sessions. Or maybe a patient propped up on an exam table. Both. Either way, NOT GOOD.

She paused. That was fixable, maybe? He perhaps would not want her in his bedroom, but he might at least allow her to transfigure the table into something that was closer to a bed. She drew a circle around it and continued.

- Tired of having a session uniform
- Tired of feeling anxious all the time
- Tired

The vitamin regimen looked like an exceedingly good idea. She saw the gynecologist, who was reassuring, and the healer, who was a complete quack with moon cycles and other nonsense.

She was nervous about the first session and his reaction, but she decided she trusted him, and that she knew he would be kind to her. She was still intimidated when he met her at the door, and immediately rethought her idea of being casual in jeans. He took her bottle and listened to her natter on.

“So, I am taking these vitamins now, and I have no idea how you feel about it, but I made a list of suggestions for the male partner.” She slid the list over to him with a silent apology. He had mixed the drink perfectly with the lime and ice, and it was better than the juice concoction she had come up with.

“I made appointments with a gynecologist and a healer, and it seems I just need a bit more time.”

She couldn’t read his thoughts at all, so she just kept talking. “How have you been?”

“Well.” He looked so much nicer than she did in his trousers and impeccably crisp shirt. She wondered if he had plans for Saturday night. She had another unenticing healthy dinner waiting for her at home. She wanted a basket of chips and she wanted a real drink.
“Despite it all, I finally feel as if I am…well, competent at teaching. Are you able to teach the same lessons to the same classes and keep your sanity?”

He looked as if he were merely enduring her. “Yes.”

She laughed. Idiot. “The main topic I wanted to talk to you about was maybe switching it up during the sessions. I feel…well, I feel rather on display on the table, like how I felt at the doctor’s office, and…I have been thinking about the research you did, and I appreciate it so much, but…I think it would be more comfortable…elsewhere.”

“In my bed?”

“If that is okay with you, yes, that was what I was thinking, or I could…”

“That’s fine.”

She had finished her drink, and he collected their glasses and walked into the residence. He walked through the library and suddenly there was a corridor she had never seen before. She followed him in to his bedroom. It was lovely and understated and so very much him as much as his library was. His bed was high quality and sturdy and beautiful in its simplicity. His duvet was dark grey silk and she was tempted to jump on the bed and roll around in it. He had a large wardrobe, a full bookshelf, and an armchair across from the bed, perfect for fastening his boots in the morning, and she pictured him doing just that. It made her childhood bedroom she still slept in look ridiculous. The door to the adjoining bathroom was open and she silently asked permission to enter it but pointing at it. He nodded.

His bath was still slightly steamy and damp from his recent shower. She peeked behind the curtain. He had bar soap and an unlabeled bottle on a little shelf. Otherwise, it was a large space that she imagined was heaven under the water. She pictured him with his head thrown back, naked, magnificent.

She used the loo quickly and decided to remove her shoes and jeans to avoid awkwardness in there. She left her knickers on to avoid having to walk across the room bare-arsed. She checked her hair and teeth in the mirror and headed out. She walked to the bed, sat and held out the lube for him because she did not know what to say. She removed her knickers and then sat back on his lovely bed that was just firm enough so she didn’t sink in.

He put some of the lube on his fingers, and she spread her legs so he could touch her. The last two times he had done this, she had almost come immediately, but this time, she was stuck in her head. You ordered him back here, and now you are a cold fish on his bed. Dammit, Hermione, fucking ffffffff something.

If only she had that kind of power. But just as she was beginning to feel hopeless, he started talking, low and quiet and the definition of sex.

“I missed this.”

“What?” her head snapped to him. “What did you miss?”

“I missed your cunt, witch.”

Holy Merlin, that voice. She practically gushed. He slipped one of his fingers inside her. Fuuuuuuuuccccckkkkk. He hooked it and dragged it around. Oh, fuck me. He took off his trousers, and he was naked from the waist down. She got the best look she ever had of his cock.
“May I touch it?”

“What do you want to touch?” he teased her.

“Your cock. Please.”

“Of course.” He moved closer with his hand still all over her, just where she wanted it. She reached out and took it in her hand. It was hard and extended, but it twitched once she held it. She had not given a hand job in a while, and she wasn’t sure where to start with him.

“Show me. Show me how to touch you. Show me what you like.”

He looked at her for a moment, and then took his cock in his hand, leaving the other hand on her and continuing to touch her inside and around. She had not seen many demonstrations of male wanking, but this was something so different. He touched himself gently with his thumb at the top. She could see his other fingers underneath, stroking firmly in time with what his thumb was doing. There was a drop of liquid at the tip and he swiped it with one finger and then used it to continue to stroke himself gently.

He was starting to lose control as she had witnessed him do dozens of times now, and she realized that as much as she wanted his cock inside her just then, she also wanted to see him stroke himself through. She wanted to see him burst forth and see the result of this. He was steady on his mission, though, and moved to enter her as his breath started to hitch, signaling the coming crescendo. She leaned back and opened her legs wider, ready to take him in. She watched his face closely as he did, his eyes were closed, and he did not notice how closely she was observing him. She was so focused on him, she lost concentration on herself, and when he came after just a few thrusts, she was on the edge, but not there yet. She thought for a moment about faking it, but she could not breach his trust like that, so she just enjoyed his reaction. This paid off because he realized in moments her state and her began rubbing her in earnest, focusing only on her.

“Come for me, Hermione,” he said in her ear, thrust in one more time. and she lost it and came right then. Oh, FUCK!

They stayed like that for a few moments. She had the urge to wrap her arms around his back or maybe start to unbutton his shirt, perhaps entice him into the shower with her, and he was back to business quickly putting his trousers on. She sighed quietly and grabbed for her knickers, afraid she was going to spill everything inside her on this beautiful bedding. She took out her little pillow and her book, which was much less problematic than Sanchrist Castle, but nowhere near as entertaining.

She had continued her plotting of an alternate Sanchrist. She had put them in a storm shelter instead of a cottage in front of ogling people. They had fallen into each other’s arms and started to make sweet, tender love. Then she abandoned it because Ylena was always going to be a complete moron, and Anton was always going to listen to his total git mates.

She had started over and had written three chapters. Her heroine was Evgenia, much savier and self-confident young woman, who married Constantine--cold and distant, but who really did have a heart of gold in there. Zhenya didn’t know it yet, but Con would never try to turn her or listen to his friends against his better judgement. And Zhenya herself was not going to let her betrothed—the wedding was plotted for chapter five and would feature every vampy excess that Sanchrist had deprived its readers by being set just post-ceremony—get away with not touching her for months. Zhenya had needs, thank you very much. Hermione realized she had not read a line in her book as her wand chimed.

She dressed and packed and then found herself without a cloak and therefore without a handy
occupation as he followed her to the door. She wondered what he would do if she spun around and planted a kiss on him, but when she decided to give it a go, he was thrusting the bottle at her.

“Keep it. Enjoy it. I’ll see you Monday,” she said. She knew her cue to leave.
Part Five: Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Hermione

She had to run from work Monday the seventh and was still in teaching robes when she arrived at his office door.

“Hello,” he said, and she had to restrain herself not to react. *He speaks.*

“Hello; I’m frazzled sorry.”

“Do you come here straight from work?”

“Yes. Almost always.”

“When do you eat?”

“After. I usually eat late. I quit the Hogwarts feeding schedule about five minutes after I left. My parents always worked late when I was growing up. We rarely ate dinner before eight. And that is so much more than you wanted to know.”

He took her cloak and her robes. She was wearing a pencil skirt and boots with her typical sensible work jumper underneath. He started pouring drinks in the corner.

“No, eating as early as we do here is fit only for the nursery,” he said.

“Must you eat in the Great Hall every night?”

He handed her a glass of ice water and sat behind the desk.

“No. We have two nights off a week.”

She nodded.

“I need to wait out a student,” he said as an explanation of why they were sitting at the desk.

“Oh yes, from the first cycle.”

“Quite,” he said, not unpleasantly.

“That was…,” she was trying to say something sympathetic but not be patronizing.

“Yes.”

“Who are you waiting for?” she asked. He could tell her to be quiet or ignore her if he wanted.

“A second-year unfortunate to be in class with a pack of sociopaths.”

“What must that be like?” She said it lightly.

“From her own house.”
“Oh, dear.”

“Yes. She came to me for help, I tried to put her off in the next two cycles, awfulness ensued. So I am available tonight if she needs me. The prefects will be available to help her if she needs it in about…” he hit a quick charm with his wand. “Ten minutes.”

“You are a good teacher.” She said it quietly. It was not flattery.

“I am not,” he stated it as fact rather than argument.

“You are. I have the proof actually. Or I did. It does not exist anymore because I didn’t repeat the exercise this cycle. Every single one of my Introduction to Potions students who went to school here cited you in an essay as the reason they enrolled in potions at university.”

He snorted. “Trying to eradicate me most likely.”

“No, not even close. They all thought you were great. I have adapted my teaching methods to match yours more closely.”

“That is not what you experienced as a student in my classes.”

“I was afraid of you. I also did not have you for years six and seven. Regrettably.”

“It is a different time now.” He looked as if he had come from work, too. although she supposed he had actually come from work and dinner. One tendril of hair had come lose from its binding on the back of his head and was covering his forehead.

“It is. Do you like teaching now?” she asked him.

“Like is a strong word.”

“Are you happy here?”

“Happy?”

She could not tell if he was irritated or amused. “Yes?”

“Happy is a strong word.”

“Content?”

“As much as…” His voice trailed off.

“You seem much different from my Potions teacher. You look younger. You seem more…content.”

“That is a low bar. I suppose you are happy at university. Being a Potions Master.”

“No. I have yet to find my niche. I am a mediocre teacher. I am an excellent researcher, but I have not found a subject that fascinates me. My brewing skills are fine,” she laughed. She undersold herself a bit. Her brewing skills were top-notch. “I want to make it out of September with my magic intact and then figure out what to do going forward.”

**Severus**
He felt the same.

The tempus spell sounded. “Miss Holdscloth appears not to need assistance.” He stood up from the desk and took her glass. She was wearing a variation of his favorite outfit with the knee-length skirt and the boots, and he was anxious to leave the therapy session behind and proceed with the next activity. He had left the corridor to his bedchamber open and he walked on through with her following.

“Severus?” she said as soon as they were in his room.

“Yes?” He turned to find her right behind him.

“May I kiss you?”

He took a sharp breath in and blew it out. “Do you want to?” he looked at her skeptically. She seemed earnest.

“Yes.” She walked a fraction closer to him and brushed a lock of hair off his forehead and then gently touched her lips against his. She had to stand on her toes to do it. He placed his hands lightly on each hip and kissed her back, less tentatively than she did. She could push him away. She didn’t. Instead she met his intensity and started walking the pair of them to the armchair and pushed him gently to sit. She straddled his lap and kissed him again, this time opening her mouth. He rolled his tongue around hers and closed his eyes. Her skirt was hitched up and rising to her hips as she sank lower. He could feel her core covered by cotton knickers right against his cock. He put his hands on the sides of her thighs pushing her skirt up more.

She raised up on her knees and started unbuttoning the front of his trousers, pulling out his cock and letting her fingers glide under it very close to the way he touched himself.

“Merlin, witch,” he murmured and let her continue.

Suddenly she was off him and rifling through her bag for the lube and then shoving her knickers down. He took the tube from her.

“Quick!” she said as he fumbled with the lid and squeezed a little on his fingers. She didn’t seem to need much, but he spread some around the general area before she sank down on him. It was very frenzied and very exciting, and he probably was not going to come while they were fucking at this angle, so he could slow down and savour for once. He had a hand on either side of her, a fist full of skirt and arse, and he was guiding her up and down and she continued to kiss him. He just let her do most of the work for two or three minutes—he was not sure he was judging time accurately. Finally, he pushed her up and off and then twisted her around so she was seated in the chair, and he sank down in front of her and spread her knees wide.

He dove in face first, watching her eyes become huge.

“Oral is not…UNG! You can’t…we’re not supposed to UUUUHHHHHHHNNNN!”

He had laid his tongue on the whole real estate of her clitoris.

“Severus, stop!” She scooted up the chair, away from his face. “We can’t. No oral when you are trying to…”

“No oral?” What kind of fuckery is this?
“No…cunnilingus when you are trying to conceive. Fellatio is okay as long as you come inside me. Ugh. Sorry.” She sounded mortified saying the words.

“Where did you read that?”

“In a journal. There are rules about everything.”

“Apparently.”

“Sorry. Otherwise… I mean, you seem rather talented.” She had slid off the chair beside him and had taken his disappointed cock in her hand. It rallied very quickly and he crawled on top of her. He hitched up one of her knees and drove in with her back on the rug. The leverage was perfect and he was able to put his fingers on her as he thrust in and out. He could not help but be chuffed that he was fucking an incredibly sexy woman on the floor of his bedchamber. He speculated quickly that this had just shot to his number one future wank fantasy. She had put her hand on his and was moving it how she liked it, which took out the uncertainty. He let his mind go and focused on how perfect her cunt felt around him.

“Fuck me hard; I’m going to come,” she uttered through her teeth, and that was what it took for him as well.

“Fuck, Witch,” he said as he came inside her. She pulled him down and kissed him again. He could feel that his hair was everywhere, and he felt self-conscious about it for a moment, but she did not seem to care. She finally let him go to breathe, and he could see she was smiling broadly. She scooted herself around so she could prop her legs up with her knees bent on the armchair and just stayed lying on the floor. He did, too.

“I could fetch your book.”

“I didn’t bring it. I am between inspiring pieces of literature.” She smacked his arm lightly with her hand—rather a love pat, in his very limited experience. “I am writing a book.” She turned her face toward his, and he did as well. They were close to eye to eye. “Yes! I have written two chapters already.”

“Potions?”

“No. It’s a sex-positive feminist gothic vampire romance.”

“One for the new age.”

“Exactly!”

“No year-long unconsummated marriages?”

“No!”

“Sounds like a best-seller.”

“One can dream.”

“I assume you have a nom de plume.”

“One would assume that. I should definitely have one. Bob Smith?”

“Hmmmmmm….”
“Kingsley Shacklebolt?”

“You would sell some books. You would also probably be sued. Harry Potter?”

“Oh, that’s perfect! I will sell a shit-load of books, and how could he sue his dearest friend?”

“I don’t think he could.”

“Perfect. You are brilliant, Severus. My knickers are beside you.”

He handed them over and she put them on awkwardly over her boots and then raised her hips to pull them up.

“Thank you.” She leaned over and pecked his mouth before she rolled the other way and stood up with more grace than he could ever manage. He had shoved his cock back in his trousers, but he was still unfastened and disheveled. He sat up, feeling foolish for the first time since he had entered the room, but she did not seem to notice that he was a disaster.

“I’ll just pick up my robes and be on my way. See you Wednesday?”

“Yes,” he said as she bustled through his library.

He had not smoked in twenty years, but he could have lit one right then and there. He finally shuffled to his feet and made his way to the shower, dropping his rumpled clothes as he walked.

The next four sessions were mostly waist down affairs with minimal kissing although some, always initiated by her. He loved every moment, but he was afraid to lose himself in the endeavor. She had invaded his dreams on nights he was especially lucky. In these stories that played out so vividly in his head, they were partners in everything, and one time there was a dark-headed baby he had to push far away upon waking so as not to become lost in it.

He’s had to start over in his fertility project, but not completely. He remembered the results and the research from the previous cycle, so he did not have to begin with a void in front of him. He was still analyzing the problem and wasn’t close to the brewing stage yet. If they were successful, it would probably take a month or two of work he could carry over. He was hopeful about it.

