Secrets Never Keep

by Valady

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she's married to whom?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 7

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she's married to whom?

Chapter 1

Narcissa was sitting in a chic little café near the beach in Calais. She had been living at the chateau in Ardres for over a year now. Her divorce from Lucius had been amiable, each realizing the previous years had changed them both and they had grown apart. The first few months had been hard, but now she had come to enjoy being a single witch. She sipped her wine while listening to her friend ramble on about the latest gossip. She glanced out the window and watched the hustle and bustle of the common people going about their business when something caught her eye.

A small child who appeared to be no older than three or perhaps four, he was holding the hand of a familiar-looking young witch.

The child though did not favor the witch whose hand he was holding. If she didn't know better, she would have sworn she was looking at Draco when he was that age. A memory from that awful time when the Dark Lord ruled over her home and family came flooding back into her mind.

"Enough, Bella!" hissed the Dark Lord. "This one is stubborn," he said as he bent down and grabbed a handful of curly hair. "Perhaps I should allow Fenrir to have a go at you, hmm."

Hermione tried to hide the fear she felt at the thought of what the werewolf would do to her. He laughed as another idea came to him. "No, perhaps not... there wouldn't be much left of you when he was done. He can be such an animal. No, I still need you alive enough to answer my questions." He stood up, letting go of her hair, and allowed her head fall onto thick carpet and turned around.

"Lucius... you haven't entertained your Lord in quite a while. Break this little Mudblood!"

"My Lord," Lucius said his eyes averted to the floor. "I don't think I could..."

Lord Voldemort hissed and in two large strides stood in front him. "You have a choice, my servant. You either fuck the Mudblood or I'll give your wife to Fenrir."

Narcissa saw the look on Lucius' face. He would never allow that animal Greyback to touch her. She watched as her husband approached the frightened girl on the floor... later that night she held him while he cried over what he was forced to do.

"Oh Merlin," she muttered to herself as she watched the young woman and child walk past the cafe.

"Narcissa? What is wrong?" The voice of her luncheon companion startling her out of her thoughts.

"I just remembered I have an appointment in twenty minutes that I cannot break. I do have to run, Beatrice, I'm sorry. We'll do lunch again soon though," said Narcissa as placed enough galleons on the table to pay for their lunch and rushed out the door.

She saw the little blond-headed boy and his mother turning the corner, and moving to follow, she cast a Disillusionment Charm on herself. Quietly as she could, she caught up to the two as they made their way into a local apothecary shop, slipping in before the door closed. "Now remember, Alexander, you do not touch anything in here," the younger witch said to the child.

"Yes, Mummy," he responded with a distinct English accent, identical to his mothers.

They walked up to the counter as the proprietor spoke to her. "Ah, Madam Sutton and Master Alexander, how are you doing this lovely day?" He greeted the two of them.

She smiled as she spoke. "We are doing fine, thank you, and yourself?"

"Much better thanks to your husband. The potion he made me did the trick; perhaps one day he'll share the improvement he made to it with me. I assume you are here to pick up his order?"

"I'm glad to hear it helped and yes... is it ready?"

"But of course, all packaged and ready to go," he said, handing her a parchment-wrapped package.

"How much do we owe you?" she said as she placed the package in her bag.

"Your husband has already taken care of the cost, Madam. Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"No thank you, I believe this is all we needed. See you soon," she said as turned and left the shop.

Narcissa continued following them. *Husband? Whom did she marry? It wasn't that Weasley boy; he's still in England as far as I know. I read he recently married to that Brown girl.* She followed them as they walked toward the bookstore as the child cried out, "Da!" Pointing to a tall, brown-haired man. There was something familiar in his walk, but she couldn't place exactly what. She watched as he approached the pair and almost gasped as she heard him speak.

"Alex," he said in an all-too-familiar voice... one she would know anywhere. "Have you been a good boy today?" She watched as he bent down and lifted the boy up in his arms.

"Yes, Da, I good," he said as he hugged the man.

"Hello, love," he said to the woman as he kissed her cheek. "Did you remember to pick up..."

"Your package from the apothecary. Of course I did," she said as she returned the kiss.

"Well, Alex, since you were so well behaved, I think that deserves a treat. What do you say we go for some ice cream?"

"YES!" Alex yelled out.

Narcissa watched as the woman took his offered arm and the three of them walked off. Who would have ever thought Severus Snape was alive and living in France... with a wife and child! Keeping a discreet distance, Narcissa followed them to small crème glacée shoppe. She stood across the street, keeping out of the way of others, and watched as the three ate. They all seemed so happy. It did her heart good to see Severus smile. It had been too many years since she had seen him genuinely happy.

****

Severus still had the sharp instincts of a spy. He knew they were being watched, but by whom? Their stalker was either well hidden or under a Disillusionment Charm. He would bet it was the latter. He needed to get Hestia and Alex safely out of the way, and then he would find out the identity of the intruder.

Hermione, or Hestia as she was now known, could sense something was off with her husband. "Syl, what is it?" she asked.

"Just thinking. Didn't you two want to go explore the bookshop today?"

"Yes!" cried out Alex, bouncing excitedly in his seat.

"Are you done with your treat?" he asked the child.

Alex nodded.

"I can't hear your head rattling," Severus said as he looked at the boy disapprovingly.

"I done," he said pointing to his empty bowl. "See all gone!"

"Ahh, very good. And you, my dear?"

"I'm quite done and ready to go. Shall we?" she asked as she moved back her chair and stood up.

Narcissa followed them closely as they walked down the road and stopped in front of a small bookshop. She saw him kiss the woman on her cheek and turn away as the two entered the store. He started walking past her when he suddenly turned around, wand in hand and pointed at her. He spoke in a low yet threatening tone.

"Did you really think I wouldn't sense someone following us? Show yourself, now," he said.

Placing her wand on her head, Narcissa cancelled the Disillusionment Charm. For a brief second she could see the recognition in his eyes before he quickly covered it up.

"Who are you, and why are you following me and my family?"

"Don't act like you don't know me, Severus. We've known each other far too long for these silly games."

"Very well," he said as he grabbed her arm as he quickly turned and Disapparated with her to his office at the university. Letting her go, he placed wards and a silencing charm on the room and deftly relieved her of her wand.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Somewhere we can talk and not be disturbed," he said as he seated himself behind his desk. Gesturing to the chair on the other side he said, "Have a seat, Narcissa, and start explaining why you were following my family."

"I didn't know they were 'your' family, Severus. I didn't even know you were alive. And I would bet my last galleon the child is Lucius'."

"Alex is MY son," Severus said sternly.

"He looks nothing like you. In fact, he looks exactly as Draco did at that age."

She watched as Severus' eyes hardened as he attempted to control his emotions.

"I was there when he was conceived... I was forced to witness the hell she went through. I..."

Severus stood suddenly, his anger pouring off him in waves as he slammed his fist onto his desk. "You know nothing of the hell she went through! You know nothing of the nightmares she has had.

"Or her personal hell of loving a child who looks exactly like..." His voice broke, as the words seemed to stick in his throat.

Narcissa watched as he sat back down, his eyes closed as he breathed in deeply, trying to gain back his control.

"You're right. I don't know what she felt or thought. I do know that Lucius went through his own hell dealing with what he did that night," she said as she stood and started pacing in front of the desk.

She heard him snort at her statement. "Lucius has done many awful things in his life, Severus, so have you... But rape was never one of them until that night."

"None the less, it did occur, and she's had to live with the aftermath of it," he said. "Now, tell me how you found us."

Narcissa sighed as she sat back down. "I didn't search for any of you. I found her and the child quite by accident." She saw the disbelieving look on his face at her statement. "It's true, Severus... I was having a perfectly nice luncheon with an old friend, and when I looked out the window, I received the shock of my life.

