

Deliver Us

by Venus

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.

LadyTuesday – Asteroid Beater

Chapter 1 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



Envy

"More sinners are cursed at not because we despise their sins but because we envy their success at sinning."

~ Thomas Babington Macauley

If Sartre was correct and hell really is other people, then it stood to reason that he must have been a far more loathsome reprobate than anyone credited him, for surely this God-forsaken hospital was one of the lesser known circles of the Inferno. The constant buzz of noise pounded into his brain, and the stares, good God, the stares made him want to scream. As if people hadn't gawked at him enough before the war, each one of these sojourns back to London marinated him in a thousand different reasons why he'd left England. He held back a scoff, but only just. More than half of his life given to the glorious cause of saving Potter's talentless neck, and still the wizarding world refused to allow him to slink away into obscurity with dignity. He'd had his fill of notoriety; now he just wanted a house somewhere quiet where he could enjoy seclusion. It was damn unfair that the greater masses respected the privacy of the Boy Who Lived but wouldn't extend him the same bloody courtesy no matter how many times the fool lauded him as a hero. If he had his way, he'd hole up at a cottage in the middle of a forest somewhere he'd be damn sure he'd never again have to face an obsequious Potter, a never-ending string of Weasleys, or the insufferably sympathetic portrait of a man whose final words would be etched into his psyche even without the help of a pictorial representation. More than that, his chosen hermitage would certainly never feature the bushy-coifed harridan currently attempting to glare holes in his forehead. How dare she try to browbeat him into submission, the arrogant little chit; she had learned that trick from him.

She crossed her slender arms over her chest and leveled what he assumed she meant to be an intimidating gaze in his direction. While hospital administration didn't currently appear to be agreeing with her, life, as it seemed, did. Hermione Granger sat in front of him not as the gawky, skinny-limbed teenager he'd known but as a slim, confident woman in the full flush of young adulthood. Despite the towering scowl that pinched the lineament of her high forehead, her facial features had all "caught up" with each other, balancing out her once too wide eyes and too large teeth into the face of an arresting young witch. Some people might even go so far as to call her attractive, though he'd never admit to being one of them. If she was anyone other than Hermione Granger, he'd have said he was surprised that someone hadn't snapped her up, but with Granger, it wasn't exactly a shock that she was unmarried. Though, on second thought, he supposed that Ronald Weasley, that gormless hair pile, was probably just itching to take her on. Obnoxious though she may be, Granger did possess some little smarts, and a life shackled to that nimrod would be a colossal waste of her talent. Now that was justice for you: Severus existed in a world where a powerful, intelligent wizard such as himself was shunned for lack of attractiveness or inane social graces, but the witless wonder managed to get on with someone of three times his intelligence quotient. Granger had blossomed into a comely witch, and she had decided to favor Weasley with her attentions. The very thought of it left a sour taste in his mouth just on principle. When she sucked on her front teeth in a show of annoyed impatience, he scowled back at her all the more.

"Well?" she said at last. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Little that would be acceptable in polite company, I'm sure," he sneered in response.

Granger sighed heavily. "You know, Professor Snape, these little meetings would be a lot more pleasant on both parties if you would just behave yourself. And actually show up for them, of course. Then I wouldn't have to send Aurors to chase after you like hounds at a hunt. As part of your parole agreement..."

"I'm not a common criminal," he snapped. "And I find it interesting that you have no qualms about abusing your connections with the Auror Department to drum up business for yourself."

"...you were assigned the mandated monthly sessions of physical therapy for the rehabilitation of your physical faculties after Nagini's bite," Hermione continued as if he hadn't spoken, "...and the accompanying psychological evaluations to deal with any after effects of the war and your attack."

"I notice that Lucius Malfoy managed to wriggle away without any mandated psychological evaluations to 'deal with the after effects of the war'," Snape practically spat the sentence at her. "He seems to have escaped without even a jail sentence."

Granger exhaled hard through her nostrils as she picked up a quill and made notes on the parchment in front of her. "I can't speak to Mr. Malfoy's punishments or lack thereof. I'm your caseworker, not his."

"And you've done such a bang-up job, too. Lucius sits up there in a comfortable mansion with a beautiful wife, mountains of money, and no more than a slap on his wrists, and I ... why, I get a complete lack of privacy, your moronic cohorts hammering on my door at ungodly hours, and the pleasure of chatting with you about my mental acuity. Well done, Granger."

She tried to keep writing, but her quill nib made dents in the parchment. "You'd have a lot more privacy if you'd just show up to your scheduled appointments instead of making us chase you and drag you back to Britain. I had sympathy for you the first three times we went looking for you. 'What a horrible shame,' I said to myself, 'that this poor man has gone through so much and people won't leave him alone.' I figured I'd make it easy on you, keep the visits quick so that you could get on with your life and only have to bother with us for an hour or two a month. After the six months I spent Apparating to and from Beirut to help the boys find you three years ago...where I was robbed twice, hit with every conceivable jinx, and infected with four cases of diseases I'd rather not discuss...I figure you deserve whatever you get."

Severus smoothly rebutted, "Nice to know someone is on my side."

Hermione opened her lips to retort, but seemed to think better of it. Dropping her gaze back to the parchment in front of her, Hermione slashed words across the blank assessment form she used for each of her clients.

Severus watched as the muscle in her jaw twitched. Unable to resist, he decided to needle her a little further.

"As long as you're taking the time to make unbiased, cogent judgments on my life, why not discuss yours as well? I assume that Mr. Potter is as achingly naïve and tetchy as always?"

Granger whipped her head up so quickly she could have given herself whiplash. The polite expression plastered over Severus's face only multiplied her ire.

"I take it that's a 'yes'. I heard he proposed to Miss Weasley, poor girl. No doubting where the genetic strengths for their brood will come from. Oh, and how is the ever-impressive Ronald? Still trying to pretend that your relationship is built on something more than proximity to Potter, then?"

Hermione's eyes blazed with anger, but her cheeks bore the splotchy redness of embarrassment. Clearly, he'd struck home on a topic or two. Granger stiffened her spine, however, and glared back coolly.

"You know, I think you're jealous."

Severus blinked for a moment before a harsh bark of laughter burst from his lips.

"Jealous of whom? Potter? As ridiculous as that would be, you have to mean Potter because I know that even you are not foolish enough to believe me jealous of Weasley, that bumbling twit."

"You are," Hermione said indignantly. "Ron and Harry have everything you want but can't have: careers they love, respect and admiration in the wizarding world, privacy when they need it, and..." Hermione hesitated, biting her lip over the last part of her sentence. Her cheeks colored more before she finished. "...And women who love them."

Snape snorted through his long nostrils. "Oh, yes, how could I help but be jealous of the fools they make over the peerless specimens of womanhood that could be attracted to those two? I'd rather be buried alive than make such a dunderhead of myself for a woman of that caliber."

That comment snapped Hermione's composure like a dry twig. Slamming her palms down on her desktop, Hermione rocketed out of her chair and leaned so far over her desk that Snape moved away to avoid bumping noses.

"Of course you're the last man to make a fool of himself over a woman, Professor. Still convincing yourself that you hated James Potter because of his Quidditch skills, then?"

The silence that rushed into Hermione's tiny office nearly deafened her.

"I'm sorry, Professor, I..." she started, but trailed off as Snape slowly rose from his chair.

After unfolding himself to his complete and imposing height, he said, "We're done here," in a low hiss and strode towards the exit. No sooner had he opened the door than Harry and Ron poked their heads into the office.

Clearly sensing the tension in the room, Ron strode over to Hermione and immediately laced an arm around her, a hand at her waist. Hermione leaned into him and thrust up her chin as Snape favored her with a scathing glare. He made to stalk out, but Harry blocked the doorway and drew his wand reluctantly.

"I'm sorry, Professor," he said, "but I can't let you leave without supervision. Too many parole violations in the last twelvemonth."

Severus again glared at Granger, who turned very deliberately and stretched to kiss Ron on the cheek. As if the argument had never taken place, she smiled winningly at him and said, "What do you say to a romantic evening alone with me tonight? I'm feeling rather appreciative of my good fortune."

Pleasantly flummoxed, Ron put both arms around her back and drew her closer. "Lucky me," he said with a smile. "I can pick up some fish and chips and a video, and we can have a romantic night in."

Hermione's face fell just a tad, Severus noted with satisfaction; this plan was clearly not on par with what she considered elements of a "romantic night in".

She hesitated a moment before nodding. "Sounds lovely." Despite her usual distaste for public displays, Hermione pulled Ron to her for a kiss and was rewarded with an enthusiastic response and a disgusted huff from Snape's direction. By the time Ron released her with a smile and a promise to return at the end of the work day, Snape and Harry had gone.

