

Can't Take My Eyes Off You

by sunny33

Severus and Hermione are both feeling disgruntled after the war is over. Especially with each other. Watch the fireworks when they are sent on a special mission together.

Chapter One: Watching

Chapter 1 of 23

Severus and Hermione are both feeling disgruntled after the war is over. Especially with each other. Watch the fireworks when they are sent on a special mission together.

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Chapter One: Watching

Severus

Why am I here again? Wasn't it enough that I nearly fucking died in that gods-forsaken shack? Haven't I paid time and time again for my lousy choices as a teenager? How did Minerva persuade me to act as babysitter for the bloody Golden Trio until the media frenzy dies down? They camped out in the woods for months; surely they can take care of themselves? But, no, "They need watching, Severus. There may be delayed reactions to all the stress they have been under." *They* may have problems. *They* may fall to pieces. I suppose *my* emotional state is irrelevant.

What the hell are they doing now? I swear those three are going to drive me insane. Are those water balloons? I haven't seen those since I went to primary school usually directed at me. A water fight. How fucking puerile. Two weeks ago, they were fighting for their lives against a group of vicious Death Eaters and the most evil dark wizard of the century, and now they are tossing water balloons at each other. Pathetic. Merlin, those squeals would wake the dead, Granger.

I can see why Weasley only ever played Keeper; his aim is dreadful. And Potter is no better. He may be able to catch, but he can't throw. Just as well it didn't take a well-aimed rock to do the job a week ago, or they would all have been smouldering piles of ash. Granger has them completely outclassed.

Yes! Weasley takes it right on his slack-jawed face! That'll teach you to underestimate the know-it-all, boy. She'd probably researched the flight trajectory of water balloons for hours before agreeing to participate. Bloody sycophantic swot.

Ha! Potter collects one right on the chest. I'll bet that was cold; I can see her putting cooling charms on the water as she fills her balloons. The idiots are still wondering why hers are so icy.

Merlin's great, hairy bollocks! They're ganging up on her. That's hardly fair; two great oafs against one slender girl... hmm... woman. She's certainly changed for the better over the last year or so, filled out considerably. I wonder if anyone has told her she should wear a brassiere. On second thoughts, why ruin a good thing? Those breasts are magnificent. Bouncing around under that T-shirt. You know you're an old pervert, don't you, Snape? Don't care. They don't know I'm watching.

Oh, good one, Potter. Right on those delectable... Arrghhh! Nimue, that T-shirt is transparent when it's soaked. Gods, these trousers are getting tight; must stop watching... can't stop watching...

Why is she looking straight up at this window and winking?

Hermione

Got him! Score one to Granger, with the help of the clueless ones. I probably should have told them I was setting Snape up. Ron no doubt thinks I went braless just to give him an eyeful. He'll be all over me like a rash later. Mind you, that might add to Snape's discomfort, but I'm not sure I want to encourage the Wandering Hands of Doom. I think I'll just go upstairs and see if Snape is still in the library before this T-shirt dries off.

Damn, that worked well. Stretching up to get that book off the shelf just behind his chair was a master stroke. I think *he* nearly had a stroke. He certainly let out a groan and covered his lap with his book in an awful hurry. What's the matter, Professor? Got a little problem there? I suppose that could be why he's so miserable. I don't imagine many witches over the years have found their way into *his* bed. Almost feel sorry for the poor fellow. If Ginny and Lavender's reports are anything to go by, wizards seem to need frequent sex to keep them functioning. Mind you, Snape *is* twenty years older than their boyfriends, but that still places him in his prime for a wizard. Perhaps I should lay off teasing him.

It's just so bloody boring, sitting around here all summer.

I know Professor McGonagall is trying to protect us from the media and any still-roaming Death Eaters, and we get plenty of visitors with the Weasleys, the Order, and Dumbledore's Army members, but it's just not the same. After all the funerals and tears it would be nice to get out and forget the last twelve months. It's the first summer for years we haven't been preparing to fight evil, and we are confined to quarters like a bunch of kids. If it weren't for those Oaths we swore when we joined the Order, I'd be out of here and on a beach somewhere. Perhaps we could persuade Snape to chaperone an excursion to the south of France.

Or perhaps not, judging by the filthy look he just sent my way.

Oh, that's right, wet T-shirt still. I'd better go upstairs and change. He's still looking a little flustered and can't seem to sit still. Time to revert back to the annoying know-it-all bookworm he always sees.

That's better. Damp, cold T-shirts really aren't comfortable to wear. I still can't believe I did that. My mother would have killed me. Molly would have killed me. Professor McGonagall would have killed me. Snape looked like he wanted to kill me... or...

I wonder why Snape has been such a foul-tempered, uptight arse since he's been staying here. Even more so than usual. Voldemort and Dumbledore are dead; he's been offered his old job back, and his name has been cleared. He's even been given a medal or two. I'd thought he would loosen up a little. Hogwarts is under repair, and his own house was burned down by some anti-Death Eater vigilantes, so it was damned nice of Harry to invite him to stay here. Not sure what Professor McGonagall said to convince him though, as he certainly doesn't seem happy about it. Mind you, he never seems happy about anything, except taking points off Gryffindor and awarding detentions. Git. I suppose when school starts up again and he can start stalking around the halls terrorising students, he'll get over his snit and revert to his usual merely unpleasant self.

He might have had a job to do during the war, and coddling his Slytherins while treating the rest of us like dragon dung was part of his cover, but he seemed to relish it far too much. I know now he suffered from unrequited love for Harry's mum for years and felt guilty about her death, but that was twenty years ago. Most *normal* people would have moved on. And I realise he can't help it if his hair is greasy and his teeth are crooked, but with a little more effort on his part he could look much more presentable.

Snape's an intelligent, well-read man. He suffered social isolation, physical deprivation, and near death to help get rid of Voldemort, but my Potions professor is never going to be a nice man. I don't think he has it in his genes. Gods, I'll be pleased to get back to Hogwarts. I'll only really have to see him in Potions class there. I swear, I've been put off breakfast for life, having to share the kitchen table with that ill-tempered bastard. At least, in the Great Hall the staff sits at the other end of the room; they can enjoy the delights of Severus Snape's morning sulk instead.

Oh, no, here come the boys. Totally drenched of course and dripping on the carpet. Are they wizards or not? Honestly, boys! Bloody macho men can fight evil madmen but have no idea how to use a simple Drying Charm. I've obviously spoiled them. They're in for a surprise this year at school. No more Miss Nice Witch. They can do their own homework. If they want to be Aurors, they'll have to learn to work unsupervised and do their own research.

Severus

Fuck! Caught peering over Granger's breasts. I'll never live this down. I hope she's not feeling vindictive. Any hint of this and I can kiss my job goodbye. Not that I really want to go back to teaching lack witted ingrates, but there were no better offers. Obviously, an Order of Merlin is not sufficient recommendation when it is accompanied by a nasty tattoo on the left arm.

Bloody hell, what's she doing in here? That white T-shirt is even more transparent close up. I do believe she may be a little cold, if those erect nipples are any indication.

Mmm. Dark caramel, placed atop wonderfully rounded, bouncing breasts that are just the right size. And they are two feet away from my face. Does she *really* need a book from that particular shelf? Oh, gods, I hope she doesn't notice my trousers are bursting at the seams. Fuck, the weight of the book rubbing against me is *not* helping.

Thank Merlin, she sat down. Why does she keep looking at me that way? She can't tell I'm about to explode in my boxers, can she? If she doesn't take her know-it-all arse and her delectable breasts upstairs soon, she might learn more about me than she ever wanted to know.

It's a pity she's such an irritating, self-righteous chit of a witch. Between Granger and the two academic freeloaders she sponsors with her prodigious brain, I'm sure my life next term is going to be hell. All three of them in Advanced Defence. I couldn't ask for a better welcome back gift. I know, Potter got rid of the Dark Bastard and was instrumental in obtaining my release from custody before I even regained consciousness, but he is still an abominably annoying prat. And the redheaded berk is completely oblivious to Granger's lack of interest in his groping. Although, why I'm interested in Granger's love life is beyond me. I do fancy her tits though. And she is intelligent and appears to be one of the few women I've met who devours books as I do. Give her a few years, and she might eventually grow up and become less overbearing.

No, make it ten.

Finally, she's gone. Now, Locking and Silencing Charms on the door. Gods, I can barely get these buttons undone. Ahh, that's better. Mmm... oh, yes... faster, Sev... yes... yes... YESS!

So much for that.

I'd be mortified at not lasting more than a minute, if time wasn't of the essence. A quick Cleansing Charm. There, all tucked away and back to proper professorial demeanour. Cool, calm, collected, and not at all interested in the bountiful assets of one of my students. Especially not *that* student. Minerva would kill me. Molly would kill me. Hell, most of the Order would kill me.

There they are. The two drips. Literally. Sev, *you* kill me with your wit sometimes. Ha. She's ordering them around as officiously as Molly on a good day.

Take that, you prats.

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Some readers might recognise the first part, which was a drabble I posted some time ago. I challenged myself to write a multichaptered story using only Severus and Hermione's train of thought and unembellished dialogue without any accompanying narrative.

Many thanks to ladyinthecloak for her beta skills and the girls at work, who all helped in various ways.

Chapter Two: Under Orders

Chapter 2 of 23

Hermione and Severus are summoned by Kingsley for a special mission.

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Chapter Two: Under Orders

Hermione

Now what? I finally get rid of the boys upstairs so I can have some peace and quiet to read, and someone sends a bloody owl. At this hour.

Come on, you stupid bird, hand it over! Yes, it's only a crust of bread, but what do you expect with those two human waste-disposal units living here. And the other one is almost as bad.

Give. It. Here! Damned uppity Ministry owls. Think everyone owes them a free lunch.

What the hell does Kingsley want with us at this hour of the night? Oh, for heaven's sake, I'll have to go and wake him up. That'll go down well, I'm sure. I'll be lucky not to be hexed just for having the temerity to come within three feet of his bloody door. Well, he'd better not mess with me. Nothing more dangerous than a witch with PMS.

Wake up, Snape! I've been knocking for ages. Wonder if he has a Silencing Charm up?

Wonder *why* he has a Silencing Charm up?

The dirty bastard!

How could he?

Okay, maybe after that display I gave earlier he could. Eww. The git is in there doing *that* while thinking of my breasts. Eww!

Ha. That'll fix him.

Severus

Wet T-shirt. Acceptable, Miss Granger.

Full, bouncing tits. Definitely Exceeds Expectations, Miss Granger.

Incredibly pert nipples. Outstanding, Miss Granger!

Just as well I remembered to use a Silencing Charm. Wouldn't want the bountifully-breasted pain in the arse or her sidekicks to know I was doing this. Again.

Oh, what the fuck is *that* doing in here?

Stop playing with yourself, Snape, and get out here. Kingsley wants to see us. Now!

Merlin! Even her damned Patronus is bossy. And how did she know? Oh. Silencing Charm. Way to be obvious, Sev. Why didn't you just put a sign on the door? "Professor Wanking. Keep Out."

All right. All right. I'm coming! Or would have been if you hadn't interrupted. Give me a minute to get my clothes on, or you'll get more than you bargained for.

Tempting. Might shut her up for once. No, I'd better not. Can't afford to be reported to the Board of Governors for flashing the sweet, innocent students. Innocent my bony arse.

"WHAT?"

"No need to shout, Professor. I'm right here."

"That's the bloody problem. *Why* are you right here?"

"There's still no need to be rude."

"It's one o'clock in the morning, and I was busy... Oh, stop sniggering, girl. What do you want that cannot wait until a decent hour?"

"Kingsley sent us a message. He wants to see us urgently."

"Oh, for fuck's sake. That man is such a drama queen! Nothing could be *that* urgent."

"He obviously thinks so. Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Are you coming, *sir*?"

"I wish I was."

"What was that? I didn't quite catch it."

"Never mind, Miss Granger."

"You want us to do WHAT?"

"Now, calm down, Severus. It's not that bad. Compared with your previous spying missions, this will be nice and easy."

"Nice and easy? With a brash, Gryffindor know-it-all, who is likely to blow her own cover and mine within the first twenty-four hours? I think not. And how are we supposed to track down the source of illegal magic without using any of our own? That's ridiculous!"

"What about my N.E.W.T.s? I can't just disappear off to some Muggle boarding school for a term and miss all those classes. And how on earth will I fit in there? I haven't done their subjects for years!"

"I'm sure Hermione is capable of maintaining her cover, Severus. She is Muggle-born, after all. She'll probably be able to give you some pointers. The Muggle world is no longer the same as it was twenty years ago. And, Hermione, I have spoken to the headmistress, and she has reassured me you are so far ahead already a term elsewhere will not affect your final scores.

"I've looked into the Muggle curriculum, and you only need to take the minimum three subjects at that level. I suggest English, which is mainly literature based. I'm sure with your love of reading and writing essays... Don't snort, Severus... Mathematics is similar to Arithmancy without the magical component and with a little revision over the next month or so should be easily within your capabilities. Finally, I believe you are quite talented with the flute. You should know enough theory to take Music as a subject."

"But, only *three*?"

"Hermione. You will not be there to prove your brilliance. With only three subjects to study, you will have more free time to investigate the problem. You don't even need to excel. In fact, I would prefer you did not stand out from your peers. With a little magical intervention, we can create an educational record and exam results, but we do not want any curious Muggles looking too closely at them."

"And me, Shackbolt? I hope you have not assumed I will be up to teaching Muggle Chemistry? While some of the concepts are similar to Potions, the subjects are quite disparate."

"Oh, no, Severus. You will be the new Music master. Miss Granger, were you aware Severus here is quite the virtuoso on the saxophone? Not something he willingly admits, but nevertheless, his skill and knowledge of music will stand him in good stead for this assignment. Not only can he openly carry around his wand, disguised as his favourite conducting baton, but who would expect a wizard to excel in such a Muggle endeavour?"

"You appear to be taking great delight in revealing some of my best kept secrets, Shackbolt. And you see fit to subject me to Miss Granger in yet another classroom."

"All the better for you two to communicate any findings. Luckily for the mission, Muggles do not have the Victorian attitude to education we see at Hogwarts. For you to be seen to be friendly with Miss Granger will not appear unusual in the least. Mentoring is very common in their system, and as two newcomers it will seem natural if you take more interest in her."

"And exactly *what* is so entertaining, Miss Granger?"

"Oh, nothing, sir."

"Spit it out, woman. You obviously have some ludicrous thought running through that infernal brain of yours."

"I just... I just..."

"What?"

"I just realised you will have to be a lot *nicer* to the students than you are used to, sir. If you don't want to stand out, that is. I have a couple of cousins at Muggle boarding schools, and while they are a little more formal than the local comprehensives, the teachers are generally reasonably approachable and friendly."

"Oh, tremendous. Not only am I stuck with this insufferable chit, I have to be *nice* to her!"

"Only in public, sir. Feel free to be your usual charming self in private. One other thing. Detentions are usually only an hour and just involve writing lines or doing an essay. No cauldron or other scrubbing. And no docking of House points."

"Splendid, Hermione. I can see you will be a fount of information for Severus over the next few weeks."

"Fantastic. No points deductions. Where's the fun in that?"

Hermione

Bloody Magical Law Enforcement. All those Aurors and they can't manage to get into a bloody school to track down some supposedly illegal magic. What's the use of training those people about undercover work if they go to pieces as soon as Muggles are involved? Unless they can *Obliviate* them, they run for cover!

Trust Kingsley to remember Snape was a Half-blood. Now, I'm stuck with the sod for a whole term or longer. Partners, he said. Sure. When would Snape ever see me as an equal? Wonder what colour the sky is on Planet Shackbolt? Purple? Perhaps he's been sucking on an old stash of Dumbledore's lemon drops.

And what's in it for me? Another chance for glory? Ha! I've had enough of that tripe to last a lifetime. Let me see. I get to spend quality time with Severus Snape, miss a whole term of Hogwarts classes, and learn Muggle subjects, which might be interesting but no bloody use to me. All the while skulking about without using magic while trying to find someone else who conveniently has a wand at their disposal. Fan-bloody-tastic!

I suppose there's one bonus. Snape has to behave. That'll be fun to watch. No more stalking around tormenting students day and night. He'll have to be polite and reasonable. I wonder if he knows how? He might blow a gasket just trying. I'm so sick and tired of his foul temper.

Damn, he found me. What does he want now? Can't he see I'm trying to sulk in peace? Honestly, you'd think he was the only one who had his plans disrupted the way he is carrying on. Pillock. As if you were really looking forward to another year teaching dunderheads, Snape. They say a change is as good as a holiday.

I can't believe he can play the sax. Such a mellow instrument. And what did Kingsley say? A virtuoso.

I'll believe *that* when I hear it.

Snape

Fucking Kingsley fucking Shackbolt! Fucking blithering idiots who can't do a simple job, just because it involves Muggles! And who the hell had the inspired idea of shackling me to the Granger chit for a term? Fantastic tits notwithstanding, she'll drive me to drink within a week. Fucking know-it-all, overachieving, hand waving Gryffindor. Partner? I don't think so. Give that girl an inch, she'll take a mile. If I start treating her as an equal, she'll want tea and crumpets and a nice chat every Sunday.

A quick shag on the hearthrug, perhaps...

No, I did *not* just think that. Quick, Sev, think of something else. That's it... settle... settle... find your inner rage.

A music teacher! What, does he really believe it's so easy? I can read a little music. I can play music. I've read a lot *about* music. But to teach it to a bunch of precocious brats who have probably been playing their instruments since their mothers wiped their noses for them...

Fuck. I'll have to find a few books.

I don't suppose there are any in the library. Great. Miss Squeaky Clean is lurking in here. Shouldn't you be out playing with your little friends, Granger? Oh, how I am going to enjoy watching you have to behave as if you are merely an average student. It'll make your blood boil. I can see the pout already.

So, she can play the flute. Perfectly, no doubt. Cocky little bint.

I'll believe *that* when I hear it.

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Band Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to ladyinthecloak for her beta skills.

Chapter Three: Planning the Mission

Chapter 3 of 23

Hermine and Severus reluctantly plan their new identities.

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Chapter Three: Planning the Mission

"You look displeased, Miss Granger. I would have thought the extra challenge this assignment provides would suit you perfectly."

"I'm sure with a considerate and like-minded partner, it would be an interesting and exciting mission. However, I have you."

"Tut, tut, Miss Granger. I should deduct points for insolence."

"Tough. We're not going back to Hogwarts next term, and it's the holidays. You can deduct all the points you want. It's your breath you're wasting, not mine. Now, was there anything *important* you wished to discuss, *sir*?"

"*Our* task. And make no mistake, Miss Granger, I am no more enamoured of the idea than you. So I suggest you adjust your attitude and listen."

"*My* attitude? I'm not the one who's been stalking around the house seething for the last four weeks. We are stuck here against our will as well, but *we* are trying to make the best of it."

"And that includes a slanging match with Weasley at lunch?"

"Ron was being a prat. As usual. I'd just told him we had been ordered to go undercover instead of going to Hogwarts as planned, and he went ballistic. Said I couldn't be his girlfriend if I went away. I don't want to be the daft prat's girlfriend! I'm being forced to abandon my education, all but abandon my magic, and spend three months associating closely with *you!* And my fucking monthly is due, if you must know!"

"Oh."

"Yes, that's right. Typical male. One hint of PMS and they run and hide. Good riddance!"

"Here. Try this."

"What is it? Don't you think poisoning me is a bit obvious?"

"Just drink it, you sharp-tongued harridan. It helps relieve the symptoms of PMS."

"Why are you being nice to me? Getting in practice?"

"Miss Granger, I just need to be able to have a discussion about our task without you transforming into a screaming fishwife every time I say something. Tell me, do Potter and Weasley have to put up with this every month?"

"No. They've learned to bring me chocolate. Lots of chocolate. But as certain people around here won't even let us set foot out of the door..."

"There, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Ah. That's better. Didn't even taste revolting."

"Not everything I brew tastes bad."

"No, just ninety-nine percent of it. What was it you used to tell us about imbuing potions with your own magic as you brew? Perhaps personality has an effect too?"

"Perhaps. Nevertheless, this does not address the task we need to perform. As Kingsley said, I will be installed as the Music master, and you will be enrolled as a sixth year student taking the minimum number of subjects required. He has arranged for me to be accommodated in a staff cottage very close to your boarding house. As such, we should be able to arrange discreet meetings for you to report any findings. We're to avoid using any magic, so as not to alert whomever it is causing the magical disruption.

"They have an appalling lack of information, just that someone is performing magic within the main school building, and the wand is not traceable to any registered source. To date, they do not even know whether the magic performed is for good or nefarious purposes, or whether it is a staff member or a student. We will need to be very alert to any traces of magic and follow any suspicious persons nearby until we find the witch or wizard responsible."

"Could it be someone unknown to Hogwarts manifesting uncontrolled magic?"

"Unlikely. The analysis of the pattern suggests it is controlled, wand-driven magic, and the register at Hogwarts has not missed an incipient witch or wizard yet. Not all of them attend the school, but they are tracked from the moment they first manifest."

"Ew. Big Brother is watching you. Never mind, Muggle reference."

"I have read Orwell. I was simply surprised at you using it in that context. Magical children are monitored simply to keep them and their friends and families safe."

"That was the justification for Big Brother. I see little difference. A paternalistic bureaucracy maintaining the power in the system by controlling the lives and choices of the individual."

"I'm not discussing ethics and morality with an eighteen-year-old, Miss Granger. Can we get back to the topic in hand?"

"Perhaps you should take a potion yourself, sir. For that headache."

"How did you know I..."

"I think the way you were frowning and rubbing your temples might have been a slight giveaway."

"I wouldn't have a headache if I didn't have to deal with infernal, Gryffindor..."

"Now, Professor. There's no need to be insulting!"

"Fine. We shall continue this conversation another time."

"Certainly, sir."

Hermione

Now, what was that all about? First, he brings me a potion, obviously freshly brewed, and then we manage a discussion without coming to too many verbal blows? Is there something wrong with him? I was just beginning to enjoy winding him up. Much more entertaining than, "Yes, Professor Snape, sir. No, Professor Snape, sir," all the time. He *almost* seemed to be enjoying it too while we were with Kingsley. Bloody men, they're all the same. Just when you think you're beginning to understand them, they change their behaviour. Bastards.

I suppose I have to accept it. I'm going undercover with one of the most unpleasant men I know, and there's not a thing I can do about it. If nothing else, I'll get some fun watching Snape play Muggle. Pity I don't own a video camera.

Look at him. All trussed up in those wizarding robes as if it was the middle of winter. You'd think he'd melt if any skin was exposed. He's going to look quite different in Muggle clothing.

Snape

Damn. Did I just allow the little brat to scold me? I must be losing my touch. And she keeps insulting me as if she has forgotten I'm her professor. Fucking impertinent witch. Although her analogy using Orwell was surprisingly insightful for her age, if not a little cynical.

I'd better get used to her change of attitude. Sounds like it would be acceptable behaviour in the Muggle school, although why they would tolerate such disrespect is beyond me. They need to start awarding proper detentions and other punishments, or the children will run riot.

There she is, chewing her lip and frowning as usual. What's the matter, Granger, the thought of being Miss Average too much for your ego?

What the hell is she laughing about? There's no-one else in the room but me. She was studying me, the chit. What's so funny, Granger?

"Excuse me, sir. I have a question."

"I know."

"What do you mean, you know?"

"You always have a question. Or two. Or fifty."

"That is uncalled for, Professor. I simply..."

"Have plagued me with questions from your very first Potions class. Why would now be any different?"

...

"All right. What is it?"

"Names."

"Names?"

"Names. Kingsley told us to think of appropriate names to use and let him know by today. Have you had any ideas?"

"How difficult can it be? I'll be... Right. I see your point."

"We need to keep the same initials, so if we slip up it'll be less obvious. And it will make it easier if we have to sign anything."

"I do not plan to *slip up*."

"Nevertheless, however *remote* the possibility, it still needs to be considered."

"Very well. I shall be Stephen Sneyd, and you shall be Harmony Grant."

"Harmony? What sort of name is that?"

"It's close enough to Hermione so a slip won't be noticed, and you can always tell anyone who asks your parents were peace-loving hippies."

"You are hardly likely to slip up and call me Hermione, sir."

"I was thinking more of when you are introducing yourself, Miss Granger, and when your name is called. It will be easier for you to answer to something that sounds similar to your own name."

"But Stephen does not sound like Severus, sir."

"Sneyd, however, is similar to Snape. I do not encourage familiarity, even from my colleagues, Miss Granger."

"Which is fine at Hogwarts, Professor, but this is a Muggle school. If you expect to blend in, you will need to use your first name with the staff. How about Sebastian?"

"Do I *look* like a Sebastian?"

"Er... no. Selwyn? Sefton? Hmm. No. I suppose not. I've got it! Seth. That's a nice, simple name. Manly even. Don't roll your eyes, sir. It's not polite. Besides, I think Seth suits you."

"And who am I to argue with the Gryffindor know-it-all. Seth it shall be."

"You chose my name, so it's fair. And don't call me a know-it-all!"

"Why not?"

"It's not nice."

"Miss Granger, no-one ever suspected me of being nice."

"You can say that again."

Hermione

Bugger!

I forgot Kingsley told me to take him shopping and get his hair seen to. I can see it now, Snape stalking around the department store, snarling at anyone who comes near and wanting everything in black. Well, I've got news for you, laddie, and it's all bad!

Okay. I really shouldn't take pleasure in that.

But I shall.

A music teacher. Hmm. They are usually nerdy, socially inept types or bohemian geniuses. He needs to gather information, so the nerd is out. Snape, you're in real trouble now.

Calm down, Hermione. He's back and watching you again. Laughing to yourself will only raise the paranoid git's suspicions. Not that he wouldn't be justified. Hell, I'd be suspicious of me if I started chuckling evilly to myself in front of others.

That's better. Serene, undisturbed, mature.

Snape in jeans and a scruffy T-shirt with a slogan scrawled across his chest. No. The school wouldn't allow that. Nice image, though. He'd look good in tight jeans.

I did *not* just think that.

...

So, nerd's out, bohemian's out, what to do?

Herms, you idiot, he plays the sax! He needs to be cool, have his own style, smooth. Like to see him pull *that* little bit of acting off. I know just the place to shop. All I have to do is to get him to co-operate. Splendid.

Wonder what he's thinking? His cheeks are awfully red.

Snape

Oh, fuck. I have to take her shopping. Or rather, she has to supervise my clothing purchases. What's she going to do? Measure my inside leg?

Down, boy. She's *not* going to be there.

I need to get laid. Badly.

"So, Professor, when do we go shopping?"

"There's no rush. We have six weeks before term starts to organise our affairs."

"I thought you might need some time to get used to your new clothes and hairstyle."

"Hairstyle? No-one said anything about changing my *hair!*"

"But, sir. Male teachers in Muggle schools, especially boarding schools, simply don't have long hair, unless they are ageing hippie art-teachers. Would you like to use that look?"

"Don't play the innocent with me, girl. You know perfectly well I have to blend in."

"Then, we'll need to get your hair cut, and probably a little grey wouldn't go amiss. By the time most Muggles have reached their forties they usually have a few grey hairs."

"Thirty-eight."

"Pardon?"

"I'm not in my forties, I'm *thirty-eight!*"

"Sorry, sir. My mistake. Actually, that's better. Fits the idea I had."

"*What* idea? I don't suppose it involves a tattoo or two? They seem to go along with most jobs I get myself into."

"I hardly think tattoos would be appropriate. No, I was thinking along the lines of smooth and stylish. It's a fairly posh boarding school, but you'll be a music teacher, so you'll hardly be expected to belong to the conservative suit and tie brigade. What about some dark, well-fitted trousers, a coloured shirt, and a pinstriped waistcoat? Of course, your dragon-hide boots will work perfectly as they are."

"And the tie?"

"No tie. Seth Sneyd is far too cool to wear a tie. Your hair could be a little shorter, perhaps to the base of your neck and layered back off your face with a little length over your forehead, just enough to be stylishly tousled. Of course, you would actually need to *wash* it and use something to..."

"Miss Granger, you are coming perilously close to the edge of my tolerance. My hair is greasy naturally. It *is* washed regularly. What you see is what you get."

"Oh, for heaven's sake. Are you a Potions expert or not? Even I could create a simple degreasing shampoo. You just don't want to make the effort. Are you afraid someone might actually *like* you if you improved your appearance? Never mind. Don't answer that.

"Now, for weekends and such, you'll need casual clothes. A good pair of jeans, T-shirts, and a black waistcoat should do it."

"Why are you so obsessed with waistcoats, Miss Granger?"

"Simple, really. We can use that as your 'signature' look. By always wearing a waistcoat, it becomes a point of difference, but focuses people's attention on the waistcoat, not you."

"Very clever, but I was planning to remain unobtrusive. Dressing outlandishly is hardly conducive to subtlety. You obviously have a lot to learn about spying."

"And you have a lot to learn about Muggles. I shall be the average student wearing uniform and blending in with the others while listening and watching for any information. You, however, will be the distraction the bait, as it were. While everyone is talking about the groovy, new music teacher, I can sniff around a bit in the background. And if you can *manage* to act cool and laid back, you might find other staff members actually *talk* to you. If you turned up dressed as yet another boring, ordinary teacher, it could take weeks to develop any decent contacts. This way, you will make an impact, which should draw the female staff if nothing else. And I'll bet they will be your best source of information about any strange occurrences."

"When you said bait you really meant it, didn't you? I'm not sure I can live up to your expectations, Miss Granger. There's only so much improvement to be gained."

"Oh, bollocks. With the right hairstyle and clothes and a *smile*, you'd be surprised. Just make sure your true personality doesn't surface... sir."

"I assure you, I have been acting a role since before *you* were born. I do not doubt I could perform adequately. Your plan does have some merit, Miss Granger. However, I reserve the right of final approval of any clothing choices; is that clear?"

"Perfectly, professor."

Hermione

Well, that was interesting. Taking a professor shopping was hardly what I would have expected to be doing over summer, especially *him*. I wonder what was going through that convoluted mind of his when the shop assistant was measuring him. I thought he was going to pull out his wand when the girl measured his inside leg.

