

Bed Rest

by melusin

A missing scene set in the 'What Goes Around' universe. A bit of TLC is needed...

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: The following takes place after the last scene at the end of my story 'What goes Around' (but before the Epilogue). If you haven't read it, then this won't make a lot of sense.

A smutty little pressie for everyone who kept me going with their encouragement and reviews.

Thanks to Sempra for a prompt and thorough beta.

Disclaimer: It's all JK Rowling's. Not mine. Not now, not ever.

'Easy, Purdy. Mind his head.'

'Must you fuss so, woman?'

'If you hadn't cast that damned Patronus, I wouldn't have to.'

The worried frown on Hermione's face belied her scolding. She took her anxiety out on the pillows, thumping and re-arranging them, while Purdy gently levitated the drained looking wizard onto her bed. Apart from the acerbic tongue, there was very little fight left in him; the Strengthening Solution she had managed to get down his throat had yet to take effect, and he looked, quite frankly, terrible.

'You didn't have to prove anything, you know that.'

Severus' chest wheezed as he drew breath to answer. 'It was spectacular, though, wasn't it?'

Hermione rolled her eyes and sighed heavily.

'I'm a *raven*.'

'You're delirious.'

'Headmaster Snape is to be doing no more magic,' Purdy squeaked, wagging a spindly finger at him. 'Purdy is telling Nurse Poppy.'

'No, she bloody well isn't.'

'Severus, that's quite enough.' Palming her wand, Hermione removed his boots with the minutest of flicks; they fell to the floor with a muffled thud. 'Purdy is worried about you. We all are. And you know full well you overtaxed yourself. Now, you are going to rest...here or the Hospital Wing...the choice is yours.'

Their patient scowled, but said nothing.

'Good. That's settled, then.' Hermione patted his hand, which earned her another scowl, before turning to the house-elf. 'Fetch some nightclothes, please, Purdy, and then we'll make him more comfy.'

'We?' Severus exclaimed after Purdy had vanished. 'Over my dead body.'

'Look, I know you're feeling helpless...' Hermione rummaged in her pocket for the medicinal phials Poppy had given her earlier and plonked them on the bedside table. '...but there's no need to take it out on Purdy. After all she's done for you, the least you can do is try to be civil.'

Severus just had time to snort before Purdy reappeared clutching a grey nightshirt.

'Thank you, Purdy,' Hermione said, accepting the garment from the house-elf. 'I'll take it from here.'

Purdy opened her mouth to protest, but snapped it shut again when Severus' hand disappeared up his sleeve.

'I shall call you if he needs anything, I promise,' Hermione said hurriedly. 'I shan't let him out of my sight.'

Purdy nodded, looking somewhat placated. 'Elves is concerned, Headmistress. Elves is waiting for news.'

'Then go and tell them. And thank them again. For everything they've done.'

Risking a last look at Severus, who nodded curtly, Purdy bowed and faded from sight.

'About time,' Severus muttered.

'So...' Hermione fingered the soft material in her hand. 'Nightshirt...?'

'What of it?'

'Nothing,' Hermione replied innocently. 'Now, let's get you into it.'

'I'd rather you got me out of it.' Severus smirked as she blushed prettily. 'Tut, tut, Headmistress Granger. Not even sunset and you're trying to get my clothes off. Such scandalous behaviour for a woman of your position.'

'Oh, behave yourself.' Still blushing, Hermione began attacking his buttons around the neck of his robe, being careful not to pinch his skin. 'You've had more than enough excitement for one day, so don't be such an idiot. I can always call Purdy back, if you prefer. I'm sure she'd love to take over.'

Severus gave her the filthiest look he could muster, but let her get on with it without further ado. Once Hermione had managed to loosen his robe, she began tackling the innumerable pearl buttons on his undershirt. Rediscovering the feel of his skin, cool underneath the tips her fingers as she worked her way downwards, made something clench deep inside, and she fought the urge to touch him with more than a detached interest; it had been so long, but now was definitely not the time.

Hermione's discomfort did not go unnoticed. 'Why, Headmistress,' he purred, 'you're hands are trembling. I wonder why that could be.' He chuckled when she didn't reply. 'Here,' he said, delving inside his sleeve. 'Take my wand before you break it.'

'That's enough of that, Professor Snape,' Hermione said in her best don't-push-your-luck-I'm-Headmistress tone of voice. 'Spare me the wand jokes, if you please.' She nevertheless relieved him of it and placed it alongside the potion phials. 'Now, do you think you can sit up a moment to slip these off?'

'I'm not a complete invalid,' he grumbled, pushing himself up.

'No, but you will be unless you rest.' Hermione gave him no time to bemoan his predicament further; she had him out of his clothes and into his nightshirt before he could say 'Dreamless Sleep'. Another deft flick of the wrist, and he was safely tucked up in bed.

'There,' Hermione said, satisfied with her handiwork, though his condition was still giving her cause for concern: his skin was as white as the sheets on which he lay; his lips too, were devoid of colour. In stark contrast, the lank, dark hair spread over the pillows only served to emphasise his pallor and to show just how fatigued he was. 'I'll be back in a moment.'

Severus closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. The bed had a comforting familiarity, even though it was many years since he'd lain in it. The curtains and canopy were red and gold now, of course, as befitted a Gryffindor Head. A bit gaudy for his tastes, but at least Hermione hadn't gone overboard with the rest of the decor: there were no rampant lions anywhere to be seen, and she'd chosen a quilt in rather muted, chocolate and cream tones. *Bearable*, he thought, relaxing into the mattress with a sigh. He had always felt safe in this room, and he knew he'd have no trouble going off to sleep...

'How's the patient?'

'Shh... I think he's sleeping...'

Severus' eyes remained firmly shut while Hermione conversed in hushed tones with the uninvited guest currently occupying the picture over the fireplace.

'... heard his Patronus changed...'

