

Valentine's Day

by tonksinger

It's Valentine's Day, the most miserable day of the year for Severus and Hermione. They would like nothing more for it to be over, but someone has decided that they'd like it to continue... Written for the 2008 SSHG exchange for Julilith.

The First Morning

Chapter 1 of 5

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AN: This was a gift for Julilith in the 2008 SSHG Winter Exchange. I hope you enjoy it. Many thanks to laiksmarei and moonrevel, my wonderful betas, who continuously save me from comma hell.

It had gone on long enough, really. The surreptitious looks, the inconvenient daydreams, the ever-so-slight flushes in response to a comment or raised eyebrow, and, he was sure, the bouts of masturbation with each other's names on their lips and faces in their minds. He was tired of listening to his friend pointedly Not Talk About Her, and he was tired of hearing her stammer that she had Not Been Checking Out His Arse, Really. It was for their own good, he decided, and he was the man to do something about it.

Besides, he was rather bored. The Ministry was no fun to mess with since Kingsley became Minister, his son had moved in with his new boyfriend, and his wife...whom he loved dearly, make no mistake about it...had recently developed a liking for swarthy, overly muscled men and would not begrudge him a little fun whilst she played.

So, at 12:01 AM of February 14th, he set his plan in action with a flick of a finger and waited for the fun to begin.

"And now," the Dark Lord said, looking down the slits that were his nose at Severus, "you and your little Mudblood girl will face the cannons." With an airy wave, he brushed the feather on his tri-cornered hat so it lay flat and then turned to the army of knickerbockered Death Eaters that stood behind the line of cannons, matches at the ready.

Severus wrapped himself around the young woman beside him, knowing that they wouldn't escape.

"FIRE!"

RumblerrumbleBOOM!!

With a groan, Severus realized that the ear-shattering noises that had been plaguing his dreams weren't simply the cannons that dream-Voldemort had added to his arsenal and were, in fact, actual rolls of thunder that had been keeping him from fully sleeping for the past hour. It had simply taken an especially loud crash to rouse him from the restless doze he had mistaken for sleep.

There were those who had expressed envy for his dungeon quarters during such epic storms as this, saying that the sounds must be muted by being underground. He had grown very tired of providing the explanation: that his quarters were under the lake, very close to those of his House, and that the water that largely surrounded his walls worked as an amplification system that the biggest Muggle rock bands would kill to acquire. The sleep patterns of Slytherins did not fare well during storms; even when Silencing charms were used, one could still feel the vibrations of the water, which was even more unnerving than the thunder itself.

Sitting up, he cast a glance at the clock hanging on his wall. No matter how much he glared at it, it refused to say anything other than five twenty-seven AM, February 14th, 2003. Not being a good sleeper at the best of times, Severus knew he wasn't going to get any more rest that morning, certainly not now that he was mostly awake. Growling at the weather, he got up and headed to his wardrobe.

As he pulled out something black and intimidating to wear, he had the distinct feeling that his clock had been trying to relay an important piece of information to him. Frowning, he turned back and reread the display.

February 14th...

"Oh, *fuck*." He winced at his choice of epithets. Fuck; yes, that was exactly what many of the students would do...and what he probably wouldn't do, unless his right hand and a detailed and practiced fantasy counted. It was Valentine's Day, that annual homage to some poor bastard getting martyred in the Middle Ages, which everybody honored by giggling and giving their intended swains extremely obnoxious cards. Even without the decorations Lockhart had once provided, the feelings and behavior that the holiday incited in the students was enough to drive Severus up his dungeon wall.

At least it's only one day, he told himself as he laid out the robes he had selected and then headed for the bathroom. A shower would wake him up nicely and perhaps help with the tension that had attacked his shoulders the second he realized what day it was.

A very high-pitched yelp greeted him when he entered the bathroom; apparently, the Hogwarts house-elves were not accustomed to the staff members walking into the bathrooms stark naked at ungodly hours of the morning. He caught a glimpse of huge eyes peering over a heap of laundry before the creature vanished with a *crack*, taking the clothes with it. Shaking his head at the sensibilities of the elf and wondering if it was going to do something painful to itself for seeing him in a state of undress, Severus stepped into the shower, murmuring the word that sent perfectly hot water cascading from the ceiling. With a sigh, he stretched out his arms and planted his hands against the rough stone wall of the shower, allowing the water to hit his head and shoulders and wash away some of the tautness of the muscles. In the end, he knew the shower wouldn't do much good, as the tension would probably return by the end of breakfast and increase throughout the day, necessitating a longer, hotter shower before bed.

But it did feel nice. Severus...without changing position...reached one arm over to a small niche in the wall and retrieved a bar of his personal soap, which he made every month. Wetting it briefly, he began rubbing it over his body, inhaling the scents of juniper and sage that it contained. He rubbed some of that lather through his hair, as well, just to remove the worst of the grease; he had long ago given up on doing anything significant with his hair. After a final rinse, he turned off the water and stepped out to grab a thick, fluffy towel that the house-elf had placed on the counter.

Twenty minutes later, dried and dressed, Severus slipped out of his quarters, shut the door firmly behind him, and wearily began walking to the Great Hall. He had debated with himself whether to stay in his rooms until it was time for breakfast, but had decided that awaiting the meal in the Great Hall gave him a better chance of being able to eat it and leave before the giggling students (and, probably, giggling staff) showed up.

He wondered if the house-elves were being affected by Valentine's Day, as food appeared on the tables a good fifteen minutes after it normally would, and while a quarter of an hour was not an impressive amount of time, it was sufficient to thwart his plans. The early risers arrived shortly after the food; Flitwick, the current Headmaster, smiled at Severus before climbing up the small stair that allowed him to reach the Headmaster's seat, which had to be raised to allow him to be seen over the table. He was followed by Sprout, already bearing a smudge of dirt on her nose, and then Hermione Granger, who had taken over the Charms position, and a good portion of Severus' thoughts, when Filius became Headmaster a year ago.

He remembered that first day very well, as he and Granger had gotten into a heated debate not two hours after she had arrived. It had begun as a discussion of why unicorn tail hair was better when finely or coarsely chopped and had quickly escalated into a full argument. She had stood her ground surprisingly well, staring up at him with sparks flying from her brown eyes, even as he sneered at her ideas and insulted her evidence. After a particularly scathing last word, Severus had stormed back to his rooms, got in the shower, and wanked himself into a daze. Merlin, he had wanted to drag her back there with him and make her concede her erroneous points as he pounded into her soft, curvy body.

"Severus? Could I speak to you for half a minute, please?" Flitwick's squeaky voice carried easily over the quiet susurrus that was beginning to rise in the hall. Out of the corner of his eye, Severus saw Granger's bushy head turn, her insatiable curiosity prompting her interest. Inwardly, he snarled as he stood and walked over to the middle of the table, sinking into the empty chair of Professor Sinistra. Flitwick, while intelligent and not someone Severus ever wanted to duel again, had a knack for innocently saying things guaranteed to embarrass his audience in some way. And while Severus despised being embarrassed in front of any member of the human race (or other race, come to think of it), Hermione Granger was right at the top of the list and had been for the past year. Oh, he was careful not to let her know it; he taunted her, snubbed her, and baited her at every opportunity and generally came out on top. Of the conversations, that is. Whether or not he would be on top in any other, more interesting situation had not yet been determined and was unlikely to be so, especially if the impending conversation with Flitwick was about to go as badly as Severus suspected it would.

Taking a sip of tea and placing the cup down on the table, Flitwick turned to Severus and clasped his small hands together. "As you may recall, Severus, the Ministry has arranged for a member of its office to come and speak to the staff about a few issues regarding funding and government-introduced syllabi. Now," he continued, fixing Severus with a shrewd look and making his voice a bit sterner (which meant it became louder), "I know you wouldn't dream of trying to get out of the meeting, but do try to avoid any... coincidental accidents. Potion spillages that take two hours to clean up, unexpected detentions, that sort of thing. Thank you." He beamed at Severus, who was grinding his teeth so hard that the little man could probably hear the enamel wearing away, and turned back to his breakfast.

Scowling, Severus stood and walked back to his seat with all the dignity he still had. One or two of his colleagues along the table were practicing the art of Transfiguring chuckles into coughs, though they were wise enough to not look at him while they did so.

He was about to sit back down when a misty voice said in his ear: "Oh, my dear Professor Snape!" and his cup was seized by ringed, skeletal fingers attached to wrists covered in more metal than the suits of armor.

There was no need to turn around. Sybil Trelawney would be standing there, staring into the ceramic vessel like a Muggle child staring at the telly as she rotated it clockwise in her hands. While the old fraud did not descend from her high bower very often, she made up for it by being twice as annoying as any of the other staff members when she did. Assault By Teacup Reading was one of her favorite plays; mysteriously, each time she did so, the same predictions would "come to her." Professor Sprout, however, had yet to be eaten by the Venomous Tentacula, and Hermione, (he tried to call her Professor Granger, but the name he moaned in the night insinuated itself into his thoughts. What the hell. She'd never know.) had not been hit by multiple stray charms and been turned into something really unpleasant during her Charms class. And as for Severus' prediction...

"I see..." she breathed, "I see... a woman! Yes, an ethereally slender woman, possessed of many powers... and I see a heart... it must be... love! Yes, my dear Severus, love!"

To his disgust, one of her bony hands came to rest on his shoulder. Every year she tried to tell him that he was destined to fall in love with her. Needless to say, it hadn't happened, and now that Hermione had appeared, it was even less likely to. Besides, even if Sybil wasn't a contender with Lockhart for Theatrical Fraud of the Century, Hermione was made of round, plump curves and could hardly be described by even the most opium-addled of Romantic poets as "ethereal."

"Fascinating, Sybil," he said, brushing her hand off his shoulder and turning to sneer at her. "I wasn't aware one could read fortunes in coffee sediment. Tell me, does the caffeine prove them to be false faster? Or does that take as long as usual?"

She gave a melodramatic sigh and placed his cup back in the table before sweeping down the aisle to her seat, which was, fortunately, far away from him. Sudden

movement along the table indicated that the rest of the staff had taken preventative measures and either poured themselves a fresh cup of tea or hidden their empty cup beneath the table until the old bat was safely past.

Resting an elbow on the table, Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. He had a prediction of his own to make, one that he was sure would hold more truth than any of Sybil's.

It was going to be a very long day.

Hermione glared at her breakfast, doing her level best to ignore the two Ravenclaws who were practicing for the Hogwarts Tonsil Hockey Team directly in her line of sight. It was really pathetic, she thought, as she viciously impaled a piece of bacon on her fork, that she was actually jealous of hormonal, horny teenagers. Normally, she didn't give them a second thought, but, well, it was Valentine's Day, and she had no one. Again. This had been the state of affairs for the past four years, ever since she had walked into the kitchen of the Burrow to find Ron passionately snogging Dean Thomas. At the time it had been a bit of a relief; she had suspected that Ron was gay for a while, and it was good to see him with someone as perfectly matched for him as Dean was. It just meant that she was alone on Valentine's Day and had not been shagged in a year and a half.

And that time had been with Neville. And it had lasted ten minutes total, from the first inept, rather sloppy snog to his grunted and unshared orgasm. It barely counted.

Of course, her celibacy wasn't entirely the fault of others, unless their not being Severus Snape was a vindictive move on their parts. Or if there was some sort of conspiracy to prevent Severus from ever having a semi-civilized word to say to her. *I'm not even asking for a semi-civilized word*, she thought as the bell rang and she slipped out of the Hall. *Just a shag. For starters, anyway.* She hadn't yet really allowed herself to consider dating Severus a possibility, as the words "dating" and "Snape" went together about as well as "Voldemort" and "fluffy kittens," so for the moment a seductive dinner followed by (hopefully excellent) sex were her plans.

Easier said than done. Her biggest obstacle, aside from the acerbic and volatile personality of the man she was half in love with (and the fact that she was half in love with him meant that she didn't altogether object to said personality), was her own fear of rejection and looking like a fool. Ever since her childhood, she had a desperate need to impress others, especially teachers...hence her know-it-all personality, one thing Snape could always be guaranteed to mention when he taunted her. The only time he hadn't used it on her was in the debate they're had on her first day (a debate which she had clearly won, but he, of course, would never admit that). God, he had been so commanding and proud, even when he was wrong, with his black eyes snapping as he glared down at her. She'd shoved her hand into her knickers the second the door to her rooms closed behind her.

