

# In an Alternate Universe

*by Ms\_Figg*

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## The Tables are Turned

*Chapter 1 of 6*

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### Chapter 1 ~ The Tables are Turned

"Mr. Snape, put your blasted hand down and let someone else have a chance to answer my question," an irate Professor Granger hissed at the pale, dark-haired young man who had his hand raised.

Severus Snape slowly lowered his hand, his dark eyes locked on the scowling Potions mistress.

"Thank you. Now that Mr. Snape has so kindly deigned to give the rest of you dunderheads a chance to make your meager offerings, let's see some responses or there'll be a pop quiz!" Professor Granger spat.

Several hands flew into the air.

Severus Snape stared at his scowling teacher. Professor Hermione Granger had to be the coldest, meanest and most brilliant witch he had ever met. She was also one of the most courageous.

The seventh-year Gryffindor was one of Harry Potter's best friends and a brilliant student, excelling in every class. Most considered the pale wizard a know-it-all and a stickler for perfection. He and Ronald Weasley had stood by the boy-who-lived in the final battle against Voldemort and in the end helped to bring about the evil despot's downfall.

Initially, Professor Granger had been hunted for the death of Albus Dumbledore and ultimately arrested. But when the Headmaster reappeared, restored by a Horcrux, she had been taken from Azkaban and restored to her former position as Potions mistress. Her part in Voldemort's death had come out in the end. The witch's love of Harry's deceased father, James Potter, had been a driving force in garnering her aid.

James had been the one who told her she was a witch and had befriended the strange, dark young woman. She had been broken-hearted when he was sorted into Gryffindor. Lily Evans and several of her friends, who called themselves the "Velvet Murders," had antagonized the witch throughout her young years at the school. She had sought the company of her fellow Slytherins, falling in with Bellatrix Black and the rest.

It had been difficult going for her at first in Slytherin because she was a Muggle-born, but she was so dark and vengeful that she had managed to cull the favor of the Dark Lord. She had had no love of her own tainted magical background nor her people, especially Lily Evans, who was Muggle-born like she was. In fact, Lily may have been one of the driving forces that had turned her to the dark side completely.

Her own mother and father had both died, her mother by her father's hand, and her father by his own. All Granger had cared about was her own advancement and had shown a great talent for potions from the very beginning.

It was Professor Granger who had developed the elixir that had changed Tom Riddle into Voldemort and sealed her place as one of his most trusted servants. When the despot killed James Potter in an attempt to destroy his son, Harry Potter, the witch had changed allegiances, swearing to see the wizard dead, and had spent many years protecting Harry so he could come of age and destroy him.

On Professor Granger's back was a mass of scars that resembled a tree with many branches, the result of the Dark Lord's occasional displeasure. She had often been whipped and Crucio'd by the frustrated despot during her servitude, but she had returned to him time and time again to garner information for the Order of the Phoenix. Now he was dead, and she was left to her bitterness and guilt.

Severus calmly accepted the parchment the Potions mistress handed out, giving the class a pop-quiz anyway, her lips curled sardonically as they groaned. The black-eyed wizard looked up at her as she placed the parchment on his desk, but she ignored him as she always did, moving away with a billow of robes.

He sighed.

She acted like he didn't exist, unless she was dressing him down about something. He didn't mind it. It didn't bother him at all in fact.

Actually, it turned him on a little.

"Something must be very wrong with me," he'd muse to himself as he lay in his four-poster bed fantasizing about the dour witch.

She had to be twice his age and was as approachable as a basilisk. When she trained those slitted brown eyes on most students, they were so full of malice it was cringe-worthy. But Severus loved when she looked at him that way.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sick," he'd sigh, rolling over in his bed and trying to get the witch out of his head.

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Severus, Harry and Ron were in the common room, supposedly studying. They weren't, however, and the topic even managed to bring Severus out of his normally studious mood. And that topic was: Witches.

Or Shagging Witches.

"I'm telling you, Harry, I had Padma that close to shedding her knickers . . . then Filch comes hobbling up with that damn cat," Ron complained.

Harry shook his head. He'd just shagged Ginny, but he couldn't tell Ron that and live.

"I think I need an older witch," Severus said.

Ron and Harry looked at him curiously.

"How old?" they both asked him.

"At least in her thirties," Severus said with a sigh.

Both Harry and Ron made faces.

"That's ancient! A witch that age is all dried up, Sev. Why in the world do you want to shag somebody with a gray bush?" Ron asked him incredulously.

"Ron, it's unbelievable how dense you are," Severus snapped at him. "Thirty isn't old for a witch, or even forty. They can live until two hundred."

"Still, there are plenty of young witches to shag, Severus. Anyway, I heard you've already given a couple the high hard one. Luna Lovegood. Susan Bones. I heard you even put it to Draco's witch, what's her name."

"Pansy," Severus said, scowling. "Well, that's not true. Not entirely."

Now Harry was interested.

"You didn't shag any of them?" Harry asked him.

Severus shook his head.

"I almost did. I got their clothes off of them, kissed them a bit, touched them . . . then . . ."

He stopped talking.

"Then what? What?" Ron demanded.

"Shhhh!" Severus said to him, his dark eyes looking around the room. No one was listening. He turned back to his friends.

"Well, none of them would let me do what I wanted to do," he said in a low voice.

"What did you want to do besides shag them?" Harry asked him.

Severus told them.

"EWWWWW! I'm never bloody drinking anything after you again, Severus! You're sick! Nasty. How could you want to do that?" Ron choked.

"There's nothing wrong with it. I've tasted nastier potions," the seventh year said.

"Eww, you 'tasted' it?" Ron said, paling.

"From my fingers, yeah," Severus admitted.

"No wonder they wouldn't let you do it. What witch wants a tongue down there? That's where a cock goes. I bet they ran like hell from you," Ron said.

Harry wasn't saying a word. He'd thought about doing the same thing to Ginny.

"No. They didn't run until I took off my boxers. Then they took off. They wouldn't let me shag them. Not one. They said I was too big," Severus said with a sigh. "Luna even started crying. That's why I want an older witch. An older witch would probably let me do what I wanted and wouldn't care how big I was."

"I thought witches liked big tools," Ron said, amazed.

Severus shrugged.

"So did I. But they don't. At least the ones I've gotten hold of don't. I need a tough witch, one who's been through some things," the wizard said, getting a faraway look in his eyes.

Harry studied his friend.

"Severus, you know the witch you want, don't you? I can tell," he said to the pale wizard, who looked around the room again and then nodded his head slowly.

"Yeah, I do," he said. "Professor Granger."

Both Harry and Ron looked at Severus as if he'd gone stark, raving nutters.

"Professor Granger! Are you mad? She'll chop off your cock with a dull knife and put it in a jar next to her pickled creatures! I bet she doesn't even have a normal pussy. There's probably teeth in it or something!" Ron exclaimed.

"I should have known better than to tell you," Severus hissed at him. "Ron, you don't ever understand anything. You're such a bloody git."

"You'll be the bloody git if you ever let Granger get wind of what you want to do to her," Ron shot back at him, looking rather green. "Plus, she's absolutely shapeless."

"That's just how she wears her robes. Sometimes they pull against her, and you can see she has big breasts," Severus retorted. "And a round bum."

"Oh, gods, I think I'm going to throw up," Ron groaned, staggering away from the table exaggeratedly as Harry laughed.

Severus pointedly gathered his books together, stuffing them into his knapsack.

"You two need to grow up," he seethed. "There's nothing wrong with wanting an older witch."

Harry grinned up at the tall, pale wizard.

"Maybe not, but there's definitely something wrong with wanting Granger," he chortled.

Severus considered kicking Harry's chair out from under him, then thought better of it and strode away.

They were both idiots. Why did he even hang around them?

Angrily, he stormed up the stairs and to his Head Boy room, slamming the door behind him and tossing his knapsack on the bed. He sat down and stared at the floor.

"It's not mad. I'm just . . . just mature for my age," he breathed.

Then he let out a sigh and lay down on the bed, staring up at the ceiling.

"Nobody understands," he muttered.

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*"Where have they hidden him, Granger?" Voldemort lisped from his throne at the chestnut-haired Death Eater standing before him with her eyes lowered to the floor.*

*Around Hermione stood several steely-eyed, masked Death Eaters awaiting their orders.*

*"I do not know, my Lord. Albus has taken him someplace, and I have been unable to find out where," the witch lied, knowing what it would cost her. Her Occlumency walls were firmly lowered in place. No matter what happened, Harry Potter was safe.*

*"Crucio!" the despot cried, training his wand on the witch, who seized up and screamed horribly as the dreaded pain encompassed her body. The others watched, unmoving.*

*After twenty seconds or so, Voldemort released her, and she fell shuddering and convulsing to the floor. He watched her for several minutes until her seizures eased. Two male Death Eaters walked forward and pulled her to her feet, then withdrew, her face wet with tears and lip bleeding from being bitten as she shuddered from the curse.*

*Voldemort's face twisted into a leering expression.*

*"You have been unable to find out many things, Granger. I am displeased. You know what that means, don't you?" he hissed at her, crimson eyes glittering.*

*"Yes, my Lord," Hermione replied, steeling herself for what was to come.*

*"Bring it in, Wormtail," Voldemort hissed to the fat wizard standing at the right of his throne.*

*"Right away, my Lord," he replied, rushing off, then returning with what looked like a large wooden block with rounded edges and attached circular metal pieces. He dragged it in front of the throne. Two female Death Eaters approached Hermione, who stood still as they removed her clothing. Voldemort's eyes washed over her body. It was unmarked for the most part. He preferred it that way.*

*"Lock her in," he breathed.*

*A burly male Death Eater approached and roughly pushed Hermione to her knees and bent her over the wooden block. A neck restraint was locked into place, holding her head steady. He stretched her arms over the sides where there were wrist restraints and locked each hand into it. Then he pulled her hair away from her upper back, revealing it and the marks of the Dark Lord's displeasure, scars branching upward and away from a thick center mass that went the length of her spine.*

*It looked like a tree.*

*Hermione lay there, her cheek pressed to the cool wood, her arms outstretched, the flesh of her back exposed. McNair entered with a short three-tongued scourge, three sharp metal pieces on the end.*

*"You know what to do, McNair. Do not go outside the pattern. Give her more branches. Do not scar her any place else. When you are done, you may have her," Voldemort hissed.*

*"Yes, my Lord. Thank you, my Lord," the executioner growled, looking down on the restrained witch.*

*"Now scream, Granger! Scream!" Voldemort hissed as the scourge was brought down expertly, ripping into her flesh.*

*Hermione obliged him as she always did, crying out in agony as she was whipped once again for her failure.*

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Professor Granger woke up with a start, drenched in perspiration. Another nightmare. Hers was a life of nightmares. Naked, she rolled out of bed and walked into her bathroom, pulling open her medicinal potions store and taking out a bottle of dreamless draught. Its contents were low. She would have to brew more tomorrow.

The witch opened it and tilted the bottle to her mouth, draining the potion and setting the empty bottle on the vanity. She looked at herself in the mirror.

"It's never over, is it?" she asked her reflection, which looked back at her with haunted eyes. Then she turned, looking over her shoulder at the scars on her back, her eyes running over the trunk and branches. Yes, the Dark Mark was gone, but this mark . . . These marks would always remain to remind her of where she had been.

To remind everyone.

She used the loo, then returned to her four-poster bed, falling into it and rolling over onto her stomach.

Sleep would come soon. And for a short while, blissful forgetfulness.

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Severus tossed and turned in his bed, flipping from his belly to his back, then back again. He had an enormous erection.

The young wizard wasn't aware of exactly what he was dreaming, but whatever it was totally absorbed him until he groaned and ejaculated in his boxers. He woke up then.

"Oh, bloody hell," he hissed as he felt the warm stickiness filling his shorts. "Not again."

He sat up slowly, his face contorted, and reached for his wand on his nightstand. He picked it up, lifted his boxers and pointed the tip at his gummy pelvis.

"*Scourify*," he hissed, cleaning himself.

Normally, the young wizard slept in the nude, but for the past several weeks, he'd been having an extraordinary amount of wet dreams that left his bed a mess. If he wore his boxers to bed, at least he could keep his release localized.

Severus put his wand back, then dropped back onto the bed, disgusted.

It wouldn't be so bad if he could actually remember exactly what the hell he was dreaming that made him come so much. Just a glimpse of it. Something. It was like he was being cheated. He had to be shagging in his dreams.

It was just downright frustrating.

He had to do something about this situation and his infatuation with Professor Granger. He already reached the Age of Consent, past it actually. He'd just had a birthday in January. He was now eighteen. Eighteen would seem better to an older witch than seventeen, wouldn't it? The wizard began to think and think hard. What could he possibly do to get Professor Granger's notice?

He already did his very best in her class, though she never gave him proper marks for his work. There were always a few points shaved off. He learned not to question the witch about this, because every time he did, she took off more points. When he asked her why, she would give him a nasty smirk and reply:

"Because I can, Mr. Snape."

Severus lay there in the semi-darkness. Professor Granger wasn't impressed by his intelligence or his talent with potions. She seemed to enjoy making fun of his eagerness to learn and to share his knowledge. He didn't mind it, because at least she focused on him then. So what if it were negative attention? It was still attention.

He sighed. What could he do? He was doing his best . . .

Hm.

His best. Maybe that was the problem. Maybe he shouldn't do his best. Maybe . . . maybe he should do his worst.

An immediate war occurred between his mind and his libido. He had almost perfect marks and had worked so hard to keep his grades as perfect as he could. How could he purposely sabotage his marks?

Easily. He was a randy young wizard, and randy young wizards would do just about anything to get shagged. Severus' problem was unlike most young men: he had a particular focus on a witch who was twice his age, cold, sarcastic and would probably hex him as easily as she'd draw her next breath.

But if he started to really do badly in her class, then she would be forced to take him aside and at least talk to him, take an interest in what was happening. She still was a teacher after all, and Severus knew he was her best student despite how she treated him. He doubted if she wanted him to suddenly bottom out in her class. She might even think it was a reflection of her teaching.

He could even play the sympathy card.

"It's just not worth it, Professor. No matter how hard I work, I can't seem to make the marks I need. I just want to give up," he'd say.

Try as he might though, the wizard couldn't reasonably imagine Professor Granger saying anything remotely understanding to this. Most likely she'd browbeat him for being a quitter.

He'd like that. He always liked when she yelled at him.

Well, at least he had an idea how to get her attention and maybe be alone with her. But how to tell her how he felt? What he wanted?

He didn't know, but he'd be graduating soon, and if he didn't do it before then, most likely he never would.

All right. He had a plan now. It seemed insane, but it's what he had to work with.

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"Where is your essay, Mr. Snape?" Professor Granger asked.

She was sitting at her desk and sifting through the parchments that were handed forward.

"I . . . I didn't do it," Severus said.

A collective gasp arose from the rest of the class. Severus Snape didn't do an assignment? Good Grindylows.

Professor Granger scowled at him and waited for the boy to say more.

He didn't.

In a very controlled voice, Professor Granger said, "Mr. Snape, is there any particular reason you didn't complete your essay? Were you indisposed? Ill? At the point of death?"

Actually that is the only reason Professor Granger could think of why the walking brain wouldn't do an assignment. Even then, most likely he would die with his quill in his hand, his big nose in a book, and his assignment two feet longer than necessary.

"No, Professor. I just didn't do it," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

This caused another collective gasp from the students.

"Are you all having some kind of respiratory problem?" Professor Granger snarled at the rest of the class. "The next person who gasps is going to be cleaning the colons of freshly slaughtered Stinkbuggers!"

Everyone fell silent, almost not daring to draw a breath at all. Stinkbuggers were perhaps the nastiest things on earth. They were beetle-like creatures that seemed to be made completely of shit. Very noxious, pungent shit that they could shoot quite a distance out of their colons. It was a defensive mechanism, and Stinkbuggers were always on the defensive. Unfortunately, the shooting didn't end when they died. They could spasm for hours, squirting the filth everywhere. And worse, when cut open, they virtually exploded. No one came away clean when dealing with Stinkbuggers. Ew.

Granger leveled her eyes on Severus.

"Mr. Snape, I will see you in detention this evening. Perhaps by then you will come up with a feasible reason for neglecting the work I've assigned you," she said to him, an ugly look on her face.

"Yes Professor Granger," Severus replied with a helpless little smirk.

Hermione studied him.

For someone who'd just got detention, Mr. Snape looked extraordinarily happy.

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Harry and Ron were playing a game of wizard chess when Severus descended the stairs. Ron looked over at him, as did Harry, both of their eyebrows raised.

"Oy! What the hell are you doing, Severus?" Ron asked as the wizard strode up to them.

"Going to detention," Severus replied.

Harry looked him up and down.

"You look like you're going on a date to me," he said, adjusting his glasses.

Severus was dressed in his best robes, and his black hair was brushed to silkiness. Ron sniffed him.

"Are you wearing cologne?" Ron asked him as Harry shook his head.

"If you must know, yes," Severus said, scowling at him.

"Granger's going to see you dressed like that and make you collar a salamander or collect Manticore shit or something, Sev," Ron said. "You're just begging for it."

"She's not that bad," the wizard replied.

Harry and Ron looked at each other incredulously, then back at Severus.

"Where the hell have you been for the past seven years? Granger is a fucking terror. You're going to come back here with your robes shredded. I guarantee it," Ron said, shaking his head.

"Maybe not. I'm going to tell her how I feel about her," Severus said in a low voice.

"What?" Ron yelled.

Everyone in the common room looked over at them curiously.

Severus scowled at Ron.

"Will you keep it down, Ron? I don't want everyone to know," Severus hissed at him.

Ron lowered his voice as Severus scowled at the other students, who went back to studying or whatever they were doing. Ron made a face.

"You don't want everyone to know? Oh, they're going to know all right. When what's left of your body is retrieved from the dungeons," Ron said to him.

Harry snorted, fighting back a laugh.

"Talk to him, Harry," Ron said. "He won't listen to me."

Harry looked up at the wizard. Severus met his eyes coolly. He was determined to do this. Well, it was his life.

Harry shrugged.

"It's his funeral, Ron. All we'll be able to do is send flowers," Harry said, smirking.

Harry didn't believe Professor Granger would actually kill Severus, but he had a feeling the smitten wizard was going to catch a bad one. Telling the snarky witch he had a crush on her wasn't a good idea at all. He'd probably get hexed . . . and hexed good.

"I've got to go," Severus said.

Ron stood up, grasped both of Severus' shoulders and looked at him somberly.

"You were a good friend, Sev. I'm going to miss that big brain of yours. Want me to do the eulogy?" he asked

Severus knocked Ron's arms away as Harry cracked up.

"You're an idiot, Ronald Weasley," Severus hissed, striding away.

Harry and Ron looked after him as he headed out of the common room.

"There goes a brave wizard," Harry said, shaking his head slightly.

"There goes a dead wizard," Ron corrected him. "We'd better get an owl out to his next of kin."

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Severus had just made it to the Entrance Hall and was about to turn down the dungeon corridor when a familiar and very unappreciated voice called out to him.

"Fancy seeing you at this hour, Mr. Snape," Albus Dumbledore said, walking up to the wizard, wearing bright yellow robes with blue stars and a matching hat. Severus was tempted to shield his eyes but, instead, greeted the Headmaster.

"Good evening, sir," Severus said politely.

Albus studied the young Gryffindor over the rim of his half-moon glasses, looking down his long, crooked nose.

"Don't you look nice, Mr. Snape. Don't tell me you are courting a Slytherin?" the old wizard said, sniffing delicately in Severus' direction, scenting his cologne.

Severus looked shocked for a moment. Albus continued.

"I assume by the way you are dressed and smell, you are on your way to Slytherin house to meet a witch, though you should have gone earlier. There is only one hour until curfew," Dumbledore continued, his blue eyes twinkling. "That's not much wooing time."

Severus reddened a bit, then said, "Actually, sir, I'm on my way to serve detention with Professor Granger."

Both of Albus' eyebrows rose in surprise.

"Dressed that way, Mr. Snape?" he said, looking over his nice robes, then delicately adding, "I'm afraid that they might not look as good when leaving as they do arriving, my boy. Professor Granger is notoriously . . . vindictive with students she assigns detention to. She feels they are infringing on her personal time, and she can make the experience . . . quite unpleasant."

"I just wanted to make a good impression, sir," Severus said.

Again, Albus' eyebrows rose, and he looked at the wizard rather curiously.

"A good impression, Mr. Snape? On Professor Granger?" he asked him.

Severus nodded.

"Yes, sir. Perhaps if she sees I've put my best foot forward, she won't be too . . . vindictive," the young wizard replied.

Dumbledore shook his head sadly.

"Ah, Mr. Snape. I'm afraid Professor Granger is permanently stuck on vindictive. It's left over from her service, you know. She had a difficult time of it and is very bitter and withdrawn because of her experiences. It really isn't her fault, you know. She has nothing in her life to bring her any joy, any respite. She is quite the lonely witch, although she wouldn't admit it even under the Cruciatus Curse, and it is a shame. A terrible, terrible shame. She could offer so much . . ."

Here the wizard's voice trailed off because Severus was shifting from foot to foot. Now he was late. Professor Granger was going to be angry about that.

"Go along to your detention, Mr. Snape. Good luck with your robes," the Headmaster said with a smile.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," Severus replied, turning and heading down the dungeon corridor at a good clip.

Albus watched him go, then turned toward the main stairwell. He wore a thin smile as he mounted the steps, well aware that Mr. Snape was indeed wooing a Slytherin.

A very snarky and unapproachable Slytherin twice his age. Since the boy was past the age of consent, he was well within his rights to do so.

But the question was, was he in his right mind?

Well, the infirmary wasn't too busy tonight. Poppy could give him one-on-one care if he needed the facilities.

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Professor Granger sat in the Potions classroom scowling at the clock on the wall. It was five after eight, and Severus had not yet arrived. This was as much out of character as not finishing his homework assignment. He was usually annoyingly punctual.

Suddenly, the classroom door opened. Hermione narrowed her eyes, a scowl on her face as Severus entered.

"How nice of you to join me, Mr. Snape," she sneered at the young wizard. "You've earned yourself another night's detention for making me wait. You are on my time, Mr. Snape, and my time is valuable."

Severus walked up to the desk and looked at the witch apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Professor. I met the Headmaster in the main hall, and he held me up for a bit," he said to the witch, staring at her intensely.

"I assume you told him you were on your way to detention," she said to him.

Severus nodded.

"So why didn't you get a note?" she snapped at him.

"I didn't think," Severus said, taken aback.

"That seems to be a major problem with you of late, Mr. Snape. Not thinking. Not doing your assignments . . ." Hermione began, then stopped, taking in his attire as the scent of his cologne reached her.

Her eyes drifted over his robes, then his hair.

"Mr. Snape, why are you dressed as if you are going out on a date?" she asked him.

Severus reddened a little, then tried to strike a bit of a dashing pose.

"I'm not. I just wanted to look presentable," he lied.

"Well, you stink to high heaven," Professor Granger snapped, pulling out her wand and Scourgifying him. "How much did you pay for that scent? Two Knuts? My gods. Go sit down."

Red, Severus took a seat as Hermione stood up and began to clean her blackboard.

"I had something planned for you," the witch said as she wiped the board, Severus' eyes following her body's motions as if hypnotized, "but seeing the way you're dressed . . ."

She turned around and smiled at him malevolently.

". . . I've changed my mind."

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Two hours later, covered in Stinkbugger shit, a tired and chastened Severus returned to the Potions classroom from the witch's lab. Hermione had assigned him to transfer about two hundred of the bugs from one terrarium to the other, both on opposite sides of the room, without the use of magic or gloves. Stinkbugs were defensive and fast, hard to catch by hand under the best of circumstances. Then he had to clean the terrarium and the lab as well, also without magic.

"Oh, good gods, Mr. Snape!" Professor Granger cried, pulling her robes up over her nose. "Don't you have the good sense to Scourgify yourself before coming back to the classroom?"

Severus had been so dazed by all the shit flying at him, the poor wizard could only think about getting out of the lab.

"Sorry," he muttered.

Professor Granger pulled out her wand and thoroughly Scourgified him, then cast a freshening spell to clear the stench out of the air. She looked at him with a satisfied, if rather nasty, smile.

"Tomorrow night, you will transfer the Stinkbugs back to their original terrarium," she said.

Severus sighed. He should have expected it.

"Now, you may go, Mr. Snape," the witch said, rising from her desk and walking around it. She stopped in front of the wizard. "Be sure to be on time tomorrow night. And I expect that assignment finished and on my desk when you come to class."

Severus stood here, unmoving. Hermione scowled at him.

"I said you can go, Mr. Snape," she said to him.

Severus' stomach felt like a horde of dragons were flying about inside.

"I don't want to go," he said in a low voice, so low the witch could barely hear him. She did, but she couldn't have heard what she thought she did.

"What was that, Mr. Snape?" she demanded, her face contorted.

Severus cleared his throat.

"I said I don't want to leave, Professor," he said a bit louder. His eyes looked a bit wild.

Professor Granger's brows lifted in surprise.

"You . . . you don't want to leave? Why is that, Mr. Snape? Afraid of ghosts perhaps? Don't like to walk through the empty castle? A fine Gryffindor you are," she mocked him.

"That's not why," he said softly.

Hermione scowled at him.

"Then, pray tell me, why?" she replied.

Severus stared at her for a moment, his heart pounding. This was it, now or never.

Suddenly, the wizard darted forward, wrapping his arms around the witch, and kissed her, backing her into the desk and hanging on for dear life as he pressed his lips to hers. It felt like heaven, even though she was struggling.

Finally, the witch bit him and, shocked, Severus released her. Then . . .

SLAP!!!

The professor slapped the young wizard as hard as she could, then drew her wand, pointing it between his eyes.

"I should kill you for that!" she hissed at him. "If you weren't a student . . . I would! How dare you try to force yourself on me, you little bastard! You're out of here, Mr. Snape, and most likely heading for Azkaban! I intend to press full charges!"

Severus stared at the tip of the wand with his eyes crossed.

"If you do send me to Azkaban, it will have been worth it," he said softly to the shocked teacher.

Professor Granger stared at the wizard, suddenly realizing what this was about.

"Oh, good gravy," the witch said. "Don't tell me you have a crush on me, Mr. Snape."

"It's more than a crush," the wizard said. "I think about you all the time, Professor. I can't help it."

Fuck. This was all she needed. Some hormone-driven Gryffindor panting after her. Professor Granger lowered her wand.

"Go sit down, Mr. Snape," she said, shaking her head. "We're going to have a little talk."

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A/N: I would like to thank my beta, Notsosaintly, for cleaning this story up for me. She might not be so saintly, but she sure has the patience of one. \*\*\* Thanks for reading.

# The Oath

## Chapter 2 of 6

Severus, in an outburst of emotion, makes an oath that he will not be with anyone if he can't be with professor Granger. Unfortunately, something goes horribly wrong, placing Hermione in an awkward and unwanted situation.

### Chapter 2 ~ The Oath

Severus took a seat in the first row and sat there looking at Hermione as she paced back and forth, her robes billowing while she pinched the bridge of her nose.

Merlin's short hairs. How the hell was she going to deal with this? Severus Snape was one of the most, if not the most, intelligent young wizards at Hogwarts. Even as a youngster he had shown more maturity than other students his age, but this was a bit too much maturity as far as the Potions mistress was concerned. Finally she turned to him.

"Mr. Snape, you are intelligent enough to know that there is no way I would ever 'date' you," she said to the wizard.

Severus blinked at her. Date? He hadn't ever thought about dating her. That would be . . . awkward. Plus he didn't have enough money to take a witch out on the town.

"Yes, Professor. I know that," he replied.

"If you know that, why do you persist in allowing yourself to feel this way?" she snapped at him.

"Because we don't have to date to . . . to . . ." he began, reddening as he tried to tell his teacher they didn't have to date to shag. People did that all the time.

Hermione stared at him, unable to believe what the boy was trying to say.

"Are you saying, Mr. Snape, that you don't want a relationship. Just a tryst?" she asked him, her eyes narrowing.

The nerve of the boy.

"Well, not just one tryst. At least two," he replied honestly. "Although I'd really like as many as I could get."

Hermione stared at the boy. Was he a complete idiot? That's nothing to tell a witch you wanted to woo. As she looked into those dark, honest and rather innocent eyes, she realized that it wasn't idiocy, but honesty he was sharing with her. He had a physical attraction to her. He wasn't in love and instinctively knew the difference. Since he was a young wizard, he didn't know how to play the game and thought that honesty was the best policy to get into a witch's knickers. Oh, Mr. Snape had so much to learn.

"Well, you won't be getting any from me, Mr. Snape. Really, I am twice your age. You aren't a bad-looking wizard, despite that huge honker of a nose. Surely there are witches your own age who find you attractive enough to give you a tumble," she said to him.

Severus sighed.