'... too much for him, Minerva...'

'... Salazar was tickled pink... but you know you shouldn't...'

'... I don't care what Dilys thinks. He's staying put...'

'Would you two mind not talking about me as if I weren't here?'

'I'd better be off, dear,' Minerva whispered. 'He's obviously on the mend.'

Severus didn't quite catch Hermione's reply, and he kept his eyes closed as she crossed the room to the bed.

'You can open your eyes,' said Hermione. 'She's gone.'

His eyelids felt very heavy suddenly, but he did as she asked. 'I don't know why you allow a portrait in your bedchamber. I didn't.'

'Only Minerva's allowed in here,' Hermione said, lowering herself carefully onto the edge of the bed once more. 'And she's kept me company on more lonely nights than I care to remember.'

'That may be so, but I hope you make good use of those curtains you've hung around it...' The exhaustion was creeping into his bones. It was as much as he could do to furrow his brow and nod in their general direction. 'I wouldn't put it past Phineas to have a gander at you getting ready for bed if he thought he could get away with it.'

'Takes a Slytherin to know a Slytherin, no doubt.' Hermione smiled, a bit too condescendingly, Severus thought, but making up some caustic riposte required more energy than was available to him at the moment. Better to ignore it. 'Now, get some sleep. I'll wake you to take your next dose of Strengthening Solution in a few hours.'

Severus yawned. 'And where will you be?'

'I have some correspondence to catch up on, which I can do here,' Hermione replied, getting up. 'And plenty of reading to keep me busy afterwards. Just call if you need...'

But Severus was already fast asleep.

~ * ~

Hermione lowered her portable writing desk to the hearth rug, looking anxiously towards the bed as it touched the floor. Severus slept on peacefully; it was highly unlikely that the little noise it made could have disturbed him, anyway, seeing as she'd cast a Silencing Charm before beginning her paperwork for fear of waking him with the rustle of parchment or the scratching of her quill. She watched the rise and fall of his chest a little while, wondering how his presence in her bed could be both strange and so fitting, before picking up her novel from the footstool and opening it at the bookmarked page where she'd left off.

It wasn't often Hermione had the chance to read purely for pleasure these days, and she was soon lost in the story: a bodice-ripping novel set during the French Revolution, which didn't let historical fact get in the way of a good yarn. Rubbish really, she told herself guiltily whilst pouring over the sordid escapades of the virile, eldest son of some minor nobleman coming to grief in the stewpots of Paris. She'd soon sussed the heroine: a spirited trollop, for whose virginity the hero had just paid handsomely. No doubt she was really a young aristo, hiding out in the brothel in an attempt to escape the guillotine, who would somehow manage to fend off his advances, fall in love with him (and he her) and be taken to England and happily married by the end of the book.

Hermione took no notice of her stomach as it made a loud rumble, snorting in disgust as the plot took a predictable turn *I should have a go at writing one of these*, she thought. *I'm sure it can't be that difficult*. Wetting her finger to turn the page, she raised her head and glanced at her charge, only to find a piercing pair of black eyes watching her intently. 'Oh,' she said, cancelling the charm. 'How long have you been awake?'

His gaze didn't waver. 'Long enough. I have been... observing you.'

'Oh, have you, now? You should have said something.' She could feel her colour rising again, and it was all his fault...staring at her like that. Hermione closed the book with a snap and said a little too brightly, 'Ready to eat?'

Why had she said that? The hungry look on his face made it quite clear that he was, only it wasn't food he had in mind. Hermione's pulse increased as Severus turned fully onto his side, his eyes still fixated on her, and rested his head on his fist. She pressed her thighs together; not everyone's idea of an Adonis, granted, but that didn't stop her from wanting him any less. *Soon, but not now*.

'Do you have any idea how beautiful you are when you give something your undivided attention?' Severus asked, interrupting her thoughts. 'You were totally oblivious just then to everything around you.' He patted the quilt. 'Come here. Please.'

His wolfish expression and gentle endearments seemed strangely at odds with each other, and she looked at him suspiciously. 'I-um... Are you feeling all right?' Discarding the novel, Hermione stood and approached the bed. 'Should I call for Poppy?'

'I am quite rested, thank you.' Severus graced her with the tiniest of smiles. 'And I am neither delusional or drunk... Hermione fair.'

'Phew, that's a relief. You had me worried there for a minute.' Hermione smiled back as she perched beside him, half on, half off the bed. 'Now, I don't know about you, but I'm starving, and the elves will be beside themselves waiting to attend your every whim. Shall I order us some supper?'

Severus shook his head. 'Not just yet, thank you. I have a more... pressing need...'

'Oh? OH... Then I'd better get Purdy to Apparate you...'

'In a moment.' Severus clasped her hand and brought the palm to his lips. 'I can hang on a bit. I just need to know... In the garden... What you said... When you said you... loved me, did you mean it?'

Hermione lowered her head, but nodded. 'Yes, I did. Of course I did.'

'I'm glad.' Severus' eyes seemed to focus on a point just over her shoulder. He flopped back onto his pillow, but kept hold of her hand. 'Recent events seem to have illustrated...yet again...just how... transient life is. I think it is high time I accepted the fact, stopped behaving as if I were immortal, and... admitted my feelings for you...'

'Oh, hush... there's plenty of time for that.' Hermione brushed his cheek tenderly. 'We'll take each day as it comes.'

'No. I have to say it now.' Leaning into her caress, Severus gave a small moan of pleasure. 'While I still have the courage.' He sighed and kissed her hand again. 'A moment ago... when you were so wrapped up in whatever it was you were reading, it felt as though I was witnessing something... intimate...as though I'd been granted a rare glimpse of something precious...I could have watched you for an eternity and not tired of it.'

