

Soot and Smudges

by *astopperindeath*

It takes a smudge of Floo powder for him to really see her...

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer. I own nothing from the HP universe, Scholastic, Warner Brothers, or Jo's brain. I'm not making any money.

"Damn! This meeting is important! Could you not for once look presentable?"

Hermione openly glared at Snape. She hated Floo travel with a passion. No matter how hard she tried, she always came out of the fireplace with her face and clothes smudged with soot and her hair a static-electricity mess. But she *was* a witch—a few simple charms would put her to rights. Not that Snape cared about that. He was a stickler for personal appearance, especially for these monthly meetings about their potions research. So, monthly, he berated her—the dressing-down serving as a release valve for his stress.

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"In case you have forgotten, you're a *Potions mistress*. Brew something to fix that straw pile you call hair! If you're not willing to brew it yourself, I'll do it for you! Not to mention your clothes! You're a woman, Granger. Try wearing something that doesn't fit you like a potato sack for once! Looking like something the Kneazle dragged in will *not* help us keep our research funding! I know the hooligans you associated with as a child were male, but for once, could you attempt to look like the thirty-year-old *woman* that you are? Good gods, Granger!"

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This month's berating hurt her far worse than normal. It was as if he didn't even see her anymore. The mental image of herself that he had dated back to when she was eighteen—fresh out of the war, caring little about her own appearance and caring too much about making a name for herself. She had learned quickly that appearance was everything in research and academia, so she'd used her Order of Merlin monies to buy a new wardrobe, hair charms, and makeup, and she had done her best to fit into the feminine role expected of her. Especially lately...

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Snape was seeing red. Of all the times she could have chosen to look a mess, she picked today. Didn't she understand how close they were to losing their funding? After five years and little progress, nobody cared about their attempts to cure Lycanthropy. There she was, covered in soot and wearing the same frumpy robes as always.

Except she wasn't. As he'd berated her, she had cast a few self-cleansing charms and stood before him soot and wrinkle free. *And are those new robes? The emerald green suits her well... Oh, bloody hell, when did she get pretty?*

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He couldn't handle this paradigm shift in his thoughts for her. Pretty? Certainly not. He noticed that Hermione's eyes widened as he took stock of her appearance for the first time in a decade. Her hair, while it would never be tamed, at least didn't have appearance of Trelawney's mop any longer. Her robes were slightly low cut, revealing the promise of a gorgeous set of tits. It was too much on top of his already skyrocketing stress.

"If we lose this funding, it will be your fault entirely. Why I ever decided to take on such an inept assist—"

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She couldn't stand the criticism any longer. For months, she'd been trying to show him that she was attracted to him. She had even botched up a new trial of Wolfsbane so he would have to spend extra time with her. Yes, he'd screamed at her for an hour, and yes, it had been difficult not to burst out laughing, knowing she'd done it on purpose. But when he'd stopped maligning her appearance and started maligning her abilities, she had to make him stop. And, not fully realizing what she was doing, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed him.

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Oh gods. OhgodsOhgodsOhgods. What in the gods' names was she doing?

She pulled back slightly, eyes boring into his.

"Look, Severus. I'm pretty, I'm smart, and I actually don't mind being around you. So, this is what is going to happen. We're going to go to our meeting. We're going to get our funding renewed for a year. We're going to go to Hogsmeade. You're going to buy me dinner, then walk me home. You *will* come in for a nightcap... and you*will* make me breakfast. Two eggs, coffee, and melon, to be precise." She said all this, smirking.

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Snape was not the sort of man whom anyone bossed around, especially an annoying chit like Granger. But as he looked down at her, he realized she was right in some regards. She *was* pretty, and she *was* smarter than any woman he'd ever known. And she *was* the only woman who put up with his shit. Hoping he wouldn't fuck this up any worse than any of his other relationships, he bent down and tentatively pressed his lips to hers.

When her hands slid up his chest and tangled themselves into his hair, he knew he was doing*something* right.

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That day, their grant was renewed for the year. They celebrated in Hogsmeade well into the night, much to the shock of the many patrons who knew them. At the end of the evening, he tucked her hand into the crook of his arm and escorted her to her cottage. They sat on her couch, sipping champagne and celebrating their good fortune.

The next morning, he made her breakfast—two eggs, scrambled, French roast coffee, and a bowl of chopped melon—serving it to her in bed. The bed they remained in for much of the rest of the weekend.

A/N: So, I tried writing something snarky, and it turned out fluffy... oops. Thank you so much to my beta, debjunk, for making this presentable!