

A Mutually Beneficial Arrangement

by melusin

Propositioning the Potions master doesn't quite work out the way Hermione planned.

In The Mood

Chapter 1 of 2

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Sylvanawood and I were lamenting the plethora of angst ridden, doom and gloom fics around at the moment. So, we challenged each other to write a feel-good fic. This is the first chapter of my effort, which is, basically, a pointless piece of smut.

Thanks as always to septentrion for the beta.

Of all the... Severus could not *believe* that she, of all people, would have had the bare-faced cheek to proposition him like that.

Clenching his fists in anger, he barely registered the sixth-year couple hurriedly breaking apart as he stormed by, so intent was he on reaching the safety of his dungeon chambers before he vented his spleen. Damned *insolence*.

It took a large tumbler of firewhisky to calm him down. Only then was he able to even begin rationalising what had just transpired. Hermione Granger *Hermione Granger*, had lured him to her chambers on the pretext of showing him a rare text she had acquired for her collection, only to ply him with wine and suggest that they... that they become...

Fuck Buddies.

Severus shuddered. What in God's name did she think he was? Some kind of stud for hire?

He was still bristling with indignation after the second tumbler.

It took a third for him to question why he had been so stupid as to turn down the offer of free, no-strings sex. She wasn't bad looking; he had to give her that, and such an arrangement would dispense with the formalities of asking her out to dinner, paying for overpriced food and making meaningless small talk while trying to guess whether or not he'd get his leg over before the night was out. This way, it was a dead cert...cutting the crap and getting straight to the sex. What was wrong with that? Wasn't it supposed to be every man's idea of a dream date?

If that was the case, then why was he so upset?

He sighed. Why couldn't he just come out and admit that he'd developed... *feelings* for Miss Granger since her return to Hogwarts? The smart-arsed know-it-all of old had disappeared, to be replaced by a confident and rather pleasant young woman: intelligent, amenable as a colleague, assertive in an argument, and someone whose company he could tolerate for more than five minutes at a time. The idea that he might, actually, quite liked to have asked her out to dinner seemed to have materialised sometime between the second and third glass of whisky. And now, after her little *request*, he knew that she was interested in him...or at least, she didn't find him totally repulsive...which meant that if he had asked her out, the chances of being rejected and made to look a complete fool would have been minimal.

Bugger.

Sooo... What to do about it? Severus tapped his lips thoughtfully. Despite his rather... abrupt exit, Miss Granger had given him the weekend to think it over... He'd be mad not to reconsider. But... he still didn't like the thought of being used like some... living sex-toy. And, having made such a bold move in approaching him, Miss Granger would have the upper hand in the relationship...if that's what you could call it...which simply would not do. Severus grinned, a plan forming in spite of his inebriated state. This was guaranteed to determine just how interested in him she was...

So be it.

If it was his cock she wanted, his cock she was bloody well going to get.

~ SSHG ~

Well, Hermione thought, draining the dregs of her wine and Banishing the glass, *that wasn't quite the reaction I'd expected.*

Huffing, she got up from her chair and made her way to the bedroom. It had been a perfectly logical suggestion; he could have at least discussed it with her like an adult instead of storming off like... like...

An intensely private, rather sensitive man?

'A simple "no" would have sufficed,' Hermione grumbled as she got ready for bed. 'Oh well, Plan B it is.'

It looked like it was back to scouring the Lonely Hearts section of the *Prophet* again for some suitable, available wizard...not that she was in the least bit hopeful of finding anything remotely shaggable. Hermione had all but given up on that score. Sighing, she divided her hair equally into three and started to plait it, bemoaning her celibate state. Since she'd returned to Hogwarts...to Britain, in fact...decent male totty had been hard to come by.

'Perhaps I sounded a bit desperate.'

Staring critically at herself in the mirror, Hermione examined the laughter lines that had somehow managed to sneak up on her and wondered where her twenties had gone. The last decade had simply flown by. They had been good years though, and she wouldn't have changed them for anything.

'Cheer up,' she said to her reflection. 'You could be married to Ron with a baby on each hip.' The witch in the mirror cackled. *What a disaster that would have been.* Turning him down and travelling the world instead had been one of her better ideas.

But it had been a near thing. 'Let's take a year out,' Hermione had suggested to Ron. 'Travel the world a bit. Then we'll settle down.' But Ron had insisted George needed his help in the shop and didn't want to wait. So, after a huge row, she went anyway. Which was just as well as it turned out. A year became two and then three. Hermione visited places she'd read about and wanted to see for ages...places she knew that Ron would have found boring and totally uninteresting. And then the International Owl had arrived, informing her he was married; it didn't come as any great surprise to her that all she felt was relief.

A new life, a whole new world opened up. She forged new friendships (and had the occasional fling) with people who were ignorant of her identity and knew nothing of her past. To her delight, Hermione found herself being treated as an individual and not a third of a trio, or a friend of Harry Potter. And, rather unexpectedly, she also developed a taste for older men...intelligent older men who were neither intimidated nor threatened by her own intelligence, men who found clever, interesting women like her sexy. It was a revelation not to be seen as a walking encyclopaedia but as an attractive and desirable woman: Hermione Granger came into her own.

But, inevitably she grew tired of being constantly on the move, and with no serious relationship to tie her down, her thoughts turned to home. She'd been vaguely wondering what she was going to do on her return...she supposed she'd have to take a few NEWTs to stand a chance of getting a decent job...when the owl arrived out of the blue with Minerva's offer of employment. Madam Pince was planning on retirement and looking for someone to train up as her replacement. Would she be interested? Hermione sent her reply back by return owl.

And now, three years later, here she was. Back where she'd started with a lot of living under her belt.

And her favourite library soon to be under her care.

And the enigma that was Severus Snape.

He'd been the last person Hermione had expected to see on the staff, but there he was, back with a vengeance, determined to see reforms in the school system and, more importantly, in Slytherin House. She hadn't expected, either, to grow to like him, but she had, slowly, first as a colleague and then as something... more. What exactly, she wasn't sure. Snape was as surly and sarcastic as ever, but now she could detect a wry sense of humour behind the barbs, which had gone over her head when she was in school. She observed him for a long time, unsure if she should ask him to dinner, weighing up the risks of embarking on a full-on relationship: it could prove awkward if things went pear-shaped, she reasoned, seeing as they both lived and worked under the same roof.

A fuck buddy, however...

Why *had* he turned her down? Hermione was positive there was no significant 'other' in his life...he hardly ever left the castle...so she'd been confident he was unattached when she'd broached the subject...and had thought it safe to assume he was straight since he'd been in love with Harry's mother. She shook her head. Here they were: two single people, both in need of some action (at least she was, at any rate) with very little in the way of choice of partner; it seemed the obvious solution. So, what was wrong with it?

Yawning, Hermione pulled back the bedclothes and climbed into bed. 'Stupid man,' she muttered. 'His loss.'

'Nox!'

~ HGSS ~

'Morning, Miss.'

The following Monday, Hermione looked up from her desk to see a young first year holding out a letter.

'Professor Snape asked me to give you this.'

'Thank you.' Hermione took the letter off the girl and turned it over. It wasn't bright red and set to explode, but that didn't mean it wasn't dangerous. Suspiciously, she tapped it with her wand and checked for curses. It seemed innocuous enough, so she broke the seal and read it:

Miss Granger,

I have been giving your offer further consideration and come to the conclusion that I was somewhat hasty in my original decision. If you are still amenable to the idea, come to my chambers Friday evening, no later than eight o'clock. Wear that low-cut blue robe of yours...and nothing else.

S. Snape.

Oh, kinky. Hermione smiled to herself. He was obviously planning something. Finally, she had a Friday night to look forward to.

~ HGSS ~

For the rest of the week, Severus carried on as if nothing had happened. He didn't return Hermione's smile later that Monday morning when he entered the library, but merely inclined his head as he usually did, and was satisfied with the look of puzzlement that crossed her features. Keeping her on edge and wondering what he was about was part of The Plan.