Lucky bitch.

Oh, bloody hell, there I go again. Must stop thinking lewd thoughts about the git. It's unnatural!

He did well, really, despite the fact he looked mortified ninety percent of the time. Half a dozen shirts and not one of them black. Even a red one, which looked damned good on him. I'm having a nasty, Gryffindor influence on his wardrobe. *Three* waistcoats. I think he quite liked them. He'd never admit to it, though.

I can't believe he bought jeans. Or what a nice, tight arse he has. Snape of all people. Pity I can't tell anyone. Not that they'd believe me, anyway.

The haircut looks good. Makes him look far more Muggle. He'll never be a cover model, but at least he looks halfway decent now. Getting it off his face was half the battle. Wonder if he'll keep it short when he gets back to Hogwarts? I'm beginning to think we might just succeed at this ridiculous mission, after all.

Snape

Oh, gods, that was the most embarrassing afternoon of my life. Having my inside leg measured by a young girl was so unseemly. And all Granger could do was grin inanely. Then, she chooses the most impractical coloured shirts. How can I hide potions splashes on light-coloured shirts?

Oh, right.

No potions.

Fucking know-it-all.

I think I surprised her with the jeans. Caught her ogling my bum in the mirror. Ha! Consider that payback for the wet T-shirt incident, witch. Don't know about the hair. It's a bit hard to hide behind when it's short and combed back. I like the waistcoats, though. Makes the Professor look stylish. I should dress this way when I return to Hogwarts. That would shock them all. Maybe Minerva would stop harping on about my appearance. Not that it makes any difference to Granger's bossy, overbearing attitude.

Has she always been this bad?

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. I challenged myself to write a multichaptered story using only Severus and Hermione's train of thought and unembellished dialogue without any accompanying narrative.

Many thanks to ladyinthecloak for her beta skills and the girls at work, who all helped in various ways.

Chapter Four: Studying Together

Chapter 4 of 23

Hermione and Severus prepare for their mission.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were, I wouldn't share!

Chapter Four: Studying Together

Hermione

Why didn't I carry on at a Muggle school? Mathematics is so simple compared with Arithmancy. I don't know why my cousin makes such a fuss about it. Well, I think I've covered the entire syllabus for the two years prior to sixth year. Now, where's that reading list for English?

Read it.

Read it.

Ooh. That was a good one. Loved that book. Read it five times.

Read it.

Shakespeare. *Please*. My parents named me Hermione for a reason. I was reading *that* when I was eight.

Poetry. Mmm, my favourites.

What? Is *this* all they expect the standard of punctuation and grammar to be? Even Harry and Ron can do better than this... on a good day... with no Quidditch matches coming up.

Snape looks confused. Perhaps teaching Music may be more difficult than he thinks. Nice to know he isn't perfect at everything. I should think of him as Seth... I mean Mr Sneyd.

Seth sounds better...

Okay. Enough daydreaming. Music then. I'd better brush up on my theory. It was a while ago. To work, Hermione, or rather, Harmony.

Snape

I wish I'd learned some theory when I was younger. Look at her. Miss Fucking Everything Comes So Easily Granger. I'd like to hex that smug expression off her face.

I wonder what she is thinking about. That smile is very... enticing.

No. Not enticing.

Back to work Sev. Seth. Whatever.

Dammit. I'll just have to use the patented Snape glare if anyone asks any awkward questions and look up the answer later. Of course, I could concentrate on the practical part of the syllabus; let the next guy cover the theory. That's it. I'll make them all practice for a recital.

Go on, Miss Granger. You study the theory well. With any luck your ability to memorise the book will come in very handy.

Oh, Merlin, here she comes. Probably to show off how much she already knows.

"Professor... er... Mr Sneyd?"

"Yes, *Harmony*."

"What exactly are you planning to teach my class this term?"

"As little as possible, if I get my way."

"Pardon?"

"A little of this and a little of that."

"Oh. Finding it difficult, then?"

"Don't be impertinent!"

"Well, don't pretend you know anything about musical theory. You learned by ear, didn't you?"

"What? You've mastered Legilimency in the last few days as well? Why am I not surprised?"

"No. I could tell by the way you've been scowling. If you are as fine a player as Kingsley says and learned the traditional way, this stuff would be easy. So, you must be a natural."

"Well. My parents could not afford fancy lessons. I had a second-hand saxophone and some old records. Which is more than you need to know. Hell, Kingsley has no idea."

"Why didn't you tell him you had no theoretical background? Oh. Right. You're Professor Severus Snape, Potions master, Defence master, superspy, expert at all things. Wouldn't do to admit a flaw, would it, sir? Oh, stop glaring. That hasn't worked on me since fifth-year. You really ought to try a new technique."

"You are impossible, girl. Impossible and disrespectful and insubordinate. I've a good mind to Floo Kingsley and call this mission off."

"Don't be so daft. You know he wouldn't have ordered us to do this unless he had no other choice. Now, do you want help with that theory or not?"

"How do you think you are going to help *me*? You are not even a real senior music student yourself, let alone a teacher. You are forgetting your place, Miss Granger!"

"Harmony. You have to practise calling me that. I spent six years learning music theory from an excellent teacher and was several levels ahead of my age when I went to Hogwarts. I've also read a lot over the last few years in my spare time. This syllabus for sixth year is mostly work I covered years ago. Nothing there I can't handle. So, let's get to work. Tell me what you know already, and we'll go from there."

"*You plan to teach me?*"

"*You have a better idea?*"

"No."

"Then?"

"All right. I give in. Pass on your wisdom, Madam."

"Do I get to set homework?"

"Don't push your luck."

"Spoilsport!"

Hermione

Snape is such a prat. I think he's worse than the boys when it comes to ducking work. There I was, thinking he was a bigger swot than me, and it turns out he'd rather read novels than texts. Unless it's about Potions or Defence. And Dark Arts probably. No wonder he was crap at Transfiguration. It's all in the theory. He says he's a *hands-on learner*. Bet he read that in a Muggle book. I swear if he makes one more excuse to avoid reading the theory text, I'm going to hit him on the head with the damned thing.

What's that? Music?

For the love of Merlin, how can such a black-hearted bastard make music so sweet? I know Kingsley said he was a virtuoso, but I thought he was exaggerating. He's playing that saxophone like it was a woman's body, all delicate caresses and subtle nuances of movement. And the look on his face.

Bliss.

Gods, he looks so much younger.

I bet he has no idea I'm watching. He'd hate it.

Snape knows Cole Porter? Perhaps he has some redeeming features, after all. Oh, that's good. Casting a charm to provide the percussion makes all the difference. Must ask him for that spell one day when he's in a good mood. Or at least not such a foul mood.

Where is it? Ah. There.

Let's see what he thinks of this.

Snape

Fucking bossy brat. Who does she think she is? It's no wonder those idiots used to complain about her obsessive studying. She's going to drive me to an early grave. Not that I haven't tried myself, but some idiot decided to revive me. Damn. Could be decomposing quietly, minding my own business instead of being harassed to read a book which tells me nothing I want to know. Fucking Kingsley Shacklebolt. Fucking Music teacher. What was he thinking?

To hell with it. Where's my sax? I'm sure I picked it up from my quarters.

Ah. That's better. It's been too long. Playing always did help me relax.

Feel the music, Miss Granger. Forget the theory just feel.

I've got you under my skin. I've got you deep in the heart of me...

So the know-it-all can play. Let's try a little Sinatra.

Not bad, Granger. Can you follow this riff?

Smart arse.

Now she thinks she can lead. Go on, Granger, do your worst.

Oh, fuck. Why would she choose *that* song?

"Wow. That was fantastic. I haven't played with anyone for years! Did you develop those variations yourself?"

"No fancy music teacher, Miss Granger. Remember?"

"Well, I can see why Kingsley raves about your playing, sir. It was brilliant! No, seriously. You can do things with a saxophone I've never seen done before."

"Indeed."

"I have one question, though."

"Of course you have. You are conscious and retain the power of speech."

"Oh, piss off, you prat. Shouldn't that Cole Porter song be played in a higher key?"

"Language, Miss Granger! I was not aware there were hard and fast rules about the key to be used in an individual piece of music."

"But the sheet music specifies it."

"Has it escaped your notice I do not use sheet music?"

"No, but..."

"Not everything has to be done by the book. Just let yourself feel the music. It's like creating a potion."

"I suppose if you'd had the sheet music, you would have scribbled notes in the margins on how to improve it. Bloody arrogant..."

"Nothing is immutable, Miss Granger. Except perhaps your attitude."

"My attitude? I'm not the one who thinks he can do better than some of the best musicians in history. You. Are. Bloody. Arrogant!"

"I suggest you keep your impertinent hands to yourself, young lady."

"Well, you keep your enormous nose out of my face!"

"I'll not be told what to do by an insolent chit like you!"

"Fuck off, Snape!"

"Er. Hermione?"

"What!"

"You do remember you'll be back at Hogwarts after Christmas?"

"And, your point?"

"So will Professor Snape. Do you really want to lose every point Gryffindor has accumulated as soon as you walk in the door?"

"Snape will get over it."

"Hermione, what's got into you? You refer to him as Snape after telling us off for years for the same. You insult him, swear at him, and poke him in the chest. I know you're stressed about this assignment, but even *I* know you shouldn't do that!"

"Oh, toughen up, Harry. He's been obnoxious since the moment he walked through that front door. I thought once the war was over, and he didn't need to pretend to be a Death Eater any more, his temper would improve, but he's still the same mean, unfair git he always was. I'm sick of being the good girl and behaving. If he doesn't like to hear the truth, it's his problem."

"Come on, Hermione. He hasn't been so bad lately. You've just been spending too much time together preparing for this mission. I really thought you two had made peace when I heard you playing together before."

"That's half the problem, Harry. One minute he's almost pleasant, witty, and relaxed. The next, he starts insulting me again. I never know where I stand."

"From where *I* stand, it seems you're both guilty of that. Can you just try to hold your temper, for the sake of Ron and me? I'm sure half the time he doesn't mean what he says. It's just a bad habit. Don't take him so seriously. Oh, don't cry, love. Come here."

"I'm sorry, Harry. You're right. It's as much my fault as his. I can't seem to help it. He just rubs me up the wrong way!"

Severus

What was that all about? We play together as if we had done so for years, and the next minute she is swearing and poking me. Temperamental little brat. Just when I thought we might be able to work together in harmony.

Harmony. Who thought that name up for the witch? Oh. It was me. Idiot.

Typical. Harry bloody Potter comes to the rescue. That's right, Potter. Listen to her woes. Maybe she'll prefer you to Weasley. Merlin knows he's not getting anywhere.

What? Potter as the voice of reason. Wonders will never cease.

Oh, for goodness sake, girl, don't you know when someone is teasing you? Okay. Since when did Severus Snape tease anyone? Good point.

So, I rub her up the wrong way? I should be so lucky.

Stop it!

She's a child. A student.

She's nearly nineteen. She'll be your partner undercover for three months.

Then she'll be a student again.

Damn!

Hermione

Harry's right. I have to loosen up a little. Ignore his insults. He probably has no idea how to carry out a normal conversation with another person. If I react like this to him at the school it'll blow our cover. I'm not supposed to have met him before, so I can hardly go around swearing at him all the time.

Not that it wouldn't be extremely satisfying.

We only have a week before we go. I hope we'll be ready.

Damn. I have to make sure he can manage without using his wand. I've seen him do most things.

Make tea, use a Muggle pen, shop. I suppose I could show him how to use a mobile phone. Those new text messages would work to share information and arrange meetings. Must ask Kingsley. I'd better take him to a library and show him how to use a computer. They are bound to use them at the school.

What else? I'm sure there's something I've forgotten. He obviously showers the normal way, contrary to popular belief, as I've seen him leave the bathroom afterward. There was that time he was only wearing a towel. Mmm. Wonder what was under it?

Stop it!

He's a teacher. And he's old.

He's a man. And he's only thirty-eight, and we'll be working closely together for three months.

Then we'll return to Hogwarts.

Just as well.

"Right. Are you all set?"

"I believe so, Shacklebolt. You have all the modified transcripts in place? I assume we will be expected?"

"All the records have been altered to show your new names and backgrounds. The headmaster has been visited by an Auror, who performed a mild memory modification so he recalls interviewing you for the position of Music master. Hermione's application form and acceptance for the school are on file, and her school record is in their system. It shows she is an average student with a talent for the flute. Remember, Hermione, *average* only.

"Severus, you will be teaching all six years of students. You *must* control your temper. We cannot risk you being the subject of an inquiry. You will arrive later this morning by train, and Hermione will be dropped off this afternoon by her 'parents,' two of my top Aurors, who will advise her of her cover story once they pick her up.

"Any questions?"

"I can take my wand, can't I, Kingsley?"

"Yes, Hermione. Just make sure it is disguised somehow and don't let anyone handle it. Our target is likely to recognise it as a wand even if it looks different. But *neither* of you are to use magic unless it is an emergency or one of the specific detection spells I have provided. Traces of any other spells could alert our quarry and contaminate the scene. Hermione, I know as a Muggle-born you can manage perfectly well without magic. Severus?"

"I *do* remember how things worked before I learned to use my wand. Miss Granger has obtained us a mobile phone each so we can communicate. I suggest you make use of one as well so we can easily report in."

"Grand idea, Severus. I shall get my secretary to find one. She's a Muggle-born as well and will be able to show me how it works. I'll just have to ensure Arthur Weasley doesn't get his hands on it.

"You have your clothing sorted out. Nice haircut, by the way, and I see you finally did something about your teeth. Really getting into the part, aren't you Severus?"

"You had your teeth fixed? Oh... nice. If it was that easy, why didn't you do it years ago?"

"It was *not* easy. And thanks for paying attention. Do you know how painful that procedure was, Miss Granger, and no-one even noticed?"

"Perhaps if you smiled more often, someone would have."

"Perhaps if you kept your nose out of my business, we could let Kingsley get on with his job?"

"Yes, well, try and get along, you two. You have to work together quite closely for some time. Now, remember your mission is purely to find out who is using magic in the school and what it is being used for. You do not need to apprehend the user or make them aware of your presence other than as teacher and student. When you have

uncovered the information, you simply report it and return to Hogwarts. We will then deal with it once we have a target to be extracted and interrogated. I anticipate it will take at least a few weeks to settle in and several more to obtain what we need. However, I hope you will be back to your normal activities by Christmas."

"What if we find out who it is in the first week or two?"

"Then, Miss Granger, we will be lucky enough to return to Hogwarts where the discipline is much more to my liking."

"Oh, give over. You don't scare me."

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash over on LiveJournal.

Songs Snape and Hermione played, in order, are: *I've Got You Under My Skin*, by Cole Porter; *Come Fly With Me*, by Frank Sinatra; and *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You*, by Bob Crewe and Bob Gaudio. Snape, after all, had a Muggle father, who played Muggle records.

Many thanks to ladyinthecloak for her magnificent beta skills.

Chapter Five: Another Know-it-all

Chapter 5 of 23

Hermione and Severus are frustrated with their mission.

Disclaimer: They are not mine. And if they were, I wouldn't be sharing!

Chapter Five: Another Know-it-all

Hermione

Two weeks. Two weeks and nothing to show for it. There's more bloody magic in my little fingernail than there is in this place. Kingsley must have acted too late. The bird has flown. Perhaps it was one of last year's sixth years, or a teacher who has left?

Why we have to stay here another month is beyond me. Surely, whoever it is would have done *something* by now? Although, Kingsley could be right; the culprit is possibly smart enough to conceal any tracks. I suppose another month of observation would be useful.

I only wish Seth... Sneyd... *Snape* would stop encouraging his senior students though. If I never see another girl drooling over the *hot*, new music teacher, or wittering on about how, "Ooh, Mr Sneyd has such a gorgeous voice," and, "Mr Sneyd kept me after class today. I think he fancies me!" again, I'll be a happy little spy. He kept you after class because your essay was a load of toss, you stupid cow!

Okay. I admit it. The new clothes and hairstyle have done wonders for Snape's appearance. There's actually quite a sexy wizard under all those robes and scowls and greasy hair.

Never thought I'd think that.

But it's Snape, you idiots. He could disembowel you verbally without so much as raising his voice and probably would enjoy every moment of it if he wasn't constrained by the role he has to play. He'd dearly love to show you what a *real* detention is all about, not just spending half an hour writing lines while ogling his arse. And don't even start me on the ways he could hex you if he caught you doing it.

Bloody Muggles.

I'm going to hell for thinking that, aren't I?

I'm going to hug Lavender and Parvati when I see them again. They fuss a lot over their hair and clothes, but I've never seen them spend an hour in the morning in front of the mirror like these girls. Hair, make-up, nails, and that's just for school! The way they hoist up their breasts in those push-up bras and leave their shirt buttons undone would never be allowed at Hogwarts. And the short skirts... At least the boys are the same. I think boys would be boys, no matter where in the world they were. Simple, ever-hungry, sports-mad creatures that they are.

It's really odd not seeing anyone, even teachers, wearing robes. And they're all so casual with each other. Everyone's on a first name basis, even some of the younger teachers. I wouldn't be brave enough to call Snape 'Seth' though. He'd probably bite my head off!

At least the main building is an old stone castle, just like Hogwarts, and the boarders' quarters are more modern buildings. Muggles certainly have the advantage with insulation and air-conditioning. It's bliss to have a cool room at the end of a hot day, and I don't have to share.

I'll have to tell Harry all that sneaking about we had to do at Hogwarts has paid off. With no omniscient Dumbledore, prowling Filch, or nosy portraits to worry about, sneaking out to Snape's cottage late in the evening is so easy. It's a little disturbing, letting myself into my professor's living quarters, but better to have a key than to knock and draw attention to myself. Haven't had anything to report anyway. Not that he's done any better. Too busy fending off his adoring fans, no doubt.

Oh, Merlin, what did I miss? Why does he have to interrupt a perfectly good moping session with a bloody question? I'm supposed to be Miss Average, Seth. Stop picking on me! Go ask that know-it-all Amelia. Look, she's just about bursting out of her blouse wanting your attention.

Snape

Fucking Shackbolt! Another four weeks. For what? I think my mouth has gone into spasm from all the unaccustomed smiling. And what on earth do those foolish chits think they are doing? Even when I punish them, they seem to take it as a personal favour. Oh, for those happy, hedonistic halls of Hogwarts where points taking gave such joy, and detentions were real and served to get all those distasteful tasks done.

It's no wonder Granger hasn't discovered anything of use yet. All those hormonal teenage boys sniffing around her like she was some new treat can't be helping.

Not that I can blame them. Her school uniform never looked so good under Hogwarts robes.

You're a pervert, Snape. A disgusting, old pervert.

It's *her* fault. She brought my attention to her magnificent tits. I was blissfully unaware of her assets before that fucking water fight.

Tease.

But those buffoons had better not touch her. Insufferable Gryffindor know-it-all she may be, but she's *my* insufferable Gryffindor know-it-all.

Well, not *mine*. My charge. My responsibility. My student.

Back to that again. Bugger!

She watches me with that amused glint in her eye in class. She knows damn well all this being nice is fucking hard work. Then she waltzes into my quarters as if she owns the place. Too bad if I am walking around naked.

Now there's a thought.

Pervert.

Concentrate, Sev. The class is watching. Wouldn't do to have those daft bints see a bulge in my trousers. I'd never get them out of here. Right, where were we?

Granger seems to have drifted off into a world of her own. Must be time to wake her up.

"Er. Sorry, Mr Sneyd, I didn't catch the question. Would you mind repeating it, please?"

"Perhaps you could pay a little more attention to what is happening inside the classroom and less to the scenery outside the window, Harmony."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, let's try again. What is an arpeggio?"

"A broken chord?"

"Correct, if somewhat brief. Does anyone have anything further to offer? Amelia?"

"An arpeggio is a broken chord that typically goes up to the tonic and then down again. For example, in C major, the arpeggio typically starts with the C, then runs through E and G to the next higher C, the tonic, and then back down to G and E and ends with the lower C."

"Excellent. Now, Harmony, don't you agree your answer was a little concise?"

"Oh, sir. I could *never* hope to attain Amelia's brilliance."

"Indeed."

"Next question. What sign can be used to denote 4/4 beat?"

...

"Anybody other than Amelia?"

...

"Very well. Please enlighten the class, Amelia."

"One may use a semi-circle that looks like a capital C, and people believe it stands for "Common" time. But this isn't quite correct. Until the early seventeenth century, triple time was considered the perfect beat, and anything outside that was considered imperfect. Therefore, a 4/4 beat would have been considered imperfect and was thus represented with an incomplete circle. This may have to do with the religious belief of the Holy Trinity. The semicircle is also seen with a vertical line through it; this stands for "tempus imperfectum diminutum" meaning..."

"Yes, well, thank you, Amelia. It appears time has run away on us again. Please practise your pieces for the recital over the next few days, everyone, and I will run through them with you next week. Have a good weekend."

"Excuse me, sir. May I have a word?"

"Certainly, Harmony. Just give me a moment to clear these desks... Thank Merlin. I thought they would never leave."

"It's your magnetic personality, *Seth*. They can't help themselves. You're so *nice*."

"Very bloody funny. Do you have anything important to tell me, or do you just enjoy irritating me?"

"Mostly that, if I'm honest. Seeing you smiling and speaking pleasantly to your students is true entertainment. Except that bloody know-it-all Amelia Radford. You don't have to be so nice to her."

"What, and blow my cover? I don't know why you're complaining. She's annoying and verbose, but she doesn't hold a candle to a certain Gryffindor know-it-all of my acquaintance."

"You take that back, Snape. I was never *that* bad."

"Oh, but you were. Worse. And don't call me Snape."

"Sorry, Mr Sneyd. Or should that be Seth? Or Mr Temptation? That's the latest. You would think those girls had never seen an attractive man before."

"*Attractive?*"

"Don't get your hopes up, Sethy-babe. I happen to know under the trendy clothes, stylish hair, and sexy voice lurks the true Severus Snape. Order of Merlin and Master of the Sneer."

"And what would you know of the true Severus Snape, young lady?"

"I know the war is over, and he doesn't have to act as a foul-tempered, mean-spirited git any longer. I know he could look for the positive things in life instead of the negative. I know he could start living again."

"Perhaps he simply doesn't know how any more?"

"Perhaps he needs to ask for help?"

"Perhaps."

...

"Anyway, I just came to ask if you still had that musical theory text of mine. I can't seem to find it."

"No. I don't think so. Haven't you memorised that one yet, Miss Granger?"

"You know perfectly well I haven't. I'd get it out of the library tonight, but it closes at five. I can't believe they expect students to do their homework with no access to the library after dinner. It's absolutely ridiculous!"

"Not everyone wishes to spend their free time in the library. However, I have a key."

"You have a key?"

"Teacher, remember?"

"How could I forget? Mr Sneyd, sir, please may I use the library tonight?"

"I'm not sure. I'd have to accompany you to ensure you were not there for illicit purposes, and I don't know if I can spare the time."

"Please, sir. You know how much I look up to you and respect you, Mr... Seth. We could spend quality time together, getting to know each other."

"Oh, cut it out, Granger. You don't simmer very convincingly. Perhaps you should ask Amelia for tutoring? When do you want to use the library? I suppose I could find something to do while you're there. Just promise me one thing. No mooning, drooling, ogling, or groping."

"What about if I did it covertly?"

"You couldn't be covert under Potter's Invisibility Cloak, girl."

"You should be so lucky anyway, Snape. After dinner this evening will be fine, if that suits you?"

"Dinner never suits me. All those salads and wholegrain breads. Gods, I miss Hogwarts meals."

"It won't do you any harm not to eat stodge for a while. Salads are good for you. Embrace the greens."

"The only thing greens are good for is as potions ingredients. And the house-elves do not cook stodge. They cook fine, traditional British fare. None of this new age nonsense."

"Your arteries are probably groaning as you speak."

"Master of Potions, remember?"

"Teacher, Potions master. Is there *anything* you aren't good at?"

"Rugby. Cricket. Tennis."

"Ha! So they've got to you already about coaching a sports team. That would be something worth watching."

"Don't get your hopes up, miss. It's never going to happen. However, I believe there is a policy that *all* students must participate in at least one sport. Which one were you planning to sign up for?"

"Fuck. I forgot about that. Can't my *favourite* teacher sign something to excuse me? Say I have to assist with the recital organisation or something."

"Language, Miss Granger."

"Considering I've heard you use the word a number of times, I'll plead bad influences."

"I think running would suit you. Just think how much fun it would be, getting up at dawn, inhaling all that fresh air as you run lap after lap around the track..."

"Piss off, Snape."

"That's right. Walk away. No respect, the youth of today."

"Come on, Harmony. What did you talk to Mr Sneyd about? You were in there for ages!"

"Yeah, c'mon. Give us all the gen. What did Mr Dreamy have to say? Did you get close enough to sniff him?"

"Sniff him? What on earth would I do that for, Cathy?"

"To find out what sort of cologne he wears, of course."

"Why do I care what sort of cologne the man wears?"

"You may not care, but we do."

"You know, I just can't understand what you see in him. He's not that good-looking. And I've heard he can have a really foul temper at times. He's probably just holding back because he's new here."

"Ooh! A real bad boy! A temper just proves he's passionate, and he's so sexy."

"Yeah. Lee's right. He's so dark and striking and... masculine. He doesn't need to be handsome to be sexy, Harmony."

"Oh, for goodness sake, don't you two have a class to go to?"

Hermione

They're going to drive me mental, I swear. And so is he. All that good-natured teasing and smiling. Eww. It's just not natural. I keep expecting the nasty git to surface at any moment and flay me with the rough side of his tongue. Can't be good for his blood pressure keeping all that vitriol under wraps. Perhaps he'll get an ulcer?

Actually, Seth Sneyd is quite a man. Attractive, witty, patient. I wonder if it will rub off on Snape. Perhaps I can create a potion to make him stay that way. I'd be the heroine of Hogwarts. The Girl Who Tamed Snape.

No.

I couldn't do that.

I like the old Snape better. Glares and all. At least I know where I stand with him. Preferably somewhere in Antarctica, if he had his way.

I must be crazy.

Bugger. Sports. I hate getting all hot and sweaty. Wonder if hopscotch counts? I used to be good at that when I was seven. I'd probably trip over the marker now. Surely they must have options for those of us of a more academic disposition? After all, we exercise all the time.

Balancing equations.

Speed reading.

Pen pushing.

See. I bet the sports master didn't think of *that*.

Damn, I'm late for Maths!

Snape

Great. An evening with Granger. Just like the good old days at Grimmauld Place. Her, me, and the books.

I don't suppose it ever occurred to her I might have a social life. That perky, blonde French teacher... what's her name... Giselle? Marie? She might have been about to invite me around to her place to see her... translations.

Sure, Sev. And flobberworms might fly.

At least fantasising about her breasts is considered fair game. Although they don't measure up to Granger's.

Pervert.

Mind you, an evening at the library could give us an excuse to check out some of the places in the school we can't access during the day. No-one patrols at night. The security around this place is appalling.

Oh, fuck. Here they come. Seth Sneyd's fan club. How I wish I could treat them to a dose of Severus Snape. They'd probably wet their bloody pants.

A/N: This story was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for the beta.

Chapter Six: Investigations

Chapter 6 of 23

Severus and Hermione do a little snooping around the school after hours.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were, I would not be sharing them!

Chapter Six: Investigations

"So, Seth. How are you finding it here? Any problems so far?"

"No, thank you, Jim. It took a week or two to find everything and assess where my students are at academically, but things are going well now that is sorted out."

"How is it compared with your previous position? A boarding school up north, wasn't it?"

"Yes. A small private school. I doubt anyone here has ever heard of it. Hogs... er... forth Academy."

"No, can't say I've heard of that one. Mind you, there are so many of those private academies around nowadays. Did you enjoy it there?"

"It was... challenging. Yes, I suppose I did enjoy the *teaching*, all except the occasional explosion. There were definitely some students who were more satisfying to teach

than others."

"Explosion?"

"Er... temper tantrum."

"Yes. We've all had to put up with those. Adolescents the same everywhere. Hey, Mike, come over and join us!"

"Mornin', chaps. How are the teenage terrors today? I hear you have a little fan club going, Seth. You'd better watch out; those senior girls can be a real trial once they decide you're worth chasing."

"It sounds as if you've had experience with that yourself, Mike."

"Not for a long time, mate. I'm a bit old and crusty for them now. I'll leave fending off the students to you young bucks."

"So, tell me, Mike. What do the live-in staff here do for entertainment after hours?"

"Are you bored already, Seth? I'm sure young Marie wouldn't say no to a round of drinks at the local pub. Just don't get seen under the influence. The bloody kids will always find out and make your life hell."

"No, I was thinking more along the line of special interests. Sports, hobbies etc. Does anyone do anything interesting?"

"Apart from the usual sports coaching, there's a chess club, debating society, and a drama group. Of course, you know about the choir and orchestra. Nothing out of the ordinary, really. We're quite a boring bunch around here."

"Speak for yourself. Just because you teach Physics. Come and sit in on one of my Art classes one day. The kids have a lot of fun, and I bet Seth's lessons are entertaining."

"Oh, you arts types are all the same. Just because you don't understand science, you think it's boring. I'll have you know my senior class is building a rocket for their special project. Much more fun than mucking around with paint and fiddles! Still, we may need to borrow some paint to finish it off, so I suppose you have some uses, Jim."

"Thanks. I think. Do you suppose you could arrange some appropriate music when this old coot's class take off for the distant yonder, Seth?"

"Er... Certainly. I think Also Sprach Zarathustra might suit your mission well."

"Also... what?"

"See, Seth. Science types. No culture!"

"Indeed. Mike, I was wondering how many new staff you take on each year. Everyone seemed to know each other already when I arrived."

"Oh, that's because you are the first new staff member for two years. Not a lot of turnover here. Most people stay once they settle in. It's a nice lifestyle, not too rushed, and a very pleasant place to live. Fancy a coffee? I'll fetch one for you while I'm over there."

"Thank you, I will."

"Sorry I'm a little late. I had to shake off Amelia. She was determined to come to the library with me once she knew you were letting me in. She spent ten minutes telling me how much she admired your intellect, your musical talent, your wit, your sexy body... I nearly vomited."