He was not dreading the faculty meeting on the fifteenth, either. He’d had fun at the Broomsticks at the beginning of term. He’d had FUN. The camaraderie among his colleagues had stuck through the weeks that followed. He had hatched a plot to give the Headmistress nothing to discuss with them at the meeting. This plot had involved sitting at a little table at the pub with Neville and Hannah Longbottom and sharing drinks and conversation as if they were friends. He could not think of another word that would better describe the relationship. And Minerva, Filius, and Rolanda were surely his mates. It had taken him three and a half months to establish this, but to them, it was just September. They had accepted a closer bond with him without question. It was truly astonishing.

For the meeting, he had charmed flasks that looked like they held water or maybe tea, but instead, they were full of his old friend 2001 Alta Vista Malbec, two bottles divided among flasks for Rolanda, Filius, Minerva…and Neville. His had water; he had decided to cut back on the alcohol this month. He rounded up Rolanda so she would not be late, and then casually passed out the refreshments to his friends.

“Oh, good on you, Severus,” Filius practically moaned after taking a generous swig.
“I want to commend you for leading the Great Hall dismissal procedure smoothly so far this term?” Headmistress McCollough began the meeting.

“Cheers, Severus,” Minerva raised her flask to him. He knew the schedule so thoroughly he could ace a NEWT on the subject and reminded his colleagues at every meal. He nodded at her with a wry smile.

McCollough moved on to the quidditch practice rota for the year. He had turned that over to his sixth and seventh year prefects on the first day. He marked two seventh-year essays while she nattered on. He was legitimately impressed at the detailed analysis they were demonstrating. He was able to critique at a level he had hardly reached in the past. All levels were exceeding expectations. He had a very good feeling about this year’s OWL and NEWT results.

The Headmistress finally reached the points-distribution discussion, and Professor Longbottom turned to him with a sly little grin. She brought out Harwell’s chart and praised it as if it were holy writ. Out came Minerva’s.

“My, my, Professor McGonagall, the mastery of transfiguration by Gryffindor last term was OUTSTANDING,” he said with as sincere a tone as he could summon.

“There are no names on these?”

“Yes dear, we are aware,” Minerva said with impressively infused condescension. “I will take the critique under advisement.”

“Let me assure you that I am not addressing one faculty member with this item. If we observe these two charts…”

“Professor Longbottom and I have discussed this very matter,” Snape called down.

They had been two pints in at the Broomsticks when he had raised the subject. “How many points did you deduct across all houses last year?” he had asked, and Neville had turned red instantly.

“I…I am not good at point deduction. I just hate to because I am afraid they will be discouraged…”

“You let them walk all over you!” Hannah had chimed in. “I hear you in the greenhouses. You are such a good teacher, Neville, but they won’t truly respect you until you toughen up a bit.”

“You don’t have to be excessive. Taking five points from the right target will go far,” Snape had advised.

Neville had reported back several times so far this term of successful point deduction.

“If you will call up the data so far this term” he requested the Headmistress. She looked confused and slightly distressed that she was ceding control of the meeting. She flicked her wand, however, and displayed their current totals.

He had awarded eighty-five points so far and deducted sixty. Neville had awarded one hundred and fifty—good grief—and deducted forty-five. It was a start. The Headmistress looked at the charts with a mixture of confusion and pride.

“What are you playing at, Severus?” Minerva hissed from the side.

“Just always trying to keep growing in my professional development.”
“Me, too,” Neville turned around and grinned at Minerva.

“Oh for the love of…”

“So now we have three positive examples of point distribution available? I hope we can all look to Professors Harwell, Longbottom…and Snape for continued leadership in this area.”

He nodded at her. They were out of there in twenty-five minutes. He strolled back to his quarters and took a leisurely shower, redressed, and then continued his marking until Hermione knocked at his door at nine.

It was the first chilly evening of the month, and she had her heavier cloak around her. She smelled of crisp outdoors. Her cheeks were slightly flushed. He walked around to meet her and take her cloak and on impulse, brushed her mouth with his. She took a step closer to him and embraced him.

“How are you?” she said quietly in his ear.

“Quite well.”

She let go of him and took a small step back. She was smiling warmly at him. “I’m so glad,” she said, and he believed her. She was wearing grey wool trousers and a fancier burgundy jumper than she usually wore on a work day. “Did you have to do something at work?” he indicated her outfit but felt foolish at the question as he heard it in the air. Of course she had to do something at work, idiot.

“No,” she laughed. They were walking casually through the library towards his bedroom. “This is the first colder day, and I couldn’t face tights this morning, so I chose this outfit.” He nodded as if wardrobe considerations were something in his life.

They reached his room and she embraced him again, he put his arms around her and felt how comfortably warm her body was against him. She started kissing him and also working her hand into his trousers. He was just starting to be hard, and she caressed him firmly up and down his shaft. “Yes,” she hissed into his mouth as his cock grew in her hand.

She shoved his trousers to the floor and then unfastened hers and did the same. Hers had some kind of side closure that would have stumped him, so he was glad she took care of it. They shuffled out of their trousers and footwear. The lube now lived in the little drawer by his bed. He knew that he was her only partner currently—how would it work to be with someone else given their project?—but it still filled him with contentment, with happiness, that it was there, and that this was where they were together.

During his little reverie, she had slunk over to his bed where she was waiting for him. She was wearing the smallest pair of wine-coloured lace knickers he had ever seen. They were held together with little ribbons on each side, under her hip bones. She pulled one in a clear invitation for him to pull the other. He crawled in beside her and did just that. Then he pulled the garment from under her and stowed them in the drawer before he picked up the tube that was there and then shut his new treasure away.

“I cannot see well enough for this task, I believe,” he said in a quiet murmur. He grasped her hips and started turning her over and lifting her. She received the message and settled up on her knees with her bum close to his face. Before he applied the lube, he licked her only once, but he covered sufficient distance.

She gasped. “Not within the rules.” She sounded regretful, which was enough.
“Rules,” he said derisively and began working her over with his fingers. She pitched forward and was bracing herself against the headboard. She was already quite wet, but he rubbed the lube around in case it had some tactical value as advertised. She felt warm and exquisite, like fine velvet, and she was making noises that indicated she was enjoying his fingers. He wanted her right on the edge before he plunged himself in, but she was becoming difficult to resist.

“Now!” she wailed, and he rose up on his knees behind her and guided himself in and then pressed forward so he was against her back as close as he could be. He left one hand around her clit and put the other with hers on the headboard. Their fingers were touching as he started to move. She bucked against him, and he pushed her hair aside and put his mouth on her neck. She came with a little roar, right in his ear. He plunged forward and then back as she rode out her climax and shucked his hand from her sensitive bud. He replaced it on one breast, hooking his arm around and holding her tightly through her clothes as he fucked her with abandon and came with her pressed back as she helped milk everything out of him with her squeezing pussy.

“Hermione,” he moaned when he was empty and sated and every nerve in his body was satisfied.

“You are amazing,” she gasped, and they collapsed in a heap on the bed.

“You,” he said quietly. He still had her hair pulled aside and he was kissing her neck and her ear and everything else he could reach. “You.”

They stayed there quietly for five minutes or so. Will we fall asleep? Are we going to sleep here? He was not sure if that was the proper thing, and he could not turn his mind off enough to sleep anyway. She finally disentangled herself, and he felt the loss immediately.

“Your knickers are in the drawer,” he said with a good deal of regret.

“I have another pair in my bag. Those were not my work knickers. If you would like to keep them…”

“Thank you.”

She laughed, and after she pulled on a pair of dark-coloured cotton knickers, she kissed him on the mouth. She put on her trousers and slipped on her shoes. “I will see you Thursday, Severus. I will see myself out.”

He scrambled off the bed, bare-arsed and grabbed her arm to pull her close to him. He kissed her as properly as he could before becoming too self-conscious about his state of dress. “Good night, Hermione.”

Hermione

Third Week of September

(Cycle Four)

To do:
• Grimmauld—Saturday, 12th
• Chapter Five—Wedding
• Shop: Sunday, 13th
• Biscuit week, faculty lounge M: 13—F: 18
• Chapter Six—Wedding Night
• Session: Sunday, 13th 6:00
• Chapter Seven—Newlywed life (?)
• Owl Angelina
• Session: Tuesday, 15th 9:00 knickers situation (?)
• Meeting with Master J.A.M.—Wednesday: 11:00
• Session: Thursday, 17th 6:00 NEVILLE!!!!!
• Lab quizzes: Friday: 9:00 Intro/organics, 11:30 Mastery/unstables, 1:00 PfE/herbal salves, 2:30 Inter/manips
• Chapter eight: Constantine’s stand

Shop:

Boots

• lube
• red lip/smoky eye (?)
• Vitamin B6: 12-hour release
• Folic Acid

Easy Street

• Stilettos from cycle 3 (?)

Eloise’s

• Black dress from cycle 1 (?)
• Knickers situation—black for 9/19, other (?)

Sainsburys

• Yogurt
• Milk
• Courgettes
• Aubergine
• Garlic
• Tomatoes (3-4)
• Yellow onion
• Lemons/limes
• Plums
• Berries—check inventory
• Dried red lentils (?)
• Quinoa (?)
• Bread
• Split chicken breast
• Salmon
- Tea
- Pellegrino (2)

**Marvin’s Magical**

- Biscuits for faculty lounge
- Baby’s First Potion Kit
- Ink
Chapter Three

Hermione

The weather was warm again after pretending to be autumn on Tuesday. She remembered this day so well; how the early evening setting sun turned the leaves almost golden. How the fruit was so heavy and lush. It was no wonder that she kept forgetting Neville, but not today. She had thought about it all day, and she had left work a few minutes early so she could speak to him directly.

She had scheduled her Grimmauld mission early this month so she would not have to cram it in her birthday weekend. It had worked seemingly as well as it had the first time, though she was very curious to see how Harry and Ginny behaved toward one another at the party.

She found Neville pruning some spiky bush outside Greenhouse Two.

“Neville!” she called out, and he looked up and shielded his eyes from the waning sun with his hand.

“Hermione?”

“Hello! How are you?”

“Well, great. It’s good to see you. Are you here to work with Professor Snape? He said you two were collaborating on a Potions project? Something about sustaining properties of chemical… something.” He laughed.

“Professor Snape told you that?”

“Yeah, today, in fact, at lunch.”

“Neville, I…” she did not know where to begin.

“What? Oh, Professor Snape and I are…well, we are friends or something like it. He is a useful resource, you know, he’s been a teacher for so long, and as far as classroom management goes…”

“Neville!”

“I guess it is surprising when you think about…but, you know, everyone has changed since then. I think he must have had a good summer. He came back to school, a little different, right? You have noticed, working with him?”

“Yes. You’re right. That’s great, Neville. Well, I just wanted to stop by and say hi; I will see you Saturday?”

“Yeah, Hannah and I are looking forward to it.”

“Great—me, too.” She took off for the dungeon, chuckling the whole way. When Professor Snape met her to the door of his office, she could not take the grin off her face. “When did you become
friendly with Neville?"

“He has been a colleague for…eight years.” He was walking with his back to her, not revealing his
face, so she grasped his elbow to turn him around.

“You know what I mean!”

“We are not merely friendly. We are colleagues. We are friends.”

“You and Neville are friends?”

“Yes. As well as his wife.”

She could not find the words, so she walked into his chest—it was right there anyway and put her
arms around his shoulders.

He tipped her face and kissed her.

He had invaded her head as they rocked on his bed. She was on top, riding him. She had taken off
her skirt and knickers. His trousers were down his legs though not totally off. He had fingered her
with the lube almost to the point of orgasm, but she had been the one to push him down on his back
gently and to take his trousers down. She had cupped his bollocks in one hand and licked the
underside of his cock before she put her whole mouth on it and sucked him up and down before she
climbed on him and lowered herself on to him. It was very hard to see in his dark bedroom.

“Little bit of light?” she asked.

“Demi-lumos,” he said, and she could see his face.

She had her hands splayed on his chest for leverage as she moved up and down on him. He also had
his hands on her hips, guiding her. She could not watch him unobserved as she had so many times
when she was lying on the table, and his eyes were squeezed shut. She was looking in his eyes.

Do I know you? Who are you now?

As if he could read her thoughts—he couldn’t or wasn’t trying to; she knew what it felt to have a
Legilimens in her head—he pulled her down so she was lying against his chest. He wrapped her
tightly in his arms, and he moved in her so slowly as if he were trying to stay in that moment. Her
face was at the side of his neck, and she trailed gentle kisses up to his ear. His movement was hitting
all sorts of critical places, and she felt a rush of new arousal. “Oh, Severus,” she whispered in his ear
and squeezed around his cock.

He growled, and holding them even more tightly, flipped them over so he was on top. She bent one
knee to keep contact forward on her clit. She was right there, and she wanted to come while he was
fucking her like that with abandon. She grabbed his bare arse and guided him to hit right where she
needed him to and came as his cock filled her completely.

“Fuuuuuuuuck,” she gripped him as her orgasm hit, and she could feel him falling, too. His face
looked for a moment as if he were in agony, and then every muscle in it relaxed, and he lowered
himself still inside her so that their whole bodies were pressed together.

“Oh my god,” she whispered, and his chest shook a little. He was chuckling. “Are you laughing at
me?” she tried to say seriously, but she was giggling as well. He raised up on his elbows and kissed
her deeply, passionately, she would say before he moved his hips away from her and settled in
beside her with his front pressed against her side.
She could reach his thigh, and she caressed it gently, and they lay there in silence. And then her stomach growled loudly, which set him in a series of actions: off the bed, trousers up, hand extended to help hitch her up.

_Ugh, it’s just food. I would rather stay here._

She dressed and put her shoes on.

“Late Saturday?” he asked as they walked through the library. It had been warm for a cloak when she had arrived, but she had one shrunk in her bag because the evening was cool.

“Yes, I’ll be here.” She kissed his mouth and headed out.

Friday was a planned busy day with quizzes in all four classes. She had been running this schedule on Monday the twenty-first consistently, but the results had been mediocre across the board. She had decided to let them have it on Friday instead. They clearly were not using the weekend to study, and at least this was they could enjoy it without guilt. She marked the results as she went, too. She was determined not to be in bed with a hangover Sunday as she had been the past cycles, so she could have a pleasant day, too.

She had her patisserie breakfast the morning of her fourth thirtieth birthday before hitting the shops. She had her pedicure for her cycle three shoes and took up the offer to have her hair done, too. The stylist straightened it and then pinned it in a fancy style behind her right ear, so the rest of it was smooth.

She had time to finish the chapter she was working on, in which Zhenya, whom Hermione had taken to calling _Janny_ in her head, saw a spark of the honorable man her husband was. Until then, Constantine had been gruff and only really connected with her in bed. Janny had been reading in the parlor anteroom, though, when the horde came over to persuade him to join their brutal conquest, and he had refused without hesitation. She wrote the last word of the chapter with a satisfied flourish.

She bathed and then applied her makeup. She looked full-on glam, which seemed appropriate for the fourth time around. She flooed into the Broomsticks and let her friends make over her. Harry and Ginny didn’t look quite as cozy as they had the last cycle when they had just had their night away, but not hostile, either. Angelina was there with George’s arm around her shoulder, pulled close to his side. Hermione accepted a glass of wine from Hannah, but it wasn’t really tempting to drink. They all moved to the table more quickly this time, Hermione noticed, and she wondered if her mission to get a few drinks in her from the beginning had driven the previous evenings.

“Neville and Hannah told us you were working with Professor Snape,” Harry called across the table.

“Yes, how did that happen?” said Ginny.

“We share a mentor. We were both at his house in August, and it led to this project.”

“Severus says you are too brilliant for him,” Hannah added across the table.

“SEVERUS?” Ron called in dismay. “Severus?”

“Hannah?” Angelina laughed.

“Well, Professor Snape, you know who I mean!”

“Hannah and Neville and Severus are friends, and why shouldn’t they be? You have worked together for how long?”
“Exactly, thank you, Hermione,” Hannah clinked her glass against Hermione’s still full one.

The subject moved on to jobs, which she could actually contribute thoughtfully on, then quidditch, then food and cake, then dancing. She had been looking forward to this cycle’s version of just how time-consuming babies are, but it never flowed over there.

