

Incense of the Heart

by sc010f

Hermione learns that even though you've defeated a Dark Lord, saved the world, and earned an Order of Merlin doesn't mean you've got it all.

One

Chapter 1 of 7

Hermione learns that even though you've defeated a Dark Lord, saved the world, and earned an Order of Merlin doesn't mean you've got it all.

Hermione's first clue that something was wrong was the exploding feather.

"You can take my first-years," Flitwick told her with a reassuring pat on the hand. "They'll be spellbound anyway, and you always had the best technique. It's just the Levitation Charm, and, as I recall..." He was actually twinkling, Hermione noticed with a great deal of trepidation. "You were particularly adept at *Wingardium Leviosa*."

"But will they..." Hermione started to ask.

"Listen? Of course! How could they not? You're *Hermione Granger*! Now really, I insist. You will be wonderful, and it will count towards your NEWT coursework."

"But I..."

"You'll be fine, dear," he insisted, giving her a gentle push, and Hermione found herself facing a room full of expectant eleven- and twelve-year-old Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws, each grasping their wands tightly.

Come on, you can do this, Granger. You faced down Bellatrix Lestrange.

"Welcome to the practical section of Charms," she managed to croak. "Take up your wands gently, please."

A small hand, attached to a small person in the first row, shot up.

"Miss?" the boy demanded.

"Yes?"

"Are you really Hermione Granger?"

"Yes, I am. Now, does everybody have their wands in a gentle grasp?"

"Miss?"

"Yes?"

"Really Hermione Granger?"

"Yes, really. Now, take your wands like so. No, not too hard, you don't want to snap them, and let's start by practicing the movement."

"Miss?"

"Yes, Mr...?" Hermione trailed off.

"Hardaway, Miss."

"Mr Hardaway, what is it *now*?"

"Are you really Harry Potter's best friend?"

"Harry Potter and I are very good friends, yes," Hermione told the nascent Hufflepuff with exaggerated patience. "Now, take up your wand and practice with me a gentle swish and flick. Ready? Let's begin. Swish and flick. Swish and flick. Say it with me."

"Miss?" Cecil Hardaway's hand waved wildly. "What about Ronald Weasley?"

"Mr Hardaway," Hermione said sharply, "I am not going to answer any more questions about Harry Potter or myself. Now pick up your wand and practice the movement."

Silenced for the moment, Cecil took up his wand and practiced his swish and flick.

"You are not trying to hit a Quaffle, Mr Hardaway," Hermione snapped, doing her best impression of Professor Snape. "The swish and flick is *gentle* motion. Much better.

"Now, class, let us practice the verbal portion of the charm. For as you know, a charm has two elements: the wand movement and the verbal. Who knows what the verbal portion of the Levitation Charm is?"

Cecil Hardaway's hand shot into the air.

"Mr Hardaway?"

"Did you really send Dolores Umbridge to the centaurs when you were a fifth-year?"

Why, for the love of God, couldn't McGonagall allow me to deduct points? Hermione wondered.

"Anybody else know what the verbal portion of the Levitation Charm is?" Hermione asked the class.

Other than Cecil's desperate hand waving, the room was still.

"Anybody?"

In the back, a Ravenclaw boy farted, and chaos erupted in shrieks of laughter.

*Oh this is going just **fabulously**.*

Ten minutes later, Hermione had managed to restore order, only by virtue of a Noise-Canceling Charm and a series of strong Air-Freshening Charms.

"Now listen to me very carefully," she told the class quite firmly. "Yes, I am Hermione Granger. Yes, I am friends with Harry Potter *and* Ronald Weasley. Yes, I sent Umbridge to the centaurs when I was a fourth-year. And if you're not careful, I will send *you* there as well. Now sit down, be quiet, and speak only when you are spoken to. Do I make myself clear?"

A mumbled chorus of "yes, Miss" greeted her.

"Good." Hermione pointed at a sniggering Hufflepuff. "You. What's your name?"

"Harris, Miss."

"Well, Harris, tell me: what is the verbal element of the Levitation Charm?"

"What's an element, Miss?"

Hermione clung to the shreds of her patience.

"An element," she said, enunciating slowly and carefully, "is an integral piece, *the* integral piece, of a charm. The verbal element, along with the wand movement, allows the witch or wizard to draw upon his or her magic to execute the charm, thereby allowing..." Hermione's voice warmed as she described the beauty of the magical power coursing through the witch or wizard's veins, and how, at its very basic level, magic was a part of the individual, drawn in harmony from the head and the heart. She wound up her lecture and asked, "... so, what is the verbal element of the Levitation Charm?"

The farting Ravenclaw tentatively raised his hand.

"Yes?"

"Erm, may I use the loo, Miss?"

Hermione sighed and looked at the clock amidst a chorus of titters. There were still twenty minutes left in the class.

"Yes," she said resignedly as the Ravenclaw smirked his way to the door.

"Anyhow," she continued, "the verbal element, the verbal piece of the Levitation Charm..."

"Oh, an element is a *piece*!" exclaimed a Ravenclaw girl.

"Well, yes," Hermione admitted.

The girl rolled her eyes and threw her quill down. "Why didn't you *say* so?" she demanded.

Hermione resisted the urge to scream. Gathering her wits she said, "Do you all understand now what I meant when I asked you what an element is?"

The class nodded.

"Can somebody tell me what the verbal *piece* of the Levitation Charm is?"

The eye-rolling Ravenclaw raised her hand. "Of course," she scoffed, "it's *Wingardium Leviosa*."

"Very good," Hermione said through clenched teeth. "Now let's all say it together. *Wingardium Leviosa*."

" *Wingardium Leviosa*," chorused the class, " *Wingardium Leviosa*."

"Good," said Hermione. "Just remember, put the accent on the middle syllable. It's *Lev-i-OH-sa* not *Lev-i-oh-SA*."

"*Wingardium Lev-i-OH-sa*," the students echoed as Hermione took the time to marshal her wits. Perhaps she could do this, after all.

When she was satisfied with the students' proficiency and pronunciation she said, "All right, let's put them together. Everybody, watch me first, and then try it yourselves. Remember: swish - *Wingardium* - and flick - *Lev-i-OH-sa*. Ready? *Wingardium Leviosa*." She swished and flicked; the wrist movement, she noted in passing, was, as always, perfect. The result, however, was not.

The feather exploded in a bright bluebell ball of flame and a thunderclap of noise. Twenty-two shocked faces confronted her, including the farting Ravenclaw who had just returned from the loo. White with dismay, Hermione stared back at them through a thin film of smoke. Only Cecil Hardaway ventured to raise his hand.

"Was that supposed to happen, Miss?" he asked.

Hermione turned to him and opened her mouth to speak, but only squeaking came out.

Somewhere in the heavens, somebody took pity on Hermione. The end of class bell rang and, still shell-shocked, the students trooped from the room.

Flitwick squeezed in between them.

"Well?" he asked cheerfully. "How did the first day go, dear?"

It was all too much. Hermione, heroine of the Second Voldemort War, recipient of an Order of Merlin (Second Class), acknowledged girlfriend of hero Ronald Weasley, best friend to Harry Potter, and staunch defender of one Severus Snape, burst into tears and fled the Charms classroom, nearly bowling over Flitwick in her haste to leave. She did not escape unscathed, however. Shortly after her near miss of Flitwick, she barreled into Severus Snape.

Snape went flying, Hermione went flying and students scattered as the two of them tumbled down the short flight of stairs adjacent to the Charms classroom.

Hermione landed on something solid and Snape-like.

"Miss Granger," the solid and Snape-like mass demanded in a fierce whisper, "what the *hell* do you think you're doing?"

As Hermione scrambled to her feet, she noticed three things: first, that Severus Snape was apparently alive and in perfectly good health; second, that a small knot of curious students had gathered, including several whom she recognized, Luna Lovegood among them; and third, that there was no way she could explain her actions to Professor Snape (who was rising to his feet with more grace than was fair) without appearing to be a complete fool.

"I would assume, Miss Granger, that after a year of ignoring your schooling, you would have fallen behind in your studies, but not that you would have forgotte*all* of the school rules, including the prohibition against *running in the corridors*!"

"Sir, I... I'm sorry, I just had to get away from the Charms classroom," Hermione blurted.

"Move along," Snape said menacingly to the gathered crowd of students.

They melted away.

"Now why, Granger," Snape demanded, "were you in such an all powerful hurry to flee the Charms classroom?"

Hermione opened and closed her mouth several times.

"Well?"

"I... they... Professor Flitwick had asked me to teach the first-years the Levitation Charm, and one student asked me about Umbridge and the centaurs, and then another farted, and another rolled her eyes at me and..."

Whatever reaction she had been expecting from Professor Snape, it was not that he would burst out laughing. "Is that all?" he demanded. "The mighty Granger can't control a classroom of eleven-year-olds?" He looked at her for a moment, and then began to laugh some more.

Hermione flushed in indignation. "It's not only that!" she exclaimed, pushing past him. "I tried to perform *Wingardium Leviosa* and I..." she hiccupped, "I blew up the feather!"

Ignoring the stunned silence from Professor Snape, she fled towards the safety of the Gryffindor dormitory.

AN: Not mine, no money. Special thanks go to AnnieTalbot, Bluestocking79, Subversa, and RichardGloucester for their super fast help on this project.

Two

Chapter 2 of 7

Hermione has more trouble. Snape refuses to give her the answer, but a ghost (or two) has some unwelcome insight.

Hermione's second clue that not all was well was when she tried to take a bath and ended up with a bathroom full of mud.