"Nice to know *someone* has taste. I'm sure we'll miss her delightful company. Perhaps she can join me another evening?"

"I'll be sure to pass that on, sir."

"Don't even think about it, Granger. Do you want to lose all Gryffindor's points when we return to Hogwarts?"

"Hmm. Might be worth it."

"Of course, I could let it slip to Ewan that you have a thing for redheads."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Try me."

"Okay. Truce. No Amelia and *no* Ewan. And stop smiling. It's creepy. That's better, the glare I can handle."

"Hmmmph."

"So, how do we get inside the building? It's all very well having the key to the library, but..."

"I have the key to the side entrance. All the staff who live on site have one. Here, this door. After you, Miss Granger."

"What? No stalking ahead. You're going soft, professor. What *are* you doing? I thought we weren't allowed to use our wands?"

"I'm checking for magical residues on this lock. This is one of the Magical Law Enforcement spells Kingsley gave me and will leave no trace of magic to disrupt any evidence."

"Why are you checking here, particularly?"

"Think about it, Miss Granger. Kingsley told us the magic was tracked down to this main building. The witch or wizard using the magic has to enter the building somewhere, and his or her illicit activities are unlikely to be taking place during the day in front of hundreds of Muggles."

"Of course. And to get into the building after hours, they would need to cast *Alohomora* or something similar. All we need to do is check every outside door on the ground floor. Wait a minute. What if the culprit is a teacher? He or she would have a key and wouldn't need to use magic to get inside."

"We'll worry about that possibility if we don't find any evidence tonight. Now follow me and cease your interminable chatter."

Hermione

How many bloody doors does this place have? I've counted sixteen so far, and we're only halfway around. And we haven't been to the library yet. I really do need that book!

Seventeen. Nothing.

Eighteen. Come on, Snape, I don't want to be stuck here all night alone with you.

Then again, why not? I'm sure we could entertain ourselves.

It's *Snape!*

True.

Nineteen. As usual, nothi... Hey! There was a faint glow there. Someone really has been using magic in this school!

Now, where's he off too? I wish he would talk to me. It's not like anyone else is around to hear.

Ah, I see. Good point test all the locked doors in the corridor leading from that entrance. He's like a great, black, hunting hound, sniffing the trail of his prey. Or perhaps a vampire, although I never did believe those rumours. Just because his skin is so pale and he seems to never sleep at night. On that basis a third of the sixth year boys here would qualify. Those without sports scholarships, that is. I've never seen such a bunch of nerds in my life. They make Ravenclaw boys look positively sociable.

Where does that door go? It certainly doesn't look as if anyone uses it often, tucked away between the Maths storeroom and the cleaning cupboard. Magic here too. So it wasn't just our imagination.

Wonder if someone is still in there?

Oh, bugger. He hasn't thought of that. Get back here, you idiot!

Snape

Stop sighing, Granger. This is not exactly my idea of a fun evening either. I'm sure I could think of a few more *interesting* activities...

Pervert. Concentrate on the job.

Finally! Now, to track down where our mysterious culprit goes to. No, not that way. There, that corridor seems to be holding a small, residual magical charge.

Come on, Granger. Keep up! Gods, she's just like a little puppy, trailing after me with her big, brown eyes watching my every move.

Found it. I suspect our answers might be waiting for us behind that nondescript door.

Oh, what does she want now?

"What?"

"You can't just go in there, sir. Whoever is using magic here could well be in there already."

"Your point being?"

"They might not take kindly to being interrupted, Snape. Don't you think you should proceed with caution?"

"I hardly think a *Gryffindor* would be in any position to advise a Slytherin on caution, Miss Granger. However, your concern is duly noted. Now, stand back."

"What, are you going to blast down the door?"

"You've watch too many Muggle movies, Granger. Now watch an expert in action."

"Okay, smart..."

"Shhh!"

...

"There's no-one here. Is there any trace of magic in here?"

"Just a faint glimmer over here in the corner. Look, under those cloths."

"This looks like clay. Why would someone need to use magic to model clay? Surely, if they were that bad at it, they'd find another hobby?"

"Not just any clay, Miss Granger. Look."

"Wow. It sparkles and shimmers. What is it?"

"It's a special type of magical clay, enhanced with quartz powder. It's commonly use for making protective rune stones, although it has been put to some less than savoury uses in the past. One of which is for coercion. If the clay has been shaped into a particular rune and had a Submission Charm placed upon it, the wearer would effectively be under an enchantment no less powerful than the *Imperius* curse."

"But isn't that dangerous? Surely if that sort of use became common knowledge, it would cause mayhem."

"Thankfully, it is not well known. It was one of the vile ideas Tom Riddle developed. Only one of his followers would know of it."

"That means there's a Death Eater in this school?"

"Don't look so concerned. I suspect whoever has been working in here is merely a pawn. There are no active Death Eaters left now. They were either killed in the final battle or imprisoned in Azkaban. One or two have been set free, but Kingsley assured me they were among the minor offenders and have been stripped of their wands and any ability to perform magic. They are exiled from the wizarding world indefinitely."

"But wouldn't that make them more dangerous?"

"How so, Miss Granger?"

"You take people who have already shown contempt for the law, morality, and compassion, remove their most precious commodity their magic and cast them out where they are no longer under observation. What do you think would happen?"

"They would be forced to get on with life as a Muggle. I can't think of a more appropriate punishment."

"I think some are more likely to become resentful and want to find a way to get back at the system that has wronged them in their eyes. Maybe there is someone out there using a student for his own nefarious purposes."

"Don't you think you are extrapolating a little far, Miss Granger?"

"No. I don't. And don't you think we can drop the *Miss Granger*? We're currently snooping around the school after hours and working on a mission as supposed partners. I would have thought you could call me by my first name, or at least drop the *Miss*."

"Very well, Granger. I've noticed you use *Snape* as often as you use *sir*."

"Only when you annoy me. Which is most of the time."

"I hope you will remember your manners when we return to Hogwarts, Granger."

"Yes, yes, I know. Points will be deducted for impertinence. Play another record, Snape. That one's scratched."

"I suspect all that camping you did last year has addled your brain, girl. You used to be the respectful one. Don't think I didn't notice."

"Not addled cleared. I realised some time over the last few weeks that you, dear sir, are *not* as scary as you would like people to believe. Most of the time, you are just an ill-tempered misanthrope who couldn't behave pleasantly even if he wanted to. However, you do have the occasional moment of humour which redeems you."

"Has it ever occurred to you, Granger, I might actually enjoy being an ill-tempered misanthrope?"

"You'd really prefer me to believe that? Especially after watching you over the past two weeks. Do you realise I've seen you smile more often this week than over the entire previous seven years? Much as it goes against your entrenched habit of surliness, you actually appear to enjoy being fair and reasonable."

"Damn. My secret is out. I can see the headlines now. *Ex-Death Eater Snape Caught Smiling at Student. Parents Write to Complain.*"

"You'd scare the firsties. Well, the second-years at any rate. The first-years won't have a basis for comparison. And Neville. He'd have a heart attack if you smiled at him."

"Ah. The inimitable Mr Longbottom. I suppose I will be blessed with his presence in my classroom when we return. Pity. I was enjoying the peace and quiet."

"But he doesn't do N.E.W.T. Potions."

"Which is being taught by someone else. I'm returning to the Defence position."

"But, I thought Potions was your real passion?"

"It is, Granger. Researching and brewing, at least. However, I despise *teaching* Potions. Defence is far more... fun."

"Only you would think watching students hex each other is fun, Snape. You are seriously warped."

"And you like me like that."

"I think I might. But don't tell anyone I said that."

"I wouldn't dare. I've heard about you and your canaries."

"Good. So long as we understand each other. Now, what are we going to do about this?"

"Nothing tonight. We've proven there's something amiss. Now, we need to find out who is behind it. Any suggestions, *partner*?"

"We have to assume it's a student, given they used magic to get inside. Are we able to put a ward on the door so we're alerted when they next turn up, or is that against Kingsley's ridiculous no magic rules?"

"I shouldn't think it was a problem. He was more concerned about overt displays in front of Muggles and contaminating the scene."

"As if we are stupid enough to do that. However, a drying charm for my hair after I've showered would be a real luxury. Standing around wrapped only in a towel for ages is a real nuisance."

"Hmmm. Do you think we can change the subject? I'm not sure I should be contemplating my student dressed only in a towel."

"My, my, professor. I believe you're blushing from the thought. I've *seen* you dressed only in a towel, and it didn't make me blush."

"That's only because you were too busy staring at me. Yes, I noticed. See, *now* you blush."

"Well, what girl wouldn't stare, seeing a man who usually is wrapped up in so many layers half naked? If you must insist on walking back to your bedroom in a towel, you'll have to put up with the occasional once-over. Oh, give over. I'll bet you enjoyed it."

"Maybe. Maybe not. You'll never know, Granger. Back to the matter in hand. Yes, there is also an alarm ward among the spells we can use. It will notify me when the door has been breached by magic, and I will investigate."

"We will investigate. We're a team, remember, Snape."

"I will endeavour to inform you. But if it is late, it may not be possible."

"Just make sure the ward alerts both of us. Then we can arrange to meet outside beneath that oak tree on the corner and go from there."

"Very well. If you insist."

"I do."

...

"There. Done. Now, shall we leave?"

"No way. I still need that book. If I return without it, Amelia is sure to assume we've been meeting for less-than-educational purposes."

"She would be correct, as usual."

"Still. There's no need to foment rebellion. It's bad enough she told all her friends in the boarding house where I was going and with whom, but if she thinks there's anything going on... Oh, stop smirking! It won't make them stop trying, you know. In fact, they'd probably try even harder to get your attention."

"Merlin save me! Come along then, and let's fetch the bloody book. I wouldn't want to encourage speculation."

"Ooo, Seth. Can't we stop for a teensy snog on the way? A little snuggle?"

"Stop that, Granger. You're scaring me."

"Sethy, sweetheart, don't run away. You know you want to!"

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for the beta, and the girls at work for all their ideas over morning tea.

Chapter Seven: Happy Birthday, Hermione

Chapter 7 of 23

It's Hermione's birthday, and only one person knows.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were I wouldn't be sharing them!

Chapter Seven: Happy Birthday, Hermione.

Hermione

Bloody hell. Morning already. All right, all right, I'm moving. Why anyone wants to hear some overly chirpy breakfast radio announcer shouting in their ear about the latest idiotic practical joke doing the rounds when they are still half asleep is beyond me. At least my alarm clock back at Hogwarts did practical things like telling me how late I was for breakfast.

There. Toilet, shower, and teeth done. I suppose I'd better put on a little mascara and lipstick to keep up appearances.

Or for Seth.

Don't be stupid. Just because he was reasonably approachable last night and even made jokes doesn't mean he isn't still the same mean, over-critical bastard he was three weeks ago.

But by the end of the evening he was almost *flirting* with me. That comment about the towel and what I said afterwards. Oh, gods, how can I face him today? I even said I liked him! He tricked me into that, though. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

Okay. I'm Hermione Granger. Harmony is just a cover story. Seth Sneyd does not exist. Any suggestion of a good nature is purely a construct of Snape's cover. He spied in Voldemort's camp for years of course he gets right into his character. As soon as we return to Hogwarts, it'll be back to berating Miss Granger for being an insufferable know-it-all and docking points left, right, and bloody centre.

Calm now. Good. Time to face the day. At least the girls are surprisingly easy to live with, even Amelia now I know her better. I can't believe they accepted me without question into their group, which is more than most witches I know would have done.

Damn him. Why did he have to pick now to head off to the Dining Hall for breakfast? Couldn't he have made his own in his cottage?

Is he smirking at me?

Snape

Well, that was a more interesting evening than I'd expected. Granger can be quite entertaining when she's not trying to outshine everyone around her. And she blushes rather enticingly.

I suppose I shouldn't have made that towel comment. But she started it. Does the wench not realise the image her description would bring to any red-blooded male? Although I'm pretty sure I paid her back in kind. She was rather fixated on my naked chest the day she caught me between the bathroom and my bedroom at Grimmauld Place.

Right, what do we have for breakfast? Nothing, it would seem. No house-elves to supply the food, of course. I suppose I'll have to join the masses if I wish to eat. And no separate staff table here. Oh, what joy.

There's Granger now. Blushing again. I never used to have that effect on a woman.

I think I might enjoy today's sixth year class.

"Ooh, there he is. He's coming to breakfast this morning! Do you think he might sit at our table?"

"He's wearing the red shirt. That's my favourite. He looks so hot in it."

"Come on, Harmony, hurry up!"

"I'm coming. What's the rush, anyway?"

"Mr Sneyd is just ahead of us. If we're in line just behind him, we could invite him to sit at our table."

"Why on earth would he want to sit with us? Why do you want to sit with him, Cathy?"

"Because he's dreamy. And the way he speaks... it's so..."

"Well-articulated?"

"No. I was thinking smooth... silky... seductive..."

"Oh, for goodness sake. *Seductive*? You think it's seductive when he asks you what key is used for a particular piece of music?"

"Well... no. But I could imagine him using his voice for *other* questions."

"Such as?"

"Cathy, would you like to meet me for a drink this evening?"

"My turn! Lee, could you come closer?"

"Amelia, would you please turn out the light?"

"*Amelia!* That's so not going to happen!"

"Why not? It's my fantasy, and I'll take it where I like!"

"Shh. He'll hear you lot. You're so embarrassing!"

"Aw, Harmony. You're no fun. After all, it was you who spent yesterday evening with him. You came in so late we didn't get to hear how it went. So, spill!"

"Yeah, Harmony, what *did* you get up to last night? I saw the sneaky smile he sent your way when he saw us."

"It was *not* a sneaky smile, Lee! It was a smirk. He's just being superior because we... er... had an argument last night, and he won. We went to the library, did some work, and left. End of story."

"Why are you blushing then?"

"Because, Amelia, I can imagine the road your mind is travelling down, and I'm pretty sure I don't want to be on it."

"Oh, I do. I'll travel down that road with him any day."

"Cathy, you're hopeless. Can we just go and eat breakfast, please?"

"Only if we sit at Seth Sneyd's table."

"Oh, all right. But don't blame me if he's not happy about it."

...

"Good morning, Mr Sneyd. Mind if we join you?"

"Er... no, I suppose not. Good morning, Cathy, Amelia, Lee, Harmony."

"Thank you, Mr Sneyd; you didn't need to pull out my chair."

"You're welcome, Harmony. *Why have you brought those three with you?*"

"*Why are you whispering? Don't you want your fan club to know how much you adore them? And they dragged me to sit here.*"

"*What, you didn't come for the pleasure of my company? I'm deeply wounded, Harmony. And after all that begging for a snog, too.*"

"*Oh, shut it, Seth, you know I was joking.*"

"*That's right. Destroy a poor man's hope. Typical woman.*"

"*You're hopeless. I liked you better when you were mean and nasty, although I'd never have thought I'd admit that. And stop smirking; it makes the girls wonder what you're up to!*"

"*I'm just admiring you in that uniform. You should wear those colours more often.*"

"*Ha bloody ha. I suppose you thought it was a great joke when you found the school colours were green and silver.*"

"*You have no idea how much pleasure it gave me.*"

"*Pervert!*"

"... and I spent all day reading that book you recommended, Mr Sneyd. Wasn't it great?"

"Very good, Amelia. It's nice to know *some* people listen to what I have to say. I'm pleased you enjoyed the book. Now, I really must be off to prepare for my first lesson. Have a good day, ladies."

"Awww. He's so charming. I don't know why you can't see that, Harmony. And what were you whispering with him about? For someone who says she doesn't like him, you certainly have a lot to say to him."

"If you must know, he was asking why we had followed him. I had to try and explain without telling him you three were lusting after his body and drooling over his voice."

"Oh, I'm sure he wouldn't have minded."

"But I would have! He would have thought I was thinking the same."

"Well, you sat beside him."

"I didn't get a lot of choice, Lee. He bloody near shoved me into that seat. Probably his self-protective instincts kicking in."

"Oh, well. There's always lunchtime."

"And there's the warning bell. We'd better finish up and head for class."

"Spoilsport. Were you always such a goody-good at your old school, Harmony?"

"Trust me. You wouldn't believe what I was like at my old school, Amelia."

Hermione

'Have a good day, ladies.' If he gets any more pleasant I'm sending a message to Kingsley. This place is affecting his personality. Not that I mind exactly, it just makes me feel uncomfortable. It's like waiting for the other shoe to drop. Any minute he'll revert back to his usual black-hearted self and start snarling and scowling enough to scare the dead.

Returning to Hogwarts is going to be hell. I'm sure he's going to compensate for all this niceness. Especially with me. After all, I've witnessed it. He'll be sure to remind me of my place.

Well, he'll just have to take a running leap. I'm over treating him like a superior being. He's just a wizard, who can damn well be polite. I know he has the potential now.

Oh, hell, I'd better catch up with the girls. Maths will be as good a place as any to start. I wonder if anyone would give themselves away if I started using wizarding oaths. If they ask questions, I could always say I read them in a book and thought they were a milder alternative to usual swear words.

Slow down, Amelia. Damn girl always has to get to class before anyone else!

Snape

Look at her. For once, the know-it-all is unsettled. I must remember this when we return to Hogwarts. A few pleasantries and she's all flustered. Wish I'd known that sooner, could have saved myself a few death glares over summer. Although, she does look quite fetching when she tries to look fierce.

I wonder how Trelawney would react if I was civil to her? No, best not risk it. I'd never get rid of her. But Sprout might be worth playing with. She becomes defensive if I so much as look at her for too long.

I'm not sure I want to go back to stalking around looking for opportunities to deduct points. The entertainment value is not really worth the extra effort entailed. This more relaxed attitude is certainly less work, and no detentions to supervise at night is a bonus I could learn to live with.

Oh, well. Back to work. First year. What joy. At least they can't blow up xylophones. Now, where are my earplugs?

"I meant to tell you the other night, I've asked around in the staffroom, and, as far as I can tell, no-one has any odd hobbies. Our target is almost certainly a student in any case, as there have been no new staff members employed over the last two years. Have you made any progress, Granger?"

"Not yet. I've talked to damn near all the fifth and sixth years, and I can't sense any magic, even at close quarters. I've tried using wizarding swear words occasionally to see what reaction I received, but nothing."

"What about the younger students?"

"I don't think it's anyone younger. As it was first noticed last year, the magic would have had to be performed by a third year or younger, and I don't think that's likely. Not with the degree of concealment being used."

"Youth did not appear to stop you and your cohorts. What was it? Yes, exploring forbidden corridors at eleven, brewing Polyjuice at twelve, stunning *me* at thirteen. Being younger *really* held you lot back."

"You *would* remember that. And I was twelve, thirteen, and fourteen at the time. I'm almost a year older than the boys."

"Oh, yes. That reminds me. Happy birthday, Hermione."

"Er... Thanks. How did you know?"

"It's not exactly a secret. It was on your school record."

"But you remembered. That's really... er... sweet, Snape."

"You mention that word in the same sentence as my name again, woman, and you might live to regret it. And don't expect a gift."

"Actually, there is one *little* thing you could do for me."

"Dare I ask?"

"Say something for me."

"What would you have me say?"

"Say, 'Ten points from Gryffindor, Miss Granger.'"

"Are you insane, Granger?"

"No. Just say it!"

"Very well. Ten points from Gryffindor, Miss Granger."

"Is that the best you can do?"

"What was wrong with that?"

"More vitriol. Say it like you really mean it."

"TEN POINTS FROM GRYFFINDOR, MISS GRANGER!"

"Ah. That's better. It *is* you."

"I could have told you that. Was it ever in doubt?"

"Well, I was beginning to wonder. You aren't exactly behaving in your usual... er... delightful manner."

"Oh. You miss the greasy git then?"

"I find I do. Pleasant as you have been in class over the last few weeks, it's just not you, Snape. I want my professor back... I don't believe I just told you that! Oh, stop grinning. At least give me a glare so I don't think I've been Portkeyed to a surreal alternate dimension where Severus Snape has turned to sweetness and light."

"There. Happy now?"

"Thanks. I needed that."

"You are a very odd witch, Granger."

"So I've been told, Snape."

Hermione

I can't believe he remembered my birthday. It's not like anyone else here knows, and all my friends at Hogwarts aren't allowed to contact me. Imagine the questions if owls had started appearing at breakfast, dumping parcels in my cereal. To think the only birthday greeting I've had was from Snape... I mean, Seth as Snape he was unlikely to have bothered.

Why do I keep thinking of him as Seth when he is being nice? Because *Snape* and *nice* don't belong in the same sentence any more than *Snape* and *sweet*. But why not Mr Sneyd?

No. Doesn't work. He's either Seth, the attractive, flirty, funny, Gods-I-want-to-touch-him Muggle, or Snape, the mean, brooding, sarcastic... powerful... witty... fucking sexy, Gods-I-want-to-touch-him wizard.

I must be ill.

Or deranged.

Perhaps I'm spending too much time with Amelia? She's rubbing off.

Someone save me from myself! I need Ron and Harry to remind me Snape is cruel and disdainful and...

Snape

What's got into her knickers?

Not me. Pity.

Pervert.

I wish her a happy birthday, and all she wants is for me to act as myself for a change. I wonder if those points will register back at Hogwarts. It's term time, and she *is* my student at the moment. The look on Minerva's face would be priceless all tight-lipped and disapproving.

At least, she apologised for mistrusting me all last year, although having her weeping over my hospital bed was a little unnerving. I never knew the old biddy could cry. Still, before I had to do the old man's bidding, she'd been a good friend in her own way. I must make the effort to be more pleasant to her when I return.

That's all very well, but what will I do about Granger? Why do I have the urge to kiss her all the time? Although it would be one way of silencing her prattle.

I wish this was over. It's bad enough playing the part of the smooth and charming Seth Sneyd all day without the added frustration of Granger becoming over-familiar.

Or not familiar enough.

Severus Snape would have no problem maintaining an appropriate distance from the beguiling little chit.

I hate Severus Snape.

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her beta work. Special kudos go to the girls at work for all their ideas, their names, and their personality quirks, especially Amelia.

Chapter Eight: Halloween

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were, I wouldn't be sharing!

Chapter Eight: Halloween

"Harmony, what have you planned for your Halloween Ball costume? I'm going as an elf. Er... why are you giggling? Elves aren't funny; they are tall and ethereal and blonde, like me."

"Sorry, Lee. I just had a completely different image in my head. Yes, you'll make a fine elf. I hear Cathy found a great fairy outfit complete with wings, and Phil is going as a werewolf."

"Phil? The captain of the First Fifteen? When were you talking to him? He's so gorgeous. Tall, dark, all those muscles in all the right places."

"I thought you fancied Mr Sneyd?"

"I do. But Phil is actually attainable. I may have a rich and varied fantasy life, but I'm not completely stupid, you know. Teachers don't date students. They would get into far too much trouble. So he'll just have to fancy me from afar. Stop laughing. I'm quite serious! So, what are you wearing?"

"I'm still trying to figure out why they are celebrating Halloween in Scotland. I suppose Mrs Nelson thought of it. She's from California, and it's a big thing over in America. Anyway, I thought I'd find some witch's robes and a wand. Shouldn't be too hard to *conjure* up a costume."

"Haha. Very funny. Look, there's Amelia. Let's ask her what she has planned."

"Planned for what?"

"The Halloween Ball. Had any ideas for a costume?"

"My mum's sending me a pirate's wench costume she used for a party last year. It'll make the most of my best assets."

"You *always* make the most of those assets, especially when Mr Sneyd is around, Amelia."

"Well, if you've got 'em, flaunt 'em, I always say. Isn't that right, Harmony?"

"If you must. He looks like the breast type."

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, just a feeling."

"I wonder what *he* will be wearing. Teachers have to dress up too."

"Oh, stop drooling, Amelia. What, do you think he will dress as a pirate and come and sweep you away?"

"A girl can hope..."

"Oh, my. Would you look at that!"

"What? What is it, Cathy?"

"Mr Sneyd. Look at him. What's so funny, Harmony?"

"Oh... nothing... Just, Seth as a vampire... Oh, give me a minute."

"*Seth*? Is there something you aren't telling us, Harmony?"

"Pardon?"

"You called Mr Sneyd 'Seth'. I've noticed you often talk to him after class. What's going on?"

"Er... nothing, Amelia. Nothing at all. Just a slip of the tongue."

"*Sure*. We'll be watching you, won't we, girls? If any of us are making headway with *Seth*, we expect all the details. Ooh, don't those robes swirl beautifully. Watch out, here he comes. Act natural!"

"Good evening, ladies. You are all looking enchanting tonight."

"Thank you, Mr Sneyd. Your costume is amazing. Where did you find the frock coat? It fits so well!"

"Oh, it was just something I rustled up. Harmony, would you do me the honour of this dance?"

"Um... Sure, Mr Sneyd. Why not?"

...

"See. I *told* you something was going on. Look at them, chatting away as if they've known each other for years. And he's holding her *way* too close."

"Don't be such a jealous cow, Amelia. I think it's sweet."

"He's a teacher, Cathy!"

"So? Would that stop you if you were in her place?"

"Mmmm. No. I suppose not. But she's always saying she can't see why we all fancy him."

"Hey, look who's dancing with Harmony!"

"We noticed, Lee. He came and asked her while you were off getting the drinks."

"Wow! They're dancing awfully close, and he can't seem to keep his eyes off her breasts."

"He's a man, Lee, and that dress *is* rather low cut. Of *course* he's making the most of it. Lucky tart."

"You just wish it was you, Amelia."

"Do I ever!"

...

"What are you playing at, Snape?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Wearing your Hogwarts robes out in the open like this. Do you want us to be discovered?"

"Oh. Calm down, Granger. If there were any ex-Hogwarts pupils here as students or staff, I would have recognised them, or they would already have recognised me. Besides, you can hardly talk. I doubt you found *those* robes in a Muggle dress-up shop. And you have your wand out on full display, not to mention everything else. Have you no shame, Granger?"

"You don't seem to mind, judging by the amount of time your eyes are focussing on my cleavage and not my face, Snape."

"I didn't say I minded the view, I just object to every other male in this damned hall sharing it."

"Seth, darling, don't tell me you're jealous?"

"Just thinking of your reputation, Harmony dear. After all, it's nothing I haven't already seen, is it?"

"Yes, well, I was bored that day. And you were being a right grumpy bastard."

"So you thought you'd give the old git a show? Mature, Granger, really mature."

"You didn't seem to be objecting later that night when you were locked in your room with a Silencing Charm on the door."

"I'm a man, Granger. I have normal male responses. Or did you think I had ice in my veins?"

"I wouldn't have been surprised."

...

"Mmm. You dance very well, Snape, but do you realise everyone is looking at us?"

"And so they should. I have the most beautiful woman in the room in my arms. They're just jealous."

"Oh, cut the Seth act out, Snape. It's getting old."

"Do you not think I am capable of complimenting you, Hermione?"

"No."

"Not even when I am dressed as myself?"

"What, you really are a vampire? Ron will be pleased; he had money riding on it. You realise you're going to get us both into trouble?"

"By merely dancing and conversing?"

"Dancing is fine. Staring at my cleavage is a little inappropriate, *Mr Sneyd*."

"But you have such a delightful cleavage, Granger. Where else is a man to look?"

"A *teacher* should refrain from ogling his student, Snape. You don't want us to be thrown out of school, do you? I don't imagine our faked records would withstand too close a scrutiny."

"If only I should be so lucky. At least this interminable assignment would be over. Are you sure you haven't sensed any magic in your classmates?"

"Not even a whisper. If it wasn't for the evidence we found in that storeroom, I'd think we were on a wild goose chase. I'm about ready to give up hope."

"We'll give it another two weeks, and if nothing further turns up, I'll notify Kingsley."

"Brilliant. Then at least I can get back to studying for my N.E.W.T.s. I hate to think about how much work I've missed. All those homework assignments I've not turned in. How will I ever catch up?"

"Just stop talking for once and dance, Granger. If I have to be present at this ridiculous function, I am at least going to enjoy myself."

"You're enjoying dancing with me?"

"Er... Yes."

"Not just the ogling?"

"Yes. Are you satisfied, woman?"

"Yes."

...

"You realise you will have to dance with the others now? Don't make that face; you started it."

"If I must. But I expect you to rescue me later if necessary."

"Only if you behave."

"Seth Sneyd will be the epitome of respectability."

"No more ogling."

"Why not?"

"You only get to ogle my cleavage, Seth. The others would take it far too seriously. *I* know you're just an old pervert at heart."

"Point taken."

"Now, off you go and dance with Amelia. She's starting to pout."

...

"Harmony! What was it like? I bet it was amazing, being held in his arms... You're so lucky. What did you talk about?"

"I'll admit he's a good dancer, Lee, but that's all there is to tell. We just talked about schoolwork and assignments."

"He was looking down your dress the entire time! Didn't you notice?"

"Yes, I did. And I told him off for it."

"Only you would do that, Harmony. The rest of us would just let him look!"

"Well, I'm not the rest of you. Now, where's that drink? All that dancing has made me thirsty."

"Looks like Amelia is having fun, but he's not talking with her like he did with you, Harmony. I think he *likes* you."

"Rubbish. He just realises I'm not going to drool over him like you lot!"

"We do *not* drool. Or not that much, anyway."

"If you say so. I'm off to the supper table. Anyone coming?"

Hermione

Well, that was more fun than I'd expected. And I definitely did *not* expect to spend so much time dancing with Snape. Although it was really Seth; he was far too charming to be Severus Snape.

Perhaps the ogling part was Snape.

Yes, definitely Snape.

Pervert.

But I liked it. And I liked it when he told me I was beautiful, even if he was laying it on a bit thick.

And dancing with him. Mmmm. Nice.

I suppose I'd better have a quick shower after all that dancing. Where's my soap?

Ooh. That tingled. What was it? Holy Merlin, magic has been used here and not very long ago. A Drying Charm perhaps. It's definitely a witch we're looking for. And a senior girl, if she's using this bathroom.

