

What If?

by sunny33

Hermione's life is turned upside-down when she sees a man who disappeared three years earlier.

Chapter One: Guess Who?

Chapter 1 of 6

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Disclaimer: Last time I looked, they all belonged to JKR.

Chapter One: Guess Who?

"Ahhh." The soft sigh of pleasure escaped her lips as she sank back into the couch in the window of her favourite coffee shop and inhaled the fragrance of freshly roasted coffee beans. For all the wonderful things the wizarding world had to offer, it took Muggles to make a decent latte. Even the talented house-elves at Hogwarts could only brew a lacklustre attempt, despite their much-vaunted culinary skills. Discovering the perfect coffee a few doors down from St Mungo's when she was accompanying Neville Longbottom on a visit to his parents had been an unforeseen bonus. Every morning since, she had left home a little earlier to savour her favourite beverage and the muffin of the day before Apparating the short distance to the Ministry to start the tedium of the day's work.

The Department for Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures: Beast, Being, and Spirit Division was supposed to have been her means to continue her fight for the better welfare of house-elves, werewolves, and other repressed groups, but she had found her brilliant reputation and organisational capabilities to be her undoing. Immediately seconded into the position of personal assistant to the Head of Department, Reginald Jordan, her days consisted of finding and filing numerous petty reports and forms, making Reggie *call me Reggie, dear, can't have a sweet young thing like you being so formal* tea, and shielding him from Floo calls, memos, and unwanted visitors. Unfortunately, most visitors were unwanted, as Reggie firmly believed in a low-stress lifestyle, which entailed passing the majority of his work onto his long-suffering second-in-command, Bernard Percy. The young witch's attempts to draw her boss's attention to the inequities in the wizarding world were met with a bland smile, a few platitudes, and a request for more tea. Reggie didn't get where he was today by interfering with the status quo.

Every evening, she returned home bearing the weight of her frustration upon her slender shoulders. Three years after helping defeat Voldemort, Hermione Granger was bored witless. The cleverest witch of her age had been assimilated into the ever-hungry Ministry of Magic as fodder for the bureaucratic process. Her ungraceful exit from the Weasley fold after calling Ronald a slobbering, lack-witted ingrate with a microscopic IQ and an equally microscopic penis in front of his entire family was hardly ladylike, although immensely satisfying, and had left her with few friends in the wizarding world. Few, that is, except her housemate, Harry Potter, who had likewise extracted himself from Ginny Weasley's clutches before he had been smothered whole by the red-haired behemoth she called a family.

Moving into Grimmauld Place with Harry had been a godsend, both financially and psychologically. Their friendship had cemented into a closeness and ease with each other that saw her at breakfast with no make-up, hair untamed and wild, and her raggedy old dressing-gown and fluffy slippers, and Harry sitting down to dinner after a hectic day as a junior Auror smelling decidedly dodgy and walking around the house after he had finally showered in nothing but a towel. If the lingering spectre of 'what-if' occasionally entered the two friends' thoughts at the end of a tiring day, it was rapidly relegated to the 'Things We Don't Talk About' zone of their relationship. *Friends* was easy, *best friends* was great, but *friends with benefits* was completely out of the question.

Today's muffin was strawberry and white chocolate. Decadent, unhealthy, and divine. Taking her first mouthful of creamy, rich coffee, Hermione ceased musing about her

unsatisfactory life and glanced out of the window beside her to the scene beyond. Early morning commuters walked purposefully along the footpath, heads bowed and briefcases swinging. Few shoppers were about yet, but several groups of uniformed teenagers lurked on corners, delaying their inevitable arrival at school. Her second mouthful of coffee nearly ruined her paper as the sight of a black-clad, bleak-expressioed man caught her eye.

Snape. Dour and pale as ever, even wearing Muggle clothes he looked out of place. The years rolled back as she sat and contemplated the man walking down the footpath towards the café.

"Why are we here again, Harry?"

"Because someone should be. He gave up everything to protect us, Hermione. It's the least we can do."

"But you know he would hate us to see him like this, so exposed and vulnerable. What will he say when he wakes up?"

"Don't worry about that, just come on. He's in here."

"Oh, gods, Harry. The poor man. He's so pale."

"And so still. Do you think...?"

"No, he's warm. And breathing, just. You know, he looks so much younger without the scowl on his face. He must only be thirty-eight if he was the same year as your parents. I always thought he was a lot older."

"What are you doing? You probably shouldn't be touching him, Hermione."

"I read about it in a book. Apparently, when someone is in a coma, physical contact is very beneficial, even if they appear to be unaware. As is talking to them, isn't it, Professor? Although, knowing him, he would probably prefer silence."

"But you're stroking his face. That's... that's..."

"The only skin I can access other than his hands. You wouldn't want me to touch anywhere else, would you? I'm certain he wouldn't. He'd probably have a fit if he knew I was touching his face! Here, you hold his hand."

"Well, okay. I suppose that wouldn't hurt."

"Don't forget it was your idea to come. We're here, so we might as well do the best we can."

"I feel like a right prat, holding Snape's hand."

"Professor Snape, Harry. You know, his nose doesn't look so bad now. It used to make him look so overbearing, but now it just seems to suit his face. He's not even that bad looking."

"Don't get too carried away, Hermione. I might start thinking you like him."

"I don't suppose anyone likes him. I wonder if anyone ever loved him. Except maybe his mother. His father didn't seem to. It's such a shame. He's just a man, human, with feelings like everyone else."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Oh, Harry. You saw him cry in those memories. You know how he loved your mother. How can you say that?"

"Sorry, I didn't really mean it. And why are you stroking his nose? That's just odd!"

"I don't know. Just because I can. I've decided it's not a bad nose."

"Well, stop it. You're creeping me out! Besides, it's time to go. They only allowed us ten minutes."

"We'll have to work on that. Goodbye, Professor. I know you can't hear me, but we do hope you get better soon."

She smiled as she watched him pass by the window. If only Snape knew how often she and Harry had visited, held his hand, and caressed his face while he was unconscious. She had no way of knowing if it had helped, but the Healers had commented that he was always less restless after their visits. The day he had awakened was a different story, however.

"What's that noise, Harry? Sounds like..."

"He's awake. And he's not happy. Furious with someone by the sound of the shouting going on in there."

"Oh. Perhaps we should leave, then."

"What, after all your talk of him needing comfort and human contact?"

"That was when he was comatose, Harry. You go in. I'll stay out here."

Hermione had always regretted the lapse in her Gryffindor courage that day. After that, Harry had visited alone, and only a few times before Snape had made it quite clear he wanted to be left alone. Ron's smug expression as he said 'I told you so,' had not helped. He had stubbornly refused to have anything to do with 'the greasy git' and had never understood why they had bothered visiting him.

Since then, Snape had been seen rarely, despite his exoneration and much-lauded bravery in the face of extreme duress, and rumours abounded as to his continued residence in the British wizarding community.

Severus Snape looked physically fit, despite his pallor, better than he had ever looked in the six years he had taught the witch observing him, but the expression on his face as he crossed the road to the entrance to St Mungo's, briefly paused to check for unwelcome Muggle eyes, and disappeared into the bowels of the shabby, red-brick building left her feeling unaccountably sad. For instead of the straight-backed, indomitable wizard who used to cut a swathe through students and teachers alike as he billowed down the corridors of Hogwarts, Snape wore the demeanour of a beaten man, resigned to accept less than he had expected of life.

Finishing her coffee, Hermione headed off to work with a new puzzle to unravel. Why was Snape at St Mungo's? He did not look like a patient, and as far as she knew he was not employed there. Why was he so...? She couldn't describe it. He just wasn't himself. Not that it was any of her business, but the know-it-all in her remained unsatisfied.

"Guess who I saw today, Harry?" she asked, serving him a helping of stew.

"No idea, Herm. Percy the Prat?" he replied as he reached for a fork.

"Luckily, no. Last time I saw him, he spent half an hour describing his valiant battle with the filing system in his office. Apparently, alphabetisation was insufficient; the files had to be colour-coded and cross-referenced as well."

"Pot."

"Pardon?"

"Pot calling kettle black. Who spent weeks rearranging the library here? Who else has a Dewey Decimal coding system in their private library?" Harry pointed with his knife.

"At least you can actually find what you're looking for now, Potter," she replied with a mock scowl.

"Anyway, who did you see?" he asked.

"Severus Snape. Going into St Mungo's. He doesn't work there, does he?"

"Oh. Haven't seen him around for ages. I did hear he was doing some Potions consultancy work for Healer Smethyck on the Dai Llewellyn ward. I think Minerva coerced him into it, as by all accounts he's not particularly happy with the job... the assistants... the facilities..."

Hermione laughed. "Since when has that man been happy with anything?"

"True, that."

"There was something about him, though. I would have thought with the war being over and his spying days finished he would be happier, or at least content, but he looked so different."

"He never looks happy, Herm. We just established that," Harry pointed out.

"I know, but he always looked in charge, confident. No-one would dare cross him. But now... now, he looks defeated. As if he's alive but not living, just existing. It's so sad. After all those years of risking his life to save the wizarding world, it's as if no-one cares." She shrugged and poured two cups of tea. Handing one to Harry, she sipped hers slowly.

"I suppose few people can see past the fact he was a Death Eater and killed Dumble..."

"Harry! You *know* that isn't true!" she scolded.

"I know. *You* know. But most people only believe what they read in the papers. Remember that awful article Rita Skeeter wrote saying his trial was a farce and he should never have been exonerated. We know it was a load of bollocks because we saw his memories and talked to Dumbledore's portrait. I'll bet he's only working for St Mungo's because he can't get a job anywhere else."