"I need an older witch. The younger ones are too scared and have . . . have hang-ups. They won't let me do what I want to do," he complained.

Hermione blinked at the boy. What could he possibly want to do other than shag at his age? That's all any young wizard thought about.

"What do you want to do, Mr. Snape? Tie them up? Urinate on them? What?" she asked him, her face twisted.

Severus made a face himself. Urinate on them? Ew.

"No! Nothing like that. I just want to . . . to taste them. Down there," he said, looking a bit embarrassed.

Hermione slumped back against the desk. Oral sex? Severus Snape was a muff diver at seventeen? Or was he eighteen? All right. All right, she could handle this.

"Mr. Snape, have you ever considered just sticking with the basics at first?" she questioned him. "You will be more successful. Maybe afterwards, a witch will consent to be more 'experimental.'"

Severus shook his head.

"They won't let me do that either," he said despairingly. "They're scared."

Hermione stared at the young wizard. Was there some deformation? No, he must mean they were scared to have intercourse for the first time.

"You'll have to bone up on your powers of persuasion, Mr. Snape. Reluctance is natural for a virgin," she said.

"Two of them weren't virgins, Professor. That has nothing to do with it," the boy said, letting out another sigh.

"Are you . . . you . . . er . . . deformed in some way, Mr. Snape?" the witch asked, unable to help her curiosity about this.

"Sometimes I think so," he replied. "They say I'm far too big to shag."

Hermione's brown eyes flicked downward for a moment, though the Gryffindor was seated behind the desk and the view of his lap not visible. Too big? Oh, Circe's Sailors.

"So I thought, maybe an older witch would be more . . . understanding," he continued, looking at her hungrily.

All right. Maybe that made some sense in his universe. Actually, his thinking wasn't far off the mark. He was a good looking young wizard, and a lot of older witches



wouldn't mind him for a boy toy. But not her.

"Mr. Snape, I have to ask you this. Why in the world would you focus on me? I have never given you or any male student the slightest inclination that I would welcome such advances. Most run from me as if I were a basilisk," the professor said.

Severus looked at her, his eyes getting a bit glazed.

"I admire you, Professor Granger. You are the most brilliant witch I have ever met. And you're just so . . . so . . . I don't know how to put it. You're like . . . like . . ." he began, stumbling over his words.

"I see why you aren't successful with witches, Mr. Snape. Your ability to explain yourself is dismal," the witch said to him.

Severus scowled.

"I can usually explain myself," he said with a bit of an edge, "but this is different. It's something I want so badly I can't find the words to say how I feel. You're just so unreachable, and I want to be the one to reach you. You're so controlling, and it's like I want to be controlled. You never seem to appreciate anything I do, Professor. Maybe you'd appreciate me that way . . ."

His voice faltered. He sounded like a little wimp.

Hermione stared at the boy. He wanted to be controlled. Good gods. It sounded like he wanted to be her . . . her slave. She had known Severus Snape since he was eleven. He always enjoyed being the first to discover something no one else knew, to solve a puzzle before anyone else. Did he see her as something to be broken open and examined?

"Mr. Snape, what you want is impossible. I am not interested in you in such a way. I'm not interested in any wizard. I live a celibate life by choice. You do know what celibacy is, I'm sure," she said to the young wizard.

"Yes, I know what it is," the Gryffindor replied, "but I don't think you live that way because you want to. I think it's because of what you've gone through. I know you were tortured and mistreated by Voldemort. And you're a witch, so . . . you probably weren't just Crucio'd . . ."

"Shut up!" Hermione suddenly screamed at him, her eyes wild. "Don't try to figure out 'what's wrong' with me. There doesn't have to be anything wrong for me to make a life choice of this nature, you stupid boy!"

Severus just sat there. He didn't look abashed at all. His black eyes were calm, knowing, and for a moment he looked much older than what he was.

"You've been hurt, Professor," he said softly, "and you continue to live with your pain. I might not know much, but I know that much. There has to be a reason you're so cold and cruel to people."

"People are cruel. Thoughtless, thick-headed, cruel and ungrateful," she hissed at him, dark memories returning to her.

"I wouldn't be," Severus said, his voice becoming rich with emotion. "I'd never be cruel to you. There's been enough cruelty . . ."

"Get out!" Hermione suddenly cried, startling the wizard. "Get out of my classroom, Mr. Snape. This entire conversation is over. There will never be anything between us! And if you ever try anything like this again, you'll be very, very sorry! Now get out of here!"

Severus slowly stood up and met the glaring witch's eyes.

"Professor, I still feel the way I feel. You yelling at me isn't going to change that. I like when you yell at me, and I really want . . . I really, really want . . ."

Suddenly, the wizard drew a deep breath, and a look of determination filled his eyes.

"If you won't accept me, then I won't go for anyone else!" he declared in a fit of adolescent emotion. And it was enough to set what happened next in motion.

Hermione's eyes widened with horror as she felt the swirl of magic that announced a wizard oath. Oh gods! No!

Hermione ran up to the wizard and grabbed him by the lapels of his robes, shaking him roughly.

"What did you do, you idiot! You took a wizard oath! Of all the stupid, insane things for you to do! You've just relegated yourself to a life of celibacy!" she hissed at him.

A wizard oath could not be broken until the terms under which it was invoked were met. In this case, that meant Hermione would have to engage him or he would never become sexually involved with any other witch for the rest of his life. The oath wouldn't let him.

Severus looked at her calmly.

"No, I haven't," he replied, "you have. Unless you accept me, Professor Granger."

Shocked, Hermione released the young wizard, staring at him as if it were the first time she'd ever laid eyes on him.

"Why, you little manipulative bastard!" she hissed at him. "You're not going to put this on me! You wicked, evil . . . how can a Gryffindor do something like this?"

"I didn't do it on purpose, Professor, but it's done now. I'll have to live with it if you don't release me," he responded. "I might not be a Slytherin, but I know I have to deal with the consequences of my actions. I have no choice. Good night, Professor."

With that, Severus turned and left the classroom, leaving a stunned Professor Granger behind. Severus Snape might not be a Slytherin, but he certainly had a few Slytherin-like tendencies.

Hermione stood there a good five minutes before slowly gathering her things and heading for her private rooms. She placed the parchments and books on her desk, then walked over to her liquor cabinet and fixed herself a Firewhisky.

A double.

She knocked it back and rasped as the fiery liquid coursed down her throat, then sat down in one of the two armchairs in front of the fireplace and stared into the flames.

What a fucking mess this was.

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"I assure you, Hermione, you are not responsible for this situation, nor are you under any obligation to Mr. Snape. The young man is an adult for all intents and purposes. He has to deal with the consequences of his actions. No one will blame you," Albus Dumbledore said to the witch seated in front of him.

"He's an idiot," she hissed. "A hormone-driven dunderhead. A fool! How could he do this?"

Albus looked at Hermione.

"You don't remember what it was like to be young, Hermione?" he asked her.

"I've never been young," she replied. "I had no childhood. There were no times of blissful ignorance when I didn't know how hard and unfair life was. My father beat it into me by the time I was four."

Albus looked at her sadly. His professor had had such a hard time of it all her life, and still she had worked hard to end Voldemort's madness. Though her reasons had been selfish, she could have shirked her painful duties. But she never had. What she had suffered was horrible.

"There was a time, Hermione, when you . . . loved," he said to her softly.

"He chose her over me. Lily Evans." Hermione hissed, her eyes dark with hatred as she thought about the Muggle-born. She'd been dead nearly eighteen years, and Hermione still hated her. "What good did love do me? All it did was get me a tree on my back and more recurring nightmares than any one person should have to bear."

"Perhaps if you had something else in your life other than your memories of those dark times, Hermione, the dreams wouldn't occur so often. You are always alone, in darkness. You need respite, joy, something that will bring you light. Distraction. Enjoyment," Albus said softly.

Hermione looked at him suddenly, her eyes narrowing.

"You want me to engage that Gryffindor!" she accused the Headmaster.

"No. I would never presume to advise you on such a delicate, personal matter," Albus replied, his blue eyes twinkling annoyingly. "No. Never. If Severus Snape never experiences a woman, never marries and never has children to comfort and care for him in his old age, it will be his fault. Youth is not an excuse when you make stupid mistakes in judgment, is it, Professor?"

"No. It isn't!" Hermione snapped.

"Well then, you can just continue on as you have been with a clear conscience," Albus said. "Once again I tell you, you are not accountable for Mr. Snape's life path. Now, return to the dungeons and your work, Hermione. Thank you for telling me the situation. I am sure it will all work out."

Hermione scowled at the Headmaster, then rose and stalked out of his office. Albus shook his head. As brilliant as the professor was, she was sadly lacking when it came to matters of the heart. She closed herself up tight and wouldn't let anything or anyone in.

She'd been hurt enough.

But what Hermione failed to realize was that in order for wounds to heal, they needed to be allowed to be open, to breathe, to interact with the environment. This went for internal wounds as well.

No, Albus Dumbledore didn't think it would be a terrible thing for Professor Granger to indulge herself with young Severus Snape. He was a brilliant young wizard and could offer her much more than a sheet tangle or two. He was sharp, inquisitive and challenging. He had a mind and loved to use it. That made him very different from other young wizards. It made him . . . suitable.

But again, it was Hermione's decision.

Albus didn't know if the witch would allow the young wizard to live out his life without ever knowing female contact, but he hoped in his heart she wouldn't. He hoped that somewhere inside the witch's damaged psyche there was a place that could feel and empathize. The Potions mistress knew what it was to want someone and not have him. Maybe she would remember what that was like and give the smitten young wizard the closure that she never had.

If she didn't, Severus Snape was doomed to a very lonely existence.

\* \* \*

"You what?" Ron screamed at the pale wizard, his eyes bugging out of his head.

Severus sighed. This was why he brought Ron and Harry into his room to tell them what happened with Professor Granger last night. He knew Ron would blow up.

Even Harry was looking at him as if he had lost his mind.

"I didn't mean to take the oath, but she wouldn't . . . She didn't understand . . . and I was desperate," Severus said to his friend.

"Of course she wouldn't understand, Sev! The only thing that Granger understands is Potions and pain. You would have done better trying to explain yourself to the Grinning Gargoyle. I can't believe this!" Ron said, dropping down on the wizard's bed next to Harry.

"You should have just let her cut it off," Ron continued. "At least there'd be nothing down there to make you want to shag."

"If she doesn't accept him, Ron, it's like she's cut it off anyway," Harry said, looking at Severus, who sighed.

"I don't think she'll let that happen," he said softly.

Ron looked at him incredulously.

"Severus, this is Granger we're talking about. Granger. She is not a normal witch. She has no soft feelings. She's probably delighted that you'll never dip your wick as long as you live," the redhead said.

"I don't intend to back off," Severus said. "I'm going to make sure she's aware of me for the rest of the time I'm at Hogwarts. I have to. Or . . ."

"Or you're going to have very calloused palms covered in thick black hair from wanking off for the rest of your life," Ron said. "You can wank off, can't you?"

"Of course," Severus spat at him. "Don't be stupid. Masturbation isn't considered sex. But then again . . . maybe it is . . . for you. Are you in love with your hand, Ron? Let's see your palms."

Ron scowled and stuck out his hands, wriggling his fingers.

"See. Nothing," he stated.

Severus leaned closer, examining them.

"I see a few hairs. They're just blond," he lied.

"What? Where?" Ron demanded, examining his palms. "I thought that was an old witch's tale."

Harry wanted to laugh, but didn't. Ron wanked off so much it was a wonder he still had a foreskin. It should have been worn away by the constant friction. If his palms ever

did grow hair, it would probably be quite long and flowing. Harry smiled at an image of Ron wearing large misshapen leather gloves to hide his secret shame, tendrils of hair sticking out at the wrists.

"Anyway, I'm not giving up," Severus declared. "I'm going to make Professor Granger want me just as badly as I want her."

"One word. Well, two words. Imperio and Obliviate," Ron offered. "Quick and painless . . . if you don't actually look at her while you're shagging her, that is."

Ron shuddered at the thought of it. Gah!

Severus looked at Ron for a moment.

"Get out of my room, Ron," he said, pulling out his wand and removing the wards on his door. "You are never supportive. Ever."

"What do you mean? I am being supportive, Sev. I told you not to say anything to her, but you did . . . and look what happened. The only way you're going to get any pussy now is if you buy a cat from the Magical Menagerie to keep you company."

"OUT!" Severus bellowed at him.

Ron looked at him, hurt.

"Fine. Try to help a bloke out, and this is what you get. The boot," he muttered, then opened the door and left the room.

"He's such an idiot," Severus hissed, sitting down on the bed next to Harry.

"He's Ron, Sev. You know how he is. He overreacts and doesn't think before he speaks. But he means well, you know that. And he'd do anything for you," Harry said to the pale wizard.

Severus sighed.

"I know. I know, Harry, but why does all that loyalty and friendship have to come wrapped in such an annoying package?" he asked the wizard.

"That's just the way it is," Harry replied with a shrug.

There was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Severus called.

"It's Luna. Luna Lovegood," a soft, somewhat spacey voice responded.

Harry and Severus looked at each other, both mouthing "Luna?" before Severus stood up and pulled open the door.

"Luna? What are you doing here?" he asked the witch, his black eyes sweeping over her.

"I wanted to talk to you," she said. Then she noticed Harry.

"Oh, hi, Harry," she said, giving him a little wave.

"Hi, Luna," he said and then said to Severus, "Hey, I'm going to go, all right? I'll talk to you later."

Normally, Harry would have given Severus a little eyebrow waggle at Luna asking to "talk" to him. But there would be no waggling on either Harry's or Severus' part in this case. The wizard was shut down.

"All right. I'll see you later," Severus said, stepping aside as Harry walked through the door.

"Bye, Luna," Harry said to her.

"Bye, Harry," the witch replied.

Luna looked up at Severus.

"Can I come in?" she asked him softly.

"Yes," he said.

Luna wandered in, and Severus closed the door behind her.

The witch turned to him.

"Severus. I've decided I want to do it with you now," she said nonchalantly.

Both of Severus' eyebrows rose.

"What? Now?" he said.

"Yes. I gave Seamus a shag the other day. My first one, and he was awful. When you and I were together, the way you kissed me and touched me was so nice. I didn't feel anything like that with Seamus. He kind of pawed all over me, but I did it because I had been putting it off so long. And it kind of . . . well . . . wasn't enough. Maybe . . . maybe big isn't so bad. I mean, there has to be more to it than what I went through with Seamus," the witch said, starting to unbutton her robes.

Normally, Severus would have jumped at this, despite his desire for Professor Granger. He was a young wizard, not a witch, and wired differently. He saw nothing wrong with wanting to shag more than one witch. But he felt nothing stirring as he looked at her opening her robes. It seemed as if she wore nothing under them.

"Ah, Luna, I can't do it," he said to the witch. "You'd better go."

Luna stopped unbuttoning her robes.

"You're mad at me. I figured you would be since I didn't let you shag me the last time, but I promise I will this time. I don't even have on knickers, Severus," Luna said to him, her wide eyes resting on the wizard.

"I'm not mad. I just can't, Luna. I . . . I have my reasons," he said lamely.

Luna buttoned up her robes again, but didn't look perturbed about it.

"You're mad," she said confidently. "Wizards have their pride. You're punishing me for getting you excited and then not doing anything. It's all right, Severus. You'll get past

it. It's childish but . . . there you are."

She wandered back past the wizard and opened the door, turning to him.

"I'll be back, Severus. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but one day before graduation. Until then . . ."

Luna flashed a rather large, shapely pink-tipped boobie at him with a rather naughty smile.

"That's just something to keep in mind. Bye, Sev," she said, leaving.

Severus staggered forward and closed the door, then back to the bed where he fell in face first. Of all times for Luna to finally give in. Shit!

"Why me?" he groaned into the bed sheets, his voice muffled by the mattress.

\* \* \*

The next day, Severus provided the required assignment when he entered the Potions classroom, placing it on the Potions mistress' desk as requested before taking his seat. Then he proceeded to eye his professor, not interacting the way he normally did, allowing the rest of his classmates to address the witch's questions.

Hermione was cool on the surface, not taking Severus to task for his noticeably ill response to her instruction. The wizard's dark eyes rested on her in such a way that she was aware his attention was based on much more than usual student/teacher interaction.

But it wasn't until that evening that Hermione realized just how distracted she had been by the young wizard. She was on her rounds, looking to find errant students engaged in less than stellar activities when she saw Prefect Draco Malfoy making his own rounds, rounds that rightly belonged to Severus Snape, the Head Boy.

"Mr. Malfoy," she said, slightly irritated that a student of her own house was out patrolling without her knowledge, "what are you doing patrolling the corridors?"

Draco immediately recognized the witch's displeasure and made an effort to displace the blame for his presence. Snape was the Head Boy and had the right to delegate the authority of all Prefects. He told Draco about his detention and that Draco was to cover his rounds. The Slytherin had no choice but to oblige him.

"Detention?" Hermione snapped. "With whom?"

Draco blinked at her.

"Why, with you, Professor," the boy replied.

Hermione turned with a billow of robes and headed directly for the dungeons. Because of what had happened the night before, she had completely forgotten she had assigned the boy another night's detention. She stormed into her Potions classroom and looked about. He wasn't in here. Maybe he saw she was absent and returned to Gryffindor tower. It was just as well. She really didn't want to see the boy.

Then, she heard a slight clinking noise coming from her lab. Drawing her wand, the Potions mistress slowly and quietly approached the partially opened door. She pushed it open slowly, then quickly pulled her robes up over her nose to try and protect it from the stench of aggravated Stinkbuggers.

There, crossing the room, was Severus, dressed in what could only be described as a simplified version of a beekeeper suit, but in scarlet and gold. The colors could barely be seen, however, since he was covered in Stinkbugger shit. He transferred them from one terrarium to the other in handfuls, wearing thin gloves. The little monsters were shooting shit everywhere, and Professor Granger had to leap back to avoid a stream blasted toward the door.

Severus heard her, and turned to face the witch, waving at her a bit like a Muggle astronaut.

"Get out here immediately, Mr. Snape. Leave the Stinkbuggers!" the witch snapped at him, her voice muffled by the raised robes.

She left the doorway.

After about ten minutes, Severus exited the labs, dressed in his everyday robes and looking as fresh as a moonflower.

Hermione stalked up to him, her face inches from his, though much lower.

"What are you doing in my classroom?" she hissed at him.

"Serving my detention. You told me what I would have to do last night," the wizard replied, his dark eyes resting on her a bit longingly.

"You have no business being in here. For all I know, you've raided my stores and stolen valuable ingredients," the professor seethed.

Severus raised his arms.

"You can frisk me if you like, Professor," he purred at her.

*I know I'd like it,* he thought as he looked down at her.

"Put your arms down, you stupid boy!" Hermione snapped. "I have no intentions of frisking you."

"Please?" Severus breathed at her. "I might have really taken something. Something like Boomslang skin maybe."

He thought about suggesting she check his trouser pockets first, but it was an idle, and somewhat suicidal, idea that he wisely let pass.

"You haven't taken anything. You're a Gryffindor. Your house isn't known for taking advantage of fortuitous situations. You're too . . . noble," Hermione said, a look of distaste on her face. "Now, leave my classroom, Mr. Snape. Your detention is over. And from here on out, if I'm not here, you're not here. Understand me?"

"Yes, Professor," Severus said, slowly lowering his arms but not moving.

Hermione pinched the bridge of her nose. Damn. Was she going to go through this again?

"Leave, Mr. Snape," she said to him, walking around her desk and sitting down, pulling a stack of parchments toward her.

Severus took a step toward her desk.

"Professor Granger, please don't make me leave," he said to the witch, his dark eyes full of passion. "I . . . I want . . ."

"I know what you want, and you can't have it! You stupid, ignorant little idiot! You put yourself in this situation, and you're just going to have to live with it. I am not about to strip down and let you shag me, Mr. Snape. You're just going to have to deal with the consequences of your own adolescent stupidity. Now get out before I blast you out!" Hermione cried, standing up and drawing her wand.

"You might as well kill me," Severus said in a low, pitiful voice, "because if I don't . . . if we don't . . . I'm going to die."

"Lack of pussy has never killed a single man in the world's entire history, Mr. Snape. I highly doubt if it will kill you," she snapped back at him furiously.

"Professor, you don't know how I feel . . . If you'd just let me show you . . . touch you, you'd know what's inside me is real," he breathed, taking another step toward her. "You're the only witch I . . ."

"*Imperio!*" Hermione hissed, hitting the young Gryffindor with the spell.

"Now leave my classroom, Mr. Snape, and don't come back tonight," she said to him, her face contorted with rage.

Moving jerkily as if trying to throw off the spell, Severus turned and walked out of the classroom, pulling the door closed behind him. He walked up the corridor a ways before he felt the spell lift. He sighed, running his hand through his black hair and turning around to look down the dark hallway. He thought he saw a little sliver of light as if from a slightly opened door. Then it disappeared.

Severus sighed again. He felt as if his life were going to end if he didn't get Professor Granger to accept him at least once.

"You might as well kill me," Professor Granger mimicked as she gathered her papers together. Young wizards were so fucking dramatic. Severus Snape was a drama king. Snorting, she headed for her private rooms.

Severus made it to the Gryffindor corridor, walking very slowly. Draco appeared, finishing his round on that floor. He looked at the Head Boy.

"What happened to you? Did Professor Granger torture you for detention?" he asked the pale wizard, noting his eyes were rather bloodshot.

"No," Severus said weakly. Then he staggered.

And fell.

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Madam Pomfrey clucked her tongue as she waved her wand over the unconscious Severus, who was lying on a cot in the infirmary. Draco had summoned help immediately, and Filch had brought the boy in, tottering with him dangerously as he carried him.

"His condition seems to be magically-based. Physically, I can find nothing wrong with him," the mediwitch said, her brow furrowed. Albus stood by her, looking down on the boy worriedly.

"Has he a spell on him now?" the Headmaster asked her.

"Nothing that was cast by another. Spells usually dissipate. The source of the magical signature I'm getting seems to be generated . . ."

The mediwitch paused as she continued to pass the wand over Severus.

"It seems it's self-generated," she finished, turning toward Albus. "This is a spell he's cast on himself."

Albus studied him.

"He took an oath recently," he said in a quiet voice.

"A wizard oath? For what?" the witch asked him.

Albus looked at her.

"Ah, it's rather personal, I'm afraid. I don't think he would want you to know, Poppy," the old wizard said.

Poppy scowled.

"Albus, when someone this young takes an oath, sometimes it is so powerful because of the passion of youth that it can become detrimental, actually beginning to eat at the person because it is unfulfilled. It weakens him, feeding off his life force. But this can happen only if the oath requires some action to be taken. If it were an oath of silence, for example, it usually reacts like any other oath. Can you at least tell me if the oath was one requiring fulfillment?" she asked him.

"Yes. It definitely was," Albus replied. "Fulfillment requiring another person to act in tangent. Something that person is not willing to do."

Poppy sighed.

"Well, someone better talk to that person, because if Mr. Snape does not fulfill that oath, there's a good chance it will kill him," she told the Headmaster soberly.

Albus shook his head. A wizard oath could be taken once a wizard or witch reached the Age of Consent, but it didn't always mean they were ready to take it. This was definitely a rare quirk of the spell, but not unheard of. Obviously, Severus' unrequited desire for the Potions mistress had turned in on him because he was so young and inexperienced with very strong emotions and intentions. It was intent that powered the way magic operated. Desire could be a terrible, powerful force. Kingdoms had been razed to the ground because of it.

"As you know, Poppy, there is a ritual that can be performed to break an oath's hold on a person," Albus said doubtfully. There was, but it was very painful and dangerous. An oath actually took hold of the soul of an individual, becoming bound to it. Dark Magic was involved in its removal.

Poppy stared at Albus as if he'd grown two more bearded heads.

"That will kill him quicker than the oath will," she snapped at him. "Clearly it has a very powerful hold on him, Albus. He'd never survive the process. Never! You're just going to have to talk to whoever is bound to this oath and convince them to help this young man to meet its conditions; otherwise, he's as good as gone in a few weeks at the most."

Albus stared at Poppy.

Professor Granger wasn't going to like this development one bit.

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"WHAT?" Hermione roared, almost blowing the pointed hat off the Headmaster's head as they sat in his office.

The moment Albus offered her some pepper imp candies (which were her favorites), rather than the usual lemon drops, she knew something wasn't right in the dragon's lair.

"Now, calm down, Professor," Albus said, raising both hands in a calming manner.

"Calm down? What do you mean he's dying because of his oath?" the witch demanded. "How can an oath kill someone?"

"Well, in most cases an oath of fulfillment simply binds a person to do their best to complete some act, only adding impetus to move toward completion. An impossible oath generally will dissipate over time," Albus began.

"He took an impossible oath!" Hermione said, scowling.

"Ah, to you, yes. But Mr. Snape believes it is possible to consummate a relationship or at least a tryst with you. Your reluctance to do so has no bearing on that belief whatsoever. It is not impossible, but unlikely," the wizard continued.

"You're damn right it is," the witch growled, looking at Albus sullenly.

"Mr. Snape's desire for you is fueled by the powerful urges of youth. As you know, a young person's desires are quite powerful. They can generate poltergeists of great destructive power without knowing it. This even occurs in young people without magic and has been documented among teenaged Muggles. Think of the oath as taking on the nature of a kind of insensate poltergeist, the destructive nature focused inwardly instead of outwardly. Instead of destroying the surrounding world, it destroys its own source, freeing itself since it will never be completed otherwise," the wizard finished, his blue eyes resting on Hermione soberly.

"This is insane," Hermione muttered, more to herself than Dumbledore. "Snape is going to die if I don't fuck him? Oh, Voldemort's slimy scales."

Both of Albus' eyebrows rose at this rather lewd commentary on the part of his Potions mistress, but he said nothing.

Hermione looked at him. For a moment, just a small moment, Albus could see vulnerability in those brown eyes.

"This is unconscionable," she said quietly, "to be blackmailed into shagging a seventh-year wizard."

Albus shook his head.

"It isn't blackmail, Professor. I am sure Mr. Snape didn't intend for this to happen. I've done some investigation, and up until yesterday evening, he was fine. He showed no signs of sickness," the Headmaster said.

Hermione stared at the Headmaster.

"He told me if we didn't . . . didn't engage, he would die," Hermione said, her voice dark.

Albus considered this.

"Did you feel a resultant magic to this statement? Did he take another oath?" he asked the witch.

Hermione shook her head.

"No. I felt nothing but rage. My own rage," she answered him.

"It could be his declaration took hold with the original oath, inadvertently adding a new intent, one that will have deadly results," the Headmaster said. "Possibly, the magic didn't manifest because the oath was already in place."

All of this was conjecture. Despite all the research that had been done over the ages, much of the way magic operated remained a mystery. The best anyone had was theory.

Hermione sat in the armchair, silent and brooding for several minutes before rising.

"I must go, Headmaster. I have a class in a few minutes," the witch said.

"Mr. Snape has been released this morning. No doubt he will attend your afternoon class. Ill as he is, he is still a very determined young wizard. It would be a pity if his young life were snuffed out before it truly began, don't you think, Professor?" Albus asked her.

Hermione said nothing other than "Goodbye, Headmaster," then tossed a bit of Floo powder into the Floo and stepped through, her robes billowing slightly.

Fawkes let out a sad little trill from his perch. Dumbledore turned to look at him.

"Yes, it is quite a sad situation, Fawkes," the wizard said to the phoenix. "Hopefully Hermione will find it in her heart to make one more sacrifice for the Greater Good. This threat is not as great as the Dark Lord's rise, but the demise of such a promising young man would be truly tragic."

Fawkes bobbed his head in agreement.

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"Severus, you look terrible," Harry said as Severus walked into the common room. The wizard was paler than usual, his eyes rather bloodshot and his normally shiny hair, lank and without body. Ron slowly shook his head.

"I bet Granger put some kind of deterioration spell on him. Do you still have your knobblies?" the red-head asked Severus as he sat down heavily between them. He felt a bit winded.

"Of course I do, you idiot," he snapped at Ron. "I'm just sick."

"Watch for signs of them falling off," Ron advised as he studied the wizard. "They'll probably be the first to go."

If Severus felt a bit stronger, he probably would have punched Ron squarely in the nose. But he was in no condition to brawl.

He slowly rose.

"I've got to get my books. I have Arithmancy," he said, making his way up the stairs.

Harry shook his head.

"He really looks sick, doesn't he?" he asked Ron.

"Of course he does. Tangling with Granger is unhealthy. Period. I hope he survives long enough to help me get ready for the big Advanced Transfiguration exam. Mum will kill me if I flunk it," the wizard said worriedly.

Harry scowled at Ron. This wasn't the time for him to be thinking about himself. But this was standard Ron. The boy who lived looked up the stairwell worriedly. Before, Severus' attraction to Professor Granger had been rather funny. Now it looked rather serious. He was sure it had something to do with her. Maybe she had poisoned him or done something else nasty. He wouldn't put it past her, heroine or not.