There are only ten senior girls in this boarding house. Amelia, Cathy, and Lee haven't returned from the ball yet. Lisa went home last week with glandular fever. Jenny and Maggie had just arrived back when I passed through the common room. That leaves me, Morag, Denise, and Katrina.

I must tell Snape. He can access their records to find out more information.

Damn. It's far too late now. I'll go first thing in the morning before everyone else is up. Even if he's not awake, I can use that emergency key he gave me to get in.

Finally. Progress.

Snape

Thank Merlin that's over. All those girls with wandering hands. I *never* had that problem at Hogwarts.

Of course, Severus Snape is an unappealing, nasty, points-docking ex-Death Eater. Girls and women run a mile from him. Except Granger, and she was the only one tonight who *wasn't* attempting to check out my assets.

I'm not disappointed. Really. She behaved very well for a half-dressed temptress.

Fuck. Who am I fooling?

Pervert.

At least she seemed to enjoy dancing with me. And didn't really seem to mind me staring at those luscious breasts.

Oh, stop it down there. I'm *not* getting off on the thought of Granger's tits again!

Where are those essays I had to mark?

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her beta expertise.

Chapter Nine: A Private Moment

Chapter 9 of 23

Hermione goes to report to Severus and finds something unexpected.

Disclaimer: They don't belong to me, and if they did I'd keep them all to myself.

Chapter Nine: A Private Moment

Hermione

I suppose I'd better get up. Snape needs to know what I discovered last night, preferably before class. I hope he's in a more serious mood this morning.

Hmm. I never thought I'd think that about Snape.

Right, no-one seems to be around. I'll just slip out and sneak over to his cottage.

Come on, Snape. Answer the bloody door. I can't afford to knock any louder or wait out here too long. Someone might come along. Oh, well, he did give me a key for a reason. If you haven't opened the door in sixty seconds, Snape, I'm coming in.

It's quiet in here. Perhaps he's still asleep? Not like him usually he's an early riser. Wait a minute, there's something going on in the bedroom. Am I hearing what I think I'm hearing? Wet slapping noises and heavy breathing. Good grief, he's got a woman in there! I know it's not polite to giggle, but the thought of Snape with a *woman!*

Bitch.

I should go. I really should.

Dammit, I can't help it. Just a quick peek. What sort of woman would shag Snape?

Foolish, know-it-all Gryffindors, maybe. But he's Seth at the moment. Any number of women would have him. Wonder who?

Oh, my! He's alone. He's naked. He's naked and he is... he is... Oh, my!

My usually miserable, foul-tempered, ex-Death Eater professor is lying naked on his bed, one hand cupping his balls, and the other stroking a rather impressive erection. Thank Merlin his eyes are closed. Look at those lovely, thick eyelashes, and soft, full lips. Don't know how I missed them before. Probably because his mouth is usually busy berating some poor student or taunting me.

I have to go before he catches me staring. He'll kill me if he finds out I've seen his bits.

Who am I kidding? I can't take my eyes off him. Where the hell did that bitter, mean-spirited wizard get that body from? It didn't look too bad under the Muggle clothes, but... wow! Not that I've seen any naked, aroused men before, but I'm sure penises aren't usually that thick and long. To think *that fits there...*

Okay. Not a good idea to squeeze my thighs together protectively. It felt rather good. Oh, just did it again. The man's a bad influence. But what a man!

So, that's what it looks like when a man comes. Amazing. I'm feeling all hot and bothered now. He's just lying there, come all over his fist and stomach, body limp, eyes still closed, and an expression of bliss on his face. That's *Professor Snape?* He's just ruined my nice, comfortable asexual image of him.

Bastard.

Who am I trying to kid? I've been lusting after him for weeks, and after that night at Grimmauld Place I know damn well he has real blood running in his veins instead of ice.

I'd better get out of here before he comes to his senses. I still have to talk to him. I suppose I could slip out and knock on the door again give him time to clean up and act as if he's just been asleep.

On second thoughts, he's never missed an opportunity to humiliate or deride us. Why am I being so soft? Now is the perfect opportunity. He might kill me, but it will be worth it, knowing I've died for a worthy cause. Embarrassing Snape.

And another peek wouldn't hurt.

Now, that's convenient. He must have set the coffee going before his little interlude in the bedroom. How organised is that? A cup each, I think.

Severus

Why does my recalcitrant cock choose this morning to remind me of its presence? I know I haven't given it any attention for a few days. I can't remember the last time I actually had a woman it was so long ago. Probably some nondescript whore in Knockturn Alley, paid for by Lucius in a fit of supercilious pity for his dour, unattractive friend. No wonder I don't recall any details.

At least my libido has started reasserting itself. Spending all my time trying to stay alive over the years was not conducive to a healthy sex life. A quick wank from time to time had to suffice. Stress will do that to a man. Erections were few and far between, but the occasional orgasm did wonders for my mood. Not that the little brats would have ever known. It would never occur to their pea-sized brains that the only reason they hadn't lost an inordinate number of points that day was because I'd spent a little longer in the shower that morning. Probably would have totally fucked with their minds. Should have told them, really.

Coffee time. Hmm, wandering around the cottage naked with a raging erection is deliciously sinful. I think it's time to treat myself to a decent, unrushed orgasm for a change.

No. Still no queues of eager women lining up at my bedroom door. I suppose I'll have to settle for my trusty fist. It's reliable, experienced, and has never let me down. Better than a woman, really.

Now, I'll just get comfortable. Which one shall I use today? Ah, my favourite. Long, red hair; slender, supple body; green eyes looking at me accusingly...

No, perhaps not her then.

Curly hair, brown eyes, waving hand.

Pervert.

My hand alone will have to do. Oh, yes, that's the way, long, slow strokes to start with, up and over the head. I'm so good at this. Comes from plenty of practice since the war ended, you wanker. Oh, shut up and give your balls some attention. Mmm, just a gentle squeeze. Oh... oh... yes!

What? Soft footsteps, subtle floral fragrance. It's her. What the fuck is she doing in my cottage at this hour? I should stop, but dammit, it feels so good.

So good. Go on, Granger, watch if you dare. The professor is otherwise engaged.

Up and down.

Oh gods, why don't I do this more often? My cock feels so good in my hand. My hand feels so good on my cock. Oh... yes!

I can't believe she's still standing there, watching. Any other girl of her age would have turned tail and ran, but not Granger. Bloody Gryffindors. At least I'm putting on a good show, if the flush in her cheeks and squirming is anything to go by.

Oh, gods, it feels good. Up and down. Up and down.

Faster.

Faster.

Faster!

I'm coming!

I'm coming, and a nineteen-year-old student is *watching!*

Yes! Yes! Fuck, YES!

Gods, that was amazing. I see she's gone. Too much for her, I suppose. Perhaps I'm an old pervert at heart, after all; having an audience certainly seemed to enhance the experience.

Hermione

"Ahem."

Yes, Snape, that's right. Here I am in your bedroom with coffee, and you're lying there naked, floppy, and sticky.

"Ready for coffee?"

It's bloody hard to keep a straight face as if I regularly share coffee with semen-splattered men.

He's taking this awfully well. Too well. Only a split second of horror on his face and he's back to Mr Inscrutable. Oh, come on, Snape. You're not even going to wipe yourself with a tissue or cover up? Tough guy, huh? And the eyebrow. Fine, just drink the coffee as if nothing untoward has occurred. Your student hasn't just witnessed you masturbating, and you're not stark naked in front of her.

Smart arse.

Nice arse, actually. There I go again. And why can't I stop looking at his penis?

"You're up and about early this morning, Granger."

Oh, so now he states the obvious. Why is he not the least concerned that he has been caught at an extremely private moment? Or is he just refusing to admit he's concerned, just to mess with my mind? Probably.

Bastard.

"I had something urgent I needed to report to you, but as you had your hands *full* when I arrived..."

I'll take any opportunity to smirk at him for once.

"So it appears. Do you usually walk into men's bedrooms unannounced?"

What do I say? I can't stop looking at his groin where his penis appears to be lengthening once more. Is he becoming aroused simply by sitting naked before me? Or is that normal for a man? He certainly responded to my breasts after that water fight. Hell, I'm way out of my league here.

Some Gryffindor I am. Had to run away into the sitting room like a damn Hufflepuff just because he was getting erect again and didn't care if I saw it. That's a change from tossing a book into your lap, Professor. I suppose he's on home ground here.

Come on, get dressed and let me get out of here. Or don't get dressed. I'll be tough and put up with it.

Thank Merlin, he's finally finished. Showered too, that was quick. Should have spent a few minutes longer in there; those trousers don't look very comfortable stretched like that. Pity the mask is back in place. He's all buttoned up and repressed again.

"So, what was so urgent you had to disturb my morning routine?"

I swear he's mocking me.

"Routine? That's your routine? Pleasuring yourself?"

I can't help it. Sometimes my mouth runs away with me.

"Wanking, Granger. I'm a man. We wank. We don't *pleasure ourselves*. Now, is there anything else you would like to know about my personal habits, or can we get on with business?"

Who is he, and what has he done with Severus Snape? I never thought I would hear that sort of expression from his lips, even in his Seth persona. Perhaps living Muggle-style has loosened him up a little. I see his trousers haven't loosened any the man has stamina, have to give him that.

"Some time soon would be useful. I don't have all day."

Now, rudely interrupting my ogling, *that's* the Severus Snape I know and love. Just an expression. I still think he's a first class git I just happen to fancy shagging. I must concentrate on the information I have to pass on and forget about what I now know lurks under his layers. It's hard work.

"I went to have a shower last night when I returned to the house. Oh, stop smirking, I didn't tell you that for your personal enjoyment.

"Anyway, when I entered the shower stall..."

"Now, you're telling me you were naked and expecting *menot* to visualise."

"Get your mind out of your trousers, Snape. If you keep up that train of thought, you won't fit in them any longer."

"Hmm. True. So, there you were, naked in the shower. Is this going anywhere, or are you just deliberately tormenting me?"

"Well, I must admit it's rather enjoyable watching the great Professor Snape at the mercy of his inner pervert, but I did discover something important. There were definite traces of magic in the bathroom. Strong enough for me to notice without any need for a spell."

"Any idea who had been in there before you?"

"No, but I've narrowed it down to Morag McConnachie, Denise Stewart, or Katrina Wallace. They are the only senior girls who use that bathroom who I couldn't account for. Can you check out their records for any clues as to their backgrounds?"

"Yes. They're all in my fifth-year class. I'll find a reason to need the class's records. And you can try talking to them; see if you can find out anything else."

"Okay. Well, I'll leave you to your perverted mind, then. Don't have too much fun without me."

Snape

She's gone. At last I can deal with this little problem in peace. Not so little, are you, my friend?

I must remember to double lock the front door next time I have needs to fulfil. Or, then again, perhaps not. She almost sounded as if she wanted to stay and watch again. Or participate.

Wishful thinking, pervert. She's just teasing me. Fucking know-it-all knows exactly how she affects me. I'm never going to be able to look Minerva in the eye when we return to Hogwarts. Wonder if I'll be allowed to eat every meal in my quarters? Either that or *pleasure myself* several times a day so I don't betray myself with a bloody erection every time I see the witch.

Oh, that's good. This could easily become a habit. Well, more of a habit.

Yesss!

That's better. Perhaps it will behave itself for a while.

Fuck. Nearly missed breakfast!

A/N: This story was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Thank you to karelia for looking it over for me and the girls at work for all their input.

Chapter Ten: Tennis, Anyone?

Chapter 10 of 23

Hermione plays tennis. Snape enjoys it far too much.

Disclaimer: If they were mine I would keep them under lock and key. They can't be trusted.

Chapter Ten: Tennis, Anyone?

"I wonder where Mr Sneyd is this morning. It's not like him to be late, even on a Sunday."

"Yeah, Cathy. I haven't seen him at all."

"Do you think he had too much to drink last night and slept in? Have you seen him, Harmony?"

"Why would you think I had seen him?"

"Why are you blushing then? *Have* you seen him?"

"I haven't seen him have breakfast, Lee."

"Look! There he is. Wow, he looks a little flushed... and sort of sexy."

"You *always* think he looks sexy, Amelia."

"No. I mean he looks like he has just been shagged. Do you think... Why are you giggling, Harmony?"

"Er... Nothing. Just laughing at your reasoning. Sneyd looks a little ruffled this morning, and you immediately deduct he's been having sex. Perhaps he's just a little tired after his big night out."

"Well, he was dancing with you a lot. Perhaps *you* wore him out."

"Oh, I'm sure *my* hands are clean. It must have been you girls."

"We only had one dance each, not like *some* people, who had at least four."

"Six."

"What, Amelia, you were counting?"

"*Six!* You lucky tart! What have you got that we haven't?"

"Magic?"

"Anything?"

"No. Not a trace. She must have thought everyone was still at the ball the other night. Just sheer luck I came back a little earlier than the rest."

"You didn't notice anyone else slipping away early, then?"

"No. And I've talked to all three of them about the ball. Who they went with, how they enjoyed it, and how long they stayed. Nothing. Have you had a chance to check their records?"

"Not yet. I'm collecting them this afternoon. I thought you might like to join me after your last class to help. I'm sure another pair of eyes wouldn't go amiss."

"I'd like to help, but I won't be free until after dinner. I have *sports* practice."

"After dinner will be fine, around six-thirty? Meet me at the door we used last time – we'll use my office. Call it extra tuition if you need an excuse. Merlin knows your classmates will believe it. I know you're supposed to be playing the average student, but you really took it too far today. You don't have to act completely clueless."

"A little overdone, was it?"

"Even Mr Weasley could have answered that question with more insight."

"Ouch."

"Indeed. May I ask what sport you have chosen?"

"Tennis. And I'm hopeless. I can't seem to get the racquet to connect with the ball. I've read all the books about techniques, and it just doesn't help. I always miss the ball by a split second."

"Not everything comes from books, Granger. You must have some hand-eye coordination, or you wouldn't be so proficient with Charms. It's simply your timing. No doubt you're over-thinking each swing. Try to relate it to using your wand – set your body free from your mind and just let instinct take over."

"I thought you weren't interested in foolish wand-waving."

"Have you seen me demonstrating duelling?"

"Yes."

"Did I use a wand?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"It was like watching you dance... Your wand was an extension of your body... It all just flowed."

"Exactly. Now think of your tennis racquet in the same way. You're not holding it, merely using it as an extension of your arm."

"How do you know so much about tennis?"

"I know nothing about tennis. But I have seen it played, and the same principles apply."

"Oh. Well, I'll give it a try. Thanks!"

"You're welcome. Six-thirty then?"

"I'll be there."

Hermione

Bloody hell. What's *he* doing here? Couldn't help himself I suppose. Had to come and watch me make an idiot of myself.

Oof. Didn't even see that one coming. How does someone hit the ball that hard? How does someone actually hit the damned ball? Think of it like your wand, he said. I'd like to see you try it, git!

Missed again!

Oh, just look at the bastard smirk. He's enjoying this far too much. Now he's waving his hand like a wand. Okay, I get it!

Here it comes.

It's not a tennis racquet. It's an extension of my arm.

It's not a... Hey! I hit it!

And the sarcastic one is applauding.

Take that!

Ah. That's the trick. Pretend they are Snape's balls you are hitting over the net.

If he ever mentions this at Hogwarts, it'll be canaries for him!

Snape

Granger should wear shorts and skimpy tops more often. Preferably not in front of any young men.

Just me.

Pervert.

She really is hopeless. I don't think she could hit the ball if it was three times slower. Remember the water balloons, Granger. You had no problem tossing them around. I suppose she used magic then.

Come on, Granger. Relax. Think of your wand like I told you.

That's it.

That's my girl!

Why is she looking at me like that? Have I done something wrong?

"Do you fancy a walk after dinner, Harmony? Lee and Amelia are keen to wander down to the village shop for some sweets."

"I'd love to, but I have to meet Mr Sneyd up at the school at six-thirty. He wasn't particularly impressed with my performance in class today and offered me a catch-up session."

"Lucky you, getting him all to yourself. I hope you behave yourselves."

"Cathy! He's a teacher!"

"Just saying – you, him, alone. He seems to like you, you know."

"He's just doing his job. Teaching. Nothing else."

"Okay. Okay. Don't get your knickers in a knot!"

"Hi. What's up with you two? You look like you've been arguing. Coming to the village, Harmony?"

"No, Lee. I'm studying."

"With Seth."

"I'd like to have private lessons with Seth. Private *anatomy* lessons!"

"Amelia!"

"What? Don't try and tell me you haven't thought the same? Well, Lee and Cathy, anyway."

"Oh, yes."

"Definitely!"

A/N: I'm not sure why this chapter ended up so short. It's just the way it turned out.

This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LliveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for the beta. Hugs to Amelia for... well, just being Amelia!

Chapter Eleven: Giving Into Temptation

Snape and Hermione meet to check the files of the possible suspects. They get a little sidetracked.

Disclaimer: If they were mine I would keep them under lock and key. They can't be trusted to behave.

A/N: Chapter Ten was posted at the same time, so don't miss it out.

Chapter Eleven: Giving in to Temptation

"I don't know how you do it."

"Do what?"

"Manage to get those girls drooling over you and watching your every move. It never used to happen at Hogwarts. Well, not unless your Slytherins have dubious taste in men."

"That was not exactly complimentary, Granger. I take it you decline to participate in the drooling?"

"I don't *drool*, Snape. My main concern is checking out these files, and you keeping your dirty mind under control."

"I don't think I'm the only one around here whose mind strays, Granger. When in glass houses..."

...

"Gods, do you think it's living without magic that does it? I mean, you're still *you*. And I'm..."

"Still an annoying, know-it-all Gryffindor?"

"Something like that. And we do have to go back to Hogwarts and resume our usual roles."

"Head of Slytherin and Gryffindor Princess? Greasy git and Miss Squeaky Clean?"

"Don't be so flippant, Snape. I meant as professor and student. After all, we're really working here as colleagues despite posing as teacher and student. I don't know about you, but I'm going to miss baiting you. Oops, I meant *talking* with you. Really."

"I don't believe there is need for concern. Once I'm permitted to be myself, I'm sure you'll avoid me as you always have before, Granger."

"But is that really who you are, Severus? I'd always assumed most of the intolerance, unfairness, and general negativity was due to the stress of living as a double agent and a necessary cover to do so. Is the *real* you truly so bad?"

"You seemed to think so back at Grimmauld Place."

"Only because I was disappointed you'd not changed after the war. I've seen how different you can be here, and although you say it's all an act, I just can't reconcile *this* witty, personable, and even flirty man with your previous persona."

"I thought you missed the git?"

"I do at times. I miss his brilliant sarcasm and innate presence. I miss the stalking and the swishing. He was always so intense, even when he was avoiding us as much as possible. Perhaps that was why I was so disappointed. I suppose I just expected *more*."

"More what, exactly?"

"I don't know. Just... more."

"Don't sigh, girl. Despite your idealistic fantasies, I am, and always will be, Severus Snape. You might not have liked me as I was, and you might not like me as I will be, but that is not going to change the facts. Take me or leave me, as you see fit."

"Take you? I wish."

"Don't mutter under your breath, Granger. It's not ladylike. Time we stopped idle chatter and got to work. You take Morag's file, and I'll check Denise's. Look for anything that could possibly indicate a magical background."

"Yes, sir!"

"Good to see you can still obey orders sometimes, *Hermione*."

"Get fucked, *Severus*."

"Are you offering?"

"*Snape!*"

"Sorry. Couldn't resist."

...

"Look. Morag's father is not listed. Apparently, he left her mother before she was born. He could be a wizard."

"Or just a cad. We'll need more than that as evidence. Keep looking."

"Were you always this much of a git, or did you have to work on it?"

"Comes naturally."

"That's what I thought."

...

"Here's something. Denise was home schooled until she was thirteen and seems to have had a lot of accidents as a child. Uncontrolled magic, perhaps?"

"Or simply a clumsy child who lived somewhere remote. Look at her address."

"True. Now, Miss Wallace. What secrets do you have?"

"I'm finished with Morag's file. I couldn't find anything else. What have you found?"

"Do you have to read over my shoulder, Granger?"

"Oh, Seth, I just wanted to be close to you."

"You'll get more than you bargained for, if you keep pressing yourself against my back like that, woman."

"Promises, promises."

"Never mind promises, look at this. Katrina Wallace was born in Scotland to Andrew Wallace and Maria Nikolas. When she turned three, they moved to her mother's parents' home in Greece. She only returned here *in January*."

"What's so significant about January?"

"Kingsley said the magical activity here started in February this year."

"Just after Katrina arrived!"

"Precisely. There is no reason given for the family moving to Greece. And I vaguely recall an Andrew Wallace a few years behind me at Hogwarts. It's a common enough name, but..."

"They might have moved when she first manifested magic. And if she has a wand, it's likely to be from Greece and not registered here with the Ministry."

"Why would her parents send her to a Muggle School? And why then, when Voldemort was running rampant through the Ministry and had *me* installed at Hogwarts?"

"It doesn't make sense to us, but I remember reading an article in the *Daily Prophet* around Christmas, which mentioned Greek wizards were under close scrutiny due to unheralded numbers of sightings by Muggles around that time. Perhaps they had to get her out of the country for some reason and chose Scotland because of her heritage. They could hardly send her to Hogwarts, with the situation there, so hiding her in a Muggle school was probably the next best option. As long as she didn't perform any magic, she was as good as invisible."

"Except she has, and we are no closer to finding out why. I'd wager my best bottle of Ogden's there is someone else involved."

"How can you know that? She might just be a bratty fifteen-year-old who won't stop using her wand?"

"Is that like certain teenagers who wouldn't stop using Invisibility Cloaks and magical maps to get into trouble?"

"We were *not* bratty!"

"Indeed you were. You three caused more trouble than the rest of your year combined."

"I don't suppose Draco Malfoy letting in a bunch of Death Eaters counts then? But then again, he was one of your Slytherins!"

"And you know damned well I had to pander to that boy or risk blowing my cover."

"That boy would have done better with a swift kick where it hurts, Snape. Maybe then he wouldn't have put you in the position of having to kill Albus Dumbledore!"

...

"Snape? Are you all right? I'm sorry; I shouldn't have brought that up. It was unkind and uncalled for."

...

"Snape. Severus. Come on. I didn't mean to upset you. Please... you're scaring me. Don't just sit there staring! Severus!"

"I didn't want to kill the old bastard, you know, Hermione. He made me do it. I didn't ... want... to..."

"Hush. It's all right. Everyone knows you were under an Unbreakable Vow. Come here."

Hermione

Oh, Merlin, what have I done? I've never seen Snape like this before. He's so still and quiet, and I'm sure he looks suspiciously close to tears. Way to go, Granger. Re-open old wounds just as they are healing.

He looks so distressed. Dammit. I'll just give him a hug. Even Snape needs hugs at times.

There, there, that feels better, doesn't it?

He smells so masculine. Warm and strong.

I like hugging Snape. I think he likes it too. His eyes have lost that despairing look.

Uh oh.

I think he's going to...

...

Mmmmm. I know I shouldn't have. It was probably taking advantage of him when he was most vulnerable.

But he kisses like a dream. Lips so warm and firm, tongue so sweet.

Oh, my. His hands are stroking my bottom. Feels good. Don't hold me too close, Snape, or I might find something interesting down there.

Oh, yes.

Definitely interesting.

Bugger! Why did he stop?

Snape

So soft.

Can't stop kissing her. Touching her.

Drowning the memories in her sweet embrace.

Don't ever let me go.

...

Dammit, this can't happen.

Must.

Stop.

Now.

"No, we can't."

"Why not? Don't you want to?"

"Yes. No. I... Merlin, woman, of course I do. You felt that much."

"Then why not? We've been dancing around it for weeks now."

"You know it's inappropriate in so many ways, Hermione."

"Why? Because you're my teacher? You haven't really been my teacher for well over a year, Severus. The roles we're playing now are simply that. Roles. Cover stories. You're twice my age? So. I don't care. Chronological age and maturity do not necessarily go hand in hand, as well you know."

"But *I will* be your teacher again once we have finished here. And age may not matter to you, but it will matter to your friends and family. They will simply see me as the old pervert I am for even considering you in this light."

"Perhaps I like old perverts, Snape. Sure as hell beats young, fumble-fingered oafs. And guess what? I'm not going to be in your class, so you *won't* be teaching me."

"You are dropping Defence Against the Dark Arts?"

"Oh come on, Snape. We fought Death Eaters at the end of fifth year. We spent all last year searching for and destroying *Horcruxes*. We infiltrated Gringotts using Polyjuice and Unforgiveables. I was tortured by Bellatrix at Malfoy Manor, and later we fought Death Eaters again in the final battle. Harry, Ron, and I have already been granted honorary Defence N.E.W.T.s. Didn't you know?"

...

"Severus?"

"You were *tortured*? By *Bella*?"

"Yes. I'd rather not discuss it. It's not exactly a pleasant memory. I assumed you knew."

"My task was to keep Hogwarts' students under control. I was not informed of everything that went on outside the school."

"Well, that's beside the point. It's old history now. Don't change the subject."

"I was not changing the subject. I was just... just... I don't know. Shocked. Angry. Guilty."

"Don't be daft, Snape. It wasn't your fault. How could you have prevented it?"

"Still. I was part of the same group. How can you...?"

"Want you? Like you? L..."

"NO! Don't say it! Just don't. Don't give me false hope. I can't do it again."

"But, Severus..."

"No. Go. Please."

"But..."

"Go. Now."

Snape

Oh, gods, what have I done?

It was bad enough when she was aware I wanted her. Lust, pure and simple. Easily explained by circumstance and easily suppressed once the situation returns to normal. Nothing a few suggestive remarks wouldn't defuse.

What the fuck possessed me to kiss her?

Now, she must know it all.

Now, she must know I love her.

I love her.

I love Hermione Granger. And she as good as admitted she felt the same.

We're bloody screwed.

Hermione

Damned foolish, noble, self-doubting man! Why can't he believe someone would want him, even care for him? How can I just carry on as though he didn't kiss me like he really meant it?

Don't give me false hope.

Does that mean what I think it does?

Oh, Severus. I don't think I knew how I felt about you until I saw that look of despair in your eyes when I mentioned Dumbledore. I just wanted to hold you in my arms until the pain went away.

I enjoy spending time with him. I adore his wit, even when he's being totally obnoxious. I even enjoy arguing with him. And kissing him was divine. I want him so much I can't think straight.

Gods, I love him. Bloody Severus Snape.

How in the seven hells did that happen?

How am I going to pretend it didn't?

"So... How was private study with Seth, Harmony? Did you get to know him better?"

"Oh, yes, Amelia. He's such an amazing kisser and has hands that light fires all over my body."

"No need to be sarcastic. I was just asking."

"Sorry, perhaps you should tell me how your shopping expedition went. Lee, did you manage to find me some of that chilli chocolate?"

"No. I looked in both shops, but they hadn't heard of it. Where did you say you have bought it before?"

"Back in Hogs... er, I mean Hoggs Superstore. It's in London, near my grandmother's house."

"Never mind. Perhaps you can ask her to send you some?"

"Yeah. That's a good idea. I'll get her to send enough for all of us."

"Eww. Chilli chocolate. No thanks."

"Where's your sense of adventure, Cathy?"

"Back at the shop with the plain milk chocolate."

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for the beta.

Chapter Twelve: Frustration Leads to Revelation

Chapter 12 of 23

Hermione reveals more than she should to her friends.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were, I wouldn't share nicely.

Chapter Twelve: Frustration Leads to Revelation

Hermione

There he is, sitting and chatting with the French teacher as if nothing was amiss. How could he? Kisses me until my legs turn to jelly, admits he cares, and then runs away and avoids me like the wizarding plague. I haven't even had a chance to catch him after class; he disappears from the room so fast.

It's not like I haven't noticed him watching me when he thinks I'm unaware. He thinks he's so unreadable, but I know him much better now. I can see he's stressed, despite his brilliant portrayal of the cool, unshakeable Seth Sneyd. The fisted hands as he stands before his desk, the slight frown as he sits staring into space while we work, the

forced smile. His suppressed arousal is as evident to me as if he had a bloody great bulge in his trousers. Maybe he has, but he keeps *that* area well hidden.

I just have to look at him, and I'm burning. His voice caresses me as his body avoids any physical contact. The fleeting moments when our eyes meet before he averts his gaze, reveal his desire and, oh, gods, the mutual *awareness* when he is close.

I can't stand it. I'm so bloody frustrated, and he must be as well.

Why, Snape?

For some baseless notion he's not worthy? I've a good mind to sneak into his cottage one night and shag him senseless, then see what he has to say. But I don't want him to just think I only want sex. It's more than that.

Dammit, I want all of him. Every skinny, pale, beautiful inch of his skin. Every twisted, sarcastic, brilliant part of his mind. And every tender, needy, passionate scrap of his dear heart.

Just as well I haven't come up with any more information relevant to our task. He would *have* to talk to me then.

Bloody wizards.

Snape

Must she sit there looking at me with such open *want* in her eyes? A man can only take so much. Merlin knows it takes all my willpower not to haul her into my office and take her right there on the desk. I'm surprised no-one has noticed my near constant erection.

We can't, Granger. We just *can't*. It's not right, and, for once in my miserable life, I want to do the right thing.

Our fingers brush as she hands in her homework, and she pulls away as if burned.

Yes, Granger, beware, for I fear my passion will ignite and consume us both. I don't know if I'm strong enough to withstand it.

She offered her body and her heart that night. Willingly, without reservation.

I still wonder why.

What am I to do with her?

What am I to do with myself?

"Hey, Harmony, what's up? Has Ewan been trying his stupid pick-up lines again? Don't pay him any heed; he just thinks he's cool because he's in the school production. Anyone would think he was some big-name actor, the way he carries on."

"What? Er... no, I haven't seen Ewan."

"Lee, can't you see she's pining over Mr Sneyd. They haven't had any of their after school study sessions for weeks, and he's avoiding her after class. Isn't he, Harmony? What happened?"

"Nothing. Just a little difference of opinion. And I'm *not* pining, Cathy. Pining would imply there was a relationship. He's a teacher. I'm a student. That's all there is to it."