"I can only imagine how Lucius is going to react--," Narcissa was stopped from finishing her sentence by the wand aimed between her eyes.

"You will not say anything to Lucius. Do you understand me?" he said, his voice threatening as he held the wand steady, ready to cast the necessary spell to protect the woman and child he now called his family.

Narcissa closed her eyes and took a deep breath, trying to remain calm. "He has the right to know, Severus, that he has another son."

"What he doesn't know won't hurt him. I will not risk the damage to my family that his presence could cost us. Swear a Wizard's Oath that you won't tell him or anyone, or I'll have no other choice but to Oblivate you," he said.

Narcissa knew she had no choice. Severus would make good on this threat to alter her memory if she refused. She would just have to find another way to let Lucius know. "Alright... alright... I, Narcissa Malfoy, swear I will not tell Lucius or anyone about the child."

The magic swirled around them as she spoke the words sealing the oath.

Severus relaxed and once again resumed his seat. "What are you doing in France?"

"I live here now, at the estate in Ardres to be precise. After the divorce, I just wanted to leave England and start anew. Lucius was quite generous in giving it to me in the divorce settlement."

"Lucius can well afford it," Severus said.

"How long have you been here in Calais?"

"Not long."

"How did you manage to survive?"

Severus looked at her with his usual scowl planted firmly on his face. "I did, that's all that matters."

Narcissa sighed. "It seems some things never change. You're as talkative as ever, Severus."

"We're not here to catch up with each other, Narcissa," he said, wishing he didn't have to turn away one of the few people he had once called friend. However, the need to protect Hermione and Alex was his first concern. "I'll only say this once and then you are free to leave. If you see my wife, my son or me on the streets of Boulevard de Gaston, turn around and walk the other way. Do all you can to make sure she doesn't see you. Do you understand me?"

"I wish you wouldn't lock me out of your life, Severus... it's been so long since I've seen you," said Narcissa as she reached across the desk placing her hand on his. "Knowing that you're alive, after believing you dead for so long..."

He moved his hand from under hers and held it up, stopping her in mid sentence. "It has to be this way. Seeing you could bring that whole nightmare back to her, and I won't risk it. You have no idea what she went through."

"The last thing I heard was that she left England about two months after the war ended. I haven't heard anything about her since, until today," she said hoping to find out a bit more.

"Enough, Narcissa!" he said sternly. "It's time for you to leave." He stood and waved his hand bringing down the wards and Silencing Charm and then handed her wand back to her.

Taking her wand back, she stepped towards him and placed a kiss on his cheek. "Good-bye, Severus," she said as she turned and Disapparated.

A/N: This story was written for Silverdoe2127 on the lm_hgficxchange on LJ. Many thanks to Lady_Karelia for the wonderful beta work. Also, thanks to Pyjamapants and Luvsev for the cheerleading!

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 7

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she’s married to whom?

Chapter 2

Narcissa Apparated to her Ardres estate and quickly made her way to her sitting room. She had to come up with a way for Lucius to find out about Alex. She called for a house-elf to bring her tea and spent the rest of the afternoon and evening coming up with a plan worthy of any Slytherin.

The first part of her strategy was to have someone discreetly watch the comings and goings of Madam Sutton when she was unable to. Her routine needed to be known. She also needed to know Severus' schedule, what times and days his classes met. Lastly, she had to come up with a reason that would require Lucius to come to France and then carefully arrange his 'accidental' discovery of Hermione and his son.

"First things first," she said to herself as she sat down at her desk and took her quill in hand. She had enough friends in France that one would surely know a discreet wizard who, for enough Galleons, would be willing to follow a woman and child.

****

Hermione a.k.a. Hestia was concerned about her husband. He had been acting strange the last few days... well, strange for him. Asking her daily if anything out of the ordinary had happened during her day seemed to have become a habit. Every time they went out, he appeared to be waiting and watching for someone to appear. He added more wards to their home, and they argued about applying a glamour to Alex when they went out. She didn't know if this behavior was due to their proximity to England and the bad memories associated with it or something else. Did something happen that he neglected to inform her about? One thing was certain, she would find out and soon.

That evening Syl stood at the window in the sitting room just watching as if he were waiting for something to happen. "I think it would be a good idea to disillusion these windows, so no one can see in," he said.

"Really, you're being paranoid, Syl. Who would be looking in our windows? What is wrong with you lately?"

He turned toward her, his face void of expression.*Ah, the mask is in place. Yes, something is definitely wrong,*Hermione thought to herself.

"What could possibly be wrong?" he asked.

"I'm not sure what it could be, Syl, so why don't we skip the back and forth banter? It does tend to get boring rather quickly. Besides, you know I'll just keep on asking until you do tell me," she said as she folded her arms over her chest and gave him the 'I can be as stubborn as you' look.

Syl sighed, "Nothing is wrong, Hestia." He turned and started walking towards his home lab.

She walked up behind him, grabbed his arm and led him to the bedroom where she promptly locked the door and added a silencing charm. Hermione turned to him, her temper starting to run short with his stubborn insistence that nothing was wrong. "I've known you too long, Severus, not to know when there is something bothering you. Now out with it!"

"You know better than to use *that* name," he hissed. "What if someone had overheard?"

"Do you take me for a fool? Really, what did you think the Silencing Charm was for? Laughs and giggles? Now, enough stalling, Severus, I want to know what is wrong!"

He noted the volume of her voice rising ever steadily. He took a deep breath and ran his fingers through his hair. "I wish you wouldn't have argued with me about placing a glamour on Alex. It would have prevented..."

"Prevented what, Severus?" she asked.

He turned his face from her, wishing he could find a way not to answer her question. "I fear that someone has questioned Alexander's paternity, Hermione. He does bear an uncanny resemblance to Draco when he was that age."

Her heart started pounding rapidly in her chest, and she could feel the beads of sweat starting to form on her forehead. "Who, besides you, in Calais could possibly know what Draco looked like as a little boy?" she asked, trying to hold back the trembling in her voice.

"Oh, someone who has known him ALL his life, perhaps," he said with a bit of sarcasm.

Hermione felt the blood drain from her face at the thought that it could be him. "Nnn... not..."

"No, not him. Narcissa."

"Hhhhow... wwwhen... what do we do, Severus? We'll have to leave Calais as soon as possible!" Hermione said as she felt herself losing control. Panic was setting in quickly.

Severus grabbed hold of her, bringing her into his arms and holding her closely. "Shhh, love, we're not going anywhere. She saw you last week, disillusioned herself and followed you and Alex. She knew immediately who Alex was... who his natural father is at any rate. I confronted her when I left you and Alex at the bookstore."

"Oh, Merlin, she's told him by now."

"No, she has not. I made her take a Wizard's Oath to never tell him what she knew."

"Do you think that will stop her?"

"She knows the consequences of breaking an oath. We're safe for now, love." He kissed the top of her head and continued to hold her tightly.

Later that evening neither could sleep. Hermione worried that somehow Narcissa would find a way to get word to *him*; she couldn't deal with seeing him. Not yet... she wasn't ready for that. She knew, deep down inside, that it would happen one day. It was only a matter of time. Maybe he would want nothing to do with the child; after all, he was a half-blood, and surely, he wouldn't want to taint his precious bloodline by acknowledging such a child.

Severus' thoughts were racing also. To the world, Alex was his son, even if he and Hermione knew that was in name only. It didn't matter to him; Alex was his son and Hermione was his wife. He'd be damned if he let the likes of Lucius Malfoy come in and claim Alex. Although he had heard through his source that Lucius had reformed, so to speak. He was no longer the pureblood supremacist he had once been. Claiming a half-blood child would silence those who still held doubt of his being truly repentant.

