

No More Than Reason

by starmom

Headmistress Granger has some new ideas for changing the school. Severus Snape is damned if he'll let her get away with it. And the staff is stuck at Hogwarts for the summer until they do. Pure crackfic written for the Winter 2009 SSHG Exchange on LJ.

~A Silly Romance in Five Acts~

Chapter 1 of 1

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~ a silly romance in five brief acts ~

Note: Deathly Hallows didn't happen. *Everyone* is alive. Raspberries to JKR. So there.

Act One

Muggle Studies

Draco Malfoy, Professor

Curriculum Topics:

- The Magic of Muggle Inventions: Computers, Mobile Phones and Ball Point Pens(*years one five*)
- Why They Do it That Way: Contemporary Muggle Culture and Customs in Great Britain years one and two)
- When Pictures Don't Move: Muggle Arts and Culture(*year three*)
- When Worlds Collide: Famous Muggles Known by Wizards and Vice-Versa Case Studies(*years four and five*)
- Muggle Enterprise Internships: Living and Working in the Muggle World(*years six and seven*)

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Draco Malfoy sat in bed propped up by dozens of decorative pillows. As he skimmed Hogwarts' proposed new curriculum, he plucked a few of his favorite crisps from a shiny red bag and popped them into his mouth, one after another.

Since a group of enterprising Muggle-borns in the Department of Mysteries had figured out a way for electricity to work within magical environments, Hermione Granger,

Hogwarts' new Headmistress, was determined to integrate technology and other brilliant Muggle inventions with magic into the school's new curriculum.

Draco brushed the crisp crumbs off his emerald green pajamas. *At least she's binned Divination*, he thought with a laugh as he turned the pages and popped another crisp. No doubt about it, he thought with open admiration, Granger had balls.

~ @ ~

## **Defence (Formerly 'Defence Against the Dark Arts')**

**Remus J. Lupin, Professor**

### **Curriculum Overview**

While an understanding of the Dark Arts will remain an important part of this subject, the revised curriculum presents Defence from a wider perspective, providing students with an opportunity to develop their skills in greater depth. A long-neglected concern is the physical requirements necessary for the practise of defence. In this course, the students will be challenged to develop their physical stamina and strength, previously available only to those students playing Quidditch. All students will have three hours a week of directed physical activity, including (depending on year of study) yoga, Pilates®, tai-chi and cardio training.

Another important new aspect of the curriculum will be use of communication devices in team defensive drills, including two-way radios, Patronus communications and spell/signals.

All classes will use the appropriate by-year version of **Magical Defence: Theory and Practice, 1st Edition** (H. Potter and H. Granger, Owl Publishing, Diagon Alley/London, 2005).

From the previous curriculum, the instruction in standard defence spells, defence against magical phenomena (i.e. Boggarts, Zombies, Inferi) and non-human sentient beings (vampires, werewolves) will be retained.

*Note: all creature-related topics, including protective spells against Red Caps, Grindylows, Kappas and Hinkypunks, will be moved to the revised Magical Creatures course.*

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Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks-Lupin sat together in their living quarters, burrowed into their favourite plush chairs as they reviewed the proposed curriculum in general, and their own courses in particular. They had sent their son Teddy to Tonks' mother at the end of term, and they were anxious to re-join him for the summer...his last before starting at Hogwarts as a first-year student. However, to be compliant with the Board of Governors' ridiculous directive, they'd have to remain at Hogwarts until the staff could come to a consensus agreement about Hermione's proposed new course of study.

Remus sighed. Tonks grumbled.

"How am I supposed to find the time to prepare all the materials for..." Tonks whined, reading from the page in front of her, "...*a side-by-side review of wizarding and Muggle History: from the 12th to the 21st century*?"

"I believe Hermione has already prepared extensive course materials, notes and hand-outs in the addendum packet," noted Remus morosely, pointing to the large stack of boxes next to their adjoining desks.

As Tonks glanced at the boxes, she brightened and her hair pinked up. "Ah! Well, that's a help, isn't it? Bright girl, our Hermione!"

"You have help, but I don't know the first thing about yoga or...*or Pirates*," Remus spluttered.

Tonks stood, took the large binder from Remus' hands and tossed it on the floor. She took its place, making herself comfortable on his lap, and nuzzled her short, blue-haired head under his chin. He wrapped his arms around her in response.

"That's *Pilates*, luv, not *Pirates*. It's a type of exercise for your tummy." She patted his nice, softening middle.

"Oh." She felt a bit of tension in her husband relax. Then he tensed again. "But, it just seems... wrong, Dora!"

Tonks began to tease the spot below his right ear with her teeth. "Don't fret about it. I think Hermione plans on hiring someone to teach those bits. One of the Patil girls, I think." She moved up to nibble his earlobe. "Anyway, we don't have to fuss about it now. The conference isn't till tomorrow," she whispered in his ear and licked along its ridge. "And since Teddy isn't here, we have the whole rest of the evening to ourselves..."

Remus growled as he stood, lifted his wife securely in his arms and carried her into their bedroom.

~ @ ~

Arithmancy

Sirius Black, Professor

Curriculum Overview

This revised curriculum combines the previous course of study with the Muggle science of Statistical Methodology. Students will learn not only the formulae for predictive magic, including numerology and runic study, but apply theory to the rigours of statistical analysis. Combining magical techniques and modern computers, students will be able to test arithmantic equations under standard deviation and generate predictive models, both wizard and Muggle.

Advanced students of Arithmancy will be expected to create and present their findings in a visual medium, including scattergrams and pie charts.