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Severus hoisted his books on his shoulder and staggered slightly. The wizard reached into his pocket and took out the bottle of stamina potion Poppy had given him, opened it and took a swig. He capped it back and felt a bit better. Stronger. He looked at himself in the mirror. He did look ill. He remembered what the mediwitch told him when he woke up.

"The oath you took is turning on you, Mr. Snape. Whatever it was that you are bound to fulfill must be fulfilled," Poppy told him gently. "Otherwise it could mean your life."

He had stared at her. He didn't know what to say. He was trying his best to reach the professor, but she refused to be reached.

She hated him.

Well, this development meant one thing for certain. He was going to make history. He'd be the first male to actually die from the lack of pussy.

\* \* \*

Professor Granger was on her way to lunch when she was confronted by a very unwelcome individual.

Harry Potter.

She looked into his green eyes, the eyes of his mother, the eyes of Lily Potter, and her hatred reasserted itself. Yes, he looked like James, but it was those eyes, those blasted, hated eyes that separated them by miles.

"Is there some reason you are blocking my way to the Great Hall, Mr. Potter?" she asked the young wizard, her face contorted.

Harry looked at her. The lank hair. The contorted face. The familiar expression of malice the witch always wore when she came in contact with him. Despite her service, Harry Potter was sure of one thing . . .

Hermione Granger hated him.

"I need to talk to you, Professor. Concerning Severus Snape," the wizard said to the witch, his heart thudding.

Hermione stared at him for a moment. Clearly this was a case of Gryffindor nosiness.

"Mr. Snape is not my charge, Mr. Potter. What could I possibly offer concerning him except that he is an annoying little know-it-all who seeks to dominate my classes?"

Harry stared at the witch for a moment.

"I . . . I just want to know if you've done anything to him," he said hesitatingly.

Hermione scowled at him blackly. Even though she was less than pleased with the randy little bastard, she would never openly do anything to him that could possibly place her job and livelihood in jeopardy.

"What," she said coldly, "are you attempting to imply, Mr. Potter?"

Harry swallowed. Accusing the Potions mistress of hexing one of her students was dangerous business. But he had to know.

"It's just that, well, he's sick. Really sick. And he wasn't before he served detention with you last night," Harry said, "and I know that . . . that he's told you that he . . ."

"Stop right there, Mr. Potter!" Hermione hissed at him, furious. "Your friend's infatuation with me is disturbing and annoying, but to even suggest I've done something to injure a student in any manner is more than insulting! Fifty points from Gryffindor for even thinking such a thing! Now get out of my way!"

Professor Granger pushed by Harry and headed up the dungeon corridor, completely pissed off that he knew of Snape's attraction to her. But she slowed somewhat as she realized that he must not have revealed that his oath was killing him, or else Harry wouldn't have approached her the way he did.

She swooped into the Entrance Hall, terrified students parting before her like she was an evil Moses and they were the Red Sea, then turned down the corridor that led to the teacher's entrance. She entered with a scowl and took her seat, ignoring her fellow staff members as she always did. She glared at the students gathered around the tables, received several satisfying blanches, then ordered her lunch.

As she waited, her brown eyes slid over to the Gryffindor table. Yes, Mr. Snape was there, and he did indeed look ill. Ronald Weasley was seated next to him, waving a piece of chicken under his big nose.

Severus pushed his hand away.

"Stop it, Ron. I said I'm not hungry," Severus said to him, pulling a book out of his knapsack and opening it.

"You've got to keep your strength up, Sev. That hex Granger put on you is draining your strength. Just take a bite. One bite," Ron said, holding up the drumstick again.

"Ron, I'm telling you, I'm going to shove that drumstick right up your arse if you don't leave me alone," Severus snarled.

Ron blinked at him.

"Fine," he said, putting the chicken down on his own plate.

Harry entered and took a seat next to Severus.

"Well, Granger said she didn't do anything to you," Harry said to Severus, who looked shocked.

"What? You said something to her?" he snapped at the wizard.

Harry looked taken aback.

"Yeah, I said something to her, Severus. I wanted to know if she'd done anything to you," the boy who lived responded.

"Why don't you just mind your own fucking business, Harry? I want to deal with this myself!" Severus yelled at him.

Everyone in the Great Hall fell silent, looking at the pale wizard, who wavered in his seat for a moment. Both Ron and Harry caught his shoulders.

"Severus? Are you all right?" Ron asked him as Severus reached into his pocket and took out the bottle of stamina potion. He opened it and drank some down. He strengthened a bit, shrugging away from his friends.

"I'm fine. I just wish everyone would leave me alone," he said, picking up his knapsack and exiting the Great Hall. There was something off about the way he was walking, however. He didn't have the smooth glide he usually did.

Both Harry and Ron looked up at the dais as the Great Hall returned to normal, students whispering about Severus' outburst and how he was probably going to lose points

for using foul language in the presence of staff members.

Professor Granger looked back at them with narrowed eyes and a slight smirk on her face.

"She did something to him, Harry. Just look at her," Ron said, frowning at the Potions mistress.

Actually, Hermione was wearing that expression just to aggravate the two wizards. She knew they both thought she was quite capable of killing Severus slowly, and she did nothing to dispel that belief. To be honest, she was a bit worried about Mr. Snape's state. Not only was he sick, but obviously he wasn't eating either.

She sighed as her soup arrived. She'd observe him in class this afternoon and then decide what she would do, if anything.

\* \* \*

Mr. Snape looked perfectly awful when he arrived in class. His skin was so pale, tiny blue veins could be seen beneath his skin, which was dry. His lips were chapped and his eyes dull and defeated. It was easy to see he was trying to focus on the lesson but having difficulty. Every few minutes he would pull out his stamina potion and sip it.

Hermione knew that continued use of the potion would result in it losing its effectiveness. The boy's more frequent use of it showed that was precisely what was occurring. Albus had said Poppy gave him a few weeks, but it seemed he was deteriorating far faster than that. She gave the class a reading assignment and sat down behind her desk, looking at Snape with hooded eyes.

Suddenly he looked up at her. He didn't actually do anything, make any kind of expression, but Hermione could have sworn she heard his soft voice say,

"Please help me. Don't let me die. I don't want to die."

Hermione started and stared at him openly. The wizard's eyes dropped back to the book, and he didn't look up again.

When class ended, Hermione told Severus to stay after class. He dropped heavily back into his seat and took out his stamina potion. He tilted it to his mouth, then hesitated, shaking the bottle.

He was out.

He looked at the witch seated before him.

"Professor, do you have a bit of stamina potion? I'm out, and I don't think I can make it up to the infirmary without a boost," he said to the witch.

"You are such a fucking idiot, Mr. Snape," Hermione hissed at him, "and I have to tell you I do not appreciate being put in such a compromising position. I am aware your oath has turned on you and that you're dying. You deserve to die for being so damn stupid as to focus on a witch twice your age that has no interest in you."

Severus began to slump in the chair.

"However, Albus would never forgive me if I let you slip into the darkness. I've taken stripes for the Greater Good . . ."

Here Hermione paused, then sighed.

"I suppose I'm going to have to take you too," she said, shaking her head.

Severus stared at her.

What? Did Professor Granger just say she'd shag him?

Immediately the wizard's color returned and strength flowed through him. He was hungry too, starving in fact. Even his hair became shiny and silken again.

Hermione watched the near miraculous transformation as the oath ceased to feed off the boy. It was clear that he was restored. Severus smiled at her brightly.

"Oh, good gods," she breathed, letting her head drop to the desk.

"Are we going to do it now?" Severus asked her excitedly.

Hermione lifted her head, her face contorted.

"No, we're not going to do it now, you randy little bastard!" she said to him. "Later. Tonight."

Severus looked delighted.

"What time?" he asked her breathlessly, looking as if he'd hit the Wizarding Lottery.

Hermione rolled her eyes. Gods, it was just sex.

"After you finish your rounds, come to my office," she said to the grinning Gryffindor. "And don't rush through them either. I know how long it takes to patrol the castle."

"I won't," he breathed at her. "Thank you, Professor."

"Considering the circumstances, a simple 'Thank you' is not enough, Mr. Snape. You can be assured that you will be repaying me for this for the rest of your term at Hogwarts, if not for the rest of your life. And you will be taking an oath of silence as well. I won't have you blabbing all over the school," she snarled at him.

Severus felt himself getting hard at that snarl. Oh, this was going to be stellar. Just . . . stellar. He rose from the desk and quickly walked around it, approaching Hermione's desk, his lips pursing in anticipation. Surely she'd give him a kiss since she'd agreed to shag him.

Suddenly he was staring at the tip of her wand.

"Don't even think about it, Mr. Snape," Hermione hissed, her eyes narrowed. "Now, turn around, pick up your knapsack and leave my classroom."

Severus stared at her with hot eyes.

"Yes, Professor," he said, turning and doing just as she asked, an annoying spring in his step as he exited, pulling the door behind him. Then he dipped his head back in.

"I'll see you tonight," Severus said, the broad smile back.

"Get out!" Hermione yelled at him, flicking her wand at the door so it slammed shut. He'd just managed to get his head out just in time.

Professor Granger dropped back into her chair and ran her hand through her hair.

Gods damn it.



\* \* \*

A/N: lolol. Well, she's given in. Now the fun starts. Thanks for reading.

## A Little Prep

*Chapter 3 of 6*

A very eager Severus gets his opportunity to have at the witch of his dreams, but must melt those very hardened walls around Hermione's heart to stand any chance at all of making this something more than just one tryst.

Chapter 3 ~ A Little Prep

Both Ron and Harry were amazed when Severus strode into the Great Hall, sat down, and began to pull food toward him, piling it on his plate. He looked . . . well . . . great.

"Blimey, what happened to you?" Ron asked the wizard.

"Nothing," Severus said, helping himself to string beans.

Harry studied him.

"You're not sick anymore," he said a bit suspiciously.

"People do get better," Severus said, diving into his food.

He was so hungry he could have given Ron a run for his money. He wanted to be sure he had plenty of energy for tonight.

Hermione watched the young wizard tuck away his food. He certainly was putting it away. Maybe if she were lucky, he'd get a terrible stomach ache and she'd be able to postpone their "date."

No. It was best just to do it and get it over with.

She picked at her chicken.

Albus, who was sitting at the end of the table, noticed with interest that Severus was looking quite fit. He gave a thin smile. That could only mean one thing. The impossible oath had become possible. He looked down the table at his Potions mistress. Ah, she was picking at her food. The only time Hermione picked at her food was when something was weighing on her mind.

The Headmaster had no doubt that this particular load was none other than Severus Snape. Well, hopefully the witch would make the best of the situation. She had been alone for a long time, far too long.

Severus made quick work of his meal and stood up.

"What's the rush?" Ron asked him as Severus slung his knapsack over one shoulder.

"I have some studying I need to do," Severus replied, leaving.

Harry and Ron looked after him.

"Well, as long as he gets off on studying so much, maybe he'll be all right not shagging," Ron commented, biting into a potato.

Harry just shook his head and returned to his meal, glad his friend had recovered.

\* \* \*

Severus quickly entered his bedroom, threw off his knapsack and securely warded his door. Then he walked over to the wardrobe and removed the bottom drawer. He reached in and felt around a bit until he found what he was looking for. He pulled out two shimmers. He pointed his wand at them.

"Finite Incantatem," he breathed.

In his hands appeared two very well-worn books. He smiled and carried them to his bed, then lay down on his stomach, looking at the titles. He had been studying these particular books in private since the end of his fifth year. He knew them cover to cover, although he had never had a chance to put any of his knowledge into practice; though goodness knows he had tried. Well, that was about to change.

What were the titles of these great books of knowledge?

The first was *The Joy of Sex* and the second, *The Illustrated Book of Kama Sutra*

As far as Severus was concerned, they were both required reading for any intelligent wizard who wanted to master the art of shagging. The moment he began to have sexual urges concerning witches, he started studying the proper way to shag them. He was a perfectionist to the end.

He began leafing through the pages and stopped on a page that gave suggestions on how to stop premature ejaculation. It was common in young men who were just starting sexual activity. He didn't want that to happen. As he read through the chapter, he began thinking.

Hold it. He shouldn't have to worry about this. He lived in a magical world. There were magical ways to stop him up. And he already had the answer, thanks to the oath.

Severus rolled out of the bed and summoned a house-elf, sending it to the infirmary to get an extra strength bottle of Stamina Potion from Poppy. The mediwitch didn't yet know he had recovered, so she sent it down directly, figuring he was out.

Severus might have been a Gryffindor, but he was a rather shady one when it suited him.

The young wizard thanked the elf, tossed the bottle up into the air and caught it, smiling. He was well now, so most likely the potion would work on him as if he hadn't been taking it all day. Just to be on the safe side, he'd drink it just before he shagged the professor.

He was going to make tonight last as long as possible.

\* \* \*

Hermione sat in her study, dressed in a housecoat and sipping a brandy. From time to time her brown eyes drifted to the clock on the mantle. It was after ten now, and still Severus hadn't arrived. She popped a chocolate bon-bon into her mouth. She liked how chocolate and brandy complemented each other.

If she were lucky, her randy Potions student would suffer the fate of most overly eager young men getting their first piece, and the tryst would be over almost as soon as it started. So, she decided to look relatively sexy and wore a short, Slytherin green nightie beneath her robes. She'd probably have to stand for a few kisses and artless gropes from the boy, but was relatively sure he'd want to get right to the main event. Men weren't wired for much foreplay. Sometimes it took years for them to figure out a woman wanted more than her heels summarily thrust into the air.

Well, then again, Mr. Snape had indicated he wanted to perform oral sex on her. Hermione had nothing against it, provided it was done properly, but she didn't hold out much hope on that. He was what, eighteen years old? As long as he didn't actually bite her or snag her clit on a tooth, she'd let him try. Anything to get this over with.

Suddenly, she heard a loud pounding.

Oh, good gods! Was the idiot trying to beat the door in?

Wand in hand, Hermione stalked through the study wall into her office and pulled the door open.

Severus stood there, a big smile plastered on his face.

"I'm here," he announced happily.

"I'm sure all of Hogwarts knows you're here, the way you were pounding on my door, you simpleton. Now get in here!" she snarled at the young wizard.

Severus walked in, his eyes fixed on Hermione's housecoat as if he could see through it. Hermione scowled at him.

"Through there," she said to him, pointing at the open wall.

Severus nearly streaked through it.

Hermione ran her hand over her face as the wizard disappeared into her private rooms.

"Gods, Albus, what I don't do for you," she sighed, walking in after the wizard and closing the wall behind her.

\* \* \*

Hermione turned to find Severus standing in front of her fireplace, his head tilted back, draining the contents of a bottle. Did the boy need a bit of liquid courage?

"What are you doing?" she demanded, walking up to Severus and snatching the now empty bottle out of his hand. She read the label, then looked at him, her eyes wide.

"Extra Strength Stamina Potion?" she asked him incredulously.

"Yes. Young wizards have a problem with premature ejaculation. So I wanted to make sure I wouldn't. This is my first time, so of course I want it to last," he said to her, his dark eyes once again zeroing in on her housecoat.

"Of course," Hermione said, throwing her hands up in defeat.

Well, so much for the quick route.

Severus began to quickly unbutton his robes.

"What . . . are . . . you . . . doing?" Hermione hissed at the wizard, who continued working at his robes.

"Getting naked," he responded, not looking up. "I have to be naked, don't I?"

"Whoa. Slow down there, Speedy. We've got to lay a few ground rules first," Hermione said to the wizard. "You're not going to just come in here, rip off your robes, and tackle me . . ."

"Of course not," Severus said, opening his robes and revealing a strong, pale, nearly hairless young body clad in very tented black boxers. "You require at least forty-five minutes to an hour of foreplay to be properly prepared."

Hermione blinked at the wizard as he peeled off his robes, tossed them on the back of one of the armchairs, then started toeing off his boots.

Dear gods. She'd forgotten she was dealing with Hogwarts' proverbial walking brain. No doubt he had studied for this like he did everything else.

It was clear young Severus Snape intended to have sex by the book.

Shit.

\* \* \*

Hermione eyed the young wizard, who now stood in readiness, not even looking at her face, staring at the house robe that concealed her body from him.

"Er . . . Mr. Snape . . . eye contact," she said to the wizard, who looked up at her, his eyes shifting back downward a couple of times before he could actually focus.

Looking at the young wizard, Hermione had to admit he was a handsome specimen, though his youth was evident. He was lean and sinewy, with well developed abs and legs like runner's legs. Spare black hair peppered his thighs and calves. His feet were rather big, and judging by the enormous size of the tent in his boxers, the statement about wizards with big noses and feet was true, at least in his case.

"Now, would you mind telling me just where you heard I'd require the amount of foreplay you believe I do?" she asked him, frowning at the excited look on his face.

"I didn't hear it. I researched it. I've been studying sex since my fifth year. It's quite fascinating in theory," the wizard replied. "I can't wait for the actual application."

He took a tentative step toward Hermione, who scowled at him blackly. He stopped.

"Well, you're going to wait," she snapped at him. "At least until I get some kind of understanding of what you think is going to happen. How did you research this, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Textbooks," he replied shortly, his eyes helplessly falling back to her housecoat.

"Textbooks? What kind of textbooks? Biology?" the witch demanded.

"Oh, no, Professor. Biology books just talk about the function, not the skills involved. I've read *The Joy of Sex* and *The Illustrated Book of the Kama Sutra* from cover to cover at least a hundred times apiece. I know what I'm supposed to do, and . . . and I have a couple of positions I'd like to try too . . ."

Hermione looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Mr. Snape. I'm not a joy witch that you can just twist into any contorted position and go to town on. My gods, boy. Don't you have any sense of propriety?" she asked him, shaking her head.

"I don't think I'm supposed to when it comes to sex. Propriety ruins it from what I understand," he replied logically. "I'm supposed to be . . . open and willing and adventurous."

He licked his lips as his eyes moved lower, resting on her thighs. For a moment, Hermione felt like covering up in something more than a house robe.

"Am I going to have to wait long?" he asked her, a bit of a whine in his voice.

Hermione sighed. It made no sense to try and put this off any longer. The boy looked as if he were going to explode if he wasn't huffing and thrusting in the next five minutes.

"Come on, Mr. Snape. And I don't need forty-five minutes worth of foreplay. In fact, I don't need any. We can just get right to the fucking," she said as she entered her bedroom.

Severus' mouth dropped open at her use of such foul language. It was as if he were frozen in place. Hermione stuck her head back out the door.

"Are you coming, Mr. Snape?" she snapped at him.

"Yes," he breathed, hurrying into the bedroom behind the witch. He looked around the dismal room. She only had a four-poster bed, a dresser, a wardrobe, and a wooden chair. There were no paintings or decorations of any type. It was quite austere. There wasn't even a rug on the cold stone floor.

Hermione turned to look at him.

"I . . . I want to do foreplay," Severus said, frowning at her slightly. "I want to learn about your body and what to do to it to make it respond to me. I can't learn that if I just have intercourse with you. It's all part of shagging."

Hermione snorted.

"Mr. Snape, you are probably the only wizard in the wizarding world who ever bothered to crack the cover of *The Joy of Sex*. Believe me, men function without foreplay just fine. All they need is a willing female and they go into automatic. That tent in your shorts proves the truth of that statement," the witch said, looking at his fabric covered erection. It certainly was large.

"Maybe we are easily aroused, but that doesn't mean we're all the same. I know I don't want to rush through this, Professor. I don't want it to be terrible. I want you to like it," he said softly. Then suddenly, he ran back into the other room.

Hermione sighed again. He wanted her to like it? How in the hell could she like it? The only reason she'd agreed to bed the boy was to keep him from becoming worm food.

Severus returned with his wand.

"I'm supposed to set the mood," he said to her, flicking his wand.

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FOR INTERACTIVE MOOD-SETTING STREAMING MUSIC CLICK HERE

<http://www.theburningpen.com/Switch/lgio.m3u>

\*\*\*\*\*

Hermione started as she heard a wah-wah sound; then sensuous music began to play.

*I been really trying baby, trying to hold back this feeeeeeling for soooo loooong, and if you...*

Hermione slashed her wand, stopping the music.

"What the hell was that?" she demanded, looking at Severus incredulously.

"Mood music. I researched it, and that's supposed to be the song that is shagged to the most," he said, both eyebrows raised. "I thought you'd like it."

"Well, I don't!" she snapped. "Do me a favor, Mr. Snape. Save your attempts at making this a 'romantic' situation, because it isn't. I'm doing this only to keep you from dying, you silly fool. No other reason. I am not attracted to you."

Severus looked at her, his face sober.

"You're not attracted to me yet. Maybe you will be when this is all over, and you'll let me come back," he said softly, his eyes full of emotion.

"That will never, ever happen, Mr. Snape," she spat at him. "Believe me."

Snape blinked at her, then lifted his hand, concentrated, and tapped his wand to his fingertips. Slowly a rose formed, colored a deep purple and black. It was beautiful. He held it out to her. Hermione had never seen anything like it.

"It's for you," he said softly. "I made it for you like this just to show you that . . . that to me, you're like this rose, Professor. It's beautiful, but it's colored with . . . with pain. I just want . . . just want . . ."

The wizard's voice faltered as he looked at the witch, who was staring at the flower he held out in his pale hand. No, Mr. Snape wasn't smooth or suave. He didn't know what he was supposed to say to make her be less cruel to him, so he did what many males before him had done in order to win a woman over . . . made a gesture. And it was an honest one.

"Please," he implored her. "Please take it, Professor."

Hermione hesitated, then slowly approached the young wizard and took the flower from him. She sniffed it. Yes, it was a real rose. An amazing bit of magic, really. It took

deep emotion to sustain a living thing . . . emotion and a bit of soul. The wizard had given her a part of his soul. No one had ever done that before.

No one.

"Thank you, Mr. Snape," she said.

"You're welcome, Professor," the wizard breathed.

\* \* \*

Hermione turned, walked over to her bare dresser, created a small glass vase, and put the rose in it with a bit of water. Then she turned.

"Shit!" she cried.

Severus had moved behind her and was almost right on top of her, startling the witch. Mere inches away, he looked at her, heat in his black eyes.

"Mr. Snape! Must you intrude on my personal space like this?" she said to the wizard, pushing at his chest.

He didn't budge.

"Yes," he said, licking his lips. "I want to kiss you. Can I kiss you?"

Hermione sighed as the boy leaned toward her.

"All right, Mr. Snape . . . just . . . mmmph!"

Severus latched on to Hermione's mouth like a blood-sucking niflick, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her hard, his body pressing into hers hungrily. She could feel the hardness and length of his cock pushing against her pelvis as the young wizard hung on, attempting to bend her back over the dresser.

Gah! She couldn't breathe!

Desperately, she pinched his side, and Severus yelped, releasing her mouth but still holding on to her body. Gods, she was so round and . . .

"Severus Snape! I do breathe air, and my lips are made of flesh, not wood!" she gasped at him. "I refuse to walk around Hogwarts looking as if I had too much Muggle Botox injected into my lips! Stop kissing me so hard!"

"I'm . . . I'm sorry. I usually kiss better than this. It's just that . . . it's you," he breathed at her passionately. "Let me try again, please."

His eyes were so desperate, Hermione gave in. Gods, were all young wizards so passionate? Well, this was his first time, after all. He was a male, not a female. He wouldn't be a shy and retiring virgin.

"Go ahead, Mr. Snape. But gently. Gently," she said, closing her eyes and pursing her lips.

She waited and nothing happened, though she could feel the wizard breathing heavily, his chest rising and falling against her breasts. Hermione opened one eye.

He was staring at her.

"What?" she snapped at him, irritated by this waste of time.

"Could you say it again?" he asked her breathlessly.

She scowled at him.

"Say what?" she asked him.

"My name. You said my name. Severus. It sounded . . . wonderful to hear you say it," he responded. "Please call me by my name, Professor. Not Mr. Snape."

Hermione blinked at him.

"Well, if I do this, I don't expect you to be so familiar. This might be an intimate situation, but we are not actually that intimate," the witch responded.

"I'll keep calling you Professor if you like, but please call me by my name," he said to her.

"All right, Severus," she said, and the wizard once again attacked her mouth, but much more gently, working his lips against hers sensuously. He really did know how to kiss, and his grip relaxed somewhat as if realizing she wasn't going to break away from him.

His young body moved against hers helplessly as he drank in her lips, his senses whirling. She smelled like flowers. Like jasmine. And she was so soft, so round, so full . . . not like the young witches who felt as if they'd break in his arms. Gods, he wanted to get closer. Tentatively, he attempted to slip his tongue into Hermione's mouth, tapping it on her closed lips. He felt them part slightly, and his breathing increased as he entered that warm, wet sweet place, exploring it. He began to shudder against her, unable to hide the urgency his body felt.

Hermione was a bit impressed. Severus was a very good kisser, and his ardor was becoming a bit contagious. She felt his hand slide up her back. He couldn't feel her scars because she wore both the nightie and the house robe still. Well, he would have to feel them and see them sometime.

Maybe they would turn him off.

Hermione felt a bit of a twinge at this possibility. The tree on her back was a large deterrent to her becoming intimate with anyone. She had been through hell, but was a strong enough woman not to let it destroy her completely. She knew not all men were brutes and could separate true attraction from soulless possession. Still, that ugly mass of scars that followed her spine and spread branches across her upper back marred her body, which already wasn't perfect. She was certain that any potential lover would be revolted by that tree. If Severus was revolted, she'd let him go . . . but . . . that would be confirmation that she was a ruined witch. That Voldemort had truly left his mark.

"Your house robe . . . Take it off," Severus said against her mouth. "I want to touch you, Professor."

He certainly knew what he wanted. Hermione decided to let him run with this. It wasn't completely terrible now that he had some modicum of control, though she could feel him shaking a bit.

"Let me go," she said softly.

Severus released her, stepping back a few inches, watching her hands as she untied the sash to her robe and opened it, revealing the Slytherin green nightie that fell mid-thigh, held up by thin straps over her shoulders. She did have large breasts, and her hips were rounded, her waist a bit thick. Her legs were very shapely and strong looking.

The young wizard let out a noise when she removed the robe and laid it on the dresser. Hermione looked at him as he fastened his eyes to her body. The expression on his face was one of . . . awe.

"You're beautiful," Severus breathed. "You don't look like you'd break."

Break?

"I'm no teenage witch, Mr. . . Severus. I'm not nubile or thin . . ." she began.

"No, but that's good. You're a real woman," he replied, cutting her off as he looked into her eyes.

"I don't have to worry with you. You're not going to cry or push me away or . . ." he said, his soft voice quavering a bit.

Hermione couldn't help but be moved by the young wizard's appreciation of her. It came from his heart. These were no empty words meant to win her over. It was truly how he felt. Of course, everything he said was in relation to his own desires, but still it was clear he believed that she was everything that he wanted in a witch. Who, even a snarky Potions mistress, wouldn't find that affecting?

Hermione caught herself, however.

"I will be pushing you away if you do anything untoward, Severus," she said to the young wizard.

Severus had no idea what she meant by untoward as he moved in again, pulling her soft body against his, letting out something between a groan and a whimper as he felt the thin cloth between them. He could feel the heat of the witch's body now, the curves of it clearly. He kissed her again, hungrily, sliding his hands up her back . . .

He stiffened. So did Hermione as he felt the scars underneath the thin silk.

He released her, stepping back.

"Turn around," he said to her in a low voice.

Hermione looked up at him and said nothing. Let the boy see her marks, her shame. She turned around almost insolently, listening to him breathe.

Severus' black eyes looked at the few branches that rose above the fabric of Hermione's nightgown. Raised welts, obviously from a scourge. The wizard stepped closer, and Hermione closed her eyes as she felt him gently catch hold of her straps and lower them down her arms as far as they would go, revealing the head of the tree and all its branches. Severus pulled her nightgown down to the small of her back, taking in the thick mass that made up the trunk of the tree.

He didn't say anything, and Hermione's eyes began to glisten helplessly as the first male in ages looked upon her ruined body.

"Still want to shag your professor?" she suddenly snapped, pain in her voice as she stood facing away from him. "As I said, I'm no lovely young thing. I've been marked. Scarred. Not the 'beautiful body' you fantasized about, is it?"

Severus could hear her bitterness.

What had she gone through during all those years of service? What kind of monster would do this to a witch? He scowled blackly.

"I wish we could kill Voldemort again," he said softly, his voice full of quiet rage, "but this time, I'd want to do it myself. Kill him slowly and painfully for doing this to you, Professor. But you're still beautiful . . . even more so because you didn't run from this. You continued in your service until the end. It isn't a mass of scars, but a testament to how brave, selfless and courageous you truly are. Trees represent new life and rebirth. Overcoming death and growing stronger. That's you, Professor, and you are beautiful, believe me."