****

Weeks passed as the plan slowly came together. Narcissa secretly watched Hermione and the child, finding out her daily routine/weekly routine. It was essential to her plan; she could leave nothing to chance. She only hoped that she would be able to convince Lucius to come to France when the time was right.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 7

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she's married to whom?

Lucius,

I really do need you to come to Ardres. That problem I mentioned in my earlier letters has not yet been resolved.

I need your help with this, as it falls into your area of expertise. And no, I cannot tell you about it in a letter nor would a Floo call suffice. Please say that you'll come here and help!

Narcissa

Narcissa looked over her short note to her ex-husband and hoped that this time he would give a positive reply. She had been trying for a few weeks to get him to come to France, with no luck as of yet. She called for her snow owl, Noria, who came quickly on hearing her mistress call. She petted and crooned to the pure white bird before attaching the letter. "Take this to Lucius, Noria, and wait for him to respond before you come back," she said as she opened the window and sent the owl in its way.

Between the detective she'd hired and her own surveillance of the couple, she had their schedules well documented. Now, if she could only get that stubborn ex of hers here and things would finally come together.

****

Hermione kept her word and was vigilant in keeping aware of her surroundings but had not yet been aware of anything suspicious. She hoped that the former Mrs Malfoy would not find a way to make him aware of the existence of the child. Of course, she always knew it would happen that one day he would learn of Alex, but she fervently hoped it would be sometime in the distant future and not the near. The thought of seeing him again set her nerves on end and her stomach churning. She knew he hadn't had a choice that night; if he hadn't done as Voldemort had bidden, he and his family would be dead. However, she remembered every awful detail of that evening. Even now, years later, she would on occasion have nightmares about it... Bellatrix's evil laughter still ringing in her ears as she woke up in a cold sweat.

Severus was her savior of sorts. He was there to help her through her nightmares and made sure that she was well taken care of. She in turn helped him to heal... inside and out. It amazed her that he had insisted on marrying her--he'd refused to take no for an answer. He had not allowed her child to come into this world a bastard. The love, though, that had come later, well into their second year of marriage. Even now, it amazed her. Who would have thought that she and Severus Snape would end up married and in love? She laughed to herself imagining how Ron and Harry would react to that statement. The sadness returned then, and she wondered where they were. Were they both married? Did they have children of their own? Did they think about her?

It was hard to live in hiding, to stay away from friends and family. She felt a tug at her hand; looking down, she saw her son's angelic face. "We go eat with Da?" he asked.

"Not today, love. Da has classes."

"Oh," he said, looking forlorn.

"How about we have a picnic on the university lawn? Maybe we'll see Da looking out the window?"

"YEA!" screamed Alex. "We go now!" he exclaimed as he attempted to pull her along.

Hermione laughed. "Okay... We go now."

****

Lucius Malfoy sat alone in his opulent manor, going over his morning mail. A particular letter from his accountant at Gringotts reminded him he had to make an appointment to go over the latest earnings on his investments. He hated dealing with goblins, and this appointment would no doubt cost him a few hundred Galleons. "Why can't he just send the damn report to me?" he spoke aloud to the empty room and took the next letter in the pile. As he broke the seal, he heard a tapping at the window. Looking up, he immediately recognized the owl... It was Narcissa's. Flicking his wand, he opened the window to allow it entry.

The owl landed on his desk and held out its leg for him to remove the parchment.

"Did your mistress instruct you to wait for my reply?" The owl nodded in response. "Very well, why don't you go to the owlery and rest for a bit. I'll let you know when it's ready," he said and watched the owl gracefully fly out the window.

Sighing, he broke the seal and opened the letter. He smirked as he read it. "Really, Narcissa, as if I would believe there is a problem you are incapable of handling. You're losing your Slytherin cunning, my dear. What is the real reason you want me to come?" he wondered.

Eyeing the letter from Gringotts, he thought going to France would be a good excuse to get out of another boring and costly meeting with the goblins*Alright, Narcissa, it's time to find out just what it is you are up to,* he thought as he picked up his quill to respond to his ex-wife.

Narcissa,

I think you are losing your Slytherin cunning, my dear. However, I am intrigued as to the real reason why you are so insistent that I come to France. Expect me in two days' time, and I do hope it is a very good reason.

Lucius

After reading it over and drying the ink, he sealed the parchment. He called the owl back and sent it quickly on its way with his reply.

****

Severus, or Professor Sutton as his students called him, slowly walked up and down between the work areas, examining the potions his current class was brewing. He enjoyed teaching at university level. The students were brighter and wanted to learn what knowledge he had to offer them. It was so unlike teaching at Hogwarts where he only on occasion had a bright and willing student. His Hermione had been one of those few. How he wished things had been different back then; he would have given her the acknowledgment she had deserved for her efforts. Of course, though he would temper it with criticism... Doesn't pay to have a student who is too confident.

As he neared the tables by the window, he sighted Hermione and Alex eating under a tree directly across from the Potions building. He smiled as he watched his son turn, looking up as if he would be able to catch sight of his dad. Of course, he wouldn't be able to; the windows here were charmed to keep out most of the sunlight, as some ingredients did not mix well with it. Turning around to eye his students, he noted that all was going as it should and turned to step into his cloakroom. Closing the door, he opened the window and stood in front of it waving to his family to catch their attention.

Hermione was the first to see him. She caught Alex's attention and pointed out the window to him where he stood.

Severus smiled as he watched Alex wave wildly at him and heard him faintly yelling 'Da.' He waved back at them, wishing he could join them. There was one thing he could do though... He rummaged through his cloak, and finding parchment, ink and quill, he quickly scrawled a note to his family. He then fashioned it into a paper plane, much like the ones the British Ministry used, charmed it and sent it flying down to his wife and son.

Alex watched in fascination as the paper took flight and headed towards him. He caught it and squealed with glee. "Look, Mum! Plane!"

"Yes, I see. It's a note from your dad," she said. "Give it to me, and let's see what he has to say."

Reluctantly, he handed her what he saw as his prize and watched as his mother unfolded it.

"It says: I wish I could join you two, but know that I love you both and will see you at home, and it's signed Dad."

Hermione looked up to see him still standing at the window and blew a kiss to him. He waved back and indicated he had to return to class. "Wave goodbye to your da now, Alex. He has to get back to work."

The little boy turned and blew a kiss to his dad as he saw his mother do and then waved at the man he thought was his father. He watched as the window closed, and his da disappeared from sight.

Shortly after, they were done eating. It was time to head back home and for one sleepy little boy to go down for a nap.

****

Narcissa sat in her private dining room, having her morning tea and toast. She wondered what time today Lucius would show up; he had failed to give her a time. *Typical of him, really. He always loves to keep people guessing,* she thought as she looked out the window with a view of the gardens. The gardens here couldn't compare to the ones at the manor, but she would work on that with her gardener. *Roses. Definitely need more roses here.* As she continued her internal dialogue, she failed to notice the sound of footsteps coming her way.

"Narcissa," said Lucius as he entered the room. "You're looking as lovely as ever," he said as he approached her and placed a peck on her cheek.

"Have a seat. Did you eat yet?"

"Just tea would be fine, thank you."

Narcissa poured the tea into a cup that appeared on the table, thanks to the efficiency of her house-elf. "It's a new blend I discovered. I hope it meets with your approval."

"I'm sure it will be fine. You always had exquisite taste," he said as he brought the cup to his lips. "Mmm, marvelous."

"I'm glad you like it. Of course, it doesn't hold a candle to Tieguanyin, but I found a lovely little cafe that serves it exclusively. I'll take you there later."

Lucius watched his ex-wife's body language and noticed a slight fidgeting when she mentioned the cafe. *So, this 'problem' is some way associated with this cafe. Interesting,* he thought as he continued to feign interest in the tea.

"They serve the most delicious pastries, too. There is this dark choco..."