It wasn't as though there was really anything to take her mind off it, either, as was evidenced by her first class of the day, fourth-year Charms with the Hufflepuffs. They were learning Summoning and Banishing Charms, which were easy to explain and relatively easy to perform correctly but could cause considerable problems if not done well. Seated at her desk, she watched the line of students on the right side of the room as they Banished and Summoned cushions to and from the line of crates on the right side of the room. Or tried to, anyway.

"Erm... Professor Granger?"

Scanning down the row of teenagers, she found Jardon Brevley, an earnest boy who strongly reminded her of Neville, with his hand in the air and a look of chagrin on his face. She had but to follow his gaze to the chandelier above to discern the problem. With a sigh, she flicked her wand at the cushion and sent it soaring down to him, dislodging a few candles in the process; thankfully, the cushion had not caught fire. She repaired the broken fixture more out of a habit of fixing broken things than an actual desire to keep it looking nice and then went back to staring into space and thinking about Severus.

Hermione was not normally given to mooning over a man, and so it was doubly irritating when her inattention caused her to not see the cushion flying towards her, nor hear Brevley's shout of warning. The impact of the pillow on her face was more than enough to bring her back to earth with a thud. Staring at the cushion, which now lay on her desk mocking her with its pink, squashy innocence, she fought the urge to Banish it right back at him, along with some choice epithets about aiming. However, she decided, as she gave the boy a tight smile and gently levitated the cushion back to him. Just because she fancied Snape didn't mean she had to adopt his teaching methods.

The rest of the morning dragged by. *I am never again assigning oral presentations to the third-years* she thought as the tenth student stammered his way through a speech on Cheering Charms while the rest of the class stared at various points near him with glazed expressions (except for a few who were sniffing from their public-speaking-induced breakdowns). The sound of the lunch bell was one she rarely had so much cause to appreciate, and she fled the classroom without even giving homework.

During the course of her morning classes, Hermione had gradually forgotten what day it was today. She was reminded when she came around a corner and nearly collided with two Gryffindors holding hands and staring dreamily into each other's eyes. The remains of a box of chocolates was on the floor next to them; she couldn't help but notice with a twinge of envy that it was a good brand, pricier than the usual rubbish students got for their sweethearts. However, being gifted with expensive choccies was not against the rules, so Hermione went around the couple without a word.

The next pair she found were kissing behind a statue, which also was not against the rules, as all four feet were on the ground and all hands were visible. These caveats had been set in place by Headmistress Bonamure in 1853, who, so it was implied in *Hogwarts, A History*, had been caught in "compromising positions," (at the time, anything more than holding hands), as a student and wished to give her students a bit more leeway. She was recorded as being one of the most popular Headmistresses in history, especially with the male staff and, it had been noted, a few male students.

Hermione gritted her teeth against that damned twinge of jealousy again and marched past them with her head high. She encountered no other couples until she had reached the staircase leading down to the Entrance Hall, at the top of which was a deep recess into the wall on the left. She would have passed it by if a moan hadn't caught her ears. Smirking, she stopped, pulled her wand from her pocket and silently cast *Lumos*.

Let's see, she thought as the two students stared at her in frozen horror *one hand down shirt, one hand up skirt, leg wrapped around waist. And why are her hands... oh. Improper use of house tie, too.* "Disentangle yourselves and come out here, please," she said crisply, backing up a step to give them room. The boy seemed to recover his wits faster than the girl, for he had his hands out of her clothing and his tie back around his neck in much less time than it took for her to straighten her skirt and smooth her hair. He strode out to face Hermione, leaving the girl to skulk out behind him.

"Mr. Salvoy and Miss Bilstrop, I see," she said, giving them her sternest look. "I think ten points from Slytherin apiece will remind you to keep future Valentine's Day celebrations within your dormitory. And if you cannot keep your hands off each other, then remember to at least keep your hands in the open and your feet on the floor. Good day." Finished with her lecture, she spun and started down the staircase, feeling that she had earned some small triumph over Valentine's Day.

"D'you think she'd be less of a tight-arse if someone shagged her?"

"It would have to be a mercy fuck."

What! Startled by the muttered comments behind her, Hermione attempted to step on the illusory stair that inhabited that particular staircase. When no resistance met her foot, she lost her balance, and stumbled the rest of the way down, hitting the last step and going flying.

Fortunately, it was not a long staircase. And also, fortunately, Severus broke her fall. They both landed sprawled on the floor, he on his back and she half on top of him, with the breath knocked out of them. As they lay on the floor gasping for breath, Hermione managed to roll off of Severus and onto her back next to him. It crossed her mind that the exact same position, minus the pain and lack of air, could be obtained through a very different set of activities, a thought which she shut down hastily before she could blush too much.

"Professor Granger," Snape said, sitting up with a slight groan and turning to glare down at her, "has the romantic atmosphere of the day addled your brain to the point

where you cannot walk down stairs?" As she could only gasp for breath like a dying cod in answer, he sneered and added, "Or did you trip over your front teeth?"

Ignore him, ignore him, she told herself. Bracing her arms against the ground, she pushed hard and sat up, wincing as her bruised flesh protested, and retaliated with "Thirty points... from Slytherin!"

"I beg your pardon? For what?"

"For your students saying that I need a mercy shag in order to be, quote, 'less of a tight-arse!'" she snapped back, angrily brushing her hair out of her face so she could glare back at him properly. It wasn't fair that he could be sprawled on the floor with his robes and hair in disarray and still look damned sexy, while she probably looked like an electrocuted porcupine.

For a moment, it looked like he was about to say something in reply, but he snapped his mouth shut surprisingly fast and jumped to his feet. Unsurprisingly, he didn't offer her a hand up before turning on his heel and striding across the Entrance Hall to disappear through the staff entrance to the Great Hall.

Sore, frazzled, vexed, and a little turned on, Hermione clambered to her feet and stared at the door to the Great Hall. Fabulous. Now Snape knew how the students felt about her, as well as how she felt about how the students felt; the fact that it was related to her sex life, or lack thereof, was just the bloody cherry on top. It was so tempting to retreat to her quarters and have lunch of chocolates and red wine... but that would tell him that he had succeeded in upsetting her, and she was too much a Gryffindor to let him get away with that. No matter how sexily he might smirk about it afterwards.

Gritting her teeth against her treacherous libido, Hermione stalked across the large stone room, her firm footsteps echoing in the space, and yanked open the door to the Great Hall.

Afternoon Adventures

Chapter 2 of 5

Valentine's Day continues.

Had Severus been a man given to feeling sorry for his students, he might have spared them some pity for having to deal with him that afternoon, for he was in a fouler mood than usual. Unfortunately for the seventh year Advanced students and the second-year Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, he was not that sort of man. Every command was snarled, every question mocked, and every action harshly criticized. Halfway through the second-years' lesson, he caught Jane Stalder smiling a little as she stirred her potion. Silently, he stalked over to her worktable, not speaking until he was directly in front of her with his knuckles placed on the edge of her table.

"Is there something amusing to you, Miss Stalder?" he said. She jumped and stared up at him with wide eyes, obviously terrified out of her wits. "Is there something funny about Blister-cure Brew?"

"N-no, sir," she whispered.

"Then, pray tell, what is the cause for your jocularity?"

Brown eyes flickered wildly, trying to find some escape route, but he stared her down mercilessly, and she finally stammered, "It's just... aboylfancygavemeacard."

"Ah. Young *love*," he sneered. "Well, do try to keep your mind off of your classmate and on your potion, Miss Stalder."

"Y-yes, sir," she said, hastily reaching over to the cutting board and grabbing the next ingredient, which was dried Bubotuber pus. As he watched, she grabbed a measuring spoon and scooped out a measure of the noxious powder.

She was about to pour it into the cauldron when Severus noticed that she held a tablespoon, not a teaspoon, and he moved quickly to grab her wrist and prevent her from pouring it in. Too much of the powder would cause an eruption of potion similar to Mount Vesuvius. Reflexively, the girl yanked her wrist backwards, dumping most of the powder safely onto the cutting board. In the process, however, her hip bumped into the cauldron, and Severus watched with helpless horror as the yellow liquid flowed over the side of the cauldron and onto his right hand.

He leaped back from the table, but not before his skin began to bubble and writhe, some parts rising up in huge blisters, while others dried until they cracked.

"Oh, god, Professor, I'm sor....," she started, dropping the spoon to the table with a clatter as her hands flapped frantically.

"Shut up!" he snapped, startling her into silence. He needed to go to the hospital wing immediately...the potion was absorbed by the skin and would travel through the small capillaries and vessels until it affected the rest of his body. Already he could feel the skin on his forearm twitching; quickly, he encircled the affected limb with his opposite hand and squeezed, hoping to slow the blood flow.

"Everybody put a stasis charm on your potion!" he bellowed, getting some small satisfaction out of watching the children leap to obey him. "You are to stay here until the bell rings, and Merlin help you if I find so much as a dust mote out of place when I return." With that, he headed for the door at top speed. He didn't slow down one iota as he rushed to the hospital wing; he heard the exclamations and muttering of surprised portraits as he passed. Older students, wandering the halls on their free periods, dove out of his way.

It seemed to take far too long to get to the hospital wing, with his skin twitching and burning the entire way, but at last he shoved open the door and stepped inside, grimacing slightly as he looked around. He hated the hospital wing, having spent far too much time in it as a result of Potter and Black hexing him. The white, crisp sheets offended his eyes and skin, which were used to wine-hued silk. The harsh, antiseptic smell made his sensitive nose twitch, trying in vain to find the musty, complex smell of his dungeons that was as comforting to him as a blanket to a child. Most of all, he hated being fussed over and ordered about, though he knew better than to defy Poppy's commands.

Commands which were, in fact, currently being aimed at someone else. The plump witch had her back to him, bending over the third bed on the left, which was otherwise hidden by a curtain.

"Now, this is going to be a bit odd. Your skin will start to feel a bit numb in about half an hour, which means it's working. There will be another dose in an hour. I understand it's hard, but do try not to... *do* anything." Briskly, she stepped away and slid the curtain shut, preventing Severus from catching a glimpse of whatever poor sod was in it. Turning, she saw him standing inside the door and glared at him.

"What can *you* have got yourself into?" she said. "I do hope it's nothing... holiday-related. Honestly, someone must talk to those wretched Weasley brothers about their products getting into the school..." She trailed off, grumbling, before refocusing on Severus and saying, "Well, sit down, Severus, and tell me what you've done." She beckoned him over, pointing to a bed one away from the curtained one.

"I did nothing. It was a student's sloppy mistake," he said haughtily as he strode to the bed and sank onto it, releasing his arm to start unbuttoning his robes as best he could with one hand; she knocked it away and did it herself, to his secret relief.

"Half-finished Blister-cure Brew," he explained, tugging his arm out of his sleeve when he could and presenting it to Poppy for inspection. "It happened before she added the Bubotuber, so perhaps..."

She shushed him with a flap of her hand, muttering something about irritating patients who thought they knew better than the mediwitch as she felt the warped skin on his arm. Scowling, he opened his mouth to respond, but a sudden noise from the other occupied bed stopped him. Springs creaked, sheets rustled violently, and then a voice murmured something indistinct.

Given the nature of many of the magical ailments that sent people to the Hospital Wing, murmuring in and of itself was not particularly interesting. What was interesting was the very different voice that giggled and said something in response, eliciting a gasp. As far as he could tell, the first voice had been male, and the grating pitch of the giggle indicated the other to be female.

"Poppy," Severus said, "are there *two* students on that bed?"

"Yes. One of those Never Without You Potions from Weasley's Wizard Wheezes," she replied, scowling at the name of the jocular establishment. "They have to be touching at all times and feel a need to..." An unmistakable gasp of pleasure came from the bed, along with more rustling, and Poppy winced.

"To *demonstrate* their love for each other." With that, she dropped his arm and bustled off to the medicine room, leaving him alone with increasingly noisy roommates.

"Oh, god, yes, right there... Ohhhh!"

