

Anger Management

by teshara

Years after the war Hermione and Severus find themselves thrown together into a Ministry-approved Anger Management course.

One

Chapter 1 of 2

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Thanks to NarcissasKnickers for helping me come up with a potion name :D

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by teshara for qui_quae_quod

Part 1

--+-+ Hermione --+-+

Hermione sat quietly in the stark waiting room.

The red plastic chair she was sitting in was hard and uncomfortable, and the magazines had to have been sourced from only the best rubbish bins in all of Britain. The one on trout fishing in Alaska was dated 1979.

A lone, flourishing fern sat near a bare window. Hermione suspected the blond-haired receptionist that had shown her in must have a special talent for Herbology since the bit of grey afternoon light that filtered through the bare, dingy window was hardly enough to keep a plant alive, let alone allow it to flourish like this one was. There were two doors, the one she came in through and another on the other side of the room.

Hermione was uncomfortable and nervous.

The room was decidedly unpleasant, but she supposed people like her weren't supposed to be feeling comfortable in a room like this. People like her were made to sit in sad rooms, in uncomfortable chairs, while someone else went over a file listing all of their faults.

A room like this said: *what are we going to do with you?*

She was actually thinking of reaching over and retrieving the lone copy of *Wizarding Tradition*, which advertised articles like: *Selecting the Best Wax for Your Candles, Weaving for Witches, and Wool Spinning: Lama or Sheep?* when a small, pleasant looking, round witch opened the door Hermione hadn't entered through and smiled at her.

She had thin white streaks in her fading auburn hair. It was swept up into a bun and round gold glasses perched on the end of her nose. Brown robes seemed to sweep around her when she moved.

"Mistress Granger?" Hermione stiffened at the formal title, but the small witch peering at her didn't seem to have anything but a comforting smile on her face.

"Hermione," Hermione said sheepishly. "Please."

"Nice to meet you, Hermione." The witch extended a hand towards her, which Hermione grasped and shook. It was a strong hand, but her skin was very soft. "I am Mrs. Nancy Johnson."

Mrs. Johnson ushered Hermione into a cozy office lined with dark wood paneling and bookshelves lined with heavy books and the occasional houseplant.

It was a decidedly comfortable and cozy room. Hermione relaxed a bit.

Mrs. Johnson sat in a comfortable looking, brown leather chair, and Hermione settled into an identical chair across from her. There was a small table with a pitcher of water, two tumblers with ice, and a few cans of a Muggle soft drink sitting between them.

To Hermione's surprise, Mrs. Johnson cracked open a can, poured herself some of the fizzy drink, and took a sip.

"Now, let's talk about the incident." Mrs. Johnson peered at Hermione over the tops of her glasses, and Hermione felt herself blushing.

"I have no idea what came over me," Hermione admitted, her cheeks turning red. "I'm usually not like this at all."

"So start at the beginning." Mrs. Johnson said, still smiling pleasantly.

"I--I think it all started when Ron transferred to that desk job." Hermione rubbed her forehead as she felt her stomach begin to turn. Mrs. Johnson looked surprised that Hermione wasn't talking specifically about the accident that had brought her here, but didn't interrupt. "We'd always been an... independent couple."

Hermione paused for a minute, thinking of all those late nights spent alone in her potions lab, working, while Ron filled out paperwork and watched Muggle television with their dog, Patches.

He said he was fine with it. Had he been lonely? Had he even known it himself?

"I had my research and he had his work. Then after the incident at the Yaxley estate, he decided he needed a bit of a break." Hermione took a deep breath.

"Do you think he was happy?" Mrs. Johnson asked Hermione. Her eyes were warm, and Hermione found herself wanting to confide in her.

"I think he was comfortable until he moved to the desk job and met Jenny." Hermione's stomach lurched at the mention of the other woman's name.

"Then what happened?" Mrs. Johnson asked. She took another sip of her tumbler, and when she put it back down, Hermione found herself focusing on the water left on the table.

She should really be using coasters, Hermione thought.

"Some of his office chums convinced him to start going out with them, as a group." Hermione took another deep breath and it felt shaky. "Jenny was one of them. They got close. Honestly, they're quite suited for each other."

"So you accepted the affair?" Mrs. Johnson asked. It was not accusatory, just asked as if she were curious.

Hermione laughed.

"Gods, I wish it had been an affair!" She knew she sounded a little hysterical. Mrs. Johnson quirked an eyebrow at Hermione. "Then at least I could blame it on his hormones!"

"There was no affair?" Mrs. Johnson frowned. She settled back in her chair, the brown leather crackling under her shifting weight.

"He just... fell out of love. They didn't even get it together until two months after the separation. She didn't even know it was about her until he confessed it one day when a booby trapped music box went off on his desk and he took in a lungful of powdered Veritas serum." Hermione shook her head, feeling annoyed that a stray curl was brushing her cheek. How credible she must look with her hair in disarray. "She came to me and apologized."

"She did?" Mrs. Johnson looked surprised and genuinely interested. "What did you do?"

"Well, it's not like it was her fault, was it?" Hermione said bitterly. "She didn't even have a clue."

"So?" Mrs. Johnson prodded.

"So I told her he likes lavender water in his sheets, cocoa with his crossword on Sundays, and not to let him eat broccoli before bedtime or she'll be sleeping on the couch," Hermione said regretfully.

Mrs. Johnson laughed. "Did you really?"

"I did." Hermione quirked a corner of her mouth. "Well, it wasn't like we weren't already separated. I'd gotten over the shock of it all, there was no inappropriate behavior, and honestly..."

Mrs. Johnson looked completely focused on what Hermione had to say, and Hermione found herself feeling better once she got it all out. She was feeling so guilty about it all.

"Honestly, I didn't miss him." Hermione's shoulders sagged. Mrs. Johnson looked a little surprised, but her face broke into a wide smile. "I mean, I love Ron, I always have, and I always will, but honestly, while it was comfortable coming home to him, my life has been under a lot less pressure since I don't have to worry about the needs of another person. My work has become more focused, and I find myself thinking about how much energy I've wasted and how far along my work would be if this had happened years ago."

"This frustrates you?" Mrs. Johnson was nodding and Hermione felt relief flood her. Mrs. Johnson didn't seem shocked or judgmental. In fact, she was nodding as if she understood completely.

"It makes me want to tear my hair out at times." Hermione shook her head, wondering if that made her sound mad. "So when McDonald made that snide comment about why I hadn't cracked the hex on that enchanted helmet he found..."

Hermione trailed off, horribly embarrassed. She felt her face flush.

"Is that when you broke his nose?" Mrs. Johnson asked gently.

"Yes." Hermione's voice sounded very small. "I don't know what came over me."

"Well, Hermione, I think that's a perfectly reasonable explanation of events." Mrs. Johnson reached over the table and grasped Hermione's hand. "You will be going back to work tomorrow. I suggest you apologize to Master McDonald."

Hermione's heart soared. Thank the gods the Ministry was using programs like this to assess people instead of just chucking them out like they used to.

Where would she be without her funding?

And anyway, she was a Potions master, not a Curse Breaker. It wasn't her job anyway. She was just doing it in the spirit of inter-departmental relations.

Well, now that had gone well, hadn't it?

"However," Mrs. Johnson said seriously, tilting her chin down as she looked at Hermione. "You have a lot of pent up frustration. I'm going to suggest you come to my anger management group so you can work on that."