Hermione blinked back tears as the young wizard gently moved into her back, wrapping his arms around her waist and tenderly kissing her naked shoulders, moving to her throat for a moment, his mouth soft, warm, and appreciative on her skin.

"Beautiful," he breathed, his warm breath curling against her ear.

And that was the breaking point for Hermione Granger, the point where the ice around her heart and the walls around her spirit crumbled. Of course they would be erected again, but tonight, just for one night . . . she was vulnerable to this passionate young wizard whispering in her ear.

She wanted to believe him.

\* \* \*

Severus was now on more familiar ground. He had gotten to this point with younger witches, having them partially undressed, kissing and caressing their bodies. He was very good at it. It was the "close" that got him every time. He stopped trembling, the combination of empathy with the witch in his arms and the desire to comfort her helping to center him and take his mind off his own needs.

Slowly, he rubbed Hermione's soft belly, continuing his soft kisses on her shoulders, throat, and temple, his large hands moving over her skin appreciatively before he slowly began to move them upwards toward the witch's full breasts.

Wanting to be sure he had her permission, he breathed in her ear, "Can I, Professor?" his hands coming to rest just under her full bosom, still kissing her throat.

"Yes," Hermione replied, her eyes still closed, feeling the wizard pressed gently against her back. Severus expelled a breath as his hands cupped Hermione's breasts.

"Oh, my gods," he breathed, fondling her gently, then remembering how sensitive the nipples were supposed to be and tweaking them lightly. He was rewarded with a small gasp from the Potions mistress, her buttocks pressing back into him lightly. He smoothed his palms over them and received another heartening response.

Hermione opened her eyes partially and saw that they were standing directly in front of the mirror on her dresser, her partially clad body visible, the wizard behind her, head bent, black hair dragging over her shoulders as he kissed her throat, both hands moving over her breasts, their bodies moving slightly against each other.

It was very sexy and clear that Severus didn't realize the view that was before him, he was so into touching and tasting her. Hermione watched and felt him, sighing now, feeling desire starting to creep over her. It had been a very long time, after all, and Severus, young as he was, had a certain artfulness to his ministrations.

He seemed to be a natural.

"Severus, look in the mirror," Hermione breathed.

Severus looked up, his black eyes large and luminous as he saw them in the mirror, and drew in a sudden breath, his hands becoming more ardent as they slid over her body, down to the nightie still wrapped around her waist, up her sides and over her breasts. He watched himself and Hermione.

"Gods, you're so beautiful, Professor," he breathed, pressing into her harder. "Look at us. I never thought . . . I dreamed, but I never . . ."

"Sssh, you're here for a purpose, Severus . . . to save your life," Hermione said to him softly.

"No. I'm not," he said, turning the witch around to face him, his face sober. "I'm here for much more than that, Professor . . . so much more than that . . ."

And he kissed her, trying to pour all the feeling in his young heart into his possession of her mouth. Severus was very aware that being with the professor would be quite different than being with Luna or Pansy. They were little more than girls. Even though he had no idea what Hermione had experienced sexually, he knew at one time or another she must have had someone who had given her pleasure. She knew what it was like and would most likely judge his performance by it.

He didn't know if he could match whomever she had been with before, but maybe if he could make her understand how much he felt, he'd stand a chance of making some headway into her heart. Having experienced her like this, he knew even before they became intimate, he'd want to be with her like this again. Now she wasn't cold, wasn't cruel. He thought he would like her that way, but he liked her this way even more. Accessible and responsive. He didn't think she responded to anyone this way, or if she had, not in a long, long time. And that was what made this special. It would be nice if she only acted this way toward him.

As Severus kissed her, his pale hands slid down her sides and hooked into the nightie's fabric.

"I'm going to take this off," he breathed against Hermione's mouth, not asking her. It was time to show her that even though he was young, he could make her feel as beautiful as he believed her to be. He had to act like a man, not a scared schoolboy. Everything was riding on this.

Hermione didn't say a word as the wizard knelt, slowly pulling down her nightgown, his hands sliding over her hips, thighs and calves reverently, his breath quickening as her body was completely revealed, the chestnut curls of her sex before his smoldering eyes. He paused there, inhaling, feeling his mouth water. Then he stood up, more aware of how ready he was than before.

"You're going to let me . . . let me taste you, aren't you, Professor?" he asked her, licking his lips without knowing he was doing it. "You won't stop me, will you?"

Hermione blinked up at him, a little of her snarkiness returning.

"I'm not going to let you just toss me into the bed and dive in, if that's what you mean," she snapped at him.

Severus looked taken aback. No, that's not what he meant at all. He meant as part of the forty-five minutes of foreplay.

"Oh, no. No. I'll do other things first . . . to get you ready," he breathed.

"You're going to have to be good at them, because if I'm not feeling it, I'm not going to let you do it," she warned him, her eyes narrowed.

Severus' cock bounced at that familiar look. It still turned him on.

"You'll feel it," he promised. "I'm going to make you feel everything. You're going to feel like the most beautiful witch in the world."

Hermione's lip curled just a little. It seemed all men had a bit of braggart in them, even the virgins. She was about to say something else when Severus suddenly pulled down his boxers and stepped out of them.

Hermione had to struggle to keep her jaw from dropping as her eyes rested on a tool that seemed to belong on Hagrid. Dear gods. Did the boy have Incubus blood? He was fucking enormous. No wonder the girls wouldn't engage him. He was as big around as a heavy duty broomstick and damn near a foot long. Being uncircumcised only added to the apparent girth of the wizard.

Her eyes widened despite her attempt not to appear taken aback.

Severus looked at her a bit worriedly.

"Well, that's it," he said, looking down at his cock with a slight frown. "Pansy called it the 'Serpent of Gryffindor' just before she took off."

Hermione fought back a laugh as she looked up at the wizard. He seemed so pensive. Most men would be strutting about like roosters with a wand like that. He still had so much to learn about his own sexuality. Being big was normally not a bad thing, but when dealing with young witches, it probably was a bit of a problem. They weren't ready for it.

"What do you think, Professor?" he asked her softly, his eyes resting on her face.

"I think nature has been very kind to you, Severus. You'll grow into it," she said, trying to keep a straight face.

"You aren't worried?" he asked her, a bit of hope in his voice now.

Well, she was a little worried. This was going to be his first encounter, and he had drunk an entire bottle of Stamina Potion. He could beat her to death with that thing if he lost control. And it was very likely he might.

"Severus, you listen to me, and you listen good. If I tell you to stop, you stop, or I'm going to toss you out of here on your randy little ass. To meet the conditions of your oath, all I really need to do is let you enter me once. That counts as intimacy, technically. I don't have to do anything more. So, if you can't control yourself and start tearing into me, it's going to be over quick. Do you understand me?" she asked the wizard, frowning at him.

Severus' eyes washed over her body.

"I'll take my time, I promise," he breathed at her.

"All right," she said, her eyes sweeping over the wizard again. He really was quite a yummy young thing. "Now, we . . ."

Hermione let out a little shriek as Severus swept her up into his arms easily, strode across her bedroom, gently placed her on the four-poster, then scrambled in after her.

"Now, we do it," he breathed, covering her mouth in a passionate kiss.

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A/N: Whoo hoo! Thanks to my beta, Notsosaintly, and thanks for reading. \*\*\*

Severus and Hermione tangle up the bed sheets. To her chagrin, Hermione discovers later that young Severus' talents go beyond the physical into areas he shouldn't be dabbling in. The "Half-Blood Prince" indeed.

Chapter 4 ~ Talented and Smart

Hermione had been a bit shocked when Severus scooped her up and deposited her into the bed, but at least he hadn't leapt on top of her. Instead, he lay to the side and kissed her hungrily. One hand slowly slid up her right arm, caressing it gently until he reached her wrist. Then he clasped it and stopped kissing her, lifting his head and drawing the palm of her hand to his lips, his eyes closing with pleasure.

"I've always loved your hands, Professor," he said to her softly as he kissed her fingertips, lingering over the small calluses and slight, shiny burns. He took three of them into his mouth, sucking on them gently. Hermione felt a little pulse that threatened to curl her toes. How could the boy sucking on her fingers cause that kind of response?

"They're always so sure when you're brewing, so . . . meticulous. It's like they'd never make a mistake," Severus breathed, slipping his tongue between her digits. It felt good, but strange.

Hermione shuddered and pulled her hand away.

"You're too young to get so freaky," she said to him. "No more hand play."

Severus smirked down at her.

"But you liked it. I felt you shudder," he said softly, his black eyes resting on her face, one pale hand slipping to her waist and caressing her side. He certainly liked touching her, and he had a gentle touch. She had expected him to do quite a bit of groping. His hand moved over her hip and down her thigh, then back again.

"Never mind about that," she snapped, a bit disconcerted he was so observant and knew what she liked. But Severus Snape learned much by observation. It was ingrained in him. "Let's just get on with this."

"As you wish, Professor," he purred, once again kissing her hungrily, losing himself in her taste and scent and carefully mounting her body. Hermione couldn't help but sigh as the boy began to kiss, lick and suck on every bit of skin she had, his mouth moving over her throat, shoulders and arms, once again getting hold of her fingers, but quickly moving on before she complained.

But Hermione wasn't complaining as his lips and hands moved over her body, his lean form moving against her sensually as he slipped lower, kissing, suckling and nipping her breasts until everything took on a dreamlike quality and the only thing that felt real was his worship of her body. He did take his time. It was as if he were consuming something delicious and didn't want to finish the meal too quickly.

Severus moved down her body in small increments: at her belly now, kissing her soft flesh, caressing her hips and thighs, reveling in the warmth of her skin beneath his palms. He had her. He had his professor, and if this were to be the only time he would be with her this way, he was going to enjoy it and make it last as long as possible. He groaned as her body undulated under his attentions, her hands slipping into his hair, massaging his scalp, then over his strong shoulders. Gods, her touch felt wonderful, and he knew it was because she was responding to him, liking what he was doing. He applied himself even more ardently as he moved lower, nostrils flaring as he caught the scent of her arousal. He pushed himself lower, kissing the tops of her thighs, his dark eyes resting on the curling hair that protected her sex. His mouth watered, and he slid lower, gently pushing Hermione's legs apart.

He must have gotten it right. She didn't attempt to push him away at all. He looked up at the witch. Her face was red and her eyes half-closed as she shifted her body anxiously. Damn, she looked good enough to eat . . .

"Professor, bend your legs a little," he breathed up at her, still kissing her thighs so the magic occurring between them on a physical level wouldn't die.

Hermione registered what he had said and obliged the young wizard, who drew in a breath as he clearly saw her delicate, pink core, moist with arousal, the clit swollen with blood. Remembering the Kama Sutra, he gently caught the labia between his two fingers and pressed them together over her clit, then sucked on them like a lower lip. Hermione buckled a bit and made small surprised noises. Oh, she tasted so good.

This was called the "Quivering Kiss," and Severus realized how it got its name as Hermione's thighs did indeed quiver.

"What . . . What are you doing?" Hermione gasped as he kissed her lower lips ardently.

"Quivering Kiss," he breathed, then, releasing his fingers, used his nose to part her. Hermione squealed as his tongue probed her, his nose, lips and chin slowly circling, stimulating her until her hips bucked. Severus wrapped his arms around her thighs to hold her steady as he applied the Jihva-Bhramanaka or "Circling Tongue."

Hermione arched up against his mouth, her hands pressing his head down into her softness.

"Damn!" the witch hissed, lifting her head to look down on him. All she could see was the top of his silky black hair and his head rolling sensuously. A pulse of pleasure shot through her, and her head dropped back down, panting, her mouth dropping open as her eyes closed.

No one this boy's age should be able to eat pussy this good. Saying he was "talented" didn't even begin to cover it. But Severus had fantasized about this enough and knew just how he wanted to do it when he got the chance and had even practiced his tongue movements on a few dried figs. He was quite committed.

Now, all his preparations were paying off, and his confidence grew as Hermione responded powerfully to him. He could make his next move now.

Suddenly Severus rose to his knees, his eyes hot as he looked down on her body, his face glistening slightly. Hermione looked up at him.

"What . . ." she said softly, then let out a cry as Severus hoisted her hips up, sitting back on his heels, and placed her legs on his shoulders, pulling her upward so her core was at his mouth. Then he stuck his tongue inside her as deep as it would go and began whirling it.

"OH SHIT!" Hermione cried out, grasping the bed with both hands as the wizard stirred her, then began to suck, kiss and nibble on her clit. This was a combination of the "Chushita" and "Bahuchushita."

Hermione writhed as the boy held her steady, losing himself in her taste, holding onto her tightly. Severus was strong and didn't lose his grip or his focus as he brought her to greater heights. Hermione hurled obscenities at him, trying to reach him with one clawed hand, but certainly didn't try to stop him.

Suddenly the witch stiffened, and Severus was rewarded with a huge gush of release before she began to tremble. He drank every bit of her ambrosia down. He'd done it. He'd made her orgasm. His heart was pounding as he thirstily swallowed the gift given. Oh, gods, this was so amazing.

Hermione felt completely boneless as the young wizard gently lowered her back to the bed and climbed over her, resting his body on top of hers and kissing her, sharing her flavor before licking the perspiration from her temples. Then he looked down at her, letting out a very satisfied sigh.

"That was great," he said to Hermione with a smile.

She looked up at him. Great? Gods, he was so young. An older wizard would have found a better word to express his delight. But Hermione seriously doubted an older wizard could have done a better job of it. So it was a fair trade-off.

"It was . . . fair," she replied, still quivering a bit. That had been some climax.

"I'll get better at it," he said to her, a bit hopefully.

Hermione didn't say anything to this. This was just a one-time tryst with the boy. She didn't want to get his hopes up that it would be anything more. One time . . . to save his life. But at least she was getting something out of it.

Severus began kissing her again, hoisting himself forward so his cock rested against her core; then he began grinding into her gently, making little groans as she oiled him up. His kisses became more frenzied as he became more excited, pressing down against her hard as she helplessly pressed back, trying to satisfy the ache between her thighs. Damn, if he was this good now . . . what would he be like when he reached full adulthood?

Finally he pulled away from her mouth.

"I can't wait to be inside you, Professor," he breathed down at the panting witch. "I can't wait to feel you wrapped around me. Can I do it now? Please?"

His eyes were both hot and pleading, his pale face contorted with desire.

"Yes, but remember what I told you," Hermione said to him.

All that registered to Severus was the "yes" part.

Hermione let out another surprised cry as the wizard once again rose to his knees and quickly hooked her legs over his shoulders, spreading her wide under him.

"This is called the 'Yawning Position,'" he breathed, staring down at the very accessible juncture of her thighs and grasping the base of his erection.

*Shit*, Hermione thought as he leaned forward slightly, resting one hand on the bed by her head and aiming for his target.

He certainly knew how he wanted to do this.

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Severus pulled his foreskin back, the sensitive head of his organ glistening, as he carefully drew nearer. Suddenly, he struck the upper part of Hermione's core with it, gasping as he did so. Hermione let out a gasp as well.

"What are you doing?" the witch cried as he struck her several more times, his body quaking at the contact.

"It's called 'Piercing.' I hit the upper part of your yoni with my lingam," he panted, shifting and striking her lower, "Unnggh. This . . . this is called 'Rubbing.'"

Dear Circe. The boy was beating her with his cock. And it felt amazing. Hermione arched helplessly as he alternated, Severus gasping as he did so. Watching his cock tapping her so intimately had him open full throttle. If he hadn't drunk that Stamina Potion, this would indeed be over.

Finally, Hermione caught hold of his arm.

"Enough, Severus . . . This is supposed to be sex, not torture!" she hissed at him.

"According to the Kama Sutra, this is sex," he said, still holding his tool and looking at her hungrily, raising it to strike her again.

Gods damn it.

"If you hit me with that thing again, I'm going to hex it off!" she snapped at him, lust making her even snarkier than usual.

Severus blinked at her for a moment, then suddenly pressed the head to her entrance and slipped inside her. Hermione let out a cry as his girth pierced her body, and Severus let out a stream of uncontrollable gasps as her softness wrapped around his sensitive glans.

"OhOhOhOhOhOhOhOhOhhh . . . Professor! Professor!" he groaned, his eyes wet as he tried to convey what he felt. He couldn't move, his body quaking as she pulsed around him.

"Calm down! It'll be all right," Hermione gasped, partially impaled by the excited young wizard, his shaking sending little vibrations down his thick shaft and into her body.

"You feel incredible . . . I can't . . . how am I supposed to . . ." he hissed at her, his eyes desperate.

"Breathe," Hermione hissed back at him, extremely turned on by his reaction. It certainly wasn't what she expected.

The wizard hovered over her, holding himself up by his hands, his mouth slack and lower lip trembling as he looked down at himself partially inside the witch, her pink flesh wrapped around him and slightly puckered, like a small mouth. He pushed a bit, sinking deeper, and threw his head back, his black eyes rolling up into his head. Hermione let out a little moan as his hardness sunk into her deeper.

"Oh, fuck," Severus gasped, his head dropping forward, and he looked at Hermione as if she were the most beautiful creature he had ever seen in his life.

"I love you!" he gasped, sliding in farther, parting her flesh deliciously.

"You don't love me! You love pussy," she hissed up at him, her own eyelids fluttering as she caught hold of his slender waist and pushed, making him withdraw slightly. Severus let out another stream of gasps as she slid around him. Then she pulled him back toward her, guiding his motions, helping him to fall into the stroke.

"Oh, damn," Hermione breathed as Severus began to move on his own, his strokes jerky, unable to penetrate her fully yet. He wasn't used to such delicious sensations. This was nothing like wanking off. She was warm, alive, tight, her body seeming to suck and pull at him, his cock bathed in heat, and wetness, and . . .

Severus watched himself enter and withdraw, his shaft glistening with Hermione's lubrication, just able to make out white streaks on his pale organ. He groaned, and suddenly he fell to his elbows, landing on top of the witch and sinking inside her fully, locking his mouth to hers desperately, doubling his penetration.

"Oh, gods . . . Professor," he moaned against her mouth as he began to stroke her, everything about "Sporting of the Sparrow" and "Blow of the Boar" flying out of his head as he lost himself in the softness of her body and the sweetness of her lips.



Hermione gasped against his mouth as he penetrated her deeper, his size stretching her, hitting bottom, but not too hard. What was even more heady were the boy's gasped appreciation and frenzied kisses covering her mouth, her face, whatever part he could reach as he rippled and flowed, his body undulating, not breaking contact. His arms encircled her, trying to hold her as close as he could as he experienced his first time with a woman.

And it was glorious.

"You're so beautiful, Professor. Oh, my gods, how am I ever going to not want to do this to you every time I see you?" he breathed against her cheek passionately, his body flowing over hers, connected, his arms around her as Hermione gasped with pleasure.

"Don't . . . talk!" she managed to get out, not wanting to concentrate on anything else but her pleasure. Gods, this was good. Much better than she had imagined it would be with such an inexperienced young wizard. His passion was a large part of it. Severus Snape was completely lost to her, moving in and out of her hungrily, breathing his pleasure, desire, and love into her ear.

He managed to raise himself up on his arms again, staring down at Hermione as she hissed and moaned, her voice like music to him, the scent of sex heavy in the air. Suddenly he wound his hips, whirling inside the witch, and her eyes flew open as she let out a groan.

"You liked that," he panted, doing it again, then again, before falling back into the stroke, looking down and watching himself penetrate her for several moments, his heart full as her body accepted him, all of him, then looking back at her face. "You like me. I know you do, Professor. You'll let me come back, I know you will."

"Shut up!" Hermione hissed at him, pulling him down into her even harder.

He caught on quick and began to fuck the witch hard, gasping at every stroke. He felt as if something were building up inside him, an intense tightening in his groin, pleasure racing up his back. He cried out as Hermione's nails suddenly raked down his back, and he began plunging even harder, the witch shrieking now, as he rode her body for all he was worth.

"Oh, yes, Professor . . . yes!" he hissed. Hermione squelched around him, her body and breasts bouncing beneath him. Oh, he couldn't imagine anyone looking as beautiful as his Potions professor did at this moment, receiving him, taking him in, and liking it. He drove into her, his black eyes taking in her every response, listening to every utterance, his heart pounding in his chest, his body unable to stop moving, his cock claiming every wonderful inch of the woman under him. He felt her stiffen and held himself deep inside her, boiling over.

Hermione arched up and exploded, once again clawing Severus, who cried out both from the pain and his own powerful release, the world spinning around him as he fell heavily on the witch, clutching her close to him as he pulsed, filling her, groaning in ecstasy. Nothing he had ever experienced compared to this . . . nothing. He kissed her weakly all over her face as his pulsing slowed, and his back burned as perspiration mixed with the scratches the Potions mistress had left on his pale body. Oh, but it had been worth it. Definitely worth it.

Severus fell still, his breathing slowing and evening out, as Hermione panted beneath his weight, feeling the sting of him deep inside and his organ pulsing and softening as it deflated. He had come quite a bit. Good thing she had made sure to drink a full bottle of potent contraceptive potion. All she needed was to get pregnant by a seventh year.

Hermione lay there, Severus resting on top of her. Suddenly, she heard a little snore.

"Oh, fuck," she breathed.

The boy was asleep on top of her. He hadn't even withdrawn.

Well, good as he was, he was still a young wizard. That he fell asleep wasn't that much of a shock. Hermione shifted, managing to roll him off of her. The wizard rolled onto his back, arms and legs splayed, his loins and flaccid organ still wet with their mingled juices.

He had a little smile on his pale face.

Hermione looked at him, then sighed. She had intended on sending him directly back to Gryffindor Tower, but hell, he was already asleep, and by the look of him, she'd be hard put to wake him up. She sat up and let out a little noise. The boy had been very thorough his first time. She climbed over him, walked over to her dresser, and retrieved her wand. She Scourgified herself, then the nude young wizard snoring loudly in her bed. She studied him, then sighed, putting her wand down, picking up her nightgown, and slipping it on. Then she picked up her wand again and flicked it toward Severus' discarded boxers. They reappeared on his lean body.

Hermione walked back over to the bed, flicked her wand at it, Scourgifying it under the sleeping wizard, then covering him up with the Slytherin-green bed sheet. She looked down at him, his long black eyelashes, and big nose. He still wore the smile as he shifted slightly. Hermione couldn't help but smirk at that.

She put her wand in the nightstand drawer, then climbed back over Severus, slipped under the sheets, and turned to look at his profile.

Well, he was out of danger now and had his cherry suitably popped.

He'd be satisfied.

The witch turned away from him and settled down to sleep.

She'd eject him in the morning.

Early.

\* \* \*

The next morning when Severus woke up, he was startled at first, sitting up and looking around Hermione's room wildly before realizing he was still in his professor's bed. He fell back, smiling for a moment until he realized he was alone.

He sat up again, noticing he was in his boxers and Scourgified. The door to the bathroom was closed, but he could make out the shower running. Professor Granger must be getting ready for the day. But . . . it was Saturday, so she didn't have classes.

The young wizard slid out of the bed and stealthily walked over to the bathroom door, placing his ear against it. Yes, the shower was running. He tried the door and found it open. He slipped in and stared at the translucent shower door, watching as Hermione bathed her body. He already had a morning erection, but he definitely became more aware of it as he looked at the witch.

Slowly, he began to approach the shower. Hermione suddenly froze mid-wash.

"Get out of here and get dressed, Mr. Snape! Immediately," she snapped.

Severus started.

"But . . . but I want to shower too," he said to her, watching as the witch's hands went to her hips.

"You can shower when you get to Gryffindor Tower," Hermione said, frowning.

"But . . . but I thought we might . . ." he began.

"We won't. Now, go get dressed like I told you. I'll be out in a minute," the witch said.

Severus let out a sigh and dejectedly walked back into the bedroom, picking up his robes and shrugging them on. If only he had woken a bit earlier, he probably could have persuaded the Potions mistress to give him another go. He sat down on the side of the bed and pulled on his socks, then his boots. He waited.

Eventually, Hermione came out of the bathroom, fully dressed and looking as untouchable as ever as she looked at the wizard.

"You are out of danger now, Mr. Snape. Now, give me your oath you will not be telling your friends about our . . . activities," Hermione said to him, her eyes narrowing.

"I wouldn't tell them anyway. This is between you and me, Professor," Severus said, his eyes hot as he looked at her. Hermione had the distinct impression she was naked to the boy.

"No, Mr. Snape. It 'was' between us. There is no 'is,'" the witch said. "Now your oath."

Severus reluctantly gave Hermione an oath that he wouldn't tell anyone about what had occurred between them the night before. The witch nodded, then walked to the door of her bedroom, motioning for the wizard to follow her. But he continued to sit on the bed.

"Come along, Mr. Snape. It is time for you to depart," she said to him evenly as the young wizard's dark eyes rested on her soberly.

"It's Saturday. Neither of us has anything to do on Saturdays. Can't I spend the day with you? We don't have to do anything," he said to Hermione, who sighed.

He was like a whipped Muggle puppy.

"Unlike you, I do have things to do, Mr. Snape, and it doesn't include playing nursemaid to a love-sick little Gryffindor. What we had last night was a one-time occurrence. We can move on now. You can practice your prowess on witches closer to your age, witches who want to be involved with you in that manner," Hermione said.

Severus studied her.

"But you liked me that way, Professor. I could tell. I could feel it inside you," he breathed. "You wanted me. I know you did."

Hermione scowled at him.

"Mr. Snape. What I felt for you was purely physical. It was . . . reactionary. I am a practicing celibate . . ." she began.

"Not anymore," the young wizard said with a bit of smugness that made Hermione want to whip out her wand and blast him. But she didn't.

"I AM a practicing celibate, who only indulged you to save your miserable life. Don't put more than what it was into this. I am not about to become your 'girlfriend,'" she snapped at him.

Severus stood up and began to slowly walk toward her.

"How am I supposed to look at you the same way, knowing how you are, how good . . . how . . . how . . ." he began.

"You'll manage. I'm sure I'm not the first thing you wanted in your life but couldn't have, Mr. Snape, and I won't be the last. Now, please leave my rooms. I won't ask you so nicely next time," Hermione said, her brown eyes cold.

Severus stopped a few inches from her.

"A kiss then? One last kiss, Professor?" he asked her, his eyes pleading.

She shook her head. To kiss him would give him hope there could be something more.

"No, Mr. Snape. You received your last kisses from me last night. There will be no more," she said sternly.

Severus blinked at her, his mouth working as if he wanted to say more. But he didn't. Shoulders slightly slumped, he walked out of the bedroom into her study.

"I'll send you to the Entrance Hall. You must be hungry," the witch said.

Severus looked at her a bit sorrowfully.

"I'll never eat . . ." he began before Hermione screeched, "DON'T YOU DARE SAY IT!" afraid he'd set another blasted oath in motion.

Severus shut up.

Hermione rubbed her forehead with her hand, then strode up to the Floo, took some powder out of the box, and tossed it into the flames, which turned green.

"The Main Hall," she said, then looked at Severus pointedly.

"Goodbye, Mr. Snape," she said as the boy approached the Floo.

The wizard stopped in front of the fireplace and let out a long sigh. Hermione rolled her eyes, taking them off him for a second.

Suddenly, Severus grabbed her and kissed her hard on the mouth, the witch struggling in his arms. He released her with a rakish smile, then dashed through the flames before she could draw her wand.

"Why of all the impertinent, sneaky, low-down . . ." Hermione cursed, spluttering.

But the Gryffindor was long gone, no doubt proud of himself that he managed to steal a kiss and escape getting hexed. Hermione shook her head at the boy's audacity.

"Well, that's that," she said, straightening her robes and running her hand through her hair. She headed for her labs.

She had brewing to do.

\* \* \*

Severus came flying into the Entrance Hall out of the Floo and almost ran smack into the Headmaster, who was on his way to breakfast. He stopped, wheeling his arms for balance, out of breath. The Headmaster looked at him curiously.

"Good morning, Mr. Snape. In a hurry for breakfast?" he asked the young wizard, who was looking back at the Floo a bit nervously until the flames turned red again. He let out a sigh. Then he realized the old wizard was addressing him.

"Um . . . yes. I'm very hungry this morning," he replied, discovering he really was. Sex took a lot out of a wizard.

"I see," Albus said to him. "You are looking much better than the last time I saw you."

"Yes, sir," Severus agreed, his eyes shifting a little as he wondered if the Headmaster knew the exact nature of the oath he'd taken. Probably not. How could he?

"I take it the oath you took has been resolved satisfactorily?" the wizard said.

"Oh, the oath? Um . . . yes, sir. I'm fine now," he said uncomfortably. But his second oath not to reveal anything didn't choke him, so it must have been all right to answer.

Oaths were tricky things, however. He wouldn't be punished by it for telling something someone already knew. And Albus knew there was only one way that oath could have been satisfied. Hermione must have bedded the boy. Well, he didn't look any worse for wear.

"I'm glad to hear it, Mr. Snape. Now, go get your breakfast," Albus said with a smile.

