

One Vital Ingredient

by *cocoachristy*

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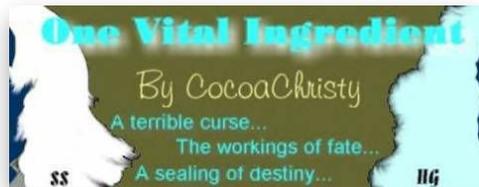
What's Love Got To Do With It?

Chapter 1 of 13

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A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter One

What's Love Got To Do With It?

This was the end, and Viktor Krum knew it. This war had been going on for three years, and in a few minutes it would all be over. He was dying a slow and painful death. A death he felt he was entirely too young for, but thanks to Luna Lovegood, it was death nonetheless. She'd hit him with a Slicing Curse. Not necessarily fatal, but this one happened to hit him on his left side, going all the way across his chest, hitting both lungs at the same time. He felt like he was drowning.

Viktor looked up and vowed to take as many with him as he could before he went. The first thing he saw was Hermione Granger. *Granger! Stupid bint!* He'd offered her his protection if only she'd come to him, but no, she chose Weasley, saying she could never love a true Death Eater. Well, that was her mistake. He supposed his mistake was in believing that the Dark Lord would come out victorious. A flash of green light a few minutes ago proved that when Potter had defeated Voldemort once and for all.

The Death Eaters, however, were not going down without a fight. He watched in fascination as Bellatrix Lestrange battled Neville Longbottom. Viktor never knew the quiet mouse had it in him, but revenge was a great motivator. He shook his head in disappointment when, rather than kill the mad woman, Longbottom restrained her for the Aurors.

He looked once more across the battlefield, wondering in morbid curiosity who was killing whom or restraining, as the Order's case may be, when a move on the right of Hermione showed the youngest Weasley, fighting for all she was worth. Which, in Viktor's opinion, was not much.

An idea suddenly formed in his fever-ridden brain. Lifting his wand, he pointed it at the Weasley girl and said, *Viscerum Moribundus!* Knowing that she would, he watched as Hermione ran to her friend to see if she could help her. When Hermione looked around to see who'd cursed her friend, her eyes locked with Viktor's. Nodding his head in acknowledgement and grinning evilly, he raised his wand and sent the same curse towards Hermione, hitting her chest dead center. He smiled in satisfaction as she fell. Three minutes later, Viktor was dead.

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Three Days Later

Most of the Order members were gathered at the newly built Hogwarts, trying to decide what to do about Hermione and Ginny's situation. It seemed that nobody knew exactly what the girls had been hit with. Because there were so many people in the room, both girls decided to wear their robes rather than the hospital gown that Madam Pomfrey tried to insist they wear.

When Severus Snape, the reinstated Potions professor, and Draco Malfoy, the new DADA professor, entered the hospital room, per Poppy Pomfrey's request, they were not met with happy greetings, but they were not tossed out either. Everyone had decided to treat the situation for what it was. They knew that the two Slytherins had actually spied for the Order, even after Albus had died, and they knew the reasons that Albus had been killed. That didn't mean they had to like the situation or the men, though, and so most didn't.

"Severus," Minerva said, "perhaps you can be of some assistance. Are you aware that Miss Granger and Miss Weasley were both cursed during the final battle?"

"I had heard so, yes. What is it that you need, Headmistress? A potion?"

Draco snarled at the room in general. They all acted as if Severus didn't exist unless they needed something from him. Even after everything he'd done and risked, they still treated him terribly, and that alone caused Draco to hate this group of hypocrites. He did concede, if only to himself, that Professor McGonagall did treat him decently, but she was the only one.

"Well, to be honest, we don't know exactly what we need." She looked to Poppy, who nodded her head in agreement, wringing her hands worriedly. "We are not sure what they were hexed with exactly. I'm afraid I have an idea, having heard Albus mention something like this many years ago."

"I even contacted St. Mungo's," Poppy explained, "but they are just as stumped as I am. It's as though their bodies are..." She couldn't continue.

"I see." Severus turned to Hermione and Ginny, who were both lying on a bed, seemingly in at least mild pain. "Did either of you see who cursed you or hear the words used?"

As Ginny shook her head, Hermione reluctantly spoke. "Yes, I saw. It was Viktor," she said, looking determinedly at her hands. She felt responsible for this situation and was more than a little hurt that Viktor would actually hex *her*.

"What? Viktor? Why didn't you say so?" Ron asked, obviously perplexed.

"I didn't think it mattered," she said with a sigh. "I tried to explain to the Healer what he said, but he said that there was no such curse." Hermione looked to Professor Snape. "He said, '*Viscerum Moribundus!*' when he cursed us both."

Draco sucked in a deep breath and looked to Severus. "No..."

"What?" Ginny asked, panicked at the expression on Malfoy's face. "Do you know what sort of curse that is then?"

"Yes," Severus said morbidly. "It goes back many years. No one knows who created it precisely, but Grindelwald used it during his time to torture Muggles and Mud...er, Muggleborns. When the Dark Lord discovered it, he and Bellatrix Lestrange used to enjoy that form of torture and taught the rest of us how to use it. However, the curse can be cured with a potion, but it requires three drops of a newborn infant's blood."

Draco added, "He'd planned to make some followers have children to build his armies. This was a way to ensure the women would go along with it...have a child to be raised in his service or die a horrid death."

"Well, Fleur is due any day. I am sure she would allow us six drops, don't you think, Mum?" Ginny asked her mother hopefully.

"Oh, yes dear," Molly said, relief written all over her face. "I'm sure that would be no prob..."

"I am not finished," Severus said in an aggravated tone at being interrupted. "The problem is that the newborn has to come from the victim. If you conceive, the curse goes dormant, but it returns full force once the child is born."

Gasps and worried looks filled the room. Starting to enjoy the discomfort of these people somewhat, Severus went on. "And the baby has to be conceived by the victim's soul mate, as it were." He sat down and watched the commotion he knew would follow that statement with suppressed glee. He wasn't disappointed as everyone started talking at once.

"That's right," Draco put in. "And if the woman wasn't married to or seeing the man who was her soul mate, the poor sod was found and forced to help."

"Don't worry, Hermione. We'll make a baby," Ron declared.

Ignoring Ron and everyone else, Hermione looked to her former professor and asked, "What exactly happens if we don't conceive a child and take this potion? How can we even know for absolute sure who our soul mate even is?"

Before Severus could answer, Draco spoke up with obvious glee at Hermione's predicament. "Well, Granger, all of your internal organs will begin painfully shutting down one by one. Heart, lungs, kidneys..."

"Yes, I know what the internal organs are, Malfoy!"

"Ah, but did you know you only have ten days to actually conceive after you are cursed?"

"What? No! Three days have already gone by!" Hermione was starting to feel the panic that Ginny had been feeling all along. Deep down, she had really believed that once Professor Snape got there, he would be able to cure them.

Looking at the headmistress and speaking over the voices that were all speaking at one time, Severus said, "I suggest you cast the spell and see exactly who these girls' soul mates are so that we may attempt to contact them. I have a potion that will allow them to conceive on the first try."

Walking over to Hermione, Ron tried to reassure her. "Don't worry, love. Once we confirm what we already know, then we'll do what's necessary. I am here for you always; you know that."

Hermione merely nodded as she began watching her hands once more, not quite convinced that Ron was going to be able to help her. She did love him, but her soul mate? She was uncertain if she would be that lucky to have found and fallen for her soul mate.

Draco snorted again in amusement while watching the weasel trying to comfort the Mudblood, and then he looked to Harry Potter. He'd just taken it for granted that Potter would run to the youngest weasel's side, but he hadn't moved from his place against the far wall. *Interesting.*

"If I could have everyone's attention, please?" Professor McGonagall yelled above the noise. "I think the sooner we get started, the better. There isn't much time."

When she was positive that she had everyone's attention, the headmistress looked to Ginny. "Miss Weasley, this won't hurt a bit. I am just going to point my wand towards you and say the spell. The name of your soul mate will then appear."

"Why isn't this spell often used, Professor?" Hermione wanted to know. "I mean, it seems as if everyone would use it to ensure they married the right person."

"Because, Miss Granger, there is a bit of dark magic in this spell. However, it was often used, many years ago, for prearranging marriages. Most times, the soul mate would turn out to be someone the girl hated or was a stranger. This started causing many elopements, and eventually, the spell was no longer used."

"Oh, how terrible! I don't blame them! To have to marry someone you don't love or, worse, hate! To bring a baby into that sort of environment... I don't know if I could bear that, really... But I wouldn't have a choice, would I? If I want to live, I have to do it." She looked to Professor Snape for confirmation, and he nodded his agreement.

Draco laughed. "Don't worry, Granger, I can promise you that/ won't be your soul mate! And besides, nobody said anything about marriage."

"Heaven forbid," Hermione said under her breath.

A little louder, Ron said, "Trust me. We weren't even worried about that, you ferret!"

"Now listen here, you..."

"Gentlemen! That will be enough!" Professor McGonagall fussed. "I think we have more important things to do just now than bicker with and insult one another, don't you?"

Nobody answered the headmistress, but everyone stopped talking. Satisfied, she turned her attention to Ginny once again. "As I was saying, there is no pain. Now, are you ready, dear?" Ginny shot a quick glance at Harry, who was standing by the window and looking outside, and nodded that she was. Professor McGonagall pointed her wand and said, "*Ut Gemina Animae Declaratus Sit*"

Suddenly, the words started forming before her eyes. Nobody said anything for one full minute when the name Draco Malfoy appeared. "Um..." Ginny started.

But before anyone could utter one word, Ron shouted, "No way in bloody hell! No way! You won't marry that ferret, and you certainly won't have his baby!"

"A baby born out of wedlock is not considered a true Malfoy heir, Weasley," Draco lazily said. "And it's either my baby or die. Which would you rather she do?"

"I don't care about it being a Malfoy heir! If you think for one minute..."

"Hush, Ron!" Hermione hissed. She realized what Malfoy was saying, even if Ron did not.

The headmistress said, "Not *one more word* from anyone! I have to see to Miss Granger."

Turning to Hermione, she asked, "Ready?"

"As I'll ever be," was her solemn response as she was still a bit gobsmacked from Ginny's answer to the spell.

When the spell was directed at Hermione and the name Severus Snape appeared, pure mayhem broke out in the room. Everyone was yelling and accusing. Even Harry joined in this time.

Nobody even noticed when Hermione and Ginny slipped from the room.

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They decided to go sit by the lake and watch the giant squid as he lazily splashed about. Thirty minutes passed before either of them spoke.

"Well, this is a fine mess, eh, Hermione?" Ginny tried to sound upbeat, but it came off as desperate.

"To say the least."

"What will you do? I mean, do you actually want to..."

"Ginny, you heard the professor and Malfoy. *We* don't have a choice. It's more of what will *they* do, isn't it? And I think I can safely say that I am destined to die a very painful death." She tried in vain to stop the tears that started to flow.

Ginny turned her head back to the lake. "I really don't want to die. But I think I am destined to as well. It's just that, well, we're so young. I mean, it's one thing to die in a battle, or an accident even, but to know it's coming! In about a week, we are going to die."

"I'm so sorry, Gin. I know Viktor did that to pay me back, and I hate more than you will ever know that you got caught in the middle of that. I feel responsible for..."

"Stop that this minute, Hermione! I mean it! I don't blame you because it's not your fault."

Shaking her head because she didn't want to think about Viktor, she said, "I suppose we need to make up some sort of will."

Ginny laughed out loud. "I don't have anything worth making a will for. I will just give my wand to Ron before... Well, before. What about you?"

"I'll have to think about it. When my mum and dad were killed last year, I inherited everything, so I do have some money and property, plus the business. Anyway, not to change the subject or anything, but do you mind if I ask what was going on between you and Harry? He seemed a little off."

Ginny sighed and shook her head. "Right after the battle, when Harry and I were alone?" Hermione nodded, encouraging her to continue. "He told me that he felt like things were starting to move too fast for us and he wanted a break. This was before he knew I'd been cursed though," Ginny said quickly, reading the glare in Hermione's eyes.

"But I thought...all of us thought...that you and Harry were becoming quite serious. What changed?"

"I honestly think that before he had to face Tom, Harry thought he was going to die and that he needed someone who loved him to hold onto. You know? And when everything was over, well, it all got to be too overwhelming. It doesn't matter now anyway. It's a moot point." She stopped talking when her voice started cracking.

As they sat in silence, they both heard the footsteps coming from behind. Both assuming that it was Harry and Ron, neither girl turned around.

Hermione jumped when she heard, "Miss Granger, a word if you please. In my office."

"Of course, Professor. I apologize; I didn't realize it was you."

Waving his hand in front of him in a sweeping motion, he said, "It doesn't matter. After you."

Hermione stood and started towards the castle with Professor Snape following her.

After Hermione and the professor left, Draco sat down beside Ginny. Neither spoke for a few minutes. Finally, Ginny couldn't bear the silence any longer. "Say what you've come to say, and then leave me alone."

Ignoring her tone, Draco told her, "I don't know how big of a binding we can have in the limited time that we've got, but the sooner we start planning it, the better. You needn't worry about the cost of anything; I will take care of it all."

He could almost laugh at the expression on her face. He knew what she was thinking...that he'd just let her die and relish in it. Well, he had to marry someone, he thought, and he would rather it be Ginevra than Pansy, who his parents...and hers for that matter...just assumed he would.

He'd been attracted to the youngest Weasley since the beginning of his sixth year when Blaise Zabini brought her to his attention. After that, he began watching her and had to admit that when away from the other three, she wasn't half bad. No, he wouldn't mind being bound to her.

"You mean, you want to marry me? Why? You hate me! Besides, we don't have to be husband and wife to have a baby, you know. You said so yourself."

"Ginevra, I don't hate you. I hate your brother. Besides, a baby born outside of marriage won't be considered a true Malfoy heir. He or she wouldn't inherit anything, per the arrangements my great-grandfather made when my grandfather wanted a child with his mistress rather than his wife. This was arranged on a wizarding contract and is therefore unbreakable."

"I see," she said but was still surprised that he'd even care if her baby was considered a true heir. "This baby...my baby...would matter to you?"

"I believe it would be *our* baby."

"Well, what kind of marriage would you expect, Malfoy?"

Raising his eyebrows, he instructed, "Call me Draco. I am about to create a child with you. I would expect the traditional kind, of course."

"Oh, I see. You mean married to one person, but sleeping with another?" she said hatefully. The thoughts of that infuriated her for reasons she couldn't name or understand.

He was looming over her in a flash, his face only inches from hers. "Let me make this perfectly clear, right here, right now. You WILL NOT be sleeping with Harry-Fucking-Potter while you carry the Malfoy name or anyone else for that matter. Do you understand me?"

She shoved his chest and found him unmoving to her surprise. She'd always thought of him as some sort of weakling. A mama's boy. "I was speaking of you, not me, you imbecile! It's your grandfather who wanted a child with his mistress! Anyway, I've not slept with Harry! I've not slept with any..." She stopped herself, realizing she was telling him more than she wanted him to know in her anger.

He eased back, but only a fraction, so that he could look into her eyes. "That sounds unbelievable. You've had several boyfriends."

"So? How do you know how many boyfriends I've had anyway? Besides, I don't sleep with everyone I date, and you obviously do. I didn't really love any of them, except Harry of course, and well, he just didn't get that far. Anyway, why am I explaining this to you? It's none of your business."

"Oh, it most certainly is my business, as you will soon be my wife." He didn't bother to tell her that after she was brought to his attention, he'd made it his business to know as much about her as he could without making anyone suspicious.

"I never agreed to marry you, Malfoy. Besides, do you want to tell me all of the women you've slept with?"

He simply looked at her for a long moment. "That's a conversation for another day, I'm afraid. However, I can let you know that I will not take a mistress, Ginevra, or be unfaithful unless you refuse me." When she deliberately turned her back to him, he asked, "Would you really rather die than marry me then?"

Suddenly, the weight of her situation hit her like a ton of bricks, and she began to cry softly. If she didn't marry Draco Malfoy and have a child with him, she was going to *die*! It all seemed unreal, not to mention unfair. "No. No, I wouldn't. I'm sorry. I seem ungrateful, I know I do, but I just can't seem to take all this in. It's too much." Taking a deep breath, she told him, "I would be very grateful to marry you, Draco."

He gently rubbed her back as she cried.

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Hermione nervously followed her former professor into his office. She'd had to move back when they got to his door so that he could take the wards down.

"Have a seat," he instructed.

She sat and just stared at him. When he said nothing, she asked, "Sir? Did you want to discuss this... situation we're in?"

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose to fight off the migraine that was coming on. Why on God's green earth did it have to be him? He opened his eyes and studied the girl...no, young woman...sitting in front of him. He couldn't figure how he could be her soul mate or she his, as he was not attracted to her in the least, and he was positive that the feeling was mutual. But this was the situation, and it needed to be dealt with quickly. She didn't have much time.

Cutting to the chase, he said, "Tell me, Miss Granger, what do you expect of me?"

She looked at him with confusion. "Nothing. I mean, well, this is my problem, sir, not yours." She took a calming breath that didn't work.

"Yes, I understand that mostly this is your problem. However, it's not solely your problem, as the spell identified me," he told her impatiently. "I want to know what you want to do."

"Considering the circumstances, sir, I would say it's more of what *you* want to do. I don't have a choice. I have to either conceive with you or die."

"Stop calling me sir every time you speak!" She jumped when he yelled. "I know that we are going to have to have a baby! I can't let you die, can I? What I want to know is how you want to handle the situation? Do you wish for a binding? Let me tell you before you answer that question that unwed mothers in the wizarding world are... frowned upon, as are their children."

"I hadn't thought, I mean, um, si...er, Professor, I didn't realize you would help me, so I haven't thought of the situation, as it were."

He rose slowly from his seat, leaned over his desk, and never took his eyes off of her. "Let me get this straight. You mean to tell me that you actually thought I would just let you die? Knowing that it's within my power to help you?"

Hermione's eyes widened as she leaned back as far as she could in her seat. It was hard to think with him looming over her like that. "Well, considering how you feel about me, that you hate me, I just thought..."

"Silence! Do not presume to know my feelings on anything!" He turned from her and walked to a door on the far side of his office. After he had gone through, Hermione started to get up and leave, thinking she had made him so mad that he was finished with her.

He poked his head through the door as she started to rise and said, "Miss Granger! Come! I need a more comfortable setting for this ridiculous conversation."

She timidly walked through the door into what she knew must be his personal chambers. Seeing him sitting in one of the chairs by the fireplace, she decided to sit in the other. "I want to apologize for my assumption of your feelings and actions. I realize now how that must have sounded to you."

Not addressing her apology, he asked, "Would you care for a shot of firewhisky? Some wine?"

"I...I don't know." She stared into the fire as if mesmerized by the flames.

He raised an eyebrow. "You don't know? You haven't been able to answer one question since I brought you here. Tell me this: What do you know?"

Flushing in embarrassment and anger, she spat, "I know for sure that I am going to die in one week. That, I know." She turned away from him, refusing to let him witness her anguish.

"Stop being so dramatic for Merlin's sake. You most certainly will not die. I just want to know how you wish to handle this."

"I don't know!" She grabbed her head with both hands. "My head is spinning. Would you just tell me what it is that you want to do?"

Taking a drink of his whisky, he watched her. "I believe that we should have some sort of binding. I don't wish to have a child outside of marriage. It's hard enough in the world as it is without adding unnecessary problems."

"But... we don't love each other! As a matter of fact, you don't even like me! Why would you want to bind yourself to me for all eternity?"

He rolled his eyes. "I believe I asked you to stop being dramatic. A lot of marriages are entered into without love. Most, from my experience. I can tolerate you, as long as you keep your idiotic friends out of my sight and, most importantly, my chambers."

"You would expect me to live here with you?"

"Yes," he told her without bothering to explain.

Burying her face in her hands, she murmured, "I am so confused!"

"Well, you'd better figure it out soon. The clock is ticking." Suddenly a thought occurred to him. "You're not a virgin, are you?"

Looking at him through her fingers, she answered, "No. Um, are you?"

"Certainly not."

Taking a few deep breaths, she said, "All right. I suppose you're right, about the binding, I mean. And I want to say, I really appreciate your help. Without it, well, without it, I would die. I owe you my life." As she said that, the tears she couldn't hold in began to fall.

"Don't blubber now! There is no cause for that now that you know I will indeed help you, and you are not going to die."

Nodding, she asked, "What about my money?"

"What about it?"

"I know a little about the wizarding laws, regarding marriage and such. When we become husband and wife, what's mine becomes yours. I don't like that."

"I neither want nor need your money, I assure you. You can withdraw it out of Gringotts and deposit it into a Muggle account so that nobody will know of its existence for all I care. What I do care about is the child. I will have equal rights in all things concerning my child. Make no mistake."

"Of course." She tilted her head somewhat, and it made her look even younger while the tears were still drying on her cheeks. "I had no idea you even wanted a child." She sniffed.

"There are many things about me you don't know. We don't know each other at all really, outside of the student-teacher relationship." That thought made him nauseated. "Or the brief run-ins during Order meetings. Unfortunately, we don't have time to rectify that now. All you need to know right now is that I will marry you and give you the child you need to save your life, and I will have an active part of all things concerning my child. When would you like to have the ceremony?"

This was all happening so fast. One minute they were talking about her money, then raising their child, and the next, they were talking about a binding ceremony. Her vision was blurring and her stomach was rolling. She couldn't keep up. She was sick and she was tired. She wanted sleep. She couldn't think at all. "Tomorrow?"

"Fine. I'll arrange it. Now, I suggest you go to your friends and explain the situation. I won't have Weasley, or Potter for that matter, trying to fight me for your honor. Speaking of Mr. Weasley, I must request that you do not plan any future liaisons with him once you are my wife."

"Oh, God, Ron..." She nodded numbly as he continued.

"You can go to Hogsmeade in the morning and purchase all that you will need. Minerva and Molly will escort you and Miss Weasley."

"How do you know that? You've discussed it with them!" she accused before he could say anything. "How dare you? Let me just say that when we are married, you will not dictate..."

"Enough! This has been a trying day for all involved, so I will just say that you need to calm yourself. The only thing I discussed with those two was that if you wanted a binding ceremony they wanted help you. I didn't just assume, as you have been doing about everything concerning me...including this...that you would agree to marry me. Now, we're both tired, Miss Granger. I need sleep and so do you. Come. I will walk you back to the infirmary."

She burst into tears, completely exhausted, confused and scared to death. She felt as if she were drifting in an alternate universe and she couldn't find solid ground anywhere. "Y-y-es. I am so tired. I...thank you. I d-d-don't know what else to say to you. All this seems so... so..."

As she stood to leave, she fainted. Severus barely caught her before she hit the floor. Sighing, he said, "What a perfect end to a perfect day." Refusing to carry her in any form back to the infirmary, he simply laid her on his bed and removed her shoes. After a bit of thought, he covered her.

Turning, he grabbed an extra blanket out of his wardrobe and headed for the couch. *Not even married to the child, and she's already got me sleeping on the couch. What a fine start to what I'm sure will be a wonderful marriage,* he thought sarcastically.

Christy's Notes: This is my response to the Potter_Place Winter 2007 Prompt Challenges. I liked # 23: Ginny or Hermione is hit with an ancient, evil curse. Exactly what it does is up to you. The cure for said curse is a potion which can easily be made, save for one vital ingredient: three drops of a newborn's blood. The catch? The baby must be of the curse victim. How does this affect the victim (Hermione or Ginny), their friends (everybody else), and their lover (Harry, Draco, or Severus)?

Well, here's chapter one! Binding and conception up next. Forgive my Latin; it's definitely not my strong suit!

Viscerum: flesh, internal organs, bowels, entrails, heart

Moribundus: ways, conduct, character, morals.

morior : to die, wither away, decay

Ut Gemina Animae Declaratus Sit: let the twin of the soul be proclaimed

This is loosely translated, of course!

The title of this chapter is a song by Tina Turner from the year 1984.

Southern_Witch_69's Notes: I always love stories where they are sort of forced to see each other in a different light...then we get to witness the journey of developing feelings and the realization that they appreciate getting tossed together. Great start!

Making Love Out Of Nothing At All

Chapter 2 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Two

Making Love Out of Nothing at All

Hermione awoke groggily in an unfamiliar bed. She looked around the room in confusion and tried to wake her addled brain *Where am I?*

When she started to rise, she felt her body start to ache all over. *This must be from the effects of the curse.* Still not knowing exactly where she could be, she decided first things first and looked around the room for a door that would lead her to the loo. She had to go desperately.

Sighing in relief when she found it, Hermione hurriedly used the toilet and washed her hands. Without her bladder distracting her, her foggy mind was able to take in her surroundings and remember the events of yesterday and last night.

The last thing that she remembered was... *No! No, I couldn't have possibly...fainted! Oh, what a fine kettle of fish this is.* Closing her eyes, she grabbed the sink tightly with both hands, lowered her head, and prayed she would just disappear. When the gods didn't see fit to grant her request, she sighed and wondered where her former professor was. Now that she knew she was not going to die, she felt more sure-footed if still a little scared.

Leaving the loo, she straightened up his bed and started to leave the bedroom when an odd thought struck her. *This is his bed! Will we share this bed after we have our binding...oh, God, binding...today, or will he allow me a room of my own?* Rubbing her hand over the duvet, she thought, *This is where we will conceive our baby. A baby...with Snape!*

Feeling overwhelmed again, she had to sit on the edge of the bed for a moment to gather herself. It just wouldn't sink in. Not only the curse and the ramifications of that but also the fact that Severus Snape had turned out to be her soul mate! More confusing, he actually wanted them to marry. It was very hard for her to wrap her mind around that, considering she knew that he hated her. Or she thought he did. After their talk last night, Hermione wasn't so sure of anything now.

She did understand...somewhat...his reasoning of wanting them to marry. Sure, it was hard for a child in any world, but especially the wizarding one, to be born out of wedlock, but Hermione didn't see why they couldn't get to know one another first to see if they would at least be compatible.

But because he was actually going to save her life, she didn't feel like she should argue with him, much less flat out refuse. She was so scared and confused! Because the pain was slightly increasing, she decided to seek out Professor Snape and see if he had a potion that would take the edge off the pain. She could bear it, but with everything else she had to face, Hermione didn't see why she should have to. *I hope Ginny isn't in much pain. Perhaps I should get some for her, too.*

Once she stepped out of the bedroom, the first thing that registered was the loud breathing. Not snoring...thank God!...but the breathing was louder than normal. Walking over to the couch, Hermione was startled at the sight before her.

There was Snape, lying on the couch, one arm flung over his head, one sock clad foot on the floor and one hanging over the arm of the couch, as he was too long to completely fit. Hermione took the time to study him while she could do so unobserved.

How would they get along? Would he ignore her or talk to her? She bet he could be very interesting if talking about a subject that interested him. What would their life be like? Would he argue if she wanted to work after the baby came? Does he want more than one child? Where would they live in the summer months away from Hogwarts? So many things they still needed to discuss!

He wasn't the most attractive man, she thought, still gazing at his sleep-ridden face, but then, she had never been one to merit people by their looks. She proved that by dating Viktor Krum. Oh, sure, girls wanted and followed him everywhere he went, but it was because he was famous, not because of his looks. Then there was Ronald. Hermione knew that most didn't think him good-looking, but he was to her in his own way. She admired his loyalty and bravery most. She suddenly thought, *Oh, God, Ron! He doesn't even know yet. How will I tell him?*

"It won't get any better, you know," Snape mumbled from the couch, eyes still closed.

"What?" Hermione asked, his voice startling her from her thoughts. *Is he reading my mind?*

"My face. No matter how long you stare, it stays the same," he said.

"Oh, no, I wasn't... I mean... There isn't anything wrong with your face, sir. I just didn't want to wake you."

He snorted. "Really, stop calling me 'sir.' It reminds me that not too long ago you were a student in my care. And I know very well what my face looks like, Miss Granger. Is there something you needed? I can't believe you were staring at me for the pleasure of watching me sleep."

Hermione blushed at having him know she'd been watching him. "I was wondering if I could have some Pain Potion, *Severus?*" *There. That shouldn't make me seem like a student!*

Raising an eyebrow at her forwardness, he asked, "Are you in a lot of pain, or is it mild?"

"I can handle it if I have to."

"Well, I think that would be best. You have to take the Conception Potion tonight, and I don't think it would be a good idea to mix the two," he explained. "I do not want to take any unnecessary risks of the conception not happening tonight."

"I see. You're right," she agreed. "I can deal with it. Um, I wanted to thank you for last night and apologize for, well, for passing out on you." She averted her gaze from his, too embarrassed to look him in the eye.

"It was understandable with everything you've had to deal with lately. I have no illusions, Miss Granger. I know that I am not your pick."

"Well, really! *That* is not why I passed out!" she said indignantly, putting her hands on her hips in a way that all of her friends would have recognized as her temper rising. "How shallow do you think I am? Besides, I know that I am no raving beauty myself. You accused me of judging you last night and of making wrong assumptions about your thoughts. Now this morning, you are doing the same to me."

Sitting up and twisting his head from side to side to try and work the kinks out of his neck, he told her, "True enough. Still, I know some of what you must be feeling."

"I suppose because you're feeling much of the same. Look, if you want to just conceive tonight and take some time to get to know one another before we get..."

"No, I don't. I do not wish to conceive a child out of marriage and have him labeled a bastard. Besides, it doesn't matter how well we get to know each other, Miss Granger, the fact remains that we will in fact be having a child together; therefore, we will need to be married. I... must insist."

Closing her eyes and lifting her face towards the ceiling, she gave in. "All right. If we're going to be married today, then at least call me Hermione." She lowered her gaze and looked at her affianced husband. "What time do you want to have the binding ceremony?"

"I know that Draco had planned on a ceremony of some sort to Miss Weasley. Perhaps we could have them at the same time?" She nodded that it would be fine with her. "Then I will speak to Draco and Minerva. She and Molly can escort you and Miss Weasley this morning for the appropriate attire, and then we can wed early this afternoon."

"Could we do it a little later? I really need to speak with Ron."

"I thought I made it clear that I wished for you to cut all liaisons with that boy!"

She stumbled back a couple of steps before she could stop herself. "It's not like that! I have to tell him, face to face, that I will be marrying you! And like it or not, he is a major part of my life. I won't be unfaithful to you, but I have to do this."

"I see," was his only reply.

"What about you?" she demanded.

"What about me?"

"Well, is there anyone... special that you need to inform of our... situation?" She was suddenly having trouble forming the words as the reality was sinking in. She was not only going to be married to Severus Snape, but she could also possibly lose Ron's friendship for good.

He threw his head back and laughed. "Oh, yes, dear. I have them lined up for me, don't you know? The witches can't keep their hands off of me." Sobering, he looked into her tired, brown eyes. She seemed sad and weary. "No," he said quietly, "there is no one. And you needn't worry. I won't put any kind of marital restrictions on you that I wouldn't keep myself."

"Okay." She nodded. Hermione knew it in her heart, but felt better hearing him say the words aloud. "I am going to go back to the hospital wing to shower and change. Would you ask Professor McGonagall to let me know when they're ready to leave?"

"Yes, and I will have a house-elf bring your belongings to my chambers as well."

"Oh. Yes, all right. I hadn't thought about that, but yes, I will need my things I suppose..."

He looked amused at her expression. "Very well. Just have someone come and get me after you and Miss Weasley have finished shopping and readying yourselves. Draco will likely be with me."

"Fine. I will see you later today." She turned and started to the door. Before she opened it to go, she looked over her shoulder and into his eyes. "I really don't know how I will ever repay you for saving my life, but for now let me just say, thank you."

She went through the door before he had a chance to reply. He wondered how long she would be grateful to him after they'd lived together.

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Ginny lay in her bed in the hospital wing and woke slowly. She instinctively knew that Harry was sitting in the chair by her bed without having to open her eyes. She rubbed her forehead with her hands, not really wanting to speak with Harry just now.

Noticing that she was awake, Harry started, "Ginny..."

Holding up her hand, she simply said, "Don't." She looked over to him and noticed his pained expression. "It's not your fault, Harry."

"I know that I didn't cause the situation, love, but I feel like I've let you down."

"That's just rubbish though. There was nothing about the situation that you could've controlled!" Ginny told him exasperatedly. She didn't feel like comforting him. It was her life on the line, damnit! "Harry, you just can't save everyone, no matter how much you wish that you could. It wasn't for you to do this time."

"No, apparently it was for Draco bloody Malfoy!" Taking her hand in his, he said, "You don't have to have anything more to do with him after you conceive, Ginny. I-I-I'll be here for you and the baby. I would do that for you. I can be a father to this baby..."

"No. Harry, you're not in love with me, and I have known this for a long time. I don't want you to feel guilty that you were relieved when the spell didn't name you as my soul mate." She laughed at his shocked expression. "I looked at you, you see. I saw your expression. Part relief it wasn't you and part shock that it was Draco. Besides, that wouldn't really be fair to you or Draco...not to mention the fact that he'd never allow you to raise his child. Anyway, I thought you liked him some now?"

"I can be in the same room with him without wanting to hex him, Gin, but that doesn't mean I want you to have to deal with him, even if it is only for the child." His face was screwed up in anger.

"Oh, that's right. I haven't told you. Harry..." She didn't know quite how to tell him. "Do you remember yesterday when Draco explained that a child born out of wedlock would not be considered a true Malfoy heir?"

"No, Ginny! Don't do it!"

In a soft voice, Ginny told him, "It wouldn't be fair to my child to deny him his inheritance, Harry."

"But to marry Malfoy? You don't love him...hell, you don't even like him! You don't have to do this! You can..."

"Harry! Stop, okay?" Tears started to gather in her eyes, and she blinked them back. "Don't you get that without this baby, I *wilbtie*? And I don't think Draco would even conceive a baby with me if I don't marry him. For some strange reason, he wants this. It's going to save me, don't you see?"

"So, you're feeling indebted to him, I get that. I just want you to be happy, love. That's all I have ever wanted for you," he whispered, feeling defeated.

"Yes and filled with guilt because you don't love me the way that I've loved you. You know, last week, or hell, yesterday morning, I would have hated you for this." Smiling, she added, "For a little while, at least. But now, it's just not important to me. Well, that's putting it in the wrong way. I mean, YOU are important to me, and you always will be. But, Harry, I've accepted the fact that you're never going to love me, and I've moved on. Believe it or not, I started moving on before you even ended things. I felt it, you see. Besides, I can't afford the luxury of being mad at you right now."

"He doesn't deserve you. But then, neither did I." He shook his head. "I dunno. Maybe because he is your soul mate, whatever that's supposed to mean, it will work out for you. I really want it to, you know."

"Yes, I know."

Just then Ron came bursting into the room. He looked at his sister and best mate. Misreading the situation, he smiled and nodded at the both of them. "You two going to give it a go?"

"What are you on about, Ron? You know that the spell named Draco Malfoy!" Ginny told him.

"But, Gin, you can't seriously be considering having a baby..."

Ginny put a hand on either side of her head and pulled her hair, irritated. "Yes, I can, and I am! Didn't you understand, brother dear? I have to get pregnant by my soul mate...who just happens to be Draco Malfoy. Now don't say another word about it because it's just going to piss me off."

"And so it's true what I've heard? You're going to marry him then?"

"Yes, I am. Our parents agree that I should, Ron. I don't want to deny my child his rightful birthright. Mum will be here in a bit to take Hermione and me shopping." She realized her mistake as soon as she'd said it.

Ron looked up sharply and asked, "Why would Hermione go? Oh, to help you pick out your wedding robes, of course." He looked relieved. "Yes, of course. Say, where is she?"

"Here," Hermione said from the doorway, having heard the last part of the conversation. Her stomach was tied up in knots. She did not want to have this discussion with Ron.

He beamed a smile at her and said, "There you are, baby." Holding his arms open, he told her, "Come here."

She gratefully went into his arms, laid her head on his chest, and surprised herself by bursting into tears.

"Ssh, it's going to be okay. I'm here for you. I love you."

The declaration only made her cry a little harder. "Ron, there's something I need to tell you..."

"Where were you last night? I looked all over for you," he told her as he gently wiped her tears off her cheek.

Taking a deep breath, she blurted, "I spent the night in Professor Snape's chambers!"

"Huh? Could you run that by me one more time, babe? I didn't get that."

Backing out of his arms so that she could look into his eyes, Hermione sniffed and explained, "I spent the night in Professor Snape's chambers."

"So," Ron started, looking at her tummy, "you're now pregnant?"

"No, not yet."

"Then why on earth did you stay..."

"I fainted. Everything was just too much and..."

"Um," Harry interrupted. "I think I will just go and let the two of you hash this out..."

"No, Harry. You need to hear this. You, too, Ginny."

"I already know." She shrugged when Hermione looked at her. "Professor McGonagall told me last night after I talked to Draco that she thought you would agree, and I can see that you have."

"Agree to what exactly?" Ron demanded.

"Well, as you already know, I have to have Professor Snape's baby to live." When the boys nodded, she continued, "Well, it turns out he doesn't want to have a baby outside of marriage."

Stiffening, Ron wanted to know, "What did he say when you told him you wouldn't marry him?"

"I didn't tell him I wouldn't marry him, exactly."

"Well, what *exactly* did you tell him, Hermione?" Harry asked as he rose from the chair.

"That I *would* marry him?" Hermione answered Harry but never took her eyes off of Ron.

"Why? You know I want to marry you, Mione! Why would you accept him?"

"Because, Ronald! I want to live!"

"You don't love him! Don't do this! I know that you have to have that bastard's baby, but damnit, marry me! I'll take care of your baby, I swear it."

"No," she agreed, "you're right. I don't love Professor Snape. But, Ron, I can't marry you. Don't you see? You would resent the baby and, in time, me. I don't want you to hate me...I don't think I could take that." Turning to Harry, she started to plead her case to him until she noticed his expression. "Harry?"

"You would do this? Knowing what all he's done, you would actually do this?" He balled his hands into fists without thinking. "I can't believe you, Hermione!" he yelled as he started towards her.

"Now, hold on, mate!" Ron said to Harry as he stepped between him and Hermione, surprised at the venom Harry was spewing at her. "That'll do."

"Are you mad, Ron? She is going to marry *Snape*!" Turning to Hermione, Harry told her, "If you do this, I don't think I could be around you anymore. I hate him... with everything in me."

"Of course she's not going to marry him. Calm down." Taking Hermione's hand in his, Ron told her, "It will be just fine. I wouldn't ever resent you or an innocent baby. You know me better than that."

"Ron," Hermione pleaded, "you and Harry have to understand. It's not about you two. It's about an ancient curse and Ginny's and my will to live."

"I do understand why you need to have a baby, Mione. Just like I understand why Ginny has to have the Ferret's. I don't get why the two of you say *yobave* to marry those arses! You don't because you have me. Ginny doesn't either."

"It's what he wants, and after giving it a lot of thought, I agree. He pointed out how single mothers are looked down upon...as are their children. I have to think of this baby now, guys," she said, imploring them both. "He won't abandon this baby or stand back while another man plays father. It's not just going to be me anymore. And in order for her child to be considered a true heir, Ginny has to marry Malfoy. How many times do we have to tell you that?" She turned to Ginny. "Gin? Are you okay?"

"Yes," her friend told her quietly. "I am. Harry, Snape is not the man we thought he was," Ginny told him on Hermione's behalf. "You know it's true!" she exclaimed when he turned his furious green eyes on her.

"It's not right," Ron said. Turning his imploring eyes to Hermione, Ron asked her, "Why do you have to marry him? Why can't you just marry me? You wouldn't be a single mum then."

"BECAUSE IT'S *HIS* BABY, RONALD! It's the one request he's asked of me in exchange for doing his part." Getting mad, she asked, "What if I told him no to the marriage, angering him, and he told me no to the baby? I would die. A painful death, mind you!" Calming, she continued, "I know this hurts. It hurts me as well. But I don't really have a choice, and I don't want to talk about it anymore. My body hurts enough already from this curse."

"Oh, is that what's causing these pains?" When Hermione nodded, Ginny asked, "Can't we take a bit of Pain Potion?"

"No, the professor said he didn't want anything interfering with the Conception Potion."

"Hermione," Harry said to get her attention. "You are my family, and I love you. I would never abandon you or our friendship, but I can't be around you for a while. It still hurts me to see Snape."

"Harry..." she began, but then stopped when Ron started talking.

"Yeah, it'll take a while." He turned his head then because he didn't want anyone to see the tears running down his face. It was humiliating. He couldn't fool his sister though.

Rising, Ginny went to run and put her arms around his waist and her head on his back. "Hey, I love you. It's going to be okay..." She started tearing herself. "Look, it's not something we want to do; it's something that we have to do."

"Yeah, I get it, Gin. Let me go now." When she squeezed tighter, he sighed and said, "Really...let go. I don't want to be here just now. I can't do this."

She reluctantly released him, and he walked out the door without another word to anyone. Turning to Harry, she asked, "All right?"

"No, but then, that's my problem, isn't it?" Saying nothing else, he turned to follow Ron out the door.

Hermione held a hand up before Ginny could speak. "I am going to shower and get ready. I just don't have the energy to talk about this anymore."

As Hermione was walking towards the bathroom, Ginny sat in the chair that Harry had abandoned, put her face in her hands, and cried the tears she'd been holding since she'd woken up.

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Minerva had watched her two former students brooding for the last thirty minutes, and she was getting rather tired of it. "Miss Granger! Miss Weasley! Enough of this nonsense now. Let's start trying on some robes!"

Taking pity on the two girls, Molly told them, "Look, girls, I realize that right now these are not bindings of love. However, the spell named those two your soul mates." She didn't tell them that she'd done the spell herself while she was behind them today. She'd sighed as she'd gotten the same results that Minerva did. "One day, you could very well be in love, and you really don't want to ruin this day by refusing to select the robes that you want."

"You're right, Mum. I know you are. It's just hard. This is not how I pictured my binding." She realized she was close to whinging and closed her mouth tightly.

"No, nor me, love." Turning to Hermione, Molly whispered, "I always thought that you'd be my daughter, you know."

Tearing up yet again, Hermione said, "I know. Me, too. But I'm not destined for Ronald anymore it seems. I do, however, consider you a second mother to me, Mrs. Weasley. Especially when my parents were killed..."

"Hush now, no talk of that today." Molly's heart was breaking. "Here, Ginny dear, try this," she instructed as she took a set of beautiful ivory silk robes from the rack. "And Hermione, you try these white."