"Mmph! Yeah!"

Snarling, Severus pulled out his wand and cast *Silencio* over the bed and was rewarded with blissful silence. He was damned if he was going to listen to two students copulating while his arm healed. Of course, the spell didn't stop vague silhouettes from being thrown against the curtain, so he turned away. Whatever perversions his students might attribute to him, the thought of being a voyeur to this pair was almost nauseating.

Poppy returned soon, bearing a lurid green bottle and a swath of white bandages; she made no comment about his having turned away from the curtained bed, but simply took his arm and poured some citrus-smelling liquid over it. He gritted his teeth as she began rubbing it into his skin: the potion she used made it feel like slightly acidic ice cubes were being run over his skin. He stared at the wall as she massaged his arm, trying to ignore the faint scraping of bed legs against the floor that he could hear behind him.

"You've got very good musculature in your arms."

"I beg your pardon?" he yelped, staring at Poppy, who was taking a surprisingly long time to work the lotion into his skin. Quite an unnecessarily long time, in fact, and using rather slower, more caressing strokes than was entirely professional. He frowned at the top of her grey-flecked head as the caresses...and they were definitely caresses now...moved from his arm to his hand, fingers moving slowly over his palm. Feeling rather alarmed, he tugged his hand away, and for good measure, shoved his other one into his pocket.

"I expect it's all that cauldron stirring," she said, and he tried very hard to convince himself that there had not been a lascivious lilt to the last two words. "Well, you'll be back to doing that in about twenty minutes, though there won't be time before the staff meeting." The wink she gave him before she bustled off had him repressing a shudder.

Dear gods, he had just been chatted up by Poppy Pomfrey. This wretched holiday must be having a serious effect on her for that to have occurred. The thought that maybe she had been contaminated by the two students currently gasping and rolling around in the other bed crossed his mind. Severus had a passing familiarity with the idea of hitting on people, but he was rarely on the receiving end, unless you counted Trelawney's little stunt at breakfast. And the witches who usually tried to chat him up tended to be extremely subtle and seductive (Narcissa came to mind) or really horny and blunt (Bellatrix). Various levels of intoxication were generally involved.

As for being on the giving end... well, Severus had found the occasional witch who was extremely susceptible to a low, silky voice and a raised eyebrow. And he was certainly better at using innuendo than Poppy apparently was. Stirring cauldrons, indeed.

He grimaced, glancing at the time. Poppy would have a fit if he left a minute before the allotted time, and he had ten minutes to go.

It was then that the bed with the two students actually started hitting the stone wall in a painfully familiar rhythm.

Getting to the staff meeting a bit early suddenly sounded like a wonderful idea. The bell signaling the end of the day's classes rang as he was halfway to the staff room, though due to the distance between it and the Hospital Wing, nearly all the other teachers got there before he did. Hermione came trotting up the corridor as he neared the door; he smirked at her glare before sweeping inside.

The rest of the staff was seated in rows of wooden chairs, except for Binns, who was floating in the corner. The usual armchairs were nowhere to be seen, and a wooden podium had been placed in front of the mantle. After scanning the room, Severus concluded that his day had just got a bit worse: the only empty chairs were next to each other, in the front row.

And Percy Weasley was standing next to the podium, pulling a large folder out of his attaché case.

Wonderful. A long, boring presentation spent sitting in the front row next to a witch with whom he was in lust. Crossing his arms, he threw himself into the farther of the two chairs. While having Hermione slide past him would have been a lovely experience, he did not want to make the presentation feel longer by having an erection the entire time. He didn't even risk looking at her as she slid into the seat next to him, instead focusing his glare at Weasley, who had moved behind the podium and was looking over his audience as he arranged his papers on the podium.

"Good afternoon, everyone," he began in the pompous tone Severus well remembered. "I'm Percy Weasley, the new head of the School Governors, and I'm here to discuss some very important changes we are implementing next year. Most of them are regarding budget, but there are a few other matters to cover. Now," he continued, adjusting his horn-rimmed glasses and looking down at the podium, "let me begin with the proposed budget allotment for repairs to the Quidditch stadium, a topic that I'm sure you are all aware of..."

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If Percy Weasley and Professor Binns were placed into a contest to see who could put the most people to sleep, it would be a dead heat. Hermione shifted in her chair and tried desperately to pay attention to Percy as he nattered on about new regulations on desk heights. At least with Binns, there had been information to learn and take notes on, but the past hour and a half had been less informational than Umbridge's classes. Most of the changes Percy was talking about could have been implemented without anyone noticing or caring.

Beside her, Severus let out a long exhalation that even the self-absorbed prat at the podium noticed; she saw his eyes dart towards Severus, though it was hard to tell if it was out of nervousness or reprimand. He did seem to start talking a bit faster, which argued for nerves. Even Percy was hesitant to irritate the volatile Potions Master, it seemed; she repressed a smile at the effect Severus had on ex-students, no matter how grown up and pompous they were.

Half an hour later, the torture was over. Percy had finished his dreary monologue and asked if anyone had any questions. The silence was deafening. Percy's ears turned a bit red; he muttered a thank you and began to reorganize his papers. *All the warnings of a major Weasley sul* she thought as she stood and stretched her arms, feeling her shoulders and vertebrae pop as she moved.

"Excuse *me*, but could you perhaps pause your yoga session and let me by?" Snape was standing there, tapping one foot against the floor and looking extremely vexed. With a small smile, Hermione dropped her arms and stepped back; he brushed past her without a word, and she glared at his retreating back before turning to follow. Would it be so hard to just mutter a "thank you?" To acknowledge her in any way?

But then he would be like all the other polite, charming, utterly dull men who populated the world, instead of a rude, sarcastic, completely fascinating man who she desperately wanted, and she probably would not be staring at his lovely, muscular, dangerously tempting arse as she walked behind him.

As the situation stood, however, she seemed doomed to want him and want to slap him for all time. Of course, combining lust and slapping in her mind led invariably to spanking, which had her staring at his arse with an entirely new set of ideas.

"Hermione!"

*Oh, no.* She recognized the voice that had called her name, as she had just spent two hours listening to it. She turned to see Percy Weasley heading towards her with a determined look on his face. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Severus pause as well and glance over his shoulder.

"My goodness, you walk fast, Hermione," Percy said when he reached her, panting slightly.

"It's a habit one gets into around here," she replied, forcing a weak smile.

"I well remember it," he said, chuckling a little at his weak joke. "I was just wondering what you thought of the new regulations for desk heights. A witch of your intelligence would of course understand..."

Automatically, she tuned him out. She had something of an excuse, as Severus had decided now would be an excellent time to study one of the paintings a little ways down the hall, only a little ways out of her direct line of vision. No doubt he was hanging around so he could have a good snicker at her expense, but whatever his reasons were, watching him study the painting intently was a good bit more interesting than listening to Percy. A stray piece of hair was clinging to his cheek; he flicked it away with one long, graceful finger, and she inhaled sharply.

"I knew you'd be shocked, but what do you say to it?"

*Shit.* "Y-yes, of course," she stammered, bringing her attention back to the redhead, who was looking pleased with himself in a way that promised unhappiness for someone else.

"Excellent! I'll meet you at nine in the staff room and then we can Floo to the restaurant. I'm looking forward to it, but then, I expect you are as well." With a final adjustment of his glasses and a slight bow, he turned and headed back down the corridor to disappear inside the staff room.

Hermione stood, feeling like she was stuck in the twins' portable swamp. This could not be happening. There were multitudes of wizards to whom she would have agreed to go on a date, wizards like Malfoy, or Cormac McLaggen, or Ron. She could not have inadvertently agreed to a date with Percy Weasley, the Prat to End All Prats.

A choked noise from Severus indicated that she had, indeed, done just that.

Well, she was not going to give that man the satisfaction of knowing that his snickers upset her. Sticking her chin up a little, she turned on her heel and marched off in the opposite direction, already planning what she would wear. Percy or no, it was still a date on Valentine's Day, and she was determined to at least look respectable, if for no other reason than to show a certain black-haired man, should she run into him, exactly what he was missing out on by making fun of her.

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She just... agreed to go on a date with that toadying little pustule of a Weasley Severus ground his teeth together and choked back a cry of outrage.

Speak now or forever hold your peace... Too late. The boy was gone, strutting back into the staff room like he'd just married the Queen of England, and quick, receding footsteps indicated Hermione's exit.

What on earth would drive an intelligent, lovely witch as herself to go out with someone like Percy? Severus had not been watching her too closely during the meeting, but she had looked as incredibly bored as he had been. Desperation, perhaps? He knew of no paramours of hers, so perhaps that had driven her to take the only option presented.

And you're not allowed to complain until you work up the balls to ask her yourself said a nasty little voice in his mind. Snarling a bit, he skulked down the hallway to his dungeon, thinking that a nice glass of Firewhisky would make the day look, not brighter, but at least not quite as sharp around the edges. And Flooing in sick to dinner sounded very nice as well. And a book.

"Good evening, sir."

Quilas Dertagh, a Slytherin in his seventh year, gave his snarling professor a cordial nod and greeting, a move which either spoke for his confidence in his charm or his sheer idiocy. Probably the former, as the boy had to be aware that he had cheekbones you could hang nooses from and floppy blonde hair. No Slytherin worth the name was unaware of any charms they possessed. Of course, Dertagh wasn't brilliant by any means, but he held enough sway in his House to ensure that no trouble was made about his going out with a Ravenclaw.

Severus gave him a curt nod and then forgot about him.

"*Diffindo!*" Severus heard a woman whisper the incantation from somewhere to his left; behind him, he heard a rip of seams and a clatter of books, quills, parchment, and ink pots, falling from what was undoubtedly a ruined bag. He felt something light hit him in the back, and he turned to see a red piece of parchment fall to the ground. Bending, he picked it up.

"Ouch!" He dropped it hastily, as it suddenly gained life and sliced into his finger.

"Oh! Sorry, sir. It's just a card Lorelei gave me...she enchanted it to attack anyone who isn't me, I think." Dertagh appeared in front of Severus, clutching his belongings to his chest as he scooped up the card, which emitted a faint purr and twined around the boy's hand.

"By the way, sir, did you hear where that spell came from?" This was murmured softly, clearly meant for Severus' ears only. Severus shrugged, but flicked his eyes over to the small alcove where he had heard the voice before turning and walking away. He heard another muttered spell, which sounded like "*Accio girlfriend!*" followed by scuffling and feminine squealing.

Let it not be said that Severus Snape ever stood in the way of his Slytherins getting shagged, even when their Valentine's Day card had just sliced his finger open. As long as no other teachers caught them and no one got either pregnant or ill, he really didn't care what they did.

And, frankly, Dertagh needed to stay in his girlfriend's good graces if he was going to pass Potions. And Charms.

Charms. Severus felt his fists clench as a vision of Hermione appeared in his mind. The thought of her with another man inflamed him, a possessive feeling to which he knew he had no right. At the same time, he was resigned to it; he could hardly expect a young, attractive, vivacious witch to stay cloistered in her rooms because he secretly fancied her but didn't have the nerve to tell her. He was much too self-protective to put his emotions and dignity on the line for a feeling that was undoubtedly unreciprocated. What reason would she have to like him? He was ugly and old, and he had yet to hear of a woman desiring a man who expressed dislike and disdain for her at every opportunity

And, of course, he insulted her so she wouldn't suspect that he desired her.

And because he insulted her, she would never desire him in return.

And he would never tell her of his feelings unless he was certain they were reciprocated.

For dinner that night, he had half a bottle of elf-made wine. Dessert was a large glass of firewhisky. Accompanying the meal was a side dish of brooding, garnished with visions of Hermione both actual and fantastical.

Severus was more than a bit tipsy when he finally stood up from the armchair near the fireplace and headed for the bathroom, intent upon showering some of problems away, including the tipsiness. There was no house-elf in there this time for him to surprise, which made a nice change. One stockinged foot slipped on the tile, and he just managed to grab the counter to keep from falling. Gripping the edge of the counter with all the strength he could muster, Severus carefully bent over, stood on one foot, and pulled off his black, worn sock. A wave of dizziness hit him, and he fought the urge to straighten up quickly, as the sober part of his brain knew this to be a Bad Idea; when it passed, he got the other sock off and stood up slowly.