"Thank you, sir," Severus said, hurrying into the Great Hall. He was hungry enough to eat a Hippogriff.

Albus looked after him thoughtfully.

"Quite a wizard," he mused as he headed for the teacher's entrance. He couldn't help but wonder how Hermione had fared with the boy. He hoped it hadn't been too trying on the witch.

But if Hermione had been grading Severus on his performance, he would have garnered an "Exceeds Expectations."

This wasn't too bad a mark, considering it was Hermione. Any other witch would have probably given the young wizard a hearty "Outstanding."

\* \* \*

Severus spent the rest of the morning in his room going over the night before in his head and groaning over the huge erection that resulted. He wished he had more control. Then he could have shown the Potions mistress all the other positions he knew. Maybe that would have won her over.

Finally, he had to take a cold shower. He didn't want to wank off. After last night, it would be a poor substitute. Just as he had dried off and exited the shower dressed in his boxers, there was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" he called.

"Harry and Ron," Ron called back.

Severus picked up his wand off the nightstand and unwarded his door.

"Come in," he called.

Ron and Harry entered.

"Hey, Sev. Wanted to know if you wanted to do a bit of flying? Toss the Quaffle for us so we can practice?" Harry asked him, smiling.

"I guess so," Severus replied, turning his back to the boys as he opened his wardrobe for a fresh robe.

"Oy! What happened to your back? You look like you've been clawed by something," Ron said, looking at the long scratches that ran from Severus' shoulders, down to his waist and off to the side. There were sixteen long scars down his pale back.

Severus fought for an answer.

"I ran through some brambles in the Forbidden Forest. They snagged me," he lied, pulling on his robes quickly.

Ron and Harry looked at each other, then back at the wizard who had turned around and was buttoning up his robes.

"Bramble scratches wouldn't look like that, Severus. They'd go straight across your back, not like that. It looks like someone grabbed you by your shoulders and ran their nails down your back," Harry said, pressing his friend.

"Come on, Sev. What gives. A witch did that to you!" Ron said eagerly. "You shagged somebody last night, didn't you?"

Severus looked at the both of them and sighed.

"Yeah, I did," he said shortly.

Ron looked at him hungrily.

"Who? Who'd you stick your wand in? Was it Luna?" he asked the wizard.

"I took an oath not to tell. It was the only way she'd let me do it," Severus said.

Ron scowled at him.

"You what? Took an oath? Why the hell did you do that when you knew we'd want every detail?" Ron hissed at him before dropping heavily on his bed, holding his forehead in his hand.

Harry stared at his friend.

"Well, was it good at least?" Ron asked Severus.

The wizard paused, his dark eyes going hot.

"Yeah, it was," he replied, then shook off the feeling of desire welling up in him at the thought of the Potions mistress impaled by him and moaning with pleasure.

"Do we at least know the witch?" Harry asked him.

"Yeah, but that's all I can say, Harry, so stop asking me about it," Severus replied, sitting down next to Ron and pulling on his socks.

"Was it Professor Granger?" Harry asked him directly.

Ron stared at Severus wide-eyed. Had he actually shagged the snarkest witch in the wizarding world?

Severus looked at Harry incredulously.

"Professor Granger?" he repeated. "What the hell do you think? You know how it came out when I told her how I felt. What would have changed?"

Harry studied him as Ron heartily agreed.

"He's right, Harry. Besides, he still has his goods. If he had shagged Granger, they would have been bitten off by the roots," Ron said, shuddering as Severus scowled at him.

"Well, what about the oath you took?" Harry demanded.

"Impossible oaths wear off," Severus replied. "I guess that's what happened. Now are we going to go flying or what?"

Severus grabbed his broom out of the corner, reduced its size, then exited his room with his friends, Harry continuing to look at him suspiciously.

Severus said he hadn't shagged Professor Granger, but Harry wasn't sure he believed him. The wizard was quite tenacious when he wanted something. For him to just give up was out of character. But then again, he might not have given up . . . He might have simply taken advantage of a situation with another witch and found he could shag her.

Yeah, that made sense.

More sense than Granger giving in.

\* \* \*

Hermione spent both morning and afternoon in her labs, brewing potions for the infirmary and replacing her Dreamless Sleeping Draught supply. The witch was in a horrible mood, mostly because her night with Severus kept coming back to her in disturbing clarity.

"Gods damn it," she hissed as the boy's blazing black eyes appeared before her. "Get out of my head, Severus Snape."

She stirred a potion viciously.

By late afternoon she realized she was hiding out in the dungeons, avoiding both breakfast and lunch because of the Gryffindor. She had never run from anything. She wasn't about to start now just because she tangled up the bed sheets with the young wizard. She'd been through worse things.

"I am not about to change my mode of operation because of some randy little wizard," she told herself, cleaning up her lab with a vengeance. "I am a mature witch. I can face him. I've faced worse than him."

Yes, she had. But what she had faced were horrible situations, painful ones. Situations that had required her to be tough, strong, and unflappable. That wasn't the case with Severus.

Their interlude had been pleasant and affecting. Something . . . something good. Something that required her to be giving to some extent. The boy acted out of honest desire for her. He didn't want to just use her and cast her aside. He didn't want to cause her pain. And he didn't want what they had started to stop.

But it had to stop. She wasn't some randy witch on the prowl for young meat. She was Hermione Granger, Potions mistress. A disciplined woman. In control, most of the time. Well, some of the time. She did have the occasional violent outburst, but that was to be expected. She certainly wasn't led about by her libido.

Hermione entered her bedroom to change her robes, glancing at the rose in the vase on her dresser. The rose Severus had given her. She stared at it.

One thing about living items sustained by magic, they usually faded within a few hours, the connection with the soul dissipating. But this rose, it was still fresh as if just produced.

"He's just over-reactive," she said to herself dismissively. "He was feeling strong emotion when he created it, brought on by lust. It'll probably be dead when I return from supper."

Hermione did go to supper, and Severus was there. The boy did his best not to look up at the dais, at the woman who gave him his first sexual experience, at the witch who meant more than anyone in the world to him at this time in his life, but had a hard time of it. Yet, every time he did glance at Hermione, she glared at him, warning in her eyes.

"Don't act like a smitten little fool, you idiot," her narrowed eyes seemed to say.

"Wow, Granger looks like she wants to hex you, Sev," Ron observed, looking up at the surly professor. "That's what you get for telling her you want to shag her. I don't think your knobblies are in the clear yet. I'd get a magical cup if I were you. With extra defensive charms."

"Shut up, Ron," Severus hissed at him, irritated.

"I'm just trying to keep you in one piece," Ron replied, biting into a pastry.

Harry had to agree with Ron. The Potions mistress seemed to have a touch of extra malice towards the Gryffindor.

The rest of the weekend went off without a hitch, especially since Severus didn't patrol on the weekends, so there was no chance of Hermione running into him in the corridors.

The rose still sat on her dresser, in perfect bloom, not a petal out of place.

\* \* \*

Monday afternoon, Severus arrived early at Potions class. Hermione was sitting at her desk and looked up as the Gryffindor limped in. He looked terrible. His hair was lank, his pallor pale, and he tottered as he walked.

A bit too much.

He plopped into his chair and turned a bleary eye on the Potions mistress.

"Hello, Professor," he said weakly, his soft voice quavering.

Hermione eyed him, pulled out her wand, and flicked it at him, removing his glamour.

"What kind of idiot do you think I am, Mr. Snape? Really. Glamouring yourself to try and get my sympathies again. Well, it won't work," she snapped at him as more students entered the class.

"Drat," Severus sighed to himself.

Well, it had been worth a try.

Later, a student added too much Deadly Nightshade to a potion, and the classroom had to be hurriedly cleared. When Hermione returned, she noticed Severus had left his Advanced Potions book on his desk. Idly, she picked it up and thumbed through it. Then she blinked.

In all the margins were notes and some of the potions' instructions had lines drawn through them and handwritten instructions in their place.

"What is this?" she said to herself, reading some of the notes.

"What? What does he think he's doing?" she snarled as she read changes to potions that had been established for years. There were also a number of unfamiliar hexes and jinxes scrawled in the margins as well. In fact, there were so many notations in the margins that they rivaled the print.

The young wizard was purposely altering potions. Did he actually use these in class? Did he purposely break away from the established methods to use his own wooly instructions? If he did, it was unconscionable. He was putting every student in her class as well as himself in danger, the idiot. Well, this wasn't going to continue.

She looked at the name on the inside jacket.

Snorting, she said, "The Half-Blood Prince? Oh, good gods."

Apparently, Mr. Snape suffered from narcissism as well as randiness.

Hermione placed the book in her pocket and gathered up her paperwork.

She was going to have a talk with Mr. "Half-Blood Prince."

ASAP.

\*\*\*\*\*

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After collecting all the books and parchments the students left behind, Professor Granger stormed out of her Potions classroom and toward the Great Hall.

Ron, who was seated at the table in front of a precarious pile of food that threatened to topple over at any moment, suddenly stopped eating and shuddered. He swallowed and looked at Severus.

"Did you feel an icy chill?" he asked, shuddering again.

"No," Severus said, biting into a pork chop.

Her eyes narrowed. Hermione scattered a few of her own charges as she billowed through the dungeons with purpose, bumping into Crabbe and snapping at him to watch where he was walking.

"Wow," Crabbe said to Draco as Granger passed, her face pinched in a scowl. "Professor Granger seems pissed off."

"That's her 'Hunting' scowl," Draco said in a near-whisper. "Whoever she's looking for is in for it. Glad it's not me."

"Brrrr," Ron said, hugging himself and looking about. "If I didn't know we were inside, I'd swear there was a storm coming."

"Just eat, Ron," Severus snapped, "before that mountain of food in front of you falls over and sweeps us away."

Harry chuckled. Ron did have an awful amount of food on his plate. Sometimes Harry suspected he had a tapeworm or two. No matter how much Ron ate, he never got any bigger.

"It's the Weasley metabolism," he'd say between forkfuls.

Hermione turned into the Entrance Hall, stampeding a few more students as she stalked toward the main doors of the Great Hall. The students all held back and let her pass. It was unusual that the Potions mistress entered supper in such a manner. Usually she used the teacher's entrance.

Granger was just about to rip the doors open when she was called.

"Ah, Professor Granger, a word if you please," the voice of Albus Dumbledore rang out behind her.

Hermione closed her eyes for a moment. The Headmaster would pick this time to stop her. What in the world did he want? There was a student to terrorize.

Hermione turned to see Albus smiling at her benignly, dressed in royal purple robes, his long beard braided into two plaits with matching purple bows on the end. She sighed and walked toward him.

"Yes, Headmaster?" she said with a hint of irritation.

"I noticed you were in quite a hurry to get into the Great Hall. Usually you use the teacher's entrance," the wizard said curiously.

Hermione fought the urge to blatantly roll her eyes. Albus was definitely fishing. Why didn't he ever just ask what he wanted to know?

"Yes. A situation has arisen concerning one of our students. Something that might even require expulsion from the school," Hermione said to him.

Both of Albus' eyebrows rose at this.

"Expulsion? That is quite a harsh punishment, Professor Granger. Usually the worst we give is suspension," the Headmaster said.

"If what I suspect is true, Headmaster, then the situation is so extreme that expulsion is the only possible punishment to suit the crime," Hermione responded.

"Crime? Has someone been murdered, Professor?" Albus asked her.

"Not yet," she said, her eyes narrowing.

The Headmaster thought she looked angry enough to do a bit of life-taking herself.

"Would you care to give me the details of this grievous infraction, Professor?" Albus asked her.

Hermione shook her head.

"No, sir. Not until I investigate and get both an explanation and a confession from the student involved," she responded, "after which I will apprise you of the situation and give you my recommendation."

"That is fine, Professor Granger. Just make sure that physical torture is not one of the methods used to secure the confession," Albus said, fully aware Hermione could torture someone just as well with her words, which could be sharp and cutting as knives.

"Of course not, sir," she responded.

"Very well. Carry on, Professor Granger," Albus said.

"Thank you, sir," Hermione replied, then turned with a billow of robes, walked to the entrance, and pulled the doors open with a flourish.

This was quite the visual, since most of the students were now inside. The doors flung open, and Hermione stormed through them, her face twisted in anger and eyes narrowed. The students unfortunate enough to be sitting off the center aisle all reflexively leaned forward over the tables as if afraid they would accidentally come into contact with her, though there was at least five feet of space on either side of the snarky Potions mistress. The entire student body fell silent.

Ron looked up and paled as Hermione's eyes seemed to fall on him. She kept walking forward.

"Oh, my gods. Granger's coming for me," Ron hissed. "What the hell did I do? I'm not even in any of her classes! I knew that blast of cold was an omen!"

Both Harry and Severus looked up and saw Professor Granger bearing down on them, her eyes glinting.

"I don't think she's coming for you, Ron," Harry whispered. "She's looking at Severus."

Ron let out a relieved sigh as Severus just stared at the angry witch, his heart starting to pound as she stormed up to them.

She looked down at him imperiously for a moment. He blinked up at her. Hermione had to force herself not to think of him on top of her, shuddering and declaring his love. This situation had nothing to do with that one.

"Mr. Snape, after supper you are to report directly to my office. Am I understood?" she snarled at him.

Severus felt a bit of tightening in his loins as her brown eyes flashed at him dangerously.

"Yes, Professor," he replied, his voice cracking a bit.

"Be prepared to stay a while," she snapped, stalking away.

Ron watched her go as murmuring began around the Great Hall, everyone discussing in muted tones just how long Severus was for the world. Ron turned to Severus.

"What did you do?" he asked the pale wizard, his blue eyes wide.

"I didn't do anything," Severus replied, looking up at the dais. Hermione glared back at him with malice.

"You must have done something. She made one of her 'Grand Entrances.' That usually means at least a month's worth of detentions," Ron said, staring at Severus as if he would never see him again.

"I'm telling you, Ron, I didn't do anything. At least nothing I can think of," Severus replied, returning to his meal.

"Maybe she found out something, Sev," Harry suggested. "Have you been doing anything sneaky? Something you can get in trouble for?"

Severus shook his head.

"No. I've conducted myself like a proper Gryffindor," Severus replied, thinking the only thing he did do that might be considered untoward was shag his Potions mistress. But he couldn't get in trouble for that. She was a willing...well, maybe not so willing...participant.

"Well, she's got something on you, believe that," Harry said, looking up at the dais. Hermione curled her lip at him. "I don't envy you a bit."

"I hope you got that magical cup I suggested. If I were you, I'd be so scared, my nads would be shrunk to the size of peas," Ron said, picking up a huge turkey leg.

"Shut up, Ron," Severus snapped at him, trying to return to his meal, but not feeling hungry any longer.

What the hell had he done?

He looked toward the dais again, but Professor Granger was eating her meal now. A salad. Severus was familiar enough with the witch through pining for her and watching her every move to know that something was truly on her mind. She only ate salads when she was stressed. Otherwise, she ate quite a bit of rare meat. Ron suspected she was a werewolf, though he had no proof except that she often snarled at her students.

Severus picked at his peas. Whatever he was in trouble for, he'd find out later.

\* \* \*

When Severus showed up at Hermione's office after supper, she wasn't there yet, so he loitered outside the door. Draco Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle sauntered by, smirking at him.

"What'd you do to Granger, Snape?" Draco purred at him, slowing his pace. "She seemed really pissed off. Looks like somebody's going to be losing a few points. What a shame. Slytherin and Gryffindor are neck and neck for the House Cup. Still, we appreciate your efforts for our cause."

"Get out of here, Malfoy, before I give you another set of tits," Severus snapped at him.

Severus had given Draco breasts earlier that year after Draco cast a Tripping Spell on Harry when his back was turned. Harry had been heading down the main stairwell and could have been badly hurt if he hadn't grabbed the railing in time. Severus had hit Draco with the hex before the Slytherin could react, large triple-D gazongas filling out his robes. It had taken hours for them to deflate.

Draco scowled as Crabbe and Goyle both stiffened. Severus readied himself.

"Three against one, eh?" Severus said through clenched teeth, his hand flexing as if he were a gunfighter. "I'll get at least two of you."

Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle looked at each other doubtfully. They outnumbered Severus, but the Gryffindor was fast. Not only was he fast, but he used hexes no one had ever heard of before. He had made Goyle's toenails grow one day in the corridor, with very entertaining results. They had been so thick that Madame Pomfrey had to clip them back with a pair of specialized toenail clippers made for trolls.

Still, they didn't want to back down from a single Gryffindor. They stared at each other.

"Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Goyle, and Mr. Crabbe, get to your house immediately!" Professor Granger hissed.

She had walked up on them while they were focused on each other. Severus relaxed.

"Yes, Professor," Draco replied, giving Severus one more glare before he, Crabbe, and Goyle continued down the hall. Severus watched them go, then turned to find the Potions mistress glaring at him in much the same way Draco had been.

"What's this about, Professor?" Severus asked her, his dark eyes hot.

Maybe she wanted another go with him.

Hermione noticed the hopeful look in his eyes and frowned at the boy's nerve.

"I'll ask the questions, Mr. Snape. Now, follow me," she said, walking down the corridor.

Severus followed, his eyes resting on her hips as she walked ahead of him. He felt himself hardening a little. Hermione stopped in front of the Potions classroom, unlocked the door, and turned to him just in time to see his eyes quickly flick upward. Had he been watching her arse? Dear gods.

"Just get in the classroom, Mr. Snape, and take your seat up front," she snapped at him.

Severus entered the classroom and did as she asked, looking up at her curiously as she billowed around the desk and stood in front of him. She reached into her pocket, pulled out his Advanced Potions book, and slammed it down on the desk.

"What is this, Mr. Snape?" she demanded.

Severus looked at it calmly.

"My Advanced Potions book, Professor," he responded.

Hermione flipped open the book and pointed at the name written there.

"I assume the 'Half-Blood Prince' is you, Mr. Snape. Quite the modest title," she said sarcastically.

"Actually, I picked it because my mother's maiden name is Prince and my father is a Muggle, Professor," Severus said.

Hermione looked at him.

"Are you sure, that's why you chose such a prominent-sounding pseudonym, Mr. Snape? Or is it because you believe you are above everyone else when it comes to following long-established rules and instructions. A Prince can change the rules, can't he, Mr. Snape?"

Severus blinked at her.

"If he has the authority, I suppose so," he responded.

"Well, you do NOT have the authority, Mr. Snape! I've looked through that book and read the changes you've made to instructions for some very dangerous and volatile brews, changes that can cost lives, Mr. Snape! Your life and the life of my students! It is an asinine, irresponsible, and decidedly dangerous course you have taken, young man, one which will surely result in your expulsion from not only this class, but Hogwarts itself!" she snarled at him.

Severus looked at her calmly despite her declaration.

"Why would I be expelled if the changes work?" he asked her. "Why would you have me thrown out if I've improved the brewing process?"

"Improved? Why, you arrogant little bastard. You actually believe you have improved potions created by masters long before you were even born?" she asked him in disbelief. "The delusions Gryffindors have concerning their own greatness is ludicrous."

"I don't believe it," Severus said quietly, "I've done it."

"If you have, you've done it by risking the lives of everyone around you while you 'experimented.' That's tantamount to casting a random Killing Curse and hoping it doesn't hit anyone," she said to him. "Even if you have had some small success, the end result does not justify the means by which you accomplished it. You are out of here on your ear, Mr. Snape. I will not have such a reckless student at this school!"

Severus frowned back at her now.

"Do you think I'm stupid enough to test a theory in a class full of pupils, Professor?" he asked her, his eyes now full of disdain. "I've experimented on my own time, in a safe area. Alone. The only one who was ever at risk was me. And I knew what I was doing. I only used my findings in class after they'd been tested and retested. I am not an idiot, and I HAVE improved the brewing process of several potions. If you try to get me expelled for that, I will fight to stay here. I am at Hogwarts not only to learn, but to improve. I am going to be a Potions master someday. The best there ever was."

Severus didn't make this declaration with overblown pride, but with quiet certainty. A very sincere certainty that Hermione couldn't help but feel.

"You'll fight me?" she asked him softly, her eyes glittering.

"Tooth and nail," he replied, meeting her gaze evenly. "You'll have to prove my annotations and changes are dangerous. You won't be able to do that, Professor, because everything in there works. Even the spells."

"You are an arrogant little sod, aren't you, Mr. Snape?" Granger hissed at him.

"No. I just know what I know," he replied, his eyes as hard as diamonds.

Hermione had to admit she was a bit impressed at the boy's confidence. He wasn't the least bit cowed about what he'd done, and he defended himself without hesitation. Most students would have been apologizing and pleading with her to give them another chance. But not this young wizard. He had conviction concerning his skills.

She hated to admit it to herself, but his confidence was quite attractive.

Hermione stared at him a moment, then picked up his book, leafing through it until she located a very difficult, complex potion to brew that he had scrawled all over.

The Draught of Living Death. It was next to impossible for a novice to brew this correctly the first time, even with the proper instructions. She looked at Severus with narrowed eyes.

"Come to the lab, Mr. Snape. You have brewing to do. You'd better hope your high opinion of yourself and your abilities hold true, or you will be packing your bags tonight," she hissed at him.

Severus looked at her, a cunning look washing over his face.

"What's in it for me if I do brew it correctly with my improvements?" he asked her.

Hermione frowned at him.

"What the hell do you mean 'what's in it for you'? You don't get expelled, you idiot!" she snapped at him.

Snape still sat there.

"I could refuse to brew and force you to bring me before the Board of Governors for expulsion; then I could show them firsthand that my techniques work. That would make you look rather inept, Professor Granger. It might even make you . . . seem a bit jealous that a student was able to improve brews you could not," he said in a low voice.

Hermione began to shake with rage. How dare he suggest such a thing?

"It's not that I could not improve them. I found no reason to tamper with what was already perfection," she snapped at him, itching to give him a blast from her wand.

"If the techniques were perfection, I wouldn't have been able to improve them, would I?" he purred at the witch.

Hermione stared at him.

"You should have been in Slytherin house," she said to the young man.

"I have just enough scruples to have been spared that," Severus replied silkily, looking much older than he really was at this point. "If I have indeed improved the brewing process like I claim, Professor, your instruction over the years will be considered the reason for my skills. You will receive acclaim for teaching me in such a manner that I was able to forge ahead on my own. The student is only as good as the teacher, after all. That would be quite the quill in your cap, not to mention it will probably result in a salary increase to ensure such a wonderful instructor is not wooed away by another school. I will gladly give you all the credit for my abilities . . . if there is something in it for me."

Hermione listened to him, a bit appreciative of his calculating nature. She had never realized Severus Snape had such a manipulative streak. It was very appealing.

"And what would you want, Mr. Snape? Unlimited access to my stores? Perfect marks for the rest of the year?"

Severus shook his head.

"No. Nothing as complicated as that, Professor. If I prove that I have improved the brewing technique on whatever potion you choose from that book, then I only want one thing," he said softly.

"What?" Hermione asked him impatiently. "What is it you want, Mr. Snape?"

"You."

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A/N: Interesting turn of events. Whoo, young Snape is playing with fire here. Guess some traits just don't change. Lol. Thanks for reading.

## The Prince and the Villain

### Chapter 5 of 6

Hermione and Severus come to a tentative agreement concerning his brewing of the altered potions. A change in venue results, Severus being placed in the dungeons by order of Albus to facilitate his brewing. While Severus is out, Hermione is viciously attacked in her rooms.

### Chapter 5 ~ The Prince and the Villain

"Me?" Hermione nearly spluttered.

She would have never believed Severus Snape would dare try to . . . to purposely blackmail her into a tryst. Not directly. What happened with the oath had been an unfortunate accident. But this! He was purposely trying to manipulate her into a sexual relationship!

The wizard had bigger balls than a fucking troll.

"Yes. You, Professor Granger. I want you if I prove myself," Severus said, his dark eyes softening.

"You insolent young pup! Trying to negotiate to have sex with me? You have no morals! No ethics!" she seethed at him.

Severus fought back a little smirk. Professor Granger was a Slytherin, wasn't she? Morals and ethics never played a very large role in a Slytherin's basic make-up. She was trying to turn his own house inclinations back on him. Trying to make him feel guilty about what he was attempting to do. Well, Severus didn't feel guilty. This was an opportunity to get at the snarky witch the way he wanted. He wasn't about to pass on that, no matter how un-Gryffindorish it seemed. But she was wrong about his motives. Well . . . partially wrong. There was more to this than sex.

Severus shook his head.

"I'm not negotiating for sex, Professor," he said, then faltered. "Well, I guess I am, but I want more than that. I want to be able to spend time with you, brew with you and learn from you. Yes, I've managed through trial and error to alter brewing processes, but there's still so much I don't know that you do. Things I want to learn.

"I'd like to talk about things, about potions, about life . . . and about you. You're a brilliant teacher, Professor, and I think you're beautiful as well. We could enjoy each other, I know we could. I don't have anyone I can talk about serious things with, intellectual things, and I don't think you do either. It has to get lonely for you. I have ideas and



thoughts I'd like to be able to share with someone and get opinions on. I like to debate too, but no one has enough knowledge to be challenging. I just know you'd be good at it. So, yes, I want you, Professor, but for more than just sex, though I want that too. Lots of it," the wizard said. "I know you could teach me about what it really is. I know the mechanics, but that's it. You could help me there."

Hermione studied the wizard.

"You certainly want a lot, Mr. Snape. What you are asking for would take up much of my time," she said to him.

"It would only be until I graduate, Professor. That's only a few months. In return you'll be able to brew your potions better, earn a better salary and be revered as a very talented teacher long after I'm gone. I mean, if I can't brew these potions, you're willing to ruin my life as punishment. So I think if I can brew them, you should be willing to share your life with me as a reward. It's only fair," Severus said.

Ah, there it was. The Gryffindoriness, yet tempered by self-interest. An interesting combination.

"I guess from where you're sitting, Mr. Snape, it appears that way, doesn't it?" Hermione said to him with a disarming smile. "I tell you what. I'll consider your proposal while you are brewing. How's that?"

Hermione hoped she sounded disarming as well. She had no intentions on agreeing after the fact. If he did manage to improve the technique, good for him. He wasn't going to suck up all her spare time.

Not that she had much to do with it other than brewing, drinking Firewhiskey and marking papers. She never went anywhere.

Severus arched an eyebrow at Hermione.

"I . . . don't think so, Professor. I'd prefer to know your answer now," he said slowly.

Hermione swelled indignantly.

"Are you saying you don't TRUST me, Mr. Snape?" she hissed at him.

"I'm just saying I'd like to know your answer before I do anything," he replied diplomatically.

"Mr. Snape, you will go into my labs and prepare yourself to brew the Draught of Living Death this instant!" Hermione snarled at him.

"I won't," Severus said stubbornly, meeting her narrowed eyes.

Hermione really did feel like hexing him, the smug little bastard. He knew he had her. By taking him to task about the annotations in his book, she had cast down the gauntlet, erroneously thinking she had Severus dead to rights. She had also told Albus there was a "situation" that she would have to apprise him of, so he was expecting a report. If the Gryffindor couldn't prove his techniques viable, he would be expelled, yet if they proved to be as he said they were, Albus would sing his and her praises from the turret tops. But if Severus didn't brew anything at all, there would be a hearing where he would demonstrate his techniques. If he were successful, then everyone would blame her for putting such a talented student under scrutiny, perhaps out of malice or even jealousy.

Gods damn it.

"Mr. Snape, you do realize by not obeying me in this matter, you are breaking school rules," she said to him in a last effort to make the stubborn wizard capitulate.

Severus shrugged.

"Considering the situation, that's the least of my worries, Professor. I'm facing being expelled anyway. Another broken rule isn't going to make it any worse," he replied logically, "unless you try to get me sent to Azkaban as well. But if you do, you'll fail."

Hermione glared at him for a full five minutes. Severus looked back at her expectantly.

Gods, was he really willing to go to such lengths in order to gain access to her? Hm, but she still didn't like the idea of being bested by a seventh-year Gryffindor, no matter how delicious he was starting to appear. There was a third option.

"Mr. Snape, I could just copy your annotations and test them myself," the Potions mistress said.

"In that case, I would be forced to take my techniques to the Headmaster myself to insure that I received credit for my discoveries. Not to say you would steal the credit, Professor, but better safe than sorry, especially when dealing with a Slytherin," Severus replied.

Hermione turned bright red. He had an answer for everything. He was so aggravating, but still so compelling. Those dark eyes burned into hers, waiting for an answer.

The Potions mistress paced back and forth a few times, as if that would help her situation. Then she looked at Severus again, noting the hopeful look in his eyes. Well, the boy wanted more than sex . . . he wanted intelligent companionship and to learn. If she did this, she would sort of be his patron or mentor, with additional privileges. Privileges that would only get better with time and experience.