"He could go back to teaching at Hogwarts," Hermione suggested.

"You know Minerva has been trying to get him back for the last three years, but he always hated teaching. Couldn't you tell?" Harry teased.

"Mmm. I suppose so. But there should be..." She stopped speaking as her housemate placed a finger to her lips.

"Hush. He's not a house-elf. He's a grown wizard and a bloody powerful one at that. He's quite capable of fighting his own battles. Anyway, I'm off upstairs to shower. Thanks for dinner; it was great!"

"Just remember it's your turn tomorrow. And, Harry?"

"Yes, Herm?"

"Make it edible this time!"

Sitting in the dark chill of his sitting room, Severus Snape scowled as he reviewed the list of potions he had been contracted to make. Although some were complex and interesting to make, most could have been done by any competent Potions student. Burn pastes, pain relievers, Calming Draught. Even that precocious Granger girl he had spotted in the Muggle café that morning could have done it. Discarding the list in favour of a glass of Firewhiskey, Snape slumped back in his armchair and closed his eyes. Life was to be tolerated. Firewhiskey helped a little.

Upon awakening at St Mungo's after the final battle, Snape could only feel cheated. No longed-for departure from the world that had treated him so poorly; no opportunity to find and apologise to Lily beyond the veil, and most of all no way of retracting the gift of his most private memories to Potter. For the Boy Who Lived to Humiliate Him had seen it all: his promise to Dumbledore, his love for Lily Potter, and his tears. The brat had even had the temerity to visit him once or twice, prattling on about how sorry he was for the way he had behaved and how grateful he was. Snape had feigned sleep to avoid meeting those startling green eyes and seeing the undoubted pity within until he reached the limit of his tolerance and sent the boy away.

As soon as he had been deemed fit to care for himself, Snape had left through the little-known rear entrance to hide away at Spinners End. Out of sight and out of mind. Only rapidly diminishing financial reserves had seen him leave the mean dwelling to seek a market for finely-crafted potions, but as soon as the brewer of the supplies had been revealed any interest had been rapidly withdrawn. He had even considered Minerva's offer, but had not been able to bring himself to return to the place which held all his worst memories. The offer of work from St Mungo's had been impossible to refuse despite the menial nature of many of the tasks required. It paid the bills and put food on the table, which was more than a murdering ex-Death-Eater deserved.

A/N: Written for the 2010 SSHG Exchange as a gift for Southern_Witch_69. Many thanks to my lovely beta, karelia.

Chapter Two: If At First You Don't Succeed...

Hermione's obsession with Snape grows, and what is bugging Harry?

Disclaimer: The characters and settings belong to JKR. I just took them for a little outing.

Chapter Two: If at First You Don't Succeed...

After seeing Snape passing at the same time every morning the previous week, Hermione deliberately avoided the comfy couch and took her cup outside to one of the small, round tables on the footpath. Placing herself at one of the outer tables, she waited for him to appear.

Sure enough, at exactly seven forty-five, the black-clad wizard appeared around the corner. Schooling her features into calm, she smiled and nodded when his eyes met hers as he passed. Cold, dark, and bitter, they betrayed a mere flicker of surprise as he continued walking without pause.

For two weeks, Hermione persisted with a simple acknowledgement; her only reward a scowl, a glare, or occasionally a harrumph as he passed. Once, she was certain she detected a minute quirk of his eyebrow. He must have been in an exceptionally good mood that day.

"Why doesn't he speak, Harry? Were we that awful at Hogwarts?" she complained one evening.

"Must have been to him. Horrible, brash Gryffindors, we were." Harry grinned. "And you were the worst of the lot, Miss Know-it-all Handwaver."

"I was not! He hated *you* the most, Potter!" Hermione scowled as Harry simply laughed.

"Maybe he did. But what do you want him to do? Sit down for coffee and tell you the story of his life?"

"As interesting as that would be, no. Just a smile... Oh, shut it, Harry. I'm sure he's capable. A nod. Something to say he knows I'm a person, not a flobberworm he's scraped off his boot."

"Always one for high ideals, Herm. Hey, he could always have started walking on the other side of the street. He must fancy you!"

"Oh, very funny, Potty. Next thing you'll be telling me you fancy shagging Dolores Umbridge."

Harry shuddered. "Now, that was uncalled for. You're a cruel witch, Hermione Granger."

"You know you need someone like me to keep you grounded. Wouldn't want the saviour of the wizarding world to get too cocky."

"Yes, dear."

"Good answer, Harry. You're learning."

Hermione's obsession with Severus Snape grew as the days passed without any response from the dour wizard. She had been certain he would give in and speak eventually, if only to order her to sod off and leave him alone. The quiet snort which erupted into her pre-dinner glass of wine was met with a curious stare from her housemate.

"What's funny?"

"Nothing."

"Must have been something; you nearly inhaled your wine."

"If you must know, I was wondering why Snape hasn't told me to get out of his line of sight yet."

"Oh. Snape."

"What do you mean, 'Oh, Snape,?'" She frowned at Harry's resigned expression.

"It's just he is all you ever talk about nowadays. I know you feel sorry for him, but I... I dunno..." He shrugged and without any further explanation left the room.

Hermione's determination not to ask eventually lost the battle with her curiosity. Harry had been unusually quiet over dinner, watching her with an odd expression, and had been lounging on the couch since his shower, clad only in his favourite, tatty towel.

"What?" she asked after the umpteenth soft sigh.

"Pardon?"

"What's the problem, Harry? You've been behaving out of sorts all evening."

"Oh. Well, I've been wondering... It's probably crazy, but... do you think we could ever... you know...?"

"No, I don't know. We could ever what?"

Harry blushed and rose to stand before the fireplace. "Do you think we could ever be more than best friends?"

Hermione studied him as he shuffled from foot to foot. "Do you want more, Harry?"

"That's the thing. I don't know. I *know* I love you and you love me. We've always assumed we're only friends, but how do we know it's not more if we don't try?"

"But what if it changes everything? Ron..."

"Yeah. I know."

"Besides, then I couldn't slop around like this," she indicated her old dressing-gown and slippers, "and you would definitely have to shower before dinner and stop running around in only a towel."

"What? Are you saying I pong?" Harry tried hard to look offended.

"Yes, when you get home from work, you're usually quite whiffy." She screwed up her nose and grinned.

"Why haven't you said anything before?"

"I have. You just haven't taken the hint. But don't worry, I'm used to it. I'd kick you out of the kitchen if you were too high."

Harry rolled his eyes, then finally realised what else his friend had implied. "And the towel thing. Does that mean...?"

"I'd probably want to jump you all the time if we had that sort of relationship and you kept running around half-naked." She grinned.

The dark-haired wizard smiled for the first time that evening as he posed. "So, you think I have a good body?"

"Harry, you know you have a great body. Any woman would be pleased to get her hands on it. Although, for all I know, you might be as lacking as Ron in certain essential departments." Hermione brought her thumb and index finger together two inches apart.

"Oi! I'll have you know I'm perfectly well endowed," he retorted.

"All right then. Prove it. Drop the towel," she challenged.

Much to Hermione's surprise, Harry obeyed. Impressed despite herself, even though the topic of conversation had obviously helped, she sighed. "Okay, you can put the towel back on now. I'm done."

"Pervert!"

"Exhibitionist!"

"It was okay, wasn't it? It's just... I've never had a chance to ask a girl before." Harry was still in need of some reassurance.

"Magnificent, Harry. Haven't seen one better." She rolled her eyes. Men. They were all the same.

"Like you've seen a lot of naked men."

"Well, I've seen Ron's and Charlie's. And it's not only you boys who look at magazines, you know," Hermione admitted.

"Charlie? I don't remember you ever going out with him." Harry frowned, thinking he'd missed something important.

"I didn't. I walked in on him in the bathroom at the Burrow when I was sixteen. Awfully embarrassing it was, too."

"Didn't stop you having a good look, I'll bet," Harry teased, resuming his position on the couch.

"I was embarrassed, not blind."

"So, Ron's was..."

"Smaller. Happy?"

"Yeah." Harry couldn't stop the wide grin appearing on his face.

"Mind you, it's not how big it is, it's how you use it."

"I don't mind practising," Harry offered helpfully.

"Oh, go to bed, you idiot!" Hermione slapped him on the arm as she passed to take the cups back into the kitchen, the enormous *what if* stamped on her awareness carefully hidden.

Thinking of her best friend as a *man* rather than simply Harry kept her tossing and turning long into the night, to finally wake sweating, breathless, and confused after dreams of not one, but two dark-haired men.

The next morning found Hermione fussing with her hair before she went down for breakfast. Fastening a recalcitrant curl back with a clip, she muttered under her breath, "Dammit, I never used to bother. Why did he have to bring it up now?" The awareness that their unspoken but mutual avoidance of the issue of their relationship had been irrevocably breached was terrifying yet exciting. Hermione hesitated in the hall, taking a fortifying breath before opening the door to the kitchen to find the tea brewed and her plate already loaded with scrambled eggs and bacon. Peering around the door to see if there had been an overnight invasion by house-elves, she only found Harry: clean, tidy, and wearing an apron.

"What's the occasion, Potter? Or have you been subjected to too many misfired spells at work lately?" Humour was the best defence against the conflicting emotions threatening to give her the headache from hell.

"Nothing like that. I decided if I wanted to convince you I could be suitable as a boyfriend rather than a housemate, I'd better look after you better." His hesitant smile endeared him to her even more.

"Oh, Harry. Are you really serious about this? You want to take the risk?" Hermione studied his face closely as he poured the tea.