Over the course of about five minutes, he managed to get the rest of his clothes off; it would have been longer, but he had abandoned his many-buttoned robes in the sitting room before his "meal," so his alcohol-fuzzed mind only had to contend with the buttons on his shirt and trousers. There was one brief moment of confusion when he had unbuttoned his trousers and tried to tug them down, only to find that they wouldn't move past his arse. It took a minute of hard thought to remember that he hadn't taken off his belt.

Nude at last, he stepped into the shower and turned on the hot water, flinching slightly as it gushed down on him and shocked away a bit of his intoxication. He stretched, rolling his neck and shoulders to determine how tense he was. The alcohol had loosened him up some, but not enough to allow him to sleep easily; fortunately, he had a remedy for that. Keeping a tight grip on the curtain rod, just in case, Severus reached over to the counter and, after a few tries, picked up his wand. He reached over his head to point the tip at his upper back and said, "*Automasse.*" Immediately, he felt warm, invisible hands kneading and rubbing his tight muscles, coaxing them into relaxation. A soft groan of release escaped his lips as the spell massaged him; he gasped when it hit a particularly tight knot.

The water was perfectly hot, he was perfectly drunk, and it was perfectly easy to imagine that those invisible hands were not invisible at all, but rather were small and feminine and attached to plump, curved arms, which were in turn attached to a plump, curved torso. Severus' eyes drifted shut as the fantasy began to take hold: Hermione standing behind him, as naked as he was, working her clever hands along his tight shoulders, moving down his back until she just brushed the dimples above his arse, then wrapping her arms around him and starting on the front of his body.

He moaned and leaned one arm against the shower wall, bracing himself as he ran his other hand down his abdomen, then wrapped his fist around his hard cock. In his mind's eye, Hermione had moved around and stood between him and the wall, still rubbing her clever hands over his body, a mischievous smile curling her lips as she turned around and pressed her body against the wall. Groaning, Severus pumped his fist along his cock, his free hand clenching with each pulse of pleasure. Her arse was perfectly round and full, and it bounced with each imagined thrust into her hot, sweet cunt. His fantasy started to unravel as he pumped faster, pleasure making his mind grow less and less lucid, until it shattered as he exploded.

"Hermione!"

Sated but not satisfied, Severus slumped forward, releasing his now-limp member. Alcohol, hot water, and orgasm had made him light headed, so it took him two tries to end the massaging spell before it pulverized his shoulders. Shutting off the water, he stumbled out of the bathroom. The towel he had used that morning still lay in a heap on the floor; he grabbed it and dried himself off enough so that he wouldn't ruin his sheets when he collapsed on them moments later.

The small part of his mind that was still working properly after the evening's activities was whinging about papers to grade and syllabi to make up, but the rest of his mind told it to shove off. It wasn't as if the students cared when they got their essays back, after all. He would do all that tomorrow, when it wasn't fucking Valentine's Day.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Chapter 3 of 5

The end of the first day and the start of... the first day?

AN: Many thanks to my beta laiksmarei for her wonderful work on this piece.

What kind of person, Hermione thought as she lay flat on her back in her bed, staring at the ceiling like it was Snape's *arsetakes a grown woman to Madam Puddifoot's?*

Percy fucking Weasley.

Gods, if there ever was a date that required large amounts of alcohol in order to be tolerated, it was the one she had just gone on; so of course, her companion had chosen the one place in the whole of wizarding England that did not serve alcohol. It served hot chocolate and tea and rained confetti down upon its poor customers, but there was nary a bottle of vodka to be seen. There was nothing entertaining to look at while Percy talked and talked about recent goings-on in his department, most of which seemed to revolve around him solving very complicated problems but never getting a promotion or raise. She had been ready to suffocate him with the pink doilies by nine-thirty, except that the damned things were too lacy for that to work.

And then, when they'd stepped back out into the cold night and she'd tried every excuse she knew of to get away from him, he'd *kissed* her. Or, at least, he had puckered his lips up tighter than his arse and pressed them against hers for about ten seconds while she stood frozen with horror. How on earth had Penelope Clearwater gone out with this man for two years? Did they have a non-kissing relationship? When he finally, *finally*, pulled his mouth off of hers, they'd stood for several seconds in utter silence.

"Well, Hermione," he'd said, "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid this just isn't going to work out in the long run." With that, he'd offered to escort her back to the castle, a fate she'd narrowly escaped by telling him that Hagrid had asked her to drop by sometime to say hello. The rapid look of disgust that passed over Percy's face right before he bid her goodnight told her everything she ever needed to know about him. It made sense, at a certain level; she could not imagine anyone more different from this stuck-up,

pompous arse in front of her than big, uncouth Hagrid. She'd given him the curtest and least sincere "Good evening" that ever crossed her lips and then fled before he could change his mind. Thank goodness the storm had cleared away; she had not been forced to walk back in the rain.

And now here she was, alone once again on Valentine's night.

There was only one thing to do, really, that might make her forget her loneliness for a little while. It wasn't as if she didn't do it most nights, but tonight it seemed like she needed it more than ever, that guilty pleasure of hers. Pushing herself off the bed, she shed the clingy dress robes she'd worn on her date, hanging them back in the wardrobe before pulling open the top drawer and pulling out a short silk nightie. The material caressed her skin like a lover as she slid it over her head and tugged it down her body; she couldn't help running her hands over her body once it was on so she could hear and feel it against her skin. The chilly air in her room made her nipples tighten a bit, and when the fabric slid over them, she could not help but sigh a little.

After she had removed her makeup and braided her hair to tame its bushiness somewhat, Hermione slid between the cotton sheets of her bed and settled back against the pillows; the torches around the room died with a flick of her wand. After a quick "*Lumos*," she tucked her wand into a loop of curtain rope that was wrapped around the bedpost, allowing the light to fall over her head and chest. There was a routine to this activity; everything set so she could get the maximum amount of enjoyment out of it.

With a small smile of anticipation, she opened the drawer in her nightstand and pulled out, first, a box of Honeydukes chocolates, and second, a copy of Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*.

When the magical world was getting you down, there was nothing like a Muggle fantasy novel to cheer you up.

Selecting a dark truffle, Hermione found her bookmark and, after taking a slow, sensuous bite and allowing the rich flavor to travel over her tongue, began to read.

"Do you know who I am?" the unicorn asked.

"Very well, you're a fishmonger! You are my everything, you are my sunshine, you are old and grey and full of sleep..."

Hermione read and ate until about eleven, when her eyes started to drift closed, at which point she turned off her wand, put the book and the chocolates away, and fell asleep.

Well, there it was. The first day done. He smiled to himself as he watched the clock tick closer and closer to midnight.

They thought it was over, poor things.

The fun was just beginning.

He was sure they'd thank him for it later, at the wedding, possibly. One must go through hell in order to achieve heaven, or something like that.

The clock struck midnight, and while no pumpkins turned into carriages, a careful observer might have noticed a slight shiver in the air around Severus Snape and Hermione Granger: they vanished for the smallest fraction of a second and reappeared in completely different positions. A dark truffle reappeared in Hermione's box of chocolates; in Severus' liquor cabinet, a half-empty bottle of wine was suddenly completely full.

A rumble of thunder washed over Hogwarts. He grinned outright, patted the little Time-Turner affectionately, and went to bed. Tomorrow was, for some people, another day, and he had things to do.

Severus wrapped himself around the young woman beside him, knowing that they wouldn't escape.

"FIRE!"

RumblerrumbleBOOM!!

Not again. Severus groaned and rolled over to bury his face in a pillow, cursing Thor, Zeus, and any other god of thunder and storms in existence. Was it so hard to let him sleep until a decent hour of the morning? And would it be so hard for Morpheus to find a dream that involved booming noises *without* Voldemort being involved? He was used to having serial dreams, but he didn't particularly like watching a cannonball fly towards him while he tried to cover Hermione with his body; if he had the dream again, he would be forced to find some Dreamless Sleep potion if he was to get any rest.

Thunder rolled again, defying his efforts to burrow into the downy pillow and find peace and a few more minutes of sleep. Severus sat up with a growl and glared at the ceiling before rolling out of bed and moving to the loo. He didn't bother to look at the clock; whatever he saw there would serve only to depress him, he was sure.

I must be assigned the most prudish house-elf in the entire school! he thought a few minutes later, standing under a stream of hot water as he remembered the frantic squeak the creature had made when he entered. One would think the little buggers would figure out that he slept nude and prepare themselves to occasionally be faced with more of the Potions master than they might have wanted to see. All the yelping and vanishing really wasn't necessary. It wasn't as though Severus cared what they saw.

Besides, the elves were notorious gossip-mongers; if, somehow, word got around to, say, Hermione, about the approximate size of certain portions of his anatomy, well, it probably wouldn't hurt his chances with her.

His own general attractiveness was not something Severus was particularly confident about, but plain old length and width were hard to deny.

Hunger, he was finding, was also hard to deny, as he sat in the Great Hall and waited for breakfast to show up. It was one thing for the house-elves to serve late on a holiday, but they had no excuse today and he was growing steadily more irritated. The food got there right before Flitwick did, and Severus used a full mouth as an excuse not to say anything to the little man. He focused on eating as quickly as he could without making himself look like a glutton.

When he looked up from his plate, Hermione and Pomona had both arrived; the latter was rubbing at the side of her nose with her napkin with a rueful smile. Hermione inspected the older witch's face and nodded, lips moving in what was probably an assurance of cleanliness, before returning to her own breakfast.

"Severus? Could I speak to you for half a minute, please?"

What now? Severus stared at the headmaster, frowning as he stood and walked up the table to his seat. Was the man intending to deliver every message he had for Severus during breakfast? Did a hidden sadist lurk within the diminutive headmaster?

Taking a sip of tea and placing the cup down on the table, Flitwick turned to Severus and clasped his small hands together. "As you may recall, Severus, the Ministry has arranged for a member of its office to come and speak to the staff about a few issues regarding funding and government-introduced syllabi..."

"Again? Was it not covered thoroughly enough yesterday?" Severus snapped, crossing his arms and glaring down at Flitwick's puzzled face.

"Yesterday, Severus? There was no such meeting yesterday. Mr. Weasley is scheduled to come in today, after classes get out."

"Headmaster, with all due respect, I'm really not in the mood for pranks." What Severus wasn't saying was that Flitwick was not usually given to playing pranks on his staff,

even on April First, and that Severus was not appreciative of this new direction in his boss's personality.

If he had decided to take on the Weasley twins' hobby, Flitwick was looking to be promising: his look of innocent bewilderment was quite convincing.

"No pranks, Severus, I assure you. Just a meeting in the staffroom after the last bell rings." Eyeing him with a hint of condescending apprehension, Flitwick added, "Have another cup of coffee, Severus."

Severus put as much sarcasm into his reply as he could without sounding completely insubordinate.

"Yes, *sir*."

Whirling around so he could make his way back to his chair, he saw that carrying out the order would be, for the moment, impossible. Trelawney had already commandeered his mug and was staring into it.

Do people never bloody learn? He had no patience for the old bat's nonsense. Whipping out his wand, he snarled, *Accio cup!* and watched as it was torn from her hands and carried to him. Already walking towards his seat, he caught the flying cup mid-stride and didn't even acknowledge Trelawney as he sat down.

"Severus, I saw... I saw a woman, Severus...." She was fluttering behind him, her bangles clanking as she waved her arms through the air for dramatic effect.

"Sybil," he said, not looking back at her as he poured himself a fresh cup of coffee, "the prediction was utter bollocks yesterday. It continues to be so. Do stop making a fool of yourself by predicting that I will fall in love with you, because I would sooner fall in love with the Giant Squid." He heard the faintest of gasps from Pomona, and all movement behind him ceased. As he stood and exited, coffee in hand, he thought he heard the beginning of bereaved sniffs from Trelawney, and he definitely got a couple nasty looks from those who had overheard his comment. Trelawney's eccentricities were not enjoyed by any on the staff, but the kinder among them were sympathetic towards her sensitive disposition.

But he thought he saw a smirk on Hermione's lips as he passed.