"Mum! We can't afford this!"

"Well, Draco insisted he wanted to pay for the entire thing, so I say let him. Only, don't tell your father. I'm not sure what he'd say to that. I just want you to have all you want."

"Mum, this is not exactly a happy day for me or Hermione. We're not happy, nervous brides, you know."

"It doesn't matter. Now, try these on; we haven't got all day!"

It took only three different tries for Hermione and five for Ginny, but they both had new wedding robes. Hermione tried to refuse Professor McGonagall when she insisted that Severus wanted to pay for them, but the professor won out in the end.

When they passed a jewelry store, Hermione told them to stop. "What about wedding rings?"

"Oh, I'm sure Severus will take care of that, dear," Molly assured her.

"Well, I don't want him buying his own wedding band! I want to go look."

"I don't think it's necessary, Hermione, really," McGonagall assured her.

"It's necessary to *me*. Ginny, what about you?"

"For some reason, I agree. It's the least we could do, I say."

"Fine, go! But don't dawdle!" the impatient headmistress instructed.

They both nodded and walked into the shop, walking directly to the bands. "May I help you?" the sales clerk inquired.

"Yes," Hermione answered. "We'd like to see some wedding bands please."

If the clerk was surprised, he didn't show it. Taking out the tray of wedding bands, he placed them on the counter for the girls to inspect. "No," Ginny told him, "men's wedding bands."

"Pardon me," he told them as he took out the correct bands.

"Hmm," Hermione said as she looked the bands over. "I don't think anything with a stone... Gold wouldn't do... This one," she said as she picked up the platinum band up to inspect it. It was a plain band. It was perfect. Turning to the clerk she asked, "How long would it take for you to engrave the symbol for a Potions master on this band?"

"Ten minutes, I'd say. It costs fifty Galleons extra to do that, however."

"That won't be a problem. I'll take it."

"And you, young miss?" he asked Ginny.

Looking to Hermione, she said, "Well, I think this one would suit." She pulled out a white gold band with a square cut emerald in the center. It just screamed Draco to her. "With maybe an M monogrammed into the stone?"

"Yes, it can be done as well. Payment first, ladies."

"Ginny!" Hermione hissed quietly. "Can you afford that?"

Lifting her chin as Hermione had seen Ron do countless times when his back was up about money, Ginny told her, "I've some money put by."

"You mean the money you've been saving for that new broom?" When Ginny nodded, Hermione said, "Oh, Ginny, are you sure you want to spend this much?"

"Well, he is sacrificing a lot to save me. It's the least I can do. It just feels right to me, Mione." She didn't add that she felt guilty because she was dreading...to the point of sickness...the thought of sleeping with him. Ginny felt she owed him this much at least.

"Okay, let's do it then."

After they'd paid and were assured that the rings would magically alter themselves to fit the finger, both girls left happy.

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The binding ceremony took less than thirty minutes. They'd married on Hogwarts grounds by the lake, surrounded by friends and family, with the exception of Ron and Harry. Their absence put a heavy weight around Hermione's and Ginny's hearts. They were greatly missed.

The brides' looked lovely in their silk robes. Both Severus and Draco wore black dress robes. One had a scowl and one was smiling.

When they'd realized that the girls had actually bought wedding bands for them, the Potions professor and the DADA professor were both dumbfounded, not having expected that.

They had a small supper in the Room of Requirement, and then each couple went separately to their chambers.

Ginny nervously looked around Draco's rooms, as she'd never been in them before. She was stiff and aching and just wanted to sleep for a week. She was so emotionally drained that she felt like crying one moment and like this was all a dream the next.

Her shoulders tightened when she felt Draco's hands on them. "Relax, Ginny. I won't hurt you."

"I'm not worried that you'll hurt me. Why would I be?"

Raising both his eyebrows, he said, "No reason, you just seem a little anxious."

"I'm not. I *am* starting to hurt from this curse, though, so maybe that's why I seem so anxious to you."

"Okay, honey," her husband said, gently taking her arm and leading her to his sitting room, "just sit on the couch. Let me get you some champagne. Then you can take the Conception Potion that Severus gave us, and we'll get started. I think the pain stops once you conceive."

She jerked her arm from his grasp. "I can walk in here by myself. And to be honest, I'm not really sure I should have alcohol with this potion."

He looked slightly disappointed, then shrugged. "It's not a problem; we'll just have mimosas for breakfast! Now you just sit right here, and I'll be back for you in a second."

Ginny nodded and watched the fire as she swallowed her potion. This day felt surreal to her. She couldn't get the image of Ron crying out of her mind. Not only was her body hurting, but her heart ached as well. She knew she'd acted more nonchalantly with Harry than she'd felt, but what was she supposed to do? Neither Harry nor Ron could fix this for her or Hermione, so why should they all suffer? She shook her head and absently swatted the tears away. She was so tired of crying.

Draco walked into the room and held a hand out for her. "I'm ready. Come with me, Ginevra." She trembled at the intense look he was giving her *Why is he looking at me like that? He acts like he actually... wants me.*

She frowned when she walked into the bedroom. He'd turned the bedding down and revealed cream-colored silk sheets that he'd strewn red rose petals all over.

There were scented candles everywhere, some floating and some sitting on the dresser and nightstand. She saw an elegant green negligee lying across the back of a chair.

When Ginny cast her eyes to Draco, she noticed it was as if he were holding his breath, waiting for her approval. "What's all this, Draco?"

"Well," he started, "it's your first time. Your first time should be special."

"There was no need for all of this. No need for the trouble."

"Ginevra, it was no trouble. Believe it or not, I do want you to be happy."

She felt guilty and turned away from him. "I need the loo."

Pointing to a door, he told her, "Sure, right though there. Don't forget your gown!"

Exasperated, Ginny bit out, "I don't want to put that gown on. I'll be right back."

She shut the door firmly behind her as she entered the loo. Her stomach was in knots, and she was, yet again, fighting tears. This was going to be her first time making love, and it was going to be with Draco Malfoy. She felt bad feeling this way because he *had* gone to a lot of trouble, but her heart wasn't in it.

Why couldn't Harry have loved me and taken care of my pesky virginity? She wondered, not for the first time. *Well, he didn't, and there's no use thinking on that now. I just need to buck up, get out there, and do this.*

Sighing, she ran cold water over her face for her puffy eyes. She used the loo, washed her hands, and did a quick *Scourgify* on her body. That was all she felt up for. Gathering her courage, she opened the door and stepped out.

Draco stood there in a pair of silk pajama pants the same color as the negligee she'd seen on the chair. Her eyes rounded, and she just said, "Um..."

"There you are," he said softly, as if he was trying not to frighten her. "Come here," he requested and held his arms out for her.

She walked to him and looked up into his gray eyes. Draco cupped her face with his hands and bent to kiss her. When she instinctively turned her head and scrunched her eyes tightly, he took it in stride and started with her neck.

As he began backing her to the bed, her stomach started rolling with nerves. Ginny's brain was screaming *No! This is not right! You don't love this man!*

He mistook her tremble of queasiness for a tremble of passion. "Turn around, love. I need to get these buttons." His hands were shaking with nerves. He'd wanted everything to be perfect for her, his wife, on her first time. No other man would ever touch what was his, and Draco felt a sense of pride knowing that, so he'd wanted to reward her.

He gently slipped the robes from her body and carefully laid them on the chair so they wouldn't wrinkle. She wouldn't look at him. "Turn around, Ginny. I want to see your eyes."

She slowly turned and looked up at him. She was shaking and very pale.

"What is it? Are you having terrible pain?"

"No. No, that's not it. Do you think we could just do this? Get it over with?"

"Yes, it's time we got started. Here," he said as he knelt before her, "just let me get these for you." He removed her knickers and left them on the floor. As she hadn't been wearing a bra, she was standing before him naked while he still had his pajama pants on.

She brought a hand up to cover herself, and he told her, "There's no need for that. You're very lovely. I've thought so since my sixth year actually."

Her eyes widened and her mouth flew open. "I don't believe that. You were with Pansy Parkinson then."

"So? That doesn't mean I can't admire other beauties. And you, my dear, are beautiful."

She turned her face from him and said nothing. Deciding she wanted to get on with it, she got into the bed and waited. Suddenly, he started pushing his pants down and walked to the bed.

"I want you so much. I can't remember wanting another woman so much."

She turned away and took a shuddering breath. She didn't want to hear his praises of her. She had hated him since her first year when his father had put that blasted diary in her cauldron. Draco'd always been so nasty to her and her friends, and she couldn't turn years of loathing into lust in the blink of an eye. If she could have, she would've taken a dose of Lust Potion to get through it.

He tried to kiss her again, and she turned away. Not discouraged, he began to kiss down her body. Her stomach knotted more with each kiss. When he stopped at her curls, she quickly sat up and demanded, "Oi! What are you playing at down there?"

"Trust me; you're going to love this."

"No, don't." When he bent his head as if to continue, she said, "I mean it, Draco. Stop."

"What is it, baby? You all right? What can I do to make you more comfortable? I only want to make this special for you."

"It's just... Listen, there's no need for all of this; really there's not. Because nothing will make it special for me...not really. I don't love you, Draco, so I don't feel like I'm making love. I've always thought my first time would be with the man I loved, you know? I know we have to have sex to create this baby, so we can just skip all this romantic stuff and just get to it."

"Excuse me? Skip this? I don't think I want to. You know, there are two of us here, woman. Maybe needed all of this stuff. I'm not daft, Ginevra. I know that we're not in love. But you are my wife, and I wanted to do this for you. What do you do in return? Slap me in the face."

"Oh, my God," Ginny said more harshly than she'd intended because she felt guilty. Guilt was not an emotion she cared for. "Honestly! I don't want all this! You want me to feel something I don't!"

"You're wrong about that. I didn't expect you to fall at my feet, but I didn't expect a cold, unfeeling bitch either. Conceive this baby by yourself...I don't need this, and I don't need you."

He grabbed his trousers and a shirt and threw them on while Ginny sat on the bed, watching him wordlessly. Everything he'd just said was true. How could she have been so uncaring? He had gone to a lot of trouble, and she scoffed at every attempt he made.

She just couldn't help it; all of this felt wrong to her. It was wrong...everything was all wrong. But it was time to grow up and stop feeling sorry for herself. She was being ridiculous, and she knew it!

Still, she said nothing as he put on his shoes, picked up his wand, and stormed out of the room. She stayed where she was when she heard the door to his chambers slam.

Giving in to the pain of her body, mind, and spirit, Ginny curled herself into a ball on his bed and wept herself to sleep.

*** **

Hermione followed Severus to the dungeons, nervous and unsure. She wasn't a virgin, and she was glad of that, but before, she'd been with a boy. Severus Snape was all man.

He unwarded his door and moved to the side so that Hermione could step into the room. He still didn't speak as he walked directly into his bedroom. His silence was too unnerving for Hermione.

"Severus?" she called out.

"Yes, what is it?"

Hermione looked around the room, searching her brain for something to say. She hated that he'd just left her alone like this.

When a few moments passed and she still hadn't said anything, Severus moved to the bedroom doorway. She was standing in the middle of his sitting room, still wearing her wedding robes, frantically looking around as if something was about to jump out and attack her.

"Did you need something, Miss...er...Hermione?"

"Well, I was just wondering..." She moved her arms in a circle. "You know, when?"

"When?" he asked.

Snarky bastard! "Yes. When! Should I come into the bedroom? I've taken the Potion."

"I was going to grab a shower. Feel free to come in here or wait in the sitting room. This is your home now, too; you don't need my permission to move about."

When he walked back into his room, she decided to sit and wait. She wasn't comfortable enough to 'move about' just yet. When she heard the shower, she suddenly had the urge to go to the loo.

Absolutely refusing to go while he was in the shower, she went to the loo the students used. She was very happy school was not in yet. Still a couple more weeks before that.

After she was finished, her hands washed, and a Cleansing Charm cast, she left to go back to Severus' chambers. Hers now, too, she supposed. When she walked back in and re-warded his door the best she could, she noticed the shower was no longer running.

Risking a peek, she was happy to see that he was still in the bathroom. Quickly, she used her wand to get her wedding robes off, took off her knickers, and jumped into bed. She pulled the covers up to her chin and made sure all of the candles had been extinguished.

She was so nervous, her teeth were chattering. When the bathroom door opened, she sucked in a breath. It was time.

In a rough voice, Severus said, "*Lumos!*" Turning to look at his bride, he told her, "I understand that you wish total darkness, but please allow me to get into the bed without breaking my neck."

"I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking about that. I only thought to..."

"Keep it dark so that you can't actually see my face?"

"No! That thought never even entered my mind! It's just that I am nervous, and I thought having the lights off would help me."

"What are you nervous about? You told me you're not a virgin."

"I'm not! But I've never been with *you*, have I?" She didn't bother to tell him she'd only been with Ron two times.

Eyeing her intently, he conceded. "Too right. You haven't." Without saying another word, he walked to the bed. Smirking at the blanket pulled to her chin, he asked, "Do you wish to turn out the lights now?"

She nodded, and he complied. After a few moments, she felt the bed dip and knew he'd gotten in beside her. They lay side by side nearly a minute, neither of them moving or speaking.

"We have to do this, Hermione. It cannot be avoided."

"I know that! I'm not trying to avoid it; I'm just waiting for you to... do something!"

Taking the lead, Severus leaned over and gently kissed Hermione, sucking her bottom lip into his mouth teasingly. She let out a small gasp of pleasure that encouraged

him.

He nibbled his fill of her mouth and then moved to her throat. Severus had a sudden urge to mark her, but fought it back. He didn't want to give the gossips more to talk about.

"Mmm," she hummed when he moved his lips and tongue to her breast. She hadn't meant to make a noise, but that just felt so good.

"Do you like that, Hermione?" he wanted to know.

"Yes, it feels good." Hermione didn't feel as shy in the darkness, though she'd had a bad moment or two thinking about just whom she was shagging. It was hard for her to separate Severus Snape the dreaded Potions professor with Severus Snape her husband, but she was determined to make this good for the both of them.

Feeling emboldened by her positive responses, he moved a hand down her belly and very gently brushed her curls. He wished he could see her eyes.

He began slowly rubbing her outer lips, enjoying teasing her. It'd been a while since he'd had a woman, and he was going to make the best of this. He wasn't sure when she'd want to have sex again.

She began to move against his hand without realizing it. She shuddered with need, wanting him to use his fingers and relieve some of the pressure building in her center. She grasped his shoulders and slightly raised her hips.

He chuckled. "Want something?" Damn, he was enjoying this.

She opened her eyes, but realized he couldn't see her. She didn't know it would be so dark in the dungeons, but of course it was. Suddenly, she wanted to watch her husband's face, but was too afraid to say it.

"Tell me," he demanded. Knowing he was doing this to her was extremely erotic to him. Getting frustrated because she was suddenly silent, he said, "Say it, Hermione. Tell me what you need, and I will give it to you."

"I need relief," she whispered, embarrassed. "From this ache."

"Where? Where do you want me to touch you?"

Rather than speak, she grabbed his hand and placed it where she needed it. After that, she rubbed against him, unknowingly provocatively.

With a small growl, he inserted a finger and felt her body hum from the pleasure.

"Yes," she said. "More!"

He inserted another, then pressed his palm to her clitoris. She tightened her grasp on his shoulders and threw her head back.

"Severus," she said quietly.

"Yes, I'm right here with you. Touch me, Hermione."

She blindly placed one hand on his chest and slowly moved down, happy to make him shudder for once. When she found his erection and stroked it, he kissed her hungrily.

"Yes," he hissed. "Just like that!"

Knowing that if he didn't stop her soon, it would be over, so he whispered in her ear, "Place me inside of you. I want inside, Hermione."

Saying nothing, she put the tip of him at her entrance and steadied herself. Pausing for the anticipation, he leaned down and kissed her once more.

As he ended the kiss, he slid home, groaning at the sensation of being inside of a hot, wet, tight woman. It thrilled him when she matched his pace, both moving in a steady, quick pace and chasing the pending orgasms that were already upon them, thanks to their caresses, and when he finally felt her tighten around him, Severus grabbed her hips to steady her.

After a few more thrusts, he emptied himself into her. Breathing hard, he immediately rolled off so that he wouldn't collapse on her.

She mistook his gesture, though, and rolled to her side, facing away from him. He frowned at the back that he could not see and decided to just sleep. He was sure she would not tell him what was bothering her, and he was too tired to try.

Hermione was thoroughly confused. During their... coupling, Severus acted as if he was completely into her. Then right after, he just rolled off like it was nothing. Hurt, she closed her eyes and let herself drift. The last thought before she succumbed to sleep was, *I'm pregnant...*

Christy's Notes: Whew! I hope you enjoyed this chapter! I feel bad for Ron; he really does love Hermione. Ginny really hurt Draco, but it was hard for her. Harry was confused, too, but he won't give Hermione and Ginny up.

The title of this chapter is a song by Air Supply from the year 1983.

Southern_Witch_69's Notes: Very good chapter. I think the reactions were believable, especially Ginny's, the poor thing. I also understand why the "boys" are upset and sympathize with them.

Angel is a Centerfold

Chapter 3 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Three

Angel is a Centerfold

Draco stumbled into his chambers three hours later, pissed off his arse. He'd gone to the Hog's Head to drink his troubles away, but the thing was, his troubles seemed to fancy firewhisky, too.

He sat on the couch and sighed. After he'd left and had a few, he understood what his wife was trying to tell him...to an extent. No, they didn't love each other, and no, they didn't really know each other, but damn it all, he had tried. It wasn't as if he'd been the one to hex her!

Being a virgin made things a little more difficult for her. He supposed that all girls had some sort of fantasy about their first time with the man that they loved. He leaned back, rested his head on the back of the couch, and closed his eyes.

Not only had they not been in love but they'd also spent all of their time at Hogwarts as students loathing each other. Well, to be fair, he'd loathed her brother, Potter, and Granger. She'd just been an unfortunate bystander. But he understood that she'd loathed him.

As he was drinking, he remembered what happened her first year and the part his father played in that. Just another strike against him. But hadn't he done all that he could to make up for that? Hadn't he gone all out on the room, the flowers, and the candles? Didn't he buy her an expensive negligee? He'd been gentle and caring. What more did the chit want from him?

Thinking about it stirred his anger once more. Knowing that the conception needed to happen tonight since she'd taken that potion, he stood and headed for the bedroom. *She wants a fuck only? Fine. I'll fuck her then.*

He slammed open the bedroom door, and noticed everything was the way he'd left it, spiking his anger up to fury. *Stupid cow could've gotten rid of all this shite, as she'd obviously hated it in the first place.*

He used his wand to put the candles out and Levitated them to the fireplace. Once inside, he started a fire and watched them start to burn. The second thing to go into the fire was her negligee. The rose peddles followed. When he lifted her wedding robes, he stopped. He couldn't bring himself to burn them, so he threw them on the floor.

He looked at the bed and truly saw his wife for the first time since he'd entered the room. She was curled up on the bed in a ball, as if in self-protection, and the tear tracks were still on her cheeks. He felt a momentary clutch around his heart but then hardened it. This was what she'd wanted. He snorted. *Probably thinks I'm going to let her die. It would serve her right if I did. Icy bitch. Must have ice water running through her veins.*

He walked over to the bed and started undressing, never taking his eyes off of her. He noticed she hadn't bothered to get dressed, only pulled the covers over her. As he watched, she trembled. *That's right. Tremble, little girl. You'll do more that tremble when I'm done.*

After he'd finished undressing, he grabbed the covers, jerking them off of her. She jumped up, startled. Looking around in confusion, she finally spotted Draco, and her relieved look amused him. "Draco? What are you doing?" She suddenly realized she was sitting there naked and uncovered, so she immediately tried to cover herself. He wouldn't let her.

"Draco, what's the matter with you? I..." She fumbled for words when she noticed the look on his face. Gone was the loving and romantic Draco. She couldn't say who this Draco was. She felt horrible for the way she'd acted. She couldn't help how she'd felt, but he had only been trying to make her first time special for her. She'd told herself that if he came back tonight, she would do everything in her power to make things up to him.

"I need to fuck you, Ginevra. You have to conceive tonight. Now budge up."

She silently moved to the center of the bed so that he could get into it. He could tell she was afraid, and he reveled in it. "I tried to do this my way, and you wanted no part of it. So now, we'll do it your way."

She nodded and lay down. He looked at her lips and desperately wanted to taste her, but he refused. If she wanted to be treated like a Knockturn Alley whore, then he'd treat her like one.

He let his gaze roam up and down her body in a leering way. When she tried to cover herself again, he took the bedclothes and threw them to the floor. "Oh, no, *my* dear wife. There is no modesty in fucking, you see."

She turned her face away from him in embarrassment, and he roughly grabbed her chin, turning it back. "You will not turn away from me again. Understand?"

She said nothing, only watched him. He knew she was afraid; he could see it in her eyes. *Good. Be afraid. This will be as cold and unfeeling as you are.*

He grabbed himself and began to stroke, making his semi-hardened cock fully erect. He watched her gaze drift to it, and this time there was no mistaking the fear. He smirked. "Better get used to that. You are about to become very intimate with this cock." The crudeness suited his feelings.

She started to turn her face away again, and he watched with satisfaction when she caught herself at the last minute. He quickly laid himself between her thighs. "I would say this won't hurt a bit, but I'd be lying. I'm sure this will hurt quite a lot."

He positioned himself at her entrance and started to thrust in without bothering to check if she was ready, but he made the mistake of looking down at her face. Her big

brown eyes were open wide, and one lonely tear slipped out of the corner of the left one.

What am I doing? This isn't some whore...this is my wife! What is wrong with me, treating her like this because she hurt my pride! Dear Lord, she'll never want me again, and I don't blame her. Undone, he laid his forehead on hers. "Ginny. I'm sorry, baby. Don't cry." He leaned in to lick the tear off her face.

She looked up then into his eyes. He slowly lowered his head as if to give her time to turn away. When she didn't, he kissed her gently. When she hesitantly responded, he licked her lips with his tongue, coaxing her to open her mouth. When she complied, Draco lazily thrust his tongue into her mouth and tangled it with hers.

She unknowingly put her hands on his shoulders as she began responding to his kiss in earnest. He moved from her lips to her jaw and traced it with his tongue. Her breathing quickened, and he moved to her collarbone. He kissed the left side and moved his way to the right, leaving wet, open-mouthed kisses as he went.

She began moving just a little. Enough to let Draco know that he was having an effect on her. He moved down to her breast and licked a circle around the outer part before he laved her nipple. Her breathing became shuddered, and her moving became a bit more frantic. He moved to the other breast and lightly nipped her hardened nipple. She let out a long moan of pleasure, and he stopped to look at her face.

"Draco," she whispered breathlessly. "I'm sorr..."

"Ssh. Don't." This time he couldn't stop the ache spreading throughout his chest. "Kiss me, Ginevra," he pleaded. "Kiss me like you want me."

She placed a hand on the back of his head and pulled him down to her. When he was only inches from her mouth, she whispered, "It seems that my body has made the decision for me. I do want you." She rose the last few inches and placed her mouth on his in an impassioned kiss.

He lost all train of thought. He'd wanted her so badly and now he had her. He was the one who trembled when she moved her hand up and down his back. "Draco," she moaned, "I don't..." She began lightly thrusting her hips, instinctively searching for release. "I need..."

"I've got you, baby. Just hold onto me." She placed her hands on his shoulders once more as he slowly moved his hand down her belly. He started to curse his drunken state, knowing he would not be as smooth as he wanted to be, and that likely it would end things sooner. He very tenderly cupped her center and inserted a finger.

"Oh, my," she said as he moved his finger around. He knew that even though it felt good to her, it was not enough, so he slowly inserted a second finger and began stroking her a little harder, pressing his palm flat against her. "Ah, Draco, don't stop! Whatever it is you're doing, keep doing it!"

He smiled with satisfaction as he pleased her. He wanted to pleasure her, to be good to her, and hopefully, to eventually love her. When her eyes widened and her mouth formed a big O, he knew she was close to tumbling over the edge of bliss. When he felt her tightening around his fingers, he thrust into her.

He grabbed the pillow on either side of her head and squeezed his eyes shut, trying to last through her orgasm, which was hard to do, as she was so tight and wet and throbbing around him. She'd reflexively grabbed his arse and pulled him into her further after she'd gotten over the first shock of pain. When he felt her coming down, Draco began to slowly move inside of her.

He locked his gaze with hers and watched each expression with fascination. Pain. Shock. Pleasure. It wasn't until she returned his gaze that he thought there may be a little acceptance in her eyes as well. When he felt that he could hold off no longer, he lowered his head and kissed her as he emptied himself into her. "Ginny..."

She placed her hands around his back and hugged him gently. He rose up on his hands so that he wouldn't crush her. "All right?"

"Yes," she told him, not exactly sure what she felt. She was surprised she'd felt such pleasure from him. She had all but convinced herself that she would feel nothing, and afterwards, she thought there'd be a hollow feeling inside. Instead, there had been intense pleasure, and inside her was a steady glow. "I don't know what to say..."

Moving beside her and pulling her close, her husband told her, "Don't say anything. Just rest." He kissed the top of her head and closed his eyes.

She placed a hand on her belly before snuggling a little closer to her husband. Tomorrow would come soon enough.

*** **

For the second morning in a row, Hermione woke up alone in Severus Snape's bed. She felt a little disappointed by his absence and couldn't figure out why. She lay there, staring at the ceiling, remembering the events of the night before.

Sex with him had been a pleasant surprise once she'd gotten over the fact she was shagging her ex-Potions professor. Her face reddened while remembering what he'd wanted her to say to him during...ask him for the things that she'd wanted. She couldn't believe she'd acted so... wanton! Or how exciting it had been.

But afterwards, he'd just rolled off of her. Not that she'd imagined he would want to snuggle or anything, but to just say nothing... It made her feel cheap. And it had hurt her. She sighed. She was probably just overly emotional after the fight with Ron and Harry yesterday. Ron. She hated the fact that this had hurt him so badly. Harry too.

Idly, she lifted her left hand and looked at the wedding band that Severus had placed there the day before. This was the first time she'd really looked at it since she'd received it. It was a simple band of white gold encrusted with small diamonds around it. It was really rather lovely.

Wanting a shower, she rose and headed for the extra wardrobe she'd noticed. Just as she'd suspected, her clothes were neatly hung or folded and placed inside. After grabbing a pair of clean knickers and a bra, she found her comfortable jeans and a light jumper before warding herself in the loo. She wasn't quite comfortable enough to have her husband walk in on her while showering as she'd seen her parents do.

Freshly showered and dressed, Hermione walked out of the bedroom to spot her groom sitting at a small table eating breakfast and reading the *Daily Prophet*. "I see you have deemed to finally grace me with your presence, Madam Snape."

She jolted at being called Madam Snape. It sounded odd to her. "It's not that late! It's only just after nine."

When she continued to stand in the same spot, Severus lowered the paper and asked, "Will you be joining me, or are you planning on standing there and watching me eat all morning? You know, this watching me is becoming a habit of yours. First while I was sleeping and now while I eat. Am I quite safe from you, do you think, Madam?"

Hermione blushed deeply, turning her face away. "Yes, quite, I assure you, sir." She'd been more formal in her speech than she normally would have due to her embarrassment. She moved to the table and sat down. After viewing her choices, she filled her plate with eggs and bacon and began to eat.

Severus was still watching her and making her uncomfortable. She slammed her fork down and asked, "What is it? Do I have egg on my face?"

"I was wondering how you're doing? Are you feeling all right?" he asked in a concerned tone.

She wanted to brush off his question because she was not sure exactly what he was asking her about. "I feel fine. Why do you ask?"

"After last night, you seemed... Well, you didn't seem fine. I just wanted to make sure that you are."

This angered her, so she replied in kind. "You mean I didn't seem fine after you'd just rolled off of me and then dismissed me without so much as a thanks? Is that what you're referring to?"

He very slowly, very deliberately, set the paper on the table and turned in his chair so that he sat face to face with her. "I most certainly did not dismiss you. And obviously,

you are indeed bothered."

"Whatever you say," she said with pain in her voice as she started to rise. He grabbed her wrist to keep her seated.

"After we'd finished," he began to explain, and she wanted to crawl under the table from total humiliation, "I moved myself from over you so that I would not collapse on and crush you. When I'd gotten settled, you'd turned your back. I wasn't sure if you'd wanted me to speak with you or perhaps just go to sleep, so I said nothing."

"I'm sorry. I just assumed..."

"Yes, and what did I tell you about assuming things where I am concerned?" he asked condescendingly.

"Touché," she replied. "But you need to realize, it's hard when you've known someone for years and already have an opinion formed not to make some assumptions."

"I understand that, Hermione, but you have to remember, you've only known me for years as a teacher. A harsh teacher at that. Now while I'm not saying that I'm an easy person, I will say that I am not the same *type* of person outside of the classroom."

"All right. Just don't expect me to change anything overnight. We are both going to have to get to know each other better. As a matter of fact, you've only really known me as a student. I know you must have opinions formed from that."

"Agreed. Now," he said as he was rising, "I need to go to my office to start preparing for the new school year."

"What all will you have to do?" she asked, genuinely interested.

"Today, I will be working on new syllabi."

"Why don't you just use the ones you had last year?"

Severus raised an eyebrow and looked at this wife. "Because, Madam Snape, I like to change things up so that the students won't know what to expect from me. It keeps them on their toes."

Hermione wondered if he liked hearing the words 'Madam Snape,' as he kept referring to her as that. "Need some help?" she asked hopefully.

"Certainly not. I will no doubt finish much faster working on my own." She noticed that he glanced down at his ring.

"I hope you didn't mind about the ring. When Professor McGonagall told me you'd probably just buy your own, I thought this was something I could do considering you'd paid for everything else."

"No, I don't mind. I wonder, what made you think of the Potions master symbol?" Severus had received little pins and such when he'd become a Potions master, but refused to wear them on his robes as a lot of other teachers had done. He suspected that Flitwick would fall over from all the ones he wore one day. But he felt that on his wedding band, it was appropriate.

"I wanted to get something that reflected you. Say, had you all ready bought yourself a band?"

Severus looked up into her eyes and almost smiled. That was one of the kindest things she'd said to him so far.

"Indeed, but it was no problem to return it by owl this morning. Now, I want to go get started so that I am not in my office all evening."

"All right. I'll see you later then." Hermione smiled. He seemed pleased with his ring.

"Good day, Madam." He told her as he walked through his study to go to his office through his chamber entrance.

*** ** *

Lucius Malfoy had just returned home from a two-week bout at his château in Paris with an Italian Playwizard model. He'd accompanied her there on a photo shoot, and he was utterly exhausted.

Since Narcissa had died, he'd been a very sought after wizard. Playwizard had done an article on him, naming him one of the top fifty bachelors in the Wizarding world. That was how he'd met Sophia. She was doing a photo shoot in London the day he'd gone there for an interview.

They'd wanted to do a double feature with him and Draco, but his son had flatly refused. Lucius grimaced. He knew that Draco didn't approve of how he lived his life. But what did the boy expect him to do? Live a life of celibacy because his wife had died?

Lucius knew that he'd never love anyone again as he'd loved his wife. That's why he decided he'd never remarry. But a dalliance or two every once in awhile... Well, that was another matter all together.

His mind drifted back over the past couple of weeks to one night in particular when Sophia brought her friend Giselle to his room. What a lovely evening that had been.

Thinking of threesomes made him think of Severus. Oh, what fun they'd had in their younger years! *think it's time Severus got back into the dating pool. He could use a bit of how's your father, I'm sure. It's likely been years for the old chap. Perhaps I will owl him and Draco for lunch this week.*

After he'd fixed himself a brandy, he sat in his favorite chair by the fire to read the back issues of the *Daily Prophet*. Picking up the first one on the pile, he flipped through it. This went on for a couple of issues until he came upon one that caused him to choke on his drink. The headline all but burst off of the page:

Ginevra Weasley, the Next Minister of Magic Arthur Weasley's only daughter, marries the heir to the Malfoy throne, Draco Malfoy!

"What the fuck is this shite?" He skimmed down the page and read how it had been a small, intimate ceremony at Hogwarts. "Did the boy knock that chit up? Likely so, even after all of the Contraceptive Charms I've taught him. Damn and blast! To taint our bloodline! To mix us with paupers such as..." Lifting his brandy glass, Lucius started to fling it against the wall and then stopped as a thought occurred. He placed his brandy on the table and rubbed his chin with his index finger and thumb.

"Yes... Yes, that could work. This could be my ticket back into the Ministry. To actually be related to the next *Minister*. Everyone knows he will be voted in. Perhaps I'll back him, publicly and financially."

Standing up and quickly walking to his desk in his study, he sat down to begin his plan. "I think a huge wedding party in a few months to properly start their union and show that I am supportive would be perfect. We'll have it right here at the manor."

He opened the drawer to his desk, took out a quill and some parchment, and began an invitation list. Only the crème de la crème would do for this shindig!

*** ** *

Draco threw open the pounding door with a very distinct scowl on his face. He'd been nibbling on his wife and was angry at the intrusion.

"Still in bed, are you?" Lucius asked, smirking at his son.

"Well," Draco drawled, leaning against the doorframe, "I did just get married yesterday. We are still... celebrating."

"Yes, about that. Not a word, Draco? I am your *father!*"

"Well, you had a previous engagement. In our *family* home in France. Besides, you wouldn't have enjoyed yourself. Not your type of people, Father."

"That's hardly the point. The fact remains that you are my son, and I should have at least been informed. I suppose I am to be a grandfather in a few months?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

Draco chose not to fill him in on the circumstances. "Yes, you are."

Sighing, Lucius said, "You should've known better, Draco. She is a *Weasley*, you know. Of course she would want to land a Malfoy, and she used the oldest trick in the book. However, it's done now, and there's nothing to be done for it."

"You're going to want to be very careful when speaking of my wife, Lucius. Very careful. And she's a Malfoy now, not a Weasley. It would do well for you to remember that."

Leaning in closer, Lucius asked, "You threatening me, boy?"

"As a matter of fact..."

"Draco? Was that Hermione?" Ginny asked as she walked into the room wrapped in a towel. She'd just gotten out of the shower. Laughing, she said, "Tell her I got a late start, and that it's your fault..." She stopped and stiffened when she saw who was in the doorway.

Giving a last menacing look at his father, Draco turned to his wife and smiled. "No, not Granger. It's my father."

Walking into the room as if he owned the place, Lucius extended his hand to his daughter-in-law. When she placed her hand in his, he surprised her by kissing it. "Welcome to the family... Forgive me. I seem to have forgotten your name."

"Ginny," she said.

"Ginevra," Draco said at the same time.

Smiling, Lucius said, "Ginevra. What a lovely name." Unable to stop himself, his eyes wandered down her towel-clad frame.

Feeling uncomfortable, Ginny turned to her husband. "Um, I'm going to get dressed. I am meeting Hermione soon." Turning back to Lucius, she informed him, "This isn't our first meeting. Good-bye."

As she walked into their bedroom, Lucius turned his furious eyes to his son. "The blue diamond, Draco? You would dare? You know very well that ring has been in our family for four generations! And what does she mean this is not the first time we've met? Of course she would know who I am, and I realize that she is Arthur Weasley's daughter, but..."

"Well, to address your first complaint, the blue diamond was handed down to me to do with as I saw fit. I saw fit to bestow it on my wife." Inwardly pleased he was angering his father, Draco continued.

"Don't you realize who she is, Father?"

"I just told you..."

"No, not only Mr. Weasley's daughter. Do you not remember putting that diary into her cauldron her first year? She almost died."

Oh, for Merlin's sake! How was he supposed to remember every little thing he'd done? Really! Yes, well, let's leave the past in the past, shall we? Now, I've decided to throw a wedding party for you and your wife. I am thinking right before Christmas where you'll have time off from this... job."

Draco started to protest, and Lucius threw up a hand to stop him. "I really must insist. Don't argue with me on this, Draco. I've already started the preparations. It's unseemly enough that I didn't attend the ceremony...I will have this."

"Fine. Whatever you want."

"Good. It's settled then. You and your wife can stay the weekend at the manor."

"Just mind how you look at her, and watch your manners. I won't have you... leering at my wife like a dog in heat."

Stepping very close to his son, Lucius informed him, "I believe that it's you who needs to mind your manners, boy. I won't tolerate your speaking to me this way." With a satisfied glint in his eyes, he noted that his son backed away slightly.

Backing off, Lucius added, "I am going to go visit Severus. See if he wants to make a weekend of it on his next one off. Bye, Son."

Smiling, Draco said, "Yeah. You do that."

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In a good mood, Hermione walked towards her husband's office. She was going to enter through their study as she'd seen him do. She wanted to let him know she was going to meet Ginny.

Just as she reached the door, she stopped as she'd heard voices.

"... Sophia, the Playwizard model?"

"Yes, Lucius, I do know of whom you speak. Very nice, as I recall."

"Oh, indeed she is. I barely rested the whole time I was there. That's one of the reasons I returned home."

Well, really! Hermione thought as she unashamedly listened to her husband and Lucius Malfoy wistfully discuss that woman.

Severus smirked. "How hard for you, Lucius. What a tedious life you've been leading."

Laughing out loud, Lucius said, "Indeed. Indeed, it is. Now, speaking of my life, I have to wonder something. Why is it that nobody informed me of my son's nuptials?"

"Well, for one thing, it all happened so fast," Severus started to explain. "And truth be told, it was for Draco to do if he wanted you there, Lucius. I refuse to get involved in your feud."

"I'm not asking you to, *friend*, just asking for some common courtesy. I should've been there!"

Well, it's not Severus's fault that Draco wanted to exclude you! Hermione fumed.

"And Weasley's daughter? You should have stopped it or at least talked them into postponing until my return! I've found a way to use this to my advantage, however, so at least I can salvage some of this wreck."

How good for you! So unselfish! Hermione couldn't believe this man's audacity.

"Well, under the circumstances..."

Waving his hand impatiently, Lucius said, "Women get pregnant everyday. It's not like a week or two would've mattered."

Leaning back in his chair and studying his oldest friend, Severus asked, "Have you spoken with Draco? Do you know the situation?"

"Yes, I went to see him before coming here. He informed me that I am soon to be a grandfather."

He doesn't know! I hope Severus doesn't tell him!

"I see. Well, that's true enough."

"Enough of this droll talk, Severus. I've informed him that I will throw him and his wife a party before Christmas. I expect you to attend."

"Oh, I wouldn't dream of missing it," Severus assured him.

Outside the door, Hermione smiled at the sarcastic tone her husband used.

"In the meantime, what say we make a weekend of it on your next one off? It's been too long for you...you're in desperate need of a woman."

Excuse me! Draco must not have told his dear old dad that Severus is married to me!

"You think so, do you? Well, actually..."

"Yes, I do. We could go to my château and meet back up with Sophia. She's into threesomes. Had a lovely one with her friend Giselle while I was there. It reminded me of you."

WHAT? Hermione closed her eyes and took a shuddering breath.

"Mmmm, yes, those were the days," Severus said nostalgically. "I do remember that one time with Avery's sister. Now she was a hellion!" Shaking his head, he said, "I thank you for the offer, but no, I cannot."

Oh, thanks for taking the time to remember me...your wife...during your lustful little walk down memory lane!

"Of course you can, old man! Trust me, you'll feel better for it, and by the time we are finished with you, you'll be thanking me profusely."

"No, I can't Lucius. You see, while Draco was marrying Miss Weasley, I..."

"Severus, I wanted to let you know that I'm going to see Ginny and... Oh, excuse me. I didn't realize you had company," Hermione lied. She'd heard enough.

"Oh, that's the way of it then, eh? Got yourself a bit of... A... Well, what do you call her, Severus?"

Crossing her arms over her chest, Hermione informed Lucius, "Most people call me Hermione!"

"I, however, call her wife. This is my wife, Lucius, Hermione Granger Snape."

"Well, good God, man! Has the whole world gone mad? You too? And not a bloody word?"

"Yes, the same day Draco wed," Severus informed him.

"I see."

"Yes, I believe you do." Turning to Hermione, Severus said, "You are going somewhere with Mrs. Malfoy?"

"Yes. I just wanted to let you know in case you came back in for lunch. I won't be long."

"That's fine. I'll see you this evening."

Nodding, she turned to Lucius. "Good day, Mr. Malfoy." And she turned and walked out without a backwards glance.

"Oh, dear," Lucius said with mock concern. "I do believe she heard us."

"Oh, bloody hell!" Severus said. "I think you're right!"

Christy's Notes: Glad Draco came to his senses there at the end and didn't hurt Ginny! Also glad that Severus and Hermione worked things out. Lucius is a troublemaker, I say!

The title of this chapter is a song by the J Geils Band from the year 1982.

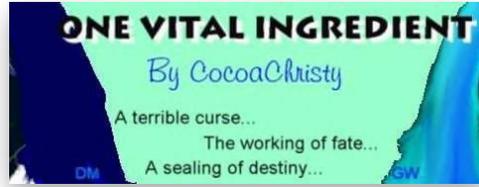
Southern's Notes: Snicker! I wonder what she'll do with what she overheard.

For Your Eyes Only

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, *Southern_Witch_69!* Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Four

For Your Eyes Only

Hermione stood in front of her full-length mirror in the bedroom she gladly shared with her husband, studying her body. She wasn't worried that Severus would come in and catch her; he generally stayed in his office until nine or later marking essays and the like.

She was looking for a solution to a slight problem nibbling at her. It had only been a week since she'd been married, and her husband hadn't touched her since their wedding night. When they'd made lo...er, shagged, she'd thought it had been wonderful and thought that he'd felt the same...or at least he'd hinted at it during their conversation that following morning. Obviously, she'd been mistaken.

They'd had plenty of lively conversations during breakfast for the past week on many different subjects. It seemed to her that the man could speak with at least a little authority on any subject that she brought up. Nothing for them was dull in that area. The more she was around him, the more interesting he became.

What really surprised her was the fact that she didn't long for Ron. They'd never had conversations about anything for any length of time that didn't involve Quidditch or his family. Looking back on her relationship with her ex, Hermione realized that they would never have made a long-term commitment work between them. They were just too different, and they'd never seemed to have the companionship that she and her soul mate had found.

She and Ron had argued more than not...and not the passionate let's make up in the bedroom kind. He certainly never challenged her intellectually or made her re-think what she knew to be true. Couldn't argue several different sides of one subject. All at once, it hit her. *We had to have Harry as a buffer! Alone, we never went fifteen minutes without an argument or hurt feelings!* That was a sobering thought indeed. She never would have found the easy companionship with Ron that she'd found with Severus.

