

Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing, Baby

by Stefdarlin

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus rode in the passenger seat of the little Prius, quietly brooding. Hermione had, somehow, finally convinced him it would be in his best interest to attend dinner at the Potters. She'd used her supple body to make her point and had included a ride in her little car, which she knew he was captivated by. Furthermore, like a mindless zombie, he had given in, again, which made him angry with himself and her, the vixen.

Besides, he had really been enjoying the new Muggle video game she had brought home. She'd called it a Wee, and the thing was small he would give it that. Interrupting his newfound delight with the video game had not exactly sat well with him. Therefore, he was sitting with his arms crossed and silently fuming that he had let her talk him into leaving his precious toy behind. To her credit, Hermione remained silent on the trip.

Looking out the window so he wouldn't have to engage in conversation should Hermione choose to pursue it, Severus watched the lamp posts cast shadows across the road in the darkness. Soon, the brightly lit signs of Muggle London illuminated the interior of the car with shades of blue, pink, and green. One flashing sign in particular caught his eye, and with great interest, he craned his head back to read it again. He had almost missed it.

"Stop!" he yelled as he whipped around, causing Hermione to slam the brakes of the little car. The momentum caused the safety belts to constrict, holding them both in place. Behind them, cursing and the squeal of brakes could be heard.

"What is it? What's wrong?" Hermione looked at him with alarm. Their car sat in the middle of the road, and cars whizzed past at an alarming rate, horns blaring and profanity flying.

"We need to go in there. I didn't want you to pass it." Severus turned and pointed at the flashing sign which could be seen out the back window.

"A bowling alley? Of all the...Severus Snape! Don't EVER do that again! You could have got us killed. If you wanted me to stop you could have just asked me in a civilized manner, not have me thinking I was about to hit some poor man and almost take out the motorway," Hermione seethed through her teeth, her face distorted with anger.

Severus' face mirrored her anger. "And why is it you have never told me there was such a thing as a bowling alley? Yet you bring home that contraption which is not real and deny me the real thing?"

A puzzled frown crossed Hermione's face and she moved to speak, but before she could, Severus popped open the door and got out of the car. "Severus!" she called to his back, but he closed the door before she could get out another word and strode to the curb and into the parking lot of the bowling alley. "Of all the..." she broke off and

grumbled, then pulled the car into the parking lot and got out to follow Severus into the establishment.

As Severus entered the building, Hermione caught up with him. "Severus, this is not the same as bowling on the Wii," she told him with some exasperation in her voice. Briefly he looked at her, and then she followed his gaze over to a group of identically dressed people sitting in a circle, cheering on an individual who advanced into the lane. With agility and grace, the small gentleman bent and released his ball fluidly. It took an arced path as the ball spun toward the pins. Then, with a loud crash, the pins scattered and fell. The small man threw his arm in the air and pulled it down in a train-whistle motion while the group behind him whooped and hollered.

Severus turned to Hermione, looked down his nose at her, and asked sarcastically, "You were saying?"

Hermione's eyes widened when she realized he thought she was lying. "Fine! You think actual bowling is as easy as the game we have, go right ahead then." She waved her arm in the direction of the attendant behind the desk, placed her other hand on her hip, and gave him her best know-it-all look. Severus sniffed derisively and stalked past her toward the desk. Behind him, Hermione fumed and shook her head. So much for having dinner with friends, she thought. She then followed Severus to the counter.

Severus stood at the counter and looked at the bowling attendant with an intent face. "Help ya, mate?" The employee asked with a drawl, his bright green shirt displaying an embroidered patch with the name Larry.

"I want to bowl," Severus replied sardonically while on his right, Hermione rolled her eyes.

The worker looked from her to Severus, cleared his throat, and continued, "Alright, you need shoes?"

Severus frowned. "No, unlike some of the riff-raff here, I have shoes as you can observe from the boots on my feet. Just give me the remote, and I'll be on my way."

Larry's eyebrows rose, and he looked nervously at Hermione, whose lips quirked up on one side. He then looked back at Severus. "Uh, remote? I'm sorry, sir, but we don't have no "remotes" here, just balls and shoes."

Severus scowled, then sniffed as he looked back over at the large group of matching people. "Fine! Then give me a... ball."

"B...but, sir... you are gonna need a pair of bowling shoes if you are gonna go onto one of the lanes. And the fee is two-fifty per game per person."

"Two there's a fee to play a game I can play at home for free? What rubbish!" Severus exclaimed, his eyes glittering with his anger.

Hermione huffed and asked, "Are you ready to leave, then?"