He was staring at her again, searching her face in that disconcerting way of his as if she might crush his sentiments or ridicule him even now, after everything that had happened between them. Hermione rubbed her thumb along his bristly jaw line, hoping it would reassure him that she would never...could never...do any of those things.

'Gods, woman.' He swallowed hard. 'I never thought I could be jealous of a book.'

Hermione didn't quite know how to respond to that. She worried her lip, wondering what he'd say if he knew just what sort of book he was jealous of. But that was a confession for another day. 'Severus, I...'

'Don't say anything. This is hard enough for me as it is.' He took a deep breath and tried again. 'You have all but enchanted me, Hermione Granger, and I know of no countercurse. Will you let me... love you 'til the end of days? Could you lose yourself, in me, do you think, like you do in all your other endeavours, and make a lifetime study out of it? Of me?'

'Hmm... we-ell...' She smiled, but he looked so terribly solemn, so earnest, Hermione couldn't bring herself to prolong his agony. 'Yes,' she said in all seriousness, 'I believe I could.'

'Starting now?' A swift tug on her arm and Hermione found herself nose to nose with a very smug looking wizard. Getting a whiff of some rather sleepy breath, however, Hermione grimaced, bypassed his lips and favoured him with a kiss on the forehead instead.

'When you're better,' she said firmly.

'Spoilsport.'

'It's not easy for me, either, you know.' Hermione gave him a swift peck on the cheek before reluctantly disentangling herself from a very strong pair of arms that were equally reluctant to let her go. 'Pur...'

'How may Purdy serve Headmistress of Hogwarts.'

'Were you listening, elf?' Severus glowered at the little creature, who had appeared at the speed of light. 'Well?'

'Purdy is awaiting the summons like a good elf,' she squealed, glancing anxiously at Hermione. 'Is Purdy doing wrong?'

'No, no, no,' Hermione answered quickly, afraid that Purdy's self-harming instincts might kick in. 'You surprised us with your, er, prompt arrival, that's all. Professor Snape didn't mean to shout, did you, Severus?'

'As long as you didn't overhear...'

'There, you see? Now then, Purdy...' Hermione scrambled off the bed and pulled back the bedclothes. 'Please take Professor Snape to the bathroom, give him his privacy,

and then go and fetch his shaving things from his quarters...oh, and you'd better get his toothbrush, too, while you're there...'

~ * ~

Damn this old body. Damn it to hell and back.

He'd only closed his eyes briefly, he knew he had...no more than a second or two, at any rate...just to bask contentedly in the unusual sensation of a full stomach and to recover from Purdy's efforts at tickling his palate. It had seemed so terribly *decadent*: supper on a tray in Hermione's bed, all manner of tempting morsels, his favourite pudding... He'd been unexpectedly ravenous at the sight of all that food and had packed it away in no time. When was the last time he'd eaten with such enthusiasm, with such an appetite? Severus couldn't honestly remember. Perhaps it was a side effect of too much Strengthening Solution...he'd have to check on that when he was up to it...but whatever the reason, jam roly-poly had never tasted so good...so good, in fact, he'd managed a second helping. And it was still there, sitting in a rather comforting lump just below the ribs. Severus gingerly rubbed his tummy and squinted in the direction of the window. It was dark. How long had he been asleep?

A little sigh to his right made him aware of the other presence in the room. Severus smiled to himself, wondering what sight would greet him this time. He resisted the temptation to find out a little bit longer, relishing the anticipation, before rolling his head in the direction of the sound.

Hermione was sitting by the fire as before, engrossed in what he assumed was the same book. Only now she had changed into her night things, elongated the chair into a chaise-longue and was reclining, bare feet poking out from the hem of her tartan dressing gown, absentmindedly winding a loose strand of hair around her finger.

Time seemed to stand still as Severus drank in the vision before him. His eyes raked down Hermione's form, coming to rest at her toes. Blue? She'd painted her toenails *blue*. Who'd have thought it: Hogwarts' prim Headmistress hiding a rebellious streak inside her sensible shoes? He couldn't help but stare at them in fascination as they slowly wiggled in the warmth of the fire.

Hermione brought her hand to her mouth to cover a yawn, flexed and pointed her feet and then wiggled her toes some more. Quite unconsciously, Severus wet his lips, wondering how she'd react if he decided to lick those delectable looking arches and suck those edible looking toes. He wondered also why such a peculiar desire should strike him now, having never had the urge to lick anyone's feet before.

He grinned, relieved, as a tingle in his balls heralded the first physical stirrings of a reawakening libido. And about bloody time, too. There hadn't been much movement downstairs since before the assault. A most welcome sign, indeed, that he was on the road to recovery...although the timing couldn't possibly have been worse. The thing was, he desperately needed the toilet again: that last round of potions had gone through him like a dose of salts. So, what was the best course of action to take? He knew he ought to summon Purdy, but his pride was telling him he could easily make it to the bathroom under his own steam, no problem. Wasn't he feeling stronger, after all? Yes, he could do it; he had to do it. The time had come to show Hermione he wasn't some weak old man who couldn't empty his bladder without the aid of a house-elf. The bathroom was only a few strides away...

Gathering all his energy, Severus threw off the bed covers and got to his feet. The room tilted a bit, then steadied. He took a wobbly step forward.

'What on earth do you think you're doing?' Hermione cried, casting her book aside without a thought for its welfare. She was across the room and at his side in an instant.

'Need a pee,' Severus mumbled, ignoring his shaky knees and taking another step. 'Don't try and stop me.'

'I should really get Pur...'

'I don't need any help.'

'Oh, all right. Have it your own way.' She slipped an arm around his waist as her Summoned wand flew towards her. 'Lean on me,' she instructed. 'But if we fall over, I'll levitate you, understood?'

'Understood.'

'And...gods you're heavy...if you get into difficulty,' she puffed, 'you'll call for me...or Purdy. Are we clear?'

'Perfectly.'