The couples were more coupled than ever with George and Angelina looking as if they’d had quite the reconciliation and Harry and Ginny making a brave go at it as well. She danced with Luna, who was very hard to follow but quite energetic on the fast numbers. Hermione held her friend close on that last song that played in her head all the time now.

“Hermione, your energy is bright pink,” Luna murmured against her chest.

“Yes? Is that good?” She was in too good a mood to be anything but charmed by Luna’s nonsense.

“What? Luna?”

“Maybe not. It just is so…pink.”

“Pink energy is?”

“A new soul. But maybe it was what you were speaking about at dinner, your teaching, you know. Are you in love, Hermione? Perhaps…”

She took a moment to refuse to give this any mental credence. “Oh, Luna, how are you? Are you happy?”

Luna was off on her creature discussion for the rest of the song.

Hermione hugged and kissed them all goodbye. She flooed home, kissed Crooks, too. He had stopped paying attention to her whims. She transfigured her shoes for the walk and checked her lipstick before she began her journey to the dungeon.

She restored her shoes as she made her way down the corridor towards the Potions classroom. She had always been at least tipsy at this point of the evening if not full-out pissed, so it was odd to be fully aware. She had a moment of apprehension that it would be awkward, but they had survived so much awkwardness; surely they could handle a sober woman in a party dress.

He met her at his office door.

“Happy birthday, Hermione,” he said and kissed the side of her face. He took her hand and led her into a library transformed.

It looked like an outdoor space. She could not see the regular furniture. There were strings of lights from all directions and several large, paper globes as well. The ceiling was charmed to look like a starry sky with a crescent moon. In the center of the room there was a small iron table with two stools. On top of it were two champagne flutes with orange twists in them. There was a bottle of Pellegrino in a bucket of ice on a table to the side. He filled the glasses and handed her one. He clinked her glass and then pointed his to her. To you. They drank them down and she put it on the table with shaking hands. There was a tiny plate on the center with two square chocolates. He picked up the saucer and silently invited her to take one.

“What’s this?”
“A little experiment. I hope it is not awful.”

“You made these?”

He nodded.

She picked one up gingerly, but the chocolate base was sturdy. She took a bite, and her mouth filled with warm, liquid caramel with just a hint of salt in the sweet river.

“Ooooooooh,” she sighed out and took another sip of her drink. The flavours combines perfectly, as if they had been engineered to do so, and then she realized that of course they had. “Oh, Severus, this is the most delicious bite…”

He looked so at peace and…happy. She put down her drink and took him in dance hold. They swayed to inaudible music playing loudly in her head.

“I thought of music, but I was not sure what you liked,” he said quietly.

“I have appalling taste,” she said, trying not to sing aloud.

He laughed. It rang out as the most joyous sound she had heard in a very long while.

“You have the most delightful laugh, Severus,” she said and held him tighter.

He broke away enough to dip his head down kiss her. He had taken his arms from around her and was holding both sides of her face in his hands. His eyes were closed. She was holding on to his sides to keep upright as he kissed her more passionately than anyone had in her life.

He started moving his hands from her face to her back, and she felt him tug on her zip and slowly pull it down. The dress hugged her fairly tightly, but it had just enough give to flow down her hips and end up as a pool around her feet. She stepped out of it as he continued to kiss her. His hands were not yet finished at her back. They reached for the hooks of her bra, pressed them in and released. It joined her dress on the floor.

He brought her back in tightly against him, her bare chest against his white shirt. She felt arousal take over as she felt the sensation of her nipples against his chest separated by just a thin layer of cotton. She started working the buttons of his shirt, and he let her get about half way down before he took over again. He broke off the kiss from her mouth and began kissing down her neck. He took one of her breasts in his hand and then put his mouth around it sucking not at all gently. She felt another rush of arousal. She was aching with it. She had the urge to throw her leg over his shoulder and drag him down to the floor and climb on top of him. Her needy moan filled the space.

He kept his mouth at her breast but the other trailed down her side until he found the tie at her hipbone that fastened her knickers.

“I love this design,” he uttered against her. He pulled the string at the other side, and then she was naked in the library with just her shoes. He started kissing down her body again, trailing down her center to her thighs. When he reached her feet, he took one leg and bent it, so the foot was resting on one of the chairs. He positioned himself so he was at her center and kissed back up her leg until his mouth had reached what was clearly his goal. He licked her as he had the last night they were together from stern to stem as it were. She opened her mouth to protest and he plunged two fingers inside her and lay his tongue flat at the front, swirling it until she was incapable of speech. Then he looked up at her.

“I do not care about the rules, and even if I did, it is utter rubbish. I researched it all afternoon at the
library.”

“You did?”

“Yes, and there is some shoddy work out there. There ought to be consequences…” He looked as if he had been distracted. An expression of annoyance passed his face again, and the old Severus was back for an instant, and she adored him so—every bit as much as his better adjusted self, which she adored a great deal. She opened her legs wider to encourage him in his previous occupation. He went right back to work.

She ran her hands through his hair, quite brazenly pressing his face into her more firmly. He needed little encouragement. His tongue was everywhere, and his fingers had found the magical place inside, and she was riding his mouth as she lifted higher and higher. She took her foot off the chair and wrapped it around his shoulders. She clamped her hand around the back of the chair because she was afraid she was going to fall backwards when she came. She took a deep breath and relaxed her core so there was no tension and then came all over his mouth and fingers and practically roared as she did.

He slowed down and started kissing her softly again. She stood there and recovered; she was panting as she came down. Finally, she took the sides of his face in her hands and brought him up, so he was standing again. She kissed him and tasted herself all over his mouth. “Take me to bed,” she whispered.

Without hesitation he hoisted her into his arms as if he were carrying her over the threshold. He walked with her pressed against him into the bedroom and laid her gently on the bed. There was light coming in from the charmed library and they held eye contact while she unbuckled her shoes and placed them beside the bed, and he took the rest of his shirt off and then unbuttoned his trousers and let them fall to the floor. He was fully hard, and she took a moment to look at his naked form. He was beautiful in the soft light. She scrambled in the bed to turn down the bedclothes, crawl in, and then rather ridiculously invite him into his own bed.

He joined her, and then spent a moment under the cool sheets rubbing their whole bodies against each other luxuriously. She rolled on top of him and kissed his chest, taking each of his nipples into her mouth in turn. She could see feint scars on him but was as unconcerned about them as she was the one that crossed her chest, which he had completely ignored as well. She took his cock in her hand and stroked it, which prompted him to turn her over and taking one of her knees in his hand and bending it upward, entered her in one motion until their pelvic bones touched. No lube, no need for it, he started moving in her immediately. She wrapped her leg around his waist and pressed into his back and bum with her hands dragging him in as deeply as possible. She would swallow him whole if she could; she wanted every bit of him in her.

“Hermione,” he moaned.

“Severus,” she answered. “I love this; I love it.”

“Yes.”

She was on the edge of orgasm again, and she put her fingers down between them so she could use his motion to set her off, but he deflected them and replaced them with his own.

“Let me fuck you, Hermione. Let me fuck you.”

“Yes, you can. Yes, Severus.”
“Come for me; make me come.”

“Yes,” she whispered and clamped down on him setting off her own orgasm and his own.

“Oh,” he wailed as he filled her, and “Oh,” again as he came down.

She brought him in closer and laid her head on his chest. He brought the bedclothes up and around them, and she was so warm and comfortable that she had no need to think anymore.

**Severus**

He woke with her still lying on his chest. The charmed lights had gone off in the library, and it was pitch black once again. There had been times when living in the dungeon was the most perfect habitat for him. The darkness was comforting, He could sleep at any time of the day. He could escape to his room from every measure of horror and cocoon himself away from it.

There were times, though, more recent times, in which it felt oppressive. She had arrived just after eleven. They had been at it for forty minutes or so; they had fallen asleep. He had no idea if it were one in morning or ten and no way of finding out without reaching for his wand in his trousers. He also needed the loo. He sighed and tried to gently disentangle himself, but she stirred. He rolled over her without touching, put his feet on the floor, and hit a tempus with his wand. Four in the morning. He crept quietly to the bath and relieved himself, hoping to crawl back in bed, take her in his arms again and sleep another four hours or so.

He was bitterly disappointed to find her scrambling about when he entered the room again. She was looking for her underwear and dress. Her bag and wand were in the library. He sighed and lit the room dimly.

“Thank you. Sorry I fell asleep on you.” She shook her head as if she were daft.

He followed her into the library and lit that as well. He could remember how beautiful he thought the space was last night, but now he felt foolish about the display. She quickly transfigured the dress into a black top and skirt. She hooked her bra and drug it around in seconds covering up the loveliest tits he had ever seen…held…kissed.

“We could go back to bed until morning.”

“Oh, thank you, Severus. I am sorry to be such a bother. I will go. Enjoy your Sunday. She swept past him into his room and soon the high heeled shoes were canvas trainers. “Thank you for the gorgeous birthday. I loved it.” She took his face in her hands and bussed his mouth before she was gone in a flash.

He went back to bed with a lump in his heart. He could smell her in the bed, but it was not comforting, just a reminder of how empty it was.

He awoke hours later in a much brighter mood. He was starving and Sunday breakfast in the Great Hall was a treat. Neville and Hannah were there with Rosamond and signaled him to sit with them. He motioned with his head to Filius and Minerva, and they all ate breakfast at a round table where the families sometimes sat. The baby was in a good mood and putting on a show for them all. He thought about asking if he could hold her, but he would not know where to begin, so he admired her from across the table. He then went back to the dungeon and was productive in the lab before
retreating to his chamber for a lovely Sunday afternoon nap.

They finished the cycle with two rushed sessions. Monday, she seemed distracted though she was kind and attentive and seemingly came under his fingers—he hoped she would never fake it with him, and just the thought sent him into a bit of a panic. Wednesday, she was more present, and he took all her clothes off again and hoped she might fall asleep. He realized that was ridiculous; she had not even eaten dinner yet. Anyway, she had plans.

“It’s Luna’s last night in town. We’re meeting for dinner,” she sounded apologetic. He wondered about Miss Lovegood for the first time in years.

“Where does she live?”

“All over. She is based in South America? Peru—the Andes, I think, bit she is all over North America and Australia.”

She kissed him hurriedly as he was becoming used to, and then she was gone, and the wait began. He was torn this month. He would love to have another cycle like that one. But they were running into their imposed deadline. She also had been so desolate with the failure last month. He was not sure what he would do next if they had succeeded. He was not sure what he would do if they never succeeded. The safest path for his immediate future was another negative, and he longed to see it.

He was quite nervous this time, much more so than he had been the last two months. He also missed her keenly, which annoyed him. They were approaching the time when he would not see her at all anymore, and he had worked himself into a state, thinking he was going to have to learn how to live without the joy of seeing her every other day. He would have to wake up without that little hope to cling to. He wanted to replace it with something, and he felt he would, but it was going to be a painful recovery, he could tell.

It hardly helped that she looked glorious when she arrived at his office on the evening of the thirtieth. She was wearing an autumn weight dress with her tights and boots. Her hair was curling down her back; she looked so much like her, he had to steady himself for a blow. Perhaps it will be negative, and then I can breathe. Oh, what we will do if it is negative. Visions of a month’s worth of plans flooded his mind and calmed him.

He was not ready when she drew her wand and whispered the incantation. He was not ready when a strong white mist immediately enveloped her midsection.

Chapter End Notes

- There is no new curse; it’s just a positive pregnancy test.
- This chapter was inspired in part by Grooot’s portrayal of beleaguered but still grimly amused Snape in Mongoose, MyWitch’s captivating work Party Hat, and Marriage1988’s beloved’s birthday chocolate caramels.
21 December, 2009

Dear Master Granger,

I trust you have ended the term and have begun the holiday break. Our last day of exams was yesterday. I have completed some preliminary research on adoption in magical society and would like to share it with you at your convenience. I will be at school through the twenty-sixth and back the third of January; the winter term begins on the fourth. If you have an afternoon available during the time I will be at school, please reply to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,

Professor Severus Snape

Snape doubted anyone had ever considered every word so closely on such benign a document as the pathetic letter he tied to a Hogwarts owl and sent it on its way. He had initially included a sentence inquiring about her health, but he could not master the words, so he had left it out.

He had woken up on October first magically the same as he had been his whole adult life. It was hard not to be skeptical about the curse. If she had not become pregnant, and if they had decided to jump off the wheel of madness, would they have woken up as Muggles that morning? His rational mind had trouble accepting it. He did remember, however, how terrified he had been those few days after he had woken up in hospital.

The October days rolled on, and the experience became more surreal. If his life had not changed significantly, he would be tempted to attribute it all to a very strange, long dream. But he had close friends now and classes filled with students whose every move he could predict, as well as a house full of charges whose lives he was now involved in more deeply than he had ever been before.

Neville had mentioned her once.
“Will Hermione be here this week? Hannah and I were thinking we could all go for dinner if you fancy it.”

“The collaborative part of our project is finished.”

“Oh, that’s too bad. I think she needs to get away more often from that house and cat. We hardly see her.”

Yes.

He had underestimated the gap she would leave. Part of it was the regular sex being gone, but so much of it was her—not the idea of her, but exactly her. He did not know how she felt about him; he suspected she was fond of him and perhaps sympathetic. He loved her. It was unambiguous. He had not given up hope; it still fueled every day. He thought of her as his mind drifted into oblivion in bed each night, and he thought of her as he emerged from dreams she often featured in. She factored in every decision he made during the day from whether to take a walk into the forest—he could picture her traveling up and down the grounds on session days—to what books he should read.

He had read _Sandchirst Castle_ through twice, reading past where she had given up in disgust. It was just as terrible as she had reported, but he loved it. He could picture her reading it in whichever skirt she was wearing that cycle, her face twisted wryly, laughing sometimes and stopping to comment to him occasionally.

He had another chance; they were still connected, by the child they had conceived but by more, too, he hoped. He wondered what she was doing for Halloween, and considered reaching out, but he was not ready yet. If she rejected him, that would be it. He had to wait to make his move concerning something she had to consider, so he was patient.

November was very cold, and the time passed glacially. He continued to put out fires in the classroom and Slytherin House where he could. Miss Holdscloth was a frequent presence in the lab and office as she worked with the first-year students. He had not had a long conversation with her, but he had spoken up a few times when he thought he might be helpful. Keeping her safe was most helpful.

He plotted and became obsessed with his planned December overture. He learned everything he could about adoption in the magical and Muggle worlds. (He rejected the latter quickly as there was too much legal work involved, and he doubted it would be in the best interest of their likely magical child anyway.) He researched pregnancy and marked her progress as the weeks went on, wondering how she was feeling and how she was coping with the changes taking place. He worked on his project every spare minute so he would have something to show her when they met. And he agonized over the wording of his note.

As soon as the owl disappeared he began to fret about her reaction. Mercifully, he did not have long to wait. The owl returned within the hour with a little response clipped to his foot. Snape had stayed in the owlery, not wanting to wait until lunch for a reply. He had been trying to read, trying to relax now that the term was over and most students had departed, but he was too nervous. It was a miracle that she had replied so quickly, no matter what the news. He detached the note with shaking hands, and gave the owl a biscuit before he retreated to his corned to unfold the small bit of parchment.

Dear Severus,

I am so happy to hear from you. I will come to you (I know the way—ha!) tomorrow afternoon—1:00? Let me know if that is not a good time, otherwise, I will see you then.
He read it five times before the words permeated into his brain. She was happy to hear from him—
because she had been thinking about the adoption, and she was glad he had initiated the meeting.
She could be happy to hear from him; she could want to see him. It was not impossible. He shoved
the parchment into the pocket of his frockcoat and billowed his way down flights and flights of steps.