Her private room, usually reserved for the Head Girl (this year a Ravenclaw), came equipped with a private bath and shower.

After a soothing cup of tea and an hour's perusal of her Advanced Charm Making book, she ventured to the bathroom to soak the tension from her neck and shoulders.

"*Aguamenti*," she murmured and went back to her room to undress.

When she returned to the bathroom, the tub was overflowing with mud.

"*Finite Incantatem!*" she cried, waving her wand at the tub, to no avail. Mud seeped and bubbled from the tap, dripped onto the floor and splattered everywhere.

"*Finite! Finite! Finite!*" she cried, voice ascending the scale as her panic increased. There was no effect.

Hermione Granger was not, by and large, a witch prone to bad language. Ron and Harry had sworn plenty for the three of them over the years. But at that particular moment, she deemed it necessary to let fly. "What the fucking hell is wrong with this fucking castle?" she wailed in despair. "First my feather, and now *this*!

Moaning Myrtle popped up through the slimy gunk and goggled at her. "Are you supposed to be using language like that? I'm telling if you're not," she cackled.

Hermione clutched her dressing gown to her and sank to the rapidly muddying floor in dismay. "Fuck off," she muttered.

Myrtle loosed a surprised gurgle and disappeared up the tap again.

Hermione sighed and waved her wand half-heartedly at the pile of mud that had been her bathroom. "*Finite Incantatem*," she tried again.

The fountain of mud hiccupped and stopped.

Hermione stared. "*Evanescio?*" she ventured.

The mud disappeared.

"*Aguamenti!*" she insisted. And from the tap poured crystal clear water.

Hermione scrambled to her feet and looked around. "*Something*," she said to herself, "is wrong."

Bathed, changed, and with her hair knotted and secured with her wand, Hermione spent the quiet hours after dinner and before curfew in the library, frantically researching topics on magic gone awry.

"It could be," she reflected aloud, "that I was hit by a spell during the battle. But I'd have felt it by now, and Madam Pomfrey checked me very carefully for Dark Magic. So that's out." She ruffled through her notes.

"Some disease affecting the entire wizarding world?" she wondered. "Surely there would be reports of it elsewhere. I wonder if..."

"What I wonder, Granger," Professor Snape cut in, "is why you cannot manage to do your work without the constant chatter. *Some* of us are trying to do serious research."

Hermione squeaked, jumped, and banged her knee on the bottom of the carrel. "Oh, bollocks!" she muttered, rubbing the injured part.

"Ten points for language," Snape snapped.

"What are you doing here, Professor?" Hermione gasped. "Nobody comes to this portion of the library!"

"Closest to the Restricted Section but not actually *in* it?" Snape leered at her.

Hermione blushed. "It's quiet," she said, "and nobody comes here. So I can do my research and, well, Madam Pince won't give me a pass yet. She said that I had, er, caused too much trouble in the past to warrant the privilege of access to the Restricted Section."

"I see."

"And anyway, I didn't know anybody was here."

"Well, I am. And *you*, Granger, should be abed. I do believe that the curfew bell is going to ring momentarily. Or do you feel that as such *decorated* heroine of the War, you are somehow exempt from the rules?"

"No!"

"No, what?"

"Sir, no, sir."

"Do you need to be told again? Clean up your area and go to bed."

"Yes, sir," Hermione replied, not bothering to hide her petulant pout.

"Would you prefer Gryffindor to lose more points for your attitude this evening?"

"Sir, no, sir." Hermione straightened her area briskly and prepared to leave.

Suddenly, the torches in the library snuffed themselves out.

"What... what's happening, sir?" Hermione couldn't keep the panicky edge out of her voice. She might have been a War heroine, as Snape had called her (albeit derisively), but after the past year, the dark made her jumpy.

"The torches have gone out," Snape's familiar tones shot at her from the darkness. "I would think that much would be obvious, Granger. Even to you."

"I know *that*, sir. What I meant, *sir*, was *why* have the torches gone out?"

In the darkness, Snape sighed. "There was a great deal of damage done to the castle," he said, "and even the most basic of maintenance spells are difficult to sustain. Have you noticed, for instance, Granger, that the staircases do not currently move?"

Hermione opened her mouth to say that of course she'd noticed that the staircases were stationary, but closed it again. ~~She~~*hadn't*.

"No, sir," she admitted, "I hadn't noticed. I'd been so wrapped up in preparing for my NEWTs this December – Professors Flitwick and McGonagall have arranged a special dispensation for me to take them early – that I'd just... missed it."

"Well, you know now," Snape replied. Hermione paused. Was that regret she heard in his voice?

"What... what else doesn't work?" she asked.

"Open your eyes, Granger," Snape snapped at her. "Look at the world around you for once, you insufferable swot."

Hermione gasped. "How dare you!" she demanded, whirling in the darkness to where she thought he was. "How dare you speak to me like that! I've been..." she trailed off. "Professor?"

There was no reply.

"Professor Snape?"

Silence greeted her.

Pushing down her rising panic, remembering that she was Hermione Bloody Granger, a heroine, the brightest witch of her age, ~~the~~*woman* who aided Harry Potter, Hermione fished her wand from the knot of hair atop her head and held it out.

"Focus, Granger," she muttered. "*Lumos*."

The tip of her wand glowed. It was a weak, sputtery *Lumos*, but it was light. Hermione felt the panic subside.

"You can do this," she told herself. "*Lumos*." The tip grew brighter. Finding her bearings, Hermione stepped carefully through the stacks as the curfew bell sounded. "You *can* do this, Granger," she told herself again, striding past the now empty desk of Madam Pince.

Disaster struck. Behind her, a floor board creaked, and a ghost (she never discovered which one) moaned. Hermione's *Lumos* flickered and died.

"Oh, bollocks," she squeaked. Her nerve broke as the ghost moaned again, and she dashed to the dim light of the entrance, not quite sobbing in terror.

Behind her, Professor Snape lurked, cloaked in the shadows, watching her. Beside him floated the ghost of Vincent Crabbe.

"*Lumos*." Snape turned to Crabbe and raised an eyebrow at his former student.

"What's wrong with her?" the ghost asked.

"I do not know, Crabbe," Snape replied. "Why are you in the library? You couldn't find this place with a map when you were alive."

Crabbe shrugged incorporeal shoulders. "It's pleasant here," he said. "Nobody bothers me, and I can catch up on my reading if students leave books open. Madam Pince doesn't yell at me and lets me read, as long as I don't frighten the ickle firsties."

Snape did not reply.

"Times change, Professor," Crabbe said. "Not all of us were able to survive, but some of us managed to learn from our pasts. And anyway," the ghost said as he began to float back into the stacks, "I think if I'd known this place was so nice when I was a boy, I might have spent more time here. It's amazing what you can learn about yourself, Professor, if you stop to reflect for a moment."

AN: See Chapter One. These characters still do not belong to me.

Three

Chapter 3 of 7

Hermione opens her eyes, dislikes what she sees, and is told to close them by Professor Snape.

Morning met Hermione buried under her covers, clinging to an ancient and battered teddy bear.

"Mmf," she grumbled, poking her head out from beneath the duvet and blinking in the bright sunlight. "Bugger," she said with the realization that she had not slept. Sighing, she pushed to covers from her bed and rolled her way to the edge. "Bugger," she said again, stretching.

At some point, Granger, you're going to have to get some sleep.

Staying awake all night long researching and reading was one thing; lying awake, tense, jumping at every sound and trembling in the dark, was something else entirely.

"This is no way to live," she told herself, sticking her tongue out in the mirror.

"If you keep doing that, your face will freeze that way," the mirror informed her.

Hermione leapt back with a startled cry.

"There's something wrong, isn't there?" asked the mirror.

"What?"

"I don't know," the mirror said, "but something about you doesn't feel quite right."

"Nosy piece of glass," Hermione muttered.

"Nosy yourself," the mirror rejoined. "You have a problem."

"I don't need to listen to this," Hermione said, scrambling out of her pajamas and turning on the hot tap in the shower. Steam soon filled the small bathroom. "A nice shower, that'll fix it."

"Well, dear, how did Practical Charms go yesterday?" asked Minerva McGonagall at lunch. As a nod to her status as a senior student, Hermione had been invited, and chose to sit, at the staff table. There weren't many Gryffindors present this year whom she knew very well. Most of the current ones stared at her and whispered behind their hands. Even Ginny had opted not to sit for her NEWTs, choosing to marry Harry as soon as she could.

Hermione gulped a mouthful of pumpkin juice. "Fine," she mumbled. "Ugh."

"I thought I heard an explosion were any of yours students injured?"

"An explosion? No!" Hermione affected a carefree laugh. "There may have been a little *pop* when I er... one of the student's feathers got too close to the ceiling. A ... erm, change in the atmosphere I think Professor Flitwick's got a charm in the ceiling that changes the pressure."

"I see." Professor McGonagall leveled a long look at her. "Miss Granger, are you feeling all right?"

"What? Me? Never better!" *Except that I haven't dared to cast a charm since Lumos failed me, and I haven't slept in two days, and I'm scared that I'm losing my magic, and I don't ever, ever want to go back into that classroom, I'm great.*

"Well," Professor McGonagall said after a pause, "be sure you're taking care of yourself, dear. It would be a shame for you to get this far and..."

"I'm doing *fabulously*!" Hermione insisted, reaching for the jug of juice.

"Oh, allow me." Flitwick reached across Hermione and knocked over the jug.

"Oh dear!" Hermione squeaked, grabbing for her wand. Unthinking, she cried, *Evanesco*!