Clear, green eyes regarded her steadily as he met her gaze. "I think we have a good chance of working out as a couple. We've already proven we can live together without trying to hex each other over every difference of opinion, we like the same movies, and we can even have the occasional intelligent conversation." Harry listed some of the points he had prepared earlier while cooking the eggs.

"I suppose that's a lot more than I can say for my relationship with Ronald," she replied. Hoping she wasn't about to ruin the best friendship she'd ever had, Hermione continued, "All right, Harry. You have a month to convince me. Just remember, I'll be taking notes."

"I wouldn't expect otherwise, Herm. You'll probably bloody grade me!"

Half an hour later, Harry's words were still circling through her thoughts as Hermione sat at the café. When she saw Snape, she smiled as usual, met his eyes, and returned to her musings until startled by a smooth voice in her ear.

"Why?"

Turning to find Snape looming over her, an odd expression on his face, she replied, "Why what, Professor?"

"I'm no longer your professor, and why do you smile at me?" he asked, scowling.

"Why not? People usually smile at acquaintances who pass by."

"Not in my experience." He pulled up a chair and sat, studying her silently for a minute or two.

"Perhaps your experience is not representative of humanity in general, sir."

"Most likely." His sudden departure without a backward glance was unsurprising. He was Snape.

Hermione stared after the retreating black figure and shook her head. At least he had spoken this time. It seemed she was destined to have confusing relationships with men.

"Hermione? Hermione!"

"Oh, sorry, Reggie, I was miles away." She frowned at her own weakness. Being caught fantasising about stimulating conversations with Severus Snape only served to underline the lack of challenges she faced at work.

"I noticed. Do me a favour, love, and fetch some sandwiches. I'm dying of starvation here. All this damned paperwork." He brandished the sheaf of papers Hermione had spent hours dealing with earlier which were merely awaiting his signature.

"Of course. Wouldn't want you falling behind this afternoon due to lack of adequate nutrition. Back in a jiffy." *Wouldn't want you falling asleep during your chess game with Douglas from Filing.* Rolling her eyes as she left the office, Hermione took her time strolling to the staff dining room and placing the order with the house-elves in attendance. It wasn't as if Reggie would miss her unless one of the dozen or so witches or wizards he usually tried to avoid called by.

Turning off the heat under the potatoes and checking the sausages, Hermione took a moment to flick her wand at her clothes to remove any food splatters. The dining table was set with a tablecloth for once, and even the cutlery matched. She wasn't trying to impress Harry. Really. But after much introspection, between imaginary philosophical discussions with Snape, she had decided to give Harry a little encouragement.

Five minutes later, the wizard himself rushed in from upstairs, hair still damp and fully dressed.

"That's a pity," Hermione declared as Harry poured the wine.

"What?"

"You're dressed." The twinkle in her eyes could have outshone Albus Dumbledore.

"I'm trying to be respectful, Miss Pervert."

"Spoilsport. How do you expect me to imagine you as a sex god if you cover up all your finer attributes?" She moved behind his chair and ran her hands over his well-formed biceps.

"Here I was thinking you were a sweet innocent, and all along you've been ogling my wares." Harry leaned back into her touch and sighed.

"Well, a girl's got to have some thrills. It's not like I've had many offers lately."

"I suppose I should be grateful for that. Mind you, you're still obsessing over Snape. I'd hate to think I had competition," Harry growled as her cheeks flushed. "I do, don't I? You fancy him!"

"Do not. I think he's fascinating, is all," she explained.

"Ask him to join you for coffee."

"I thought you didn't want competition." Hermione was confused at her friend's sudden change of tactic.

"I don't. What better way to eliminate him than have you spend a few minutes talking to him. It's not like he has suddenly developed social skills or anything." Harry smirked.

"I might just do it, then. And you might be surprised, Harry James Potter."

Harry laughed and filled his plate. "Herm, so might you."

When Snape appeared the next morning, Hermione decided to call Harry's bluff. "Good morning, sir." His slight nod as he approached gave her the confidence to continue. "Would you like to join me for a coffee?" Despite his brusque, "No, thank you, Miss Granger. I have work to do," she did not miss the slight faltering of his stride and his quickly suppressed expression of astonishment.

Three mornings, three invitations, and two curt excuses later, Snape finally agreed.

"Oh, very well. If you insist. Although, I have no idea why it is you appear so interested in my company." His protests were belied by the trickle of warmth in his dark eyes as he sat, disgruntled, at the small café table and ordered a coffee, black, no sugar."

"That would be an espresso, sir," the waitress explained patiently.

"Fine. Bring me one, then." Snape's snarl had the girl scurrying off back to the kitchen.

"Are you sure you don't need any sugar?" Hermione dared.

"Quite, Miss Granger. My disposition does not improve with sweeteners, I assure you."

"No, I suppose not. Perhaps a muffin?" she countered.

"I'm sure you didn't invite me to sit here just to ply me with food. Now, what do you want, girl?"

"Civility would be a good start, *sir*."

"Don't push your luck, Granger." Snape's coffee arrived, and he took a sip. "Merlin, how do they make this stuff? It tastes nothing like the coffee at Hogwarts."

"That's because the coffee at Hogwarts is weak and poorly brewed. That's real coffee. Personally, I prefer the milder flavour of this latte, with a spoonful of sugar to counteract the bitterness, but you appeared to know better." She glanced at his face from under her lids and caught a slight upturn of his lips before he schooled his expression into its usual dour lines.

"Obviously not." He summoned the waitress and requested the same drink Hermione was enjoying. Upon tasting the new beverage, complete with sugar, he nodded, then finished it without another word.

"Better?" she asked.

"Indeed. Good day, Miss Granger." He stood and left without awaiting her reply.

"Good day to you too, Snape," she spoke into the empty space beside her.

A/N: This was written for southern_witch_69 in the 2010 SSHG Exchange on LiveJournal. Many thanks to karelia for her amazing beta skills.

Chapter Three: Explorations and Explanations

Chapter 3 of 6

Harry and Hermione exchange confidences, and Snape has a revelation.

Disclaimer: The characters and settings belong to JKR. I'm just taking them out for a wee picnic.

Chapter Three: Explorations and Explanations

"So, how's my competition behaving?" Harry asked as he wiped the last dinner dish.

"Snape? He actually sat down and had a coffee today. Didn't say much except to complain about the espresso *he* ordered." Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Sounds about right. Do you think he'll join you tomorrow?"

"No idea. But I'll ask him again. You never know, Harry, he might sweep me off my feet and take me back to his place to seduce me." She grinned as her would-be suitor snorted. "Okay, okay, chance would be a fine thing. Can you imagine Snape trying to seduce anyone?"

"Hermione, that's *not* something I want to imagine! Stop it!"

"You're just afraid I'll find he has something you haven't. You know I've always admired his mind... and his courage... and his loyalty... and that *voice*..."

"Keep that up and I might start fancying him myself," Harry warned with a waggle of his eyebrows. "Oi. Don't laugh. Wizarding society doesn't see anything wrong with that, you know."

"No, Harry. It's the thought of you and Snape." Hermione collapsed onto the couch, laughing, then suddenly stopped and stared at Harry with a speculative gleam in her eye.

"What? You don't really think I would..."

"No. But," she purred, "I bet it would be hot to watch!"

"Hermione Jane Granger! If your mother could hear you now, she'd be mortified! Wash your mouth out, woman!"

Hermione bent over double again in mirth. "You're so easy to wind up, Potter. You should have seen your face!" She just managed to catch the cushion he tried to whack her with before it connected.

"Bloody hell. I have no idea why I even want to be your boyfriend." Harry twisted his grip and pushed the cushion behind the still-giggling witch's head as he straddled her on the couch, hands on either side of her head. Faces mere inches apart, he swallowed hard as their eyes met in the sudden, charged silence.

"I don't know either," she whispered, warm breath caressing his face.

"Because you're brilliant, caring, honest, brave..." His lips barely touched hers, a promise, nothing more. "And so beautiful." Harry stood, his arousal clearly evident to them both, looked down, and quirked his lips in a rueful smile. "I think I'd better go upstairs, now. Good night, love."

Hermione slumped back and sighed as the door closed behind him. Matching his passion would be surprisingly easy, but she knew if she did, there would be too many questions left unanswered, possibilities unexplored. For despite her flippant words, she could not remove the idea of Severus Snape as something more than just a sour ex-teacher from her imagination. The almost-smile she had caught on his face as she had teased him that morning had left her wanting more.

Frowning, the young woman shook her head. Fancying two men at the same time was something *other* girls had problems with, not Hermione Granger. Especially when one of them was supremely unaware of her interest. *Damn you, Potter. If you hadn't teased me about Snape being your rival, I would never have begun thinking about him in that way. It'll be all your own fault if I decide I prefer him.* That settled, she headed upstairs to bed.

Harry did not make an appearance at breakfast, having left the house early. Hermione suspected it was not extra diligence on his part that took him to work so early, but appreciated the time to think anyway. Such was the state of Hermione's mind as she sat at her customary table at the cafe, she didn't notice Snape approaching until he had seated himself and beckoned to the waitress. His scowl forbade her from commenting while she watched him take the first sip of his latte. Smiling at the faint relaxation in the lines of his forehead as the exquisite brew worked its magic, she broke her muffin into two pieces and, taking half herself, pushed the plate with the other half over to Snape's side of the table. His raised brow was met with a smile and a shrug as she took a bite of her portion.

"That was not necessary," he told her after he had finished every last crumb on the plate. "But thank you."

"You're welcome, sir," she replied.

