

The Scent of Magic

by JunoMagic

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

Sahasrara

Chapter 1 of 8

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Author's Notes (1): This story was written for a prompt by Florahart for the 2010 SS/HG Exchange on LiveJournal. It is a declaration of love for the olfactory miracle of perfume, and especially for the magical scents from the Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, which inspired this story. I am indebted to the owners of BPAL for graciously granting permission to use the BPAL family, BPAL scents, and the Lab in this story. Of course, all narrative references to BPAL in connection with the imaginary world of HP are purely fictitious. Nevertheless I hope all of you will enjoy this little homage to the magic of scent.

Thank you: I am incredibly grateful to: my beta-readers, Bluestocking79 and Machshefa; my alpha-readers, Mischievous_T and Zauza; many knowledgeable friends who patiently answered some very odd questions, besides my alpha- and beta-readers especially ariadne1, Ferporcel, Juniperus, and Organic Chemist; and last but not least, my amazing and supportive friends on LiveJournal and Buzz, who helped me brainstorm, listened to endless discussions of odd details, my ranting and raving, and still cheered me on and encouraged me every step of the way you know who you are!

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The Scent of Magic

oooOooo

I. Sahasrara

'As perfume doth remain

In the folds where it hath lain,

So the thought of you, remaining

Deeply folded in my brain,

Will not leave me: all things leave me:

You remain.'

Arthur Symons

~~~

### From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

*Fragrances of perfumes and potions consist of infinitesimal organic molecules with high vapour pressures. Those volatilised compounds assault the olfactory epithelium. Once detected by the sensory neurons inside that thin membrane, scents directly impact the central nervous system of Muggles and wizards alike.*

*All other sensory stimuli are filtered by the thalamus.*

*Only perfume acts directly on the brain.*

*There, its fragrance is processed in the limbic system, one of the oldest parts of the human brain, and an area connected with memory, sexual and emotional impulses.*

*In other words: before you even know it, you have received a scent and reacted to it.*

*That is the effect of any ordinary Muggle smell.*

*Now consider magic.*

*A whiff of fragrance ensnares the senses, mesmerizes the mind and beguiles the soul with redolent illusions. A sniff of scent kindles desires, fuels lust and sparks depravities. An inhalation of perfume restores memory or robs all reason.*

*That is why magical perfumes are so dangerous, so coveted, and so bloody expensive.*

~~~

2 September 1996 [1]

'It's Amortentia!'

'It is indeed. It seems almost foolish to ask,' says Slughorn, looking impressed, 'but I assume you know what it does?'

'It's the most powerful love potion in the world!' I exclaim. It is a difficult, dangerous, strictly regulated potion; as such, I've naturally read about it before.

'Quite right! You recognized it, I suppose, by its distinctive mother-of-pearl sheen?'

'And the steam rising in characteristic spirals,' I go on enthusiastically, 'and it's supposed to smell differently to each of us according to what attracts us, and I can smell freshly mown grass and new parchment and'

But then sudden heat rises to my cheeks, and I do not complete the sentence.

~~~

### 2 September 2008

I sit at my desk and stare at a piece of parchment, smoothed soft and limp like a tissue in the course of twelve years.

The faded, innocently rounded handwriting of a schoolgirl stares back at me.

However, it is not as neat as my writing normally was at that time no print perfect calligraphy. The upstrokes are edgy, the downstrokes executed with too much pressure. In fact, it's very nearly sloppy. Had it been a Transfiguration essay, Professor McGonagall would have had something to say about that.

But it's not an essay.

It's just a piece of parchment with some notes.

And some questions.

Questions for which I still have no answers, even after twelve years.

~~~

Amortentia

Also simply called 'love potion'.

Description: *In cauldron or bowl, the potion can be identified by its spiralling steam, a viscous consistency, and a shimmering, silvery appearance that is best described as 'mother-of-pearl'. The potion smells different to everyone. Its unique aroma is based on whatever holds the most intense and intimate attraction for every person.*

Ingredients: *Information not available.*

(Class A non-tradable substance; code E PofEP production only for educational purposes)*

Possibly Ashwinder eggs. Considering the effects, probably Alihotsy leaves. And maybe the sheen of the potion is due to unicorn horn? Concerning the scent, I'd normally assume a bodily substance of the drinker has to be added, possibly tears or sweat; but there's no way Professor Slughorn could have added something like that for all students of his class or could he? If not, a magical technique must emulate the effect. Something like an alchemical transubstantiation. But what base substance can you use for something like that?

Preparation: Information not available.

(see above)

Effects: Contrary to its English name, A. does not cause 'love'. Love cannot be conjured by any magical means. Instead, the potion causes obsession and infatuation. It lowers the inhibitions and affects the mental stability of the drinker. The potion also acts as a powerful aphrodisiac and potency drug, at the same time increasing the fertility of the drinker. Additionally, the potion is used for divinatory purposes supposedly it reveals one's 'true love' with its unique fragrance.

The potency of the potion increases between conclusion of brewing and consumption.

