

Lotions and Potions

by sc010f

Severus Snape has been dead for years, and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 9

Severus Snape has been dead for years, and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

The late Severus Snape presents the first and last word in potions and lotions. Perfect for that special, hard to buy for witch or wizard on your Christmas list.

"Harry! What is this?" Hermione demanded, waving the offending parchment at him, dislodging the marmalade pot.

"The twins' new line of products," Harry said around his toast. Ginny smiled and poured him another cup of coffee.

"They're desecrating the memory of Severus Snape for *marketing*?"

"That's a little extreme, Hermione," Ginny said, passing the sausages. "Fred and George are trying to . . ."

"Capitalize on the death of a hero?" Hermione demanded. "How could you support this?"

"Hermione . . . listen, it's a difficult time for all of us - this is an opportunity to . . . bring Snape the recognition he deserves. All of the formulae that Fred and George are using - thanks very much, Ginny, I will have another slice - are from Snape's papers. Plus, each product they sell comes with the pamphlet you wrote about what a hero he was." Harry smiled benignly across the table.

"That was his *obituary*, you insensitive clod!"

"Whatever it was it's certainly helping the sales!" Ron chimed in from behind his newspaper. "People can't get enough of the old git's story. Or his products!"

"I can hardly imagine that Professor Snape would have made beauty products," Hermione huffed.

"Well, he didn't; not for himself. But apparently, he had a side business going on with Madame Maxime. Must have started after the Triwizard Tournament or something. She was more than happy to sell the rights. It gave her and Hagrid enough to marry on, you know," Ron commented also around a mouthful of toast.

"Speaking of marriage, Hermione, when are you going to settle down and get yourself sprogged? It's the only way, you know," Ginny asked, smiling beatifically.

Hermione tried not to throw the toast rack at her friend. Ever since Ginny and Harry had announced the impending arrival of their first child, Ginny's answer for everything had been marriage and children.

"Well, some of us have work to do," she contented herself with saying. "Thank you for breakfast."

"Come back and see us again! You can't work all your life!" Ginny called to her back.

Hermione seethed all the way from the Potters' front door to the Apparation point near her office building.

She was still seething as she arrived at her cubicle that was overrun with papers and books . . . with the addition of a package wrapped in the distinctive paper of Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes perched precariously on her desk.

Gingerly she picked up the card.

Merry Christmas! read the card. *Perhaps the enclosed will improve your outlook as well as your lookout. Love and kisses, D.*

Draco fucking Malfoy.

Equally gingerly, she opened the package. Inside was a small jar of face cream with the legend *The Late Severus Snape Presents*. Out fluttered a small parchment with *The Legend of Severus Snape: Hero for All Time* printed on it. It was her obituary.

Flummoxed and furious, Hermione sank to her chair. How could that bastard do this? Not only was Draco capitalizing on Professor Snape's demise (as chief bankroller of the adult side - something Harry wouldn't touch - of Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes - his being Charlie's ex-flavor of the month had its uses for all the Weasley family), but he was also perpetuating the sheer crassness that was the commercialism of Christmas.

Hermione seethed all the way up through lunch, but by three, she had calmed down enough to cast an appraising glance at the jar.

It sat on a shelf right before her treasured copy of *Hogwarts, A History*.

Taunting her.

Improve your outlook as well as your lookout, indeed.

Hermione turned back to her work.

The jar sat upon her shelf. When six came, she was driven out by the friendly house-elf cleaning staff and gathered her things in preparation for Christmas drinks with Draco.

It wouldn't hurt, she supposed, to try a little.

Sighing heavily, as if the weight of the wizarding world was upon her shoulders, she put a dollop on her face, massaged it in, and slipped the jar into her bag before she hurried down into the holly-decked streets.

"Granger danger! Granger danger!" slurred Draco.

"Shut up," said Blaise, cuffing him affectionately as the pair watched Hermione unsteadily make her way back from the bar laden with their drinks.

Draco wondered if it was too soon in their relationship for him to slink under the table and suck Blaise off. Probably.

"She is looking better; do you think she's used it?"

"Of course she used it. Look at how Weasley's watching her." Draco pointed to the corner where Ronald Weasley had broken off his snogging session with Madeline Threepwood to watch his ex-girlfriend move across the pub.

"That's it, I'm calling in our bet," Blaise crowed.

"What bet is that?" asked Hermione, plonking their drinks down on the table.

"The bet that Draco and I have that you'd use Severus' product and attract the attention of every straight male in here."

"zat so? And what exactly did you wager?"

"Yeah, Blaise, what am I going to have to do?"

Blaise's smile was smug.

"Blow me under the table."

Her flat was cold and dark. Crookshanks had died that autumn, and she hadn't had the heart to replace him.

"Merry Christmas to me," she muttered, sitting down on her couch, pulling the jar of lotion from her bag.

She had to admit, her face did feel nice. Perhaps *The Late Severus Snape Presents* line of products was a worthwhile endeavor. It just didn't seem right to take advantage of a hero. Looking at the clock, she noticed it was time.

"Severus? I'm sorry I'm late," she said, settling onto a cushion and drawing her cloak close to her.

Silence was her only reply. The silvery grey tombstone sat in the snowy quiet of the country graveyard. Severus Snape had professed a desire to be buried in the churchyard of a small town in the north of England, far from Hogwarts.

"It's almost Christmas Eve, Severus," she said, "I'd come tomorrow, but I have to go to my parents' tomorrow. So I thought I'd come tonight."

She paused. She had been making this pilgrimage for several years: a sop to her conscience for leaving him to die.

Some nights were easier than others. This was not an easy night.

Giving up, she sat in silence, trying to find the words to tell him about Fred and George's use of his products, Ginny's pregnancy, Draco's burgeoning relationship with Blaise, her continuing solitude.

"Oh, come off it, Hermione," she muttered to herself, "like he'd care about your nattering on."

"On the contrary, Miss Granger," a voice came from behind her, "I appreciate your concern. Although you are courting illness by sitting out here in the cold. Come in before you catch your death."

Hermione scrambled to her feet and spun, scattering snow and slipping on an icy patch. The last thing she heard as she cracked her head on Severus Snape's tombstone was Severus Snape's voice, cursing softly.

The room was spinning and the pillow behind her head soft.

"Are you feeling better, Miss Granger?" asked Severus Snape, swimming into focus.

"Ngh - dead," Hermione managed.

"No, just rumored to be so."

The room spun and went black again.

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Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 9

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Lotions and Potions - II

"You're . . . not dead?" Hermione asked over the rim of her mug, about an hour later. She was wrapped in a plaid blanket that smelled of lavender. Her head swam, but from what she could tell, the room was warm and cozy, with books lining the walls and a fire crackling merrily in the fireplace. Sipping her tea, she tasted the sweet tang of brandy.

"Neville Longbottom, of all people, came to my rescue after you bugged off," Snape replied from a dark corner of the room. "Did it not occur to you to even bind the wounds?"

Hermione blushed and ducked her head, instantly regretting it as her head throbbed.

"Well, we had, er, other things on our minds."

Snape snorted, moving across the small sitting room to crouch before her, pushing her head down gently and examining the bump on the back of her head.

"I suppose," he sighed. "In any event, Longbottom's grandmother was kind enough to shelter me until I had sufficiently recovered. Apparently, she viewed me as the primary reason for her grandson growing a spine and fulfilling his destiny. She was so grateful, she gave me this cottage. I have anonymity, books, and the royalties from *The Late Severus Snape Presents* line of cosmetic products." Knees creaking, he rose from the floor and stood before her.

Hermione stared, mouth open.

"You? You're *supporting* the product line?"

"You're surprised. And not as such - I am hardly in a position to object. I'm dead, remember? Up until an hour ago, Augusta Longbottom was the only person who knew of my existence."

"But . . . why? She *hates* Slytherins!"

If Hermione's head had not been spinning, she would have noticed the faraway look in Snape's eye.

"She was fond of my mother," he said quietly. "They were cousins. And she was kind to me. She kept my secret; she told Neville that I had died. She protects me now and handles the proceeds from the cosmetics that I developed. Why, exactly, do you object, by the way?"

"Well, it seemed to be to be a desecration!" Hermione protested weakly over the throbbing in her head.

"As opposed to being tossed face down in a mass grave full of Death Eaters? Or tried and sent to Azkaban?" Snape snapped.

"We made sure you were honored!" Hermione harrumphed.