"Narcissa, I couldn't care less about pastries, or this cafe you're rambling on about. What is this problem you insisted that I HAD to come here to help you with?"

"Well," she said, fidgeting a bit with her toast. "It's not something I can tell you about, per se. It's something you need to see to really understand."

Lucius nodded. "When, then, will you be showing me what this 'problem' is?"

"It's not here at the villa. We need to go to the cafe."

"Well, then, what are we waiting for?"

"It's too early to go, yet. We'll need to be there about elevenish."

Lucius sighed and took another sip of his tea before replying. "Very well. Elevenish then... this had better be worth my time."

Several hours later, Lucius found himself sitting at a small table, in front of a large window, across from Narcissa. *She was right; this tea is exquisite,* he thought as he took another sip. "Excellent tea, but where is this problem that I can only see, and you cannot tell me about?"

"Isn't the view lovely?" she replied.

"Narcissa, no more games!"

"Just keep watching the view, Lucius. You'll see it soon."

"Very well," he sighed as he once again looked out the window. His eyes scanned back and forth over the Boulevard de Gaston. He was about to scold Narcissa about her silly game when he spotted a child. One he would have sworn was the mirror image of...

Narcissa knew when he went pale that he had spotted the child.

He looked over to her with a million questions written on his face. "There's more, Lucius."

"What more could there possible be? How could she keep this from me? Why..." he said as he quickly stood up, intending to confront the mother of his child.

Narcissa grabbed hold of his arm, keeping him from leaving. "Lucius, no! You can't... Not this way. Sit down, there's still something else you need to know.

"You know why she didn't tell you. Can you possibly blame the girl? After all she endured in our home..."

"I know--I was there also."

Narcissa sipped her tea, trying to decide how to tell him the rest. "She's married to a Potions master. One we're well acquainted with..."

He looked at her curiously. "The only Potions master we knew has been dead for over four years."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "He's not."

A/N: Thanks to Lady_Karelia for all her help and the beta work on this story.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 7

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she’s married to whom?

"No, that's not possible. I saw that thrice damned snake bite him," Lucius said. In a matter of moments, his world had been turned upside down. First finding out he had a son he didn't know existed and now learning that Severus was alive.

"Drink some of your tea. You look like you're about to pass out."

Lucius' hand was shaking as he picked up the cup and endeavored to take a sip. Some spilled over the rim, landing on the pristine tablecloth.

She reached over and took the cup from his hand just before he lost his grip on it. "Perhaps a glass of water would be a better idea," she said in a voice loud enough for the waiter to hear. Seconds later a glass of cold water appeared on the table.

"Here, my dear, use two hands and drink slowly. I know this must all come as quite a shock to you."

"You have a way with understatement, Cissy."

Lucius gripped the glass with both hands and took a drink; as he set it down, the woman and child in question were walking past the window. She must have sensed that she was being watched; she turned her head, looked in the window, and stopped dead in her tracks as she saw the all too familiar couple watching her in turn. The color drained from her face and was quickly replaced by shock, fear and panic. Bending down, she picked up the child and instantly Disapparated from where she stood.

"Oh, my," said Narcissa. "I believe Severus will know you are here any minute now." She stood up and tugged at a still stunned Lucius to follow her. "Put the tea on my bill, Maurice," she called out as they rushed past the waiter.

"As you wish, madam," he said as he watched the couple scramble out the door.

Still holding on to his arm, she dragged him down the street to the nearest public Apparition site. "Where are we going?" asked Lucius.

"To the Université de la Maîtrise Magique... to see Severus," she said as she put her arms around him and with a turn and a pop Disapparated.

Hermione Apparated to the hallway of the Potions building and rushed to Severus' classroom. In her fear, she didn't even think to knock; she just barged in and ran to him, unable to speak more than a syllable or two, as she tried to catch her breath.

"S... Syl..." Her breath catching as she tried to speak.

"Hestia? What is wrong? Calm down; you're beginning to hyperventilate," said Severus as he saw how pale she looked.

"Him..." She tried to tell Severus what had happened, but the shock of seeing him, here, in Calais was too much for her to handle. She felt that her worse fears were about to become reality.

He caught sight of his class staring at them, questioning the situation. "Put a stasis on your cauldrons; gather your things and leave. Class is dismissed for the day," he said as he guided Hermione, still holding Alex close to her into the cloakroom.

"Da?" he heard Alex call to him. With Hermione holding on to him so tightly, Severus was amazed the child was still able to breathe.

"Hestia, calm down and give Alex to me," he said as he extracted the child from her arms. Alex in turn put a strangle hold around Severus' neck. "What is wrong, son?"

"Mummy scare me," he mumbled into Severus' shoulder.

"It's all right now. There is nothing to fear." He crooned as he rubbed the child's back, trying to calm him enough so he could find out what had happened. He heard the last of students leave and turned to Hermione. "Come, let's go to my office, and you can tell me what has put you in such a state."

"NO," she yelled. "They'll be there."

"They who?"

"HIM," she said. Her eyes were begging him to understand whom she was talking about.

He thought about whose presence would cause her such panic when suddenly he realized who it must be.

"You mean Lu..."

"YES! He's here... in Calais." Tears began flowing and relief swept through her that he finally understood what she was trying to tell him.

"I want you to take Alex and go home. Do not leave and don't worry; no one can enter except you and me." He handed Alex to her and put his arms around both of them. "I'll be home as soon as I can. It'll be all right, Hestia... I promise." He kissed her tear-stained face. "Apparate from here. I'm going to my office." He released them, Hermione turned, and they were gone.

Hermione Apparated to the sitting room and immediately began pacing, completely forgetting the child she still held in her arms.

"Mummy, down. I want down," Alex pleaded. He could perceive the frenzied emotions of his mother, and it was frightening to him. He didn't understand what was wrong.

"Oh, baby, Mummy is sorry," she said as she carefully placed him down on the floor. "Are you all right?"

Alex nodded. "Why you scared, Mummy?"

"Uh, Mummy saw someone she didn't think she'd see again for a long while," she said, hoping he wouldn't question her too much further. "But everything is okay now."

"The man wit the white hair made you scared, didn't he? Is he bad man, Mummy?"

For the first time in a long time, Hermione Granger, Gryffindor know-it-all, didn't know the answer to a question.

Severus quickly made his way up the stairs to the next floor where his office was located. As he opened the stairwell door, he could hear muted voices coming from somewhere nearby. He would bet anything he would find them right in front of his office. Casting a Silencing Charm on his shoes, he made his way towards his office and the two people he knew were looking for him. Staying close to the wall, he peered around the corner and saw Lucius and Narcissa in the midst of a somewhat heated conversation. Neither seemed to detect his presence yet, so he turned the corner and edged his way closer to the couple.

"This is all too much, Cissy. How can you expect me to believe he's still alive? I saw all the blood... No one could live through that."

"You know his body was never found. Even you spent months searching for him with no luck."

"It does make sense now why the Granger girl suddenly disappeared. What doesn't make sense is how she is now married to someone who, in all rights, should be dead."

He was within inches of them now, and still they did not sense his presence.*Getting sloppy in your old age, friend,*he thought as he placed a hand on Lucius' shoulder.

Lucius spun around; the wizard before him barely resembled his old friend, but the voice was one he never thought he would hear again.

"I would suggest you two cease to talk about this so openly in the corridor. One never knows who might be listening," Severus said as he stepped between them to stand in front of his office door. "May I propose we take this to a more private venue?" He opened the door, holding it for them to follow him into the room.

"Ms Bouchard, please cancel any appointments I have this afternoon, and you may take the rest of the day off," he said as he passed his secretary and went through to his office.

"Yes, Professor, and thank you, sir!"

"Sir, Madam, would you care to join me or shall we have this meeting in my reception area?" he asked with the sarcasm Lucius remembered fondly.