~ * ~

'Drama queen,' Hermione muttered affectionately as the bathroom door slammed in her face. She hung around uncertainly for a while, shifting from foot to foot, but when there were no cries for help forthcoming, she soon left him to it.

The bed was in a rumpled mess. Tidying it would give her something to do, and... then she had to make her mind up about the sleeping arrangements. The ~~bed~~^{er} bed, looked very inviting, but Severus needed his rest more than she did. The last thing he needed was her tossing and turning all night. And it seemed a bit presumptuous to just climb in there, as much as she'd like to, as much as it would be nice to wake up next to him...

Hermione shook out the thought as she shook out the quilt. The chaise would be fine; her Transfiguring skills would ensure she didn't wake up with a stiff neck, and they'd both get a good night's sleep. That decided, Hermione turned back the bedclothes and cast some freshening charms on the sheets.

And not a moment too soon. Materialising with a startled 'oomph', Severus bounced on the bed, landing flat on his back with Purdy straddling his chest.

'I told you I could manage!' Severus bellowed. 'And get off me!'

'What the...?' Hermione blinked, not quite believing her eyes. 'What's happened?'

The little house-elf leapt off the bed like a scalded cat and ran to hide behind Hermione. 'Purdy is sorry; Purdy is a...'

'Will one of you please tell me what's going on?'

'I decided to have a shave...'

'Headmaster Snape was having trembly hands!' Purdy clutched Hermione's dressing gown and peered anxiously at Severus.

'All right, so I couldn't hold the *razor*,' Severus said through gritted teeth. 'But there's nothing wrong with my *legs*, you daft creature.'

Hermione held up her hand, silencing them both. 'Was he unsteady on his feet, Purdy?' she asked.

The elf nodded, looking up imploringly at Hermione. 'Headmaster Snape is needing to rest.'

'You're quite right, and if he can't be trusted to do it here...' Hermione ignored the indignant huff from the bed. 'I'm sure he would be better behaved if he were under the care of Madam Pomfrey. What do you think, Purdy?'

Purdy didn't dare answer. Nervously, she glanced back and fore between the Headmistress and former headmaster.

'I'm not going anywhere,' Severus said, scowling. 'I flatly refuse...'

'Then say you're sorry.'

'What?'

'You heard. I told you earlier you had the choice, and I've had enough of this bickering.' Hermione detached Purdy from her clothing and pushed her towards the bed. 'Now, tell her you're sorry for yelling or you can recuperate in the hospital wing.'

'Very well. I... apologise. Satisfied?'

'It's not up to me.' She glanced at Purdy, who was nodding vigorously while backing away. 'Good. Now perhaps we can all get some sleep.'

Hermione waited until Purdy had left before sitting down beside him. 'You must be the world's worst patient,' she said, reaching for his hand. 'No wonder Poppy was only too happy to let me look after you.'

Severus stared at their joined hands and started to draw small circles with his thumb. 'I only wanted to make myself... presentable,' he said. 'The bathroom mirror shrieked like a banshee when it saw me, which was hardly surprising. I looked ghastly.'

'Hm...? Did it?' Only half-listening, Hermione shivered. Wasn't it amazing what a thumb could do...? 'You're not... well...'

'I was still, um... capable... of walking.'

'Stubborn git.' Her body had managed to lean closer to him without bothering to ask for permission, and she could see that he had indeed scrubbed up quite nicely. She decided to inspect Purdy's handiwork more thoroughly. 'Smooth...,' she said, tilting his chin to one side. 'Very... smooth...'

'Um... Will you kiss me, now?' Severus asked hopefully. 'I brushed my teeth especially.'

'Hm...?' Her lips were hovering above his, anyway. It seemed a pity to waste the opportunity. 'Well, in that case...'

His eyes fluttered closed, and the thought, *He's got gorgeous eyelashes*, briefly registered before her lips found his. It was a gentle kiss, deliberately so on Hermione's part, until Severus' hands began to wander, first tentatively and then with more confidence. His arms encircled her, one hand holding her head firm; fingers loosened the knot of her hair, gently tugging at the grips that were valiantly trying to keep it in place, until it sprang free and tumbled around them.

It was Hermione who broke the kiss. Panting and more than a little flushed, she pulled away from him, kissed the tip of his nose and whispered, 'Goodnight.'

'Good *night*?' Severus echoed, perplexed, as Hermione got up. He watched her go to the chest at the foot of the bed and remove a pillow and a blanket. 'What are you doing with those?'

'I'm sleeping over there.' She jerked her chin at the chaise. 'I thought it would...'

'And what's wrong with the bed? Severus asked. 'It's big enough for a Quidditch team, let alone the two of us.'

Hermione sighed. 'I just want you to have a good night's sleep, that's all.'

'And you think that'll happen with me here and you over there?' He quirked an eyebrow. 'Besides, it's ~~your~~ *your* bed. If anyone's going to be sleeping on a Transfigured chair, it's me.'

'But...'

'Come to bed, Hermione.'

She hesitated a second, then stuffed the bedding back in the chest. 'Okay. I'll-er... just get ready. Won't be a minute.'

She scuttled over to her dressing table, only too aware of the eyes boring into her back. Feeling a bit self-conscious, Hermione sat down, removed her earrings, plucked out the odd hairpin that Severus had somehow managed to miss and then began her nightly brushing ritual. He was still staring...she could see his reflection in the mirror...by the time she'd divided her hair into three and plaited it. What on earth he was finding so fascinating, she hadn't a clue, but she did her best to ignore his scrutiny while she continued with her routine regardless, swiftly applying some heavy-duty night cream to her face and neck and wiping off the excess with a tissue. The crows feet at the corners of her eyes, which usually came in for close inspection at this point, she left alone, however...not wanting Severus to think she was vain, or worse, neurotic.

There. This is me. Take it or leave it. Out loud, she said as she stood up, 'Nearly finished.'