Number of Words: 1830

Prompt Words Used: forest, lineament, fish and chips

Please remember to leave a review, as we get points for every review received! Thanks.

kittyperry - Comet Chaser

Chapter 2 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



Avarice

"Poverty wants much; but avarice, everything."

~ Publilius Syrus (Roman author, 1st century B.C.)

Severus was tired of the constant reminders of his previous mistakes. As he stormed out of the room and made his way out of the building with celerity, Potter hot on his heels, he fumed inwardly. That Granger had had the audacity to bring up Lily, his beloved Lily, was the last straw. Did the woman not understand childhood friendship? Of course he had loved her, but when she had proved herself so false a friend as to refuse to forgive a teenage insult, he had over the years come to realise her shallowness and pettiness. If she could love Potter, superficial, golden boy Potter, then she was obviously not the right woman for him. Was she not the sister of Petunia, pedestrian, small-minded Petunia? However beautiful and angelic she may have appeared after her martyrdom, she was still of the same ilk as her sister. Blood will out, as his mother would have said. Giving those memories to Potter had been a calculated move. Severus had spent days pondering over the best way in which to show the moronic brat what he had to do and convince him to believe in Severus' message.

When Severus had survived Nagini and Voldemort but not the irritating diktat of the Wizengamot, he had realised it was because he was poor and lacked the right connections. He had no family wealth to back him up. Yes, he was strong and powerful magically, and he had fought for the greater good, but he could not line the pockets of the Wizengamot members, and so he was forced to submit to the ignominy of Granger trying to analyse him, for Merlin's sake.

Thus, Severus had begun to plan how best to amass the means for gaining respect within the most sacrosanct of brotherhoods, the only community that had welcomed him no matter his position in the political climate, the select community of qualified Potions Masters who were inducted into the Order of Lao Tzu. His position as a member of the Order of Lao Tzu had saved him from rotting in Azkaban and given him the opportunity to contact elusive Potions Masters and Mistresses, but Severus wanted more; he wanted to be a part of the inner council. The inner council of the brotherhood had power and prestige around the world; no Wizengamot ruling would apply if the Masters who were part of the inner circle of Lao Tzu disagreed.

Potions Masters of the inner sanctum had wealth and time to undertake extensive research, to develop groundbreaking new potions and techniques, but despite Severus' cynosure, what stood in his way were the dual requirements of time and money. Experimental facilities, ingredients, rare books and specialised scrolls were not easy to find, nor were they cheap. Thus, to begin his initiation into the inner sanctum, the heart of the Order of Lao Tzu, Severus needed money, lots of money.

His sojourn in Beirut had not been merely to avoid the exasperating parole evaluations; he had actually been learning ancient healing and brewing techniques from a Palestinian refugee witch, who had papyrus scrolls of mindboggling value that were only passed down via apprenticeship to those who showed absolute dedication to the art of medicinal brewing. The knowledge he had gained from Black Leila, as the crone was known, had sparked an idea in his mind, and his secret brainchild was born. Severus had begun to brew and supply a selection of products to British and European apothecaries under the name of *Sensuality*.

Trade in Middle-Eastern and Asian potions was uncommon in Western Wizarding circles. Thus, well-heeled, expatriate witches and wizards had been some of Severus' best early customers, for they had been delighted to find products of such quality from what they supposed was an indigenous Potions Master. That the more sophisticated and wealthy members of Wizarding society had quickly latched onto the extremely exclusive products had been an added bonus.

Currently, Severus lived in Simla. The north-west of the Himalayas provided him with the dual benefit of taking him away from Britain and the clutches of the Ministry, as well as allowing him to pursue his ongoing research into the esoteric art of Ayurveda. The more he learned, the more extensive grew his range of products. From simple shampoos and conditioners to hair-straightening and curling treatments, spot remedies, anti-wrinkle creams, hair-growth serums, anti-aging lotions, skin-whitening and tanning solutions, Severus brewed them all. There was nothing that the global Muggle beauty industry produced that he did not match and improve upon. The latest in his range were erotic potions that enhanced the sexual experiences of lovers. This branch of the company had taken off so fast that even Severus was surprised at the gaping need in the market, and his new *Sexuality* line of chocolates, soaps, soaks, body paints, lubricants and other products brought in the clients like bees to a honeycomb.

Five months had passed since his last forced appointment with Granger, and he had done his best to avoid being found. However, when Severus moved into his newest stately estate, he failed to take the multiple measures he normally did. Perhaps he had grown complacent, perhaps in his heart of hearts, he had begun to miss the harriard and her fine eyes, but he left sufficient clues for anyone determined enough to find him. His current house had once been the abode of a former British Governor of India, who had used it as his summer retreat. The marble floors, the delicate sandalwood and rosewood furniture, the Burma teak doors, they all gave the mansion a distinctly imperial air.

Hermione had suspected that Professor Snape would not turn up for their next appointment after her completely unprofessional behaviour at their last consultation. She knew she would have to grovel and apologise for mentioning the Potters. Thus, rather than trouble the Aurors, who she knew would listen in to her conversation and said grovelling, she decided to travel directly to Beirut to find him, but in vain. With much trial and error, she perfected a complicated tracking charm and discovered him in India. There, she tracked him to the north of the country. Once in Simla, she made her way to the large house on the hill. She wondered if it was a hotel, for it was very imposing, but she had been distinctly told by a woman in a green silk sari that 'the gora sahib was at home.'

The house, however, proved to be empty. The wards were simple, not the intricate ones she had come to expect from the former Death Eater. There were no passwords either, which surprised Hermione and immediately made her pull out her wand in readiness for some diabolical trap. Cautiously, she made her way inside. The furnishings were exquisite, and Hermione could not help but appreciate the tastefulness of the décor. However, the area that held the strongest residue of his magical signature was towards the back of the house, which was decorated in a less ornate fashion. There, she found a heavily warded wing, which she assumed was his private domain.

Unable to break through the wards, she made her way to a series of adjoining rooms where she discovered large quantities of empty bottles and boxes bearing the labels of *Sensuality* and *Sexuality*. Hermione herself had only been able to afford to buy one of the expensive products, the hair serum she used on very special occasions. It made her hair a glossy curtain of silk that cascaded down her back in amazing curls. The price, though, was exorbitant. She had bought it for Harry and Ginny's engagement party, and even Ron, who never noticed anything, had commented that her hair looked nice.

What is Professor Snape doing living in a house this impressive wondered Hermione, *and what is he doing with large quantities of empty Sensuality and Sexuality containers?* As the pieces began to fall into place, she realised that the mysterious brewer had to be Professor Snape *How odd*, thought Hermione. *He doesn't seem the type to brew beauty potions.* But she did realise he was easily talented enough to make these fabulous products. However, if what she suspected was correct, then he had been involved in this secret enterprise for several years, and nary a word had he spoken of it.

Despite realising she was intrigued beyond mere professional curiosity, Hermione began to explore the house in greater detail. As she made her way to the first floor via the grand staircase, her breath caught in her throat at the sight that greeted her eyes. It was the most magnificent library, at least two stories high and filled from floor to ceiling with shelves of valuable books and scrolls, with the most perfect light flooding through the huge windows and dome-shaped glass ceiling. Hermione was known for her own hoard of books, but this collection spoke of not mere desire, but actual avarice. *Who would have thought*, mused Hermione, *Professor Snape is a closet Dr. Faustus.* But as soon as that thought entered her mind, she chastised herself for her lack of charity. This was hard-won gain, not the gift of Mephistopheles, for if Professor Snape was the man behind *Sensuality*, he could have bought all of these books ten times over.

Even as Hermione stood gawking at the open doors to the library, she heard the distinct sound of Apparition. Turning around, she found herself face to face with the scowling countenance of Professor Snape.

'Granger. Do your duties as a Ministry caseworker now include trespassing, breaking and entering?' demanded Snape without preamble. 'I hadn't realised.' He sneered at her from halfway up the staircase as he continued to mount the steps.

Nonplussed at how to react to this almost civil greeting given their last meeting, Hermione merely said, 'Good afternoon, Professor.' Smiling in what she hoped was a pleasant manner, she added, 'Since the mountain will not come to me, I thought I would come to the mountain.'

Severus smirked. Trust Granger to compare herself to a prophet. 'Well,' he said, 'I don't see your usual contingent of Aurors. Are you not planning to apprehend and manhandle me back to St Mungo's? Or were you thinking to take me on single-handedly?'