What happened next became a legend in the annals of Hogwarts:

Hundreds upon hundreds of garter snakes emerged from the expanding puddle of juice and slithered through the Great Hall. Students screamed, benches were overturned, food was spilled, a stampede formed.

"Miss Granger!" cried Professor McGonagall. "What have you done?"

Utterly dismayed, Hermione sank back in her chair and watched numbly as the professors attempted to restore order.

Two hours later, after the last snake had been rounded up and Banished, Hermione was still sitting in her chair, staring at the stain on the tablecloth. Professor Snape strode up to her and stood on the other side of the table, glowering at her.

"Come with me, Granger," he said.

"What?" Hermione jerked herself from her reverie.

"Are you deaf? Come. With. Me."

"Why should I?" Hermione folded her arms across her chest and pouted. Deep within her, the soul of the swotting student who had always respected her professors, even Professor Snape, shriveled in embarrassment.

"Because I know what's wrong with you," Snape replied. "Now, you can behave like a two-year-old, or you can come with me."

Go with him. He can help you.

"How can you know what's wrong with me?" Hermione demanded. *I don't even know what's wrong with me!*

"Miss Granger, do not make me escort you out by wand-point. And do not assume that even though you style yourself as a know-it-all, that you actually know *anything* at all."

Snape strode down the corridor, and Hermione panted, trying desperately to catch up.

"Please, sir," Hermione gasped, scrambling after Snape. "Where are we going?"

"Granger, be silent." Snape spun in a dramatic flare of teaching robes.

"But..."

"*Granger!*"

Hermione subsided.

Snape looked at her for a long moment. "Better," he said.

Before Hermione could ask what he meant by *that* cryptic pronouncement, Snape was off again. "As you follow, Granger, we will begin," he tossed over his shoulder. "Begin by looking around you. What do you see?"

"Why, the school, of course," Hermione panted.

"Look *around* you, Granger, tell me what you see."

"Well, I see the school building, the portraits, and..." Hermione paused, stopping short. "The portraits ... they're all different."

"Astute, Granger. Now, keep up! I told you to observe, not to gawk."

"Picky, picky," Hermione grumbled, scurrying after her professor. "Please, sir," she called in what she hoped was a placating tone, "why are the portraits different?"

"Come along, Granger. What else do you see?"

Hermione looked around. "Scaffolding," she said, "and plaster, but where are the house-elves?"

"Like the portraits," Snape said, glancing over his shoulder, "they have changed."

"Is Hogwarts ever going to be the same?" Hermione wondered, averting her eyes from a particularly bad scorch mark on the bare stone.

"Nothing will ever be the same, Granger. We're here."

Snape stopped so suddenly that Hermione cannoned into him. He gave a grunt of irritation.

"Do you mind?" he inquired with icy disdain. "If you're not woolgathering, you're barreling into me. Honestly, girl, what is *wrong* with you?"

"I don't know, *sir*," Hermione snapped. "I thought you were going to tell me."

Snape sighed. "No, Granger, I know what's wrong with you. It does not follow that I would *just tell* you. *Fiat Tablinum*."

The door in front of them clicked open and Snape strode in.

"Well?" he asked spinning again. Hermione privately thought he ought to stop the dramatic twirling; it was, all things considered, a bit overdone. "Are you coming or not?"

Forbearing to comment, lest it result in more point deductions, Hermione followed Snape into the room.

It was surprisingly cozy. Obviously, it was a Slytherin room with deep green and silver accents. But a fire sprang to life upon Snape's entrance, and the shadows in the room sprang back as candelabras blossomed to light.

"Sit," Snape gestured to the sofa. "This is my study."

Hermione sat and looked for the jars of specimens and crawling things in formaldehyde. Instead, she saw shelves lined with books, moving photos, some stills (surprisingly), and scattered here and there, modest pieces of art. A soft rug covered the floor.

There were also several comfortable looking chairs a perfect nook for reading.

"But I thought..." she began. "Well, there'd be bugs, and creepy specimens..."

"That is the office attached to my laboratory," Snape explained with exaggerated patience, as if she was an idiot. "This is my private study."

Hermione stared.

"Close your mouth, Granger, you'll catch flies. This, unlike the Potions office, is where I come to study as opposed to develop potions and prepare for the labs. Very few people know about this place, by the way. I would like to keep it so."

Hermione opened her mouth and closed it again. "Why?" she finally asked.

"Why what?"

"Why me?"

"Really, Granger? That's the best you can do?" Snape sighed theatrically. "Fine. Because it is not a common occurrence for a witch such as yourself a witch who is as talented as yourself to have such problems controlling her magic. If I am not mistaken, you are also not sleeping well, are you?"

"Wha... no, as a matter of fact, I'm not."

He called me talented that's the first time he's ever done that!

"Now, listen, Granger," he said, "what do you hear?"

"Nothing, just the crackling of the fire."

"Exactly. This is the quietest place in the castle."

"But why did you bring me here?"

"Because I know what's wrong with you, and Minerva doesn't. I told her I would handle this," Snape admitted, crossing to a small table with a wine bottle and a few glasses. "Drink?"

Hermione stared at him.

"You're over eighteen, are you not?"

"Yes, sir, I am. But why did..."

"Here. It will probably be lost on you, but it's a rather nice Pinot Noir." Snape shoved the glass into her hand.

Hermione took an exploratory sip. "It's... smooth," she said, "and I can taste... are those blackberries?"

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Not a total heathen, then," he remarked. "It is from a place called the Willamette Valley, in America."

"It's lovely," Hermione said.

"I am glad you appreciate it."

"Sir?" Hermione ventured, as Snape seemed to have sunk into some sort of reverie over his glass.

"Yes, Granger?"

"Why did you bring me here?"

"So you could think," he replied.

"What?"

"So you could think. Reflect. And hopefully, discover what your problem is."

"But you said you knew."

"I do know, but to tell you would defeat the purpose of you discovering it on your own."

"This is getting unnecessarily Zen-like," Hermione grumbled.

"I will ignore that flippant remark," Snape said. "Now, close your eyes and clear your mind."

Hermione goggled at him. "You're not going to teach me Occlumency, are you?"

"No. You should be so lucky. No, Granger, I am trying to get you *to focus* and come up with an original idea, for once in your life."

"Why, sir?"

"Why, what?"

"Why you? Why not Professor McGonagall? She saw what happened in the Great Hall. Why did she tell you to take care of... me?"

"Despite the fact that she did witness your rather spectacular display of misplaced magic," Snape said, "she has less personal experience with your situation than I do."

"I still don't see why you won't tell me," Hermione insisted.

"Because I *can't*, Granger. The answer has to come from you. Now, close your eyes."

Hermione did so. "What am I looking for, sir?"

"You are looking for space. Breathe deeply. Focus first on my voice, then on the fire crackling." He paused and Hermione obeyed. With her eyes closed, his voice *did* sound rather nice. "Now, empty your mind of all logical and conscious thought."

Hermione opened an eye.

"*Close them!*"

"It just sounds so out of character for you, sir," she admitted.

"Really, Granger? *That* is your brilliant observation? I promise you, I'm not going to turn into Sibyll Trelawney on you. Now close your eyes and focus, or I shall deduct more points."

Hermione did so.

"*Relax*, Granger."

Hermione tried.

"Focus on your magic. Feel it running in your veins."

Hermione breathed deeply. And after a few minutes, she spoke. "I can feel it," she said, but it's... it's off."

"How is it off?"

Hermione frowned. "It feels like it's coming from the same place as always..."

"Where is that?"

"Here." Hermione put her hand to her chest.

"Here?" Snape was suddenly beside her, covering her hand with his warm one.

"Yes," she breathed. He smelled of wine and a faint hint of aftershave. With her eyes closed, she could almost imagine that his teeth weren't yellowed, and his hair wasn't...

Snape had snatched his hand away as if he had been burned. "But what, Granger?"

"But it feels like it's in the wrong place. Like *I'm* in the wrong place." She could feel the sofa shift as he moved away and was bereft. "Like I'm in the wrong place," she repeated.

"It's that simple," Snape acknowledged gently, and Hermione's eyes snapped open.

"It doesn't sound simple," she retorted.

"It is, Granger. You've just hit on the nub of the problem."

"I'm not in the right place?"

"Correct."

"But..."

"Put it this way, Granger," Snape said, rising and standing before the fire. "Each witch or wizard's magic is tied to a strong sense of place."

Hermione nodded.

"It is one of the reasons that there are not many witches or wizards who travel very much. If they are fortunate, they will live in the place where their magic is strongest. They are drawn to it."

"I see," Hermione said. "Is that why you have the Malfoys in Wiltshire and the Blacks in London and the Weasleys in Ottery St Catchpole?"

Snape nodded. "Wizarding families share a strong affinity for the same place. It is often, but not always, hereditary."

"Is that the case with every witch or wizard?" Hermione asked.

"Yes. And if they cannot live there, the witch or wizard will try his or her best to spend as much time in that place as he can."

"And if she isn't able to live there? Or spend time there?"

"They wither and die," Snape said shortly.

"Oh," said Hermione. "Where... where is your place?"

"The Prince estate is in Devonshire," Snape answered. "But when my grandfather died, my mother's brother forbade us to visit anymore."

"Oh, Professor..."

"It is in the past, Granger, and may I remind you this is *not* for you to share with your little friends?"

"Oh, no, of course not! So... is your place in Devonshire?"

"No, as a matter of fact, it isn't. When my uncle forbade us to visit, I was very young. And I found another place. My mother was not so lucky."