Hermione was accustomed to students forgetting things they had learned the day before; many of her pupils had sieves for memories, and she usually tried to be patient with them, at least if they were trying.

But never before had an entire class denied any knowledge of what they had covered the previous day. Normally, she would have accused them of playing a prank on her, but as she inspected the puzzled faces before her, it became apparent that they firmly believed what they were saying. Besides, half of them were Hufflepuffs, so lying en masse was out of the question.

"So, according to you all, yesterday we simply went over the theories and techniques of Summoning and Banishing, and today is supposed to be dedicated to practicing those spells?"

Collective nod.

Hermione sighed and put her hands on her hips. There were no vacant gazes that would indicate Confunding or memory charms, nothing out of the ordinary besides the fact that they all seemed to have forgotten the previous day's lesson. But Hermione was not given to disbelieving that which she knew to be true; she very clearly remembered Brevely's mishaps and her subsequent misfortune. Yesterday had happened.

Unless she was the one who was Confunded. It was incredibly unlikely...who could have done it?...but right now it was looking more and more plausible.

Well, she might as well let them practice while she did a bit of reading about the Confundus Hex, and she could rearrange the syllabus later depending on which side turned out to be in error.

"Very well. The cushions are in that cabinet over there..." she pointed across the room, to a beat-up wardrobe near the door, "...as are the crates. Set up the crates against that wall, line up opposite, and practice. If you have a question, just ask; I'll be back in a minute."

Leaving them to set up, she quickly slipped through the door to her quarters and headed for the huge bookcase that stood along one wall. Rows and rows of leather bindings met her eyes, and a smile tugged at her lips. She couldn't help but caress the spines as she searched for the book she needed, feeling the many different textures: embossed, dragonhide, plain leather, worn, stamped... The one she pulled out was battered black leather, with peeling gold lettering on the front that read. *Taking the Confusion out of Confunding*. Despite the terrible title, it was actually a very informative book.

When she returned to the classroom, she found Brevely standing looking sheepishly up at the chandelier. She knew without looking that his pink pillow would be up there, and she sent it back to him without a thought.

The same pillow crashed into the back of her book several minutes later.

Something was very wrong.

She was very quiet all through her next classes, not mentioning that her students gave the same speeches and made the same mistakes as they had the previous day. The same students were snogging in the corridors as she walked slowly to lunch, her mind whirling. Happenings that would be dismissed by Muggles as coincidence or déjà vu were generally taken seriously by wizards, or at least by wizards who wanted to take full advantage of their long life span, and Hermione was no exception. One or two odd occurrences were perfectly normal at Hogwarts, but her morning surpassed the normal oddities. Even at Hogwarts, it was not normal for one's morning to be repeated verbatim, especially when no else seemed to be aware of it.

It was a testament to how absorbed in thought she was that she forgot about the trick stair. Down she tumbled.

But this time she did not collide with Snape and end up in a not-unpleasant heap on the floor with him.

This time, he moved out of the way, and she landed on the floor by herself. It hurt.

As she lay on the cold stones, trying to get her breath back, his sneering voice came to her.

"What's your excuse for tripping today, Hermione? Fondly reminiscing about your date with Percy?"

"Oh, yes, that's it," she gasped, sitting up to glare at him. "Can't stop thinking about those horn-rimmed glasses. Nothing gets me hot like being bored out of my mind." She didn't bother waiting for him to help her up, as it would entail being on the floor for the foreseeable future. As she started to brush herself off, a light went off in her head and she snapped her gaze to Severus, whose face bore a look of similar sudden enlightenment.

"You remember--"

"It's happening to you--"

They stopped and stared at each other for a moment. He spoke first.

"So, I take it that you, too, have had an alarmingly familiar morning?"

"Yes. I thought I was going mad for a while, but then it all started adding up; you have no idea how wonderful it was to hear you mention that date. I mean, it was a terrible date, but at least you remember yesterday happening...I'll just shut up now," she added, seeing a very familiar scowl appear on his face and realizing that she was babbling.

"You should say that more often," he said, crossing his arms and regarding her with a smirk as she narrowed her eyes. The smirk faded, and he continued, "However, I believe we should discuss this situation, preferably somewhere private."

"My classroom is just upstairs," she offered; at his nod, she turned and preceded him up the stairs, being extra-careful not to hit the trick step. He waited as she unlocked the door, though once it was open he brushed past her like she was a house-elf, striding into the room with his usual domineering attitude.

When she turned back from closing and locking the door, she found him leaning against the edge of her desk, one finger tracing the contours of his mouth. Willing herself not to focus on that damned finger, Hermione opted to sit on the student desk right in front of him, crossing her legs and wrapping her arms around her knee. The height of the desk meant that she was at, if not eye level, then at least chin level with the tall man. And she was damned if she was going to sit at the desk like some student serving detention.

"Well?" she said, quirking her eyebrows up slightly. "You wanted to discuss this, Severus."

"I was merely waiting for you to get comfortable," he said, voice heavy with sarcasm.

"Thank you, I am. Now..."

"For some reason as yet unbeknownst to us, the day of February fourteenth is being replayed. From what I've seen, and what you mentioned, we are the only two people who realize this is occurring and have any memories of yesterday. Events that happened yesterday take the same course unless we do something to change them. We need to find out how this is being done, how to stop it, and who to kill afterwards."

She chuckled at his last words, surprised that he had made a joke, though with Severus, it might not be in jest. His eyebrow arched at her laughter and he said, "If someone did something that might require *me* to go on multiple dates with Percy Weasley, I know I would want to kill them."

Hermione felt her eyes go wide with horror. "Oh, Merlin, no..."

He smirked and continued. "Of course, we have been able to change events, so perhaps you will be spared."

"But to what extent can they change?" she wondered aloud. "I mean, I tripped over that damn staircase today, but it was for different reasons. Maybe certain things are destined to happen, no matter what we do to prevent them."

"That is not a pleasant thought." At her inquiring glance, he reluctantly added, "Due to a clumsy student, I spent a rather unpleasant hour in the hospital wing yesterday. I have no desire to repeat the experience."

"It wasn't worse than my date. Trust me."

He snorted and stood up, glancing at the clock on her desk. "Lunch is almost over. Might I recommend that we meet again at the end of the day to debrief? That is, if one of us is not otherwise occupied?" She nodded curtly, and he swept out the door without so much as a word.

Bloody hell. She was going to be spending a lot of time with Severus. No reputation to worry about, no essays that actually had to be graded... Aside from being bored out of her mind every day, there were some distinct advantages to this phenomenon. Of course, she wanted to stop it, but she was fully prepared to take advantage of it while it lasted.

Well, at least now I know I'm not in my personal hell. She wouldn't be here Being forced to repeat Valentine's Day for perpetuity would probably be a significant portion of his personal hell, but no way would hell include a perfect excuse to spend lots of time with Hermione.

And so what if someone saw them and was suspicious? By the next day, said person wouldn't even remember what they had seen. No consequences, except for anything he might say or do to Hermione; he essentially had a ticket to do whatever he wished. It didn't matter if he graded essays or even bothered to show up to class: he got a clean slate every morning.

This situation kept looking better and better the more he thought about it. He was seriously considering not going to his afternoon classes; after all, he reasoned, pausing in his walking, if he avoided the class, he would not get potion spilled on him, and therefore would not be forced to go to the Hospital Wing.

Of course, it would make his students happy if he didn't show up, but he didn't really care.

He was halfway to the kitchens, intending to make up for his missed lunch, when he ran into Filius.

"Severus! Don't you have classes to be at?"

So much for that plan. He had a sinking feeling that if he tried to get out of classes any other way, he would be thwarted. Additionally, he suspected that Hermione would trip on that stair every day, they would somehow be forced to listen to Percy's speech every day, and somehow (this though made him grit his teeth) she would end up going on a date with the red-headed imbecile.

No, this might not be his personal hell, but it was starting to look like purgatory.

He avoided the Blister-Cure Brew that day, but only because a scorpion that was supposed to be dead, well, wasn't. Clutching his swelling, burning hand, he half-ran to the hospital wing, watching with horrified interest as streaks of sickly green began emanating from the sting. Of course, he had no antivenin, as he hardly expected to get stung by an ingredient that was supposed to be dead.

Sure enough, when he arrived at the Hospital Wing, Poppy was bending over the same curtained-off bed; third down on the left.

"Now, this is going to be a bit odd. Your skin will start to feel a bit numb in about half an hour, which means it's working. There will be another dose in an hour. I understand it's hard, but do try not to... *do* anything."

Merlin. Being there was even worse the second time around because he *knew* exactly what was happening in that bed and he *knew* exactly what Poppy was going to try to do to him. And, if the events of the day were anything to go by, it would be futile to try to avoid either.

Resigned, he sank onto the bed, holding out his wounded arm and muttering "Scorpion sting," when Poppy inquired as to the nature of his injury. He responded to her with grunts and nods, hoping to deter her from making another pass at him.

It didn't work. The same lewd comment was made, with the same lascivious tone, and Severus left the second Poppy did, not wanting to endure another round of listening to the students fornicating. He managed to escape while they were still in the gasping, giggling phase.

As an experiment, he tried going to back to his quarters instead of to the staffroom.

Five minutes later he was headed back the other way, with a very chatty Professor Sinistra at his side expostulating on the wonders of some new algorithm. Severus had a feeling that if he'd jumped off a tower, Madam Hooch would have swooped by on a broom, caught him, and delivered him through the staffroom window.

He had left the Hospital Wing earlier than the other day, but his detour ensured that he got to the staffroom at the same time as the previous day...that is, right before Hermione. She did not look happy at all, not that he could blame her; her evening was likely to contain a surplus of Percy Weasley. Of course, any Percy Weasley was a surplus.

And knowing that Hermione was not looking forward to her evening with Percy made Severus, if not happy, then a bit less miserable; it was not even his usual delight at the misfortune of others, but rather the knowledge that at least Weasley wasn't competition.

Percy's speech had been gnaw-your-own-ear-off dull the day before, but hearing it again brought the agony to new heights. Severus spent the time staring in what he was sure was an unnerving way at Percy's freckled forehead and was rewarded each time the young man nervously brushed his fringe forward to conceal it. After the question-and-answer session (Percy asked if there were questions and was answered with silence), Severus stood and waited for Hermione to leave, which she did with remarkable alacrity. He caught up to her in the corridor, and when they paused around a corner, Hermione glanced over shoulder to see if the redhead was following.

"I don't see him," she said, carefully peering around the corner. "Maybe if we avoid something fair and square, we get off...oh, shit!" She nearly collided with Severus' chest as she jerked her head back around the edge of the wall, but it was too late.

"Hermione! Hold up a second, please!" The crisp, tight, tones of Percy's voice echoed down the hall, loud enough that she couldn't possibly plead ignorance.

"He's got Flitwick and Sinistra with him!" Hermione hissed, wringing her hands as the trio of footsteps neared, and then hastily putting on a neutral, curious face as the three came around the corner. Neither Flitwick nor Sinistra looked particularly happy with their present companion; Percy, of course, was oblivious to their dislike.

"Hermione!" he repeated, smiling broadly and extending a hand. "It's been far too long since I've last been able to talk to you. Why don't you join us for a drink down at the Three Broomsticks tonight? And it's on the Ministry," he added in the same sort of conspiratorial tone that any other man would recommend a brothel to his friend.

"Yes, Hermione, do. And you as well, Severus, if you wish." Flitwick looked at Hermione, and then Severus, with something akin to manic pleading in his eyes. As Headmaster, he was required to show a modicum of hospitable tolerance towards even the most obnoxious of Ministry officials, unless they were being truly unreasonable.

"That's very kind of you, really," Hermione said, her voice edging into the borders of shrillness as she held up her hands in polite protest, "but--"

Sinistra cut her off with a chuckle. "Come, come, a lovely young woman such as yourself should not be sitting in her room on Valentine's Day." The older witch reached out and took Hermione's hand. "Just for a few drinks, my dear, and then we'll let you go home and snog your book collection silly." Severus smirked as Hermione bristled, but nevertheless, she was dragged away by the trio, with one last, pleading look at him over her shoulder.