Hermione bristled. 'I came alone to apologise,' she said in response. 'My conduct was unprofessional and out of line. I should not have let you get to me.'

Severus chuckled darkly...then, at the look of utter confusion on Granger's face, chuckled even more. 'So you came all the way to the Himalayas to apologise? Big of you.'

'Must you be so difficult all the time?' she asked in exasperation. 'I'm sorry, alright? Can you just accept my apology and forgive me so we can move forward? I have better things to do than chase after you, you know.'

'Such as spend a romantic evening in with Weasley, with a nice meal of fish and chips and a video, perhaps?' taunted Severus.

Hermione's face glowed in anger. She knew he had noticed her disappointment at Ron's suggestion. Taking a deep breath to control her raging temper, she asked as calmly as she could, 'Does that mean I'm forgiven?'

Surprisingly, Severus did not continue with his attack. Instead, he sighed and asked, 'Lunch? I'm hungry and I have work to do. You can ask your incessant questions while we eat, and then you can get out.' Severus had never forgotten Lily's inability to forgive a misspoken word. No matter how angry Granger had made him, he had vowed to himself never to repeat Lily's behaviour. If he was asked, however shoddily, for forgiveness, he would grant it. He had learned the hard way what being unforgiven could do to a person's psyche.

A/N - 1967 words

The prompt words for this chapter were:

celerity

diktat

cynosure

kitten

wand

knightbus

password

I have used: celerity, diktat, cynosure, wand and password

Please remember to read and review! Our team gets points for every review. Thanks.

Clairvoyant – Meteoroid Beater

Chapter 3 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



Disclaimer: Not mine. No money.

"Nothing irritates me more than chronic laziness in others. Mind you, it's only mental sloth I object to. Physical sloth can be heavenly."

~ Elizabeth Hurley

Sloth

Her reverent fingers gently traced the words on the yellowed pages of the thick tome resting in her lap. Hermione indulged in a wistful, breathy hum, a combination of a sigh and a purr. Her long-time, faithful familiar, Crookshanks, lounged beside her on the arm of the reclining chair, purring contentedly as she stroked his luxurious, ginger fur.

"I just can't decide. Curry or Chinese for delivery tonight?" She continued to peruse the phone directory for suitable dinner fare, hoping divine intervention would make the choice for her.

"Meooooooooow."

Hermione snorted at the animal's overzealous suggestion of multiple entrées. "No, I'm not getting both, you greedy pig. I've gained almost half a stone since I've been on holiday. I can't afford to put on any more weight. I'm barely fitting into my clothes as it is. I abhor using extension charms on fine fabrics."

Crookshanks scrutinized his mistress' attire and responded with a dramatic caterwaul that could only be described as mocking. It was blatantly ironic considering the gaudy, over-sized sweatshirt she wore, torn at the collar à la *Flashdance* and emblazoned with the pretty, youthful images of George Michael and Andrew Ridgely. Her spandex leggings were the perfect finish to this tasteless ensemble.

"Thank you for your kind support. I'll remember that at feeding time, my fair-weather friend."

The ancient half-kneazle shrewdly demonstrated contrition, leaning toward Hermione and gently butting his head against her upper arm, uttering a short, soft 'meow'. *Too little, too late.*

The massive phone book fell to the floor with a dull thud as Hermione jumped up from the rocker recliner. The chair reacted to this sudden loss of occupant with a jerky, back-and-forth motion that showed no signs of slowing any time soon. Startled, Crookshanks leapt to the floor and began to groom himself in earnest, as if embarrassed by his own fraidy-cat behaviour.

"I thought familiars were supposed to be sympathetic to their masters," she chastened him, shaking her head to heap further disapproval on the animal.

Fluffy bunny slipper-clad feet carried her to the kitchen where she began dinner preparations. "Good evening to you, Mr. Patel. I would like to place an order... chicken Vindaloo, mild... vegetable biryani... naan... Is that enough for free delivery? Yes, good. How long? I'll see you in forty-five minutes. Thank you, Mr. Patel."

She replaced the phone in its cradle, then padded back to the living room, all the while avoiding the scattered carcasses of empty takeaway cartons, Dairy Milk wrappers and empty bottles of Muggle alcopop...piles of refuse which threatened to suffocate her recycled-cork flooring. She fell back into the still warm chair with an ease and grace comparable to Hagrid dancing the lead role in Swan Lake. With a few wiggles of her nowadays more ample bottom, she settled into her most recently acquired, prized possession.

Her impulsive decision...an extended leave of absence from St. Mungo's...didn't lend itself to travel abroad, too cost prohibitive. However, nothing prevented her from sitting in the literal lap of luxury during her stay-at-home holiday. Her tricked-out, dragon hide rocker recliner was replete with clever amenities: hidden cooler within the armrest, cup holder, extendible side pocket for remote controls. The best feature had to be the 'magic fingers', heated massage providing total body relaxation from her frizzy split ends to her pedicure-challenged toes. With a chair like this, who needed a man?

With a click of the universal remote, Hermione was bathed in flickering light, caressed by smooth Latin beats. Her argument with Crookshanks was just a memory now, thanks to a few swigs from a fresh, cold bottle of coconut Bacardi Breezer. *I wish all my problems could be washed away so easily.* Her sight was focused solely on the

wall-mounted, flat screen television, but her heart and mind transcended the boundaries of her London flat, and she travelled to the world of a homely, yet highly intelligent, executive assistant.

An assiduous, rhythmic knocking brought her awareness back to England and reality. *That was fast, nowhere near forty-five minutes.* "I'll be right there." The prospect of a warm, fragrant, savoury meal energized Hermione. She jumped to her feet and all but ran to answer the door, avoiding the obstacle course of unwashed, discarded clothing dotting the floor, the irregular pattern reminiscent of a mild case of dragon pox.

"I didn't expect to see you this soon, Mr. Patel," she shouted as she counted out the necessary Muggle funds from her coin purse. She flung open the door, fully expecting to see the smiling face of a short, podgy, balding, middle-aged Muggle, arms laden with yummy Indian foodstuffs. Instead, she was greeted by the scowling visage of a tall, thin, dark-haired, middle-aged wizard, empty-handed of course, but dressed in sartorial splendour befitting his new station in life.

Her stumbling feet sent Hermione reeling backwards; to add insult to injury, she tripped over a stack of out-dated issues of the *Daily Prophet*. An elegant, long-fingered hand reached forward to offer a reprieve to the witch sprawled awkwardly on the floor.

"Professor Snape, what are you doing here?" Her perfunctory, futile attempt to make herself more presentable consisted of pulling down the hem of her shirt and tucking errant curls behind her ears.

"You missed our biannual, parole-board-required appointment. I was merely..." He fell silent as his harsh, unforgiving eyes strayed from her face to the squalid scene behind her, taking in all the details of the messy, repulsive tableau, the train wreck that was her flat.

His sneer had never before been more derisive than it was now. "Congratulations, Miss Granger. You are the second person in a decade to render me speechless. The first was the Dark Lord...indirectly through Nagini, of course."

Hermione could feel the blush of mortification as it travelled from hairline to cleavage. *Merlin's balls! I've become inured to all this rubbish.*

"You know what they say about curiosity?" He turned to glare at Crookshanks, who had the good sense to run far away from the tall, dark man. "So I hope I won't regret asking this, Miss Granger, but what in the hell is going on here!"

"I was just waiting for delivery of my takeaway order and watching television. *Betty la fea*, to be exact. It's a telenovela, or soap opera, and there are twenty versions from various nations. I have completed an exhaustive study of them all, only to discover I prefer the original Columbian version. It has more... poignancy."

"You are babbling, Miss Granger. Leave of absence means a corporeal withdrawal from one's place of work. Did you perchance leave your know-it-all brain at St. Mungo's when you went on holiday?" His sharp, bitter tongue couldn't be arsed to wait for an answer before continuing its chastisement. "I don't care what you were *doing* before I arrived. How did you and your home come to be in this..." he paused carefully to choose his words, "state of chaos?"

She relaxed a bit, certain his concern was genuine. "Professor, I think you'll be more comfortable inside my apartment rather than in the hallway."

"That's debatable. Can you guarantee my health won't be endangered in that cesspool?"

"Inasmuch as you can promise to go five minutes without uttering some scathing, sarcastic remark."

"Touché." He strode past her to stand before the sofa, scanning in vain to find the safest place to sit, one which wouldn't leave a greasy spot on his fine, tailored suit. He perched on the very edge and kept his hands in his lap, trying to touch as little of the grimy sofa as possible.

