

Man to... Man?

by sara lady dalian

Severus has words with a disgruntled suitor of Hermione's. Words are said, accusations are made and feelings are discovered.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 3

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A/N: This song was written quite a while ago, and some of you may have read it on another archive. Slytherinlaurel has given it an overhaul for me and it came out even better. She is a wonderful beta, and I couldn't repost these without her wonderful assistance. This is one of the first fanfics I ever wrote. It was inspired by the Gary Allen song "Man to Man." It is not a song fic, really, but a recognition of the song's universal situation. This is a three-chapter ficlet from Severus. The next story, "Something to Talk About," will come from Hermione. Both are completely written and will follow in a timely manner.

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The door to the Potions classroom slammed home. And, for once, the surly Potions master was not responsible. Severus Snape, the resident door slammer of Hogwarts, looked up from his pile of second year essays with a frown, wondering who was insolent enough to be slamming his door.

What he saw was a young woman with long brown hair and flashing eyes dumping her unusually heavy school bag on the nearest table with shaking hands. She looked as if she could throw a cast of Unforgivables and burst into tears simultaneously. The incongruity worried him. As powerful as this particular witch was, he very rarely saw or heard of her losing control of her emotions, Draco Malfoy aside.

"Miss Granger. Is there some reason why you feel the need to test the mortar around that door?" His tone held an almost indefinable trace of humor in its sarcasm.

"I have found, Professor, that quickly shutting doors tends to be a good deterrent to most humanoid demons." Even she must have heard the snap in her tone as she turned to face her professor. He could see the mental tally in her mind as she calculated his most likely response to her sardonic levity.

"Is that technique currently being taught in Defense?"

She quirked her head at him, barely allowing her smile to show. "No, Professor. That theory was formed on... personal... observation."

Severus wondered how often she had fought this particular 'humanoid demon' in researching this theory. "Hmmm. I imagine that you have a reason for coming down here now. You have nothing brewing, nor are you scheduled to be doing any for another week."

When she nodded, he noticed that her temper had mutated again to some form of calm fury. However, her eyes were still bright. "I know, Professor. I was hoping you would allow me to start one of my trials this evening."

Severus knew that, theoretically, her experiment was ready to commence, but he was concerned that in her current emotional state, she would not be able to keep her mind on her experiments.

"Your schedule will be kept to, Miss Granger. However," he said, looking down his rather awkward nose, "there are several potions that need to be prepared for tomorrow's third year class. If you are still in need of a 'distraction' from your 'human demon'," and here he sneered at the thought of the *extremely* messy potions that were needed, "you may prepare the more *rudimentary* potions."

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. He could see the calm acceptance, and even gratitude, that rolled through her. She took off her outer robes and draped them across a desk

"That's fine." She followed his eyes to the potions ingredients laid out on the workbench. She sighed silently, getting right to work. To Severus, she seemed in no hurry to leave his dungeons, and he wondered what it was that was keeping her away from Gryffindor. The coolness in the lower part of the castle seemed to fit her mood perfectly.

Professor Snape silently watched the girl over his grading as she went about her tasks. The thought of a goody-goody Gryffindor voluntarily spending time in the dungeons still made him uneasy, but she was different. She was precise, quick and, on nights like this, silent. If there was someone he had to have around, it was good they possessed that third quality.

Though, by the look on her face, he was glad that he was not the one she was directing her anger towards.

It was several hours later when he looked up from his grading and noticed that she had fallen asleep over a book while waiting for the last potion to finish brewing. He stood up, being careful to not scrape the chair across the floor stones. As he hovered over her, he could see her frowning even in her sleep, her eyes moving and twitching as they followed a dream. Clenching his jaw, he scooped her up in his arms, noticing that she was just a little heavier than she looked. The door to his office opened as he approached it. Somehow, it was aware that the master's arms were occupied, and that he could not be bothered with something as trivial as opening a door. Convenient, that, when he had his hands full of ingredients or bottles. The door closed behind him as he stepped through.

He was just covering Hermione with a blanket when he heard his classroom door slam open for the second time that evening.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 3

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He was just covering Hermione with a blanket when he heard his classroom door slam open for the second time that evening.

Severus Snape sneered to himself as he heard his 'visitor.' That boy could wait until Lucius Malfoy grew wrinkles before Snape would hurry with *this* task. He flicked his wand over the girl, and the accumulated potions smears, dribbles and mess on her face and robes disappeared. Another flick lit the fireplace. Yet another dimmed the candles and sconces.