"You were the only one who did, Miss Granger. Potter wept himself silly over the alleged 'romance' with his mother and then promptly shagged Miss Weasley. The Potter attraction to red-haired harridans apparently breeds true. As for the rest of your friends ..." Snape shrugged.

"But ..." Hermione chewed her lower lip. Questions bubbled to her mind and immediately vanished. *What does one ask a recently resurrected hero, anyway?* she wondered.

"The question is, Miss Granger," Snape's voice jerked her from her reverie, "what am I going to do with you?"

Hermione looked up to find him standing before her, arms akimbo, feet planted firmly, hip-width apart.

It might have been the concussion, or it might have been whatever it was that Snape had put in the tea, but at that moment, Hermione's head cleared.

And also at that moment, she noticed he was wearing black socks, blue denims, a grey cable-knit jumper, and beneath that, a white t-shirt. The collar on the jumper hid the massive scaring on his neck, and his hair, longer than it used to be, fell in a silky curtain about his shoulders.

Silky curtain?

Holy Merlin, his hair was *clean*.

"Miss Granger, I asked you a question. Surely the slight concussion you sustained has not deprived you of the power of speech?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then answer my question - what should I do with you?"

"I-I don't know, sir," Hermione stuttered. Would he Oblivate her? Stun her? Torture her?

"Well, you can't stay here. I will have your word, by the way, that you won't reveal this to any one of your little friends. Only Augusta knows, and I'd like to keep it that way."

"O-of course, would you like a wand oath?" Hermione dug in her sleeve for her wand.

"That will not be necessary," Snape snapped. "Just your word."

"I promise not to reveal your existence. But can I come and see you?"

"Good God, girl, why?"

"Just to make sure you're ... still around."

"Your concern is touching. No."

"Why not?"

"I see your stubbornness has not changed. I said no. Leave me be. I have no interest in reassuring you that I still live."

"Well, yes, but . . ."

"But what, Miss Granger?"

Hermione paused. She could think of nothing to say.

"Well . . . you should be able to Apparate. On your way." Hermione stood unsteadily; this was not the Snape she remembered.

Snape stalked across the room and jerked open the door.

"Well?" he snapped irritably. "Were you waiting for an embossed invitation?"

Still a bit dizzy, Hermione stumbled from the cozy cottage at the edge of Long Higgleton. Taking a deep breath, she Apparated very carefully to her London flat.

Sitting in the darkened living room, she drew a pillow to her chest. Something about the entire encounter with Snape had seemed off. He had seemed less irritable, for Snape, that is. He was also less frightening and intimidating, and at the same time, he was at peace, confident.

Having thought all that, however, Hermione was still flummoxed; it wasn't just the encounter that was off - it was Snape himself.

Despite the fact that the grouchy git is supposed to be dead, you mean?

Mentally telling herself to shut up, Hermione worried and picked at the problem until she fell asleep, fully clothed, on her sofa.

Waking on the morning of Christmas Eve with the imprint of the fabric in her cheek did nothing to lighten her mood or put her in the Christmas spirit. Dread of having to talk to Mrs Longbottom didn't help, either.

The idea that she, the august Mrs Longbottom, might have a solution to Snape's odd behavior did. For the first time in a while, Hermione began to hum as she stumbled off to her shower, waving her wand in a desultory fashion at her coffee maker.

In the shower, she decided that talking to Mrs Longbottom wouldn't be worth her time - the old lady probably didn't want to talk about it, and anyway, wouldn't she be at St. Mungos?

Drying her hair, Hermione decided that it was worth the effort to talk to her. Perhaps she could bring some biscuits.

Pulling on a fresh pair of socks, Hermione dithered again. Biscuits? Really? Would biscuits appease a bitter old lady who spent her Christmases with the comatose forms of her son and daughter-in-law, attended to by her grandson?

Sipping her coffee, Hermione decided that some things were too important to be ignored. Plus, Mrs Longbottom was no more scary than her Grandmother Granger, and if she could charm Granny Granger with a few kisses and some sympathetic questions about her lumbago, surely Augusta Longbottom wouldn't be *that* difficult. Glancing at the clock, she decided she had time for a quick batch of her mum's shortbread.

Secure in her baking ability as well as her ability to charm, Hermione set to work, all the while dictating questions she wanted to ask Augusta Longbottom to the Dicto-Quill that hovered about her flat.

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Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 9

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Hermione fidgeted over Christmas Eve dinner with her parents.

"Dearest, whatever is the matter?" asked her mother.

"Nothing, Mum, I'm just thinking about some issues at work."

"Well, you haven't touched your mince pie." Elaine Granger pushed Hermione's plate at her daughter.

"I'm sorry, Mum, I'm just not that hungry."

"Well, ducky," said her father "why don't we go a-caroling?"

Hermione tried to sound enthusiastic in her acquiescence, but later that evening, or rather, at two on Christmas morning, tucked up in her childhood bed, after a caroling session that ended up at her parents' neighbors' house, with everybody (except Hermione) drinking way too much eggnog, all she could think about was Severus Snape sitting alone, presumably, in his cozy sitting room in Long Higgleton.

Five hours later saw Hermione creeping from her parent's house, after leaving a note saying she would be back for Christmas lunch, and Apparating to the Cotswolds to beard Augusta Longbottom in her den.

"I must say, this is highly irregular," Augusta Longbottom declared, glaring at Hermione over her pince-nez as she sat at her breakfast table. "But my grandson assures me that you have the best of motives and are quite capable. Brightest witch of your age, was the phrase, I believe."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. Would you care for shortbread?" Hermione asked, offering the box.

"*Not* at eight-thirty on Christmas morning, thank you!"

"I'm sorry."

Mrs Longbottom harrumphed slightly and sipped her tea. The silence stretched.

"Madam – Mrs Longbottom, I wanted to ask you a question."

"Well? Speak up, girl!"

"Mrs Longbottom, I wanted to ask you about Severus Snape."

"And why would you want to do that?"

Hermione hesitated – what could she say to Mrs Longbottom that wouldn't break her promise to Severus?

"I . . . I'm upset about . . . the way his name has been used to market the line of cosmetic products, and I heard that you might have some information about, well, what happened to him," Hermione stammered.

Mrs Longbottom glared at the young witch.

"Indeed," she said.

Hermione opened her mouth to reply but shut it again with a snap as she clung to the shreds of her temper. The silence stretched again.

"Dare I ask what you plan to do with any information you think I am able to give you?"

"Set the record straight, perhaps? Neville told me that he brought Professor Snape to you, and that you and he had cared for him, but . . . he hadn't survived."

"There you are, then," Mrs Longbottom replied, sitting back and taking a piece of Hermione's shortbread. "You know all that there is to know." She took a dainty bite.

"But -" Hermione protested.

"This interview is at an end, Miss Granger, unless you would care to share your delicious shortbread with me?"

Hermione sighed, accepted the cup of tea, and tucked into her shortbread. Neville hadn't been joking when he called his gran a hard nut to crack.

But failure at the Longbottom abode did not dictate failure on other fronts. Hermione took her leave of Mrs Longbottom as soon as she could politely do so and called her parents.

As it was nine-twenty on Christmas morning, she woke them. They were not pleased that she was not in her bed and even less pleased that she was proposing to bring company for Christmas lunch, but she bargained on being their darling daughter who loved her parents very much and eventually won out.

Being an only child had its uses, sometimes.

"What are you doing here?"

Snape scowled at Hermione, tapping his slippers impatiently. Hermione noticed that the slippers were dark green while his pajama pants were dark red, almost Gryffindor shade. The dressing gown was green and belted just tightly enough for her to catch a glimpse of a bare chest, pale in the morning light. He sipped his coffee meditatively as Hermione blushed and soldiered on with her mission. She did wish that he would at least invite her in: it was bloody cold on his doorstep.

He did not.

"Inviting you to Christmas lunch with me and my parents. Will you come?"

"Where?"

"To lunch with me and my parents. You shouldn't have to be alone on Christmas Day."

"What makes you think that I'm going to be alone on Christmas Day?"

"Well . . ." Hermione paused – how was she so certain that he was going to be alone? "I doubt you're welcome at the Longbottoms."

Snape nodded.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was planning on spending today *alone* with a book. By myself."

Hermione drew herself up.

"Last offer, Professor; my father roasts a mean goose."

"Your offer is not tempting in the least, let me assure you, Miss Granger."

"Well, then, please?" Hermione wondered why she had thought begging would be a good idea.

"What?"

"Please." Hermione was aware of how pathetic it sounded.

"Feel sorry for me?" Snape quirked an eyebrow.