She flopped gracelessly into the recliner, its see-saw gliding making her nauseous. Or maybe her churning stomach was due to the intimidating, critical man seated on her couch. She needed to find just the right words to give voice to the despair which had been plaguing her for months. Her neglected appearance, the accumulated debris, these were the physical manifestations of her depression. But the cherry on top of this sundae of mixed emotions was her inexplicable attraction to this enigmatic wizard; she'd been surprised to realize, after they'd shared lunch at his hilltop mansion in Simla, she'd taken a fancy to him.

"Where's that famous Gryffindor moxie of yours, Miss Granger? Cat got your tongue is no excuse; your familiar has left the room." His needling bordered on the far edge of sarcasm.

"If you must know, I'm burned out. Depressed. I hate my job. I'm just spinning my wheels; I've no hope for advancement at St. Mungo's." She gasped at her own bluntness. Her teeth were poised for lip-gnawing action in anticipation of a torrential rain of acerbic words from hurricane Severus.

His body trembled ever so slightly as he held his sardonic wit in check. "Then quit. As a case worker, your considerable talents are wasted on the masses. I can think of several careers for which you would be better suited."

Her smile was tentative; she'd had little reason to smile these past few weeks, but she didn't altogether trust his sincerity either. "Somewhere in this mess is a three-foot parchment filled with Arithmantic analyses of several different careers, all promising satisfaction on intellectual and emotional levels. Bookshop manager, librarian, Arithmantic quality controller, the list goes on and on."

"May I suggest you use the remainder of your holiday to search for fulfilling, gainful employment? However, I doubt your dissatisfaction with your career is solely responsible for your complete disregard of housekeeping and personal hygiene."

Hermione's timid smile faded into nothingness. Taciturn, stoic Severus Snape dared allude to her personal life? *But he's already seen me at my worst. I've nothing more to lose. In for a penny, in for a pound.*

"Ronald and I were not a good match, too disparate in our temperaments, interests and goals in life. Love alone would never have sustained us. I deserve the love of a man who can stimulate me intellectually and..." Hermione had the good sense to edit herself, though not quickly enough to stop that inconvenient blush. A knock at the door saved them both from further embarrassment.

"I claim no power of divination, but I assume that would be Mr. Patel at the door."

She laughed for the first time in a long time. "Would you care to join me for dinner, Professor? I ordered more food than I could ever eat on my own."

"On one condition, Miss Granger. I will accept your generous offer, if you allow me to tidy up your flat with some foolish wand-waving while you freshen up with a real shower, not some pathetic, ineffective cleansing charm."

She flashed him a broad, yet surprisingly bright, plaque-free grin. "I accept, but I also have one condition. I insist you call me Hermione. I plan to quit my job, so I'll no longer be your caseworker."

"Very well, Hermione." Her name tripped easily off his tongue, in that velvety voice, smoother and richer than any Shakespearean actor's. But alas, the five minute moratorium on sarcasm had expired. "I trust you can work some magic on that rat's nest you call hair. It would repel Snow Monkeys, and you know how indiscriminate they are, eating the bugs they pick from each other's fur."

A few minutes earlier his chaffing words would have wounded her, but now his biting remark felt more like a flirty, friendly nip. Hermione's spirit was lifted by the promise of a hot shower, spicy food, and an interesting man. The future looked brighter, indeed.

A/N: Many thanks to kittylefish for her beta work and RedSkyatNight for providing me with details about flavored malt beverages sold in the United Kingdom.

Word count: 1971

Prompt words: assiduous, inure, sartorial

HermioneDiggory - Moon Chaser

Chapter 4 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



The flesh endures the storms of the present alone; the mind, those of the past and the future as well as the present. Gluttony is a lust of the mind.

~ Thomas Hobbes

Gluttony

Severus lay sprawled on his opulent burgundy-and-gold patterned velvet duvet, staring fixedly up at the intricate play of light and shadows on his bedroom ceiling as the fire crackled away merrily in the grate across the room. The handsome antique teak grandfather clock had just struck 2:00 a.m. when Severus finally gave up on sleep and called down to the bleary-eyed, young kitchen elf on duty and requested a pot of Darjeeling and a tray of his latest creation for his extremely popular *Sensuality* line, a selection of luscious dark chocolate truffles in a variety of flavors and spiked with carefully crafted potions to allow the consumer to experience anything from a mild calming and inhibition-lowering effect for the painfully shy, to a sweet dreams truffle that, when eaten right before bedtime, would result in a vivid dream of one's beloved, to a specialty truffle that would induce intense arousal and incredible sensitivity for those desiring an exquisitely mind-blowing sexual experience.

When Severus had dined with Miss Granger earlier in the evening...a completely unexpected yet surprisingly pleasant experience to be sure...he had found himself toying with the idea of offering to share some of his exquisite creations with her before catching himself and inwardly reeling in shock, wondering what in the hell had possessed him to think of sharing the fruits of his inner sensualist with his former student.

And yet... the Miss Granger he found himself slowly growing to admire had changed a great deal from the rather plain yet deeply earnest young girl with a wild, golden halo about her head and the eternally waving hand. No, the formerly shy bookworm had blossomed into an attractive young woman. She was still Gryffindor honest and forthright to the core, but passionate, yes... He had seen a becoming fire in her eyes that brought out flecks of copper, bronze and gold that matched the full mane of curls that tumbled down over her shoulders and spilled almost to the beginning of her pert bottom.

Admit it, old man, Severus thought to himself, *the girl...the young woman, rather...is quite unmistakably lovely. And she seems not to be completely averse to your sarcastic conversation nor to mind that you will never be a contender for Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile award. So what is wrong with pursuing any possibilities that may come your way?* Severus thought about that for a long moment. It had been far too long since he had let himself think of engaging in a romantic liaison with anyone, let alone a former student and Gryffindor.

Turning away from such unaccustomed musings, Severus reached over to refill his teacup only to discover his plate of truffles was surprisingly empty. There was nothing left but a few dark chocolate curls, bits of toasted hazelnut and the odd drop or two of fruit liqueur adorning his plate and his pajama top.

Severus groaned as he belatedly realized he had been mindlessly consuming astonishing amounts of his favorite foods of late, everything from innumerable plates of delectably buttery-flaky miniature Cornish pasties and deep-dish shepherd's pies to entire pints of black raspberry, fudge-swirl gelato with double-chocolate walnut biscuits and trays of his beloved dark chocolate truffles... Images of said gastronomic delights marched through his mind in a relentless parade of gluttony and brought to the forefront of Severus' bewildered mind a horrifically vivid mental image of Ronald Weasley blathering nonsense at the Gryffindor table at Hogwarts, his wide mouth crammed full of everything within reach of his monstrously long arms, sickening Miss Granger and everyone around him with an up-close-and-personal view of his half-masticated meal. Fortunately for Weasley, he apparently had the metabolism of a flock of hummingbirds, but, alas, Severus' middle-aged body would not emerge so unscathed.

Shuddering in utter revulsion, Severus steeled himself to face the inevitable consequences of his unthinking bout of gluttony. Gathering his courage, he stripped down to his boxers, then resolutely turned to face the full-body mirror on the wall and gazed for a long moment, contemplating the recent changes to his physique. Passing over the silvery web of scars that adorned his neck, a parting gift from the late and unlamented Dark Lord's equally late and unlamented reptilian familiar, Severus gazed with approval at his chest and shoulders, which were nicely muscular, but not overly so. As for his lower body... well, the legs and thighs were long, thin and reasonably well-toned, but he saw that what had once been the slightly concave curve of his belly was very much a thing of the past, and he found himself sporting the beginnings of a paunch. Still, he sighed in relief... so far, his body had not deteriorated quite as badly as he had feared.

Then he turned to the side to view his form in profile. And nearly keeled over in shock at the unexpected and highly unwelcome sight of his distinctly rounded, protuberant arse.

"Sweet Merlin's undershorts," he bellowed to the empty room, "what the HELL happened to my ARSE?"

Never mind that Miss Granger seemed to enjoy his company; one long look at his newly blossomed bum and the girl would surely laugh in his face and then run for the hills. No lovely, young witch would care to be seen on the arm of a portly, porky Potions master and former Death Eater. Well, he wasn't quite as far gone as that yet, he sighed with relief. He was not a Gregory Goyle, not even close. But if he didn't get himself and his ravenous appetite under control, he could give up contemplating any possibilities that might have existed with the shapely Miss Granger.

Then again, Miss Granger... Hermione... was nothing like his former love. Lily. Bright, beautiful, brilliant Lily Evans with the flaming hair and the heart of ice. Severus' jaw tightened as he remembered how even prior to "the unfortunate Mudblood incident"...as he privately termed it...he had caught Lily's gaze so frequently straying towards the wealthy, popular and damnably attractive utter bastard known as James Potter, would-be father of the Boy Who Lived, and his pet mutt, Black.