He could hardly sleep that night. He was terrified not that she would be pleasant but distant. He
worried that she would be formal and friendly enough but be detached. Neville and Hannah were
preparing to go with the baby to Hannah’s mother’s house for Christmas. They were still at school
but not around very much. Filius and Minerva were about, but hey had their long-standing solitary
traditions of how to spend those precious, free days. He was sorely lacking in distractions. He played
chess with Filius after breakfast and then the hours before one stretched out in front of him. He
decided to prepare as if it were a session. He expected nothing, but at least he would look his best.

He sat behind his desk at half-past twelve and tried to mark exams, but he kept being distracted.
Finally, at four minutes of the hour, there was a knock at the door.

He crossed quickly and opened it, and then all his previous concerns left him as he saw her.

She looked unwell. Her skin was rather grey; her eyes hollow though bright in expression. She
looked as if she had been through an extended illness. He immediately took her under his arm, ready
to catch her if she feinted, which did not look at all unlikely.

“Hermione, are you quite well?”

She laughed.

“I am mostly well!” she said through laughter, as if the statement was remarkable. “The fresh air just
now was lovely, and I am just now starting to feel human again.”

“You have been ill?” He could hear the horror in his tone.

“You idiot! Why did you wait so long to contact her?

“Not ill; just pregnant.”

He was still clinging to her, and she was gently removing herself from him. He stepped away
immediately. “Do you want to sit?”

“Yeah—here?” She pointed to his desk.

“We could or we could go to the sitting room. I have a tea set-up…”

“That sounds great.”

He took her cloak and hung it on his office tree, and then they moved into the sitting room. All the
times she had been here, they had never spent any time in there, just walked through on the way to
the library or bedroom. The furniture was formal but more comfortable than it looked, and she sank
into the settee. He was at the little tea corner, but he could speak to her without turning his back.

“You are feeling human again?” he prompted her.

“Yes. About a minute after I left here on the thirtieth, three months ago,” she shook her head, “it feels
like years. Anyway, I started feeling poorly about a minute after I left here. I thought I might be imagining it, but that was the beginning of eleven weeks of misery. I couldn’t keep tea down, let alone solid food. I have been making my way through classes through sheer will, but they must suspect something is up as many times as I have had to dash to the loo.”

“Did you see a healer?”

“Well, no. I decided to go back to the doctor. It is so much easier to keep the whole thing confidential that way.”

“You have not told anyone?” He loved having a secret with only her.

“No. I don’t know if I will be able to keep it hidden the whole time, but I have not told anyone yet.”

He had kept waiting for Neville to announce, “Did you hear Hermione is up the duff?”

“You deserve your privacy, and I am not looking forward to twelve rounds of who is the father?”

He nodded. “So there was nothing to be done about your illness?”

“There are a few Muggle remedies, but none of them did anything for me. There are some potions, but they have not been extensively tested. I decided to tough it out.”

“You look as though you have lost a stone.”

“A stone and a half, but I am eating again. Food tastes wonderful now; I can’t get enough, so I am sure I will gain it back. And everything looks good with the pregnancy, right on schedule. I am due June eighth. That’s the week after our exams, so good timing, if luck holds.”

He had calculated her due date at the library. He would be in the middle of exams then, but if she wanted him there, he would not give a second thought to chucking it.

“You mentioned in your letter about adoption information?”

“Yes.” He had to take a moment to switch over to practical concerns. “I have some papers in the office…”

“Yes, get them. I have some, too.”

He returned in an instant with a binder of parchment. She pulled out a small notebook that must be her journal.

“I am so curious to hear your thoughts—I have rather strong opinions on the subject.”

“By all means,” he prompted her.

“Well I don’t think you can beat…”

“Sweden?” he could not help himself. It was the overwhelmingly best choice, and he thought she must think so, too.

“Sweden! Yes, brilliant, Severus. Is that what you concluded?”

“Clearly.” Sweden put no pressure on the birth parents before the event. It was confidential, and the wizarding society there was one of the most peaceful in the world. It was rather a paradise to raise a child.
“Oh, I am so happy you agree. I have already been thinking in terms of Inga or Stellan,” she placed her hand on her midsection for the first time since she had arrived. It was so charming, he could hardly contain himself from sweeping her into his arms. Stop that.

“Inga or Stellan,” he chuckled.

“It helps to address the object of your consternation by name, I have found.”

“Inga or Stellan, you have put your mother through the mill.”

“Quite. Though I don’t think of myself as their mother—they are two distinct people to me, though there is only one baby in there, thank Merlin. I think of myself as their little protector, I suppose, until they can meet their proper mum and dad.”

It was so sensible and so heartbreaking at once. ENOUGH, Snape. You have no claim here. He nodded.

“Sweden, though? I love it that we came up with the same answer.” She reached out and put her hand on his arm, and he very carefully placed his over hers. She smiled at him, and he conveyed his feelings through his eyes as best he could. “How have you been, Severus?”

“I have been…I have been concerned about you. I should have contacted you sooner.”

“Oh, no worry there. I have been hibernating whenever possible and not fit for company.”

“You should not have had to go it alone.”

“It was probably best. I had loads of time to think and to clarify all measures of things.”

“What kinds of things?” He could feel the blood pulse in his neck.

“My job, my house, my life. I made a wrong turn somewhere. I don’t think it matters where, but I know I need to right it.”

“I have something I want to show you,” he said. He had brought it in with the adoption research. He took it from the little side table and handed her the binder that contained the lab report and primary research conclusions. She started flipping through the pages. “This is…this is excellent, Severus. This is…how did you have time for…”

“I had a four-month September.”

“So did I but I didn’t do anything like this! What have you…what are you…”

She had that moment that he so often had in which there were so many thoughts and it was hard to order them and communicate them.

“I have only done the research. I have not started on the brewing or testing. I wanted…I wanted to know if you were interested in studying this with me. Collaborating…”

“YES! I am not sure that I want to do Potions for ever and ever, but this is exactly what I am interested in looking at right now. I have been thinking…” she poured through some pages again. “I have been thinking exactly this, but I had no idea where to start!”

“I thought we could meet three or four times a week. You could come here; I could go to your
“Oh, you…you don’t have to come to me. I know your…freedom of movement is limited. And I like it here. I love it here.” She was bashful suddenly.

“That would be perfect, if you could come here…”

“Odd evenings? What do you think?”

“That would be ideal. The schedule is tested.”

“Indeed! Here, I have something for you, too.” She reached into her bag and pulled out a prodigious stack of parchment bound perfectly together with metal clips. She plopped it on his lap and then looked up at him expectantly.

“Blood Oaths,” he read. He wanted to laugh, but he gave her a look of amusement with a small eyeroll.

She burst out laughing. “Oh, it gets so much worse.”

“By Elsa Gustavvson.”

“Keep going.”

He turned the page. “‘To my darling Bjorn, without you this creation would not exist.’ Very clev…”

He could not finish the word, because she had taken the parchment from his lap and replaced it with herself. “My darling Bjorn,” she said with a smile and then put her mouth on his.

**Hermione**

She kissed him, and she was emotionally and physically prepared for him to remove her kindly from him and tell her that he did not see her in that way.

She had awoken in his bed the night after his birthday, clutching to him as he disentangled to go to the bathroom. *Come back soon, Love.* It had rung in her head so loudly that she thought she might have said the words aloud. *I love him. I LOVE him.* She had the textbook flight response, and she chided herself for being such a cliché as she dressed and ran from the dungeon.

*I have fallen in love with Professor Snape.* He seemed fond of her. He had set up the gorgeous birthday in the library. He certainly seemed turned on by her. But did he love her? She was so shocked at her own response, she didn’t have time to ponder his. She decided that they could take the next cycle to figure it out. But they were successful, and she was so thrilled in that moment. The white mist was still lingering throughout the room when she threw herself against him and begin jumping in celebration.

“We did it!”

He seemed pleased but subdued, as if it was just another part of his day. She kissed him on her way out, and he was stiff until the end, when he loosened up a little bit around her and squeezed her in his arms for a moment before she left the dungeon.
She did feel tremendous relief that she would not have to worry about starting a magic-free life. She was giddy as she walked up the grounds. It wasn’t until she was home and trying to prepare dinner that her new constant companion, crippling nausea, hit. She was unable to eat more than a few tentative bites.

She had a new mission to survive the current test. To go to work every day and not let on that anything is different. To keep this being growing inside her alive until it was time to hand him or her over. At first, she didn’t have time to ponder her feelings, but they kept creeping in.

Her goal every day was to complete work and make it into her bed. Once there, she wrote chapter after chapter of her book. She discovered that writing this absurd story, wrapped in blankets, being ready to bolt to the toilet and throw-up everything, brought her more joy that anything potions related ever had.

And her hero Constatine, dark and closed and brooding and stoical, began to remind her of someone she couldn’t stop thinking about.

*How is school going? Is he maintaining his friendships? How are the Slytherins doing? Does he miss me? Does he miss me? Does he miss me? Does he think about the times we were together? Does he desire me?* She would look at herself in the bathroom mirror after twenty minutes of crouching on the floor, resting her face on the cool, cool tile between bouts of vomiting. She would look at herself with her hair matted to the back of her head and her colourless face and scrubby night clothes—the only garments that felt remotely comfortable—and laugh at the thought of anyone finding her desirable in any context. And that was fine at that moment because any kind of sex sounded revolting.

In her dreams, though, she was very desirable and full of desire as well. She dreamed of them together in his quarters and at her house. She dreamed of them together on holiday at a remote location. She dreamed of them doing the shopping, and taking care of the garden, and walking around with a pushchair, which was the most ridiculous image of all. However unrealistic, she loved those dreams.

She braved civilization in November at the Ministry to research adoption policies. She fell in love with the Swedish system and society, and it began to permeate her thoughts and dreams. She looked into Muggle adoption, too, but rejected it almost immediately as not practical or beneficial for them or the child. Ideally, this little one needed to grow up far away from the UK where someone might eventually decode his or her parentage.

She made another appointment with the gynecologist, who let her listen to the strong heartbeat. The doctor had no solutions to the awful nausea but had information on every other topic. The pregnancy research was on.

She started plotting about contacting him. They had to discuss the adoption plans, after all, and to let him know how everything was coming along seemed the courteous thing to do. She thought about just showing up or sending an owl, and she was deep into those thoughts when his letter arrived.

She was kissing him waiting for him to very politely move her off. But that’s not what he did. He anchored her closely to him with one arm and then stroked her hair with his other hand. He seemed to want her closer to him than he already was.

“Do you want this? Do you want this?” she repeated idiotically.

He didn’t answer, but he stopped kissing her and held her head against his so their foreheads were touching. He had his eyes squeezed shut and seemed to be trying not to cry, so she cried for both,
bursting into massive tears that started pooling down her face, soon joined by her nose running as if it was trying to catch up. She was surprised she wasn’t drooling as well. He held her against his shoulder than and rocked her like a child until she finally regained her composure.

“Yes,” he said. “Yes, I want this.”

“I want to be your partner, Severus. It’s what I want most.”

“Yes.”

“I want you to help me with the pregnancy. I want to see you more than just on odd days. I want to research fertility with you.”

“Yes.”

“Yes?” She wanted him to say more. She felt herself on a ledge, and she was not convinced he was there with her.

“Yes. I am going to Tahiti on Saturday, will you come with me?”

“Yes!” she cried.

“Will you stay with me through Christmas and Boxing Day—will you spend the holiday here? I can’t leave…”

“YES!”

They made it back to his bedroom where she fell asleep about thirty seconds after her first orgasm since the last time she was here. She was wrapped up in his bedclothes and in him and slept like a stone for hours.

“Hermione…Hermione…”

She rolled over groggily. “Yes?”

“I have to be at dinner tonight, and you have to eat.”

The light was low, and she could see that he had showered and dressed and looked like the perfect gentleman, while she was in mess of a rumpled state. But he was asking her to dinner, so she was up and charming her hair and clothes to look acceptably presentable. She dashed into the loo and looked at her happy face in the mirror. She completed a quick silent cheer with hand motions and then put a serene smile on her face to meet him in the library.

They walked side by side to the Great Hall. She hadn’t been there in years and was trying not to stare as she ascended the stair cases. There were very few students staying over—as it should be, she thought. The faculty that had stayed were at one round table at the front.

“Hermione!” Hannah called across the room to her.

“Miss Granger?” Professor McGonagall looked pleasantly surprised to see her.

“Oh, it’s so lovely to see you, dear. Are you here with Severus?” Professor Flitwick looked older than the last time she had seen him.

“Are you two working on your project?” Neville said.
“Yes, we will be doing just that,” Severus said quietly. He pulled out a chair for her and waited until
she was seated before sitting himself. “We are working together, but Hermione is here because we
are partners.”

“Partners? What are you…partners in?” Professor McGonagall said with a baffled look on her face.

“In everything,” Hermione said, and Severus took her hand. “We are partners in everything.”
Chapter Two

January and February 2010

Hermione

January

A Tahiti themed birthday had seemed so appropriate when she had started planning it, but now that she and Hannah were charming tiki torches and hanging colourful (garish?) Japanese lanterns all over *The Broomsticks*, Hermione was rethinking her plan.

Rosamund was sleeping soundly in her pram. Hannah had taken a break to feed her about an hour ago and was now doing most of the decoration work while Hermione pondered.

“It looks great; it’s going to be great. We’re not going to finish unless you…”

“Sorry! You’re right.” Hermione snapped back to work. It all looked nothing like the real thing; how could it? Certainly, though, he would understand the inspiration and be pleased with the effort. He knew about the party, as Hermione did not think a surprise would be the way to go. She had arranged for Professor Harwell to take his patrol that night and presented it as an evening out with friends rather than an elaborate affair. She looked around at the string of brightly coloured fish lights that Hannah was about to start affixing to the walls. *Hmmmmmm.*

They had whisked away on Boxing Day. She had been to Australia each year since the war to check on her parents, who seemed happy in their new lives. Besides that, she had not left the continent, and she had certainly not been on a holiday like this one.

She was no longer nauseated at all. Every day she woke up without that companion she was grateful, but she was still tired most of the time. There was not a better place on earth to be tired, though. The little wizarding village where they stayed had private huts that were open on one side, so the sea breeze circulated throughout. The large bamboo bed was raised two meters off the ground, so it felt as if she were sleeping on a cloud, and she could look out and see him fishing or swimming.

She had laughed when she discovered his wardrobe was exactly what he had worn all the time she had known him and did not contain anything except black wool trousers and button-down white shirts.

“What do you wear for swimming?”

“Nothing. A Notice-Me-Not is sufficient.”

She had fallen against him in laughter and offended him—they were still traversing the beginning of their partnership, after-all.
“I used to look at that bookshelf, you know, your travel bookshelf, with your mementos, and imagine you on holiday. Never did I picture you starkers!”

He had gone straight into annoyed Snape mode, which he didn’t yet realize she found delightful. She had changed his mood, though, by kissing the grumpiness off his face, and then becoming so enthralled, kissing the clothes off his body as they stood in their little hut. She had leaned him against the bed for support and taken him into her mouth where she ravished him in a way she had never been able to do before. She licked and sucked and prodded and practically worshipped him until he had no choice but to come down her throat with a wail.

He had tried to reciprocate, but she had postponed her turn.

“No, it seems you are dressed for a swim now, and I would like to watch. Don’t turn up the charm too high.”

The beach was deserted anyway, and she enjoyed the view immensely as he walked leisurely down to the beach, into the water and finally dove in like a dolphin when the surf was deep enough. By the time he had swum for forty-five minutes or so and was ready to be finished, there was a family with young children, all as naked as can be on the beach, so he walked casually back to the hut without concern or notice.

He already looked browner and so beautiful against the sun behind him. She was lying across the bed watching him approach, feeling her insides turn to mush. She was wearing a simple cotton shift with nothing underneath. So far, the pregnancy had been most comfortable with the least restrictive clothes possible, and she planned to wear little else in Tahiti.

