



is it here, with you, in my lab, when you're supposed to be working?"

"Professor, you startled me. I, uh, take it you haven't seen Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes' new line of plushie war heroes?" Hermione blushed as she clutched the stuffed doll to her breast, idly stroking the long black yarn that passed for its hair.

He stared dumbfounded at the cloth doll, one thought running through his mind: He'd give anything to trade places with 'his' plushie at the moment. Shaking himself from his stupor, he snarled at the startled witch. "Why in Hell's name would they create that?"

"The money from the sales will be donated to a special fund. Actually, I thought it was illegal to use our images for profit." Hermione shook her head. "Legally, I think they should be required to get a release from us. I told them I wouldn't help unless they donated *all* the profits from their sales to W.W.O.O.F. We finally settled on them sending releases to everyone and a 75/25 split of the profits with the costs coming from their percentage. The clothing line we agreed to split 50/50."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. Yes, this was the witch who'd wanted to save house-elves by establishing S.P.E.W. "I'm sure I will regret this. What does woof stand for?"

"Not woof, W.W.O.O.F. There are two W's."

"Fine, W.W.O.O.F., not woof. What does W.W.O.O.F. stand for?" he asked angrily, his voice dropping menacingly as he barked out the phrase.

"War Widows, Orphans, and Others Fund. It's a very worthwhile cause. I sit on the board that determines disbursements. We help those who have lost spouses and help parents pay for books and tuition when the family can't afford it, that type of thing. We talked about W.W.O.O.F. at the Order meeting last week."

Severus ignored her last comment, not one to frequent the meetings now that the war was over. "And people will actually pay good money to buy those?"

"There has been a lot of interest. Harry's line of action figures has been quite profitable. It's funded more than one student's education." Hermione shrugged. "Might as well make our notoriety count for something. Like it or not, you are a war hero, Professor. People are interested."

Severus snorted quietly. War hero. It was interesting how 'morally flexible' people were. Actions taken on behalf of the light were 'heroic' while the same actions were seen as crimes against humanity when acting on behalf of a megalomaniac. Shaking his head, he sighed heavily, thinking he really should have died that day in the Shrieking Shack. It would have made things much easier and would've probably saved everyone a lot of grief. "Fine. Leave those things on my desk. I'll look at them while you're at lunch."

The absurd toys sat piled on the corner of his desk, their lifeless cloth eyes seeming to mock him as he glared at them.

"Ridiculous, why would anyone want to buy a doll representing me?" he snarled, staring angrily at the 'Severus' plushie on his desktop sitting innocently next to the 'Hermione' plushie. His eyes traced the shape of her doll, automatically cataloguing the similarities and differences with the image he held of her in his mind. Fingering the edge of her doll's robe, he wondered just how realistic these dolls really were?

Annoyed, he threw his wand down. How had he come to this?

A moment later he picked up 'his' plushie. There couldn't be anything wrong with looking at the image of himself, could there? At least he'd know how 'correct' they were. His eyes widened with shock as he lifted the doll's robe. *'Dear God,'* he thought. *'What were those idiots thinking?'*

The door slammed open against the back wall as Severus burst into the lab, startling his apprentice. *'Great, his mood seems blacker than usual. I wonder what set him off this time? Better tread carefully,'* she thought. Nodding quietly, Hermione greeted the angry man. "Professor."

The two plushies hit the counter top with a soft thud. "Tell me, Miss Granger, how could you let those two dunderheads create anatomically correct dolls? Where in the hell did they come up with the dimensions they used?"

"Anatomically correct?" Hermione snatched the dolls off the bench. *"Please, tell me I wasn't so stupid as to have given him the altered dolls?"* she thought in a panic. Those were hers, not the samples she'd meant to show him. "You weren't supposed to see these. These are my copies. I must have mixed them up with the samples Ron sent over yesterday. These are the copies you were supposed to get." Reaching into the bag at her feet, she pulled out a small box and set it on the counter top next to the two dolls lounging there. She opened the box to reveal two more plushies nestled inside. 'Her' dolls were quickly switched for the correct ones. "Just out of curiosity, the dolls, are they, um, correct about the size?"