"So where is it?"

Snape smiled briefly. "Far from here, Granger. I escape when I can."

"And mine?"

"That, Granger, is for you to discover."

Hermione frowned. "How come," she asked, "how come I didn't know about this before?"

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Has it occurred to you, Granger, that you just might have missed something by bugging off your last year to live in ~~dent~~?"

"I... what?"

"It's part of the Seventh Year curriculum for Muggle-borns. Most witches and wizards develop this yen about their eighteenth birthday. You would have known that, if you'd stayed where you were supposed to. Even with Alecto Carrow around, McGonagall would have seen to it that you were prepared."

"But the Horcruxes..."

"Oh please, Granger. Anyway, you have to find your place and do it quickly, or else there will be more incidents like the one this morning. Now, it is time for you to attend your evening tutorial with Professor Flitwick." Snape glared at her. Any spark of tenderness Hermione thought she had detected was gone. The fire flickered and went out.

"But how do I begin?" Hermione asked, rising.

"That is not something I can tell you, Granger. You must look for yourself."

"But..." Hermione found herself rapidly propelled to the door.

"Go to class, Granger. And try, for once in your life, to observe the world around you."

Snape slammed the door on her.

"Observe the world around me," she muttered to herself. "Find my place. Great. Just great. I can't even find my *parents*."

AN: See chapter one for disclaimers and thanks.

Four

Chapter 4 of 7

Hermione takes Snape's advice perhaps a little too far.

Hermione knew a bit about meditation from her mother's yoga practice but had scoffed at it. Now she was faced with having to perform some form of meditation on the instructions of *Professor Snape*.

Really, it was ridiculous.

"Really, it's ridiculous," she snorted as she trudged through the corridors to Professor Flitwick's office.

"What's ridiculous, Granger?" asked a voice.

Hermione looked up at the filmy form of Vincent Crabbe.

"What are you doing here, Crabbe?"

The ghost shrugged. "I died when I let the Fiendfyre get out of control. I can't leave."

Hermione narrowed her eyes and drew her wand.

Crabbe snorted. "You can't actually hurt me, Granger."

"You tried to kill us!"

"Yes," replied Crabbe. "Sorry about that."

"Sorry?"

"It's an apology, Granger. Sometimes, when we do things that are wrong, we have to apologize for them. Sometimes, we even get the opportunity."

Hermione stared at the ghost.

"It's odd for you, isn't it, Granger?" Crabbe said mockingly.

"Well, it's not in character. What happened to wanting to kill the Mudblood?"

Crabbe chuckled and Hermione shuddered at the gurgling. "That was a lifetime ago, Granger."

"It was only last May."

"Look around you, Granger. Things have changed. I've changed."

"Obviously."

"Well, yes, I'm dead. But death changes you rather dramatically."

"I have to go to tutorial," Hermione said, attempting to sweep past him.

"Oh, Flitwick? Nice teacher never said anything bad about a student. Here, I'll come with you."

"I don't need the company, thank you."

"Oh, stop being such a stick in the mud, Granger. Hm, mud, Mudblood, that's rather clever, you know..."

"Oh, for goodness sake!"

"Don't get your knickers in a twist, I'm just fooling. That's one of the advantages of being dead. You can say shite you believed when you were alive and realize just how much shite it really was. You living take everything much too seriously."

Hermione wasn't convinced of that. She strode along the corridor, trying to ignore the presence of the ghost, but to no avail. Crabbe floated after her, chatting and pointing out various items of interest to him.

"...And that's where we used to jump the first-year Hufflepuffs. They were so afraid of us it seemed like their fear was an insult, you know? But we had no idea then. We were so young. Things change, Granger. I mean, look at the castle!"

Hermione, despite her better judgment, followed the direction of Crabbe's finger. Where once there had been a beautiful stained glass window, there was now a bricked up wall.

"Professor McGonagall and Professor Sprout decided that there shouldn't be any more ground floor windows that were too nice to get broken. Plus, they thought it was hazardous somebody could break in through them. Hindsight, eh?"

Hermione stopped and stared. "But the shepherdess was my favorite!" she exclaimed.

"You could have told that to the Death Eaters who broke her," Crabbe said.

"So much damage..."

"You didn't notice, really? I suppose it's different when you're so focused on... what are you focused on, Granger?"

"Why, my studies!" Hermione resumed walking. "My NEWTs, of course."

"Oh Granger, Granger." Crabbe floated along side her. "There are more things in heaven and earth than NEWT scores."

Hermione had reached Flitwick's office. "They're important to me," she snapped. "I'll get my NEWTs, get a good job in the Ministry, fight for justice, marry Ron, have children! And live! You can't say that, can you?"

"And you need a good NEWT score to marry Weasley? For pity's sake, Granger, you're already more clever than he is by miles. You're cleverer than anybody else in this place I'm stuck here for eternity, I know! You just can't seem to open your eyes to what's around you."

"I don't need to listen to this. You're the one who destroyed half the school!"

"Death changes you, Granger. I may not be the brightest torch, but I did learn that. I know better now. I can see things more clearly. And you, Hermione Granger, can't seem to see for shite."

Crabbe drifted down the hall, pausing to yell *boo* at a passing Hufflepuff who giggled and poked at him with his wand. Crabbe giggled back; apparently it was a ritual for them.

Hermione shook her head.

Things are getting out of hand, she thought. First, Professor Snape pours me a glass of wine and tells me to meditate, and now I'm getting life lessons from Vincent Crabbe's ghost.

Really, it was ridiculous.

Crouched under the covers later that night, clutching the battered bear she had saved from her parents' home, it didn't seem quite so ridiculous.

Have you failed to notice you can't sleep? Her conscience poked her. *Or that you're wound so tight, you almost jumped out of your skin when Vincent Crabbe yelled "boo"*

at that Hufflepuff? Or that you barely heard a word of what Professor Flitwick was trying to tell you tonight? How are you going to handle the Gryffindor/Slytherin practical section of Charms tomorrow, eh? Going to explode another feather?

Hermione groaned aloud and threw the covers from her bed. Now even her brain was out to get her.

"Fine," she said to the empty room. "I'll try it."

Silence greeted her.

"What did Snape say? Relax, breathe, and concentrate?" Hermione wondered. "This is ridiculous."

Grumbling, she smoothed the covers of her bed and sat cross-legged, as she'd seen her mother do before. The thought of her mother, thousands of miles away, inaccessible to her, unaware of her very existence, sent a stab of misery through her.

"I'll come for you," she whispered. "I'll bring you back. But first I need to solve this. In and out," she murmured, remembering her mother's routine. "Focus on the breathing, on the self."

Feel your magic.

Deep within her, Hermione could feel her magic tingle, well up. Before, it had always been a practiced, precise feeling, a series of organized steps. Only recently had it been a frantic scramble to pull power from where there seemed to be none.

Her magic was unreliable. The thought terrified her.

Concentrate, Granger. Focus on your core magic. That place your power comes from.

She could feel herself settle. Feel her magic calm.

Concentrate, Granger.

Unbidden, a vision rose before her eyes. Mountains in the background, evergreens, misty rain. She was sitting on a deck, watching the ocean throb and heave beneath her.

Around her, the wild weather surged, whipping her hair and clothing about her, but within, there was peace.

Fog stole in from the ocean, enveloping her, cradling her, and the wind was still.

Her magic *sang*.

Not daring to open her eyes, Hermione clung to the vision of fog and ocean and trees and rain and wind and crawled beneath her covers.

Clutching her bear, she sighed, and for the first time in what felt like years, she slept.

Buoyed by a good night's sleep, Hermione faced down the Gryffindor/Slytherin Charms class with a great deal more success than the Ravenclaw/Hufflepuff class earlier in the week.

That was, she managed the magic portion. As the students stampeded out of the room at the first clamor of the bell, Hermione sank onto the stool upon which Professor Flitwick usually stood and tried to collect her scattered wits.

There was gum on the desks Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes Whacky 'Baccy Chews, if she wasn't mistaken bits of parchment and quills scattered about the classroom, and several discarded books.

Hermione sighed as she rose and gathered up the left behind books there were some students, she reflected, who would be unable to complete their reading for Monday. Perhaps she would try to find them, at least the ones who were her housemates, and return their books to them.

The Slytherins, on the other hand, presented a bit more of a problem. She knew where the Slytherin dormitory had been, of course, but she knew that the dungeons had sustained serious damage, and she wasn't sure if they were still housed down there.

She could, she reflected always find Professor Snape and return the textbooks to him. She owed him a thank you, in any event, for the good night's sleep,

All she had to do was find Professor Snape.

Finding Professor Snape turned out to be more difficult than she first thought, primarily due to the chaos of the castle.

It's almost October, she thought. *How is it that I didn't realize what a state the place was in?*

House-elves were everywhere bustling through the crowds of students, she'd never remembered seeing them out and about quite so much. Scaffoldings covered massive portions of the walls, and half of the torches did not flame to life as Hermione walked down to the dungeons, searching for the Potions classroom.

*I thought I knew where the classroom was. Why can I not find it? Left here, go down the stairs, across the corridor..*She came up against a blank wall.

"Now what," she muttered. Drawing her wand, she held it in the palm of her hand *Point Me.*"

The wand wobbled and rolled off of her palm, clattering to the floor.

Hermione felt a surge of disappointment.

"I don't think the spell is supposed to do that." Vincent Crabbe streamed through the wall behind her.

"Must you?" Hermione demanded sharply. "You nearly scared the life out of me."

"I doubt that," Crabbe replied. "Remember, I'm sort of an expert on being lifeless."