'Now where are you going?'

'I just have to clean my teeth...'

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Severus had decided that if Hermione didn't come to bed soon, there wouldn't be much point, as it would be time to get up. She must have been in the bathroom a good ten minutes, at the very least. With a sigh, he put his hands behind his head and stared up at the canopy. This was not how he'd anticipated spending his first proper night with Hermione. Was this normal behaviour? Did she go through this palaver every night? If so, he supposed he would have to get accustomed to it, though in a way, he wasn't sure he wanted to...not to the extent where he'd start taking the little things for granted, anyway. Little things like watching Hermione brushing her hair, for instance, were far too precious to ever want them to become mundane. It was most strange, he mused, this love business, this obsession with the minutiae of another's life. Strange, too, that he couldn't recall having these feelings the first time around...

In the time Hermione had been absent, those earlier stirrings down below had returned with a vengeance, intermittent tinglings having turned into a full-blown hard-on. Indeed, his cock would be making an impressive tent in the bedclothes right now...if it weren't for the weight of the quilt.

Severus tugged at the heavy bedclothes to ease the pressure, but it didn't make a great deal of difference. And what on earth had possessed Purdy to fetch the oldest, greyest, *itchiest* nightshirt in his possession? The damned thing had somehow managed to rise up and twist awkwardly around his legs while he'd been sleeping, as if he wasn't uncomfortable enough. It was most annoying.

As he wriggled about, readjusting himself, Severus could not avoid brushing against his straining erection. He very briefly considered knocking off a crafty one, but having no means to clean up the evidence, decided against it. Perhaps Hermione might be persuaded to help out later...if he could convince her that it wouldn't be detrimental to his health. Otherwise, the chances of him getting a good night's sleep were slim. He gave his balls an absentminded scratch while he pondered a strategy...

'Fuck it.' Severus yanked at the neck buttons, desperate to be rid of the irritation. A quick glance at the bathroom door, and the nightshirt was off over his head, scrunched up into a ball and thrown on the floor. He settled back on the pillows with a sigh. Much better.

~ * ~

Severus didn't bother to pull the bedclothes up to cover his bare chest when Hermione walked back into the bedroom a few moments later. He didn't miss the sharp intake of breath, either.

'I am more... comfortable. Like this,' he said before she had a chance to comment.

'Okay... If you say so...' Unfastening the tie of her dressing gown, Hermione padded to the foot of the bed where she slipped it off and draped it over the chest.

It was Severus' turn to gasp. The red silk nightgown she was wearing underneath clung to every curve of her body in an extremely pleasing way. Acromantuala, if he wasn't mistaken. Expensive, alluring. His cock became even harder at the sight of Hermione's nipples, stiff and clearly outlined through the gossamer like material, and Severus wondered if that was his doing, or if she was feeling the cold.

'Like it?' she asked, walking slowly towards him in what could only be described as a predatory manner.

'I do. Very much,' he replied, his eyes still glued to her chest.

'I'm glad.' Hermione did a twirl to give him a view of the back. 'An improvement on my old one, don't you think?'

'Yes...I...' He swallowed thickly. 'Money well spent...'

Hermione's shoulders sagged. 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't be teasing you like this. I just didn't want you to think I dress like a Victorian prude all the time, and seeing as we can't do any...'

'Take it off.'

'Severus, I...'

'Let me look at you. Please. It won't do me any harm.'

Severus watched the battle on Hermione's face, thinking she might refuse at first, but then she pushed the straps over her shoulders. 'Can't remember what I look like?'

she asked, smiling wryly as she allowed the flimsy garment to slide to the floor. She stood still, worrying her bottom lip, and seemed uncertain what to do with her hands. Ah, so that's what she was doing in the bathroom... She'd trimmed her pubes...and probably shaved her legs as well.

'I was drunk not blind...' Severus' eyes travelled up to her face. 'And I could never forget how lovely you are.'

His pronouncement was greeted with a pleased smile. 'Good,' she said, rubbing her arms. 'Can I get in now? I'm freezing?'

'Curtain.'

'I beg your pardon?'

Severus pointed at the fireplace. 'Attend to the curtain.'

'Oh, yes. Right.' Hermione casually waved a hand over her shoulder, not bothering to check if she'd hit her target. *Now* can I get in? To my own bed?'

'Impressive,' said Severus as the empty portrait disappeared behind a swoosh of fabric. 'And yes, as much as I'd like to stare at such an outstanding view all night, I don't want you to catch pneumonia.' He made a meal of slowly peeling back clothes, smirking as Hermione's gaze was inevitably drawn downwards...

'Ignore it,' he said, aiming for nonchalance. 'It's got a mind of its own.'

'I believe you,' said Hermione, scrambling under the covers. 'Though thousands wouldn't...budge up a bit, will you?'

'Actually, there is one other thing...' Severus tugged gently on the band holding her plait together.

'Oh, don't.' But he carried on loosening her hair regardless. 'It'll be a frightful mess in the morning.'

'But it's always a mess.' An indulgent smile on his lips, Severus watched her unruly curls spring outwards, framing her face. 'Which is why I adore it. So wild, untameable... Looks like you've been shagging all day.'

'You like my *hair*?'

'I love it. Now, come here; you look like you need warming up.' Mmm, this was more like it. An armful of naked Hermione. Severus pulled her flush against him. 'That's bet...ye gods, woman. Your feet are like blocks of ice!'

'S-sorry.' Hermione shivered. 'I usually have a hot water bottle...and wear a nightie.'

'You're forgiven.' He'd forgive her anything. She smelled almost edible: vanilla and something fruity...like a trifle, in fact...and her reluctance to get closer seemed to have all but dissipated. There were no more barriers to dismantle, and it occurred to Severus that this was how it was always going to be from now on. 'Besides which, I feel duty bound to keep you nice and snug tonight.' Gently, he trailed his fingers down her spine until they found a smooth, round buttock just begging to be squeezed.