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Sirius read through the curriculum changes for his subject three times, and he still had no idea what any of it meant. But it didn't matter; if it came from Hermione Granger, then it was perfect. Leaning back in his sofa, he picked up the glass beside him and took a deep sip of Firewhisky. He closed his eyes with a satisfied sigh and thought about Hermione. He'd just have to go to her for advice and help. They'd have to spend long hours in her office... or his rooms perhaps as she helped him work through his lesson plans. He'd offer her a glass of wine as they reviewed arithmantic equations. They'd share some personal moments, and then... then...

Sirius shook his head hard to snap himself out of his reverie. He'd been wooing Hermione for the last three years. She had gone out with him a few times at the beginning. It would have developed further, he was certain, if it wasn't for her complete devotion to her work. She had made him take an Unbreakable Vow not to send her flowers every day like he had before she'd become Headmistress. Or chocolate. Or poetic missives. Or... he'd forgotten the rest, which reminded him to have a look at the list she'd drawn up. He'd hate to die before the term had even started, requiring her to find a replacement for him. He'd never want to inconvenience her like that.

With a sigh, he picked up the document and began to read it through once more.

~ @ ~

Filius Flitwick sat in one of Severus Snape's tufted armchairs sipping his morning coffee, his feet not quite reaching the floor. He closed his eyes, both to savour the aromatic dark roast and to block out the frenzied pacing of Hogwarts' Potions master. Still, he could feel the pronounced breeze created by Professor Snape's robes as they billowed at each turn.

"The woman is an affront! An embarrassment to this institution!"

Flitwick sighed and reluctantly opened his eyes. "No, Severus. I believe that honour clearly belongs to Dolores Umbridge *not* Hermione Granger." Severus' scowl deepened and his pacing quickened. "While her methods may be questionable," added the Charms teacher, "I believe she does have the best interests of the school at heart."

"The position should have been yours, Filius!" Snape thundered. "She manipulated the Board of Governors without any consideration to experience and protocol! And this... this... MONSTROSITY!" he cried, flinging the document with the proposed curriculum to the floor, spilling its pages.

"The PRESUMPTION! The ARROGANCE! The unmitigated GALL!" he shouted, fists clenched so tight that his knuckles turned white.

That he'd have to incorporate Muggle pharmacology into his advanced-level Potions courses was absurd. The idea of combining Potions and Herbology was preposterous. But the final straw that was causing the veins in Snape's forehead to pulse to near bursting was that he'd be required to team teach this hideous hybrid of a course with Neville Longbottom, Pomona Sprout's Herbology intern.

"I'll *never* agree to this ABOMINATION!"

Filius thought about his planned holiday in Venice and sighed. It was unlikely he'd be sipping Chianti along the banks of the Grand Canal any time soon.

"I thought that you and Miss Granger had become...*er*...congenial," offered Flitwick in an attempt to change the subject and to see if the rumours were true.

Severus ceased pacing abruptly, seething. "There is no *Miss Granger and I* We are NOT congenial, friendly, amicable or have any type of connection whatsoever!"

"Ah, my mistake. Apologies, Severus," said Filius with a twinge of disappointment, calculating that he now owed Pomona five Galleons.

Filius' question irked Severus more than he cared to admit. In fact, he had come to have a modicum of appreciation of Hermione Granger in light of her Ministry achievements in interspecies cooperation. He also recalled the impression she'd made at last year's Ministry Benefit for War Orphans. Her attire...or lack of it...had revealed more of Miss Granger than anyone had ever seen and made it abundantly clear that the esteemed witch was no longer the student that he remembered.

Perhaps it was the barely-there diaphanous silver gown that had swayed him, but he'd surprised himself when he'd inexplicably asked her to dance. And afterwards they'd had a reasonably tolerable conversation. After that night, Severus had seriously entertained the idea of asking Miss Granger to dinner. However, he recalled with bitter irony, after her appointment at Hogwarts had been announced, this never came to pass.

Filius flicked his coffee cup into that magical place where all displaced objects went and hopped off the chair. "I suppose we should proceed to the meeting, Severus," he remarked with a grimace. "I imagine it will be a long day."

Severus' response was to point his wand at the object of his ire that lay in a heap on the floor.

"*INCENDIO!*"

~ @ ~

The new Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry sat down at the ancient desk with a satisfied smile, savouring her success: she had achieved her goal and become the youngest person to ever sit in this office. She trailed her fingertips along the marked surface of the desk until they rested upon the large white binder that contained her finest work. Her self-assurance wavered only a little as she registered the alert and disapproving visages of the school's deceased leaders that surrounded her.

"Are you sure you don't want to reconsider, dear?" The soft brogue of the recently deceased Headmistress penetrated the tension in the room. "I'm sure both you and the rest of the staff would dearly love to be off on your summer holidays."

"And whose fault is that, Minerva?" she inquired evenly. "My proposal would have been accepted by the Board of Governors without a fuss if you all hadn't intervened."

"It's outrageous!" This shrill outburst came from a portrait far above her head. "She's *deranged!* She has to be stopped!"

"Now, Marguerite," admonished the portrait of Minerva McGonagall. "I'm sure the staff will come to a reasonable agreement. It was the best solution to the conflict," she said with false cheer and confidence.

"Of course they'll all see the sense of it!" Hermione announced with conviction, her fingers clasping the document under her hands protectively. "Then we can all go home, enjoy the hols and get some rest before the start of term!"

A bark of laughter came from her right. She turned to see the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black wearing the self-satisfied smirk that was the trademark expression of every Slytherin. "I somehow doubt that," he drawled. "I venture to predict that we'll be enjoying the pleasure of your company for most of this summer, Headmistress Granger."

Hermione Granger loved a challenge. She picked up the binder that contained the biggest challenge of her life, hugged it to her breast and smirked at the portrait in return. "That remains to be seen, Headmaster. I've been known to be quite convincing, as my presence in this office attests."

Determined to have the last word, Phineas Nigellus muttered as Hermione Granger swept past his portrait and out of the office: "We shall see, indeed."