With the unhurried grace that he had perfected over years preying upon unsuspecting Hufflepuffs, he moved from his office – via a door that he now had to open – and into his classroom. As he had suspected there was a rather irate, male Gryffindor standing over Miss Grangers' belongings.

Though most of the students could guess Professor Snape had a temper, very few had ever seen it in full force. Severus had grown very good at hiding the storm that raged inside him, most of the time. But this insolent *Gryffindor* was lowering the walls separating his freckles from Severus' fury very quickly.

"Well, well, if it is not one of the resident Gryffindor dunderheads. Come for a volunteer detention? Gryffindor bravery is certainly strong tonight." The soft, menacing words somehow managed to echo off all the walls of the dungeon, producing an effect similar to Stupefy in its victim. Finally, the tall, lanky young man straightened his shoulders before gathering that same maligned bravery. When he managed to turn around, he faced a Professor who seemed to be oozing more evil than usual.

"I was just..." he paused, reflexively swallowing, "looking for Hermione. We had a d-- meeting this evening, and she didn't come. She missed dinner, too." The boy's eyes were large, bright and slightly dilated.

Black eyes, cold and harsh, bored into the student's. Snape's mind remembered the girl's eyes when she entered his classroom earlier that evening. Whatever the reason that she had not wanted to be with this little... dunderhead... it was something serious. "You have missed her, apparently. When you find her, you may tell your friend that she has lost Gryffindor five points for littering my classroom." Snape sneered at the boy who was now looking more indignant by the second. "And as for you, I suggest you get back to your tower before curfew. If I catch you still about, it will be fifty points from Gryffindor for you *and* whomever you are with."

The boy said nothing else, but clearly wanted to speak the disrespectful thoughts running through his head. His eyes widened and flared; his temper was begging to be let out and given a few minutes reign. However, in one of the smartest moves he had made since first year, he held that temper in check and left the Potions classroom - but not before he slammed the door behind him.

Snape glowered at the door as if he could pierce the boy who had just left. Damn male Gryffindors. They were always acting so... *Gryffindorish*. At the thought of Gryffindors, his mind flashed a picture of the female lying on his office couch. Why she was worth such consideration he did not yet know, but he was finding that she was different from her housemates. She, at least, could keep a civil tongue in her head and had learned how to keep her own mouth shut – most of the time.

He, out of habit, started to bottle the cooled and completed potions and placed her freshly prepared ingredients under a holding charm. In just a few minutes, he was done, but he still did not know what to do about the sleeping girl on his couch. If this were any other student, he would have woken her with a rather rude jinx and sent her about her way with a nice deduction of points. However, as she was not any other student, and the situation was definitely not a normal one, he could not. Minerva was not in the castle now, so he could not send her there.

Severus sighed as he walked back into his office – via a door that once again opened for him and his armful of supplies. As he sat the supplies down on the shelf next to the door, he saw the answer – a flask of a very special potion. A wicked smile appeared on his face. She could go there, and no one would think anything of it.

He walked over to the fireplace and grabbed a handful of Floo powder. Just as he was about ready to throw it in the fire, he saw a burst of green flames. And Albus Dumbledore's head.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 3

What kind of trouble is brewing for Severus in Dumbledore's office? And, more importantly, what will come of what happens?

He walked over to the fireplace and grabbed a handful of Floo powder. Just as he was about ready to throw it in the fire, he saw a burst of green flames.

And Albus Dumbledore's head.

"Ah, Severus. Would you please join us in my office?" Severus could see the Headmaster's eyes roaming the room behind him. It did not take him long to find the sleeping girl on the couch. Something about the Headmaster's quiet appraisal bothered Severus. Albus Dumbledore in this kind of mood could be very dangerous.

"I will be up in a few minutes, Headmaster." He thought to say that he needed to send Hermione on her way, but the Slytherin stopped before the words reached his throat.

"Very well, Severus. Finish up what you were doing and join me as soon as possible." There was that slight hint of 'something' in the older wizard's voice that Severus couldn't identify, something that probably meant trouble.

Snape merely nodded, keeping his expression as stern as he could. This girl was going to cause him a massive headache before the night was over; he had no doubt. Something about her had been bothering him for some time now. He just wished that inkling of... something... would go away.