She lifted bottom part of the skirt to her hips and spread her legs as he walked the last few paces up the steps on the open side of the hut and spotted her as she started to leisurely rub herself, dipping her fingers inside and spreading the wetness languidly, keeping her eyes on him the whole time.

He growled and hopped up the steps to the bed, enveloping her in one motion and kissing her as he pulled her dress away from her body and replaced her hand with his. He tasted of the salty spray. He had spelled the sand off him—Hermione could hardly remember what it was like to be a Muggle at the beach. She grabbed his hardening cock and palmed it, stroking him in time with their kisses.

There was very little physical sign of the pregnancy yet. She was broad enough in the hips that she had not popped out at all in front. Her breasts were larger, but perhaps not noticeably so, and she wondered as they rubbed their whole bodies against each other, how it would be different when the child was larger between them. She left that thought as he put two fingers in her and found the right spot while he was using his thumb steadily on her clitoris. “OOOooooooh,” she gasped and arched her back while pressing herself more firmly against his fingers. “Oh yes, right there.”

He sat up on the bed, so he was perpendicular to her and could get more leverage. They had moved so she was propped up on the bolster at the head of the bed. He stroked her hard and deliberately while he bore into her eyes with his own.

“Touch yourself, too,” she whispered, and he moved his other hand down to his cock and began stroking himself the way he had showed her that time in his bed. This image had been a frequent theme in her dreams since then. A bead of moisture appeared from the slit on the end of his cock, and it almost made her come just looking at it. He wiped it with his finger and was about to use it as lube on himself.

“I want to taste it,” she said wantonly.
He paused for a moment and then leaned forward and placed the finger next to her mouth. She took the whole thing in and sucked it exactly as she had his cock earlier in the day. He moaned deeply into his throat. His hand on her hadn’t let up and she was right on the edge, about to plunge over when he removed the hand and replaced it with his cock, filling her in one thrust.

She came immediately, crying out and arching her back. He lifted her against him so she was sitting on him as her orgasm came wave after wave after wave, like nothing she had ever experienced before. She felt as if she had melted into a puddle and might have if he had not held her firmly with his hand at her back.

When she had recovered, she wrapped her arms around his neck and started lifting herself up and down in him, squeezing him when he was at the hilt of her. A minute of that was all he could bear, and he flipped her soundly and pounded her into the bed until he came with a howl. She tried not to laugh; he certainly hadn’t at her, but she was struck by her surreal existence and how it had led to that moment with her beloved Severus Snape in Tahiti.

They napped until the sun was starting to go down, and then they dressed to walk into the village and find a place to eat. He put his wool trousers and cotton shirt on and began to fasten his boots.

“I could…” she held her wand toward him and mimed transfiguration at him. He froze and looked at her with a defensive, almost frightened expression.

“I don’t care, Severus, you can wear what you want, I just thought you might be more comfortable in lighter clothing…and sandals.”

“I have traveled before,” he said stiffly.

“Of course you have. Forget I mentioned it. Let’s go,” she embraced him to reassure him.

“Would you?”

“Help you with your clothes? Any time! I rather love fashion—I know it’s frivolous.”

“You always look perfect.”

“Thank you, Severus,” she felt herself blush. “Now let me see…unbutton your shirt.” She transformed the material to a light linen, keeping the buttons and colour. “Lovely. You feel more comfortable in trousers rather than shorts?” He nodded. She made them looser and lighter and then transfigured his boots into very fashionable black leather sandals. “You have lovely feet, Severus. You are very lucky.”

She was wearing the transparent, billowy cotton shift that was thicker in strategic places so she wouldn’t be quite such an exhibitionist. She felt like an earth mother with her wild hair and flowing dress. She took his hand and they walked slowly to the village.

“Hermione?”

“Yes, sorry.”

Hannah was looking at her again.

“Is this line straight?”

“Yes, it looks perfect. Thank you…thank you.”
“Of course! We are finished here—you should get back to school and get ready; see you at seven-thirty?”

“Perfect.”

When they returned a few hours later, Hermione could hardly believe the magic that Hannah had pulled off. It really looked like the village in Tahiti. She and Severus wore winter clothes—he was back in old faithful, bless him, but Hannah had handed them each the pineapple rum drink that had been ubiquitous during their holiday. Neither of them had actually drank one—him because he preferred something less sweet, her because of Inga or Stellan. Both accepted with a smile and gratitude.

Severus’s friends had outdone themselves, as if they were making up for many missed birthday acknowledgements, and probably were. There was wine and books and a chess set from Filius, and a lovely deep green jumper from Professor McGonagall, and a beautiful potted brewer’s garden suitable for the dungeon from the Abbott-Longbottoms.

Hermione had bought a Gaugin print that she had already given him as well as a photo of them on holiday for the travel shelves. She had not invited people who were exclusively her friends. She would try to integrate them gradually, and Severus deserved a party with his people. They tucked in to a gorgeous dinner Hannah had coordinated as well as a coconut cake and champagne. Hermione took a sip of that one for the toast, but it practically made her retch.

He was quiet but obviously pleased, and he danced with her in public for the first time not in a tropical paradise among strangers. They swayed to island music for the rest of the evening.

“I have never had a birthday,” he said quietly in her ear. And she broke hold to look at him, confused. “Of course I have had birthdays, but I have never HAD one…”

He seemed in danger of choking up, so she held him as closely as she could. “First of many, Severus.”

Severus

February

He had felt out of place so many times in his early life, he now took pains to avoid such situations. He had to chuckle at his present circumstance, dressed as a Muggle in a doctor’s office with people, mostly women, mostly visibly pregnant and at least twenty years younger. She wanted him here, though, so he supposed he belonged.

She was eighteen weeks along, and she still hardly looked pregnant when she was dressed. She had on Muggle trousers and boots with a reasonably tight jumper, and he could see just the outline of the swelling that was quite visible when she was undressed. In her robes, it was completely concealed, which she planned to do throughout. Master Rycliffe and the researcher at the Ministry were the only magical folk besides the two of them that knew of the pregnancy, and the other two men thought they had been lucky on the first try. The whole story was a secret for now between the two of them. Perhaps they would reveal it someday; perhaps not. They were curious about the spell and potion they had used, but they had agreed to keep it under wraps for now.
“Ms. Granger?” a nurse who looked far too young to be out of school popped her head from the doorway.

Hermione had been lost in her own thoughts with her fingers lightly entwined in his, snapped to attention and led him through the door. There was a chair for him as she went through several indignities, from having to remove her clothes and replace them with two tie-on gowns, being weighed on a scale in the corner, and having to provide a urine sample behind an odd little hidden door.

It was his first time at a Muggle doctor’s office, and he was trying to appear as casual as possible as he took it all in, but it could not be more different than his experience with healers. For one, there had never been any disrobing unless an injury required it. There were not all these stops and personnel, either. You sat on a table, the healer used her wand, she stated the diagnosis, you started treatment. He realized he had no idea about magical midwifery, though. Need to research that. They were making progress on the fertility project.

They were finally shuffled into a tiny room with very serious looking machines and another chair in the corner for him. It was shoved up against a medical table where Hermione perched, and they waited again.

“It is cold in here,” he said without thinking of her bare legs and feet. He remembered her observation that had led them out of the library and into his bed and hit a subtle warming spell instead of making further unhelpful comments.

“Thank you,” she said, and took his hand again. He had not known before the comforting properties of having his hand held. He wished she could be there all the time to hold his hand and help him through a stack of awful first-year essays, patrol on the dark, winter nights, or when Minerva took the last of the marmalade at breakfast. He squeezed it gently. He had told her he loved her twice, and each time he had feared he might faint from the feeling of risk. She had said it countless times. She knew how he felt; she did not have doubt, and she accepted his whole, flawed self.

He was feeling himself grow emotional again when another young woman, this one a doctor, knocked aggressively on the door and then opened it immediately.

“Hello, Hermione!” she said with confidence that awed him.

“Hello, Dr. Gupta. This is my partner, Severus Snape.”

The thrill had not receded hearing that out loud. The small woman shook his hand firmly.

“Congratulations, Severus.”

“Thank you.” What else was there to say?

She was looking at a little, flat computer she held in her hands. “You gained three pounds back in the last month, Hermione. That is quite good. You are feeling better?”

“Yes.”

“Wonderful.” Without words, the doctor eased Hermione onto her back on the table. Hermione kept his hand in hers on the other side. Dr. Gupta opened Hermione’s gown and started feeling her abdomen, which was more extended than he had seen just a few days before. She slept over at school on the odd evenings when they worked on their project, but they were in still in the negotiation stage of what they would do about a permanent arrangement, and she stayed at her own home the other nights. Neither had the time to hash it out in the middle of the term, but they had
agreed that they would live together full-time as soon as they could formulate a plan.

“Feels perfect for eighteen weeks. Are you ready to take a peek?”

Hermione looked at him and smiled when she answered. “Yes.”

He had been looking forward to this since he read in the autumn during their separation about pregnancy. He’d had no idea before the level of Muggle sorcery that would allow them to see the baby while it was still in the womb. The doctor applied jelly from a tube onto Hermione’s belly and then placed her wand on it gently as he had seen in photographs. All three turned their heads to the screen as an image appeared—an image that was so clearly a small baby he had to steady himself with the handrail. Dr. Gupta pointed out the brain and the heart, which was unmistakable, and the spine and the internal organs.

“You do not wish to know the sex, correct?”

“That’s right,” Hermione said, eyes glued to the screen.

She couldn’t bear to give up Inga or Stellan at this point, and knowing who was in there would make the other disappear. He did not want to know because he was already far too attached to a child he would have to hand over in a few months.

“I won’t print any revealing shots,” Dr. Gupta said with a smile. As much as he agreed with Hermione’s decision, it was rather galling to have this stranger know something about the end of the story that they did not know yet. But he would have a copy of this, and that was far more important.

“All right, then.” Dr. Gupta made some notes on the computer in her hands. “I will see you in four weeks Hermione.” She turned to him and squinted her eyes for a brief second and then covered up the fact she had forgotten his name. “Lovely to meet you, Dad. Please come again with Hermione.”

He shook her hand and nodded and tried not to react to the moniker because he was not Dad, and he probably would never be. It was all right. He had her, and that was enough, but there was an unmistakable stab at his heart.

Hermione dressed quickly, and they were on their way. His momentary angst was gone. It was a clear sunny day for February. They’d had lunch at a wonderful café before her appointment, and she was taking him to her home for the first time. They ducked into an alley she had used before for apparition, and she stopped for a moment and embraced him.

“You steady?”

“Of course,” he said, but not defensively. It had been a lot to take in. She held him tightly and then kissed him on the mouth.

“Love you,” she whispered, and he brought her in closer. They kissed and then apparated off, landing in a very peaty smelling garden shed. They lost their balance on reentry, and he threw himself on the ground to break her fall, just as she grasped on to a handle on the wall, leaving him in a heap. She hoisted him up and ignored his grumblings.

She opened the shed and revealed a large, suburban plot, divided into several beds, but most of it open lawn. The house was larger than the bungalow he had pictured and two-stories. Dentists, he thought. Quite privileged. The house he grew up in flashed into his head, and he felt a familiar rush of shame before he could stop it. Rubbish. She does not care.

She spelled open the wards and lock and led him through to an entry way with Muggle laundry
machines. A very large, orange cat...or something streaked past them and ran into the garden. “That’s Crooks. He’s ridiculous. Ignore him.”

They walked into an immaculately clean kitchen, with a round table and a chair that was clearly her spot. She had spoken of working at the table, and there was a container of Muggle pens and pencils as well as parchment and quills in a little box.

“You can help me cook dinner later,” she said as she led them into a large space that appeared to be both sitting room and library. “It didn’t used to look like this. I did a lot of work in the Septembers—over and over,” she laughed. “I was influenced by a library I visited then.”

He saw it in the way the shelves were arranged. She did not have the work tables—that was obviously what the kitchen table was for, but she had organized and categorized her shelves very similarly to his. **It would be an easy task to combine them.**

She pulled a book filled with photos and flipped through them. “This is what it used to look like,” she showed him a shot of a formal sitting room on one side and more of a family area with large television on the other.

“I still have it,” she flicked her wand, and a hinged door swung open above the hearth, revealing a large screen. “I have a bit of a habit,” she confessed. He had not watched television since he was a child in the odd pub, but he did not find it off-putting.

“Sounds entertaining.”

“Right!” she said and laughed. She took his hand and led him up the stairs. “I have gone through my parents’ room—it’s just another bedroom now, but I still have my childhood room. I thought about switching but couldn’t really see the point.”

She opened a door revealing a small but delightful bedroom with more bookshelves and a rather girlish day-bed she had expanded to be a double. It was covered with a floral duvet that looked like the ideal gift for a fifteen-year-old girl. But the room was mostly windows, and the light was perfect, and he could tell immediately why she loved it.

“Come here,” he said quietly, and it came out of him mouth like a growl. She stepped toward him, and he pulled her jumper over her head and buried his face between her breasts as she pressed herself against him. Doing this in the light of day was so different from their very satisfactory but rather dark dungeon encounters, and it made him think of Tahiti. A surge of arousal flooded him at the thought, and he began tugging down her trousers, which had a soft panel in the front for her expanding belly. She pressed her mouth against his and opened hers, kissing him with desire.

“You want...”

“Yes!” she whispered.

He scooped her up and put her down on the bed, taking off her trousers and knickers as she went to work on his clothes. He needed her right then, but he decided to deny himself for a few moments, settling between her legs and exploring her with his mouth and tongue.

“Yes, thank you,” she gasped, and he stopped himself from chuckling. She tasted earthy and sweet and perfect, and he did not stop as she pressed herself into his face, seemingly about to come. He put his lips around her clitoris and sucked in with his tongue as he slipped a finger inside her and caressed her as she called out his name and came on his mouth.

“Yes,” he said in satisfaction, moving up to her, taking his cock out and holding it ready, not wanting...
to wait another moment. She opened herself and let him in, wrapping her legs around him so he could push in deep. He paused a moment and held her against him tightly before he began to move. He watched her face when he began thrusting in and out. She looked relaxed and happy and present. She was running her fingers up and down his back, enveloping him in a way that made him feel safe and loved. She smiled and began squeezing herself around him, and he fucked her hard and came, planting his face at the side of her warm neck as he did. It was fantastic, but it was also one of thousands past, present, and future, and he could not remember being so content as he pulled out and wrapped himself around her. She took off the rest of his clothes that he had not had time for and folded the two of them into the bedclothes. He drifted off with his face at her breasts, as if he were a child.

He woke some time later. The sun was still out, but it was setting quickly. She was awake and caressing his hair. He shifted so not so much of his weight was on her, but she snuggled in close to him.

“Your house is beautiful,” he sighed.

“Really? Do you think so?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want…would you live here? I mean if it were an option, if you weren’t living at school… would you live here?”

“Yes.”

“Because I have been thinking.”

He could not see her face, but he could picture her expression from her tone. It was hopeful but slightly guarded as if she were afraid he would point out how ridiculous her idea was. “Go on,” he said with as much an encouraging tone as he was capable.

“I am not…I do not see me staying in my current position.” Then she launched into her absolute Hermione Granger genuine steam of consciousness monologues that he suspected she thought annoyed him but that he actually loved because it gave him space to think without having to immediately respond.

“I don’t hate it, and I could probably keep on for the rest of my career and do okay. I doubt I inspire anyone, and I certainly don’t inspire myself, but I could teach and research and publish and attend the meetings and do the faculty feed back things and mentor…you know. But…when I wrote my book…”

The wizarding publishers had all rejected her manuscript. They would have published it in a second, he knew, if it had her name attached to it, but as Elsa Gustavvson, no one was interested. He doubted they had read it. He had. It was funny and rather filthy but romantic. She had refused to be put off and had sent it to a Muggle house which had agreed to publish a limited run with more to come if it sold.