## Act Two

"Computers are fantastic inventions! Of course no one was as surprised as I to discover...and admit...how clever Muggles actually are! But once you've become used to having one, you'll never want to fuss with a quill and parchment again! Of course, I wasn't happy about having to take that Muggle Appreciation Programme for Pure-bloods after the war, but it was amazing! It really did change my life! Have you ever seen a chat room? Oh, you must! I adore chat rooms!"

~ @ ~

"I'm still not convinced there isn't something between them, Pomona. In fact, I'll double the wager on it!"

"You're on, Filius!"

~ @ ~

"You see, Hagrid, Red Caps are officially designated by the Ministry as 'Creatures', so the study of them belongs in your new course."

"I don't know... them Grindylows are all right, but Red Caps are bloody difficult to catch, let alone keep in one place long enough to study 'em."

"Hagrid!"

"Sorry, Professor Sprout."

~ @ ~

"Are those orange worms you're eating, Draco?"

"They aren't worms, they're cheese puffs. Little bits of crunchy cheese. Go on... try some! Just dig into the bag!"

"Er... no thanks. Another time, perhaps?"

"No problem. I've arranged for the house-elves to stock them in the staff room!"

~ @ ~

"But I can't even THINK properly when he's around, let alone teach with the man!"

"You've got to let go of your childhood fears, Neville. If you could cut the head off that giant reptile with the sword of Gryffindor, you can certainly handle Snape! Besides, Pomona can't do without you and the children all adore you, which is far more than could ever be said about him, and you know it!"

~ @ ~

"Did you see the look she gave me last night at dinner, Tonks? I know she has to be discreet, but I really think it's only a matter of time before she declares herself!"

"Snap out of it, cousin! You're delusional! It's only a matter of time till she hexes your bits off if you keep going on about it."

~ @ ~

She entered the Room of Requirement quietly, trying to get a bead on her staff before they realised she was there. It was startling at first, to see their usual wizarding attire in sharp visual contrast to the setting she had chosen for this important meeting; the Room of Requirement had been Transfigured into a corporate Muggle meeting room. Long tables were set into a square, with a screen at one end, computer and projector in the middle. The only thing that reflected the inherent magic of the school were the food and beverage tables that provided whatever was requested and the house-elves that popped in and out to clear away the soiled plates and mugs. If she was going to push a radical change onto the school, she'd thought, it might as well happen in an equally radical setting.

So far, no one seemed to be paying much attention to the ambience of the room. Instead the teachers were engaged in a gaggle of animated discussions. The single exception, sitting in rigid silence in one corner of the square and staring malevolently at the computer, was Severus Snape. Hermione fought to quell her anxiety about Severus. She expected him to be the most formidable obstacle in her plan to bring the school into the new century. Even if the collective former Headmasters and Headmistresses hadn't organised and presented a formal protest to the Board of Governors, Severus would have single-handedly led the staff into revolt. So perhaps this compromise, to work through their differences and come to a consensual agreement, was in fact the better of the two options.

Her concern about Snape the teacher was compounded by her confusion about Severus the man. She'd been more than a bit surprised when he'd asked her to dance at the Ministry Benefit. She had been well aware of the attention the men at the event had paid her, especially since the care she'd taken to get into the dress was only exceeded by the magic required to keep it up. But the penetrating stare she'd received from Severus Snape as she greeted him was both unexpected and... *not* unpleasant. Still, she couldn't quite picture the stern professor gliding about the dance floor, yet he *had* asked her to dance. She clearly recalled the odd frisson of sensation when he'd put his arm about her. That he'd care to actually hold a conversation with her afterwards, as peers and without the usual scorn and vitriol she'd become accustomed to as a student, was equally startling... and even more enjoyable. But now, observing him fume so intensely that she was certain steam would come out of his ears, the fearsome Potions master of her childhood was back: in full regalia and nasty temperament. Hermione took a deep breath, ready to wrestle the overbearing bat to the floor if she had to.

*I'm sure he'll want what's best for the students,* she reassured herself, and raising her head high, she stepped to the front of the room.

~ @ ~

The darkness outside the magical windows in their ersatz conference room indicated that the sun had set long ago, but the staff of Hogwarts was no closer to an agreement than they'd been at the start of the day. Despite some small concessions on Hermione's part, she had held fast to her vision of a twenty-first century magical education that combined the best of Muggle and wizard instructional methodology and subject matter.

Most of the participants, however, had given up the day as a bad job. Getting ready to leave for supper, the staff was gathered around Draco's computer. Pomona Sprout clapped her hands in delight when she tapped her wand on the tiny owl on the screen and a soothing voice chirruped, "*You've got owls!*"

All but Sirius Black were ignoring the heated conversation in progress between the object of his desire and Severus Snape. He watched the two of them raptly, switching expressions from blissful adoration for Hermione to sneering disparagement for Severus.

Hermione's hair had come loose from its magical moorings to explode about her head like some operatic version of Medusa. Her expression was wild with frustration, and her usual upright posture slumped with exhaustion.

"You live in the Dark Ages, Severus! You resent everyone and everything, and now you are taking it out on our children's future! It's time to grow up, you spiteful, intractable man!"

"And you, *Headmistress*," Severus rejoined, spitting the title out of his mouth like something foul, "have finally turned into the righteous, sanctimonious harpy you promised to become when you first stepped foot into my classroom at age eleven!"

"At least I can envision a world for our children to inherit! And I am willing to fight for it...just as I fought Voldemort!"

"Don't you DARE talk to ME about fighting Voldemort, you presumptuous prig!" Severus roared, leaping to his feet and reaching Hermione in just a few long strides, sparks spewing from the tip of his wand. The glint of fear in her eyes spurred him on. "You spent mere months in a forest and a few hours in battle, while I gave my LIFE to protect *the children!*"

As Severus backed Hermione up against the wall, the staff shifted their attention to the escalating battle.