Hermione sighed in resignation. It wasn't ideal, but if she learned how to control her emotions, she'd be able to focus on her work more, she reasoned.

Hermione nodded and Mrs. Johnson looked satisfied. The round woman rose and went over to a small table with a drawer. She pulled the drawer out with a squeak and brought out a green brochure from inside.

"We meet Wednesday evenings," Mrs. Johnson said as she handed the folded paper to Hermione. "Eat supper before coming. Sometimes being hungry can affect people's moods."

"Thank you," Hermione said as she took the brochure and tucked it into her robes. "For everything."

"Don't thank me yet," Mrs. Johnson said with a twinkle in her eye as she showed Hermione to the door leading outside. "Wait until we get that temper of yours under control."

--- Severus ---

"I hardly touched him!" Severus Snape's arms were crossed, and he was glaring at the fat, patronizing witch sitting across from him.

"That's not what your report says." Mrs. Johnson peered at him over the tops of her glasses.

"I don't care what that bloody thing says," Severus grumbled. It was annoying the way this woman stared at him. It reminded him of Dumbledore, except he suspected this cow was twice as daft. "Perkins was an incompetent oaf at Hogwarts and no doubt still is. Did he even spell my name right in that thing?"

He threw a look at the manila folder as if it had personally wronged him.

In a way, it had.

Mrs. Johnson opened the folder and read it. "Oh yes, he did. And, quite remarkably, a few other details from the incident as well."

Severus shifted uncomfortably in his chair as she read from the folder.

"Let's see what else he spelled right," she said silkily. "Well, he got 'assault with a mug of ale' correctly... as well as 'beat him to the ground with a chair.'"

Severus snorted and flipped his head, rearranging a lock of hair that had fallen into his face.

"Hardly touched him?" Mrs. Johnson quirked an eyebrow at him.

Severus stayed stubbornly silent.

"So what started all this?" Mrs. Johnson looked at him pointedly.

"A rude buffoon in a pub," Severus grumbled as his arms gathered tightly to his body.

"Care to explain?" Mrs. Johnson asked.

"First he wanted to see my scar." Severus' hand went to the high collar he wore, and he rubbed it. He felt a sliver of sympathy for Harry Potter, blast it. Everyone wanted to see that damn scar. "Then he said some rude things about 'fence-sitters' and 'turncoats' and followed it all up with a comment about my mother."

"Is that when you hit him with the mug?" Mrs. Johnson asked, smiling in sympathy.

This was all lost on Severus, who felt she was far too entertained by the whole incident.

"No, that's when I hit him with a Leg Locker Curse," Severus said grouchyly. Then much quieter: "Then I hit him with the mug."

Mrs. Johnson pulled her lips into her mouth and bit down. Snape got the distinct impression she was fighting back laughter.

In the old days they would have either forgiven him or chucked him out, not this wishy-washy nonsense with a glimmer of hope at the end of laborious mental torture.

"I'll be honest with you," Mrs. Johnson said with a shake of her head. "I don't think you belong here."

Severus looked at her in surprise. He expected her to at least get some more of the Ministry's money by saying he needed further observation.

"Dangerous to the students of Hogwarts? No."

Severus found himself feeling a bit more chipper than he had a few moments ago. This wasn't going to disrupt his life at all.

"Dangerous to yourself..." Mrs. Johnson tilted her head and gave him a questioning look.

"And just what's that supposed to mean?" Severus gave her a cold glare.

"I mean a balanced Professor Snape would have made him feel like a complete moron without even turning around, not bash him over the head and beat him to the ground," Mrs. Johnson said with pursed lips. "Looking for a fight, were you?"

Severus said nothing, but scowled at the rotund woman. He tried to place her in one of his many classes and failed, but she was quite obviously a former student of his.

"Well, I think I have the solution to help you channel some of that energy more productively." Mrs. Johnson smiled pleasantly at him. "I don't think you have a problem. Society does have a problem with you. That man in the pub may have deserved a smack, but we can't do that in polite society."

She raised an eyebrow at him, and Severus felt a little ashamed, in spite of himself.

Dammit! Was she a Slytherin? This was maddening!

She rose to her feet and waddled over to a small battered table and opened a squeaky drawer. Snape watched as she pulled out a folded piece of green paper and walked back to him. She held it out to him and he took it and looked at the cover. It had a picture of an angry looking wizard hurling a hex at a terrified looking, fleeing wizard.

Severus frowned. "A dueling club?"

"I'm afraid not," Mrs. Johnson said with a pat on Severus's shoulder that made him flinch. "It's an anger management group. Perhaps we'll be able to find a way for you to calm down a bit."

"Is this really necessary?" Severus sneered at the pamphlet.

"If you want me to approve your continuation at Hogwarts, yes," said Mrs. Johnson sweetly.

Severus was reminded of Umbridge briefly and felt his lip curl. He opened, and then closed his mouth. Mrs. Johnson gave him a satisfied smirk.

He took a breath. "When is this group?"

"Wednesday nights," Mrs. Johnson said as Severus stood. "Eat something before you come."

Severus picked up his cloak from the back of the chair and tucked the pamphlet into a pocket inside it. He reminded himself it could have gone far, far worse.

-+--+ Hermione -+--+

Hermione adjusted her brown tweed robes and adjusted the fat bun on the back of her head before throwing a handful of Floo powder in her kitchen's stone fireplace.

"Forty-three Willard Circle," Hermione said before she took a step into the leaping green flames.

She felt herself spin as she flew through the Floo Network to her destination.

She felt her feet hit the floor, and she stumbled slightly as she arrived at the location that had been in the anger management pamphlet. She reached out her hand, and she felt cold marble under her fingertips.

"And who are you supposed to be? Sherlock Holmes?"

Hermione blinked as the familiar sneering voice filled her ears. Her eyes darted around the unfamiliar room until they settled on her former Potions professor.

"Oh dear God, you expect me to be able to go through this with that tosser?" Hermione heard herself blurt out.

She instantly decided it was worth it to see the look on his face. A small thrill went through her.

Thankfully, Mrs. Johnson wasn't in the room to witness the exchange.

"Touché, Granger," Snape said, tilting his head.

A balding man in heavy, dark green robes was sitting in a soft looking, brown chair. He quirked a corner of his mouth at the exchange.

A slight, blond witch in flaming red robes looked as if Christmas had come early. She was sitting cross-legged on a maroon beanbag, and she was grinning from ear to ear.

Hermione surmised that he had greeted her in much the same way.

Well, she may have to learn to keep her temper, but she didn't have to put up with that type of treatment.

It's not like she had hit him.

The room she had entered was actually quite large. There were several chairs and beanbags, colored in natural tones, scattered about the room for people to sit in. The walls were paneled in dark wood. Amber colored shades were on all the lamps. The dueling dummies covered in brown leather that matched the rest of the earthy, cozy room didn't escape her notice, either.

She strode into the room and settled into a comfortable tan chair where she could glare at Severus freely.

He was even starting to look uncomfortable. Brilliant.

A panel in the wall opened and Hermione smiled as Mrs. Johnson came through.

"I'm glad to see you all on time," Mrs. Johnson said warmly. "Now, seeing as we have some new faces this week, why doesn't everyone say a bit about themselves."

"Well," the man in green started, "I'm Barnaby Krause. Father of four. I work at Gringotts. I'm here because I hexed my wife's lover."

"That seems reasonable!" Snape frowned, as did Hermione.

"At the bank when he came in to make a withdrawal," Barnaby said sheepishly.