“I loved every day of writing it…even the tedious bits I…well…they were more…joyful than anything I had done until then. And I love our project, and I want to work on that and other…problems like that…with you…but maybe part time? They have been looking for another full-time faculty member in potions for…well, for years, and no one has fit, but you would. You are a better teacher than me, and you love all of it Severus, you do, it’s all over your face when we are brewing and testing the results. You were born to do this. I…well…the part I am looking forward to the most
is when we have all the data and I get to write it all into a report for us to publish, and I already have a sequel to *Blood Oaths* in my head, and that is what I want to do…you have no idea. The thought of writing that book and not having to teach or grade another essay…that’s what I want. I hate to quit. It’s so counter to what…”

“Discovering what you love and changing your plans accordingly is not quitting, Hermione.” He interrupted her.

“No?”

“Of course not.”

“Would you be interested in moving to the university job? I know your whole life is Hogwarts and now your friends…”

“Yes!” he said emphatically.

“Really?”

“Yes. My friends will still be my friends. The only promising part of…” he realized he was caressing her belly, but she didn’t seem to mind. “Of failure was being able to start over.”

“Then let’s.” She brought him in close again and kissed his mouth. “Let’s start over, Severus.”

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry for the delayed update. The last two weeks have been busy, and that won’t let up for the next few weeks. There are two chapters left, and I will update as soon as they are each ready. Thank you for continuing to read the story.
Part Six: Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Three

May 28 and 29, 2010

Severus

He was finishing up the week with one eye on the weekend as was his recent habit. He was going to shrink some cartons and move them into the house. They had already transferred about half his library. They were still using the dungeon lab for their project, but they were transferring that, too, into her lab at university. His decision to seek the university position and resign at Hogwarts had taken hours of discussion and more silent contemplation. Hermione was very good at decision making. He was not. When in mid-March he was still running several scenarios in his head and aloud, he started to become nervous that she might decide it was all too much. Instead, she hashed it out with him until they had settled on a plan.

He had met with the university administration, who were skeptical about him because why would they not be? Hermione had come to his defense, and they had reacted predictably—of course you are defending your partner. But she had brought in a parade of students, some of whom he hardly remembered, and that had apparently been enough. The university administration had offered him a faculty position—different from Hermione’s as she was a research fellow, and he was teaching. Then she declared her intention to move to part-time, and he appealed to take half her research. He ended up with exactly what he wanted. It was hard to fathom.

Then he had to resign from Hogwarts. A copy of his cleverly crafted letter no longer existed, and he felt as if he had moved beyond those feelings anyway. He made an appointment to see Headmistress McCullough just before the Easter holidays.

“I know why you’re here. Dean Mathis sent me a courtesy owl.” She sat behind the massive desk that was his during the second worst year of his life. She had aged during her time as Headmistress, but she looked out of place behind that desk that he still associated with Headmaster Dumbledore. He looked up at that portrait, and the old man winked at him. Too soon, old man. “I was hoping to talk you out of it,” she said with a sigh.

Does not want to find a new Slytherin Head, he thought, the old bitterness bubbling up. But that was not what her face expressed. It said she was genuinely sorry to let him go. Impossible…perhaps not?

“It is time.” He said quietly.

“If you say so. I want to thank you, Professor, for the leadership you have shown—not just with your House but with the faculty, too. I appreciate your…support of the esprit de corps.”

He nodded and coughed slightly, not wanting to laugh or scoff.

“Well…Congratulations? If you know of anyone who would be interested in…either of your jobs?”
And he did just that. Hermione made a list of Slytherin graduates of the university Potions program, and the Headmistress took her pick. She chose well, too, Snape thought. One of the first new Slytherins after the war, an exemplary student with plenty of common sense. A young woman—the first female Head of Slytherin in over a century. Snape hoped she would adjust again to life in the dungeon. He wrote her a tome of advice.

It was then time to tell his friends. Minerva took it the worst; Filius the best—he was as proud as if he had been promoted—with the Abbott-Longbottoms flatteringly morose. He encouraged them to befriend his successor and help her out.

He spent the Easter holidays with Hermione in Putney, working on making her house a home for them. Both were rubbish as domestic charms and the house needed some work that was either going to require Muggle workmen or a charms course. He threw himself at Filius’s mercy, and his friend spent the better part of two days up and down ladders inside and out until the place looked as if there had been a major renovation. They fed him and kept him in wine and music as he worked, and he acted as if he could think of nothing better than to help out at Casa Granger-Snape.

Severus was still a novice at friendship, but he was learning by example. He and Hermione returned to school three days before the spring term started and brewed enough potion to keep the hospital wing stocked for two years. Hermione left to finish out her own term, which was shorter than his. Snape was sad to see her go, but both had the sense of a final push before their new adventure could start. Filius surprised him the last Sunday night of vacation.

“Severus, do you fancy a chess match? I bought a bottle of Ogdens.”

Snape did not need the enticement. He would miss these quiet evenings with his colleagues. He resolved to invite them over regularly. The Ogdens was smooth and the game was easy with his old friend.

“Severus,” Filius said after they had both made several initial moves. “You are going to be a father.”

Snape almost dropped the pawn in his hand. He looked at Filius. Was he speculating? He thought of the time they had spent together. Hermione was concealing the pregnancy under her robes, but if you really looked at her… He supposed that was what had prompted this.

“I am not.”

“Is it…Severus, forgive me. It’s none of my business.” Filius took a drink and studied the board again. It was Snape’s turn, and his whole line of strategy had left him. *Bother.*

“Neither of us are…” He tried to put himself back into the mindset he had when this all began last summer. “Neither of us…planned…desired…parenthood. The child will be…we are…the child will be adopted.”

“That is admirable, Severus.” He looked as if he wanted to say more, but the rest of the game was quiet. Snape could no more pour his heart out to Flitwick than he could sprout wings, but he was gratified that the man obviously cared about him.

The match fell apart—neither could plot a move, so they finished their drinks and ended it as a draw.

He had classes in the morning, but suddenly he had to see her; he had to sleep in the same bed as her. He could not leave; there were returning students all over the corridor, so he sent out a terse message via owl and met her at the dungeon entrance.
“Has something happened?” she asked.

He felt a flood of guilt. She had bustled her way down the hill, seven and a half months pregnant because HE was feeling fragile. He took her hand and walked with her through the corridor. The students had heard that he was leaving and had probably heard gossip about him and Hermione, but none of them dared say anything. She was bundled up in the still chilly early spring, and no one would guess what she was concealing under the robe. He felt quite the coward, really. If he were being honest, he would proclaim their situation to the world. *I love her, and this is our child, and I love him or her, too.*

As soon as they were behind the door of his office, he took her into his arms and held her, the baby huge between them now. She was exquisite when she was undressed and unconcerned about concealment and she had the now impressively extended belly. He could not keep his hands off it in bed and in the bath and everywhere else when they were alone.

“What is it?” she said so quietly.

“I am sorry. I should have left you in peace.”

“Nonsense. I was thrilled to hear from you. I was dreading sleeping alone.”

*Yes. The very same.*

“Have you eaten?”

“I have some cheese and biscuits. I could not be bothered, really.”

He tutted around gruffly at her lack of care for herself and then led her to the kitchens where some very reserved elves made a plate for her. He poured himself a glass of water and sat on a high stool with her while she ate the entire meal.

“I guess I was hungry. I need to do a shop, but I was tired today.”

“All you have to do is let me know.” He should have thought of it anyway. He was going to have to adjust to life on the outside without perpetually stocked kitchens and breakfast that appeared promptly on the table.

“I know, I know, but I thought I sure could do it…then lacked motivation. I’ll go tomorrow.”

“After a day of work on your feet? Bezzy, could you prepare a basket for Master Granger to take home with her? She will need enough food for two days.” The elf began filling the basket immediately. “I have no classes Wednesday morning, I will do the shop then,” he said.

“You don’t have to. When was the last time you were in the shops alone…”

“I want to!” he said entirely too forcefully.

“You are too kind to me,” she said, not offended in the least.

“Nonsense,” he muttered.

They had established a habit from then on of not spending nights apart. She mostly came to the dungeon because he was not free to leave except for the occasional night. He preferred sleeping at the house in the room they were making their own. They talked about converting her parents’ room into a shared workspace. There was a third, small bedroom that Hermione’s grandmother used to
have when she lived with the family. It had hardly been touched over the years.

He was almost ready to leave that Friday at the end of May when he received a message via owl.

S,


H

He left immediately without the cartons. He charged up the grounds like he had not since his days of receiving summons. He was not worried exactly. She had been feeling off for the last two weeks, but she had not experienced anything that was not in the normal range of late pregnancy. He was clinging to the last few weeks of this time before the baby was gone, while she seemed to be very anxious to be finished with the pregnancy and move on to the next phase of their life.

*It is still beyond anything you could have imagined.* Years of content life stretched ahead of him. *You have nothing to be unhappy about.*

He felt the rather violent whoosh that apparition brought, and it grounded him a bit. He chuckled at the irony. Crooks was stalking the garden and eyed Snape with wariness rather than suspicion. *He is warming to me.*

“Hermione?” he called as soon as he was through the kitchen door.

“I’m up here.” She sounded stressed, exhausted. He took the stairs two at a time and found her in the bedroom, kneeling on the bed, leaning into the headboard, her arms folded on the frame, her head on them. “I don’t know if this is it. They feel tighter and a little more painful.” She had been having contractions for weeks. They had marveled in bed as her whole midsection had turned rock hard and extended out almost a yard. “My back hurts.” She whimpered, which communicated more than her words had. Through all the indignities of the last year, he had never heard anything like that tone. She had cried a little in the beginning, but otherwise, she had been stoical. He was concerned.

He whispered the spell to remove his boots and settled on the bed behind her so he could rub her back. “Is this okay?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, I’ll let you know. I might want you not to touch me soon. I am a mess.”

He did not have the right words for this, but he brushed her hair back from her neck and magically secured it to the back of her head, tight enough to stay but loose enough that it would not make her head ache. He knew the right spell from years of securing his own hair.

“I don’t know what this is,” she said with an air of despair. “I don’t know if it’s just more of the same and I am tired because it’s Friday, and I was on my feet. Or it might be something.”

“Dr. Gupta said to not hesitate to some in.”

“Mum went in three times before she was actually in labour and got sent home every time.”

Hermione had found her mother’s journals she had kept while she was pregnant, and they had become the *Gospel of Anne*. Snape could have lived without the prophet of 1979 because she caused
more stress than she answered questions, but he kept that opinion to himself.

“I could just seem me dragging you to hospital and OH!”

The last syllable was said with obvious pain.

“That is not your back?”

“No. That’s different. That feels more like…something going on in there.”

He took her firmly in his arms from behind and pulled her gently so they were reclined on the bed. “I think it is time to be checked anyway,” he said, tamping down fear that was rising in him.

“Yes,” she said, and began to sit. She’d packed her bag the previous weekend and had insisted he put a change of clothes as well. He had made it to all her appointments since the first one he attended, and they had taken a two-session class at the hospital about childbirth.

As out of place and ancient as he had felt among the young couples, it was thrilling to be out as partners and equally thrilling that their fellow pupils assumed they were going to be parents.

They said goodbye to Crooks—he could probably take care of himself for a month or more. They side-apparated into an alley in London that was close to the hospital and usually deserted. That evening there was a restaurant worker on a smoking break that they almost killed via shock, but Snape was able to calm him down and confund him while Hermione braced herself against the brick wall and practiced the breathing technique they had learned in class. They took a cab the rest of the way, according to plan. They had cash in an envelope for it, but he was rubbish at Muggle money and looked a complete fool. The cabbie seemed to chalk it up to the impending birth.

Hermione had made a thorough plan but was quickly overwhelmed because of stress and pain. He took the journal from her—he did not really need it, as he had thought this all through himself—and was able to navigate them to maternity where the nurses took over quite ably.

They were in a room with two other women in labour, but the areas around the beds had curtains drawn. He cast silencing charms around them, so everyone could have some degree of privacy. “Do you want something for pain?” he asked. She had brushed him off at the house, but her suffering had intensified.

“NO! Don’t ask me again!”

She was determined to do this completely by the natural Muggle book, just as Saint Anne had.

“I won’t,” he said tersely, but she did not seem to notice his tone.

A nurse called Sandra bustled in and took charge, and Snape was immediately grateful. Sandra was his age and clearly experienced. Hermione had already changed, and Sandra did vital exams and then efficiently but gently checked her to determine how far the labour had progressed. “Four—you are on your way. I will be back shortly. We have called Dr. Gupta.” She left quickly.

“Four—I was two on Tuesday at Dr. Gupta’s.”

“You were absolutely right to come in,” he said.

“Yes, I think so.”

She handled her pain like a cat—stretching every way on the bed, against the bed, on her knees on
the floor, against the wall. Sometimes she wanted him to hold her or rub her back, sometimes she wanted him to disappear. Sometimes she wanted him to talk and then castigated him for saying “the most ridiculous things, Severus!” If he were not so anxious, it would be somewhat humourous.

About an hour later, Dr. Gupta arrived as cheery as always, but rather dismissive of Hermione’s pain. “When you get to eight, you get the gas!” That sounded ominous, though he knew what she was referring to because of the class and the journals and their conversations for the last month.

She checked Hermione again. Snape realized that all the indignities at the appointments had been leading up to the grandfather of them all. “Six! Well-done, You!”

Again, they all departed, leaving the two of them alone to endure the continuing agony. Hermione seemed to be in a battle internally: her rational self against the pain, and she was determined for the pain not to win. Since he had proven himself useless, he tried to stay quiet and out of the way. She was alternating backing up against the wall and letting it support much of her and kneeling on the floor with her arms in front of her, also on the floor and her head resting on them, looking like a very miserable yoga practitioner.

Time passed agonizingly slowly, but finally the team returned to check progress. Please be ten, please be ten, please be ten. Dr. Gupta’s face fell for the first time in their association. “Still six,” she said as she withdrew her hand. Hermione had to be flat on her back to be checked and she rolled over into a ball facing away from them. Snape could tell from the movement of her shoulders that she had started to weep. He walked over and picked her up partially, so she could rest against him, and she put her arms around him and cried silently into his chest.

“Oh, poppet, it’s perfectly normal. We will give you some more time and come back.” Dr. Gupta said, and Severus sorted that away for later. He had an idea what the reaction would be if he ever dared call his fierce Hermione poppet. The team left again, and Hermione stayed against him until another contraction hit.

“Why is this not working?” Her hair had come unstuck, so he took a band from his pocket and wound it around the hair, pulling it from her face again.

“I am sure it is.”

“You’re sure? REALLY?”

He reverted to silence. She took off the gowns because they made her feel restricted and went through her whole yoga routine again, completely unabashed at her nakedness. He would never share these thoughts, but she looked like a goddess of the earth working through a spring ritual.

When the team arrived back again, she was arse up on the floor.

“Are you too hot, Hermione?” Dr. Gupta asked.

“No, I just cannot stand clothes.”

They chuckled, and he could tell Hermione took it as condescension and was biting her tongue not to retort. Dr. Gupta checked again and frowned. Snape’s heart sank.

“Hermione, we must put you on a drip that will boost labour. Your baby is fine right now, heartbeat sounds lovely, but we need to move this along if we want to keep it that way. This is going to make the contractions stronger. I know you wanted a natural birth as much as possible, but I recommend an epi…
“Give it to me!”

The team all laughed again, and Snape took her hand. She dug her nails into his fist, but she avoided snapping.

The team in the room doubled in size and soon she was hooked up to several machines and was dressed again, he supposed for the propriety of others.

The anesthesiologist arrived with another set of machines on a cart and two other people.

“The acoustics in here are so strange!” Dr. Gupta said in frustration. “I can’t hear anyone approaching. I was about to call you again.”

Hermione looked at him as if he had released noxious gas into the room. He wandlessly turned off the silencing spell.

“How long will this take?” Hermione asked the anesthesiologist with audible despair as he was inserting a very large needle into her back.