Sirius jumped to his feet and unsheathed his wand. "Stay away from her, you foul excuse for a man!" Sirius cried.

Flitwick, as the presumptive mediator in these proceedings, hastened over to Sirius and pulled him away, sensing that the man would only make things worse. As he watched the war of words between the teacher and the Headmistress, however, an idea began to form.

Severus was so close that Hermione could see his eyes flicker with anger and feel the heat emanating from his tall, lean body. Unbidden, the memory of dancing in his arms popped into her mind, which fuelled her anger all over again. She placed her palms on his chest and pushed so strongly that the man stumbled backwards.

"You're angry that you didn't die, aren't you? You're taking it out on me and holding this school hostage because you don't have the spine to resolve your real issues with

the one responsible for them!" Hermione was screaming now as she fought back tears. She took a deep breath: there was no way in hell that she was going to cry in front of Severus Snape! "Go hex Dumbledore's portrait once and for all! Blast it to smithereens!"

"Severus! Hermione!" the Charms teacher squeaked loudly, positioning himself between the combatants. They were both staring daggers at each other and breathing heavily. Tonks rushed over to pull Hermione to one side of the room, while Remus grabbed Severus and dragged him to the other.

"Well, that was *such* a productive day!" said Draco brightly as he closed down his laptop computer, singing out a little tune as it shut itself off. "I'm sure we're all looking forward to doing it all over again tomorrow!"

### Act Three

A week later, they were no closer to a resolution of the 'conflict', as they'd come to call it, than when they'd started.

Each day began with Filius stressing the importance of listening and compromise. Things would move forward a bit, when Hermione agreed to this tweak or that. But inevitably the day would end with Hermione and Severus verbally eviscerating each other, stopping short of firing off hexes only when Filius intervened. At this point the staff didn't give a rat's arse about what the children should be taught. They simply wanted to be done with it.

When the weekend came, they did manage to come to one consensual agreement: to give themselves a break, to rest, to take care of personal business, to try and salvage what they could of their holiday plans and most of all, to get away from each other.

~ @ ~

On Saturday morning, Hermione felt bereft. Sipping coffee in her rooms adjacent to her office, she reviewed the fiasco of the previous week. It was all Severus' fault for holding firm in his opposition and preventing an agreement! Worse, she couldn't think of a single thing to do or say that would change his mind. Their battles had left her exhausted, yet... oddly exhilarated at the same time. She tried to puzzle this out, but the pieces wouldn't fit together. She sighed, put the coffee cup down on her small breakfast table, stood and stretched. One thing she could do, she thought, was to take her usual weekend stroll along the lake. A good, brisk walk and some fresh, clean air might help clear her head. Then, perhaps, she could put her mind towards devising a new strategy.

~ @ ~

Hermione felt her limbs begin to relax as she took long strides, deep cleansing breaths and soaked in the early summer sun. Perhaps it would help, she thought, if they took lunch outside next week. A change of environment might do everyone a world of good! Her solitary reverie, however, was broken by the sounds of voices up ahead, just behind a copse of trees where students often came to sit upon the tall rocks when the sun was shining. Hermione slowed her pace and tried to discern the owners of said voices. It wasn't really eavesdropping, she reasoned, if she just happened to overhear conversation as she was passing by. But the first thing she heard stopped her cold in her tracks.

"I wouldn't have believed it myself, Filius, if I hadn't heard it from his own lips! Severus! In love with Hermione Granger!"

"No, Remus, you must have been mistaken! Severus? No, no, no. I have a hard time believing he could be in love with *anyone*, but especially NOT the Headmistress! He's come close to killing her several times this past week!"

Hermione felt her heart rate accelerate as if she'd been running for the last quarter hour instead of walking. She moved closer, checking to make sure the men couldn't see her behind the trees.

"I agree that it seems preposterous, but it's true, nonetheless. I overheard him speaking with Draco."

"Hmm... I suppose that Mr Malfoy is the only person at school he feels he can confide in," reasoned the Charms teacher. "So what did he say?"

"Well..." Remus hesitated. "Perhaps I shouldn't repeat it. It was a private conversation."

"Oh, come now, Remus! Do tell!"

*Do tell!* Hermione echoed silently as she fell to her knees, too weak with shock to remain standing.

Remus dropped his voice, forcing Hermione to crawl closer.

"Well, Severus admitted that he's cared for Hermione for some time, and in the past year, his feelings for her have only increased."

"That's right!" Hermione watched Filius nodding his head energetically. "I heard they made quite an impression together, dancing at the Ministry Benefit!"

"He told Draco... what were the words? Oh, yes. 'It was as if my love for Miss Granger sprang into life fully whole: a new and perfect thing!'"

Hermione let out an involuntary gasp, then clasped her hand over her mouth.

"Severus said that? But I've only heard words of disparagement from him when it concerns our new Headmistress!"

"But that's just the thing, Filius! When Hermione became his superior, he saw his hopes with her dashed! If he can't have her love, he's determined to make her hate him. He feels that it's the only way he can bear working alongside her."

"I must say he's doing a brilliant job of it! Hermione can barely look at the man without hexing him. But how terribly sad for Severus!"

Remus shrugged. "Well, perhaps it's for the best. I doubt that Hermione would be able to reciprocate that kind of love. Her work is her life. I don't think she'd be able to find the time, let alone the patience to be with someone as difficult as Severus Snape."

Hermione scrambled to her feet and winced as a branch broke beneath her foot. How dare they assume she was unable to feel and return someone's love! Of course she could be patient! They clearly didn't know or understand her at all! She stifled a verbal response when she saw the men coming her way and ran behind a large tree just in time.