"You looked?" he asked, his eyes widened with surprise before narrowing to appraise the expression on his apprentice's face.

"No, not really. Well, not looked exactly. Since they're going to sell a line of clothing that goes with the dolls, George gave me a few samples to try. When I was changing its outfit..." Her voice trailed off as her expression turned guarded. Thoughtfully, she reached for the two sample cloth dolls. "So, are they correct?"

Severus watched the witch for a moment before answering. "Would you say your doll was accurate?"

"My doll?" Maybe the castle would accommodate her silent plea and the floor would open up and swallow her whole. She waited a minute, still not looking at the angry wizard in front of her.

"Yes, your doll. Is something wrong with your hearing? Is your doll accurate?"

No, no such luck, she hadn't disappeared. "Well..." She glanced down, a slight blush staining her cheeks. "It's a bit smaller on top than I am. I'm not sure my 'height' is exactly right, but other wise, I suppose it's accurate, for a plush doll. There was some hitch in the magical process. I don't understand why the proportional average didn't translate properly." Hermione's eyes widened in understanding as the implication of his question finally hit her. "So, your plushie...?"

Severus nodded smugly. "Has a similar miscalculation."

"Really?"

Severus' eyes closed in apparent pain. "They're idiots. And they didn't ask for your help when they created these dolls?"

"They sort of asked after the fact. Numbers, both Muggle and magic, aren't exactly Ron's or George's strong points. They used a proportional average figure when creating the spell to make the dolls, and now they can't seem to get it to adjust correctly. George is working on it. But the version they plan to sell isn't anatomically correct anyway, so it won't matter."

Severus shook his head, a worthy cause or not, he didn't want miniature plush versions of himself, anatomically correct miniature plush versions of himself, his bits at hand, so to speak, wandering around for all to look at. It was nice to know Weasley wasn't quite as stupid as he'd thought. Warily he dragged a hand through his hair. "These two are the correct prototypes? The plushies have not been released to the general public yet?"

Hermione smiled brightly. "Yes, of course, these are the prototypes. I told you, I did manage to convince them they needed releases from all of us before they could sell the dolls, even if it does benefit such a worthy cause." She gestured to the two dolls he was holding. "Those are just samples for you to look at." Her voice faltered as he glanced at the box now holding the 'other' dolls. "I know they finished Ron's, Harry's, and Ginny's dolls already. I probably should have brought copies of those, too. Yours and mine are the last two to be produced."

"Where is this release you keep mentioning? No one has approached me with any paper work."

Nervously, Hermione nipped at her bottom lip. "They're afraid to talk to you. Ron thinks you'll either hex or poison them if he or George come round."

"I imagine I'd do much worse," he murmured quietly. He looked up to find Hermione watching him intently. "So they left it up to you to show them to me?"

Quietly, the witch nodded. "More or less."

Severus looked at the plush version of himself again, raising one eyebrow as he prodded the doll. Not feeling any protruding bits in the nether region, he looked skeptically at Hermione before raising the doll's robe. "Makes me feel pervy, looking to see what's under its robes. Why, in the name of Nimue, were those two anatomically correct if the versions they're selling aren't?"

"The dolls they're planning to sell will be plain, no, uh, bits or bobbles. And really, it's for a good cause." Hermione reached for the box holding 'her' dolls, intent on getting it out of the Potions master's sight when she felt his hand at her wrist.

"Can you explain to me why those two are different?"

"Different?"

"Yes, different," he said with a chuckle. "Not the same as these two. Different."

"No."

"No, you can't explain, or no, you won't."

"Yes." Her cheeks coloring slightly, Hermione stared down at the counter top, wishing she were anywhere but there.