Severus returned to his rooms and spent the night in much the same way as he had the previous night (or, at least, the previous iteration of the current night. Or something like that), except that he only had two glasses of wine instead of half the bottle. Around eleven-thirty, as he was settling down in his favorite armchair with a book, hair still damp from the shower, there came three very firm knocks upon his door.

There was really only one person it could be. As he stood and made his way to the door, he rapidly tried to empty his mind of the last thoughts it held of said person. *She is not naked and tied to the bed. She is not naked... damn!* with only moderate success. At least most of his blood was still in his head when he opened the door to find a very irate and slightly tipsy Hermione standing in the corridor.

"You bastard! You left me to be taken by those three!" She could not have sounded more venomously accusing had he allowed a pyromaniac with a matchbox near her books. "Percy cornered me in the pub and talked at me for ten minutes without a break before I could plead essays to grade and leave!"

"I'll knock you unconscious next time, how about that?" he shot back. "If I did, though, the Weasley boy would probably accompany you to the hospital wing and place cool compresses on your forehead until you woke up. Some things are doomed to happen today, I fear. Trust me when I say you do not suffer alone."

She glared at him for another second, and then her shoulders slumped, and she gave a sigh of deepest unhappiness.

"How long can we do this? I'll go mad if this keeps up, I really will."

"I concur." Regarding her for a minute, he stepped back, gestured to his sitting room and said, "Come in and we can discuss the matter."

"Oh. Er... all right. Thanks." Was that a blush on her cheeks as she passed him or just the glow of alcohol? *Alcohol, old man. Definitely. Probably, anyway.* He followed her, allowing himself a brief moment to stare with greatest longing and enormous appreciation at her plump, round arse, before tearing his eyes away and heading for the liquor cabinet.

He poured a glass of firewhisky and turned back to find her seated comfortably in the chair he had just vacated, legs primly crossed and eyebrows raised in expectant reproach. Scowling, he reached for a second tumbler and measured out a few fingers of the volatile liquid, which he handed to her on his way to the couch.

Sitting down, he watched as she took a deep gulp of the liquor, coughing a little when the fiery aftertaste hit. As she wiped her watering eyes and looked back at him, he calmly knocked his glass back and only had to clear his throat a little at the end, smirking a little at her pursed lips.

"Well, I expect you've had more practice," she said, lifting her chin defiantly and jerking it at his empty glass.

Touché. He shrugged nonchalantly. "Can we get to the matter at hand?" She nodded.

For a few minutes they reviewed the happenings of the day, comparing them to the day before: Hermione tripping, Severus getting hurt, the staff meeting, the date.

"Is there any way we can make one or more of those completely impossible?" Hermione asked, sipping thoughtfully at another glass of firewhisky. "Say if I walked down a different corridor, or if you stayed away from the desks in your class?"

"Unlikely," he said, waving a hand in dismissal. "Whatever geas or curse we're under would persevere...you might trip over something else, or a student would spill his potion sample over me as he turned it in. Even if we barricaded ourselves in our rooms all day and pleaded illness, it would find a way, though it might be a bit easier to control."

"Well, we're just one big bloody ray of sunshine, aren't we?"

"An excess of sunshine burns."

That startled a bark of laughter out of her, though she sobered quickly and stared at the fire. He knew what she was thinking: how long would this go on? And how long could they stand it?

"Well," she said softly, looking back at him with the slightest of quirks in her lips, "I suggest we get drunk, because I'm out of ideas."

The clock on the mantle chimed midnight as she raised her glass in a bleak toast to him. They sipped quietly, both sinking for a moment into their own thoughts. Severus was just about to ask if she wanted more alcohol when the room...no, the entire plane of existence, every molecule in his body...*twitched.* For the briefest moment he felt as though he were being yanked in a hundred different directions, like he was on a rack that clamped onto every piece of his body and pulled.

And then he knew no more.

Time Goes By So Slowly

Chapter 4 of 5

Valentine's Day continues for our poor pair...

Really, he thought, staring at the little Time-Turner on his desk, *for being two of the most intelligent people I know, they can be quite dumb sometimes. At least when it comes to their own desires.* Being a man who went after (and got) everything and anything he wanted, he really couldn't understand the mental and emotional blocks others put up that prevented them from doing the same. If you wanted another person, you subtly let them know it while convincing them that you were what they wanted (if only for the night) and plied them with 1924 Pinot Noir. Sex ensued.

It wasn't that bloody complicated.

Of course, his impatience wasn't entirely on his friends' behalf. If everything worked out as he planned it, he would be in for a treat as well. His cock stirred a little as he imagined all the possibilities of success, and he shot another glare at the Time-Turner.

Well, perhaps the third time would be the charm, though he was starting to think that the fifteenth time might be the charm if their bloody-mindedness kept up. With a push against his huge oak desk, he pushed his leather armchair back and stood up, stretching and allowing himself a yawn. He tugged at the ribbon that tied his hair back, letting the long, silken tresses fall loose around his shoulders. Perhaps a long, hot bath before bed would be a pleasant environment in which to assuage his aching loins. He smiled to himself as he began shedding his clothes on the way to the bathroom, casually dropping them on the floor as he went. Maybe tomorrow would be the day.

It was three iterations of Valentine's Day later, and Severus was seriously contemplating whether the rules of mortality applied in this situation. Maybe if he died it would end? Or would he simply arrive, alive and well, in his bed to be woken by the thunder that he was beginning to hate with an impressive ferocity. Every fucking morning it woke him from his dream, though he was torn between annoyance at being woken up and relief at not having to repeatedly experience being hit by cannonballs.

He glanced at the clock; it was half-past eleven, about time for a very unhappy Hermione to arrive, fresh from her most recent Percy Weasley Ordeal. He grudgingly admitted to himself that she was having a rather harder time of it than he was, as having to suffer through several hours of that boy's company every night easily trumped having to go to the Hospital Wing every day (though the repeated injuries were quite aggravating). The amount of liquor she consumed when she showed up in his rooms each night was a clue, if nothing else, though the curse was kind enough to refill the bottle every day.

As if hearing his thoughts, Hermione chose that moment to knock on the door.

"Come in," he said, summoning two glasses and the firewhisky from the cabinet and settling down in his preferred chair. Thus occupied, he didn't look at her until she had collapsed onto the couch; when he did, and saw what she was wearing, he couldn't contain a snort of laughter.

"Pajama party, was it?" he said, snickering as she shot him a deadly stare and tucked her red-and-fluffy-slippered feet beneath her and wrapped a worn lavender dressing gown more tightly around her. He was intrigued, however, that he caught no sign of a nightgown hem underneath said dressing-gown, which gapped to reveal smooth calves and knees.

"Excuse *me* if I've been a bed-bound invalid for the past two hours." She reached for her glass and took a large gulp, only rasping a little at the end. Her skills at drinking had improved considerably over the past few nights; as she had previously pointed out, practice helps.

"Am I given to understand that you faked sick?"

"Yes. I thought I was golden, I really did. I mean, it was nine-fifteen and he hadn't shown up and then... then..." She trailed off, staring miserably into the fire. Then, all of a sudden, she hurled her glass into the fireplace with a crash, watching as the flames flared when they caught the liquor.

"The pompous sonofabitch brought me soup!"

Never before had soup-bringing sounded like a deed that should warrant life in prison. Severus stayed very still as Hermione stared first at the fire and then at him, breathing heavily. She was beautiful in that moment, with the fire in her eyes matching the blaze in the hearth as she fought to regain control, small hands clenched around fistfuls of her dressing-gown.

"I am truly sorry," Severus said evenly, taking a sip of whisky. "Was it chicken or vegetable?"

"It was fucking beef broth and he was all set to spoon-feed it to me while bathing my 'fevered brow,'" she replied. "I finally had to inhale some and have a coughing fit all over his nice suit to get him to leave." She slumped suddenly, her eyes traveling to the carpet.

"Severus, we've tried everything, excepting suicide. Are we really trapped here forever?"

He was too much of a cynic to give her false hope. They stayed there for a while, Hermione staring at the carpet while Severus stared at her and wondered if now was as good a time as any to make some sort of proposition. After all, what had he got to lose at this point?

Well, if she refuses, then you're stuck forever with the one woman you want, who would know that you want her, but wouldn't want you, and it would quite possibly be the most awkward situation you've ever been in. And it would still be bloody Valentine's Day every day. He decided to keep his mouth shut and instead buried his miseries in the firewhisky.

Hermione traced the patterns in his Persian rug with her eyes, letting her mind sink into the colorful whorls and dots. Every night she had been debating with herself whether to tell Severus of her feelings, and every night she talked herself out of it. He would probably just dismiss it as a pathetic plea for some physical comfort during this rather trying time, and she would have to go through the rest of the curse without looking forward to a drink (or three) in his rooms each night. And the constant knowledge of why there was an extra sneer in his lips when he looked at her.

Well, she would just have to keep going as it was. *With my books, my chocolates, and my vibrator keeping me company each night. Lovely* Irritated at her own foibles, she

stood up and moved to the fireplace, watching the flames crackle. She could see pools of hot, molten glass where the shards of her tumbler had melted. Any regret she might have felt at breaking the glass was glossed over by the knowledge that it would be there, whole and complete, for her to break again the next night. And the next. And the next...

Merlin, that was depressing. Sighing, she ran her hands through her hair, tugging it around to one side so she could rub at the knots of stress in the back of her neck. Behind her, she heard Severus shift and stand up, his feet making soft sounds against the rug. She felt more than heard him move to stand just behind her, a little closer than she would have expected—but then again, he had had a bit to drink tonight. It probably didn't mean anything.

She hoped like hell it did mean something.

Turning slightly, she caught her breath at the sight of him. The firelight simultaneously softened and sharpened his features, giving warmth to his sallow skin even as it cast angled shadows over the planes of his face. It erased the scowl lines, put a warm glow in his black eyes, and turned his hair to silk.

The sight had her knickers dampened in about two seconds, and she blessed the heat of the fire for lending pink to her cheeks which hid her blush. Hastily, she turned back to look at the fire, both hoping and dreading that he had noticed her gawking at him. The smooth murmur of his voice from behind her had her knickers going from damp to saturated; that voice was a natural weapon.

"You do realize that when we are free of this, I will not allow you to abuse my glassware in such a manner."

"And you do realize that I don't throw glassware unless I'm really upset." It was so tempting to pick up on the implication in his sentence: that she would still have access to his glassware once the curse was gone. She dared not mention it; if it was what she hoped it was, then it would be fine, but she didn't want to scare him or force his hand. He was so damn prickly and unpredictable that there was no telling what he'd do.

The clock on the mantle chimed midnight in her ear, making her jump. She shot it a look of pure hatred, and then turned around and looked at Severus. He was scowling fiercely at the clock, and she had to smile at the familiar look of frustration and dislike being aimed at an inanimate object. His gaze flicked back to her, and when their eyes met, Hermione wanted nothing more than to dive into those black irises and never come out. She felt herself leaning forward a bit, closing the surprisingly small distance between them, waiting to see what he would do.

His eyes went wide, but he, too, leaned in, and she thought she saw one of his hands make a movement upwards, as though he wanted to cup her cheek. It was surreal, and maybe in the morning it would be attributed to too much firewhisky and stress, but right now it was perfect.

And then, right before she mustered up the nerve to stand on her toes and offer her lips for a kiss, every fiber of her body jerked in a familiar way. She was pulled in a million different directions and then the world went black.

When she woke up in her bed, her alarm clock whistling in her ear, Hermione stared at the ceiling for a half a second before sitting up and yelling.

"I almost had him! Almostkissed him, and now he'll just say we were drunk and stupid! One more bloody minute, would that have been too much? When I get my hands on you I'll... I'll... well, you'll be bloody sorry I got my hands on you!" She sat in her bed, hands clenching the sheets as she breathed deeply through dilated nostrils, lips clenched in an expression that Ron had learned to fear.

Unsurprisingly, her morning did not go well. Of course, technically her morning went exactly the same way it had for the past five times, but it seemed even worse than usual. She snarled at her students, nearly bringing Brevley to tears, and took fifty points from every couple she encountered in the hallway. She did remember, however, to cast a Cushioning Charm as she approached the staircase, for sure enough, Peeves had strung a length of twine along the top of it, and she went tumbling down. Unhurt but in an even fouler mood, she brushed herself off and looked around for Severus, who was usually there to laugh at her mishap.