"Oops," Hermione heard herself saying.

"I'm Kristie Perkins," the witch in red said. She shifted on the beanbag and it made a swooshing sound. "And I... behaved inappropriately with my wedding coordinator."

She blushed as red as her robes.

Hermione chuckled. She loved Molly to pieces, but she nearly got throttled when she and Ron were planning their nuptials.

"Would you like to go, Master Snape?" Mrs. Johnson asked encouragingly.

Snape threw a sharp look at Hermione, who looked at him with curiosity.

"You needn't call me Master, and since we are no longer at school, Professor hardly seems appropriate," Snape said slowly, as if he were trying to put off telling what he had done as long as possible. "I suppose... Snape would be acceptable."

It sounded as if it pained him to say it.

Hermione snorted.

Snape threw her a look of barely veiled outrage.

"I am a Potions master and professor at Hogwarts," Snape said through clenched teeth. "And I'm here because I started a pub brawl."

"What?" Hermione laughed. "You've got to be joking!"

"Now, Hermione," Mrs. Johnson said with disapproval in her tone.

"I'm sorry," Hermione said as she tried to compose herself.

"And what are you here for, if I might ask?" Snape snapped.

"I am Hermione Granger, Potions master and employee in the Department of Mysteries--"

"Potions master?!" Snape blustered as he sat straight up. "When the bloody hell did that happen?"

Mrs. Johnson cleared her throat loudly, and Snape crossed his arms tightly and settled back into his chair. He glared at Hermione.

Hermione found herself smirking. "After Hogwarts of course," she said airily. "I traveled to Bulgaria and studied under Master Kunin. It was an incredible experience and a great honor."

"You have to teach for two years before you get Mastership status!" Snape frowned.

"And I did so with Master Cornwall at the Camden estate near Burton-on-Trent. They had seven children and I oversaw their potions training." Hermione said crossly. "I can provide you with a resume if you like."

Snape raised his eyebrows at her and leaned back in his chair. Hermione felt the need to ignore him for the moment.

"Anyway, I am here because I broke my coworker's nose," Hermione muttered.

She heard Snape snort from his chair.

She glared at him.

"Well, as you can all see, you all have the same thing in common: you've all had a moment where you've lost control of yourselves," Mrs. Johnson said calmly. "If you were career trouble makers, this would be far more serious, but your records indicate these types of behavior are out of character for you, and that's why you are here instead of being detained or fired from your jobs."

They all seemed to shift uncomfortably.

"Now, I have sensed a pattern that all of you have been under more stress than normal lately," Mrs. Johnson said to all of them. "We're going to work on how to deal with that stress before we get into what managed to set you off."

Hermione listened intently to Mrs. Johnson as Snape glowered across from her.

They were asked to examine their feelings over their own self worth, talked a bit about why they took irrational people seriously enough to act on it, and a bit of what their logical actions should have been.

Hermione felt as if the woman was stating the obvious, but she nodded along and agreed to think about why she acted the way she had more thoroughly.

When their hour was over, Hermione rose, ignoring Snape, and thanked Mrs. Johnson. She made her way to the fireplace and took a handful of Floo powder when she realized the last thing she wanted to do was go home to an empty house.

That was what had started this, after all.

'Leaky Cauldron,' Hermione heard herself say.

Green flames leapt forth in the fireplace, and Hermione stepped into them, feeling the familiar tug and flying sensation of being swept through the Floo Network.

Her feet landed with a thud, and she opened her eyes to see the large, cheerful common room on the bottom floor of the Leaky Cauldron. She wiped her sooty feet on the fireproof mat near the hearth and stepped in.

"Hey, Hermione!" Neville Longbottom called from behind the bar.

"Tending bar again?" Hermione asked as she made her way up to the counter.

"Yea," Neville said, making a face. "Francine's out with the flu and Katie was having morning sickness something awful. I put her in a room upstairs with a potion. She'll be out for another hour."

"Nothing we can't handle."

Hermione turned to see the speaker, and Neville's wife, Hannah, spin out of reach of a drunken wizard as she balanced a tray of empty mugs. She placed her tray next to Hermione and gave her husband a weary look.

"You sure about that?" Neville grinned at her.

"Four tables are asking for their tabs, so we'll be fine," Hannah said as she bustled behind the bar and started tallying figures in a small book. She absentmindedly waved her wand at a row of bottles, and a tall, dark bottle rose out of the crowd and poured out four shots of a glowing green liquid.

"So what'll it be, Hermione?" Neville's eyes flicked behind her for a moment as he glanced at someone arriving in the fireplace.

"Just a pint," Hermione sighed. This really was much better than just going home to go over the latest issue of *Potions Worldwide*. "Surprise me."

Neville poured a dark brown liquid into a pint glass and handed it to Hermione. "I'll start you a tab."

Hermione took the glass and turned around, sloshing some of it onto the wizard standing behind her.

"Oh, I'm terribly..." Hermione's eyes narrowed. "What are you doing here?"

"I haven't been banned from every pub in the world, yet, *Master* Granger," Snape said snidely.

"Well, I suppose it's nice to have goals," Hermione said flippantly. "Excuse me."

Hermione wished she could have seen the expression on Neville's face as she pushed past Snape and made her way to a small, recently vacated, wooden table in the corner. She waved her wand and cleared it of the debris of its former occupants and stacked a small pile of shot glasses near the edge of the table.

She pulled her copy of *Potions Worldwide* from her bag and had just had her first sip of her pint when the chair next to her was pulled out and Hermione found herself looking at a drunk, dark haired wizard with a cocky expression.

"Wuzza nice bird like you doin' readin' in a bar like this?" he asked as he clumsily fell into the chair beside her.

"What?" Hermione asked, her eyebrows going up.

He flipped her magazine shut and waggled his eyebrows at her. "You could be talkin' t' anyone. Doin' anythin'?"

There was that eyebrow waggle again.

"I believe you're in my seat."

A cold voice came from behind Hermione and the young man threw a dirty look over his shoulder, then nearly fell over himself and knocked the chair over trying to get to his feet quickly.

"You!" was all the drunken man could muster.

"Indeed," said Snape as he waved his wand and the chair was righted. He held a pint glass in his hand. "Now you want to go back to your friends."

"Of course," the drunken man said as he turned around and stumbled back to his friends.

"Performing Unforgivables as pub tricks, are we?" Hermione hissed at him.

"Hardly," Snape snorted as he took the seat nearest Hermione and set his pint down.

The young man had headed back to his group of friends, and he was now gesticulating wildly.

"Can I help you?" Hermione asked exasperatedly.

"Yes," Snape glared at her. "Tell me why you went to Bulgaria to continue your potions training."

"So I wouldn't have to deal with you." Hermione returned his glare as she reopened her magazine. "Anything else?"

"Yes," Snape said as he relaxed a bit and took a drink from his pint. "When did you find your spine?"

"About the same time my marriage broke up," Hermione said coldly.

"I saw in the papers," Snape said as he sipped his pint again. He licked the foam off his upper lip, and Hermione wondered what he was getting at.

"It made the papers?" Hermione barked out a laugh. "Gods, they must be hurting for real news."

"Hey!"

A hand fell on Snape's shoulder and Hermione frowned. Snape closed his eyes and appeared to be counting.

"Can I be of assistance?" Snape said slowly.

Hermione began looking for either Neville or Hannah, but Neville was shaking a martini and Hannah was totaling up several tickets, and neither was looking in their direction.