Lucius cleared his throat. "After you, my dear," he said, his hand gracefully waving Narcissa to go ahead of him.

As Severus closed the door, he again activated his special wards. "Feeling any effects yet, Narcissa?" he said, eyeing the blonde witch, his displeasure at her apparent betrayal radiating from his every pore.

"I didn't tell him. My oath was not broken. Lucius saw them on the street."

Severus scoffed. "I'm sure you had something to do with his being in the right place at the right time."

Her blush was enough to confirm that he had guessed right about her plan. "He has the right to know..."

"HE," Lucius interrupted her, "is sitting right here. I don't appreciate being referred to in the third person as if I weren't in the room."

He turned to Severus and said, "It's good to see you alive and well, old friend. However, I'm at a loss as to explain how you accomplished that feat."

"It's a long story, and I'm sure you're more interested in another matter at the moment," Severus said as he opened his desk draw and produced a bottle of Old Ogden's. "I'd ask you to join us, Narcissa, but I think this conversation would be best if it were between Lucius and me." With a wave of his hand, the door opened for her. "I'm sure you know the way out."

"Severus, I..."

He held up his hand, indicating she shouldn't continue her statement. "Please just go," he said, motioning to the open door.

Narcissa looked at the two wizards and sighed. "I'll see you back at the villa then, Lucius," she said as she walked out, the door shutting itself behind her.

A silent Accio and Severus called two glasses from the shelf, poured a healthy measure of Firewhiskey in each, and then handed one to Lucius. "You look as if you could use several glasses of this."

Lucius took the proffered glass and downed half its contents in one go. "I have no idea what question to ask first."

Taking a slow sip from his glass, Severus took in the sight of his old friend. He hadn't changed too much since the war... not physically anyway. No, Lucius was born with the ability to carry himself in an aristocratic manner, no matter the circumstance. The only time he had ever seen his friend 'ruffled' had been during the final battle.

"I guess the best place to start would be at the end of the war," Lucius said. "How did you survive?"

Severus sat back and relaxed in his chair. "Do you want the long version or the short?"

"Short for now. You can tell me the more detailed version another time."

"Very well, I had been slowly making myself immune to Nagini's venom. I knew, as we all did, that Riddle was becoming increasingly unstable in his last year. What I didn't count on was almost having half my neck torn apart. Fortunately, I made it a habit to carry certain potions at all times. Once I was alone, I was able to administer a Blood-Replenishing Potion and a powerful healing potion before I bled to death. Once I was sure Riddle was dead for good, I left England. I had a small sanctuary set up in Paris for myself, just in case."

Lucius sighed. "I should have known. You always were the resourceful one. Always ready for any contingency."

"In my position I had to be."

"Mmm." Lucius nodded. "How did you end up with... Miss Granger? Mrs Snape?"

"We go by the name Sutton, Sylvester and Hestia Sutton."

"Was she part of your plan?"

"No. She was a total surprise. I found her serving drinks in a seedy pub..." His thoughts drifted back to the night he had discovered her.

Severus stealthily made his way down the dark back alley, the wound on his neck still painful at times. His contact had finally acquired the rare orchid he needed to brew

the latest potion he hoped would finally cure the damage Nagini's venom had caused. As he neared the local pub, the pain hit him again, causing him to stumble. He leaned against a wall, waiting for the pain to subside. He looked up and down the alley and noticed an old pub across the way, the aged door marred by various hexes that had missed their mark over the years. 'Perhaps a shot of Firewhiskey to help ease the pain,' he thought. He slowly walked towards it, grabbed the handle and opened the door.

The patrons looked as worn down and dingy as the pub itself. Walls so old and dirty the original color had been long forgotten. Tables etched with initials, the lacquer worn off from decades of abuse. He chose a table set in the corner, giving him a view of the room and its occupants. The only woman in the place appeared to be a waitress, obviously pregnant. She seemed familiar, but he doubted any witch he knew would be caught dead in a pub such as this.

She made her way to him to take his order; as she neared, he thought his eyes were deceiving him... or perhaps he was hallucinating. No, there was no mistaking who this woman was. "Miss Granger, what in the name of Merlin are you doing here?"

She stopped in her tracks, her eyes nearly popping out of her head. "Pppproffessor?" The tray she was holding tumbled to the floor with a clatter.

"Hey, girl! Pick that up, you clumsy bint, and get back to work or you'll be back out on the street!" yelled the barman.

She started to bend down to retrieve the tray that had rolled under his table.

He reached down, picking it up and handing it to her. "We need to talk," he stated simply.

"I can't... not right now. What do you want to drink?"

"When would be a good time?"

"You're going to get me fired, and I NEED this job," she said, her voice starting to tremble. "Please, what do you want to drink?"

"Firewhiskey," he said and watched as she walked up to the barman to place his order. He couldn't hear what was being said, but it was obvious the man was berating her.

Looking dejected, she returned with his drink and placed it in front of him. "That'll be eight Knuts, please," she said loud enough to heard by others. As he handed her the coins, she leaned toward him and said, "I get off work at two a.m. Meet me at the corner; we can talk then." Then she walked away.

He nursed his drink for almost an hour, carefully watching Hermione, a million questions running through his mind. There were still four more hours until they would meet. As much as he wanted to keep watch over her, he knew he should at least go to his lab and start the potion. Draining the last of the Firewhiskey from his glass, he looked over at her one more time and walked out the door.

"I was there when she got off work, and she took me to her room. To say it was a hole in the wall would be putting it nicely. Of course, I couldn't allow her to stay there in her condition. She was stubborn about leaving. Sometimes I swear she is part mule."

Lucius laughed under his breath. "I think it's a trait all women share."

"No doubt," he agreed as he refilled their glasses.

"Eventually she saw the logic of moving in with me. I had a larger flat, and it was definitely cleaner than where she was at the time. Slowly, over the weeks, she began to open up and tell me what had occurred that night."

He observed the tension building in Lucius; obviously, he hadn't come to terms with the events of that evening. "She knows you had no choice. However, the thought of seeing you again causes her extreme anxiety."

"If I could have found a way not to do what he..." Lucius struggled for the words to express his remorse for his part in that nightmare. He studied the warm brown color of the Firewhiskey in his glass before lifting it to his lips and taking a long sip. Old Ogden's was good for calming the nerves.

"I think it may be time for the two of you to face each other again," Severus said, barely believing what words were coming out of his mouth. "Give us a day or two. I'll need time to talk to her about it."

"I think we both need a day or two before that meeting. I'll be staying at the villa in Ardres."

It was Severus' turn now to be ill at ease. "I love Hermione and Alex. I'm the only father he has ever known. I won't..."

"I have no desire to break up your marriage, Severus. I can see how much you love them both. I would... I would like a place in my son's life, and... well, I'm not sure what else at the moment," Lucius said as he drained the remaining liquid from his glass before he stood up.

"It's been a draining day for all of us," he said as he stood up and with a wave of his hand released the wards on the room. "I'll owl you soon," he said, opening the door for Lucius.

Lucius started to leave, but stopped and turned towards Severus. He placed his hand on Severus' shoulder, giving it a light squeeze. "It is good to see you, old man."

Severus returned the gesture. "It's good to see you, too."

With a small smile on his lips, Lucius left.

Severus sighed heavily as he closed the door. Now, he had to go home and calm Hermione down. He did not look forward to telling her that she would have to meet with Lucius Malfoy much sooner then she had anticipated.

A/N: Big thanks to Lady_Karelia for her infinite patience and wonderful beta skills.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 7

Severus appeared in the front hall of their home. The first thing he noted was the silence. He quietly walked into the sitting room to find Hermione asleep on the sofa and Alex on the floor playing with his toys. "Alex," he said in a low voice, so as not to awaken his wife.