She started biting her lip, as was her habit when nervous or trying to work out a difficult problem. She wanted her husband again, more than she actually cared to admit, but didn't feel comfortable enough making the first move. *How can I get him to make an advance when I'm not sure that he even wants me?*

It's weird that I never seemed to want Ronald this much. Actually, I never even thought of sex with him unless he initiated it, and then it was more of wanting to do it because I knew he wanted to. I never... ached for Ronald. Why is it then that after only a week I want Severus almost more than I want to take my next breath? She started to feel a little guilty, but brushed that feeling aside quickly. She didn't actually believe that Ron was truly in love with her, although she knew he did love her. *There is a difference between the two!*

Her brow furrowed when she'd started thinking of Severus again and remembered his talk with Lucius Malfoy. *Obviously, he enjoys sex. Threesomes. Really! But he must enjoy a certain... type of woman, and I don't fit the bill.* She'd found a Playwizard magazine and looked up the notorious Sophia. From his conversation with Malfoy Sr., he seemed not only to already know who she was, but liked what she looked like very much. Well, Hermione knew that she definitely couldn't compete with that perfect body.

Sophia was full and lush. Her breasts were big and her waist was small. Her hips flared out just the right amount to give her generous curves, and she had long, straight, shiny black hair. Her eyes had been the deep dark brown of her Italian heritage. She'd had a look on her face that seemed to say, 'I know what you want, now come and get it.' The woman was...in a word...gorgeous.

Hermione concentrated on her own face and body as she remembered that picture. She considered herself... plain. Nothing special. She wasn't flat-chested, nor was she overly busty. She was average, she supposed. Her waist was small, but her hips didn't really flare enough to give her any curves.

Although she'd learnt to tame the frizz, her hair was still very curly. Her eyes were a dull brown, not at all exotic like the illustrious Sophia. She tried a sultry look and laughed at herself.

She'd tried to look up Avery's sister in an old Hogwarts annual, but most had been destroyed, so she'd never found a picture of the mysterious ex-lover of her husband. She sighed. Hermione was never one to try to compete with other girls, but she really wanted her husband's attention. It amazed her how much she'd come to care about him in such a short time.

She remembered a conversation with her mother when she'd asked advice about Ron. Hermione had tried to be logical, but her mother had insisted that love was anything but. "You'll know it when you feel it, my dear. I have no doubt that you have strong feelings for the Weasley boy, but from talking with you now, I'd never say I can see love shining in your eyes. Love can build over time, or it can strike lightning fast."

Hermione had laughed. "Mum, I've never believed in 'love at first sight' or that you can 'just suddenly' fall in love."

Her mother had frowned at her then. "Well then, I'm sorry for you, dear. And hopefully, you will be proved wrong one day."

Suddenly, her musings were interrupted when the bedroom door burst open and the man of her distress walked into the room. She yelped, started to cover herself with her hands, and then stopped, as an idea occurred to her. *Well, here you have it, Severus. Do with me what you will.*

"Oh, um... Pardon me. I had no idea that you weren't dressed." He turned stiffly and started to go out of the door when she called to him.

"Severus! Wait a minute."

"It's no problem, Madam," he said with his back to her. "I will come back and speak with you when you are dressed."

"So, I'm right. I don't affect you whatsoever, do I?" She turned her face away and wished desperately she had a robe or something close by to cover herself with.

Severus stopped and really looked at his wife. She seemed so... vulnerable. When he'd walked into the room and saw her standing there, the stirring in his loins had nearly done him in. He'd known that he needed to make a hasty exit before revealing that. Not affect him? At the moment, he couldn't remember ever wanting a woman more.

"Yes, you affect me." He didn't want to elaborate until he heard more of what she wanted from him. He'd not be humiliated.

"Well then, why haven't you... you know... *ouched* me since our wedding night? I mean, I know I'm no Sophia or anything, but if you'd show me what you like, I'll try to please you." She laughed nervously, forgetting she was not supposed to know who Sophia was.

"For one thing, I wasn't sure my... intentions would be accepted. Secondly, who is Sophia? I am not sure who you mean." Then it hit him suddenly, and he raised his eyebrows. Lucius' Playwizard model. *So, she did hear us. Eavesdropped is more like it, the little chit.*

She chose to ignore his second statement, as she'd seen the realization in his eyes when he'd remembered who Sophia was, and address the first. She wasn't in the mood to talk about Sophia with her husband anyway. She was nervous enough as it was. "They would be," she informed him quietly. "Very much so."

"I see." And he was beginning to see more than she was saying. *She's insecure about herself. I should have noticed before.*

"Hermione," he said, deciding to use her first name, as it sounded more intimate, "have I ever given you any reason to believe that I think you're not attractive?"

"I can answer that in four words. *I see no difference*"

He immediately knew what she was referring to and cringed. *Damn and blast! Will everything from my past forever haunt me?* That's not entirely fair. You were very young and my student. Let me re-ask the question. Have I given you any reason *since we've been married* to believe I find you unattractive?"

"Other than not wanting to touch me? No."

"It's not that I haven't wanted to. I didn't know that you've wanted me to, and I didn't want you to feel obligated to... be with me because you felt you owed it to me. I'd rather relieve myself in the shower than have you under those circumstances."

The image of Severus masturbating in the shower popped into her mind, and Hermione flushed from head to toe, which was hard for her to hide, as she was standing there in her all together. "It wouldn't be that. Never that." She gathered up her courage. "I truly do want you."

Deciding there'd been enough words between them and that he needed to show her rather than tell her, Severus walked to her and stood just inches from her body. "Let me assure you, the feeling is very mutual, Hermione."

He leaned in slowly and gently pressed his lips to hers. She immediately opened for him, and he pulled her close. Content to hold and kiss her for the moment, he stood there and savored her mouth and arousing responses while rubbing his hands all over her soft, smooth skin.

She moaned slightly as she stepped in, wanting to be as close as possible to him. She felt completely lascivious standing there totally naked, kissing him while he was fully clothed. It was very titillating.

He struggled for control as she all but wrapped herself around him. *Lord, she is so responsive!* He never imagined he would be fortunate enough to find someone who would completely lower all of her inhibitions and fully accept him as he was. But that was exactly what Hermione was doing, whether she realized it or not.

Leaning in close to her ear and whispering, he said, "Let's move closer to the bed so that we won't fall, and I'll extinguish the candles for you."

"No!" she yelled and backed up only enough so that she could look into his eyes. "I want them lit unless *you* want it dark." She suddenly felt unsure again, so she averted her eyes.

"Hermione," he began patiently, "it's okay. I understand why you would want it dark."

"But I don't want it dark, Severus. Not at all. I love looking into your eyes when you are passionate about something we're talking about; they're so dark and brooding." Hermione lifted her hands to frame his face. "I would like to see how you look at me while we're..." She was becoming embarrassed and couldn't finish the sentence.

"Making love?" he finished for her.

She smiled shyly and nodded. She realized that her husband thought she believed he was ugly, but she didn't...not anymore. Not like she had when she'd been younger, and he'd been her mean Potions professor.

Now that she'd gotten to know all the different sides of him, she was more intrigued by him than ever. He was becoming more attractive to her everyday.

"All right then. If it's truly what you wish, we'll leave them lit."

She stood there silently, looking up at him with her big, warm, chocolate eyes. He smiled down at her and placed his hand on her face as he lowered his head and began to kiss her once again.

She reached up as he was devouring her mouth and started unbuttoning his robes, fingers shaking with the desire he was inspiring in her.

He moved his hand down her belly and brushed over her curls, never touching her where she was aching the most. Instead, he moved his hand to her thigh and began rubbing it from the top to as far down as he could reach.

Once she'd finished unbuttoning his robes and shirt, she pulled them down his shoulders and let them drop to the floor. Feeling emboldened from discovering he really did want her, she dropped to her knees to unfasten his trousers.

Looking up into the heat that seemed to radiate from his eyes, she gently laid her hand on his bulge and massaged. "Yesss," he hissed as he closed his eyes and rocked gently. She bent and gave him an open-mouthed kiss on his bulge over his trousers. His eyes snapped open as he looked down into her face. He shuddered with need.

Slowly, she unbuttoned the buttons and lovingly caressed him as he became revealed to her. "Severus," she whispered. She bent once more and kissed his flesh this time. "I want to taste you."

He couldn't speak. He was so awed and amazed by her and filled with such need that he thought he might explode at any moment. Severus simply looked down at her and laid his hands on the top of her head lightly, giving the lead to her.

Remembering that words seemed to arouse her husband, Hermione leaned down and, going by instinct, licked him from tip to end and back, then told him, "I've never done this before. I've never felt the urge to do this to anyone before you, and now, now I not only want to, but I have a *need* to. I have such a need for you right now, Severus. I don't fully understand it." She couldn't explain where this empowering need had come from; she only knew that it was.

He felt humbled. He'd wanted her to use her mouth on him desperately, but couldn't fight the need building inside *of him* any longer. Overwhelmed, he too went down on his knees and grabbed her somewhat roughly to him. "Hermione," was all he said as he dragged her mouth to his and feasted.

She lifted her arms around his neck and pressed herself into him, shaking and moaning. "I don't remember ever feeling this way."

"Yes, I know. I feel it, too." He lowered her to the floor, knowing he'd never make it to the bed, and allowed her to take him into her hand as he laved and nibbled her breasts. "At this moment, I feel as if I'll never have enough of you." He marked her this time, right on top of her heart.

She answered, so far gone in her passion she barely knew what she'd said. "I don't want you to. Don't stop, Severus. Never stop."

"Say it, Hermione! Tell me what you want, what you need." He wanted more than to just feel her desire for him...he needed to hear it.

"You...all I want is you. Filling me. Inside me. All around me. Come inside of me...now, now, now..." She chanted. She was lost in her desire for him, and he knew that at that moment, she thought of nothing else.

Half delirious himself, Severus thrust into her and stilled, looking down into her face. Here she was...*his wife*. Wanting and needing him. Suddenly, he had an urge to be tender.

He slowly moved inside of her as she lifted her legs to wrap them around his back. "Look at me," he demanded.

She opened her eyes, unable to do anything except follow his command. She became lost in his eyes and felt truly wanted by a man for the first time.

Oh, she'd known Ron had wanted her, but never like this. Never to the extent that it seemed as if he'd forgotten everyone and everything else. She'd always felt like she was being compared to others before her and found lacking.

With Severus, she felt like she was desired. Desired with nothing lacking. Hermione hadn't realized how much she'd needed to feel those things until now.

Severus tilted her hips and thrust in as deeply as he could go. He groaned and began to pick up the pace. He knew he was near the end, but he wanted her to finish with him. Circling her clit, he commanded her, "Come for me. Hermione, come for me!"

It was his voice that triggered it, and she came with a low satisfied moan. She clung to him as she felt him empty himself into her. When he started to roll away, she grabbed him.

"No, not yet. I'm not made of glass, you know."

He relented and stayed tangled up with her. After quite a few moments had passed, he told her, "Hermione, I am going to fall asleep. I need to move."

When she didn't answer, he asked, "Hermione?" Concerned because she was still quiet, he looked down and noticed that she'd already fallen into a satiated sleep.

Chuckling, he rolled off of her but immediately pulled her back against his chest possessively, not caring that they were still on the floor. Sighing happily, Severus drifted off for the first time with his wife contentedly asleep in his arms.

*** **

Ginny lay in bed, watching her husband sleep. It was hard for her to reconcile this Draco with the Ferret of days past. He'd been treating her respectfully and tenderly.

Nothing like the wedding night fiasco. She took half...or if she was honest, most...of the blame for his actions that night. He'd started out sweet and caring, and had she not hurt him, he would never have left that way. She was very glad he'd come back.

After having sex with him that first time, she'd been amazed and surprised that she could feel so extensively for him. What she felt though, exactly, she couldn't say. And almost every night this week, he'd wanted her. She smiled remembering. He sure was a lusty wizard.

She leaned down close to his neck and sniffed him. She loved the smell of him, all manly and sexy. She loved to lick him just there. He loved it, too, by his reactions when she did so.

Her brow furrowed as she thought of Harry. She was beginning to realize that she couldn't have felt the encompassing love that she'd believed. Oh, she knew that she'd loved Harry...there was no mistake about that...but it couldn't have been as deep and desperate as she'd thought. Before she'd thought of him constantly...most definitely daily...but this was the first time this week that he'd entered her mind. *Odd, that. I wonder if it's because of all the... sex I've been having with Draco.*

Now she seemed to be feeling... all mixed up over Draco Malfoy. Her husband. She knew that he had feelings for her, and that touched, as much as frightened, her. He'd told her once that he'd noticed her in his sixth year. She still found that hard to believe. He insisted it was true though. *But why?*

He sometimes brought her little gifts. Flowers once. Honeyduke's finest chocolates another time. A bottle of perfume and perfumed soaps and lotions. Her most treasured item was her personal monogrammed stationary. He'd told her that his mum had loved writing personal notes...thank yous, invitations, and such...on monogrammed stationary. Ginny could certainly see why.

His actions baffled her though. She kept trying to figure out his angle and what he was up to. On the surface, his feelings, whatever they truly were, seemed genuine. Not that she thought he loved her, but he did seem to care a great deal for her. But then, he'd been a Death Eater, and he knew how to lie about what he felt. She came to the realization that she didn't want it to be a lie because she was starting to care about him, too.

Even though she didn't know *exactly* what it was she did feel, she knew that this past week had been very nice and... relaxing. She smiled to herself again and stretched lazily.

Looking down into her husband's face, she gently stroked his hair, not wanting to wake him. Ginny loved both the color of his hair and, especially, his eyes. She could lose herself in his gorgeous, gray eyes. When he felt passion, they were dark and stormy, the way Ginny thought them the most beautiful.

She sighed. If she was not careful, she was going to develop some very deep feelings for this man. It was easy to tell herself that she could still control her feelings when it came to her husband, but she knew it was a lie.

Quietly, she slipped out of bed and went into the bathroom for a shower. She didn't want to wake him; he had to go meet his father in a couple of hours to go over wedding party plans. When he'd told her she didn't have to go with him, she'd proceeded to show him how thankful she was for it.

She still shivered when she remembered the way Lucius Malfoy had looked at her. She remembered feeling so happy that morning after the night she'd spent with her husband...until she had walked in and found Lucius Malfoy in her doorway.

For a moment, she couldn't move. When she looked at Draco's father, all she'd seen was the diary, and all she remembered was her first year and being responsible for all of those horrid things. Knowing that she'd hurt innocent people was worse for her than almost dying. He'd caused the same reaction in her when she and the others faced him at that Ministry. Then, he turned his eyes...Draco's eyes...towards her. The look in them made her feel like a helpless first year again, not someone who'd fought grown Death Eaters in a battle.

That look was all that it took for her to remember that she had been standing there in a towel only. Needing escape, she made an excuse and fled. As if walking away brought her out of her trance, she took her parting shot. She'd wanted him to remember exactly who she was. No, she'd never be comfortable around him. Thank God Draco seemed to understand that.

Turning on the shower and adjusting the water to the right temperature, Ginny stepped in and sighed in bliss.

Draco had been awake while his wife had been studying him. He knew she was starting to have feelings for him, and that made him happy. *just wish that I knew what she'd been thinking of so hard.*

When she'd leaned down to sniff at his neck, it was all he could do not to throw her on her back and devour her whole. Ginevra had never made the first move with him.

When his wife had tenderly stroked his hair, he felt a small bubble of hope form around his heart. He was growing on her. He wanted Potter out of her brain and...if he'd had his way...life forever. Draco was no fool. He knew that would never happen, but a man had to have dreams, right?

He decided to surprise his wife and slipped quietly out of bed. He walked into the bathroom, naked, as that was how they'd both been sleeping all week, and gently pulled the shower curtain back so that he'd not startle her. "Need your back washed?"

Ginny jumped a little and then turned to smile. "I wouldn't mind."

He joined her and just stood there, looking at her as the water ran lazily over her body. Having a shower together was something they'd never done before. She seemed to tremble a little under his intense gaze, so he lightened the look and smiled. "You look good wet, Mrs. Malfoy. I do so enjoy the view."

"Well, you're not so bad yourself, Mr. Malfoy. I thought there was a rumor going around about a back wash?"

"Oh, indeed." Draco smiled. She'd just recently started to flirt a little with him. She was still testing the grounds, he knew. That was fine with him, as they had a lifetime to figure it out.

He grabbed her bottle of body wash that he'd bought for her and poured some onto a flannel. Moving to stand a little closer, he began to gently wash her back and shoulders, then he moved down to her bottom...where he'd spent more time than necessary...before going on to her legs.

Ginny's head fell back as she closed her eyes in ecstasy while her husband washed her, and he hardened at the expression on her face. It was the face she made while making love. He gently turned her around.

He poured more body wash on the cloth and began with her front side, starting at her legs and going up this time. When he'd reached her center, she was just starting to feel the first tingling of arousal. Draco leaned in and kissed her there.

Her eyes snapped open. "Draco, what are you about?"

"I'm going to do what I've wanted to do since our wedding night. I am going to love you with my mouth here," he told her as he began to massage her, causing her arousal to move up a few notches.

She reddened and looked over the top of his head. "Oh, I don't know, Draco. You don't really have to do that. I can't even imagine that you *want* to do that..."

"Believe it. I want to do it. I want to taste you. Look at me, Ginevra," he demanded. When she looked down, he told her, "You're really going to like it, and I really want to do this."

She simply nodded and looked over his head again. He knew that she was embarrassed, but he would soon make her forget that and everything else.

He leaned in and started with her knee. When he moved to the inside of her knee, she involuntarily closed her legs a little more. "Spread your legs, baby." When she didn't move, he looked back up into her face. "Ginny, open up for me, okay?" She didn't say anything, only opened her legs a little. Draco smiled. "Just a little more." She did, but he could tell she didn't really want to.

He leaned back in and licked the inside of her thigh and slowly worked his way to her center, sucked easily on her clit, and moved to lick down the inside of her other thigh. When she gasped from the pleasure, Draco lifted his head so that he could see her expression. Her head was thrown back once more, and her eyes were closed. He smiled. *She's so beautiful.*

He grabbed her bottom and pulled her closer, and then leaned into her and used his tongue to torture her. He licked the outer part first before nibbling firmly but gently. She began to moan, and when he placed his tongue inside of her and moved it around, she cried out in pleasure. *Damn, I wish I could see her face!*

She began to rock her hips, just doing what came natural. Draco applied more pressure with his tongue, and then he moved it back to her clit as he inserted two fingers into her. His tongue and fingers moved together.

When he could feel her becoming close, he sucked hard on her clit and circled his fingers faster. She grabbed his hair and pulled as she came, calling out, "Oh, my God! Draco!"

When she finished, he quickly stood and grabbed her thighs. Lifting her up, he roughly thrust into her. She leaned her head back against the wall, wrapped her legs around him, and enjoyed the ride, as it was difficult for her to move.

Gray eyes met brown, and he never took his off of hers as he loved her. She lifted her head and kissed him, tasting herself mixed with his flavor. It was erotic to her.

Draco was too excited, so he knew he was never going to last. "I'm going to come, baby. I can't hold back."

"It's okay, Draco, let go. I've already... When you... Um, ah! Yes! Oh, that feels so good! You can..."

He came before she could finish her sentence. He placed his forehead to hers and closed his eyes. He was slightly disappointed because he'd wanted to make her have one more orgasm before he'd finished. He had never had any problems doing that before, but then, no other woman had ever excited him this much before.

"Baby, you're going to be the death of me." He lifted his head and shook it. He was still holding her up and was inside of her. Looking into her eyes, he told her, "I'm sorry."

Her eyes widened in complete shock. "What for? That was amazing." She wrapped her legs more firmly around his back, secretly glad that her husband was able to hold her up.

"Yes, you are too amazing. That is why I couldn't hold back any longer. You feel too damn good." His legs and arms were starting to tremble from holding her, so he gently put her back on her feet. "I wanted you to come one more time." He was almost petulant, but he caught himself.

"Well, we'll have to practice more to get it just right, eh? The way you want it?"

Kissing her, he said, "I have heard that practice makes perfect."

Suddenly serious, Ginny grabbed Draco's face with both of her hands. She'd noticed his expression and wanted him to understand. "Honestly, that was wonderful. *You* were wonderful. Nobody has ever made me feel this way, Draco. I promise you that."

That lifted his spirits immensely. He knew what she was telling him...that Potter specifically had never made her feel this way...and he was grateful. "It's the same for me. I just want you to know that, Ginevra."

She turned her face away so that they lost eye contact. "Sure," she said as she shrugged.

She didn't believe him, he could tell. "Let's get out of the shower, okay?" She nodded. They turned off the water, stepped out, and began to dry off. After they'd brushed their teeth, he started to walk out, but turned to her before he reached the door.

"Ginny," he called to her, and she looked up. "I know that I've been with others; I can't change that. But when I tell you that none of them have made me feel the way you do, I mean it. I wouldn't say it if I didn't."

He turned and walked out of the bathroom then so he could dress, wondering just what it was about his wife specifically that made that statement true. Draco couldn't pinpoint one single thing, so he left it at that. *Perhaps it's the soul mate thing...*

After he pulled his trousers on, he peeked back in the bathroom to see what his wife was doing. She was putting on the lotion he'd gotten her. That made Draco smile as he walked back to his wardrobe to grab a shirt.

When he'd finished dressing, he called out, "Ginny? I'm going to the manor now."

She walked out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. She'd magically dried her hair and then put her make-up on. Smiling, she walked towards him. Putting her arms around his neck, she kissed him long and deep. "Have a nice time, love."

When she started to move, he grabbed her and pulled her back, wanting to kiss her again. *She probably didn't even realize she called me love, but I don't care.* "Bye, baby."

When he left, she fell back on the bed and smiled. It was turning out to be a great day.

*** **

In a dank room above a bar in Knockturn Alley, two former Death Eaters sat and planned. "He'd pay plenty to get her back. He's got it to spare, too."

"Yeah, my sources tell me that he inherited all of his mum's money from her share of the Black fortune. Turns out, he got the Lestranges' half, too."

"You don't say! How?"

"Well, when they were kissed by the Dementors, Bellatrix's money went to her sister, Narcissa, per her will. Of course, in Rodolphus' will, it stated that all he had went to his wife. So, when they were kissed and since everything went to Narcissa, because she'd died in the war, it all reverted to her son."

"Fuck me! He's likely more wealthy than his old man!"

"I'd say so. And you remember how he'd talk about the Weasley chit some at those meetings. He wanted her, even back in school. Well, he wanted to fuck her anyway. I can't imagine why he'd marry her. I always thought he was for Pansy."

"Damn, man! Who cares about all that shite? I'm not here to gossip about that; I'm here to make plans. It will likely take a couple of months to work it all out. We need a place to keep her. Have to have food for her... Stuff like that. Have to study up on wards and the like so she won't be able to escape."

"You're right. I'll look in my father's old library. There's bound to be some sort of book we could use in there. In the meantime, you be looking for a place."

"Fine. We'll meet back here same time next week."

"Agreed." When his accomplice turned to go, he told him, "And be sure to find a comfy bed."

Laughing, the man replied, "Oh, mate. *That* goes without saying."

After the first Death Eater had gone, the second sat on the chair and looked out of the dirty window. "We're going to pay you back, you filthy traitor. And have a little fun with the wife in the process. Too bad we can't go for Snape while we're at it. He was the worst traitor of all."

He laughed just thinking about Ginny Malfoy. "Yeah, she's a looker all right. Wonder if you'll still want her after we've used her in every way possible? Bet not. Ah, well, mores the pity. Enjoy her while you can...I sure plan to."

Christy's Notes: Looks like feelings are coming to the surface for both couples. Mature, adult feelings are quite different from teenage lust. Hmm. Something wicked this way comes...watch out, Ginny!

The title of this chapter is a song by Sheena Easton from the year 1981.

Southern's Notes: Ah, moving right along then.

Misunderstanding

Chapter 5 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Five

Misunderstanding

Hermione lay in bed, smiling at the good luck she'd found herself in. She and Severus had been married for almost four months now, and not once had she ever awakened before him...until now. She lay on her side facing him, elbow propped, head in her hand. She was going to use this rare twist of fate to study her husband.

He was not a handsome man to most, she mused. His nose was too big, his hair was almost always greasy, although she appreciated the fact that he'd been washing it twice a day, once in the morning and then again before he came to bed. His teeth were a little stained and somewhat crooked, causing the 'daughter of dentists' that was forever inside of her to cringe. His skin was very pale.

And yet, there was something about him. Some sort of... sex appeal. Hermione Snape had come to the realization that she found her husband incredibly sexy. Since the night he'd walked into their bedroom and found her studying her naked body in the mirror, he'd made love to her quite a lot. They had never gone longer than three days without making love.

She smiled down at him and lightly traced his nose with her finger. She'd discovered he could do wonderful things to her body with that nose. She bent and kissed the tip. He didn't stir.

She raised an eyebrow in speculation. *Hmm. Interesting. I wonder what else I could... play with?*

Hermione very slowly and gently rose to her knees, watching her husband to make sure she didn't wake him. Gently making her way down the bed, she positioned herself between his legs. Looking up into his face once more, she pulled her nightgown over her head before she eased his pajama pants down, only to the top of his thighs.

She had been wanting to try this, but for some reason or another, it had never happened. Severus had sure tasted ~~her~~ everywhere, but when she'd start to taste him, he would always flip her over and thrust into her. Not that she minded. This was just something she'd wanted to do for her husband. Hermione knew he had to like it. From hearing Parvati and Lavender tell it, all men *loved* it.

She remembered one night in her dorm when those two had been very explicit. It was one of the only times that Hermione had truly listened to their conversation. They had been giving each other pointers. Being the know-it-all that she is, Hermione had remembered most of what they'd said. Now, it was time to put her 'knowledge' to use.

Taking a deep breath for courage, Hermione lowered her head and took her husband into her mouth. She suckled him lightly at first, until she heard his first deep moan of pleasure. After that, she added a little more pressure as she moved her head up and down, circling his tip with her tongue.

Is he awake yet? she wondered. Not sure, she started to nibble the underside of his penis while gently cupping his balls.

"Hermione," Severus whispered huskily as he grabbed her head with both hands.

Raising her eyes only, she looked up and found herself staring right into the black eyes of her husband. She wondered why she didn't go up into flames from the heat in those eyes. Saying nothing, she made a little humming sound with her mouth that had Severus trembling.

As he began to move his hips in time with her mouth, Severus laid his head back on the pillow. She gagged some from the movement, as she was not expecting that. He slowed his grinding a bit, but unconsciously pulled her hair tighter.

Her mouth was starting to ache, so she placed her hand on the bottom of his penis and pumped as she sucked the top. Even though she was getting tired, she didn't want to stop. It was unbelievably arousing to her knowing that she was giving her husband such pleasure.

He raised his head once more to watch her mouth on him, and then he noticed her hand creeping down her slightly rounded belly. His eyes widened as he watched her hand go under the elastic of her knickers to touch her clit. She closed her eyes as her excitement built.

Without realizing it, as she circled herself faster, she sucked him harder. When she started to shudder, Severus pulled her up and off of him. Hermione grabbed his thighs tightly as her orgasm subsided. Only after she'd come down did she realize that her husband had come with her.

Looking up into Severus' face, Hermione smiled, satisfied with herself. "Good morning."

"It most certainly is." He took his wand off the nightstand and cleaned them both. Raising his eyebrow, he asked, "What's gotten into you this morning?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just wanted to take advantage of the fact that for once, I woke up before you did. Thought I'd give you a little wakeup call." She grinned mischievously.

Stroking her hair, he told her, "I have to say, that is the best wakeup I've ever received."

She snuggled closer, taking advantage of one of the rare times that he held her while awake. During sleep, he always pulled her to him and slept with his arms around her, but very rarely did he do so while he was not sleeping.

"The best?" she asked.

"Without question. I am beginning to see the advantages of having a wife," he teased.

"Oh?" she asked as she pulled her nightgown back over her head.

"Indeed."

"Even better than say... a threesome?" She had wanted to ask him about that since she heard him and Lucius Malfoy talking about having them in their youth, but had never had the courage to do so. Until now.

Sighing, he said, "I've wondered how long it was going to take you to bring that up. I knew that you had to have heard us when you mentioned that model Lucius has been seeing."

"Yes, I listened," she admitted. There was no need in trying to lie about it now. "I hadn't planned to, but after I heard the content of your conversation, I was curious. I still am."

"You know what they say about curiosity, my dear."

"Did you have very many with Mr. Malfoy?" she asked, ignoring his slight warning.

"Hermione! I do not wish to discuss this."

"Were your threesomes with the one woman only, or did you and he have different ones?"

Giving in a little, he answered. "Mostly with just Annabelle." At her questioning look, he said, "Annabelle Avery."

"Oh. How about with Mrs. Malfoy? Did the three of you ever..."

"Only once, and we were all extremely drunk at the time. It was many years ago, Hermione. I don't want to talk about my Death Eater days."

"I have just one more question. Did you and Mr. Malfoy ever...er...do anything to each other? Did he ever..." She gestured with her hand. "Take you into his mouth, or did you ever take him into yours?"

After she'd asked the question, she wondered if she truly wanted to know the answer to it. She never could stop herself from seeking the answers to anything that she didn't automatically know. This was no different, but she admitted, if to herself only, some things were better left unknown. She just couldn't get the image out of her head and wanted to know...or she thought she did.

Severus jerked up into a sitting position. "Enough of this. There is no need for us to dredge up the past. These things happened before you and I were together, and I refuse to discuss it any longer. There are some things that a man does not care to discuss with his wife! This is most definitely one of them." He stood, pulled up his pajama pants that he suddenly realized were still around his thighs, and walked into the loo.

Was he blushing? Oh, my God. He was. Hermione closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

When he walked back into the room to gather his clothes before he took his morning shower, Hermione remembered what she had been discussing with Ginny the night before. They had decided that they were going to ask Severus and Draco about that night on the tower. They both really wanted to know the hows and whys of what had happened that night.

Hermione gathered what was left of her courage and said, "Well, there is another topic I would really like to talk to you about. One that I think is very important and is in no way related to threesomes. Would you please tell me about the tower and Professor Dumbledore?"

He froze. Slowly, he turned his head to face her and looked into her eyes. "No. I will not. Now, have you finished interrogating me this morning? If this is the price I have to pay for fellatio, I will gladly do without!"

She jerked back as if he'd slapped her. "Interrogating? I am doing no such thing! I just wanted to know..."

"Things that are *not* your business! You have no right..."

Hurt more than angry, she placed her hands on her hips and interrupted, "No right? I see." Not wanting him to see the tears in her eyes, she turned her face away. "It's just that I thought we were beginning to have a real marriage where we could talk to each other about anything. I thought you were beginning to trust me."

"Hermione," he said, exasperated, "we do have a real marriage."

She shrugged. "A true marriage where you'll only talk about certain things that you feel appropriate and the rest I'm not to bother you with?" Holding up her hand when he started to speak, she said, "I really do understand about you not wanting to talk to me about your past sexual experiences. That's okay. But I was hoping you could open up just a little about the headmaster. I know that it hurts you, you know. I wanted to help take some of the pain away. But I see now that I would be of no help to you there."

"I've never talked of it to *anyone*, Hermione, not just you. I... I can't."

"That's fine. Forget it." She turned to go use the loo before he could get into the shower. "It's just... Well, I didn't think I was just anyone to you anymore." She started to open the door.

"Hermione, wait," Severus called to her. He could tell that she was truly trying to make this a real marriage, and he discovered at that moment just how badly he wanted a real marriage with someone he could actually trust and possibly love. "Just give me time. I wasn't expecting you to ask about that. I *will* talk with you about it; I promise. I just need time first."

She smiled at him softly. "That's all I ask."

When she went into the loo and shut the door, Severus let out a breath he hadn't known he'd been holding.

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Draco stood in the doorway of his loo, watching his wife and feeling helpless. She was violently sick again. She'd been taking the Nausea Potion, and it did help some, but never the first thing in the morning. He sighed. Their sex life had been almost non-existent for the past month because she'd been so tired lately as well.

He wanted to go to her, but for some reason, she seemed to be embarrassed when she became ill. "All right, baby?"

Sitting up and resting her head against the wall, Ginny smiled weakly. "Almost. Thanks to the potion, I'm only sick about two times. Much better than the five or six that it had been before."

"Yeah," he agreed. "I suppose so." He walked to the sink to get her a cup of water. "And Granger is not sick at all, you say?"

Ginny smiled at him. "I don't know why that is such a sore spot with you, my dear. Our pregnancies are not some sort of contest. Thank you," she said as she took the glass he held in front of her.

"I know that!" he told her, irritated. "I just wonder why, that's all." He crouched in front of her, rubbing her hair out of her face. "I hate to see you suffer."

Taking a deep breath, she told him, "It's easing off now. Help me up? I want to brush my teeth and have a shower."

He took her hands and pulled her to her feet. On impulse, he hugged her to his chest tightly. "Are you still planning to go to Diagon Alley with Granger today for new robes?"

"Yes. I want something spectacular to wear for this party your father is giving us. Besides," she said as she patted her belly, "I can't really wear any of my old ones anymore."

Draco looked down at her stubbornly flat stomach. "I don't see why not. Not that I mind you buying yourself new robes, mind. I'm just saying you're not any bigger now than before."

She framed his face in her hands. "You're so sweet. I am a bit bigger, but not much. Don't worry," she said at his disbelieving expression. "Once I'm no longer sick, I will

become huge, and you won't find me attractive anymore."

"That would never happen. I'll always find you attractive." He leaned in to kiss her, and she gently shoved him back.

"I need to brush my teeth and have my shower. I feel... dirty."

Laughing, he told her, "Go on then. Do you think you could eat any breakfast? I can have some brought to us."

"I could try tea and toast, as long as you don't have a lot of greasy things for yourself."

"All right," he said, "tea and toast for two it is."

Draco ordered the light breakfast from a house-elf and lay back down on the bed as he waited. He grinned when he heard his wife singing in the shower. *Feeling better now, I see. Good.*

Shortly after the breakfast was spread out, Draco heard the shower stop and his wife drying off and applying her lotions. It was pure lust that hit him when she walked back into their bedroom naked. He was thankful she'd gotten used to him in these past few months.

Without realizing it, he sat up and began to stroke himself over his pajama pants. It had been a long time for them, and he was painfully swollen.

Ginny stopped in mid-stride and watched her husband. She'd only ever seen him do that once before and that was on her wedding night. Then, he was doing it to frighten her. This time, whether he knew it or not, it was arousing her. It was so erotic to watch him pleasuring himself. "Draco," she whispered.

"Mmmm," he answered. "Ginny, I need you. Do you think you can..."

Ginny was at the bed in three steps. She roughly shoved him down on the bed and straddled him, rubbing her center over his erection. The only barrier was the silk pajama bottoms that covered him. She bent and kissed him, nipping his bottom lip.

"Oh, God, baby." Draco didn't know what had gotten into his wife, but he didn't mind it one bit. He groaned when he felt her trembling from her own needs.

She slithered down him and jerked his bottoms off. He understood this would not be slow and easy lovemaking. This would be frantic coupling. They were both too needy from going too long.

She quickly straddled him again, and felt his thighs shaking between her own. She looked down into his eyes, brown meeting grey and kissed him again, more gently this time.

He grabbed her hips to steady her, but she was too lost and sank down on him. They both threw back their heads and groaned in unison.

She stilled and looked down at him, never having been on top before. "Ride me," he instructed. She smiled once and then lost herself in her husband.

He watched her love him, all her inhibitions lowered. She arched back and rubbed her hands over her breasts, pulling her nipples as she rolled them between her thumb and fingers. Her flaming red hair looked like a lake of fire as it hung down her back.

She started to move somewhat erratically. Knowing she was close, he placed one hand on her thigh and rolled her clit with the other. When she came, she let out a yell of triumph that caused her husband to go with her.

"Ginny, my God! That was amazing."

"Mmmhmm," she said lazily, quite pleased with herself. She stood, found her robe, and put it on. Teasing him she said, "You're not so bad yourself. I think I'll keep you." Ginny went back to the bed and sat down beside him.

"Oh, you do, do you?" He expertly flipped her to her back and kissed her thoroughly. "Well, you're in luck because I just may let you."

She laughed. "What will you do today while I am off shopping with Madam Snape?"

Draco winced. "Don't call her that; it's not right. I'm going to go and drag Severus out for some Christmas shopping, I think. My father wants to meet us for lunch in any case." He picked up his pajama bottoms and put them back on.

She made a face at the mention of his father, but chose not to comment. "I need to get some Christmas shopping done as well." Her face scrunched in concentration as she tried to remember how much money she had. Draco read both expressions.

Sighing, he told her, "Ginny, don't worry about Lucius. I would never let him harm you. Okay?" She nodded, but wouldn't look into his eyes. He grabbed her chin and turned her to face him. "I mean that."

"I know you do, Draco. Thank you."

"And, stop worrying about money, for Merlin's sake! We have more than enough!"

"You have more than enough," she stubbornly corrected.

"I see." He was hurt, and he didn't try to hide it. "So, when your father works, and your mum stays home, well, that's just his money then? That's how your family does things, is it? Must be hard on your mother when she needs something."

"Well, no, of course not! They have an account together with Gringotts and..."

"Yes? Do go on," he urged her.

"That's different."

"How?" Draco demanded. "How is that different? Ginevra, you're my wife! Don't you think it's high time you acted like it other than in the bedroom?"

If he'd punched her, she couldn't have been more shocked. "I don't... I didn't mean... Draco..."

"Think about it. You refuse my...our...money. We hardly ever go out in public, and when we do, you never touch me. You have been to the Burrow, and I've been to the manor, but we've not gone together...as a couple, I mean...and we won't until this party."

She lowered her head, her cheeks flaming. "Oh, Draco, I'm so sorry." She looked up then, eyes wet. "I never thought about any of that. I never meant to hurt you."

"Ginny, I just think it's time we started acting like a married couple and stopped being one in name only."

"And in the bedroom," she teased, trying to lighten the mood. When he only stared at her, she relented. "Yes, I agree. And I apologize. I never meant to make it seem less. I...I care for you; you have to know that."

He rubbed her arms. "It's okay. I do know that, but sometimes I like to be told or shown."

Raising her eyebrow playfully, she told him, "You have to admit, I did show you pretty well just now."

"No complaints there, I assure you." When her stomach growled, he laughed. "Think you can eat?"

"I could, but I don't believe I want cold tea and toast."

"Oh, Dobby cast a Warming Charm on it when he brought it in since you were in the shower."

"Well, in that case, bon appetit!" she joked and got down to the business of eating.

They ate in companionable silence for a while when Ginny asked, "Draco, when you were on the tower, what stopped you from killing Professor Dumbledore?"

He fumbled with his tea before finally setting it down. "What?"

"Well, Harry said that when push came to shove, he could tell you weren't really going to do it. Kill the professor, I mean. So, I was just wondering about it."

He sat back and roughly rubbed his hands over his face. "Oh, Potter said, did he?"

"Don't make this about Harry, Draco. And don't try to change the subject." She threw her napkin down testily. "If you don't want to answer, don't."

When she started to rise, he grabbed her wrist, remembering the little speech he'd just given her. "Because Dumbledore started saying things to me, and I was trying to figure out if I believed him or not."

She sat back down. "Things?"

"Yes. He was talking about protection for me, my mother. Even Father. Helping me find a way out. I knew that the Dark Lord was becoming... insane. More and more every day. With my father hell bent on doing every little thing he was told, I didn't feel like I had a choice."

"There's always a choice."

Draco snorted. "Easy for you to say, Ginevra. You have no clue." She started to speak, and he stopped her. "Your first year was horrid, I grant you, but it was nothing...nothing...compared to the real thing. You had a memory of a sixteen-year-old boy. I was dealing with a man. A monster, really, who got off on punishment and power."

She took his hand. "I'm sorry, Draco."

He shrugged. "So, when we were up there, and Dumbledore started talking, I began to hope. I thought maybe... But, then Severus... Well, you know."

"Why did Professor Snape finish it when it became obvious you were relenting?"

"That's for him to say." He looked off for a moment, lost in the memory. "Besides, if you don't get started, you're going to be late," he told her to throw off his mood. He didn't want to upset Severus with talk of the tower later.

Ginny jumped up. "Oh, no! I'd better hurry!" She leaned down and kissed her husband. "I'll see you later!" she told him as she hurried to finish dressing. She could hear him chuckling as she dashed in the bathroom.

*** **

Hermione and Ginny walked down the street, laughing and talking. Happy. "Ginny, you looked absolutely gorgeous in those robes!"

Smiling, Ginny said, "Thanks. You looked great too." She looked at the ground and unconsciously rubbed her tummy. "I'm not sure about Draco's gift, though."

"Ginny, are you crazy? Having Colin make an oil painting of that photograph he had of Draco's mother is a wonderful idea! He'll love it!"

"It's just that he doesn't talk of her much. I wouldn't want to hurt him or cause him any unnecessary pain."

Putting her arms around Ginny's shoulders and squeezing, Hermione told her, "He's going to love it, I promise. I've noticed a sentimental side of him when the two of you are together that I never would have associated with Malfoy."

"I know. He treats me as if I am precious." Mrs. Malfoy smiled, a dreamy look in her eyes. "He's wonderful, actually. I never would've believed it, but he's just so... so..." She hugged her arms around her body.

"Ginny, do you *love* him?"

She jerked her head around to stare at her best friend. "No! No, I don't. But, well, I like him an awful lot. I think about him all the time when he's not with me. I absolutely love our intimacy."

Hermione snickered. "That sounds like love, my dear."

"What about you, then?"

"What about me?" Hermione asked, confused.

"Don't think I didn't see that lingering kiss your husband gave you before we left. You didn't exactly cringe away...as I saw you do that one time with Ron."

"Ginny!" Hermione blushed. "All right," she conceded. "I'm infatuated with my husband, too. He's just so..."

"Yeah," Ginny agreed. "Just so."

Laughing, Hermione said, "Let's get some lunch. I'm starved."

"I could eat," Ginny agreed. "I think Ron told me that he and Harry were going to the Leaky Cauldron with Dean Thomas, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and Tonks. Something about them finishing that Auror exercise before any other team, and they're celebrating. Did you want to avoid it?"

"No, I don't. I think it's high time we made amends with the boys. Christmas is just around the corner; we're going to be at the same parties and such. Most definitely at the Burrow together. Enough time has past that those two really need to forgive us. It's almost been four months! Honestly!"