"But you would like there to be more, wouldn't you? It's okay, Harmony, we *are* your friends. You don't have to pretend with us. We all like him, but you know us; we're all a bit daft. We don't really mean it. But we've seen the way you look at him. We've seen the way he looks at *you*. No-one here is going to judge either of you. Just tell us what we can do to help. Oh, don't cry, love. It can't be that bad."

"But... b-but... it is. You can't possibly understand. There are things you don't know about us things I c-can't tell you. *Any* of you."

"Shh. You don't have to tell us anything you don't want to. But you can trust us. Me and Lee and even Amelia. We won't breathe a word to anyone. Cross my heart and hope to die."

"Don't say that!"

"Why? It's just an expression."

"Not where I come from. Not where Seth comes from. Don't *ever* say that in front of him!"

"You knew him before?"

"No... yes... Dammit!"

"You did. But you can't say why."

"All I can say is we're here for a reason. I can't tell you any more than that, or it would cause a load of trouble. And you mustn't tell anyone. Not a soul. Either of you. Okay, you can tell Amelia, but she has to swear to secrecy."

"Tell me what? And why the secret squirrel stuff?"

"Harmony is about to tell us about her and Seth Sneyd. And how she knows him. But you mustn't tell anyone, or she will get into trouble. Okay, Amelia?"

"Sure. I'm in. My lips are sealed."

"Harmony isn't your real name, is it? And his isn't Seth Sneyd. And he isn't really a teacher."

"No, Lee. We're undercover. But he *is* a teacher. A damned good one. He's taught me since I was eleven. Don't ask where; I can't tell you."

"How old *are* you, Harmony? A seventeen-year-old wouldn't be doing what you're doing."

"I'm nineteen. And technically still his student, or will be when we finish here. *That's* the problem. Here, we are working as partners. Getting to know each other. Back home, it will be back to teacher and student. And you have *no* idea what he's really like."

"You said once he had a bit of a temper..."

"Well, I understated it. Among his other skills, he's a brilliant actor. If you'd known him as long as I have, you wouldn't fancy him at all. He's had a major makeover to get him looking the way he does now usually his hair is long and greasy and flops over his face, and he wears clothes as old-fashioned and repressed as his demeanour.

"Most of his students are scared of him and avoid him whenever possible. His bitter sarcasm and antisocial behaviour have left him with few, if any friends, and certain other roles he's had to play until very recently, which I can't reveal, have meant he has lived under extreme duress for years.

"The Seth Sneyd you see here is as real as the glossy, retouched photos of the actresses in women's magazines. Hell, I've seen him smile more often in one lesson here than I had for the previous seven years!"

"So, Harmony, you're saying he's really this awful, unattractive man, and yet you still care for him. Why?"

"Because, Lee, who he was then was not the real Sev... Seth either. He was playing a role where he had to be seen to be like that, just as he is acting the charming music teacher here. I'm not sure who the real man is, but over the last two months I've discovered he's witty, incredibly intelligent, sensitive, and, yes, bloody sexy. He's still arrogant at times, snarky, and volatile, but I wouldn't have him any other way. I'm just so afraid he'll slip back into his previous persona out of habit, and I'll lose him again."

"But haven't you talked to him about it?"

"That's the problem. Before we came here, he spent the summer supervising me and two other students at the house where we were living. His mood was appalling, and I'm afraid I lost the plot a bit and told him what I thought of him. Several times.

"Since then, we've cycled between decent conversation, shouting matches, and sarcastic jibes, interspersed with varying degrees of flirtatious and downright vulgar suggestions. And *he's* just as bad. But we haven't really sat down and talked about the future. He's just decided a relationship is inappropriate and that's it. End of story. Since we kissed the other night, he's avoided me."

"You *kissed* Seth Sneyd? So, was he any good?"

"Bloody amazing. I really thought we were going to..."

"Oh my god! You were going to sleep with him! Be still, my beating heart. And he said no?"

"Unfortunately, Lee, his sense of honour is stronger than his libido. I wish mine was."

"No wonder he looks all hot under the collar in class nowadays. He probably wants to carry you off into his office and have his wicked way with you."

"I wish, Cathy. I wish."

"Er... Harmony. I was just wondering. You're not the average student you appear, are you?"

"Sorry, Amelia. Back at my old school I was known as the school swot. Top in my year every year. Seth takes great pleasure in reminding me I was far worse than you'll ever be. I used to drive him mad when I was younger, waving my hand around and parroting answers from textbooks I'd memorised over the summer."

"You read the textbooks the summer *before* the year started? I kneel to you, Miss Queen of know-it-alls!"

"Bloody hell, Harmony. You *have* been holding out on us. You realise she could have been helping us with our homework, girls?"

"Oh, no, we're *not* going there. I spent six years running myself ragged trying to help my two best friends study. Never again!"

"Six years? I thought you'd known Seth for seven."

"Er... Circumstances meant I had to have a year off last year, which is why I still have another year to finish."

"You didn't have..."

"NO! I was *not* pregnant! I only wish it had been something as mundane as that... I wish..."

"Lee, go and find her a drink of hot chocolate. Whatever happened last year must have been really traumatic. Shh. Come on, Harmony, whatever it was, it's over now, isn't it?"

"Y-yes. But things happened. Bad things."

"Was Seth involved? Did he do something? Is this some kind of mixed up 'want the bad guy' sort of thing?"

"Seth Sneyd is no bad guy. He's the most heroic, self-sacrificing wiz... man I know. We all owe a great deal to him. Even you three, though hopefully you'll never know why."

"Wow. Sounds like you really have it bad. Here, drink this. Hot chocolate always helps."

"Thanks, Lee. Thanks, all of you. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Hermione

Now what do I do? I shouldn't have told them so much, but it just all spilled out. I was so frustrated with Snape's behaviour. I suppose I should be thankful I didn't whip out my wand and do a little magic demonstration while I was at it.

Mind you, I can just see the look on Snape's face if those three found out he was one of the most powerful wizards in Britain. No, Hermione, it's not worth the hell that would break loose if you violated the Statute of Secrecy.

Pity. At least he might talk to me.

"Hi! How was the village market?"

"Brilliant. You should have come. I'm sure it would have made you feel better."

"Maybe. I just didn't feel like it."

"Look what Amelia bought. Isn't it gorgeous?"

"It's just one of the cheap ones. There were some that were much more expensive. Special pendants that give you good luck with your love-life or some such nonsense. The salesman tried to tell us if we bought one and gave it to the boy we fancied, he would fall head over heels for us. What a load of rubbish. Still, they are pretty. Harmony, why are you looking at me that way?"

"Amelia, can you take it off so I can have a closer look, please?"

"Sure. Here. Look at the way it sparkles in the light. I love the shape. It looks like a symbol of some sort."

"Ansuz. How appropriate."

"Pardon?"

"Oh, nothing, Amelia. Yes, it's very pretty. So, what stall did you buy it from?"

"It was the small one in the north-western corner. He seems to sell plenty of the more expensive pendants as well as the cheaper ones, although I can't really see a difference. He says it's magic. Thinks he's a comedian, that one."

"Is he there every week?"

"No. Only about once a month. Do you want to buy one? He'll still be there for a while yet. You have time. Want me to go back with you?"

"Thanks, but it's okay. I'll just go and fetch my purse. Won't take me long to walk down there. You three ought to get some of your homework done. I did mine while you were away. See you soon!"

...

"Anyone want a drink? I'll grab one from the fridge."

"Amelia, come back here. Think about it. Wasn't that a bit strange? First, she didn't want to go down to the village, and now she suddenly has to go and buy a pendant."

"You don't think...?"

"I'm sure. I'll bet the first place she goes is Seth's cottage. Those pendants have something to do with the reason they are here. Let's follow them."

"*Cathy!* We promised not to ask any questions."

"Lee, we didn't say *anything* about finding stuff out for ourselves. Besides, they may need help."

"She'll kill us if she sees us."

"Then we'd better not be seen, had we? Come on, she's just left."

A/N: Ansuz is a rune signifying, amongst other things, a revealing message or insight. It can also represent good health, truth, wisdom, and harmony!

This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal.

Thanks to karelia for the beta.

Chapter Thirteen: Spy Tactics

Chapter 13 of 23

Severus and Hermione go off to find their quarry. The girls follow. Chaos ensues.

Disclaimer: No, they don't belong to me. Unfortunately.

Chapter Thirteen: Spy Tactics

Snape

I'm so pathetic. Sitting here drinking alone, just because I'm too fucking afraid to risk my heart again. She deserves so much better. Gods, I wish this bloody mission was over. With any luck I will be able to avoid her for the rest of the year and get on with being a miserable bastard again.

Cheers, Snape. Drink up.

Oh, who the hell is that? Can't a man get pleasantly sloshed in peace?

Go away.

If I pretend not to be here...

Fuck, it's Granger. Forgot to get that key off her. Hope she's happy now. Here I am, half-dressed and half-plastered.

Come to take advantage of me, witch?

I may just let you.

What on earth is she looking for in my bathroom?

Hermione

What in Merlin's name has he been doing? Just when I make a major breakthrough, he has to be sprawled on his couch, shirt undone, trousers off, and smelling like a distillery.

Damn you, Snape. How can you look so bloody enticing even like that? I must be crazy. Or have no taste.

He must have some Sober-Up potion in here.

Yes! Once a Potions master, always a Potions master!

Now, to get him to drink it.

"What are you doing fosshicking around in my bloody bathroom, woman?"

"Here, drink this."

"Sshober-Up? Why should I? I shpent a long time getting this pleasantly pissed, so why shpoi it now? Don't you want to take advantage of me?"

"Oh, gods. He's a whiny drunk. Cute, but whiny."

"Will you shtop talking about me as if I'm not here, Granger. Ish not polite, you know. Come and sit on my lap and tell me all the wicked things you want to do to me."

"Tempting though that offer might be, by morning you'd be hung-overand horrified. Not a sight I'd like to contemplate before breakfast. Just drink the bloody potion; I have something important to tell you, and I need you sober. Now!"

"All right. All right. Don't shout. I'm drinking. Bloody bosshy witches."

"Thank you. Do you think you can string two sentences together now without making offers you'd regret later?"

"Yes. Thank you, Granger. Do you think you can stop staring at my crotch long enough to tell me why you felt the need to barge in here yet again? I *could* have been otherwise occupied."

"I wouldn't have been complaining. Maybe next time. Anyway, you need to get dressed. We're going down to the village."

"Why? Oh, for Merlin's sake, Granger, my face is up here... Now, tell me what is going on."

"Sorry. Can't help myself. Forbidden fruit and all. Although *why* it has to be forbidden is beyond me."

"Granger!"

"Oh, right. The girls went to the market this morning. Amelia came back with a pendant she had bought from a stall there."

"And this is a good reason to interrupt my afternoon's activities?"

"It is when the pendant has been crafted from the same magical clay we found, and the stall-owner is also sellingspecial pendants that guarantee the recipient will fall in love with the giver."

"Fuck. Why didn't you say so sooner, girl?"

"You were hardly in a fit state..."

"Point taken. I assume you want to check out this stall-owner?"

"Yes. Apparently, he's only there once a month, so I thought we should go down there now and see what we can find out."

"What are we waiting for then?"

"Er... perhaps you should put some trousers on. Pleasant as the view is, I'm not prepared to share it with any other girl."

"Possessive wench, aren't you, Granger?"

"Get used to it, Snape."

"Where is this stall?"

"Over there, in the corner. Let's go... What?"

"We can't afford to just wander over there. If he's a rogue Death Eater, he might recognise you, and he'll definitely recognise me, even with the short hair. Just follow me."

"Professor Masterspy in action. I should feel privileged."

"Silence. Now, we'll lurk under this tree and watch for him to appear. I think he must be behind the stall at the moment. Fuck, he's looking straight at us. Come here! Mmmmph."

...

"Mmmmmmm. You kissed me."

"You noticed. Always knew you were quick. Now, next time I'll face away from him. Keep your bloody eyes open and see if you can get a look at him."

...

"I could get used to this spying technique. Can we do it again? I need another look."

"Granger. Don't play with me. What did he look like?"

"Spoilsport. He's youngish, around thirty, with a thin, blond, scarred face, as if he had acne in the past. Almost like an older version of Stan Shunpike. Sound familiar?"

"Edgely. He's related to Shunpike a cousin I think. He joined late last year and never had a chance to participate in anything too serious before he was caught. Pleaded temporary insanity and had his wand snapped and a tracer put on him to prevent him using another."

"Couldn't Voldemort get around that?"

"He could have if he'd wanted to. But Edgely was of little use to him. He'd already been caught once and was too big a security risk."

"But how would he know the Coercion Charm?"

"Edgely was incompetent as a Death Eater, but he wasn't entirely stupid. He learned as much as he could while he was with them... *us*."

"*Them*, Severus. You were *not* one of them."

"Forget the positive affirmations, Granger, and concentrate on the job in hand. Now, kiss me again and tell me what he's doing now."

"I thought you'd never ask."

...

...

...

"Are you quite finished?"

"Mmmm. Nearly."

...

"Granger..."

"Hold that position for a minute, Snape. There's a girl approaching the stall. Bingo! It's Katrina, and she's handing him a package. What shall we do?"

"Avoid being seen for a start."

"You didn't think of that when you were snogging me under the tree for anyone to see. What would any teachers or students have thought if they'd seen us?"

"I'm a spy, Granger. There were none nearby."

"Smug bastard."

"Stop talking for once and follow me."

"Yes, boss."

"About time."

"About time, what?"

"About time you learned your place."

"Get fucked, Snape. And yes, that *was* an offer."

"Your language has deteriorated considerably since you've been spending time with Muggle teenagers, Granger."

"Spending time with you is more likely to be the problem, *Professor*. Hey, you could have warned me you were going to stop!"

"Shhh. She's taking a shortcut through the woods. We need to stop her and question her."

"How? It's suspicious enough being seen together without blithely going up and asking her whether she's been consorting with any Death Eaters recently."

"She's a witch. We don't need to worry about her finding us out. We *do* need to find out what is going on. I suspect by the look on her face, she's not doing this willingly. She might need help. Besides, you and I, Granger, are two accomplished wizards. I hardly think a fifteen year old who's been attending a Muggle school for nearly a year is a threat."

"You know, Snape. That's one of the nicest things you've ever said to me."

"Well, make the most of it; you won't get a repeat offering. Now, do you have your wand?"

"You need to ask?"

"Right. You catch up with her and engage her in conversation while I circle around between her and the school."

"Okay. Be careful."

"You too."

"Psst. What are they doing now, Cathy? I can't see."

"They seem to be following Katrina. And arguing. Wait... no, they've split up. Harmony's catching up with Katrina, and Seth is sneaking around behind them."

"I can't believe they spent so much time kissing under that tree. Anyone could have seen them."

"Didn't you notice, Lee? They were pretending to be snogging while Harmony checked out that stall-owner. Well, they actually did snog, but she was watching him the entire time. Looked like they didn't want him to see their faces."

"Look, girls. Harmony has stopped Katrina. Wonder what that stick is for? Seth has one, too."

"What sticks, Amelia? Oh, those ones. That's his lucky baton. Remember we asked him about it on his first day. Hey, look at that. She just pointed it at Katrina, and she fell over."

"And Seth is using his now. I've never seen a conducting baton do *that* before. How the hell did he do that? Katrina had a stick too, but he made it fly over there."

"This is definitely *not* normal. I thought they must have been working for the police, but this is weird."

"You're telling me. Cathy, what do you think?"

"I think Miss Harmony Grant has a great deal of explaining to do."

"They seem to be interrogating Katrina. Oh, look, she's crying. And Harmony is hugging her."

"Bloody hell. Do you see what I see?"

"What, Amelia?"

"That man from the stall. He's sneaking up on them. And he's picked up Katrina's stick. Those things look pretty dangerous. I'll bet he's up to no good. Girls, we need to take action. Our friend and our teacher are in trouble."

"What can we do?"

"Run. Run and yell. That'll distract the stall guy. Ready... GO!"

"So, you're telling us you were sent here to escape from the situation in Greece, but you were foolish enough to be seen using your wand, which you were *supposed* to have left at home. Furthermore, now you are being blackmailed by Edgely into performing dark magic on the clay so he can make money from gullible Muggles? What part of wrong do you not understand, Miss Wallace?"

"Oh, go easy on her, Snape. She's terrified of you. Why don't you just loom a bit less and let her explain."

"She's a foolish child, Granger. She ought to be terrified."

"*Snape? Granger? Are you...?*"

"Yes, Katrina. I'm Hermione Granger, and this bad-tempered git is Severus Snape."

"But you two are heroes. Why are you here at my school?"

"Because, young lady, your little escapades have come to the attention of the Ministry of Magic, and we were sent to investigate."

"I'm so sorry. I just missed using magic so much I came into the woods here and practised a few Transfiguration exercises. I didn't know he was watching. He said he'd turn me in to the Ministry, and they'd send me to A-Azkaban. I didn't know what to do. My parents would never have understood. He said it was just a simple charm to encourage people to think well of others."

"And it did not occur to you to question why he did not use the charm himself?"

"I wondered, but I was too afraid to ask."

"Well, I think you need to talk to Kingsley Shackbolt, Miss Wallace. He will deal with you as necessary."

"He won't send me back, will he?"

"Don't worry, Katrina. Kingsley is very fair. His main concern will be bringing Edgely to justice. As long as you cooperate and tell him everything you know, I'm sure everything will be all right."

"I just love it here so much. Everyone is a lot friendlier than in Greece, and girls get more freedom."

"I think that's enough chatter, Granger. We need to get back to school to notify Shackle... What the fuck is that racket?"

"Bloody hell. It's the girls! And Edgely! *Stupefy! Incarcerous!*"

"Well done, Granger. Now, what do you propose we do with these three?"

"Er... explain?"

"I think we'd all better stay right here until Kingsley arrives. Can you watch this lot while I send a *Patronus* message?"

"I'm on it."

"*Expecto Patronum!*"

"Snape? What was that?"

"I have no idea."

"It used to be a doe, didn't it? It's not one now. Looked like a large cat!"

"I see your formidable powers of observation remain unchallenged. Now, stop your infernal giggling, witch, and do something about your friends."

"Like what?"

"I suggest you talk to them before they develop lockjaw from standing there gaping with their mouths wide open."

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Thanks to karelia, who betaed. Hugs to the girls at work, who brainstormed with me over morning tea.

Chapter Fourteen: Explaining Magic

Chapter 14 of 23

Hermione and Snape have a little explaining to do.

Disclaimer: I'm just borrowing them from JKR for a little outing.

Chapter Fourteen: Explaining Magic

"But... he called you a witch, Harmony. That's impossible."

"Cathy, Lee, Amelia, there's something I have to tell you. Well, there's rather a lot I have to explain. I suggest you all sit down here on this log."

"What's *he* going to do?"

"Snape? He'll watch Edgely and Katrina."

"Snape? Is that his real name?"

"I suppose I'd better start at the beginning. I'm Hermione Granger. I'm a witch. The wizard over there is Severus Snape, my Potions and Defence Against the Dark Arts professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Katrina is a witch from Greece, and Edgely is a wizard who has been breaking all sorts of wizarding laws and is about to get his comeuppance."

"But magic doesn't exist..."

"I thought you'd say that, Amelia. Did you not notice how we immobilised Edgely?"

"Yes... but I didn't understand it."

"Never mind. Watch. *Accio* dry wood! *Incendio! Aguamenti!*"

"Wow! That's some trick."

"It's not a trick, Lee. It's magic. Real magic. This is my wand. It channels the magic, so I can use it effectively. I can do some things without it, but it's easier to use the wand. I'm sure Snape over there can do far more wandless magic. There are communities of witches and wizards magically hidden amongst you Muggles non-magical people all over the country. One of the biggest is just outside Hogwarts. Some of us, like me, are Muggle-born, which means both our parents are Muggles. I can tell you it came as quite a shock when I turned eleven and received a visit from a Hogwarts professor to tell me I was a witch and would be attending their school."

"Some of us are half-blood, like Severus, with one Muggle and one wizarding parent, and some are pure-bloods. We have a Statute of Secrecy, which I have just broken by telling you this, but as you had already inadvertently witnessed us performing magic, I suspect I'll get away with it. Any questions so far?"

"I have one. What will happen to us now?"

"Good question, Cathy. Usually, the Ministry of Magic yes, we have our own bureaucracy will come along and *Obliviate* any Muggles who have witnessed magic by mistake. That is, modify their memories. But I'm hoping you will be prepared to swear an Oath of Secrecy not to tell anyone, even your parents."

"Why not just make us forget?"

"Because I kind of like you idiots, and I'd hate to lose you as friends now we have solved our little mystery."

"Getting sentimental again, Granger?"

"Oh, shut it, Snape. I didn't ask your opinion."

"I see what you mean about his personality, Harmony... I mean, Hermione. Is he always this nasty?"

"Miss Radford, *that* was me being pleasant. You do *not* want to see me being nasty."

"Trust me, Amelia. You don't."

"So, why were you here? And what does it have to do with Katrina and the stall guy?"

"Our Magical Law Enforcement section had been alerted to the use of illicit magic within the school grounds. Normally, they would have investigated themselves, but with such a large number of Muggles here it was too difficult. So, they sent us in undercover to find out who was performing magic and why. It's taken quite a while to track down, but we know now Katrina was the culprit."

"Was she doing something bad?"

"Not initially, Lee. Foolish, but not bad. She used her wand where she shouldn't, and Edgely saw her do it. I won't go into details, but he's been in trouble with our authorities and isn't allowed to use his own magic. He blackmailed Katrina into helping him manufacture dangerous items, which he then sold to innocent people."

"The expensive pendants. They really were magic!"

"Yes, Amelia, and a nasty little piece of magic at that. They are designed to coerce people into having feelings for another that are completely false. Kingsley and his team will now have to track down every one he has sold and deactivate it."

"Did I hear my name spoken in vain?"

"Hey, where did *he* come from?"

"It's called Apparation, Cathy. We use it to move from place to place magically. Much faster than the bus. Kingsley, about time you showed."

"Always pleasant to see you, too, Severus. So, what do you have for me? And why do you have three conscious Muggles here? I hope you two have a damned good explanation."

"Ask Miss Granger. They're *her* friends."

"They helped us apprehend Edgely. If it wasn't for them, who knows what would have happened. Please don't *Oblivate* them, Kingsley. They're prepared to swear an Oath of Secrecy."

"Perhaps you'd better start at the beginning. The last message Severus sent me only said you had uncovered some possible suspects. I'm assuming you've progressed since then?"

"Well. I do believe we have to thank these three young ladies for their assistance. Hermione, are you quite convinced they will not pose a security risk if we allow them to retain knowledge of the wizarding community? You will have to vouch for them and take responsibility if any breaches of secrecy occur."

"Did you hear that, girls? Are you prepared to swear to secrecy, knowing I will be punished if you tell anyone? Right, then. Kingsley?"

"I'm satisfied. Will you excuse us a moment please, Hermione? Now, do you three have any further questions before I go?"

"We do, Mr Shacklebolt. By the way, I'm Amelia, and this is Cathy and Lee. Exactly *how* important are Hermione and Severus in your world? You seem to, you know, respect them both a lot, and from what Hermione said, you are a very important wizard yourself."

"Pleased to meet you, girls. Your friends here are not just ordinary wizards. They played an enormous part, along with some others, in defeating a very evil wizard earlier this year. Severus particularly, spent many years putting his life on the line for us. Quite simply, they are heroes. Don't let them tell you any different."

"Hermione said he was a hero, but she never told us she was one too. No, sir, she didn't tell us *why*. So, they are quite er... powerful?"

"Oh, young lady, Severus Snape is one of the most powerful and accomplished wizards of his time, and Hermione is still young, but she is a remarkable witch."

"Wow! We'd never have thought. She seemed so ordinary, and he seemed so *nice*."

"Which is exactly the roles they were told to play. I see you are looking sceptical still. Cathy, isn't it? How about I arrange a little demonstration? Severus! Hermione! Would you two mind doing a little favour for me?"

"The last little favour has taken three months, Kingsley."

"This one will only take ten minutes. I would like you to demonstrate duelling to these three sceptics. They seem to think you are a simple, easy-going pair. I cast Notice-Me-Not and Muggle-Repelling Charms around the area when I arrived, so you needn't look so horrified, Severus."

"I assumed you had. I was merely appalled at the thought of duelling Miss Granger. Despite her exemption from my class this year, she's still only a teenage know-it-all. I hardly think it is appropriate for me to duel with her."

"Oh, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised, Severus. I don't believe you ever saw her in action during the final battle. She took out several Death Eaters and did so in a most efficient manner. Don't underestimate her."

"Cathy, did he say final *battle*?"

"Yes. And Death Eaters. Just who have we been living with?"

"I think we're about to see, girls. Looks like Seth... oops, Snape, has decided she's worthy competition after all. I wonder what a duel is, anyway?"

"Bloody hell! He moves like lightning! And did you see that streak of light?"

"Yeah, but look how she dodged it. It's like the Matrix movie I saw in the holidays."

"You saw that, Lee? Was it good?"

"Never mind that now. This is way better. I think they must use some sort of force field thingy, by the way the lights bounce off. What would happen if they connected?"

"It's called a shield, girls. And they are not merely lights. The spells they're using are a mixture of harmless Jelly-legs Jinxes and such, as well as powerful stunners. See that red one Severus just dodged? That would have knocked him out cold if he hadn't moved so fast. There are other far more dangerous spells including those that torture and kill. Magic can be lethal if used inappropriately."

"Do you mean to say they have *killed* people?"

"Unfortunately, they both have had to kill in the line of duty. But remember, girls, it was not a game. The wizarding world was battling a merciless tyrant who would stop at nothing to take power. They did what they had to do. We nearly lost Severus in the process. I'm sure Hermione will fill you in on some of the details, but don't expect too much of her. She lost several friends earlier this year and is still grieving."

"I guess that's why they seem to have such a close relationship. Shared experience, and all."

"Relationship, Cathy? They don't even like each other. I'm actually surprised they haven't hexed each other before now."

"Oh, you'd be surprised. Actually, sir, just how important *are* you in your Ministry?"

"You'll have to do better than that, Snape! I learned to block those back in fifth year!"

"Don't get cocky, sweetheart. I'm just being a gentleman. Ouch! That connected!"

"Well, don't be patronising. Good try, but you missed! See what you think of that!"

"Ha! Miles away. Let's see how you get on when I cast nonverbally."

"Piece of cake, Snape. Ooh, a stunner, I'm sooo scared!"

"Damned know-it-all!"

"Arrogant git!"

"Bloody hell! Where did you learn *that*?"

"From you, darling, in sixth year Defence."

"Fucking swot!"

"Sticks and stones..."

"What? Damn!"

"Ha! The old distraction technique. Works every time. Oh, Merlin, you're bleeding. I thought you'd block it."

"How did you know that curse, Granger?"

"From your old book. Here, let me look at it."

"It's nothing, just a scratch."

"Let me look all the same. I can heal it for you."

"Granger, you're *not* getting my shirt off. Granger... what are you do..."

...

...

...

"I think they're finished duelling."

"Do you wizards always kiss and make up after you have fought?"

"Er... no, Amelia. But I see what you mean about *close*."

"I'm getting all hot and bothered just watching. He is a fantastic kisser."

"Don't you feel like a voyeur, Cathy?"

"No. If they want do that in public, they have to live with an audience... Oh, my, but not *that*. Do you see where his hands are, Lee?"

"And hers. Lucky girl."

"Ahem. I think you have quite ably demonstrated *duelling*. Thank you, Severus and Hermione."

"Oh, Mr Shackbolt. Just when it was getting interesting."

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to my wonderful beta, karelia, and the girls at work for all their input.

Chapter Fifteen: Back to Class

Chapter 15 of 23

Snape and Hermione have to endure the rest of the term, and the girls have more questions.

Disclaimer: Snape and Hermione belong to JKR. The girls are mine.

Chapter Fifteen: Back to Class

Snape

Why did I agree to finish the term here? I know it made sense to stay. It gives the headmaster here a few weeks to find a replacement, and I don't have a job to go to at Hogwarts until next term, but still. Every day I see her. Every day it gets harder. And not just psychologically. No amount of wanking allays the desire I have for her. I feel like a damned hormonal teenager!

At least her friends have stopped making eyes at me in class. I think they might be a little afraid of me now. About time.

Just the recital to go and then Christmas at Grimmauld Place.

With her.

Fuck.

Hermione

Three more weeks to change his mind. Well, five more if I count the Christmas holidays. But with Harry and Ron around, I'm hardly going to get a chance to seduce him. They'll be all over me like a rash wanting to know how I managed to handle Snape for three months.

Gods, I'd love to be handling him right now. Preferably those parts of him I saw the morning after the Halloween ball.

Now, there's a thought.

I still have his key.

"It's so cool you were able to stay until the end of term, Herm... Harmony. Oops, nearly slipped up. But we're going to miss you so much when you leave. You do promise to write, don't you? And visit if you can? You know, with all that 'popping' around you can do, surely you can 'pop' down for the occasional weekend?"

"Yeah. We want to get all the news about how you are getting on with Seth."

"It's okay to use our real names when no-one else is around, Lee. Just be careful in front of anyone else. And, yes, I'll try and arrange to come and visit, although that will depend on whether the headmistress at Hogwarts gives permission. I'm going to miss you all as well!"

"Can't you just ask Snape?"

"I don't even know if he will be talking to me back at Hogwarts, Cathy. He's such a stubborn, bloody bastard."

"But the way you two were snogging after that duel, we all thought..."

"So did I. But once again, he pulled the, 'We can't, I'm your teacher,' act. If I didn't want to kiss him so much I'd bloody well throttle him."

"There must be something you can do. Why don't you just bail him up after class and pin him to the desk?"

"Amelia! I *can't* do that!"

"Why not? We'd stand watch outside the door, wouldn't we, girls?"

"Sure. We'd be your bodyguards. We'd be his personal bodyguards if we didn't think you'd cast some nasty spell on us for even thinking about his body!"

"Think away, Lee. Just remember, he's *mine*. He might not appreciate that at the moment, but before too long I'm going to knock some sense into that dark, broody brain of his."

"I'd love to be a fly on the wall when you do that."

"You wish!"