A pained look crossed his face at her words. "Snape will do. The honorific is unnecessary, Miss Granger."

Hermione decided to risk chasing the touchy wizard away. "Hermione will be fine, *Severus*. I'm not really all that fond of formalities, anyway."

"So I've noticed." His lips quirked into that almost-smile again as he indicated her plate and stood to leave. He paused as if to say something but merely tipped his head slightly. "Good day, Hermione."

"Good day, Severus," she replied.

A visit to the Indian takeaway around the corner from Grimmauld Place served to provide dinner that evening. Hermione had far too much to think about to bother with cooking. She had quickly showered and dressed in jeans and a brief top with her hair pulled loosely into a ponytail. Expecting Harry home any moment, she refreshed the Warming Charm on the food and set out the plates and cutlery. Unaccustomed as she was to the sensation of butterflies in her stomach, she had opened the wine already and was pouring her second glass of fortification when the object of her anxiety walked through the door.

"Hi." His nervous smile met hers.

"Hi. Curry for dinner," she said brightly. "Go and make yourself presentable, and I'll pour you a drink."

"Okay. Be right back." The rapid thump of footsteps on the stairs reminded Hermione of how much had changed in the previous week. When before she would have been rolling her eyes at her housemate's rowdiness, now she struggled not to think of how he would be stripping off his clothes and standing naked under the shower. Such imaginings would have previously had her snorting at her own boldness. Now, her body heated as she wondered what would happen if she went upstairs and knocked on the bathroom door. A muffled whimper escaped her when the door opened and bare feet padded along to his room. He was naked but for a towel. Naked, and only one floor above. Did she dare?

"Here, I brought your wine." His door was partly open.

"Hang on. I'm not decent!" Harry lunged for the towel he had tossed onto the bed.

Hermione grasped her wand and Summoned the towel. Grinning, she teased. "Here, come and get it."

"Hermione!" Harry crossed his hands in front of his groin and groaned as she deliberately allowed her eyes to travel the length of his body, which was responding to her scrutiny with a mind of its own. "You're embarrassing me!"

"You weren't embarrassed a few days ago. What's changed, Harry?" It was amazing how much a little wine helped.

"This." He raised his hands to reveal the hard truth of her effect on him. "I can't help it, Herm. When you look at me like that..."

Hermione dragged her eyes upwards to meet the green of his. Stepping closer, she dropped the towel on the floor and reached for his hand. Placing it flat on her chest between her breasts, she smiled. "Feel what you do to me, Harry."

"It's beating so fast. And your skin is so soft." Slowly and deliberately, he allowed his fingers to drift lower until they caressed the swell of her breast beneath her tank top. Her response was evident through the thin fabric, uninhibited by any undergarment. "Oh, gods, Hermione, I need to see you."

Mind fuzzy with desire, Hermione took the hem of her top and pulled it over her head. Exposing herself for the first time to the young man she had known for ten years, she blushed.

"Beautiful." He traced a path down to one of her rosy nipples and explored the difference in texture, forgetting his own arousal until he felt her hands exploring it in turn. Reality returned with a bracing slap to remind him of his promise. "No, love. I gave you a month. We need to wait. I want us to be sure this is what we want."

Hermione reluctantly withdrew and stepped back. Breathing heavily, she nodded. "You're right. I don't know what came over me. I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to tease."

"S'okay. I wasn't complaining." He looked down at his still rampant erection with a rueful grin. "And neither was he, but do you think you can put your top back on, or I'll never get my jeans zipped up."

Smiling, she covered herself and left him to dress. The tell-tale sound of the bathroom door closing again brought another flush to her cheeks as Hermione realised exactly how Harry was dealing with his problem.

Dinner was surprisingly convivial, despite the hormones simmering in the air. Both managed to reign in their errant libidos long enough to converse about the day's work.

"What did Snape do today?" Harry asked as he settled onto the couch.

"Oh, I nearly forgot to tell you. He actually sat down without being asked and ordered a coffee. I even shared my muffin with him." Hermione grinned as she sat beside Harry. "And you'll never guess what happened next."

"You made a date for dinner? I might have known you were only toying with me upstairs. Your affections lie elsewhere, I can tell."

Hermione whacked him on the arm. "Don't be such a prat! I called him sir, and he told me to just use Snape, so I ended up calling him Severus. And he didn't hex me! He still didn't say much though, simply drank his coffee and left."

"That's a major advance, you know, Hermione. Remember how most of the other teachers at Hogwarts called him Professor Snape and not Severus. Perhaps he *does* fancy you." Harry studied her face. "You definitely fancy him, though. I can see it in the way your eyes shine when you talk about him. I was only joking about him being competition, you know."

"I know, Harry. But it's your fault I can see him in that way. If you hadn't mentioned it..." She sighed and took his hands. "About upstairs. Do you think it means anything, or are we both simply frustrated? I mean... when did you last... you know...?"

"Have sex?" Harry helped her out.

"Yes. And not what you just did upstairs."

His reddened cheeks belied any words of denial. "Oh. You noticed. I sort of hoped you wouldn't."

Hermione giggled. "I left you with an erection that almost looked painful, and you immediately scuttled into the bathroom and spent several minutes in there. What was I supposed to think?"

"You have a good point. Okay, I admit it; Harry Potter is a right tosser. What's new? Any of the Weasleys could have told you that."

Hermione reined in her imagination before continuing. "So, Harry. You didn't answer my question. How long ago was it?"

"You really want to know? Two years."

"I thought you must have... Not that blonde you brought home last year? Or the brunette?"

"No. No-one since Ginny. I think she ruined my confidence for a while. And you?"

"Same. Only Ron, and he wasn't very good."

"Ouch. Poor you. So you're desperate, huh?"

"No more desperate than you, Potter. Maybe I'll have to seduce Severus Snape and have you for afters?"

"Oh, don't make promises you can't keep, Granger."

"I really think you *do* fancy Snape as well, Harry."

"Maybe *you're* the one who has competition, Hermione." Harry's laughter lingered in the room long after he had gone upstairs to bed.

Over the next week, Hermione found concentrating on work was the only solution to the endless dilemma scrambling her brain. The two dark-haired wizards in her life rarely left her thoughts. There had been no further intimate episodes with Harry, as he gallantly tried to give her space to make up her mind. Their friendship remained steadfast however, and plenty of teasing about the other's state of frustration was to be heard over dinner.

Snape had become a regular customer at the café, sharing a muffin and coffee with Hermione during the week. He seldom attempted conversation, seemingly content to spend a few minutes in her company each morning. Occasionally, she would ask about his latest Potions research, to be rewarded with a succinct summary of the inadequacies of St Mungo's, but one Friday Snape changed the rules.

"Tell me, Hermione, now you've succeeded in enticing me here to your table, what do you want to know?" He carefully placed his cup down as he awaited her reply.

"Pardon?"

"While I appreciate your forbearance, I've noticed you have appeared to be about to ask a question on several occasions over the last week. I repeat, what do you want to know?"

"Nothing." Her attempt at denying her curiosity failed dismally in the face of his sceptical eyebrow. "Anything... everything. Dammit, stop smirking at me. Of course I'm curious. You spent years protecting us, even though you didn't like us; you saved our lives on many occasions and even managed to teach us at the same time. You nearly died, but survived, then you disappeared for three years. You, Severus Snape, are..."

"Enough. Don't idealise me, young lady. I simply did what had to be done, and what I had Vowed to do. I'm no hero."

His bitter tone sliced into Hermione's heart. "No. You're just a man. Human, like everyone else." She reached over and placed her hand on his, feeling the faint tremble as he struggled for control.

"Human," he murmured. "I remember hearing that once when I was in St Mungo's. There was someone who used to come..." He shook his head as if to dispel the memories. "I must have been hallucinating while I was unconscious. No-one would have been there." Snape looked up to meet warm, brown eyes and flushed cheeks.

Hermione smiled as his startled expression revealed his sudden understanding.

"It was you. You were there! You stroked my face and talked to me and held my hand." He bowed his head and gazed at his empty cup.

"No. Harry held your hand, Severus. He was there, too."

"And Weasley, I suppose."

"No. Ronald wouldn't come." Her own bitterness pervaded her words.

"Why did you and Potter..."

"Visit you? We hated the thought of you lying there alone after all you had done."

"No. Your Gryffindor sense of honour would have inevitably led you to my bedside; I have no doubt of that. But you touched me. Talked to me. You touched my bloody nose!" He looked up again as he remembered and scowled. "Why the hell were you stroking my nose, woman?"

"I'd read some Muggle books about caring for a patient in a coma. They all stressed how important touching and talking to the patient was. Even though you were unconscious, there was a chance you could still hear and feel what we did. It seemed the right thing to do. I'm sorry if it disturbed you."

His bark of laughter startled her. "Typical know-it-all. Using Muggle techniques in a wizarding hospital. No wonder the Healers never said anything about your visits. Don't apologise. I had not remembered you being there, just a feeling of comfort. I never knew whether it was real or not. But my nose?"

Hermione shrugged. "It was the most obvious part to stroke, and besides, I liked it. When you were lying there so pale and silent it was the one thing that was still *you*. I think stroking it comforted me as much as it did you." She smiled at his incredulous expression.

"Just my luck. The only visitors I get while I'm unconscious, and one has a nose obsession. And Potter held my hand. I'm not sure whether I really want to know why."

"Simple. I told him to. It was hold your hand or stroke your face. Between you and me, I think once he realised no-one else would know, he quite enjoyed it. But he'd never admit it." She grinned at Severus's grimace of distaste and glanced down at their still-joined hands. "I suppose I'll have to make do with your hand now instead of your nose."