"Hermione." Still holding her wrist, he stepped closer and tentatively traced the line of her jaw with his other hand before gently urging her to look up at him. "Why are those dolls different?"

"Call it an exercise in Transfiguration and futility, if you like. No one's going to see them, so you don't have to worry. Just forget you ever saw them. Please, just sign the release? It really is for a good cause."

"Yes, you've said that. Several times." Severus ignored the parchment now lying to the side on the bench that had materialized out of thin air at her pleading. His dark gaze intent, only one word slipped from his lips. "Why?"

Silently shaking her head, Hermione refused to answer him.

"I'm not signing anything until you answer me. We can stand here all night, all weekend, if you like," he said quietly. Slowly, he stroked his thumb over the tender flesh of her wrist, her hand still captured in his. Idly, he noted the pulse jumping erratically at her throat. "Why did you transfigure the dolls?"

She looked at him with something akin to horror before looking away.

"Why?"

"Because it was the only way to be close to you," she whispered.

"Why would you want to do that? You're a young woman with the rest of your life ahead of you." Seeing the tears welling up in the witch's eyes, his voice softened. "A young woman with a plushie designed after her, why would she care about being close to me, the bat of the dungeon?"

Shrugging questioningly, Hermione refused to look at him. She'd thought her crush was long gone when he'd accepted her as his apprentice. But working day in and day out with the dour man had only served to awaken old feelings, enhancing the childish emotions as an adult perspective turned her original crush into something deeper. He wasn't nice, but she'd had more than her share of 'nice' in the last few years. What he was, was funny, intelligent, attentive (actually listening when she had something to say, instead of dismissing her comments as 'bookish' and bossy), interesting, and dead sexy, whether he knew it or not. She suspected he knew what his voice could do to a woman, using it as a weapon when he chose to, playing it as an instrument as a means to an end when it suited his purpose. He used it now, his voice was low, silky, infused with barely contained sexuality, dark chocolate, a bit bitter, but oh so heavenly.

"Hermione, why did you transfigure my plushie?"

"Does it matter?"

"It must. If it didn't, you would have answered me by now. Where is the young woman who turned in twelve feet of parchment on the uses of powered bicorn horn when I only asked for three?"

"God, I really was a know-it-all, wasn't I?"

Severus nodded, chuckling quietly. "It's the reason I agreed to take you on as my apprentice, though that will be coming to an end soon, too. I believe you will be starting the second half of your double major acting as Minerva's apprentice next semester, no?"

"Two years with you, then two years with her before I can take the finals for my double mastery," she said with pride.

"All very admirable, even if it did mean I've had to put up with you for the last two years. So tell me, why did you transfigure the dolls?"

"Can't we let that go? Just sign the release and we can get back to work."

"And what will you do with those?"

Ah, so that was it. She could always transfigure another set, one whose proportions were more accurate. Maybe if she figured out the miscalculation to her doll, she would know the correct size to make his doll. "These? I'm going to get rid of them. They were just a, uh, result of a spell I tried out. Here, I'll change them back."

Severus' hand stilled her movement. Really, she was too easy for him to read, by half, even without Legilimency. "What's to stop you from transfiguring another pair?" He plucked the transfigured Hermione doll from the box, one eyebrow rising questioningly. "I only looked at the copy of my doll when you left them with me. What will I find if I look at your doll?" Severus watched his apprentice, wondering just how far the down the blush the witch was sporting went.

"Professor," Hermione said shuddering slightly.

The longing in her eyes laid her heart bare to him. If he were wrong, though he was sure he wasn't, she would have his bollocks for earrings. As if time stood still, he slowly leaned in and captured her lips, his arms encircling the witch, drawing her to him. The kiss was chaste, a whisper of touch with the promise of more to come. Her eyes slipped closed as he nuzzled the soft skin at her jaw line, trailing a line of feather soft kisses as he moved. "Still not willing to tell me why?"

