

Cornered

by windwings

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Initially, this was meant to be a couple of drabbles for GrangerSnape100 comm, but my plot bunnies started fornicating uncontrollably, and there was no stopping them :)

I'd like to thank **melusin**, my wonderful beta, for making this readable.

The gentle hubbub of merry-making guests filled the Great Hall with brightness and joy, as if it weren't bright and joyful already, with all the elaborate decorations added by the house-elves for the occasion. And Hogwarts' house-elves were known to be nothing short of arduous about their duties.

The fifth anniversary of Voldemort's demise was celebrated with pomp and extravagance, now that the losses of war didn't smart as much, and the ripping pain caused by the deaths of loved ones had given way to quiet sorrow.

Hermione Granger waited patiently until the small commotion caused by her arrival died and tried to socialize.

She gave her regards to Harry, who was decidedly inebriated (again), and Ginny, who was heavily pregnant (again), and made 'a round of duty', as she called it, to exchange a few polite, unnecessary nothings with all those who would be scandalized if she didn't. She was thinking of calling it a night when she spotted him. He was standing there, his posture more relaxed and casual than she had ever remembered it to be, all austere black and a touch of green, which, on him, was almost naughty, and chatting with Percy Weasley. *Chatting. With Percy.* In a most animated manner.

She knew she should have fled the moment she saw him, but she was too busy staring to concentrate on the conscious work of her mind. Sure enough, Snape, ever the man with a pair of eyes in the back of his head, turned around, and for a moment everything else became a blur except for two black eyes set upon her. She shook her head, annoyed that his gaze still held power over her, and almost turned to leave, but it was too late; he'd already left Percy to his glass of bubbly and was striding towards her, his movement lithe and beautifully economical.

She sighed and plastered her best, exaggeratedly eager smile on her face, hoping to aggravate him into leaving before one of them made a complete idiot of themselves (and she wouldn't bet on him being the idiot).

"Ah, the famous Miss Granger," Snape said, instead of a greeting, his tone dulcet. "Gracing these old walls with your presence, I see. What a pleasure to see you."

Hermione watched his face assume the expression one could have after eating an especially sour lemon and reciprocated with imitating it as best she could.

"The pleasure is all mine, Professor. Do you have some business to discuss with me, or have you developed an appreciation for idle chit-chat?" she asked mellifluously.

"I have business that involves idle chit-chat," he answered, unruffled by her sarcasm, grabbed two flutes of champagne from a levitating tray that presented itself obligingly

at his right side, and handed one to her.

Damn, the bastard is seductive when he wants to be suave Hermione thought grudgingly and pretended to sip her champagne.

"Well? You have my undivided attention," she said impatiently and made a point of looking at her Muggle watch. She hoped the complacent git would take the hint. She'd already had enough of his presence to fret and fume and be generally miserable for the week to come.

"I won't impose much on your misanthropic mood, Miss Granger. It's just that I intended to enquire about your use of the Time-Turner... third year, wasn't it?" Snape looked the embodiment of a refined socialite making small talk.

Hermione's stomach felt like it was about to drop to her feet. Oh, Merlin. *He knows.*

"What about it?" she asked, trying to sound bored.

"Oh, a trifle, really." Snape produced a toothy, predatory smile. If he'd wanted to scare the living daylight out of her, he'd succeeded. "A little bird told me that you had used the Time-Turner to go back in time to one and the same event repeatedly. I just found it... odd, and the scholar in me would like to hear about the experience first-hand. For instance, do you suppose you might have changed something in the time-space continuum?"

She wanted to slap the look of false academic interest right off his otherwise perfectly smug face. Damn and fuck. He had her back to the wall, and he knew it.

"Did that *little bird*, perchance, belong to a rare species of half-arsed peacocks, who have just increased their chances of extinction by at least one individual, and was its name Percy?" she asked, narrowing her eyes.

Damn Perce. She'd feed him his balls when this was over. She should have remembered that he had a vindictive streak the breadth of the English Channel when she'd ditched his offer of lunch and a stroll in a park so off-handedly.

"Maybe," Snape purred. "Mister Weasley indeed has access to some peculiar information, what with his new post as Chief Archivist."

Hermione shrugged her shoulders, took a hefty swig from her flute, and surveyed the room for an opportunity to avoid this conversation.

However, the gods of opportunities, it seemed, had decided to have a good laugh at her expense today.

"So, about that special occasion, Miss Granger..." Snape prompted.