No sign of him. Come to think of it, she hadn't seen him at breakfast either. Was it possible for him to get sick while under the curse? If so, Hermione was determined to do whatever it took to catch what he had.

However, illness had not kept him away that morning, as he showed up at the meeting that afternoon. Resolving to ask him where he had been that morning, Hermione settled into her usual seat, front and center, and waited for the torture to begin anew. To her surprise, Severus did not join her in the seat next to her; craning around, she saw him leaning against the back wall of the staff room, arms crossed over his chest. His hair had swung forward, shielding his face, so she could not make out his expression.

"Professor Snape, there is a chair right here, next to Hermione, if you would like to sit down..." Percy gestured to the aforementioned furnishing, adjusting his horn-rimmed glasses self-importantly.

"I am not blind, Mr. Weasley. If I wish to sit, I will." His voice was like a whip, and Percy drew back a little before gathering himself and turning his gaze to the...slightly...less hostile portion of his audience.

"Well, if we're all comfortable, we can begin..."

Tuning him out automatically, Hermione fixed her gaze on the wall behind him and allowed her mind to wander. Why didn't Severus sit? It was possible, of course, that he was just being contrary and rude, but he was unlikely to sacrifice his own comfort for that. He could have just sat down in front as usual and surreptitiously cast jinxes on Percy the whole time. And why would he be missing the entire morning but show up to this God-awful event?

Of course, she reminded herself, she had no proof that he had been gone from his morning and afternoon classes; she simply hadn't seen him at either meal or in the hallways when she usually did.

He might just be avoiding her.

Bastard.

Well, she'd get him after this, preferably in a corner where he couldn't escape, and they would have Words. Confronting him would probably be the most enjoyable part of her day, since it was unlikely that he would welcome her into his sitting room that evening after she yelled at him. Plan in mind, Hermione concentrated on finding something interesting enough to look at to keep her engaged through the next hour of Percy's speech. A curious carving of an imp in the corner of the fireplace caught her eye, and she began studying the little wood figure with as much interest as she could muster.

Almost... Severus thought, staring at the clock as it ticked towards the end of the torture.*It's almost over...* He needed to know exactly when it ended, because he had to escape twice as fast as usual to avoid Hermione. He still wasn't quite sure what had happened the night before, but he didn't want her finding him and asking rather uncomfortable questions...or worse, apologizing for what she had done while intoxicated. No, it was quick getaway time if it ever had been.

He stared at the clock, almost desperate enough to sink to personification and accuse it of mocking him with each tick. Mentally he shook himself. There was absolutely no reason for him to be this upset over something as simple as the woman of his dreams looking very much like she had been about to kiss him, which was tinged with the uncertainty that accompanied all such actions when alcohol was involved.

Certainly nothing to get agitated about.

The clock chimed. Percy stopped talking. Severus fled.

A few portraits exclaimed at his pace as he flew down the corridor to the dungeons, hoping that he had left quickly enough to elude Hermione. Years as a spy taught him well, though; he slipped into a small alcove and stood, waiting to see if she passed him. A quick Disillusionment charm made sure he blended in perfectly with the shadows.

Footsteps, coming down the hallway, echoing slightly. They were slow and erratic, as though the person were pausing to look into alcoves and empty classrooms. They were also too close for him to slip out unnoticed. Safer to stay where he was.

There was a very low murmur of a voice, answered in similar tones; whoever they were, they were right across the corridor from him, though a little farther up. More footsteps coming closer, coming directly towards him, and then Hermione stood in the entrance to the alcove, hands on her hips.

"Severus, drop that Disillusionment spell right now, or I'll conjure some paint to dump on you. Red paint."

Damn portraits never could keep their mouths shut. He felt like a complete fool as he undid the spell. Peace had made him soft, apparently. She had a smirk on her face that she must have picked up from him, and he glared at her for looking smug and for looking lovely in her victory.

"I didn't take you for the type to chase after a man, Hermione," he said.

"Depends on the man. Severus, I--" She glanced back up the corridor, and he saw a pained expression cross her face. "Ohfuck!"

He didn't have to ask. Quickly, he reached out and yanked her into the alcove. She was already babbling.

"Oh, Merlin, I can't talk to him any more. If I have to spend one more minute with that insufferable man, I swear I will...Severus, I don't knowdo something!"

He had a thought. A mad, impetuous thought that might get him the slap of a lifetime, but it was guaranteed to get rid of Weasley, and, if he had any sort of luck at all in the world, might get him what he wanted.

Severus waited, holding Hermione's arm as she mumbled about how miserable she was and if there was anything he could think of anything, he was given free reign to do it. He waited until Percy's freckled face appeared in the alcove entrance, horn-rimmed glasses glinting in the light of a nearby torch.

"Hermione? Are you in here?"

Taking a swift, deep breath, Severus yanked her close to his body and kissed her hard. She stiffened, surprised, and he pulled away, hoping she would play along.

"Professor Snape! What on earth are you doing? Hermione, come here, it's all right..." Percy reached out for Hermione's other arm, frowning at Severus. Hermione, though, seemed to have other ideas, for she wrapped her arms around Severus' neck, and, much to his surprise, kissed him back in a way that left no doubt as to her intentions.

"Oh... er... well, I'll just be going then."

He didn't even get the chance to leave, as Severus grabbed Hermione's hand and nearly bowled the redhead over as he pulled her out of the alcove, heading for his rooms. The two of them all but ran to the dungeons.

The instant the door to his bedroom shut behind them, he had her pinned against it, faces close together and bodies flush.

"Are you sure you want this?" he asked her, needing some assertion of her desire, of her willingness. In answer, she wound her fingers into his hair and pulled him down for another kiss, murmuring the word "Yes" against his lips. Tongues met and slid over each other, tasting and exploring as the kiss deepened. She traced light, tickling lines on the roof of his mouth; he groaned and retaliated by suckling on her lower lip until she moaned. They separated, panting, and she wasted no time in pushing his robes down his shoulders and flinging them into a corner, leaving him in his black coat and trousers. He did the same with hers, greedily running his hands over her body, caressing each plump curve.

She stood on tiptoe to kiss him again, but he backed away, teasing her as he started unbuttoning her shirt, revealing a gorgeous black lace bra. He also toed off his shoes and socks, holding her up as she did the same. With his help, she got his coat and shirt off, and he was rewarded when she placed open-mouthed kisses all over his chest and ran her hands up and down his back. Fumbling at the zipper on her skirt, he cupped one of her breasts, feeling its soft weight as she moaned into his mouth and pressed into him. The skirt hit the floor and she stepped out of it, showing off thigh-high stockings, suspenders, and matching knickers. He growled at the sight of her: smooth, creamy skin; full curves and a flush that was rapidly suffusing most of her face and chest. Her lips were parted and swollen, and her eyes were hot as she stared at him.

His trousers hit the floor in record time; seizing her around her waist, he half-flung her onto the bed and followed quickly, collapsing between her thighs to stare down into her eager face.

It was so small he almost missed it. A little tug behind his navel, akin to that of a Portkey, but much diminished. Another man might have dismissed it as a side affect of the fast-growing erection in his pants, but Severus was not another man. He pulled away from Hermione (not without some difficulty) and looked around.

To all appearances, they were still in his bedroom.

"What...what's wrong, Severus?" Hermione panted. "I thought you wanted--"

"It's not that," he said, quickly looking back into her stricken face and hastening to reassure her. "Did you feel a tug just now? As if you had been using a Portkey but not as strong?"

Her brown eyes glazed over for a moment as she thought, then she nodded. "I did, yes. I take it you did as well?" He nodded and rolled off her, helping her to sit up as he scanned the room.

It was his bedroom. The bed was in the right place, the rugs were right, everything down to the book lying on his bedside table was exactly right. Yet something very basic was wrong.

"Severus? Is it just me or is it awfully warm in here?"

About to scold her for her terrible use of innuendo, he stopped. Yes, as a matter of fact, his room was at a comfortable temperature, which would have been innocuous had he not been a man who lived in cold dungeons. It should have been freezing.

"I do not believe," he said slowly, "that we are in Hogwarts. Someone has gone to great pains to replicate my room elsewhere. It would have been a very expensive project, and it would be foolish to think that it was unconnected to the curse." He pulled out his wand and cast a few spell-detection charms.

The wall across from his bed lit up brilliantly, a huge rectangle of spelled area glowing. Twin bolts of light shot from his and Hermione's wands, hitting the wall at exactly the same time to reveal a huge pane of glass, behind which was a small room containing a table and a comfortable armchair.

In that armchair, looking extremely chagrined, was Lucius Malfoy.

Tomorrow is Another Day

Chapter 5 of 5

The culprit behind Severus and Hermione's torment has been caught; now, what to do with him...

AN: Thanks for reading everyone! Here's the ending--warnings for voyeurism, exhibitionism, and light BDSM.

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There was a deadly pause.

"Lucius. I should have known." Severus crossed to the window and pointed his wand directly at his old friend, who winced slightly and put his hands up in surrender. Slightly foppish and self-absorbed he might be, but Lucius knew exactly when he had lost...and how to stay alive in such circumstances. "Come out here. *Now.*"

Lucius nodded and, still keeping his hands in plain sight, stood, spun, and vanished with a hollow *pop*, to reappear just inside the door of the ersatz bedroom.

A door which he was promptly slammed against by Hermione throwing herself at him and jamming her wand under his chin.

"It was *you!*" she screeched, grabbing his collar and yanking him down to her level. "It is your fucking doing that forced me to go *ofive dates with Percy Weasley! Do you know what that's like, you smarmy, conniving bastard?*"

"I'm terribly sorry about that, Miss Granger," he said, voice only shaking a little in the face of her ire, "but really, it was the only way to ever get you and Severus to realize what was there--"

"And for you to fulfill your little voyeuristic kink." Severus crossed his arms and stared at him, several options of action running through his head. On the one hand, he was very angry with Lucius for daring to interfere in their lives in such a drastic manner; he would see that the man got what was coming to him. But there were different ways of going about such things: one could rave and yell, as Hermione was continuing to do, or one could... twist. Alter slightly.

Besides, he had a beautiful, willing woman in her knickers, and that was not an opportunity he was going to give up quickly.

"...and then I will jump on the pieces!" Completing her litany of threats against Lucius's person, Hermione released the man and stepped back, planting her hands on her hips, which caused her bum to shake in a most pleasing manner.

"Severus, it's your turn," she said, still keeping a wary gaze on Lucius. She squeaked in surprise when Severus crept up behind her and slid his arms under hers, encircling her waist. He met Lucius's eyes over her head and watched him straighten up with a familiar lusty gleam.

"My dear," Severus murmured into Hermione's ear, licking the soft lobe between words, "Lucius really did allow us to come together. I feel that a little exhibition of our passion and desire may be what he deserves."

"Severus! You can't possibly...mmm--mean... *that?*"

"That is exactly what I mean," he replied, nuzzling her neck and eliciting a sigh. "He gets to watch." Any protests on Hermione's part were rapidly turned into gasps as he attacked her throat and shoulder with his mouth, caressing the soft flesh of her stomach as he did so.

"I knew you'd see reason, Severus. Thank you, my old friend. Now, I'll just go back behind the window; pretend I'm not here..." Lucius trailed off, seeing the smirk that was rapidly growing on Severus's face. The two men had known each other for a very long time, and no doubt recollections of the other times Severus had worn that smirk were running through Lucius's head.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't dream of making you go back into that dark little room. Why don't you just stand over by the mantle, where there's an excellent view of the bed?" A flick of his wand turned the request into a threat, and Lucius edged over to the mantelpiece, looking nervous. The tension started to leave his body as Severus gently tugged Hermione (who was now moaning as he gently cupped and caressed her breasts) over until they both stood in front of the foot of the bed, about a meter away from Lucius.

"Yes, Lucius, we're going to let you watch. But no touching," Severus added, deliberately stroking Hermione's round hips as he said it. Lucius nodded and moved one hand down to the front of his pants, cupping the hardness that was just visible.

"Ah. You see, Lucius, when I said no touching," he said, flicking his wand and binding Lucius hands to the mantle, on either side of his head, "I was including touching yourself."