"You're right, of course. Ron asks about you all the time. He's hurting, Mione. But, I agree. He needs to start healing."

Hermione's heart clutched. The last thing she wanted was to hurt Ronald. He'd been her first love. "It's just that I miss my best mates."

"I know. I miss them, too. Oh! I forgot! I asked Draco about the tower this morning. He talked of it some, but not much at all. Just basically said that Dumbledore started offering him a way out, so he stopped to consider. That's when...er...Professor Snape...well...you know."

Sighing, Hermione agreed, "Yes I *do* know. Severus wouldn't speak of it all when I asked. But he did promise that he would in time. I have to settle for that. I'm just so impatient!"

Laughing out loud, Ginny told her, "That's an understatement! Remember that time..."

"Well, well, well," a voice drawled out. "What have we here?"

They were across the street from the Leaky Cauldron, standing in front of an alleyway. Both Ginny and Hermione felt prickles of fear rising inside them.

"Excuse us, Flint," Hermione said as politely as she could manage. "We were just going to meet Ron and Harry for lunch." She pointed across the street.

"Oh, I don't think so," a voice sounded behind Ginny. "We want a word with Mrs. Malfoy here, you see. Although, seeing you with her is a pleasant surprise."

Ginny spun around. "Nott! Whatever you have to say to me, say it, and then leave me alone!"

Rubbing his chin in thought while ignoring Ginny, Nott asked Flint, "Marcus, do you think there'd be room? It'd be one for each of us."

"Sure, there's room. But I want *her*," he whinged as he pointed towards Ginny. "I want Malfoy's woman."

Ginny fought the nausea rising. "I don't know what the two of you are talking about, and I don't care. I've had enough, and we're going. Come on, Madam Snape," Ginny said, wanting to sound braver than she felt.

"*Snape*? Did you call her *Snape*?" There was a look of pure glee in Nott's eyes. He turned to Hermione, considering her intently. "You married old *Snape*, did you? What? Did he rape you and knock you up?"

Before she could think, Hermione reared back and slapped him hard across the face. "How dare you speak of my husband that way!"

Suddenly, Hermione found her throat enclosed in Nott's hand and herself being shoved back into the alley. "Grab Weasley, Marcus!"

"Oh, with pleasure!" He grabbed Ginny's arms so that she couldn't go for her wand and began pushing her into the alley. He glared as she kicked his shins. Shoving her against the wall, Flint told her, "I'm only gonna say this once. If you try something like that again, I *will* hurt you."

Ginny rubbed the back of her head because she'd rapped it on the wall when Flint had shoved her. He pocketed her wand along with Hermione's, which he'd caught when Nott threw it to him. "What's going on?" Ginny demanded. "What do the two of you want with us?"

"Several things," Nott started as he slightly loosened his grip around Hermione's neck. "Revenge, for one thing. Money for another. Oh, your husband will pay dearly to get you back, a tasty morsel like you." He turned to Hermione. "Not sure about yours, though."

Hermione shoved his chest, and he stumbled a few steps back. Smirking, he warned, "Oh, I do love it when they fight. All of that shaking and trembling!" Without taking his eyes from Hermione, Nott said, "Marcus, ward the entrance to the alley. And place a Notice Me Not Spell. I don't know that I want to wait until we're home."

"Oh, yeah." In his excitement, Marcus fumbled the spell a bit. He started towards Ginny. "You know, you sure was the topic of many a fantasy in the House of Slytherin, especially your husband's. I wonder if he ever got around to doing all those things he used to say he wanted to do to you?"

She started backing away, a look of disgust on her face. "Sorry, can't say the same for you. I'm not sure I even knew you existed while I was in school."

"You little bitch!" Marcus drew his wand and hit Ginny in the center of her chest with a spell that knocked her off of her feet and a few steps back. When she hit the ground, she cut her shoulder on a rugged bit of metal.

"Ginny!" Hermione cried out and started to go check to see if she was okay. Hermione screamed out in pain when Theodore grabbed her shoulder and clamped down as hard as he could with his teeth.

Hermione elbowed him hard in the stomach. That caused him to release his grip on her.

Infuriated that she'd hit him, stopping his favorite form of torture, Theodore roughly grabbed Hermione and spun her around to face the wall. He grabbed both of her hands and clamped them both in one of his. Using his other hand, he shoved her into the wall, bent down, and bit her hip as hard as he could, causing her to scream out in pain.

"Let her go, you oaf!" Ginny demanded. She struggled to rise, but Marcus held her down. "Get off!"

"Oh, no. I'm going to enjoy this." Marcus leered.

Ginny began to buck wildly, finally realizing what he intended to do. "No! Don't! Noooo!"

"Stop squirming!" He grabbed her hair and slammed her head into the ground. "I mean it! Stop it!"

Hermione wasn't sure how long he'd been biting her. She only thought of her baby. Tears sliding down her face, she began to fight wildly when she realized her friend was about to be... raped. "Get off of her!"

Marcus began to laugh, but he was cut off before a sound even left his throat. Suddenly, he was lifted off Ginny and thrown to the ground. Soon, Theodore followed his friend. "What the bloody hell do you two think you're doing?" Ron yelled as he towered over the two men. "That's my *sister*!"

"And that," Harry said as he pointed toward Hermione, "is mine." Picking a man at random, Harry pointed at Nott. "You! Explain. Better make it good; your life is depending on it."

"Nothing to explain, mate. We've been seeing these two on the sly for a while now. They wanted a go, they did. As she likes it a bit rough, I was just giving it to the Mudblood right and proper...just the way she was begging me to," he taunted.

There was a fist in his face before he could blink. "You watch your filthy mouth!" Ron turned to Hermione. "All right?"

Hermione only shook her head, not wanting to speak. Once she did, she'd not be able to control the tears.

Suddenly, Tonks stumbled into the alley. "Say, we wondered where you two got to. Did you find out who was screaming?" Suddenly realizing there were other people in the alley, Tonks said, "Oi! Hermione, Ginny! Didn't see you there. All right? We heard what we thought was someone screaming when we walked by, but for some reason couldn't quite figure out where it was coming from. We could tell some sort of Notice Me Not Spell had been placed; we've been trained in that sort of thing you know, and..."

"No, they're not, Tonks," Ron interrupted. "They've been attacked by those two imbeciles!"

Tonks went from a concerned and talkative friend to a concerned and competent Auror in seconds. Assessing the situation, she said, "Okay. Potter, you and Weasley stay with the girls and check for injuries, shock, and the like. Thomas, Kingsley and I will take this lot to the Ministry. Looks like we'll be able to keep this under wraps thanks to that half-arsed Notice Me Not. I don't see Creevey lurking around."

"Right. That's good. We'll be there directly." Harry looked down at Ginny, who was too stunned to stand. He held out his hand, and she took it, allowing him to help her up. They followed Ron and Hermione out of the alley.

Tonks took the first aid kit out of her pocket and spelled it back to its original size. "Here's some Pain Potion for them. Have them get pictures of the injuries as soon as possible for evidence if it's needed. Especially before they are treated."

"All right," Ron said. "We won't be long. Um, is this safe for pregnant women?" He handed Hermione the potion, and when Tonks nodded that it would be safe, she drank it.

Harry framed Ginny's face in his hands and bent his head close to hers, checking her pupils. He was worried that she might have a concussion.

Ron simply gathered Hermione in his arms after the other Aurors left to try and squash her trembling. He'd seen that bastard biting her like some sort of wild animal. He began to gently rub up and down her back.

Before he knew what was happening, Harry had been sucker punched in the face and knocked to the ground. "What the fuck?" He rubbed his hand under his nose to wipe the dripping blood.

Harry looked up to see Draco Malfoy looming over him. "Oh, this just perfect! What is your *problem*, Malfoy?"

"Oh, I don't know, perhaps the fact you were about to kiss my *wife* right here on the street?"

Ron turned slightly to give Malfoy a piece of his mind, but found himself face to face with Snape instead.

"How touching. Lover's reunion?"

"Severus, this is not what it looks like." Hermione was surprised her voice was so calm.

"Silence!" He turned back to Ron, who still had his arms around Hermione. "It would behoove you to remove your hands from my wife, Weasley," Severus said in a voice so low that Ron had to strain to hear him.

Dropping his arms, Ron turned to stand fully in front of Severus. "I'm not going to try to explain this to you because frankly, I don't give a rat's arse what you think, but..." Ron stepped back as Severus stepped forward.

"Did I ask you to explain anything? I have eyes."

"Severus, honestly, this is not what you seem to be thinking." Hermione turned at the sound of Harry yelling.

"Are you mad? I was not about to kiss anyone! Good Lord, Malfoy!"

Suddenly, Draco lunged, and Ginny quickly stepped between him and Harry, placing a hand on each of their chests. "Stop this!" Then she made the grievous error of turning to Harry and placing both of her hands on his chest.

"Harry, please don't do this. Let me talk to him. Please."

Draco's lip curled as he clinched his fists. "Take. Your. Hands. Off. Of. Him. NOW!"

Ginny jumped and Harry snarled. "Let me tell you what happened, you great git!"

"Oh," Severus interrupted, "we can see perfectly well what was happening." Turning to Hermione, he said, "Let's go." When she simply stood, shocked to the core, he yelled, "MOVE!"

"Now that'll be enough of that!" Ron said with more bravado than he actually felt. There was just something about Snape that made his skin crawl. "I'll not stand here while you speak to Hermione that way!" Turning to Draco, Ron said, "And you watch how you speak to my sister, Ferret!"

Walking up to Ron until they were almost nose to nose, Severus demanded, "And just what are you going to do about it? I will speak ~~to~~ *my wife* anyway I choose, boy. She is no longer any concern of yours."

"That's a lie. She's plenty of my concern."

When Severus started to move, Hermione finally snapped out of her daze and spoke through her pain that had lessened somewhat since she'd taken the Pain Potion. "Severus, have you lost your mind? I don't know what exactly you think was going on, but..."

He rounded on her, and she took two full steps back. "You will not speak to me right now. Get back to the castle; we will discuss this in the privacy of our home."

"Yes," Draco agreed. Grabbing Ginny's arm a bit roughly, he said, "Let's go."

"Don't grab her like that, Malfoy!"

"Harry, it's fine. Really. I'll go home and explain things. It'll be okay."

Harry wasn't so sure. Neither was Ron. Those two Slytherins looked ready to kill and to kill the wrong people. "Maybe we should go back with you so that we can explain."

"You'll do no such thing!" Severus bellowed. "What you will do, Weasley, is stay the hell away from me and mine. I will not warn you further. Come near her again, and you'll regret it. Tremendously."

"Now see here, Snape..."

"That goes for you, too, Potter. Just give me a reason," Draco threatened.

"Yeah, you're pretty tough punching a man when he doesn't see it coming."

Draco turned quickly and accidentally knocked Ginny back. Without even glancing at her, he told Harry, "Fine, let's go. You can see it now!"

Without warning, Ginny bent over and retched. Falling to her knees, she bent further and folded her arms across her tummy. Draco sneered. "Don't pull that shite here. Get up, and let's go."

Ron started towards Draco, and with tears running down her face, Ginny stood. "Don't. Ron, I want you and Harry to go. This is just making it worse. Hermione and I need to speak with our husbands. Please."

Without saying another word, Ron turned and nodded at Harry. They turned and walked away, knowing if they didn't go, there would be more trouble.

Hermione turned to her husband and put her hand on his arm. "Really, there is an explanation for this."

He shrugged her hand off of him. "I don't want to hear it. Let's go."

Ginny turned to Draco, but he cut her off before she could speak. "Leave it. Not a word."

The two couples went back to Hogwarts in total silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

Christy's Notes: Oh, boy! What a fine mess this is!

Misunderstanding is a song sung by Genesis from the year 1980.

Southern's Notes: Good grief. One step forward, ten steps back, eh? Pricks if you ask me. I wish Harry or Ron had kicked some arse.

All Out Of Love

Chapter 6 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates.
Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, *Southern_Witch_69!* Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Six

All Out Of Love

Both couples Apparated back to the school, not speaking as they walked through the gate and began the walk towards the large doors.

Once they'd entered the castle, the men nodded to one another and each went their respective ways with two extremely angry and hurt wives in their wake.

Severus opened the door to their rooms and stood back for Hermione to enter. Once she did, he slammed the door and turned to her. "How could you?" he demanded.

"If you would shut your mouth long enough for me to explain..."

"I don't need or want your ruddy explanations, woman! I have eyes, don't I? I just want to know why you would do this to me...and so publicly!"

Hermione threw up her hands in exasperation. She began to pace the room. "Ginny and I had just finished buying our robes for the party next week when..."

"Save it," he instructed as he went to pour himself a firewhisky. He quickly knocked it back and poured another. He looked up at Hermione to see her eyes narrowing as she glared at him.

Once she was certain she had his full attention, Hermione said, "I have had enough of your rude, barbaric behavior!" When he started to cut her off once more, she told him, "Don't you dare shush me again! I *will* have my say!"

"You can have nothing to say that I wish to hear! *I know* what I saw!"

"What you *think* you saw. You know nothing."

"My instincts have served me well these past years, Miss Granger, so I trust them."

What the fuck? Miss Granger? Oh, merciful Lord!

"Your instincts are always right, you say?"

"More than not." He drank down his firewhisky and placed his glass down. "I am still alive after many years of spying; I think that is proof enough. And I know what my instincts are telling me now."

She determinedly walked to him and grabbed his left arm. Tapping the place where his Dark Mark would be, she asked, "And how did your instincts work for you when you pledged yourself to a mad man?"

He grabbed her left wrist roughly and pulled her ring finger. "About as well as they did here when I pledged myself to you, I'd say."

She couldn't hide the hurt that'd flashed in her eyes. Jerking her hand away from his grip, she asked, "Why are you so determined to believe the worst in me, Severus? There is a valid explanation for this, yet you *refuse* to listen. I've not done anything untoward!"

"BECAUSE I TRUSTED YOU! You said, 'Let's have a real marriage, Severus. Confide in me, Severus. *Trust* me, Severus.' I was beginning to! For the first time in a very long time, I had hope for something good in my life! And what do you do the first chance you get? You betray me!" He picked his glass up off of the table and flung it into the fireplace. "Thank God I held off on trusting you completely!" He turned his back to her so that he could watch the flames dancing in the fireplace.

"I. DID. NOT. BETRAY. YOU! You git! Why are you so quick to think that I would hurt you this way? I've done nothing to cause you to think I would even remotely betray you."

A memory of Lily Evans and James Potter flashed in his mind. She was supposed to have met him, but when he'd arrived at their rendezvous, Lily was in the arms of Potter...in an intimate embrace, much like the one he'd found Hermione and Weasley in. He quickly squashed that long ago memory and rounded on her. "Nothing except stand in a very intimate, public embrace with Weasley. I asked one thing from you, Hermione," he said, forgetting he was back to calling her Miss Granger. "One. I asked only that you stop all liaisons with that boy."

"I did! I've hardly been out of your sight since we've been married!" She stomped her foot in exasperation.

He folded his arms across his chest. "Except when I'm teaching, grading papers in the evenings, or supervising a detention. Shall I continue naming the times you've been out of my sight, *dear*?"

Hermione grabbed the back of the chair and squeezed until her knuckles turned white. Shutting her eyes tightly, she growled low in her throat. "This is the most ridiculous discussion I've had in a long while." Looking up into his eyes, she spoke softly. "Severus, do you honestly, in your heart, believe that I've cheated on you with Ronald?" She held her breath as she waited for him to answer.

His eyes never left her face. "Yes, I do. I am not such a fool as to think you never loved him, and you obviously still do love him."

"Well, of course I do! I will always love Ron. Harry, too, for that matter. But I am *not* in love with either of them. They are my best mates for heaven's sake!"

"How convenient for you." He started walking towards her, and she stepped back. "Know this. I will not be made a fool of."

She snorted, unable to help herself. "You don't need me for that. You're doing a fine job of acting like a fool all by yourself." She took another step back as he stepped forward once more.

"From this moment on, we are married in name only. Do not speak to me of anything of a personal nature; I won't answer you. Nor will I ask you of anything unless it concerns the baby."

"Severus, don't do this! *Listen* to me." Desperate, Hermione spoke quickly, wanting to tell him what had happened before he stopped her again. "When Ginny and I got to the alleyway across from the *Leaky Cauldron*, we saw..."

He began striding towards her again. "I do not wish to hear it!" He suddenly turned and kicked a table, knocking it over. "I have to hand it to you. It's been many years since someone has been able to fool me right and proper as you've done." He started clapping. "Well done! Well done, indeed!"

"All right; THAT'S IT! I'm done here! You refuse to listen to the truth? Fine! I don't give a damn any longer! I don't know who's hurt you in the past, but I do know that it wasn't *me*! Do you think I can't see that you are punishing me for another's sins?"

"You know nothing about me or my past. Now, you never will. I hope you're pleased with yourself."

"What I am is tired. Like I said, I'm done." She sliced her hand through the air. "Finished. Through. No matter what I say, you're going to believe what you want to. Your *assumptions* here are wrong, however. I want to make that perfectly clear. And it doesn't take a genius to figure out you've been deeply hurt before. Now, I refuse to listen to your nonsense any longer."

Her hip was beginning to throb greatly with pain, so she wanted to go see Madam Pomfrey. She also needed to make sure all was well with her little one, and she needed to get some pictures for the Aurors. She hesitated as she walked towards the door. Her husband had begun to pace, so she'd have to go past him to get to the door.

Hermione stood staring at the door, trying to decide if she wanted to risk walking by him when a voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Going somewhere?"

"Yes, I need to go see Madam Pomfrey."

He stared at her for so long she was beginning to fidget. "I don't recall your having an appointment today."

Folding her arms and lifting her chin, she informed him, "I didn't. It's Saturday." She refused to offer him anything more. If he wanted to believe she had betrayed him, especially after she'd tried numerous times to explain what had truly happened, then so be it. "This is a different matter all together."

"I see. Is there something wrong with my baby?" His eyes drifted to her belly, full of worry.

"Not that I'm aware of. *Our* baby seems fine. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to go." She strode by him and to the door.

When she reached the door she turned and looked over her shoulder. "Severus? One more thing. I am a Gryffindor, through and through. Do you know what that means? You can count on me to do the right thing."

He rocked back on his heels and studied her. "Right. That's what the Marauders' thought about Peter Pettigrew. They were not able to count on that man to do the right thing, as he *betrayed* them all."

"See, that's where you're wrong. That rat was counted on all right. It's just that the wrong person had the privilege of counting on him." She turned and left, quietly closing the door behind her.

Severus stood there a long time after she'd left. He rubbed his chest as if it were aching and closed his eyes. "You've gone and done it now, old man. You've fallen in love with another Muggle-born Gryffindor, only this one has the potential to do more than merely hurt you. She could actually destroy you. How the hell could I have let this

happen! Damn it all to hell and back!"

He stormed to his study to grade the mid-term exams, slamming the door as he entered.

*** **

As Ginny and Draco were walking to their rooms, she suddenly had to stop and retch. Her stomach was too nervous, and she felt just a tad dizzy from her earlier ordeal.

She was a bit surprised when Draco leaned over her and used his wand to clean the mess. Without saying anything, he turned to go back.

"Draco, seeing as how I'm *starting this shite again*, and I'm out of Nausea Potion, I am going to go see Madam Pomfrey. I will be back directly, and then we'll talk."

"Yes, do hurry back. I have plenty I want to say to you."

She left without replying. He was back to his old, sarcastic, ferret self she remembered so well from her school days. She didn't understand why he wouldn't let her explain.

Whether it was the fact that he was a Slytherin, man, or just plain stupid, she didn't know. She did know one thing for sure though. She was not going to put up with his arse.

She reached the hospital wing and called out for Madam Pomfrey, as she wasn't sure where the matron was. When she entered, Ginny felt relieved. "Hullo, Madam Pomfrey. I need you to examine me if you have time."

"I do have time. Is everything all right, dear? You're not due for an examination for two more weeks."

"Well, I was attacked today in Diagon Alley. I've been hit with a spell, cut my shoulder, and banged my head pretty hard. Oh, and I will need pictures of the injuries before you heal them. I expect Hermione will be here sometime today as well. She was attacked, too."

"Oh, my goodness!" the mediwitch exclaimed. "Where is Mr. Malfoy? I would think he would want to be here with you!"

"He doesn't know yet. He wouldn't let me explain. Well, it's a long story. I also need more Nausea Potion."

"Surely you don't mean to keep this from him?"

Ginny shrugged. "I dunno. I don't really want to talk about that. My head is pounding, and my shoulder is killing me."

"Oh, right! Of course." Poppy examined Ginny and took the photos required. She had a small, practical camera in the hospital wing for this very thing. It spit the pictures out as soon as they were taken so that they didn't have to wait for them to be developed.

After the photos were taken, Poppy healed Ginny and gave her some Pain and Nausea Potion. "You will be fine, Mrs. Malfoy. Take these only as needed of course." She shook her head. "I wouldn't keep this from my husband, dear. It's bound to blow up in your face."

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind." Ginny didn't want marital advice at the moment. "Perhaps I won't strangle him when I get back." Ginny put the pictures in her pocket and started for the door. Just as she reached it, Hermione opened it.

"Ginny, are you okay? The baby?"

Ginny smiled weakly. "We're both fine. Just banged up a bit." Ginny studied her friend. "You holding up okay? What did Snape say when you told him?"

"I never got the chance to! He won't listen to me! So, I decided not to even try." Tears gathered in her eyes. "It just hurts. We've been getting along so well lately."

"Stubborn men! I haven't tried to speak with Draco yet; I came directly here. I was still vomiting. I'm going to go give it a try now."

"Well, I hope you have better luck than I did."

"Thank you. Don't forget you need to get pictures of your injuries."

"All right. I will come to check on you later."

Ginny hugged Hermione. "Okay, see you then."

When Ginny reached her rooms, she found her husband looking out of the window, holding a drink. He turned when she walked in, but didn't acknowledge her.

"Have you finished your temper tantrum? Are you ready to listen to me now?" She stood glaring at him, hands on her hips.

"I don't have temper tantrums. I just don't take kindly to my wife kissing other men on the street. Harry Fucking Potter! Damn you, Ginny!"

"That's preposterous, Draco. Why would I be kissing Harry? He was checking me for..."

"Because you're bloody well in love with that prat! You always have been. Oh, I thought, just maybe, when the spell claimed me to be your soul mate that things would change for you. For us. That I would finally be able to admit that I'm in love with you. But I can see I've been a fool. Well, that's going to change."

"I'm not in love with Harry any longer! I did love him. Like you, I can't change my past. But I can assure you that I no longer love him in that way." She shook her head *and he just say that he's in love with me? Finally be able to admit it? How long has he felt this way?*

"And it's not as if he really wants *you*," Draco continued as if she hadn't spoken. "He just doesn't want *me* to have you. It's always some competition with him! If he'd wanted you, he could've had you at any time! But no, he has to wait until you're *mine*! If I want it, then Potter has to have it!" Draco balled up his fists, becoming angrier by the second.

"Are you mad? Harry doesn't want me, Draco; nor do I want him. What happened was..."

He turned and leered at her. "You know, I never would have thought you'd be..." he looked her up and down, "so free with your attentions."

She raised an eyebrow, forgetting the explanation she'd wanted to give. "What, exactly, is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that only a certain type of woman would be married to one man while she kisses another on the street."

She slowly walked towards Draco, murder in her eyes. "Oh? What type of woman is that? Enlighten me."

"I'd say slut sounds about right. I was thinking while you were off to get your potion that your mum sure has a lot of children. Does it come natural for you then? The sudden urge for sex, consequences be damned?"

Before she thought about what she was doing, Ginny balled up her fist and hit Draco in the face, knocking his head back and against the window. "You shut your mouth,

you arse! How dare you speak about my mother, or me for that matter, that way? You know I was a virgin when we got married. I'd say it's hard to be both a slut and a virgin at the same time, you imbecile!" She turned and strode away from him, afraid she might hit him again.

He rubbed his jaw. Narrowing his eyes at his wife, he threatened, "Don't you ever hit me like that again, Ginevra. I won't stand for it."

She whirled around. "Then keep your filthy mouth shut, and I won't have to! I will not stand here and listen to you talk about me and my family that way. I'm trying to explain to you that Hermione and I were att..."

Draco walked up to his wife and bent so that they were nose to nose. "You will not abuse me! Don't worry about explaining things to me. You don't really need to. I get it. I've always known in the back of my mind that it was Potter you wanted. But I let myself hope, you see, because I've wanted you for so long. Well, no more."

"What are you saying?" Ginny was getting a very bad feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"I'm saying that I no longer want you. Potter is welcome to you. Oh, don't worry," he said when she started to speak. "I'll not divorce you. I wouldn't do that to my baby. He'll still be a Malfoy heir. But please do use some discretion and keep your affairs out of the street."

"My God, Draco, I wasn't even thinking about money! You have to know that it's you I want! My actions alone towards you ought to make that clear. I DO NOT WANT HARRY! If you would just listen to me! Flint and Nott..."

Draco turned away from her so that she couldn't see what the thought of living without her was costing him. Not only did his heart ache, his whole body hurt. "STOP IT, GINEVRA! I can't talk about this anymore. I need to go."

Ginny was becoming angry again. "Draco, you are the most stubborn man! You don't want to hear the truth? Well, that's fine. I can't force you to listen to me. But you will hear this. I don't want Harry or any other man. I'm trying to tell you that..."

Draco stepped to the door. "I'm leaving."

"Are you coming back?" Ginny asked, a little panicked.

"Yes," was his short reply. "But don't wait up." He slammed the door on his way out.

She rubbed a hand over her jittery stomach. She was hurt, angry, and very confused. *Draco's in love with me?*

Ginny walked to the sofa and sat down. She had a lot of thinking to do. She needed to figure out exactly what she felt for her husband and how she wanted to deal with it.

*** ** *

Hermione lay in her bed, wide awake and restless. It was after midnight, and Severus still had not joined her. She was worried. After she'd gotten back from the hospital wing, Severus hadn't been home. It gave her plenty of time to think things through.

She supposed that it did look as if Ron and she had been embracing. That helped her to understand his initial reaction *But why wouldn't he let me explain? Why did he just jump to the conclusion that I would have some sort of affair with Ronald?*

The answer was obvious. Someone had done this very thing to him at some point in his life. *Did he catch her in the act? It would make sense. But still... to speak to me like he did! I've never done anything to him!*

Hermione rolled to her side, punching her pillow. She couldn't get comfortable. *Damn stubborn man! A marriage in name only!* Oh, that had hurt her. The whole business hurt.

How will we ever get past this? Do I want to even want to try to get past it? Will he always react this way, never even asking me if something bothers him? Hermione sighed, weary. *Where the fuck is he?*

She turned to her back, kicked the covers off of her, and threw her arm over her head. Chewing her lip, she started rubbing small circles across her belly. *He was definitely hurt... I could see it in his eyes. I never knew I could hurt him, that he cared about me enough. I sympathize for him there, but I can't let him treat me like this and get away with it. It's inexcusable. I won't have it!*

Hermione felt like she was riding on an emotional Hippogriff, flying up and down so fast that she barely had time to think. She decided to close her eyes and force herself to sleep. There was nothing more she could do tonight.

*** ** *

Ginny paced her room like a caged animal. Draco had still not come home. *Where is he? What is he doing? Who is he with?*

She sat back down and jiggled her foot, unable to keep still. Running her fingers through her hair, she thought *So what if it looked like Harry was going to kiss me? Draco could've at least asked me! But no! He just walks right up and punches Harry in the face. Insane, jealous prat.*

She put her thumbnail in her mouth and began to nibble. *He said he loved me...twice. But does he, or was that just something he spurted out in the heat of the moment?*

She jumped up and started to pace again, looking at the door, willing it to open. *I can't let him treat me like this. Slut, he called me.* Her chest ached when she remembered the way he leered at her. As if he hated her.

How could you truly be in love with someone that you think so poorly of? This is not going to work, she decided. *I can't just let him treat me like this, speak to me like this, and then just walk out. Potter can have me, can he? I'm his possession to be tossed aside...given to someone else...when things get too complicated? Well, they wouldn't be complicated if he would've just listened to me!*

Suddenly, she felt bone-tired. She walked into the bedroom, found her nightgown, and put it on. After she got into bed, the weight of the day hit her. Putting her hands over her face, she sobbed long and hard. Feeling too many emotions at once. Hurt. Angry. Bitterness. Despair. Scared. But most of all, she felt abandoned. There was nothing else for it. In her time of need, her husband...who claimed to love her...had abandoned her. She wasn't sure if she would ever be able to get past that.

The pill was too bitter to swallow. She deliberately turned away from the door, closed her eyes, and let sleep overtake her.

*** ** *

Severus sat at his office desk, brooding. He'd left the rooms before Hermione had woken. It wasn't the first time he'd slept on the couch. He didn't want to see her; it hurt too much. He quashed down the guilt he'd felt when he remembered the wounded look in her eyes. It almost offended him that she could manage that look so easily.

He was glad that most of the students had gone home for the holidays. By the time they returned, he would be back to his usual self. He'd gotten through one heartbreak, he could survive another. The only problem was that he wasn't really sure he would survive this one.

She consumed him. His mind, body, and soul. Never had he felt this way. *Thank Merlin I never let her know it!* He supposed she would think him petty for staying out of their marital bed the night before. That he was punishing her. Perhaps he was. *Damn Weasley! I'd kill him if I could get my hands around his throat!* But he had to protect himself. He would protect himself...by staying the hell away from his lying, cheating wife.

Severus was brought out of his thoughts by a knock on his door. Scowling, thinking it was Hermione, he barked, "Enter!"

When the door opened, Severus was surprised to see Kingsley Shacklebolt walk through. Rising, he stuck out his hand in greeting. "Kingsley. What brings you here?"

"Hello, Severus." Kingsley shook Severus' hand and then sat in the chair Severus indicated. "How's Hermione holding up?"

Raising an inquisitive eyebrow, Severus said, "Just fine."

"Well, you've got a tough bird, Severus. That's for sure. Not many would've held up half as well. Anyway, you'll be receiving an official Ministry Owl, but I wanted to tell Hermione and you in person. Do you know where she is? I could tell you both together."

Clearing his throat, Severus told him, "If she is not in our rooms, I don't know where she is. I would be happy to relay a message for you if you'd like."

Smiling, Kingsley informed him, "I have good news! There won't be a trial. The sodders confessed. They didn't have any choice, really."

Cocking his head to the side, Severus asked, "Who confessed to what?"

"What do you mean, man? Flint and Nott." He took out Hermione's wand and laid it on the desk. "They've confessed to the attacks: attempted rape, battery, and intentions of kidnapping."

Keeping his face deceptively clear, Severus said, "How did you get them to do that?" He suddenly felt his stomach drop.

"Well, they had the wands. Not to mention, Harry and Ron literally pulled them off while they were attacking Hermione and Ginny. So when we took them into interrogation and presented the evidence stacked against them, then showed them the pictures of the injuries, they cracked."

"You have pictures?" When Kingsley nodded, Severus told him, "I'd like to see them."

"Sure. They told us the whole plan. It was pretty sick. The original plan was to kidnap Ginny, demanding a large ransom. They had no doubt that Draco would pay it. We went to the location they told us where they'd planned to keep her. It made me sick, Severus. It was obvious by the bed and sex toys what they had planned. And let me tell you, those were not normal sex toys. Some of them looked like torture devices.

"Hermione was not really part of the original plan. They just lucked out when she happened to be with Ginny. Well, actually, they lucked out Ginny was there as well. It was a chance meeting that they'd tried to take advantage of."

"I see." Severus quelled the feeling to be sick right there on the floor. *What have I done? Oh, I am such an idiot. She'll never forgive me for this, and I can't blame her.* Outwardly, he showed no signs of distress.

"Anyway, I need to go. I have a court appearance in a few minutes. I tried to find Draco, but I wasn't able to. Do you think you could pass this on to him? I would like them to know before they get the owl."

"Yes, I will inform him. Thank you for stopping by. I really appreciate it. Hermione will be thrilled."

"It's not a problem. I will see you at the wedding party."

"Yes. Good day, Kingsley." When the Auror shut the door, Severus immediately cast a Locator Spell and set out to find Draco.

*** **

Severus found Draco in the Room of Requirement, punching a bag with a vengeance. Severus knew how the boy felt. He dreaded this conversation.

"Draco? A word, please."

Draco stopped to see Severus looking at him, a foreboding expression on his face. Breathing heavily, Draco stopped and walked away from the punching bag. Suddenly, the room changed, and a table appeared, loaded with refreshments.

Picking up a goblet of water, Draco downed it. After he'd wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, he asked, "What is it?"

"Tell me, did you speak with your wife last evening?"

Draco snorted. "I told her what I thought of her and her public affair with Potter, then I walked out. Went to the Hogs Head and drank my troubles away. Still haven't been back there. You talk to your wife?"

"I accused her; talking is a stretch."

"Well, what did they expect? I can still see that bastard's hands on her, his head leaning towards her." Getting mad all over again, Draco threw his goblet down. "I shouldn't have stopped with one punch. I should've killed his arse, once and for all!"

"Sit down, Draco."

"What? I don't want to sit! I want..."

Pointing to a chair, Severus barked, "I said sit! I have something I need to tell you, and you'll need to be sitting when I do."

"Fine. Whatever."

Filled with dread because he didn't want to do this, Severus said, "I had a visitor today. Kingsley Shacklebolt."

"Oh, what did he want?" Suddenly, Draco jumped up. "If Potter is filing charges against me..."

"No, it's nothing like that." Taking a deep breath, Severus said, "They were attacked by Flint and Nott."

"Who? Potter and Weasley? They likely deserved it."

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Severus said, "No. Our wives. Flint and Nott attacked Hermione and Mrs. Malfoy in Diagon Alley. Potter and Weasley were the ones to find them and pull them off before they could... Well, before they could rape them... attacking them in such a way that they'd likely never get over."

"Are you telling me... You mean to say that... Oh, sweet Jesus! And then I just... accused her of... Oh, no."

"Yes. They've confessed to it. Apparently, those two had originally planned to kidnap your wife for ransom. Had a small place to keep her with a huge bed and sexual torture devices, according to Kingsley."

"How did they know that she would be in Diagon Alley that day?"

"They didn't," Severus informed him. "It was a chance meeting. And just lucky for them that Hermione happened to be there with her. Draco, you do realize..."

"Yeah, I fucking realize. The things I said to her. Accused her of. Called her!" Bending down and putting his head in his hands, Draco said, "She's not going to get over this. Saying I was a jerk is putting it mildly."

Looking off to the side, Severus agreed. "I did much of the same with Hermione."

"What are we going to do?"

"Grovel comes to mind," Severus attempted to joke. "I honestly don't know. If I were in Hermione's shoes, I wouldn't accept an apology."

"Neither would I," Draco admitted. Miserable, he stood and began to pace. "I love her, you know."

"I had thought as much. We need to decide what we're going to do about Flint and Nott."

"Yeah, we do. Something befitting their crime, I'd say. But first I need to make things right with Ginny."

"Yes, I agree, if it's at all possible. Here, Kingsley left her wand."

"You're going to talk to Hermione then?"

"I'm going to attempt it. She thinks I didn't come home last evening." Severus frowned. "For once in my life, I actually don't know where to begin... what to say."

"The truth, I imagine. Although with Ginny, it may not be enough. Granger seems more, um, sympathetic I'd say."

"You didn't hear what I said to her...about her."

Draco growled. "We've really bugged this up, mate. I don't know what to do! How to fix this! I've never been in this position before, damn it! With any other woman, I wouldn't care, but it's *Ginevra*." Draco sat back down and put his head in his hands.

Sighing, Severus stood. "I'm going to go."

Nodding, Draco ran his hands through his hair and leaned back. "Good luck."

"Thank you. I fear we will both need luck and more." Severus left, and Draco covered his face with his hands. Rubbing briskly, he stood. He felt groggy and tired from his hangover added to his lack of sleep.

He wanted to go to Ginny, but instead, he let the room transfer once more. He set out to beat the hell out of the punching bag. Rather than Potter's face this time, it had Nott's and Flint's.

Christy's Notes: Well, well. Now they know. Let's see how the wives will act when the tables are turned.

All out of Love is a song by Air Supply.

SW69's notes: If I were Hermione or Ginny, I believe I'd make them sweat it!

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Chapter 7 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, *Southern_Witch_69!* Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Seven

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Severus started back to the rooms he shared with Hermione, but decided at the last minute to go to the Ministry of Magic instead. He wanted...no needed...to see the

photos of his wife's injuries. He was still in slight shock.

The Potions master shook his head as he walked toward the gates. *It was a normal assumption! She was in his arms, and he was rubbing on her* Comforting her, as he knew he should have done.

Yes, the assumption was normal, but I should have let her explain. He leaned back against the gate and put his head in both hands, remembering a long ago explanation.

"Severus, wait!" Lily Evans shouted as she ran towards him, her brilliant red hair flying behind her.

"What for, Lily?" Severus stopped and folded his arms across his chest.

"Because I want to explain things to you! If you'll let me." Once she reached him, Lily struggled to catch her breath.

Severus shrugged. "All right. Did I misunderstand the situation?" he asked hopefully.

She blushed, and he knew that he had not. "Well, no, not exactly. James and I spent the night talking in front of the fireplace in our common room, and we've discovered that we truly are meant to be together. We've gotten back together. Please don't hate me. I couldn't bear it. I never meant for you to find out this way..."

"Potter! It's always Potter!" he spat, full of fury. "You used me. You knew that we've always hated each other, and you also knew that if he thought something was between us that he would want you back," he accused.

"NO! No, I...I..." She didn't want to think that she could have been so full of guile. Giving up, she simply said, "You can't help who you love or who you don't. I'm so sorry, Severus." Then she raised up on her toes, kissed his cheek, and fled.

Severus looked back at the castle. He could never have stood hearing those words out of Hermione's mouth, so he never intended to allow her to say them. His mistake...one he would correct as soon as he could...if she let him.

He straightened. It was time to face this. Severus Apparated to the Ministry and headed for the fourth floor in search of Kingsley. Instead, he could only find Weasley. He cleared his throat to get the boy's attention.

Ron looked up, distracted. "What do you want, Snape?"

Folding his arms and raising an eyebrow at Weasleys' disrespect, he simply said, "I wish to see the photographs of my wife's...and Draco's...injuries."

"Why? Wasn't seeing the real thing enough for you? You're some piece of work, you know that?"

"My business is my own! Never take it upon yourself to question me again, boy. Now, if you are not capable of assisting me, I suggest you find someone who is."

Ron stood, barely containing his fury. Full of hate, he spat, "You over-grown, greasy git! You don't deserve her! How dare you treat her like a... a... scarlet woman after she'd been..."

"Ron!" Harry said as he came around the corner. "What's wrong with you? I can hear you all the way down the hall." Then Harry turned his direction to where Ron was looking.

"Snape," he simply said, as if that explained Ron's behavior.

Ignoring Harry for the moment, Severus told Ron, "I've never claimed to deserve her. The spell deemed me her soul mate. I will not discuss our marital, therefore personal, life with you." Turning to Harry, he continued, "I want to see the photographs of both women's injuries. Kingsley assured me that I could. Should I go to him?"

"No, I'll get them for you. Come with me, Ron."

Severus stood where he was, not bothering to enter any of the offices. He had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, and it was all he could do to hold it inside.

Still fresh from the memory of Lily's bitter rejection, added to his abhorrent behavior to his wife, he received an unwelcome jolt when Potter had looked at him through his mother's eyes. He tried to shake it off, but the sickness seemed to be getting stronger instead.

He snapped back to attention when he heard the footsteps coming back down the hall. It was Potter, rather than Weasley, who approached him.

"Here, you can take these. They're copies."

Severus nodded and turned to leave, but was stopped by Potter calling out to him. He stopped and turned. "What is it?"

"How are they? We've wanted to stop by and see, but we were unsure." Harry sneered at his former Potions master. "Didn't want to cause ~~more~~ problems for them."

Taking a deep breath to control his temper, he informed the other half of the bane of his existence, "My wife is fine, as is Mrs. Malfoy. If they need you, which is doubtful, they will send for you."

"It's not doubtful!" Weasley shouted. "Look, Snape, we've been friends...and more...for over half of our lives, and we won't go away because you wish it."

Severus quickly strode towards Weasley, getting nose to nose. "Do try to live out the next half with someone else! She is mine now...don't forget that, least I have to remind you."

"It's too bad that *you* forgot it when you were yelling at her on the street and accusing her! Don't you know her at all? Or maybe you treat the things that belong to you carelessly? I dunno, and I don't care, but I do care about Hermione. Maybe you're the one who needs reminding, so let me refresh your memory. I will always be there for her if she needs me...not you or anyone else will ever change that!" Ron started to raise his hands to push Snape away from him.

Harry laid a restricting hand on Ron's shoulder and then turned to Snape. "It isn't wise to threaten an Auror, especially in the Ministry of Magic. I suggest you go now before I can't hold him off any longer."

"It's no threat, Potter. It's a promise. Count on it, the both of you." After one last glare, Severus turned and left, robes billowing in his wake.

"I'll be watching you, Snape!" Ron shouted as Severus walked away.

Ignoring Weasley and feeling aggrieved with what he was about to see, Severus immediately Apparated to Spinner's End so that he could view the photographs in private.

With shaking hands, he opened the envelope.

*** **

Hermione paced in her room, wondering where her husband could be. She had mixed emotions where he was concerned. She was very angry with him for not listening to

her, but still had a strong desire to explain the situation to him.

Deciding that she could not spend one more second cooped up alone in their rooms, especially after the horrid nightmares that had plagued her all night, Hermione decided to go check on Ginny.

It didn't take Ginny long to open the door after Hermione knocked. "Hi, Gin. All right?"

Ginny stiffly jerked her shoulder in a half shrug and stepped back to allow Hermione entrance. "You?"

Hermione shook her head. "Not really. I don't think Severus even came home last night."

Ginny began to pace, biting her nails. "I know that Draco didn't. It's conflicting. I want him to come home, but I want him to stay away from me at the same time."

Hermione watched her friend and began to worry because of her erratic actions. "Why don't we sit and get some tea maybe?"

"Oh, no, no, you go ahead. I'm fine."

"Ginny. Sit. You need to calm down. Think of the baby."

Yes, yes, you're right. Of course, you are. Here, let me call a house-elf."