"Still," said Filius, who took two steps for every one of Remus' to keep pace, "the man deserves some happiness in his life. It's such a pity he'll not find it with Miss Granger."

~ @ ~

As they drew closer to the castle, Filius Flitwick and Remus Lupin burst into gales of suppressed laughter.

"'...sprang fully whole into a new and perfect thing?' Filius wheezed between guffaws.

"Could you have done better?" asked Remus with mock petulance.

"Hagrid could have done better!" The two men burst into another round of hysterics as they stepped into the courtyard.

Filius stopped Remus with an outstretched arm and a high-pitched squeak. "Wait!"

"What?"

Filius began to dance upon his toes. "I think that there is a problem in the kitchen that will require the attention of our Headmistress. Perhaps we should send Severus to fetch her!"

"You are a short, evil genius, Flitwick," acknowledged Remus with a slight bow and a wicked grin.

~ @ ~

The sounds of birds flying overhead echoed through the trees as Hermione stepped unsteadily towards the large stones in the now-empty clearing. Her normally organised mind was now a muddle of confused thoughts and feelings, stunned at the revelations she had overheard.

Could it be true? Severus Snape...the man she believed hated her beyond reason...was in love with her? Hermione began to laugh and found herself unable to stop, even when she knew it just the overflow of her own churning emotions. Severus? She'd heard it stated as a fact, yet she couldn't turn it into understanding. Leaning against the tallest boulder, Hermione put a hand to her head and began to breathe deeply to regain a semblance of equilibrium.

Perhaps... perhaps it did make sense, she thought. She recalled the night of the Benefit and how nice it felt to dance with him. His firm torso pressed against her curves as he led her around the floor so expertly. She recalled his long fingers splayed across her back, uncovered by design, and how warm they had felt. They had spoken so easily that evening, and she remembered that she'd thought he might...

Hermione gasped as all the pieces of the puzzle fell easily into their designated places. Of course! His anger was a mask for his despair! The man who had been deprived of a normal life felt that his one hope for love had been dashed...again! Her breathing quickened as a flood of feelings, the feelings of a woman, not the concerns of a Headmistress, coursed through her. Why *couldn't* he be with her? So what if she was his superior? She didn't think there were any school regulations prohibiting it. She would check, of course. But if there was a way, Hermione Granger would find it.

She was startled by the sounds of heavy footsteps and crushing foliage, and as if she had summoned him there, Severus Snape stepped into the clearing wearing his most disagreeable and forbidding grimace.

"As if there was no one else to send on this trifling task, I have been asked to bid you attend to a matter in the kitchen," he barked, turned on his heels and stepped back through the trees.

Hermione blinked at the space where Severus had stood.

"I have been asked to bid you attend to a matter in the kitchen," she repeated aloud slowly, searching through the words for a hidden meaning. Then she smiled.

"I see through you, Severus Snape. You *do* love me, you silly fool!" And Hermione twirled in place with a triumphant laugh, happier than she'd been in years and reinvigorated with the certainty that an end to the 'conflict' was at hand.

~ @ ~

Tromping back to the castle, Severus was livid that his one day free of Miss Granger had been spoiled. Did they think he was some house-elf to send on such an inane errand? He was just about to enter the courtyard when he heard a female voice mention his name. His spying instincts took over automatically as he tucked himself behind a colonnade to listen.

"Oh, Pomona... she's in such despair over Severus!"

*Hmph...* good! It was reassuring to hear that annoying chit was just as miserable as he was.

"Can't she just tell him?"

*Tell him?*

"Oh, Merlin forbid!" The alarmed voice responding belonged to Nymphadora, the werewolf's bride. "He hates her so much already that if she confessed her love for him, he'd destroy her. Can you imagine? He'd torture her with a vengeance for admitting it! She'd be unable to lead the school and be forced to resign!"

Severus' smirk froze on his face as the words hit him like a Bludger. *Love?* He didn't know which emotion to take in first: the shock of finding out that Hermione Granger was in love with him or the joy in considering her potential resignation.

"How long has she felt this way?" Pomona Sprout asked, eager for the gossip.

Tonks sighed. "I'm not sure, but I think she must have had feelings for him before the Ministry Benefit. She admitted that she bought that smashing bit of fabric just so he'd notice her."

Severus' mind instantly recalled the image of Hermione in the gossamer gown she'd worn that night and how she'd felt in his arms. He felt his throat go dry. She wore it for me? He was incredulous. None of it made any sense.

"Well," sniffed Pomona, "if she cares about the man, she certainly has gone a bit round the bend in the opposite direction, hasn't she?"

"That's just it! It's the only way she can cope with working alongside the man she loves when she knows he'll never care for her in return. She's *got* to push him away! But when she's alone... well... she just cries herself to sleep every night."

Pomona hands flew up to her chest, as if to protect her own heart from breaking. Then the two witches turned and walked into the castle.

"The poor dear. It's just tragic for her, falling for the one bloody man who doesn't have a heart!"

Severus couldn't move. If he moved it would mean everything he'd just heard would be real. Hermione loved him? That shrew? The bane of his existence? But then he remembered how he felt about her before she became Headmistress. He *had* been attracted to her. He had been... interested. But the Metamorphmagus was right. He *could* use this against her. He was from Slytherin after all, where exploiting someone's vulnerability for personal gain was practically a moral imperative. And if it forced her to resign... well... that would solve all their problems, wouldn't it?

But what did Pomona *mean* by saying that he didn't have a heart? No one who had loved and lost as he had could be called heartless! A broken heart was the surest and most painful sign of its existence after all. Again, he considered the idea of Hermione Granger being in love with him. He thought of her petite body reaching for him, her creamy skin touching his and his hands in that mane of unmanageable hair. And the more he considered it he was shocked to discover that the idea wasn't distasteful at all. In fact, he felt warmed by it, just as he recalled the warmth of her bare back beneath his hands as they had danced together those many months ago. It was a dizzying, unfamiliar feeling that came over him next. It was so unusual that he had to reach into his memory to define it. And as it came to him, he realised that it might be hope.