"So, what happened about Katrina and that Edgely guy?"

"Edgely has been sent to Azkaban, our wizarding prison. Katrina had her wand sent back to Greece and basically was just soundly told off. She won't need any other punishment. Having her wand taken off her will be hardship enough. It becomes a part of you, really. I lost mine during the war briefly and had to use someone else's. It was never the same. However, it's been good for both of us having to live without using magic. We do get a little over-reliant on it."

"What sort of things do you use it for other than duelling?"

"Oh, just about everything. You know about Apparation and the fire and water charms. We turn lights on and off with magic. Warm things. Cool things. I use it to dry my hair... not being able to here has been a *real* nuisance. My friend's mum uses magic a lot for household chores such as cleaning, washing dishes, peeling vegetables, and chopping food. We can change one item into something else by a process called Transfiguration, even alter clothes. But we have to be careful. If someone says *Finite Incantatem*, which cancels a spell, while we are wearing clothes Transfigured from a piece of paper, it could be very embarrassing. It's useful in an emergency, though.

"We can unlock and lock doors, levitate objects and people, blow apart a wall, and fly on broomsticks. We have Healers who use magic to heal the wounded and sick, or use various potions."

"You *really* fly on brooms? I thought that was a fairy tale."

"We can. I don't. I hate it."

"You said before Snape was your Potions master. What does that mean?"

"He taught us Potions. Sort of like chemistry, but with less science and more magic. He had this wonderful speech he used to make every year to the firsties, which summarised his love of the art. I remember it sent a thrill down my spine to hear it. Brewing fame and bottling glory, and all that. We brewed potions to cure boils, heal burns, and make someone laugh. We can use Polyjuice to look like someone else for an hour, or Felix Felicis for luck. Potions have almost as many uses as spells, but don't tell Snape I said that. He always said he didn't have time for 'foolish wand waving'."

"Looked like he was pretty good at it the other day!"

"I didn't say he wasn't good at it, Cathy, just he didn't think it was everything. He's a master of Potions probably the best in Britain. What he can't brew in a cauldron is not worth troubling with."

"Do you think he would do his speech for us? If we asked nicely?"

"I doubt it. You can ask, but don't blame me if he cuts you to ribbons with his tongue, Amelia."

"Aww. Sevvie wouldn't do that. We're his mates. Oh, don't look like that, Hermione. I'm just kidding."

"Why are you leaning out of the window, Lee?"

"Picking flowers. Here, girls. Choose one each. Shortest stem has to ask Snape to do *the* speech."

"You lot are crazy. I knew it! I'm going to do some homework."

"Why bother? You're going back to your own school after Christmas to do Potions and stuff. I don't suppose a good grade from *Seth* for music will help there."

"Hey, it's about the *only* time I've ever had a decent grade from him, so I'm making the most of it. Gives me satisfaction, knowing he has to be reasonable here."

"And she calls *us* crazy!"

"Excuse me, Mr Sneyd. Can you spare a moment?"

"Yes, Cathy?"

"Er... *Has everyone left?*"

"Yes. *Why are we whispering?*"

"Sorry. Um... The girls and I... well... Lee and Amelia, not Hermione, because she said you wouldn't, but we wanted to ask anyway..."

"Spit it out, girl. I haven't got all day to stand here listening to you babbling on like an idiot!"

"Ouch. You really aren't that nice, are you?"

"No. I'm sure Granger has enlightened you as to my charm. Now. What. Did. You. Want?"

"Well, Hermione was telling us the other day about your first year speech, you know, the one you give in Potions class. And we'd like to hear it. If that would be all right, that is, and not too much trouble. Please?"

"Why on earth do you want to hear that?"

"She said it sent a thrill down her spine, listening to it. And it explained Potions really well."

"Oh, very well. I suppose your friends are outside the door?"

"Er... yes."

"Bring them in then. And listen well, I'm *not* repeating myself."

"Brilliant. Thanks, Mr... er... Snape. Come in, he's agreed to do it."

"You too, Granger? Wanting to relive your childhood?"

"Just checking to see you didn't eviscerate Cathy. I know and respect your temper, even if these three idiots don't."

"Fine. Just sit there and keep quiet. All of you."

"Where's he going, Hermione?"

"Oh, I imagine he's gone to get into the part. Just wait."

BANG!

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making. As there is little foolish wand waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses ... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.*"

"There. Satisfied?"

"Wow! The way he swept in here and slammed the door. And where did he get those clothes from? I can see why you say he is scary at Hogwarts. If he'd done that when I was a first year, I'd have bloody well wet my pants! But you're right; it *does* send a thrill down your spine."

"Some firsties do wet themselves, Lee. He must have Transfigured his clothes when he went into his office. They are the sort of robes and coat he wears all the time at Hogwarts."

"Not very user-friendly, are they? All those layers. How can you expect to seduce him through all that lot?"

"*Amelia!* I do not want to seduce him. Well, I do, but not at school!"

"I heard that. Can I have that in writing, Granger? I have witnesses."

"Oh, don't kid yourself, Severus, dear. You're going to give in one day, and then you'll regret holding out on me. And don't think you can hide behind Minerva McGonagall's skirts all year."

"Once I get back into my teaching robes and persona, I guarantee you'll lose interest, witch."

"Severus bloody Snape, how many times do I have to tell you the snarky bastard turns me on! So, call St Mungo's; I've been hexed too many times. I want you, bad temper, and all! Why can't you see that, you great pillock?"

"Perhaps I just get turned on when you're angry, Granger. All those sparks flying. You could light up any wizard's life. Mmmph..."

...

...

"Can I ask a question? Just when you come up for air."

"It had better be a good one, Amelia. I'm rather busy snogging some sense into this bloody man at the moment."

"Do all witches and wizards express affection like you two, or are you just odd?"

"We're just odd. Now, go away. And close the door behind you."

...

"Oh, gods, Severus. How can you pretend there's nothing between us? We ignite whenever we touch."

"It's just lust, Hermione. One quick shag and you'd be over it. It's not worth ruining your reputation for. If you're that desperate for sex, there are plenty of boys in your class who would love to oblige."

"That's bollocks, and you know it! Sure, we have a powerful physical attraction I can feel yours pressing against me now, so don't try and deny it, but it's so much more. I don't believe for one minute that simple lust feels like this. I don't just want to get into your bed, I want to get into your mind and your heart. I know you feel the same; you as good as admitted it the other evening, and I've seen it in your eyes and in your smile. I've felt it in your kiss, and the way your hands tremble on my skin. As do mine. Look at me, Severus. Look into my mind and see the truth!"

"I can't. I look at you and want to Vanish your clothes and gaze upon your naked skin. I want to impale myself within your body and stay there forever. I want to wake up beside you every morning, hear your laughter every day, and surrender to your kisses every night."

"Don't you see, Hermione? I'm your teacher. It's *wrong*. I'm just a pervert for even thinking about you that way. It's just the situation here and the part I'm playing. Once we return to our normal roles, you will forget me."

"Oh, Severus. How do I convince you I'm serious? I *love* you, dammit! You. Severus Snape. *Not* Seth, charming though he may be. I love the real you; the man I've known since I was a child."

"You didn't even like me four months ago. How can you say you love that man now?"

"Because I've discovered who he is under his prickly skin, that's how. Heaven knows that armour is enough to scare off most people, but I'm *not* most people."

"I'm going now. I only ask you to think about what I've said. Term is over next week, and you have the recital to handle. But when we're at Grimmauld Place, we *will* talk again."

Snape

Well, that's it. The recital is over, my bag is packed, and the music books are put away. Back to being a wizard.

I'm going to miss this. Everyone here is so relaxed and happy. The students are still hormonal idiots, but they are innocents. War hasn't touched their lives and damaged their souls. Magic and power is meaningless to them.

They're so lucky.

Now, I need to face my future.

Without Hermione.

She *will* change her mind when she sees her friends again. This will be cast aside as a temporary aberration. If I'm lucky, she won't make any complaint about inappropriate behaviour.

Oh, Hermione.

My love.

Hermione

I can't do it. I want to, but I can't. I promised him I would leave him alone until we were at Grimmauld Place.

That damned key is so tempting. Just let myself in and take him by surprise. With any luck, he would already be naked and ready for me.

Oh, gods, yes.

I can see him now, lying on his bed, skin pale and soft, one hand lightly stroking his penis, and the other beckoning me to join him. I'd walk into the room and, slowly, seductively, remove my clothing. He would stare at me, fixated, as my body was finally revealed to his eyes. His erection would grow hard and demanding as I stepped up to the bed and finally lie skin to skin beside him.

Our kisses would begin as gentle touches of lips to lips and gradually become more passionate as our hands explored every inch of the other's skin, leaving no small corner untouched, no intimacy unbreached. Eventually, our lips would follow the paths of our fingers, tasting and licking and nibbling until we were both ablaze with fever and want.

Then, and only then, our bodies would join, mine welcoming his home until we flew together in ecstasy through time and space to a place where love knows no boundaries or preconceptions.

But all the wishing in the world won't bring him to me until he is ready.

Soon, Severus.

Then, I will come.

And hopefully, so will he.

A/N: * passage quoted directly from Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.

This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal.

Please note, Hermione's rose-tinted view of sex is purely her own. She'll learn.

Thanks to karelia for her wonderful beta skills.

Chapter Sixteen: Return to Magic

Chapter 16 of 23

Severus and Hermione return to Grimmauld Place for the Christmas holidays.

Disclaimer: The characters and settings belong to JKR. I'm just tormenting them a bit.

Chapter Sixteen: Return to Magic

"Bye! Don't forget to write!"

"And send us some of those Honeydukes chocolates."

"And we expect *all* the details if you shag Snape!"

"*Amelia!*"

"What? You were both thinking it."

"But we didn't say it!"

Hermione

They're crazy, but I love them. Apart from Ginny, I've never really had a girlfriend before. Lavender and Parvati were too self-absorbed, and Luna is, well, Luna. And even Ginny is so wrapped up in Harry most of the time, we never get to talk. It was nice just being one of the girls.

I suppose that happens when you're not being an obnoxious know-it-all, Granger.

Bloody hell, now he's taken up residence in my head!

Okay, now I'm out of sight, I can find a quiet spot and Apparate. Wonder where *he* is?

Oops. There he is. On the ground. Must have Apparated here at the same time. Lucky we didn't get Splinched together.

Now, that's a thought.

Well, he could have at least checked I was all right. Seems he's taking this return to the old Snape seriously.

Ha. You can't fool me, Snape; I'm on to your game. She won't chase the greasy git.

Well, too late, darling. I know what the greasy git is hiding under his sneers, and I rather like it.

Oh, heavens. There are the boys. Better stop ogling Snape's bum. They might have heart attacks.

Snape

Damn, nearly gave myself away when she landed on me. Had to get out of there fast. Perhaps if I ignore her, she'll leave me alone.

Don't leave me alone, my love.

Fuck. She looks so bloody enticing when she's frustrated.

Oh, good. Wonder Boy and the Red-headed Menace. They'll keep her out of my hair.

And my trousers.

Why does that not help?

"Mione! You're back!"

"Ron! Harry! I've missed you so much! I hope you've been keeping up with your homework while I've been away."

"Bloody hell, Harry. She's away three months without so much as a letter, and the first thing she's on about is our homework!"

"You know damn well I wasn't allowed to be in contact with you lot. *Undercover*, remember?"

"I know, love. I was just teasing you. We've had to make do with winding up Neville, and he's nowhere near as much fun. Although, since Snape's been away, Nev's been a different bloke."

"That's *Professor* Snape, Ron."

"So, you're back to that. Whatever happened to 'Fuck off, Snape!?' I would have thought after three months in his company you'd barely be on speaking terms."

"Shall we just say, Harry, I've seen him in a different light now. You have *no* idea how unnerving it was while he was acting as Seth Sneyd, the charming, trendy music teacher. He had a *fan club!*"

"A fan club?"

"Yes. A bunch of girls who thought he was the sexiest man in the school. They hung around him like bees around a honeypot."

"This is *Snape* you're talking about? I know he looks better with that haircut and those clothes, but... Hey, *you* didn't think he was sexy, did you?"

"Actually, I had to agree with the girls. Once I got over the whole smiling thing, I realised he's damned hot. Sorry, boys. I guess I'm just a girl, after all."

"He smiled?"

"All the time. Well, in front of the other students, anyway. Most of the time when we were alone he was being a complete pillock. That's when he wasn't ogling my cleavage while we danced at the Halloween ball, or..."

"You *danced* with Snape?"

"You had *cleavage*?"

"Oh, for goodness sake, Ron. I danced with him. And I enjoyed it. Yes, even the ogling. And Harry, what do you think *these* are? Old socks?"

"Hermione, I really did not want to think about your breasts. You put them out there enough when we had that waterfight."

"I didn't see *you* turn away, Mr Pure and Innocent. Besides, if you noticed them then, why were you so surprised I had cleavage?"

"I was more surprised you'd showed it off, actually. What happened to the prim and proper Hermione Granger we used to know? Have those Muggles got to you with their wicked ways?"

"Hermione Granger has discovered she has a libido, if you must know. And she didn't need any help from the Muggles."

"Anyone we know?"

"What makes you think I'll tell you two? Still, it's good to see you. Now, tell me all about Hogwarts. What have I missed?"

Snape

Thank the gods she changed the subject. I was sure those two idiots were going to put two and two together.

And how dare they even *think* about my witch's breasts. They are for my perverted imagination only.

I'm sure she'll keep them occupied for a few hours. Time for me to have a long hot shower and relieve the pressure in my trousers... again.

I think I'll wear it out soon.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Harry, Ron. Is the coffee on?"

"Er... yes. Here, I'll fetch you a cup."

"Don't bother. I'll get it in a minute or two, once I've glanced at the *Prophet*. Has anyone seen it?"

"It's in the library, sir."

"Thanks."

...

"Oh, stop it, you two. Anyone would think you'd never heard your names used before."

"But, Hermione. He was *polite*. And *pleasant*. It's just not normal. Are you sure he didn't get hexed while you were at that school? Or smoke something funny?"

"No, Harry. He's spent three months as Seth Sneyd, acting reasonably and calling students by their first names. He just hasn't quite broken the habit yet. Isn't that right, Seth, dear?"

"Were you talking about me, Granger?"

"Of course. You're a very interesting topic of conversation. Oh, don't scowl; the boys have seen you behaving yourself. They know you can now."

"Well, don't get used to it. I'm sure I will locate my inner git somewhere, and then you can all relax. Now, where's that fucking coffee?"

"See, boys. I told you he can be a complete pillock."

"*Hermione!* You can't call him that! Even we don't go that far."

"Listen to your friends, Granger. For once, they are showing more respect than you."

"Respect? I'll give you respect, Severus Snape, when you admit you're wrong."

"Hermione? Is there something we should know about?"

"No, Ron. It's between me and this pig-headed, self-sacrificing prat here. You do *not* want to know!"

"Right, then. We'll just be off to the shops. Back in an hour or so. Er... Professor? Please don't hex her while we're away. I think it's *that* time again."

"Yeah, 'Mione. We'll bring back chocolate. You know that always helps."

...

"Do you need some of that potion, Granger?"

"The only thing I need is *you*, Severus. You're just too blinded with self-denial to see it. I'll be in my room. Feel free to join me..."

Snape

Gods, I'm tempted.

I want to forget about who I am, who she is, and just go to her. Behind that door, we can forget the world and just be a man and a woman. We'll create our own magic, drink from the cup of life, and dine on the fruits of love.

Oh, for the love of Merlin, that's pathetic! Waxing poetic about something that's never going to happen.

Get a grip on yourself, man!

No. Not that sort of grip...

Dammit. I need to find a decent book and take my mind off the witch.

Hermione

I suppose it was pointless hoping he would take up my invitation. Can't blame him really, one minute I tell him I love him, bastard nature and all, and the next I'm berating him for it. He probably thinks I've totally lost it.

I need a plan. A plan of seduction.

No, that won't work. He's a bloody Slytherin and will see through anything I can come up with. I'm too much of a Gryffindor. But maybe that can work in my favour. The direct approach. He'll never see it coming...

I just need to try and ignore him for a while, so he thinks I've given up.

That'll be bloody near impossible. I don't know if I have enough willpower.

Study. That'll do it. Catch up on last term's work.

He'll never suspect a thing.

"Come on, Hermione. It's Christmas Eve. Can't you give the books a rest, just for tonight?"

"And tomorrow is Christmas Day. You'll want my full attention then. Just let me study for an hour or two longer, and then I'm all yours."

"Listen to her, you fools. Perhaps you should consider a little study yourselves. I imagine you have been barely able to string two words together in your essays with Granger otherwise occupied."

"Oh, *now* he's back. Thanks, professor, for your support of your fellow men. Come on, Harry, we're obviously not wanted here. Let's go and find the chess set. I feel like giving you a thrashing."

"Is there something going on between those friends of yours I should know about, Granger?"

"Sounded like it, didn't it? No, just their usual chess rivalry. They'll never grow out of it."

...

"Why are you studying so obsessively, Granger? Do you not realise you could have passed your N.E.W.T.s last year and still obtained top marks?"

"That's not the point. It doesn't hurt to be prepared. And I can't believe you just said that. Where was the praise when I was in your class all those years? Would it have harmed you to write one positive comment on my essays?"

"It could have harmed our entire war effort if the wrong person saw what I really wanted to write, Granger. Suffice to say, you were always my best student in Potions. Although the incessant hand-waving really was damned irritating."

"I stopped that in fifth year. Did you not notice? I suppose you were so busy ignoring me, you didn't realise I'd given up trying to get your attention."

"I was too busy treading the thin line between my two bloody masters to worry about anything else at the time. Risking one's life every day tends to make one somewhat introspective."

"I'm sorry, Severus. I knew that, really. It was just so frustrating, knowing the one person I desperately wanted to impress was unmoved."

"You did impress me. You still do, every moment of the day. I want..."

"I know. I do too."

...

"What are you doing?"

"Just hugging you. Nothing else."

"Oh. I think I can handle that."

...

"Snape?"

"Mmm. What?"

"You're a really good hugger."

"Don't you dare tell anyone."

"Of course not. They'd all want one, and I told you, I *don't* share."

"You're impossible, Granger."

"And you love me for it."

"Indeed."

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her comma-catching and the girls at work for their ideas.

Chapter Seventeen: Christmas Comes But Once a Year

Chapter 17 of 23

It's Christmas day, and the girls have sent presents.

Disclaimer: The characters and settings belong to JKR, only the plot shenanigans are mine.

Chapter Seventeen: Christmas Comes But Once a Year

"Come on, 'Mione! Get up! It's Christmas Day!"

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, stop banging on the bloody door, Ron. You're not five years old!"

"Pretty please. We have some great presents for you."

"Oh, all right. I'll be down in a minute. Just let me use the loo."

"Five minutes, or I'll be back to carry you downstairs myself."

"Five minutes. I promise."

...

"Oh! You're in here."

"So I am."

"Er... You're naked."

"You noticed. I'm usually naked when I've just finished bathing."

"Are you usually that... er... hard? Not that I'm complaining the view's great from where I'm standing."

"Granger. Will you *stop* staring at my penis? It isn't helping."

"You like me looking at it?"

"What do you think? I'm a man. You're the woman I desire. Of course I'm enjoying you looking at me. I just don't think you should."

"Can I touch then?"

"Arggh. No."

"Just a little stroke?"

"No!"

"Perhaps, if I got down onto my knees and... Oh. Too late. I'll just..."

"Granger, what are you doing?"

"Tasting you. Mmm, essence of Snape. Not as bad as I thought it would be."

"You've been thinking about the flavour of my..."

"Well, you won't let us *do* anything, so my imagination is all I have left. Oh, bugger, I can hear Ron coming back upstairs. I'll have to leave you to clean yourself up. Not that I would have minded helping..."

"Just go, Granger, before your redheaded friend starts asking awkward questions."

Snape

Oh, gods, did that really happen, or am I suffering from some weird hallucination brought about by intense sexual frustration? Did I just explode at the very thought of her taking me into her mouth? Did she really scoop up my semen on her finger and *taste* it?

Doesn't help when my bloody cock's back at full alert just at the sight of her moist, pink tongue licking her finger with such enjoyment. I can't go downstairs like this.

Won't take long. Never does when she's on my mind.

Ahh. Ahhh. Gods, Hermione!

"Finally! What took you so long?"

"A girl's got to do what a girl's got to do, Ron. Now, where are all these presents?"

"A whole pile arrived earlier by Ministry owl. Some are for you, and some are for 'Seth'."

"Those girls! They must have asked Kingsley to help."

"Girls? What girls?"

"Just some Muggle friends I made at the school, Harry."

"So, how did they know where to send the owl? How did they know *how* to send an owl?"

"I told you, boys. They witnessed Snape and I using magic and also helped catch Edgely. I convinced Kingsley to swear them to an Oath of Secrecy, because I wanted to remain in contact with them."

"Oh, that's right. You told us that over dinner the other day."

"And Merlin forbid you pay attention to anything other than the food on your plate, Ronald Weasley."

"Are you going to open them?"

"No, we should wait for Snape to come down. He was... er... in the bathroom when I came downstairs. He shouldn't be too long."

"Oh. Okay. Can we open ours then?"

"Good grief. You're no better than when you were eleven, Harry. Go ahead. I'm sure Snape isn't the least bit interested in your gifts."

"Hey, look! A new jumper! Cool!"

"Harry, you idiot! Mum sends you a new jumper *every* Christmas."

"I know, but it's still a surprise finding out what's on the front... Oh, it's Grindelwald's mark. How... interesting."

"Bloody hell. I'll have a word with her about that, Harry. It's not really appropriate."

"S'okay, Ron. She meant well. What have you got?"

"Basilisk fangs. Complete with blood. Hermione?"

"I've got a picture of a tent. Is she trying to torment me?"

"No. It's just Mum's weird sense of humour. It'll get worse as we get older trust me. She knitted Bill one with a naked woman on it once because she thought it was time he got himself a girlfriend."

"She didn't!"

"She did. He hid it in the back of his wardrobe for a year or so until she'd forgotten about it, then gave it to Mundungus."

"Good morning, children. I see you couldn't wait until you went to the Burrow for Christmas dinner."

"Good morning, old man. Christmas morning present opening is traditional. Look, there's even some for you."

"For me? From whom, Granger?"

"Open them and find out. I have some too."

"Come on, professor. Let's see what you've got."

"Been there, done that."

"What was that, 'Mione?"

"Oh, nothing, Ron."

"What the hell is this thing?"

"A T-shirt, Snape."

"I *know* what a T-shirt is, Granger. I mean *this!*"

"Oh, that's priceless! Who sent it?"

"Amelia bloody Radford."

"Why doesn't that surprise me? Well, are you going to try it on?"

"I am *not* wearing a green T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan *Super Saxy* written in red, sparkly text!"

"It's Christmas. It's festive. We're all wearing our jumpers. Just put it on under your shirt. No-one else will know. And don't put your shirt back on until you've modelled it for

us, Saxy-babe!"

"Hermione. I don't know what went on in that Muggle school, but that's Severus Snape you're teasing. Students *don't* tease Snape. Hell, I bet his colleagues don't dare tease him. He's been in an amazingly reasonable mood since you two returned please don't spoil it!"

"Don't be such a wet blanket, Harry. Snape loves it."

"I love what, Granger?"

"Being tormented. Hmm, that looks good. Shows off your muscles. Turn around."

"Are you finished examining me, woman? Why don't you open one of your own gifts?"

"Professor, you do realise you don't *have* to do what she says. She's bossy enough at the best of times; if *you* start giving in, she'll make *our* life hell."

"I'll try and remember that, Weasley."

"Look! Cathy sent me some of the hand lotion her mother makes. I was always borrowing some."

"A Muggle product. May I examine it?"

"Go ahead. It's made from all natural products: beeswax, honey, and various herbs. Right, Harry, it's your turn. What else have you got?"

"Let's see. Here's one from... er... I'll leave that one until later."

"Bet it's from Ginny. What's the matter, Harry? Afraid my little sister has given you something *personal*?"

"Maybe. Perhaps I'll open yours instead... Cool! New Quidditch gloves. Thanks, mate!"

"You're welcome. I'll open this one from you... Wow! Is that real obsidian?"

"Yeah. I saw the set in the shop in Diagon Alley. I knew your old chess pieces were getting tired."

"Thanks, Harry. Want a game later?"

"Of course. I'm counting on it. Now, Professor, your turn again."

"If I must."

"Yes, you do, Snape. Open the one from Lee."

"I'm almost afraid to look. At least it's too small to be another T-shirt. Oh. That's quite thoughtful of the girl."

"What is it?"

"Cufflinks. In the shape of musical notes."

"Oh, they're lovely. See, I told you they liked you. Now, this one's also from Lee."

"She appears to have a sense of humour. A brooch to match my cufflinks. How... curious."

"Well, we were a team, weren't we?"

"Indeed."

"Boys? You're next."

"We've both got boxes of Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes from George. Of course, you never saw anything, professor."

"As long as they do not appear in my classroom..."

"Wizard's honour, professor. We'll only use them to play tricks on other teachers."

"*Ron!* You will not be using them in *any* classrooms!"

"You're no fun, 'Mione."

"What did Cathy send you?"

"It appears to be a photograph."

"Are they Hermione's friends, professor? And why are they wearing T-shirts with *Seth's Fan Club* on them? That's kind of disturbing."

"Yeah, but *she's* cute. Can you introduce us some time, 'Mione?"

"That's Amelia, Ron. And yes, I'll introduce you to her one day, as long as you promise to behave like a gentleman. I'll just open this little parcel from her. Oh, my! That's... that's... hilarious! And so apt."

"What is it, 'Mione? What's so funny?"

"Hermione, why did she send you a badge with the professor's picture on it? And what does W.I.L.F. stand for?"

"You don't want to know, boys. Just don't ask."

"*Granger*... If you must wear that badge, I insist you tell me what the acronym means."

"Come here. I'll whisper it to you."

"Ron, why is Snape blushing?"

"No idea, mate, no idea. Let's open some more presents!"

Snape

Only a few more days to go before I can return to the relative safety of Hogwarts. I wish she'd stop wearing that badge. Sooner or later, someone is going to figure out the meaning, and then all hell will let loose. She swears it's a spoof on an obscure Muggle reference, but I nearly had to leave when young Ginevra Weasley asked her to explain in front of the entire Weasley clan.

Thank Merlin the eggnog exploded just then. I suspect George had spiked it once too often.

Granger's been extremely quiet over the last week. Spends all her time with her head in her books. Even the tiresome twosome have given up on her. At least I can watch her from this corner while she studies. Might as well take the opportunity now while I can.

New Year's Eve tonight. I'd better hide in the library, or she will take advantage of the situation.

I hope she finds me.

A/N: W.I.L.F badges have been circulating recently. The acronym is a parody on the word milf. If you don't know what that means, I suggest you look it up.

This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal and betaed by the marvellous karelia.

Chapter Eighteen: New Year's Eve

Chapter 18 of 23

Hermione puts her plan into action.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were, I would not be sharing!

Chapter Eighteen: New Year's Eve

Hermione

He's at it again. I'm surprised he gets any reading done at all, the amount of time he spends watching me. I think the badge is getting to him he's becoming anxious whenever anyone mentions it. I suppose I'll have to keep it hidden at Hogwarts. Too many nosey students around, and sure as Hagrid has an unsavoury creature in his back room, some Ravenclaw will know the reference. I want to tease him, not get him in trouble.

I wonder what we are doing tonight. No doubt the boys will have something planned. Pity the girls are all at back at home, we could have invited them to a party.

Just keep watching, Snape. Tonight's the night.

"Three minutes to go! Where are Luna and Neville?"

"I saw them sitting in the kitchen a few minutes ago, Harry. Shall I go and fetch them?"

"Yes, we should all be together when the clock strikes midnight. Hermione, do you know where the professor is?"

"Lurking in the library, I should imagine. I'll find him."

...

"There you are. Come and join the party it's almost midnight."

"I don't think your friends need me around, Granger."

"Harry asked me to find you especially. Not that I wouldn't have done so anyway."

"I don't doubt it."

"What's that? Oh, it's cheering from downstairs. It must be midnight already."

"Granger... no. It's not a good idea."

"Happy New Year, Severus. Don't turn away. It's midnight, and I insist on a New Year's kiss. Mmm. That's better. Mmmmm. Oh, Severus!"

"Shut up and kiss me again, woman."

...

...

...

"Hey, Hermione, did you find..."

"Er... Harry. I think she did."

"Oh, my. Have I had too much to drink, or are Hermione and Professor Snape snogging in there?"

"Ginny, you've only been drinking fruit punch."

"Oh."

"Exactly."

"Well, I think it's beautiful. Makes sense with her badge, and all."

"You know what the badge means, Luna?"

"Of course. Don't you?"

Snape

I'm a coward. A pervert and a coward. I have a beautiful, intelligent witch who loves and desires me, and I'm hiding in my bedroom, rampant with need and shaking with the effort to control myself.

I have to leave. Everyone has gone home from Hogwarts this year, but the house-elves will still be running the kitchens.

Tomorrow. First light.

Now, I just have to survive the night.

Hermione

Well, it's now or never. Almost had him in the library. Bloody man must have incredible willpower to leave like that. I couldn't have done it.

He's not going to run again.

Right. I'm showered, perfumed, and wearing only my skin under this robe. I defy you to turn me away this time, Snape!

"What are you doing in here?"

"Staking my claim, Snape."

"What claim?"

"My claim on your heart. My claim on your body. My claim on you."

"I can't... We shouldn't... Merlin's balls, you're naked!"

"So are you, conveniently."

"So beautiful. So soft."

"Touch me, Severus. Let me take your hand and show you. Yes... there... and there. Oh, heavens, yes, there!"

"I can't..."

"You can. I can. Oh, my, it's so hard and so eager. I want to touch it."

"Don't... Don't... Oh, gods, don't ever stop."

"Mmm. It feels so good to hold you in my hand at last. You like that? What if I did it with my tongue?"

"Merlin, stop, Granger, before it's too late!"

"Spoilsport. Just when I was enjoying it, too."