Hermione took a moment to look at her life. Really look at it. She had nothing really. Oh, she had her job, a secure position, a roof over her head. But that was about it. She had been hiding from life, finding solace in her misery and pleasure in making the lives of others just a touch less joyful because the old adage was true that misery loves company. Severus made her realize she was tired of being miserable and tired of spending night after night alone. And not just sexually, but emotionally and mentally. Hell, if she agreed, he could be a pleasurable diversion over the next few months. A reprieve of sorts from the dull ache her life had become.

Hell. Why not? For years everything she'd done had been for the benefit of others. Now it was time for Hermione Granger to have a little fun, a little excitement. The good kind. The kind that didn't always have death hanging over it.

She looked at Severus and sighed, because she knew once she said it, he was going to overreact.

"All right, Mr. Snape. I agree to your terms. If you fail, you will be expelled, but if your techniques work, I will allow you to 'keep me company' until graduation. Does that satisfy you?" she asked him.

"It will when you take an oath," he replied, smiling.

"An oath? Why, you little . . ."

Hermione let out a stream of profanities that blew Severus' hair back, but he sat at the desk stoically until Hermione grudgingly took the oath. Then he leapt up from the chair, pumping his fist in the air.

"YES! YES!" he cried, doing a little victory dance as Hermione looked at him in disbelief. Good gods, she'd agreed to sleep with this little cretin? He was acting as if he'd single-handedly won the World Cup. Merlin help her.

Suddenly, Severus latched onto Hermione, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her hard, trying to slip his tongue into her mouth.

She stomped on his foot.

"Ow!" Severus cried, holding his injured foot and hopping about as Hermione wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

"You will not latch onto me like the Giant Squid whenever the urge hits you, Mr. Snape. You haven't brewed the Draught yet. Next time you do that, I'll hex you where you'll feel it most!" Hermione snapped at the wizard, picking up the Potions book and heading for her labs.

"Come on, Mr. Snape," she called back to him.

Severus gingerly put his foot down. It hurt, but he wore a very broad smile as he followed the witch, limping slightly, and he wondered if he might be able to get another shag out of her tonight.

\* \* \*

Hermione watched as Severus removed his robes, revealing his lean young body clad in a crisp white button-up shirt, black trousers and black boots, polished to a gleam. He undid his cuffs and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He was all focus as he set up the cauldron, carefully examining it before Scourgifying it several times and then casting an additional purification spell on it. He set it up, then carefully chose a set of scales, plucking at several, his black eyes intense as he checked the ballast. Hermione had the feeling of being invisible as the wizard walked to her stores and collected the ingredients he needed to create the Draught without as much as even glancing at the book.

He quickly prepared his ingredients, adding the base to the cauldron and efficiently chopping up valerian roots and other herbs, scourging his utensils, measuring the amounts precisely and adding them to the cauldron. Within ten minutes, bluish steam was rising from the cauldron and the potion already resembled the smooth, black currant-colored liquid that heralded the midway stage.

Severus added a few more ingredients. Up to this point he was following the original instructions. Now he was to add the Sopophorous Bean. Hermione started, because instead of chopping the bean as instructed, the wizard picked up a silver dagger and with the blade crushed the bean, which exuded more juice than Hermione could have ever thought possible.

Severus deftly scooped up the juice and added it to the cauldron. The potion turned a perfect shade of lilac. Hermione had to admit she was impressed. Normally, this was the portion of the brewing when errors were made. But so far Severus was doing well, better than well, and crushing the bean was certainly more effective than chopping it.

Now came the most difficult part. According to the instructions, the potion was to be stirred counterclockwise until it turned as clear as water. But Severus added a clockwise stir after every seventh counterclockwise stir. The potion immediately turned a pale pink.

Hermione blinked. She had never seen the potion react so quickly. The wizard was barely twenty stirs in. It normally took about seventy stirs before there was any reaction. Hermione watched as the potion turned clear as water in less than a quarter of the time it normally took. Severus stared down at it, then slowly turned his head to look at his professor.

"You can test it now, Professor," he said softly. "I think you'll find it viable."

Feeling rather stunned, Hermione approached the cauldron. Severus never took his eyes off her as she checked the contents. Hermione looked at him, her eyes wide.

"It's viable," she breathed as the clear liquid sparkled.

"Yes, it is, Professor," the wizard replied, moving a bit closer. "And now, according to your oath, so are we."

"Now, just a minute, Mr. Snape," Hermione said to the approaching wizard.

"That's Severus, Professor," Severus said in a low voice as he inched closer to her.

"Fine. Wait a minute, Severus," Hermione repeated, holding up her hands.

Severus stopped, but the eager look in his eyes said he intended to keep coming.

"I proved my techniques work," he said to her. "You took an oath I could keep you company."

Hermione gave him a rather crooked little smirk.

"You've proven ONE technique works, Severus. I need to know they ALL work before we go any further. And I need them presented in a legible manner. I can't very well give Albus that dragon-scratch you have scrawled in the margins of your potions book," she said to him evenly.

Take that, smart boy.

"What? But that's not fair!" Severus said to her, frowning.

"It is perfectly fair. I'm not going to fall flat on my back for you, then discover only one technique works. You're going to have to demonstrate them all for me," she said to him, her eyes glinting.

"Some of those brews take three weeks to complete!" Severus complained, a slight whine in his voice.

"Then I suggest you start on those first. Tomorrow I will set up a separate work area for you, and after class you can come down and start," Hermione said to him, turning and walking out of the lab.

Severus stared after her for a moment, then dropped his head. He should have known she had something up her robe sleeve. It had been too easy. Now she was going to put him off for several more weeks, and he still had to brew. Damn it!

Hermione grinned to herself as she walked back into the Potions classroom. Severus put his robes back on, put his Potions book in his pocket and followed her back into the classroom, dragging his feet.

She turned to him with a smug little smile.

"Never try to out-Slytherin a Slytherin, Severus," she said to him. "At least not this Slytherin. Now, you may go."

"Go? But, I did brew one potion. That should be worth something. A kiss? A caress? Something, Professor," Severus said to her, looking extremely put out.

Hermione considered him.

"All right. Close your eyes," she said to him.

Severus did so, pursing his lips. He felt the witch's hands lightly rest on the sides of his head and tilt it downward. She was shorter than he was, and he quickly licked his lips for extra softness.

Hermione kissed him, right in the middle of his forehead.

"That's for trying so hard," she said as the wizard opened his eyes, looking at her in shock. "Now, get going. I have parchments to mark."

"But . . . but," Severus protested.

"Five points from Gryffindor," Hermione said to him, frowning.

Severus sighed.

"All right, but I'll be here right after supper tomorrow," he said to the witch.

"I'm sure you will be, Mr. Snape," Hermione said, reverting to proper address.

Severus turned toward the door, opening it slowly, hoping to put the witch off guard so he could steal another kiss, then run like hell before she hexed him. He opened it wider, stepped forward a bit, then suddenly spun . . . only to find Hermione's wand pointed directly between his eyes.

The Potions mistress cocked her head at him.

"Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice and you get a new appendage growing out the top of your head. Goodbye, Mr. Snape," she said.

Severus smiled.

"Goodbye, Professor," the Gryffindor replied. Then he left.

Hermione let out a sigh and closed her door. After a moment, she warded it too. Just in case. She walked back to her desk and collected the day's work she had to mark. She shook her head slowly as she thought about the brilliant young wizard.

He really should have been sorted into Slytherin.

\* \* \*

Severus was feeling quite a bit better by the time he reached the corridor leading to Gryffindor tower, and that was because he realized some of those brews would require him to enter Hermione's domain at all hours of the night.

And that had possibilities.

He gave the Fat Lady the password and entered the common room. Ron was in there, chatting up one of the Patil sisters. He jumped up the moment he saw Severus enter. He hurried up to him as Parvati frowned.

"Severus! You survived!" he said, overjoyed, then made a big production of looking him over for damages.

"What did the old bat want?" he asked the pale wizard, who scowled at him but didn't say anything. This was Classic Ron.

Severus sat down on the sofa.

"She found out about my altering of brewing techniques," he said.

Ron's eyes went round with horror.

"Oh no! What did she say?" he asked, sitting down on the edge of the seat.

"Well, she was going to try and get me expelled, but I told her that I'd fight to stay because the changes I made to the brewing processes worked," the wizard said.

"You told her you'd fight her?" Ron asked in amazement.

Severus nodded.

"You really don't like your life, do you, Severus?" Ron said, shaking his head, truly amazed the wizard made it back to Gryffindor tower in one piece. "So what happened then?"

Severus wasn't about to tell Ron he manipulated the situation so the professor agreed he could "keep her company."

"Well, I showed her one of the brews. The Draught of Living Death. I made it perfectly. Now I have to show her all the other potions work," he told the redhead.

"But in order to do that, you're going to have to be down in the dungeons constantly, Severus," Ron said to him.

"I know," Severus replied, trying not to smile.

"But . . . you'll be down there with . . . with her," Ron said as if this were the most horrible thing in the world.

"I know," Severus said.

Ron looked at Severus with a furrowed brow. He didn't seem at all upset about being sequestered alone with Professor Granger, a situation Ron equated with being caged with an underfed and salivating Manticore.

"Severus, you aren't still going to try and shag her, are you?" he asked the wizard.

"No, Ron. I'm not going to try," Severus replied.

He was going to do it. Again. Eventually.

Ron let out a sigh of relief.

"That's good, Sev. I was worried about you there for a moment. Anyone who'd want to tangle with Granger like that would have to have a few loose bolts in his broom. She's awful," the wizard said.

Severus didn't reply to this. He stood up.

"I have homework to do before I go on my rounds, Ron. I'll see you later," he said to the wizard.

"All right," Ron said, looking around for Parvati, who had left when Ron so rudely jumped up to talk to Severus without so much as an "Excuse me, Parvati."

"Where'd she go?" Ron wondered, perplexed.

Poor Ron. At this rate, he was never going to get laid.

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After she finished marking parchments, Hermione visited Albus to apprise him of the situation with Severus.

"He actually improved brewing techniques, Hermione? At his age? That's amazing," Dumbledore said. "Imagine, one of our students making strides in the field of Potions before even graduating. This is absolutely wonderful! I must contact the Ministry at once!"

Hermione shook her head.

"Headmaster, I think we should wait to find out if all the new techniques work. I need to get a special dispensation so Mr. Snape will be allowed out after rounds in order to tend to the brewing. Some potions will require him to go to the lab in the middle of the night. If Argus holds him up, then the potions could be ruined," she said to the old wizard.

"Hm," Albus said thoughtfully, drumming his fingers on his desk.

Behind him, Fawkes let out a trill.

"You know, Professor Granger, this is quite important. Extremely so. We really need to make sure we facilitate young Severus' success in this matter. Give him every opportunity to handle his brewing properly without disrupting his ability to study and keep his marks up. Traveling back and forth between Gryffindor tower and the dungeons will be draining on the boy. I believe he should be sequestered in your rooms for the duration," Albus said firmly.

"My rooms? Albus, you can't be serious!" Hermione sputtered.

"You do have an extra room off your study. He could use that," the Headmaster said, totally oblivious to Hermione's horror. "This way he would have easier access to the labs and not have to move through the castle at all hours of the night."

"That's insane, Albus! I can't have an eighteen-year-old wizard domiciled in my rooms with me! What will people say?" Hermione said, flustered.

"Since when have you ever cared what people have to say about you, Hermione?" Albus replied. "Severus has done something amazing, something he will be revered and honored for, and he is your student . . . your protégé. You need to do everything you can to assist him. You will be receiving credit as well, Hermione, for your splendid teaching methods that no doubt inspired him. I do believe a bit of a pay raise will be in order."

Hermione blinked at Albus. It was going just as Severus said it would. But the randy wizard locked in her private rooms with her? Hermione groaned as Albus went over the details. He would notify Minerva immediately and have the house-elves move the boy's things as soon as possible.

"It will only be for a few weeks, Hermione. It will all be worth it in the end," Albus said to her encouragingly. "Now would you like to tell him, or should I?"

Hermione looked up at Albus, imagining what Severus' reaction would be if she told him. He'd probably break something.

"You tell him, Headmaster," she replied, then dropped her head and pinched the bridge of her nose, shaking her head ruefully.

She should have never opened that damned book.

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Hermione sat picking at her morning meal when Albus swept by her, exiting the Great Hall through the teacher's exit. No doubt he was going to wait for Severus in the main hall and tell him of his "new arrangements."

As she was leaving her rooms this morning, Hermione had heard the house-elves busily working in the bedroom that Severus would occupy. She hadn't looked in on them. She felt she would be too tempted to blast them out of there. Damn Albus and his ideas.

Now seated at the dais, the Potions mistress watched the Gryffindor eat his breakfast with hooded eyes. He was sitting between Harry Potter and the non-stop eating machine, Ronald Weasley, who was masticating on a mouthful of biscuits and jam. Severus glanced toward her for a moment, a wistful look in his dark eyes. She scowled at him reflexively, then finished her breakfast and headed back to her office to prepare for her first class.

Hermione took out her lesson plan and sketched out a few notes, but found it very hard to focus knowing that the randy young wizard would be in her rooms before the day was out. Well, he'd better keep his hands to himself.

He'd find it hard to brew without any fingers.

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Severus had just finished his breakfast and was exiting the Great Hall with Harry and Ron when the Headmaster called to him.

"Mr. Snape, a word if you please," the old wizard said with a bright smile.

Harry and Ron continued on to Gryffindor tower as Severus walked up to Albus, whose blue eyes were exceptionally twinkly.

"Yes, sir?" Severus said politely.

"I wonder if you might come with me to my office, Severus. We have much to discuss, my boy. Professor Granger has told me about your brewing improvements and how she intends to test your methods. We would like to facilitate this, and that will require a certain change in your current situation," the Headmaster said, leading Severus to the Floo in the main hall.

Change in his situation? What kind of change?

The Gryffindor followed Albus into his office. The wizard offered him the comfy armchair in front of his desk as Fawkes trilled a welcome. Severus sat down and looked at the Headmaster curiously as he took a seat as well. After beaming for a full minute, Albus got down to it.

"Severus, you have done something exemplary. Improved brewing techniques that have been established for centuries. You are going to go down in the history books if you have accomplished what you say you have," he said to the young wizard.

"I have, sir," Severus replied confidently.

"I believe you. However, showing your techniques will be difficult if you have to continuously run from Gryffindor tower down to the dungeons at all hours of the day and night. It will not only keep you hopping but most likely interfere with your studies. Therefore, I have made other arrangements for you in order to make your task easier. You will be occupying the spare room off the Potions mistress' study until you complete the brewing. Your things are being moved at this moment," Albus said to the wizard.

Severus stared at him in disbelief.

"Professor Granger's rooms?" he said hollowly, the office around him seeming to bend and flex as if he were suddenly thrown into some kind of time warp.

Albus nodded, his brow furrowing slightly.

"Now, Professor Granger probably won't be the ideal roommate, but if you stay in your own room and not disrupt her too much, you ought to be able to make out just fine," Albus said to him. "Just give her plenty of space."

Severus stared at the Headmaster blankly.

Albus blinked at the empty expression on the boy's face.

"Severus? Severus? Are you all right, my boy?" he asked the young wizard. Severus' eyes focused.

"Ah, yes, sir. I'm fine. Just a bit shocked," Severus replied, doing his best to keep the broad smile that was trying to get out in check.

"It is you who will be doing the shocking if you prove your techniques work," Albus replied with a smile. "Now, I suggest you go to the dungeon area and retrieve your books for class. No doubt the house-elves have been quick and thorough. Professor Granger will show you your room."

Severus popped up out of the chair like a Jack-in-the-Box.

"Yes, sir," he said breathlessly, heading for the office door at top speed.

"Ah, Severus?" the Headmaster said.

Severus turned back to the wizard, his eyes bright.

"Yes, sir?" he responded.

"Good luck, my boy," Albus said to him as Fawkes let out yet another trill.

"Thank you, sir," Severus said with a nod and a smile. Then he exited the office.

Albus leaned back in his chair, folding his fingers together.

"What I wouldn't give to be a fly on the wall in those quarters," he said, shaking his head.

\* \* \*

Severus took the stairs three at a time as he headed for the main floor. Ron and Harry spied him speeding toward the dungeons.

"Where's Sev going?" Ron said to Harry. "Doesn't he have Advanced Arithmancy? Why is he heading for the dungeons?"

Harry shrugged.

"He must have a reason," the boy who lived replied.

"I wonder what Dumbledore wanted with him," Ron said as the two reached the main floor and turned toward their next class.

"We'll find out what's going on at lunch," Harry said. "Now let's go."

\* \* \*

Hermione had just finished compiling her notes when a heavy knock sounded on her door. She frowned. Who was at her door this early?

"Come in," she snapped.

The door opened, and a brightly smiling Severus entered her office. Obviously the wizard wasted no time hightailing it down here once Albus told him of his new arrangements.

Hermione narrowed her eyes at the Gryffindor. "Couldn't you have at least waited until the end of the day to encroach on my domain, Mr. Snape?"

"I came to get my books for class," the wizard said, grinning at her.

"Your books?" Hermione repeated, her eyebrows lifted.

Severus nodded enthusiastically. "Yes. The Headmaster said all my things have been transferred to my new room," he said to her, his delight nauseatingly evident.

"It is not 'your' room, Mr. Snape . . . it is MY room, a room that you are merely occupying for a short period of time. Don't you forget that," she snapped at him.

Severus continued to smile at her.

"Wipe that damn smile off your face!" Hermione growled at him. "This is not a happy occasion! You are infringing on my privacy and disrupting my routine. I don't appreciate this one bit, Mr. Snape."

Severus tried to look less happy but failed miserably.

Hermione looked at him for several moments, then stood up and walked from behind her desk to the wall that opened on her study.

"Watch me carefully. I'm only going to show you this once," she said to the young wizard.

Severus watched as Hermione pressed a series of stones and memorized it instantly. He felt he wouldn't forget that combination even if he was hit with an Obliviate. It was the key to all his randy little desires concerning the Potions mistress. The wall slid up, and Hermione entered, followed by Severus. She pointed to a door on the right side of the study.

"That is your room for the time being. I expect you to stay in it when you aren't going to and from the lab," she said to him as Severus opened the door.

Two torches flared up, and he saw he had a full-sized bed, a wardrobe, chest of drawers and several bookshelves. His bed was spread in Gryffindor colors, which made Hermione's nose wrinkle with distaste as she looked in behind him. Damned elves. Did they have to try and make him feel so at home?

"There's no writing desk," he said as he walked up to the shelf and removed several books, sticking them into his knapsack. "I have no place to do my work."

"I'll have one put in," Hermione replied, scowling at him as Severus experimentally bounced on the bed, then looked at her rather hotly, his eyes speaking for him.

"I know our agreement, Mr. Snape, and I warn you that if you attempt to 'put any moves' on me before you complete your brewing, you will be spending much of your time in the infirmary rather than this room. Do I make myself clear? Your being in my rooms is not a license to attempt to maul me every chance you get," she snapped at him.

"I don't want to maul you, Professor," he said softly, "I just want to be with you."

Hermione snorted.

"I already know what you want to do with me, Mr. Snape," she replied, her eyes hard. "If you were a Slytherin, I'd think you planned this entire situation."

Severus smirked at her and stood up.

"But I didn't. You did this, Professor, when you decided to try and get me thrown out of Hogwarts," the young man replied. "I have to say I'm glad you did. It wouldn't have worked out better if I did plan this. It makes things so much easier."

Hermione frowned at him again before sighing in resignation. The boy had a one track mind, and that track specifically led to her.

"You have your books. Go to class," she said to him, stepping out of the doorway and giving the young wizard ample room to pass without coming into contact with her.

Severus walked by her, his eyes triumphant. She felt like kicking him.

"After class this afternoon, you are to go into the lab and prepare your next project," she directed him. "And I expect you to begin transcribing your notes in a legible manner."

"Yes, Professor," he said cheerily, his black eyes full of mirth.

"GET OUT!" Hermione yelled at him furiously. He was so damned smug it was unbearable.

Severus hurried through the wall into her office.

"See you tonight, Professor," he called back, then hurriedly ran out, almost colliding with several Slytherins who were passing on their way to class.

"Completely insufferable," Hermione hissed as she closed the wall to her private rooms and collected her notes for class.

In bad temper, she headed for her classroom.

Her students could count on a rough hour.

\* \* \*

"In her rooms?" Ron exclaimed in horror as Severus informed him and Harry why Dumbledore wanted to speak to him after breakfast. "What the hell is Dumbledore thinking? She's going to kill you, Severus."

"No she's not, Ron. Gods, she's a teacher. I'll be fine," Severus replied with a hint of exasperation.

"Fine dust," Ron said, his brows furrowed as he looked up at the dais where Professor Granger sat, looking more sour than usual as she ate her lunch. Harry stared at Severus.

"How long are you going to be down there?" he asked Severus, who gave him a little smirk.

"Well, at first I planned to do several brewings at once to speed up the time, but then I decided to space them out instead," the young wizard replied, spooning a bit of soup into his mouth.

Ron stopped chewing and looked at Severus as if this were the stupidest idea he had ever heard in his life.

"Why'd you change your mind, Sev? You should want to get out of there as soon as possible. The longer you stay down in the dungeons, the more likely you are to lose a body part," Ron said to him around a mouthful of chicken.

Severus looked at him.

"I want to make sure I do everything properly, Ron. Too many cauldrons spoil the brew," he replied sagely.

Harry frowned at him slightly. He didn't believe his friend for one moment. Severus wanted to stay down in the dungeons with Professor Granger. He was still trying to shag her.

"Severus, are you sure you know what you're doing?" Harry asked him, not wanting to say what he was thinking because Ron would have conniptions, most likely loud ones.

"Of course I know what I'm doing, Harry," Severus replied, looking toward Hermione for a moment. The longer he was down there, the more he could work on breaking her down. Yes, it might be a little risky, but the professor couldn't really harm him too badly. She'd get in a world of trouble with the Headmaster.

"It's your arse," Ron said, shaking his head slowly, then looking at Harry. "I still think we ought to get an owl out to his next of kin."

Harry laughed as Severus scowled at Ron.

"Shut up, Ron," he snapped.

From the dais, Hermione watched the trio, her brown eyes narrowed. By the furtive glances Harry and Ron had thrown her way, it was easy to tell that Severus had informed them of his change in lodgings. Soon it would be all over the school. From further down the table, Minerva McGonagall eyed the Potions mistress. She'd had a fit when Albus told her one of her Gryffindors would be in the Slytherin Head of House's care for several weeks.

"Albus, it's the perfect setup for Hermione to take an untold amount of house points from Gryffindor. She's bad enough when she just has classroom contact with my students. She's going to use him to put Slytherin ahead in gaining the House Cup," the witch complained.

"Now, now, Minerva. Hermione isn't that bad. As long as Severus conducts himself properly, you have nothing to worry about," he said to her placatingly.

Minerva harrumphed.

"She's taken points from students for breathing too hard, Albus," the witch said. "Besides, it is unseemly for a witch of thirty-six years to have an eighteen-year-old male student in her rooms. It's scandalous!"

Albus raised an eyebrow at Minerva.

"Are you suggesting that Professor Granger may have 'designs' on young Mr. Snape?" he asked the Transfiguration professor. "Professor Granger?"

Minerva fell silent for a moment. She knew, as did everyone else at Hogwarts, that Hermione did not indulge with any male and hadn't for a number of years. To think she would go after Severus, a young, inexperienced wizard, who was a Gryffindor no less, was absolutely ludicrous. Of course, it didn't cross her mind that Severus might go for the Potions mistress. In Minerva's eyes, all her students were 'innocents.' At least when it came to sex and older wizards and witches. She had no idea she had a young predator in her house. And Severus, despite his honest desire for Hermione, really was a predator and quite good at it for one so young.

"No, I suppose not," she said with a sigh. "I just don't like it, Albus."

"You'll like it fine when Gryffindor house gets the credit for producing the brightest Potions master in years," he replied reassuringly, patting her hand. "Young Severus will be a credit to us all."

Well, he might be a credit to the rest of Hogwarts, but to one Hermione Granger, he was a complete pain in the arse.

\* \* \*

An irritated Hermione snapped and snarled at her last Potions class. Most of the reason she was in such a bad mood was because of Severus, who sat staring at her with a look of pure, idiotic joy on his face. This was the last class of the day. Then . . . then he'd be in her quarters, alone with the witch of his dreams.

But the way Hermione was feeling, it was more than likely she would be the witch that nightmares were made of. He was totally oblivious to her scowl, and she meanly assigned the class a four-foot essay due tomorrow because she felt so . . . impotent.

There was no way out of this situation.

Severus made it even worse by flicking his eyes toward the clock every thirty seconds or so, as if willing time to speed up. This irritated Hermione even more.

Finally, the class ended, and Severus was one of the first out of the door.

Curious students on their way to the Great Hall watched as the Gryffindor let himself into the empty Potions office. The wards had been set to his signature so he could take them down at will.

"What's Snape doing?" Goyle said to Draco as Severus slipped through the door and closed it.

"It looks like committing suicide," Draco said. "Come on, let's tell Granger and help him along."

Draco and Goyle hurried back to the Potions class and found Hermione gathering paperwork together. Draco knocked on the doorsill, and the witch looked up with narrowed eyes.

"What is it, Mr. Malfoy?" she demanded, still in a foul mood.

"I thought I should tell you that Severus Snape just broke into your office," Draco said, hiding a delighted grin as the witch turned red as a salamander.

"He did? Why that little ba..." Hermione growled, then caught herself, remembering students were present.

"Thank you, Mr. Malfoy. Five points to Slytherin," she said, hurrying through the short corridor that led to her office.

"Snape's dead," Draco grinned to Goyle, who looked at him with a big ape-like smile. The two Slytherins left, trotting up the hall and stopping to listen at the Potions office door.

They didn't hear any blasts or cries for mercy.

"Damn. I bet he left before she got there," Draco muttered, disappointed. "Come on, Goyle. Let's go to supper."

The two young wizards headed up the corridor, Draco in the lead and Goyle lumbering behind him.

Damn. The pureblood really wanted to see Snape get fried.

\* \* \*

Hermione rushed into the office, ready to browbeat, but Severus wasn't there. Scowling, Hermione let herself into her quarters and froze as she saw Severus sitting in one of the two armchairs in front of the fireplace, which was lit, in what looked like black silk pajama bottoms and . . . and was that a smoking jacket?

He was eating a ham sandwich and looking very much at home, his Advanced Potions book resting on the small table next to a plate and a glass of Pumpkin juice.

Hermione stalked up to him, billowing around the chair, her arms full of parchments.

"What," she hissed, "do you think you're doing?"

Severus looked up at the witch, put the sandwich down, swallowed what he was eating and gave her a disarming smile.

"I'm relaxing after a hard day of classes," the wizard replied, stretching a little and wriggling his toes luxuriously in the black fuzzy slippers he wore. "I always do this."

"I'm sure," Hermione snorted, eyeing his attire.

She walked over to her desk calmly, put her paperwork down, calmly drew her wand, turned and blasted the Pumpkin juice, plate and sandwich to dust before setting Severus' fluffy slippers on fire.

Severus yelped and jumped out of the armchair, kicking his flaming footwear into the hearth.

"Hey! Why'd you do that?" he said to the witch, still shaking his hot bare feet as if some residual fire clung to them.

"This . . ." Hermione hissed, "is my study. Mine. My territory. My domain. That . . ." Hermione pointed to the doorway on the right that led to his room, ". . . is also mine, but you are temporarily infringing on my domain like a creeping, unwanted Gryffindor weed. You will sequester yourself in that room during your time here unless I give you permission to be in my study. And there will be NO eating in here, period. You'll attract magical roaches, and they're next to impossible to remove once they've set in," she snapped at him.

Snape just blinked at her, his eyes focused on her lips. It was as if he hadn't heard a word she'd said. She had turned him on by yelling at him and setting him on fire . . . magically. It only took a little kindling to get his libido in gear.

Hermione rolled her eyes at his look.

Merlin's Dangling Dingleberries. How was she ever going to stand this?

"Earth to Severus. Did you hear me?" she snapped at him.

"Ah, yeah. No eating down here," he said softly.

"And no being in my study without permission," she added darkly. "Besides, you should be in the labs brewing, not lounging about stuffing your maw. Now get out of here and get started on the Polyjuice Potion!"

"Yes, Professor," he said, walking slowly towards her rather than his room.

Hermione's wand hand twitched noticeably.

"I suggest you make a change in direction if you don't want your feet set on fire this time," the witch said dangerously.

Severus stopped and looked at her. Then, with an annoying smirk, he did change direction and walked into his room, leaving the door open as he pulled off his specially Transfigured smoking jacket, baring his strong torso, and then looking toward the witch, who flicked her wand at the door, slamming it shut.

"The nerve," she spat, Scourgifying the dust left behind from his meal.

Presently, Snape exited his room, dressed properly in student robes.

"I'm going now," he announced to Hermione, who was sitting at her desk and marking parchments.