Hermione sussed him out in five minutes flat and found it all highly amusing. But she played along, making polite conversation at the High Table and refraining from mentioning their assignation...even when no one else was in earshot.

When Friday eventually came around, Hermione could not help but feel a few butterflies in the stomach as she checked her appearance in the mirror one last time. Her blue robe was rather flattering; it was her favourite, and she would have worn it, anyway. Severus obviously thought it suited her, too. Smiling, Hermione took a handful of Floo powder and threw it into the grate. On Severus' invitation to 'come through', Hermione grabbed the bottle of wine she had bought especially for the occasion and stepped into the flames.

Straightening up on the other side, Hermione blinked to accustom her eyes to the dimly candlelit room. 'Hello?' she said, peering through the gloom.

'Good evening.'

Hermione turned in the direction of the voice. 'Oh, there you are. It's a bit dark in here, isn't it?' She held out the bottle of wine towards him. 'I brought this. As a peace offering.'

'That was not necessary.' He pointed towards the chair nearest to her. 'I have already attended to it. Please, sit while I pour you a glass.'

Hermione sat and watched, wide-eyed, as Severus got up and poured two glasses of wine. He was wearing tight-fitting trousers (black, she supposed, although it was hard to tell in this light) and a white shirt buttoned up to the neck. Having only ever seen him in wizard robes, it was pleasing to discover he'd been hiding a very fit body underneath them. She felt rather hot all of a sudden, despite her lack of underthings, and she felt herself blushing as Severus moved towards her.

'... um. I'm sorry if I... offended you last week,' Hermione managed to say, taking the offered glass. 'I know I can be a bit blunt at times...'

'We should establish some ground rules,' Severus interrupted. 'Decide how far we want to go with this.'

Nodding, Hermione agreed. She sipped the wine. 'Well, I'm open to suggestions, but I can say for definite that I'm not into pain of any kind.'

He snorted. 'Contrary to popular belief, I am not the Marquis de Sade.' Severus turned his back on her and returned to his chair.

Oh, my God! Look at that arse.

'I would also like to propose that whoever is... host for the evening, decides on the... activities.'

That seemed fair. 'I'm okay with that.'

'Good. Stand up and take your robe off.'

Hermione choked. 'That's a bit... I thought we could talk...'

'You come on to me like a tart, yet you expect me to treat you like a lady?' Severus folded his hands in his lap. 'Disrobe or leave; it's up to you.'

Hermione took another sip of wine while she considered his ultimatum. Well, she supposed she'd have to do it sometime. It might as well be now. She knocked back the rest of the wine in one gulp, put the glass down and stood up, tripping over the edge of the rug.

He smirked. 'Oops.'

Glaring at him, Hermione unfastened her robe, slipped it off her shoulders, and let it fall to the floor.

Severus' gaze immediately dropped to her breasts. Resting his elbows on the arms of the chair, he steepled his fingers and pressed them to his lips. His eyes slowly raked over her naked body.

Hermione smiled, tilting her head coquettishly. *Any minute now*, she thought, *he's going to tell me I'm beautiful.*

But he said nothing. Instead, he made a circling gesture with his index finger for her to turn around. Somewhat miffed, Hermione complied.

'Lift your hair up and hold it on top of your head...both hands.'

'O-kay.' Hermione gathered her hair up into a loose bun, resting her hands on top. She glanced over her shoulder; Severus was staring at her impassively.

'Eyes forward,' he barked.

Hermione sighed, wondering whether instigating this had been such a good idea. She'd come here for some fun, for some stress relief, but he seemed hell bent on teaching her a lesson for coming on to him...a lesson she could well do without. Oh, well, in for a Knut... Hermione heard a rustle and the squeak of leather as Severus got up and stood behind her; her skin prickled deliciously with the feel of his breath on her shoulder.

'Hmm...' Hermione swayed slightly, eyes fluttering in anticipation of his touch. This was better. He was achingly close... His lips brushed against the juncture of her neck and shoulders, and she gasped.

'Ohh...'

'Like that?' He did it again.

'Mmm, yesss... More.'

Severus chuckled. 'You, madam, are in no position to make demands.' He licked his way up to just behind her ear. 'Did you know that the nape of the neck is one of the most... unappreciated parts of a woman's body?' he murmured.

'It... is?'

'Mmm.' He gently nibbled her earlobe. 'And yours, my dear, is quite delectable.'

Severus then proceeded to demonstrate just how unappreciated and neglected her neck had been. Feather-weight kisses ghosted against her skin, then some firmer ones, a gentle nibble, a suck. But no more than that. Contact. She wanted some contact. *Now*. There was only a certain amount of his teasing she was prepared to take.

'Please... Touch me...'

Severus stepped away from her. 'We had an agreement, Miss Granger. Have you changed your mind?'

'No. Don't stop. I... I'm sorry... and, um,' she swallowed, 'don't you think it's about time you called me Hermione?'

He appeared to consider this for a moment. 'I think it would be wiser to keep this arrangement on a more... formal level,' he said silkily. 'Being on first name terms implies a certain... intimacy, don't you think? And, as you have made abundantly clear, we are not lovers. So, shall I continue?'

Why did he sound so bitter? Disheartened, Hermione let out a long sigh. 'Yes...so long as you don't intend driving me to distraction and then throwing me out before...'

'Rest assured, Miss Granger,' he whispered in a tone designed to give her goosepimples, 'I intend giving you a good, hard, fucking before you leave here. Now, close your eyes.'

She could live with that.

Seemingly not in the least bit of a hurry, Severus began to kiss a trail down her back. There was no pattern to the path of his kisses. Hermione could not anticipate where the next would fall. Squirming under the onslaught, she held her breath and gasped alternately as with each kiss he moved downwards and, hopefully, to where she wanted his mouth the most. The occasional tickle as his hair brushed her skin was the only other stimulus, and yet it was all very arousing. But, pleasant though it was, her arms were starting to ache.

'How...oh, that feels nice...long do I have to keep my hands on my head?'

From the unmistakable creaking noise of knees bending and the warm breath somewhere near the vicinity of her tail-bone, Hermione surmised that Severus was no longer standing. Things were looking up. In spite of her discomfort, she wriggled in delight.

'I have finished with your back,' he replied. 'You may drop your arms, but put your hands on your waist where I can see them.'

With a sigh of relief, Hermione let go of her hair, rotated her shoulders a few times and wrapped her arms around her body. As she did, the tip of a tongue, soft and wet flicked ever so briefly along the crack of her arse, and she inhaled sharply, holding her breath as slow, deliberate kisses replaced the licks, covering every inch of her buttocks. Unconsciously, Hermione adjusted her stance, moving her feet further apart. Severus chuckled against her skin, the vibrations sending a shiver up her back.

'Sensuous little thing, aren't you? Spread your legs wider for me... Wider... Let's see if you taste as delicious as you smell, shall we?'

'With pleasure.' Leaning forward slightly to give him better access, Hermione whimpered as Severus' tongue gently licked her inner thigh before burrowing inside her labia and circling all too briefly around her clit. Then it was gone again. Gods it was frustrating. 'Aren't you *ever* going to touch me?' she moaned. 'And when are you going to take your clothes off?'

'For tonight,' a raspy voice replied, 'you will know only my mouth and my cock...and my attire need not concern you. Now, stop complaining and get down on your knees, arse up, and rest your head on your hands.'

Only too gratefully, as her knees were getting decidedly wobbly, Hermione joined Severus on the floor.

'Comfortable?'

'I'm fine,' she replied. 'Enjoying the view?'

'Very much so,' he retorted. 'Like it, do you, showing me everything you've got?'

Giggling, she wiggled her bottom at him.

'Wanton little trollop,' he growled. 'Now, where were we? 'Oh, yes. My tongue was about... here.'

Oh, yes, it most definitely was. And it felt fucking wonderful, too. Oh, yess...this was the business. Her clit was getting the attention it deserved now. *Lap, lap... suck*. Her breathing sped up as the tingling started, and she couldn't help begging him to touch her again...anywhere, it didn't matter, but some fingers inside her would be nice.