"Just give me a minute... *Minerva's knickers. Minerva's knickers. Minerva's knickers. Minerva's...*"

"Snape, I've finally got us both naked at the same time and actually touching each other, and you are rabbiting on about Professor McGonagall's knickers. Is there something you want to tell me?"

"Dammit, Granger. I thought you knew everything."

"Not everything. Only almost everything."

"You obviously don't know when a man is about to lose control. Imagining Minerva's knickers..."

"Oh. But I wouldn't mind."

"I would. For once, I'd like to come inside my witch."

...

"Mmmm. What was that for?"

"Calling me your witch. Now, kiss me again, or I'll find a better use for my lips."

...

"Mmmm. Do you think we could get on with it now, Snape? I think I might die from frustration if we don't."

"You and me both, Granger. Are you ready?"

"I've been ready for weeks. Now, Severus. Now!"

"Merlin, you feel so good... so tight... so perfect! I can't hold back!"

"Don't then. Faster. Fuck me, Severus! Yes... yes... yess!"

"Oh, fuck! Hermione, I love you!"

...

"Satisfied now, witch?"

"Mmm. Very. Was pretty good for the first time. You were amazing."

"Your first time? You were a v..."

"Virgin. Yes. I was never interested when I had offers, and during the last year or so, well, there hasn't been any opportunity."

"You do realise I'm going straight to hell for this?"

"Don't be daft, Snape. Nothing that heavenly can be a sin. Now lie back down and let me explore. I didn't get much of an opportunity before."

"Yes, well, I apologise for that. You did ambush me though."

"Don't apologise. It was fantastic. And I can feel something else down there I'm interested in."

"You don't need to... You'll be sore."

"Shh. I want to. And I'm not uncomfortable, just..."

"Horny?"

"*Snape!* I didn't think you'd know such an expression!"

"Granger, I've been horny for the last four months. I know all about it."

"Well, let's see if we can do something about it."

"Mmm, let's."

Snape

What have I done?

Nothing much, only deflowered a student, betrayed her trust, and potentially ruined both our reputations.

I have to get out of here. I can't think straight with her naked body wrapped around mine, and her hair tangled in my fingers. All I want is to wake her again and make her mine yet again.

Mine.

My woman.

Hermione

Well, that didn't go the way I expected. So much for flying through time and space. It was more like one of Neville's cauldron explosions, all heat and urgency and liquids.

Always thought all those poetic descriptions about sex were a load of bollocks. Give me hot and steamy any day. Gods, he was magnificent. And he fitted. And felt fucking incredible.

He said he loved me.

I knew it.

Why isn't he back from the bathroom yet?

My beloved Dearest

Hermione

Last night was indescribable. Your gift to me was wholly undeserved, yet I will cherish the memory for the rest of my life.

We must, however, return to Hogwarts and reality. We cannot pursue this relationship while you are a student and I am a teacher.

I beseech you to respect my wishes in this. My feelings remain unchanged, and it will take all my resolve to stand by my decision.

Be sure your claim on my heart will ever remain, even if I treat you with disdain before others.

Yours always

Severus Snape

"Have you seen Professor Snape this morning? He hasn't shown up for his usual coffee."

"Not me, Harry. Mind you, I only came downstairs ten minutes ago. Where's Hermione?"

"Dunno. I haven't seen her since last night in the library. You don't think...?"

"Hermione and Snape?"

"Well, they did seem to be enjoying their New Year's kiss last night. And who would kiss *Snape* anyway? They've both been acting kind of odd lately."

"Yeah. She bosses him around, and he doesn't object. What's *that* all about? It's almost like they are..."

"Flirting?"

"I think there was a lot more that went on at that Muggle school than they are telling us. Harry, we have a mission. We must investigate."

"But how?"

"Those friends of Hermione's. The Seth Sneyd Fan Club. I bet they'll know."

"You just want an excuse to meet the blonde one with the big..."

"Amelia. Her name is Amelia. I'd appreciate it if you showed a little respect to my next girlfriend."

"That's jumping the gun a bit, mate. You don't even know whether she has a boyfriend already."

"She can't have one; she was too busy drooling over Snape, for goodness sake. The girl must be desperate."

"Hmm. You may have a point there, Ron. How do you suggest we contact them?"

"Kingsley will know. Hermione said he was the one who swore them to secrecy."

"Brilliant. I'll Floo him now. We haven't much time before school starts back."

"Or Hermione comes downstairs..."

Hermione

Oh, Severus.

Why?

He never seemed to care what other people think about him before.

Why now?

No. It's not that. He's still afraid my feelings are transient. The man is so fragile under that hard shell. So much pain in his past. So much loss. No wonder he doesn't trust fate to deal him a fair hand.

How do I show him how much I care? How much I need him?

I wonder if I should talk to Professor McGonagall. But that would mean breaching Severus's privacy.

Maybe there's another way.

Snape

Peace.

Cold stone and empty halls.

Time to think without Hermione's presence filling my senses.

Oh, Merlin, how I wish I could fill her again.

And again and again.

How can I do it? How can I stay away?

I'm no longer cold and empty. Hermione has seen to that.

I need to talk to Minerva.

"What did he say, Harry? You didn't tell him about Hermione and Snape, did you? We don't want to get them into trouble. Hermione is scary enough alone without Snape being after our blood as well."

"I told him we wanted to thank the girls for being such good friends to Hermione. He was a bit reluctant, but eventually agreed when I promised to be very discreet about contacting them. There are some advantages to being The Boy Who Vanquished Voldemort, after all."

"You're my hero, mate. Now, act normally I can hear Hermione coming downstairs."

"Good morning, boys."

"Mornin' 'Mione. Hey, what's up? You look like shite. Too much to drink last night?"

"No, Ron. I had very little to drink last night."

"But you were all over Snape at midnight. I thought..."

"I must have been drunk? Hardly! I knew exactly what I was doing, and so did he. The bastard!"

"Did you? Did he? Do we need to go and defend your honour?"

"Harry! This is *not* the seventeenth century, and you're not my father. If you need to defend anyone, I suggest you watch over that bloody professor of ours. If I catch him first, I might have to hex some sense into him."

"Er... Hermione. Exactly *what* did he do?"

"It's more what I did that's the problem."

"Okay. What did *you* do?"

"Ifellinlovewithhimandseducedhimandscareshimaway."

"Hermione, we can't understand you if you talk into your hands. Look at me. Speak clearly."

"I fell in love with him and seduced him and scared him away. Happy?"

"You did WHAT?"

"You heard, Ron. Shut up and let her talk. Tell us what happened, love. I thought you hated him."

"I never hated him, Harry. That was the problem. The reason I was so angry with him over summer is because I'd really expected him to be different, more relaxed. When he continued to behave in the same horrid way as before, I just lost it."

"So, what changed?"

"He did. Well, he didn't really. I knew all his acting as the cool, charming Seth Sneyd was just that, acting, but when we were alone, he gradually started changing. It was like some of Seth's characteristics had rubbed off onto Snape. He was still sarcastic and impatient, but he was also witty and fun at times. The longer we were there, the more he opened up, and the more I liked him. We both realised we were physically very attracted to each other but tried to deny it as long as possible until... certain things happened... No, Ronald, I'm *not* going to explain more..."

"If you both feel the same way, what's the problem?"

"Oh, Harry, he admits he cares for me, and I know he wants me, he still has this bloody stick up his arse about having a relationship with a student. And when he found out I was a virgin before..."

"I thought you and Viktor Krum..."

"Not that it's any of your business, Ron, but no, we didn't. Anyway, when he found out he had taken my virginity, he panicked and then disappeared this morning, presumably back to Hogwarts. He left me this note."

...

"Eww. This is a bit soppy, especially for Snape. Are you sure he wrote it?"

"Of course I'm sure, you idiot! It's his writing. Surely you've seen enough comments scrawled on your essays to recognise it by now!"

"So... clearly, he really does love you. Why can't you wait until you graduate?"

"Harry, that's a whole year away. Would you want to avoid Ginny for a year just for some ill-founded matter of principle?"

"Well, no, but that's different. We're much closer in age."

"That's not the point. Besides, I suspect that's not the main problem. He knows damn well I'm not taking Defence this year, so he won't *be* my teacher. And Merlin knows he has little regard for other people's opinions, so the age difference should not be an issue."

"True, but if that's not it, why did he leave?"

"I believe he doesn't have enough faith in me, or his own appeal, to allow himself to risk getting hurt. He thinks I'll drop him like a stone, if I so much as get a hint of interest from someone my own age. I've told him I'm not interested in anyone else, but he is *so* stubborn!"

"I guess all you can do is go to Hogwarts as planned and wait to see if he will change his mind."

"I've figured that much out myself, Harry. Doesn't mean I have to like it. But I do have to get packed. I'll just grab some toast and coffee and go back upstairs. Don't forget you two have to pack as well."

"Typical. She has a crisis in her love life, and she still remembers to nag us about packing! We have two more days before we have to go back to Hogwarts!"

"Never mind about that. I'm going to Apparate to the Muggle school on Sunday afternoon and see if I can find Amelia. Kingsley said they should be back by then, as they start back at school on Monday."

"Why? Hermione told us all we needed to know."

"So. I'll just thank her as we told Kingsley then. You going to come?"

"Sure. Let's not worry about packing until tomorrow. Then, we'll figure out an excuse to disappear on Sunday that Miss Clever-Clogs won't see through."

"Sounds like a plan, mate. Look, it's cleared up outside. Quidditch?"

"Thought you'd never ask!"

A/N: Written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her beta advice.

Chapter Nineteen: Back to Hogwarts

Chapter 19 of 23

Severus and Hermione return to Hogwarts. Inevitably, they meet up.

Disclaimer: They aren't mine, and if they were, I wouldn't share.

Chapter Nineteen: Back to Hogwarts

"Severus! I wasn't expecting to see you back so early. What in Merlin's name have you done to your hair? It looks so much better, and those clothes are a vast improvement on the old frock coat."

"Thank you, Minerva. I hadn't realised my previous appearance was so unappealing."

"Oh, rubbish, Severus. You knew damned well and worked hard to maintain it. I hope you will not revert back now you have returned. I would be most disappointed in you."

"Rest assured, Minerva. I've grown accustomed to this attire. But do not assume I will play the amenable Seth Sneyd back here at Hogwarts."

"I'd heard rumours you had been seen to smile on occasion while you were teaching last term. I forbid you to do that here it would traumatise the students far too much."

"Miss Granger has already told me something along those lines, Minerva. I shall endeavour to be the surly bastard you all know and avoid."

"No need to go that far. Just don't let any... ahem... fan clubs start up."

"Oh, hell. Has Kingsley been gossiping again?"

"He came to visit just before Christmas. It seems your Muggle admirers had asked a favour of him."

"And what exactly did those ridiculous girls request?"

"Nothing for themselves, Severus. They were apparently very concerned regarding a certain couple to whom they had developed an attachment. Oh, don't groan. Kingsley told me all about the duel and how it ended. The girls were most anxious he inform me you had not done anything Miss Granger had not wanted."

"Fuck, Minerva. Is nothing private?"

"Not if the welfare of my students..."

"You do not need to worry about protecting Miss Granger. She is quite safe from me."

"Don't get all stiff-necked with me, young man! I was about to say, 'Not if the welfare of my students *and* staff is at stake.' From all accounts, you and Hermione developed a relationship while working *together* as partners. You are both of age, and there is no suggestion of lack of consent on her part if her friends are to be believed."

"She's returning here as a *student*, Minerva. Need I remind you of the charter of the school? *No intimate relationships are to be condoned between students and staff of Hogwarts.*"

"Have you read the entire charter, Severus?"

"No. But I have studied the section pertaining to staff and student relationships."

"Then, perhaps you'd better read it again. And this time read all the Appendices."

"Are you suggesting...?"

"Go, Severus. Read it. I believe you will find the full charter in the library under School Documents."

HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

CHARTER OF REGULATIONS

Appendix Four: This appendix pertains to Rule 35, Section III, which states, 'No member of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry staff shall pursue, perpetuate, or otherwise form a relationship with a student beyond that of teacher and student. Head of House responsibilities, mentoring, and extra tutoring as required are considered acceptable.'

An exemption to the above rule may be applied if ALL of the following conditions are met:

- i. The student is of full wizarding majority and in his or her final year of schooling.*
- ii. The relationship has developed in circumstances not related to the usual student and teacher roles.*
- iii. The student is not directly taught, graded, or otherwise assessed by the teacher.¹*
- iv. Both student and staff member agree to the use of Veritas serum to verify the consensual nature of the relationship.*
- v. The relationship is undertaken with due discretion and is not disruptive to the running of the school or the welfare of the other students.²*

Notes: 1. Rule 23, Section IV, Subclause 6 also applies.

2. Subject to the judgement of the incumbent Head of School.

Snape

Rule 23. Hmm, school discipline. Section IV deals with detentions and House points. Subclause 6, where is it?

Oh, terrific. I admit to caring for the know-it-all, and not only do I have to suffer the jeers and comments from my students but I cannot issue her detention or deduct House points. She'd run roughshod over me, I can just see it.

But I'd get laid regularly.

And I really do love the brilliant little wench. Somehow, she makes me forget the darkness in my soul and fills me with light.

What am I afraid of?

Apart from public humiliation when she discovers boys of her age are younger, better-looking, and less likely to verbally flay her?

Or is it my pathetic, scarred heart that is likely to break when she leaves me, as she must eventually?

Better not to let her get close again.

Where's that damned frock coat?

"I thought you weren't going to wear that?"

"I changed my mind. The haircut will have to satisfy your infernal desire to alter my appearance, Minerva."

"I see. And did you read the school charter?"

"I did. The Appendix you mentioned is irrelevant. There will be no student-teacher relationships at Hogwarts this year."

"Oh, Severus. I really thought you'd made progress."

"The only progress I desire to make is with this syllabus meeting we are *supposed* to be having. My private life is of no interest to anyone but myself, and I'd appreciate it if it stayed that way."

"Very well. The syllabus. I see you've made some additions to the course material. Are you sure Legilimency and Occlumency should be freely taught?"

"Only to those who demonstrate a reasonable talent. I'm certainly not offering to repeat my mistake of three years ago."

"Which particular mistake was that, Severus?"

"Potter!"

"I can see why that might have been difficult. At what age will you offer this extension class?"

"Sixth and seventh year only. After an initial assessment, I will decide who will be suitable."

"And if Mr Potter should apply?"

"If he can now control his mind, I shall endeavour to teach him."

"Excellent. Now, what of the junior classes?"

Snape

Right, Sev. They'll be here soon. Just stay calm. She's just one of hundreds of students who will be walking through that door any minute now. No need to get agitated.

That's right. Think of Argus in his underwear.

No. Not good. Not at all relaxing.

Try a nice, soothing stream. Yes, there it is, clear, sparkling water tumbling over submerged stones until it falls over the edge to form a delicate waterfall reflecting myriads of tiny rainbows where the sun's rays hit. And under the waterfall is Hermione, dancing naked in the cool, refreshing...

Oh, fuck. That's uncomfortable. And embarrassing if Minerva or anyone else notices. Back to Argus in his underwear.

Merlin, they are noisy little brats this year. I swear they get younger and smaller every year.

I'm not watching the Gryffindor table.

Truly.

Dammit, of course I am. Where is she?

Oh, gods, there she is. In uniform. Damn Gryffindor colours; she looked much better in green and silver.

Don't look.

Don't look.

Don't... damn!

If looks could kill, I'd be a dead wizard. She's not happy, and I doubt I can blame the Dormant Duo this time. Even they are giving me dirty looks. Well, more dirty looks than usual.

Well, glaring didn't help. They appear to be immune. I should never have let them relax around me over Christmas. Class is going to be hell.

Wait a minute. Hermione said they were exempt from seventh-year Defence. For once someone out there is on my side.

There she is, smiling and laughing with them all while I'm up here with Hooch and Sprout for company. At least they aren't talking to me... yet. I think the new haircut and teeth have unnerved them. Excellent.

Look at how all her peers have grown in the last six months. How can she miss the extra muscles and stubble?

If they touch her, I'll kill them.

Hermione

Nearly there. In five minutes I'll be in the Great Hall. I wonder if Severus will be there. Oops. Better start thinking of him as Snape. Wouldn't want to slip up in front of Lavender. Mind you, I'd love to see his face if I called him Severus in front of everyone. He'd have a fit!

There he is. Back in the Snape uniform, just as I expected. At least he will have to wait for his hair to grow again, and his teeth are permanently fixed. He doesn't look quite so unattractive now.

Who am I kidding? He could be wearing an old sack and have his old teeth and hair back, and I would still love him. He sits up there with the rest of the staff, but now I can see how apart he really is, even amongst others. So lonely.

Dammit, Severus. Look at me.

Look at me!

Yes, that's right. I'm cranky. How dare you leave without even talking to me. Just you wait until my first class with you.

Oh.

No classes with Severus. I'm hardly going to see him.

Bloody hell, everyone wants to know where I've been. Why can't I just tell them I've had a torrid affair with the Defence master, who happens to have a rather delicious body under all those layers and is a fantastic lover?

Perhaps I should. They'd never believe me anyway.

"So, Hermione. Where *were* you last term? Professor McGonagall said you were off doing some special research, but she wouldn't tell us any details. And did you know Snape wasn't here either? No-one knows what *he* was up to. More spying, probably. I see he's had a haircut. It doesn't look so bad like that."

"That's *Professor* Snape, Lavender. And I was... er... studying... er... Muggle technology. Professor McGonagall seemed to think it would be good for me to do it as an extension course."

"Only you would be excused from one course and immediately find something else to replace it."

"That's me, Parvati. An incurable swot. Just be thankful *you* didn't get the extra work."

"Oh, I am."

"Hermione!"

"Yes, Neville?"

"Ron tells me you and he aren't together any more. Does that mean you're open to other offers?"

"No."

"No? Why not? Surely we can't be all trolls? Or have you found someone else?"

"Hey, leave her alone, Seamus. Not every girl here finds you irresistible, you know!"

"Thanks, Harry."

"S'okay, love. That's what we're here for. If anyone bothers you, including You Know Who, let me know."

"If *he* was bothering me, I rather think I'd be enjoying it."

"Hermione. Just don't go there. We'd rather not know."

"You're such a baby, Harry."

Snape

Thank Merlin that's over. Now, if I can just get back to my quarters without seeing her.

Good, no-one around. They're all still gossiping about their holidays in the Great Hall.

Oh, fuck.

Hermione

I can't stand it any longer. I'm going to my room. Thank goodness we have private rooms this year. If I had to share with Lavender or Parvati, I would have been driven crazy. Amelia and the girls were much more fun.

There. Escaped.

Looks like Severus was thinking the same. Well, it's now or never.

"Severus! Please wait!"

"Miss Granger. Do I have to remind you we are back at Hogwarts now?"

"Don't be such a prat. No-one is around, and two days ago we were naked in bed together. I've seen, touched, and tasted every inch of your body, so don't expect me to pretend I haven't. I just wanted to say I will respect your wishes... for now... but don't expect me to wait too long."

"Before you choose one of your would-be suitors? There seems to be plenty of opportunities."

"No, you pillock. Before I come to find you and shag some sense into that ridiculously insecure brain of yours. I told you before, and I'll tell you again and again until it sinks in. I claimed you, Severus Snape, and I'm not letting you get away. Now, go to your quarters before I embarrass us both in front of all the students that are about to be in this corridor."

Snape

So much for the frock coat and robes. Just as well no students overheard that conversation.

No-one has ever used shagging as a threat before. Well, not to me. The woman has no sense of propriety. Why can't she take no for an answer?

Stupid question.

If she wants me as much as I want her...

But it won't last. It can't last. She'll get a better offer.

I should enjoy her while I can. The sex was bloody good, and I could teach her a thing or two.

Gods, she was a quick learner. The way she used her tongue...

Shouldn't be thinking of that while in the corridors. Someone will notice.

Thank Merlin for robes. I would never have hidden *this* in those Muggle trousers. It's a wonder there's any action down there at all after the other night's activities.

Finally, my quarters.

Oh, Hermione. Why can't I stop imagining her hands on my skin and her lips on my...?

Oh, yes. Those lips. So moist. So hot.

Yes...

Ahhh... What the fuck?

What is it with women I know sending their Patronus to interrupt a perfectly good orgasm? I'm beginning to think they have a secret Anti-Wank Detector.

'Look, Severus is at it again. Time to send in the troops. We can't allow him *that* sort of entertainment.'

Bloody witches.

A/N: This story was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her beta work.

Chapter Twenty: Avoiding the Issue

Chapter 20 of 23

Hermione keeps trying, and Severus continues to avoid her.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, and if they were, I'd keep them in my own toy box.

Chapter Twenty: Avoiding the Issue

Hermione

I think he got the message. I hope he got the message.

I'll just have to be patient for a while. Give him some time to get used to the idea.

Now, where's that book?

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry: Administration and Reporting.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry: Board of Governors' Responsibilities. Getting closer.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry: Charter of Regulations. That's the one. Now, what does it say?

...

...

Not much in that, just a load of boring rules, which anyone in their right mind would follow anyway.

'No flying of brooms is to be permitted inside the Castle. Wouldn't have stopped Fred and George.

'The Prefects' bathroom is for the use of Prefects only. Bathing is the only activity permitted. Mixed bathing and licentious activities will be punished appropriately.' I can think of some licentious activities Severus and I could get up to in there... And I'm sure he could dream up a suitable *punishment*.

What's this? Appendices? Hmm.

Appendix Four.

Got you, Snape. No more excuses.

"What was so urgent it couldn't wait until tomorrow's staff meeting, Minerva?"

"I'm sorry, Severus. Did I interrupt something important?"

"Er... no. Nothing I couldn't suppress... I mean, put into stasis."

"What's the matter? You seem very tense."

"I'll be fine once I get back to my quarters and finish what I was doing. Now, you sent for me?"

"Oh, yes. This just came through the Floo from Kingsley Shacklebolt."

"Why doesn't that surprise me? Always interrupting... Don't tell me it's another case he and his cohorts cannot solve. I'm not interested. His last little problem caused enough trouble."

"Have you still not sorted out your relationship with Hermione?"

"No. Don't even ask. What did Kingsley want?"

"I don't know. I haven't opened it. There's one letter for you and one for Hermione. I imagine they are the final reports on your mission. I should ask a house-elf to fetch her as well."

"No, don't. Please, Minerva, if you value my peace of mind..."

"All right, Severus. I'll send for her once you have left."

"Thank you. If there's nothing else?"

"No, that was all. Good night, Severus."

"Good night, Minerva."

Severus

Well, I've survived the first week. Not having her in my class helps.

I never thought I would miss that bloody waving hand so much.

Just seeing her at meals is bad enough. She's so happy down there with her friends. If only she'd stop those furtive glances towards me. Every time I see that look in her eye my skin burns and my trousers tighten. Even Filius noticed yesterday. Had the cheek to ask me if I had a problem, just because I was a little restless. He'd be restless too, if he had a raging erection threatening to burst his seams whenever a certain witch looked his way.

She's only caught me in the corridors once this week. Just as well Argus came along when he did.

Saturday tomorrow.

Thirty-nine.

Lucky me.

Hermione

Gods, that man is elusive. I suppose twenty or so years of spying helps. Apart from meals, I hardly ever see him. How can I confront him about the Hogwarts Charter if I can't bloody find him?

So much for being available to your students, Snape.

I may have to call in a few favours.

...

Now, somewhere on this map there'll be a pair of footprints with Severus Snape's name on them.

Ah. There he is.

The Astronomy Tower. How convenient.

Don't you dare move, Snape. Your day of reckoning has arrived.

Good. He's still up there. A Do-Not-Disturb on this stairwell to prevent interruptions and a little Silencing Charm on my shoes, and he won't know I'm there until it's too late. Must remember to use that handy spell I found to seal the door, so the sneaky bastard can't escape.

"Good evening, Severus."

"Oh. It's you."

"Don't sound so disappointed. It's not good for a girl's ego, you know."

"Sorry. I was just leaving."

"No, you weren't."

"Miss Granger, what have you done with this door?"

"Nothing that can't be fixed once we have had a little talk, Severus. And stop calling me Miss Granger. That really is perverted considering where that mouth of yours has been."

"Very well, Hermione, what exactly do you wish to discuss?"

"The little matter of Appendix Four."

"Appendix Four?"

"Appendix Four. *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry: Charter of Regulations*. You know, the book you signed out a week ago. Don't play the fool with me, Snape."

"Oh. That one."

"Yes. Which part of the wording of that particular Appendix did you not understand? The part about the student being of legal majority? The mention of the relationship developing outside the school? Or was it that tricky little sentence referring to the student not being taught directly by the teacher? And to think I believed you were an articulate, intelligent wizard, who could easily understand a little bureaucratic babbling."

"Hermione, I..."

"You what, Severus? Think I would prefer callow boys when I've known a real man? Don't believe I mean it when I say I want *you*, Severus Snape, in all your black-robed, sharp-tongued fury when I've seen you naked, tasted your desire, and felt you explode inside me as I've done the same? Can't imagine how I can love you, the dreaded Potions professor and ex-Death Eater when I've seen your smile, heard your laugh, and felt your tenderness. I told you on New Year's Eve I was staking my claim. You're mine. I'm yours."

"Don't stand so close to me. I can't think..."

"Don't think, Severus. Feel. Believe. Live. I can feel your heart beating so fast even under all those layers. Let it free."

"I can't. I shouldn't. Hermione... no... Mmmmmph."

...

...

...

"No! Please. Please, Hermione!"

"All right. But promise me you will consider what I've said. I love you, Severus, and that's not going to change. And I know you love me."

"Yes. Yes, I love you, exasperating witch that you are. But..."

"I know. You need more time. Oh, by the way. Happy Birthday."

"Thanks."

Severus

What the hell is wrong with me? I spent twenty years spying, risking my life and my mind time and time again, and I can't find the courage to risk my heart. I know she loves me. I just can't believe it will last.

I could have taken her right there on the Astronomy Tower. She had me almost exposed to her touch. Gods, it felt so right.

What kind of spell has she cast on me? One glimpse of her and I'm weak at the knees. One touch and I'm in heaven.

You're an old fool, Sev. A pathetic old fool whose cock has taken over his higher mental functions.

No, not just his cock.

His heart.

Hermione

So close. Why did he have to stop? One more button and I would have held him in my hand. He was so hard and desperate at first.

Dammit, Snape. Why?

How can I prove him wrong?

I can't.

I'll just have to wait until he realises I'm not about to run off with some idiotic boy who can barely tie his own shoelaces.

"So, 'Mione, how's the latest *project* going?"

"Project? What project?"

"The Triple-S project."

"Ron. I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Neither have I, mate. Are you sure there's not something extra in your pumpkin juice this morning?"

"Triple-S. S.S.S. Shag Snape Silly."

"Brilliant!"

"I thought it was clever."

"No, you've got it completely wrong, boys. It's Shag Snape Senseless."

"Or Shag Snape Silent. That would be good for avoiding detentions. Can you work on that one, Hermione?"

"He'd have to talk to me first. I haven't seen him outside of the Great Hall for a month. I'm sure he's been avoiding me since that night on the Astronomy Tower."

"*What* night on the Astronomy Tower? What have you not told us?"

"Nothing happened, Harry. Although it wasn't for the want of trying. Remember, I borrowed your map. He was up there alone, so I decided to insist on a little conversation. Unfortunately, he was as pigheaded as ever. The bloody man doesn't seem to think he deserves to be happy."

"Do you want us to talk to him, 'Mione?"

"No. But thanks for offering, Ron. It means a lot knowing you'd be prepared to risk his wrath for me. You two are the best friends a girl could have."

"Hey, guys! Why the long faces?"

"Nothing, Gin. Hermione here was just... er... complaining she didn't have a date for the Hogsmeade outing on Valentine's Day."

"Oh, that's not a problem. You can come along with us, Hermione. The more the merrier!"

"Er... thanks."

"Did I hear someone say the pride of Gryffindor is looking for a date for Hogsmeade? Whatever has the world come to?"

"Oh, bugger off, ferret. No-one invited you into the conversation. Don't you have some flies to pull the wings off?"

"No need to be unsociable, Potty. I've just come to offer my services to the lovely Miss Granger. Would you allow me to do you the honour of escorting you to Hogsmeade this weekend, Granger?"

"When you put it like that, Malfoy, I don't know how a girl could refuse. But I guess I'll have to be strong. No. Go away."

"You don't know what you'd be missing."

"Oh, I have a fairly good idea, and it makes me want to vomit."

"Your loss."

"Good one, 'Mione! He looked right put out!"

"Smarmy bastard. Just because his father bought himself out of Azkaban and back into the Ministry."

"Never mind Malfoy. Have you two done your Potions essays yet? Oh, don't give me those looks. N.E.W.T.s will be here before you know it."

"Ah, Granger, just the witch I've dreamed of meeting alone in the corridors."

"What now, Malfoy?"

"I simply wish to re-extend my offer for this weekend. Now you have lost those two hangers-on, I thought you might wish to reconsider."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you want to escort me? You've spent the last seven years insulting me, hexing my friends, and even trying to kill us all. What's changed?"

"Maybe I like a challenge, Granger."

"Maybe you like the idea of associating with a decorated War Hero. It's not going to work. I'm not going with you."

"Very well. But I'm not going to stop trying. You'll see."

"Hermione, my dear. Only two days left before the weekend. Rumour has it you're still lacking a partner. My offer stands. Come with me to Hogsmeade and the feast. I'm sure I can show you a good time."

"I'm sure my idea of a good time differs from yours, Malfoy. And do you mind not standing in my immediate vicinity. That nasty cologne you're wearing is quite overpowering."

"My cologne comes from the finest parfumerie in Paris, Granger. Unfortunately, some people do not have the taste to appreciate it. Here, take a good sniff."

"Eww, Malfoy. Get your face off mine."

"No need to get violent, Granger. Not that I mind a little spirit in a woman."

"Oh, go to hell, Malfoy."

"For you, anywhere."

Hermione

Well, that was another productive session at the library. I'm finally up to date with the work I missed in the first term. Pity I can't say the same for the boys. A week behind in their essays, and they have no excuse. They would have me believe they don't need me to tell them when to work. If they had their way, it would be all Quidditch and no study at all. I don't know why they bothered coming back if they weren't going to do any work.