Severus gazed at her, realizing what could be his folly. He then looked at her with one eyebrow raised and one side of his mouth quirked up to indicate they were staying. Turning back to the man behind the counter and clenching his jaw, he told Larry, "Then give me some shoes."

The man swallowed audibly, obviously intimidated by the encounter. "T...that'll be one pound. The shoe fee is separate," he added nervously.

Severus scowled again, and the attendant backed away from the counter. Severus sighed and reached into his pocket, then dropped the money onto the hard surface. "Now, give me the ball and the shoes," he told the gentleman in a way which suggested no one would get hurt if he complied.

Larry swallowed hard again and moved apprehensively to retrieve the money and place it in his register. "What size? And the balls are over there." He gestured to a round rack stacked with lurid colored balls about ten feet away.

Severus looked in the direction he indicated, telling Larry his shoe size at the same time, and winced at the awful colors of bowling balls they had to choose from.

Laying the shoes on the counter, Larry said, "You'll be on lane four. Just turn in your shoes when you're done. And you, miss?" He directed his attention away from Severus, who had wandered off to the ball rack, and smiled approvingly at Hermione.

"I'll take a pair of sevens, and I'm with him," she informed the attendant, grabbed their shoes, and scuttled after Severus. She caught up with him at the ball rack.

Severus stood at the ball rack, systematically testing each ball. He jammed his fingers in the holes of one, subsequently having to pry them out when they got stuck. He then lifted one to test the weight, then another, frowning each time.

Hermione concealed a giggle. "Since this is your first time, you might want to choose several weights to narrow it down," she mentioned innocently.

Severus turned slightly and looked down his nose at her again. "Why do they have to be such horrid colors? Pah!" he exclaimed and set one back down hard. "They could at least make them all green or black."

"I think the purpose of the colors is to help people tell which one is theirs."

Severus looked at her with disdain, then went back to testing. He finally seemed to settle on three balls, which were pink, purple, and green respectively. But when Hermione selected her ball and made her way to the lane, she noticed the balls he had selected and placed on the carousel were now Slytherin green and black.

"Severus," she whispered.

"Hm."

"You can't use magic here!" Her voice rose, but then she cleared her throat and lowered it when he raised his hand in an effort to silence her.

"But I didn't like the colors. Moreover, no one is watching," he motioned to the surrounding Muggles who were watching their companions bowl and were not paying attention to him and Hermione.

Hermione rolled her eyes, then held out a pair of brightly striped, orange and white bowling shoes to him. Severus flinched and asked, "What, in Merlin's name, are those?"

"Your bowling shoes."

"Even Albus bloody Dumbledore himself would roll over in his grave if he were presented with those!" he scoffed at the shoes and moved into the lane without taking them from her.

"You have to put them on, you know, if you're going to bowl."

"What on earth for? I have perfectly good boots on my feet."

Hermione sighed, trying to draw patience into her tone. "Bowling shoes are specifically designed to keep you from sliding down the lane with the ball and give you just the right momentum to throw the ball. If you don't wear them we'll most likely end up at St. Mungos instead of the Potters tonight."

Severus seemed to ignore her comment, as well as the shoes, and moved to pick up one of the balls he had selected.

"Severus," Hermione whispered harshly, beginning to lose her temper. He turned to look at her with raised eyebrows. "Ignoring me won't change the fact that you need the shoes," she finished crossly.

Again, he turned his back on her and studied the lane. Picking up a ball, he moved to the center like he had observed. Then, standing at the top of the lane, he bent and rolled the ball off his arm, trying to mimic the movements he had seen. From behind him, he heard a snort he knew was unmistakably Hermione's. When he turned, Hermione offered him a smug look then crossed her arms.

At the sound of a loud clang, Severus spun back around to see what had happened. There, at the end of the lane, his ball was braced up against a metal bar which encased the pins behind it. "What the..." he began, angry at this new development.

Attempting to stem her amusement, Hermione explained, "We have to set up the scorekeeper in order to play." She motioned to a brightly lit screen near him and moved to sit down at the little desk. Severus followed.

After a few manipulations from Hermione, with Severus watching over her shoulder, they were ready to play. Above the lane, a screen showed their names and prompted Hermione first.

"And why do you get to go first? I am the one who has never done this before. Plainly, I should be the one who goes first," Severus complained in a dry tone.

"I thought you might like to observe how to do it a little closer," she told him in a suggestive tone. "Besides, I thought it was ladies first." At that remark, Severus rolled his eyes.

When Hermione started her turn, she squared up the pins while holding the ball in front of her face. Behind her, Severus snorted. Dropping her hand which held the ball, she twisted around to sneer at him and added, "Sh!"