"Oh, right. Er, sorry about that."

"Apology accepted, Granger. I think that's the first time you've ever apologized to me. How about an apology for trying to poison me and Goyle during second year?"

Hermione stared at him. "Poison you? I only knocked you unconscious! And anyhow, who tried to kill me last May?"

"Point taken." Crabbe nodded. "Where are you going with those books?"

"I'm trying to find Professor Snape. They belong to his students."

"So?"

"I thought he'd want to give them back to them."

"Why?"

"So... they could study for their tests over the weekend?"

Crabbe threw back his head and laughed. "Study over the weekend? Really, Granger? Oh, that's rich."

Still laughing, Crabbe floated off.

"Wait!" Hermione cried. "Where is Professor Snape's classroom?"

But answer came there none. Hermione found herself alone in the dim corridor. She pursed her lips and said something really desperate:

"Oh, *hell*."

September ended in a wild windstorm that seeped into the walls of the castle and whistled in the corridors. Students in the upper parts of the tower dormitories would find themselves awoken by dismal howling and damp beds as the roof leaked.

Aloft in the Gryffindor tower, Hermione herself found that she was again sleeping less. Only periods of intense concentration upon either her studies or upon the vision of what she supposed was her place gave her any respite. But by the first Saturday of the month, she was miserable.

Guilt over her parents gnawed at her she'd spent no time looking for them that summer, preferring to spend the time at the Burrow, sneaking off to the back fields with Ron and Harry and Ginny to escape the oppressive grief that hung over the dilapidated home.

Guilt over Ronald gnawed at her she'd promised to write to him every weekend, and to Floo-call as much as Professor McGonagall would allow, but here it was October, and she'd only written to him once. Granted he'd not written either, but one couldn't expect too much from him, even if they had promised each other that they would keep in touch.

Hermione brushed away the troublesome thoughts and tried to return to her homework. But her eyes wouldn't focus, the tip of her quill snapped as she bore down too hard, and a huge blob of ink spread across her essay.

"Oh, *bugger*," she cried in frustration, pushing away from her desk. "I can't keep on like this!"

Throwing on her cloak, she fled her room, down the stairs to the Gryffindor common room. It wasn't a Hogsmeade weekend, and the weather was so inclement that the Quidditch match had been cancelled; the common room was packed and noisy. Pushing her way through the mass of bodies, she scrambled for the door.

Thankfully, the halls were deserted. Torches flared to life as she ran through the corridors and down to the front entrance.

Outside, the wind blew her back against the door. Hermione paused her first impulse was to find Hagrid in his newly rebuilt hut, but even the half-giant's boisterous company seemed too much to bear.

"Concentrate, Granger," she muttered. "You can't just run away and not know where you're going."

Unbidden, a vision of sea and mist and evergreens rose before her eyes.

"It can't be around here," she mused, drawing her cloak tight around her and heading for the gates. "I wonder if it's a beach in Ireland."

Had it not been such a wild day, had she not been driven to such desperation, Hermione might have paused to think for a moment. But she was a Gryffindor, and she had, once in a while, given into the impulsiveness that was one of her House's hallmarks.

"Destination, determination, deliberation."

Hermione turned into nothingness.

AN: See chapter one for thanks and disclaimers.

Five

Chapter 5 of 7

Hermione wakes up and meets a cat.

The first thing Hermione was aware of was a hard floor at her back.

The second thing she noticed was warmth.

The third and fourth things were that she was alive and being stepped on by four delicate, yet sharp-clawed paws.

"Get off of her, you wretched feline," a familiar voice growled.

Hermione groaned.

"Granger, you are not seriously injured. Cease polluting my floor," the voice instructed. "Or do you wish for me to cast *aRennerivate* again?"

"Nrgh, no..." Hermione struggled to open her eyes. When she managed that feat, she found herself staring into a pair of intelligent blue ones. Long whiskers tickled her nose.

"Saturn, I will not tell you again. Leave Granger *alone*."

Who was Saturn?

The owner of the eyes and whiskers also appeared to possess a pair of ears, one of which twitched in the direction of the familiar voice that Hermione could not, for the life of her place.

"Granger, get *up*." Whoever owned the voice obviously expected Hermione to obey him, and she struggled to move her arms and legs. All she could produce was a weak scrabbling.

"Oh, Merlin's bollocks, is that the best you can do?"

Hermione meant to snap *apparently so*, but managed only a weak "apfrgh" before the hard floor spun her back into the comforting darkness.

Hermione awoke again, this time on a soft surface. There was a soft, warm, purring object on her stomach.

Where am I? Nearby, she could feel the warmth of fire and smell something delicious. *Is that stew?*

Carefully, Hermione shifted, and the soft, warm, purring object raised its head.

Oh, it's a cat. Hello, puss. It looks Siamese.

Hermione reached out a hand (it felt leaden) to pet the cat. She noticed she was dressed in a soft, oft-washed t-shirt and sweatpants.

What did Professor Snape call it? Oh, yes, Saturn.

"Hello, Saturn."

Saturn purred and butted his head against her outstretched hand.

"You are such a good cat," Hermione observed.

"*Good* isn't the adjective I would choose."

Professor Snape!

Am I wearing his clothing?

*Good God, did he **dress** me?*

Painfully, Hermione turned her head to blink confusedly at the denim-clad knee near her.

"What... Did you dress me?"

"Not the question I was expecting. No, Granger, there are clothing charms available to me. I promise you, your modesty is intact."

"Oh." Hermione struggled through the fog in her brain. "What am I doing here?"

"Exactly the point, Granger," Snape rejoined, squatting so that he was at eye level, "Why *are* you here?"

"I Apparated."

"That's not what I asked you, stupid... You did *what*?"

"Apparated. Please, sir, why can't I keep my eyes open?"

"You Apparated? Granger, did it not occur to you how dangerous it is to Apparate over five thousand miles? Whatever possessed you?"

"Five thousand... Sir, where *am I*?"

"You are," Snape said heavily, "in my house, my *home*."

"Spinner's End?"

"No! Don't be ridiculous." Even grasping to consciousness, Hermione could detect the sneer. "*This* is my home, not that flea-bitten hellhole in Manchester."

"And where is *this*?" Hermione grumbled.

"Siletz Bay."

"Where?"

"Siletz Bay, Oregon."

"Oh, God."

"If you like." Snape's mouth twitched. "Professor will do, however."

"I just Apparated almost five thousand miles?"

"Welcome to the conversation, Granger."

"How did I *not* kill myself?"

"I admit I am at a loss. What possessed you to come here, anyway?"

Hermione pushed herself up on her elbows. The room spun, but not as much as she had expected. Saturn miaowed at her and jumped off the sofa.

"I... ooh, I was trying to get to the place in my vision."

"Your vision."

"When you told me to concentrate, to feel my magic pulling me to a place, I saw someplace wild, with sea and mist and mountains. And I thought it was Ireland, so I just ... went."

She blinked, looking around the room. It was long, and at the end where she sat, a cheerful fire crackled in an exposed brick wall. Beside the fireplace, the facing wall was a bank of windows that looked out onto a deck and a beach and stormy sea. Turning slightly, Hermione saw that the room was divided into two portions by a massive, curved staircase, separating the living area from the kitchen and dining area. All around her was warm, golden wood, comfortable chairs, tasteful rugs, and piles of books that seemed to be begging to be read.

"It's beautiful," she murmured.

"Thank you," Snape replied, "but you still have not explained why you are here. Ireland? Do you know nothing about topography?"

Hermione glared at him. "This, there." She pointed through the window. "I saw *that*. There. That was the place I supposed to be."

"Your place. The place from which you draw your magic is my back deck?"

"Well, this area." Hermione felt herself growing stronger as she spoke. "What are *you* doing here?" she demanded.

"This is the place where my magic resides," Snape replied. "There must be some mistake."

"Why?"

"Because, if a witch and a wizard share an affinity for the same place, the consequences..." Snape paused. "The consequences are rather serious."

"Serious? How?"

Snape looked out at the wild water. Hermione was stunned to see him chewing his lip.

The silence stretched between them. In the kitchen, the refrigerator clicked on. It was a surprisingly Muggle sound. Suddenly, she felt comforted, secure.

"You have to leave," Snape said. "I... I may have been hasty in telling you about finding the source of your magic. Minerva will be wondering if you're awake, anyway."

"Min Professor McGonagall knows I'm gone? How long..."

"Granger, you have been unconscious in my living room for a week."

Hermione boggled at him. How could she have been unconscious for so long? And how had Snape come to be here during term time?

Snape grabbed a handful of Floo powder from the basket atop the mantle.

"A week," Hermione murmured.

"Yes. You are fortunate that last Saturday was not a Hogsmeade weekend; I usually come out here on the weekends when I am not on duty."

"How do you get here?" Hermione asked, sitting back down abruptly.

"Portkey," Snape replied, crouching before the fire. "And then I Apparate or drive from Portland. Much easier and safer than from Hogwarts. MINERVA! CAN YOU HEAR ME?"

"Portland," Hermione muttered. "Hogsmeade. Oregon. Oh, Merlin." The room began to spin again.

"MINERVA, WHAT? WHAT? GRANGER HAS COME TO," Snape bellowed into the fire. "Bloody transatlantic Floo lines."

Black specks floated before Hermione's eyes.

"Professor," she said. "I think... I think I'm going to..."

"Oh, no you don't, Granger. MINERVA, I'LL CALL YOU BACK. I'LL CALL YOU... Oh, hell."