"I'd prefer you gone," she replied without looking up.

Severus smirked again and exited the study.

As soon as the wall slid down, Hermione put down her quill, sat back and rubbed her eyes.

She still had to deal with tonight. She knew she had laid out the rules for the young Gryffindor, but she knew with certainty that despite him being Head Boy, he didn't have much regard for rules.

\* \* \*

Hermione was still sitting at her desk when she heard the wall slide up. What? It took at least three hours to prepare the ingredients for Polyjuice Potion and get it started. Scowling, she looked at the open wall. At first she saw no one.

She drew her wand.

"There's no way you could have finished prepping the brew this quickly. Preparing the ingredients requires the normal amount of time, even if you have managed to speed up the brewing time," she snarled, "so I suggest you go back to the lab."

Suddenly, a form stepped through the door.

It wasn't Severus.

It was another wizard, a very unwelcome one.

"Hermione," Lucius Malfoy purred, looking as debonair and handsome as ever, his blond hair falling over his shoulders, dressed in immaculate green dress robes, the ever-present, silver-tipped cane in his hand. He smiled at the witch, a dimple appearing in one cheek.

"Lucius, what are you doing here?" Hermione demanded, her face black.

"Now, now, Hermione. Is that any way to talk to your savior? To the man who saved your life . . . to the man you owe a Life Debt?" the wizard purred, entering the study.

He had been here many times before Albus Dumbledore's purported death, which was why he could get through her office and into her quarters. This was the first time he'd been here in more than a year, and Hermione hadn't thought to remove his signature since his advances had ceased.

"I don't owe you anything, Lucius. That debt was cleared when I saved Draco's soul from being fragmented," she hissed at him. "Now, leave my quarters."

Lucius simply smiled at her, although he stopped advancing.

"I'm afraid you're wrong, Hermione. It was Narcissa who bound you to the blood oath to keep Draco safe, not me. You still owe me," he breathed.

"But Draco is your son too," Hermione said sharply. "I did both of you a service by saving your only heir, Lucius. I owe you nothing and will give you nothing!"

Lucius studied her, waiting . . . waiting for the witch to be subjected to the pull of the debt. She would be compelled. But to his chagrin, nothing happened.

Hermione had been waiting too. Anytime Lucius came to her, she was driven to allow herself to be subjected to his desires. It was the price she had paid when he had convinced the Dark Lord to let her live after she did not show up at the graveyard when he was resurrected. Lucius had convinced her she had been loyal, and Voldemort had Crucio'd the pureblood severely for interfering, but allowed Hermione to live. She owed Lucius her life, and the wizard had taken full advantage of it until she had "killed" Dumbledore and informed him her debt to him was paid.

He hadn't taken this well. He had enjoyed his engagements with Hermione because she didn't want him. She had never wanted him. And that was what made her so desirable, her hatred of him. Lucius got off on that. And missed it.

Hermione gave him a rather nasty but victorious smile.

"I'm not compelled, Lucius . . . so leave. That's proof my debt to you is repaid," she said.

Lucius began to twirl his cane, his gray eyes resting on her.

"You know you miss me, Hermione. How about one more dip of my wand for old time's sake?" he purred at her.

"I don't miss anything about you, Lucius. You're selfish, cruel, and manipulative. A decent wizard wouldn't have made me do the things you did. A decent wizard would have saved me because it was the noble thing to do," she spat at him.

"Just because I am a noble doesn't mean I am noble," the blond wizard said, his eyes darkening. Suddenly, he pointed his cane at her.

"*Imperio!*" he hissed, catching Hermione by surprise with the spell.

Lucius suspected she might not cooperate, and so was prepared. He had inserted his wand into his walking cane, hoping to catch her off-guard.

And he did.

Hermione stood there, unable to move, her wand extended and brown eyes shifting wildly as Lucius walked up to her.



"Put your wand on your desk and come to me," he said to her with deceptive softness.

Hermione's arm moved jerkily as she dropped the wand on her desk, then twitchily walked around it toward Lucius, stopping about two feet away. Her eyes were glistening.

Not again. She thought she was free of him. Free of this.

Lucius slid his hand over her cheek slowly, studying her face, her eyes as tears helplessly slid from the corners.

He smiled.

"You know, Hermione. I've missed you greatly. Yes, yes, I know I have plenty of women to fuck, willing women . . . all shapes and sizes, willing to do whatever I wish because I am so . . . desirable."

Lucius began to walk around Hermione, his hands clasped behind his back, his cane resting between his shoulder blades. He leaned over her shoulder and pulled her hair back, his lips close to her ear.

"It's terribly boring, sticking my cock in witches who want it. There are no more revels to suit my darker tastes. I did have you for a short while, Hermione, and you were just as delightful as any terrified Muggle bitch, particularly since I didn't have to murder you when I was finished. You hate my touch . . ."

Lucius licked her ear, and Hermione shuddered inwardly.

"My wealth, looks and breeding mean nothing to you . . . In fact . . . you've always given me the impression you think yourself better than me in some way. That is why I enjoy fucking you . . . I know it turns your very soul cold," he breathed, pulling away from her ear and walking back around her. "Every stroke I give you humiliates and disgusts you. Such a turn-on to know you are so helpless against me. That you hate me so. Anytime you groan my name, it is a groan of anguish . . . not pleasure. Every gasp is one of shame, degradation and loss. I take from you every time I touch you. So appealing."

Lucius reached around her, running his hand up her spine.

"I particularly miss the Tree, the raised marks of your treachery. To think, you actually deserved them," he said softly, "you traitorous whore."

Hermione wanted to hiss that Narcissa was also a traitor. She had pretended Harry was dead when he wasn't, and that was how he had gotten to Voldemort. But that didn't matter to Lucius. His wife had been trying to save their son, and Harry was the only way she knew Draco would have a chance. She had acted on behalf of his offspring.

"I was hoping against hope that the Life Debt would compel you to me, but I came prepared just in case it didn't. As I said, I've missed our times together. If this is to be the last time, it will be the best time," he said with a bit of a growl. "But don't worry. You won't remember. There's no way I intend to let you finger me for rape, Hermione, though I'll consider this closure. A well-placed Obliviate will take care of any . . . possible unpleasanties, though I'm sure you're going to wonder what happened to leave you so sore and bruised with the taste of come in your mouth. A mystery you'll just have to live with."

Lucius turned and warded the wall, cast a Silencing Charm, then walked over to the desk and retrieved Hermione's wand, sticking it in his pocket. He pointed his cane at the now defenseless witch.

"This wouldn't be nearly as fun with you under the Imperio," he breathed, releasing her.

Hermione was no match for Lucius hand to hand. She knew it from earlier encounters. He had no problem punching her in the face or jaw or ribs.

He wouldn't now.

"I hate you, Lucius Malfoy," she hissed at him as the wizard began to unbutton his robes with one hand, keeping a good grip on his cane as the witch came back to herself.

"I know, Hermione. I know," he replied with a lascivious smile, waiting for the witch to run.

She always ran. It was fruitless, but she did it anyway.

Hermione didn't disappoint him.

\* \* \*

Severus returned to the Potions mistress' rooms an hour and a half later, a broad smile on his face. He had started the brewing. He needed to study and planned to persuade Hermione to let him use her study because it was brighter in there.

Or something. He'd figure it out.

The moment the wall slid up, he saw something was wrong. Both armchairs were tipped over, the small table between them smashed, parchments, quills and bottles of ink were scattered all over.

"Professor! Professor!" the young wizard cried, running into the study and looking around frantically.

"Professor Granger!" he yelled, running into the bedroom.

He stopped just inside the door, horrified by the sight that met him. The bedroom was also in a shambles, the wardrobe overturned, the mirror over the dresser broken, the nightstand lying against the far wall. But that wasn't the most terrible sight that greeted him.

Hermione lay in the bed nude, her body black and blue, covered in scratches and what looked like bites. Her thighs lay gaped, wet and bruised, and the young wizard could scent sex in the air. Her clothing lay ripped and torn on the floor beside the bed.

Severus ran over to her, staring down at her swollen face, the dried blood encrusted in her hair, his heart pounding as he stared at her, afraid to touch her, his black eyes taking in her sad condition. It didn't look as if she were breathing. Oh gods.

"Professor," he said brokenly, believing her to be dead. She was so still. His eyes welled up.

"Oh, gods, who did this to you?" he said softly. "Who would do this to anyone?"

Suddenly, Hermione groaned and shifted. Severus dropped to his knees on the side of the bed as she partially opened her swollen eyes. They were glazed with pain as they shifted towards him. Her mouth moved.

Thank Merlin she wasn't dead. Severus felt he could breathe again, at least a little.

The young wizard folded part of the rumpled sheet over her battered body and leaned toward her.

"Professor, I'm going to go get help," he said to her softly.

Hermione's swollen lips moved. She said something, but he couldn't hear her, and her lips were flecked with blood.

He leaned closer.

"No," Hermione whispered, "Healing . . . Pain potion."

"But . . . but there's no way a simple Healing potion can take care of this, Professor. I need to get Poppy and Dumbledore!" Severus said desperately.

"Get . . . me . . . blasted . . . idiot," she gasped, her pain-filled eyes angry now. He had to listen to her. She knew what she needed.

"All right. I'll get them," Severus said. "Wait here."

Even through her agony, Hermione let out a snort as Severus sprinted out of the bedroom. Where the hell was she going to go?

She lay there aching, not knowing who did this to her, but every orifice burned. She stunk of sex and could taste semen in her mouth. She'd been raped, then most likely Obliviated. If Severus went for help, then he would be the prime suspect. She didn't believe him capable of such an act, not when he had worked so hard at trying to seduce her.

On the floor lay the black and blue rose, still in the flush of life despite being without water, no sign of blight on its petals.

She needed to get to Spinner's End. There, she had stronger brews to heal herself. After she recovered, she'd set about trying to find out who did this to her. She didn't want anyone to know what had happened. It would just add more difficulty to her life.

Severus came in with an armload of potions. Not only Healing and Pain potions, but Pepper-Up and Stamina potions as well. He put them on the nightstand, then gently slid onto the bed, lifting Hermione partially up and resting her against him, his eyes drifting over her bruises, a murderous feeling swelling inside him.

He'd kill whoever did this to her.

He carefully uncapped one of the Pain potions and slowly fed it to her, tilting the bottle carefully against her bruised lips. Hermione let out a sigh.

"Another," she whispered, and Severus obliged her. Then he fed her the Healing potion, followed by the Stamina potion and a few sips of Pepper-Up.

Hermione now sat on the edge of the bed, the sheets gathered around her body, bite marks on her shoulders.

"I need to report what happened," Severus said quietly. "There has to be an investigation."

"You'll be the one investigated," she said weakly, turning her swollen face toward him. "We need to go to Spinner's End. I have stronger brews there, brews I took when I served the Dark Lord and returned broken and tortured. I've been through this before, Severus. Worse than this. Go find my wand. I need it to Apparate."

Severus looked at her with raised brows.

Did she say Apparate? No one was supposed to be able to Apparate on the grounds of Hogwarts. But Albus had arranged for Hermione to do so, because of the dismal condition she would be in most of the time when she returned from Voldemort. She kept the ability a secret. She wouldn't have revealed it to the Gryffindor if she didn't have to.

Severus hurried back into the study and found her wand on the floor near her desk and returned it to her. Then he took off his robes and helped her up, his black eyes both tender and angry as he gently placed them over her shoulders, buttoning them.

As he did so, he noticed a hank of hair on the bed. It was long and blond. As Hermione finished buttoning the robes, he discreetly grabbed the hair and pocketed it. It had to belong to whoever had done this to her. He knew several spells that could reveal who the hair belonged to . . . and when he found out . . .

The wizard felt hot, searing hatred boil over him.

Someone was going to die.

"Hold on to me," Hermione suddenly breathed.

Severus started, then took hold of her arm gently. Very gently.

With a crack of thunder, they Disapparated.

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A/N: My, this took a rather dark turn, didn't it? And it will get a bit darker before it gets better. Severus isn't going to let this pass. I'm hoping I translated Hermione's horror well. No glorifying it here. I know there are some people into rape fantasy (I admit, I get into it once in a while.), but this isn't one of those situations. What exactly happened will be revealed in the next chapter, but not in a way remotely arousing. At least, not to me. Anyway, thanks for reading.

## A Reckoning

*Chapter 6 of 6*

Severus and a battered Hermione visit Spinners End. The Gryffindor discovers her assailant's identity and sets about his plans to avenge her.

### Chapter 6 ~ A Reckoning

Severus and Hermione reappeared in one of the most depressing, rubbish-strewn areas the young wizard had ever seen. It was night, but Severus had a feeling that even in the bright light of day, all would be colorless and dull.

Rows of close, dilapidated brick houses stood side by side, bordering the cobblestone street. They were small, disheveled, obviously the former abode of mill workers, and extended back from the street in almost identical straight rows. Most of the sad little buildings were boarded up and abandoned. Bits of trash caught by the wind slid across the landscape as if alive and seeking shelter, places of rest. A tall chimney towered in the distance, moonlight causing it to stand out in relief against the dark, grayish sky.

It was black and cold-looking, as if it hadn't seen heat for many, many years.

A river ran along the other side of the street, bordered by a railing, a flat, thin path following its undulations, serving as a middle ground between the stinking waters and steep banks overgrown with weeds and splattered with garbage.

Was this where the professor lived? No wonder she was so hard, so cold. How could it be otherwise, surrounded by . . . by this? It was terrible, depressing and bleak.

"Come on," Hermione said weakly, still holding onto Severus for support and walking toward the end of the street.

A cat yowled, then hissed. Then a dog barked furiously, giving the impression that even the animals in this place were angry and sullen.

A breeze from the river lifted the couple's hair as they walked slowly, Severus careful to keep a gentle hold on the injured witch. He noticed as they walked that most of the abandoned houses were attached . . . terraced with a small alley between them. And they also seemed to be connected to the homes behind them. Back-to-backs.

There were no front gardens on any of the houses. They opened straight onto the pavement. The air was ripe with the smell of spoilage, organic, the decomposition of something that had once lived. They approached a house at the end of the row, the very last one. It too was tiny, but unlike the others, it wasn't connected and had a bit of space around it. Beyond the house stretched dead barren earth, possibly a former building site, or with its slightly crater-like depression, maybe even a bomb-site.

Hermione pulled out her wand and murmured a complicated incantation, then opened the door. All was blackness inside, and the air was close, stale and cloying. Severus could smell old leather as he stepped inside.

Hermione flicked her wand, and a small candle lamp hanging from the ceiling lit up, casting a rather inadequate light. Severus blinked. They were in a very small sitting room, the walls covered in black and brown leather-bound books, and a ratty sofa, armchair and table clustered beneath the flickering light.

Hermione lived in a "two-up-two-down" style home, which meant there were two rooms on two floors. She didn't have indoor plumbing and used a communal lavatory when home, and her water came from a pump outside.

No wonder she stayed in the dungeons at Hogwarts. They were palatial compared to this cramped, sad dwelling.

"Help me to my chair," she said to Severus, who eased her over to the armchair, eyeing the uncomfortable looking lumps in the cushion before helping her down. Why didn't she move? This was awful.

Hermione looked up at him, the bruises on her face darkening now. She tried to smirk, but winced. She was stiffening up now.

"My ancestral home, courtesy of my Muggle father," she said softly. "My mum married a real prince."

Severus said nothing. Her father must not have been much of a provider to raise her in a place like this.

"All the grandeur has you at a loss for words, I see," Hermione lisped. "Well, don't get comfortable. In the kitchen, you'll find a large wooden tub with a bucket next to it. Take the bucket outside to the pump and use it to fill the tub."

Severus' large nose wrinkled. Surely she wasn't going to actually bathe in the water that came from the grounds here? It had to be filthy, judging by the river's scent. He looked at her hesitantly.

"Well, go," Hermione groused, leaning her head back in the chair and closing her eyes. Her aches were coming back. She needed to treat herself.

Severus walked into the tiny kitchen. There was a gas stove, a tiny table, tinier cooler and cupboards. Pots hung on the wall. A large wooden tub sat beside a wall. He dragged it to the center of the floor and looked at the bucket before drawing his wand. There was no way he was going to let the professor soak in filth. He pointed his wand at the tub.

"*Aquis*," he said softly, water shooting from the tip of his wand, slowly filling the tub.

In the sitting room, Hermione heard the sound of flowing water and grunted approvingly.

At least he wasn't a complete idiot.

\* \* \*

Half an hour later, Hermione was soaking in the tub, a medicinal smell filling the kitchen as the herbs and potions she had Severus add to the water did their work. Severus sat at the small kitchen table, his dark eyes resting on the witch, who appeared to have fallen asleep. His job was to keep the water warm and not let it cool or the ingredients would cease to work.

Her bruises were lightening, however, and the swelling of her face was greatly reduced. Severus stared at her as her words came back to him.

"I've been through this before, Severus. Worse than this."

The young wizard looked upon the witch of his desires and got a very cold feeling inside. Hermione had been through this before, and by the cool way she'd handled it . . . without raging or falling apart, showed him she was used to being mistreated and abused by men, used to being used by them to slake their own desires without a thought as to how she felt.

He blinked at her . . . then the guilt set in.

He had used her too. No, he hadn't beaten her, but he had forced her . . . it wasn't planned, but still she had been unwilling to engage him and did so under duress. For Severus, it had been the pursuit and fulfillment of a fantasy, but now . . . now it was something so much worse. Now he was manipulating her, wanting sexual favors if he proved his brewing techniques viable. He knew they worked, and she had taken an oath that she would "keep him company" if he were successful. He would be successful.

In essence, he was raping her too, only in a way that seemed more "acceptable." If it wasn't exactly rape, it was definitely coercion.

Gods, what had he done? What could he do to fix this? He had to fix this, to make it up to the witch in some way. He had been a cad, worse than a cad. He had used Hermione just as much as any other man she came into contact with.

Severus realized something else as well. She said she had been a celibate for years. But that wasn't true. It couldn't be if she were engaging in sex.

The wizard's brow furrowed.

No. That wasn't correct. She'd been forced to have sex; that wasn't the same thing. She was celibate because she didn't willingly take lovers or have a relationship with a man. If she had her choice, she wouldn't have sex with anyone. And who could blame her?

And here he was, trying to force her into a short-term sexual relationship with him.

There was only one thing he could do. Release her from that portion of the oath. She wouldn't have to sleep with him. He still wanted to talk with her and learn from her, but

he didn't want to force her into doing something she didn't want to do.

Severus really was a Gryffindor at heart.

Then there was the matter of the man who had raped her.

Severus pointed his wand at the tub and heated the water around the witch. She didn't stir. He placed his wand on the table, partially stood up and retrieved the blond hairs from his pocket, studying them with a frown.

They were very long, like a witch's hair. Could a witch have done this? No. He didn't think so, though there were a number of rather aggressive lesbians at the school. But he doubted any one of them would go for the professor.

"What is that?" Hermione's voice suddenly said.

Severus started, reflexively dropping his hand in an effort to hide what he had. Hermione's eyes narrowed. She felt much better now, and better meant she was back to her snarky self, not that she ever stopped being snarky, even when in pain. She stuck her hand out, shaking the water off of it before turning it palm upward.

"Give it here, Mr. Snape," she said, using her formal teacher voice and address.

Severus reluctantly handed Hermione the hairs.

"I found those in the bed. I was going to cast a spell to find out who they belong to," he said softly, "then we'll learn who did this and make him pay."

Hermione stretched the long, blond strands out, her jaw clenching.

"There's no need for a spell, Severus," she said darkly. "I already know who this hair belongs to. I know who raped me."

Severus' heart began to pound, and his face contorted murderously at this bit of news.

"Who?" he hissed with such vehemence Hermione's brown eyes turned on him, her mouth quirking unpleasantly.

"Oh, don't tell me you plan to avenge me? Dear gods, boy. That's all I need, you running off and getting yourself killed because of this. The very idea is ludicrous," she said to him disdainfully. "I swear, Gryffindors make my ass itch."

"But . . . but you were raped! Beaten! Professor, if I hadn't found you, you would have died! Whoever did this should be punished! Killed!" the wizard said angrily.

Hermione snorted.

"I wouldn't have died. I would have just been in bad shape until I made it here," Hermione told him. "It just so happened I had you to help me. It would have taken much longer without you to help me walk, fill the tub and retrieve the ingredients. But I would have survived . . ."

Here the witch's voice dropped to a near whisper.

"I always do," she said softly, her eyes becoming vulnerable for a moment.

Severus stared at her, unable to believe what he was hearing.

"You mean, you aren't going to do anything about this? Professor, that's madness! You've been assaulted, violated. Someone has to pay. Tell me who did it!" Severus demanded.

"No," she said calmly, "I won't tell you, Severus. It doesn't matter anyway. I doubt he will come back."

"You can't possibly know that. Whoever it was obviously Obliviated you! He could do it again if he gets the opportunity," Severus said, his black eyes hard.

"He won't," Hermione said with certainty.

"I want to know who it is, Professor," the wizard insisted. "What he did to you was wrong! You sound like you . . . you deserved it or something. No one deserves that."

Hermione looked at the young wizard consideringly. He was so passionate about everything. It was a bit annoying, really.

"You know nothing about me, Severus Snape," she said to him. "Nothing other than I was a spy for the Order, teach Potions and have a tree on my back because of my service. You think what happened to me terrible?"

She let out a little bitter laugh.

"It was nothing. Nothing compared to what I've been through, things that I still remember, things I have nightmares about. It was one man, Severus, one man who took what he wanted, then Obliviated me afterwards so I wouldn't have to remember the pain or the terror. In my case, that's an outright act of mercy."

Severus blinked at her. It was easy to see he still disagreed with the way she was handling this. Well, maybe some cold, hard facts would set him to rights.

"You have no idea what it was to be a Mudblood witch among the Death Eaters," she said coldly. "I was often given as a reward to groups of men at a time . . . and after I was tortured, my torturer was given leave to do what he wanted to me. All Voldemort ever told them was 'Don't kill her.' I could be raped, sodomized, beaten, kicked, cut, pissed upon, spit upon, covered in come . . . whatever they wanted to do to me, they'd do. Then I had to come back, take care of myself and give the Order what little information I had gleaned before I returned to Voldemort again. I've seen more cocks than a chicken farmer . . . and it was all done for the 'Greater Good.' I became used to it, Severus. Pain, humiliation and agony was the whole of my life for a long, long time . . . now bitterness and resignation."

Severus looked at her helplessly. Damn, what a horror her life had been . . .

"But . . . but . . ." he protested, but Hermione held up her hand and stopped him.

"What you have to see, Severus, is that I've only received a small dose of the past tonight, and I'm grateful for that because I know how much worse it could have been. It makes no sense for you to want to charge in and try to right the wrongs done to me. There's no way you can do it, Severus. Life goes on despite its unfairness. I've learned to live with it."

"But you shouldn't have to! You're no longer in service to anyone! No one should be able to just . . . just use your body without you wanting them to . . ."

Hermione's brown eyes rested on Severus coolly.

"Is that so, Severus?" she asked him in a mocking voice. "That's quite humorous coming from you, considering our situation."

Now, Hermione was quite aware that Severus was nothing like the predators that she'd dealt with most of her adult life, but she couldn't help tormenting the impressionable young wizard. Old habits were hard to break, and inside, she was miserable. As has been said before, misery loves company.

Severus' eyes became rather wet-looking.

"I . . . never meant to take advantage of you, Professor," he said, feeling nauseous. "I . . . I was just attracted to you . . . You were all I could think about. I just wanted . . ."

"I know what you wanted, and you got it, didn't you? Don't begrudge my rapist who did the same," she hissed cruelly. "And with you, it isn't over. You still want more, my feelings be damned. At least he took what he wanted and left."

It was as if she'd plunged a knife into the Gryffindor's heart.

"I release you!" Severus gasped, tears starting to fall from his eyes, surprising the witch. "I release you from your oath, Professor. You don't have to let me touch you ever again! I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

Severus dropped his head, covering his face with his hand and sobbing.

Hermione stared at him as she felt the swirl of magic that signified the conditions of the oath lifting.

"Oh, good gods," she sighed, slipping under the warm water surrounding her as Severus' shoulders shuddered uncontrollably.

Now she had gone from having a randy Gryffindor occupying her rooms to a contrite, morose and guilt-laden Gryffindor occupying her rooms . . .

. . . which was infinitely worse.

\* \* \*

Hermione and a very contrite, silent Severus returned to Hogwarts, the Potion mistress showing no visible signs of her attack. Severus did attempt to make her at least take off one day from class, but she declined.

"As I told you, Severus, I'm used to this," she told him sharply.

He shut up and stayed that way until they made it back to the castle. His dark eyes looked around Hermione's ruined bedroom, his heart tight in his chest as he imagined the unnamed wizard attacking her and throwing her about.

No matter what the witch said, he still had murder in his heart.

"Go and check on the brewing, then go to bed," Hermione said to the young wizard. "I'll clean up."

Severus gave her a rather sad look, then left, saying nothing.

Hermione sighed again. She hoped he wouldn't be this way for the entire duration. It would be worse than fighting him off, which she kind of enjoyed in a twisted way. Despite her coldness toward men in general, Severus' attraction to her was something different . . . something other than pure lust. She knew that, and every woman liked to be thought of as desirable as long as that desire was a natural one. Even if they wouldn't admit it.

Still, she had been cruel to say what she had to him. He was young, inexperienced and hadn't meant to be controlling. He only wanted what he wanted. And he would never attempt to actually force himself on her . . . well, other than stealing a kiss. That was more of a testament to his courage than him being abusive. He knew to run when he was successful, not push forward.

Hermione sighed as she used her wand to put everything back in order. The last thing she did was pick up the rose. It had been still vibrant and strong earlier that day. She studied it, her eyes becoming just a tad wet.

For the first time since Severus produced it for her, the flower showed signs of wilting.

Now, Severus didn't actually create the rose from scratch. More than likely he had charmed it while still on the vine and conjured it at the proper time. It was impossible to create life magically. But what he had done was alter the flower and connected himself to it emotionally, giving it part of his life to sustain it. Part of his soul. Still an impressive bit of magic. The rose was a barometer as to how he felt towards the Potions mistress, what was in his heart.

Now it was fading. Most likely his guilt was making this happen.

Hermione let out another sigh. Gryffindors and guilt went together like dragons and dragonsbreath. Hopefully he would bounce back. If he didn't, maybe he'd at least hold it in so she wouldn't have to deal with it. She had enough on her mind.

Damn Lucius. She should have known he wouldn't just let her go without a last, horrible bout of abuse. But so much had gone on, and he had seemed accepting. Severus had a point. He could come back.

The witch cleaned up the study and then removed Lucius' signature from both the study wall and the Potions office. He wouldn't be able to lower her wards any longer, and she doubted he would make another effort to have at her without someplace private to assault her.

At last, it was over.

\* \* \*

Severus returned just as Hermione was repairing the small table between the armchairs. He looked at Potions mistress, who scowled at him. There was none of the usual heat in his eyes, and he gave off a defeated air.

"The brewing is fine, Professor. I'm going to bed now," he said softly, then turned and entered his bedroom, closing the door behind him quietly.

If he had planned on testing the waters tonight, those plans had been tossed, most likely permanently. Hermione stared at the closed door for a moment, then retired herself.

In his room, Severus put his wand on the nightstand and slowly unbuttoned and removed his shirt. Then he checked his trouser pockets as he always did before taking them off. He felt around in his pockets, then stiffened.

Slowly, he drew out one long blond hair. There had been quite a hank of it, so he hadn't gotten it all.

Still dressed only in his trousers, the wizard sat down on the bed, laid the strand carefully on his nightstand and picked up his wand. He pointed it at the hair.

"*Ostendo Alio*," he breathed.

Severus watched as a fine mist rose from the hair, spreading over it, then coalesced, forming a ghostly, but familiar face.

"The bastard!" Severus hissed as he stared at the likeness of Lucius Malfoy, Draco's father.

The image faded, and Severus sat on the side of the bed, the expression on his face terrible. Draco's father had raped Professor Granger. It was hard to believe that

someone as prominent and well-known as Lucius would commit such a terrible act.

But then again, the pureblood probably thought himself above the law. He was rich, charismatic and well-known. He had even managed to fudge the truth about his service to the Dark Lord and time in Azkaban, saying he'd only served the vile wizard because his family had been in danger and Voldemort promised to wipe out his entire line if he failed to obey him. Narcissa helping Harry also had helped to clear their family name.

But what he'd done to Professor Granger proved he was indeed a cruel monster.

He had to pay for it.

If Severus punished him, then he could make up for at least part of what he'd done to the witch.

Or that was what the boy first thought.

Then logic set in. If he killed Lucius Malfoy and was found out, he'd spend the rest of his life in Azkaban. It would be satisfying to see the wizard dead, but then his entire life would be ruined. He might as well kill himself since his life would be over.