“A few minutes, dear,” the older man said pleasantly.

They left again, and Hermione was now strapped to the bed and still in pain with no way of relieving it somewhat with the positions she had been relying on. Ten minutes, fifteen, twenty, she was still in agony. He was just about to fetch Dr. Gupta when she stilled on the bed. “I can’t feel my legs. I can’t feel anything,” she said with great relief.

He sighed, grateful, though not as much as she was, and pulled the chair to the bed. He took her hand, and she did not shuck it away.

“Oh, this this soooooooo much better.”

“Do you think you should try to sleep?”

She looked at him as if he had two heads and then laughed.

“I am sorry about all this,” he said sincerely. It was so unfair the burden she had when he had escaped any of it.

She caressed his fingers with hers. “I am the one that pulled that book.”

“That is true.” Thank you, my darling girl, for pulling that book. He leaned over and kissed her mouth.

“I love you, Severus.”

“I love you, too, Hermione.” The words came out as easily as any had ever.

They sat quietly and watched the monitor as the contractions intensified. There was another monitor that was suddenly peaking in time with the contractions. That went on for about a minute before the team arrived again. Dr. Gupta practically shoved Snape out of the way checking screens and then putting the hand monitor right on her belly.

“Hermione, your baby needs to be born. It is fine right now, but I don’t like the heartrate trends I am seeing, and…it needs to be born. Dad,” she said, turning to Snape, “You may come with us. Sandra will get you prepped.”
Sandra took his person in hand and led him to a small room. “Now is the time to use the loo,” she ordered. He realized he needed to desperately. He did so quickly, and then she showed him how to wash his hands and cover himself in blue garments. “Let’s go,” she said as soon as he covered his boots. They practically ran down the corridor to the surgical wing. She popped open a door where he saw Hermione draped and strapped to a table, looking terrified. He sent her as fortifying a look as he could muster.

“Severus, please stay by her head,” Dr. Gupta said without her usual casualness. It was the first time she had not called him Dad.

He could see the doctor begin the incision, and he turned his head to face Hermione as he was afraid he might pass out. He stayed there until he could hear another shift in tone from the doctor and her team. He cautiously looked up.

“Severus, what is it?” Hermione started to panic.

“There!” Dr. Gupta said with great relief. “It’s been too long, though! Larry, I need her out!”

The anesthesiologist’s casual manner transformed instantly as he popped from his stool on the other side of Hermione’s head. “Mr. Granger, will you please wait by the door.”

Snape was lost. “Severus, everything will be fine,” Sandra called out. “We do this every day.”

He did not have a chance to speak to or encourage Hermione before Dr. Kramer had slapped a mask on her face and was counting down. “She’s out.”

Snape felt on the verge of tears and was trying to calm himself from panic when he heard a lusty cry from a newborn. A medical team that had been in the corner went to work immediately, but the doctor cried out within moments. “Dad, he is fine! He is just fine!”

He? Snape felt tears fall down his face. “How is she?” he called out with an audible sob.

“She is going to be just fine, Dad,” Dr. Gupta’s friendly tone was back, and it was the most comforting sound of his life.

“Do we have a name, Dad?” called one of the nurses beside the little cart where the baby was crying indignantly.

“Stellen,” he choked out.

“Well, come meet Stellan, Dad.”

He only had a glimpse before they wheeled him away, asking Snape to follow. He was put in a chair as the cart and team disappeared behind a door. Sandra, bless her, had come along, though.
“Sit here; they’re going to give him a wee cleaning and wrap him up, and then both of you can go to Hermione’s room. She will be out for an hour or so, but she us fine, Severus. And your son shows no sign of distress. Dr. Gupta was a little concerned about his heart rate, and then your wife was not responding to the treatment to prevent her body from…” she looked at him with kind eyes. “But soon everything was just textbook. Just textbook.”

He nodded gratefully. Sandra left, and he was not sure how long he sat, but soon enough, the cart reemerged with a swaddled bundle at the center.

“This way, Dad.”

They rolled down the hall. He was behind so he could not see the baby. They finally arrived at a small but private room where Hermione lay on the bed as if she were asleep. A nurse was waiting for them. “Everything looks fine with Mum. She will be out for a little while. You just sit here and get to know your young man, and your wife will join you directly,” she said. Any other time of his life, those words would have caused him endless irritation, but just then he felt a fresh round of tears streaming down. Thank Merlin we are not at Mungo’s with this display. I would never live it down.

He sat in the seat beside Hermione’s bed. She was covered with a sheet up to her chin and looked to be sleeping peacefully. The nurse carefully picked up the bundle in the cart and handed it to Snape, showing him how to position it correctly. “Here is your Stellan.”

The baby was asleep. He had scant black hair and an unmistakably familiar nose right in the middle of his otherwise sweet face. Oh, Stellan. I am so sorry.

Hermione

She was dreaming she was underwater and desperately needed the loo. She also felt like a turkey, stuffed and trussed and stretched on a spit. She tried to open her eyes, which was impossible at first. She tired again, willing them open. She saw a sliver of light, daylight, she registered. She saw movement across the small room. She saw Severus. He was rocking. He was sitting in a rocking chair. He was holding a bundle of blankets. He was holding a baby. He was looking intently at the baby. He loved the baby.

In March, she had found a treasure in her parents’ bedroom. They were moving some things out; it was to be a shared workspace, they had decided. There were cartons she had not gone through during the Septembers; there was room for them, and they contained the most personal things that Hermione could not donate or look at during that time. She was ready in March.

She knew her mother kept journals, but the ones Hermione was familiar with were mostly business, very much like her own. These were different. Her mother had kept journals of her pregnancy. She must have taken the others with her when they left in a rush but not remembered these. In any case, Hermione had a record of her mother’s entire pregnancy.

Their experiences had some aspects in common, but they were mostly different. Anne had not suffered the debilitating nausea that Hermione had. Anne and Phillip had been married for fifteen years when she became pregnant, and they had been trying for ten. Hermione wracked her brain to remember her mother talking about experiencing infertility and came up blank. Hermione realized
there was so much she didn’t know about her mother. Hermione’s life had changed so drastically when she turned eleven—probably the age that her mother would start opening up and sharing more of herself with her daughter. And just at that time, Hermione had started to hide so much of her life from her parents. If they had known a tiny fraction of the danger of her life as a young teenager, they would have yanked her out of Hogwarts in minutes.

Hermione had drifted apart from them steadily, spending more of her holidays away than she did in Putney or traveling with her parents. She read about Anne’s longing to be a mother and cried in the bath when Severus was not around or when he couldn’t hear. She realized she was not crying only because she had denied her parents a real relationship with their daughter, but also because she felt a similar longing. She was going to give birth and hand over Inga or Stellan, and that had to be the right choice. Severus had not expressed any interest in parenthood, and she hadn’t either. They were preparing to start new lives; they couldn’t possibly shackle themselves to a baby.

She was so happy with their fresh start. She didn’t just love Severus, she trusted him completely. She read frustration in the journals from Anne regarding Phillip, and she knew that she was in the beginning stages of her relationship, but she couldn’t imagine being so…indifferent to her love. She was just getting to know some of the details of Severus’s life. He was terribly reserved about his past. She knew his parents had been awful. She knew he had grown up in dire poverty. She was beginning to understand why he chose the path he did in his late teens, and she understood fully the degree to which he regretted it. His circumstances and choices had made him reticent and deliberate. He worked through internal struggles slowly. He did not share his pain. To foist parenthood on him at the last moment seemed the height of selfishness.

There was a glimmer of hope that perhaps he would be willing to try again in a few years when they were established in their new life. And if not, he adored Rosamond Abbott-Longbottom. Perhaps they could be special auntie and uncle to their friends’ children. She would find some way to fill the void.

But friends were another sticky spot. His friends reacted with joy and support upon finding out about their partnership. Her friends were confused and even angry. Angry—as if she had betrayed them by falling in love with an unexpected person. Neville and Hannah were on her side completely, but Harry and Ron and that lot acted betrayed—betrayed! It was the most ridiculous, infuriating reaction she could imagine, and it verified that her feelings of distance with her friends had been well-grounded.

She met Harry and Ron at Broomsticks in late March to try to hash it out. She had not told Severus any of it because she feared it would kill any chance of them all becoming friends in the future. She had hid the pregnancy from everyone because she could not bear the reaction when and if they found out about the adoption, so she wore her flowing robes she had transfigured to wear everyday until the end of the pregnancy and nursed a butterbeer while her oldest friends expressed dismay.

“I don’t dislike him, Hermione, but he’s so…damaged.”

Harry and Ginny were separated, unable to overcome their problems. Damaged, really?

“Who among us is not damaged?”

“But Snape?” Ron made a disgusted face.

“You don’t have to like him or understand why I do, but you could be happy for me. I am happy.”

“If you say so.”
They had left it with a chilly air.

Ginny had been distant since the separation, but even she took a moment to send an owl wondering what was going on with Hermione.

G,

I am very well and very happy. We would love to have you and the children over any time. Hope things are well with you.

H

Her university colleagues were baffled that she was handing over her job to her boyfriend. They had never been close anyway. If it had not been for Severus and his little group of friends, including Professor Flitwick, who renovated their entire house in two days, she would be in quite a state. As it was, she felt mostly…blessed.

Friday the twenty-eighth had been her last day at work. She was looking forward to ten days or so of relaxation before the birth and the separation from Inga and Stellan. By ten in the morning, though, she was not feeling right. She waited to owl Severus until she could not stand it a moment longer. Then nothing had gone as planned; nothing was as she pictured it. That was not correct, she realized as she gazed at her partner and baby in that rocking chair. He had been exactly as she pictured him. She had been awful, the exact stereotype of the irrational, hateful woman in labour, while he had been calm and everything she needed the whole way. She had tears immediately.

“I’m sorry I was so mean to you!” she croaked out.

He turned to her, seemingly shocked hear her voice.

“You are awake,” he said.

“Yes. I was awful.”

“You were magnificent, Hermione.”

That made her cry harder. “Have you owled Sweden?” she choked out.

“No,” he said “No.” He stood up so gingerly, not disturbing the bundle in his arms and walked over to her. She tried to move over so he could sit beside her on the bed, but she couldn’t budge. He leaned over and showed her the baby. “Stellan,” he said quietly.

In one instant, Inga and her adorable braids on either side of her head disappeared, and Hermione took in Stellan’s complex but beautiful, sleeping face. She knew that face. She loved that face. “Hello, Stellan,” she said with a cracking voice.

“I was waiting for you to wake up before I contacted Sweden.”

“Could we not contact Sweden?” She was pleading, sobbing.

“Let’s NOT contact Sweden,” he said decisively.
They were quite a trio: two crying adults and one baby sleeping without a single care.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your patience. One more chapter to go...
Chapter Four

September 2013

Hermione

On the morning of the party, Hermione and Hannah were barefoot in the little kitchen in Putney putting the finishing touches on the spread while Severus and Neville were in the garden, each with a child in tow, configuring seating and making a last-ditch effort to rid the space of a gnome that had followed Crooks home.

The Granger Snapes had invited four dozen of their friends and colleagues to celebrate the publication of their study: *Potions and Male Fertility*. It had made a rather sensational splash in the *Prophet* the previous week. Hermione and Severus had been the featured guests on the top Wizarding radio chat show, “Now You Hear It with Dexter Cooney,” but Severus had walked out when Dex had asked whether their three-year-old son had inspired the study or been the result of it. Hermione had finished the interview in a clipped, professional tone.

“This looks like enough food for two-hundred,” Hermione sighed, taking in the sight of the trays of finger-portions on every available surface plus several extra shelves they had transfigured.

“They will eat it, believe me,” Hannah said as she pulled a tray of mini plum tarts from the oven.

Hannah had become Hermione’s true best friend very soon after Stellan was born. Hermione and Severus had stopped at the Ministry on the way home from hospital, with tiny bundle strapped protectively against Hermione’s chest. They were legally required to register the baby forty-eight hours after birth, something taken care automatically at St. Mungo’s. They had missed the deadline because Hermione had not been discharged until three days after her cesarean. Severus refused to leave with the baby without her. They were not sure what they would face at the Ministry, but apparently the clerks in that office had seen it all.

“Stellan Granger-Snape—is that correct?” The kindly bureaucrat did not react to his old Potions professor registering a birth along side one-third of the Golden Trio.

“Granger Snape. No hyphen. Granger is his middle name,” Hermione corrected pointing to the words on the parchment form.

“Granger Snape. Yes. Mother, Hermione Jean Granger, single. Father, Severus Tobias Snape, single.”

“We could take care of that today, too,” Severus said quietly.

“Do you want to?” She was shocked. They had never broached the subject of marriage, and in her experience, Severus did not make decisions without a good deal of rumination. Of course, he had
agreed to parenthood in an instant, so perhaps it was a new era.

“Yes.”

“What does marriage registration entail?” she asked the clerk.

“There is a ritual we can perform here in the office, and then a similar process to registering the child.”

Stellan shifted against her breast as if he were weighing in on the current question on the table and then fell asleep again.

“I would like to,” she said to Severus rather than the clerk.

“It is a slow day; you can step right through here.” The clerk led them to an office with a counter and another worker where they filled out some paperwork. They were shuffled into another office where a witch of at least eighty in official looking robes gestured for them to come forward.

“Both of you are here of your own volition and have not been coerced, spelled, charmed, hexed, or in any way compelled to enter into this union against your will.”

A look passed between Hermione and Severus. *Spelled, indeed.*

“Sorry. But with the past…unpleasantness, we have to ask.”

“I am here of my own free will,” Severus told her.

“I am as well.”

“Wonderful. Let’s begin.”

Hermione had not pined about her wedding day ever, but if she had thought of it at all, she doubted she would have pictured herself in elastic waist track bottoms against a saggy and sore mid-section with a baby wrapped against her breasts. If she had anticipated anything about the event, she would have at least seen herself in a lovely ensemble. But she realized she did not care at all as she stood beside her darling Severus, hands joined. She heard but could not feel the “spell” the witch performed, which did make her raise an eyebrow slightly. She glanced over at Severus and discovered his identical expression. It was as good a sign as any.

They left as a legally sanctioned little family. It did not change the way they felt, but it did offer a bit of comfort, she realized. They took a cab back to Putney, terrified to side-apparate with their tiny baby. Hermione settled on the couch and Stellan immediately woke and latched on to her breast. Her milk had arrived in the middle of the night, and his world had improved drastically since. She brought her arm around to hold him close.

“So…” Severus began and then stopped.

“Yeah. We have…nappies.”

“We have two gowns for him and two blankets.”

“We have this wrap.”

“Hmmmm…Would you mind if I left to…forage?”

“Please do. We’re fine.” She snuggled Stellan in more closely. “The food situation for us…”
“On the list.”

He had returned fifteen minutes later with Hannah, Neville, Rosamond, and a minimized trunk of baby gear, and then he and Neville left for the second half of the mission. The Abbott-Longbottoms treated the event as one of boundless joy and nothing to be scandalized or even shocked about. Hannah sat down immediately with Hermione and her journal.

“There are enough clothes for the first year in the trunk. Between my family and Alice, I am not sure Rosa wore the same gown twice. You can transfigure a drawer into a fine cot, though you might want something more permanent. This is a lovely home, Hermione. I covet your kitchen.”

Hermione hadn’t had many female friends over the years. She loved Luna and Ginny and was perfectly fond of Susan, but it had always been difficult on her end to connect. Since January, Hannah had been inching her way into Hermione’s heart. That day in early June, they became best friends.

“There is not much that they need at this age. Once he becomes too restless for the wrap, you will probably want a pram. They are indispensable on the grounds, anyway. You’re finished with work for this term?”

“I have grading, and I need to shut down the lab.”

“Do they know where you are?”

“No.”