Hermione moan was silenced by his mouth on hers, but she pushed him off, gasping. 'You know I want to, very much...'

'But I'm not supposed to exert myself.' Severus let out a long, frustrated sigh and brought Hermione's hand to his groin. *This*, however, is not going anywhere, thanks to that last Strengthening Solution you gave me, and is most definitely not conducive to sleep.'

'I could get you something to relax you,' Hermione offered.

'No. No more potions.' Severus rolled onto his back, smirking as Hermione followed and laid her head on his chest. 'I suppose a blow job is out of the question.'

'Yes.'

'A hand job, then?'

'Yes.'

'Yes?'

'Yes,' Hermione repeated more firmly. 'It's out of the question.'

Severus yawned. 'No sleep for me in that case.'

'Try thinking of something else.' Hermione wriggled away from him, letting in a cold draught of air as she did so before snuggling down again. *Nox!* Like you said, this is a big bed. So. I'll stay over here...out of temptation's way.'

Easier said than done when he could still feel her lingering warmth and knew that she was within touching distance. 'It must seem strange to be sharing it with someone, nevertheless,' he said.

There was a soft gasp in the darkness. 'It is. A bit.'

'Are you... all right?' Severus asked.

'I'm fine. It just took me by surprise... your voice... next to me... in the dark.' She seemed a little breathless. How curious... Severus tried to think of something else to say, to see how she'd react, but Hermione beat him to it. 'What's your bed in Slytherin Tower like? Is it as big as this?'

'You mean you haven't been... snooping?' Did she just *whimper*? Did his voice really have that much of an effect on her? If so, he'd be stupid not to capitalise on such an advantage. 'You do surprise me.'

Her giggle really was quite delightful. 'No, I still haven't seen Salazar's apartments...I checked on the dormitories and common areas, of course, to make sure everything was as it should be, but I was waiting for you...'

'To give you... the guided tour...?' No, not possible. He could never be that lucky. 'Strangely enough, the idea did cross my mind during my sojourn in the hospital wing.' And some. Merlin only knew he'd had plenty of time to hone a raunchy fantasy or two involving Hermione and his new apartments. 'I'm sure I could arrange... something.'

'That would be very... um, nice.'

'Very well... And perhaps we might... No, perhaps it would not be appropriate.' Severus paused, wondering if Hermione would take the bait.

She did. 'What? What do you want to do?'

'I...' He hummed, pretending to think about it. 'I would be delighted to show you around... at a price...'

'A price? What sort of price?'

She sounded curious, amused even. Excellent. 'Oh, nothing exorbitant, don't worry. I merely propose... a forfeit of one item of clothing per room.'

There was a deathly silence, and Severus thought he might have pushed his luck a bit too far. He decided to appeal to the Gryffindor in her. 'Or am I expecting too much of you?'

'Um... So, how many rooms are there?' Hermione asked, a little croakily, Severus thought.

'Seven.' He could almost hear the gears turning in her brain. 'Shoes count as one item, as do... stockings. '

The bedclothes rustled as Hermione turned towards him. 'Hmm... I think you'd better tell me more about what's going on in that devious, Slytherin mind of yours...before I commit myself.'

Severus chuckled softly. 'If you insist, but first I must set the scene. Let me think...'

'I'm all ears.'

'You see, when Hogwarts was first built,' Severus began, ignoring the interruption and huff of annoyance, 'the idea of a wizarding school was a novel concept. So novel, in fact, it attracted the attention of many a foreign dignitary...' There was a lot more he could say on that subject, but time was pressing. 'And to cut a long story short, Salazar, unlike Godric, understood the importance of making connections with influential people.'

Hermione yawned.

'Not boring you, am I?'

'No,' she replied, 'but can we get to the point before I fall asleep?'

'I was about to...' Severus glanced above him, momentarily distracted, as a slender moonbeam pierced the arched window near the ceiling. It cast enough ghostly light for him to just about make out the faintest outline of Hermione's head on her pillow. He shifted onto his side. 'Those people brought gifts as tokens of their esteem, expensive trinkets from their own time as well as treasures from the ancient world...including some very rare texts...'

'Books?' Hermione asked.

'Ah, I see I have your full attention.' Severus edged closer. 'Yes, manuscripts, really. So, if you want to see them...' He let the carrot dangle in the air a bit longer. 'Are you willing to accept my terms?'

'Hmm... I still think I need more details concerning your... fee,' Hermione answered, though even in the dim light, Severus could tell she was only goading him...challenging him, even. And he was more than up for it.

'In that case, I envisage something along the following lines.' He paused for effect, clearing his throat. 'Once we have arranged a suitably convenient date and time, I suggest we meet in the main reception hall...you are already familiar with that.'

'How could I forget such a beautiful room?' Hermione sighed. 'Those fabulous tapestries... such a pity. Did the elves manage to restore them?'

'You shall see for yourself very soon,' Severus replied. 'Now, as to the details, you should wear a formal dress robe as befits the occasion...'

'Green, I suppose.'

Severus snorted. 'The colour is not important, seeing as you won't be in it for long. I do, however, insist on evening gloves...black evening gloves...and yes, they count as one item before you ask.'

'Oh. So... dress, gloves, shoes, stockings and presumably suspenders...' Hermione's voice was full of laughter. 'What else would you have me wear, Professor Snape?'

'Minx. You want me to spell it out for you? Oh, well, he'd come this far. 'Bra and knickers...the sort that leaves your arse bare...'

'You mean a thong?' She sounded peeved. 'I haven't worn one of those horrid things since I was a teenager.'

'Indulge me,' Severus said, his hand straying to her pillow. 'And I will make it worth your while.' He paused again, side-tracked by a wisp of hair that had somehow managed to snake around his finger without a by your leave. 'So... from the main hall, a door leads to a smaller, more... intimate reception room, designed around an Egyptian theme, incidentally. The statue of Horus just inside the door will be happy to look after your robe while you do a circuit of the room, admiring the artefacts.'

