

Contraceptus

by Ariadne AWS

Severus has found Hermione's shoe. What happens next? (Winner, Best Drabble/Snapshot ~ 2008 OWL Awards)

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: For Droxy, who provided this prompt on Authors & Artists Night at Terminus: "Severus has found Hermione's shoe. What's next?" This was supposed to be one drabble, but the damned thing developed a plot, so it's a seven-part series.

Severus opened one eye and glared at the morning, rubbing a finger over the angry lump on his forehead, his eye falling on the parchment on his desk. *Blast.*

An hour later, bathed, dressed, he sat at the desk and squinted through his headache to read.

You will find your medicinal potions supply missing. I've taken them to my flat.

P.S. Your cauldron, too.

He remembered laughter, sharing brandy by the fire.

Nothing after that.

He suspected, however, that the welt on his head and her potions theft related somehow to the single silver sandal he'd found under his bed.

She was twirling the other sandal around her finger, glaring moodily through a tumbled curl at her table, where potion bottles arrayed themselves on a chessboard, playing through a series of moves only to stop, re-set, and start over.

No series of moves was longer than six.

She didn't look up at his arrival, just sat twirling her shoe.

"I've returned its mate."

"So I see."

The potions bottles continued their abbreviated games.

"Do you plan to explain your hasty departure?"

The twirling stopped. She held up her shoe, giving him an excellent view of its heel.

"No. Deduce it."

The blue queen bottle checkmated the black king bottle. The pieces reset.

"I remember nothing after you joined me for a drink after the ceremony."

She examined the silver heel. "That doesn't surprise me. I'm amazed you're standing this morning."

"You brained me with your shoe?"

A dimple that could only be described as "bitchy" appeared, but she did not look at him.

Hermione twitched her wand at the blue bottles. The queen rose and hovered in front of Severus' hand.

"That's not a headache potion."

"Two points to Slytherin. What is it?"

"Contraceptus."

"One point. And its date?"

Blast.

The blue bottle returned to its place on the board. The game began anew.

Hermione stopped twirling the sandal and fingered the heel. "Why, Severus?"

With all the dignity he could muster, standing as he was in her flat holding a silver sandal, the mate to the one she'd clocked him with the night before, he muttered, "Why... what?"

She shot him a disgusted look. "Please."

"Why do I have a Contraceptus potion in my private stores dating from your sixth year at Hogwarts?"

Her eyes blazed an affirmation.

"You were a student."

"Who was she?"

"No one of consequence."

"Who was she?" Hermione demanded, her cheeks reddening.

"It is none of your business, Hermione."

"It is when I go to your stores intending to rejoin you in your bedroom only to discover...*that*."

The blue bottle hovered mid-move for emphasis.

"I repeat. It is none of your business."

"Not any of the staff, I'm sure..." Several black pieces left the board in quick succession. "Dumbledore would not have allowed a Death Eater inside Hogwarts. Visitors were curtailed, students forbidden." Her eyes glowed with enough intensity to inflame the board.

"That leaves few possibilities. Was it Tonks, Severus?"

He paled.

His voice a low whisper. "How dare you, Hermione?"

She looked pointedly at her shoe in his hand and tilted her chin.

His hands were trembling.

"You've not denied it, Severus. Do you ask me to believe that your prevarication skills have slipped?"

His hand tightened around her shoe.

"You always communicate by not speaking. Always. How do you think I knew to save you, knew how? Not because you spoke the words, but you told me, just the same, because I knew to look. I'm looking now, Severus."

"And you see what?"

"I see a pathetic attempt - "

"*Stop.*"

The board re-set. The black headache potion bottle moved one space forward.

"I said she was no one of consequence. You have correctly surmised that the potion was made for no one on staff, that no Death Eaters were in the castle, and that students were forbidden. It was not the Auror. It was made for..." he muttered something inaudible.

His skin felt clammy. He'd never hated himself more.

Uncharacteristically, Hermione said nothing.

"It was made in case..."

A blue pawn moved forward.

He raised his clenched fist to his forehead and turned away. "For you. In case they won."