As a shy and sullen teen, Severus had tried very hard not to notice his pretty friend's distraction, but still, it had stung his fragile, young ego quite sharply. In his darkest moments, Severus forced himself to admit that the shining angelic vision of Lily Evans Potter that he had clung to for years was little more than a desperate, self-perpetuated fraud. He had long suspected that the mutt, Sirius Black, was Lily's true passion and first love, that the only reason Potter ended up with her was because Black knew his friend truly coveted the witch while Black was content in his ongoing attempt to sleep with every witch who would have him. In his pain and fury in the aftermath of Lily's betrayal, Severus had been tempted to blurt out his every last thought and suspicion on the subject of Potter's best friend and his fiancée, but the words stuck in his throat like cold treacle. He couldn't stand the thought of seeing the pain in Lily's eyes. Clearly she had not felt the same way about hurting him. Lily saw the brass ring of popularity and wealth that Potter dangled in front of her, and she seized it with alacrity, firmly placing Severus in her past and never looking back.

Miss Granger, now, though quite similar to Lily in some ways, was in others her polar opposite. She was far more brilliant and intuitive than Lily had ever been, but the most striking differences that set Hermione apart were her compassion and ability to forgive. Yet she was wasting her vast potential in her current position. She was the only student he had ever considered taking on as an apprentice, had the fates been kinder and allowed him to approach a Muggle-born Gryffindor with such a proposal. Even in his bad old days as the indisputably most hated and loathed professor in Hogwarts' modern times, Severus had reluctantly observed that, as she blossomed with the grace of maturity, Hermione never seemed to display the awe, the reverence nor the fawning worship for the traits of physical beauty and personal popularity, at least, not to the degree of most of her feminine contemporaries. The unfortunate brief crushes on that twit Lockhart and the callow, youngest Weasley male could be set aside as follies of the past and youthful inexperience. He suspected Granger had only hung onto her relationship with Weasley for so long out of a misguided sense of loyalty and friendship, but from their earlier discussion, he knew she was ready and willing to discover what she had been missing. Perhaps, if he played his cards right, he would be allowed to help Hermione discover her inner sensualist, just as he had discovered his own.

Should he be lucky enough to win such a prize as the lovely and accomplished Miss Granger, Severus reasoned, he could show her his idea of a romantic evening, and it would involve something much, much better than greasy fish and chips wrapped in newspaper and whatever piece of misbegotten tripe constituted a good movie in the opinion of Ronald Bilius Weasley, which would likely involve copious amounts of blood and guns, or footballers, or half-dressed women the boy could drool over and compare unfavourably with the unfortunate witch by his side. *The young twit never could see what was right in front of his face* he recalled, trying to remember the name of the busty little chit the oaf had been seeing on the side... *Violet, no Lavender... one Lavender Crabbe, formerly Lavender Brown*. Yes, Weasley had dated her as a student... Merlin only knew how many times he had caught the indefatigably randy pair in various well-used nooks and crannies, towers and empty classrooms at Hogwarts. If he had a Knut for every time he'd seen Ronald Weasley's freckled, spotty arse, he would easily have been as wealthy as Lucius Malfoy long before he had become the premier designer and distributor of the finest quality potions in the international wizarding world.

No doubt the Weasley boy would make a fool of himself with a ploy to regain the witch's affections at some point, and with the nostalgia of longstanding friendship on his side, he might possibly get Hermione to reconsider her opinion. Unless Severus could manage to pull himself together, pull his famed Slytherin cunning out of mothballs and find a way to persuade the witch he was a worthy contender for said affections, preferably in such a way that she thought it was all her idea. After all, no worthy member of the house of Slytherin would enter blindly into an ocean of possible disappointment with nary a dinghy nearby to carry one to safety.

However, there was a certain... uncomfortable situation that required his attention before setting into motion any potential plans for romantic conquest.

Casting another glance at his disturbingly well-padded bottom, Severus sighed as he formed his agenda for the coming day. First, he would speak to the kitchen elves with regard to less calorie-laden alternatives when preparing his meals. Second, he would look into devising a more rigorous exercise routine for his planned exterior improvements and stick to said routine with sedulous zeal. Third, he would owl one Miss Granger and subtly inquire as to her plans for the upcoming weekend.

Hmm... Perhaps she herself might be the antidote to this wizard's middle-aged pudginess and the ultimate solution to getting his body back in shape Severus thought with a devilish smirk.

Word count: 1940

Prompt words used: Cornish pasties, antidote, sedulous, exterior

Please remember to review! Team Venus gets points for every review received.

livvy6 - Gravity Keeper

Chapter 5 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



"Let not the sun go down on your wrath."

Ephesians 4:26

Wrath

Fred and George Weasley sat in their storeroom, listening to Ron's latest wank about his break-up with Hermione.

Fred cleared his throat. "Look, Ronnie-kins, this is all exciting, you going to pieces over Hermione, but are you planning to DO something about it?"

"What d'you expect me to do?" Ron shouted. "You know she's seeing Snape? He's so rich now. Maybe that's what Hermione wants...some rich bloke."

"He's hopeless," said George to his twin.

"Completely," replied Fred. "If you want Hermione, then you need to out-Slytherin Snape."

Ron looked as if they had asked him to kill himself. "That's impossible! Snape tricked You-Know-Who... He was a spy... He knows all the angles!"

"Not true, little brother," Fred announced as he led them all into the front room. Fred took a handful of parchments from underneath the register and sorted through them. When he found what he was looking for, he looked up, grinning wickedly.

"What you need is some inside information," he said.

Ron knitted his brow. "What is it?"

Fred turned the parchment to show Ron. "You see that? There's your way to get Hermione."

"This can't be real. It doesn't sound like Snape." He frowned as he glanced further.

"Little brother," continued Fred, "you have so much to learn. Now, Hermione is a proper witch, right?"

"Yeah," Ron mumbled.

"Do you think Snape has... you know?"

"No!" Ron insisted. "I know Hermione. She's not easy to get in the sack. Snape'll be waiting for a while."

"But you and she ...?" asked George.

"Of course!" Ron said, affronted.

"There's your edge!" Fred explained. "You need to buy these things. You need Hermione to know she means more to you than Quidditch."

Ron's eyes lit up. "Y'think it'll work?"

"Absolutely," Fred and George said in unison.

"But it won't be without sacrifice," reminded George.

"It will cost you every knut you have and then some," added Fred.

"It's really underhanded," Ron whispered.

"Sure," said Fred. "And I am positive that Professor Severus Snape would NEVER stoop to such *gaucherie*!"

George sniggered. "When dealing with Snape, little bro, watch out. He won't give up without a fight."

"You have to outfox him," interjected Fred. "Don't think for one second Snape hasn't been plotting this very idea. You'll just do it first."

Severus and Hermione walked to her flat after a wonderful dinner and night at the opera. Hermione leaned into his arm. Things were moving along beautifully. Severus had her arse over teakettle when he had shown up at her door two months ago with flowers and an invitation to dinner.

Hermione smiled as she remembered how Severus had declared his intentions to her.

Severus fiddled with flatware and cleared his throat. "Hermione," he said, "I find you to be an intriguing and intelligent witch. I would like to see where this might lead, if you are agreeable."

Hermione lowered her head to hide her smile. He was so formal. She looked up at him and gently placed her hand over his.

"I would like that," she replied.

Severus' eyes shone; then he stiffened, looking serious. "I don't want to rush this. I think we could discover something good."

Hermione felt shivers up and down her arms. Never had the word 'good' held so much promise.

They reached her flat, and Hermione stood on her toes to kiss Severus charily on the cheek. She had never before been the aggressor during these moments. Severus looked down at her as she slowly lowered herself, her hand sliding down his black-clad chest.

Silently, Hermione unlocked the door and slid her hand into Severus', welcoming him into her flat. Inside, it was dark, but light enough for them. Severus shut the door with his foot as he drew Hermione closer. He kissed her mouth tentatively at first; however, she *had* invited him in, and he needed nothing more to understand what she wanted.

The couch groaned as they added their weight onto it. Hermione parted her lips, and Severus crushed her against him with a scorching kiss. His mouth traveled down her neck as his hand felt its way up her side to her breast.

Hermione squeaked as his hand made contact. They broke apart, and Hermione scrambled off him.

"Sorry," she whispered. "I forgot myself."

"If that is how you forget yourself, you should be rendered an amnesiac," Severus replied, his fingers brushing her cheek.

"Taking things slow," Hermione whispered.