"I believe my friend here was trying to talk to that bird!"

Snape turned around and saw a short, stocky wizard standing behind him with his arms crossed. His blond hair was cropped close to his head and stuck out wildly, and his brown work robes were stained. Snape rose to his feet and Hermione took a deep breath.

"And I believe my colleague and I were having a discussion," Snape said as he frowned down upon the little man. "And your 'friend' needs to learn how to talk to a lady."

"And wot you gun' do about it?" the dark haired, drunk young man challenged loudly.

That got Neville's attention. His head snapped up and his brows furrowed. He put down the cocktail shaker and fished his wand out of his robes.

"I beg your pardon?" Snape thundered.

Then the blond wizard shoved him.

--- Severus ---

"I suppose you're going to reason you didn't start this one?" Mrs. Johnson peered at Snape over the top of her glasses.

He glared at her. He certainly had not started this one. Even the witnesses had said so.

"However, it was your wand that threw the hex that shattered all those bottles." Mrs. Johnson flipped the manila folder shut.

"I did reimburse the Longbottoms for their loss," Severus grumbled. He felt his lip twitch and he tried to control it. "They were very reasonable."

"Indeed they were; if not for their testimony, you might be in some serious trouble."

"Thank heaven for small favors," Severus said flatly.

Longbottom was a colleague of his and hadn't liked anyone trying to be pushy with Granger, either.

"What I want to talk to you about was why you felt the need to stalk Hermione to the Leaky Cauldron." Mrs. Johnson looked at Severus seriously.

Severus took a deep breath and tried not to sound irritable.

"I wanted to know why she sought her education in Bulgaria instead of here." Severus' attempt to sound professionally curious had failed. "We are colleagues. Perhaps she had some insight on a project I'm working on."

"Really," Mrs. Johnson said skeptically. "I think it was more like you wanted to know why she avoided you after graduation."

"I'm not the world's most popular teacher," Severus scoffed. At least that much was true. "Why would I care?"

"Do you know the answer to that?" Mrs. Johnson asked pointedly.

Severus stayed sullenly silent.

"Well, that's another thing for you to think about," Mrs. Johnson said as she put her hands on her knees and rose to her feet. "I'll tell the board it was all a misunderstanding, but I think you knew that."

Severus rose to his feet and reached for the cloak over the back of his chair.

"Severus."

His eyes snapped to her at the sound of his first name.

"Think about what motivates you to do things." Mrs. Johnson met his eyes pointedly. "Before it gets you into real trouble."

Severus took a deep breath and nodded once.

-+--+ Hermione -+--+

"So that's when the light fixture came down?" Barnaby asked excitedly.

"No! That's when the little blond one hexed the big bloke in the red robes that tried to break it up!" Hermione thought for a moment. "Then he shoved him into Snape and that's when his wand misfired and the light fixture came down."

"Good heavens!" Kristie said, looking quite excited. Her hand fluttered to her neck and the wide sleeves of her bright orange robes fell to her elbow, showing off her gold and orange bangles. "Was anyone hurt?"

"No," said Hermione with a sigh of relief. "Neville managed to get off a Levitation Charm and held it steady before it crashed into the fray."

"Is that when the Aurors showed up?" Barnaby chuckled.

"Yea." Hermione grinned and shook her head. "What are the chances we'd leave here and someone would pick a fight with us?"

"I'm afraid to say a lot of people wouldn't mind giving Professor Snape a go," Kristie said, blushing. "Dumbledore was an excuse. He's tortured nearly everyone that's gone through Hogwarts over the years."

Hermione grunted an agreement as green flames leapt up in the hearth in their anger management meeting room. Snape stepped through and shook himself off slightly. Water droplets pooled on the floor and Hermione frowned at them.

"Rain?" Barnaby asked. "Where on earth is it raining?"

"Scotland," Snape grumbled. "On a wild goose chase for Hopkirk Daisies."

"Hopkirk Daisies haven't been in Scotland for over a hundred years," Hermione scoffed.

"Well, an advanced student of mine said he might have spotted some while chasing a snitch that had gone out of control." Snape took his cloak off, and Hermione felt a bit more relaxed as she watched him dry out his clothing and the floor. "I did come upon some Peony Mice, though."

Hermione's face went slack and she gaped at him.

He smirked.

"How did you find them?" Hermione said, getting excited.

"My thoroughness and excellent Herbology skills," Severus said loftily as he hung his dark cloak on a hook near the fireplace.

Mrs. Johnson chose that moment to enter the room, and they all took their seats.

"Since the scuffle at the Leaky Cauldron warranted coverage in the *Daily Prophet*, I'd like to talk about how you all felt about the incident." Mrs. Johnson sighed.

The discussion was positive, with Mrs. Johnson only having to chide them for laughing a few times. Snape stayed stonily silent throughout the discussion.

"I think the point so easily overlooked is that for some reason they managed to get off while we are here examining our feelings," Snape spat.

"Oh, they didn't get off," Mrs. Johnson said lightly. "Don't you worry about them."

Hermione wondered what the woman was referring to, but didn't ask.

Snape grumbled under his breath, but didn't say anything outright. Mrs. Johnson ignored him.

"So what is your best recourse when encountering an unreasonable person?" Kristie asked curiously. "You can only walk away if they let you."

"You do what they did. You defend yourselves and then escape as soon as possible."

"We did not escape as soon as possible," Snape said defensively. "The Aurors came and broke it up."

"Never give up, never surrender," Hermione said sarcastically. Snape gave her a dirty look.

Mrs. Johnson chortled, but the others only looked confused.

"I believe Miss Granger has gotten to the heart of the matter," Mrs. Johnson said, looking around at the members of the group. "You were going through a lot of stress in your lives when you had the incident that brought you here. Something inside you decided that conceding one more time would signify some loss of self, even when you were dealing with an unreasonable person."

She turned to Snape. "Snape, you seemed angry at the idea of us thinking you defended yourself and Miss Granger and got away."

"He didn't defend me!" Hermione said with a frown on her face.

"And you," Mrs. Johnson looked directly at Hermione, "easily get upset when someone even hints at the idea that you need to depend on anyone else for anything."

Hermione's nostrils flared, but she said nothing.

"But you are all here because of similar situations. I want you all to think about how your interpersonal relationships affect your mood and temper," Mrs. Johnson said, signaling the end of the meeting.

They all rose and Kristie grinned at Hermione, who felt a bit sheepish.

Mrs. Johnson was right, after all. They all had issues with their competency being questioned in one way or another.

"*The Three Broomsticks!*" Hermione overheard Snape say.

She turned around quickly, but he was already through the fire and gone.

"Damn!"

Hermione bustled over to the fireplace. She grabbed her cloak before throwing a handful of Floo powder into the fire and following Snape.

--- Severus ---

Severus scurried away from the fireplace with a smirk toying around his lips. He knew he had her.

Peony Mice were nearly as rare as Hopkirk Daisies. By chance he had gotten lost on his quest for the daisies, but he'd never admit it to Granger. He'd seen a single light out in the darkness and had found an abandoned, nearly destroyed cottage. The light was from half an ever-burning candle in the rubble.

He'd walked around to the back of the house for exploration's sake, and there he had found about five square meters of perfect garden among the wreckage.

Whatever witch or wizard had lived here, their spells had been powerful and their Herbology skills exceptional.

The Peony Mice were running wild, but most had chosen to nest nearby the garden that supplied their food. With the charm repelling any predators, they had a small safe haven in which to flourish.

