



'I am surprised that you did not rush to cover up, Hermione.'

'So am I,' she said, aware that her voice was sounding breathy. Now that he was more-or-less on her level, he ceased to be a black silhouette and she was able to see his features. She gazed on them affectionately the sharp nose, lined brow and black eyes that she had missed, the last few weeks. 'I'm surprised you didn't beat a hasty retreat, yourself.'

'So am I,' he echoed. He reached a hand over her shoulder, closed her book and set it down beyond the cushion before running his fingers gently down her upper arm. The blood sang in Hermione's ears, and she was once again aware of the scents of lavender and hot stone, a more complex herbal smell from Severus's clothing, and a little of her own sweat. He drew his arm back and she felt a rush of disappointment, but he was pulling off of his jacket. She sat up at last and extended a tentative hand towards the top button of his waistcoat. He tucked down his chin and pressed his mouth onto the side of her hand. *Gods!* She started to undo the small, shiny buttons, counting silently. *One, two, three, four.* His breathing was deepening. *Five, six, seven.* The bottom button was not done up, for which she was grateful she couldn't have touched it without brushing her hand over his trouser placket. Not that she intended to steer clear of that region for long. He shrugged out of the waistcoat and threw it aside before shifting further up the cushion and leaning in.

During the half-second of his movement, Hermione felt her heart race and her skin flush in a mixture of anticipation and panic. Their closed mouths met, and she raised her arms around his neck and brushed her lips lightly once from side to side against his before opening them slightly. He responded with a gasped-in breath, his tongue entering her mouth and his hands sliding up around her back. His hands caressed the skin of her back and sides before he lowered them to support her and gently tipped them both down to the cushion without breaking the kiss. Hermione could feel his wand in its arm holster digging into her before he tugged his right hand gently free and started to run it up and down her side, then pulled back a little and kissed the corner of her mouth, then down her jaw and neck, while Hermione ran her fingers through his hair.

Severus slowly sat up again, glanced around and drew his wand, casting a series of charms. The last had him frowning in concentration. 'What were those?' Hermione enquired, somewhat breathlessly.

'Silencing, repelling charm, and invisibility. Disillusionment would be rather unkind in your present state of dress.' He gave a small, one-sided smile and laid his wand alongside the cushion with a little clatter.

'Thank you for that.' She reached up and drew him down into a more thorough kiss before he recommenced moving his mouth slowly down her body, running his tongue down her sternum and then along the sensitive underside of both breasts before drawing a nipple into his mouth and sucking gently. Hermione gasped a little, then more as he increased the suction. 'G-good,' she panted. He drew his stiffened tongue around her areola before transferring his mouth to the other nipple and repeating his attentions. Her eyes closed, Hermione felt overwhelmed by sensation the scent of the summer garden, the sound of bees in the lavender and intermittent birdsong, the sun on her skin and a building buzz of arousal.

She reached down and tugged Severus up a little, reaching for his shirt buttons. He sat back and looked at her steadily for a moment, black eyes alight with lust and, she thought, something more ... *fear?* ... before rapidly unbuttoning and shedding his shirt. He knelt up, and Hermione held her breath as he reached for his trouser buttons *Oh my ...* her arousal increased sharply as she acknowledged to herself that he really intended to go through with this. *At last!* She felt as if she had been waiting for this from the moment she began her apprenticeship. He stood, kicked off his shoes and pushed off his trousers and boxers before kneeling quickly back to her side, giving her no time to enjoy the view, and Hermione realised that he was a little body-shy. *I suspect that took a lot of courage.* She reached down and started to push down her bikini-bottoms, as much to reassure him as to hurry things along.

'Lift,' he said huskily and pulled them down and off, adding them to the growing pile of his own discarded clothing. He drew a flattened palm gently over her pubic hair, then glanced up at her with what looked now like mischief in his eyes before bending and placing a soft kiss in the same place. He breathed in sharply through his nose, apparently enjoying her scent, before rubbing his face gently over her curls and the soft skin below her navel. She looked down and saw that his eyes were closed and his expression was blissful. He slid his left hand down to the back of her knee and coaxed her leg into a flexed position before leaning in and bringing his mouth back to her mound and sliding his tongue between her folds.