Severus didn't know whom she was reminding, but it didn't matter. When it was time, she would invite him to go further...and there would be no stopping.

Hermione went to work early the following morning. She felt content. Her new job as a researcher for the Wizengamot was fascinating. She entered her office and eagerly dove into the documents on her desk.

An hour later, she heard tapping on the glass window of her door. She stood in shock as Ron Weasley entered her office.

"Ronald!" she breathed. "What are you...how did you know I was working here?"

Ron smiled. "It's not *that* hard, Hermione. We still share lots of friends."

"What do you want?" she snapped at him. She immediately regretted speaking so harshly, but since he didn't know about Severus, she wasn't comfortable being around him yet.

"Hermione," Ron began as he placed two large, dark brown parcels on her desk. "I know I really messed up. I love you, and I am willing to do whatever it takes to show you how much I value you. Have you seen these?" He gestured at the bags on her desk. The packaging looked vaguely familiar. She warily turned one toward her. She saw the brand name *Sexuality* and gasped, drawing her hand to her mouth. She reached quickly and saw its twin, *Sensuality*.

"Oh, Ron," she whispered. "What have you done?"

Ron walked to her, grasping her hands. "I spent all the money I was saving for my new Quidditch broom and emptied my account at Gringotts! All the witches are raving about this stuff, and you mean more to me than Quidditch or *anything*! Please give me a chance. I'm putting my heart out here, Hermione. I love you!"

Hermione opened her mouth to tell him about Severus when he grabbed the back of her head and kissed her. Hermione reached up and suctioned him off her face.

"Ronald Weasley!" she shouted as she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "We are over! Do you understand? Over!"

"But I bought you all this stuff!" Ron yelled back at her. "These chocolates alone cost fifty Galleons!"

Hermione whipped out her wand and narrowed her eyes. "It could be treacle fudge for all I care! You should know by now that I cannot be swept off my feet with such *foofaraws*! If you knew me at all, you would have come in here with a first edition of *Hogwarts, A History*! At least that might have been impressive."

Ron backed away as she started to move towards him.

"For your information, Ronald, I am seeing Severus Snape, and if he knew what you've done...he would turn you into a newt! Now, you take these things and leave before I do something regrettable!"

Ron grabbed his bags. "I knew it was hopeless!" he snarled. "Why can't you be like other, normal witches?"

Hermione set her jaw and slashed her wand fiercely, shouting "*Appungo*!"

Ron screamed as he burst out of her office, jostling his packages in his attempts to stop the determined, yellow, pecking budgies.

Hermione glared at the people who had poked their heads out of their offices to see what the argy-bargy was about, then whirled back into her office, slamming the door behind her.

Hermione dragged her weary body up the stairs to her flat. All she wanted was to sink into a hot bath and wash away everything that had happened with Ron.

At least it's done now, she thought. *I don't have to worry about Ron finding out about Severus.*

Hermione reached her door and saw her locking charms were breached. She dropped her satchel and coat and took out her wand before moving closer.

She gasped. Severus stood in the middle of her flat, looking as angry as she had ever seen him. He snapped his fingers, and the door shut behind her.

"What is going on here?" she asked him, confused.

"I could ask the same of you," he seethed. He began to pace as he continued to speak softly. "Imagine me, walking into the Ministry of Magic to bring you a rose to express my happiness about our interlude last evening. I saw you and Weasley standing together. I saw his hands covering yours and two bags of my very own products on your desk. Now, imagine my shock when I saw him kiss you!"

He stopped pacing in front of Hermione, towering over her darkly. "Just how long were you planning to play me for a fool?" he demanded. He backed up, and a sneer crept across his face. "And I thought you were made of better things...quality, honesty, truthfulness. I never would have guessed you had so much Slytherin in you."

"Severus!" Hermione said, trying to explain.

He turned from her, his hands balled into tight, white fists. Then, he swung around and roared, "You are no better than Lily! What are Muggle-born Gryffindor witches made of, I wonder?"

"You don't understand..." Hermione began.

"SHUT UP!" he screamed in a vicious rage.

Hermione was shocked. The last time she'd seen him like this was in her third year, first at the Shrieking Shack, then later in the infirmary when Sirius Black had escaped.

Hermione wanted to cry, but her pride wouldn't let her. She jerked her wand, and in an instant, Severus was bound in magical ropes on the floor. He growled and exploded out of them.

Hermione was furious. "Fine! You've had your say; now let me have mine! Two wizards who claim to care deeply for me have ambushed me today, and my patience is at an end!" she shrieked.

"You have no business breaking into my flat! I don't care how furious you are...there are lines, and you crossed one. You accuse me of being other than forthright. How dare you! It wasn't my idea for Ronald to barge into my office and act like an enormous arse...not that you are doing any better yourself! At least *he* brought presents! If you had bothered to stick around for the show, you would have seen me send a pack of vengeful birds to scratch off his face in order to run him out of my office! I told him I was seeing you! I told him it was over! HE grabbed ME and kissed me, thinking to win me over with your fancy products. I wanted to wretch at the thought of using any of those *Sexuality* products with him, knowing *you* brewed them. If I wanted to use those things with any wizard, it would be you, you*ü*diot!" she hollered.

Severus gazed at Hermione, her hair coming loose from the confines of her combs. Her wand sparked, her breasts heaved, and her eyes burned like amber fire. He was in complete awe. Everything *was* all right after all. He felt like a complete plonker. *What was that she just said?*

"If I wanted to use those things with any wizard, it would be you, youüdiot!"

His mouth fell open. His mind swam with all the tantalizing thoughts he'd had for two months now. His heart raced at images of Hermione naked on his bed. If he was ever going to make those images reality, he'd better repair the damage he had created...quick!

Author's note: My deepest thanks to you, kitty. Thank you for your patience and helpfulness.

Word count: 1973

Words used: gaucherie, chary, storeroom, treacle fudge, and foofaraw

astopperindeath - Black Hole Chaser

Chapter 6 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



"Lust is to the other passions what the nervous fluid is to life; it supports them all, lends strength to them all. Ambition, cruelty, avarice, revenge, are all founded on lust."

~ The Marquis De Sade

Lust

If he was ever going to make those images reality, he'd better repair the damage he had created...quick!

Except, Severus could not bring himself to do anything quickly. As much as he wanted to, he knew that crushing her to him and plundering her mouth would do nothing more than enrage her further. "Taking things slow," she had said. He just stood there, staring at her and willing himself not to move. It was either that or force matters to a head.

Hermione stared back at him, chest heaving, hair pulled loose from its confines. He could not interpret the look on her face...was it lust? Hatred? Attraction?

Thoroughly confused and baffled, he spoke, knowing it would probably just make everything worse.

"I am truly sorry for entering your home unannounced and uninvited, Miss Granger. It shall not happen again."

And in spite of her gasp and her shocked face, he threw a handful of Floo powder into the fire and quickly exited her home.

He stormed through his house, his robes billowing so hard they threatened to fly off. Ripping the robes off and throwing them into a corner, he entered his living room and,

hands shaking with anger, managed to pour a healthy glass of brandy.

He was angry for so many reasons. Angry at his inability to pause in any stressful situation before flying off the handle; angry at Weasley for bringing his slow wooing of Hermione to a climax far earlier than was prudent; and mostly, angry he was here drinking brandy instead of capitalizing upon Hermione's fiery wrath.

He had to think of an entirely new plan, and quickly. *Had her words implied that she wished for me to introduce my products into our relationship? Or was she merely implying she would prefer me to all others? Or did she just mean that between Weasley and me, she would prefer me?*

Admitting he was as confused as ever as to the inner workings of the fairer sex, he began pacing and drinking, losing himself in his stream-of-consciousness musings, and hoping for inspiration.

Instead, his brain felt as if it had been sprayed with Doxycide. All of his careful planning had been killed and wiped clean by Weasley's behavior.

Tired of pacing, he sunk into the wing chair next to his bed. Knowing he would not come up with a solution tonight, he settled for thinking about her. When he had encountered her at her home, sulking in her own self-indulgence, he had truly been worried about her. And that worry had hit him like a sucker punch to his diaphragm.

Their short moment of shared passion the night before had almost been too much. Sinking onto the couch with her, he had felt relief like a dying man might feel upon finding an oasis in the desert. As much as he had loved drinking in her kiss, he'd had to touch her. He had felt such lust for her, such all-consuming desire, he'd thought he might go mad. In fact, a part of him had felt... empty when she pulled away. "Taking things slow," she had said.

Had the look she had given him earlier, before he fled her home, been the signal he ought to take things less slow? He didn't know. He *hated* not knowing.