"Have you eaten?" Hermione asked quietly, afraid her friend would jump to the ceiling if startled too much. The slight stuttering and word repetition was worrying her.

Ginny laid a hand on her belly. "No... no, I...I don't think I could keep anything down. But let me get you some toast or something."

"Please sit, Ginny. Don't fuss over me."

Ginny walked to the table and sat, crossing her legs. Her foot jiggled back and forth in a flurry of movement. "He told me he loves me."

Drawing her eyebrows together in confusion, Hermione asked, "Who, Draco? When?"

"Yes, Draco! Who did you think?" Ginny snapped. Immediately, she covered her mouth with both hands. "Oh, my God, Hermione! I'm so sorry!" She jumped up and started to pace again.

"It's okay, Ginny."

Taking a deep breath, Ginny said, "Yesterday, when he was ranting at me saying that Harry only wanted me because I was his, he said that he's in love with me and hoped he could finally admit it."

"Finally? That sounds as if he has been for a long time"

"Yeah, that's what I've been thinking, too. But then he just leaves me...abandons me...and I can't even speak with him about it. Not that he would talk to me. He called me a slut. Said only a slut would be married to one man and kiss another on the street."

Indignant fury rose high in Hermione's chest. "How dare he? How dare *they*? Severus was just as bad, thinking I was having some sort of affair on the street with Ronald. Not only is it unjust and insulting, it's ridiculous!"

"Exactly! The hell of it is, I was starting to develop some very strong feelings for Draco, and then the jerk had to go and ruin everything."

"Yes, I know what you mean. It happened so fast. I think it was...partly at least...due to the fact that these men are our soul mates. I was amazed at how well Severus and I got on. I've never gotten along with or had more in common with any other man. His distrust, especially when I've done nothing to earn it, hurts me so much."

"Not only the distrust," Ginny started as she continued to pace sporadically, "but the opinion that Draco seems to have of me and my family. I don't understand how he can claim to love me and yet think so badly of me at the same time."

When Hermione laid a hand on Ginny's shoulder to stop her movement, Ginny stumbled back and yelped. "Ginny, you have got to calm yourself."

"I can't get it out of my head!" the red-haired girl shouted. "Every time I close my eyes, Marcus Flint appears. On top of me. Breathing on me. Trying to... to..." Suddenly, she put her face in her hands and wept.

Gently, Hermione took Ginny into her arms. "I know. I've had nightmares all night. We need to go see Poppy. She's a professional, someone we can talk to. If not her, she would know someone to refer us to at St. Mungo's."

"Yes, all right. Let's go. I just...I just can't, you know, continue like this. All churned up over the attack, wondering when Draco is coming home and at times not wanting him to. Worrying because he won't listen one moment, then not giving a damn the next. Closing my eyes and seeing Flint..."

"Yes. I feel much of the same, although maybe not to the extent that you do. Come on; let's go. We have our babies to think of, if nothing else."

*** **

Draco Flooded into Spinner's End, full of aggravation. "What is it now, Severus? I need to think...alone!"

Handing Draco a tumbler of whisky, Severus said, "You need to sit. I've gone to the Ministry today and retrieved a copy of the pictures that were taken of our wives' injuries."

"No."

"No? What do you mean 'no'? It's something you need to see."

"I can't. I don't think I could handle that, Severus."

Becoming even angrier than he already was, Severus informed Draco, "You most certainly will look at them, and you will be a man and handle it. What are you going to say when her father questions you? You can bet that he will, and you'd better have the correct answers!"

"The situation that we're in, starting with everything that has happened since we rounded that blasted corner and witnessed Potter and Weasley holding our wives, we've brought upon ourselves. Now, it's up to us to fix it, and we will start by seeing what exactly they went through. So, take your shot and buck up, boy. It's not going to be pretty."

Draco nodded, turned his head back, and downed the drink, coughing as it went down. As he set the tumbler down, he picked up the stack of photos and looked carefully at each one.

After he'd finished, Draco looked into Severus' eyes. "They *will* pay for this."

"Undoubtedly."

"I have to face her; I know that, but it's easier said than done. She's not going to want to see me."

"No, she isn't. Nor will my wife want to see me. We have to face them, however. They faced us, and we believed a lie. Surely we can face them now knowing the truth."

"I don't know if that makes things better or worse." Draco laid his head on the back of the tattered couch. "There at the end, when I told her I had to get out of there? She had fear in her eyes. She thought I wasn't going to come back. For some reason, I can't get that look out of my mind."

Severus nodded. "Hermione is the one who left after our argument. She said she needed to go see Poppy. Now I realize it was to be healed and to have those pictures taken."

Raising his head, Draco said, "It's time to go, I think."

"Yes, we've put it off long enough."

Both men left, not trying to fight the sense of dread in the pits of their stomachs any longer.

*** **

The first thing Severus saw when walking into his rooms was his wife sitting on the couch with her feet tucked up under her, reading a book.

Upon closer inspection, he was able to see the title, *The Muggle-born Witch and Her Magical Baby*. It almost made him smile until he noticed the book on the table beside her: *Surviving An Attack! Stop Being A Victim*.

Fear of rejection made his voice harsh. "It seems that I owe you an apology."

"Oh?" she asked without looking up from her book. "For what?"

Severus furrowed his brow. *She is not going to make this easy. I don't blame her.* Sighing, he said, "For making the wrong assumption about you and Weasley. I have spoken to Kingsley Shacklebolt, and I now know what truly happened."

"Terrific," was her flat reply. "Is that all?"

"I apologize for not allowing you to explain."

"All right." She still had not taken her eyes off of the book, even though she'd not read a single word since her husband had spoken to her.

He was becoming angry, even though he knew he had no right to after his behavior the day before. "Damn it, Hermione, would you look at me?"

"No, I don't want to see you right now. Why don't you just go back to where you were last night?"

"I would, but you're sitting where I spent last night, and I'm not sure if I would be welcome to sit beside you."

"You wouldn't be. I can leave if you like."

"What I would like is for you to put that blasted book down and listen to me!"

Finally looking up, Hermione asked her husband, "You mean the way you listened to me?"

"Touché." Running his hands through his hair, he tried again. "Look, I know that I don't deserve it, but would you mind..."

"Yes, actually, I would. I am not yet ready to forgive you or even hear you out. I may not ever forgive you. You can't know how much you hurt me, Severus."

He walked to her then and knelt in front of her, wanting to take her hands in his but instinctively knowing she would not allow it. "Hermione, I am so sorry. It's just that..."

She put a finger on his lips to quiet him. "Ssh. I am going to have a bath and go to bed. It's been a long day for me. I'm not handling the attack well, and I had to go see Poppy today. Although," she said, almost to herself, "Ginny is much worse. Talking things through helped tremendously, though. Poppy gave us both a potion that we can take tonight, and I plan on using mine and resting."

"You're having a hard time sleeping?"

She looked at him as if he were an idiot. "Yes, I am. What do you expect? Every time I close my eyes, I see Nott standing before me with his hands around my throat!"

Severus winced, remembering the pictures he'd seen of her lovely neck, covered in bruises. He reached out, and she scooted down the sofa and stood up. Severus stood when Hermione did.

"I can stay in the bedroom tonight if you'd like. Not in the bed with you," he clarified quickly when she shot him a disgusted look, "in the chair by the bed. Just in case you need me."

"Funny. I needed you both yesterday and last night, but you couldn't be bothered. Now I can't be. So, no, I don't want you in the bedroom with me." When he started to speak, she said, "I'm tired. I don't want to talk to you any more right now."

She turned and walked into the bedroom, closing the door shut firmly behind her. After she'd left, Severus simply went to the couch and sat, staring into the fire. He had no clue where to go from here.

*** **

Draco walked into his rooms, dread filling his whole being. When he didn't immediately see his wife, he walked into their bedroom, ready to face the consequences she was sure to hand him.

The relief was slight when he heard the shower running. There was a time, not long ago, when he would have been welcome to join her. He'd mucked that up now, he thought. God, how he ached for her. Not only the lovemaking but *her*.

He began pacing the room and noticed some pamphlets and a new potion on the nightstand on Ginevra's side of the bed. *What's all this?* he wondered, walking over to see. Picking up the pamphlets, he read:

How To Cope After An Attack: You Can Get Through This. Don't Keep Your Pain Inside.

There were others, but at that moment, he heard the water stop in the bathroom. Quickly glancing at the potion to see what it was for, he walked over to the doorway to wait for her to come out of the bathroom.

When Ginny stepped out of the bathroom and into the bedroom, Draco said, "Hello, Ginevra."

She screamed loudly and stumbled back. Alarmed, he ran to her and gently grabbed both of her arms to keep her from falling, noting the trembling. "Hey, are you okay? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you."

Her eyes were a mixture of fury and fear. Jerking her arms out of his grip, she said, "Keep your hands off of me. I don't want you to touch me." She walked to the other side of the room.

Oh, Draco discovered, there are so many layers of pain that I haven't even experienced yet Stuffing his hands in his pockets so that he wouldn't go to her and touch her again, he told her, "I know the truth now. I know that Flint attacked you."

"Good for you. Congratulations." She turned her back to him as if looking at him disgusted her.

"I suppose I deserve that, but I'd like a chance to apologize and try to explain."

"I bet." She spun around to face him once more, face full of anger. "I wanted a chance to explain to you last night, and you walked out on me *abandoned* me...when I needed you so badly. Well, I don't need you now, so you can go back to wherever you came from."

Draco shook his head in denial. "No, I won't leave you again. I messed up, Gin. I know that I did, but won't you just listen?"

"Why should I? You wouldn't listen to me!" She swiped at the unwelcome tears flowing down her cheeks, mad at herself for letting him see them.

"Because you're better than I am?" he asked hopefully.

Putting her hand on her chest and widening her wet eyes in mock surprise, she said, "What me? A slut? Better than Draco Malfoy? Never! Are you sure you really believe this is your baby?"

Draco closed his eyes and lowered his head. He was not going to rise to her bait and yell at her now. Taking a deep breath for courage, he told her, "I know I was an arse to you. I admit it. God knows I wish I could go back and change the way I've treated you. I wasn't there for you before. Please, let me be here for you now." Pointing to the pamphlets, he said, "It never occurred to me..."

"Yeah, it's obvious that there were plenty of things that didn't occur to you. Now I find that I don't care what you know or what you believe. I am going to take my potion and go to bed. I don't want you in here when I do. If you won't go, then I will."

Draco gave in, knowing that she would truly go if he didn't. "No, I'll go. You rest." He turned to leave. When he reached the door, he told her without looking back, "Just please remember, I love you."

"Right. Well, you sure as hell have a funny way of showing it."

Without saying a word, he walked out of the bedroom and closed the door softly behind him. He didn't want to push her too far because it was obvious that she was having a hard time coping with her attack.

If he hadn't been so stubborn and full of jealousy, he would have realized that sooner *I've got a lot to make up to you, baby, but I swear I will find a way.*

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Despite taking the potion, Hermione found that she still could not fall asleep. Her mind was too occupied with thoughts of her husband *I wonder what he wanted to tell me? Perhaps I should've listened to him.*

By not listening to any explanations he may have had, she was only acting as he had. She was mostly angry with him for not allowing her to talk to him, and then she'd turned around and done the same thing.

If they didn't talk things through, nothing was going to get resolved. She found, after giving it a lot of thought, that she did want to resolve things with her husband. Not only were they going to have a baby together but she could also honestly say that she wanted her marriage to work because of her feelings towards *him*.

I wonder where he went after I came in here to go to bed? Should I try to send an owl his home?

She sighed and got out of bed. She was weary and wanted rest, but it was obvious rest was not coming for a while. With thoughts of warm cocoa, she wandered into the sitting room and found her husband sitting on the couch, watching the flames in the fireplace.

Acting on the spur of the moment, she walked over to the couch. She noted that he held a firewhisky in his hand, but he'd never taken a sip. "Severus?"

He jolted. "Sorry, I did not hear you come in. Couldn't you sleep? Would you like me to leave so that you can read?"

"No... I think, well, I think I would like to talk to you."

"As you wish," he told her and gestured to the couch for her to sit.

She walked around and sat beside him, slightly facing him. She made sure not to sit too closely as she was still hurt by his lack of faith in her. "You said that Kingsley told you what happened?"

"Yes, he came by to tell you...us...that Flint and Nott had confessed and that there won't be a trial."

"They did?" she asked, shocked and glad at the same time. She really didn't want it to go to trial.

"Indeed. Originally, it was only Mrs. Malfoy they'd wanted. You just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Well, actually the both of you did. They had no idea she would be there that day."

"Right. They had no idea that you and I were even married." She sighed. "This is really great news for me, but this is not what we need to talk about."

He nodded. "I apologize, Hermione. Truly."

"I understand that, Severus. But in this instance, sorry isn't anywhere near good enough. As I sit here, I find that I am feeling hurt and angry all over again. Damn it!" She got up. "I wonder why I should even bother with you at all after the way you've treated me! I thought I could calmly sit here and talk about this, but when I see you, when I think of how you've hurt me, I wonder why I should even care what you have to say!"

"Because I think I have fallen in love with you," he said quietly to himself as she started back to the bedroom.

She stopped and spun back around, facing the couch. His back was to her, so he didn't see the gobsmacked expression on her face. "What did you just say?"

His face reddened. Placing his glass on the table, he stood and faced her. Studying her as if gathering his courage, Severus said, "I think I have fallen in love with you,

Hermione."

"You think?" She didn't want probabilities. She wanted facts.

"I know that I have."

She let out a breath and placed her hand on her belly to try to calm the quivering. Looking into his eyes, she told him, "If we are going to truly give our marriage a try, then Severus, you've got to trust me. It's okay to question me, but when I try to explain something to you, especially something of this magnitude, you've got to listen to me."

He held out his hand, and she stepped forward and took it. They sat together on the couch once more, but he kept her hand in his.

"It was the end of my sixth year," Severus began, and Hermione knew that he was going to share with her who'd broken his heart. She vowed not to utter a word until he was completely finished. This was the first time he'd ever shared anything of his past with her as important as this.

"Lily Evans and James Potter had been broken up for awhile, and she'd started talking to me, working with me in Potions, things of that sort. One day, she asked me to meet her at this willow tree by the lake.

"So I did, and our relationship began. We'd meet there regularly and have long talks, and eventually, our encounters became less talk and more... physical. She was my first," he said and turned to look into Hermione's eyes. "Although, I was not hers. Of course, James had had that privilege. That didn't matter to me in any case. I was desperately in love with her, you see.

"Then one night, shortly before the end of term, I went to our usual spot to find her in a very intimate embrace with Potter. She told me that she loved him, and they'd discovered the night before that they were meant to be together."

"Oh, Severus." That explained so much. She'd dated Ron before him, and he'd caught her in his arms. It also explained why he hated Harry. Hermione wondered how often her husband looked at her best friend and wondered what would have been if he and Lily had stayed together. She'd bet anything it was almost every time. The unwelcome and irrational surge of jealousy that overcame Hermione shocked her to the core. She decided not to think about that just yet.

"I understand, and I feel for you, but you cannot compare me to her. If you had just let me explain! I hated knowing that you thought I had betrayed you. But you can't know how badly you hurt me by not believing in me...in my feelings for you."

"I'm sorry does not sound adequate enough, but I honestly don't know what else to say or do. I know how utterly wrong I was, Hermione. I know that because of her, I punished you. I thought I was saving myself, you see, because as desperately in love with her as I was, I didn't feel half for her as what I feel for you." He turned his head from her, not used to baring his soul.

Hermione placed her hands on either side of his face and turned him back to face her. "That's a start. Being honest with me, talking to me. If something is bothering you, for Pete's sake, ask me! Severus, can't you tell that I love you, too?"

"No. I've never been loved by a woman other than my mother before, Hermione. And thinking that what I felt was one sided, my only thoughts were to protect my heart. It didn't work in any case."

"You don't need protection from me, love. I won't hurt you. But you have to learn that if this marriage is going to grow, we have to communicate. We have to trust. We have to be honest. And we cannot jump to conclusions."

"Agreed. I don't usually make the same mistakes twice."

Tired, Hermione laid her head in his lap, placed her feet on the couch, and closed her eyes. Severus placed the afghan from the back of the couch he'd put there the previous night over her and began to rub her hair. "Are we okay now?"

"Not quite, but we're getting there," she told him as she drifted off, finally able to close her eyes and rest.

Christy's Note: Well, it looks like Severus and Hermione are on their way! Poor Draco and Ginny! She's having a very hard time of it.

Should I Stay or Should I Go? is a song by The Clash from 1983.

Southern's Note: Severus is lucky his wife is understanding. Draco will have to work a bit to regain some trust.

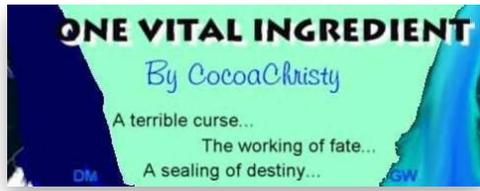
Heat of the Moment

Chapter 8 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Eight

Heat of the Moment

Draco stood in the home of his childhood, looking out of his bedroom window. The party his father was having for Ginevra and him was the next day. Draco sighed, long and heavily. He didn't feel like celebrating his marriage at the moment.

His wife would hardly speak to him. He'd been spending his nights on the couch in their rooms at Hogwarts, and Draco had no doubt that he would be spending this one on the couch in the small sitting room just outside his bedroom door.

He didn't blame her for being angry...furious...with him; he deserved it. But how long was she planning on punishing him? He remembered going to Severus and Grangers' rooms the morning after he'd tried to explain things, begging Granger for some sort of insight as to how he should handle the situation.

He could tell that those two had made some sort of break-through, and while Draco had been happy for Severus, he wondered why his wife couldn't understand, just a little.

Granger's eyes had frosted over a little when he'd walked in, swallowed his pride, and asked her advice. When she'd seen how sincere he'd been, she softened up a bit.

"She just needs time and understanding," Granger had said. "No two people react the same in these kinds of situations. She's told me that she feels you abandoned her, and I think that, more than anything, is what hurts her the most. Just be there, and listen if she wants to talk. It wouldn't hurt for you to read the book she has on the subject either. Perhaps that will give you a bit more understanding."

After that, Granger had turned on her heels and walked into the bedroom, leaving him to speak with Severus in private.

Draco shook his head and then laid it on the window. He was taking the advice to heart, but it was so hard. Ginny had informed him earlier, quite icily, that she was going to take a turn in the gardens. His father had kept up the spell started by his mother that allowed enough warmth during the winter months to allow it to continue to bloom.

Thoughts of his mother caused his already aching heart to hurt all the more. He wished so badly that she was here so that he could talk to someone. His father wouldn't do...not by a long shot.

Draco knew that Lucius thought that he was mad at him for dating again. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was his flaunting, his utter disregard of Narcissa's memory, that bothered Draco. He didn't begrudge his father companionship, which Lucius seemed to think. He just wished he acted more appropriately.

Draco turned from the windows and went to lie down on his bed. He was tired. A very apt word. Tired of fighting with both his wife and father, tired of pretending things were fine in public, tired of stress and strain, tired of not being able to comfort his wife, but mostly, he was tired of the constant ache inside of him.

He was smart enough to realize that though her sessions had helped her tremendously, Ginevra was still having a few problems after her attack. *Flint. Be looking behind your back, mate. I'll be coming for you.*

He turned on his side and closed his eyes, trying to sleep. His last thoughts before he lightly dozed were of his mother, the beautiful Narcissa, and how he wished she were alive to witness the birth of her first grandchild.

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Lucius had seen his daughter-in-law walking towards the gardens. *She really is a very lovely young woman. If Narcissa were here to train her in the ways of society and dress, she could be quite stunning.* He ruthlessly clamped down on thoughts of his wife, as he was wont to do every time she popped into his mind. He couldn't survive otherwise, no matter what his son thought.

He wondered where Draco was and why he was not walking with his lovely young wife. A stroll in the gardens could be very romantic if one knew how to use them to their advantage.

He had some time before his meeting with Arthur Weasley, so Lucius decided to have a stroll with the new Mrs. Malfoy. Walking up to her and holding his arm out for her to take, he simply said, "Mrs. Malfoy, it would be my pleasure to escort you through the gardens."

Taken aback, Ginny only slightly faltered. "Of course," she said, very lightly placing her hand on his arm, yet not moving any closer.

Lucius stiffened minutely, well aware of the fact she did not want to touch him. "Where is my son? I would think he would want to be the one to show you around."

"He doesn't need to cater to me, Mr. Malfoy. I am perfectly fine walking the gardens by myself." She gave him a telling look.

Stopping to look down at her, Lucius raised a pale blond eyebrow. Before he spoke, the thought ran through his mind that her cleavage was coming along nicely since pregnancy. *I do hope Draco is taking advantage of that!* "I was thinking more along the lines of romancing you, dear, not catering to you. And do call me Lucius. We are family now after all."

"All right."

"You're not the talkative sort, are you? Is everything okay?" Lucius was beginning to wonder about his son and his wife. They were newlyweds after all. And they certainly had not dated very long before they'd wed, else he would have heard *something*.

"Yes, why wouldn't it be? I'm just tired. Perhaps I have walked enough today. I think I'll go take a nap before supper."

He stopped and looked down at her, which caused her to stop and look up at him in return. Without meaning to, he let his eyes drift to her enticing bosom once again. "My son seems to be very fortunate in his choice of wives." He licked his lips.

Ginny stepped back from her father-in-law, face full of fury. She'd been a victim before...never again. Whether he'd intended it or not, she took his compliment as some sort of offer. One she didn't care for. "I don't care for the suggestiveness in your tone, *Mr. Malfoy*, and neither would Draco."

He managed to look utterly shocked by her statement. "Do pardon me, my dear Ginevra. I meant no impropriety. Only stating the obvious and the fact that I am happy for my son and his great fortune."

Lucius walked towards Ginny and gently stroked a hand down her cheek. "You are a very beautiful woman after all. But then, you know that. All of the beautiful ones do."

"Excuse me," said a voice from behind Ginny. "I was just checking on you, Ginevra. It's getting a bit late. Have you finished your walk?"

Draco was taken aback by the joy on his wife's face when she spun around and saw him. He'd not seen that look in her eyes, especially directed at him, for a while now.

"Yes, I have." Ginny quickly walked from Lucius to stand beside her husband. "Your father offered to show me around the gardens, but I'm a bit tired. I think I'd like to go have a nap."

Draco looked from his wife to his father and back, wondering what the hell Lucius was up to now. "I can walk you up if you'd like."

"That would be nice. Thank you, Draco." Without another word to her father-in-law, Ginny turned to walk back towards the house.

Draco narrowed his eyes and looked towards Lucius. "Father?"

"I have a meeting at the Ministry I must attend. Don't hold supper." Looking over his son's shoulder, Lucius called out, "Good evening, Ginevra!"

She didn't answer, only kept walking, so Draco turned to follow her. Gently placing a hand on her shoulder to slow her, he asked, "Are you all right? Did my father say something to upset you?"

"It's nothing. I'm truly tired, Draco."

Ginny continued up the stairs in silence, and Draco wondered if it was because she was still angry with him and didn't want to talk to him or if it was something his father may have done. For his sake, he better hope he'd behaved properly where his wife was concerned.

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Severus sat on one end of the sofa as his wife sat on the other, both reading a book. He'd finished all the grading that needed to be done so that he could spend most of his time in their rooms. He didn't want anything to spoil the fragile make-up with his wife.

They had not gotten back to the way they'd been before she was attacked, but they were much better than they had been, even if they were being overly polite. Severus detested polite.

"Are you getting hungry? It's getting rather late."

Hermione looked up from her book. "Yes, now that you mention it, I am." She turned and smiled at him. "Shall I have our supper sent here? I don't really feel like walking to the Great Hall."

"As you wish." Severus rose to place the books back on the shelf, wondering what he could say to her. Before, their conversations had flowed with ease. Now, they both seemed cautious.

"Are you looking forward to the party Malfoy is having tomorrow night?" Hermione asked her husband, keeping the topic a safe one.

Severus looked at her, his eyes penetrating hers. When she seemed to be getting uncomfortable, he spoke. "I suppose so. I haven't socialized with anyone for some time." Suddenly, a thought occurred to him. "Are you? Do you think you will be all right attending?"

She smiled warmly at his concern for her. "Yes. I'm looking forward to it! I really need to get out of this castle!" Hermione turned as a house-elf she didn't recognize brought the food in and set it up.

Severus furrowed his brow. "You're not a prisoner here, you know," he told her, defensive of her comment.

She turned to look at him. "I never said that I felt like one, Severus. Things have been busy for you with the end of term and grading papers, so we've not been anywhere for quite awhile. That's all I meant."

"I see." He walked to the table, sitting down. "Are you going to join me, wife?"

"What is it? You've not been yourself today." Hermione watched him, chewing her lip in concentration.

"I have offended you?"

"No, you haven't offended me, Severus, but you've been short and defensive sometimes. Have I offended you?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her this whole situation offended him, but he held back. He honestly believed...knew...it was his fault that things were strained between them. "No, you have not. Why would you ask me that?"

"I don't know. You seem... aggravated for some reason."

He held out his hand and motioned towards the chair opposite him. "Please sit down and eat. You need nourishment. You've done nothing to aggravate me. I'm sorry I've given you the impression that you have."

"Okay." Hermione walked to the table. After she sat, she began to fill her plate, becoming even hungrier as the aromas filled her nose. "The food looks wonderful."

Barely stopping the snort that wanted to escape him, he told her, "Well, it certainly tastes wonderful." *What next, the weather? Which robes I will be wearing to the party?*

"Mmmm, I agree. I've had a few cravings lately," Hermione informed him.

"Oh? You've not mentioned it. What have you been craving?" *I crave something myself, but not food* he thought, knowing he would never say that to her. It was too soon, and Severus hated rejection.

"It's nothing weird or out of the ordinary. I crave spotted dick. I've had it brought to me a couple times."

Severus wisely decided not to say that he could give her dick every night if she wanted it. It was too crude, juvenile, and not his usual manner, but he wanted her so badly. He'd gotten used to sex with his wife on a regular basis, and while he had been sharing the same bed with her, they'd shared nothing else. Nor did it look like she planned to any time soon.

He was determined to allow her to make the first move when she was ready. Severus knew he had no right to expect anything from her on an intimate level. His needs didn't matter.

"No, not weird," Severus told her. "Are you feeling the baby move at all?"

"Only little flurries, but I love it!"

She smiled brightly at him then, and he had to set his fork down so that he wouldn't drop it. She was beautiful to him at that moment, and all he could think was *she wanted her*.

Clearing his throat, he asked, "When is your next appointment? I would like to go with you if you're agreeable."

"Well, normally I would only go every three months at this stage, but Madam Pomfrey wants to see me once more this month due to the... circumstances. So, I will go two days after Christmas. I wouldn't mind at all if you wanted to join me." Her look changed then, going more serious. "You never used to ask me before, Severus. You always just came."

"Things were different between us then. I hadn't hurt you." He stood and walked over to the bookshelf, picking up the book she'd been reading about surviving an attack. Not facing her, he informed her, "I've read this."

Her voice was full of surprise when she asked, "You have?"

He looked at her then, and the wonder in her face combined with her stunned tone hurt him. "Yes, I have. I would do anything to ensure your happiness and well being, Hermione. I thought that you understood that."

She was speechless. Wanting to lighten the mood because she suddenly felt as if an argument was coming on, she said, "I'm just not used to seeing your sensitive side. I didn't know you had one really." She grinned so that he would understand she was joking.

Hermione immediately saw that her husband had not taken her joke very well. "Pardon me, Madam," he called to her, using the formal title to mask his feelings of anguish, "I will apologize for my insensitive behavior, once again and, everyday following if you require it, until you believe that my words are sincere." He didn't yell, but the anger was evident in his voice.

"Oh, Severus, I didn't really mean..."

"Think nothing of it." He knew that he'd cut her off again, but this time he was absolutely sure she was going to tell him that she didn't mean what she'd said about his insensitivity. The fact of the matter was that, joking or not, there was usually some small grain of truth in what people said. "I've just remembered a potion I'm brewing for Poppy. I need to attend to it. I'll be back shortly."

"All right," Hermione said as he'd walked out. "Well, you've buggered that one up right and proper, Mrs. Snape," Hermione muttered to herself. She wondered how she could get things back to normal. "It was a bad joke, you idiot! You know how easily hurt he can be."

Her husband hadn't even attempted to touch her since the night of his confession. Not even a brief hug hello or a kiss on the cheek when he left to go somewhere. Hermione wondered if it was because dredging up old memories had upset him. She'd been trying to watch what she said to him because she knew how hard it had been for him to discuss his past with her. He'd opened himself up, and Hermione was determined not to make him sorry he did.

Apparently, her strategy wasn't working. Something was off with him today. *Should I go to his lab and talk to him about it? No, I'm not even sure that's where he actually went. I don't believe for one second that Severus Snape would forget a potion he'd been brewing.*

She sighed, feeling lost. She decided to have a shower and go to bed. She seemed to tire easily these days.

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Severus returned to their rooms at half past ten. He was not surprised to find that his wife had retired. The book he'd been reading on pregnancy said it was not uncommon for a woman in her condition to need more rest during this time.

*I shouldn't have left. She needs to feel secure and loved, and I just went off and sulked like a child! How will she come to depend on me if I show her constantly how undependable I am?*

He started to pour himself a drink and indulge in a good brood when he heard the first whimpers from their bedroom. "Hermione?" he called out.

A long moan was his answer. "Hermione?" he asked again.

"No! Get off of her! Stop!" she called out, voice full of terror.

Severus ran into the bedroom to find his wife thrashing on the bed. "Hermione," he gently shook her, "wake up. Wake up now, love!"

When she felt someone grip her arms, Hermione began to fight like a mad woman. Lashing out she pushed and clawed at Severus. "Let me go! Stop it!"

"Hermione! It's me, Severus! Hermione!" Nothing was working. He couldn't wake her. He was afraid she was going to harm herself or possibly the baby. Desperately, he yelled, "MISS GRANGER!"

Her eyes snapped open, and she stared blindly at former Potions professor for a moment. All of her movement stilled until her bearings came back to her. She began to cry softly. "I'm sorry."

He wanted to gather her in his arms and comfort her, but he wasn't sure if she wanted to be touched. The book had said everyone's reactions varied. "You don't need to apologize to me for that. Are you okay?"

"No, but I would be..." She decided to chance it. She needed to feel safe and secure, and the only way that was going to happen was in her husband's arms. "I would be," she said again, "if you held me. I need you, Severus. I didn't mean to hurt you earlier. It was my attempt to joke. It was a bad attempt, and I'm sorry for it."

"Ssh," he soothed, happy that she needed him, even though he hurt over the circumstances. He rose and took off all of his clothing except his boxers.

Getting into the bed beside her, he held out his arms and said, "Come here."

She gratefully went into his arms, laying her head on his chest. Hugging him tightly, she smiled and closed her eyes. "Love you," she told him sleepily.

Severus closed his eyes, breathed in deeply, and tightened his grip. "And I, you."

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Draco sat on the couch in his sitting room, his head full of Ginny. She'd gone straight into the bedchamber when they'd returned to his bedroom, and he hadn't seen her since. She hadn't even come out to eat, though he hoped that she'd called upon one of the elves and had eaten in bed.

He needed to check on her...make sure she was all right. His father had done or said something to her; of that he was sure. He couldn't really tell, but it looked as if Lucius had had his hand on Ginevra's cheek. *Why though? Why would he be touching her in such a way?* It didn't make any sense.

The relief in her eyes when she'd realized that he was behind her was unmistakable. Had his father frightened her? In what way? Deciding he could no longer stand not knowing, Draco stood and walked into the bedroom.

His wife lay in the bed on her side, one hand tucked up under her cheek, sleeping *She's so beautiful. Even more so with our child growing inside of her.* Before he could stop himself, Draco reached out to stroke her hair.

Ginny was up and scrambling back so fast that Draco was taken aback. "Stop! What are you doing in here?"

Draco started to answer her, apologize to her, but before he could speak, Ginny continued, "Draco would not appreciate the fact that you..." She stopped suddenly, breathing heavily. "Why do you have your hair pulled back like that?" she snapped...rather than asked.

The fury in Draco was so great that he had to take several deep breaths before speaking. "Who did you think was in here, Ginevra?" he asked, although he already knew. He just wanted to hear her say it.

Ginny didn't want to talk about Lucius Malfoy. From the look in her husband's eyes, she decided it was for the best that she said nothing. "Oh, no one. I was dreaming, that's all. Why do you have your hair tied back?"

"It's getting long and was bothering me, so I pulled it back to keep it out of my face. Answer my question, Ginevra. Who did you think I was?"

Ginny sighed. "Don't do this, okay? I'm fine. Just tired, that's all."

"What did my father say to you in the garden? I know that he's upset you."

She wouldn't answer him and refused to look him in the eye. She shook her head. "There's no point in this, Draco. He's your father. Leave it."

"No, I don't think I will. I won't have my wife feeling upset and scared in my own home~~Her~~ home. I'll be back; get some rest."

"Draco..." Her would-be objection fell on deaf ears as Draco turned and headed out. She shuddered, knowing that a confrontation was inevitable.

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Lucius stormed into his study, ready to commit murder. "How dare he refuse me! Sniveling boot licker, thinking he is better than a Malfoy! Someone needs to put Arthur Weasley in his place."

He picked up a Ming vase and flung it across the room, flowers scattering around as it broke. "He thinks to keep me out, does he? Thinks he can ~~just~~ deny me, Lucius Malfoy, my rightful place in the Ministry? Well, we shall see. I will not tolerate this. I *will* take action against him."

Lucius' ranting was halted by the door being thrown open and an irate Draco storming in. "A word, Father."

"It seems you have forgotten your place, boy. You do not enter my study unannounced or uninvited!" His already frayed nerves were about to snap.

"No," Draco said, voice only slightly shaking, "it's *you* who seems to have forgotten their place. You will leave my wife be. I can be no clearer than that."

"Your wife? Your WIFE? Come now, son. She's just some trollop who's fucked her way into a good fortune. She is from nothing and not worthy of you. She knew if she didn't become pregnant, you would never wed her."

Draco balled his hands into fists. He'd never once come up against his father, had always been afraid to, but at the moment, nothing would give him more pleasure than to pound Lucius face to a bloody pulp. "Watch yourself. I happen to care very deeply for my wife. I won't have her hurt or even insulted by you. Remember that."

"So, the pup grows a pair and stands up to his father. You would choose this...her...to break out on your own and risk all that you have? Some Mudblood-loving, fortune-seeking woman who knows how to use her wiles?"

"I risk nothing, Father. Nothing I would care to lose. With the funds Mother left me, I have much more than you." Draco knew that was an extremely sore spot with his father, so he pushed the point. "In fact, we both know that I own half of this mansion and the whole of the Lestrangle estate as well. But all of this is a moot point. I don't know what you're playing at, but you *will* leave my wife alone."

"Don't push your luck here, boy." Lucius was not in the mood for one of his son's temper tantrums. "Not only does she use her wiles and seduce you but she also comes whinging to you as well. What did she tell her *loving* husband her big, bad father-in-law did to her? I am curious."

Draco struggled to remain calm, but it was a battle he was fast losing. "She never said a word. She mistook me for you when I came into the bedroom."

Lucius yawned, unconcerned. "You bore me. Answer me this. How do you know that *she* did not come on to or act inappropriately towards *me*? Perhaps she is tired of the boy and is ready for the man?"

Draco merely raised a pale blond eyebrow, much the same way his father had done in the garden earlier. With an amused look, he told Lucius, "Well, you certainly flatter yourself." Then he burst out laughing. "Oh, to think that you actually believe you could make me doubt my wife by using... yourself! Potter would have been a more believable story, Father. She detests you."

Insulted, Lucius bit out, "Then why, may I ask, are you here? If you see me as no threat..."

"Make no mistake, *she* feels threatened by you...not me...and *that* I will not tolerate." When his father started to speak, Draco cut him off, saying, "I mean it, Lucius. I've never stood up to you, I know that, but when it comes to my wife, there is nothing I wouldn't do to keep her safe and happy." He left out that he'd failed her before but would not fail her again.

Lucius searched his son's eyes and could see the determination in them. He'd always thought that if the boy's confidence ever grew, he would be a formidable opponent. "Then I will leave you to it. I wouldn't sully myself in any case with the likes of her."

"Right. I'm sure you wouldn't." Draco turned to leave, stopping just before he reached the door. "This is the last time we'll discuss this. The next time, I will hex before I speak."

After he'd gone, Lucius wasn't sure if he was proud or infuriated. He decided, more than anything, he'd rather be pissed and went for his fifty-year-old scotch.

*** **

Harry and Ron stood in the alley a few blocks down from the Ministry. They only had a few hours before they had to transfer Nott and Flint to Azkaban, but the owls that they'd received had intrigued them.

They had each gotten one the day before that was marked urgent. The contents had been vague, but had requested that they meet at this time and place.

"Who do you suppose sent us those owls, Harry? I've thought on it and can't figure it out."

"I have no idea, but it better not be your stupid brothers playing some sort of prank."

Ron chose not to comment because he'd thought the same thing himself. They were both startled by two pops of Apparition. They immediately stood back-to-back, wands at the ready. Some may have called them foolish to come here on the request of persons unknown, but at least they would be prepared.

"Show yourselves," Harry commanded, not liking the fact that he couldn't see who'd Apparated.

Suddenly, Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy appeared. They stood side by side and said nothing.

"What's this?" Ron asked, suddenly a very bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. "What are the two of you about?"

"Weasley, Potter," Severus started, "we've a request."

Harry looked from one man to the other, extremely curious. "Where are Hermione and Ginny?"

Shaking his head with impatience at the ignorance of the Boy Who Lived...how he'd ever defeated the Dark Lord he would never know...Severus snapped, "At home, asleep in bed. Where do you think they would be at this late hour?"

"Well, where do they think you've gone?" Ron directed his look at Malfoy.

Draco was not about to let on that he hadn't been sleeping in the bed with his wife and she'd never know he'd even left, so he merely told his brother-in-law, "They don't know that we've gone anywhere, Weasley. They were *sleeping*."

"What if they happen to wake up and wonder?" Ron demanded, not liking the thoughts of his sister or Hermione being alone. At least until those two were locked up tight in Azkaban.

Harry held up a hand. "Maybe the two of you had better explain what this is about. If you're here for some sort of revenge towards Ron and me, then you've wasted your time. We won't apologize for doing nothing wrong."

Ron simply nodded his head in agreement.

"No," Severus spoke, "that's not why we've asked you to meet us." Swallowing his pride was hard for a man like Severus, but he wanted to clear the air. "It seems that Draco and I should thank you actually."

"Save it," Harry said, not wanting to hear it. "It's enough that you know the truth now. Is that why you wanted to meet?" Surely that was not what this was about.

"No," Draco said. "We've a favor to ask. A big one."

"Oh?" Ron asked, looking at Snape this time, hardly believing that man would ask anything of Harry and him.

"Indeed. We want a few minutes alone with Nott and Flint," Severus explained. "Kingsley let it slip to me that the two of you were transferring them to Azkaban tonight."

Harry and Ron looked at one another. How many times had they said they would like to have a few minutes alone with those sodders? They couldn't risk their jobs, however much they wanted to.

"What's the plan?" Harry asked Snape. If it was a good one, he and Ron would likely agree.

"We'll ambush you at an undisclosed location," Snape began the explanation, wasting no time. "We will pretend to Stun you and then let Flint and Nott see what it's like to be a victim and unable to defend oneself."

The idea had merit, Ron thought. However, as he looked at Malfoy, he began to speculate. "Do you think you could take him?"

"Without question, Weasley."

"Be sure," Harry warned. "Because if they escape..."

"They won't," Severus assured. "In any case, the two of you won't really be Stunned. What do you say?"

Once again, Harry and Ron looked at each other. If the situation were reversed, they'd want to do the same. Besides, who's to say that if they didn't agree, Snape and Malfoy wouldn't still do as they'd planned, actually Stunning them for real?

"All right," Harry agreed. "Here's the timeframe." Snape and Malfoy paid close attention as Harry mapped out the itinerary.

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Harry and Ron grabbed Flint and Nott as they held the Portkey that would take them to the rocky shore surrounding Azkaban. Just as they'd landed, they felt the hit of the fake Stunner.

They both fell to the ground, lying very still. Flint looked to Nott. "What's going on? Has your father planned an escape?"

"Not that I'm aware, but let's not waste this opportunity! Let's get out of here."

"Wish Disapparation was allowed. That's a bloody long swim!"

"Going somewhere?" a voice asked from behind a rock.

Flint and Nott spun in circles for a few moments until they spotted the two men dressed from head to toe in black. Masks hid their faces, but Nott was sure who they were.

"Snape," he mocked, "what a tasty little wife you have."

Severus said nothing, and the tension mounted.

"Surely that's not Malfoy, Jr. with you?" Flint taunted. "You'd have done better to bring your wife than him."

Suddenly all the rage and ache that had been inside of Draco unleashed itself, and Flint was the unfortunate recipient...the cause of all the troubles that had been happening in his marriage so far.

Before he could control himself, as Severus had told him to try and do, Draco simply walked over to Flint and broke his nose. He found it was much more satisfying than a punching bag.

Then it began, man to man, no wands or magic. When it was over, Flint and Nott lay in an unconscious heap on the ground. Severus and Draco were satisfied that their wives had been avenged, and so had they themselves. Looking to Potter and Weasley, the men nodded their thanks and Disapparated.

Grinning, Harry asked his mate, "What do you think? Azkaban or St. Mungo's?"

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**Christy's Notes:** Flint and Nott had it coming, I say. Severus and Hermione are afraid to offend one another, but that can't last long. Poor Draco! Party up next and an

unwelcome surprise for Ginny.

Heat of the Moment by Asia is from 1985.

**SW\_69's Notes:** I wonder if they'll have any good whiskey at the party. I'm a bit tired of Ogden's, but I wouldn't mind something smooth.

## Can't Fight This Feeling

Chapter 9 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

**hA/N:** All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

*Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern\_Witch\_69! Sun, you're the greatest!*



Chapter Nine

Can't Fight This Feeling

Ginny was happy the night of the party had finally arrived. She was ready to get it over with and go back home. She had no idea what Draco had said to his father the night before, but Lucius had stayed clear of her. She was grateful.

She watched him dressing and suddenly felt lonely. Ginny had an urge to go to him and put her arms around him, but she fought it. Her feelings were mixed more than ever. She'd wanted him to leave her be, and he had. Why didn't that make her happy?