"No, yes, *no!* I just want to make sure that you have a merry Christmas. And if you come with me..."

"Go away."

"If you come with me, I won't tell Harry that you're alive."

"You wouldn't." Snape's eyes widened in horror.

Hermione knew she really would never do such a thing - certainly when it meant breaking her promise - but she was desperate. Mrs Longbottom's lack of answers left her more curious than ever.

"It's a small price to pay, sir."

Snape paused.

"If I come with you, will you promise not to bother me again?" he asked.

"Well, no, but I promise not to beg you for anything," Hermione countered.

Snape sighed.

"Very well," he said resignedly. "What time is luncheon?"

Hermione resisted the urge to leap into the air, clap, and squeal.

"We eat at one. We live in –"

"Please spare me, Miss Granger, simply Apparate here at twelve-forty-five and take me via Side-Along. I have no desire to know *exactly* where you live."

"Well, then – thank you, sir. You won't regret this."

"I'd better not," Snape growled, slamming the door in her face.

As she Apparated away to her parents' cozy London home, it occurred to Hermione to wonder why Snape had agreed so readily (surely being threatened with Harry wasn't all that it had taken) and also why Snape had refused to Apparate himself.

Her mother was glad to see her and immediately put her to work. Presents in the Granger household were typically opened ~~at~~ *after* Christmas lunch, when everyone was much more mellow.

Fortunately, Hermione had the perfect gift in mind for her difficult former professor and guest. *The Late Severus Snape Presents* line of products included a very nice shampoo and conditioner gift set for men.

Hugging to herself the image of Severus Snape opening the gift of one of his own products as he politely made conversation with her parents, Hermione fell to frying sausage with a will.

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Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 9

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"So, tell me, Mr Snape, what do you do these days?" Thomas Granger asked his guest.

Christmas lunch at the Grangers was always an affair inspired by the consumption of wine. Hermione's father was an amateur oenologist who delighted in trips to France and Italy and other wine-bearing regions, much to the distress of his usually abstemious wife.

"I'm a librarian in Long Higgletton. It's in Northants," Snape replied, sipping his wine.

"And you are a retired teacher, is that correct?" asked Elaine, passing the bottle to her husband.

"That is correct, Mrs Granger. That is how I came to know your daughter."

"Oh, of course, you used to be *Professor* Snape, Hermione's Potions teacher!"

"Yes, Mum," Hermione interjected.

"Well, it's nice that you've been able to branch out then, isn't it?" smiled Elaine.

"Yes, Mrs Granger, it is."

"So, Mr Snape, may I call you Severus?" said Thomas, pouring another glass, "What is it like to be a retired wizard? Did Hogwarts provide you with benefits? What is your pension like these days? I'll tell you, Elaine and I have had a dickens of a time with ours, but we've made some good investments in-"

"Dad! Sev- Prof- Mr Snape is a retired teacher, not a retired wizard! He still can-"

"Well, Mr Granger," Snape overrode Hermione's objection, "I have a small pension courtesy of the school, and I have been able to, over the past few years, branch out into other investments. Working at the local library offers variety."

"Well, that's lovely, isn't it, Ducky? You know, your mum and I could do worse than that," said Thomas Granger to his daughter.

"Yes, dad, it's lovely." Hermione's voice was very flat. She took a deliberate sip of her Bordeaux and tried not to watch the corner of Snape's mouth twitch at her childhood nickname.

"Let me help you with the dishes, Miss Granger," Snape said later as Hermione rose to clear the table.

"Thank you, *Mr* Snape," snapped Hermione, "I'm sure I can manage on my own."

If Hermione had any expectations of what dinner with Severus Snape and her parents would have been like, the last hour was not meeting them at all.

Snape had been quiet and charming. His dark hair was attractively tied back, his charcoal jumper and white shirt clean, his trousers neatly pressed. In fact, he looked every inch a respectable forty-something. His manners were slightly aloof, but friendly, as if he were a slight acquaintance trying to make the best of an awkward situation.

And awkward was exactly how Hermione would have described that dinner. Snape had manners! Charming ones at that! And now he was offering to help with the dishes!

"Severus," Thomas Granger said grandly, "you're a guest in our house, don't think for a moment that . . ."

"It is truly no trouble at all, Mr Granger," replied Snape. "I am happy to help."

"Well then," said Thomas, highly suggestible after a bottle and a half of his favorite Bordeaux, "off you go. Elaine and I will see to the presents."

So there they were, rinsing and stacking dishes in the Granger kitchen while Hermione desperately fumbled for something, anything, to say. She had tried to start the conversation by mentioning that she tried not to use magic in her parents' house because it made them nervous. To which he had tersely replied that he was not in the habit of using magic in front of Muggles anyway.

The silence stretched. It had been a few days of very uncomfortable silences.

"A retired wizard," she finally croaked, trying to conjure up a decent approximation of a chuckle, "my dad..."

"An understandable thing to say."

"Professor?"

"Severus, according to your father."

"Yes, I'm sorry about that . . ."

A barely perceptible shrug.

"Severus, I've been meaning to . . . why did you agree to come to dinner tonight?"

Another barely perceptible shrug.

"Miss Granger, Hermione, *ducky*, I've been asking myself that very thing."

"It's not because I threatened you, is it?" Hermione blushed the shade of the Gryffindor red dishtowel she was using.

"If I were that insecure, Miss Granger, I would not have survived the last thirty years."

"Then why?"

"Perhaps the same reason I talked to you in the graveyard."

"What was that reason?"

"Miss Granger-"

"Call me Hermione."

"Not ducky? No, it doesn't suit you. Hermione, if I knew why I agreed, I'd be a much happier man."

Snape sighed and handed her the last of the plates.

"But there must be . . . in all the years I've known you, you've ~~always~~ had a reason for doing everything you've ever done: love for Lily, to protect Harry, to fight on the side of Light . . ."

Snape's lips thinned into what could have been, in some lights, a wry smile.

"If you believe that, Miss Granger," he said, "You really don't know me at all."

Snape had responded well to his gift of shampoo and conditioner, raising an eyebrow at Hermione's cheeky comment that he should see how his name was being used.

"Very nice, Hermione," he had said calmly and slowly as if to a backwards six year old.

Hermione had blushed as her parents looked confused.

"Ducky," said her father, "do you want to let us in on the joke?"

"Oh, it's an old Hogwarts joke," Snape came to the rescue, "my colleagues used to joke that as a Potions master, I could make a fortune brewing and marketing magical cosmetic products. Hermione must have been familiar with it..."

Hermione's mouth dropped open.

Snape was being gracious over a gift that he, by rights, should have been furious about. Hell had decidedly just frozen.

"Oh, my," she interrupted, "look at the time!"

"Yes," Severus agreed mildly, "it is quite late. And I have plans for Boxing Day. Mr Granger - Thomas - Mrs Granger, it was a lovely evening. Thank you so much."

"You're quite welcome, Severus." Thomas enfolded Snape's hand in a crushing handshake. "Please, do come back again. I know Hermione brought you down, but since you're retired now, I do hear the trains from Northants are quite reliable, and we're just a few moments from the rail."

"Thank you, Thomas, Elaine, it was lovely."

"I'll walk you out," Hermione volunteered, dying to know what in the hell this charming man had done with her Potions master.

"Please do, Hermione," said Snape, pulling on his long black coat and putting a guiding hand on her elbow.

And then she felt the tension in those strong fingers.

He propelled her gently but firmly out into the chilly Wimbledon night. A light mist was falling.

"Shall I Apparate? Or would you like to?" asked Hermione politely.

"I would like a word with you first, Miss Granger," Snape hissed, jerking her towards him.

"Professor!"

"Stop calling me that, you ridiculous girl, I'm not your professor any more. Now, I want you to explain to me very clearly and very carefully just what went through that mop-covered head of yours that made you decide inviting me to your house for Christmas and subjecting me to your parents was a good idea!"

Hermione tried not to cringe as Snape held her close to him. He smelled of wood smoke and whatever it was that he used for soap - part of Hermione's brain registered these facts as being rather intriguing while the rest of her brain struggled with the fact that Snape was holding her uncomfortably close in a grip that could, in a very short time, end up breaking her arm. Her hand slipped down to the side pocket of her skirt where she kept her wand.

Except her wand was on her dresser in her bedroom.

"No answer?" asked Snape. "Well, I have a theory about your little stunts over the past few years, Miss Granger. Would you like to hear it?"

Hermione could do nothing but nod.

"I have a theory that *somebody*- and I know it was not Augusta Longbottom - told you I was still alive. Just what do you do in that office of yours, Miss Granger?"