"Oh, that. Erm, no, nothing of the kind. Your *space-time continuum* is as safe and sound as it could be in this mad world to end all mad worlds," she replied casually and waved her hand emphatically, but only managed to splatter the dregs of her champagne.

"How fascinating," Snape noted and took the empty glass from her hand, placing it on a tray that popped into existence, this time to his left.

A minute brush of his fingers on hers put her a notch closer to the end of her tether. Insufferable man, with his penchant for savouring the agony of others before delivering the final blow.

But perhaps, there was yet something to salvage. Maybe, Percy's nosiness was of slightly less epic magnitude than she would have imagined. Or, maybe, his decency wasn't on its deathbed, yet.

"Indeed," she squeezed out and brushed a few invisible specks of dust from her shoulder.

"May I ask what glorious event inspired the numerous returns?" Snape enquired, solicitously handing her another flute.

"Oh, it's banal, really," she answered, her creative streak putting words into her mouth. "Just an essay I handed in to Professor Flitwick, which I later realised needed some revision, and well, it took several trips to make it more polished."

Snape's mouth curved into an eerie smile, and then his entire face moulded into an expression of perfect triumph. Merlin, she had just walked into a trap, hadn't she? *Excellent, Hermione. Better to keep your gob shut and thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt* she belatedly thought and braced herself for the blade of his disparaging sarcasm, which was raised above her neck.

"Let me get this straight, Miss Granger," Snape drawled in, oh, the silkiest of voices. "Do you mean to say that you have clocked up *one-hundred-and-sixty-four* instances of time travelling over a span of eight months to nitpick an essay?"

He made a dramatic pause, obviously relishing in her reaction.

Hermione's chin rose defiantly. She refused to let this... this... despicable excuse for a Wizarding Batman has-been to try and make her feel ashamed of her actions.

"Do you have a point to make, Professor, or am I just wasting time I'd much rather spend away from this ludicrous party on taunts that lead nowhere?"

Snape sneered at her, a sneer that a hunting spider could sport when an unsuspecting prey was about to fly right into its web; if spiders could produce sneers, that is.

"Why, yes, Miss Granger. The fact is, the same little bird of the ginger peacock variety divulged that you had been revisiting one and the same episode which involved ~~any~~ person in a rather intimate situation."

Damn Percy. Damn him to the deepest corner of Hell, and may a horde of Satan's vilest, ugliest imps flay his pale, bony arse on the largest frying pan for the rest of eternity.

"Who would have thought? Miss Granger, a straight-O's student and an example of virtue with whom all the staff bugged the blistering hell out of me, peeping on her teacher, at the age of thirteen at that," Snape added as she was about to mentally put the sodding mishap of a wizard named Percy Weasley through some more intricate tortures.

What?

Before Hermione was able to express her doubts about Snape's mental integrity, he went on, "And don't give me that look. I know you were there, by the greenhouses, staring at my naked backside when I was taking a swim after administering the fertilizer to Sprout's horrendous mandrakes. I sensed someone's presence and was able to memorize the scent of the shampoo and identify it with you afterwards!" he barked, his eyes ablaze with fury.

"What the hell are you blathering on about, Snape?" she spat, foregoing the formalities of a proper address.

"I'm *blathering on* about your perverse proclivities."

Suddenly, an image of Snape, surreptitiously sniffing for whiffs of scent from every single female head in Hogwarts, appeared in front of Hermione's inner mind, and it had the misfortune of being so utterly hilarious that she couldn't help but give in to the onslaught of overwhelming laughter.

"So, Percy told you that, huh?" she wheezed, wiping tears from her eyes, when she was able to talk between giggles.

"Mr. Weasley informed me of your excessive use of the Time-Turner and mentioned that the situation involved was of a rather intimate nature, so I assumed..."

"You assumed that I was spying on your *magnificent* arse and kept returning to the event again and again to explore my budding sexuality? Oh, please, get over yourself, Snape. Now that I recall the occasion, I can give you a Wand Oath that I left immediately after your hands touched those buttons."

But, oh, how she had wished to stay and see, knowing full well that it may have been her only chance, what lay beneath the robes.

Snape only sulked in response and subjected her to the entirety of the power that was his patented glare of contempt.

It was obvious that he was disconcerted, thinking, perhaps, that her reaction was more genuine than anything she'd shown so far. And if she squinted just a bit and looked at him through an emotionally magnifying glass, she could suppose that he was...a mite only...hurt.