She clung to him, her hands buried in the cloth of his robes, the warmth of his breath on her skin lighting a fire in her blood. "Because I want you." She could feel the heat of his body, his leg pushing gently to insulate itself between hers, the heat of her desire pooled low in her belly.



"I just thought..."

"I have been told, ad nauseum actually, that it is a worthwhile cause. Did you really think I would be so small?"

Hermione choked on her pumpkin juice, laughing when she noticed the amusement in his eyes. "Of course not. We all know you're bigger than that, Professor."

Minerva looked between the two, sure she was missing something, just not sure what it was she didn't know. She never did understand why Hermione had opted to apprentice with Severus; war hero or not, he was a difficult man. It was apparent the two had a viable working relationship, not something many could claim. It was just as obvious Severus treated the witch with a modicum of respect. Still...

Majestically, Severus rose from his seat. "I believe you still have a research project that needs work, Miss Granger?"

"Severus, it's Sunday. Leave the girl alone."

"It's fine, Minerva. It's a side project Professor Snape has agreed to help me with."

Minerva watched as the two disappeared through the staff door. Something wasn't right, but she'd be damned if she could figure out what it was that was different about the two.

She fingered the plushie lying harmlessly on the table. The tartan sash was most becoming, but what had pleased her to no end was the slight alterations they had made to her figure, her bust slightly larger, her waist shapelier. She laughed, wondering what changes they had made to Severus' doll. His nose too large perhaps? Thank God they were plain cotton underneath their outer robes. There were some things that should be left alone. Still... dismissing further thoughts of her Potions master and her future apprentice, Minerva left the Great Hall, her plushie secreted in the pocket of her robe, a slight smile playing across her lips. Merlin, what if they had decided to make the dolls anatomically correct? She wondered if the old witch's tale that a witch could tell the size of a man's member by the size of his nose and the length of his fingers actually held any truth? That would mean... shaking her head Minerva had to laugh, as if Severus would have agreed to that.

And somewhere, far below the Headmistress, the only two known anatomically correct versions of Severus and Hermione lie nestled in their box, entwined in each other's arms, mimicking the actions of the humans they were copies of, the smile on the dolls' faces matching the smiles of the real couple as they lie together in the fading afternoon light.

-Fini

AN: An expansion of a long ago response to a challenge issued last August by Ladyofthemasque on the Mob (The Mob of Irate Torch-Wielding Fans) list (waves to Lotm! Hi, sweetie, wishing you a very, very, Happy Birthday...Week!). Found it yesterday when cleaning up my zip drive and decided to polish it up and post it.

Lotm's challenge:

*It's sooo quiet... too quiet. Quick, write me a 100-word drabble of how your favorite character*

*(HP, SoD, whatever) ended up as a Plushie-For-A-Day!*

Which was the inspiration for the first eighty-six words of this story. The remaining sentence (the other fourteen words needed to complete the challenge) was dropped since it didn't fit with the story. And for those that are going to ask what the sentence was, here is the drabble complete:

Flight of Fancy

Hermione smiled as she adjusted the white collar that peeked out from the top of the frock coat. How many times had her fingers itched to adjust his collar? Severus would never let her get this close to him, not that she had the right to anyway. She was his apprentice, and that was that.

But for the moment, she let her mind wander, let herself believe that they lived in some alternate universe where Severus was really hers and not just some fantasy she'd imagined.

Sighing, she tenderly placed the plushie on her pillow and put out the lights.

As always, my grateful thanks to the wonderful Southern Witch 69 for betaing this for me; thank you for your time and your endless supply of punctuation, I don't know what I would do without you!

-Pearle

Chicago, 2009

P.S. Never say never. I've completed the next chapter of Dances and decided to post it (it should be up now) even though I haven't finished writing the story completely. I am closing in on it. A few health problems have cropped up in the last few weeks shooting my work and writing schedules to hell. Hopefully things will get back on track soon.