The next thing Hermione knew was that Professor Snape was holding her head between her knees and muttering about bloody Gryffindors throwing up over his reclaimed pine floors.

"I'm sorry," Hermione muttered reaching for her wand. "Here, let me." She waved her wand and whispered *Evanescio*. Nothing happened.

"Oh, not again," she moaned. "I thought... Oh, *bugger*." Giving in to the exhaustion, Hermione wept noisily onto Professor Snape's denim-clad knee. She was more than a little surprised when she felt his arms snake around her and hold her close.

"It's not unusual, Granger," he said. "You've been through a great deal."

Hermione sniffled; it was a truly unlovely sound, she knew.

"Will it... will my magic come back?" she asked.

Against her, she felt Snape sigh. "If this is the place from which you draw your magic," he said resignedly, "yes."

Hermione spent the rest of her first day awake reclining on Snape's sofa (a soft, supple, dark leather) beneath a warm throw, snuggled up to Saturn and watching the waves break upon the beach. Far off in the distance, as the fog and rain swirled away from the house, she thought she could see whales breaching, but she wasn't sure.

In the corner of the room, Snape had a spotter's scope set up.

"I like watching the whales," he replied shortly when she'd asked him about it. "Every year, they make the journey from the southern tip of California to the waters off British Columbia. Every year they return."

"How many years have you watched them?" Hermione asked.

Snape smiled briefly and refused to answer.

Hermione returned to watching the endless breaking of the waves and the swaying of the grasses, clumped on the dunes.

Farther down the beach, horses and riders plodded in the driving rain.

It was in the early evening, as the setting sun broke through the clouds, with Hermione propped up with a warm mug of tea seeping into her soul and Snape in a nearby mission-style chair with a thick book, that she dared ask, "What about my NEWTs? If I can't perform magic, how am I supposed to sit for my NEWTs? And, oh, God, I've lost a week of revision!"

"Calm yourself, Granger. You are doubtless more than prepared to sit your NEWTs. A lost week will not harm you. And if all else fails, I will bundle you through the Floo. Though Merlin only knows what state you'll be in at the other end."

Oh, wonderful, Hermione thought, *Professor Snape has a sense of humor*. "I'm so glad this is amusing you, Professor," she grated out.

"You think I enjoy having you here?" Snape demanded. "That couch happens to be my favorite spot to sit in the evenings. You have also, if I may point out, usurped my cat. And my favorite mug."

"Nobody asked you to be nice to me," Hermione retorted. "I'll have you know I'm perfectly capable of..."

"No, Granger, you're not. You can't even get off my damned couch without throwing up."

"I wouldn't even *be* here if it weren't for you and your damned theories about magic having a geographical source!" Hermione stormed, sitting up sharply and dislodging a very put-out Saturn.

"I was doing you a *favor*, Granger."

"Some favor! I'm weaker than a kitten, I can't do magic at all now, so I'm stuck here for Merlin knows how long, and I'm going to fail my NEWTs because of you!" From the kitchen, Saturn hissed at the arguing pair.

"Oh, for the love of Calypso's pigs, you are *not* going to fail your NEWTs," Snape stormed back at her. "You'll be here for a few days, return to Hogwarts*properly*, and we will continue as we have always done. I can understand your impatience to leave, Granger. Believe me, nothing would make me happier. But I will not have you upsetting my cat!"

Hermione subsided.

"So, there's no help for it, I suppose," she grumbled.

"Unfortunately not."

"Erm. I'm sorry about Saturn."

"Don't apologize to me. Apologize to the cat."

Hermione stared hard as Snape raised his book and continued to read.

"I will prepare dinner beginning in one hour," he said from behind the pages. "I trust you are fond of salmon?"

AN: Not mine, no money. Special thanks to Bluestocking, Annie, Subversa, and Dicky for their super fast help with this!

Six

Chapter 6 of 7

Hermione is confined to the sofa and makes her displeasure known.

"May I help you, at least?"

"No."

"I do know how to cook."

"I don't doubt that, Granger, but I do not require your assistance."

Hermione subsided. Snape, with Professor McGonagall's shouted approval, had confined her to the sofa for the past twenty-four hours, and she was itching to be up and about.

"May I at least read?" she asked.

"If you can Summon a book. I am busy," came the reply from the kitchen.

"I feel stronger."

"I do not doubt that. But you must rest, Granger, unless you wish to be unconscious on my floor again."

Hermione subsided with a sigh and reached for a book.

"Accio Charms text."

As the book flew and hit her hand with a heavy *thunk*, Hermione felt a brief surge of satisfaction her magic was stable, and, unless she was mistaken, stronger. It was promising. Or it would be if Professor Snape would ever let her *do* anything.

"I must return to Scotland. You will stay here."

"I... why can't I go back to school with you?"

"Because Professor McGonagall and I have agreed that you should not yet travel by Portkey. It is safer. I will take your work to her and Professor Flitwick and return tomorrow with new coursework."

"But the first years?"

"Will survive without your exalted presence. They will have found another teacher to torture doubtless Horace has been suffering from their shenanigans."

"But..."

"Count yourself fortunate, Granger, that you do not have to deal with them. From what I hear, they are a group of little monsters."

"But..."

"And in truth, Granger, you do not have the temperament to be a teacher. Trust me."

With that dramatic pronouncement, Snape spun in a flare of teaching robes and disappeared with a loud pop.

"Temperament indeed," Hermione huffed. "If that's not the pot calling the kettle black..."

Carefully, she padded back to the sofa. It was actually quite late at night at the house, and although she was stronger, no sensible person would be awake at 3am if she could help it.

"You're silent this evening," Snape observed that night over dinner. "Not that I mind, compared to your incessant prattle, but it seems unlike you."

Hermione resisted the urge to make a face at him.

"How long have you had this house?" she asked.

"Since I began teaching at Hogwarts. I came here every summer that I could to work on it, to make it my own."

Lucky you. Must be nice.

"I knew this place was special it was worth it to me."

"A retreat," Hermione said.

"In a sense. If it had not been for this place..." Snape trailed off, opening his hand.

"But Professor, why did I see this place? Why was I standing on the deck out there, watching the sea?"

"Granger, I don't think you truly wish to know."

"Why not?" Hermione banged her fork down. "Why do you keep treating me like this? You open up and tell me things about you, you've been caring for me for the past *week*, and then you treat me like a child! You're only telling me half of the story!"

"You *are* a child. You are impulsive and, despite your allegedly superior talent at witchcraft, unthinking. If it had not been for Minerva's intervention and my assistance, you would be a *squib*. Did that not occur to you?"

"What?"

"Why do you think you are really here, Granger? Surely you would have noticed your magic slipping before that incident in Filius' classroom?"

"Noticed..." Hermione paused. "How did you know about that?"

"You're a terrible liar, Granger. Let me guess. Until this week, you haven't slept more than two hours a night. Until I showed you how to focus, until you saw this place Merlin help me your magic came only in fits and starts. Wake up, Granger. You would have *died* if I hadn't helped you."

"So once again," Hermione sneered at him, "the brave Severus Snape comes to my aid."

"I am as surprised as you," Snape returned. "I had hoped that, unlike Potter, you had at least some sense of self-preservation."

Pushed to her limit, Hermione shot up from the table, sending her chair sliding back on the floor. "Fuck you, Snape!" she cried.

Oh my God, I just said "fuck" to a teacher!

She clapped her hands over her mouth and slowly backed away into the living room, Snape watching her go, step by step. Dismayed, she sank onto his sofa and buried her head in her hands. She heard Snape pick up his fork and resume his dinner.

She did not hear his murmured, "About damn time."

Hermione, despite the horror she felt at having said "fuck" to a teacher, spent the night fuming.

How dare Snape tell her she was a child?

How dare he insult her?

How dare he claim to have *saved* her?

When morning crept over the house, she was still furious, lying stiffly on the sofa, staring at the ceiling.

From the kitchen, she heard Saturn jump down from the countertop as Snape padded down the stairs and began to make tea.

"Here." Snape squatted by her head and shoved a steaming mug at her. "I may have been... hasty."

Hermione levered herself up on the sofa.

"My mother withered and died when she was forbidden to return to Devonshire," he said shortly. "I do not wish the same fate for any... Minerva would have been disappointed to lose her favorite student in a generation."

"Thank you," Hermione replied. "I am sorry I..."

"Do not concern yourself. You were being goaded. It may have been... unfair of me to do so. What is important, Miss Granger, is that you heal. Minerva expects you to return to Hogwarts with me on Monday."

Hermione nodded over the fragrant mug. "I do love it here," she said, looking over his shoulder at the pink-stained clouds scudding across the sky.

"*Accio* jumpers," Snape said suddenly. "Let us drink our tea out on the deck."

Bundled into Snape's bulky jumper, Hermione snuggled into a chair and let the wind toss her unruly hair about her face. From behind the curtain of hair, she watched Snape, his face turned upwards as he greeted the day.

He's not handsome, but when he's not snarling and growling at the world, when he's at peace...

Hermione stood and joined him at the railing. Holding out her hand, she turned to her former professor.

"I'm Hermione Granger," she said, "and I very much appreciate your hospitality this week."

Snape looked shocked, and then a slow smile crept across his face.

His smile is rather nice, even with those teeth.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Gr- Hermione."

If traveling through the tunnels at Gringotts was terrifying, driving with Severus Snape through the Pacific Coast Mountain range from Siletz Bay to Portland was an exercise in torture.

Snape apparently maintained a small sports car that he hurtled through the hairpin turns on the densely wooded back roads and across narrow, one-lane bridges through the pouring rain as if Dementors were after him.