"Now what? I've poked your sensitive ego?" she asked, still not believing he had come to such a conclusion.

"What do you take me for?" he finally hissed in righteous anger. "I don't cradle-snatch."

Quite true, she thought. During her seven years at Hogwarts, never had she heard as much as a rumour of Snape being involved with a student. Though, she certainly had known a few witches who fancied him.

"That you don't," Hermione answered almost wistfully and sighed.

There was a long pause between them, during which she contemplated turning around and removing her disgruntled self from this ill-fated party, but somehow it seemed already beside the point.

"So, Weasley lied then?" Snape ventured warily and straightened up, his stance back to his teaching persona.

There it was. Her outlet. A way to bow out with grace and go home to lick her wounds in private. And maybe, in a few weeks, her life would be back to the habitual level of normalcy, her ridiculously viable infatuation with her old school teacher forced into hiding in the deepest recesses of her mind by an overwhelming desire to be happy. In spite of him, or, rather, the lack of him in her life.

However, the Gryffindor part of her brain, the one with the 'act-before-you-think' tendency, took charge of the situation.

"Not quite," she blurted out.

The implication of what she had said caught up with her, but it was, really, too late to do anything, so she simply awaited the judgment, which seemed imminent.

After a few small eternities, which, in reality, were mere seconds, he spoke. "And will I have..." he paused, as if deciding on his word choice, "the honour of becoming privy to this knowledge?" His voice sounded careful and completely devoid of all the usual snark.

Hermione looked directly at him and took a deep breath.

"The Quidditch match between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw, last Sunday in October that year. I was late for the start and running for the stalls when a stray Bludger hit me. Mind you, it only grazed my shoulder, but I was knocked down, face in the mud. You helped me up and, well, straightened me out."

The last part was said in a half-whisper, and she closed her eyes briefly, recalling in every minute detail the way his hand had felt underneath her chin when he'd wiped her face with a pristine handkerchief, careful not to use a common *Scourgify*, which was famous for its rough treatment of tender skin, such as that on teenaged girls' faces. They were completely alone, and she'd watched in awe the way the corners of his mouth quirked upwards infinitesimally. "It would seem that Quidditch has even less affection for you, Miss Granger, than you have for it," he'd said to her back then, his tone anything but unkind, and strode away, leaving her flabbergasted.

With time, the experience had become surreal, so abhorrent and resentful his treatment of her had been. They had hardly interacted outside of class or Order business, but, nevertheless, she was sure she'd never rise enough for him to deem her worthy of attention. After she had left school, he never showed any interest in her, and she would never approach him.

"I fail to see how this is memorable or romantic in any way," Snape grumbled, interrupting her train of thought, "and I don't seem to recall the occasion, at all."

"Of course you wouldn't remember," Hermione replied, her voice wavering treacherously. "Since then, I've seen you wiping teary faces, repairing bloody noses, and dealing with hysterics dozens of times...mind you, most of them were from your own house...but it's just... I felt... ever since that time... I just knew that..." She sighed and looked him squarely in the eye. "You're a good man, Snape, somewhere underneath it all. I guess this is what I'm trying to say."

He looked at her, his expression indecipherable, and she felt like she was a museum oddity.

"Well, I suppose, my departure is long overdue, so, if your curiosity is sufficiently satisfied, Professor, I'd rather be elsewhere. Goodnight to you," she said, with much more dignity than she thought she had left, and turned to leave.

"Miss Granger," his voice called a few seconds later, and she halted her steps and turned around.

His hand was outstretched, as if he was going to stop her bodily if needs be, and he quickly lowered it to his side and cleared his throat.

"I just wanted to ask if you would fancy lunch with me... Maybe next Friday," he deadpanned.

"Why?" was all she could reply, standing there completely bewildered.

"And why ever not? Maybe you are the woman of my dreams, yet all I know about you is that you are a swot and have grown up to have a *magnificent* rump."

She smiled at the thought of Severus Snape asking her, oh, Merlin, on a *date*. Why ever not, indeed?

Two weeks later, Hermione woke to the feeling of a jet-black head resting on her stomach. It was a marvelous feeling. Her hands immediately snaked of their own volition into that raven hair; so black, the dull pre-dawn light added tinges of blue to it. It wasn't all that greasy, actually, just very fine, like Acromantula silk, and so, so soft.

She sighed contentedly and thought of having a choir of fairies, singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" (the newest item in Maurizio's Magical Gifts for Every Occasion), delivered to Percy Weasley as a thank you present.