**Act Four**

In keeping with the staff's request to spend time apart, dinner that evening was served buffet-style in the Great Hall, allowing the staff to eat at any time between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m., to sit where they liked, and most of all, to eat alone or share their meal with whomever they desired. Thus, Severus Snape and Hermione Granger were oblivious to the delighted grins and whispered comments from their colleagues when the pair sat down opposite each other at the same table and tucked into their dinner without a word.

The silence between them grew so thick with tension that Hermione found it difficult to swallow the bite of roast pork she'd been chewing for the past five minutes. *This is ridiculous!* she thought and, with her heart beating faster than eating dinner would warrant, forced herself to look up from her meal. What she saw was Severus looking down at his plate with the infamous Snape glower and attacking his meal as if it was some enemy to be subdued.

When Severus had sat down opposite Hermione, he had hoped there would be some clue, some sign as to her supposed affections for him. But the woman hadn't even bothered to look up, to acknowledge he was there! *Those fools must have been mistaken,* he thought with extreme annoyance, and angry with himself for believing in the smallest possibility that someone might actually care for him!

"Is something the matter, Severus?"

Her voice jolted him out of his internal self-haranguer and he dropped his fork, startled. He looked up to see her large, brown eyes full of concern and... something else. Desire, perhaps?

Hermione felt her breath catch as he caught her gaze and stared at her with smouldering intensity. How was it that she had never noticed the raw sex appeal of the man's eyes?

"It's nothing, Headmistress. I was just... preoccupied."

"Perhaps you'd like to talk about it," she ventured.

He paused for a moment, then shook his head. "There's nothing to discuss. I'll just put it out of my mind."

"Oh, no! You mustn't!" she exclaimed, then mentally kicked herself for having disengaged her mental censor and verbalising her thoughts.

Severus raised an eyebrow in surprise as he felt his heart skip a beat at her reaction. It was true, he thought. She did love him! He picked up the linen napkin and tapped it to his mouth, momentarily speechless, which in itself was rather unnerving.

Hermione's mouth went dry as she watched him touch his lips and licked her own in response. A fully blown image of kissing those lips appeared vividly in her mind. She felt her face flush with heat.

The clatter of a plate on their table startled them both.

"It's rather quiet in here this evening. Mind if I join you?" Sirius sat down next to Hermione without waiting for a reply. "You look especially radiant this evening, ~~Hermione~~ Headmistress."

Severus glared at Sirius. Hermione gently removed the hand that had found its way to her thigh and shifted a bit to her left.

"Good evening, Sirius," she said. "Have you enjoyed your day off?"

Sirius sighed as he speared a potato. "Well, I started to look for you thinking we might share a picnic lunch, but Draco insisted that I advise him on the purchase of a new broom he'd seen in London. Then he wanted to play chess. And then he insisted on watching this Muggle film on his CDC... 'Star Wars', which was rather brilliant..."

"Severus... wait!" Hermione blurted out as she saw him stand and turn to leave.

He paused and turned, his heart leaping to see the yearning in her eyes. He fought to keep his expression neutral.

"Yes, Headmistress?"

"I... um..." Hermione had no idea in her head other than to keep the man who loved her near her for as long as possible.

"Do you wish to discuss something," Severus suggested cautiously, "in private, perhaps?"

"YES!" Hermione practically squealed in relief. She took a deep breath to reassemble her professional demeanour. "Yes, Severus. Could you meet me in my office in half an hour?"

Sirius had stopped eating as he watched the exchange between Hermione and Severus.

"Yes, of course, Headmistress." Severus gave a small nod of acknowledgement to Sirius and left the Great Hall.

Hermione sat down again and grasped her hands together to try and stop them from shaking as a thousand inappropriate but thrilling images fired her imagination all at once.

"Hermione, my dearest!" asked Sirius with alarm. "Are you all right? Has Severus done something to you?"

"What?" She blinked at him as if trying to recall who he was. "Oh, no. Of course not. I'm fine. Really." She stared at her plate for a moment and then stood once again. "I've got to go now, Sirius. Lovely chatting with you." It took every effort to measure her pace and not tear out of the Great Hall at a run.

Sirius watched Hermione leave. A frown of concern crossed his face as he tried to work out what he had seen pass between the woman he loved and the man he despised, and then attacked his roast beef with a violent jab of his fork.

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In the short time before Severus was due in her office, Hermione changed out of her robes into her shortest black Muggle skirt, silk stockings, a green silk blouse unbuttoned to just *there*, and her rarely-worn black heels. She brushed her teeth, her hair (for all the good it would do), dabbed on a bit of lipstick and blush. Back in her office, the Headmistress wasted no time in banishing the occupants of the portraits, ruthlessly ignoring their protests and pleas. Based on the shadows that flickered at the edges of their frames Hermione guessed that some of them might still be eavesdropping, but it was the best she could do. Finally, she leaned against the front of her desk just opposite the door in what she thought was a provocative pose and tried to quell her rapid breathing as she waited for Severus to appear.

~ @ ~

"iPod."

In response, the gargoyles moved aside, and Severus stepped on the spiral staircase leading to the Headmistress' office. He felt himself being drawn towards her, as if compelled by an Imperius. The idea that he had been put under some spell actually flitted through his mind. Certainly he'd never felt this way before. Even his infatuation with Lily Evans hadn't rendered him this besotted. But when the moving stairs stopped, he brushed the thought aside and knocked on the door.

"Enter."

The sight of her left him breathless. He didn't know where to look first. The turn of her petite ankle? The enticing curve of her turned out thigh? The hint of breast peeking above her blouse? In the end, it was her inviting, dark eyes that made him step towards her. It was only the exercise of his well-practiced self control that prevented him from throwing himself at her feet.