'And what will you be admiring, as if I couldn't guess?'

'Mmm... ' He allowed himself a moment to imagine the scene and made a mental note to strategically place some of the more interesting pieces on the floor. 'I expect I'll find something to occupy me. Shall we move on?'

'You've given this a great deal of thought, haven't you?'

'I had precious little else to occupy me whilst I was incapacitated,' Severus admitted. 'Now, in there, you will notice three doors; the one on the left leads into the gentleman's gaming room where Salazar indulged his passion for dice, cards and other forms of... entertainment.'

'Oh?'

The soft puff of air against Severus' palm sent a shiver down his spine that went straight to his bollocks, and it was only by a supreme effort of will that he didn't leap on top of her and have done with it. 'Yes, I suspect he and his friends enjoyed the company of, how can I put it, ladies of easy virtue, in that room...if the paintings are anything to go by.'

'I'm glad you brought up the portraits,' said Hermione without any trace of amusement. 'I was about to ask.'

Severus chuckled. 'Never fear, I shall banish them beforehand. There won't be any witnesses. The nymphs and shepherds in the gaming room are actually frescoes, though...not connected to the portrait network...and while they get up to all manner of debauched conduct, they are oblivious to anything outside their world.'

'Good,' she said, obviously relieved. 'Can't wait to see them. What else is there?'

'A large table for a game similar to wizarding billiards,' Severus replied. 'I don't suppose you've ever played?'

Hermione snorted. 'No. Played pool with the boys a couple of times, but that's it. Why?'

'I rather like the idea of you betting your bra on the roll of a dice...and losing, of course...followed by me watching you bent over the table, potting a few balls..*watching your tits dragging over the baize*... 'Anyway, from here we proceed to the ladies' drawing room...that's the middle door...where, naturally, we will dispense with your drawers.'

Hermione laughed. 'Perve. So, what's in this room?'

'You wound me, madam.' She probably had a point though, though. 'I'm not sure I want to tell you, now.'

'Rubbish,' said Hermione with more than a little mirth in her voice. 'You're dying to tell me, and you know it.'

'Oh, very well. Have it your way...' He sighed, acquainting himself with the surprisingly soft texture of her hair. 'There are treasures from Byzantium...a rather sumptuous affair, by any standards: carpets on the walls, large reclining couches, that sort of thing.' Cautiously, Severus moved his hand to caress Hermione's cheek, half-expecting her to swat it away, but instead she planted a deliberate kiss in the centre of his palm. He groaned, his cock surging in the hope of seeing some action before the night was out. 'I have imagined you sprawled on... upon a couch, spreading yourself as wide as you possibly can for me, playing with yourself, but I-I think it will be almost... impossible to keep to the plan... to resist you...'

'I'll bear that in mind,' she breathed, nuzzling his hand and kissing it again. 'Tell me where we go from there.'

'Well... I-I, then...' He swallowed thickly. 'The third... door is the entrance to Salazar's private apartments. A narrow... passageway leads to the sitting room. The walls are lined with bookshelves...'

'Ah...'

'I will allow you to... examine one volume...*in exchange for your suspender belt*.' Panting, he snatched his hand away as nuzzling turned to nibbling. He was never going to make it as far as the bedroom if he let her continue in that vein. 'I trust you know... of a spell... to keep your stockings up without it?'

'I'll take care of it, no problem,' Hermione replied, slightly out of breath. 'And sorry about, erm, that. I couldn't help myself.'

'An apology is unnecessary, Hermione.' As if she didn't know. Her resolve was weakening; she was itching to get her hands on him, all right, no question about it. Now all he had to was persuade her that he wasn't going to snuff it if she did. 'But perhaps we should stop...'

'No, no,' Hermione protested. 'Not yet. What else is there...besides books?'

'Originally, not much.' He could do this. He just had to concentrate. 'As Salazar's taste was somewhat austere...even for me...I've added some modern furniture...some chairs and a couple of sofas. I can easily imagine sitting there in comfort... stroking myself...but not to completion...while I wait for you to finish enjoying your reward.'

'I don't think I'll be able to read for very long.' Her voice was barely a whisper. 'I'm sure my mind'll be on... other things.'

'Hmm...' *In for a Knut*. He took a deep breath. 'Well, bearing in mind that I shall be similarly... distracted, and in much need of some... relief by that point, when you do tire of reading, I would very much like it if you were to kneel in front of me, take my cock in your hand...your... gloved hand...apply your mouth and...'

'Suck?'

Severus screwed his eyes closed. So much for concentration, but he only had to hold it together for a little bit longer. 'Yes. I-er shall of course reciprocate in kind when we move to the dining room, where I've a mind to lift you up, deposit you on the table and dine to my heart's content... on you. And you should be aware,' he added, 'I intend to have my fill.'

Her little moan was very encouraging. 'Name your price.'

'Decisions, decisions...' he mused. 'Hmm... While I rather like the idea of you walking around in nothing but high heels and gloves, I think it would be more practical to keep the stockings.'

'Whatever...'

'You may also take the time to admire the ceiling while you're lying there... on your back... with my tongue lapping at your clit and my fingers in your cunt. It was the prototype for the Great Hall...' He broke off, noticing a marked hitch in her breathing. *Was she...?* 'Hermione, what are you doing?'

'What do you think I'm doing?'

Gods. 'Can I watch?'

'NO,' she gasped. 'Leave the light off and... keep... talking...'