Severus considered.

Yes, it would be better if Lucius was arrested, charged with rape and publicly stood trial for his crime against the witch, then locked up in Azkaban disgraced and found out. Knowing the bastard would be behind bars for years, maybe even the rest of his life, would be better than killing him. Then he could think about what he'd done and what it cost him.

Yes, that made sense. Severus removed his boots and socks, then stood up and removed his trousers and boxers. He climbed into bed, covering up, his arms curled behind his head as he looked up at the ceiling.

He'd go to Dumbledore tomorrow and tell him all he knew. The old wizard would advise him how to go about this.

\* \* \*

Dumbledore's face was solemn as the ghostly face of Lucius Malfoy faded before him. His blue eyes were rather hard as they shifted toward Severus. He drummed his fingers on his desk consideringly for a moment. Fawkes let out a trill from his perch.

Severus, seated in a plush armchair in the Headmaster's office, waited anxiously for his response. After a moment, Albus spoke.

"Lucius Malfoy has always been of the lowest moral character," Albus said angrily, "so it doesn't surprise me he would commit such a crime against a witch he wanted. But . . . I must ask you, Severus, what does Professor Granger say about this?"

Severus' mouth turned down.

"She doesn't want to do anything about it, Headmaster. She says he won't come back and it's over, basically," Severus said, then added, "but he can't be allowed to get away with this!"

Dumbledore studied the young wizard. He knew how he felt, but it was up to Hermione to press charges against Lucius. If Severus went forward, the witch would most likely deny anything had happened at all, and then Lucius would go after the boy for attempting to "slander" him. Sadly, he addressed this possibility.

"Severus, this is hard to say, but I must say it. Stay out of it. If Professor Granger doesn't want to pursue this matter any further, her wishes should be respected," the Headmaster said to the Gryffindor, who looked at him incredulously.

"What do you mean, Headmaster? The only reason she's accepting this is because she's been mistreated all her life and feels powerless to do anything about it. She's . . . she's not thinking correctly. If Malfoy is punished, she'll get some closure. She's holding all of it in . . . feeling no one can help her. I want to help her," Severus said, his black eyes staring at the Headmaster, willing him to see things as he did.

"Severus, if you go to the Ministry with this charge, the professor can and probably will say nothing happened at all. If there is no victim, there can be no crime," Albus said gently.

"But . . . but I have his hair! How could I have gotten that?" Severus said, stretching out the hated blond strand.

"You could have acquired it from anyplace, Severus. At least, that's what his lawyers will say, and believe me, Lucius will have the very best lawyers to represent him even if Professor Granger pressed charges. And they will dig up every possible bit of her past they can in an effort to discredit her. I believe . . . I believe she and Lucius have a history. He used to visit her occasionally in the dungeons while she served the Order. I'm quite sure that will be brought up as well, that they had had an intimate relationship. Since Lucius is married, that would put Professor Granger in a bad light. It might even result in getting her sacked by the Board of Governors for her behavior. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

Severus stared at the Headmaster. He hadn't known about that. So, Professor Granger used to shag Lucius Malfoy. He thought she was celibate. How could she be celibate when she willingly slept with the pureblood? She was . . . his mistress at one time.

Still, even if that were true . . . she was still raped and beaten by him. The past has nothing to do with the present. Still, the Headmaster was right. If she wouldn't say she had been assaulted, nothing could be done. Severus knew she wouldn't. She wouldn't want her past to get out, even if she were a victim. No one would understand why she just hadn't left if she were so mistreated. More than likely, they would paint her as some kind of sexual deviant who enjoyed pain. Maybe they would even turn it around on her, saying he had abused her because that was what she liked. Then there was the possibility she could lose her job for being involved with a married man and seeing him on school grounds.

Severus sighed and shook his head.

"It's not fair," he said sullenly, defeated.

Albus looked at him kindly.

"Much in this life isn't fair, Severus. You know this firsthand from when Voldemort was in power. All we can do is choose our battles and make the best of it. In this case, my boy, I'm afraid the battle you wish to launch is already over. You have no army behind you," the wizard said gently. "I suggest you focus on your brewing and leave Professor Granger to deal with her demons. It's all any of us can do."

Severus looked at the wizard, his heart feeling heavy, like a boulder in his chest as he realized most likely that was what he would have to do.

\* \* \*

Severus checked on his brewing, then returned to the Potions mistress' quarters. Hermione had noticed he wasn't at supper. She looked up at him as he entered through the wall. She was marking essays. They were all quite dismal.

"Where have you been, Severus?" she inquired of the young wizard.

"I went to see the Headmaster concerning a private matter," he responded. "I checked on the Polyjuice Potion. It should be ready in another five days. I'm going to go study now."

Hermione watched as the wizard entered his bedroom, closing the door behind him.

Well, at least he wasn't drooping all over, aggravating her with his remorse.

She returned to her paperwork.

\* \* \*

In his room, Severus angrily paced back and forth. He still couldn't get past what Lucius had done to Hermione. She was the first witch he'd ever been intimate with, who ever connected with him. It had been wonderful. She had been wonderful. How could he let anyone mistreat her after what she'd done for him? Yes, he had manipulated her, but he knew that she had liked what he'd done to her. He wasn't trying to hurt her, but bring her pleasure, and he had done it.

Even if she didn't want him, he couldn't let Lucius get away with abusing her, beating her. He couldn't pretend it hadn't happened. Professor Granger might be able to push her rape out of her mind, but he couldn't.

And he wouldn't.

He'd find a way to make Lucius pay.

\* \* \*

When Hermione retired for bed that night, she took a precursory glance at the rose, expecting it to be in rather bad shape.

To her surprise, all signs of blight were completely gone, and it looked as if it had just been plucked, the petals, stems and leaves vibrant and lovely as ever.

"What the hell is going on?" she said to herself as she studied the flower.

"Something is definitely going on with that wizard."

\* \* \*

"I tell you, Harry, Granger's put a spell on him. I just know it," Ron whispered to Harry as they ate lunch in the Great Hall.

"He's acting just like her. He doesn't smile or hardly even talk. He won't fly with us, and he isn't even nagging at us about our work. Now, come on. Something stinks at Hogwarts. And it's Granger."

Ron was talking about Severus, of course. Over the past couple of days, there was a marked change in his demeanor. He was more brooding, silent, unwilling to enter into conversation. He seemed . . . distracted.

"Maybe it's just that he's kind of stressed. He has to go to classes, do his homework, brew the potions and make his rounds at night. That's a lot to do, Ron. He's probably just cranky," Harry offered as a possible explanation.

Ron snorted.

"The more work Sev has, the happier he is. You know that. He practically glows when exams come around. I'm telling you, Harry, something is going on down in the dungeons. Something that's changing him," Ron insisted.

Just then, Severus entered the Great Hall. The murmurs became hushed as he walked to the Gryffindor table. There was a rather dark aura coming off the Gryffindor, a sense of heaviness and . . . something indefinable that everyone felt.

Ron and Harry shifted over and Severus sat down. He didn't have his usual bursting backpack full of books with him. The wizard drew a plate of chicken towards him and didn't say anything to either Harry or Ron. Harry noticed his hair was looking a bit lank, not shiny as it usually was. It was as if he wasn't washing it, although he smelled all right.

"Hi, Sev," Harry ventured.

"Hi," Severus replied shortly, filling his plate as Ron stared at him as if looking for telltale signs of hexing or potion poisoning.

"Severus, we're going flying after supper tonight. Think you can tear yourself away from the dungeons for a couple of hours?" Ron asked him.

"No. Too busy," Severus answered him.

Draco Malfoy and his goons walked by, finished with lunch and on their way to Slytherin house to lounge a bit before the next class.

"Aw, come on," Ron pressed, "you aren't brewing constantly . . . Anyway, it's Friday. You don't have to do homework tonight. You have the whole weekend. Come on, Sev. It's not good for you to spend so much time around Granger. She's rubbing off on you. Sucking out all your joy like some greasy vampire."

Suddenly, it felt as if a small explosion went off in Severus' head.

"I SAID NO!" Severus snarled at Ron suddenly, his voice loud and angry. "Now leave me alone. I have more important things to think about other than wasting my time flying about with you two!"

The whole hall fell silent as his voice echoed through the hall. Hermione stopped eating, watching the pale wizard with interest.

Severus' black eyes darted about for a moment, and he scowled at everyone looking at him. Why were they all looking at him? He couldn't stand it.

The Gryffindor wrapped two pieces of chicken in a napkin, stood up and exited the Great Hall, his robes billowing as he stalked away, Harry and Ron looking after him.

"See? See, Harry? He's acting just like Granger. His robes are even billowing. It's some kind of transformation hex or something," he said in a low voice.

Both of them looked up at the dais at the Potions mistress. She was smirking at them.

"She knows we know," Ron hissed, ducking his head.

"She's just enjoying Severus yelling at you," Harry said. "She's a teacher. She wouldn't do anything to him other than take points or give him detention."

Ron shook his head.

"You're talking as if she's a normal teacher. She's not. She's a demoness in teacher's robes," he said, biting into a donut.

"Watch, Severus is going to go completely Slytherin on us. Mark my words," Ron said, his mouth full.

Harry looked a bit worried at this statement. Severus was acting snarky. He was always rather blunt, but not this much.

There probably was something going on in the dungeons.

\* \* \*

Severus walked behind Draco and his housemates angrily. He really did have something to do tonight. The Polyjuice Potion would be completed . . . three weeks earlier than thought possible. Hermione was going to test it and see if it were viable. There would be no elation on his part when she announced it was. He had nothing to look forward to other than recognition for his accomplishment. That might have worked for others, but not for him. He had had another prize in mind, a prize that was out of reach now.

As he walked, he couldn't help hearing Draco talking to Crabbe and Goyle, bragging about his mum's vacation.

"Yeah, my mum's going to spend a week in the Riviera. Wining, dining, you know, enjoying herself. She likes to get away. Only dad's going to be at the Manor," the pureblood said. "But I'm sure he'll find some way to entertain himself."

Severus' brow furrowed as the Slytherins continued down the corridor. He unwarded the Potions office and let himself in, closing and warding the door behind him, then let himself into Hermione's study. He stood there for a moment, then made a decision.

He walked into Hermione's bedroom, then her bathroom, his eyes scouring her vanity. He saw what he was looking for.

Her hairbrush.

\* \* \*

Severus stood by as Hermione fed the potion to a lab niffler to check to see if it was poisonous. The wizard said nothing as the niffler choked and scrubbed at its muzzle with its paws, a look of disgust on its furry, ferret-like face. But it didn't keel over.

Hermione rechecked the consistency, scent and color, then scooped up about a quarter cup of the potion, dropped a hair in it and offered it to Severus.

"Your brew, your poison," she said to him with a wicked smirk.

Severus eyed the bubbling brown potion then took it from her.

"Is it a human hair?" he asked her.

Hermione arched an eyebrow.

"Don't tell me you're worried about a repeat of your second year, Severus. Let me see, what did you turn into again? Oh yes . . . a cat creature," she grinned. "Well, it's not a cat hair."

"But is it human hair?" Severus asked her again, his eyes narrowed.

Hermione looked at the wizard. There was something very . . . angry about him.

"Yes, it's a human hair," she snapped, "whose hair we'll know if the potion works. Shaving three weeks off the process doesn't bode well that it will. I'm not going to risk being deformed in case it doesn't . . . so drink up."

His eyes resting on Hermione, Severus drank the brew down without making a face and set the empty glass on the counter. His skin began to pulse and bubble, his black hair writhing, graying and growing longer. Whiskers shot out of his chin and his already large nose remained long but became crooked and his robes changed to bright purple.

He looked down at his slightly wrinkled hands and pulled at his long white beard. He was the spitting image of Albus Dumbledore. He looked at Hermione, who noted there was no twinkle in those sober blue eyes.

"Well, it worked. You should turn back in about fifteen minutes," Hermione said to him.

"It is going to last longer than that," Severus said shortly in his own voice.

He was right. The transformation lasted for almost an hour, as long as a full glass of the potion.

"Incredible," Hermione breathed as he transformed back.

Severus didn't say anything as he began to fill bottles. If Hermione had still been under Oath, and hadn't been raped, he would have been overjoyed. Still, he was glad the potion was viable.

Hermione looked at him.

"What? No gloating that you proved me wrong?" she asked him.

"I already knew you were wrong. Why would I gloat?" Severus said rather coldly, focusing on the bottles.

Hermione blinked. Since their return, she hadn't seen the boy smile once. His entire demeanor had changed toward her and toward his friends.

"Severus, what's wrong with you?" she asked him.

Severus turned to face her with several bottles in his hand.

"Nothing I can't fix," he responded, handing Hermione the bottles.

She frowned up at him, then carried the bottles to her potions stores. As she stocked the potion, Severus slipped a bottle he had left on the counter into his pocket, then began to clean up his workspace, carefully Scourgifying the cauldron and putting it away.

Hermione returned.

"I am going out for a while," Severus said, looking down on the Potions mistress. "I'll set up the next brewing tomorrow."

His eyes had a certain coldness in them, as if his very soul was gone.

"Where are you going?" Hermione asked him.



"Just to walk about. Clear my head. Get out of these dungeons for a while," the Gryffindor responded.

Well, he had been spending almost all his time down here, either in his room studying or in the labs. He'd made no attempt to engage her in conversation at all, which was fine because she had quite a bit of work to do for her classes. She had expected him to be at least a little annoying, but the young wizard gave her a wide berth.

If it weren't for the rose, Hermione would have believed he'd lost his attraction for her. But the flower's constant state of bloom said otherwise.

"Be back by curfew. Midnight," the witch said, dismissing him.

Severus left without so much a word of goodbye.

"Hm, maybe I am rubbing off on him," Hermione mused as she headed for her quarters.

\* \* \*

Severus walked out on the grounds and immediately walked around the castle. It was dark out, and a number of students saw him striding in the direction of the Forbidden Forest. He stepped between the trees and quickly Disillusioned himself, running for the main gate. Since it was night, his shimmer wasn't noticeable.

He let himself out the gate and warded it back, then cast a Silencing Charm around himself and did an experimental Apparition.

He arrived at his destination and looked around with satisfaction. Yes, he could Apparate here.

He took out the bottle of Polyjuice Potion and a small piece of parchment. He uncapped the bottle, then carefully took out the single brown hair it contained. He slipped it through the neck of the bottle, then after waiting a few seconds, drank the bottle down.

The transformation took.

He had to work quickly. It was nine o'clock now. He only had until midnight.

\* \* \*

A knock sounded on the door of Malfoy Manor. A very timid-looking house-elf answered and invited the guest in.

"Waits here. I will retrieve Master," the little nervous creature said with a bow.

Presently, Lucius Malfoy strolled down the long corridor, dressed in silk black robes, his blond hair flowing and perfect, a look of surprise and delight on his face as he greeted his visitor.

"Hermione. You're looking . . . quite well," he said facetiously, kissing the back of the witch's hand. "It's been a while, I know, but I feel as if we've only been apart for . . . mere days."

The witch scowled at him but didn't speak.

"Why are you here? Is there something you want from me? Something you've . . . missed?" the wizard purred.

Suddenly, he was hit by a bolt of red light, his unconscious body grabbed and thrown over the witch's small shoulder.

From the shadows, the house-elves watched as their master was carried out the door. They said nothing. Not even to each other as they went about their business as usual.

They had been severely warned never to say anything about Hermione Granger to anyone, under the threat of a very painful death.

Not one of them would disobey that order, no matter who questioned them.

She was one of their master's secrets.

\* \* \*

The pair reappeared in the Shrieking Shack, Severus slinging the unconscious wizard to the floor, his brown eyes narrowed with hatred as he pulled out his wand.

He quickly placed a Silencing Charm around the shack and a window darkening spell, then lit a torch in the wall. He stared down at Lucius with hatred and cast the Incarcerous spell on him, binding him tightly with ropes.

He studied the wizard as he waited for the potion to wear off. Lucius was so much bigger than the Potions mistress. There had been no need to beat her so badly. There was no way she was a match for him physically. He had done it out of cruelty, for his own twisted pleasure.

Slowly, Severus changed back into his normal form. The moment he did, he turned his wand on Lucius.

"*Ennervate!*" he hissed, staring down at the bound wizard as he roused.

Lucius struggled in the ropes.

"What is this?" he roared, looking up at Severus with murder in his eyes. "Snape! How dare you do this to me, you filthy little half-blood! Release me at once!"

"I should release you permanently," Severus snarled back at him, his heart pounding in his chest. "You raped Professor Granger. Raped and beat her."

Lucius stopped struggling immediately, his gray eyes narrowing as he looked up at the young wizard.

"You're insane, I haven't been near the wi..." he started to say.

"DON'T LIE TO ME!" Severus screamed at him insanely. "*CRUCIO!*"

Lucius screamed, his cry mingling with Severus' cry as the boy hit him with the curse. Severus had never before used it, but all that was needed for it to be invoked was a good amount of hatred. Severus was brimming over with it as Lucius shuddered and rolled in agony.

Severus released him, panting.

"You left your hair behind," the boy said. "I used magic to find out who it belonged to. It was you. You beat her and you raped her, you sick bastard."

Lucius gasped, still shuddering.

Severus stared at him, then pointed his wand at him again.

"Legilimens!"

Lucius desperately tried to slam down his Occlumency walls, but Severus was so driven that he forced his way into the pureblood's memories and watched as he sauntered into Hermione's room, telling her she still owed him.

A Life Debt? That's why she was with him before. He had saved her life, and he was taking advantage of her, the pig. But this time, the Potions mistress wasn't having it.

"I don't owe you anything, Lucius. That debt was cleared when I saved Draco's soul from being fragmented. Now, leave my quarters."

Severus watched horrified as Lucius used his cane to cast Imperio on Hermione and take her wand away, taunting and mocking her, then releasing her from the spell.

She ran, but he ran after her, catching her before she could reach her bedroom and slinging her across the study into one of the book-covered walls. He pulled off his robes, a taunting look on his face as Hermione, with a terrified look on her face, slid along the wall, seeking a way past him. She ran again, and again he caught her, slapping her, then throwing her toward the fireplace bodily, the witch landing on the small table, smashing it.

She grabbed one of the legs, attempting to defend herself as Lucius went for her again, bringing it down on his arm. He choked her, then punched her in the side of the face, then shook her like a rat, dragging her over the stone tiles and flinging her on top of her desk, scattering parchments, ink and quills as he tore her robes open, Hermione screaming as the fabric was ripped from her body.

She only wore a white bra and knickers underneath. Lucius roughly grasped a breast and squeezed it painfully as Hermione screamed and kicked and finally managed to grab his hand, sinking her teeth into it.

The wizard howled and released her, and she jumped up and ran, Lucius pursuing her, entering the bedroom before she could close the door, forcing it open and grabbing her by the hair, swinging her about and sending her flying into the mirrored dresser, the mirror cracking and Hermione crumpling over the edge of the wooden dresser, the breath knocked out of her as Lucius approached her again.

He grabbed her by her hair again, spinning her around.

"You bit me, you Mudblood bitch!" he seethed, slapping and backhanding her until she was nearly unconscious, then throwing her across the room into her wardrobe, which she clutched at desperately. It tilted forward from her weight and she barely managed to get out of the way, falling to the floor on one side as it came crashing down.

Then Lucius began to kick her, screaming obscenities and cursing her before dragging her to the four-poster and slinging her onto it. He unbuttoned his trousers as she lay there, face swollen, blood pouring from her nose, whimpering like a wounded animal.

"You want to bite, eh? I'll show you biting, bitch," Lucius growled, falling on top of her.

It was the most brutal act Severus had ever seen, Lucius beating, biting and raping Hermione, the witch crying out in agony as he sodomized her. Unable to watch anymore, Severus pulled out of Lucius' mind.

"You fucking ANIMAL! CRUCIO!" Severus screamed again, hexing the bound wizard until he frothed at the mouth.

Lucius lay there shuddering, and Severus felt a powerful urge to kill him, such a maddening urgency to take him out of this world for good . . . but he fought it. He pointed his wand at the broken wizard.

"Divesto!" he hissed, leaving Lucius naked, then removed the ropes.

The pureblood was in no state to defend himself. Severus didn't care. The Potions mistress wasn't either when this monster was on her.

"You like beating witches? Hurting them? Controlling them? Let's see how you like being controlled! IMPERIO!"

Severus raised the shuddering wizard from the floor and rammed him face first into the nearest wall with a sickening crunch, then slammed him into another wall, then another, using the spell to beat and punish the naked wizard, then dropping him to the floor.

"Crucio!"

"Imperio!"

"Crucio!"

"Imperio!"

"Crucio!"

"Imperio!"

Severus applied the Unforgivables mercilessly to the wizard, using them to punish and torture Lucius for his unforgivable crime against the first woman he'd ever been intimate with.

After sending him flying into walls and Crucioing the wizard until he shit, pissed and vomited, Severus put Lucius' head through a window and drew him back, the wizard's handsome face swollen, cut and bleeding profusely, his body battered, bruised and cut. One arm dangled uselessly, and his right foot was turned abnormally to the side. Severus threw him roughly to the ground and straddled his body, looking down at him.

"I should kill you, but I don't want your blood on my hands, you bastard. But I will do this . . . *Enscripto Immundus!*"

Lucius let out a misery-filled groan as white-hot pain covered his forehead.

\*\*\*

There was another knock on the manor door. Again, the nervous house-elf opened it and was almost hit with Lucius' unconscious, naked body as it was flung through the portal, followed by his clothing. The wizard lay there, broken, unconscious and most definitely Obliviated.

The elf peered out at the shimmer descending the stairs. Suddenly a red light flashed in the sky, illuminating it brightly.

A call for the Aurors.

Then, the shimmer disappeared.

\*\*\*

Hermione was still up, drinking a Firewhiskey in front of the fire and listening to Vivaldi on the Wizarding Wireless when Severus came in at exactly two minutes to twelve, sweaty, wild-eyed, paler than normal and looking scared to death.

He walked straight into his room, closing the door behind him and locking it.

Hermione, who had not more than glanced at him when he entered, simply shrugged and continued listening to the Wireless, enjoying the warm glow of Firewhiskey as it coursed through her. Only the fireplace was lit, so she hadn't gotten a good look at the Gryffindor when he came in; the light had been too low.

So she had no idea anything was wrong.

\* \* \*

Hermione was awakened by the amplified sound of pounding on her office door. Groggily, she pulled on her housecoat and grabbed her wand. She glanced at Severus' closed door as she stormed through the study and out the wall into her office.

Who the hell was it on a Saturday morning? She yanked the door open with a snarl. The *Daily Prophet* lay on the floor before the doorway, and Draco Malfoy stood there, his eyes wet.

"Professor Granger, I need your permission to leave Hogwarts. Dumbledore isn't about, and my father is in St. Mungo's. Someone attacked him last night, and he's bad off," the boy said, his voice filled with terror.

"Your father's in the hospital?" she repeated slowly, her wand arm dropping.

"Yes, someone attacked him at the Manor. The Ministry is investigating now, but they don't have any leads yet. Can I go?" he begged her.

"Yes, you may go, Draco. I'll inform the Headmaster," Hermione said, feeling dazed and disconnected. She picked up the *Daily Prophet* as Draco sprinted down the corridor.

She opened it and read the headline:

**"NOBLEMAN AND PHILANTHROPIST LORD LUCIUS MALFOY BRUTALLY ATTACKED IN HIS HOME BY MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANT"**

Hermione blinked and absently closed the door, walking back into her quarters while reading the article beneath the headline. There was a picture of Healers carrying a sheet-covered Lucius out of his manor on a stretcher, surrounded by Aurors.

\* \* \*

*Lucius Malfoy, one of the Wizarding World's leading citizens, was brutally attacked in his home last night. The wizard was stripped, badly beaten and tortured by Unforgivables. Aurors were summoned to the Manor just before midnight, although it is a mystery as to how they were summoned since they could find no one on the premises other than the wizard's loyal house-elves. Narcissa Malfoy is away on vacation in the Riviera. She has been notified of the attack and is expected to return shortly to be by her husband's side in his time of need.*

*When questioned, the house-elves said they hadn't seen nor heard anything out of the ordinary the entire night and that Lord Malfoy had received no visitors they could mention. Because of the nature of Lord Malfoy's injuries, it is believed this was a crime of revenge for when he was forced into Voldemort's service and attended revels. He had not participated in these murderous occasions, yet the assailant broke his left arm, his right foot, and magically carved the word "RAPIST" into his forehead. All attempts to remove this writing results in great pain for the wizard. Healers fear it may be permanent.*

*"We will do all we can to track down Mr. Malfoy's attacker and bring him to justice. No stone will be left unturned," the Minister of Magic declared. "That such a fine and upstanding wizard would be attacked in his own home is criminal."*

*Unfortunately, the Healers at St. Mungo's hold little hope of Mr. Malfoy being able to help identify his attacker. All memories within the past two weeks have been Obliviated. To date, there is no way to restore them. We will keep our readers updated concerning the wizard's condition. Flowers, owls and cards may be sent to . . .*

\* \* \*

Hermione put the paper down on the small table next to the armchair as she heavily fell into it, shocked and dazed.

Someone had finally given Lucius a taste of his own brutality. Hermione wondered how it felt going down. She bet it had been bitter, very, very bitter. Of one thing she was sure, and that was whoever did this deserved a fucking medal, an Order of Merlin, First Class.

She sat there for a few minutes, feeling as if a great weight she hadn't known she'd been carrying was lifted. She felt light and free. At last, she saw a bit of justice.

She heard Severus' door click open behind her and watched as he walked by, barefooted and dressed in a black house coat, heading for her bedroom to use the loo. He looked tired and pale as he walked, not greeting her and avoiding her eyes as he passed through the door. His wand was sticking out of the robe's pocket.

Hermione looked after him speculatively. He certainly was a sullen little Gryffindor. She could hear him pissing even from the study. That was no surprise. That monster pipe he had between his legs probably spewed a lot of liquid. She heard the loo flush, then the water run in the basin. Severus Snape was probably the only wizard she knew who actually washed his hands after he pissed.

In a moment, he reappeared in the doorway, cast her a furtive look and headed back for his room.

"Just a moment, Severus," Hermione said.

Severus stopped but didn't turn around.

"Yes, Professor?" he said softly.

"Come here," she ordered him imperiously.

Severus walked back, hoping that she wouldn't keep him long. He wanted to go back to bed, maybe spend most of the day there. He didn't want to see anyone.

He walked around the chair, his dark eyes resting on the floor, rather than the witch.

Hermione studied him. He looked so contrite.

"What's wrong with you?" she snapped at him.

To her surprise, Severus jumped, startled.

Severus had never started at her snapping at him before. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him.

"What are you so nervous about?" she inquired.

"I'm not nervous. I'm just . . . sleepy," he said in that same soft voice, still not looking at her.

"Why are you sleepy? It's after nine. You came in before twelve. You should have gotten plenty of rest," she said to him.

"I didn't sleep well," he replied, his eyes still on the floor.

Hermione was suspicious.

"Look at me!" she hissed at him suddenly.

Severus raised his eyes, and Hermione could tell immediately he was hiding something by the way they shifted. His eyes always shifted when he'd done something wrong. She'd caught on to that much while he was still a first year and tried to sneak Potions ingredients out of her class.

"You've done something," Hermione said in a low voice. "What have you done, Severus?"

The young wizard went immediately pale when she asked this. And that was hard to do since his skin was quite pale to start with. This did nothing but make Hermione even more suspicious.

"What did you do?" she demanded. "I can tell you've done something. Don't make me use Legilimency on you."

Severus frowned.

"You don't have any right to do that," he said to her sullenly.

"I have every right!" Hermione snapped back at him, sure now he had done something untoward. "You are in my rooms and my charge. I'm supposed to keep up with you. Now tell me what you're attempting to hide. You're doing a miserable job of it."

As Hermione spoke, the *Prophet* on her lap suddenly unfolded when she shifted in the chair. Severus saw the headline and immediately began to shake.

Hermione looked at him, then down at the paper, then back at him, her eyes widening in realization.

"It was you, wasn't it? You were the one who attacked Lucius, weren't you?" she hissed at him.

"No. I don't know what you're..." Severus began, still trembling.

"Don't bother trying to lie. If I were an Auror, you'd be arrested by now. Gryffindors can't hide anything, much less assaults," Hermione said calmly.

But she wasn't feeling calm. The crazy young wizard had actually attacked and overcame Lucius Malfoy. Then she realized he knew that Lucius was her rapist, and that's why the pureblood had it carved on his forehead. To show the world what he was.

Dear gods.

"Sit down, Severus," she said to the young wizard. "Don't worry, I'm going to help you deal with this . . ."

Hermione walked over to an area of wall and slid back a false front of books, retrieving a Pensieve from the niche behind it. She walked back over to him and placed it on his lap.

". . . And then, I'm going to kill you."

\* \* \*

A/N: Thanks for reading.