Alex turned, his smile lighting up his face at the sight of his father. "Da!" he yelled.

"Shhhh," said Severus. "Not so loud, we don't want to wake Mum up, do we?"

Alex shook his head.

He walked over to the child and kneeled down next to him. "Let's surprise Mum and make dinner for her," he said as he lifted the child into his arms and carried him to the kitchen.

****

It was in that stage between wakefulness and sleep when she noticed an enticing aroma, her stomach rumbled, urging her to wake up and go find where that wonderful smell was coming from. Her muscles, however, were protesting; she hadn't meant to fall asleep on the sofa. Now, her back was going to make her pay for it. She opened her eyes and noticed the sun was low in the sky. *Merlin, how long did I sleep?*she thought as she eased herself up and rubbed her eyes.*Oh, my, where's Alex?*Her mind had registered the child was no longer in the room with her. "Alex," she called out, "where are you?"

"We're in the kitchen."

"Syl," she said, rising up and walking to the kitchen. "What in the world are you doing?"

She entered the flat's galley kitchen to find Alex putting a mixture of lettuce into a bowl and Severus levitating a pot of hot noodles to the sink, the pot tipping over and emptying its contents into a strainer. A pot on the stove was being stirred, and a fresh loaf of what smelled like garlic bread was in the process of being cut into thick slices.

"Mmm, smells delicious!" she said as she approached Severus and put her arms around him. "You should have woken me up when you came home."

He returned her embrace and kissed her forehead. "You were sleeping so peacefully that I didn't want to disturb you. I thought it would be a nice surprise for Alex and me to make dinner for you."

"It is a nice surprise, thank you," she said, kissing his cheek and turning to her son. "And this salad looks so good! Did you do this all by yourself?"

"Yup! Da said I big boy now and I can cook salid!"

"I can't wait to try it! Thank you," she said as she kissed her son's cheek. "Anything I can do?"

"No. Why don't you go freshen up; dinner will be ready in a few minutes."

"We wizeds fix the food! Right, Da?"

Later, while the dishes washed and the leftovers headed for the icebox, one little wizard was given his nightly bath and put to bed, leaving his parents some time to themselves.

Severus poured them each a glass of wine. He handed one to Hermione, who was sitting at one end of the sofa, her legs tucked up under her. He settled next to her, putting his arm around her shoulder. "How are you feeling?" he asked, trying to gently work up to the subject of Lucius Malfoy.

"Better, now that you're here." Her head leaned down to rest on his shoulder. "I thought you said she took an oath not to tell him."

He took a long sip of his wine before answering. "Straight to it then... very well. She did make a wizard's oath, and she did not break it."

"Then how did he know about..."

"I believe the former Mrs Malfoy arranged for him to accidentally on purpose be where it was most convenient for him to discover the facts for himself.

"You have a set routine, my dear, from which you rarely deviate. It wouldn't take much time for someone to learn when or where you'll be on any given day."

Hermione had never thought her penchant for schedules and routine would one day be used against her. "What else happened?"

He pulled her closer to him as he spoke. "I gave my secretary the rest of the day off, summarily dismissed Narcissa and locked myself and Lucius in my office."

She was curious, but still afraid to hear what transpired.*Time to shore up that Gryffindor courage, girl.*"What did he say?"

"First he wanted to know what the bloody hell I was doing alive when all these years he believed me dead. I gave him the short version. I really didn't want to get into what occurred when you, Potter and Weasley showed yourselves. As for the rest..." He paused to gather his thoughts. "He is, or was at the time, still in a bit of shock. First seeing Alex and then finding out that I was very much alive seemed to throw him off-kilter. And believe me, it takes a lot to shake up Lucius Malfoy."

"What did he have to say about Alex?"

Placing his fingers under her chin, he lifted her head so they were face to face. "He'd like a place in his son's life, but I think before any decision about that is made, the three of us need to meet. I believe that both of you need to come to terms with the events of that night and bring some closure. Perhaps then you both can leave it in the past."

She didn't want to cry anymore, but she felt the tears start to well up. "I know what I'm about to say may sound immature, but I wish things could go back to the way they were two months ago... before she saw us and stuck her nose in where it didn't belong."

He maneuvered her onto his lap, holding her close. "I know, love, but we don't have a Time-Turner. Do you ever regret my finding you in that pub?"

She maneuvered herself so she could straddle his legs to face him. "Never! Next to Alex, you are the best thing that ever happened to me."

His hand caressed her cheek as he closed the distance between them, and he kissed her. Their passion quickly flared, and soon articles of clothing were finding their way to the floor. "Bedroom... now," said Severus as he held on to her and stood up. He had no need to see where he was going as he kissed and suckled her neck. *Fuck Lucius, he can wait until morning for an owl,* he thought, using his foot to shut the door.

****

Lucius awoke to the sun shining through the Irish lace curtains that hung from the bedroom window. He hadn't expected to sleep in the master bedroom with Narcissa, but

he was quite miffed about being given a guest room. *One would think that after twenty-five years together, I'd be considered more than a guest!* He wasn't feeling up to par this day, not after the restless night he had just spent. The old nightmares had begun to creep back, and he had awoken several times during the night in a cold sweat.

He sat up, wiping the sleep from his eyes. "Elf," he called out. No elf had heeded his call. "Damnable creatures," he grumbled. "Just because I'm no longer their master... what the bloody hell was that elf's name again," he said to the air around him. "Boppy... Hobby... Floppy... Merlin, why do we give those creatures such idiotic names!"

"We's wonder sometime too, sir," said a small voice.

Lucius looked to his left and saw the little elf standing next to his bed, wearing the usual white tea towel embroidered with the Malfoy crest.

"What is your name?"

"I is called Hoppy, sir. You's need something?" the elf said, as it bowed to Lucius.

"Yes, tea... I do hope you remember how I take it, and have there been any owls for me?"

"Hoppy remember, used-to-be-master, and no, sir, no owls yet today." The elf snapped his fingers, and Lucius' tea appeared floating on a sliver tray next to the elf. Hoppy took hold of the tray and carefully placed it on the bed. "Does former master wish anything else?"

"Not right now. If an owl comes addressed to me, bring it up directly."

"Yes, sir," said the little elf and, with a bow, was gone.

After his tea and a shower, Lucius was feeling a bit more human as he made his way downstairs for breakfast. He found Cissy as he had yesterday: in her private dining room still in her silk dressing robe, tea and toast set on the table before her. "Good morning," he said as he took the seat opposite her. "Sleep well?"

Narcissa observed her former mate as he sat looking as regal as always. Only the bloodshot eyes gave away the fact that he didn't have a restful night. "Yes, I slept relatively well. You, on the other hand, look as if you didn't sleep a wink."

"Thank you so much for stating the obvious," he said, pouring his tea as his usual breakfast appeared on the table before him. "All of 'this' has brought back... memories I'd thought were long gone."

She reached over and touched his hand that rested next to his teacup. "I'm sorry; perhaps I made the wrong decision to bring you here to discover..."

Lucius placed his other hand on top of hers, patting it lightly. "No, you were right to do as you did, and I understand now why you had gone about it the way you did."

"I think part of it is due to my nervousness in meeting her face to face after all these years. How does one apologize for raping someone... for taking away something that can only be given once... for unknowingly impregnating someone and then not being there to help her through it all?"

"You didn't have a choice, Lucius. She knows that."

"I know, Cissy, I know, but it doesn't make it any easier to live with." He extracted his hand from hers and rose from the table. "I'm going to take a walk in the garden."

Narcissa watched as he left the room, his head down, shoulders slumped, and she silently cursed the soul of Tom Riddle.