It did not take long to store the bottles that she had completed or the ingredients she had chopped, diced and pulverized for him. Her work this evening would save him quite a bit of time tomorrow morning. He might even be able to get the last potion done during his first years' class. It would be more effective if used right out of the cauldron, and more satisfying if those little screw-ups had brewed their potions incorrectly. He almost smiled as he thought of the look on Poppy's face as she saw all the children hobbling into the hospital wing.

Just before leaving, he quickly penned a note to Hermione. After placing it on the mantle, he waved his wand at the Fireplace casting the spell to allow Hermione to Floo out. Since she was one of his precious Gryffindors, Severus was sure Lupin would not mind.

That Severus took one last look at the girl sleeping comfortably on his sitting room couch before he left the room was an unconscious gesture, one he almost didn't catch himself doing. He certainly didn't care to ascribe a meaning to the feelings that boiled somewhere in his gut at the sight.

There were times when the trip through the castle took a long time and times when it seemed just a few steps. During Voldemort's nightmarish reign there had been too many of the former. This trip was one of the latter. As he stood at the gargoyle guarding the entrance to Dumbledore's office, he neither remembered what he had thought about in general nor his passage up from the dungeons.

"Twizzler."

Disgusting Muggle sweet. He could only assume that it was the Headmaster's current favorite. Snape had never seen a 'Twizzler', but he had a feeling that would change. Whenever the Headmaster used a new Muggle sweet as his password, he tended to have it located all over his person, on his desk and on whatever food tray he served from appropriate or not. Upon entering the Headmaster's office, he could see his supposition was correct. There was a new tin on his desk with thin, individually wrapped strawberry-red sticks.

The Headmaster was not alone.

"Come in, Severus. We were just discussing a grave matter and wanted your opinion." The Headmaster's words brought about a snort from one of the young men in the room and an elbow in the ribs from the other. Severus only raised his eyebrows.

"What matter would that be, Headmaster?"

The look in Dumbledore's eyes reminded Snape of a snake about to strike at an unsuspecting mouse. It was not a look he liked, especially when he was not sure who was playing the roll of 'mouse'. "Our Head Girl has gone missing, apparently."

"And?"

The snake slithered a little closer to its mouse. "It seems the last place she was known to be is your classroom."

Out of the corner of his eye he could see both young men straighten up, waiting for his answer to that piece of news. Severus, however, kept his peace.

"And you said you hadn't seen her!" His earlier visitor spoke up for the first time though Severus thought it would not be the last time.

Silently, he turned to look the boy in the eyes and was gratified to see the hint of repressed fear bubble there. "I do not recall you asking if I had seen Miss Granger. You stated, I believe, the fact that she had missed an... appointment... as well as dinner. You did not ask her location."

"But you knew what I wanted to know!" His freckles, Severus was silently amused to see, were quickly being camouflaged by a strong red flush.

"If you wish to ask a specific question, please do make sure you use the proper words, boy. I do not care to make suppositions about what little goes on between your ears, so please do not ask me to find out using more... *invasive*... means." His tone lowered until these words were practically whispered, deadly as viper venom.

"Where is she, Professor?" The darker of the two asked him in an almost calm voice.

"Safe from your friend." Severus' voice was still low and lethal. His mind was quickly reviewing Miss Granger's arrival this evening and all the times she had come down to the dungeons after hours. Her emotional state had ranged from confusion to anger, but never ventured into the tender parts of the spectrum. If he had not been in such close proximity to her this year, Severus would not have noticed the change. She certainly had never spoken of it, apart from off-hand remarks similar to her 'humanoid

demon' one earlier in the evening.

"What do you mean, safe from me?" The boy had the gall bring himself toe-to-toe with Snape. "She's been disappearing an awful lot this year, been distant. If I find out you've done something to her, Snape..."

"Mr. Weasley!" Dumbledore stepped between the two wizards standing almost nose-to-nose in his office. "That is enough. You may not threaten a teacher." He laid a hand on each wizard's shoulder. "Severus, I need you to tell Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter where Miss Granger went when she left your classroom."

Severus crossed his arms into his robe and gave the Headmaster an appraising look. He barely caught the slight hint of acceptance and permission in his eyes. Snape knew that the Headmaster had seen Hermione in his office and knew that she was safe. "She fell asleep, exhausted, over the text she was working from, and I put her on a couch so she could rest." Both of the boys in the room processed that news differently. Potter's eyes cleared, showing no emotion; his face cleared as he thought out what the Potions Master had said. Mr. Weasley's eyes narrowed, and his mouth opened at the same time. "Why was she so exhausted? Where is she now?"