'Hmm... close, so close... Gods...'

With one long sweep, Severus dragged his tongue back the entire length of her slit and paused. Hermione howled in frustration and annoyance.

'I can make you come... or I... can fuck you,' he gasped. 'Which would you prefer?'

What? The bastard had promised... Struggling to collect her scattered wits, Hermione reasoned that she could finish herself off afterwards if she had to, but that an orgasm without a fuck afterwards would leave her feeling more frustrated than when she'd arrived.

'You promised me...'

'So I did, but I want to hear you say it.'

Git. 'I want you to fuck me. Please.'

Severus groaned as he unfastened his trousers...although he did his best to hide it.

'I trust...' Severus coughed. '...you have taken some form of contraception?'

'Yes, of course. Don't worry.' *Just get on with it.* 'Now, please.'

'Gods, you're *dripping* wet.'

Hermione felt something hard and warm slide between her legs, and she considerably rubbed herself against it. Severus let out a choked gasp, and she smirked. 'Like that, do you, Professor? Mmm, you feel *so* good.'

'Cock tease.' Severus drew back and pressed the head of his cock against her anus. 'Gagging for it, aren't you?'

'No! Don't.'

'Never fear, Miss Granger.' She could hear the self-satisfied smirk in his voice. 'You'll have to do a lot of begging for me to grant you that particular pleasure...'

Hell would freeze over first.

'... But on this occasion, I'm only interested in your cunt.' He slowly massaged his cock against her entrance before easing the tip inside. 'At this point you are no doubt wondering how... well-endowed I am. What do you imagine it will be like, Miss Granger, hmm? Will it fill you up, satisfy you...or are you going to be disappointed? Or...' he pushed in a fraction more, 'is it so big, you won't be able to handle it?'

While she did indeed hope he was hung like a centaur, Hermione hadn't been with a man for nearly a year. 'Please, take it easy. It's been a while...'

'Ah,' he sighed. 'In your own time, then. You want my cock, so take it.'

Hermione pushed against him, groaning at the welcome feel of a thick, hard cock stretching those much underused muscles and filling her completely. Rough wool scratched against her arse, and, puzzled, she looked between her legs. He hadn't even dropped his trousers.

'Start moving,' he growled. 'Show me what that talented snatch of yours can do.'

Only too happy to oblige, Hermione started to fuck him. Oh, she'd missed this...a vibrator was handy in a crisis but no substitute for this. There was nothing to compare with the feeling of a warm, hard cock inside you. She pleased herself on it shamelessly. She was fucking Severus Snape, and it was fucking fantastic. She looked between her legs again, watching the pink flesh move in and out of her, wondering what his balls would feel like slapping against her. She'd reach back and squeeze, and oh, she wanted... wanted it, wanted to touch him, wanted him to grab hold of her hips and drive into her, wanted him to finger her clit to... to... She groaned, rubbing her aching nipples against the floor for some relief.

'Oh. No. You. Don't,' he panted. 'No touching. Up on all fours and arch your back for me.'

As Hermione pushed herself up, Severus reached over her and grabbed the arms of the chair for some purchase. Hermione's hair fell over one shoulder, and the next thing she knew, Severus' mouth had latched onto her neck and he was pounding into her.

She was only too aware this was for him not her. He wasn't interested in satisfying her; Hermione had to brace herself as he gave her the fucking he'd promised. His shirt was brushing her back, and it was damp; he was sweating under it. *Oh, yes, you're loving this.* She squeezed his cock, which got his attention, and he slammed into her harder... and faster until his entire body went rigid and he spluttered something against her shoulder. One more thrust and he was done.

Severus pulled out immediately and sat back on his heels, struggling for breath. 'Finish yourself... off,' he grunted.

Hermione's hand flew to her clit, too far gone and desperate to come to care what she must look like. She screwed her eyes closed and worked her fingers faster. *Almost there. He's watching, he's watching.* She came hard, imagining Severus still inside her, but it was the thought of him watching her wank that had finally tipped her over the edge.

Chest heaving, sweaty and eager for more, Hermione sat up and turned around, pushing her hair off her face. She was just in time to see Severus haul himself off the floor and into his chair. Crossing his legs casually, he took a sip of wine from his glass and smirked at her.

Hermione stared at him in disbelief. He had to be kidding; she was just getting warmed up. 'So. That's it then, I take it?'

'Yes, I believe that concludes this evening's proceedings. You may leave.'

She tried not to show her disappointment. 'Same time next week? My place?'

He inclined his head. 'Agreed. Now if you don't mind, I have some marking to do.' He pointed to the pot of Floo powder on the mantelpiece.

Summarily dismissed, Hermione got to her feet and grabbed her robe. Not bothering to put it on, she reached for the powder and threw some into the grate. 'Have a nice weekend... Professor.'

~ SSHG ~

Five minutes later, soaking in a hot bath, Hermione closed her eyes and went over the evening's events. She couldn't begrudge him his determination to show he was no pushover; he was a proud man, after all. It was only to be expected, really, that he'd feel the need to claw back some control. And she had all week to plan what she was going to do to him. No doubt, Slytherin that he was, he would be expecting her to get her own back with something nasty, so she would have to think of something to throw him off kilter. And she had a few tricks up her sleeve that would do just that. Languorously, she slid her hand under the water and found her clit again. 'Mmm,' she sighed happily. 'Oh, yes, Severus Snape. I know exactly what I'm going to do to you.'

String of Pearls

Chapter 2 of 2

Hermione takes charge.

Disclaimer: See Chapter 1

A/N: Thanks as ever to Septentrion for the beta.

Once Hermione had passed safely through the Floo, Severus closed his eyes, let his head flop back against his chair, and heaved a great sigh of relief. The Plan had been a success: she wanted to continue their liaison in spite of everything he'd done. That had to be a good sign.

Gods, she's beautiful.

At one point, he'd been afraid she wouldn't go through with it, but his gambit, though risky, had paid off. It was just as well he'd decided to have a wank in the shower before she arrived, though; otherwise, his resolve would have undoubtedly melted the instant she dropped her robe. And even then, it still hadn't been easy resisting the

temptation to touch her. He'd had to keep his hands firmly clasped behind his back from the moment he'd stood up...sometimes digging his nails into the palms of his hands...until the point when his trembling fingers had undone his trousers.

Severus' hand cupped his groin, his balls tingling at the memory of her naked body. If nothing else, she'd given him enough sensory input to fuel his masturbatory fantasies for the next hundred years or so: the warmth of her creamy, soft skin under his lips, the dusting of freckles on her shoulder, her pleas for him to touch her, the dimple on her arse, the taste and smell of her...

Groaning, Severus unfastened the buttons on his fly to release the pressure on his rapidly hardening erection and pushed his trousers out of the way. He grasped his cock and rubbed his thumb absentmindedly over the wet tip, smearing the liquid over the head. With the last vestiges of her scent still lingering in his nostrils, he began stroking himself lazily.

Oh, Merlin, but she was tight and hot and wet for him, and he'd wanted nothing more than to grab that glorious arse of hers and sheath himself up to the hilt the second he'd slipped inside her. Instead, he'd suffered the tortuous pleasure of her slowly impaling herself for fear of hurting her, keeping still when every nerve ending in his body had been screaming for him to ram home. But by God, it had been worth the wait. She'd fucked him until he thought he would go mad with the bliss of it, until he couldn't bear it any longer, until there was only instinct and cock and cunt, and he wished he'd been able to feel his balls slapping against that wetness, wished he'd reached around and tweaked that little clit, squeezed those beautiful tits. And then he'd almost bitten her shoulder trying not to call out her name as his orgasm had coiled and twisted and torn his seed from his body.