I wonder if I stroll around a bit whether I will run into the snarky, avoidant one in a nice dark corner. Somewhere he can't get away from easily.

Like I'd be so lucky.

Someone is coming. Perhaps...

Malfoy.

Bloody marvellous.

"Granger."

"Malfoy."

"So, have you reconsidered yet?"

"Reconsidered what?"

"My offer."

"What, condescending to escort me to Hogsmeade?"

Snape

It's been a month, and still she watches me with that look in her eye. I could almost believe she was serious.

Bloody students are all behaving tonight. A few miscreants to traumatise would take my mind off Granger. I think I'll just check down this corridor. I'm sure I heard voices.

Well, I might have known. There she is, with young Malfoy of all people. I thought she had better taste.

Should I be pleased my prediction was correct, or insanely jealous?

I think I'll go with insanely jealous.

Fucking Malfoy.

Must get closer. There, a spot of Disillusionment should do it. Now, what's going on between those two?

Damn, if that boy gets any closer to her I'll hex those wandering hands to his sides.

"You *will* enjoy yourself. See, I know you want to."

"Malfoy, what are you doing?"

"Just getting a little closer. Mmm, your skin is so soft."

Snape

Fuck. Now he's running his hands down her arm. And she's allowing it.

I have to go before I do something I'll regret. She can't know I've been watching her... again.

Fucking Malfoy.

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia, my beloved beta.

Chapter Twenty-one: Poetry and Roses

Chapter 21 of 23

Valentine's Day arrives and with it a series of surprises.

Disclaimer: They are not mine. I think I'd keep 'em locked up if they were. They get themselves into far too much trouble.

Chapter Twenty-one: Poetry and Roses

"Malfoy."

"Yes, Granger?"

If you don't remove your hands from me in the next two seconds, you will disappoint your father immensely."

"How so?"

"Because you will no longer have the ability to provide him with an heir to the Malfoy fortune."

"Granger, don't point your wand down there. It's not ladylike."

"Did anyone lead you to believe I was a lady? Now. Remove. Your. Hands!"

"All right. All right. So the answer is still no?"

"No. It's fuck off!"

"Now, that's definitely not ladylike. But I like a feisty woman. It turns me on."

"You Slytherins are all the same."

"Hey, what did you mean by that? Come back, Granger! I wasn't finished..."

Hermione

Bloody arrogant prat. Where does he get off thinking he can back me into the wall and start touching me?

Ew. Creep.

And why the sudden fascination with the Mudblood. Perhaps he's bored with his Pureblood toys. Worn them all out, probably.

No doubt he believes I should feel honoured to receive his attention. Wonder if anyone has ever turned him down before.

Probably not.

Creep.

"Where have you been, 'Mione?"

"At the library, studying. Where you two should have been."

"We'll do some studying tomorrow. But reading and taking notes doesn't usually make you that flushed. What happened?"

"Malfoy happened. He bailed me up in the corridor. The prat is still trying to persuade me to go to Hogsmeade with him next weekend."

"Bloody ferret. Want us to deal with him?"

"Oh. I think he'll back off for a while."

"What did you do, Hermione?"

"Nothing much, Harry. Just a teensy threat to his dangly bits."

"You didn't!"

"Oh, yes I did. And I meant it."

"I wish we could have seen his face."

"I'll remember next time to wait until you two happen along, shall I?"

"Er... s'okay, Hermione. I think we'll pass. Wouldn't want to get caught in the crossfire."

"Sensible boys. Now, about that Charms essay..."

Snape

Damn. Fuck. Bloody Malfoy.

How could she? After all she said to me.

Okay, Sev. Settle down. She wasn't looking that comfortable. Perhaps I should have stayed and broken up their little tete-a-tete.

Sure. And hang a sign on her back. *Property of Snape*. That'll go down well.

He has looks, money, and youth on his side. I know she told me she didn't care about my age or appearance, but how can I compete?

Sooner or later she'll see the light. Then she'll forget all her promises.

Then I'll be...

I'll be...

Nothing.

Hermione

Why does he look so bitter this morning? I thought he'd been better lately, despite the way he's been avoiding me.

Gods, he looks so depressed. Oh, Severus, what has happened?

I have to talk to him. Even if it means skipping Potions this afternoon. I know he's free after two o'clock. I'll just have to be outside his classroom door waiting, so he can't escape.

Snape

Great.

What's *she* doing here? Come to tell me she's taking up with Malfoy, no doubt.

Well, I don't want to hear it.

"Miss Granger. Ten points from Gryffindor."

"What for?"

"I believe you should be in Potions class at the moment. As you are obviously not where you are supposed to be, the reason for the points deduction should be obvious. Now, leave!"

"No."

"No? Another ten points!"

"You can deduct all the points you like, Severus. I'm not going until you tell me what has happened."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Look at you. You have dark circles under your eyes; your mood is foul; and you're slumping. It's not you. Something's wrong."

"And what business is it of yours, Miss Granger?"

"I made it my business when I fell in love with you. If you are hurting I want to know why, so I can try to help. Or at least hex someone on your behalf. Don't look so bewildered, Severus. That's what people do for those they care for. Even when that person is behaving like a thick-headed dolt."

"Please don't, Granger."

"Don't what?"

"Pretend you still care."

"Severus. I don't need to pretend. Why would you believe otherwise?"

"Just go. Please, Hermione."

"I'll go for now. But I won't give up on us. Only you can do that."

Snape

Can she mean it? Is there still hope, despite the blond prat?

What do I need to do to convince her I'm the right wizard for her?

What do I need to do to convince myself?

"Hermione, my love, your skin is so soft, your lips taste of honey, and your body enthralls me. See how hard I am for you. Touch me; surround me with your heat and your love. Come to me, my darling, and let's travel to the edge of the universe together..."

What?

Bloody hell. What time is it? Five o'clock in the morning? And why was I dreaming of Severus spouting that sort of drivel?

Oh, that's right. Shouldn't read those tacky Muggle romances just before bed. Especially when I'm as frustrated as hell. Should have pinched one of the boys 'special' magazines instead. Merlin knows everyone else in the castle will get their satisfaction today.

Severus had better not. Or I'll hex his balls off. No other witch is touching *my* wizard!

Fucking Valentine's Day. The only man I want is pretending I don't exist, and all I get is Draco bloody Malfoy hanging around like a bad smell. You'd think that arrogant prat would have learned by now that *no*, when said repeatedly, means *bigger off and annoy someone who cares*.

I suppose I'll have to go to Hogsmeade with Harry and Ron and the girls. I just wish they realised watching them all snog all day is really not that much fun for a girl on her own.

Perhaps I could sneak down to the dungeons and break into Severus's quarters. I might get lucky and catch him pleasuring himself again. I mean, wanking. *I'm a man. We wank. We don't pleasure ourselves.*

Whatever, Snape.

Gods, I can still see the expression on his face as he came that morning. It was like the first time I'd really *seen* him.

Severus Snape: raw, unguarded, human.

Real.

"Ahhhh. Yes! Oh, gods, yes! Yesyesyesyesyes... Yessss!"

Mmmm. Superb. Just thinking about her coming undone while I was buried deep inside her...

I can't do this any more.

I can't just stand by and allow Draco Malfoy to take *my* woman.

Dammit, I need to fight, and I'll use every weapon at my disposal.

Right. Shower, clothes, and a quick trip to Diagon Alley before breakfast.

"Hey, Hermione. Coming down to breakfast?"

"I'll be there in a minute, Gin. I just have to tie my hair back."

"It'll be crazy down there this morning with all the Valentine's cards and gifts arriving. I can't wait to see what Harry comes up with. Do you think Malfoy will be arrogant enough to send you anything after the way you told him off yesterday?"

"I hope not. You'd think he would have got the message the first three times. No, I don't think he's gorgeous. No, I'm not interested in his money, and no, I definitely don't want to get into his bloody trousers!"

"I hear you. Although I don't really understand why you won't give him a chance. He's improved a lot since the war ended. Is this about what happened New Year's Eve?"

"What?"

"When you were snogging Professor Snape. What on earth did he say the next day? I asked the boys, but they just muttered something about him returning early to Hogwarts to get organised for the new term. I'd never thought I would see the day when Snape allowed anyone to give him a New Year's kiss! I hadn't given it much thought before, but you are beginning to make me wonder..."

"Never mind that, Gin. That owl looks like it's headed your way, and it's carrying an awfully large box. Duck!"

"Merlin! I nearly lost some hair there! Now, let's see what it is. Ooh, Hermione, look! It's those expensive chocolates I like."

"I hope they're from Harry. You wouldn't want to have to return them."

"Of course they're from Harry. Look, see the card. Isn't he romantic?"

"Lovely. Pink hearts and red roses. Very sweet of him. Did you give him anything?"

"Oh, he'll get his Valentine's Day gift later. In private."

"Ginny! Whatever would your mother say?"

"I'm hoping my mother won't find out."

"My lips are sealed. Come on; let's go and get this over with. All those soppy cards and letters. Eww!"

"Hey, mine wasn't soppy!"

"Not yours, Ginny. That was at least tasteful."

"You might get something, you know, love. Somewhere out there might be a secret admirer arranging roses as we speak."

"Yes, sure. And Hagrid will be teaching classes about cute, cuddly creatures that don't bite, sting, or smell. Trust me, nothing is less likely."

"And yet there appears to be an owl heading this way right now."

"Not for me... Ow! No need to shove it in my face! Okay, okay, I get it!"

"Looks like it is for you. That's a beautiful rose. I've never seen one quite that shade before. It's such a pure red. Who's it from?"

"No idea. There's a note but no name."

"What does it say?"

"There are no words left to speak. Weird. It sounds familiar, but I can't place it."

"It doesn't make any sense. Who would send that?"

"I don't know, Gin. But you're right. It is a lovely rose."

"Hey, Ginny, Hermione. Happy Valentine's Day!"

"Hi, Ron. Happy Valentine's to you too. I see you have your usual swag of cards."

"I can't help it if the girls all adore me, 'Mione. I didn't see one from you, though."

"Keep looking. Maybe you'll stay out of trouble today if you do that."

"Very funny. I'm intending to have a very good day."

"With whom? Lavender? Parvati? Hannah?"

"You'll never know, 'Mione. And you'll never guess."

"Oh, Ron, you're hopeless! Ginny, how do you put up with him as a brother? Ginny?"

"Er, Hermione. I think this one's for you."

"What, another rose? It's the same as the last one."

"What does this note say?"

"Same sort of cryptic message. *I thank God I'm alive.*"

"That's just odd."

"It still sounds like something I should know."

"Do you think someone is trying to tell you something?"

"Of course they are, Harry. I just don't know whether it's something I want to hear!"

"Okay, okay. Well, whatever it is, here comes another."

"Oh, for goodness sake!"

"They're still beautiful roses, Hermione. Even if the message is a little obscure. And there doesn't appear to be anything sinister about them. What does this one say?"

"There's nothing else to compare. Dammit. I've heard that somewhere before too. I wonder if it's a poem. But it doesn't make any sense. *There are no words left to speak. I thank God I'm alive. There's nothing else to compare.* If it's poetry, it's bloody awful."

"I can tell you one thing, 'Mione."

"What, Ron?"

"It's not Malfoy. Judging by the scowl on his face, he's feeling somewhat put out."

"Oh, dear. So he is. Well, at least whoever is doing this has been useful for something, even if he is completely crazy."

"Or she."

"Ginny!"

"Just saying. It could be a girl."

A/N: This was written for the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her comma-taming.

Chapter Twenty-two: Can't Take My Eyes Off You

Chapter 22 of 23

Severus finally declares himself.

Disclaimer: These characters are not mine. If they were, I would keep them to myself to play with.

Chapter Twenty-two: Can't Take My Eyes off You

Hermione

I'm sure all the flowers and chocolates have softened everyone's brains. If they're not wandering around looking starry-eyed, they're pairing up and heading off to dark corners to snog or goodness knows what. And how can I be suitably irritable when I have roses still arriving every hour or so? Three more, for goodness sake!

I'm never going to live it down. Hermione Granger, the grinch of Valentine's Day, receiving roses from an unknown bloody admirer.

Thinking of admirers, where's that damned Snape? He didn't appear at breakfast, and I can't see him here now. He has to eat sometime. Although, he's a bigger killjoy on Valentine's Day than I am, so he's probably done the smart thing and hidden in his quarters.

Bastard.

He could have invited me.

I'm sure we could have found a way to occupy our time.

I've hardly seen him over the last week. He's probably avoiding me after the Astronomy Tower incident, the coward. It's not like he wasn't participating fully before his damned conscience got the better of him again. I know one part of him was definitely eager to continue.

Oh, gods, here's another bloody owl. I thought half a dozen would have been enough. This must be costing some idiot a fortune.

Surprise, surprise, a rose. Perfect and red. Rather Gryffindor really. And another note.

And if you feel like I feel.

What's that supposed to mean?

There are no words left to speak. That doesn't seem to stop him.

I thank God I'm alive. So does everyone since the war, you prat.

There's nothing else to compare. With what?

Please let me know that it's real. I don't know what it is.

Pardon the way that I stare. Now, that's just creepy.

You'd be like heaven to touch. Creepier.

And if you feel like I feel.

I just don't get it! I should *know* what this means. It's so familiar. Perhaps all the perfume in the air today has scrambled my brains as well.

Oh, there's Severus. What's he smirking about? Thinks it's amusing, does he?

Funny that, I would have thought he would be jealous.

He should be jealous.

Why isn't he jealous?

Perhaps it's him.

No.

Snape. Roses?

Never.

"So, any more clues, Hermione?"

"No, Gin. Just more meaningless messages. Some of which are a little stalker-like. Look."

"Oh. I see what you mean."

"And everyone knows I'm getting them. Girls I've never spoken more than two words to are stopping me in the corridor and asking about the damn notes. I think I'll hide in my room this afternoon. I was nearly thrown out of the library this morning!"

"That would be a first. Look out, here comes another one!"

"The thought of you leaves me weak. Oh, for goodness sake. That's so..."

"Sweet. Romantic..."

"I was thinking more along the lines of sickening and pathetic."

"Hermione, you have no sense of romance."

"And I'll be the first to admit it. I just wish he would come forward, so I can at least tell him to shove off!"

"But you might change your mind when you find out who it is."

"There's only one man who could make me change my mind, and he's the last person who would send roses."

"There *is* someone? Really? You dark horse!"

"Fuck! I didn't mean to say that. I'm just so frustrated. Yes, there is someone. NO, I'm not telling you. Don't give me that look, Weasley. It won't work."

"Spoilsport!"

Hermione

Thank Merlin. Only two more since lunch. It's quite a lovely bunch now with ten roses. I suppose it would be too much to hope that this is it. They usually come in dozens, and there's the Valentine's feast to get through yet.

These last two messages are disturbing.

I want to hold you so much. At long last love has arrived.

He's serious, whoever he is.

I wish it *was* Severus.

Perhaps I should have sent him roses. No, he would have run a mile.

I could have showered him with rose petals at lunch. Would have been worth it to see the look on everyone's faces.

...

All right. It's nearly dinner time. Must stop imagining Severus naked and lying on a bed, strewn with rose petals barely covering his interesting bits.

Just a little longer.

Mmmm.

...

Now, where's that red dress? If I'm going to be receiving more roses, I might as well dress the part.

Dress. Hmm. Great cleavage, Hermione. Wonder if Severus will remember this dress from the Halloween Ball. He certainly appreciated it then.

Make-up. A little mascara and lipstick should do it. Wouldn't want to appear too interested.

Hair. Up or down? Up, I think. Makes me look older. Just the thing for an insecure older man.

I think I'll go down to the dungeons after dinner and see what's up. Hopefully, Severus, if he lets me through the door.

...

Damn the man. What's the point in dressing like this if he isn't even going to turn up to dinner? Now, all the other unattached boys are going to think it's all for their benefit. As if I'd want a mere boy after having a man like Severus.

Oh, great. Here comes Malfoy the Magnificent. Bigger off. These breasts belong to your Head of House. Even if he is behaving like an idiot at the moment.

"Granger. I see you dressed up for me tonight. Or didn't dress, as the case may be. Fantastic assets you have there. Would you like to accompany me to the Slytherin table? Nothing like a little inter-house cooperation, is there?"

"The only inter-house anything you're going to receive is a good punch on the nose, Malfoy, if you don't stop staring down my dress. I said I didn't want to be your partner today, and I meant *all day*. Surely those roses I've been receiving all day tell you something?"

"I heard from a very good source you had no idea who was sending the roses. So that tells me there *is* no competition."

"I will tell you once and for all, I'm not interested in you, and I'll never be interested in you. There *is* someone else, and if he saw you ogling my breasts, you would probably lose any useful bits in your trousers. That is, if he got to you before I did. So do me and yourself a favour and GO AWAY!"

"All right, all right! I get it. You think you're too bloody good to associate with Slytherins."

"Oh, I don't mind Slytherins; it's just you I find offensive."

"Hermione!"

"What! Oh, it's you, Harry."

"Weren't you a bit harsh on Malfoy? I mean, he's a prat and all, but he has improved this year."

"What is it with you and Ginny sticking up for Malfoy? If you two like him so much, perhaps *you* should go out with him. Try a nice little threesome; I'm sure he'll know what to do!"

...

"I told you, Harry. If Snape doesn't see the light soon, she's going to be hell to live with."

"Too true, Ron, too true. I wonder if that is *the* dress."

"I'll bet is, and she's wearing it for Snape to get a good look at her cleavage and hopefully get a clue. Where did she go?"

"Over to our table. Do you think it's safe to join her yet?"

"No. I'd let her calm down first. We don't want a repeat of the canary incident."

"Eww. No. That was very scary, even for her."

"You deserved it though."

"Did not."

"Did so!"

"Boys! What are you arguing about?"

"Oh, nothing, Gin. Just waiting for Hermione to... er... settle."

"Why? What did you say this time, Ron?"

"Oi! It wasn't me. It was Malfoy. He tried propositioning her again."

"That pillock will never learn. Thinks he's Merlin's gift to witches young and old, that one. Sure, he's gorgeous, but fabulous hair and a buff body don't do it for every woman."

"Hey! Since when did you think Malfoy was gorgeous?"

"Don't worry, Harry. I prefer messy, black hair to blond. Besides, you *know* I appreciate *your* finer bits."

"I did *not* need that information, Ginny. You're my sister. You're not supposed to talk about my best friend's *bits*. Or not in front of me, at least."

"Oh, get over it, Ronald. Let's go and join Hermione. Looks like another owl is on its way."

"Great. That'll really ruin her mood."

"Maybe not. Look at the way she's smiling. Why is she looking at the staff table? Harry?"

"I've got a feeling she's figured out who's sending the roses."

"You know about her mysterious man?"

"Yeah. Of course. Why wouldn't we?"

"You were there, Ginny. New Year's Eve."

"*No!* Snape? I wondered, but she threw me off the scent by changing the subject!"

"And they say boys are clueless, Harry. I think Ginny goes around with her eyes closed half the time. Oi! Don't slap me!"

"You deserved that, mate."

"Did not."

"Did too."

"Isn't this where I came in? Now, stop arguing and tell me more about Hermione and Snape."

"No way. You'll get us into trouble. If you want to know, you go and ask She Who Must Not Be Inflamed."

"Ron! That's no way to talk about Hermione."

"But it's true."

"Come on. Let's all be brave little Gryffindors and go and talk to our friend."

"You first."

"Boys. Great heroes of the war and afraid of one average-sized witch... Hey, Hermione. So? You look like Crookshanks when he's caught a rat. Spill!"

"Look. I've figured it out. It's him. The man I..."

"Snape, you mean?"

"*How did you know?* Oh, you've been talking with the blabbermouths. Thanks, boys. Last time I trust you with a secret."

"They only opened my eyes to what I'd already seen. Snape? Hey, just where was he while you were away? And where were you?"

"Okay, okay! I'll explain. We were sent away on an undercover mission..."

Severus

She should have figured it out by now. I saw her giving young Malfoy the sharp edge of her tongue as she entered the Great Hall. That'll teach him for messing with *my* woman.

Gods, she looks sexy in that dress. I could just lick my way down to her delectable breasts and ease the fabric aside until I found those exquisitely sensitive nipples...

Damn, these Muggle trousers don't hide anything.

Too late to worry about that. Seth Sneyd is here, and *he's* not ashamed of his desires.

She should have had the eleventh owl by now. That note should clinch it. Time to deliver the final rose.

"So, what did the last note say?"

"*You're just too good to be true.*"

"What does that mean, apart from the obvious?"

"You'll see. Hopefully soon."

"Hermione, that is an awfully lascivious expression on your face. Don't tell me you and Snape have already..."

"Oh, yes. Definitely. Several times."

"He was that good?"

"Ginny! Stop it! We don't need to know."

"Oh, yes we do, boys. I want details! Aw... Now you've ruined it. I'm sure she was about to kiss and tell."

"Sorry, Gin. I'm not saying any more."

"Hey, who's that?"

"That, my friend, is Seth Sneyd."

"Seth Sneyd? As in, Snape-as-Seth Sneyd?"

"None other."

"Holy flobberworms! When did he get so hot?"

"Hey! First you tell me Malfoy is gorgeous, now Snape's hot? I'm wounded."

"Oh, give over, Harry. I can still look, you know. I notice you were checking out Hermione's cleavage before."

"Harry!"

"Oops, sorry. Couldn't help it. You do have fantastic..."

"Shhh. He's playing. Listen, Ginny. Isn't he brilliant?"

"Mmmm. I can hear it; I can see it I just can't believe it."

"Look, he's coming over here. And he has another rose."

...

"What does the note say? Hermione? Hermione! The note?"

"*Can't take my eyes off you.*"

"What?"

"It's a song. One we played at Grimmauld Place. The notes were the lyrics, but they were all mixed up, which is why I didn't remember where I'd seen them."

You're just too good to be true

Can't take my eyes off you

You'd be like heaven to touch

I wanna hold you so much

At long last love has arrived

And I thank God I'm alive

You're just too good to be true

Can't take my eyes off you

Pardon the way that I stare

There's nothing else to compare

The sight of you leaves me weak

There are no words left to speak

And if you feel like I feel

Please let me know that it's real

You're just too good to be true

Can't take my eyes off you

"I didn't know Snape could sing as well."

"Neither did I. Now, hush, he hasn't finished."

I love you, baby

And if it's quite all right

I need you, baby

To warm a lonely night

I love you, baby

Trust in me when I say

I need you, baby

Don't bring me down, I pray

Oh, pretty baby

Now that I've found you, stay

And let me love you, baby

Let me love you...

"Gods, yes! Mmmmmphhh."

"Er... Harry? Is it right that Hermione is snogging the daylight out of Snape right here in front of everyone?"

"She's what? Oh, so she is. I was still getting my head around Snape singing. He doesn't seem to be minding it one bit, though."

"No. He doesn't."

"Mmmm. I take it that was a yes?"

"You didn't need to ask. You had me the moment you walked in that door. I can't believe you just sang in front of the entire school. Especially dressed like that. And stop smiling, Snape, you're scaring the young ones."

"I was desperate. I knew I couldn't compete with young Malfoy in youth, looks, or assets, so I had to use the few talents I did have. Although, if I hadn't seen you despatch him so brilliantly at the door, I might have left it at the roses and messages and hoped you'd figure it out."

"You idiot. I don't care about looks and money. It's *you* I want. You may be an old pervert, but I happen to think you're an incredibly sexy old pervert who belongs to *me*. And you played and sang for me even after you knew I wasn't with Malfoy."

"I know. I have no idea what came over me. If it ever happens again, lock me in the bedroom and throw away the key."

"Only if I get to be locked in with you. Besides, I loved it. I didn't know you could sing as well. Just another one of your many talents?"

"Come here, and I'll show you just how talented I am, Granger."

"Mmmmm. Indeed. Er, Snape, you do realise the whole school is watching?"

"Let them watch. Perhaps they'll learn something useful for once."

A/N: "*Can't Take My Eyes Off You*," written by Bob Crewe and Bob Gaudio, was a 1967 single by Frankie Valli.

A huge thank you and hugs go to lady_karelia, who spotted the bloopers and herded the commas into submission.

Thanks also to the girls at work, who all participated in some way in this story, helping me brainstorm the plot over morning tea and even lending their names for characters: Catrina, Leigh, Denise, Julie, Cathy, Caryl, Carla, Fliss, Phil (okay, he's NOT a girl), and of course, Amelia! The girls will return in the epilogue when I write it.

Special thanks to Catrina for reading over the first draft and advising me on boarding school life in Scotland. The Muggle school is loosely modelled on Morrison's Academy in Crieff where both Catrina and Ewan McGregor were educated.

Epilogue

Chapter 23 of 23

It's Hermione's graduation, and someone has arranged a surprise.

Disclaimer: They aren't mine, but I'd sure love to play with them.

EPILOGUE

"Congratulations, Granger."

"Thanks, Snape. Now kiss me."

"What, here? In front of everyone?"

"That didn't stop you on Valentine's Day."

"There was a reason then."

"I've just graduated. Isn't that a good enough reason? After all, now I can officially move in with you."

"You mean you have more possessions? I thought you had all your worldly goods moved in already. Hell, even that cat of yours has made himself at home. And it's not like you don't spend every night in my bed anyway."

"I haven't heard you complaining."

"I didn't say I was unhappy about it, witch. Now come here. I find I have a need to kiss you."

"What, in front of everyone? Severus... mmmmmph... Severus! Mmmmm. Do *that* again!"

"This?"

"Mmmmm."

"Are you sure you want to stay for the Graduation dinner? All those boring, long speeches..."

"Yes, Severus. Even though I'm sure you can find much better ways to keep me entertained. It's only a few hours, and then I'm all yours."

"I rather like the sound of that, Granger. But if you expect me to wait until then, I suggest you get your hand out from under my robes."

"Spoilsport. I was enjoying myself, and I know you were. I've decided robes can be very useful. It's a pity you rarely wear them now."

"I think it's just as well I don't. You'd be using every opportunity to take advantage of me, and I'd be walking around with a bloody erection the entire day. Oh, stop grinning, woman. It's unseemly how filthy your mind has become."

"That's only because I sleep with an old pervert."

"That, I cannot deny, Granger."

"Severus?"

"Yes, dear."

"I love you, you old pervert."

"And I love you, Hermione, filthy mind and all."

...

"Er... Excuse me, Professor Snape?"

"What is it, Mr Roberts?"

"There are some Muggles in the Entrance Hall looking for you and Hermione."

"Muggles?"

"Yes, sir. Girls. Three of them. Wearing T-shirts with your name on them and giving out badges."

"Granger, are you expecting visitors?"

"No. But there seems to be a crowd gathering. We'd better go and investigate."

...

"Hermione! Over here! Hi, Severus!"

"Amelia! And Cathy and Lee! What are you three doing here? And *what* are you wearing?"

"Ron and the boys Appar-whatsited us here. It was a real buzz! Do you like our new T-shirts?"

"*Severus Snape's Fan Club*. Well, I think they're fantastic, but I think Severus might have a different opinion."

"Do you three intend to completely ruin my reputation? It's bad enough maintaining discipline with this wench pouncing on me in dark corners of the castle and the headmistress insisting I wear 'Seth' clothing without the students here thinking people actually like me!"

"Like you? I think you underestimate yourself, Sev. We have hardly any badges left."

"Cathy! You can't call him *Sev*!"

"Why not? He's our friend, aren't you, Sev?"

"Granger. Save me from these crazy women!"

"No way. *You* made them like you, Mr Seth Charming Sneyd, now *you* have to take the consequences. I'd be more concerned about those badges all the girls are wearing if I were you."

"What badges?"

"*Those* badges."

"Oh, fuck. Tell me they don't know what W.I.L.F. means."

"Judging by the way they're giggling and blushing whenever you look at them, I'd say they have a fair idea. But don't worry, my love, I won't let them get their claws into you."

"Thanks, Granger. You're a great comfort."

"Any time, Snape."

...

"Hey, 'Mione! I see the girls found you. Great T-shirts, aren't they?"

"Ronald Weasley, I believe you have some explaining to do. How do you know the girls here? And who else was in on this little escapade?"

"Kingsley introduced us at New Year. Amelia and I hit it off right from the start. Who did you think I was referring to on Valentine's Day?"

"I did wonder later when I didn't see you with any of the girls here. But who are the boys Amelia referred to who helped get them here?"

"Neville and Michael Corner. They've been seeing Cathy and Lee. That's why we were allowed to bring them to Hogwarts. With all three involved with wizards, Kingsley and Professor McGonagall decided it would be okay."

"That's fantastic, Ron, but why didn't you tell me sooner? And Amelia, I saw you just before we sat our final exams. Why didn't you say anything?"

"We wanted it to be a surprise for both of you. A good surprise."

"It's a brilliant surprise, girls. And I'm sure Hermione will appreciate it once she has recovered from the shock of finding out Mr Weasley can actually keep a secret."

"Severus! Be nice!"

"Yes, Sev. Be polite. And when are you going to show us around this amazing castle?"

"Your wish is my command, Miss Radford. Come this way, and I will show you the dungeons."

"Ooh! Dungeons. Cool!"

"Lee, the dungeons here are not *cool*. Cold and damp, perhaps, but not cool."

"That's my quarters you're referring to, Granger."

"*Our* quarters, Snape. And they're an exception."

"So, Hermione, when's the wedding?"

"Er... what wedding, Cathy?"

"Yours and Sev's, of course. Oops. Don't tell me he hasn't asked you yet. Sev! What are you waiting for?"

"Thank you, Cathy. I believe you've just ruined my carefully laid plans for tonight. Well, Granger. What about it?"

"What about what, Snape?"

"You, me, a wedding. Fancy being married to an old pervert who can't keep his eyes off you?"

"I thought you'd never ask!"

...

...

"I take it that was a yes, then?"

"I think so, Lee, although if they don't come up for air soon, they may not survive long enough to get married."

"Do you think she'll invite us to be bridesmaids?"

"Do you think she'd forgive us if we handed out badges at the wedding reception?"

"*Amelia!*"

THE END

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