And he hated the idea of "taking things slow." The bulge in his trousers indicated just how much he hated that idea.

Groaning in frustration, he opened the drawer in the table next to his bed and lifted one of his *Sensuality* lotions from inside.

I very much doubt the upright Miss Granger will be giving into her most base longings this evening.

Severus hadn't even given her a chance to say anything. Before she could respond, before she could grab his arm and beg him to stay, he was gone in a swirl of robes and Floo powder.

Hermione stormed into her bathroom, slamming all of the doors in her wake. She let out a frustrated howl as she slammed her hands against the vanity counter. Looking in the mirror, she studied her face. *I know I gained a stone during my temporary swim in my own self-pity, but I've lost most of that. I'm not the most attractive woman, but I'm sure as hell the most attractive woman that jackass might ever end up shagging!*

She stomped out of the bathroom and into her bedroom, stalking across the room to stand before her full-length mirror. Ripping her clothes off in a fit of pique, she stared at her figure hypercritically, looking for any flaw. Her stomach, though not as flat as in her school days... *not chasing after Dark wizards and living off mushrooms in the Forest of Dean had some drawbacks...* was not as bad as it could be. She knew she would never be as graceful or poised as some witches, but she had much to offer some lucky wizard.

Realizing her self-inventory would cause more self-loathing than self-praise, she threw herself down on her bed.

Why am I even attracted to the insufferable man? He made my job a living hell; he mocked my home... Well, I have to grant him mocking my home; that first day he came, the piles of curry containers weren't the most attractive knickknacks... but still!

In spite of everything, she was attracted to him. Her altercation with Ron today had made that even clearer. *How could I ever have been attracted to... What was it Snape had called Ron over dinner a few nights ago? That "gormless hair pile." The description was apt; certain parts of Ron definitely lacked in vitality and were stuck inside an untrimmed mass of hair... ugh. Between that and his constant malapropisms, it was a wonder I never physically harmed him!*

She rolled to her side and spooned a pillow, trying not to drown in her miserable thoughts. She could hear Luna telling her not to let the Glumbumbles and their evil treacle get to her and tried to smile. But happy thoughts ultimately would get her nowhere.

Her body was tense...far too tense. That look he had given her before he'd left... She'd thought he was going to make a move. She'd been desperately willing him to make a move, but no, he had left. Left her there, body thrumming with unresolved tension, about to pull her hair out, she was so angry. *And turned on, Granger. Don't forget turned on. Lusting after your old Potions master... How attractive.*

Knowing she would not sleep without relief, she reached into her bedside table and removed her vibrator. Hoping she wouldn't regret giving into her need the next morning, she clicked it on. *I suppose I could have used those Sensuality products after all...*

She traced the vibrator over each of her nipples before passing it between her breasts. Ghosting the vibrator over her stomach and thighs, she slid her other hand up, pinching and rolling a nipple before palming an entire breast.

Hermione's fantasies about Snape were generally the same...she was Snape's case manager, chasing him from Apparition point to Apparition point before finding him in some far-off country.

She Apparates into an opulent room, red, a large, four-poster bed at the center. He approaches her from behind, pressing his body into hers and ghosting his hands over her frame. Turning her abruptly, he snaps his fingers, divesting her of her clothing in one magical rush.

She inched the vibrator closer to her core.

Snape throws her to the bed.

"Touch yourself for me, Granger," he growls.

Her hand moved to her other breast, while she traced the vibrator over her clit.

He slowly removes his clothing as she watches, frigging herself with abandon. He stands before her in all his naked glory, his cock pointing towards her like a compass points north.

Without warning, he pounces, hands pinning hers above her head. Holding them fast with one hand, his other dips into her center, twisting and stroking as she moans.

The moment he realizes her need is peaking, leaning down and nipping her neck, he slides into her smoothly, his right hand holding fast to the left side of her arse.

As she finally slid the vibrator inside, she cried out, her hips lifting slightly off the bed.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered as she achieved the climax she so desperately needed.

Giving into his own longings, he unbuttoned his trousers, liberating his semi-erect cock from its confines. Pouring a healthy dollop of the lotion into his left hand, he rubbed his hands together to release the essential oils.

He had formulated the lotion to increase sensitivity in any place it was administered. The lotion also increased the length and intensity of orgasm in both sexes. Few realized, however, that he laced the potion with a drop of Amortentia, enhancing one's sensual experience.

Taking a deep breath, he imagined what *should* have happened the night before.

His mouth travels down her neck as his hand feels its way up her side to her breast. She arches into his palm, her hands sliding into his hair and pressing his lips harder into her neck. He chuckles softly as he slowly lays her down onto the cushions, leaning over her.

He ghosted his hands over his nipples, groaning at the immediate stimulation to his nerve endings. He had formulated the lotion with magically enhanced eucalyptus, which imprinted upon the skin ghostly traces of the physical sensations experienced. His hands skimmed over his body, leaving a tingling path in their wake.

Untucking his shirt, she unbuttons it with trembling fingers before pushing it off his shoulders. He lowers himself further, kissing her forehead, her temple, before catching her lips between his own. He sinks further into her kiss as her hands run across his back, her nails digging in slightly as she pulls him even closer.

Mouth trailing across her cheek to her ear, he nips her earlobe as he wraps his arms under her. Her thighs embrace him, cradling him to her.

He slowly rolls with her off the couch and onto the carpet.

His hand skimmed down his body before clenching the arm of the chair as his other hand descended to his cock. Pulling back his foreskin, he massaged the tip for just a moment, waiting for the lotion to intensify the sensation. Satisfied with the results, he firmly grasped himself and began sliding his fist up and down his length.

Hermione leans down and kisses him, her hands on either side of his face. Straddling him, she grinds herself into him.

Removing her shirt, she reveals her lace-clad breasts, pushed high by her brassiere. His fantasy Hermione's behavior changes abruptly, as does the pacing of their lovemaking. No longer the shy girl from the last two months, she becomes the bold woman from last night, who took the initiative. Unbuttoning his trousers, she slides them and his underpants down just far enough to release his erection. Moaning in need, she lifts her skirt and slides the flimsy fabric covering her mound to the side before quickly sinking onto him.

His left hand moved faster as his other flew off the arm of the chair to cup his balls. Head rolled backwards, eyes closed, his thrusts became faster and more shallow.

Her hands grab his shoulders tightly to balance herself as she finds her rhythm. His hands find her hips and guide her motions, moving her harder and faster over his cock.

As the sensations caused by his hands and the lotion mounted, he pictured her lovely, lust-filled face.

"Hermione!" he groaned. With one final thrust, he spilled his seed.

AN: Thanks are entirely necessary to my team...all of you were so helpful and your comments helped me so much. Thanks especially to kittylefish and clairvoyant12 for your many read-throughs and for the conversations that helped keep me sane during this process.

Word count: 1953

Prompt words used are bolded: 1. Triskaidekaphobia 2. **Malapropism** 3. Maggoty Haggis 4. **Doxycide** 5. **Glumbumble** Parts 6. The Serpentine 7. **Stream**

Please review! Love it or hate it, just tell us! We get points for every review. And please go vote in the poll at The Petulant Poetess's LiveJournal site:

<http://community.livejournal.com/petulantpoetess/>

kittylefish – Supernova Seeker

Chapter 7 of 7

After the war, Severus refuses to cooperate with the authorities, and Hermione is fed up with chasing after him.



If we do not know ourselves to be full of pride, ambition, lust, weakness, misery, and injustice, we are indeed blind. And if, knowing this, we do not desire deliverance, what can we say of a man...?

~ Blaise Pascal

Pride

Severus awoke the next morning, wondering how things had gone so terribly awry. One evening, he had thought himself on the brink of ... well, of something, and the next, he had found himself alone, with nothing but a bottle of liquor and his own left hand for company. How it had all gone so terribly wrong, he did not understand.

Well, maybe he understood a little. His ferocious, foul temper had once again got the better of him. And now he had likely ruined everything. Again. And he had no idea how to fix it. He had apologized to her. What more was he expected to do? Surely that should suffice.

He determined to go about his business in his usual fashion, avoiding any thoughts that might distract him from his work. He found himself unable to focus on the new product he was developing, so he left his workroom and settled in his office. However, the current issue of *Potions Weekly* was clearly substandard, filled with tripe that failed to engage his attention. He turned to revising an article he planned to submit to that publication, but it, too, failed to hold his interest.