"Indeed." Severus's long-suffering sigh was belied by the lack of any attempt to remove his hand from hers. "I have one further question, however, if I may?"

"Of course. But remember, I haven't had my turn at asking you questions yet."

"I'm sure you won't allow me to escape that fate. I was curious as to why you stopped visiting once I had woken. Surely Potter is not more of the Gryffindor than you, Hermione?"

Hermione blushed. "Unfortunately, I have to admit he was. When we arrived that day and I heard you berating the Healer, I couldn't face you and left Harry to go in alone. I'm so sorry." It was her turn to stare at her cup.

Severus turned his hand under hers and squeezed. "Do you know why I was so angry when I woke, Hermione? No-one would tell me who the angel was who had cared for me while I was unconscious. They implied I had been imagining your touch and your voice. By the time Potter walked through the door, I had begun believing it myself. He never mentioned your visits, just sat and mumbled a few words, then left."

The young witch felt moisture gather in her eyes as she admitted, "That was my fault. I asked them not to mention our visits. I was afraid you'd be embarrassed to know we'd seen you like that, and I wanted to spare you that at least. It was enough to know you were awake and recovering. Then soon after that you disappeared."

"It appears I owe you both a debt of gratitude. If there is anything..."

Hermione lifted her finger to his lips. "Hush. You owe us nothing. But we'd be honoured if you would join us for dinner one evening. I'm sure Harry would like to meet you again and have a chance to speak coherently. He does do that from time to time, you know."

"I'll consider your invitation, Hermione. For now, I must be on my way." He stood, and for the first time a genuine smile lit his face. Taking her hand and brushing surprisingly warm lips across it, he nodded and walked away, leaving the young woman staring at her own hand in wonder.

"He's a right gentleman, that one, luv. I'd 'ang onto him if I were you," advised the plump waitress who was clearing the next table.

"Oh, I shall," Hermione murmured, half to herself.

A/N: Written as a gift for southern_witch_69 in the 2010 SSHG Exchange on LiveJournal.

Many thanks to my beta, karelia.

Chapter Four: The Possibilities are Endless

Chapter 4 of 6

Severus agrees to come to dinner.

Disclaimer: The all belong to JKR. Lucky wench.

Chapter Four: The Possibilities are Endless

"Honey, I'm home!" Harry called as he threw his robes over the hook in the hallway.

"How many times have I told you not to watch so many old American sitcoms, Harry?" Hermione chided. "Really, since we fixed the television to work here, you've done nothing but watch rubbish! There are plenty of decent programs on BBC2, you know."

Harry grinned. "Now, that's unfair. I get all the nagging of a relationship and none of the benefits. I *could* think of better things to do than watch television..."

Rolling her eyes, Hermione kissed his cheek and took him by the hand through to the kitchen. "Actually, I had a better idea. I was talking to Severus this morning, finally talking to him properly. Apparently, he was aware someone was holding his hand and stroking his face," at that she blushed, "while he was unconscious, but never knew it was us."

"Oh, Merlin. What did he say? I hope he wasn't too awful."

"No. That's the weird thing. He was grateful. He said he'd found it comforting, but when the Healers wouldn't tell him who had been visiting him, he believed he'd imagined us. *That* was why he was so angry that day. Harry, he was so stunned by the fact that anyone had cared enough to go and see him, it was as if he didn't believe he was worth anyone's time and attention." She felt tears gather again as she remembered Snape's reaction. "He was a little perturbed about my nose obsession, though."

"*He* was perturbed. Hell, Herm, *I* was perturbed enough for both of us! You really did have a thing about his bloody nose, love."

"Maybe. Anyway, I asked him if he would like to come to dinner with us. Do you mind?" Her watery smile pleaded for understanding.

"You've invited the competition around for dinner? That was brave of you, Herm." Harry chuckled at her bemused frown.

"Why was it brave?"

Harry's lifted eyebrow bore an uncanny resemblance to that of the wizard under discussion.

"Oh... So, you don't mind?"

"No, of course not. It will be good to see him again under more pleasant circumstances. When is he coming?" Harry asked.

"I'm not sure yet. He only agreed to think about it." She looked up into her friend's clear green eyes. "Why am I so nervous?"

"You really do like him, don't you? It's not just a joke any more." Harry's tone was gentle despite the weight of disappointment crushing his chest.

"I do, Harry." She reached up to cup his cheek. "But I love you. And I want you; I know that now. I think there's something wrong with me. I want you both. Does that make any sense? I mean, I barely know him, really, but..."

"You started falling for him when he was unconscious, or maybe it was the idea of him. The noble, self-sacrificing hero who gave up all hope of happiness and nearly life itself for us. Merlin, Hermione, I felt drawn to him too over those weeks. I thought I was going crazy."

"You did?"

"It was almost a relief when he woke up and pushed everyone away." Harry smiled as he remembered. "And now he's back, and we both have the opportunity to get to know him better. It's a bit scary, really."

Hermione laughed. "What, the great Auror Harry Potter is afraid he might like men?"

She squealed as he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. The hardness she felt against her lower body left her in no doubt as to his preference.

"Perhaps the great Auror can be flexible. At the moment he's rather more interested in a certain witch of his acquaintance."

"Well, it seems we have ourselves a little problem. I fancy both you and Severus. You fancy me and maybe Severus. Severus was in love with your *mother*, and for all we know has a thing for house-elves now. We know now he *appreciated* our visits, but whether he's interested in either of us in any other way is a mystery." She frowned as the tangled web of possible relationships left even her prodigious brain baffled.

"Breathe, love. Let's wait and see if he accepts your invitation first. *Then* we can work out what he wants. If nothing else, we'll still have each other." He slid his hands lower, kneading her soft bottom and thrusting gently in counterpoint. "Of course, we could always practise a little in the meantime."

Hermione pulled away before her body betrayed her resolve to wait until Snape's inclinations were revealed. Harry's pout of frustration left her chuckling as she deliberately

brushed her hand down the front of his trousers and squeezed him gently. "Soon, Harry. Soon. One way or another, you are definitely going to get to use that fabulous piece of equipment."

"Now, that really *is* a scary thought. I've never..." Harry blushed.

"You have so. Unless all your complaints about Ginny's expectations were fantasies."

"No, not that. I mean... with another bloke. I've never even thought about it."

It was Hermione's turn to redden as images of Snape and Harry together invaded her imagination. "Oh, gods, Harry. Stop it! I don't think I can take it!"

Harry's face fell. "Does it disgust you *that* much?"

"No, you idiot! The two men I want... together... naked... It turns me on *that* much!"

"Oh."

"Exactly. Now, can we *please* talk about something else for a while?"

The hours of weekend passed like treacle as Hermione wondered and waited for Monday morning. Finally, the day dawned, a few clouds hanging in the sky as if to watch the unfolding of the day.

Hermione looked up as Snape joined her.

"I hate weekends," he muttered without preamble.

"Why?" She caught the attention of the waitress with a raised hand. It appeared coffee was needed sooner rather than later. Snape's scowl and subsequent silence intrigued her. Reaching for his hand, she continued. "Come on, Severus. You can't make such a statement and then refuse to explain."

He sighed and lifted his head. For once, his expression was unguarded, unsure. "Hermione, since the war my life has been a matter of existing one day after the other. I didn't know how to live. All those years of playing a role, hiding my feelings, my fears, my very thoughts, left me socially inept, a misfit. My history as a Death Eater and Dumbledore's murderer has not endeared me to people, not that I blame them. I've tried to avoid inflicting myself on others as much as possible, and those I'm working with at St Mungo's appear to appreciate my efforts."

She squeezed his hand as his voice faltered, urging him to continue.

"These last few weeks... finding someone who *wanted* my company, even after I had scorned her advances..."

Tears threatened Hermione's composure once again as the depth of his loneliness sank home.

"I finally found a reason to wake up in the morning. A point to my existence. The few minutes we spend, just sharing coffee... Like I said, I hate weekends." His mouth lifted at the corner in a rueful acknowledgement of his own weakness.

"Well, I look forward to seeing you, too, Severus. More than I ever thought I would. I know I'm lucky; I live with Harry, so I'm not alone, but..."

"You live with *Potter*?" A mask slid over his expression as he withdrew his hand.

"Not like that, well, not yet."

"What do you mean?" The words were forced out through tight lips.

Honesty compelled her to explain. "We're thinking about reviewing our relationship."

"Oh."

The trace of disappointment in that single syllable spurred her on. "But, you see, there's someone else I'm interested in, only I don't know if he feels the same." She watched his face, willing him to understand without the need to spell it out.

His expression flickered from disappointment, to contemplation, to startled comprehension.

"Yes." Her almost whispered confirmation floated in the air between them.

"Yes." His answer was barely audible.

She looked into his eyes to find a hitherto unimagined vulnerability seeded with a glimmer of hope. Allowing her own insecurity to surface, she reached up to caress his cheek.

"Please come to dinner with us, Severus."

"Do you really believe Potter would desire my presence in his home?"

Hermione held back a smirk. "I think you'd be surprised at how welcome your presence would be. Don't forget, Harry spent weeks holding your hand and talking to you as well. He's looking forward to seeing you again."

Shaking his head in disbelief, Severus scowled. "A friendly Potter. I'm not sure whether I should be pleased or terrified."

"Well, as you were never one to show any fear, I suggest you go for pleased. And call him Harry."

"Harry." Severus tried out the sound of the young wizard's name. "I suppose I can manage that."

"Don't strain yourself, Severus. I think I prefer you whole and unharmed."