And then she was frigging herself with no heed to his presence, and he'd watched his come dribbling out of her hole as she convulsed on her fingers, and he'd regretted not getting her off while he was inside her, wondering what it would have been like to have her spasm around him. And he'd wanted to hold her while she came down from her high and stroke her hair and kiss her, but then she'd turned around, looking so well and truly ravished, so hot, sweaty and utterly delectable, it had been as much as he could do not to pick her up, throw her over his shoulder and carry her off to his bed. But he'd kept up the pretence, sticking to The Plan, managing to drag himself into his chair and feign indifference. And then he'd seen the hurt look cross her face, and he'd felt like a total bastard.

There was always next week, though; now he'd made his position clear, he would try and make it up to her...if he could, if she'd let him, if she didn't hex his balls off after she'd had time to reflect on his behaviour. Breath hitching, he gripped his cock tightly with both hands and, visualising the last glimpse of her arse filling the fireplace as she'd stooped to get into the grate, thrust up into his fists, imagining her cunt, Hermione's cunt, milking his cock instead, and cried out his need and longing into the empty room.

~HGSS~

The next morning, Hermione was appalled to discover she had an enormous love-bite on her neck. She stared at it in horror. It was the kind of thing she associated with teenage boys and their early fumbblings: a part of adolescence, a rite of passage she was grateful to have missed. *Tacky, tacky tacky*. Nonetheless, she was now sporting a whopper. Hermione hastily applied a concealment charm, trying to remember when it could have happened. It must have been towards the end...when she'd been trying not to collapse, when Severus had been riding her like a broom.

She hadn't even noticed.

Had he done it deliberately, like a dog marking his territory, or was it accidental, something done in the heat of passion? Whatever the reason, she was not best pleased.

Face it. He treated you like dirt. Like something he'd bought and paid for, and... He had no right to do that, none at all. She sighed. Last night, it had all seemed rather promising: she couldn't fault the sex...she had to give him an 'O' for atmosphere and imagination, if nothing else. But, examined in the cold light of day, the whole thing now seemed rather... tawdry. She stroked the yellow-purplish bruise tentatively; this was just the icing on the cake. The thought struck her that maybe he hadn't been playing a game with her at all. That, maybe, he really was just a nasty piece of work...some-some... horrible misogynist who had such a low opinion of her, he thought he could use her as he saw fit and throw her away when he'd finished. Maybe she'd been completely wrong about him. Maybe, she should just tell him to stuff next Friday.

But, a little voice inside her said, he'd been gentle when it mattered. The fact that she was only a little bit sore was testament to that. If he'd taken her roughly, like he didn't care, it would have been a lot worse, but he had been considerate, which had to count for something. Was she ready to give it all up as a bad job for the sake of a love-bite?

'One more chance, Severus Snape,' she said, wagging her finger at the mirror. 'Just one.' If next Friday proved to be a disaster, then that would be it. She would cut her losses and chalk it up to experience.

~SSHG~

Severus was already seated at the High Table when Hermione entered the Great Hall for breakfast. She was in two minds whether or not to ask him for a bruise salve, but she didn't think she could do it without awkward questions being asked, so apart from a brief 'Good Morning', she said nothing and concentrated on the newspaper while she ate her porridge.

Severus observed her out of the corner of his eye, but she did not look his way once.

He took this as a bad sign.

Severus poured himself a second cup of coffee and waited for Hermione to finish. Knowing that she was not in the habit of lingering over the breakfast table, he took his time, sipping his coffee unhurriedly. And sure enough, as soon as Hermione had gulped down her tea, she scurried off...without so much as a glance in his direction.

Definitely a bad sign. Severus had expected her to at least look at him...if not smile, searching for some sort of acknowledgement. That was how women usually reacted after sex...in his experience, anyway. He waited a few more moments before getting up and heading towards the dungeons; he had one or two books that needed returning to the library.

But to his chagrin, the assistant librarian was not at her post...neither was Madam Pince. Instead, Severus found two of his Slytherin prefects holding the fort.

'Is Miss Granger not here, Higgingbottom?' Severus asked, putting the books down on the desk.

'No, sir,' Higgingbottom replied. 'I think she said something about going to the apothecary's.'

'I see, thank you.'

Why did she need to go to the apothecary's? She usually asked him for any potions or... His stomach churned. Had he damaged her in some way or, God forbid, had she been lying about the contraception? His imagination ran riot, and he started to panic. She was what, thirty? Women often started getting broody around that age. What if she wanted a child but not a husband? What if...? He was striding towards the main doors before he knew it, children scattering in his wake. Once outside, much to the astonishment of those hanging around on the steps, he took off like the great bat he was reputed to be and flew off in the direction of Hogsmeade.

So, the rumours were true, then. Gleeful Slytherins held out their hands, and despondent Gryffindors coughed up their pocket money.

~HGSS~

Landing silently on the outskirts of the village, Severus marched towards the main street. He looked neither left nor right, ignoring the stares and whispers as he walked, until an all too familiar voice called out. 'Severus? You're not on Hogsmeade duty today, too, are you?'

Sybill Trelawney. Just what he needed.

'No, I'm...'

'I was just about to go to Madam Puddifoot's for some tea and one or two of her excellent scones. Why don't you join me; we...'

'Thank you, but no. I have not long finished breakfast.' He started to turn away, but she grabbed his sleeve.

'Surely a cup of tea...'

'Oh, Professor Snape,' Hermione called out from across the street. 'I picked up the potions ingredients you ordered.' She held out the bag she was carrying. 'I thought I'd save you the trip.'

Shrugging Sybill off, he stepped towards her gratefully. 'That was most kind of you, Miss Granger, but there are other matters I must also attend to.'

'Yes,' said Sybill, frowning through her thick specs at her. 'We were just about to go and have some tea.'

Severus ignored her and took the package off Hermione. He peered inside. 'Ah, they appear to have forgotten the porcupine quills. Did you pay for this?'

'Yes, of course,' Hermione replied.

'Then you may have been overcharged. Come, Miss Granger, We must sort this out immediately.' He glanced over his shoulder. 'Good day, Sybill.'

'Bye, Sybill.'

Sybill glared after them.

'So,' said Severus, when he was sure they were out of earshot. 'Bruise-healing paste. Why did you not come to me, or go to Poppy.'

'Because...' Hermione looked around quickly before giving him a brief view of her neck.

Two pink spots appeared on Severus' cheeks. 'I did...*that*? No wonder she was annoyed with him.

'Who else do you think did it?' she hissed. 'Do you think there's a revolving door in my fireplace?'

'No, of course not. I thought...'

Hermione folded her arms. 'What, Professor Snape? What did you think?'

Oh, dear. Things were going from bad to worse. 'I went to the library and you weren't there. Higginbottom said you'd gone to the apothecary's. I thought you might be hurt, that I might-that you were...' His other thoughts on the subject were most definitely better left unsaid.

'And you came after me?' Hermione sighed, her features softening, and she touched his arm. 'No, nothing like that. I'm fine, but I don't want to have to rely on a concealment charm all week.'

He nodded. 'That's understandable.' He handed back her purchases. 'Well, I'll... leave you to your shopping, Miss Granger. I shall see you at lunch, no doubt.'

Hermione opened her mouth to reply, but he Disapparated before she had a chance to say anything.

~SSHG~

Severus, however, did not appear for lunch nor, later, for dinner.

'Have you seen Severus, Hermione?' Minerva quizzed her as she sat down at the table.

'Sorry. Not since this morning, no.' Hermione sniffed the soup that had appeared in front of her. Asparagus. Her favourite.

'It's very unlike him to skip two meals these days...' Minerva continued.

'No, indeed. Perhaps there's been an emer...'

There was a shriek to her left.

Hermione spun around to see Sybill Trelawney staring into her tea-cup.

'A calamity, a catastrophe,' she wailed. 'Not one Grim buttwo'

'What was that, Sybill?' Minerva asked.

'Something about the Brothers Grimm in the tea leaves,' said Hermione.

'You may scoff,' said Sybill, peering at Hermione. 'But my inner eye tells me you are heading for a fall, so watch out.' She scowled. 'Don't go sticking your nose where it's not wanted.'