Several days passed in this fashion, with him never seeming to actually accomplish anything of substance. He resolved at least to sort through his correspondence, which had piled up a bit while he'd been distracted by ... other matters. He found an envelope bearing the seal of the Order of Lao Tzu and wondered how he had overlooked it. He opened it, removed the heavy sheet of parchment, and read the missive. Well. It had finally happened. He had been admitted to the inner circle. He had worked tirelessly towards that goal for months, had longed for nothing else. Why then did he feel so empty? With a growl, he crumpled the letter and threw it on the table.

It was no use. He couldn't stop thinking about her. He grabbed a blank piece of parchment and began to plan.

Hermione awoke with a vague feeling of uneasiness in the pit of her stomach. Then she remembered the events of the previous day and groaned. As if the argument with Ron hadn't been bad enough, now she had no idea whatsoever where things stood with Severus. And she had been so excited about where they had seemed to be heading.

A flush crept over her face as she recalled her wanton activities after he'd left. How she could be so furious with him and yet still want to do ... that, she did not entirely understand. When she and Ron had been together, she'd certainly never found anger to be an aphrodisiac, but last night, her ire had only fanned the flames of her desire.

She got out of bed and prepared for her day, resolving not to think about the irritating man. How dared he break into her home and proceed to level accusations at her? And then just to leave so suddenly, not even giving them a chance to come to any kind of understanding. She could have forgiven the rest, but leaving her high and dry like that...it stung. Her pride was wounded, and she found it impossible to get past it.

Unfortunately, her resolution not to think about him proved hard to keep. Throughout her day, as she went about her business, she found herself remembering the sweetness of the kisses they had shared. Again and again, her thoughts returned to that long moment when he had stared into her eyes, and for a moment, she had believed he would grab her and snog her senseless. She had *wanted* him to snog her senseless, dammit! Why hadn't he? What was wrong with him! *Or is it me?*...she glanced at her rear end to ensure it had not expanded beyond reasonable proportions...*No*, she dismissed that thought. It was him, of course. Just the same, she resisted the temptation to drown her sorrows in ice cream.

One day slipped into the next as she waited for him to come to her, to apologize, to make things right. But he didn't.

After a few days, resentment eased its hold on her heart enough so that she could think more clearly. As she pondered Severus's history, things began to shift into place. She had been furious with him...justifiably so, she still believed...but he had apologized to her for trespassing. She supposed that from his perspective, for all he knew, she was still furious. Since she doubted he had much experience with women, he probably had no inkling she was more upset at this point about him leaving so hastily without resolving anything than she was about the initial cause of her anger.

It began to dawn on her that perhaps he was waiting to hear from her that he was forgiven. While part of her wanted to hold onto her grudge and wait for him to come crawling back to her...after all, why should she be the one to relinquish her pride...she realized her desire to be with him trumped her need to be right.

Once she came to that understanding, she saw no need to dillydally. Without further thought, and with no plan in mind, she Apparated to his door and rang the doorbell. Twice, for good measure.

Severus was inspecting an item he had just received through Floo delivery when he heard the doorbell's demanding summons. Twice. "I'm coming, hold your hippogriffs," he muttered under his breath, his fingers absent-mindedly stroking the leather binding of the volume he held. He set it on a table in the entryway and opened the door. "Hemione."

"Severus," she said, seeming nervous. "May I come in?"

"Of course." He stood aside to allow her to pass.

Her gaze landed on the book on the table. "Is that ...?"

"A first edition copy of *Hogwarts, A History*."

"Really?" Her face lit up. "May I?" She reached for the book.

"Of course," he repeated, mentally cursing his rapidly dwindling vocabulary.

He watched as she examined the book, caressing the binding before carefully turning the pages.

"It's beautiful," she breathed.

"Yes," he agreed, his eyes not straying from her face.

She glanced at him standing stiffly in his hallway, and the sight of him seemed to recall her to the matter at hand. Reluctantly, she returned the book to the table. "Why did you leave so hastily the other night?" she asked.

He felt uncertain as to how to answer her. "I did not know what else to do," he said.

"You could have stayed. We could have talked about it ..."

"If I'd stayed, there would have been no talking." His gaze caught and held hers.

"No?" she questioned, the ghost of a smile hovering about her lips.

"No," he repeated. "Hermione, I know we said we would take things slowly. Hell, it might even have been my idea, but..." *Now, how am I to finish that sentence? 'But I wish to carry you into the bedroom and thoroughly ravish you post-haste?' I think not.*

"But what, Severus?" she asked, moving closer to him.

"But I no longer wish to take things slowly," he whispered.

"Nor do I." She stood in front of him now, looking up at him, lips slightly parted. Then she stood on her tiptoes and pressed her soft lips to his.

With that, Severus's tenuous hold on his self-control began to slip. His arms came around her, crushing her to him as his mouth plundered hers. As she responded to his passion, her tongue tangling with his, he felt like a starving man who found himself invited to feast with royalty. When they came up for air, he looked down into her face flushed with desire, her lips slightly swollen from his kisses. He wanted her with a fierceness he hadn't expected. He could tell by the look on her face that he'd surprised her when he swept her up in his arms and began to carry her to the bedroom.

"Really, Severus?" she giggled.

He shot her a look that quelled her giggling and caused her eyes to narrow with what he hoped was arousal.

In his room, Severus dropped her onto the middle of the bed and stood for a moment to savor the sight of her there. Then he followed her down and took her into his arms to kiss her again. He felt like he was pouring his soul into her with his kiss and drinking in her soul in return...though he had never believed such romantic blarney when he'd heard others spout it and was a bit taken aback at having such thoughts.

His hands roved over her body, and this time she did not stop him when he cupped her bum and then her breasts. He tugged at her jumper, pulling it up, and she willingly allowed him to pull it over her head. He stared appreciatively at her lace-clad bosom before palming both of her breasts. When her nipples hardened beneath his touch, he felt triumphant and bent his head to flick at them with his tongue through the flimsy lace.

Her sharp intake of breath as she arched into his touch fuelled his passion further. He felt greedy for her, gluttonous even. He wanted not just to taste and to savor, but to devour her whole, to claim and possess her. As he sucked her nipple, he slipped a hand over her ribcage to her abdomen before insinuating it between her thighs. He could feel her warmth through her jeans. As her legs fell open slightly, her hand traced over his chest, down his arm, to his belly where she hesitated.

His fingers deftly unfastened her jeans, and he slipped his hand inside, exploring her soft, heated flesh.

Her hands unbuttoned his shirt, brushing it off his shoulders, and Severus muttered a quick spell that divested them both of their clothes. She pulled him down on top of her, into her kiss, legs parted to receive him. As he positioned himself at her entrance, rubbing his tip against that tiny bundle of nerves, he looked into her face and was overcome with a rush of tenderness. He pressed into her, feeling her warmth envelop him as he sheathed himself in her fully. He had not believed two people could fit together so perfectly. He began to move, forcing himself to go slowly, and she wrapped her legs tightly around him as she moved in the same rhythm.

Perhaps a moment or a lifetime later, he felt her tremble and shudder around him. His mouth swooped onto hers to devour her cries of satisfaction as he thrust powerfully into her, feeding her with his own inarticulate utterances as he spilled his seed inside her. He felt like he was losing himself in her and finding himself at the same time.

Afterwards, they lay together, her head cradled on his shoulder. He brushed her tangled mane out of her face, then kissed her forehead, and she sighed, a tiny smile curving her lips.

"It's for you, you know," he said.

"What?" She looked at him through drooping eyelids.

"The book. It's for you." He kissed her forehead again.

Her eyes flew open. "What?" she screeched. "Really?"

"Have a little consideration for my ears, please. Yes, really." He watched, amused, as she jumped out of bed and ran from the room.

She reappeared moments later, the book cradled gently in her loving hands. She set it on the table by the bed, then jumped on top of him. "Thank you, thank you!" she cried, straddling him as she kissed his face and neck and lips.

Holding her, caressing her, he realized what they'd found together was worth more than money, power, or fame. Pride be damned, he'd make this work.

Author's Notes:

We get points for every review we get, so please take the time to leave one! Love it or hate it, please tell us! And please go vote in the poll at The Petulant Poetess's LiveJournal site: <http://community.livejournal.com/petulantpoetess/>

Thanks to my team, especially astopperindeath for a pivotal conversation that helped me make a key decision about this chapter, as well as LadyTuesday and Clairvoyant for betaing.

Word count: 1982.

Prompt words used are in bold: 1. **Dillydally** 2. Traduce 3. **Blarney** 4. Probity Probe 5. Quod 6. **Tripe** 7. Pillar box

UPDATE: We came in second in the challenge and so will be going on to the final round! If you liked this story, please read and review the sequel, *Is a Virtue*, found here: <http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=16392>