"That's more than I can say for most of the wizarding community," he muttered.

"I'm not most of the wizarding community. And neither is Harry. So, you will come?" She glanced up at his face, anxiety clouding her features.

"Very well. Tell me when, and I'll be there." He sighed. "Are you sure you wouldn't rather meet somewhere else, just you and I?"

"Certain. Although the idea does have a certain amount of charm. Perhaps another time?"

Snape's lips quirked in the closest Hermione had ever seen to a smile as he stood and took her hand.

"Until tomorrow." His eyes never left hers as he kissed her hand and strode off.

Much later, Severus Snape sat in contemplation of the morning's events. An unfamiliar, yet not unwelcome, feeling had stilled his hand as he reached for his customary glass of Firewhisky. She wanted him. The warmth of her regard had left him floundering for the rest of the day. Unaccustomed as he was to anyone seeking out his company, the knowledge that she liked him, and perhaps... perhaps more... His eyes closed as his imagination took him on a journey of love, fulfilment, and redemption. Maybe, just maybe, he was ready for it.

"Guess what, Harry?" Hermione had followed Harry up to his bedroom, eager to share her news.

"What, Herm?" Automatically shedding his clothes, Harry stood nude before her.

"Er, what?"

"Hermione, stop looking at my bits and tell me what you came up here for." Grabbing yesterday's towel from the back of a chair, Harry removed the distraction.

"Oh, sorry. Couldn't help myself. Anyway, Severus said he'd come. We only have to set a date."

"Great. She comes up here to tell me the competition is coming to dinner, and then she spends five minutes ogling *my* wares. You really are a pervert, Granger!" Harry rolled his eyes at his friend.

"And that bulge in the towel is your way of showing disapproval, Potter. Nice one." She grinned as she leered at the evidence of his disapprobation. "You know you're looking forward to it as much as I am. Now, off you go and make yourself presentable, and I'll go and finish dinner."

"Yes, miss. What's for dinner, anyway?"

He almost choked as she replied, "Oysters, asparagus, and truffles."

"That's a bit exotic, isn't it?"

"I'm just experimenting. They're all supposed to be aphrodisiacs, according to Muggles. I'm practising cooking them so we can feed them to Severus."

"How do you know they'll work?" Harry's doubt surfaced.

"They don't need to. He's a half-blood. He'll know what they're intended to do, and that will be enough."

Her self-satisfied smile brought a quirk to his lips. "Ron had one thing right. You truly are scary, Granger."

"Don't forget brilliant, Harry."

"Mmm. I don't know about the aphrodisiac qualities, but this is bloody delicious." Harry scraped the pot to salvage the last few mouthfuls of the risotto Hermione had concocted with the asparagus and truffles. "Although, I'm not sure about the raw oysters. Tasted a bit like seawater to me."

"Raw is best to stimulate the senses," Hermione explained, clearing the dishes.

"Just a suggestion, love, but I think that sort of meal might be a bit much for our guest on his first visit. You don't want to scare him away."

"But I thought it would send him the right message..."

"What, that you're after him for sex? Surely you want more than that? I know you, Herm. You need more than a quick shag. Hell, if that's all you wanted, you could have had me any time in the last few weeks." Harry's cheeky grin softened his words.

"Oh, give over, you idiot. I wouldn't use you for a quick shag either, you know that. I see what you mean though. As much as I'm starting to wonder what's under all those layers of his, I do care more for him than that. And, if I'm not mistaken, so do you." She smiled as his grin morphed into a more serious expression. "I don't even know why, Harry. You barely know him, really."

Hermione could have written a three-foot essay about the expressions dancing across Harry's face as he considered his reply.

"I think it was all those weeks sitting by his side. I know we didn't actually talk with Snape, but I spent a lot of time thinking about all those memories: his awful childhood, his friendship with my mother, the way my father and the others treated him. And then I thought of how many times he had stood there and protected me, even though my face and actions must have reminded him so much of my father. I realised the man lying there unconscious was a good man, an incredibly brave and powerful wizard, and someone I could trust.

"I don't know, Herm. All this talk of competition, and who wants to shag whom is really beside the point. I just want to get to know the man I discovered in St Mungo's. I think even if you chose him over me, I'd be happy if we could all be friends." Harry's conclusion, a surprise even to himself, was simple in its sincerity.

"Oh, Harry. I don't want to have to choose between you both. Let's find out if we can all be friends first before we explore any other possibilities." She stepped closer and wrapped her arms around his waist. Resting her head on his shoulder, she sighed. "I really think you should start thinking of him as Severus though, love. I'm sure that will help."

Harry hugged her back then kissed the top of her head. "I'll do that. Now, I suppose as you cooked, I have to wash up. Do you think there are *any* dishes in the kitchen you didn't use, Granger?"

She accepted his light-hearted change of subject gratefully. "No. I'm pretty sure I didn't miss any. Fine cuisine takes a lot of preparation, you know, Potter."

"Please, promise me you won't ever ask Fleur for any French recipes!" Harry ducked the well-aimed dishcloth and started scrubbing pots, wishing heartily they had bothered to learn a few common household charms from Molly Weasley while she was still talking to them.

"Any more cheek from you, laddie, and it'll be toast and marmalade."

A/N: This was written as a gift for southern_witch_69 in the 2010 SSHG Exchange on LiveJournal.

Thanks and smooches go to karelia for her superb beta skills.

Chapter Five: Fine Food and Too Much Wine

Chapter 5 of 6

Severus and Harry find they have something in common.

Disclaimer: They all belong to JKR, although she might not want them back once she finds out what they've been up to.

Chapter Five: Fine Food and Too Much Wine

The sharp knock startled Hermione, despite her incessant clockwatching over the past half an hour and perfect punctuality of their guest.

"I'll get it!" called Harry as he crossed the hall to open the front door.

Casting a quick glance over the table set with a snowy white cloth and the best dishes, Hermione quickly checked the risotto for the fifth time in as many minutes and set a Warming Charm. Removing her apron, she turned in time to find Harry ushering Severus in through the kitchen door.

"Come in, sir. Hermione is just finishing up, aren't you, Herm?"

"Yes. Everything's ready." She reached up to kiss Severus's cheek as her own flamed with the knowledge that Harry was watching, a knowing smirk on his face. "Hi. Good to see you here, Severus."

Harry, having noted the older wizard's stiff nod and forced smile, excused himself to fetch some wine.

"Let's go through into the sitting room. The food will keep until we've made ourselves more comfortable." Taking Severus's hand in hers, Hermione led him to the couch where she sat and patted the seat beside her. "Sit down. You're making the place look untidy."

He sat, back straight and uncompromising, feet neatly together, and eyes watchful. Hermione smiled her reassurance and ran a hand lightly down his tense arm.

"We're not going to bite, you know, Severus. You can relax. You're among friends here."

His tension visibly diminished under the soothing influence of her touch. "I'm sorry, Hermione. Bad habits. This place... I always had to be aware. I was never particularly welcome here."

"Well, you are now," declared Harry as he entered the room, bearing a good bottle of red wine from the Grimmauld Place cellar. "I suggest we all have a glass of this and then some of whatever smells so delicious in the kitchen. I hope you realise, sir, Hermione has really outdone herself tonight. She must have really wanted to impress you."

"Harry!" Hermione slapped her friend's arm. "Don't listen to him, Severus; he's being a prat!"

Severus finally allowed a genuine smile to surface. "You mean you didn't want to impress me?"

"No. Don't be so daft. Of course I... You know what I mean." She glared at both the smirking males. "Ooooh! You two!"

The ice having been broken, Harry poured the wine and passed a glass to Snape. "Here, sir."

"Severus will do, Harry. You're no longer a student, and I am no-one's superior in this room."

"Thank you, Severus. Perhaps we should have a toast?" Harry suggested.

"What, to the future, friends, and so on?" Hermione asked, snorting at Severus' scowl.

"I was thinking more to no more school, for any of us!"

"For once, I find myself agreeing with Harry Potter." Severus quirked his lip as he raised his glass and added, "Of course, if you repeat that, remember I do have access to untraceable poisons."

"I could use some of those at work," muttered Hermione, emptying her glass in one large swallow.

"Please don't kill off your boss on my day on duty, Herm. It just creates a huge pile of paperwork," Harry whined. "You know how much I hate paperwork."

"I see the eloquence of the written word as yet escapes him," Severus drawled to Hermione, images of essays full of cross-outs and grammatical errors returning to torment him.

"Trust me; I tried for years to educate him, but the quill was never his friend." Hermione giggled at Harry's mock scowl.

"Does the Aurory not issue detentions for inadequate form-filling?" inquired Severus with a smirk.

"Now, that's an idea. I should send Head Auror Dawlish an owl. They could make Harry..."

"Oi! I'm still in the room, and I'll thank you to keep out of our department, Granger. If you want to sort anyone out, start with Reggie!" Harry suggested.

"And we're back to those untraceable poisons again," sighed Hermione.

Severus patted her hand, which had remained on his arm. "That bad?"

"Worse," she growled, then proceeded to explain exactly why.

After twenty minutes of mutual commiserations about lazy superiors, the trials of paperwork, and mediocre assistants, the three had cast aside any residual awkwardness and moved through into the kitchen to eat.

"Mmm. This is delicious, Hermione. Bacon, mushroom, and if I'm not wrong, a touch of avocado oil." Severus smiled contentedly as he pushed his empty plate away.

"Thank you. Of course, it would have been better if Harry had let me use the truffles and asparagus after an oyster starter." She almost kept a straight face as Harry glared

in her direction.

"Oysters, hmm. A man could get the wrong message from that," Severus murmured.