"Work with the registration of Dark Artifacts," Hermione whispered.

"And you've been haunting my grave ever since you got that job, haven't you?"

"O . . . only because that's the time when I found out that you were buried there!" Hermione brought her hands up to Snape's chest and gave a mighty shove. Snape stumbled backwards and sat down heavily on the small stone wall in the Grangers' front garden.

"How dare you suggest that I'm tracking you down!" she paused "You think I'm working for the Aurory, don't you?" she cried. "You think that somebody betrayed you and that I'm trying to find you and capture you! You utter git! I felt *sorry* for you because I thought you'd been abused and maligned and your memory was being desecrated! And you didn't have to agree to come to lunch!"

"I didn't have a choice!" Snape bellowed, rising and stalking towards her.

"You did too!" Hermione retorted. "You could have warded your house, avoided me in the graveyard, Stunned me or Obliviated me at any time! But you didn't! You agreed to this, and you've, God help me, actually managed to charm my parents into inviting you *back*!"

"What choice did I have but to play along with your little game?" Snape cried, grabbing her by the arms and pulling her close to him, leaning in to speak into her ear.

"Knowing that you could turn on me in an instant, bind me and send me to your little friends in the Ministry to be tortured, imprisoned or killed. You know perfectly well I don't have my magic anymore, you stupid bint! So if you're going to kill me, you might as well do it when I'm facing you."

With a shove, he released her and stood with his arms wide, waiting for her to strike. When Hermione stood staring at him mute and motionless, unable to answer, he said, "I thought as much." And slowly, he started off down the street as the rain began in earnest; in the morning, it would be snow.

AN:Not mine, no money. Thanks and praise go to Subversa for taking this and making it recognizable English. And thanks also go to Lulabelle72 for the lovely prompting!

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 9

Severus Snape has been dead for years and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizzarding Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

"Shit," Hermione muttered to herself as she realized that she had been standing in the rain, staring at the spot where Severus Snape stood.

"Severus, wait!" she cried, hurrying towards the gate of her parents' front garden.

There was no one in the street.

The rain fell, heavier now.

"Shit," Hermione said again, turning back and racing into the house.

"Ducky?" called her father from the sitting room.

"Not now, Dad!" Hermione called back, grabbing her coat and Summoning her wand.

"Not in the house, Hermione!" shouted her mother as the wand zipped past her.

"Sorry, Mum! But this is an emergency!"

"What happened to Severus?"

"That's the emergency! I'll be back as soon as I can!"

Hermione dashed out the door and down the walk.

"Point me," she muttered, thinking of Snape. Her wand spun and then pointed towards the High Street.

"Severus!" she called again, pursuing the fleeing wizard.

Panting and out of breath, she finally caught up with him at the Underground station.

"Severus! Wait!" Hermione ran through the barrier, flicking her wand at the turnstile, which spun madly. Her conscience pricked her - she reminded herself to pay twice the next time she frequented the Tube.

He did not reply, but moved to stand on the platform heading for London.

"Will you stop, you pillock!" she cried, out of breath and patience.

"Why?" he sneered. "So you can *Avada Kedavra* me in the back as I run away?"

"No!" She stopped, gasping for breath, bending forward. Years of office work had taken their toll, and Hermione realized she was not in the shape she had been during the war.

"God, Snape, why do you," gasp, "think that the world is out to get you? When are you going to wake up and realize that you're," gasp, "a," gasp, "hero! You received a posthumous Order of Merlin," gasp, "for fuck's sake! You're the name on the front of," gasp, "a successful line of cosmetics, which is ridiculous! Nobody wants to fucking kill you! Least of all me!"

"What about those parents of students who were tortured when I was Headmaster?" he asked. "What about those families whom I did nothing to save? Don't delude yourself, Miss Granger; there are plenty of people in *your* world who would gladly dose me with my own medicine."

"My world? It's your world too, Snape!"

"Mr Snape to you!"

"Not anymore, apparently. You belong to the wizzarding world just as much as I do, and you know it!"

"Not without my magic, I don't."

Far down the tracks, a faint light glimmered in the rain as the train approached.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"Home. Via St Pancras; then maybe Bermuda, and after that, someplace else warm. The weather's lovely in Bermuda this time of year, and I don't have dangerous, pesky witches hunting me down."

"You can't take the train!"

"Do you suggest I Apparate?"

Hermione closed her eyes and took another deep breath.

"Just tell me how it happened," she said as the train pulled into the station.

"When I awoke in Mrs Longbottom's second best guestroom, I discovered my magic was gone. I couldn't even Summon a book. My wand was presumably destroyed, but it wouldn't recognize me anyway. Mrs Longbottom thought perhaps the venom had some long-term effects; her guess is as good as mine."

The train stopped, and the doors opened.

"Please, don't leave."

Snape did not reply but moved into the waiting car.

"Let me fix this, please! Let me help you."

"Miss Granger, I doubt you can fix me. And even if you could, why would I want to be made into your latest charity case? Do you think I didn't know about the house-elves?"

"Just . . . may I come and see you?"

"Swear not to reveal my presence. On your wand, please. It may not affect me, but it will affect you." Snape sounded harried.

Hermione's heart leaped in hope. She held out her wand. Snape put his hand upon it.

"Oi! Are you boarding or not?" shouted the conductor.

"I swear not to reveal your presence," Hermione whispered.

"Good enough," Snape replied.

"On or off, make up your mind!" shouted the conductor.

Hermione stepped back onto the platform and glared at the conductor, who wished her all the joys of the season with a brief flick of two fingers as he snapped his window up and the doors closed.

Her last view was of Snape, settling himself carefully into a seat in the empty carriage.

Boxing Day with her parents was not particularly pleasant - her mother was annoyed about Hermione's use of magic in the house, and her father was worried about his daughter's preternatural silence.

It was with relief that Hermione escaped to her flat close to Diagon Alley that afternoon.

Snape's condition worried her: the man who had once terrified her and awed her with his prowess, even with "foolish wand waving" had been reduced to nothing, at least in the eyes of her world. But he had made a life for himself without his magic.

What sort of life, Hermione wondered. His house, from what little she had seen, had seemed comfortable. His clothing and grooming certainly spoke of some income *The Late Severus Snape Presents* products were selling well, and he had intimated that he was comfortably well off thanks to the royalties; perhaps he really was a simple village librarian - a retired wizard.

So why had he looked *wistful* when he had touched her wand, sliding his long, elegant, pale fingers up the vinewood shaft?

Hermione shook her head - she was due to return to work soon, and the library in her department had the best resources available (even surpassing the Restricted Section in the Hogwarts Library) for the Dark Arts and Dark Artifacts.

And Nagini had been nothing if not a Dark Artifact.

Hermione smiled to herself as she reheated her mother's turkey curry for dinner. There was no stopping her now, she thought.

"Get your nose out of that book, will you, Granger?" Blaise whinged from Draco's lap.

They were comfortably ensconced in Draco's luxury flat on the south side of the Thames, (courtesy of his father, a properly penitent Lucius), with several other of their friends - well, Draco's friends really, most of whom were in a corner by the bar trying to get as drunk as they could as fast as possible to welcome in the New Year.

"Hmmm?"

"I said," Blaise enunciated each word slowly and carefully, "Get. Your. Nose. Out. Of. That. Book."

"I'm sorry, Blaise," Hermione said, looking up. "I'm just on the trail of a problem and ..." She trailed off thoughtfully.

"Draco," she said to the blonde trying his best to clean out Blaise's ear with his tongue, "Draco, what do you know about Nagini?"

Draco shuddered, withdrawing the tongue, which earned him a pinch from Blaise.

"Don't talk to me about that fucking thing," Draco said. "It slept in our conservatory, it shat everywhere and it smelled. Oh, and did I mention how I officially ~~don't~~ talk about those days? Ever."

"I thought it was a she," Hermione said thoughtfully.

"Hermione!"

"What?"

"Shut up, get drunk, and snog Ernie Macmillan before I throw you out of here," Draco snapped.

Hermione snapped her book shut and stuck out her tongue at Draco, who didn't notice because *his* tongue was otherwise occupied in Blaise's mouth.

She didn't get completely drunk, but she did get tipsy enough to be slightly gratified when Ernie grabbed her bottom and told her she was the prettiest witch at the party.

She was less gratified when he offered to take her somewhere quiet.

"Not unless you're an expert on magical herpetology," she said.

"Magical what?" Ernie asked.

"Herpetology."