Weasley's face cleared as if a puzzle fell into place. "You seduced her. She's going to see you at night. That... whore! What did you do to her?"

The wall that the boy had been pounding on all evening finally broke. The voice that came from Severus' mouth was metered and deadly. "Who do you think you are? What have I done? That is exactly what I want to know of you. For months, Miss Granger has been avoiding you, for reasons she keeps to herself. She takes on midnight patrols almost every night. Before curfew, she is most likely found in the library researching some arcane bit of lore or information until Madame Pince runs her out of the library. Why would that be, Mr. Weasley? Why would she do enough research for two admittance projects? Why would she come into my classroom tonight wanting to work enough to shut out her 'humanoid demons'?" Severus moved closer to the young man who was rooted to the carpet as surely as if he had grown roots. "What happened today? What did you do? More importantly, what did *you* do to *her*?"

Potter looked from his friend to his Professor.

The Headmaster watched them all.

Weasley shook his head. "I love her. You have no right to even look at her twice."

"You love her? Let us just see. If you love her, then we can assume that it was someone else that has been causing the pained look in her eyes all year, someone else that has nearly made her cry." He took one step closer to his adversary, his voice dropping to its most deadly tone. "Someone else who called her a *whore*."

A quick lunge from Mr. Potter kept Mr. Weasley from punching Snape in the face and getting himself expelled.

"I think that has answered the pertinent question, boys. You may return to your dorm room." The Headmaster shoed them out the door before they could say anything else.

"Oh, and Mr. Weasley, do remember what I told you earlier about curfew." Snape's eyes blazed with the desire to take the hundred points from Gryffindor right there as he knew it was past curfew but could not. However, if they continued to roam the corridors...

"Severus, a moment." The Headmaster laid his hand on Snape's arm as he started to walk out of the office.

"Yes, Headmaster?" His voice was weary at this point. He had not meant to show his anger with Mr. Weasley. Now, there were sure to be repercussions that could have been avoided.

"What had you planned to do with Miss Granger?" The dangerous look was back in his eye.

Now, Severus knew that he was in fact the mouse that Dumbledore was planning to catch. "I left her an open Floo connection to Lupin's rooms."

The Headmaster nodded his head. "Yes, he would prove to be an adequate shelter for her." Here he looked Severus in the eye before turning away and back towards the side balcony stairs. "But I think that perhaps she already has sufficient sanctuary in the dungeons." Upon reaching the upper balcony, he turned back to the young wizard. "Be sure you know just why you defended her so admirably this evening, Severus, before you tell her of what happened here. Take some time with the explanation. It might be a stormy encounter."

Severus could only turn his head back to look at Dumbledore as he heard that last bit. He was not quite sure what the Headmaster, his friend, was trying to tell him, but he left the office and made his way back down to the dungeons.

And he was very careful to watch for signs that the Gryffindor boys were still out of their tower.

The walk from the Headmaster's office to the dungeons this time was a long one, giving Severus time to think on what had happened. Emotions were not his gift; he had always known that, but he recognized basic confusion when he and it met. And it was not one of his favorite emotions.

He let himself into his classroom and into his office. Surprisingly, Hermione was still there, asleep on the couch. The note that he had written her was still on the mantle, just where he placed it. The only difference in this scene and the one he left seemed to be his perception. That had changed. How it had changed, he had not yet figured out.

He poured himself a cognac and settled into the chair next to the couch. He could see her face; barely visible above the blanket she had pulled up to her nose. He also had a good vantage point to see the fire, but not catch much of its heat.

He stayed like that long into the night, thinking of the evening that had passed and just what changes it brought for him.

AN: So there you have it. This part of the story is over and done with. Severus has had words with the source of Hermione's unease. However, the revelations of one night can often have far reaching impact. The next part of the story is called "Something to Talk About." It is very intense. The story takes place in 8 chapters, spanning 12 hours time. That POV belongs to Hermione. I hope you all enjoyed this little story and are looking forward to "Something to Talk About." I must say one more word about my beta, slytherinlaurel. She is absolutely fabulous, both as a beta and as a writer. I bow to anyone who will take my work in raw form. Thanks for coming along on the ride. Truffles, Sara.