'I'll bear it in mind.' Hermione turned back to Minerva. 'Perhaps the house-elves could take a tray down to him...make sure he's all right.'

'Yes.' Minerva beamed. 'Very thoughtful of you, Hermione. Good idea.'

~HGSS~

Hermione gave a weary sigh as she closed the door to her chambers. Saturday night. Alone. As usual. With only the Wizarding Wireless for company. In all fairness, Aurora Sinistra had asked her if she wanted to go down the pub with her and Rolanda, but as much as she liked the couple, she didn't want to intrude.

Predictably, Celestina Warbeck was belting out some tune or other, and she turned the volume down so it was just loud enough to alleviate the silence. A small, black, oval box on the coffee table caught her attention.

'What on earth...?'

That hadn't been there this morning. Wherever had it come from? Noticing a scrap of parchment tucked under the silver bow on the lid, she carefully removed it and turned it over. In a familiar, spiky hand, it read:

Please accept this small gift with my compliments.

Start with the white one...I trust you will be able to work out the correct sequence after that.

Endeavour to savour each one for as long as possible.

regards

S.Snape

P.S I await your instructions for Friday.

A present? From Snape? Hermione stared at the box wondering whether it was some kind of practical joke. What on earth could it be? Unable to contain her curiosity, Hermione undid the bow and removed the lid.

Chocolates.

Five chocolates. And handmade too, by the looks of it.

They were arranged in the shape of a cross: a white one in the centre, flanked with milk chocolates on either side, and a dark one above and below it.

Hermione was already salivating, her hand reaching for the centre chocolate as instructed, when she came to her senses. Had she gone mad? She unsheathed her wand and stopped, feeling saddened that she had to do this, that she couldn't just accept his gift on face value. Again, Hermione questioned her judgement: if she couldn't trust him not to poison her, what was she doing inviting him into her bed? She put her wand away, picked up the white chocolate, and examined it. 'All right, Severus. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt this once. But if something horrible happens...' Sitting down in her favourite armchair, Hermione popped the chocolate into her mouth before she could change her mind.

She rolled it around her tongue before biting into it hesitantly. The flood of sensations almost took her breath away. Vanilla. It tasted of vanilla and... and ice-cream cones, endless summers, beaches and sand castles, buckets and spades... She chewed some more... Paddling in the sea, her father teaching her to swim, water wings, fairgrounds and candy floss, a time before magic yet magical in its own right. A time of... innocence...

How on earth did he manage to do that?

Marvelling at Severus' ingenuity, Hermione Summoned the box and looked at the chocolates again. Yes, as she suspected, there was a slight difference in colour between the two milk and the two dark ones...and if the white one represented innocence, she could well imagine what the very dark, bitter looking chocolate represented. Definitely the one to leave until last, she decided, picking out the lighter of the two milk chocolates to try next.

Toffee? Not quite. Her taste buds grappled with the new taste, then it hit her. Treacle toffee pudding and custard... and she was back at her Sorting Feast: the boats, the first sighting of Hogwarts. Lessons, her first spell, holding a quill, evenings in the Gryffindor common room, the boys, Chocolate Frogs, Hagrid's Hut. A carefree time: a time of adventure, of first steps in a new world and a forging of life-long friendships...

Hermione wiped away a tear, feeling terribly nostalgic for a time when lulling a three-headed dog to sleep had seemed the worst terror anyone could be expected to face. If only they'd known what was coming...

Wondering what sort of memories it would rekindle, Hermione selected the last of the milk chocolates. Hmm...? How peculiar... Sweet, almost like strawberries, but bitter, too, then something hot and peppery like chilli came in behind it. She smiled. Oh yes, first kisses and... Parchment, freshly mown grass and the potions storeroom. The Burrow: Ron, sneaking into his bedroom, hesitant explorations and lost virginities, being in love, being loved and knowing war and loss and the end of childhood.

Hermione sighed, but there were no tears left for that part of her life...she had cried too much and too often for the dead. The lingering taste reminded her instead of how incredibly brave they had been and how strong the experience had made them...it was hard to imagine now when she looked at the current batch of seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, just how impossibly young they'd been, and what they...and others...had willingly sacrificed to rid the world of Voldemort.

'And what will you remind me of?' she asked the fourth chocolate, keen to move on. Well, there was only one way to find out. She put her feet up and closed her eyes...

Rich and dark...coffee and... something exotic she couldn't quite put her finger on. But mmm, how delightful! Sultry, indolent days in the tropics. Hot climates and hammocks. Longings, seduction and sexual awakenings. The Pyramids, the Pacific. Expanded horizons and new found confidence. Womanhood and searching for something that was always tantalisingly just out of reach... Definitely the best one yet.

She eyed the last chocolate in the box. Having had all the flavours of her life summed up thus far, what could its message be?

A plain, bitter, chocolate truffle. That was it? 'All right, Severus. What are you trying to tell me?' She held on to the taste a little longer before swallowing and detected a hint of something hidden, precious...maybe even that elusive something she'd been looking for. Dark, mysterious, the future? Take the chance, it seemed to say, and then it was gone.

Hermione sat a while, thinking what it could all mean. She was pretty certain he'd used Amortentia to achieve those effects, but it wasn't a love potion...she didn't think her feelings had changed towards him in any way. He must have spent ages concocting such a thing, though...which was probably why he'd skipped lunch and dinner... but why had he gone to such lengths? Was it just to say he was sorry? A box of Honeyduke's would have done just as well. And that last chocolate... Should she be worried about any ulterior motives? Hermione snorted thinking of Sybill's warning earlier. Was he trying to make her fall for him?

She'd have to ask him Friday...which reminded her. Summoning quill and parchment, she wrote Severus a quick note:

The chocolates were wonderful. Thank you so much for such a unique gift.

As for Friday, I don't have any 'instructions' or requests...just come as you are, and we'll see what the evening brings.

sincerely,

H.G.

That should confuse him, she thought, grinning to herself.

~SSHG~

Severus was not so much confused as unsettled. He didn't like uncertainties, and this didn't bode well. 'Tie a red and gold bow around your cock and present yourself naked,' was more along the lines of what he'd been expecting...he wouldn't have liked such a directive, but at least he could have understood it and hazarded a guess as to how the evening was likely pan out...and God knows it was what he deserved. 'Come as you are,' could mean anything, and it made him nervous.

He shouldn't have gone chasing after her like that. When she'd told him that she wasn't hurt (or pregnant), he'd felt so relieved he almost kissed her. Imagine. Him, Severus Snape, snogging Hermione Granger in the middle of the street in broad daylight! He'd Disapparated quickly before he could act on the impulse. Walking back across the castle grounds, he'd felt ashamed of jumping to such idiotic conclusions and decided that at the very least he owed Hermione an apology, which was when he thought up the idea of the chocolates. They had taken an age to make, but it had been worth it. Hermione had liked them... Severus picked up her note again and traced the letters with his fingernail. Sighing, he carefully placed it inside the cover of his treasured copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and wondered what she'd perceived in the darker of the

dark chocolates. It was too much to hope that she'd wanted a taste of him. *She'll tell me when she's ready.* Now all he had to do was get through five days of teaching before he could find out what she had in store for him.

Naturally, the week dragged by interminably slowly, and Severus grew ever more anxious. Whenever he saw Hermione, she smiled a sunny smile at him, which he returned with the habitual incline of the head. It did nothing to put him at ease...in fact, he had an awful feeling that he was in deep trouble. He seriously considered using Legilimency a couple of times but stopped himself. If he was that concerned, all he had to do was call the whole thing off...but that would mean he'd never get to see her naked again or have the chance to touch her and... He shuddered. No, he wasn't going to go there. This was a casual arrangement; he could not afford any emotional involvement. It was about fucking. Just that. And yes, he'd fuck her as many times as she wanted, but he would never let on that he wanted so much more out of their relationship.