White and shaking, Hermione was never so grateful to arrive at the International Portkey Terminal in the northern part of the city.

"We will return via Portkey on Friday. Pack more clothing this time. We will return every weekend, until your magic is fully restored."

He shoved a battered water bottle into her hands and clamped his own hand over her wrist.

"Hang on," he whispered in her ear, drawing her close to him as the Portkey spun them into the whirling vortex. The last thing Hermione was aware of before they vanished was his warm chest against hers and the delicate scent of his shaving soap.

Though she could not swear to it, she was certain his touch lingered slightly as he released her when they landed outside of the gates of the school.

Though she could not swear to it, she was certain that as they parted in the Great Hall he to ascertain the damage that a week of Slughorn had wreaked upon his classroom and she to the staff room to find Professor McGonagall that he gave her a brief smile.

Though she would not swear to it, she watched him go in a billow of robes and wished that they could be together in the house again.

AN: Not mine, no money.

Seven

Chapter 7 of 7

A conclusion is reached, but not everybody is initially happy with it.

"There you are, dear." Professor McGonagall enfolded Hermione into an embrace that smelled of talcum powder and whisky. "We were worried."

"Mf, Professor Snape took very good care of me," Hermione replied, struggling (politely) to free herself.

"I'm sure he did, but oh, to be stranded with him on the other side of the world for a week... you must know, dear, his bark... worse than his bite, but still, I'm sorry you should have come to me, I would have been able to help you."

"I... you're busy," Hermione wound up lamely.

I tried to... why didn't you say anything when I turned the pumpkin juice into snakes?

"I admit, when you Transfigured your pumpkin juice that morning, I was concerned... I apologize," McGonagall said again. "Had I known, I would never have sent Severus to help you. I thought you were..."

Showing off? Hermione thought bitterly.

"Erm, practicing for your practical NEWT."

Showing off.

"But that's all sorted now, and you won't have to leave Hogwarts until you're ready."

"But Professor, I think... I think that I won't be staying at Hogwarts much longer past my NEWTs."

"Why on earth not? I was hoping... well, Filius was hoping, dear, that you would be interested in taking on an apprenticeship. That way, you can stay here!" Professor McGonagall beamed at her.

"Oh, Professor, I'd love to... but really, I can't stay. This isn't my home."

"What on earth do you mean, child? Hogwarts is your home, as it was mine, and I sincerely hope that we've made you feel welcome."

"It's not that I don't feel welcome, Professor... It's just that I don't belong here."

"Oh? And where do you belong?"

Hermione frowned. "Professor Snape says that it's impossible, but, I think I belong where..." Before Hermione could finish, the door burst open and Snape billowed into the staff room.

Back to where we were before, I see.

"Minerva, there you are. Now that you have finished welcoming Granger back to your fold, I would suggest we begin our meeting?"

"Of course, Severus," Professor McGonagall replied. "Hermione, dear, why don't you come by the office later for a nice cup of tea, and we'll discuss this."

"Yes, Professor," Hermione said. Turning to Snape, "Thank you, sir, for your assistance this week."

"Granger. It was necessary."

Hermione hurried from the room.

Necessary indeed. So why did he hold me so gently when we Portkey'd together?

The week seemed to fly. Hermione taught the first years with no more incidents and, having convinced Flitwick to allow her to deduct points, fewer disruptions.

She could feel, however, her magic wavering as the week progressed.

"It will be that way," Snape informed her. She had taken to seeking him out in the evenings before curfew, in what she thought of as his nook. There, she would question him demand answers. And he would give them.

Their arguments were spirited: she would challenge him, he would respond, cutting down her assumptions with biting sarcasm

But she began to notice that his sarcasm was less cutting and more amusing. And the anger she felt, the frustration of not being able to discover the answers to all of her problems in books and the reliance she had had to place on him, began to fade.

"How did you find the house?"

"Like you, I learned to concentrate. To focus on my magic and its origins."

"It still sounds unlike you. You're always..."

"Angry? Only at stupidity. And blindness."

"How did you..."

"I learned to focus my rage. And learned to regret impulsivenessbefore I decided to Apparate five thousand miles. "

"Yes, well..."

He seemed to relent. "We all make unwise decisions," he said.

"And sometimes," Hermione said slowly, "we survive them well enough to learn from them."

"Sometimes," he agreed.

On Friday afternoon, Hermione was bursting with excitement. She would have an entire weekend to spend with him. An entire weekend to talk, to drink his wine, to eat with him, to argue with him, to enjoy his presence, his silence.

Granger, her conscience warned her, be careful. Smitten with your Professor is about the last thing you need.

Hermione wrapped her Muggle jacket around her and told her conscience to shut up!

"Are you ready?" she asked Snape as he met her at the gates to the school.

"Patience," Snape responded, "is still, I see, not a Gryffindor trait."

Had he said that a week ago, she would have flushed uncomfortably at his words. Now, however, she smiled cheekily and was flattered to see him smile briefly.

"Let's go," she said.

Snape looked at her for a long moment, and Hermione wished that she had even the slightest talent at Legilimency. His silence seemed to be the silence of a man making a decision against his better sense.

"Hold on," he finally said, pulling her towards him.

Once again, she felt the tug behind her navel. Once again, it was overshadowed by *his* presence.

A wild storm beat against the house.

Outside, the sea moaned.

Inside, a cheerful fire flickered, casting dancing shadows against the wall.

Hermione was curled up on what she now considered "her" sofa, nose buried in a book as Snape busied himself in the kitchen.

It was perfect, she reflected. It was *home*.

Despite being well fed and enjoying two nice glasses of wine, Hermione lay stiffly on her sofa, unable to sleep.

"This is my place," she whispered to herself. "So why can I not relax?"

You know why, Granger.

"But it's Professor Snape!"

There's an attraction there: he's clever, brave, an excellent cook.

"He thinks of me as a child!"

You could try showing him you're not.

Hermione lay speechless, shocked at the thoughts that wandered across her brain.

Morning found her sleepless and worried.

I cannot be fancying Professor Snape!

"We need to talk," Snape announced later that morning over tea.

"It sounds like you're breaking up with me," Hermione quipped.

Snape glared. "We have a serious problem," he said. "Are you aware of the consequences of the fact that you, apparently, have an affinity for the same location from which I draw my own magic?"

"No."

"I thought not. For all your reading, you have no powers of observation, do you, Granger?"

Hermione scowled at him. "So," she said, "what is it, then, that is so important that I have missed?"

"Granger, did it not occur to you that there is a reason why Narcissa Black left London, the home of the Black family, to become Narcissa Malfoy? Why Arthur Weasley loves the Burrow as much as he does? To the extent that he will not leave it for extended periods of time?"

"No... didn't they...weren't they always..."

"No, Granger. They discovered an affinity for certain places, a desire to draw their magic from the place where their soul mate drew his or her magic."

Hermione's brain latched onto "soul mate."

"But they're married to Lucius Malfoy and Molly Weasley!" she protested.

"And why do you think that is? Yes, they are both examples of couples deeply in love, but what do you think keeps them tied to Wiltshire and Ottery St Catchpole?"

Hermione's mouth dropped open.

"Do you mean... that you... and I..."

"It is a force," Snape said, leaning across the table and grabbing her hand. "It draws the couple together, does not let them go. It creates a bond that cannot be broken. It is said that when they are joined, there is absolute peace, absolute contentment, and absolute joy."

"Joined," Hermione echoed. "As in...*physically*?" She could feel a flush rising on her cheeks. Somewhere, deep within her, she felt an unfurling of desire.

"It's impossible," Snape said definitively, releasing her hand. "It has to be. I don't... Granger, it's... It's not possible. It was a mistake to bring this up."

He pushed away from the table, leaving Hermione to sit in shocked silence.

He was blushing, you saw it. Helikes you! It's not your imagination that he holds you closer than he should when you travel. That he saved you, that he cared for you so well.

Hermione scowled at her rapidly cooling cup of tea. It was all so preposterous.

He saved you, saved your magic. And now he wants to...

Hermione stood rapidly, trying to push the thought out of his mind.

"Severus," she said, trying the name on her tongue. "Severus."

It didn't sound bad.

There you go, Granger. Now try calling him by his name.

She found him on the deck, glaring at the heaving ocean.

"Severus," she said tentatively.

"Granger."

"Try Hermione. I don't... I don't know why I'm drawn here, Severus."

"Well, there's a reason for it, and if I am being honest, Hermione, I do not... object."

"Object to what?" Hermione demanded.

"Object to sharing this place with you."

"Severus..." Hermione held out her hand. "I don't know where this is going, but I do believe that we're to tread this path together."

Snape took her hand.

"I am not accustomed to flirtation, Gr- Hermione."

"Good," Hermione said, pulling him towards her with a grin. "I would rather dispense with flirtation entirely."

"Have you ever...?" Snape narrowed his eyes.

"Have I what?"

"Are you... experienced?"

"Oh, *that*. Well," Hermione, still holding his hand, moved to the sliding glass door, "why don't I show you?"

"Granger, I cannot pretend that..." Snape protested.

"Perhaps we should just start where we are," Hermione countered, pulling him into the living room, "and go from there."

Snape hesitated at the door of his bedroom.

Courage, Granger, Hermione told herself.

"Come on," she said. "If you're right and this is meant to be, it'll be like falling off of a log."

"I don't need metaphors, Granger."

At which point, it hit Hermione like a thunderclap.

"You're *nervous*!" she blurted.

Hermione realized that she had never been upstairs in the house.

