

Something to Talk About

by sara lady dalian

"It should be wrong," she thought, "to be thinking of a nightgown while she was in the Potions master's sitting room." -- Immediate continuation of Man to... Man?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 2

"It should be wrong," she thought, "to be thinking of a nightgown while she was in the Potions master's sitting room." -- Immediate continuation of Man to... Man?

A/N: This is an immediate continuation of "Man to... Man?" and I suggest you read that story before you read "Something To Talk About." MtM was written from Severus' POV, but this story is from Hermione's POV.

This story is Snape/Hermione, so if that pairing quicks you, then leave now and only return when you are more enlightened.

As always, many thanks go to slytherinlaurel for taking on my writing. And many thanks to my readers who waited patiently for my life to sort itself out so that I could get this posted.

Disclaimer: I will say this once. My initials are not JKR. End of story.

Something amazing happens to a body when it is slowly awakened by the crackling pop and earthy smell of a well laid fire. Muscles slowly stretch, senses come awake gradually – as if they, too, also want to enjoy the moment. The lungs draw in fewer, but longer breaths so that the smells linger. And sometimes when you are in a comfortable spot, your backside and hip snuggle down further, seeking a just-right spot so that you can go back to sleep; after all, one of the few things more pleasant than waking in front of a fireplace is going to sleep in front of one.

However, such wasn't to be for one Hermione Granger.

The marvelous sensations of waking in front of that fire were quickly pushed aside in dismay when her memory of the previous evening filled the convolutions of her mind. She opened her eyes cautiously and blinked them a few times. Nothing was familiar. Slowly raising herself off the couch she was resting on, she saw her Potions professor sitting in a darkly upholstered, wing back chair in the corner of the room, staring at nothing, but probably seeing everything. He had seen her wake up.

"Good of you to rejoin the world, Miss Granger." He seemed to pause here, as if expecting a reply – or an apology.

"Professor Snape, I'm sorry." She ran her hand over her uniform skirt and pulled her robes more tightly around her chest, cold even in front of the fire. She quickly started to gather herself further up off the couch. "I'll go back to Gryffindor."

She saw him raise his hand. "That would not be advisable, Miss Granger. It is well after curfew. Either go back to sleep or stay up, but you should not be wandering the school at this time of night."

He nodded across the room to a clock hanging on the opposite wall. Small brass hands pointed to just after three in the morning. "Oh, my." She sat back down on the edge of the sofa and gently rubbed her face. It was, as the professor had said, much too late to be walking through the halls.

Hermione studied his face. He had yet to look directly at her – he was still staring at the fire, his jaw alternately clenching and unclenching. His eyes were heavily lidded and blackened underneath so that she knew that he had not slept that night. His dark hair fell over one side of his face defiantly, as if daring him to come out of his reverie and swipe at it.

He swirled a glass lightly, the amber colored liquid softly running up the sides. She watched, transfixed, as he raised the glass to his lips and sipped from its contents. He seemed to almost hold the moment that the drink passed his throat before lowering his hand and the glass.

This silent, still Snape was a stranger to Hermione. She had seen him in many moods, from sneering to fuming anger. She had never seen this silent, pensive man before. Something about him unnerved her.

"I can hardly ever go back to sleep once I awaken, so I will stay up, I think." Only because she was watching him did she notice the slight raising of his eyebrows. He still wouldn't look at her.

"As you wish, Miss Granger."

His eyes still seemed to focus elsewhere, not in this room, nor in this moment. Hermione wondered what had garnered his interest – and then wondered if she would be better off not knowing.

She scanned the room more thoroughly than she had at first. There was a small table in front of the couch with a few books but not much else. The clock hung alongside a glass cabinet displaying various types of phials. A large desk was under both these wall hangings; it was covered with neatly stacked parchments that looked as if they had been undisturbed for quite some time.

"I usually have some tea when I get up, Professor. Do you mind if I make some?" She hoped her voice didn't sound as tentative as it felt, but this early in the morning, in an unknown situation, with him of all people, even the most stalwart Gryffindor could be excused for feeling a little trepidation. Slowly raising her eyes, she found him finally looking at her. There was a small hint of something in his eyes. If he had been anyone else, she would have thought it humor, but he wasn't anyone else.

"If you must, Miss Granger." He nodded to the low table before the couch.

She removed her wand from its pocket and swished it in a manner of which Professor Flitwick would have approved. A silent word later, the few books had stacked themselves, and a sturdy tea service had formed on the small table. She sighed in anticipation as she picked up the mug. Some people, she heard, could function before they had their morning tea, but she hadn't been able to do that since before she came to Hogwarts.