Sometimes she wanted him to just come into their bedroom and get into the bed, not asking her if it was okay. But she knew that he wouldn't. He knew he'd wronged her, and so he allowed her to call the shots there.

Ginny had been surprised that her husband had stood up to his father on her account. *He told me that he loves me. Should I believe him? He's not said it since our argument, not that I expect him to. Why would he...I've given him no encouragement of any kind.*

Ginny leaned back on her elbows and looked up at the ceiling. She missed him, plain and simple. He'd made a horrendous mistake to be sure, but was it an unforgivable one? Everyone jumped to wrong conclusions at one time or another during their life. Her brothers had called her horrid names before and for less. Not that he'd been right, but he *had* thought Harry was about to kiss her. She was so confused. *Well, tonight is not the night to decide.*

Draco turned to her, and Ginny's breath caught in her throat. He looked devastatingly handsome in his dark gray robes. "Are you ready to go?" he asked, not wanting to say too much lest he babble on about how incredibly beautiful she looked in her midnight blue robes.

"Yes," she told him, "as ready as I'll ever be."

Because they were making a public appearance and her family would be there, Ginny took Draco's proffered arm and allowed him to escort her into the room. *It's going to be a long night*, she decided as she scanned the room for familiar faces.

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Hermione began to fuss nervously with her hair and dress robes. She wished that she had brought her compact so she could check her makeup one more time.

"Stop fussing," her husband commanded. "You look beautiful. Those robes are very becoming."

Severus thought of the night before when he'd slipped out to deal with Nott. He was glad he'd done it. He'd do anything to protect Hermione. He was glad that he'd had the presence of mind to bring healing potions and study up on healing spells. Not that he and Draco needed them much.

Hermione looked down at her pale gold, shimmering robes and smiled. She did love the look of them. "Thank you. It's sweet of you to say so." She had wanted to make a good impression. This was the first public function that they would attend as husband and wife. Her grip on his arm tightened as they walked into the room and were announced by a house-elf.

Suddenly, every eye in the room was on them. Hermione wondered how in the world people did these kinds of things on a regular basis. Then she found Ginny in the crowd and smiled.

After they'd walked in and Severus had introduced her to a few of his... associates, Hermione told him that she wanted to go speak with Ginny and a few of her friends. She instinctively knew he didn't care to socialize with them himself, so she nudged him towards Lucius Malfoy.

She walked to Ginny and took her hands into her own. "Hello, Gin. How're you doing?"

"Actually, believe it or not, I'm doing okay. It never truly goes away, but it gets easier."

"Yes," Hermione agreed. "It surely does. Let's go find us a seat."

They found a few seats and sat, ready to catch up. Before they could begin, Hermione noticed that Ron, Harry, and Luna Lovegood all walked in together. "That's odd. I wonder which man she's with. Do you know?"

Turning towards the direction of Hermione's gaze, Ginny's eyes widened. "No, I don't know. It seems odd that she would be with either of them though."

"I agree." Loud laughter from her husband caused Hermione to turn her gaze from the odd trio that had just walked in. She'd never heard him laugh out loud in that way.

She couldn't take her eyes off of Severus standing with Lucius Malfoy and some woman she'd never seen before but automatically knew was Annabelle Avery. Her husband was laughing and relaxed in a way she'd never seen.

She wasn't jealous. Not in the way that he'd been. No, what she felt went beyond mere jealousy. She was hurt that he felt he could be so open and free with his emotions with these people, yet not with her. She wanted that with him so badly.

Yes, he'd opened up to her. But he'd only told her one thing from his past. Granted, it was something significant, but still, she realized as she sat here, she wanted more. She jolted only slightly when his eyes met hers, and they suddenly went from amusement to concern.

Severus started to walk to her, but stopped short when he saw Weasley walk to her and hold out his hand, asking her for a dance. She accepted without hesitation. Saying nothing, Severus walked back to where Lucius was standing.

"I've a couple surprises planned for later tonight," Lucius told Severus, proud of himself.

"Oh? Anything I should be concerned about?" he asked as his gaze kept drifting to his wife. He wondered what had put that wounded look in her eyes when she'd been watching him earlier. All he'd wanted to do at that moment was gather her into his arms.

"Not concerned, but I guarantee you'll be entertained. Perhaps your wife will adjourn to bed early."

Severus turned abruptly and gave Lucius his full attention then. "What have you done, Lucius? If you think that I will join you and Annabelle..."

"No, of course not Annabelle, although she's still very lovely." Lucius sighed, remembering. "She's with Tilden Toots now, didn't you know? No, Sophia should be here any moment, and she's bringing her friend, Giselle. Those two are quite a pair in the art of sex, my friend. I'd be willing to share either or both with you."

"I thank you, but no. Hermione is quite enough for me." He looked back to the dance floor to see her smiling up at Weasley and felt a tug of guilt. He'd never danced with her, he thought. Never even thought to ask once they'd entered. Severus was not used to dancing at functions.

"Well, perhaps you'll change your mind once you see them. They are hard to resist, old man."

"Don't count on it," Severus told him. "I'm getting a drink."

"All right. Find me later, and I'll tell you of the other surprise," Lucius told his friend with an odd look in his eyes.

Severus decided that he really didn't want to know.

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Ginny sat in her seat and watched Hermione dancing with her brother, thinking it was the best she'd ever seen the two getting along. Likely because they weren't here as a couple, she thought with a chuckle.

"I wasn't aware that you and Ron were even dating, Luna," Ginny commented as she turned to speak with her former school chum.

"Well," Luna told her, "we've really only been out a couple of times, but I've always loved him, Ginny. You know that."

"Yes," Ginny admitted, "I did. How are things going for the two of you?"

"Like I said, we've only been out a couple of times, but he's so sweet to me. Don't worry about me, Ginny," Luna said as her friend locked solemn brown eyes to her silvery gray ones. "I know I feel more for him than he does me. No matter what everyone says, I'm not truly an idiot."

"No, I didn't mean to imply that. It's just that I truly like you, Luna. I would hate for you to be hurt."

"Well, we're all hurt at sometime or another, aren't we? It's life, I suppose. No, I will enjoy Ronald for as long as he lets me."

Ginny smiled at Luna's outlook and wished she could be so optimistic. She thanked Harry when he placed a glass of punch in front of her and turned her attention back to the dance floor.

She noticed her husband dancing with Pansy Parkinson. She felt a jolt. Of course, her husband assumed she didn't want him touching her, so why would he ask her to dance? Ginny's eyes narrowed when Pansy shot her a smug look over Draco's shoulder.

Feeling petty, she only smiled back and patted her stomach, making sure her big, blue diamond glittered in the process. She felt satisfaction when Pansy averted her eyes.

Ginny turned, dismissing Pansy, and was about to start a conversation with Harry when she heard someone yelling across the room.

"DRACO! Why, you naughty, naughty boy!"

All eyes turned to the stunning woman strutting across the room towards a very happy, yet very surprised looking, Draco. The woman had long, black, wavy hair and violet eyes. Ginny didn't think she could have dreamed up a more perfect body. Her accent sounded French.

"I could hardly believe it when your father told me that you had married! And after promising to wait for me? My heart is broken!" She dramatically placed a hand on her ample chest, drawing attention there, and batted her eyes up at him. "Whatever shall you do to make up for this blunder?"

Draco discarded Pansy as if she hadn't just been dancing with him, all but forgotten. "Josephine!" Draco swept the woman up in a firm hug. "How are you, love? It's been too long!"

Lucius watched from across the room with glee as his daughter-in-law's eyes narrowed at his son and Josephine. When Ginevra turned her eyes towards him, he lifted his glass in a mock toast, letting her know he was the one who was responsible for the French beauty being there.

Mess with me, you bloody twit, and I mess back. You and your father would both do well to remember that.

Ginny turned her eyes from Lucius and stood slowly as she watched her husband speaking with this... woman. The fact that Ginny wanted to rip her hair out by the roots was not lost on her.

Harry touched her arm. "Ginny, he's obviously surprised that she's here." Harry could care less about Malfoy, even though he'd come to the realization that Malfoy cared

more for Ginny than he'd originally thought; he just didn't want to see Ginny hurt or upset anymore.

"Yes, I can see that, Harry," she replied harshly. "Sorry, I didn't mean to snap at you. I think I'll go introduce myself." Filled with determination, Ginny started walking over to her husband and his *friend*.

... 'Ave mized you like crazy! You should've come to zhe château wiz your fazer a few weeks ago. We could 'ave... caught up." She gave him a very meaningful look as she rubbed his arm from top to bottom and back up with her index finger.

Draco smiled, used to her blatant sexual suggestions. "I was getting married while my father was in France, Josie. Tell me..." He stopped short when his wife walked up, smile leaving his face immediately.

Both Draco and Josephine turned to face Ginny. Josephine slipped her arm through Draco's in a possessive way, irked at the interruption. He was so used to her doing so whenever they were together that he thought nothing of it. His wife, however, didn't miss the gesture. She also didn't miss the fact that the happy look had left his face as soon as she'd walked up, and her heart sank.

Deliberately looking at Josephine's arm through Draco's and then back up into their faces, Ginny simply said, "Hello. I'm Ginevra."

She felt the need to use her full name while dealing with someone who was quite obviously Draco's sophisticated ex-lover *That cow had better not forget the ex part!*

Josephine looked her up and down, not hiding her distaste. "Charmed, I am sure," she said and then turned her back to her and placed both of her hands on Draco's face. She leaned in to give him a kiss hello, but Draco, who was finally catching on, stopped her by gently pushing her back.

Moving from Josephine to stand beside his wife, Draco told her, "Josie, Ginevra is my wife. Gin, this is my friend, Josephine. Her family lives in the château neighboring ours in France."

This time Ginny looked Josephine up and down. "Nice to meet you. I'm sure Draco is thrilled to have you at ouwedding party."

Josephine didn't miss the subtle barb, nor did she miss the fact that they didn't touch one another when he moved to stand by her side and introduce her. "Of course 'e is! Surely you wouldn't mind if we 'ad a dance or two? Et 'as been so long since we've seen one anozer!"

Ginny stiffened, unsure how to answer. Hell no she didn't want *her* husband dancing with some over-sexed broom-stick model, but she also didn't want to come off as insecure to her either. Ginny would love to ram a broomstick right up her arse! She simply said, "Draco doesn't need my permission to dance, as he's well aware. Excuse me."

She started to walk away, but Draco put his hand around her waist to keep her there. Ginny couldn't help noticing his smug expression and wondered if he was mocking her. "I think this dance belongs to my wife," Draco said, looking directly at Josephine. "Perhaps we'll dance later. There are several men here, however, that I'm sure would love to take a turn with you on the dance floor. Excuse us."

Without asking her, Draco walked his wife to the dance floor and took her into his arms. She tensed at first and then relaxed. When she looked into his eyes, she noticed the smug look was still there. "What is it? Why are you smiling at me like that?" *Is he that happy to see his ex?*

"You're jealous."

"Humph! I most certainly am not." Ginny looked away, not wanting him to see the truth in her eyes.

"You're jealous," he confirmed, pulling her a bit closer to him. "I find that I like it."

Her body relaxed, and Ginny deeply inhaled the familiar and missed scent of her husband. She moved even closer without realizing it. "She wants you and dismisses me. It's as if she thinks that all she has to do is snap, and you'll throw me over and come running. I don't care for women like her who have such utter disregard for married men."

Draco's heart leapt, and he was happy to note that the ache that had been living inside of his chest this past week was starting to lessen. "Well, wanting never hurt anybody, but you don't need to worry, love. I'm all yours."

She looked into his eyes then. "She's a very beautiful woman."

"There's no denying that, but so are you. More importantly, it's *you* who I married. Ginevra, I want no one except you."

Ginny took the last step and leaned into her husband as closely as she could, laying her head on his chest. "I think I'm ready to talk things through now, Draco. We can't resolve our problems any other way." Until she'd felt his arms around her, she had no idea how much she really needed him. As if he was the last piece of the puzzle she needed to feel safe.

"I agree. Gin, I know this is not the time or place to discuss things, but just let me say this. I'm so sorry for not listening to you, and for the terrible name I called you and your mother. I didn't mean it, and I definitely don't think of you that way. I was just hurt, so I lashed out. If I could..."

Ginny hugged him tighter. She didn't know how much she'd needed to hear him say he didn't think of her that way until he'd actually said it out loud. "Ssh. Not here. There are too many people around. Let's just dance, Draco, so that I can enjoy being in your arms again."

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Lucius stood back from everyone, watching his son and his wife. He had been so certain that once Josephine was here, Draco wouldn't be able to resist her. She was a goddess after all.

Not that Draco's wife wasn't beautiful; she was just so... common. He couldn't understand how his son had gotten mixed up with the likes of her. Even Pansy Parkinson would have been a better choice.

He watched as Ginevra slowly drifted closer and closer to Draco. It was as if she actually melted into his arms. Lucius had never understood that term before this moment.

*My God! That boy does love her. But why? She seems to actually care for him as well!* Lucius had not been so sure of that until now. He'd observed them, noticing that they hardly ever spoke and never touched. Not the normal for newlyweds.

Or it had not been so for Narcissa and him. Merlin, he hadn't been able to keep his hands off of her when they'd first gotten married. Hell, he still hadn't been able to keep his hands off of her the week before she'd died. She'd been everything to him, and despite what the common opinion was, he'd never betrayed her whilst she was alive. He turned his head, allowing the smooth firewhisky to flow down his throat. He ruthlessly pushed his wife from his mind.

His musings were interrupted when Sophia and Giselle were announced. *Ah, finally! Now I can start enjoying this little soirée!*

He looked over to Severus to make sure he'd noticed their entrance. When he caught his eye, Lucius grinned and inclined his head towards the women. Severus simply raised his glass and smiled back, shaking his head. *You know what they say, old man* Lucius thought, all work and no play... Lucius conveniently forgot that Severus had a wife. Because he considered her beneath his friend, he never gave her, or Severus' feelings, a second thought.

Rubbing his hands together in glee, he made his way to his entertainment for the evening.

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Severus sighed and wondered about Lucius. It seemed his opinions on marriage had changed since Narcissa had died. He looked over at his own wife. She was sitting at a table with Potter, Weasley, and Lovegood.

Why am I standing here at this bar drinking alone when I have a very lovely wife with me? Severus made his way to her table just as the song ended, so he reached it about the same time as Draco and his wife. Severus noted some of the tension seemed to be gone between them, and he was glad for Draco.

Hermione smiled up at her husband and patted the chair beside her. "Would you care to sit?"

"No. Actually, I was wondering if I could have this next dance."

Hermione was up in a flash. "Of course."

Once they were on the dance floor, Severus looked down at her. "Are you having a good time?"

"I'm enjoying spending time with my friends. It's been so long since we've gotten together. Are you?"

"Somewhat. I wanted to ask you, what was wrong before? Right before you danced with Weasley, you looked so hurt. What put that look in your eyes?"

The question embarrassed her. "Oh, nothing. I'm okay."

"Hermione, I thought we'd decided to talk things out to avoid incorrect assumptions. Talk to me."

She turned her head, looking at Annabelle Avery. "She's a close friend of yours, huh?"

Severus directed his gaze to where his wife was staring. *Ah, so that's it. She's figured out who Annabelle is.* "She was at one time; she's not so much any longer."

Hermione looked into his eyes then. "You seem very... comfortable around her. Open and carefree."

He chuckled. "I don't believe that I have ever been accused of being 'carefree' before."

Hermione shrugged, stung a bit and becoming more embarrassed. "You were laughing with her, talking freely."

"Yes, I was. You were also laughing and talking freely with Weasley. Open and carefree, if I recall."

"Severus! I've told you that Ronald and I are just friends now. I know that we dated before, but I don't think of him like that any longer. I will always care for him because he's been such a big part of my life, but it's you that I love."

"Exactly. I couldn't have said it better myself." He smiled when he saw that she realized the implication.

"But... I didn't think..."

"What? You didn't think that I have friends that I care for as you do Weasley and Potter?" he asked her incredulously.

"Well," she started defensively, "you hardly ever speak with or owl anyone other than Malfoy."

"Yes, you're right. Tell me, how many times have you gotten together with or exchanged owls in the past four months with either of your two mates?"

"I've been busy! With everything that's going on and..." She stopped. He was absolutely right. "Touché," she said, admitting he'd been right.

He pulled her closer. "While I admit to having a twisted sort of pleasure at the thoughts that my friendship with a past... lover could bother you, there is truly no need. I have need for only one woman...you."

"Then why haven't you..." She stopped. She didn't want to ask, making him feel obligated.

His eyes narrowed. He unconsciously tightened his grip on her. "Why haven't I what, Hermione?"

She laid her head on his chest so that she didn't have to look at him when she finished her sentence. "If you need me, then why haven't you done anything about it?"

Severus took her chin in his hand and gently turned her head so that he could look at her directly. "Are you ready for intimacy? Is it not too soon? Have you completely forgiven me?"

Tears came into her eyes, but they didn't fall. "You hurt me, there's no denying that. And it is hard to just dismiss it and let it go, but that's what I'm going to have to do in order to have the kind of marriage I want. I do forgive you."

One tear escaped, and he rubbed it away with his thumb.

"It's not too soon. I admit I've wanted you as well." Smiling then, she said, "It must be hormones, but I swear since I've become pregnant, I'm... hmmm..." Hermione couldn't think of the proper word she wanted to use.

Mischief in his eyes, her husband asked, "Yes? You've become..." He made circular motions with his hand.

She looked around them to make sure nobody was paying them any attention. Leaning in to her husband, Hermione whispered, "Needy." When he only stared at her as if he wanted her to elaborate, she said, "Randy, all right?"

When he laughed out loud, Hermione grinned. He was laughing with her...open and carefree...even if it was at her expense. "I assure you, my love, we can rectify that situation tonight if you wish to."

"I do."

"Well then." Severus leaned down and lightly brushed his lips to hers, a promise of things to come. "Perhaps we can retire to our room a little early."

"Indeed, we can. Most definitely."

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After chatting a bit with her brother, Harry, and Luna, Ginny turned to her husband. "Let's go and say hello to my parents. We should've done so before now."

"I agree," Draco said. Trying to be civil to all at the table for his wife, he nodded to the trio sitting there. "Good evening, all." He was still floating from discovering his wife could actually be jealous over him.

Harry and Ron nodded, and Luna said, "Good evening."

Draco took Ginny's small hand in his and led the way to her parents and twin brothers. "Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. I'm so happy you could make it," Draco greeted before Ginny could say anything.

Ginny just smiled and leaned down to give them both a hug. "It's so good to see you both."

Molly hugged her daughter tightly and then scolded, "I wondered if you were going to make it over here to speak with us."

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I didn't mean to ignore you."

"Think nothing of it, love," her father said. "You've guests to attend to; we understand that." Turning to Draco, Arthur narrowed his eyes. "Draco," and a nod was the only greeting he gave his son-in-law.

Ginny was surprised at the cold greeting her usually personable father gave her husband. She hoped that Ron had not been blabbering on about their problems. "Daddy? All right?"

Arthur sighed. He really shouldn't take the sins of the father out on the son. "Yes, sorry. Have a seat," he offered and gestured to the other seats surrounding the table.

Once they sat, Draco asked, "How are Fleur and her little one?"

"Oh," Molly beamed, loving to talk of her grandbaby, "they are just wonderful. Little Willie is just as handsome as his father!"

"Willie?" Ginny asked. "I thought she'd said she wanted him called William?"

"Humph," Molly said, and Draco smiled as he was instantly reminded of Ginny. "William is an awful big name for such a wee little thing."

"Mum," Ginny said warily. "You know how she is. Why would you purposely aggravate her?"

"Well, why on earth would something as insignificant as that aggravate her?"

"If it's so insignificant, then why can't you abide their wishes and call him William?" Ginny was no fool. Her own baby would be here in a few months, and she didn't live far enough away from her mum for Molly not to try bullying her on certain things.

"Is this why you came over here? To browbeat me?" Molly snapped, hating to be questioned.

Draco chuckled quietly. They obviously had no idea how much alike they were. "You look very lovely this evening, Mrs. Weasley," he said, bringing her attention to him.

Smiling, she said, "Thank you, Draco. Tell me, how have you enjoyed being married to this one?" She pointed towards her daughter.

Expertly covering his laugh, Draco answered diplomatically, "Well, I can honestly say there hasn't been a dull moment."

"Well said!" Fred agreed.

"Here, here," George followed. "You've got yourself a hellcat with our Ginny, never doubt it."

Rubbing his jaw in remembrance, Draco agreed, "Oh, indeed I do. She keeps me on my toes, she does."

Ginny narrowed her eyes. "Somebody has to." Turning to her twin brothers, she asked, "No dates tonight?"

"No, we wanted to keep our options open," George started.

"In case we found someone worthy here," Fred continued. "Such as that French pastry..."

"That lapped you up when she walked in the door," George finished, looking at Draco.

Draco turned very red. It wasn't that he was embarrassed of having Josephine's attention lavied on him; it was their mentioning it in front of his wife when it was a very sore spot with her.

"Umm... Well... I could introduce you..."

"Don't bother," Ginny said in an irritated voice. "Looks like Charlie beat you to it."

Twin heads turned at the same time comically to study the dance floor, looking for their brother. "Fuck me!" Fred said.

"Fred!" Molly admonished. "Language!"

"Yeah, he's a right git. He knew I wanted to ask her to dance!" George said as if his mother hadn't spoken.

"No, I was going to ask her!" Fred said. "I told you that I was if Gin didn't kill her before I got the chance!"

"No, me!"

"Me!"

"BOYS!" Arthur yelled. "It's a moot point now, wouldn't you say? She's dancing with Charlie."

Ginny laughed and stood. "We're going to mingle, Mum."

"All right, dear. I expect you to be at our Christmas Dinner at five o'clock sharp. And if I don't get a chance, remind Hermione for me, would you?"

"Yes." Ginny hugged her parents and her brothers goodbye.

Taking Draco's hand this time, she led the way back to their table. "I can only take so much of them now that I'm pregnant," she confided to her husband. "Mum can be a little overbearing."

"Mmmm," was the only reply Draco felt safe enough to give. Now that they'd come to a truce, somewhat, he didn't want to say anything to make her angry.

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Pansy sat by herself, watching the crowd. She was so lonely. Draco had hurt her badly. Not only by marrying the Weasley chit, though she still couldn't believe he'd actually *married* her! When Josephine had walked in, it was like the years of friendship they'd shared were suddenly insignificant.

Oh, she knew very well who Josephine was. Draco had talked of her often enough. But what was it about herself that made her so easy to forget? She knew she was no beauty. When one is called 'Pug-faced Parkinson' all during school, she can take the hint.

But Draco, well, Draco had been her *friend*. Yes, they'd dated, and she'd truly loved him. She never thought he'd reciprocated her feelings, even when she'd given herself to him. But to just brush her aside, as if she didn't even exist...

I've got to go. I can't be here! She brushed the tears she had just realized were falling.

Before she could stand up, Pansy saw a hand appear in front of her face, as if asking her to dance. She looked up and into the green eyes of Harry Potter.

"Care to dance?" he asked, still holding his hand out to her.

Suspicious, she asked, "Why?"

"Because I'd like to dance with you."

Pansy laughed. She'd had enough for one night. "No, thanks. You've done the admirable thing and asked the wallflower to dance, Potter. You can go. *Bloody Gryffindor!*

"I'm not trying to be admirable, Pansy. I would truly like to dance with you. Now, if you're not interested, say so, and I'll go."

Relenting and curious, she said, "All right. I'd like to dance."

Harry led Pansy to the floor and wrapped his arms around her. There was just something about her sitting there all alone, looking sad and wounded. *Dracbad* been an arse to her earlier, but then, she'd been one to Ginny as well. However, seeing her in such a manner made him feel a kinship to her. He knew well how it felt to be an outcast.

It honestly wasn't that he'd felt sorry for her. For some reason, he just felt drawn to her and those big, sad eyes. It was almost like a... tug, deep in his gut.

"What have you been up to, Pansy?" Harry asked, trying to make conversation.

She looked into his eyes as if trying to decide if he was sincere. She shrugged. "Not much."

"Are you having a good time?" he asked, hating small talk, but not knowing her well enough to speak of deeper topics.

"Not really. You?"

"I seem to be at the moment. I think I'd like to get to know you better, Pansy. Are you game?"

"There's not much to know really, but if you'd like, I'm willing."

Harry laughed. "Do you work or sit at home all day?" he asked,

Pansy blushed. Nobody had ever asked her what work she did, and she was sure he would make fun of her or think that she wasn't the proper person for the job. "I work," she said, almost defensively.

"Okay," he said after waiting a beat when she didn't elaborate. "What do you do?"

Here it comes, she thought. "I helped to set up and work at the new orphanage for the children whose parents died or were arrested in the war."

Harry stopped dancing and just stood with his arms around her still, looking down at her. "I think that's wonderful."

"You do?" she asked, not believing him, still waiting for him to mock her.

"Yes, I do. Not many people would even think of those children. I'm ashamed to admit that I haven't, especially after being orphaned myself."

"Well," she said, beginning to believe him, "we can always use volunteers on the weekends. To play games or sports with them, read to the younger ones, help with the more troubled ones. Anything."

He smiled at her and her breath caught. She thought his eyes looked like emeralds. "Okay. I'm off next Saturday. Will you be there?"

"Yes. We alternate the weekends, and next Saturday happens to be mine."

"Great. It's a date. Then afterwards, I'd like to take you to dinner." As if he suddenly realized that they'd not been dancing, Harry began to sway with her once more.

"Sure, if you'd like." *Oh, my. What have I gotten myself in to?* Pansy wondered, daring to hope.

Christy's Notes: Finally, things are getting back on track for our two couples! Up next, we're going to find out why Lucius acts the way that he does and perhaps redeem him a bit!

Can't Fight This Feeling by REO Speedwagon is from 1985.

SW_69's Notes: Aw, I really like the Pansy and Harry part. Thanks!

Since You've Been Gone

Chapter 10 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, *Southern_Witch_69!* Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Ten

Since You've Been Gone

Severus awoke in an extremely good mood. He looked down at his wife in his arms and smiled blissfully. His world had fallen back into place. He indulged himself and held her tighter for a moment.

"Morning," she greeted sleepily.

"Good morning, love. Sleep well?" he asked with a knowing smirk. He was happy when she'd admitted to being tired and agreed to spend the night at the Manor. That had meant that he would be able to have her sooner. And have her he did. He had wanted her so much these past few days that he'd taken her twice during the night. He would have taken her a third time, had she not been exhausted.

"Yes, actually, I did." She searched his eyes. "You?"

"Indeed."

She hugged him and then started to get out of the bed. He only pulled her to him tighter.

"Going somewhere, are you?" He didn't want to move.

"Yes. I need the loo desperately!" He released her, and she jumped out of bed. "What's on our agenda today?" she called from the loo.

"If you would not mind, I would like to speak with Lucius this morning."

"No, not at all. I can visit with Ginny while you see him. Do you want me to send Draco down?"

"No. I have something private that I wish to discuss with Lucius."

Hermione raised a questioning eyebrow at her husband as she walked back into the bedroom, but let the topic drop. She didn't want to start out this beautiful morning nagging him after the wonderful night they'd spent together.

"Okay. In that case, I think I'll just stay here and finish cataloguing for Madam Pince. Will we be leaving? After you speak with him?"

"Yes." Severus smiled at his lovely wife. "Your stomach is growing."

She scowled. "Thank you so much for pointing out the fact that I'm fat."

He laughed. "No, not fat. With child." Severus walked up behind his wife, put his arms around her, and laid a possessive hand on her belly. His look went from teasing to serious. "My child. In my eyes, it makes you even more beautiful."

Hermione turned so that she could put her arms around his neck, humbled by the depth of emotion he could arouse in her. "I love you," she murmured in his chest.

Severus kissed the top of her head. "Me too," he told her, heart full.

She backed out of his arms. "I'm going to have a shower. Go on down and speak with Lucius."

Severus leaned down and kissed her, lightly at first, and then deepening it.

"Keep that up," she joked, "and you'll never make it out of this room."

Chuckling, he released her. "I shouldn't be very long."

"Take your time."

Severus waited until Hermione walked into the bath and closed the door before he walked out in search of his life-long friend.

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Lucius was sitting in his study, going over his accounts. Truth be told, he'd wanted to get out of his bedroom and away from Sophia and Giselle. Now that the night, thus the fun, was over, they were beginning to grate on his nerves a bit.

He sighed. Usually after a party held in his mansion, he and his Cissy would sit at the breakfast table to pick apart and discuss every detail. He missed her at times such as these.

Thoughts of Draco invaded his mind. *What would Narcissa think about our son and his choice of a mate? No doubt, she'd think as I do. That girl is not worthy of my son. Yes, she got her hooks into him, right and proper.*

He couldn't understand Draco. *How could he love her so completely? I know the look of a besotted man when I see one.* He stood and began to pace. It was done, and there was nothing he could do to undo things. If only he'd been here, rather than in France...

Lucius' musings were cut short by the knock on his door. "Come in," he called out, assuming it was his son. He was shocked to see Severus instead. "Severus. You're out

early."

Severus inclined his head in greeting. "Lucius. I want to speak with you...in private. Is that possible?"

"Yes, of course. Do come in." Lucius stepped back so that Severus could walk in.

"Can I get you anything? Tea? Coffee?"

"I wouldn't mind some coffee. Tell me, where are your... paramours at the moment?"

With an amused smirk, Lucius asked, "Why do you want to know, Severus? Are you interested after all?" Lucius sat and, in his amusement, forgot to call for his house-elf.

Agitated, Severus glowered. "No, not in the least, I assure you. I thought that I made myself perfectly clear to you on that subject, Lucius. Now, I've something I wish to discuss with you."

Lucius looked at Severus and simply raised an eyebrow. "This sounds important. What is it?" he asked.

Severus sat down in the chair in front of the desk, crossed his legs and steepled his fingers under his chin. Pausing a few moments to collect his thoughts, he said, "Tell me, Lucius, what do you know of the details about your son's marriage? Of the circumstances that brought it about?"

"I know that girl is expecting. Draco must have been captivated indeed to forget the *numerous* Contraceptive Charms I've taught him over the years."

"Is that what you think? That he married her because she is with child? Can you not look at the boy and see how he feels about her?"

"I have eyes, do I not?" Lucius asked, aggravated. "Of course I can see! I think, however, that his feelings would have run their course in due time had she not tricked him."

"She *tricked* him? How antiquated. If I'm not mistaken, it still does take two to create a baby."

Lucius waved his hand in the air dismissively. "Semantics, Severus. It's beside the point now, yeah? It's happened, and now there's nothing to be done for it. I would like to ask you, though, why you did not deem it necessary to inform me of their seeing one another?"

"Because they weren't. They've never... dated, as it were."

"I'm afraid that I don't have the pleasure of understanding you, Severus. How then is she with child if they've never dated? Dear Lord, don't tell me that this pregnancy is the result of a one night stand!" Lucius stood and started to pace.

"No, that's not what I'm saying, Lucius. Please sit and I will continue to explain."

Lucius gave in and sat back down, leveling a stern look at Severus. "Please do, *myfriend*. I am quite interested in hearing this explanation."

"Tell me," Severus asked, leaning forward a bit, "do you remember the *Viscerum Moribundus* Curse?"

Lucius sat back, considering. Rubbing his chin with his first finger and thumb, he asked, "Hmmm. Isn't that the one that shuts down the internal organs?"

"Quite right, it is. Now, do you remember the cure for said curse?"

"What is this, *Professor*, a quiz? I assure you, I graduated from Hogwarts years ago."

"Let me refresh your memory then. The curse can be cured with a potion, but said potion requires three drops of a newborn infant's blood. An infant conceived of the victim and the victim's soul mate."

"This little lesson is very interesting, Severus, but what does that have to do with... What are you saying?" Lucius asked sharply.

"I am saying that your daughter-in-law and my wife were both hit with this curse in the final battle by Viktor Krum. You'd just Apparated away shortly after, if I recall correctly. That could be why you knew nothing of it." Severus sat back in his chair to let the implication of what he'd just told his friend sink in.

Lucius furrowed his brow, considering. Severus could see when Lucius understood what he was trying to tell him. "You mean to tell me that the Soul Mate Spell was performed, and that *my son* was this woman's soul mate?"

"That is exactly what I'm saying."

"I don't believe it! Whoever cast the spell must have cast it incorrectly! I demand that..."

"Lucius, stop," Severus commanded as he held up a hand. "Had the spell been done incorrectly, then the curse would not lie dormant. Remember?"

"I see."

Leaning back against the chair, Severus watched Lucius. Quietly, he asked, "Do you not remember what it was like to be married to your soul mate?"

Lucius closed his eyes, not able to fight the immense pain in not only his chest, but his whole being this time. "How could you ask me such a thing? Do you think I could forget? Narcissa was... everything to me."

"Then perhaps you should keep in mind that Draco is in the same marital bliss. He loves his wife... She is for him. They are meant."

"I remember when the Dark Lord cast that spell on all of us all those years ago. When the name Narcissa Black appeared before me, I wanted to rage, but dared not. It was Bellatrix I wanted then, you know. I had thought that she would be a more... fitting wife. But, Merlin, how could I have known the depth of the way I would come to feel for Cissy?"

"You can't know until you experience it firsthand." With a jolt, Severus remembered when the spell had been cast on him. No name had appeared, only the word 'undetermined.' He merely assumed that had meant there was no one for him. Now he realized that it was because Hermione Granger had not been born when the spell was cast. He was glad he didn't know of this before she started Hogwarts...who knows how he would have reacted?

Lucius opened his eyes suddenly and looked at Severus. "Then this means that Miss Granger is *your* soul mate?"

"That is exactly what this means. I would appreciate it if you would accept that and my marriage. I would like a little respect where my vows are concerned."

"I apologize," Lucius said stiffly.

"Lucius," Severus began, not sure of how to proceed, but following his heart, "you used to think more of the institution than you seem to now. I can't believe that you actually invited Josephine to your son's *wedding* party. And the women you see. I don't expect you to live your days alone, mind, but the constant flaunting. You know this hurts Draco, and I do believe you're also hurting yourself."

"You cannot begin to imagine the pain I felt when Fenrir Greyback attacked my wife," Lucius began. "He all but ripped her to pieces, simply for contradicting him in the presence of other Death Eaters. Naturally, he waited until I had been sent on an assignment by our Lord. If you remember, it was when the Dark Lord forbid me any retribution that I'd switched sides."

Wanting to comfort his friend because he remembered all too well, Severus laid his hand on top of Lucius' on the desk and squeezed once before releasing him. "I could never forget it, Lucius. I loved her, too. Now that I am married to Hermione, I can see how devastated you would become. I have no words..."

"No, you nor anybody else because there are no words. She was truly the other half of my heart, and when she was killed, she took the kinder half with her." Remembering his actions, especially since his son had wed, Lucius winced. "Severus, I apologize for my disregard of you and your wife."

"Apology accepted." Severus stood and walked over to the window to admire the view. "You can't continue this way, Lucius. You must know this."

"I can't be alone!"

Severus turned from the window to stare at his friend. "I am not only speaking of the women, but they are a factor as well. Nobody expects you to be alone. Simply pick one and act accordingly. However, I am speaking also of your behavior. Your dismissal of Draco and your treatment of his wife." When Lucius looked at Severus questioningly, he explained, "Draco told me of it."

"How was I supposed to know that she is his soul mate? Not one person informed me..."

"Do you think that whether she is his soul mate or not matters here?" Severus bit out angrily. "That is a moot point! The point is simply that she is his wife, Lucius. That alone should be enough for you! You cannot go around acting as you have been and not expect repercussions. You are going to lose your son as well if you are not careful."

Lucius folded his arms on his desk and lay his head down, defeated, in a rare show of weakness. "I can't do this any longer. I see her everywhere I go. This mansion alone is full of her. I hurt constantly, Severus. Constantly. I suppose I want others to feel pain, too."

"Misery loves company?"

"Something like that, I suppose."

Severus walked back to the desk. "Sell it. There's no need for you to keep it now. It's time to move on and to begin to heal. I understand that's easier said than done, but you're going to have to try. You can't continue this way, Lucius."

"No, I would never sell the home I made with Cissy, no matter what. I have tried to move on! I went to see Arthur Weasley about getting my job back at the Ministry, but he refused me." Lucius clenched his fists at the memory.

"Compromise then," Severus suggested. "Ask him if you can come back on a temporary basis to prove yourself, and that you would be willing to have your work evaluated."

"You're barking mad, man! How humiliating! Me, evaluated by Arthur Weasley? I think not."

Severus shrugged. "You're not the big man on top anymore, my friend. Things have changed. And Arthur Weasley is not a man to trifle with, nor will he take a bribe. You're going to have to bend a little if the Ministry is what you truly want."

They were interrupted by a knock on the door. "What?" Lucius yelled, bad temperedly.

"It's me, darling!" Sophia called from the other side. When Lucius started to send her away, Severus held up a hand to stop him.

"I must go. Hermione and I need to get back home. Just think on what I said."

Before Severus could reach the door, it was flung open, and the two gorgeous models entered the room. "Ooh! Who's your friend, love?" Giselle asked.

Lucius chuckled at the panicked look on his friend's face; he couldn't help himself. "This is Severus Snape. Severus, this is Giselle and, of course, Sophia."

"Nice to meet you," Severus greeted as he walked quickly toward the door, wanting to get out of there. God only knew what Lucius had told them about him.

"Leaving so soon?" Giselle asked. "I would like you to stay so that we can get to know one another. You seem so... interesting."

"It's a tempting offer, but no, thank you. I've a wife I need to get back to." Severus couldn't get to the door fast enough.

"Your loss, mate," Sophia told him. "She can be quite inventive... with conversation."

Without another word, Severus simply walked out, making sure he closed the door behind him. He could hear the women's laughter following him as he headed to his rooms.

*** **

Ginny sat in the garden, admiring the roses. She especially enjoyed the peach colored ones. She wasn't worried about a repeat performance with her father-in-law, positive that he was tucked in his bed with his two... ladyfriends. Ginny snorted. *Ladies my arse!*

As her mind drifted to the night before, she smiled contentedly. Not from memories of the party, but from what happened afterwards. She'd lain in Draco's arms all night long, talking. Simply talking. It was wonderful.

They'd started out talking of their childhood. Just as she'd suspected, her husband had been very spoiled indeed. But what had surprised her was that he had also been very loved, although she didn't know why she was surprised by this fact.

It was that she honestly couldn't picture Lucius Malfoy in the role of an indulging father, but according to the tales Draco had told her, he definitely had been. And his mother...

Draco's entire being changed when speaking of her. Ginny couldn't help remembering how she hoped that her baby loved her as much as Draco had loved his mum. Of course, Narcissa was no longer here, so that could have a little to do with his reverence towards her, but she didn't think it had a lot to do with it. He'd truly loved and missed her. He'd confessed how he wished that his mum were still alive to witness the birth of their child. Her heart still ached for him.

It made her realize that she'd been taking her own mother for granted. She promised herself to try to be more patient with Molly Weasley and her... stern ways.

When they spoke of her past with Harry and his past with Pansy, Ginny had had an epiphany. He'd been saying that he truly cared for Pansy, loved her even, as a friend, but he'd just never been 'in love' with her, so he'd broken off dating her.

Ginny had been nodding in agreement, telling him that was the best and kindest thing he could've done for Pansy, when it hit her suddenly that Harry must have felt exactly the same way about her. She'd always known that Harry had loved her; she just didn't get that it had been the same love he'd felt for Hermione.

Somehow, lying with Draco and talking of that with him, made the hurt of that realization nonexistent. He'd stroked her hair, telling her that he was glad Potter didn't have those feelings for her. She was happy he didn't start sprouting off about how foolish Harry was because he didn't have those kinds of feelings for her. Perhaps his experience with Pansy had helped him understand Harry a little better. Ginny hoped so.

Draco had told her when he began to notice her. He admitted it was on the train to Hogwarts right before his sixth year when Blaise Zabini had said something about how pretty she was or some such rot, but that comment had caused Draco to see for himself.

He'd told her of how he had watched her during the Welcoming Feast that night and started to realize how beautiful he also thought she was. Her husband had confessed to watching her as much as he could, oftentimes taking the longest routes to his classes so that he'd pass her in the hallway. Until things started unraveling for him, that is. He told her that during those times, she'd almost become an obsession for him, that seeing her had been the only bright spot of his day. She chose not to dwell on those times...

She started chuckling, remembering that she must've fallen asleep mid-sentence because they'd talked so long. When she woke this morning, she was still wrapped tightly in his arms. She'd gently slipped out of bed, wanting to come and sit out here to reflect a bit before going back to Hogwarts.

Her thoughts were interrupted by footsteps walking in her direction. "Good morning, love. I hope I didn't..." She gasped when she realized that it was Lucius, not Draco, walking towards her. She rose quickly and turned to leave.

Careful not to touch her, Lucius stood in front of her, halting her escape. "If you would be so inclined, I would like a word, Ginevra."

"No thanks. I need to gather my things; we'll be going back home soon."

"Please."

Ginny was stunned. She studied him for a moment before relenting. "All right."

"Could we sit?" Lucius asked, gesturing towards the bench she'd been occupying before she'd seen him.

Without saying a word, Ginny walked to the bench and sat, back straight and stiff, looking at anything but Lucius.

Lucius sighed and ran a hand through his normally perfect hair. Severus was right, he had to make some changes, and this was the best place to start. "I would like to say that first and foremost, I owe you an apology, Ginevra. I have acted abhorrently towards you, and you have my sincerest regrets."

Ginny started at him, gobsmacked. "Um... Well..."

He smiled. "Draco is my son, and I love him endlessly. I had expectations and dreams for him that were my own and definitely not his. When he chose his own path...one decidedly different from the one I'd always wanted for him...I took it as a slap against *me*, never realizing that it had nothing to do with me and everything to do *with him*."

Ginny thought of her parents. "Yes. Sometimes it's impossible to live up to our parents' expectations of us." She turned to look him in the eyes then, voicing out loud what had only occurred to her at that moment. "I do love him, if that helps you any."

Lucius searched her eyes and, deciding she was telling him the truth, came to a decision. "Let me tell you a story, Ginevra."

"A story?"

"Yes. One that I think you will find very... enlightening." So he began. He told her things he'd only told Narcissa and Draco. He spoke of joining Voldemort and why he'd decided to. He spoke of the horror he'd felt when he'd realized that he'd basically pledged himself to a madman.