Hermione seemed to get what had happened, for she chuckled as she looked at the stricken expression of Lucius's face. This would be torture for the man. Well, Severus decided as he returned to Hermione's silky throat, he deserved it for what they'd been through the past few days. Maybe if he was good, they'd let him go afterward and give him a handkerchief.

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It had all happened so fast that Hermione wasn't quite sure that it was real; the recent days had been so bizarre that she was thrown off of everything. But Severus was doing marvelous things to her neck with his mouth and tongue, and Lucius Malfoy was getting what was coming to him, so all in all, life was fairly good at the moment.

She gasped as Severus brushed his thumb over her breast, shifting the lace over her skin so it tickled her nipple. His hand ventured up the lines of her bra, skimming the borders until he found the straps and slid them down her shoulders, baring her breasts. An appreciative murmur in her ear before he flicked open the catch to her bra and, with a smirk she could feel against her skin, tossed it so it landed over Lucius's left arm. The blonde man groaned, eyes fixed on the flimsy lace garment.

"You, my dear," Severus whispered, "have lovely tits." To support his words, his hands came back up to cup the soft mounds, pinching and rolling the nipples. She moaned, leaning back into him and resting her head on his shoulder. A hardness digging into her lower back reminded her that she was not the only one aroused at the moment; seizing his narrow hips for leverage, Hermione ground her bottom against his loins, smirking as he groaned and tensed.

"Minx," he said when he could speak, sharply pinching a nipple in retribution.

"It's for a good cause, though," she replied, wriggling her hips again, eliciting another sound of pleasure.

"Indeed. As is this." And, seizing his wand from the bedspread, he Vanished her knickers.

Cool air hit her moist pussy, and she sighed, watching Lucius lick his lips and jerk against the magical constraints. His pale eyes were locked on her cunt, and she spread her legs to give him a better look. Lazily, she slid one hand down her abdomen until she brushed her own dampness; when she circled her clit, she and Severus sighed in tandem.

"And it's for me, Lucius. She touches herself for me."

Suddenly, long fingers joined her own, pushing past to dip into her depths and come out soaking wet. Severus's pale hand came back up, and she caught a whiff of her own musky scent before she watched him lick every drop of her essence off his fingers. It was incredibly erotic to see the look of gastronomic bliss on his face as he did so, like he was tasting a fine sauce.

"A nice appetizer; I think, in fact," he continued, seizing her waist and flinging her to the bed, "that I would like some more." He was sliding down her body when a thought struck her, and she put a hand to his shoulder. He looked up, confused.

"On your back," she said, grinning. Two could play at this game.

Puzzled, but temporarily obedient, Severus crawled up beside her and turned over, looking up at her as she sat up. They were parallel to Lucius now, as she swung a leg over Severus's chest and braced herself with a hand on either side of his hips; a chuckle from behind her told her that he, too, had figured out her plan.

Leaning forward, Hermione studied the impressive bulge in the black pants he wore and decided to leave those on for now. Instead she began kissing a line down his stomach, tasting the saltiness of his skin, lingering a little in his navel. He groaned when she slowly began sliding the boxers down, placing open-mouthed kisses on each inch of exposed skin...except, of course, for the number of inches sticking straight up, which was clearly where he wanted the kisses. At last, she had slid the pants down to his knees and so kissed her way back up his pale thighs to his hard, rosy cock. She smiled and leaned down to breathe a puff of hot air over the wet tip; he gasped, and then she felt hot air brush over her cunt. She kissed the tip; he kissed her clit.

Lucius groaned, and the game was on. Down she went, taking as much of him into her as she could, trying to focus on sucking and licking as he expertly tongued and nibbled. He tasted salty and musky, and she savored the flavor as she swirled her tongue around his girth. She nearly bit down on him when he sucked on her clit. The moan she made must have sent vibrations through him, for he groaned loudly. Two fingers slid into her when she leaned down farther to work on his balls. When he added his tongue on her clit as he manually fucked her, she lost focus and abandoned his genitals as her first orgasm overtook her.

"Oh, yes, god, *yes, Severus!*" Spasms of pleasure flooded through her, and she felt her arms go wobbly. He continued lapping at her for a minute afterward, causing aftershocks; when she could stand no more, she swung her leg back over so she was sitting beside him, facing Lucius, who had a look of pained arousal on his pointed face. A glance downwards showed an impressive bulge in his trousers. The poor man was probably in agony. She decided to take a small amount of pity on him, and taking up her wand, she removed his trousers, allowing his erection to spring forward. He looked a bit relieved.

"Enjoying the show, Lucius?" Severus sat up and wrapped a hand around Hermione's hips, pulling her closer to him. Teasingly, he fisted his cock a few times, pulling another frustrated groan from Lucius. "I know I am. What shall we do next, Hermione?" He looked at her as he said that, the smirk back on his lips, which were still glistening with her juices.

Hermione leaned forward to kiss him, tasting herself on his lips, one hand twining in his hair to tug him closer. "Well," she said, breaking away to kiss his neck and jaw between words, "you could fuck me."

"What an excellent idea. Care to elaborate?"

"Fuck me hard," she breathed into his ear. "Fuck me into the mattress, until I scream your name. Fuck me so he can hear your balls hitting me, so he can hear your cock sliding in and out of my cunt, so he can see me jerk and shudder with every move."

His breathing was shallow now, and he groaned at her words. The long arm wrapped around her waist pulled her flush against him, and she found herself rolled onto her back, her head towards Lucius, with Severus staring down into her eyes. The heat in his gaze could have warmed the dungeons for a whole winter. The heat emanating from his rock-hard cock could have turned the stones of Hogwarts to lava. He nestled between her legs and drew her arms out to either side of her head.

"Then I will fuck you," he murmured. He shifted his hips, and she felt the tip of his cock pressing against her entrance for an instant before he thrust into her.

God, it was perfect. She was filled by him, by his thick cock, every inch of him rubbing and stretching her inner walls as he pulled out and hammered back in. He fucked her hard and slow, each thrust seeming to build up momentum and power as he pulled out, hovered for an instant at the entrance, and then plunged back into her and made her moan. Her hips rose of their own accord, matching his deliberate rhythm. Hermione's eyes fluttered closed as Severus fucked her, and she knew her mouth was slack from the pleasure.

"Look at me when I'm fucking you, please."

She opened her eyes again and locked with his black stare. His hair swung forward with every thrust, a few strands sticking to his face; his teeth were bared in a primal snarl of passion. And as much as she was enjoying being fucked by him, Hermione had a sudden urge to be the one doing the fucking.

"Severus," she panted, each thrust sending waves of pleasure that made it hard to speak, "Severus, let me... on top..."

He paused at the end of his next thrust, leaving his cock inside her. Smiling, she focused on a specialized set of muscles and squeezed, just a bit. His face contorted, and then he rolled both of them over, keeping his cock inside her.

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She was beautiful as she sat above him, sweating and panting from the exertion of the last few minutes. A halo of frizzy hair framed her flushed face, and her nipples were crinkled and hard. He reached up and tweaked one of them, getting a gasp from her. Grinning down at him, she started to move, and his mind went blissfully blank for a minute.

Slowly, she rose up on his cock, leaning forward just a bit, before sliding back down and connecting hard with his loins. The look of ecstasy on her face was breathtaking, and she threw her head back as she moved faster, leaning back so he could see his wet cock sliding in and out of her pink, swollen cunt. She added a small twist of her hips every time she came down, and soon Severus could feel his balls tightening, tension starting at the base of his spine. Gritting his teeth for control, he ground out, "Touch yourself, Hermione. Come for me."

With a moan, her fingers found her clit and began rubbing it as she increased her pace. It was erotic beyond belief to watch her touch herself as she fucked him. Her breasts were bouncing with every movement, adding to the spectacular visual. Behind him, Severus heard another whimper of frustration, but he didn't have the mindshare to crow over Lucius's pain. His orgasm was close, so close, and his hips started thrusting up as Hermione came down. Her fingers were working her clit frantically, and he felt her tightening around his length.

"*Oh, god! Severus!*" She screamed his name as her pussy exploded into a mass of spasms around his cock. That was all it took for him to let loose entirely, and he bellowed his own orgasm, back arching and hips thrusting frantically as he pumped his seed deep inside her, riding it out for as long as he could.

She slumped down, gently collapsing on top of him, allowing his soft cock to slide out of her tight cunt. He wrapped his arms around her, just relaxing into the intimate position, shifting only to brush her flyaway hair off his nose before clasping her to him once again. The haze from his orgasm clouded his mind a bit, and he had no objections; it was a haze that Hermione had caused and therefore was an acceptable haze. He had just had really good sex with a woman he had wanted for nearly a year, and he was perfectly happy to lie back, hold said woman, and enjoy the aftermath. A contented sigh from Hermione as she nestled closer told him that she felt the same way.



"Severus, *please*... this hurts..."

*Damn. Lucius.* Severus had forgotten about their voyeuristic captive somewhere around Hermione touching her clit, and he was really reluctant to abandon his current position to let the other man go. Still, it reminded him of why they were there and that they had an uncursed future to get back to at some point. Lucius had been punished, but it was impossible not to acknowledge that Severus's recent pleasures would not have occurred without him, and he should be rewarded a bit for that.

"Hermione," Severus murmured, bringing his mouth to her ear and making her squirm a bit, "we should go."

"Mmph." No sign of movement. He tried again.

"Hermione, if Lucius doesn't wank off soon, he may go mad."

"Don't care. S'all his fault. I'm comfy."

"My dear, I assure you, I don't want to move an inch, but I also do not want to spend the night in Malfoy Manor."

This seemed to work; she rolled off him with a sigh and Summoned what clothing she had. Severus sat up and did the same, and once they were both dressed (or at least as dressed as they could get), he turned back to Lucius, who was sporting an erection the color of a boiled lobster. It looked quite painful.

"Before we leave you here with lube and tissues, which, might I add, you don't really deserve," Severus said, "you will give us an oath to remove the curse you put on us. If we wake up tomorrow and it is not February fifteenth, there will be *consequences*, Lucius."

"Yes, all right, I swear I'll take it off, now please *release me!*" Lucius begging was something of a novelty, though one that was both amusing and pathetic to watch. It didn't suit him.

Hermione appeared next to Severus, wand in hand. "And I assume there's a Portkey back?" she inquired. "Because I am not walking from the gates to the castle in this outfit."

Lucius nodded frantically. "Yes, there is. The bed is set to take you back after you have sex; just get on it and kiss *Now please release me!* His pale eyes stared at them a little wildly, abject pleading in them.

Severus glanced down at Hermione; she looked back at him, smiled, and nodded. She squealed when he scooped her up and deposited her on the bed before clambering up next to her and wrapping a possessive arm around her waist.

"Farewell, Lucius." A flick of the wand and the blonde man's hands fell directly from the mantle piece to his cock, stroking it frantically.

"He won't last long, Severus," Hermione said. "Let's get out of here before he explodes, please."

Perfectly amenable to this plan, Severus bent down and kissed her, feeling her respond with all the passion she had exhibited earlier. She might have been satisfied, but he sensed that she was far from spent. It was a rather encouraging thought.

A jerk behind their navels, just as subtle as the first one, and they were on an identical bed, in a room identical to the last, except that it was about fifteen degrees colder. Automatically they grasped each other tighter, drawing together for warmth. Severus felt Hermione's nipples hardening from the cold, and he grinned as something else started hardening in response.

"It's freezing down here!" she gasped.

"Well," he said, pulling away to look down into her brown eyes, "let's get under the covers and find a way to warm up."

She smiled, and something tightened inside him that had nothing to do with his erection.

Their coupling was long and slow this time, with kisses between each thrust and bodies staying as close together as possible; not for warmth, but for the joy that the contact brought. She didn't scream this time, but the power with which she moaned his name said so much more. Afterward, she rested her head on his chest with a leg draped over his hips and he encircled her in an embrace. It was in that position they fell asleep.

And it was in that position that they woke up on February 15th and every day after that, though Hermione did insist upon using her warmer quarters during the winters because the dungeons really were freezing cold. Severus had no objections: she had a full-length mirror in her room.

Lucius wasn't the only one with a voyeuristic side.