“We’ve been worried about Severus, but he said he would be back as soon as we could. We speculated everything you can imagine. Filius obviously had inside information, but he refused to budge, other than to say that he doubted it was anything to worry about. This is the best possible scenario, though! He is so precious.” She leaned over and kissed the top of his fuzzy head. “Perhaps I will see his face someday. Rosa ate for the first fortnight.”

Stellan had fallen asleep and let her nipple out of his mouth. She scooped her breast back into her flowy top and let the wrap fall from her body, so she could present him to Hannah. Hannah took him so gently, exactly how Hermione felt he should be handled, and brought him close to her.

“Oh, Hermione,” she gasped in a whisper. “He is gorgeous. He looks so much like Severus! Ooooooooh!” She kissed his nose and settled back in his seat. Hermione rose to make them tea, and they spent the rest of the hour hashing out everything Hermione and Severus needed to know for the first month while Rosamond entertained herself on the kitchen floor with several chewable toy wands. By the time Severus and Neville returned with bags of shopping, Hermione had a plan for the family for the end of the Hogwarts term and through the summer.

They sent an announcement to Hogwarts with Hannah and Neville when they left. Hermione wrote to her department and then personal letters to Ron and Susan, Harry, Ginny, Luna, and the Burrow. They also took out an ad in the Prophet to run in the morning after the owls had arrived with the personal notes.

The reaction was entirely predictable. The public was shocked, her universities colleagues were confused, Luna and the Hogwarts friends were joyful, Ron and Harry were horrified.

They settled into the dungeon for the end of the term. It confirmed that they were making the right choice to live in the bright house in Putney. Hannah was Hermione’s saviour, encouraging Hermione and Stellen to spend the days with her and Rosamund in their quarters in the west tower and strolling
along the grounds as spring gave into summer. The women talked and talked about everything—far more talk than Hermione had ever experienced with previous friendships. Hannah wanted to return to work, and the *Leaky Cauldron* was looking to hire a part-time manager.

“Neville is trying to arrange his schedule so I could leave in the afternoon, but it doesn’t seem likely.”

Hermione was too overwhelmed with being the mother of a newborn to give it much thought at first, but when Severus finished the term, and they moved completely to Putney, she started planning. She could do her university research in the mornings and then be free to watch keep Stellan and Rosamund in the afternoon. She planned to take the baby with her to work at first and then find another arrangement when that was no longer suitable. But Hannah immediately offered to keep him in the morning, and their little co-op was born.

Neville popped by in the morning to give Hannah a rest from her late nights at the Leaky Cauldron and picked up Stellan and his shrunken gear. Hermione and Severus left for university together, and Hermione was at Hogwarts by noon to have lunch with her friends and then take both children home with her. When Severus returned from work, they brought Rosamund back to Neville who was typically working in the greenhouses and ready to see his daughter. It was a lovely relief to have four child-free hours a day for adult thought, and Hermione cherished her afternoons with the children. They converted her parents’ bedroom into a day nursery with two cots and a large area for play on the floor. Hermione wrote the second and third installments of the *Blood Oath* series, which was becoming something of a cult hit in Muggle circles.

She and Severus chipped away at their male fertility project, sending it out for independent testing at the wizarding university in Sweden because why not. They received the results back and made the adjustments; sent it out again and followed the methodical steps toward conclusion and publication.

Both Hannah and Hermione concluded that one child was enough for their families. Stellan and Rosamund were practically as close as siblings anyway, and both families felt complete. The Granger Snapes spent Sunday mornings at home and then went to Hogwarts for the afternoons and early evenings. The gang often came to Putney on Friday or Saturday nights for dinner and games.

Hermione would never have guessed that she would slide into a family life, rich with these friends and love, but that is where she had arrived. The party that September afternoon would be the first time she had seen Ron and Harry and their families since the previous Christmas. They had never established a relationship with her husband, and she did not have time away from her family very much. Harry and Ron would always be an important part of her life, but they were not her current one. That life was still in the garden wrangling chairs and toddlers and trying to maintain an even temper, though his reddening face was betraying him.

“Severus, Neville,” she called out from the garden door. “Come in and have a drink before the guests arrive. It looks perfect.” And it did. There were little fairy lights strung up overhead that looked like fire flies resting above the party. There were chairs arranged in little groups and tables of all sizes for people to eat sitting or standing while they chatted. They were lucky with a warm afternoon, and there was an area with lawn toys for the children and plenty of space to run.

She planted a kiss on Severus’s cheek as he passed her into the house. “Thank you.”

“What for? It looks to be a disaster.”

“I highly doubt it.”

He grumbled all the way to the kitchen where Hannah handed Neville and him a tall gin and tonic on
ice. “Our heroes.” Hyperbolic given the number of trays surrounding her, but clearly appreciated.

The children were hungry, so they let them eat ahead of the horde, and had settled them into cots upstairs just as the first guests started to arrive. Hermione worked the party, going from guest to guest, while Severus set up camp in the back corner with Minerva, Filius, and Neville. The children emerged well rested an hour and a half in and stole the show.

Stellan was the image of his father except for his chestnut curls, but his disposition was sunnier than either of his parents. It was comical to see Severus’s face in miniature wearing an almost constant expression of delight. It was impossible to be cross around him, even for his father, and Stellan settled himself on Severus’s knee, where father bounced son throughout the card game; Rosa mirroring him on Neville. Hermione was witnessing this from across the garden, only half listening to Luna’s tale of her latest adventure when Hannah sidled up to her and slipped her arm around Hermione’s waist.

“Thank you,” Hermione whispered to her friend, and Hannah, taking in the scene that had captivated Hermione, giggled in return.

**Severus**

He was relieved when the party broke up and people started to leave. His friends had to be back at school for patrol, so they left promptly at the end time of this affair—the invitations had stated clearly three in the afternoon to five. Hermione’s old friends, though, seemed determined to stay until bedtime. He charmed glasses to rise from the grounds and table in an orderly line to the kitchen sink and had them whizz by Potter and Weasley’s heads.

“Ron, Amelia cannot hold her eyes open!” Mrs. Bones-Weasley admonished her husband.

“Yes, dear, I’m ready,” Weasley said in a put-upon voice that made Snape roll his eyes spectacularly. Potter did not have his children with him at the party; perhaps it was his ex-wife’s turn to have the hellions. Listening to Minerva, Filius, and Neville, Snape had left Hogwarts at the very right moment, and there would not even be any Potter Weasleys there for a few more years. He indulged in self-satisfaction as his long-suffering wife graciously saw her friends out.

The Abbott Longbottoms had insisted on staying to help tidy, and they all did so efficiently and in exhausted silence using charms he had worked on since he moved into this house. The trio left before seven. The sun was setting and the early autumn chill was setting in. Hermione was eating leftovers in the kitchen with a guilty expression.

“I talked too much to eat.”

“Sorry I left you to it.”

“No, it was fine. Thank you for managing Stellan.”

“Not a chore that.”

“It can be.”

Perhaps when the boy was ill, but even that was more of a worry than a chore. “It was not.” She smiled at him, but her eyes betrayed exhaustion. “I will help him in the bath and put him to bed,” he
“No, I want to help.”

Stellan was taking the stairs two at a time. Everything was done enthusiastically if it were a great adventure even though he had bathed practically every day of his life.

Snape did not have photographs of his childhood. He had tried to forget most of it, but it was impossible to miss that except for his hair, Stellan was his physical double. Memories he had suppressed, like sleeping in the corner of the kitchen because the rest of the house was frozen over, came back to him when he saw his face on this boy who had never wanted for any comfort. Perhaps that explained at least partially the difference in temperament. But surely it did not account for it all. Hermione had experienced a happy childhood, and she was sometimes baffled by their perpetually joyful son as well.

They settled in on the floor of the master bath that was now Stellan’s domain. Snape and Hermione used the bathroom across from their room out of habit, but the large bathtub in her parents’ bathroom was perfect for nightly bath-time rituals. Hermione’s nose was a little red from the afternoon sun and she wound her curls on top of her head before she adjusted the water. He was helping Stellan out of his clothes and then nodded sagely toward the toilet, making Stellan giggle. They were just getting a hand on this new phase of life and neither parent wanted to make it into something earth-shatteringly important though they were both longing for the whole business to be complete.

Task finished without fuss, Stellan thrust his naked chest against Snape, prompting him to lift his son into the filling tub. Snape had spent so many years being untouched most of the time. The occasional short affair aside, he would go months and months, and perhaps Minerva or Pomona, when she was there, would brush her hand with his and he would practically come out of his skin. He had adjusted to Hermione’s touch easily, and Stellan as a baby as well, but as his son grew, Snape had to adjust again to this fully formed human showing no boundaries regarding his person. He lifted Stellan dramatically from the floor with a swoop, shooting him higher in the air than was necessary and was rewarded with another peal of giggles. He kissed the chubby little cheek before settling him into the not too warm bath.

“DA!”

“Stellan,” he answered. Stellan was not speaking in sentences yet—this was considered delayed, but neither he nor Hermione were terribly concerned. They communicated easily, and Stellan seemed bright.

Hermione was pouring some water from a little dish in the shape of a duck slowly onto Stellan’s head. He bent it back in pleasure. Hermione rubbed some baby shampoo into the curls and massaged gently.

“I am next,” Snape said out of the corner of his mouth.

“I am exhausted.”

“You look it. Early night.” Without complaint, she had taken on most of the promotion activities by herself this week because he could not tolerate the interviews.

“Yes,” she smiled at him.

“Mhmmm,” he responded quietly.

It would not be dark for another hour or so but going to bed by day was so luxurious after years in
the dungeon, his pulse quickened in anticipation. Plus going to sleep now meant a productive Sunday that was rare for them after late nights playing cards, drinking too much, waiting for Hannah to arrive with stories about the patrons at the Leaky.

He was washing Stellan’s feet, legs and knees with a soft cloth. He had tumbled around with Rosamund and the other children until he was content to sit on his father’s knee and charm the Hogwarts contingent. Particularly Minerva thought he was a marvel, but Filius as well was beyond avuncular with the child. Snape pictured his boy at school surrounded by adults who had loved him since birth. It was hard not to smile as widely as his son did.

“Pajamas and story and cuddles and then Mummy is going to sleep, too.” Hermione stretched out a towel in her arms and lifted the wet boy, wrapping him at once.

“Mumma,” Stellan said agreeably.

“I am going to let in Crooks and batten down the hatches,” Snape said, and Hermione nodded.

The creature was waiting at the door and sauntered in clearly contemplating whether to climb the stairs or stay down.

“We’re turning in, boy,” Snape said, expressing his opinion clearly. Crooks sniffed at him and headed for the entry way where the laundry machines were, and where he had quarters. Only because it is where I want to be; not because you suggested it.

“Good night.” Snape was ignored.

Hermione was reading about the toy bear’s picnic and was curled around Stellan. Snape had no experience with children’s literature and typically deferred this task to Hermione. He crouched over them and bussed Stellan again on the cheek and pressed himself against Hermione’s back, so for a moment they were a single unit with three parts.

“I’ll be in soon.”

He cleaned his teeth and sorted out his clothes before climbing into bed next to the wall. They usually read before spelling out the lights, but he was ready to give his mind a rest. The room arrangement had not changed since her childhood, and his side of the bed abutted the wall which meant he had no access to a table or small drawer, but he rarely missed it. He liked having the wall at one side and her body on the other. He slept better in natural light than he ever had in the perpetually dark dungeon.

She emerged from her parenting duties about fifteen minutes later. She had stopped by the bathroom to prepare for bed and was wearing a soft jersey she slept in when it was mild. He slept in nothing most of the year, except for the oldest nights, but no nights here were colder than the dungeon. Her curls were piled high on her head, and he still could not look at her with bare legs without the familiar stirring—not full-arousal, but the start of something. He pushed backwards against the wall to allow her room to climb in and then enveloped her. She rested back against him, and he pulled her closer with his arm.

“I think everyone had a good time,” she said.

“I would think so for the amount of food and alcohol they consumed.”

“Along with your stunning hospitality.”

“A given.”
She giggled quietly against him. “Wore Stellan out. And me, too. Do you think any of them will read the study?”

“The Hogwarts crew already has. The university faculty will if they have not already.” *I am not sure your friends can read.*

“Luna asked if it was an allegory.”

He snorted.

“I know,” she said in amused frustration.

Her smooth legs against his felt so warm and good. His right hand was holding her in just under her breasts. He splayed his fingers out so he could feel her nipple. *Harden. There you go.* She made a little noise to protest, but she also stretched back a bit closer to him. *Surprise!*

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Resting my hand.”

“Resting your cock, too, against my arse.”

“Not resting so much, though.”

“Yes, I notice.”

“Don’t mind it. It will go back down…eventually.”

“All righty then, good night!”

He took the nipple firmly into his fingers and twisted gently. She ground her arse into him, and then again, and then again for good measure.

“I’m going to sleep now.”

“Please do,” he said, trying to keep the chuckle out of his voice, as his hand moved from her breasts down her belly, and into her knickers. She gave up a bit of the game and raised her leg slightly so he could access the right spot. He planned to massage her clit for a moment and then take down her knickers and slide in from behind. It was a favorite sleepy sex move they enjoyed on the occasional weeknight or Sunday morning. She had other plans, though. She scrambled on top of him, laying him back flat. She shoved down her knickers and straddled him impaling herself on his cock. “Or we could…”

“If you don’t mind.”

He groaned incoherently in response. They hit a gentle spell simultaneously to close their door. They could still hear Stellan if he awoke, but the closed bedroom would give them time to disentangle before he entered.

She crossed her arms in front of her and took off her jersey and started to ride him languidly. “How does this feel?”

He growled in response. They hit a gentle spell simultaneously to close their door. They could still hear Stellan if he awoke, but the closed bedroom would give them time to disentangle before he entered.

She crossed her arms in front of her and took off her jersey and started to ride him languidly. “How does this feel?”

He growled in response. He had taken a breast in each hand, but he took one down, flicking her clit lightly each time she rose up from him, teasing her with the light touches. She let him continue for a few minutes but then started riding him more forcefully. It was still light enough in the room that he could read her expression of amused frustration. He missed a flick on purpose, predicting what it
would do to her. She grabbed his hand and brought it against her hard and even moved his fingers around the way she wanted them. *Oh, is that how you like it? I did not know.*

But she was paying no attention to his games. She fucked him hard against his hand ten, eleven, twelve times before she was right on the edge and then slowed, grinning at him.

“If I were to…” he moved his finger gently against her clit.

She sank down on him sloooooowly and rose again. “Stop,” she whispered.

“Not like this?” He stroked her gently again, and she sank down, hardly touching him except the primary point of contact.

“So close,” she said, hardly audibly.

He feathered her with his fingers, letting her maintain control. He watched her tip over the edge and ground down on him hard. He watched as she pitched her head back her curls tumbling out of the clip, nipples coming to points as she did. She made the muffled noise she had used since Stellan had become more aware of his surroundings, and then she stretched out on top of him like a highly satisfied cat.

He had no time for games and gripped her tightly to him before flipping them over, so he was on top. They had come disengaged somewhere in the process, and he drove in again five, six, seven times and came himself soundlessly—he had become adept at that during the Septembers, a highly convenient skill now. His lack of vocalization said nothing of the pleasure, though, as he filled her in five bursts.

She had taken the contraceptive potion since Stellan’s birth; they had agreed that one child was ideal for them, but he was occasionally wistful for the procreative sex they had practiced four years before. Not so wistful to even mention it to her, though. Their family was complete.

She held him as he came down from his high, and then she redressed quickly, scooting back into their sleeping positions. He kissed her neck until she twisted her head and kissed him on the mouth placatingly. * Enough. Let’s sleep.* They spelled open the door again and soon he felt his eyes weighted down, blissfully closing.

There was a peal of laughter from the next room.

“Stell?” Hermione called out sleepily.

But it was just a dream in his little son’s head because the house was quiet for the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

Finally finished this--I have been working on it slowly through a crazy month.

Thank you to everyone who read and especially those who took the time to comment. I appreciate it so much.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!