Severus' body language suggested, *well, go then!*

Hermione turned back around, muttering a scathing comment, and returned her attention to her objective. From behind, Severus studied her form. She stepped back, gave her supple bottom a shake, then advanced into the lane and released the ball. It followed a smooth arc, hitting the pins at the end and knocking eight of them down.

She turned to the carousel, a smug smile tugging up one side of her mouth, and Severus sighed in agitation. He then moved up to the carousel to take a ball. "Ah, ah, it's still my turn," Hermione informed him.

"Well, when the bloody hell do I get a turn?" he fairly shouted at her.

"Just after this go round," she informed him calmly.

Again, she did a shimmy with her bottom, and Severus momentarily forgot his attention was supposed to be on the game. But studying her form was part of learning, wasn't it? Again, her ball took a curved path, but missed the two pins left. As she turned, Hermione pouted slightly while Severus haughtily moved to take his turn.

This time, when he selected a ball, he stuck his fingers in the holes as he had seen Hermione do. He then moved onto the lane, walking with purposeful strides, and came to the point where he should release the ball. Suddenly, several things happened at once: his boots slipped as he threw his ball, causing him to fall and set off an alarm. His ball hit the floor with a loud thud and wobbled sickeningly toward the pins. Severus watched intently as it made its way down the lane and succeeded in knocking down all the pins, essentially giving him a strike, but the scorekeeper didn't reflect it.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, getting up while dusting himself off. When he looked up at the screen, he noted there was a line under his name instead of an X which indicated the system had not counted his score. "Why didn't that confounded contraption count my score?" he questioned with a frown, then glared at Hermione.

"You crossed the foul line. A strike doesn't count if you cross the foul line. Though, had you not fallen, it would have. Will you please put on the shoes now?" she almost pleaded with him. He was going to kill himself, she just knew it.

"Fine!" he replied with hostility and moved to put on the horrid shoes. At the moment, he couldn't use magic to change their color as his snafu had drawn attention from the surrounding Muggles. He shot them scathing looks in an attempt to drive them away.

Once Severus had put on his shoes, he waited for Hermione to complete her turn. While she did that, he studied the computer that was keeping their score automatically. Hearing a crash and Hermione's squeal of delight, he looked up to see she had made a strike. He frowned at first, which resulted in Hermione putting her hands on her hips and scowling at him.

After a quick lift of his lips, his face returned to a neutral state, and he moved to take his turn. This time, he didn't slip or cross the foul line, but his ball spun wildly, pulled to the left, and entered the gutter. Clenching and unclenching his hands, Severus muttered an expletive, picked up another ball, and moved to throw it down the lane in a fit of anger.

"Severus!" Hermione whispered harshly with alarm.

Her voice reminded him where he was. He lowered his arm nonchalantly, cleared his throat, and tried again. As he followed through, the ball didn't spin as much and seemed to take a straighter path. It hit the pins just to the right of the center and knocked seven down. A slight smile tugged at his lips while he watched them fall, but his face showed no emotion when he turned to face Hermione.

She raised a hand to her mouth to stifle a giggle. She could tell when Severus was proud of himself, no matter how he tried to hide it.

After that, things seemed to go smoothly except when Hermione chastised Severus for magically altering his bowling shoes. "I'm not Albus, Hermione," was all he offered as being reason enough for the change, ending the conversation as far as he was concerned.

Severus and Hermione never made it to the Potters that night. But it was a night they enjoyed thoroughly once Severus figured everything out. He even figured out the scorekeeping computer, much to Hermione's dismay.

For their last game, Severus listed her name as NoltAll, however she had her revenge when she changed his name to BlkDngnBt. But it was the final straw when Severus arranged for the bumpers to lower only during his turns, therefore keeping his balls from entering the gutter.

When Hermione placed her hands on her hips and gave him a piercing look, he looked back innocently. "What? There is no rule saying I cannot have a handicap," Severus informed, unknowingly presenting a challenge to Hermione.

For a moment, Hermione was speechless. She wasn't sure if this was a valid stipulation or not. But when Severus beat her by a large margin during their last game in his first night of bowling, she knew she would be doing some research about his conclusion. There was no way she was going to let him beat her as badly again. And as they left the bowling alley, Severus smug about his final victory, Hermione couldn't help speculating, *I wonder if Lucius has ever bowled before.*

Disclaimer: Characters, with the exception of one, belong to JKR. I make no money when I play with them. Pah!

Many thanks go to Pajamapants for beta-ing this fic and for issuing the dare, initializing its conception. I also want to thank Pajamapants and Sempra for their lovely suggestions. I could not have done it without you.

Dare/Prompt: I dare you to write a fic in which Severus walks into a bowling alley for the first time after having played Wii bowling.