~HGSS~

'Come as you are,' Severus murmured, turning from side to side, admiring the way the robe swished around his legs as he did so. He had interpreted this to mean wear your best dayrobe, and so he had. He flicked his wand over it one more time just to make sure there were no bits of fluff or anything else to spoil the immaculate blackness of it. Picking up a comb, he made a final attempt to control his newly washed, flyaway hair, but without his usual pomade keeping it in place, it was hopeless. Applying some now was out of the question since it would make his hair look as greasy as if he hadn't bothered to wash it...and that was an impression he most definitely did not want to give. He shrugged his shoulders in defeat. That was the best he could do.

Rather than arrive empty-handed...and he would have died before carrying a bouquet of flowers or some other such nonsense...Severus grabbed the bottle of wine Hermione had brought the week before to take with him. On activating the Floo, he discovered that there were no wards in place, and after calling out her name several times and receiving no reply, he stepped through.

'Miss Granger?'

'Shan't be a minute,' a voice called from the bedroom. 'Sit down and make yourself comfortable.'

Severus looked around at the available choice of furniture. The armchair, he thought, would make him seem too aloof...and it was where she normally sat, anyway. The other chair, he knew from his previous visit, was a bit on the low side. The sofa it was, then. Sitting down, Severus took stock of his surroundings: everything looked the same apart from the new flower arrangement on the side-table near the fireplace. The lighting however was softer than he remembered, and there was an ice-bucket with a bottle of champagne in it, together with two fluted glasses, on the coffee table in front of him.

As he was taking that in, Hermione stuck her head around the door and smiled. 'Would you mind opening the bubbly for me, please?'

'Certainly.' Severus leaned forward and picked up the bottle. Concentrating on peeling off the foil and untangling the wire contraption around the neck, he did not notice Hermione enter the room.

She said something, and he looked up, stifling a gasp. Clad in a black, sleeveless evening dress that appeared to be held together by a silver clasp on one shoulder, she looked simply stunning. Hermione took a step towards him, which was when he noticed the thigh-high split up the side.

'Like it?' she asked, doing a twirl.

With impeccable timing, the cork shot out of the bottle with a loud pop and sailed across the room.

Hermione tried not to laugh. 'I'll take that as a yes, then.'

Severus swallowed hard. 'It is very... becoming.'

'Thanks. You look very smart, too.' Hermione sat down in the armchair. 'Would you care to pour?' She nodded towards the glasses and crossed her legs, giving Severus a flash of thigh and a glimpse of a lacy stocking top.

Hands shaking slightly, but glad of something to take his mind of Hermione's underwear, Severus managed to pour the champagne without spilling any. It took every ounce of self-restraint at his disposal, though, not to drop his gaze as he handed Hermione her glass.

'Thank you and... cheers.' She smiled and took a sip. 'Hmm, not bad.... So. How was your week?'

It took a second or two for him to register the question. 'My... week?' Hell, it was hell. 'Same as usual. Why?' What possible reason could she have of wanting to know that?

Hermione sighed. 'Look. I think we got off on the wrong foot last Friday...not that I'm complaining or anything, but... I don't want you to think I'm using you. I didn't choose you by default; I approached you because I enjoy your company. And... I would very much like us to become... friends.'

Alarm bells starting ringing. Whenever a woman said she wanted to become his friend, disaster usually followed. Narcissa Malfoy had been the last one, and look where that had got him.

'Every time you came into the library, you were looking harassed,' Hermione continued, 'which is why I thought you might want to relax a little before... Before. Hence, the champagne.'

'I see.' Severus stared into his glass while he considered his response. 'Well, in that case... I taught Potions to children of various ages, abilities and interest in the subject. There were three explosions and two hospitalisations, neither of which were fatal. I marked the usual amount of essays, broke up an extortion racket run by three of my Slytherins and two Ravenclaws...then awarded them all points for fostering inter-house relations. I had the usual number of Howlers, Death Threats, offers of marriage from desperate crones countrywide, and requests from the deluded and insane for advice on Horcrux making. All in all, it was pretty uneventful.' He looked up expecting to see Hermione laughing at his tale of woe, but she looked deadly serious.

'Tell me,' Hermione said after a moment's silence. 'Why did you go back to teaching?'

He smiled wryly. 'If I had a Sickle for every time I've been asked that question.' And for every time he'd given the same, standard answer. 'Because, Minerva offered me the job; because Hogwarts is a relatively safe place for me to live and because I wanted to make reparations for my time here as Headmaster. I believe I owed my colleagues that much.'

'Ye-es, that's what Minerva told me when I asked her.' She was still staring at him. 'But what's the real reason?'

He could have been evasive, he really could. Equally, he could have been affronted that she'd doubted his word, but no one had ever questioned his motives further. No one had ever bothered. He stared at his glass again, his hair flopping forward, and let out a long sigh. 'All right... the truth of the matter, Miss Granger, is that I was shamed by the behaviour of my house when Voldemort attacked. They left, Miss Granger. En masse. Now, while a cynic might say they were only acting out of a strong sense of self-preservation, to everyone else, they looked like cowards...myself included. And, since I had been either their Housemaster or Headmaster from the day of their Sorting, I hold myself responsible for that desertion. If they had stayed and fought, there would have been fewer... casualties. I returned, Miss Granger, not only to help this school recover from the damage inflicted upon it, but to ensure that future generations of Slytherins never behave like that ag...' Severus flinched as two hands rested on his shoulders. 'What are you doing?'

'Giving you a back rub.'

'Wh-why?'

'Because... you're tense, it's Friday, and I'd like to give you something in return for the choccies.'

'There's no need. I...oh...'

'Just try and relax...'

Oh, fuck.

'...And for what it's worth, I think you're being too hard on yourself. You weren't there...ooh, that's a big knot...there was no one to lead them, and in any case, you would have blown your cover if you'd ever appeared to them as anything other than a loyal Death Eater. Besides, in the end, they...we...were just a bunch of kids.'

'That's beside... the...!' Cool fingers were running through his hair, raking his scalp. 'Uh... point.' At least, he was pretty sure it was beside it, though what the point...and there had been one, he was positive of that...was, he was having trouble remembering.

'Relax...'

How? How was he supposed to do that? *She's up to something*, the small part of his brain that was still thinking rationally warned; the rest of it couldn't bring itself to care. She was touching him; she smelled heavenly, and his body was responding accordingly... *This feels so...* Suddenly, the fingers were gone.

'You're really far too tense. How about we continue this in the bedroom, hmm?' She walked around to the front of him and picked up the ice bucket. 'Come on. We'll be much more comfortable there.'

Somehow, he seriously doubted it.

'Oh, and bring your glass,' she called over her shoulder as she disappeared out of sight.

Chucking back the rest of the champagne, Severus got to his feet and followed her.

~SSHG~

Not really knowing what to expect, Severus was pleasantly surprised by Hermione's bedroom. It was feminine, naturally, but not overly frilly or girly, and there was a distinct lack of pink. He glanced about him, noting the candles that were floating around the bed and creating dancing shadows on the walls. The bed itself had the covers pulled back and towels laid on it. He inhaled deeply. Bergamot...or something orangey...with something spicy and...

'Essential oils,' Hermione offered. 'In case you were wondering. Is it ok?'

'Mm. It smells like... Christmas.'

Hermione laughed. 'I'm glad you think so.' She took his glass off him and put it next to hers. 'Now, clothes off and lie face down on the bed.'

Severus hesitated a moment, but then did as he was told, kicking off his boots and quickly stripping to his underpants. He always hated this bit...and Hermione wasn't making it any easier for him, either. She was staring at his body, head tilted to one side and chewing her bottom lip thoughtfully. It made him want to bite it. Feeling totally inadequate, Severus took a deep breath and pulled his pants down to his ankles. He stepped out of them nonchalantly, trying not to look as embarrassed as he felt.

'Hmm... Very nice. Very nice, indeed.'

Smirking, Hermione unclasped the fastening on her dress and pushed it off over her hips. Severus gasped before he could stop himself. He couldn't recall ever having seeing an undergarment quite like... like *that*...well, not on a real woman, anyway.