"Oi, do you have herpes? I'm sorry! Did that git Weasley give that to you?" Ernie slurred.

"No, no, no, no, no," said Hermione, "herpetology is the study of snakes and amphibians."

Ernie was silent for a moment.

"Well," he finally said with a certain lascivious dignity, "I have a bloody great snake if you're interested."

Hermione decided at that point that she should probably go home. Alone. At the very least, she should get some sleep before Ginny's New Years Day let's-set-Hermione-up-with-Quidditch-players brunch.

AN: Not mine, no money. Thanks and praise go to Subversa for taking this and making it recognizable English. And thanks also go to Lulabelle72 for the lovely prompting!

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 9

Severus Snape has been dead for years, and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizingard Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

Late January saw a thaw in London and Hermione giving up in disgust on the theory that Nagini's venom had affected Severus' magic.

Severus' magic.

He's Severus to me, now, Hermione thought as she stirred her coffee and stared out the window of her kitchen onto the back paved area that called itself, rather grandiosely, a patio. *How odd is that?*

Sighing slightly and wincing at the terrible taste of coffee gone cold, Hermione rose from the table.

"Ouch! Bigger!" Her foot had fallen asleep. Hopping about her kitchen, she tried to work feeling back into the appendage and limped into her sitting room, piled high with books.

Not a venomous side effect, she thought, wriggling her toes in an effort to make the tingling stop *I wonder if it was atrophy?*

And then it hit her like a Stunner. If one didn't use one's magic, just as she hadn't used her foot when she had been sitting on it, what would happen?

How long had Severus been unconscious? How long had it been before Neville found him? How long had Mrs Longbottom had him in her care? Was the atrophying of magic something that could be reversed? Was there such a thing as magio-therapy?

The questions piled up like the books in her sitting room, and only Severus Snape himself could answer them. To think was to act. Hermione didn't even bother to grab her coat.

The rain was falling steadily by the time Hermione Apparated into Long Higgletton. Armed with purpose and a bottle of wine she had nicked from her father, she marched up to Snape's door and knocked firmly.

"How long were you unconscious before Neville found you?" she asked as he jerked the door open.

"Hello, Miss Granger; go away, Miss Granger," Snape growled, moving to slam the door.

"Wait! I just have some questions."

"I have no answers for you."

"Let me in; it's freezing out here."

"No."

"Please?" Hermione shoved her foot in the doorway as Snape swung the door. "Ouch!"

Snape sighed heavily.

"Bloody Gryffindor," he muttered. "You'd camp outside my door, wouldn't you?"

"It's a possibility," Hermione admitted.

Snape stared at her for a long moment.

"Come in," he finally said. "Mrs Griffiths, up the street, will have noticed you by this point. The old bat's a bloody menace."

Hermione smiled smugly and brushed past him into the house.

The sitting room was, as Hermione remembered, cozy. Bookshelves lined the walls, and a fire crackled in the small stone fireplace. An open laptop sat upon a table in the corner, and a stereo was playing music that Hermione did not recognize. What shocked her the most, however, aside from the lack of creepy things in jars and the hominess of the room, were two black cats curled up before the fire. One of them looked up and yawned.

"His name is David," said Snape intercepting her stare. "He and his brother Jonathan were sleeping under my back stoop. I brought them in and fed them and they have made themselves at home. Something I do not recommend you do, Miss Granger."

"David and Jonathan?"

"Have you not read the Old Testament?"

"Yes, but . . ." Hermione trailed off as Snape folded his arms across and stared at her.

"Now," he said, "ask your questions and leave."

Hermione gulped and sat gingerly on the sofa she had woken on the first time she'd been in Snape's cottage.

"I do not recall giving you leave to sit," Snape snapped.

Hermione glared and said, "First, I think I might have a theory as to why you've lost your magic."

"And what makes you think I am interested? What has happened has happened. It is what it is."

"Because I think there's a chance you could still have your magic."

Snape began to pace.

"Don't you think that Augusta and I tried everything?" he asked. "Dark books you aren't even aware of, potions, spells, incantations! Nothing could counteract the effects of the venom."

"But maybe it wasn't the venom!" Hermione cried. "Maybe you and Mrs Longbottom were wrong!"

"Foolishness."

"Wait." Hermione leapt from the sofa and planted herself in front of him. Briefly she caught the scent of his shaving soap, books, and wood smoke.

Come off it, Granger, focus

"Can you feel me?" she asked.

"What?"

"You can tell when I'm here, can't you? You can feel my magic."

Snape's lips tightened.

"Yes," he said after a pause, "I can feel your magic washing over me whenever you get too close."

"It sends chills up your spine, doesn't it?"

"How do you know?" Snape raised an eyebrow.

"It's part of my theory. I think your magic somehow became atrophied. Because you were unconscious without help for so long, and then in a coma for . . . how long were you unconscious?"

"I first awoke in September. But I did not move until October."

"That would have done it!" Hermione resisted the urge to crow. "But you can still feel this, right?"

She raised her wand and stoked the fire with it.

Snape's eyes fluttered closed.

"Yes," he murmured, holding his hand above the wand tip as if to feel heat from it.

"And you can feel this." Hermione whispered, 'Nox' and sent the room into darkness, lit only by the fire.

"Gods," Snape gasped, his eyes snapping open and his hands moving to cup her jaw. "Miss Granger, how did you know . . .?"

"I'm a Muggle-born," Hermione breathed. "I remember what it felt like the first time I performed magic, like there was a welling up within me, a tingling, a heat deep within my body. And then we went to Diagon Alley for the first time, and I almost fainted, it was so intense."

Her heart was pounding as she felt the warmth of his hands upon her face. His breath smelled of wine, and his eyes glittered in the firelight.

She did not want it to end.

"*Lumos*," she finally whispered, and the lamps in the room sprung back to life.

Snape released her and strode to the fire, poking at it to stir it up.

"But I don't know how to bring it back," she said. "I'm so sorry."

"Miss Granger . . . Hermione," Snape replied, not looking up from the fire. "I have a life here. It is not much of a life, but it is comfortable. If I were to regain my magic . . . it would not be . . . without cost. I would have to return to your world . . . it would be . . . difficult."

Hermione thought for a moment.

"Perhaps . . . perhaps I could find a solution and then we could see," she ventured. "I'm still under my oath not to reveal your existence, but if *you wished* to regain your abilities, and if you could, I could . . . well . . . perhaps keep your secret?"

Snape straightened.

"Perhaps that would be acceptable," he finally said.

Relief washed over Hermione.

"Thank you, sir," she said.

A corner of his mouth twitched.

"Call me Severus."

Encouraged by Severus', *oh, yes, he is decidedly Severus*, tacit approval, Hermione fell to work with a will. No library was safe from her research, and no stone was left unturned.

The librarian at St. Mungo's Medical Library was particularly harassed.

Harry and Ginny attempted to fix her up with various Quidditch players (Ginny) and Aurors and Aurors-in-training (Harry), but Hermione remained adamant. Draco and Blaise attempted to get her drunk so she could shag Ernie Macmillan, but to no avail.

"You're turning into a spinster," Draco accused her one night in the Cat with No Tails (the Leaky being closed for refurbishment).

"It's easier this way," Hermione had replied, poking through the Butterbeer nut bowl.

"Easier why?"

"Because I don't have to worry about some bloke right now. I'm busy."

Draco rolled his eyes and sipped his drink. Hermione grinned and delved back into her book.

And then on February 13th, at eleven fifty-four in the evening, Hermione found the solution.

It was so obvious, so easy, that she laughed out loud, thinking of how Severus would react.

And then she scowled out loud, thinking of how Severus would react.

AN: Not mine, no money; and thanks and praise to Subversa for making this readable English and Lulabelle72 for the prompting. They're simply fabulous!

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 9

Severus Snape has been dead for years, and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

It was not going to be easy of that Hermione was certain.

Oh, the spell was easy enough, pleasant, actually, if cast correctly, and it was almost guaranteed to work. There were several instances of its successful implementation over the ages, but the complexity of its preparation often offset the benefits of its successful execution.

And it would take some very complex preparation.

And Severus Snape still needed to agree to undergo the spell.

And there was worrying mention of side effects.

She would approach him tomorrow.

No, she wouldn't. Tomorrow was Valentine's Day and Harry and Ginny were having a party.

Yes, she would. Harry and Ginny's parties were always very boring.

No, she wouldn't. Draco and Blaise were going to be at the party.

Yes, she would, Severus was probably sitting alone in his cottage with his cats, and nobody deserved ~~that~~ fate.