"Headmistress, you wanted to see me?"

Severus' penetrating gaze made her knees go weak, forcing her to tighten her grasp on the desk.

"Yes, Severus," she said, cringing as she heard her voice scale an octave. Feeling the exquisite tension that threaded between them, it took every bit of energy to prevent her from leaping into his arms. Instead, she took a cautious step towards him.

As Hermione moved towards him, Severus swallowed hard. Her lioness' mane seemed to glow, creating a nimbus of light around her head that fed the fire in his body.

"I thought it necessary to confess something that has only recently come to my awareness," she said.

Her voice was like honey, he thought, rich and sweet and intoxicating.

"It may be that, I too, have come to a similar understanding," he replied, taking an equal, measured step towards Hermione.

Her heart leapt at his words. "How is it possible," she said softly, her eyes meeting his with equal fervour, "that I seem to be in love with you?"

He reached for her hands, and she gave them up willingly. "Hermione, I cannot fathom how that might have happened, in light of the ferocity of our disagreements and my foul behaviour towards you, but I do confess that I love you as well."

She gasped as he lightly kissed her fingertips. "And well may I show you my love in return," she whispered.

"Hermione..."

But his words were silenced as she pressed her lips to his. The kiss began as a promise, but as he pulled her towards him, it became a vow as it deepened into a driving heat that passed between them, fuelling each other's desire. They broke apart, briefly gasped for air, then joined together again, hands grasping hair, face, arms, torso, in an attempt to close any remaining distance between them.

Finally, after some time that they couldn't quantify, they pulled apart, breathless.

"Oh, Severus! I'm so glad that you came to me! I know how difficult it must have been for you!"

"No more difficult than for you, my love," he replied, reaching down to cup her face. "The thought of you crying for me at night..."

Hermione stepped back from Severus, her brow knitted in confusion. "Crying? What do you mean?"

Severus cursed himself for letting slip what must be an embarrassment for her. "It doesn't matter my sweet..."

Hermione reached up to caress his cheek. "But I've not been the one crying. It's you who has been suffering under the false assumption that you had to suppress your feelings due to the difference in our positions!"

Severus suddenly felt dizzy, as if the ground was moving beneath him.

"Suffering?" he asked, stepping away from her and smoothing out his wrinkled robes. "And what, may I ask, gave you that ridiculous impression?"

Her hackles raised high in immediate response to his tone of scorn. "And what," she retorted, "made you think I've been crying over you?"

Several moments passed as the realisation hit that they'd both been set up. Their feelings of heightened passion and desire struggled desperately against the rise of their ire and humiliation.

Hermione wanted to hit someone. *Hard*. So she threw herself at the man before her, fists raised. He caught them deftly before she could make contact with his body. In that same moment, the door of her office flew open with a crash, and an unidentifiable shape flung itself at Severus, knocking him away from Hermione and onto the floor. His head nearly bounced as it made sharp contact with the hard stone surface.

"Sirius! Stop!" It was Hermione's voice that pierced the ringing in Severus' ears.

Sirius Black had Severus pinned to the floor and ignored Hermione's pleas to relinquish his hold on the man who dared to take his place in his beloved's affections.

Filius Flitwick flew into the room, his belaboured breathing indicating that he'd run after Sirius all the way from the Great Hall. "I'm so sorry, Headmistress. I tried to stop him!"

"*Expelliarmus!*" Hermione shouted, effectively flinging Sirius off of the Potions master and into the opposite wall. Severus grabbed onto a nearby armchair and pulled himself upright.

"What the hell are you doing, you delusional fool?" Hermione screamed at Sirius. She was now in tears, undone by the accumulated emotional turmoil.

Sirius shook his head and got to his feet. "This scum doesn't deserve your love, Hermione!" he growled with disdain. "I've been patient, waiting for you. But no more!"

He pulled out his wand, prompting everyone else to pull theirs as well. But Sirius pushed past Hermione and Filius and kept his eyes and wand glued on Severus.

"Whatever you're on about, Sirius," cautioned Filius, "I think it's time to stop."

"But, Sirius! It's not what you think!" pleaded Hermione.

"*Hominem ad iusiurandum...*" Sirius began, his voice calm, the words of the spell precise and focused.

"No! Sirius! Stop! You can't!" Filius cried in great alarm. He tried to pull Sirius' wand arm down, but ended up hanging from it instead.

"What is it? What does it mean?" asked Hermione anxiously as she saw Severus' already pale face go deathly white.

"...*ABOLESCO!*" Sirius' wand swooped down from Severus' forehead to toes and finished with a whipping motion that revealed a bright blue light that wrapped around them both and flared brightly before dissipating.

Filius, having dropped to the floor, made a grab for Severus' leg. "No! Don't reply! FLEE!"

But the spell compelled Severus to respond with the only possible answer.



"*Recipere.*"

## Act Five

The Room of Requirement had Transfigured their conference room into a traditional duelling arena, reminding Hermione of the aborted Duelling Club in her second year when Severus had easily trounced the flamboyant and fraudulent Gilderoy Lockhart. She fretted that Severus was about to face a much more skilled and motivated opponent this time around.

Hermione had insisted, pleaded and begged Filius to find a way to release Severus from the Abolesco Charm, to find a counter to what was, essentially, a forced Unbreakable Vow to death. The object of one's hatred must perish, the Charms master had translated, and further explained that it was an ancient and rarely used medieval spell that compelled the object of the challenge to accept. Despite this, Hermione spent several hours in the library researching counter-charms herself. Failing at her task, she finally resorted to a screaming match with Sirius demanding that he undo the spell. She was horrified to have to finally accept and face the reality that this terrible spell could not be undone.