Then he began speaking of his wife, and his whole demeanor changed just as Draco's had. He'd told her how upset he'd been when the spell had deemed her his soul mate because he'd wanted her sister.

Once he'd started, he didn't...couldn't...stop until he'd told her everything, ending with his wife's death and why he'd switched sides. He'd felt oddly purged somehow having said everything out loud. He looked back at her, not remembering when his gaze had drifted from her face.

She had tears in her eyes, thinking only of Draco and how he had to live with the cause of his mother's death. "How horrible!"

"Indeed it was, and I'm afraid I haven't handled my life very well since then."

Ginny nodded. He hadn't. He'd been through a lot, though some things he'd brought on himself. "Well then, it's up to you to start handling it differently, eh?"

Lucius laughed out loud. Yes, he could see why his son had fallen for this young woman. How could he have missed that fiery spark in her? "My wife would have enjoyed you, Ginevra. I think she would have liked you very much."

"Do you really?" she asked, wanting that statement to be the truth.

"Absolutely. I can see you will keep my son on his toes."

She smiled. "Try to at least."

"What's this?" Draco asked from behind them, looking at his father hard.

"Nothing, son, I was just keeping your lovely wife company."

"She does not want your company!"

Ginny stood and walked to her husband, gently laying a hand on his shoulder. "Draco, it's all right. We've been having a nice conversation, honestly."

With one last glare towards his father, Draco turned towards his wife. When he saw that she was truly okay, Draco smiled. "What were you speaking of?"

"This and that," she told him nonchalantly. "I'm going to gather our things, love. You stay here and speak with your father before we go." Ginny turned to Lucius. "Thank you for the party, though I'll not thank you for your surprise from France," she told him saucily. "Never liked tart in any case. Goodbye."

Once again, this daughter-in-law of his had him laughing out loud. Deciding to keep with her tone, he told her, "You may not, but I expect your brother... hmmm... the one who is the dragon trainer?"

"Charlie."

"Yes, Charlie. I can guarantee you that he will thank me. They left together."

Ginny made a disgusted face. "Figures. That doesn't surprise me in the least. I need to go get our things together." She turned, kissed her husband on the cheek, and started back inside.

After she was out of sight, Lucius turned to clear the air with his son, but as he looked at Draco, his heart shattered.

No doubt, Draco was the spitting image of him, from his pale gray eyes, to his platinum hair, all the way down to the way his body was built, but at that moment...at that instant...when Lucius turned and saw the love that his boy had in his face when he watched his wife, all Lucius could see was Narcissa. Not so much the physical, but the expression.

Filled with emotion and heartbreak still from his talk with Severus and Ginevra, Lucius did something he'd not allowed himself...nor his son...to do since Narcissa Malfoy had died.

When Draco's gaze left his wife and turn to his father, he was utterly surprised to see the tears streaming down his face. He widened his eyes, uncomfortable because he'd never seen his father show any sort of sad emotion, much less cry. That was one of the reasons that Lucius' behavior these past months since his mother had died had bothered him so much. Lucius Malfoy had never shed one tear for his wife, and that, most of all, was what had hurt Draco.

On a ground unprecedented, Draco did the only thing he could think to do. Instinctively knowing his father was thinking of his mother, he walked to Lucius and hugged him. Lucius grabbed hold of him and squeezed tightly, as if Draco was his lifeline in a body of drowning emotions, finally sobbing and sharing his grief with his son, the only other person who had loved his wife unconditionally. Now, not only did he feel purged, but cleansed as well. Lucius would never know that this cleared the air between them more than any words ever would.

*** **

Pansy was sitting in her office at the orphanage, going over the ever-mounting paperwork. She was happy to note that she had three appointments next week for potential adoptions.

It surprised her how quickly the children were finding homes. Well, all except the more... difficult ones. She sighed, wondering how on earth she was going to help them. Most of the ones who were difficult were that way because they had been harmed...one way or another...while the Dark Lord had been alive.

She could thank Harry for ridding them of that madman if nothing else.*Harry*. Pansy looked at the clock on the wall once more. He was thirty minutes late*He's not late, you twit! He's not coming!*

Pansy could have kicked herself for getting her hopes up. She'd spent this past week since the party, allowing that small fraction of hope grow, knowing better even as she'd dreamed of him. He'd been so... intense with her when they'd danced. Truly focusing on *her*, not glancing around as if searching for a better person to be with. Now she had to deal with her disappointment and embarrassment as well, as she'd told the children to expect him.

The only other person who'd ever treated her like that was Draco, but then he'd hurt her terribly when Josephine walked into the room. When she felt a tear fall, she angrily swiped it away, vowing not to give Harry Bloody Potter...or Draco Bloody Malfoy...another thought. She refused to waste her time.

Just as she picked up the next application, her door burst open, and Harry came barreling in. "So sorry I'm late! Kingsley called a last minute meeting this morning, and it was mandatory that we all attend."

"It's no problem," she said in a short tone. "The children are around back playing all sorts of games. Just go out and jump in where you're needed."

Harry stood where he was and studied her, noticing her watery eyes. "You thought I wasn't going to show up, didn't you? I told you I'd be here, Pansy."

In a jerky movement, she lifted one shoulder. "People say a lot of things to me, Harry. Go on outside now. I need to finish these applications."

"I'm not people. It's me...Harry."

"Yeah? Who's that?" *I refuse to be blinded by a strong wizard with gorgeous eyes again!* "I don't know you, and you don't know me."

"True enough," Harry agreed. "I thought we'd established that was the purpose of dinner tonight?"

Pansy slumped her shoulders, defeated. "You're right. I apologize."

Harry nodded. "Don't categorize me or my feelings. You'll find that I won't fit into some neat, little package."

Ashamed because that is exactly what she'd been doing, she let her gaze fall to the papers on her desk. "They're expecting you out back, Harry. You really should go on out. The kids are excited that the Great Harry Potter is paying a visit."

Harry stepped closer to the desk. Taking her chin in his hand and lifting her face until her eyes locked with his, he asked, "What about the administrator? Is she excited that the Great Harry Potter is here?"

She wanted to laugh, but the expression on his face warned her that however teasing his tone might be, his eyes were very serious. "She seems to be...albeit reluctantly."

Suddenly, Harry smiled and his body relaxed. "That'll do. Reluctance never hurt anybody."

He leaned in and very lightly, very gently, and brushed his lips to hers. The shock rocked him down to the soles of his feet. He opened his eyes to find her staring at him as if dazed, so he knew that she'd felt it, too.

"Well," he said, "that certainly gives us something to think about."

Suddenly the door burst open again, only this time Ron Weasley walked in. "Oi! Sorry I'm late," he started, oblivious to the tension in the room, "I went by *The Quibbler* to try and talk Luna into coming." He rolled his eyes. "Said she's got some breaking story, but then, she always does."

Harry looked at Pansy sheepishly. "Um, I invited Ron to come with me. I hope that's okay."

"Of course it is," Pansy told him, happy for the excuse to take a few steps back. "When it comes to the children, the more the merrier."

"I was thinking," Ron said. "I could talk to Fred and George. What are they but big kids themselves? I bet they'd come some."

Pansy gave Ron a stern look. "As long as they leave their jokes in their shop, I wouldn't mind at all."

Ron looked at Harry. "I also had another idea when I went to talk to Luna. This place is not well known. Perhaps they could feature it in *The Quibbler*. Then maybe the *Daily Prophet* wouldn't be far behind, eh?"

"Why would you do that?" Pansy asked, stunned.

Ron shrugged. "For the children. They deserve a chance, and I'd like to help."

"Ron," Harry said, slapping him on the back, "that's a brilliant idea." He turned Pansy, smiling. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes, I would," she admitted, humbled by the unselfishness actions of the two men standing before her. Most she'd known would've asked 'What's in it for me?' "I thank

you."

"Think nothing of it." Ron was getting embarrassed. "Let's go, mate. I have an itch to kick your arse in a spot of Quidditch."

Raising an eyebrow, Harry inclined his head, accepting the challenge. "Better wizards than you have tried," he joked.

Laughing, Ron swung an arm around Harry. "Ah, but they didn't know you like I do!"

Shaking her head and smiling hesitantly, she told the two, "Out. I have to finish this!"

When Harry got to the door, he turned to look back at Pansy. "Don't leave here without me tonight. I've made reservations for seven o'clock."

"Sure," she agreed. "No problem." Pansy desperately hoped that the nerves quivering in her belly didn't show on her face.

Satisfied that she wouldn't, Harry followed Ron to the back, where all the kids were playing... and dreaming.

Christy's Notes: Maybe if that doesn't redeem Lucius, it at least explains him some.

Since You've Been Gone by Outfield is from the year 1986

SW_69's Notes: Ah, it's great when things fall into place.

Take My Breath Away

Chapter 11 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Eleven

Take My Breath Away

Hermione Snape sat at the table closest to the front in the library in case Madam Pince wanted to ask her a question or give her a task. She'd been coming to the library everyday these past three months since Christmas break had ended, enjoying the tasks the current librarian had set for her to do. Although it was just shy of eight a.m., the librarian usually had something for her to start on.

"Mrs. Snape, I must compliment you on your reorganization skills. The rearranging of those books in the Charms section was genius!" Madam Pince praised. "You'll do quite well here next year when I retire."

"Thank you, Madam. It's just that I've come here so often and..." Hermione shook her head to clear it. "What? You're going to retire?"

Narrowing her eyes with concern, the librarian said, "Yes, of course. You know very well that you've been my apprentice these past months! Why else would I have you doing all those tasks you've been performing lately? Are you sure you're feeling quite well? I've read that those in their seventh month can sometimes become... confused."

"Your apprentice? No, I had no idea!" The notion was fast becoming exciting for her though. "How would I have known? You've never mentioned it to me."

"Well, really! Minerva was supposed to have said something to you months ago. You came in here the very day that the headmistress and I discussed it, asking if you could help me with anything! I just assumed the two of you had talked it over and that you'd agreed."

Hermione remembered that day well. It was the day that Severus had believed she'd been cheating with Ron, and she had just wanted somewhere to go...something to do. "No. She's never mentioned it to me, but I have to admit, the idea appeals to me very much. I just need to speak with Severus."

Madam Pince huffed. "Honestly! I thought that this had already been settled; else I never would have begun your training! I'm most put out by this turn of events!"

"I apologize, Madam! I had no idea. I will speak with him after his last class today. There shouldn't be any problem though." Hermione's heart was racing. The more she thought about it, the more she wanted this position. Surely Severus wouldn't have any objection... She'd be right here in the castle and could even bring the baby with her for the first few weeks.

"See that you do! I don't have time to be training someone else at this late date! Why, it's already March!"

"Yes, ma'am," Hermione said demurely.

Once the librarian had gone to put away some books, Hermione gathered her things and left for her and Severus' rooms. She wanted to be there if he returned between classes. If not, she'd just have to wait until his classes were over since she'd stopped going to the Great Hall for meals the month before. *Circe, I hope he doesn't have any detentions tonight!*

*** **

Ron made his way into his flat wearily. He and Harry had worked the nightshift, as the newbies had to do, and he was bone tired. For once, he'd decided to ignore the ever-growing hunger pains in the pit of his stomach and fall straight into bed.

It had been an eventful night. The attempted Azkaban break was the highlight. Ron shook his head. *The stupid sodders thought they'd rush the guards. What do they think? No sort of alarms?*

It had been his immense pleasure to elbow Theodore Nott right in the nose and extremely satisfying to hear the crunch of the break. Not that he and his cohort were the only two attempting an escape, mind; no, the whole rotten prison thought they could start an uprising.

The fighting and rounding up of the prisoners had left him tired and aching. All he wanted at the moment was his bed and... Ron stopped short of closing his bedroom door. He'd been too lost in his thoughts, or he would've realized sooner that something was off.

Wand at the ready, he made his way to the kitchen, ready to Stupefy whoever seemed to be making himself at home in his flat. He pushed the door open and burst through, spell halfway out of his mouth when it registered who was standing there. "Bloody hell, Luna! What do you think you're doing?" he shouted.

Unperturbed by his hateful tone, Luna simply smiled and said, "Good morning! I wanted to make breakfast for you before I head in to *The Quibbler*..." She suddenly noticed his irate expression. "Um, I apologize for coming in here...uninvited, that is...to wait for you."

She stood there, feeling foolish as she waited for him to respond. Now jittery because he wouldn't say anything, she went on. "Okay, I can see that you're tired...long night, eh?...so I'll just leave. I didn't mean to just barge in here or anything; I just thought you'd be tired from work, and I know you're always hungry," she began laughing nervously, "so I wanted to make sure you're taken care of..."

She stopped talking. He just stood there, holding his wand, looking at her as if she were as loony as everyone claimed her to be. When the tears came, it never occurred to her to try and stop them. "Right. I'll go then. Er, Floo me when you're next off and want to go out or something."

She started walking briskly to the door. All Luna knew was that she had to get out of there, or she would make a fool of herself. She had loved Ronald Bilius Weasley for as long as she could remember. It was her cross to bear, as his feelings were obviously not mutual. That was okay, as her feelings were her own responsibility, but damn him! *Would it kill him to show me a little appreciation every now and then? Affection?*

Luna was startled from her inner musings when Ron grabbed her arm as she brushed past him. He pulled her to him roughly and kissed her hungrily. All train of thought left her head.

Ron had been speechless after his initial outburst. He stood watching her at his stove, cooking his breakfast, and giving him a welcome home smile. The sunlight had been streaming through the windows behind Luna and had outlined her, making her look angelic.

He knew she had been babbling and that he should say something to put her mind at ease, but at that moment, all he could think was *She's so beautiful, and she's all mine!* The urge to have her at that moment was so great, so powerful, that it left him stunned.

When Ron finally came to enough to see her leaving, he stopped her the only way he could think of. Finally coming up for air, he murmured against her mouth, "Thank you for breakfast, honey, but I'm a bit starved for something else just now."

Luna stiffened. She'd not let things get that far before, knowing that though she loved and wanted him, this was a part of herself she had to protect. Once they made love...shagged to him...she would never be able to move on once he'd left her. Luna had no doubt that he eventually would.

"I need to get to work. There was an attempted prison break..." She couldn't think with him kissing her neck like that.

"Umm hmm. I was there. I can tell you all about it." He moved lower and started unbuttoning her robes.

She fisted her hands in his hair, not sure if she meant to push him away or pull him closer. "Ronald," she whispered as her body filled with needs and longings she thought she'd suppressed.

Ron began backing her out of the kitchen and towards his bedroom, kissing and caressing as they went. He wanted her with a passion he'd never felt before. Overwhelming and all encompassing. His tiredness had been replaced with passion, and he wanted to show her.

Once they reached his bedroom, he stopped beside the bed and slipped her robes from her shoulders. Ron stood back so that he could admire her body and was not disappointed in what he saw. "Very nice. Luna, you're gorgeous." He began gently stroking her.

Luna blushed and, with trembling fingers, began fumbling with his buttons. She wanted things to be perfect for him, but she wasn't stupid. The more she thought of pleasing him, the clumsier she became.

Ron stopped his ministrations, wondering what the matter was. "All right, Luna?"

"Yes, yes, fine." She giggled. "It's just that these darn buttons won't cooperate! I've never had problems before..."

He very gently laid his lips to hers. "We don't have to do this now if you're not ready." He rubbed up and down her arms in a comforting gesture. "It's okay! *I'll just hold off exploding until I'm alone...*

Luna stopped fumbling and looked up into his face, searching his eyes. "I want you, Ronald. I love you. Don't say anything," she said quickly, realizing her mistake. She never meant to say that to him. "I know that you don't feel the same. Why would you? I know what I am...how people see me...but it doesn't matter...not really...I only care what *you* think, you see, and knowing that you want me is enough."

"Don't do that!" he said, his voice simultaneously roughened with need and annoyance.

She winced. "Oh, I'm sorry. I..."

"Don't assume my feelings, and don't put yourself down that way! You're a remarkable woman, Luna. I've thought so for a while. I'm sorry I gave you the impression I thought otherwise."

"Please don't," she whispered. "Don't say the words. I tend to be literal minded. If you say them, I'll start believing them, wanting them and, most importantly, needing them. I don't want to crowd you."

"Damn it, Luna! You're worth so much more than you...and apparently me...give yourself credit for! I know that lately it seems I've taken you for granted. Perhaps I have. It stops now. Right this minute! Haven't you figured out, with that smart brain of yours, that there's nobody else I want except you? I'm not very good with showing how I feel,

unless I'm angry, but you mean something to me." *More than I've realized...*

"Something?" She had not intended to push him, but at that moment, she wanted to hear it. It was important for her to hear just what that something was.

Ron looked down into Luna's beautiful, silvery eyes. Very gently, he laid her on the bed, took off his robes, and lay beside her, holding her against him.

"Even more than I've realized," he said while gently stroking up and down her back. Seemingly to himself, he went on. "I think of you a lot when we're not together. I look forward to our dates. I've wanted you almost from the beginning, but soon came to understand that I wanted more than just sex with you. That alone is unusual for me because, normally, that would be one of the first things I'd go for, but with you..."

Luna dared not interrupt, instinctively knowing he was talking of his feelings for her more to himself than to her. She wanted him to work it out himself without any prompting from her. Her heart fluttered in her chest as he rambled on, waiting for him to finally comprehend his feelings and voice them aloud. They'd been dating exclusively for three months now...he must have some idea.

"I've wanted to make you happy, more than myself," he continued, voice full of wonder. He hadn't even put Hermione's feelings above his when they'd dated, and he knew that he'd loved her without a doubt. *Love? Am I in love with Luna?*

Ron knew that he'd matured a lot since Auror training. He was finally beginning to think before speaking and find out all the details before acting, but this... He jerked and sat up, looking down into Luna's patient...although expectant...face. His mind had finally caught up to his heart.

He smiled and ran a finger down her cheek. He didn't feel panicked or the urge to flee. He felt happy. Ecstatic. He bent down and kissed her once, very gently. "I love you, Luna. I don't think I've ever understood what that meant exactly, until now, because I've never loved anyone like this before."

She couldn't stop the tears, although this time, she wanted to. She didn't want to be sniveling at such a moment, but she couldn't help herself. Her Ronald had finally said the words she'd been aching to hear most of her life, only better than she ever could have imagined. She threw her arms around him and hugged him to her tightly. "I love you, too, Ronald. So much!"

Luna began kissing him everywhere she could reach. His face, his lips, his neck, his chest... "Honey, as much as I'm enjoying this," he groaned deep and loud when her tongue found his nipple, "in about three seconds I'm not going to be able to stop myself. So, unless you want this to go all the way..."

She answered him by straddling him and locking her feet behind his back. "I want you. I need you, and most of all I love you. Love me back, Ronald."

He couldn't have stopped himself after that declaration if he'd tried. Ron deftly flipped Luna onto her back and answered her command with pleasure.

*** **

Draco had just stepped out of the shower, leaving his wife to finish washing her hair. He would have loved to wash it himself, but he had to get ready for his first class of the day. He smiled, thinking of her much appreciated aggressiveness. This month of her pregnancy had been especially wonderful. She was insatiable. He loved it.

"Do we have plans this Saturday, baby?" Draco asked.

"Hmm. No, I don't think so. Do you have something in mind?" she asked him as she turned off the water and grabbed a towel. Ginny had finally started growing once her sickness had passed, and she rubbed her growing tummy lovingly.

Her husband watched her movements and walked to her, placing both hands on her stomach, wanting to feel any movement within. She smiled up at him. "He's resting."

"Do you know something I don't? You've been calling the baby *he* ever since you became pregnant. I thought we weren't going to find out?"

"No, I didn't find out. It's just logical that this is a boy. My mum had six boys before she had me, and your mum had you... Boys are always first in my family, so I just think our baby will be a boy."

"Ah, I see. Logic." He grinned. "I love you, especially your mind, when it's being logical."

"Right." Ginny drew the word out. "You were definitely loving my mind in the shower moments ago."

"Hey, I can love both your mind and body at the same time! I'm gifted that way," he teased.

For reasons unknown, although Ginny blamed it on pregnancy hormones, she thought of Josephine just then and wondered how *valented* Draco had been with her. Now that was one... gifted witch. Her brother Charlie and Josephine had eloped Valentine's Day, much to the surprise of all in her family.

Recalling the way Draco had used his talented mouth on her in the shower moments ago, she blurted out, "You've loved Josephine the same way that you loved me, haven't you?" She didn't mean for that to come out like an accusation, although it did.

Draco turned to face his wife then, all teasing gone from his face and voice. Stopping buttoning his shirt midway, he looked directly into her eyes. "I've never loved anyone the way I love you, Ginevra."

She held up her hand. "No, don't. I'm sorry. That was uncalled for." She sighed. "Stupid hormones. I meant physically, but still, don't answer me. It's none of my business what...or who...you did before me. I know that in here," she told him as she tapped the side of her head with her finger, "but in here," she tapped her chest where her heart lay, "I get... jealous." Oh, how she hated that word.

"Ginny, Josephine and I were close for a summer. We dated and were lovers, which you already know. Our parents would have rejoiced at a union between us, and I won't lie to you, we...Josie and I...did discuss it. But that's all it would've been. Not a marriage or a home, not like we have, but a union." He cupped her face. "With her, it was all heat and no substance." He kissed her. "With you it's... everything."

"Oh, Draco, I love you!" Ginny threw her arms around him. "I've never felt this way either." She smiled. "I suppose that since I've never been intimate with anyone other than you, it's hard for you to understand, but it's difficult knowing that others have... had you."

He stiffened slightly when she said she'd never felt this way. Draco knew that she'd loved Harry Potter for years. As his wife kept speaking, he got the image of Potter over her, caressing her, loving her, and Draco only knew that he was happy that he *had* been the only one to be with her, petty as that sounded.

They'd both spoken of others, specifically Potter and Pansy, and Ginny had confessed to Draco before that the love she'd felt for Harry paled in comparison to him. He only had to believe it. Thinking of Pansy reminded him of his plans for Saturday.

"Oh, before I forget, I want to take you somewhere Saturday. It's a surprise," he said before she could start asking questions. "So, don't make any plans, okay?"

"Sure." Suddenly, she stiffened and then grabbed his hand, placing it on her tummy. "Feel!"

The baby was definitely moving about. Draco grinned. He loved to feel it. "Active little bugger, isn't he?" He looked down at this timepiece and frowned. "Damn. I have to go or I'll be late." He bent and kissed her. "See you this evening."

"Bye, love, and have a good day," Ginny told him as he left. She finished getting dressed, wondering what plans he had cooked up for them this weekend.

*** ** *

Harry had had a good six hours sleep when he woke and decided to pay Pansy a call at the orphanage. He was in an exceptionally good mood because little by little, his intriguing little Slytherin was opening up to him. All he had to do was keep her guessing.

He walked into her office without knocking and was momentarily taken aback to see her on her knees in front of the fireplace talking to *Snape*. Neither of them had heard him enter the room, so Harry didn't bring any attention to his presence.

"Thank you so much, Professor Snape. If it hadn't been for you and your quick thinking..."

"It's all right, Miss Parkinson. He will be fine now. I would like to check back this evening, after classes, if I may."

"Of course," she agreed as she sniffled. "You are welcome here anytime."

Severus nodded. "Good day."

Once he had disconnected the Floo, Pansy placed her face in her hands and sobbed loudly, brokenly. She jumped when she felt the gentle hands on her shoulders.

"H-*Harry!* What are you doing here?"

"I've come to see you. What's the matter, Pansy? What were you and *Snape* talking about?"

"You were *eavesdropping* on my private conversation? How dare you?" She stood and walked away from him, shaking with fury and desperation, ignoring her wet cheeks.

His relaxed face hardened. "No, I did not eavesdrop. I walked into your office, and you were talking, so I simply waited until you'd finished your conversation."

"Walked in without knocking...uninvited...and purposely didn't speak so that you could hear what we were talking about. Well, I don't care for your methods, Potter."

"Uninvited? Potter?" Harry had no idea what was wrong with Pansy, but he knew she was lashing out at him for something he had nothing to do with. Knowing it didn't stop his anger.

"I thought we'd gotten past all this, Pansy." He turned away from her. "I don't know what else to do, how else to act. I've done nothing to cause your distrust of me. As a matter of fact, I've done everything I know to do to convince you that I'm interested in you and would like to see where we can take... this. Apparently, I've misjudged you and your feelings. I'm through beating my head against the wall and jumping through hoops."

He started towards the door, and Pansy knew that she'd gone too far. She panicked, not wanting him to leave. She wanted to scream, but could only whisper, "Don't. Please don't walk out on me. I...I'm sorry." Then she looked away because she couldn't bear to watch him walk out on her, even if it was her fault.

Harry stopped and took a deep breath to calm himself. "Why?"

"Why?" she repeated.

"Why should I stay, Pansy, when you obviously don't want or need me to?"

Pansy faced him then. She owed him that much, she knew, even if it was costing her. "You're wrong. I do need you. I need you too much, and that scares me, Harry."

He walked to her then. "It doesn't have to," he said softly. "I won't hurt you, Pansy. How many times do I have to say that before you believe me?"

"You won't mean to. I know that. But when you move on, if we keep heading where this between us seems to be heading, it's going to hurt me. I have to protect my heart."

Harry discovered he hadn't calmed down in the least. "What the hell's the matter with you?" he asked in a dangerously low voice that anyone who knew him better would have known the anger that vibrated underneath. "I don't care to be lumped in with the other blokes you've dated, Pansy. I'm not like any of them, and I'll not try to convince you anymore. I'm done here." He turned and walked out the door, slamming it, before he said anything further.

Pansy went to her desk and sat down. She'd blown it...it was her own fault. She'd been her own worst enemy. By trying to keep herself from getting hurt and keeping him at wand's length, she'd driven him away. With everything else that had happened so far that day, she simply broke, laying her head down on her desk and crying.

Suddenly, she was pulled from her chair and engulfed in strong arms. "I couldn't go," Harry whispered into her hair. "I realized that by leaving, *was* acting like everyone else before me. We've been dating three months now, Pansy. Don't you get it? I'm falling for you."

She only shook her head, leaving it buried in his chest. "I'm so sorry, Harry. I tried to keep myself from having all of these feelings for you, but it's not working."

He held her tighter. "What's wrong, love? Why were you crying when I first came in?"

Breathing deeply and reveling in the scent that was distinctively Harry's, she told him, "It was Peter. He tried to kill himself this morning by way of poison. I did the first thing I could think of and contacted Professor *Snape*. He immediately Flooed here and quickly got the antidote. If I'd been just ten minutes later..."

"You weren't," Harry reassured her. "You got there in time."

"*This* time I did. But, Harry, he's so withdrawn, emotionally damaged. I know there has been physical damage as well, but he won't open up to me, and his psychiatrist isn't allowed to discuss their sessions. I just don't know what else to do."

"You're only one person. You're going to have to get more help here."

"How? This orphanage is run on donations only. I can't afford to pay anyone. The workers here now are here on a voluntary basis." She threw up her hands in annoyance. "I'm at my wit's end!"

Smiling, Harry said, "You know, I just may have a solution for you."

"Tell me!" she insisted and listened carefully as he spoke.

*** ** *

Severus walked into his and Hermione's rooms, distracted. His wife pounced on him the moment he entered. "Hi! I have the best news..."

"Yes, that's nice." He had yet to look at her, simply walking to his desk and going through older journals as if he was looking for something.

She folded her arms across her chest and cocked her head to the side. Hermione had never seen her husband this distracted. "I took your broom and flew to the top of the castle and then jumped. It was an exhilarating flight on the way down."

"Oh, well, I hope you had a nice time."

"It was great until I hit the ground. Right messy, that. That's why I'm as transparent as Moaning Myrtle."

"You look lovely as always, my dear."

"Severus!" Hermione yelled. When his head snapped up, she asked, "What is it? What's wrong?"

He sighed, deep and heavy. "Peter from the orphanage tried to kill himself this morning by drinking a poisonous potion. I've given him the antidote, but it worries me. The boy is only nine years old."

"The orphanage? What orphanage?" Hermione shook her head, trying to follow his words.

He looked at her as if she were as transparent as Moaning Myrtle. "I am speaking of the orphanage that Pansy Parkinson opened after the war. There were articles in both the *Daily Prophet* and *The Quibbler*. Don't you remember?"

Hermione blushed. "With everything I've been doing in the library, I haven't read much of the papers, only bits and pieces. Will he be okay?"

"Yes. Well, he will recover from the potion he drank. Who's to say that he won't try again? If there was only a way to reach him..."

Hermione went to her husband and put her arms around him. Nobody really knew how much he actually cared for his students or, in this case, future students. "I'm sorry. If there's anything I can do, let me know."

"Miss Parkinson needs volunteers, at least on the weekends." He looked her up and down. "If you wanted, you could help for a bit. Nothing too strenuous though; I'll not have you overtaxing yourself."

She smiled at his over protectiveness. She didn't mind it at times such as these. "I need to speak with you about something if you're up to it."

"All right." He walked to the couch and sat, motioning for her to sit with him. "What's on your mind?"

"Madam Pince is retiring next year, and without my knowing it, she's been apprenticing me to take her place. I would really like to, Severus."

"Without your knowing it? Just how is that possible?"

"Well, Minerva was supposed to have mentioned it to me, but she never did. And the day that Madam Pince thought that she had, I had gone to the library and asked if she needed any help... It was the day we argued over... um, well, when Ronald was hugging me and..."

"Yes, I recall the day you are referring to," he said shortly, not wanting to think of those times.

"So, with that, and because I've been going everyday, the tasks she's been giving me to do were for apprentice purposes. She and Minerva want me to take her place next year. What do you think?" she asked anxiously.

Severus looked at her, noting her flushed expression, the heavy breathing, and the passion in her eyes. He suddenly hardened, her countenance reminding him of other times she'd looked that way. He cleared his throat. "Do you believe you can handle that and a new baby?"

"Yes," she said firmly. "I do."

"Well, the decision is up to you, of course. I'll only intercede if I see that you are becoming worn and exhausted."

Hermione threw her arms around his neck and jumped in his lap, kissing him deeply. "Thank you!" She felt his hardened erection pressing against her and began to move naughtily. "Something on your... mind?"

He growled, spreading his legs to try and ease the ache a bit. "Three guesses."

His naughty little wife laughed, and before he realized her intentions, she'd unbuttoned his trousers and began stroking him. "Mmmm," he muttered as he laid his head against the back of the couch and closed his eyes, enjoying her.

Hermione stood, bending a bit so that she could continue her ministrations, and took off her knickers with her free hand. While Severus still had his head back and eyes closed, she straddled him, engulfing him in her wet, hot, tightness.

"Oh sweet Circe," he cried out and grabbed her hips as she rocked them both to bliss, kissing her thoroughly. He tried to be gentle with her, but as she began to move wantonly, caressing her breasts over her robes, and throwing her head back, he began to thrust harder. She seemed to love it. It almost seemed to him as if she were using his cock for her own pleasure which caused his already tremendous need to strengthen. As he emptied himself inside her, she came violently, pulling his hair as she trembled.

"Hermione," he said and pulled her to him roughly. He took in her scent, their scent mixed together, and felt happy.

"I love you, Severus."

"Me too."

Hermione giggled. He always said it that way, in some shortened version, very rarely saying the actual words. It didn't bother her as it used to. As she got to know him more and more, she understood this was just his way.

When she felt him moving restlessly, she asked, "Peter?"

"Yes, I would like to go and check on the boy. Would you mind?"

"Not at all. Go ahead. I'll send for our supper in about an hour. Would that be enough time?"

"Yes. Will you be all right waiting that long?" he asked as he began to caress her stomach.

"Yes, I will. I ate a snack earlier. Don't worry about me...us...we'll be okay."

He kissed her one last time, took out his wand and cleaned them both, then buttoned his trousers after tucking himself back in. "You know, I wouldn't mind a... longer, more thorough version of this in our bed tonight."

"Is that so?" she teased. Rubbing him along his buttons, she told him, "I'll have to see what I can do to accommodate you then, sir." She bent and kissed him where she'd been rubbing and had the pleasure of feeling him shudder.

"Perhaps you should eat now and be in bed when I return," he suggested.

She laughed. "Off with you," she said but was taking his suggestion under consideration. Very serious consideration.

Christy's Notes: I love it when things come together! More on the orphanage next!

Take My Breath Away by Berlin is from the year 1986

Hiya, all! Voting has started for the Potter Place

Winter Prompts Challenge. Please go cast a vote for your favorite Winter Prompt Response.

Link:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Potter_Place/polls

Southern's Notes: Whee! Things are tying up nicely!

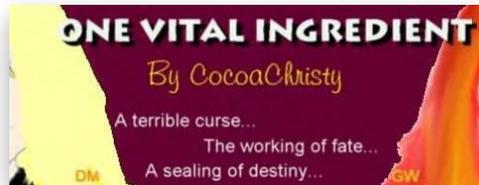
Don't You Forget About Me

Chapter 12 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, Southern_Witch_69! Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Twelve

Don't You Forget About Me

Ginny stood outside the building, hands on her hips, considering. She shot a look at her husband. "What's this?" she asked as she read the name *Wayward Souls* on the front.

"Have you heard or read anything about the orphanage Pansy has helped to open?" She nodded. "This is it. Before we got married, I used to come here on most weekends and play Quidditch and such with the kids. It was great actually. There is this one boy I've really bonded with, and I want to see how he's doing. You up for it?" he asked as he looked her up and down. "I think you could wobble around for an hour or two..."

She playfully hit him on the shoulder. "Yes. I think I'd enjoy seeing the children and hearing more about this place." She started to walk forward, and he laid a gentle hand on her arm.

"Gin, just a small warning... Some of these kids have been abused, both mentally and physically."

Her smile immediately faded. "Oh, God, I hadn't thought. But, of course, I can understand." She looked into his eyes. "I've dealt with Tom...at a young age...so perhaps I could help."

Draco smiled at his wife sadly. He'd hated that his father had a part in such turmoil for her. Leaning down, he kissed her gently. "Love you."

She looked into his sad eyes and knew that when she mentioned her past with Voldemort it made him think of his father's part in it. She sighed. He needed reassurance. "Love you, too."

Draco took a deep breath and said, "Okay, let's stop in and say hello to Pansy first. It's been ages since I've spoken with her."

"Hmm. Our wedding party, at least," Ginny said, remembering the smug look Pansy had given her while dancing with her husband.

Once inside, Draco went directly to Pansy's office and entered without knocking. What he witnessed stopped him mid-stride, which caused his wife to run into his back. "Draco! What's the..."

When Ginny saw what caused, she had to bite back a laugh. Pansy was sitting on her desk with Harry Potter standing between her legs, snogging her as if his life depended on it. "Well..." Ginny said because that was all she could think to say.

Her voice stopped them cold, and Harry turned to see the stunned couple standing there looking at them. Harry's face turned very red, and he grabbed his glasses, hastily putting them back on. "Hi, Gin."

When Harry moved back, Pansy hopped off the desk and went around it so that she could sit in her chair when facing Draco. She looked at the couple now. His wife was looking at Harry with her arms folded across her chest with an...amused?...expression on her face, and Draco was standing there gobsmacked.

"What can I do for you, Draco?"

"What are you doing, Pansy?"

She lifted one eyebrow. "Before you interrupted, I was kissing Harry. Now? I am waiting to find out why you have graced me with your presence."

Her tone snapped Draco out of his trance and brought his attention solely on her. "What's the matter?"

"The matter?"

Impatient with her, Draco said, "Yes! The matter! What in the hell's the matter with you?"

"Hey," Harry said. "Don't you come in here and start speaking to her like that, Malfoy! You have no right!"

"Bugger off, Potter. This doesn't concern you."

When Harry started forward, Ginny laid a hand on his arm that stopped him cold. This act didn't go unnoticed by either Draco or Pansy. "Harry, could you show me around? I would like to see the children."

"Not right now, Gin." He turned to Pansy. "I don't want to leave her alone with your *husband* in the mood that he's in."

Pansy smiled. "It's all right, Harry. Take Mrs. Malfoy outside and show her around. There's a lovely table in the shade where she can sit should she get too tired."

"Not until I find out what his problem is," Harry told her as he jerked a thumb in Draco's direction.

"At the moment, you are," Draco informed him.

"Draco," Pansy said, bringing his attention to her. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to see the children. It's been awhile with everything that's been going on. And I wanted to see you as well."

"Me?" Pansy laughed, but the sound was bitter. "Why would you want to see me?"

Draco furrowed his brow in confusion. "What do you mean? We're still friends, aren't we? I've missed you lately."

"No. I don't believe that we are. You showed me what you thought of *outrfriendship* the night of your wedding party." Pansy took her gaze from Draco to Harry. "Really, Harry, this won't take long. Please, just show her around for a bit."

Ginny thought back to the night of the party, trying to remember what had happened before Josephine... Then it hit her. Draco had been dancing with Pansy when Josephine walked in, and he had all but forgotten Pansy was even standing there. Those two really needed to talk.

Grabbing Harry's arm, Ginny said, "Come on, Harry. I won't be able to stay on my feet very long. Won't you please escort me outside?"

When Harry looked down at his childhood friend, his look softened. "Sure, Gin." He turned back to Pansy. "You sure?" When she simply nodded, he said, "Fine. I'll go, but if he..."

"Let's go, Harry!" Ginny said, pulling him as she walked to get him out before another argument between him and Draco ensued. "Come find me when you're done, love," Ginny said to her husband as she and Harry walked out the door.

When the door closed, Draco said quietly, "He sure does cater to her. Did you notice how one touch from her stopped him in his tracks?" When Pansy didn't reply, he looked from the door back to her. "What Flobberworm's crawled up your arse?"

"What do you want, Draco?"

"I've told you! I wanted to show Ginny this place, and I wanted to see you and the children. I'm proud of you and what you've accomplished here. Why are you acting like a first class bitch?"

Pansy jumped up from her seat and slammed her hand down on the table. Draco jumped at the sudden movement and show of anger. "You arrogant arse! How dare you come in here like everything is just fine between us and then insult me after they way you've treated me! Why don't you just go? You're not needed here."

"I've not done anything to you! What in the devil are you talking about, woman?"

Running an impatient hand through her Harry-mussed hair, Pansy said, "Do you remember us dancing during your party, Draco?"

"Yes, of course I do. What of it?"

"Do you remember when Josephine arrived?"

Impatient with this line of questioning, he told her, "YES! I remember!"

"Well then," she said smugly, "there's your answer."

"Stop speaking in riddles, Pans, and just come out with it."

"Fine! I will! When that bloody cow walked in, you threw me to the side and abruptly forgot you'd even been dancing with me. It was like there was no other woman in the room...including your wife!"

"What nonsense is this?" Draco demanded. "You're off your rocker, Pansy. I never..."

"Wait," she said, holding up a hand to silence him. "Just think back. And I promise you, Ginny Weasley was *not* happy with you right after that woman walked in."

"Malfoy," he corrected absently, thinking back to the night in question.

"What?"

"It's Ginny Malfoy," he said as he suddenly realized what she was speaking of. "Oh, Pans! I didn't mean to just stop in the middle of our dance. It was just that I hadn't seen Josie in so long, and I was surprised. That's all."

"Stopping in the middle of our dance I understand. It's the fact that you completely forgot my existence that made things crystal clear for me. You brushed me off like a bothersome little bug buzzing in your ear."

"I did no such thing!" Draco denied.

"Oh," Pansy said, shaking with fury, "you most certainly did. You didn't even think to introduce her to me, Draco. And part of the reason is that you forgot I was even

standing there."

He couldn't deny it any longer. Pansy was right. "I'm sorry. It's just that I was so shocked because I didn't even know that she would be there."

Pansy shrugged as if it didn't matter to her. "Don't worry about it, Draco. School's out, and we've all moved on."

Draco grabbed her arm. "No. We're still friends, and we always will be. I care a lot about you. I apologize if I made it seem otherwise."

"You didn't *make it seem* anything. It is what it is. You've moved on, and that's okay."

"I have not moved on from our friendship, Pansy! Damn! Things have been a little hectic lately. I brought Ginny here to show her all that you've accomplished because, as I've said, I am proud of you. Proud of what one of my best mates has accomplished almost single-handedly. Something that nobody else even thought to."

Pansy looked at him. She could tell he was being sincere and sighed with resignation. "Thank you, Draco. Don't worry about it, okay? I'm over it."

"Are not."

She laughed at his childishness, even if it was done to cause that very reaction. "Well, I am now that we've had this talk." Pansy sat back down and invited Draco to do the same. "Let's have a cuppa and catch up."

"All right, but I need to get this out of the way first." Draco took Pansy in his arms and hugged her tightly, relieved when his hug was returned. After he'd released her, Draco solemnly said, "I have two words for you, Pans. Harry Potter? Why would you subject yourself?" Draco shuddered.

Rolling her eyes, Pansy said, "He's wonderful actually and great with the children. He comes here every Saturday that he's off."

Draco eyed her speculatively. "Looks like he's been *great* with more than just the children."

Pansy blushed. "That is definitely none of your business, Mr. Malfoy."

He laughed. "It's good to see you happy again, you know. I know that you haven't been for a long time, and I'm honestly sorry for any part I had in that."

"It's different, but a good different. *I'm* different. I've discovered a lot of things about myself that I can actually like."

"You've always been likable!" Draco always defended her, even against herself.

She laughed. "Let's not get carried away. We both know better."

"Come eat with Ginny and me later," Draco invited as he realized he actually did miss her friendship more than he'd realized.

"Thanks," Pansy told him, "but I have plans with Harry tonight."

"Please... you'll make me puke. Say, I'm going to go see Pete. I've missed that little bugger."

"Oh, Draco, wait," Pansy said panicked, grabbing his arm. "There's something you need to know about Peter..."

Draco fell into a chair, horrified, as his mate filled him in.

*** **

Ginny wobbled behind Harry, impressed. "Wow, she's really done something here."

"Oh, you wouldn't believe how much," Harry told her, full of pride.

Ginny sent him a sidelong glance. "You really like her, don't you?"

"Yeah, I really do."

They fell silent as they walked, Ginny looking all around, thinking of the fact that Harry Potter was in love with Pansy Parkinson and how that made her feel. She decided that she was happy he'd finally found someone, but curious at his choice.

Once outside, she smiled at the children, watching them play. "Go on, Harry. I can see that you're dying to get up on a broom."

"You'll be all right?" Harry asked as his gaze went back towards the building. It didn't take a genius to figure out what was on his mind.