Lucius walked the grounds of the villa, wishing he were back in Wiltshire; he found the gardens there much more peaceful... and where he wouldn't have to face the woman he violated years ago. *You're a damn coward,* he said to himself. *You can face a Dark Lord, Azkaban, survive two wars, make million Galleon deals without breaking a sweat, and yet the thought of facing a little woman is enough make you want to run and hide.*

Narcissa was watching from the window, wishing there was something she could do or say to help him. There was only one thing that she could do though: be there for him after what was sure to be an emotionally draining encounter for both parties. She was about to go upstairs to prepare for the day when she caught sight of an owl in the distance. She held her breath as she watched it fly straight to Lucius. It circled him once before landing on the back of a bench. She observed as he took the roll of parchment from its leg and the owl bob its head before taking off.

He hadn't noticed the owl before it flew around him and alit on the nearby bench. "I take it you have something for me," he said. The owl held out its leg, a small roll of parchment attached to it. Untying the string that held it to the owl's leg, he took hold of the letter he'd been waiting for and dreading over. The owl bobbed its head as if thanking him and flew off. He wasn't sure how long he stood there just looking at the piece of parchment in his hand before he finally broke the seal that held it together. "Enough of this, Lucius. It's time to sort out and settle the past and move on to the future," he said as he unrolled the letter and read it.

Lucius,

After much discussion with my wife, she has agreed to meet with you, provided I am there also. I know you will have no objections to my presence, and you are welcome to bring Narcissa if you so wish.

A neutral place, I believe, would be best for this small gathering. There is a small restaurant near the beach called The Gull and The Albatross; they offer private dining rooms so we all may talk openly. I've made reservations for tomorrow at one p.m. under the name Sutton. Sorry I could not make it today, but I do have classes that I cannot cancel.

Until then, old friend.

SS

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 7

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she’s married to whom?

Hermione and Severus sat in one of the private dining rooms of The Gull and The Albatross. The room, decorated in blues and greens, was meant to give those who sat within a sense of calmness. The rectangular table sat before a bay window with a view of the English Channel. It was set so no one had their back to the window, and all could enjoy the scenic view. Hermione couldn't be bothered admiring any view, as she was fidgeting with her glass, her foot tapping incessantly and her lower lip nearly bitten through from her nerves.

Severus was on edge enough without the constant tap, tap, tap of her foot on the table leg. He was also concerned for the glass stem being twirled by her fingers, and her lip would need a healing potion if she didn't ease up on it. "Hestia, calm down, for Merlin's sake."

She looked at him questioningly, wondering why he was using that name while in a private room.

"I haven't set the Silencing Charm yet," he said in response to her nonverbal query.

"Oh," she said as her fingernails were now being assaulted by her mouth.

Severus grabbed her hand, effectively stopping her from decimating her nails. "I know you're nervous, but I'm here; you won't be meeting him alone."

"I'm sorry. I know it's silly, but I can't help feeling this way. I don't even know what to say or if I'll be able to look at him."

"I venture to say he feels the same way you do. Remember, love, the Dark Lord is gone, Bellatrix is gone, and thank Merlin, Greyback is in hell with them. You have nothing to fear from him. If I thought for one moment that Lucius had nefarious intent, we wouldn't be here now."

Hermione laid her head on his shoulder and then reached up and placed a kiss on his neck. "Thank you, Syl..." She started to speak when footsteps approached the door. She sat up and watched as the door was opened to admit Narcissa and Lucius.

Hermione turned her head to the window, though she didn't see the view.

Severus stood to welcome their guests. "Narcissa, you look lovely, as always," he said, kissing her hand. "Lucius," he said with a nod. "Please join us." He waved his hand towards the two chairs opposite them. He then set the wards and charms on the room ensuring their privacy.

Lucius held the chair for his former wife and then sat down next to her.

The old cliché about the silence being deafening would be an apt description of the scene taking place in the room. Severus was about to break the silent standoff when the menus appeared on each of their plates. Hermione quickly picked hers up and hid herself behind it. Severus tapped his wand on the menu, ordering a bottle of wine, hoping a drink would calm the nerves of everyone present. He poured some of the wine into each of their glasses and watched as Hermione and Lucius quickly emptied their respective glasses. He looked to Narcissa for a clue as to how to break the silent stalemate.

"So, Severus," Narcissa said, hoping to get things going. "How long have you been teaching here at the university?"

"Six months. It is quite different than teaching at Hogwarts; at least here, my students choose to study Potions. Unlike at Hogwarts, where it's a requirement."

"I'm sure it's a refreshing change. Have you taught anywhere else before here?"

"No. Previously, I was brewing and selling to various apothecaries. It wasn't until this past year that I was able to 'acquire' credentials that wouldn't be questioned."

"I'm glad things have worked out for you, truly. After all you've been through, you deserve it."

Severus nodded his silent thanks. "How is Draco doing?"

"You didn't tell him, Lucius?" she said.

"It didn't come up in our previous conversation," he mumbled as he poured more wine into his glass.

"Draco is married now to Astoria Greengrass. You remember her, don't you? She's Daphne's younger sister. They have a son, Scorpius; he'll be three this coming October."

"I'm surprised; I would have thought he'd be married to Pansy Parkinson."

"Thankfully no, he finally came to his senses where that social climbing tart was concerned."

Hermione couldn't help the snort that came out of her mouth. *Bet Parkinson had a cow about that,* she thought.

Narcissa took advantage of the fact that Hermione was obviously following their conversation and asked, "I've heard you are attending the university; what is your field of study?"

She slowly lowered the menu, her eyes meeting Narcissa's. "Potions and Arithmancy. I'm doing a double major."

"Oh, that is ambitious, but as I recall from what my son has said, you are quite intelligent. I have no doubt you'll do well."

"Uh, thank you," Hermione said.

"Have you decided what you want to eat?" Severus asked.

"I'm not very hungry; perhaps just the salad with grilled chicken," Hermione said.

The rest placed their orders, and soon everyone was eating, the occasional words being spoken by only Severus or Narcissa.

Halfway through, Lucius tossed down his fork and said, "This is ridiculous." He looked over at Hermione, only to find her looking back at him wide-eyed as a frightened fawn. He sighed heavily and said, "What I wouldn't give if you would look at me as if I weren't about to hex you to hell and back."

Hermione lowered her eyes. "I don't mean to... it's just that... seeing you again brings back a lot of..."

"Bad memories," he said, finishing her sentence. "For me also, Madam Snape. I haven't had a decent night's sleep since arriving in France." He paused to consider his next words, hoping that he said it right, hoping she would believe him. "Please believe that if I could find a way to take back what happened to you that night in my home, I would. Even if it cost me my last Knut."

Hermione could feel his eyes on her and, gathering her courage, lifted her eyes back to him. "I do believe that. I know you didn't have a choice in your participation in that... event. I can't imagine Severus doing any different if he was put in that situation," she said as she placed her hand on Severus'. "I imagine he would do what he had to if Alex's and my lives were threatened."

She felt a warm, soft hand on top of her other hand. Turning her head, she saw Narcissa with a tear trailing down her face.

"The war left us all scarred in some way," said Narcissa. "No one who had a part in it was left unscathed."

"Too true," said Severus.

"I do wish, though, that after the Dark Lord fell for the last time and you... discovered your condition that you would have sought me out and told me. I would have made sure you had everything you needed," Lucius said.

"I was scared; no one knew what had happened... I never told them, once I was rescued. I thought at first I was late due to the stress finally getting to me, but after the second month and I still hadn't started...

"I cast the charm three times, and it kept showing the same results... pregnant. I couldn't tell Harry or Ron the truth; they still would have blamed you. And knowing Ron, he would never have been able to look at me in the same way again. So, once all the memorials and funerals were done, I quietly slipped away one night. I haven't contacted anyone since."