By mutual agreement and in light of current circumstances, Severus and Hermione chose to ignore the machinations of the staff that had tricked them into admitting their feelings for one another. They had also agreed that the expression of said feelings must be put aside for the time being...or possibly forever, depending on the outcome of the duel.

So, on this Monday, when the staff should have resumed their discussion of Hogwarts' proposed curriculum, they stood instead to witness their colleagues as they readied themselves to fight, with the diminutive ex-duelling champion between them on the raised platform.

Hermione was torn between abject fear and unbridled fury. How had it come to this? How could they all just stand there and do nothing to stop one man from killing the other? Her tenure as Headmistress would be marked as a disaster before it could even begin! But there was nothing any of them could do.

Finally, the men stripped down to trousers and shirts and handed their robes to their seconds: Severus to Draco and Sirius to Remus. Tonks and Pomona stood on either side of Hermione. Both of them felt terrible for their part in this and tried to provide whatever support Hermione might allow them to offer.

When Draco and Remus stepped off the platform, Filius cleared his throat. When he spoke, there was a tremor in his voice.

"The rules are simple," he began. "The only spells not permitted in the Abolesco duel are the Unforgivables: the Avada Kedavra, the Imperius, and the Cruciatus. The fight will continue until one or the other has perished, or, in the modern vernacular...um...has been killed." He looked at each of the men in turn, clearly searching for some meaningful last words to his colleagues and coming up short. Shaking his head, he stepped down off the platform and turned towards the opponents.

"Acknowledge!"

The two men took three steps forward and bowed formally.

"Wands at the ready!"

Two wands snapped to attention.

"Commence!"

Hermione shut her eyes as the opening barrage of spells rang out. Wincing, she buried her head into Tonks' shoulder.

"*Diffindo!*"

"*Sectumsempra!*"

"*Protego!*"

"*Stupefy!*"

Bloodletting curses, blistering hexes and jinxes were cast and repelled so rapidly that it was impossible to know who had cast which spell. For Hermione, the silent spells were even worse, where only grunts, the sounds of splintering of wood or of breaking stone could be heard.

"You...are...demented, Black!" Severus taunted, his words clipped between panting breaths. He fired a Stunning Spell and Sirius leapt backwards, the spell barely missing him.

"You...are...an unworthy...worm!" cried Sirius. He accentuated his insult with a blasting curse. It shot wide of its mark, clipping Draco Malfoy, and hit a column, where it left a smoking, gouging hole.

"Bloody hell, Sirius!" cried Draco, clutching his bleeding hand. "That's my mouse hand, you idiot!"

Severus leapt in a half turn and flung his wand in a high arc. A giant net emerged from its tip and started to encase Sirius, who disintegrated it with a swift Shrivelling Charm.

"HA!" shouted Sirius in triumph. "You'll remember this one, Snape!" He flicked his wand in a circle."*Levicorpus!*"

The collective gasp from the audience forced Hermione to look up. To her horror, she saw Severus hanging upside down, blood dripping from his torso into his matted hair, his wand on the platform out of reach. Sirius didn't look much better. But his eyes glistened as he tasted victory. Sirius had his rival for Hermione's affections helpless up in the air and he revelled in the satisfaction of knowing that this spell...one of Severus' own invention...had brought his opponent down once before, long, long ago.

"Sirius, stop!" Hermione screamed as she ran to the edge of the platform. She looked in desperation at Severus, and in the moment his eyes locked onto hers, her heart leapt with the truth that she saw there. She shifted her gaze back to Sirius. His expression was twisted into the grin of a madman as he stepped closer to his prey. "Sirius, look at me right now!" she demanded. "If you care about me, you will stop right now! Please...LOOK AT ME!" Her command and entreaty did, indeed, make him to pause and look at her. And when he did, the spell was broken, and Severus tumbled down onto the platform in a heap.

As Severus fell, at Filius' command, the staff of Hogwarts simultaneously raised their wands to the ceiling and yelled in unison, *Accio Curriculum!*

A dozen copies of Hermione's bound "Revised Curriculum for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry" popped into existence above their heads. When the staff aimed their wands at the space between Severus and Sirius, the documents dropped, landing like a flock of oddly shaped white birds, with a thud in the middle of the duelling platform, loose pages fluttering about.

"NOW, Severus!" cried Filius.

With sudden understanding and a nod of acknowledgement, Severus leapt to his feet, pointed his wand at the work that was indeed, the very object of his hatred, and cast.

"*Incendio Maximus!*"

For a long moment, the only sounds in the Room of Requirement were the sounds of crackling flames consuming paper, and the furious splutterings of Sirius Black as Remus led him away.

Hermione, ignoring the conflagration of her masterpiece, ran to Severus, giddy with relief. And, without a thought or a care as to who was watching, they flung themselves into the other's arms, passionately claiming each other's lips and hearts.

### **Epilogue**

**HG:** What do U want 4 dinner 2night? My rms @ 8.

**SS:** Must you abbreviate? It's so juvenile, Hermione.

**HG:** Faster and saves time.

**SS:** Fine. I shall be the only one to mourn the collapse of the English language. I'd like lamb chops with mint dressing. Rice pilaf. You choose the wine.

**HG:** OK

L8R

I LV U

XOXOXO

**SS:** I LV U 2

~ **END** ~

**A/N:**

My profound apologies to William Shakespeare. Title and plot device plucked from **Much Ado About Nothing**.

Most special thanks goes to ubër-fangirl, Mollyssister, for giving my butt a kick start to get this going, helping me to brainstorm ideas that resulted in this bit of silliness, and for her valuable feedback. Also, many, many thanks to two super gals for wrangling my run-on sentences, sheparding my lost commas to their rightful places, and inventing better word choices. JunoMagic and Dreamy\_Dragon: you ladies rock!