"Oh, I don't think there would be any misunderstanding," she replied, meeting his eyes in a direct challenge.

Harry shifted uncomfortably in his seat as the charged silence lengthened and the unimagined became simply the unspoken. "Er... pass the salt please, Herm," he asked, smiling feebly as two heads turned at the interruption.

She shook her head and picked up the saltshaker, staring at it as if it was a two-headed flobberworm. "Oh... here. So, does anyone want any more wine?"

"I'll get it. We left it in the other room." Harry stood and immediately sat down again, his cheeks scarlet. "Perhaps I'll finish this first," he offered by way of explanation.

"I'm finished. I can retrieve it from the sitting room." Severus placed his knife and fork neatly on his plate and left in search of the wine.

Hermione shot Harry a curious look and hissed, "What's *wrong* with you?"

He lifted the tablecloth to reveal a distinct bulge in his trousers. "It's all your fault. All that innuendo and heated looks. I can't help it if it turned me on."

Hermione giggled. "Well, perhaps it's better you didn't let Severus see that; it could scare him off completely."

"What would scare me off? Harry Potter with an erection?" Severus had returned just in time to overhear Hermione's last words, much to Harry's dismay. "Good grief, woman, I spent seventeen years prowling the corridors of Hogwarts, finding students in all states of undress and arousal. You don't think a little bulge like that would scare me?"

"Oh, thanks. So much for supporting your fellow male," Harry grumbled.

"You're the one with the dirty mind, Potter. Although, I must say, I cannot fault the path it travelled."

Hermione sighed. "Men. One track minds, the lot of you! And here I was worried you wouldn't get on. Are you sure I shouldn't just leave you two here to chat? Maybe Harry could show you the collection of "art magazines" hidden under his bed, Severus?"

"Hey! You're not supposed to know they are there."

"Well, perhaps if you made your bed occasionally, I wouldn't see them sticking out from under the bedspread when I put your clothes in your room."

"I think she has you there, Harry. Here, have another wine." Severus poured two generous glasses and handed them to his hosts. Filling a third, he sipped slowly as he watched his companions.

Three hours later, the dishes were done, several empty wine bottles had found their way onto the coffee table, and Hermione was comfortably ensconced on the couch between the two dark-haired men, nearly asleep. Severus appeared unable to stop his hand from playing with her springy curls, and Harry was slumped with his head on her shoulder and his nose perilously close to her left breast.

"Sh'beautiful. Hermy has such nice titsh. Feel them, Sev, they're sho shoft." Harry ran his hand along Hermione's shoulder, down her arm, and across to caress the object of his attention.

"I don't think you should do that, Potter. She'll hex you." Severus was more articulate, but no less intoxicated.

"She didn't before when she showed 'em to me," Harry protested.

"Unfair. You've seen them, and I haven't."

"Here, let me show you," Harry offered, lifting the hem of her jumper.

The cool air drifting over her chest alerted the witch between them to the hungry gaze of two inebriated wizards on her skimpily covered breasts. Arousing as it was, she retained enough mental function to know encouraging them in their current state would only lead to embarrassment and recrimination in the morning.

Pushing down her jumper, she stood suddenly, staggering only a little, and managed not to laugh as the men slid towards each other without her support.

"Oh, Hermy, why'd you do that. Sev and I were jusht looking," Harry whined.

"I think it's bed time," she answered, hands on hips. Before Harry's mind wandered down the wrong track again, she added, "In our *own* beds. Severus, you're in no fit state to Apparate or Floo; you can stay here in your old room. Harry, go and check the bed is made while I find him some pyjamas."

"Pyjamas? Who said I wear pyjamas?" Severus asked. "Maybe I don't wear anything to bed."

"As interesting as that idea is, Severus, I will find you some pyjamas. Whether you wear them or not is your prerog... pregor... choice."

Within fifteen minutes, Hermione had tucked Harry into bed and was knocking on Severus's door.

"Come in," he called.

"Just checking to see you were okay," she replied as she entered to find he was already under the covers, pyjamas and clothes piled on the chair beside the bed.

"Don't I get a good night kiss?" came the soft query.

Smiling, Hermione moved closer, then shrieked as two long arms reached out and pulled her onto the bed to lie beside him.

"Ah, that's better. Now, about that kiss." His face was two inches from hers, warm breath ghosting across her cheeks. Closer and closer he came until his lips met hers in a gentle, exploratory kiss, tasting of wine and something altogether unique. Hermione's mouth opened a little as his tongue demanded access to sample her sweetness. Long moments later, she surfaced from a fog of desire and heat to find the thin blanket between them was doing little to conceal his lack of clothing, especially the hard evidence of his reaction jutting into her thigh.

Dragging her head away from his, she sat up on the edge of the bed, all previous expectations shattered by the intensity of one kiss.

"Tomorrow's another day, Severus, and I think we need to be sober before we take this any further," she whispered, reluctant to break the spell he had woven.

With a rueful smile, Severus nodded. "As usual, I can't fault your reasoning. Good night, my angel."

"Good night, Severus." Tiptoeing out of the bedroom, Hermione closed the door and leaned against its cool support for a moment. Leaving had been the most sensible thing to do, despite the clamour of her body to stay in his arms.

Hopefully, there was enough Hangover Potion in the bathroom cabinet for the morning. She suspected they were all going to need it.

A/N: This was written as a gift for southern_witch_69 in the 2010 SSHG Exchange on LiveJournal.

Many thanks to my beta extraordinaire, Karelia.

Chapter Six: Making a Choice

Chapter 6 of 6

Hermione decides...

Disclaimer: I don't own them. I'm just taking them for a wee walk on the naughty side.

Chapter Six: Making a Choice

Hermione turned the heat down under the bacon and checked the Warming Charm on the scrambled eggs as she heard heavy footsteps on the stairs. Without a word, she passed one of the vials of Hangover Potion to Harry as he staggered through the door, face pale and eyes bloodshot.

"Thanks, you're a lifesaver," he grunted as he downed the potion in one swig. Sitting at the table, Harry rested his head on his hands for a few moments until, with a sigh of relief, he looked up. "That's better. Holy Merlin, did we really drink that much?" He eyed the collection of empty bottles on the bench with disbelief.

"We certainly did. Do you remember *anything* about last night?" Hermione asked with a grin.

"Not a thing. Well, I remember... oh, bloody hell, did I *really* show Severus your...?" Harry groaned and hid his face.

"You did. Although he appeared to be enjoying the view, so I suppose I should thank you." Hermione swallowed a smile as she asked, "So, do you remember when you danced naked on the coffee table and propositioned Severus?"

Harry's face lost any colour it had gained from the Hangover Potion. "I did *what*?" he squeaked.

"Oh, it was a fine show, first the striptease and then the dance. You really had him interested."

"Leave the poor boy alone and hand me some of that potion, Granger." Severus entered the kitchen, swallowed the potion, and patted Harry on the shoulder. "I believe something as memorable as the Boy Wonder here performing a striptease would not have escaped my memory. She's just playing with you, Potter. The only striptease you did was when we put you to bed."

Smirking at the red cheeks of the younger wizard, Severus accepted a plate of food from a giggling Hermione and started to eat.

"Herm, please tell me he didn't put me to bed. I promise I'll cook all next week," Harry pleaded.

"Don't worry, Harry. He didn't see anything. If I remember correctly, he was having enough trouble getting himself into his bedroom to bother with what was in your trousers. And, just between you and me, he couldn't even manage the pyjamas."

Severus's hand stilled as he reached for more bacon. Memories of the night before flooded his mind as his body responded to internal images of Hermione's barely covered breasts and sweet, soft lips. "It appears I owe you an apology, Hermione. My behaviour last night was reprehensible."

The rigidity of his posture and sudden change of demeanour reinforced Hermione's decision not to stay the night before. Tone light and teasing, she soothed, "Don't be sorry, Severus. I'm not. You did nothing wrong. Now, eat your breakfast before it gets cold. You too, Harry."

Subdued, the three finished the meal in silence. As Severus prepared to leave, Hermione nudged Harry.

"Severus?"

"Yes, Harry?" Severus turned to face the younger wizard.

"We had a good time last night. You will come again?"

Severus glanced at Hermione, who nodded reassurance.

"What Harry is trying to say, Severus, is that we enjoyed your company and would love to have you again some time... er... have you back, I mean." She blushed at the slight smirk her words engendered.

"I'll look forward to coming." The smirk grew wider as the blush grew deeper. Stepping forward to place a chaste kiss on her cheek, Severus opened the door and left his hosts to contemplate exactly what he had meant.

One month, five decent meals, twenty-three bottles of fine wine, twelve Hangover Potions, two really bad movies, one hundred and sixty-seven innuendos, and three almost-shagged-but-chickened-out moments later, Severus, Hermione, and Harry were draped in relatively mild degrees of inebriation over the furniture in the sitting room at Grimmauld Place.

"You know, we really ought to stop doing this," mumbled Harry.

"What, slouching?" Severus sat up straighter for a moment, then slumped back into his previous relaxed position.

"No, you pillock. Drinking so much. I'm sure it's not healthy."

"Who cares? Well, they might care about you two, but I'm sure no-one gives two Knuts if the nasty ex-Death Eater drinks himself to oblivion." Snape looked at his almost-

empty wine glass and scowled. "Where'd you put that bottle? I'd better get on with it."

"Oh, stop being such a defeatist, Severus. You have two obnoxious Gryffindors who care about you. What more can a wizard need?" Hermione scolded.

Severus studied his glass once more. "Power, wealth, respect, love... oh, and plenty of sex."