Snape's bedroom was tucked under the peak of the roof and contained a view that was even more spectacular than the one downstairs. Hermione drifted to the window. Before her stretched the Pacific Ocean, immense in its vastness. She knew that somewhere, thousands of miles away, was the northern tip of the Japanese archipelago and the Chinese mainland, but as Snape's hand fell upon her shoulder, all thoughts of world geography vanished.

"I will ask you again," he murmured in her ear, "is this an experience that will be... novel for you?"

Hermione suppressed the urge to laugh as she turned around.

"I promise you, Severus," she whispered, "I am more than ready. Are you?"

"Miss Granger Hermione," he replied softly, "I can assure you, I am."

And he brought his lips to hers.

Later on, Hermione would admit that she had wondered what it would be like to kiss Severus Snape. Perhaps it had begun when she'd first actually ~~heard~~ one of his lectures the Defense lecture when Lupin had been incapacitated that she realized that she'd fancied him. Not as a woman, not then, but in that scary, adolescent way. That frightening adolescent attraction that had kept her awake at nights, thinking of him while Lavender and Parvati snored peacefully.

When Snape flicked his tongue across her lips, encouraging them to part, all thoughts of herself as a gawky, bushy-haired girl vanished. She opened her mouth, allowing him entrance, gliding her tongue across his.

He moaned.

Suddenly, what had been a tiny spark, a small attraction, became an inferno, blazing to life as she ground against him when he pulled her closer to him.

He was not close enough. He would never be close enough.

"Please," she murmured, breaking the kiss.

"Bed," he replied, his voice gravelly with desire.

Their flight to the bed was anything but dignified. Hermione managed to undo his belt buckle and top button and was struggling with his zip, as best she could with Snape practically glued to her lips.

His hands seemed to be everywhere, pulling at her jumper (a Molly Weasley present), caressing her breasts through the fabric, tugging at her jeans, wrapping themselves in her hair. It was awkward. It was heaven.

They collapsed on the bed together in a tangle of limbs and half-discarded clothing.

"This is ridiculous," Snape said, rolling away from her and grappling with his trousers as Hermione shucked off her jeans and tugged her jumper over her head. T-shirt and bra quickly followed, so that she was clad only in her knickers when Snape turned, finally having managed to discard his trousers and shirt.

A wave of uncertainty overwhelmed her: an awkward eighteen year old, too skinny from a year of deprivation, with out of control hair. She was painfully aware of her breasts, her thighs, the scarring on her torso from the hex at the Battle of the Ministry, all those things that she *knew* weren't right too big, too small, not high enough, not tight enough, shiny and puckered. She looked down at the bedspread, aware that she'd neglected to shave her legs above her knees, aware she'd forgotten to perform the bikini waxing charm she'd perfected when she and Ron had started to...

"Beautiful," she heard Snape murmur as she looked up. He was clad only in his shorts (black, she noticed), which barely contained the bulge within. Above the waistband was a trail of black hair, and above that a chest that was much too thin wiry would be a kind description. His neck was scarred, and Hermione knew the desire to place her lips upon it, as if her touch could bestow healing magic.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered All doubt and self-consciousness vanished, and she held out her arms to him.

"Hermione," he answered, and he was in her arms, worshipping her body, pressing himself to her as she wrapped her legs around him.

"Please," she cried, bucking up against his erection. "Please."

Snape drew back, and with a tender smile, he caressed his way down her neck, laving her breasts with his tongue, spending an extra moment on her scars.

He's not repulsed!

"I want to," he murmured as he kissed her stomach, the waistband of her knickers, before drawing them down. Hermione resisted the urge to roll away from him.

"No," Snape said, "I want to see." His eyes glittered and she felt a wave of lust as he drew his hands down her hips and to her pelvis, easing her legs apart and pulling the knickers off.

"I want to taste," he murmured. "I want to smell. I want to touch." He dipped his head, and his tongue, so quick to criticize, to maim, to invoke pain, drew across her quim.

Hermione's head dropped back and she moaned. "Oh, yes!"

Snape's answering chuckle sent jolts of desire through her. But it wasn't enough.

"I need you," Hermione gasped raggedly. "I need you."

"And you shall have me," he replied, raising his head.

"Take them off," Hermione ordered, clutching at his shorts as he crawled back up her.

"As you desire," Snape responded, pulling them down. Hermione took advantage, grasping his cock with her hand. "Temptress," he growled, eyes rolling back in his head.

"Enough with the flirtation," Hermione gasped, tugging him towards her.

"Hermione," Snape said, holding her gaze. "Once we join, our magics will become..."

"I know," Hermione moaned, "and I want it. I want you."

"You will be mine," Snape growled.

"No," Hermione replied, hooking her legs around his body hips. "You will *bemine*."

Snape groaned as he sank into her.

"Gods."

"Say it," Hermione gasped as he moved within her. Never had Ron felt like this. Never had she been overwhelmed by desire. "You are mine!"

"Yours."

"Yours," Hermione agreed, tilting her pelvis as he brought his hand between them. "Oh,yes."

Snape chuckled darkly and continued to thrust. Hermione tightened around him as she felt the first signs of her impending climax.

"Severus, I'm..." she gasped, freeing her hands and, pulling him towards her. "Please," she murmured.

Taken aback by her sudden movement, Snape slid into her, filling her as she ground against his pelvis.

"Severus." His name was a moan as she came.

"Hermione, you're going to make... Fuck!" Snape swore explosively as his climax overwhelmed him and he collapsed onto his elbows above her. "Hermione," he whispered, bringing a hand to her face, pushing aside her tangled hair.

"Well," Hermione said, "that was something."

Snape's answering chuckle tugged at her heart.

If Snape's bedroom was breathtaking, his bathroom was magnificent. The view still encompassed the ocean, the broad beach, the gulls wheeling in the sky, clouds scudding above them, but indoors, there was a beautiful bathtub, large enough for two to recline more than comfortably in, complete with a broad shelf, perfect for placing books.

"Oh, my..." Hermione said dreamily, dropping her borrowed robe.

"Oh yes," Snape agreed, pressing up against her. "It's one of the *nicer* features of this place," he murmured in her ear.

Hermione stretched in the tub, leaning against his chest as he licked and nibbled her neck. His hands were busy with her breasts. Hermione frowned as lovely as it was, something was wrong. All her impulsiveness, her decision to open herself up to Snape, of all people, was troubling her.

"This is heavenly," she murmured.

"Agreed."

"But," she said, "We have a problem."

"You're noticing this now? Hermione, we just had sex under what amounts to a mystical influence."

"That's just it! I barely know you. But... it doesn't seem to matter. It's all rather annoying." Hermione moved away from him. "I always thought that the man I'd be in love with... oh, God! I'm in love with you!"

"You know more than you think," Snape replied. "I assume you saw what Potter saw that night?"

Hermione paused as far as she could recall, Snape had never directly referred to the Battle of Hogwarts.

"I did," she replied. "I... didn't know, of course, that now..."

"Yes, there is that. But Hermione, you've known quite a bit about me for a while. You know about my commitment to protecting Potter, about how Albus hung Lily over my head all those years, about how, to protect Draco, I had to..."

"You did what you had to," Hermione finished for him, turning to face him. She took his face in her hands and kissed him, sliding her legs around his waist. "And you are the bravest man I've ever met. Braver even than Harry. Look at me, Severus."

Snape raised his eyes to hers.

"I won't pretend," she continued, "that I've been in love with you since the first time I saw you, or the first time I realized that at some level I was attracted to you. But I do want to know you. To discover what you like." She kissed him. "What you dislike." Another kiss. "Why you call your cat Saturn." A third kiss. "If you like football." A fourth. "If you can tolerate my taste in music." A fifth. "If we can be together and I can finish my education, pursue my dreams." A sixth and seventh kiss.

"Hermione," Snape said, "put away the list. Stop making tick marks. Do you trust me?"

"What? Yes, I suppose. I've been trusting you since before..."

"But do you trust me now? This is important."

Hermione looked at him silently for a long moment. Desire throbbed within her.

"Yes."

"Then trust this," he said, sliding so that his hardened cock was positioned just at her entrance. "Trust me that we will work this out." He slid into her. "Trust me," he said, "that our bond is strong." He moved within her and she cried out. "Trust me," he said, "that you and I are one."

Hermione clung to him, tumbling over the cliff into joy.

It wasn't perfect at first neither of them truly expected it to be.

Hermione consistently left her socks in the living room.

Crookshanks and Saturn did not get along well at first.

Snape was not, as it turned out, a morning person.

Hermione was.

Ron swore up and down that she had been cursed and said several quite nasty things behind her back and to her face before Hermione hexed him rather badly.

Harry said nothing for two months, until finally he interrupted the written portion Hermione's Charms NEWT to enfold her in a desperate hug and give her a brief, "Whatever you decide, Hermione, remember, I'm there for you." Professor Flitwick was prostrate.

Professor McGonagall was more voluble, but less traumatized than Ron, Harry and Flitwick. She did, however make several pointed remarks regarding Snape's job security and the position of his bollocks if he so much as made Hermione cry.

But they managed, much to the smug satisfaction of one Vincent Crabbe who was overheard remarking to Moaning Myrtle that he'd always known the Granger swot had a thing for old Snapey.

Myrtle was quite impressed by his perspicacity and invited him to join her in the prefect's bath any time he chose.

But the less said about *that*, the better.

AN: Not mine, no money. Thank you so much to Subversa, Bluestocking, Dicky, and Annie for all of their wonderful and speedy help with this little story.

And thank *you* for reading it!