He had captured a few, and they were nestled in a pouch inside his cloak, away from harm. He'd be nearly gleeful to show Professor Longbottom tomorrow, but he'd hardly let his coworker know. He would simply allow himself a small smirk when presenting the mice to his former student.

Granger was bound to follow him, expressing the excitement Severus wouldn't allow himself to show outwardly. She never could let anything alone when she was curious.

He snatched two mugs of ale off a blond-haired serving girl's tray as he swept by; ignoring her annoyed look, he quickly maneuvered to a table and quickly set the mugs down. Then he draped his cloak on the back of a chair and sat down quickly, trying to land in as casual a pose as possible.

He watched her come through the fireplace and nearly upset a large, overstuffed chair sitting by the fire occupied by the elderly Madam Rosmerta, who slopped ale down the front of her robes.

Severus chuckled as he watched a flustered Granger apologize profusely, and he took a leisurely drink from the mug in front of him.

Madame Rosmerta cleaned the spill with her wand and waved Granger on, smiling as if this sort of thing happened all the time.

Severus watched as Granger scanned the crowd milling about the common room of the Three Broomsticks, and her eyes finally fell on him.

As she approached, her serious look turned to a frown as she spotted the second mug of ale next to him.

"You're nothing if not predictable Master Granger," Severus said snidely.

She threw him a dirty look.

He was feeling a deep sense of satisfaction at the range of looks he'd managed to get out of her tonight. In fact, he nearly felt jovial. Perhaps these meetings were good for him, after all.

He tossed a black pouch on the small table, and it moved as if something was inside it.

Granger slipped into the chair Severus had reserved for her and stared at the pouch. "How many are in there?"

"Three." Severus sipped at his mug of ale. "There were others, but I decided not to disrupt their colony entirely."

"That was probably a good idea," Granger said. Severus watched her fingers twitch as she fought back the urge to snatch the bag up. "So what are you going to do now?"

Severus felt his eyebrows raise, in spite of himself. He would have expected her to insist he report the find to the Ministry immediately. He expected her to bore him with her insistence that this was a great find for all of Britain.

But she didn't.

It looked as if she wasn't so predictable after all.

"I thought I'd contact Rolf Scamander," Severus said stiffly. He didn't like being caught off guard. "I know he would treat... the situation with the meticulous care it warrants."

Granger snorted.

Again, Severus was surprised.

"Never thought I'd hear you ask Luna for assistance," Granger chuckled as she took a sip of her ale.

"I said *Rolf* Scamander!" Severus said coldly, feeling his lip twitch. He tried to tense his muscles so it didn't, but he could still feel movement.

Granger gave him a pitying look.

Severus sighed and contented himself with taking a giant swig from his mug. She was right, but she didn't have to be... so much like him about it.

He glanced at her and watched in horror as she poked the opening of the pouch with her wand.

He would have said something, but a mouthful of ale prevented him.

Instead, he gurgled as the first Peony mouse poked her small pink snout out of the bag and sniffed at the air. She crawled out, tentatively, her pink ruffled frill standing out in a defensive pose.

"Oh, look how big you are!" Granger whispered to the small mouse.

"They're really much faster than you'd think!" Severus said quickly, but it was too late. Two other Peony Mice, in red and yellow, darted quickly out of the bag and off the table.

"Oh, Jesus!" Granger blurted out as she struggled to get to her feet.

"What have you done, you stupid girl?" Severus snapped as he drew his wand.

A witch screamed near the bar. "Something just ran over my foot!"

"You leave her alone!"

Severus felt a shove at his back.

"What?" Severus turned around with an annoyed look on his face to see a short, balding wizard in dark brown robes and a shabby brown bowler hat.

"You'll not be calling respectable witches stupid and drawing your wand on them while I'm around!"

Severus only had enough time to register surprise before the man head butted him in the nose.

Then all he registered was stars.

Two

Chapter 2 of 2

Years after the war Hermione and Severus find themselves thrown together into a Ministry-approved Anger Management course.

--- Severus ---

Severus stormed through the Floo in his chambers at Hogwarts and tried his hardest to control his urge to kick a very good replica of a Ming vase he had had commissioned and had lovingly placed near his fireplace.

He failed and then cursed himself as he cast the repairing spell that reassembled the splintered porcelain that had scattered across his worn black carpet.

At least they had gotten the mice back.

All right, she had gotten the mice back. He had been busy fending off some working class louts who thought he was an abusive boyfriend.

Of all the nerve! Why didn't they go investigate the shrieking ninny at the bar if they wanted to be rescuers?

Screaming about a rat in a Wizarding pub... it was like protesting the Houses at Hogwarts. How did that silly nit not know it was someone's pet, anyway?

He ran his hands through his hair and paced for a moment.

Granger had come to his rescue. No one had come to his rescue since--- No! He refused to think of anything from that time any longer.

Sentimentality didn't suit him.

He took a deep breath and tried to collect his thoughts.

Green eyes swam in front of him and he let them. Sometimes it wasn't worth fighting. He felt her hands on his shoulders... her lips on his... her telling him what a moron he was for forgetting the crushed chalk in his Floating Potion and bleaching his eyebrows white.

He chuckled in spite of himself. He hadn't thought of the look on her face as she tried to slap a lid on their over boiling cauldron in years.

But he had seen it again tonight. When Granger had let the mice loose.

His heart skipped a beat and he felt the blood drain from his face.

He needed to stop thinking so much. He went to a dark oak cabinet and said the word that caused the magical lock to release.

Rows of colored potions bottles lined the shelves. This was where he kept the good stuff. His fingertips lightly caressed the bottles until they finally fell on a dusty red bottle.

A Sedatus Potion. He had two left.

He wouldn't be going anywhere. Why not?

Severus uncorked the bottle and tipped it into his mouth.

He gagged and spluttered, but drank it all. He tossed the bottle on the carpet and shook up some phosphorescent potions he had sitting on a shelf. He flopped down in a black, broken down, Muggle recliner before extinguishing the lights in the room.

In a few moments he began feeling warm and slightly mushy inside. He breathed deeply as he watched the glowing potions bottles swirl in the darkness.

In theory, Potions were supposed to enhance one's strengths and suppress one's weaknesses. It's why he desired to become a Potions master in the first place.

But in the end, he supposed, Potions were to blame for all his failings.

It was Potions where he met Lucius, Potions where he had first competed against Lily for their respective house points. It was Voldemort's promises of superior Potions knowledge that had lured him down the dark path of unforgettable regret he felt with his every breath.

Severus felt a tear stream down his face, but was suddenly blinded by green flames leaping up in his fireplace.

He yelled an oath and was surprised when he heard Granger's voice call out. "Professor?"

Before he thought about it he said, "Come in, you ninny! Just get those flames out!"

"I'm terribly sorry!" Granger said quickly and he heard a soft thud as she walked into the room.

He quickly wiped the tears from his face and shook his head as if to clear his thoughts. "What on earth was that?"

"I tripped over something," Granger called out from the darkness. "I think it's a bottle."

Severus swore and tried to wipe all of the traces of tears from his cheeks, but his cheeks felt so... funny.

-+--+ Hermione -+--+

Hermione held onto the bottle she had stepped on. She hated to think she had damaged anything he had been working on that had been photosensitive.

As she righted herself, her grip on the bottle slipped and she discovered the bottle had no stopper in it.