Hermione suddenly jumped up from her armchair and wedged herself beside him on the couch. Wrapping her arms around him, she buried her face in his chest. "Mmmphmmpbbrrrmpph, idiot!"

Harry snorted into his wine. "I don't know about you, Sev, but I've never learned East African Wafflesnuff. What do you think she just said?"

The dark wizard looked down at the mane of hair now resting on his stomach. "I don't know, but if she slips any lower, I'm sure I would find enlightenment."

Harry sighed. "Lucky you. Although, I think you have an unfair advantage."

"How so?"

"Well, she's already seen me naked. Nothing left to discover. You're the mystery man under all those layers." He deliberately raked his gaze over the older man's body.

"You've...?"

"No."

"No?"

"No. Don't you realise she's trying to decide between us? Problem is she can't make up her mind. And she won't do anything until she does."

Hermione smiled to herself as she worked her way down into Severus's lap where a promising bulge nudged her cheek. Turning her head and placing a firm kiss on the area of interest, she sat up, taking care to leave her hand where her face been. A harsh gasp rewarded her efforts as she rejoined the conversation. "I'm still here, you know."

"So I've noticed." Severus groaned as the hand in his lap squeezed and kneaded.

"Me, too." Harry's eyes glazed over as he watched the rhythmic movement of his friend's hand. "Gods, Hermione, I'm not sure whether I want to be in Sev's place... or yours." Closing his eyes and tipping his head back onto the back of the chair, Harry cheeks turned scarlet. "Fuck, did I just say that out loud?"

"Interesting comment, Harry. Would you care to enlighten us further?" Severus's deep voice caressed the air between them as the younger man opened his eyes to find himself face to face with naked desire.

"I... I..." As he struggled to find the right words, Harry found himself drawn to the other couch where Hermione took his hand and laid it in Severus's lap. Green eyes met black once again, and a question was exchanged. A tiny nod gave permission, and Harry's hand explored, for the first time, another man's arousal. It was a heady experience.

"Do you think I really need to choose?" a low voice murmured in his ear as his own erection was stroked through too many layers of fabric. Harry had no idea whose hand was on his groin, but his own moved faster in response.

"Choose? Why choose?" Severus answered the question for both men.

"I was hoping you'd say that," Hermione replied as the two wizards' lips finally met in a heated kiss. Licking her own lips, Hermione felt her own arousal crescendo as tongues explored, mouths suckled, and hands swiftly released buttons to allow direct contact of skin on skin. "Merlin, I knew that would be hot," she whispered.

Dragging his mouth away from Harry's demanding lips, Severus reached for the witch beside him. "Well, woman, are you going to join us some time this evening?"

Hermione smiled, decision finally made, and took each man by the hand. Gently pulling them to their feet, she led them upstairs to her bedroom to continue their activities in a more comfortable environment.

Naked, of course.

It had taken more than a few moments of embarrassment and several handy reference books, complete with diagrams, before the new threesome had figured out exactly what went where in any given configuration. Neither Severus nor Harry had previously had any experience with other men, but having a naked, sexy witch issuing instructions as she watched their explorations definitely added to the experience.

"Boys?"

"Mmm, yes, dear?" Harry lifted his head and tried to concentrate.

Severus cracked open one eye and scowled. "Do you have to do that, Potter?"

"What?"

"Allow her to interrupt a perfectly pleasant post-coital snooze with conversation."

"Oh, that. Yes, I do actually. Trust me, it's the only way."

"Oh, very well. Yes, Hermione beloved, what is it you wish to discuss?" A slap on his exposed arse was her only reply.

"Now look what you've done. I should slap you myself," Harry muttered.

"Promises, promises." Severus smirked.

"You two are hopeless," the witch between them complained. "I only wanted to suggest it was time we went public."

"Hermione! We are *not* having sex in public!" Harry scolded, face pink.

"Perhaps she's offering to hide under the table at the next Ministry Ball and pleasure us during the speeches. That would certainly make that ridiculous affair worth attending."

Harry grinned. "Or we could..."

Hermione rewarded them both with an elbow to the ribs. "Idiots! I meant it was time we announced our relationship. I'm sick of making excuses to avoid Draco's pitiful matchmaking attempts. Why he is so interested in my love life is beyond me. We all know we love each other; it's time everyone else knew."

"What about your job? My reputation will surely cast aspersions on your integrity," Severus cautioned.

"Fuck the job. I'm handing in my resignation, anyway. I've had a brilliant idea."

"Brace yourself, Sev. She's been plotting again. Not on *that!* Mmm, on second thoughts, brace away."

"Pay attention, Harry. This involves you."

"That's what I was afraid of." He consoled himself with reciprocating the pleasure being given by the lean hand on his groin.

"Severus, you hate your job, right?"

"With every fibre of my being. Why?"

"I feel the same way."

"I don't hate mine," Harry interrupted.

"That's okay, Harry. We only need your money."

"Oh. That's all right then, I think."

"Where was I? That's right. Now, Severus and I hate our jobs. He's one of the best Potions masters in Britain. With me so far, boys?"

"Ye-esss." Severus replied.

"I did pretty well in Potions at Hogwarts." Severus received another elbowing before he had a chance to open his mouth. "And, more importantly, people don't have any stupid, blind prejudice against my name."

"True. So, what are you suggesting?" Severus's interest was piqued, despite himself.

"I propose we set up a Potions laboratory here. Severus will brew, I'll do the selling and assist Severus, and Harry, darling, your name will be the draw card to bring the customers in."

"Won't going public with our relationship make it a little obvious that Sev is the expertise behind the business?"

"Exactly, but who's going to dare denigrate the lover of Harry Potter, Slayer of Voldemort, Boy Who Lived, Auror, and..."

"Enough, woman! His head will never fit out the door. I can see your logic, and quite frankly, if using Harry's name enables me to brew something more challenging than Burn Paste and Haemorrhoid Lotion and work in a decently equipped laboratory, I'm your man."

"Oh, you're *definitely* our man, darling," Hermione purred as she reached for the busy hands of her lovers and replaced them with her own.

DAILY PROPHET: May 25th 2003

In an exclusive interview with Ms Hermione Granger, front woman for the Wizarding Business of the Year, Potter's Potente Potions, the secret behind their success was revealed.

Ms Granger's outstanding ability to understand the needs of their market, often creating a demand that did not previously exist, combined with Master Severus Snape's instinct for devising new and improved potions has seen Potter's Potente Potions snowball from a small backdoor operation to a major contributor to our economy. The addition of non-magical potions sold as herbal remedies to the Muggle market has seen the business grow to four full-time brewers and seven assistants, all handpicked by Master Snape himself. According to Ms Granger, "Severus had taught most of our staff during his tenure at Hogwarts. He is in an excellent position to know who would be suitable as employees, and Draco Malfoy, our business advisor, has helped us grow to where we are now."

When asked about the famous wizard behind the name of the business, Ms Granger replied, "Harry is our financial backer and silent partner. His work as an Auror keeps him too busy to be directly involved in the business."

Potter's Potente Potions has also developed a close relationship with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, developing specialised potions for their use. Unfortunately, these potions are all considered classified information, and Ms Granger declined to comment on their nature.

The relationship between Hermione Granger, Severus Snape, and Harry Potter was also one of the topics Ms Granger was unwilling to discuss. After the debacle caused by our previous reporter, Rita Skeeter, upon their triadic relationship coming to public attention two years ago, the three have been very reluctant to discuss any details with the wizarding press. From all accounts, they remain happily together living at the Potter residence.

Severus threw the *Prophet* down onto the table. "I suppose they *had* to mention our private relationship. I thought the novelty of Snape the Death Eater joining forces with two-thirds of the Golden Trio would have worn off by now."

Harry snorted. "Joining forces? I think it was the thought of us all having hot monkey sex together that fascinated the wizarding public."

"I don't know about them, but the thought of us all having hot monkey sex has *me* rather interested." Severus grabbed his green-eyed lover and pulled him close for a heated kiss. After several minutes of lips clashing, tongues tangling, and hips grinding, he pulled away and rested his head on Harry's forehead. Breathing heavily, he gasped out, "Do you think Hermione would mind if we started without her?"

"Started what without me?" the witch in question asked as she brushed Floo powder off her robes.

"Hot monkey sex." Harry reclaimed Severus's lips while his hands began unfastening buttons.

Hermione's lascivious expression had both wizards shifting uncomfortably as their trousers became tight. "You do realise, boys, it has long been a fantasy of mine to come home and find you both hot, naked, and ready for action." Her eyes raked over both men's bodies, returning to the area of most interest, passion flaring as she noted their response.

"Oh, Merlin, I think I'll come in my boxers if she keeps that up," groaned Harry.

"Not before I'm finished with you," growled Severus, dragging Harry's shirt out of his waistband and releasing him from his trousers.

The sight of Severus on his knees before Harry, sucking and licking him to ecstasy had Hermione reaching for her wand. First, she blocked the Floo from any unexpected visitors, and then with a flick, several layers of annoying clothes disappeared as she rendered both wizards and herself naked.

"Ahh. Thanks, love," Harry managed between moans.

"Mmm. Improves the view no end," she replied, running her fingers down Severus's now exposed back and over his firm backside. Reaching lower, she found the object of her desire: hot, naked, and ready for action, as requested. He bucked under her hand, generating an oath from the wizard before him. "I think it's time to take this upstairs, don't you?"

"Yes, dear," the two men replied as one.

The End

A/N: This was written as a gift for southern_witch_69 in the SSHG Exchange 2010 on LiveJournal.

Many thanks to my beta, karelia.