

All Lathered Up and Nowhere to Go

by peppermint

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A/N: Thanks to dickgloucester for the brit-pick and pyjama_pants for her killer beta skills.

Also, if you think I own this, I have oceanfront property in Kansas that you will LOVE.

This was written for dreamy_dragon73 as part of the Slytherin House Yule Exchange during the OWL House Cup.

Severus Snape stood before his shower door, adjusting the water to his preferred temperature. Steam billowed from the shower stall, and he breathed it in with a thankful heart. One step left before washing the day and term's grime of boiling cauldrons and germ-ridden adolescents down the drain: a bicarb of soda, citric acid, and witch-hazel cake infused with cedar and eucalyptus oils, tossed on the shower floor to scent the steam, relax him, and cleanse his pores.

He stepped into the shower, the hot water cascading from his head to his shoulders, enveloping him in soothing warmth and comfort. He reached for a flannel and his cake of sandalwood-scented soap, spreading the rich, creamy lather over the taut planes and angles of his tall, lean body. He took special care with his hands and fingernails, digging into the container of sugar-scrub he kept in the shower to remove potion stains from his hands and arms.

His body took care of itself as his mind wandered, anticipating the weeks ahead with no students. He could sleep in, take long showers, research, and brew to his heart's content.

He was so engaged in his rapt contemplation of the myriad ways to spend his free time that he didn't notice the rapid cooling of his once-toasty-warm shower. It was wicked cold by the time he'd realised something had gone wrong, and before he could stick his shampooed head under the icy stream to rinse it, the flow of water cut off completely.

This would never do. He had to get the shampoo out of his hair. Granted, it was a manly scent, all patchouli and afternoon forest, but it was eventually going to irritate his scalp.

Perhaps an *Aguamenti* would do, if he could remember how to regulate the temperature. He tried in vain for a few moments, but only managed to produce ice-cold or boiling hot water. Foolish wand-waving, anyhow.

There was nothing for it. He exited the shower, reached for his robe... and found it missing. All he had was a fluffy, steel-grey towel. It wasn't even a large towel, but he

wrapped it around his hips and managed to secure it. He would just nip into the sitting room and Floo Minerva in her office. She would set house-elf maintenance on the pipes, and he would be back in business in minutes.

Severus padded through his bedroom and across the sitting room floor, keeping a tight hold on his towel. He reached into the bowl of Floo powder and winced as his fingernails scraped the bottom of the bowl. Empty.

Wasn't that just a pisser?

Ten minutes later, Severus Snape ascended from the dungeons wearing dragonhide boots, emerald, satin lounge pants, a quilted, black satin smoking jacket, and his steel-grey towel, wrapped turban-style around his head. It was post-curfew; any students with the misfortune of wandering the halls after the extended, holiday curfew deserved the nightmares they'd have of their horrible Potions master in his comfies. He ducked into the Hufflepuff corridor and gave the pear a tickle to gain access to the kitchens. Maybe he could just rinse his hair there.

The kitchens were relatively quiet at this time of night, with only a few elves scuttling around doing the next day's baking and prep work. There were usually more elves around, but it was the beginning of a holiday. Maybe they needed fewer workers.

"Potions master be needing something?" asked a passing elf, laden down with a large tray of proofing bread.

"Yes. My shower went out. I need it fixed, but I also need to rinse the shampoo out of my hair," Severus replied.

"Why is Potions master not using Floo-thingy?" the elf inquired a bit suspiciously.

"I'm out of Floo powder."

"Why is Potions master not just calling for elves to help from his rooms?"

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, hoping to ward off the tension headache that was beginning to bloom behind his eyes. "Because Potions master fancied a stroll through the castle in his pyjamas. Just find me a sink, and find someone to fix my shower!"

From behind him, Severus heard an indignant gasp. Indignant gasps involving house-elves could only come from one source.

He glanced over his shoulder. Granger. Oddly enough, Granger in an ensemble very similar to his own minus the towel - and flannel instead of satin.

"Professor Granger. I assure you, I am not accosting the elves for my own pleasure," he snapped, watching with amusement as the bread-elf eyed Granger warily.

"Knitting missy not bringing hats?"

Hermione held out her empty hands. "No hats, Peppy. No scarves, no mittens, no socks. Just me. I was going to run a bath, but the water's out. I thought cocoa would be the next best thing, but nobody came when I called."

Interesting. Apparently, he wasn't the only one who went running for the comfort of hot water to relax.

Peppy scowled and sat the bread down on a nearby counter. "Potions master and Knitting missy sits down and waits," she said, pointing at a set of armchairs. "And you has cocoa and biccies. And you *stays there* and not bothers any elves."

Hermione laughed, sitting down. "I suppose she told us!"

Snape settled himself in the other chair. "Impertinent elves and no hot water on the last day of term. What is the world coming to?"

Hermione smiled and poured two cups of cocoa, handing one to Severus. They sipped in companionable silence for a few minutes, savouring the taste of the cocoa and the quiet hum of the warm kitchens.

"So, Severus, I understand the lounge wear, but why the turban?" Hermione asked after a bit, dunking a reindeer-shaped, spice biscuit into her cocoa.

Snape sighed. He'd hoped Granger would just stay quiet, but it seemed he'd have to put up with small talk. "It seems to be the same problem you had. My shower went cold and then finally off. I was too wrapped up in thinking to notice, and I still have shampoo in my hair. It's starting to get a bit itchy."

"I suppose you tried an Aguamenti, but couldn't get the temperature right? Filius tried for a week to teach me the right twisty-turny squiggle for that, but I couldn't be arsed to remember it. I figured it'd only come in useful for camping, and I am *never* going camping again. Ever," she said with a shudder.

Severus smirked. "There were many things that went on that year that nobody will ever do again," he quipped and reached for a biscuit, only to have the plate disappear under his fingers. "What in the world is going on here tonight!" he snapped, setting his cocoa cup down rather forcefully. "Peppy!"

Peppy came running into the front of the kitchens, her tea-towel askew and the tips of her ears twitching. "Your biccies, more cocoa, and some tea is in Knitting missy's rooms. Potions master's shower pipes is frozen and will take a while to fix. Knitting missy's pipes is all fixed. Elves was... listening to Christmas music on the wireless, is why we didn't hear Knitting missy's call. You leaves kitchens now. You does not come back tonight!"

"Why do I have the feeling something *very* wrong is happening?" Severus muttered.

"Well, I suppose you'd better come up to my rooms and borrow my shower. I can wait a bit longer for a bath," offered Hermione.

Severus thought for a moment. Hermione's company was agreeable, even if she still had to learn the value of a comfortable silence. Besides, she was offering her shower.

"I would very much enjoy the use of your shower, Professor Granger."

A wicked look gleamed in Hermione's eyes. "Or we could just sneak into the prefects' bath," she suggested, tucking her hands in her pockets and strolling out of the kitchen. She glanced over her shoulder. "Were you ever a prefect, Severus?"

To his credit, Severus only stood there slack-jawed for a moment before hurrying to catch Hermione. He suspected she would look rather good in nothing but his towel.