She slipped her head and the bottle under her cloak and she lit the end of her wand to read the label.

When she did, she frowned and whipped the cloak off her head. She stormed over to him and shined the light in his face.

He winced and tried to cover his face but she grabbed the hair on top of his head and he took his hands away from his face to glare at her.

"Unhand me at once!" Snape scowled at her.

"Your pupils are the size of platters!" Hermione said disgustedly. "Good God, how long have you been a potions popper?" She examined his face more closely. "Have you been crying?"

"Did you have a reason for being here, Miss Granger, or is dropping by someone's house to make yourself feel self superior just part of your nightly ritual?" He swiped her hand away and smoothed his hair down.

"I wanted to apologize." Hermione shook her head in disgust. "Don't know what I was thinking."

"You were thinking if you hadn't poked at that bloody bag like a twit none of this would have happened." Snape snapped at her. "I can only imagine what next week's meeting is going to be like."

"It wasn't your fault," Hermione said quietly. "I had Mrs. Johnson explain what happened."

"You woke her up?" Snape said after a moment's hesitation.

Hermione chuckled. "Yea. I think I scared her with the way I looked."

Snape reached out and tilted Hermione's wand up so he could finally see her face in the darkness.

She had pulled her hair back into a hasty ponytail, small streaks of white running up the sides of her head to the bushy mass of hair held behind her. Her eye was bruised, but not as swollen as when she had talked to Mrs. Johnson through the Floo.

Hermione was absolutely sure he would not have reached out to her if he hadn't been under the influence of the potion. His hand even touched hers briefly and he didn't flinch.

"Go to the wall over there." Snape gestured with a shadowy hand. "Get something out of the good cupboard."

"The 'good' cupboard," Hermione repeated flatly.

She knew about people like this. It all made so much sense. Separating yourself from others. Developing a caustic personality to keep people away. Long hours spent alone.

It was all too easy for a Potions master to become overly dependent on his craft.

Hermione found the cupboard easily and opened the already cracked door.

She tried to read a bottle in the low light, but it seemed to be covered in a light film of dust. She took a deep breath and blew on the bottle.

In the darkness, she had not seen the rest of the cabinet, and her breath now dislodged all the dust trapped within its recesses. She began violently sneezing.

"As you can tell, I do this all the time," Snape said behind her in a sarcastic tone.

"Point--*achoo*--taken!" Hermione shook her head and coughed a little before going back to examining the cabinet's contents.

She found the dustless ring where the potion he had taken had sat. Next to it was a small blue bottle with a Latin label. She chose it and drank down the sweet liquid. The tenderness around her eye started fading quickly.

"Thank you," Hermione said. When silence followed she said, "Mind if I have a look?"

"I'm surprised you didn't already." Snape sighed from the darkness behind her.

Hermione took that as consent and poked around a bit more in the cabinet.

She saw potions for luck and potions for disaster. Potions for fortune, fame, and glory. A tricky little mood potion that took weeks to brew, and one outlawed under the present Ministry that had a stopper date of 1932.

"You know how much trouble you can get into for that Heartless Potion?" Hermione said incredulously, but as she started to turn to face the darkened room her eye was caught by a faded photograph pasted to the inside of the cabinet.

Hermione had seen a school photo of Snape's mother once so she recognized her face at once. She was a smiling young woman in this picture, even though her arm was in a sling. Her good arm was wrapped around a little boy Hermione could only guess was Severus. His hair was shaggy and black, and he was playfully struggling with his mother. A small, child sized potions set lay on a table in front of them with a ribbon tied around it.

She found herself smiling at the photo.

She wished she had one like this of her and her mother, but her parents really didn't understand what she did.

"My grandmother took that picture."

Hermione whirled around and almost banged into Snape, who was looking over her shoulder, his pupils round and shining. His hair still mussed up in the front.

"She finally called the police and they took him away for three weeks." Severus shook his head. "He broke the other arm when he got out."

"I'd have killed him," Hermione heard herself blurt out. She was shocked by her boldness. It really was none of her business.

"I did a quite a few years later." Snape sighed. "But not after he killed her first."

Hermione's eyes shot to his face. He was shaking his head.

"The Ministry knows. Don't feel like I've burdened you with a secret. They ruled it self defense." He reached out, past Hermione, and brushed some dust from the picture. A corner of his mouth quirked.

Hermione was stunned. She felt rage build up in her gut, but she said nothing. She wanted to reach into the picture and plunk them out, keeping them safe, but she knew she couldn't.

It was infuriating.

"Good," Hermione sneered, her voice quavering with outrage.

"When did you get so jaded, Granger?" Snape asked. There was no snide tone to it. A side effect of the potion he was on was contentment.

"I don't know," Hermione said quietly. "I wish I could tell you."

Severus selected a bottle on a shelf that looked identical to the bottle she had found on the floor. "I won't tell if you don't."

"You just sit here in the dark and watch your potions swirl?" Hermione chuckled.

"I find the introspection and visual stimuli... stimulating," Severus said, trying to sound lofty and failing miserably.

"You were crying in the dark when I came in," Hermione scoffed.

"I would have stopped pitying myself within the hour and then start drawing out hypothesis for experimental potions." Severus shook his head at her as if this were the only reasonable thing to do on a Sedatus Potion.

Hermione took the bottle from him. She looked at it. Ran her fingers over its red enamel surface.

"It takes over a year to brew, you know," Snape boasted.

Hermione tried not to laugh.

Gods, it had been years. The last time she had indulged in a Sedatus Potion she was with Viktor in Bulgaria. They had studied cloud formations for an afternoon and made notes on experimental Transfigurations.

One of those ideas had led to a grant that had funded the rest of her education and padded her parents' retirement fund.

She unstopped the bottle and drank it in one gulp. Then she made a horrible noise.

"Oh my God, what's wrong with it?" Hermione spluttered. Her potion hadn't turned out half this terrible tasting.

"Wrong?" Snape frowned.

"It tastes horrible!" Hermione said, making a hideous face.

"It's made of fungus and rotten vegetation; it's hardly going to taste nice." Snape smirked at her.

"Didn't you cut it with mint and lemon?" Hermione was starting to gag at the residual taste in her mouth.

Snape opened and then closed his mouth. He seemed to gather his thoughts, and his face took on a look of satisfaction. "I generally don't waste time on frivolities when making potions."

"Oh, I see," Hermione said lightly. "So you didn't think of it, then."

--- Severus ---

Severus felt annoyance in his dreamy haze. Mint and lemon, indeed.

He watched her walk over to his broken down recliner and flop down in it. The light on her wand went out, and he heard the chair squeak as she pulled the arm to make the foot rest come out. Then the light on the end of her wand went out, leaving the row of glowing potions to lightly tinge the room with a hint of light.

Fine. He always liked the carpet anyway. He lay down, spreading his cloak out underneath him, making sure not to smash the pouch of mice in his pocket.

"Why are you on the floor?"

Granger's tone suggested she put that action at about the same level as 'pissing in public.'

"Because you're in my chair."

There was a sound like bending wood, and then she said, "Now there are two chairs."

He tentatively pulled his wand out. He rarely used his wand when taking a potion that altered his perception, but this was a simple light spell.

As the tip of his wand glowed, his eyes widened at the large black throne sitting next to his broken down recliner. It was where a small end table had been. Hermione was covering her eyes so she wasn't blinded by his wand.

"Very funny," Severus said. He had tried to sound annoyed, but the spell made him feel so content that he just sounded vaguely cranky.