Hermione blushed. 'It's a corset,' she said, kicking her shoes off.

Severus swallowed hard.

'Yes.' *Blackwithstockingsandsuspendersandnoknickersandgodslwantosuckthosetiits.* 'I'd gathered that.'

'I don't get many opportunities to wear sexy underwear these days, so I thought I'd make the most of it,' Hermione said, giggling. 'Now, on the bed with you, Professor Snape. It's time for your massage.'

'You like bossing people around, don't you?' he grumbled, climbing onto the bed.

Hermione followed, straddling him. 'My turn to call the shots, remember?'

Only too well. *And what an excellent idea it was*, he thought smugly, feeling her pubes tickling his backside. Severus let out a contented sigh, then jumped as a pair of oily hands made contact with his back.

'Do you have a problem with being touched?' Hermione asked as she started to move her hands in a broad, circular motion.

'I am not acc...*huh*usteded...'

'I thought not,' Hermione said. 'You're like a coiled spring. Your muscles are rigid.'

That's not the only thing that's... Severus buried his face in the pillow to stifle a groan as Hermione began working her thumbs around his shoulder blades.

'Just let it go, Severus.'

'P'fessr Snip,' a muffled voice replied.

'Oh, very well,' she huffed. 'Have it your own way.'

Hermione's hands began to move more assertively, rhythmically. It was really quite hypnotic: a firm sweep over the expanse of his back, over the shoulders and down the arms. Sometimes, she would circle her thumbs up his spine and press hard when she found a 'knotty bit'...which made him yelp a couple of times, but then she'd go back to those nice, soothing circles. Severus' mind drifted, the worries of the week floating away. He could almost bring himself to believe that this wasn't just a prelude to sex, that she was doing this because she cared. But no one ever did anything for him without expecting something in return. No, she felt obliged to do it because of the chocolates. That was why; she'd said as much. He wasn't going to let that spoil his enjoyment, though. *Ahh... Such lovely hands...* Off in the distance, someone was calling his name.

'Hmm...?'

'I said, it's time to turn over.'

Sleepily, he obeyed, opening one eye to see Herm..*Miss Granger* smiling beatifically at him.

'Feeling nice and relaxed?' she whispered.

Severus nodded. Speaking seemed too much of an effort.

'Good. Put your arms out to the side for me. I'm going to do your front, now.'

Front. That sounded good. Sighing, Severus stretched his arms out to the edges of the bed. Then his nose started itching, and he went to scratch it...only to find he couldn't move his arm. His mind snapped to attention immediately. Turning his head, he saw the bindings on his wrist. 'What are you doing?'

'Hush, don't worry. I don't want you touching me just yet.'

Severus pulled hard, but to no avail. 'Miss Granger...'

'It's all right,' Hermione said, placing her hands gently on his chest. 'I'm not going to hurt you. If it gets too much, just say the safeword, and you'll be released.'

'Safeword?' Panicking slightly, he looked around him. The candles seemed closer to the bed than he remembered..*Oh, Gods! Not wax play, please, not that*

'Yes,' she replied. 'Just say, "Hermione", and you can leave.'

What? 'I did not agree to this.' He struggled against the ropes again, but they held tight.

'No?' Hermione began to trace lazy circles around his nipples with her fingertips. 'I seem to remember the agreement was... no pain, and the host...or in this case, hostess...decides on the activities for the evening. Are you going back on that agreement already... Professor?'

He gasped. 'What-what are you going to do to me?'

'I'm going to give you pleasure, of course, but you have to trust me.' She grinned. 'Can you do that?'

Trust her? He didn't trust anybody. 'Untie me.'

'Say the magic word.'

'I believe I made it quite clear, *Miss Granger*, that we were to remain on formal terms...'

Hermione moved swiftly. Placing her hands on either side of his head, she pressed her thumbs against his lips and kissed the tip of his nose. 'Don't be angry, Severus,' she whispered. 'Save your energy. You drove me crazy last week; now it's my turn.' Weaving her fingers through his hair, she pushed it off his face and tucked it behind his ears. 'Believe me when I tell you, you'll be screaming my name before this night is over.'

Severus glared at her. 'I do not scream.'

'We shall see, won't we...? Severus.'

'Do your worst. And it's Professor Snape to you.'

'Worst?' Hermione giggled, sitting back up. 'I think you'll find it's my best.'

She leant over the side of the bed, and Severus couldn't help but admire the way her breasts bounced...not that that made him any less furious, of course...and the rather fetching way that corset pushed them up... *Stop thinking about her tits!* Remembering that he was, in fact, a wizard, Severus considered Summoning his wand while Hermione was otherwise occupied but quickly realised it was hopeless. She'd get to hers faster, and then where would he be? Trussed up like chicken with an angry witch pointing a wand at his throat, that's where.

As he was contemplating making his bid for freedom, there was a chinking noise, and Hermione bobbed back up again. The way her wild mane tumbled around her shoulders made him want to grab a fistful and pull her head back and bare her throat and... Severus hissed as Hermione settled on his hips again and slowly rubbed herself along the length of his, somewhat deflated, cock.

There was no way his body could ignore the feel of a warm wet cunt.*This is what you get for being a bastard.*

'I think someone's enjoying this more than they're willing to admit.' Hermione smirked at him, looking immensely pleased with herself. 'Now, if I were a selfish person, like someone I know, I'd use *this*, she ground her hips to emphasise her point, 'for my own amusement, then throw you out. Fortunately for you, I'm feeling generous.' Still grinning, she leaned forward, resting her weight on her left elbow. 'Let's see how you like... this...'

Severus gasped. 'Fuck, that's...uh...cold.'

'Isn't it...?' Holding the ice cube she'd retrieved from the champagne bucket, Hermione trailed it along Severus collar bone, then kissed along the wet path she had made.

Wide-eyed, Severus exhaled sharply at the feel of Hermione's hot breath warming his chilled skin. 'Stop... it's...'

'Just say the word, Severus.' Hermione dragged the melting cube down his sternum and circled his right nipple with it.

'Go to hell, *Miss Granger*.'

'So you want more? That's fine by me.' She pressed the ice onto his nipple, and as it puckered and stiffened, she covered it with her mouth, sucking hard. Severus cried out and tried to wriggle away from her. She'd found his weak spot.

'Keep still, or I'll tie your feet as well.'

'You'll pay for this, you cow!'

Ignoring him, Hermione put the remains of the cube on the left nipple while she continued to lavish her attention on the right. The alternating hot and cold sensations were close to intolerable. Screwing his eyes closed, Severus bit his lip to stop himself from screaming for mercy. He thrashed against his bindings in his torment...then froze as a hand grabbed his balls. Panting, he opened his eyes to see Hermione gazing at him.

'Who's got sensitive nipples, then?'

'Fuck. Off.'

'That's, "Fuck. Off. *Hermione*"!' She squeezed his sac gently. 'These are rather warm, aren't they? Shall I cool them down a bit?'

'You wouldn't dare,' he growled.

Hermione laughed and scooted down the bed. 'You're ever so sexy when you're angry. But don't worry. I've got something else in mind *Accio, lube!*'

Lube! Severus raised his head off the pillow and glared at her. *Oh, no. You're not sticking anything up my arse.'*

'I wasn't going to,' Hermione replied, squeezing a large glob into the palm of her hand. 'But I wouldn't go putting ideas in my head, if I were you.'

He sniffed. 'Smells vile.'

'Supposed to be strawberry,' Hermione said, rubbing her hands together.

'Strawberry? Doesn't smell anything like it.'

'I know.' She sucked on her index finger and winked at him. 'Doesn't taste much like it, either.'

For some reason, the idea of being tied up didn't seem *quite* so bad anymore.

'Hmm... Now where shall I put this? Um...'

Smug bitch.

'No ideas? Well, how about... here?'

Moaning, he began thrusting as soon as her fingers closed around his cock. He couldn't help himself; it felt so slippery and warm and wonderful.