Hermione suddenly realised that she was smiling joyfully as she revelled in what Severus could do with his tongue circling her clit, running his tongue down to push at her entrance, bringing it back to flick lightly over her clit before circling again. She felt her face and chest begin to flush as she approached orgasm, but then he delivered a last flat-tongued lick to her aching clitoris and hitched himself up for a deep kiss. She squirmed beneath him, trying to angle herself to his erection, and he chuckled.

'Wait, Hermione.' He groped at the side of the cushion for his wand and muttered the contraception charm.

'Thanks.' She grinned up at him. 'Now, where were we?' She had already manoeuvred herself so that his erection was poised at her entrance; now, she slid herself downwards a little, just as he picked up her cue and thrust. She was so wet that he slid home easily, and she gave a breathy gasp at the sensation of his cock stretching her and for the fulfilment of her fantasies. He remained still, and she could feel his braced arms trembling slightly.

'Hermione...' He gazed apprehensively down into her eyes, one eyebrow raised.

'Gods, Severus.' She reached up to his face through a haze of arousal and ran her finger across his bottom lip before flexing her hips in encouragement. She was already so close to orgasm that almost anything he did would bring her there, and this gave her a joyous confidence. 'Fuck me.'

With a choked cry he pulled back a little as she squeezed her internal muscles around his cock, and then he began to thrust slowly. Within seconds she was consciously holding off her orgasm, and she could feel him iron-hard inside her, ready to come. She rocked her pelvis from side to side a little, then brought up her legs around him and locked her ankles, pushing her heels back against his buttocks.

'Hermione,' he groaned again, 'if you do that I'm going to come right now.' But she could feel her skin flushing as her excitement spiralled and she herself came hard, gasping and gripping his cock frantically. He seemed to swell inside her, and then she could feel him spasming in counterpoint to her own contractions. He lowered his head and began to kiss her face frantically, snuffling a little, and she realised that he was crying, even as she felt the last aftershocks of his orgasm inside her.

'Severus ... Severus?'

'I'm sorry,' he breathed. 'I love you, Hermione. Oh gods.'

Tears pricked her eyes too. 'Me too. I love you too.' She clung to him with arms and legs, feeling a confused mixture of awe, satisfaction, triumph and concern for his emotional reaction. They were both shaking.

Hermione released Severus slowly, and he rocked back to take his weight on his knees and arms the cushion was too narrow for them to lie side-by-side and breathed a huge sigh. 'I am sorry for that. I was overwhelmed.'

'So was I. I've wanted you for so long.' She reached up with her right hand to tuck his hair behind his ear.

Severus turned his head aside to rub his tear-wet cheek on his arm. 'I was not going to say anything until your apprenticeship had finished. But seeing you there... I did not even know you would be here today. Lucius owed me from France, to ask me to check on the alpine house.' He sat back onto the cushion and used his discarded shirt to dry his face.

Hermione sat up as well. 'Lucius knew I'd be here this week I've been going over Abraxas's herbology books *And* checking on the alpiners the garden elves are a bit over-zealous at watering to be left in charge of his gentians.'

They looked at each other. Severus began to laugh. 'That snake!'

Hermione grinned. 'I suspect that he may be more perceptive than we give him credit for. I think we may have been being a bit dense.'

'The Gryffindor Know-It-All, dense?' Severus teased. 'Oy!' He looked in apparent confusion at the crumpled shirt he was grasping, then shook it out and started to put it on. 'Ow. I think I forgot the sun protection charm.'

'I made some lavender soothing gel yesterday it's in the stillroom. Come on indoors and I'll do your back.' She stood up.

'I suggest that my apprentice get dressed. The invisibility charm will start to wear off soon, and Lucius's elves are terrible gossips.' He handed Hermione her top and started to pull on his clothes rapidly.

*Doesn't he want anyone to know?* She was confident that Severus would not make declarations that he didn't mean. She looked over at her black-clad apprentice-master, who was now sitting on the bench to put on his shoes.

Severus appeared to have understood her questioning look. 'I do not want to keep this a secret. But Lucius would be unbearably smug if he believed that he had orchestrated this right down to the timing and setting.' He stood and helped Hermione to put the cushion back onto the bench before picking up her book. 'Shall we go and test the efficacy of your lavender gel?' They walked out of the lavender garden hand in hand.