No, she wouldn't, she was within a hair's breadth of becoming just like Severus (only without the cats perhaps this spring she should get a kitten) and needed to get out more. Ernie Macmillan had given up on her, but perhaps Neville would be up for some "fun."

Plus, she could pick Neville's brain about what happened that fateful night.

"It was terrible, H'mione," Neville slurred at her.

"I'll bet it was," Hermione smiled brightly and took a sip of wine. "So tell me exactly what happened."

"Well, it was af'er the dust had settled, I found Draco sitting on one of the big fallen stones, muttering to himself.

"I as'ed him what the matter was, an' he said that he couldn't find P'fessor Snape anywhere.

"And I said 'why'd you want to find him?' And, Hermione," Neville leaned close to her, placing a careful hand on her knee, "he looked up at me an' there were tears in his eyes."

Hermione glanced over at Draco, who was drinking happily with Blaise. The two were apparently celebrating.

"I didn' believe it," Neville continued, "Draco fucking Malfoy, the ferret, actually crying, not 'cos somebody'd taken his broom, or anything like that, but 'cos someone he'd cared about was missing."

"His parents were arguing over in a corner of the Great Hall with Kingsley, and Draco said to me 'c'mon, Longbottom, you'll help me find him.' What was I going to say? That's when we saw you and Ron, an' I asked you where P'fessor Snape was."

Hermione nodded, remembering suddenly that Neville had asked her. She and Ronald had been in the middle of a rather intense snog at the time, Ron begging her to help him, help him heal, help him forget. She shuddered.

"And you said," Neville brought her back to the present, "you said that he was in the Shrieking Shack. Well, Draco grabbed my arm and we ran off. My gran saw us, and when I told her we were looking for Professor Snape, she followed us!"

"Strangest sight I'd ever seen," Neville laughed into his drink.

"And then what happened?" asked Hermione.

"Well, we arrived at the Shack and there was blood everywhere." Neville's expression sobered as he took a drink.

"An' there he was. Jus' lying there. His eyes were closed, and there was this sort of smile on his face. Like he was at peace."

"An' Draco started to be sick. Gran took one look at him an' said, 'So typical of a Black. You're just like your great-grandmother.' Well, that brought Draco to his senses, and we hurried over and there was this faint pulse."

"Gran took over and started healing him just waving her wand like, like she was mad. And then told me to apply a poultice that I'd . . . well, I'd grown a bunch of *thumphia migoralis* earlier in case we needed it, you know, with the Carrows and their detentions . . . and if there was any bleeding. So I walked right up to him and muttered an apology and slapped it on there, all the time thinking he was going to rise up and hex me, and Draco, Gran and I Levitated him down the tunnel and out onto the grounds."

"We laid him out and Gran took off her fox-fur and wrapped it around his neck. And then she tapped it with her wand and spun away. I guess it was a Portkey. Later she owed me and told me that he'd died, despite all that we'd done. I guess it wasn't enough."

Neville looked down at his fingernails, black from the dirt he spent his days in.

Hermione put her hand on his shoulder and noticed that Draco had drifted over.

"We did what we could, Granger, Hermione," Draco said. "Long- Neville and I owed him so much more. Me, because - well, the oath and all that, and Neville . . ."

"He was protecting us," Neville murmured. "And if we could bring him back . . ."

Blaise sat on the other side of Hermione, reaching across her to squeeze Neville's knee.

The four of them sat in silence as confetti hearts rained down from the cupid buzzing about the ceiling like a trapped dragonfly.

Hermione left soon after. Neville had decided that he and Draco would celebrate the life of Severus Snape by getting as drunk as they possibly could.

Hermione decided that she owed her friends the favor of granting their wish and Apparated to Long Higgletton.

"You have to physically connect with your heart's true love," she announced to a sleepy and ill-tempered Snape as she shoved her way past him into his sitting room.

"Miss Granger, should I begin with the fact that it is one o'clock in the morning?" Snape asked acidly. "Or should I begin with the fact that you reek of alcohol? Or perhaps I should inquire what in blazes you are blathering on about?"

"*Incendio*." Hermione stirred up the fire. "It's only half-past-twelve," she replied, "and I reek of alcohol only because Charlie Weasley spilled it down my top trying to look at my breasts."

"Not a comfort." Snape stretched out his hands to the fire. Hermione took the opportunity to notice he *wasn't*, in fact, clad in a ratty grey night shirt but instead was wearing pajama pants, a bathrobe and nothing else.

And nothing else.

"Anyway," Hermione continued, "I found out last night that you basically have to physically connect with your heart's true love. Magic is initially passed down from mother to child the process is part of gestation, nurture *and* nature it then is released, fully, as the witch or wizard sexually matures."

"Yes, Hermione, I realize that magic is glandular. Why do you think we begin to educate when we do? And what does this have to do with me?"

"Well, there's a theory that it isn't the glands that do it, but the connection between the child and the mother. The sexual maturity thing is a safety precaution. A magically precocious two-year-old would be pretty dangerous."

"Teenagers are not much less so."

"Granted - but there is some research into increasing magical strength, and it turns out that it's a bond between two adult wizards or witches that fosters the strength of the individual's magic."

"I beg your pardon?"

"When a witch and a wizard bond, it increases their magical ability as individuals and as a couple. If the bond is one that's true and right, there's really no stopping them or their offspring. James and Lily Potter are an example. Harry's the most powerful wizard around, and it's all because he was the product of a union of such powerful love " Hermione stopped short, realizing what she'd just said. Snape, thankfully, did not react.

"Go on, I know I'm going to regret this." Snape sat down in the wingback by the fire.

"Er, well, research shows us that one can, for lack of a better term, reengage one's magic, if it's been faltering, by bonding with someone who would be best suited to one. It reinforces that bond of well, love, and respect and affection and all that . . ."

"So I have to find a witch or wizard and ask them if they're a good match and then have sexual congress them?" Snape eyed her disbelievingly.

Hermione blushed. "Ye no, not well, yes."

"And did you give *any* thought to how that might be accomplished?"

"Well, er, yes."

"And?"

Silence filled the room, broken only by the crackling of the fire and the loud ticking of the clock on the mantel.

"Well, I did some calculations, and . . ." *Get on with it, Granger, if it were done when 'tis done, 'twere well it were done quickly; the least he can do is scream at you*

"And?"

"And according to the Arithmancy and the Runes, and, oh, Merlin, I even called a Muggle psychic, you're supposed to, er, well. . ."

"What, Miss Granger?"

The words came out in a rush.

"You're supposed to shag *me*."

AN: Not mine, no money; and thanks and praise to Subversa for making this readable English and Lulabelle72 for the prompting. They're simply fabulous!

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 9

Severus Snape has been dead for years, and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizingard Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

Whatever reaction Hermione had been expecting, it wasn't for Snape to throw back his head and laugh.

His baritone was dark and pleasing, cascading down the scale. Hermione sat, stunned. This was *not* the Severus Snape she knew and remembered.

"Sir?" she ventured.

He sobered.

"Yes, well, Miss Granger, thank you very much for your concern and . . . unique solution," he said, wiping tears from his eyes. "By far, that is the most creative suggestion I have heard in a long time even including some of the idiocy those dunderheads in your House used to perpetrate."

"But . . ." Hermione started to protest when Snape held up his hand.

"Having had my merriment, Miss Granger, please permit me to disabuse you of several notions:

"Firstly, your assumption that I would be willing, under any circumstances, magical or otherwise, to engage in any sexual activity with you is absurd.

"Secondly, what makes you assume that I even *want* my magic back?"

"Well, sir, Severus, I . . ." Hermione paused, how could *he* not want his magic back? The pensive look on his face as he watched her perform her magic, the wistful expression when he touched her wand, the way his eyes had fluttered closed as he touched her cheek as she cast the spell sending his sitting room into darkness, all spoke of a deep longing for what he had lost.

"It's part of what makes you *you*," she finally said, "I can't imagine a living Severus Snape without his magic."

"And so you volunteered to help me restore it. Forced this upon me, I might add."

"It's who you are, Severus!" Hermione exclaimed.

"It's who I was. Not anymore. I have a life, Miss Granger. I don't wish to sacrifice it for a project that would satisfy your curiosity."

"It's not *my* curiosity! It's your life!"

"Not anymore."

"Severus!"

"Miss Granger, be so kind as to face the facts of the matter: if my magic is restored by this inane process, I will be indebted to you for the rest of my days. Did you neglect to realize that I would be bound to you? As your mate? For the rest of our days?"