"Yes. I am going to sit in the shade and take it all in." She put a friendly hand on Harry's arm. "He loves her, Harry, in the same way that you love me."

Harry let out a deep breath. "If you say so. She's just so... fragile, Gin. And that prat husband of yours really hurt her. If he does it again..."

"Oh, hush up, Harry James Potter," she told him in irritation. "You're being right ridiculous. And fragile? Pansy Parkinson? Please."

"She is, Gin. Pansy doesn't show it, but she is very vulnerable."

"If you say so. Go play, Harry, I want to sit and watch a Quidditch match." She would reserve her judgment about Pansy for now. Ginny wanted to like her for Draco's and Harry's sakes, but she would wait and see.

When she started for the shade, she spotted a young boy sitting in the stands alone. Pausing for only a second, she decided to go sit beside him instead. "Hello," Ginny greeted.

The boy only sat there in silence. Undeterred, Ginny said, "It's a lovely day. Don't you play Quidditch? I love to play!"

Pete snorted, looking at her incredulously. "Sure. Do they even make a broom that would lift you?"

Ginny looked at him, raising an eyebrow. "Well, I don't do much playing at the moment, but I have six brothers, so I learned at a fairly young age, and I played two positions during my time at Hogwarts."

"You're joking!" he said, clearly not believing her. "Two? Which ones?" Pete narrowed his eyes in deliberate challenge.

"Seeker and Chaser. And yes, before you ask, *Idid* catch the Snitch!"

Pete snorted once more. "Then you must've been playing against that bloke," he told her as he jerked his thumb at Harry. "He couldn't catch a Snitch if it was the size of a Bludger."

"What? Don't like Harry, eh? He's actually a good friend of mine. He's very nice, and he would teach you to play if you asked him."

"I don't need some phony Gryffindor teaching me to do anything! I hate Harry Potter! I have a... friend...a Slytherin...who is a better Seeker than that wanker could ever be! He's just been busy lately! He *will* come back! Miss Parkinson said! I know it!"

Not knowing what else to do, Ginny put both arms around him and hugged. She wanted him to calm down, and she wanted to comfort him. "I'm sure he will. Ssh," she soothed when she felt him shuddering and struggling against her, certain he was holding back frustrated tears. Ginny began to rub the back of his head and back, slightly rocking him.

"I hate it," he said, allowing her to soothe him. If he closed his eyes, he could almost pretend it was his mum...

"What's that? What do you hate?" Ginny asked, wanting desperately to help this lost little boy.

"My life. Nothing good ever happens to me...ever. Not before the war and not after." Pete jerked away from her as if he'd just realized she was holding him rather than his mother.

Merlin, I don't know what to say to him. I don't even know his background... Maybe..." You know, if you told me the name of your friend, maybe I could find him for you."

Ginny was suddenly taken aback as his face lit up. He jumped up and yelled, "Draco!" and ran towards him with his arms open wide.

"I should've known the Slytherin he was talking about would be Draco, especially with the way he feels about Harry." Ginny slowly stood and crept her way to them.

"Where have you been?" Pete hammered Draco with questions. "I knew you would come back, but it's been a really long time. Miss Parkinson said that you've been very busy. Oh, and she is dating that wanker," he informed Draco as he pointed towards Harry. "I told you to marry her before it was too late...now you won't have a chance if you don't hurry."

Ginny felt bad for the child. It was obvious he adored Draco. She put two and two together and figured out that he wanted Draco to marry Pansy in hopes of them adopting him. She smiled when they noticed her.

"Sorry, mate," Draco said. "I married *her*." He put his arm around Ginny's shoulders.

"Her? Why?"

"Because she's my soul mate." Draco smiled.

Suddenly, Pete's face reddened in anger. He turned to Ginny. "You've ruined *everything*!" He pointed to her stomach. "I know what that is! You've a baby in there!" Turning back to Draco, he asked, "Why'd you have to marry her for?" He ran off before either of them could stop him.

*** ** *

When Severus rounded the corner, he found his arms full of an angry boy. He'd decided against going inside, wanting to see how the child was for himself rather than speaking to Miss Parkinson first. Not to mention, his wife wanted to see the children.

When Pete found himself being held tightly, he began to struggle, flailing his arms and legs about. "Stop that this instant!" Severus demanded.

"Let me go!" Pete cried out defiantly. "You just keep your hands off of me!"

Severus understood the outburst and immediately let the boy go, not trying to right him when he stumbled. "What is the matter with you, boy? Why are you running around as if the hounds of hell are after you?"

Pete shrugged, shooting Hermione a hateful look. "I don't have to tell you anything."

Severus raised one eyebrow as he folded his arms across his chest. "I beg to differ. Considering you are still under my observation after your last... stunt, I say you have to tell me quite a few things."

"Why didn't you just let me die? I hate my life! *Nothing* is the way it's supposed to be!" Pete mortified himself by bursting into tears. "I-I w-w-want my m-mum!"

Severus went to his knees in front of Pete, being careful not to touch him. He gentled his voice as he spoke. "Life rarely turns out as we wish. I'll admit, it's been crueler to you than most, but it's the one you've been dealt, so you have to accept it."

Pete merely shook his head. "I don't want to. If you had left me, I would be with my mum now."

"Do you think that would have made her happy?" Severus asked, harsher than he'd intended. "She loved you very much and would have wanted you to live your life to the fullest."

Pete shrugged but said nothing about that. Instead, he asked, "Who's she?"

"This is my wife, Mrs. Snape. Hermione, this is Pete..." Severus trailed off, realizing he didn't know the child's last name.

Hermione smiled, speaking for the first time. "Hi, Pete."

"*Wife*?" he said, ignoring Hermione. "Why does everybody need to get married?" Pete stiffened when he heard Draco calling him, and then he scowled. "Wanker," he said under his breath. This surprised both Hermione and Severus.

"Pete!" Draco said, exasperated. "What's the matter with you? Why did you take off like that?"

"Because I didn't want to be around you and your bloody wife!"

Ginny had told Draco her thoughts after Pete had ran off, so Draco knew where some of his anger was stemming from. He smiled. "She's really nice, Peter. She liked you."

"Well," the boy said defiantly, "did she tell you that she is Harry Potter's friend? Told me I should let him show me how to play Quidditch!"

Draco's heart tightened at the thought of Potter showing Pete anything, especially Quidditch. "Yes, I know that they're friends, but don't let that sway you," Draco tried to joke. "She's still great in spite of that."

"But what about Miss Parkinson? She's better than your wife!"

"Pete, Miss Parkinson is a very good friend of mine, but I don't love her as a husband should love a wife. And regardless of whom I am married to, that doesn't lessen my feelings for you. Can you understand that?"

"You don't care about me! You haven't been here to see me in months!" Pete suddenly looked towards the Snapes as if suddenly remembering that they were there.

"Why don't you show me the rest of the children, Severus," Hermione said just as Ginny slowly walked to them.

Severus nodded and then merely nodded a greeting to Draco's wife. Looking at the boy, Severus said, "Peter, I want to see you before I go. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," the child mumbled, as if suddenly feeling afraid and unsure.

After Severus and Hermione walked away, Draco turned to Ginny and held out his hand for her. When she took it, he turned back to Pete. "Son, I do care a great deal for you, and I'm very sorry I haven't been here to see you in a long time. I promise to do better."

"You won't though, not after your own child comes."

"Pete..." Ginny started, but one look from the boy silenced her.

"Can I just go in now, Draco? I am so sleepy. I want to rest some before Professor Snape comes to look in on me."

Defeated, Draco only nodded. "I'll be back next Saturday, Pete."

"Whatever," Pete said as he slowly made his way to the building.

"He's so depressed, Draco."

"Yeah," Draco agreed with his wife. "But... I have an idea on that. Come, let's sit while I talk to you about it."

*** **

Hermione looked up from her book, surprised when Luna sat down beside her. "Hi, Luna."

"I didn't mean to disturb you," Luna apologized.

"Oh, it's fine. I just got tired and decided to sit out in the shade a bit while Severus went to speak with Pansy about a child he's monitoring. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I came with Ronald. He tries to come as much as his schedule allows, especially when Harry is here."

Hermione looked up, surprised to see the both of them playing Quidditch with the kids. She turned her gaze back to Luna. "How are things going between the two of you?"

"Very well actually." Luna smiled dreamily.

Hermione looked closely at Luna. "Are the two of you serious?"

Luna sobered quickly. "Would it bother you if we were?"

"NO! No, just curious, that's all. Why would you think that it would?"

"Look, Hermione, I know that the two of you were together and serious before you and Ginny were cursed. And I know that you loved each other. The thing is... you've moved on and seem to be happy. I only want to make Ron happy. I love him."

"I will always love Ron, Luna. We were more than just a couple, you know. Ron, Harry, and I were first and foremost, best mates. I don't begrudge him any happiness...with you or anyone else."

Luna sighed with relief. Hermione meant a lot to Ron, and she didn't want to be the cause of any problems there. "Thank you. It eases my mind for me to hear you say it."

Hermione smiled. "It's no problem." She looked up once again to see Ron watching Luna intently. *Well, well. Perhaps there is more to how he feels than we know.*

*** **

Lucius sat in his study, going over the work he'd brought home with him. He had taken Severus' advice and went to Arthur Weasley. It had worked, and Weasley had given him his job back.

He stared out of the window, deep in thought. Truth be told, Weasley hadn't harassed him over his work as Lucius expected he would. Weasley was in a position to lord it over him, yet he had only been coming to his office at the end of each week.

Lucius shook his head, confused. Had the positions been reversed, he likely would've rubbed it in Arthur Weasley's face. "He is a better man than I, it seems."

"Who, Father?"

"Draco! You startled me. What brings you here on a Saturday afternoon?"

"I wanted to speak with you," Draco told him and sat in the seat in front of his father's desk.

"Oh? Is everything all right?"

"Yes... well, no." Draco sighed, running his hands through his hair.

Lucius immediately stood. "The baby? Ginevra?"

"No, no, it's not them. I'm sorry; I didn't mean to scare you." Taking a moment to gather his thoughts, Draco asked, "When was the last time you went to the orphanage?"

Sitting back down with obvious relief, Lucius said, "I must admit, it's been quite awhile. I send a monthly check still, but as far as actually going in person, I haven't been in a few months. Why do you ask?"

"Do you remember Pete?"

"The little boy you'd taken quite an interest in? Yes, I do. How is he?"

"Not well, I'm afraid. It seems he harbored the notion that I would marry Pansy and we'd adopt him. He, um, met Ginevra today."

"Oh my," Lucius sympathized. "That could not have boded well."

"No," Draco confirmed. "Not well at all. He's so depressed, Father, and I don't know what to do for him. He tried to kill himself by drinking poison."

"My God, it's as bad as all that? What happened?"

"Well, luckily Pansy contacted Severus in time, but I fear for him. I think he may try something again."

"You cannot blame yourself, son. The boy's mother was killed by Rodolphus Lestrage right in front of him. It's going to take quite some time for him to be able to live with that."

"Yes, I know, but he needs something..." Draco paused, working up his courage. "Just as you do."

"What are you saying?"

"You've not been yourself since mother died. I think the two of you could be good for each other."

"Draco," Lucius said disgruntled, "I couldn't possibly take that child in."

"Why not? You've got your job back, you've toned things down with the women, and you're leading a more respectable life these days."

"I didn't say that I didn't think I would be allowed to adopt the child, I said that I couldn't possibly! I'd hardly know what do with the boy!"

"Don't be absurd, Father. You did a great job with me!" Draco told him smugly.

"I had help there, son," Lucius said quietly. "Narcissa was a wonderful mother, and she made it all seem easy."

"Yes, she was. The very best. But you're just as good a father. I think you could both bring so much to each other. Ginny and I talked about it, and we can't take Pete right now. We have a baby coming for one thing, and for another, we've only been married a short while. We need to get to know one another better and adjust to our new life. I love that kid, Father, and he needs someone. He needs you."

"Draco..."

"We'd come over once a week to help you," Draco promised. "Ginny only met him today, but he's made quite an impression on her."

Lucius sighed. "I will think on it, Draco. I won't promise you anything, but I won't dismiss it entirely either."

"Thank you, Father. I honestly think you could make a difference in each other's lives. He could live here with you, and then this big house wouldn't seem so lonely."

"If you and your wife would move in as I've asked, that would help as well," Lucius said.

"We've been over that. But we did decide to stay in the guesthouse during the holidays and summer. We want our child to have a home other than Hogwarts, particularly when it starts school."

"Well, that's something then, I suppose. Say, why don't the two of you join me for dinner tonight?"

"Sorry, Father," Draco apologized. "Ginny was worn out after visiting the orphanage today. She's resting. Actually, I should likely get back to her. Will you give my request some thought?"

"I told you that I would, son, but I won't promise you anything. Taking on a child, especially a troubled one, is a big responsibility. I would want to be sure that I could give him the time and attention he needed and deserved. It wouldn't be fair otherwise."

"Agreed. I think too he needs someone he could talk to about... things. I think that is one of the reasons we bonded so well from the start. We both lost our mothers in a horrendous way."

"Yes," Lucius said, voice full of pain. "You both did. Draco, I'm sorry that I haven't been here for you lately and that I particularly wasn't there for you when Narcissa died. I want to be here for you now and my grandchild."

Draco laid his hand on his father's across the desk. "You were hurting, too, and needed to deal with the pain. I understand that. It's when I began to see that you were hurting yourself that I started to worry. You seem to be back on the right path now."

"Yes, largely due to Severus talking some sense into me." Lucius looked up into his son's eyes, the son he'd never denied anything. Could he love another son as much as he had this one? He doubted it. "Stop looking at me that way. I'll think on it, Draco."

Draco smiled. "All right. I am going to get back to my wife. We can set up a dinner one night this week, if you'd like."

"Yes, I would. Send my... love to Ginevra."

"I will, Dad, and thank you."

When Draco left, Lucius scowled and then smirked. Dad. His son only called him that when he knew he'd gotten his way. *Sneaky little bugger, just like his mother.* She'd often got her way with him too.

Lucius decided to pour himself a brandy. It seemed he had a lot of thinking to do. "Bugger that!" The idea was becoming more and more appealing to him. It would be nice to have a child in the house again, a purpose. "I need to speak with the boy...with Peter...and gage his feelings on this matter."

*** **

Pete slowly woke with the eerie feeling of being watched. It unnerved him because he hadn't had that sickening feeling in quite some time. He slowly opened his eyes. "Draco?"

Lucius smiled. "No, not Draco."

Pete sat up then and blinked several rapid times to clear his vision. "Mr. Malfoy?"

"Indeed. How are you, Peter?"

He gave Lucius his habitual shrug. "All right. Why are you here?" Peter asked in confusion. Mr. Malfoy never came to visit only him, especially in his room!

"I have something of great importance I wish to speak with you about."

"Me? Why do you want to talk to me about anything? I'm nobody...especially to you."

"That's not entirely true. First of all, you are definitely *somebody*, Peter. Secondly, I think perhaps we could change the fact that you are nothing to me. I'd like to tell you what I have in mind. What say you?"

When Peter nodded his acceptance, Lucius leaned in and talked with the boy about what Draco had proposed. He decided that he'd leave the rest up to Peter and go from there.

Christy's Notes: Things are falling into place it seems! Up next: the births!

The song is "Don't You Forget About Me" by Simple Minds and was popular back in 1985!

Southern's Notes: Ah, what a fitting idea for Lucius. I only wonder if the little tyke won't hold his past against him? Hmm... Sorry to see the story coming to a close!

Thank God For Kids

Chapter 13 of 13

A foul curse cast on Hermione and Ginny leaves them forced to search out one vital ingredient from their soul mates. Will Draco and Severus help them in their time of need? This is my response to a Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge.

A/N: All things Harry Potter belong to JKR. I make no money from this.

Many thanks to my awesome beta, *Southern_Witch_69!* Sun, you're the greatest!



Chapter Thirteen

Thank God For Kids

Pansy Parkinson nervously arranged and rearranged the canapés that she'd planned on serving that evening while looking with a critical eye over everything else in the sitting room. She wanted tonight to be perfect.

"Don't fuss, Pansy," Lucius lightly scolded. "All is well."

Pansy turned and smiled. "Thanks so much for allowing me to host my gathering here, Mr. Malfoy."

"You're welcome, especially since part of what we're celebrating includes me. Won't you tell me what else you are going to announce tonight?"

"No!" Pansy picked up the glass she'd set on the table and had been neglecting, taking a small sip. "You'll have to wait like everyone else."

"Well, considering that..."

"Oh, here come my first guests!" Pansy said excitedly when she heard the house-elf greeting someone at the door, cutting Lucius off. "Where's Harry? HARRY!"

"Pansy, calm down," Harry said from behind her as he placed both hands on her shoulders, trying to relax her.

She jumped instead, not knowing he had been there, and then scowled. "Easy for you to say! I'm not as liked by this group as you are!" she told him as she went to greet whoever was at the door.

She was glad to see that both couples, the Snapes and the Malfoys, were there together. "Welcome, everyone! Thanks so much for coming...especially this close to your due dates!"

Hermione smiled. "Oh, it's not a problem, Pansy. I have to admit, we're all a little anxious to find out what the mystery announcement could be."

"Too right," Draco agreed. "I've been driving my lovely wife crazy, trying to figure it out since we received your invitation!"

"Indeed he has," Ginny agreed, rubbing the discomfort in her back. "I finally had to hush him, telling him he'd find out today and no sooner."

"And now that we're all here..." Severus started and let the sentence hang.

"Yes, come into the sitting room. Lucius and Harry are in there," Pansy told them.

"Together?" Draco asked incredulously. "Alone? Oh, I've got to see this."

When they walked into the sitting room, Lucius was standing by the mantel, swirling a brandy, and Harry was sitting on the sofa. Neither were speaking. Pansy sighed. "Everyone's here!"

Harry immediately stood and walked to Ginny and Hermione, hugging them both. "Whoa! I can barely fit my arms around either of you!"

Hermione raised an eyebrow while Ginny fisted her hands on her hips. Their husbands smirked with glee at the potential demise of Harry. "What did you just say, Harry James Potter?" Ginny demanded.

When the doorbell sounded once more, Harry murmured, "Saved by the bell!"

"Who can that be?" Pansy wondered. "Everyone is here."

"Not everyone," Harry informed her. "I've invited Ron and Luna."

"Oh, I forgot! I'm sorry, Harry...I wasn't thinking!" Pansy told him as the two couples in the room watched her wringing her hands nervously.

"It's not a problem," Harry reassured. "They're here now, and that's all that matters." He walked to her and put his hands on her shoulders, facing her. Harry bent down and kissed Pansy's forehead in a comforting manner. "It's going to be perfect, so please stop fussing and worrying."

Pansy simply nodded and ran her left hand through her hair. Hermione gasped and grabbed Ginny's arm, gesturing to Pansy's left ring finger with her eyes. Ginny's eyes widened, but they both remained silent.

After the canapés were eaten and the small talk was running short, Lucius said, "All right, Pansy. We're all curious now, and we've waited long enough. What did you want to announce to all of us?"

She looked at Harry, and he stood to go her side, taking her hand in his. Pansy took a deep breath and said, "We wanted to make sure that you guys...as more than friends to us, but family as well...were the first to know." She held up her left hand, showing a square cut emerald. "We're getting married."

At first, nobody in the room uttered a word. Surprisingly, it was Luna who broke the ice. "Oh, how wonderful for the two of you! Have you set a date? Could I print a picture of the two of you and write this up in my paper?"

Harry laughed. "Calm down, Luna. And honestly, we'd appreciate it if you'd keep this quiet for now. We don't want a spectacle made of this."

"Right, I understand," Luna said as she smiled at Pansy. "It's a very lovely ring. Very Slytherin."

"Lord, Luna! We're past that now...this isn't Hogwarts any longer," Harry teased. "She told me she didn't particularly want a diamond, so I decided to get her birthstone."

Ginny and Hermione simultaneously walked closer. "It's a very lovely ring," Ginny said as she took Pansy's hand for a closer inspection, and Pansy watched her closely, wondering if it bothered her at all. She was well aware of how much both of these women meant to her future husband.

"Yes, it is," Hermione agreed. "I can't believe you didn't say a word, Harry!" she scolded.

Harry shrugged. "We wanted it for ourselves for a bit."

"Can I come downstairs now, Mr. Malfoy?" a boy's voice called from upstairs. Draco's face immediately brightened.

"Yes, son, come join us," Lucius said.

Once he entered the room and saw all of the people standing there, Peter promptly walked to stand by Lucius. When his adoptive father laid a comforting hand on his shoulder, Pete rolled his shoulder enough to get Lucius' hand off of it and took one step away. Lucius sighed.

"As for our second, but not less important, announcement, Peter is now Lucius' son. Everyone, I am proud to introduce Peter Malfoy." Pansy smiled down at Pete to see him staring daggers at her fiancé. She shook her head.

"Wow," Draco said. "I finally have a little brother!"

At this announcement, Pete turned adoring eyes to Draco. "I'm going to be you're brother?"

"That's right," Draco told him, "and an uncle very soon to my baby. It's a huge responsibility, being an uncle, but I have no doubt you can handle that."

Pete turned to Ginny then and lowered his eyes, remembering how he'd acted the last time he'd seen her. When she smiled at him, he let out a relieved breath.

"I have something in my room that I'd like for you to have, Pete," Draco told him. "I've had it since I was ten, the year before I started Hogwarts. It's a stuffed Horntail Dragon."

Lucius turned a surprised eye to his son. Cissy had given him that, and as far as Lucius knew, Draco had taken it to Hogwarts with him every year, even if he did hide it in his later years. "You're certain, son?"

"Yes. He's been a great comfort to me, and I want Pete to have that comfort." Draco turned to the boy and smiled. "He's very cool. He flies and sometimes shoots fire."

"Oh, wow, Draco, thank you so much! Nobody's ever given me anything so special before! But are you sure? Don't you want to let your own kid have it?"

"No, I want you to have it, Pete. I have other things I plan to hand down to my son."

"Okay!"

After everyone had been talking awhile, Ginny excused herself and went to the loo. The backache that she'd had all day long was starting to really intensify. When she walked out, Pansy was there waiting for her.

"I wanted to talk to you a moment privately, if you wouldn't mind," Pansy said.

"All right," Ginny replied, only wanting to go home and put her feet up.

Pansy sighed and started her well-practiced speech. "I have a proposition for you, Mrs. Malfoy."

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, Pansy! You're a year older than I am! Cut the 'Mrs. Malfoy' crap, would ya? My name is Ginny!" Ginny cringed. "I'm so sorry. You see..."

"Does it bother you that much?" Pansy demanded. "What? Do you want them all? Is having Draco madly in love with you not enough? You want to keep Harry on the sidelines as well?"

"What in the bloody hell are you on about?" Ginny moved to sit down, not able to stand any longer because the pain in her back had gotten worse.

"It's *painfully* obvious that you're upset about my engagement to Harry! Why else would you be so cross to me?"

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Pansy, Harry and I are only friends. That's all we've been for quite some time now. I love Draco, not to mention, I'm close to giving birth to our child. I will admit to you that Harry stopped loving me in that way before I did him... if he ever loved me like that...I think you and I have that in common, though it was Draco for you...so there is no reason at all for you to think I have any untoward feelings concerning your fiancé."

"Then what's the matter?" Pansy asked her. "I can tell something is wrong."

"Nothing's the matter. What did you want to talk to me about?"

"Well," Pansy began nervously, "it was Harry's idea initially, but I do think it has merit. You see, when Luna did that article on the orphanage, then the *Daily Prophet* soon followed with an article of their own, *Wayward Souls*, which was already overcrowded, became even more so. And lately, we've been getting a lot of Squibs."

"Oh, that's horrible!"

"Yes, it is. But you see, *Ginny*, I need help. I need someone who could volunteer, who wouldn't have to be paid to work there."

Ginny sat in silent thought, absently rubbing her back as her brain clicked. Suddenly, she gasped and looked up. "Do you mean to say you *wante* to work for you?"

"No, with me! *With* me! I have to have help, and unfortunately, not many people want to get involved. You could bring the baby," Pansy went on, trying to convince her. "It's just that it's becoming too much for me. Don't answer me now. You couldn't begin until the baby is a few weeks old at any rate. But, would you consider it?"

Ginny stood and began to pace the room, trying to alleviate the pain in her back more than anything. "Yes, I'll consider it. I'll speak to Draco about it tonight and... Ow!" Ginny stopped walking and bent slightly. "No, it couldn't be," she mumbled to herself. "Mum said that's the way it was with Charlie, but no... Not *entirely* in the back, surely... 'Course, it's been aching for hours... All day long actually..."

"Ginny?" Pansy asked, beginning to panic. "Can I get you something?"

"I... ah! I think that maybe you should get my husband. Oh, the pains are coming more consistently now. Damn, how could I be so stupid?" she said as she sat back down.

Pansy didn't have to leave the room, as the others came walking in, though she realized belatedly why Ginny had been so sharp with her.

"What's taking the two of you so long?" Draco demanded. "We need to get back and... Ginny? What's wrong?"

"It's time, Draco. We need to get to St. Mungo's."

Draco turned completely white. "Time? Are you sure? How do you know?" he asked, panicked, and earned a glare from Ginny.

"Yes, I'm quite... Ah, God! The pains are getting much stronger!"

"Why St. Mungo's?" Luna calmly asked. "I thought Madam Pomfrey would be treating you since you are both living at Hogwarts."

"Because," Hermione answered for Ginny since her friend seemed to be in a bit of pain just then, "Poppy told us that she didn't feel comfortable delivering the babies, as she didn't have any practice in that area. She agreed to do our prenatal care as long as we agreed to deliver at St. Mungo's."

"Who cares?" Ron said. "Ginny needs to get there now! Come on, Sis, let's go."

Ginny stood. "Ron, would you and Luna go to the Burrow and get Mum and Dad?" She turned to walk to the door and saw the wistful expression on her father-in-law's face. "Lucius, you and Peter are welcome to come as well."

"To St. Mungo's?" Peter whispered. "I-I don't know..."

Lucius smiled down at his new son. "It's all right, Son. You'll be okay, and I promise if it gets to be too much, we'll leave. Will that do?"

"Well, I do want to see the baby once it gets here. Okay," Peter agreed.

Draco suddenly sprang into nervous action. "Severus...the potion! Oh no! It's not here. We don't have it. She has to take it immediately once the baby comes. What are we going to do? We can't go."

"Calm yourself, boy!" Severus commanded. "I'll go directly to my lab and retrieve the potion I've been keeping on stasis and meet you at St. Mungo's." He turned to his wife. "I'll meet you there?" Hermione nodded her agreement.

"Right. Yes, that sounds good," Draco agreed. He turned to his wife. "Okay, love." Taking a deep breath, he said, "Let's go and bring our son into the world."

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Ginny lay in the hospital bed, sweat rolling down her face and back. It had been hours, and everything was starting to take a toll on her. "Ah, God, here comes another one. The contractions are right on top of each other now it seems."

Looking a little green, Draco laid his hand on her belly and gently rubbed as it hardened and she panted. "I wish there was something I could do for you," he told her, feeling helpless.

When the contraction ended, she lay back exhausted. "I'm too tired. I won't be able to push once the time comes. I can't believe I didn't recognize the back pain for what it was so that we could get here earlier!"

Draco bent to kiss her head just as she sprang up from another contraction. Her head hit his nose. "Damn it!" he yelled in pain. Rubbing his nose, he looked at his wife who was concentrating on her contraction.

"Oh, I have to push! Get the Healer!" Ginny yelled in her excitement. "He's coming!"

The mediwitch calmly checked Ginny and then walked out of the room to get the Healer. After a few minutes that seemed like hours to the Malfoys, he arrived and positioned himself at the end of her bed. Once he checked her, the Healer said, "Okay, Mrs. Malfoy, on the next contraction, push!"

Eventually, Ginny had to sit up and grab her knees to push for all she was worth. "I can't! It's too much! Just take it out...get it out of me, please..." She lay back drained.

"It won't be much longer now," the mediwitch soothed. "Come on, raise up. There's a dear. Mr. Malfoy, you get behind her and support her back. The head is crowning."

Draco ignored the mediwitch and quickly went to see his baby's head. "I see it! Gin, I can see our baby's head! Push now, love."

"Help me!" she yelled. "I need you, Draco."

Draco hurried around to help support his wife, knowing that he wouldn't be able to watch the entire birth. He'd felt sick when he'd looked at the head, but he couldn't stop himself from having a peek.

Ginny raised herself up again, grabbed her knees, and groaned deeply in her throat as she lowered her chin to her chest and bore down. "Breathe, Mrs. Malfoy! Don't hold your breath!" the Healer instructed.

She panted and laid her head back on Draco's chest in relief when she heard, "Stop pushing, the head is out!" from the mediwitch.

"Now the next push will be the hardest," the Healer told her. "You've got to get these shoulders out." He patted her knee. "Let's bring your baby into the world, Mrs. Malfoy. Push!"

After continuing to push for an hour, tears rolled down both Ginny's and her husband's faces when they heard the first wails of the newest Malfoy.

Draco quickly handed the Healer the potion Severus had given him once he'd arrived so that the three drops of blood could be added.

Ginny quickly swallowed the potion and looked at her husband as she wiped the tears away. "Go let everyone know, would you? I'm sure they are all dying for some news."

Draco bent to kiss his wife, who despite her splotched, sweaty face and tear-swollen eyes, was still the most beautiful woman in the world to him. "Yes, I'll let them know. Still the same name we discussed when you first became pregnant?"

"Absolutely," she told him as her eyes drifted closed. "I just need to rest my eyes a bit." Ginny was snoring before Draco made it to the door.

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The waiting room was completely full. Most Weasleys were in attendance along with Lucius and Pete and Harry and Pansy. Luna had decided to remain there with Ron as well. Every so often, someone would go and get drinks and snacks for everyone.

It seemed to be taking a long time, and Lucius noticed that Pete had curled up in a chair and had fallen asleep. Lucius went to stroke the child's hair, and startled, Pete jumped up and quickly moved away.

"Peter, I'm not going to hurt you."

Rubbing his eyes, Pete shrugged and simply said, "You're a Death Eater. I know what Death Eaters do."

Clearing his throat, Lucius told his son, "Yes, I was a Death Eater. I made a very bad mistake many years ago...one that I regretted almost as soon as I'd done it. But you have to understand, it wasn't something that was easily corrected."

"So, you didn't kill... people then?"

"I had nothing to do with the murder of your mum, Peter. I promise you that."

"Other kids' mums then?" Pete demanded.

Lucius sighed. He'd come to the realization that no matter what he did, he would never stop paying for his past crimes. "A long time ago." Lucius looked away. Maybe this was a mistake, especially if the boy couldn't feel comfortable around him.

"There's nothing I can do or say to change it, Peter. I'm sorry that you don't feel safe with me. I can only promise never to harm you. If that isn't enough, you may speak with Miss Parkinson and go back, if you wish."

Pete panicked. He didn't want to go back to the orphanage! He wanted to be Draco's brother more than anything! "I'd like to try staying with you first, sir. Miss Parkinson told me it would take some getting used to..."

Suddenly the door burst open, and Draco came into the waiting room. "The baby's here!"

Everyone stood, silently waiting, and when Draco didn't say anything else, Molly chided, "Well, for heaven's sake, boy! What did she have?"

"Oh! She had a seven pound, eight ounce, baby girl! She's absolutely gorgeous!"

"A girl?" Arthur asked. "I was under the impression she believed it to be a boy."

"Yes, well, she was wrong!" Draco said and laughed. Turning to his father, he said, "Ginny and I would like to name her Narcissa Molly Malfoy. I imagine we'll call her Cissy. What do you think?"

Lucius strained to contain the tears in his eyes. "I think that's perfect. It's as it should be." He looked down at Peter. "Life goes on."

"When can we see them?" Ron demanded.

"Soon," Draco said. "They just want to clean them both up first and check to make sure everything is okay." He turned to look at Peter. "You have a niece."

Peter smiled. "I have a niece."

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Hermione was sitting on the sofa when Severus returned from Honeydukes with her favorite chocolates. "Back so soon?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm not feeling great today. I didn't realize you were going out."

"I had thought to surprise you with these," he told her as he shook the box. "How are Mrs. Malfoy and her baby?"

Hermione smiled. "Oh, I know it's only been a week, but little Cissy has grown so much! They are both doing great! Cissy's hair is so white you almost can't see it."

"A Malfoy through and through then. I don't believe that Lucius would have permitted anything else."

Hermione laughed. "He was there with Pete. They seem to be slowly adjusting to one another. Pete is in love with the baby; he held her the whole time I was there."

"The boy seems to be doing okay, although I think it's somewhat early to declare him out of the Forbidden Forest just yet."

"Hmm," Hermione said absently, "I agree."

"Would you like your chocolates?"

"Thank you, but no. As I've said, I haven't felt good today."

"Any cramps?" Severus asked hopefully.

"Unfortunately, no. I can't describe it really, just achy and tired. Perhaps I'll go lie down for a bit, and we'll have the chocolates later while you read to me." She looked at him expectantly.

Severus chuckled. She often requested him to read to her at night, and he knew it was his voice that she enjoyed even more so than the books. "As you wish, my dear. Can I get you anything?"

"No thanks," she told him as she stood. She had only taken two steps when she stopped suddenly. "Severus! My water broke!"

Severus immediately looked towards the floor. "I don't see anything!"

"No, it wasn't very much...only a trickle." Then she felt the contractions begin. They were very mild. "Severus," Hermione said as she looked at him excitedly, "it's beginning!"

"Right, right. Okay. Would you like for me to notify the others?"

Hermione bit her lip and looked at him guiltily. "Would you mind terribly if it was only the two of us? I don't think I could handle the lot of them pacing around out there."

Severus walked to his wife and kissed her firmly on the mouth. "I've never loved you more than I do at this moment."

Hermione laughed out loud. She knew her husband and how he only tolerated her friends for her, although she suspected he was beginning to...if not like...then not mind their company. This was just something she wanted kept private, just between the two of them.

"Do you think we should go to St. Mungo's now or time the contractions?" Hermione asked.

"I want to go now since your water has broken. I would feel better. Let me get the potion and your bag, and then we'll leave."

"All right. Severus?"

He turned back to her. "Yes?"

She looked around their rooms and then back to her husband. "After today, nothing will ever be the same."

He smirked. "Nothing's been the same since Minerva performed that spell on you. Thank God."

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Because it was late in the evening when they reached St. Mungo's, the crowd was small. Hermione was grateful. She didn't think her husband would be able to stand much more excitement.

Once she'd been checked and it was determined that her water truly had broken...really! As if she couldn't tell...Hermione was admitted.

"All right," the mediwitch started, "everything seems to be in order. Now all you can do is wait until your little one decides to make an appearance."

Twelve hours later had Severus Snape irritably pacing the floor. Her contractions had been steady for the last few hours and lately, very strong.

"Ah, Severus, here comes another one."

He quickly went to her and grabbed her hand. "Hold on to me, Hermione. I'm here." Once the contraction subsided, Severus told her, "This is ridiculous! I am going to get the Healer."

Panting and sweaty, Hermione agreed, "All right."

Her easy acceptance worried him because she'd been telling him not to bother the Healer. Severus rushed out and a few moments later entered with the Healer.

"Mrs. Snape," the Healer greeted. "We've just been reviewing your case, regardless of what your husband thinks." He shot Severus a meaningful look. "It seems that despite the potions and spells we've tried, you're still not dilating. The mediwitch just informed us you've developed a temperature of 38.89 degrees Celsius. I'm afraid we're going to have to perform a caesarian-section to avoid the risk of infection."

"Oh, God! Severus!"

"Calm down, Mrs. Snape. All will be well." He turned to Severus, surprised, because he had sat down on the side of the bed and took his wife's hand into his own and was gently stroking it to comfort her. "Will you remain in here with your wife during the procedure?"

"Wild Thestrals couldn't drag me from this room, sir."

"All right. I will get the mediwitch, and we'll set everything up. Do you want to remain awake, Mrs. Snape?"

"If it's at all possible, then yes, I would. I want to be awake when my child comes into the world."

"Very well then. I'll be back directly."

When the Healer left the room, Severus turned to Hermione before she could speak. "It's going to be fine, Hermione." He bent to kiss her forehead. "I'll make sure of it."

Hermione simply nodded. She was sweaty, tired, and irritable. Right now, she desperately wanted a bath. The thought of taking a bath at that moment made her giggle, and then her giggle turned into a desperate laugh.

Severus recognized the bordering hysteria. "Hermione, stop." He gently rubbed her arms to soothe her. "Our baby is going to be okay, and so will you."

"How do you know?" she snapped and immediately regretted it. "I'm sorry, Severus. I didn't mean to snap at you, but I just want this over." Tears filled her eyes. "My parents won't even know their grandchild. I want my mum here."

"It's okay. I understand..."

"All right, Mrs. Snape," the Healer said as he re-entered the room, "let's get your baby here."

Once he positioned her, he held up a jar. "This will anesthetize the area, and this," he held up a vial, "will keep you calm."

"All right." Hermione looked at her husband. "This won't interfere with the other potion, will it?"

"No," Severus told her. "It will be fine to take them both."

Severus stayed at the head of the bed by Hermione, not wanting to see the doctor cut her open and remove their child. To his surprise, it took only a few moments to hear the wailing cries.

"Mr. and Mrs. Snape, may I present baby girl Snape?"

"Oh, she's beautiful," Hermione babbled.

Severus said nothing, just looking down at his daughter. She was red, wrinkled, and wailing. Severus was brought out of his reverie when Hermione gasped. "Okay, Hermione. Just hang on a second."

He gently got the drops he needed and gave the potion to his wife. After she took it, her eyes began to droop. "What do you want to name her, Hermione?"

"I've always liked the name Mary Jane," she said as she fell asleep.

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The Snapes and the Malfoys stood at platform 9 ¾, waiting for the Hogwarts Express. Severus thought that the whole thing was ridiculous, but Lucius insisted that Cissy experience the first train ride to the school, and everything Cissy Malfoy did, Eva Snape did as well.

Severus remembered that his wife had wanted to name the child Mary Jane. They had fought over that. He'd told her the name was too plain, and she'd insisted that after growing up with the name Hermione she wanted something plain for their child. His wife told him that with a name like Severus, she thought he'd understand.

He had told her that he'd done some research, and that Eva meant 'giver of life,' which is what their daughter had given to her. So they'd both agreed on Eva Jane.

Narcissa and Eva had been inseparable from the beginning. Mostly mischief makers, Severus thought as he watched them huddled together, one with almost white hair and brown eyes and the other with dark brown curly hair and the Snape nose, no doubt concocting something to do on the train.

He looked up just as the Potters and the Weasleys walked towards their group. "How surprising," Severus drawled out as he looked at Harry.

Harry smiled. "What? We couldn't miss our goddaughter's big day! Come, give us a kiss, Cissy! You too, Eva!" Harry gently shifted his one-year-old son, Brian James Potter, to the side so that he could give the girls a kiss. He and Pansy had decided with all the children at the orphanage, one child was enough.

Severus rolled his eyes. The Malfoys had made the Potters the godparents of their first-born. Severus had put his foot down when Hermione suggested Ron and told her 'absolutely not!' They'd both agreed on Lucius and Minerva.

Then Ron Weasley had married the year after the Potters. Luna had given Ron a son and, due to numerous complications, had never been able to have any more children. They decided to adopt two children from *Wayward Souls*, two more boys. Mrs. Weasley certainly had her hands full.

His gaze drifted to his son, Aden. At four the child was fearless. Right then he was occupied by Peter Malfoy, who'd come to see his niece off, and Carina, the second child of the Malfoys. It seemed they were stuck on constellation names. Carina was one year younger than Aden, but tried her best to keep up with him and most often did.

Severus turned to watch Lucius. Much to his dismay, Peter had decided to become an Auror. Severus smirked to himself, remembering when Lucius came to his office to rant about that.

"Daddy!" Eva called. "Here it comes! Here comes the train!"

"Me wanna ride twain too!" Aden pouted as he held his arms up for his father to hold him.

"Aden, it's not 'me wanna ride,'" Hermione chided. "What are you supposed to say?"

"I wanna ride! Twain! Can we, Daddy?"

"I ride too!" Carina yelled. She had noticed that Aden had walked away and gone to find him. "Me too, Cissy!"

"NO!" Eva and Cissy said in unison. "It's not for babies," Eva informed them both.

Carina stuck her bottom lip out, and tears filled her gray eyes. Lucius bent to pick Carina up. "Narcissa, that is not the proper way to treat your sister. She is much..."

"I know! I know! She is much smaller than me. God!"

"Narcissa!" Ginny said. "What's wrong with you? You know better than to speak to your grandfather that way!"

"I'm sorry, Grandfather," Cissy said meekly and rose on her toes to kiss his cheek. He smiled and winked at her, discreetly putting an envelope of Galleons into her robe pocket.

"There it is!" Eva grabbed Cissy's arm and pulled her. "Bye, Mum! Bye, Daddy! We'll see you back at the school!"

Both Hermione and Ginny had tears in their eyes as they watched their girls board the train. "So it begins," Hermione murmured.

"Indeed it does," Ginny agreed.

"What to you say we let the men take Aden and Carina back to Hogwarts and we go indulge ourselves with lunch?"

"I'd love to, Hermione, but I have to meet Mum at the orphanage today."

"How does she like working there?" Hermione asked.

"She loves it! Dad had the right idea there. With all of her children gone and her grandkids scattered, this was the perfect thing for her. And believe me, she knows how to handle those kids."

"I don't doubt it, not after raising Fred and George."

"Too right," Ginny agreed, and they both laughed.

"Ice cream!" Aden said as Hermione turned to him.

She looked up at her husband holding her son and her heart filled. "All right, lets go get some ice cream."

She turned to say goodbye to Ginny and took a good look at her friend, blissfully standing there with her husband and daughter. Hermione continued her inspection and looked over at Harry and Ron and their families.

"Everything is as it should be." Hermione smiled at Severus. "Thanks to Viktor Krum, everything is as it should be."

"Yes," Severus agreed. "Everything is unequivocally as it should be."

The End

Christy's Notes: This is it! I hope you've enjoyed reading this as much as I've enjoyed writing it! I want to thank you guys for all the kind reviews and for the votes! Now...off to the next story!

Thank God For Kids by the Oak Ridge Boys is from 1983.

Southern's Notes: Ah, a lovely end to a lovely tale. Thanks so much for coming up with this. Cheers.