"Your disappearance made headlines for weeks," Narcissa said as she picked up her fork to continue eating her lunch. "It's my understanding that for months Mr Potter and Mr Weasley searched for you everywhere they thought you might be. Of course, they didn't find you. The following year, Mr Potter married Ginevra Weasley; they are expecting their second child, and he's an Auror. Ronald Weasley recently married Lavender Brown; it was a rather short engagement. There's speculation that the former Miss Brown is several months along with child. He's a partner in that shop his brother owns. I hear it's doing rather well."

"I'm glad to hear Ron and Harry are doing all right."

The rest of lunch continued with talk of what Severus and Hermione had missed the last four years. There was still tension in the air, but at a much lower level.

As they ate dessert, Lucius approached the one subject they hadn't discussed yet. "About the child... I wonder, Madam Snape..."

"Please call me Hermione. I know what you're about to ask," she said. "Severus and I talked about it at length last night. I have no problem with you getting to know Alex, and becoming a part of his world, and I would imagine you'd like to have a hand in raising him.

"However, the final decision on anything to do with him will rest with Severus and me. We'll take whatever advice you'd like to impart to us, since you've raised a child before, but we have the final say. I'm not quite sure how to explain you to him, though. Severus is the only father he's known; he's been there since Alex was born."

The last bit of tension in Lucius dissipated when he heard he would not be denied access to his child. "Thank you, Hermione, Severus. I do understand that my participation would be limited, but I do insist on helping financially... What do the Muggles call it?"

"Child support," Hermione replied.

"That's really not required. I make more than enough to support us. We may not live in a mansion, but we live comfortably," Severus said.

"I meant no insult as to your ability to support your family, Severus, but I'd like to contribute to Alex's care. I will have Gringotts set up an account for him that both of you can access if an emergency arises and funds are needed for him. My will, of course, will be altered accordingly to include him. He is a Malfoy... by blood if not by name, and I will not allow him to be excluded from what is his birthright.

"As for the rest, I agree: you and Severus are his parents, and the final decisions concerning his upbringing are, of course, yours to decide. However, I do appreciate that my advice would be welcomed. Perhaps in time, Alex will come to know me as a father, though not his dad... That title belongs to you, Severus."

Hermione turned to Severus; she didn't know what to say to Lucius' speech. "Thank you, Lucius," Severus said. "I appreciate that you respect my place in my son's life. Your insistence on an account and your will... well, I think neither of us knows what to say to that.

"I had heard you changed after the war, and I will admit I had my reservations. I'm glad I've been proven wrong."

"As am I," Hermione said, finally finding her voice. "Would you like to meet Alex now?"

"I would, very much so."

"You're invited to join us also, Narcissa."

"Thank you, but I think it best if I decline this time. I'm sure I'll see you on the boulevard; maybe the three of us can do lunch one day."

Hermione, Severus, and Lucius stood in front of the playground where Alex and some other wizarding children were playing under the watchful eye of their sitters. Hermione watched Lucius' face as he watched Alex playing. A softness she didn't know he was capable of showed clearly in his eyes. The corners of his mouth raised slightly, a small smile, but she could sense sadness there also. "It's like being in a Pensieve, seeing my own memories of Draco at that age. Merlin, they look so much alike."

"He does have some of my features too, you know," said Hermione.

"Yes, he's well on his way to being the next know-it-all," Severus added and received a swat to his arm by his wife.

"Tsk, really, being inquisitive is NOT a bad thing."

"Mum... Da!" Alex yelled as he raced toward the three adults, jumping into Severus' arms as he reached them.

"Did you have fun today?" he asked the child.

"Yes, we played hide 'n' sneak and we went on the swings. I swinged really high too."

Hermione waved to their sitter, letting her know they now had Alex.

"I hope you were a good boy for Pascaline," she said as she held her arms out to her son.

"I was good, Mum," he said as he hugged her.

"There is someone I'd like you to meet, Alex. This is Lucius, he's... he's part of our family."

Lucius was stunned at her words. "Hello, Alex, it's a pleasure to finally meet you," he said, holding out his hand.

Alex hesitated for a moment before putting his hand in Lucius' and said, "Hi, Lusus, I'm Alex." He stared at Lucius, studying him. "Your hair is like mine."

Lucius smiled. "Yes, my hair is like yours."

A/N: My undying gratitude to Lady_Karelia for the beta work on this story. Without her it would have been unreadable!

Epilogue

Chapter 7 of 7

Hermione has guarded a secret for four years, and now her secret has been discovered. And she's married to whom?

Eight Years Later

"Now, make sure you write to let us know you're okay and what house you were sorted into," Hermione said as she fiddled with Alex's robes. "Be sure to do as your Head of House tells you and…"

"Yes, Mum, I'll write. I'll be fine," Alex said, hoping his mum wouldn't kiss him in front of everyone.

"Hermione, you're going to wear out the boy's robes before he even gets on the train," said Severus as he shifted their one-year-old daughter, Serena, to his other arm. "We're sure you'll be fine at Hogwarts, Alex. I'm sure you'll do Slytherin House proud."

"What makes you think he won't be sorted into Gryffindor?"

"Of all the absurd things… it's in his blood. Both his fathers are Slytherins," Lucius said smugly.

Alex rolled his eyes as once again all three of his parents started 'discussing' what house the hat would choose.

"Would it be so awful if I was Sorted into Ravenclaw?" asked Alex.

All three stopped and looked at the platinum-haired boy. "No," his mum said. "It wouldn't be awful; you're smart enough to be Sorted into Ravenclaw. We'll be proud of you no matter what house the hat Sorts you into. Won't we?" Hermione asked as she looked first at Lucius and then Severus.

"Absolutely," they said simultaneously.

The train whistle blew once, letting everyone know it was time to board. Tears started to well up in Hermione's eyes; she couldn't believe her first-born was leaving for Hogwarts. "It's time for you to get on the train, Alex. I'll miss you," she said as she kissed his cheek.

"I'll miss you, too, Mum," Alex said as he stepped into her arms, hugging her and kissing her cheek in return.

He then turned to his dad, receiving a hug from him also. "Good-bye, Dad. I'll see you at Christmas."

"No good-byes, son. Christmas hols will be here before you know it. You take care of yourself, and write your mother often, okay?"

"Yes, Dad," said Alex, trying to hold back his own tears.

Then he turned to Lucius. "I'll miss you, too, Father," he said as Lucius grabbed hold of him, hugging him close and kissing the top of his head.

"Make sure you write to all of us, or I'll come up to Hogwarts myself to give you a dressing down." He slipped Alex a bag of Galleons and whispered to him, "Don't tell your mother or dad. Consider it spending money for what you might need."

Alex laughed. "Yes, Father."

"You best board the train, or you won't find a good seat," Severus said.

"Bye, Serena," Alex said as he stood on his toes, kissed his little sister, and then ran towards the train.

Hermione broke down in tears as she watched him board. Severus put his free arm around her, and she turned to cry into his chest. "It's not as if we'll never see him again, love."

"I know," she sniffled. "But I'll miss my baby."

He looked at Lucius, who was rolling his eyes.

"Narcissa was the same way when we sent Draco off the first time." He placed his hand on Hermione's shoulder and gently rubbed. "He still needs you, Hermione; he still has a lot of growing up to do."

The train whistle blew again, and Hermione turned and searched for her son among the numerous children standing at the windows. "There he is, second car, third window," she said as she pointed, and all three started waving.

Alex waved back at his parents and watched out the window until he could no longer see King's Cross Station.

That evening in the Great Hall at Hogwarts, he waited in line with the rest of the first years. Finally, his name was called.

"Alexander Snape-Malfoy."

He sat on the stool, and the Sorting Hat was put on his head. "Hmm, yes, you are a smart one, aren't you? A product of two proud houses. You have Gryffindor bravery no doubt, yet you also possess the cunning and ambition of a true Slytherin, but I think you'll do well in… RAVENCLAW."