It was with some reluctance that she turned her eyes away from the stack of unknown books. She scooted so that her back rested against the arm of the couch. Drawing her feet up under her, she tucked them so that they rested on her robe. Her eyes turned to the same fire he was watching. It was going to be a long morning.

Ciao! Sara

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 2

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****Immediate continuation of Man to... Man?**

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Chapter 2

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It wasn't long before Hermione's thoughts slipped along familiar routes. She was in the midst of several important projects, and her mind rarely allowed her much time before it forced her attention to her academic priorities.

Her breath caught in her throat, and her hands went to her forehead. She had been making the Blood Thinning potion for Professor Snape's third years. And she didn't remember completing the final steps. It took quite a bit of conscious effort to steady her hand and move it away from her face. A few deep breaths helped calm her pounding heart. If she had ruined the potion, he was sure to have said something – or at least, she was sure he would have let her know just what he thought of her wasting precious ingredients.

She looked over at him again. His head had tipped back and his eyes were closed. Something deep inside told her that was a good thing right now. Why, she didn't know. It just was.

"It appears, Professor Snape, that I owe you another apology. The Blood Thinni--"

His hand rose to stop her. "The potion cooled and is now bottled. It was practically done before you..." and here he paused again, "lost track of its progress." It surprised her more than she'd ever admit to see a small upturn of his mouth.

An earlier thought came sweeping so quickly into her mind that she didn't have time to stop its beeline for her mouth. "If I may sir, how did I end up here? And where, precisely, is here?"

"It is difficult, Miss Granger, even for a Potions master of my experience, to bottle a potion while there is someone slumped practically in the fire." His voice was stiff and metered. "And you are in my office's sitting room." He paused, again.

Hermione had always thought that he thought through everything he wanted to say and edited it, spun it, and rethought it before he allowed the idea out of his mouth. The dramatic pauses he indulged in seemed to be the more thorough bits upon which he was chewing. From the length of this pause, whatever idea he was working on must

be particularly brutal.

"Madam Pomfrey would have needed to treat you for an incredibly stiff neck if you had slept on that bench any longer, so I brought you here while I bottled the potion." A thoughtful silence preceded a scowl. "I had a visitor as I was putting the bottles away. The Headmaster thought it would be better if you stayed here instead of wandering back to your tower."

"Headmaster?" She wondered why the Headmaster would even know that she had fallen asleep here. Had he been Professor Snape's visitor?

He must have seen her confused face, because he answered her unasked question.

"Last night's 'humanoid demon' came in search of you. It appears that you missed dinner, and an..." and he frowned just slightly, "an appointment. Mr. Weasley was apparently a little upset to learn you had left the classroom. He then went to the Headmaster, concerned, of course, about your 'disappearance'."

Hermione found herself silently disputing his assumption that Ron had been concerned for her. "And the Headmaster, being the Headmaster, knew exactly where I was." The words came out as a whisper, but of course, he heard her.

"I have no doubt." His eyebrows rose. There was something he wasn't telling her; but then, when did this man ever tell anyone the whole truth?

She shook her head again. Sometimes she couldn't understand Ron. There were times that she even wondered if she still liked him at all. "I'm sorry for getting you caught up in this, Professor. I'm sorry he came down here and made such a nuisance of himself." It wouldn't have been the first time that he had made a fool of himself by rushing in blindly, and she doubted it would be the last.

"He did indeed make a fool of himself, but it was not here." His voice had turned hard and sharp as the finest dagger. When she looked at him, puzzled about what he meant, she could almost see the anger boiling in his eyes; it was certainly there in the set of his jaw.

"What do you mean?"

He didn't answer her for a few moments. His hand swirled his glass around while he chewed on his thought. When he did speak, his tone had taken on a very staccato measure. What he told her then was shocking and disturbing. What surprised Hermione more was Snape's admission that he had defended her.

He defended her, protected her.

As he was nearing the end of his story, she noticed that he stopped short of saying something that he obviously didn't want to tell her. She wasn't sure she wanted to know.

"Why, sir?" She looked at her hands, which were resting on her drawn up knees, confused by Severus Snape's behavior and dismayed by Ron's.

"Why, Miss Granger? There are many reasons why, and they are none of your business!" And that was all that needed saying on the matter, apparently.

He had gone back to staring at nothing in particular, clenching his jaw and swirling his drink. This lasted for a bare few minutes when he suddenly stood up. He was half way out of the room when he heard Hermione's frustrated sniff. Barely looking back, he conjured her a soft, green angora throw that settled itself over her legs and shoulders. "I'm sure that when an appropriate hour arrives, Miss Granger, you will find your own way out."

The door slammed behind him, resounding within the small confines of the room.