Talk? He wanted to jump her. Now. Desperately. 'Right. Um. Bathroom... Er... Big, Roman... lots of marble everywhere...' How was he supposed to continue when all he could hear were ragged sighs and the occasional moan from the woman beside him? But he was almost there...as was she, by the sound of it. 'I will disrobe completely here...' *more moaning* '... kneel before you, remove your shoes...for the moment...and roll down your stockings and remove them also. Then we shall enter the water...' *Oh...* 'Where we shall... bathe each other... in preparation...'

'For godssake, get to the bedroom!'

'...And, if you'll let me...and it's optional...I'll shave your snatch clean, so I may pleasure you even better...'

'And... and...'

'And then, back in your high-heels, you will lead the way into the bedroom...rolling your hips and wiggling your luscious arse at me...where I intend throwing you onto the bed and fucking you all ways, in every conceivable position known to man, until we are both too sore and exhausted to continue.'

'Severus, I'm...'

'*Lumos!* Get over here. *Now.*'

With a growl, she hurled herself at him, her knee narrowly missing his balls in her eagerness to straddle his hips. It was only after she'd impaled herself on his cock and was sitting there, breathing heavily, that he saw realisation dawning on her features. Blinking owlishly, his goddess locked eyes with him, an apology on her lips.

'Don't,' he said. 'We both want this. And give me your fingers... Gods, you taste divine. Now, fuck me.'

Hermione didn't say another word, her eyes fluttering closed as she rose up...*slowly, maddeningly slowly*... until he almost fell out and then, equally slowly, slid her soppingly wet, and deliciously tight cunt, down the full length of his cock again. Severus hissed as she gave her hips a twist and ground against his pelvic bone. She looked at him questioningly, but he just smiled.

'I'm all right, love,' he sighed. 'Take all the time you need.'

Why he said that, he didn't know, seeing as his balls were set to explode. It had been much, much too long. Every male instinct screamed *take, thrust, fuck, hard* but, this time, he had to content himself with letting her do all the work and just... watch. Watch her tongue flicking around her lips as she rode him, her hands kneading her breasts, tweaking her stiff nipples, watch the point where their bodies met and his cock, slipping in an out, glistening with her juices, watch the rosy flush spread over her chest, and her hair, her wondrous hair...

'Severus, please...'

So, so close now; his thumb found her clit, and she whimpered in approval as it made firm but lazy circles, bringing her to a shuddering, almost silent climax. The feel of her quivering around him robbed Severus of his last remnant of control; his hips jerked erratically, pitching her forwards, and he was coming, lost in the bliss of his own release.

'You are *sublime*,' he groaned as Hermione collapsed on top of him, knocking the last of the air out of his lungs.

'Are you sure you're all right?'

'Yes. I'm... fine.' Severus breathed into her hair, struggling to calm his racing heart. 'No permanent damage done, I don't think, and...What's that rustling sound?' His head snapped towards the fireplace. 'Phineas, is that you? It had better not be!'

Through a jumbled mess of curls, Hermione raised her head and looked at him in utter mortification. 'He must have heard *everything*.'

Severus had never seen a more glorious sight in all his life. All thoughts of Dark curses and setting Phineas' portrait ablaze were forgotten as he tilted her chin to kiss her. 'Next time,' he said with a smirk, 'remember the bloody silencing charm, will you?'

~ * ~

Many floors below, a thirsty Eljay ventured into the kitchens in search of some hard-earned Butterbeer. It had been a long shift; personally supervising the decorations in time for Professor Snape's return to the new Tower was tiring, and he wasn't getting any younger. Not that he was complaining, mind. Work was work, and it was his pleasure to serve. A bottle of Butterbeer at the end of the day wasn't a lot to ask for, really, was it? Humming to himself, he'd almost reached the pantry door when he noticed an exhausted Purdy slumped over the Slytherin table, head on her arms, snoring quietly. Now that was an elf who took her loyalty to the humans in her care too much to heart, in his opinion. Something needed to be done; a knackered house-elf was no use to anyone. He tutted to himself as he crossed the otherwise deserted kitchen and gave her a gentle prod. 'It is late. You should be in bed.'

Purdy sat up with a jolt, blinking rapidly. 'Is something wrong? Is Purdy being summoned?'

'No.'

'Then Purdy will wait until the summons is coming.' She rubbed her eyes and yawned.

'You are being foolish,' said Eljay. 'There will be no summons. Look.' He snapped his fingers, and an image of the Headmistress' bedroom appeared, swimming into focus

like a mirage, on the table top. 'The humans have copulated and are sated from their exertions. They will have no further need of you tonight.'

Balefully, Purdy regarded the scene, the tips of her ears burning bright pink at the sight of her beloved Headmaster Snape, naked and entwined with Headmistress Granger. It seemed her two favourite humans had resolved their differences and found the love she'd always wished for them at long last, but still... 'He...Headmaster Snape has no further need for Purdy,' she said sadly, tears trickling down her cheek.

Eljay tilted his head and regarded his companion intently, as if seeing her for the first time. She was really rather lovely...big eyes, stubby nose, pointy chin...especially when she blushed like that. It was most becoming. 'Cheer up,' he said, sitting down beside her. 'Humans will always need elves. Let's face it; they would not survive very long without us.'

Purdy turned to face him, eyes bulging, full of hope. 'Do you... really think so?'

'I do.' The smile she gave him made his nose tingle. 'And shouldn't that have been, "Is Eljay really thinking so?"'

Purdy raised her hands to her mouth in horror. 'No...yes. That is... Please don't tell anyone.'

Eljay laughed. 'I won't. I promise your secret's safe with me.' A click of his fingers conjured up a large checked hanky, which he offered to her. 'Here. Blow.' He waited patiently until the trumpeting noises had subsided. 'That's better. Now, I know it's terribly late but... Would you care to... join me in a Butterbeer...or two? I think we both deserve it.'

Her ears turned a rather fetching shade of crimson as she smiled shyly. 'Y-es. Pur...' She took a deep breath./d like that. In fact, I think that sounds just perfect.'

~ Finite ~