"Furthermore, did you not realize that the moment my magic is restored, and you return to your life, the Aurors will be upon me in moments, hauling me off to trial and imprisonment?"

"I'd protect you!" Hermione cried. "And nobody believes you're a criminal! All the wizingard world believes you a hero! The man whose love for the mother of the Boy-Who-Lived saved the, er, Boy-Who-Lived," she trailed off lamely.

"Potter never could keep his mouth shut," muttered Snape.

"No," Hermione agreed, "but what you sacrificed for Lily and Harry was . . . well, it made everyone realize just what a hero you were! And are!"

"So you had this all planned out," said Snape, watching her over his tented fingers.

"N no, not as such. I had it planned out to the announcement. And . . . I guess . . . I didn't think that . . . "

"That I could refuse?"

"Yes."

"Foolish girl."

Hermione's head snapped up. How *dare* Severus bloody Snape call her foolish? The man who was hiding his sorry arse in Long Higgleton, Northants, living off of the royalties from a ridiculous (yet surprisingly effective) line of *beauty* products!

Her temper snapped.

"I'm not the fool, Severus Snape!" she cried. "You can spend your days living off of Mrs Longbottom's charity, hiding from the world, or you can go back to being the wizard that you are and rejoin the wizarding world, *where you belong!*"

Snape rose from his chair, dressing gown flapping.

"This conversation is over, Miss Granger!" he bellowed. "You will leave this instant, or I will not be responsible for my actions!"

"Fine." Hermione shot up from her chair and flounced to the door. "But you don't know what you're missing!"

"Leave! Now!"

Hermione slammed the door behind her.

The next week, she Apparated onto his doorstep with a basket of bread, cheese, meats, wine, and a chocolate cake. Her baking skills had improved greatly since her days of lodging at Grimmauld Place with Harry and Ron after the War.

"Go away," he said.

"Reconsider my offer," she countered, thrusting the basket into his hands.

"No."

"Then at least enjoy the wine," she said, turning away and Disapparating away with a pop.

She did not miss the tightening of his fingers around the basket and the tightening of his lips as she disappeared.

On Easter Sunday, she appeared again with a Dutch oven wrapped in a heating charmed blanket with a stewed lamb, fluffy fresh bread, a salad and another bottle of wine.

"Go away."

"Happy Easter, Severus! I brought you Easter lunch."

"Leave."

"Not a chance."

Snape pinched the bridge of his nose.

"You're going to camp out again, aren't you?" he accused her.

"That was the plan, yes," Hermione admitted.

"Fine; come in," he said.

"Thank you."

After two glasses of very fine wine, Snape had mellowed to the extent that he twitched a corner of his mouth at her description of the row between Ron and his latest ex-girlfriend, and actually laughed out loud when she told him about Blaise and Draco, or Blaco, as she had taken to calling them.

He had even mellowed enough to tell Hermione a little about his life:

"It's a modest life, but it is *my* life," he said, glaring at her as if defying her to argue.

"I don't doubt it."

"Mornings are spent reading the paper mostly and catching up on the world." He gestured to the laptop in the sitting room. David was curled up beside it, tail flicking the top.

"I have made . . . investments from the largess that Mrs Longbottom has provided from the royalties. I also research Mug- traditional herbal remedies. I hope to publish a book in the near future."

Hermione listened: Potions had been a strong subject for her at school but not an obsession. Severus' interest not only in magical Potions but also the properties of various plants found in the Muggle world was fascinating.

By the end of the meal, she discovered that she had learned quite a bit.

As she was taking her leave, several hours later, he said, "This was . . . a pleasant evening, Hermione."

"Thank you, Severus." Hermione smiled sweetly. "Does this mean that I can return and not have the door slammed in my face?"

"Perhaps," he said.

Hermione took it as acquiescence, and she left.

April showers brought Hermione back to Severus' cottage with a pile of books on flowers and herbs and gardening.

Severus raised an eyebrow as she Re-enlarged her gifts and placed them on his coffee table.

"I thought you might enjoy these," she said.

"Thank you."

"They're a mix of Muggle and magical," she continued, watching his lips and eyes carefully.

"Are they?"

"Indeed, and I thought, perhaps, I could help you in your garden now that the weather has improved."

Severus' lips twitched.

"Did you indeed?" he asked.

"Yes. I've found that I enjoy . . . spending time with you." The words came out in a rush.

"Well, Miss Granger, I shall expect you next Saturday. We can begin by cleaning out the flower beds. I am two weeks behind schedule already."

Hermione grinned all the way home.

"Granger, you've been acting like the kitten that's got the cream. What happened to you?" Draco asked the next evening.

"Nothing," Hermione airily replied, settling into their booth.

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Granger, you're a terrible liar."

"Nothing that's any of your business," Hermione glared at him.

"Whom are you shagging?" asked Blaise with the careful pronunciation of a true inebriate.

"Nobody."

"Nobody."

"Nobody!"

"Granger . . ."

"Nobody at all."

Hermione had the comfort of *that* at least being the truth. She ignored the niggling feeling that she'd much prefer it if she ~~was~~ shagging Severus. Once was all it would take, after all.

But he had remained adamant: insisting that he would not be beholden to her for the rest of his days and that he did not, under any circumstances, want his magic back.

"Granger," Draco whispered in her ear, "come back, you're miles away."

No, just Northants.

"Sorry, I'm just . . . distracted."

Draco snorted. "Apparently."

"Sorry, what were you saying?"

"Nothing of any importance to you, love," said Blaise. "Just that we're afraid you're going to die single and alone. With twenty-three cats."

"I don't have any cats!"

"Oh, sorry," Blaise amended, "Just single and alone."

"Bugger off," Hermione grumbled into her pint.

Blaise's look brought the word "lascivious" whole new worlds of awful meaning.

"Don't mind if I do," he said, leering at Draco.

Hermione did her best not react.

Saturdays in April and then May were spent toiling in Severus' garden. He insisted that no magic be used, but Hermione cheated as often as she was able.

"Miss Granger! I distinctly forbade you to use magic!" he bellowed from across the vegetable patch.

"Sorry, Severus," she said innocently. "It just slipped out!"

"You're a terrible liar, Granger!"

Hermione smirked into the mulch. She had noticed that every time she used *her* magic, Severus looked, good Merlin, the man looked as if he were fighting *arousal*.

Matters came to a head one June afternoon when the sun was shining weakly through the clouds. Hermione was Levitating a huge pile of compost from one end of the garden to the other when Severus threw down his spade and cried, "If I agree to this, will this torment end?"

Hermione dropped the pile.

"What?"

"Damn it, woman! Every afternoon you come here," he said, striding across the garden to grab her by the shoulders, "and flaunt your magic, sending it washing through me, every moment a torment."

"Severus, I "

"Don't play innocent with me, you . . . you . . . temptress!"

"Temptress?"

Hermione opened her mouth to protest that she was merely trying to show him what he was missing, how magic made their lives more complete as wizards, how magic was the very *core* of what they were and how dare he call her a temptress, when he brought his mouth swiftly to hers, claiming her lips in a bruising kiss.

When he finally drew back, eyes flashing as he battled fury, frustration, desire, and uncertainty, Hermione was gasping, thankful his hands remained firmly on her, else she would have sunk helpless to the dirt.

He cupped her jaw, just as he had so many months ago and in a voice raw with emotion he said, "Against my better judgment, I have changed my mind. You may proceed with your attempt to restore my magic. But be warned, I will *not* place myself in your power."

And he released her, turned on his heel and stalked to the cottage door where he paused.

"Are you coming, or would you prefer to demonstrate to my neighbors just how powerful a witch you really are?"

AN: Not mine, no money; and thanks and praise to Subversa for making this readable English and Lulabelle72 for the prompting. They're simply fabulous!

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 9

Severus Snape has been dead for years, and Hermione is incensed that Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes could possibly be capitalizing on his name to sell beauty products. Written for Lulabelle72's prompt, "the late Severus Snape presents".

Hermione followed Severus into his cottage.

Did he really just say what I thought he said? Don't hesitate, Granger, he might change his mind

Inside the sitting room, Severus stood, arms folded across his chest, scowling at her.

"We do this," he growled, "and if I find myself the least bit bound to you forced to call you my master "

"Mistress."

"Master. So help me Circe and Hecate, I will take steps. *I will not* serve another, is that clear?"

Hermione could only nod.

"Now," he said, "how do you propose we begin?"

Hermione took a step forward, tracing her fingers gently over the buttons of his shirt.

