

The Potions Master's Bane

by pyjamapants

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Chapter 1 of 1

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This little story was written for ladyintheclock and is dedicated to betas, admins, and comma chasers the world over. As always, thanks to kittylefish and persevero to chasing this particular set of commas.

Severus's eyes darted to the teetering stack of O.W.L. essays, which theoretically contained at least one or two meaningful essays from some of the finest minds Hogwarts had to offer. He snorted. Complete and utter tripe was more like it.

He snatched one of the parchments from the top of the stack. Bugging hell. His quill slashed furiously. His teeth clenched. The knot just to the left of his fifth vertebra threatened to bulge through his skin. If Marie Thistlewhite misspelled hellebore one more time, he would fucking tattoo the word on her hand. He rubbed his forearm absently. Perhaps a magical tattoo that burned every time she made another—his quill scrawled a blistering comment in the margin—fucking spelling mistake. Was it too much to expect that his charges grasp the very basics in spelling, grammar, and punctuation?

He tossed the essay aside. It landed on the floor underneath his sideboard where it disturbed an impressive collection of dust bunnies. They drifted off to congregate as far as possible from the offending piece of parchment.

Warily, he grabbed another essay from the pile. It suffered nearly the same treatment. Apparently, Martin Edgecombe had never met a comma he didn't like. Severus held the paper up to the light. Were they really commas, or did the little miscreant have a nervous habit of tapping his quill on the parchment after every other word?

After the fifth such essay, Severus's head hit the desk with a loud thunk that caused his wife to scurry into his office.

"Severus, are you okay?" Hermione asked worriedly. It was a bit alarming to see one's normally composed husband face down at his desk, quill in hand, with red-spattered parchment scattered about him.

Severus raised his head with a loud sigh. "I swear these are the worst fucking essays I've ever had the misfortune to read."

"Oh, is that all this is? Come on, love. I'll give you a massage," Hermione murmured, leading him by the hand into their quarters.

Severus stripped off his shirt and lay face down on the bed, surrendering to his wife's ministrations.

Hermione began kneading his shoulders and said, "Severus, the essays are always like this when they first return from the summer hols."

"Are they?" he asked, his voice muffled by the pillow.

"Well, some of them never improve, but, yes, they are almost universally bad at the beginning of term."

"How do I usually handle this? In my old age, I seem to have forgotten the cycles of student performance." He groaned as her hands drifted from his shoulders to his spine.

Hermione snorted. "I don't believe you've ever been particularly attuned to patterns of student behaviour, unless it involved tracking the best spots for catching snoggers."

Severus mumbled something that sounded suspiciously like 'piss off'.

Hermione chose to ignore him and began digging her thumbs into the knot just to the left of Severus's fifth vertebra. Good gods, how did he manage to get this tense over a stack of essays?

She continued, "You usually respond by storming into the classroom and bellowing something to the effect of—"

She paused to muster the most Snapish voice possible. "Such abysmal performance will not be tolerated in my classroom. Attention to detail is of the utmost importance to the study of Potions. If you can't be bothered to spell the ingredients correctly or use proper grammatical construction in your essays, then how can I be certain you won't mangle your ingredients and blow us all to smithereens? Correct these essays in accordance with the feedback I've already suffered through delivering, and return them to me tomorrow. Fail to do so, and you'll be scrubbing cauldrons in detention until your hands bleed."

Hermione cleared her throat—*gods, that gravelly voice was harder than it sounded*—and continued in her own voice, "You also usually tell the first years that you've never seen an incoming class more poorly educated in the Queen's English or common sense. Oh, and you tell seventh years that if they plan on pulling such a stunt when they have a job, they had best be certain they enjoy the thrill of job hunting."

Hermione settled into a sitting position on Severus's bum while she continued working away at the stubborn knot, trying to ignore the fact that she was straddling her husband.

Severus turned his head and glared at Hermione. "You think you're very clever, don't you? Have you been eavesdropping on my classrooms?"

"Severus, I heard variations of that speech six times."

"Yet you never had to redo one of your essays, did you?"

"Well, I've always been a bit of a grammar nerd."

Severus began laughing loudly. Hermione found it rather disturbing to be astride her quaking husband while they were not more enjoyably engaged, particularly since she suspected he was having a laugh at her expense. Her eyes narrowed as she watched Severus wipe tears from his eyes while the last strains of his laughter waned. She attacked the knot with renewed gusto.

"Aaaah! Less vigour, woman!"

"What were you laughing at, Severus?"

"I find it amusing that you felt the need to qualify your penchant for mastering everything down to the last niggling detail. Have I mentioned lately that I love you? You know I could never have married someone who was careless with their semicolons."

The echoing crack against his buttocks signalled that his message had been received, if not appreciated.

Finally, the nasty little knot dissipated, and Hermione was able to continue massaging the rest of Severus's back. Her hands dipped lower, and she scooted off her husband to begin rubbing his lower back. Gods, but the view was glorious. Her hands danced across his back, stopping briefly to tease the top of his arse.

It was then she heard the low rumble of Severus's snore. It figured that she would work herself into a frenzy while lulling Severus into a deep sleep. She carefully levered herself off the bed, taking care not to disturb him.

Hermione gently lifted the covers and crawled into the other side, casting a spell to put Severus to bed as well. She propped herself against the headboard and began rubbing her aching calves. She'd seemingly walked the entire school four times during the day, completing various errands and duties for the Headmistress. True, it was sometimes rather onerous picking up the various and sundry tasks to compensate for her lighter class load. She stretched one last time before grabbing her stack of nearly completed Arithmancy essays. *Oh, but the trade-off is well worth the trouble when it comes to grading essays.* She grinned slyly as she flipped through the pile to make sure she hadn't skipped any. Her stack was significantly smaller than Severus's; it contained no first- or second-year essays, and classes were much smaller and more manageable. For the most part, the essays were free of any red marks denoting silly grammar or mechanics errors. Even those still prone to making such mistakes were bright enough to bribe their classmates to proof their work after a few gentle suggestions from her quill. Yes, by the time third year rolled around, Severus had generally beaten proper grammar into most of them. She suspected the other teachers helped, as well, but relied on Severus for the majority of the bloodletting. Replacing the essays on her nightstand, she reached for her wand to douse the lights, thankful she was able to reap the benefits of Severus's blood, sweat and tears—her elective-level classes were generally devoid of dunderheads.