He climbed onto the throne and found what looked like a hard surface was quite soft and conforming to his body.

"How did you make this?" Severus asked, genuinely interested.

There was a pause in the darkness next to him. "I told you, I got a grant for experimental transfigurations."

"This is amazing." Severus ran his hands over the light surface. "This material... what is it?"

"You should see what happens when you pour a permanency and strength potion over it."

He could nearly hear Granger smirk in the darkness, and he felt a flutter in his stomach.

He really should have eaten something before taking the potion. What an odd feeling. Maybe the potion was a bit old.

"Please owl me a copy of your findings. I would like to read them." Severus settled into the throne.

"I will."

He heard Granger settle into the chair beside him, and as his hands explored the chair he found a handle on the side.

"Does this recline?" Severus asked incredulously.

"Yup," Granger said. Now it sounded as if she were stretching. "And I can show you how to make them transparent if you like sunbathing in the nude."

"I beg your pardon?" Severus doubted he would ever feel relaxed enough to let anyone make fun of him.

"That idea was popular enough to fund me a trip to Iceland for a symposium on the properties of star fruit and its application to modern potions." Granger stopped settling and sighed. "It was brilliant."

Severus didn't know if she was talking about her spell or the symposium, but he imagined the statement was accurate either way. He pulled the handle and let the chair cradle him as he reclined back.

They watched the potions swirl in silence for a moment before he asked, "Why did you break your coworker's nose?"

"He made me feel stupid," Granger said. "I hate it when people make me feel stupid."

Severus frowned. As much as he hated to admit, Granger was one of the most intelligent witches he'd ever known.

"Why did you start a brawl in a pub?" Her voice sounded small, like she didn't expect him to answer.

"I can deal with the normal insults." Severus sighed. "You killed Dumbledore. Traitor. Turncoat. Greasy git. Blah blah blah."

"But?" Granger prompted.

"But I'd had a bad day, and he insulted my mother."

"Oh." Granger sounded like someone knocked the wind out of her.

Then she surprised him again.

"What the hell is wrong with people?" She sounded angry.

There was that flutter in his stomach again. Perhaps he should eat something.

"Would you care for me to make a list?" Severus snorted.

Granger snorted back, and Severus found himself smiling in the dark. He was glad she couldn't see.

He sighed in resignation. His curiosity was getting the better of him. "Tell me about your masters' thesis."

"Oh!" Granger chuckled. "That! Well, it all started at the star fruit symposium."

And so she told him. It was nothing less than brilliant, even though it didn't affect him since he didn't tend to brew exotic potions. He didn't really expect anything less.

He kept feeling that feeling in the pit of his stomach, and it was starting to annoy him.

"Are you hungry?" Severus asked lazily.

"I am." Granger sounded almost apologetic.

"We could order chips from that new takeout place in Hogsmeade," Severus suggested.

"We could go for curry in London."

Severus could practically hear her grin.

"Should we go out in this state?" Severus asked her. "The potion still has a couple hours to go before it wears off."

"Live a little."

Severus heard Granger pull herself up in his chair, and he grabbed the handle that would make him sit up.

"I'm not sure this is a wise course of action." Severus frowned. Since he had gotten older, he had gotten far more cautious about things.

"I used to do this all the time with Viktor." Granger's wand shone in the darkness again. "We'll just pop in and out. We'll be fine."

Against Severus' better judgment, he agreed.

Taking the Floo to Diagon Alley had been rather simple and they passed through the Three Broomsticks into Muggle London. The fog was heavy, and Granger transfigured their cloaks and robes into Muggle wet weather clothing. Snape had always been cautious not to use his wand when taking potions, but Hermione used hers with ease.

They stomped down the sidewalk, past pubs and closed shops until they found a tiny little restaurant with three tables inside and a queue out the door.

"Good Lord," Severus said as they joined the queue. "Every pub let out at once?"

Granger chortled at him. "Been awhile since you've gotten out?"

It had been quite awhile, actually. He used to go out occasionally, when he found himself in London doing errands, but with the rise in catalogue sales in the Wizarding World, he didn't get a chance to get out much anymore.

"Well, never mind." Granger waved one of her hands. She seemed uncomfortable with his silence.

They stood in line for a few moments, listening to the young people around them.

Snape's eyes fell on a small glowing box some Muggle girls in line were fiddling with. It seemed to have a small typewriter pad attached to it. He was trying to figure out what it did when a high, brassy voice rang out.

"Can you stop staring at my tits?"

A short girl with long black hair was staring at Snape. She was wearing a rather low cut shirt and too much makeup, in Hermione's opinion.

"I beg your pardon?" Snape looked taken aback.

"You're staring at my tits!"

"I was looking at that... whatever it was you girls were fiddling with." Snape sneered, and the other girls cringed, but the girl that had accused him wasn't backing down.

"Like you've never seen a cell phone before!" The girl looked disbelieving.

"That's a phone?" Snape blurted out.

"Listen," Granger cut in. "He's been working with tribes in South America for three decades. No, he doesn't know what a cell phone looks like."

"Well, I think you're lying!" the black haired girl accused accurately.

"And I think you're an annoying bitch," Hermione snapped. "And if you don't want people staring at your tits, you might want to put them away when it's this cold. You look like you're smuggling gumdrops."

Then Hermione heard a deep laugh by her side, and she realized Snape was laughing.

The sound was quite nice. Hermione was enjoying it immensely before the black haired girl slapped her.

Severus had just enough presence of mind to register that, technically, two women were fighting over him before he noticed a large, red-haired man stalking in their direction.

It was too late to just leave, however. Hermione had already jumped on the other girl and seemed to be... pulling out tufts of her hair? Severus mused for a moment about Muggle beauty devices before the red-haired man seized both girls and tried to tear them apart.

Severus probably would have let him, had he not kicked Hermione in order to save his girlfriend's hairdo. At that point he had to step in, he had reasoned to himself.

--+-+ Hermione -+-+--

Hermione sat on the edge of a cot in a lonely cell, staring at her hands. She'd really done it this time.

They'd even taken her wand.

She probably shouldn't have pulled it out in the first place. Especially in front of Muggles.

But that big one had hit Snape on the nose, and she heard it crunch.

Now they were going to ship her off to Azkaban, at least for a while.

She was shaken out of her reverie when she heard two sets of footsteps march up the hallway to her cell. A jangle of keys. A lock turning. The door opening.

Then Snape came through the door and it slammed shut behind him.

She looked at him sheepishly.

He glared at her. He opened his mouth.

He closed it. Suddenly he looked very tired.

Snape walked over to her and sat next to her on the cot.

Hermione glanced over at him and realized he was looking at her.

So she started giggling.

She knew it was hysteria. That she was terrified they'd put her in Azkaban. That they'd snap her wand. That they'd take away her research.

But he started chuckling back.

His nose was straight once again and the swelling was going down. She assumed the Ministry healers had set it and had given him a healing potion. She knew it must be sore.

So she reached out and flicked it.

"Ow!" Snape scowled in hurt surprise. "What was that for?"

"For checking out that silly bint's tits and getting us into this mess!" Hermione chided him.

He smirked. "Well, it's not like yours were out or anything."

"You'd look at them if they were out?" Hermione asked.

"I'm not dead yet, contrary to popular hope," Snape said sarcastically.

Hermione thought for a moment. An evil grin spread across her face. Snape looked taken aback.

"I'd like to see your scar," Hermione said, a smile still playing over her lips.