'Ohh, *Ohh*, Her...' Letting his head fall back into the pillow, he gave himself up to her expert hands. It was almost as nice as the real thing; it was all too easy to imagine her cunt around him as he rocked his hips in time with her movements. 'Please... don't stop.' It wouldn't take much more...

'Sorry, big boy. Not yet.'

Hermione took her hands away, leaving his cock feeling cold, exposed and unwanted. But soon they were back, sliding up and over his thighs, fondling his balls, wrapping something around them...

'*Now*, what are you doing?'

'Just some beads,' Hermione said. 'To take the edge off.'

She tugged gently, stretching his scrotum away from his body. It felt strange, slightly uncomfortable but not unpleasant.

'More lube, I think.' Squeezing the tube, Hermione squirted a generous amount directly onto his cock. Severus yelped.

'That's bloody freezing!'

'Oops.' Giggling, Hermione carefully wound the remaining half of the necklace around his shaft from base to tip.

Not knowing what she was going to do, Severus sucked in a breath as Hermione took him in hand again and started stroking, rolling the beads under her fingers as she did so.

'OHfuckohfuckohfu-uuck...'

'Feel good?' Hermione cooed, changing hands. 'Let's see how long I can make you last.'

Hermione worked Severus skilfully, bringing him close to orgasm and then pulling down on his scrotum to deny it, until he was begging for release.

'You know what you have to do, Severus.'

'Y-ess. Anything. Oh, gods, please...*please*.'

Pushing the beads down to the base, Hermione took his cock into her mouth and sucked.

'Oh... *Hermione!*' His bonds were gone, his hands flying to Hermione's head, pushing her down, insensible to anything but the urge to thrust and come into something hot and wet and willing...

Hermione choked and swallowed. While she was still trying to get her breath back, Severus pounced, pushing her backwards and pinning her to the bed with the length of his body. Chest heaving, he stared down at her shocked expression. *Fuck. I've scared her.* A second later, Hermione's face cracked into a grin, and she started giggling helplessly. Something bubbled up and broke inside Severus at the sound of her laughter. Something that felt suspiciously like happiness. Miracle of miracles: she wasn't frightened of him.

'Laugh at me, would you?' Severus reached for the champagne bottle. Pushing himself up on one arm, he took a hefty swig, hiccupped and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. 'Like some?' Before Hermione had a chance to reply, he poured the remainder of the contents over her chest.

Hermione shrieked. 'Aargh. You bast...' but was cut off when Severus' mouth descended on her breasts and started licking and slurping and sucking.

'I've been wanting... to do this... all night.'

'What...oh, gods...waste good...*ahh*...champagne?'

Smirking, he let the nipple he was attached to leave his mouth with a pop. 'Be thankful it wasn't the contents of the ice bucket.'

She looked beautiful...lying there, hair all over the place, all wet and sticky and eminently fuckable. Hermione's hand reached for him, her palm stroking the side of his face, and Severus leaned into it, eyes fluttering as her thumb traced the ridge of his cheekbone.

'Kiss me, Severus.'

Oh, how he wanted to, but... Severus shook his head ruefully, heart aching at her evident disappointment. How could he tell her that he was hanging on to his pride by a thread? That if she wanted an open relationship, kissing her was out of the question? That if he allowed himself that indulgence, and she went off with another man, it would break him?

'That is one intimacy too far... Hermione.'

She nodded, swallowing hard. 'Okay. I understand.' Hermione pulled Severus' head down to her chest and held him there, stroking his hair. Severus shifted his weight so he was lying at her side and ran his hand over her stockinged thigh, toying with the suspender. He could feel the first stirrings of arousal in his groin and vowed that, this time, he would make it good for her.

Nuzzling the breast closest to him, Severus put his hand between her legs and gently eased them apart. Cupping her mound, he dipped two fingers inside her. Oh, yes. She was more than ready for him. 'Are you always this wet?'

'Hmm...? Oh, that's nice... Yes... usually...'

Deftly, he probed until he found the spongy spot he was searching for and pressed.

Hermione shuddered against his fingers. 'Oh, that's... oh...'

'Like that?'

'Yes, yes I do... more.'

Curling his fingers slightly, Severus continued to massage her g-spot. 'Rub your clit.'

Watching her pleasure herself was making him hard again, but it was her face, screwed up in concentration that Severus found the most fascinating. That was the face he wanted to see when she came with him inside her, and he wanted to be inside her right now. Withdrawing his fingers, Severus shushed Hermione's moans of protest and got between her legs, pushing home with one steady thrust.

He watched her face closely for any signs of discomfort, but Hermione's gasp of pleasure reassured him that everything was all right. Hooking her legs over his arms, Severus pulled out and thrust deeper, moving slowly at first, wanting to make it last as long as possible.

'I want you to come for me.'

'Can't... not like this...'

He stilled. 'What? Never?'

Hermione shook her head. 'No. But don't stop. It's still nice.'

Nice? He'd show her nice. He was a Slytherin for Merlin's sake. With the pride of his house at stake, Severus allowed her legs to flop back down on the bed and shifted position so that he was lying with his right leg over Hermione's left. 'Let's try it like this. Don't be afraid to squeeze.'

'Oh. Okay.' As Severus started to move again, Hermione quickly fell into the rhythm he set, bumping against him and rubbing herself against his pubic bone. Severus doubted he would ever forget the look of wonder on her face.

'Oh, that's... incredible.'

Severus picked up the pace at her cries of encouragement. Hermione was squeezing him harder as her breathing grew more erratic...so hard it was almost painful, but he gritted his teeth and kept going. By the pink flush spreading over her chest, he knew it wouldn't be much longer.

'Come for me.' Latching onto her neck, he sucked on that sensitive spot as Hermione dug her nails into his buttocks and screamed his name, shuddering and twitching uncontrollably under and around him. Then all control deserted him, and there was nothing and no one but them... her... this...

~HGSS~

'I think I've done it again,' Severus said, touching the new bruise on her neck. He hoped he didn't sound *too* unrepentant.

Hermione rolled her eyes. 'Just as well there's some bruise salve left, then.' She stroked his face tenderly. 'I really, really want to kiss you now, though. I wish you'd let me.'

He sighed. It would be all too easy to give in, but he couldn't afford to take the risk. Unless... 'Tell me,' Severus said, winding a lock of her hair around his finger. 'The last chocolate. What did you get out of it?'

Hermione turned on her side to face him. 'I've been meaning to ask you about that,' she replied. 'It tasted like... like something hard to reach but worth the effort. Something I had to take a chance on. I think. Were you trying to tell me something?'

Oh, that was a good sign. A very good sign indeed. 'Well, no. Not exactly... Its purpose was to give you a clue about what you're seeking in your life right now.'

'A clue, eh?' Hermione frowned in mock puzzlement. 'I wonder what it could be?'

'Me...!' Severus replied quickly while he still had the courage. 'Go out to dinner with me. Then, if things work out...'

'What? You mean dinner like... as in a date?'

She didn't sound *too* opposed to the idea. 'Yes,' Severus forged ahead, regardless. 'I want to do things properly. Court you. Better still, let's spend the day together. We could go to London if you want or...or anywhere.'

'Are you saying you won't kiss me unless I agree to go out with you?' Hermione's lips were twitching. Was she laughing at him?

'Yes.'

'That's blackmail.'

'Yes.'

'I see.' Hermione bit her lip. 'So... after our day out, your plan is... we have a romantic dinner for two and then what happens...a bit of hand-holding? A moonlight walk around the lake?' She was smiling at him. A genuine smile, and his heart did a somersault.

Severus risked a shy smile of his own. 'If that would please you.'

'It might. And then what happens?'

Severus wished she'd stop nibbling her lip in that bloody infuriating way of hers. 'And then... Then I'd... escort you back here...'

'Yes?'

'Yes, and... Stop laughing...and then I would...'

'Yes?'

'That is to say, we'd... Oh, sod it.'

And he kissed her.

~~ END ~~