"First," she said, "I think you're a bit overdressed."

"And you, Miss Granger?" he asked, stepping in closer to her.

"And I believe I am as well," she whispered as one of his hands toyed with the collar of her shirt and the other wound itself in her hair.

"And then?"

"And then . . . the spell we recite at the moment of our shared, er, climax is," Hermione found she could barely breathe, *iuncti iuvamus, iuncti iuvamur*. We should, er, experience a silver light enveloping us, and then . . ." Her eyes fluttered closed.

"And then, as we are joined, power will flow through us." Severus' voice was husky, as if with desire. His thumb traced across her lower lip, pulling it down slightly.

"Yes," she whispered.

"And then, as we are one," he bent to whisper in her ear, "my power awakens."

"And we are joined."

His lips were on hers, her mouth opening beneath his, accepting, welcoming, inviting his tongue.

She groaned into his mouth as his grip on her hair tightened. She worked her hands between them, worrying at the stubborn buttons of his shirt until they came undone

and her hands were on his chest.

He broke their kiss and pulled away, shirt hanging.

"Shirt," he rasped, "off. Now."

Hermione was only too happy to comply, telling herself this was no time to be concerned over cup size or the scarring on her torso at the base of her ribcage. Her shirt, grubby from her exertions in the garden, flew from her hands and landed on the sofa, later to be annexed by Jonathan as one of his catly prerogatives. The brassiere followed, falling to the floor.

"Beautiful."

Hermione grinned a bit saucily. "How long has it been?" she asked.

"Too long," Severus growled, crushing her into his embrace and backing her out of the room.

She stumbled over the threshold and into his arms. His bedroom was small, just at the top of the stairs, tucked into the eaves. The evening sunlight streamed through the small dormer window, limning Severus with gold.

"Angel," she whispered.

"Demon," he replied with a tight grin, but whether he meant himself or her, Hermione did not stop to wonder. He caressed her breasts, cupping and squeezing, tracing the swells and lines with his hands, lips, and tongue.

"Oh, Severus." His name was a prayer, a groan.

"Beautiful."

Hermione wanted to laugh, to protest, but his hands were moving lower, fingers gentle against the scarring, to the waistband of her jeans.

Her hands were busy as well, cupping him through his trousers, feeling his arousal against the cloth. He wanted her: she finally had proof.

"Let me," she murmured, sinking to her knees to release him.

"Oh, gods," he groaned as her hands, warm and gentle, pulled his trousers and pants down, and he stepped out of them, pulling his socks along.

"No socks." She grinned. "Good." And she took him into her mouth.

He was hard, tasting of salt and smelling of the musky scent she would forever identify as *Severus*.

"God, Hermione," he groaned, winding his hand in her hair, resisting the urge to thrust.

Hermione did not reply, but suckled and teased with her tongue and hands, licking and fondling.

"Hermione," he groaned again, "please, I need to . . ."

"What?" she asked, drawing back. But her question was unanswered as he pulled her to her feet and walked her backwards to his bed. As she sank down onto it, she fumbled for the button and zip, shimmying the jeans past her hips, catching the knickers and pulling them off.

She was more fortunate than Severus, catching the edge of her socks in her toes and pulling them off. As she looked up, she caught him staring at her.

"What?" she asked, suddenly self-conscious.

"You're lovely," he whispered, bending low over her, urging her back onto the bed.

Hermione reclined as he explored, tasted, touched, drove her to the edge. She whimpered.

"I need you," she begged, wantonly wriggling upon the bed beneath his touch.

"Yes," he murmured, his devilish fingers rising from her clit, stopping only to taste her sweetness.

"Please," she begged.

"Yes," he whispered, kissing and caressing his way up to her face.

"Please," she begged again.

"Oh, yes."

And he thrust into her, surely, strongly.

Hermione groaned, glad Severus had not asked her how long it had been for her. Ron had been the last, and that had been bordering on four years ago. But while Ron had been pleasant enough, Severus was a completely different experience.

While Ron never paid her mind once he was in her, Severus reached down to where they were joined.

"Move," he murmured. "Move with me."

Hermione could only comply, lifting her hips as Severus began to gently caress her clit.

Hermione wondered if she would be able to form a coherent sentence ever again.

"*Iuncti iuvamus, iuncti iuvamur*, Severus began to chant as his fingers followed their inexorable course.

As the light seemed to brighten in the small room, Hermione found her voice,

"*Iuncti iuvamus, iuncti iuvamur*."

"Again, my angel. *Iuncti iuvamus, iuncti iuvamur*."

Hermione could only echo:

"*luncti iuvamus, iuncti iuvamur.*"

And the golden light in the room brightened and then faded as the setting sun sank below the horizon, but as the shadows grew, a silvery light seemed to come from the point at which the couple on the bed was joined.

The light grew, enveloping them.

And Hermione was coming, and it felt as if her very soul was rushing from her body, and at the same time, she felt Severus above her, striving, thrusting erratically, filling her with *his* essence, *his* life, *his* magic.

And still Hermione was coming, and Severus was calling out, and the light was growing brighter, and the entire room seemed to expand and then contract. And as Severus came, head thrown back, the room seemed to explode in a burst of silver flame.

In the aftermath, they lay together, sweaty, sticky, and gasping, and Hermione brought her hand to his cheek.

"Do you feel that?" she asked, for the very room seemed to pulse with magic.

"Yes," he whispered, not opening his eyes. And then Severus waved his hand, and the light on his bedside table sprung to life.

"We've . . . we've done it," Hermione whispered jubilantly, for to speak louder would seem a desecration.

"Yes," he whispered, pulling the blanket free from beneath them and covering them both with it, whispering a cleansing spell as he drew her towards him.

And worn out from their exertions, she slept, encircled and safe in his arms.

"This is a bad idea."

"It will be fine. *You'll* be fine."

"I'm weaker than a kitten . . ."

"And as fierce as a lion."

"Pray do *not* insult me with your House."

Hermione laughed and tossed a tea towel at him.

"Just dry the dishes; we need to make room on the table for the drinks."

Severus grumbled and set to his task. Hermione was busying herself with the sausages and cheesy bits when the wards around the apartment shimmered and a bell rang.

"They're here," she said, noticing, as she rushed to greet her friends, the subtle tightening of Severus' hands on the tea towel.

Cheerful and noisy, Neville, Harry, Ginny, Draco, and Blaise burst into her sitting room.

"So, where's the bloke, Granger?" asked Blaise, leaning in for a kiss on the cheek.

"In the other room, but we're not . . . *not dating.*"

"Nah, just shagging each other senseless so you appear at work looking ravaged and content," scoffed Draco.

Hermione paused. Whatever she had with Severus wasn't a traditional relationship. It had evolved since the morning they had awoken when, as she was gathering her clothes and spelling the cat hair off of her shirt, Severus had padded down the stairs, gathered her into his arms, and murmured in her ear, "Just where do you think you're going?"

She had not left his cottage until the next morning.

But Severus would not be beholden to her, either, refused to allow her to leave more than a toothbrush and a change of clothes, or discuss any plans for the future.

"I will not," he had said, "permit you to be shackled to me. Nor shall I permit myself the same fate. We will proceed one day at a time."

"He's my . . ." she began to answer.

"Friend," came a voice from the kitchen.

The silence, of all the silences that had reigned since Hermione had first discovered Severus Snape alive and well, ten months previous, was immense.

And then the place broke into pandemonium. Harry wiped tears from his eyes as Draco threw himself at Severus, embracing him and crying, "Severus, Severus." Neville was exclaiming and hugging Blaise, and Ginny squealed and launched herself at Hermione, giggling and laughing, "I knew it! I knew it!"

Over the noise and the jubilation, Hermione found Severus' gaze slightly moist. And Severus smiled, first one corner of his mouth and then the other.

"Friend?" she mouthed at him.

"*My* girlfriend," he replied.

And Hermione smiled and laughed and hugged Ginny.

Later that night, as they curled together in Hermione's bed, hands clasped, feet and legs entangled, Severus spoke. "I may have been slightly inaccurate earlier this evening when I called you my girlfriend."

"Oh?" Hermione's throat tightened and her stomach dropped.

"Yes," Severus replied, leaning in to kiss her and resting his forehead against hers. "I meant to say"

"What?"

"My love."

AN: Thanks and praise go to Subversa for her impeccable beta job. She's the best! Thanks also go to the lovely Lulabelle72 for the fabulous prompt. I have made no

money from this endeavor, but I have had a wonderful time!