"What?" Snape snapped at her.

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours."

--+- Severus -+--

Severus instantly knew she wasn't talking about showing him a scar. He felt very warm all of a sudden.

His eyes were drawn to the front of her robes.

He found himself loosening his collar.

He kept it buttoned extra high these days and charmed the buttons to keep them from slipping when they were fastened. This was the first time he wanted to show it off.

He pulled the stiff collar away from his skin and closed his eyes as she leaned in to look. He wasn't expecting to feel her light touch against the hard scar tissue, and he flinched, but forced himself not to pull away.

His breath got raspier. The potion had nearly worn off, but her touch still felt like sparks against his skin.

"I think I might be able to help you with that," she said finally.

His eyes flew open, wondering how she had known what was going on under his robes.

"I'm working on an experimental potion for skin regeneration. It was originally for Arthur..." Hermione trailed off.

"Has he tried it yet?" Severus asked.

"No one has." Hermione sighed. "It has about two more weeks of brewing."

Severus nodded. It was always tragic when your work got interrupted.

"Well," Hermione said with a small smile as she started unbuttoning her robes. "I guess we did have an agreement."

Part of Severus told him if he was a gentleman he would stop her.

The part that was throbbing under his robes was reminding him how long it had been since a woman willingly touched him and he really wanted to see her with less clothing on.

She opened her robes and exposed a blue, low cut bra. Severus reached a hand out and brushed his fingers over the tops of her breasts.

She looked sincerely surprised, but enthusiastic at his touch. She leaned into his hand and their eyes met.

He hooked a finger into the top of her bra and pulled the stretchy material towards him. He looked into it before he pulled it down and let go. The stretchy material caught her under her breast and pushed it up, leaving her bare.

She gasped, but watched as he lowered his head to her. His lips gently wrapped around her nipple and when she began weaving her fingers through his hair he knew he had her.

He pulled down the fabric of her other bra cup and gripped her breast firmly when it was free of its confines. She groaned and squirmed, making their little cot squeak.

He gently guided her down to the cot, and she snaked her hand down to run over the bulge in his robes.

He swore when he realized just how much he wanted her and how quickly he was going to last, but before he could explain her, she had pressed her mouth to his.

His nose screamed in pain, but he tried to ignore it.

"I-" Severus didn't know why he was still so afraid she would reject him. "I want to---"

"Severus, fuck me," Hermione demanded in panting breaths. "Fuck it, I need it, fill me up, stretch me out, make me come all over your---"

Severus crushed his lips to hers. If she kept that up he'd be done all over her instead of in her. The idea made his mind reel.

He yanked her robes up and found her panties gone already. Was that normal? Did she often go commando? He found himself desperately wanting to know these things.

He pulled his own robes up and felt her hand go around him, trying to guide him gently, yet impatiently into her.

As he pierced her, he felt her back arch underneath him, watched her breasts bounce, her mouth open in a groan and he felt himself smiling.

He reached down and started rubbing his thumb against her clit.

"No," Hermione moaned. "I don't want to finish so soon."

"If you don't, I will, and you'll lose your chance," Severus said gruffly.

"Never mind then," Hermione groaned and grabbed Severus by the hips, pulling herself up and slamming herself against him.

'Weasley got bored with this?' Severus heard himself thinking. 'What's the other girl? A Chinese contortionist?'

"Harder!" Hermione barked.

"Bossy little thing, aren't you?" Severus observed as he threw himself on her and started to grind into her.

She started to groan louder and her fingers dug into his hips as she got closer to her climax.

He cupped on of her breasts and watched her face as he twisted one of her nipples.

She practically struggled against him as she approached her climax, then she buried her face in his robes to muffle her screams.

He took himself out of her briefly so he could hoist her legs up on his shoulders, then pierced her again.

She reached her hand up and ran her fingers through his hair as she caught her breath. She started clenching herself around him, making it harder for him to pull out. He felt a bead of sweat run down his forehead and he exploded in her.

It felt like it was never going to stop, his legs shaking from the force. Her legs slipped off his shoulders and he moved each of his arms in turn to let her put her legs down, still gripping him deep within her.

He shuddered for a moment more before laying on her to catch his breath.

He closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of contentment flooding through him, much more powerful than the last, tiny bit of residual potion he was still feeling.

They heard footsteps and Severus practically leapt off Hermione, spilling their combined mess onto the inside of her robes. He reached for his wand to clean them up quickly, but quickly remembered they had taken it from him.

She was hastily trying to button her robes, and he smoothed his robes down before pulling hers back to where they should be instead of bunched around her waist.

There was that key in the lock again and to Severus' surprise, Ron Weasley and Harry Potter walked through the door, wearing their red Aurors robes.

The years had been good to Harry. His hair was still thick, although peppered liberally with white. Ron however, had lost a lot of his hair, a horseshoe of light red running around his skull.

Ron looked from Hermione to Severus, shaking his head. "Couple of delinquents, Harry. Don't know what we're going to do with them."

Severus felt instant relief. They wouldn't hesitate to torture him for sure, but they wouldn't joke with Hermione unless everything was fine.

"What's the bad news?" Hermione ran her hands through her hair.

"Well, only a few people saw you pull off that stunning spell and I got them all." Harry shrugged. "Most of them were drunk anyway."

"All the witnesses say that silly cow started it, so you're fine there," Ron said. He was still shaking his head.

"But you did perform magic in front of Muggles," Harry said, raising an eyebrow at them.

"And if I didn't know better, I'd say you two were under the influence of something." Ron folded his arms across his chest.

Severus and Hermione both suddenly found themselves trying to look innocent, but failing miserably.

"So they've given you a huge fine, but you got off," Harry said, shaking his head. "For some daft reason they're giving you your wands back."

Harry pulled Hermione and Severus' wands out of the sleeve of his robes and handed their wands back to them.

Hermione leapt up from the cot and threw her arms around Harry.

"Thank you!"

"I figure after all this time I probably owe you one." Harry grinned at her. "It's late and now we have oodles of paperwork to go through, so we're going to be off. Just keep yourselves out of trouble for a couple of weeks. If I have to read anything more about you two in the papers I might vomit."

"The *Prophet*?" Hermione looked confused. "We're in the *Prophet*?"

"High profile divorce means its high profile when you start dating again." Ron shrugged. "And it's not like you two have been all that discreet, have you?"

Severus blinked in disbelief. Hermione looked just as stunned.

"Well, anyway, you're free to go," Harry said, breaking the uncomfortable silence. "Hermione, Ginny would love to see more of you. Stop by sometime next week. Please."

"I will." Hermione smiled at him. "Tell her I'm good for Thursday."

"Will do." Harry nodded to both of them. "Night."

Ron nodded to them and he left with Harry, leaving Hermione and Snape in the cell.

"Well, I guess we can Apparate out of here," Hermione said with a sigh.

"I suppose we can."

They looked at each other for a moment.

"I suppose now comes the time to pick a spot to Apparate to," Snape said off handedly.

"I suppose it does," Hermione said, fiddling with her wand.

She glanced at him for a moment. "You know... when I tripped over that bottle in your room I think I dropped something. I should retrieve it."

"What did you drop?"

"I don't know. I'll figure out something later."

Severus quirked a corner of his mouth at her. "Indeed."

"Meet you outside the front gates?" Hermione grinned coyly at him.

"I'll see you there."

They raised their wands together, and in an instant and a pop, they were gone.