The effects of A. manifest nearly instantaneously. The drinker acquires a pale and unhealthy complexion and exhibits signs of obsession. Hallucinations may occur. The object of his attraction is perceived as the most wonderful thing on earth, and is often identified with light phenomena, e.g. 'a ray of purest sunlight'. At the same time, drinker grows more and more excited and aggressive, until complete loss of control occurs.

Ron:

freshly mown lawn on the Quidditch field: a damp fragrance with a sweet-sour tang that tickles

the clean, slightly starchy scent of Scrivenshaft's student issue parchment from the pack I gave him for his last birthday

his hair, freshly washed with my Muggle shampoo, smelling squeaky and wet, of honey and lemon

Professor Slughorn's Amortentia:

freshly mown grass, but definitely not from a Quidditch lawn; it's a much 'warmer' scent, and somehow spicy

new parchment, yes, but not Scrivenshaft's cheap stuff ... a smooth scent, with a subtle perfume perhaps from a custom-made parchment treatment?

also hair, I think, but not wet or damp; dry hair. Hair and herbs ... somehow soapy ... and it smells a lot 'hairier' than Ron's hair

~~~

I still remember writing that note.

Cowering in the Charmed shelter of drawn curtains on my four poster bed just after lunch the ink I spattered on the coverlet in my hurry to write down what I knew brutal black on soft sage-green its earthy, sharp tang mixed with the cloying undertone of Lavender's vanilla-sweet young-girl's perfume the way my heart raced and my throat constricted the trickle of sweat itching between my breasts ...

Linked to scents that shocked me deeply, this note, and what I did, thought, and smelled that day, is still present for me in a way that even some of the most gruesome memories of the war against Voldemort are not, or at least not anymore. (Thank Merlin for that.)

This phenomenon, at least, is easily explained by how odour information is processed and stored in the brain. The olfactory system is anatomically tied to the limbic system and the hippocampus, to long-term memories and emotional memories. That way, smells can create overwhelming flashbacks, and even just remembering scents can bring back the past more vividly than any photograph.

After Hogwarts I went to Muggle college in America and earned a B.A. in chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, where I participated in a work/study program at the Monell Chemical Sense Center. So I know a *lot* about olfaction now and about chemistry, biology, culture, and the links between them.

Amortentia, however ...

Even after twelve years, I have more questions than answers.

I still don't know either the ingredients or the recipe for Amortentia.

In the States where I also did my apprenticeship working for the Muggle and the magical branch of Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab Amortentia is not just 'strictly regulated', permission for brewing limited to educational purposes. It's simply illegal there. Unless you have good connections to the black market, there's no way to obtain the potion. I haven't smelled it again since that day in Professor Slughorn's classroom. And it's even more difficult to get hold of someone who can brew it ... and with a normal salary, absolutely impossible to get said someone to divulge either components or formula. Not that there's any guarantee that witch knew either to start with.

Yes.

I tried.

I like to think, though, that my guesses concerning the ingredients have improved over time. Definitely no unicorn anything in that potion. But I'm certain I was right about the Alihotsy leaves and the Ashwinder eggs. I'd even bet my sweet round arse that Mooncalf milk and ground Occamy egg shells are in the recipe. Probably some spiralling shells or other. And Devil's Snare in one state or another.

Not sure I'd risk my life for the idea of Lamia's tears as an ingredient; but there's something sinister in it, and it's not something simple like the mucus of a virgin's orgasm.

At least I'm a good deal more certain of what I actually smelled on that balmy September day in 1996.

Yes, I definitely did smell freshly mown grass. Just as I said.

But, just as I wrote on that parchment, it was not the short lawn on the Quidditch field, glistening with dew on a summer morning, as green as the sky was blue, and as sweet and as sour as the first time I fell in love.

The head note of Amortentia that struck my nose first was a meadow at the height of summer, redolent with herbs at noon, with the heat permeating the ground, and golden grasses whispering waves over that sun-dried clearing in the midst of the woods.

And I didn't just smell parchment; what my naïve nose registered was a heart note of fine vellum, probably scented with magical perfume for only magic may capture the fragrance and essence of lilies. (Muggles can only emulate that odour, building compositions that deceive a lazy nose into believing that yes, this is the scent of lilies.) And newly bound books. Only that explains the hint of leather at the back of my tongue; new parchment in the wizarding world is far removed from the stink of liming and fleshing of Muggle history.

The hair still stymies me.

Of course by now I know that the base note was simply oily hair. But a dozen names come to mind that fit this description. First and foremost, Harry; but also Draco, Goyle, Professor Flitwick, McLaggen, Ginny, Padma (though curiously not Parvati), and of course Professor Snape. But he apparently never washed his hair at all; I know what the girls and Harry and Draco used. And if my Amortentia has *anything* to do with Goyle, Professor Flitwick, or McLaggen, I'll sign up for the nearest Catholic convent tomorrow.

The shampoo I smelled was made of basil, mint, cilantro, and lemon. And it was not liquid. It was a soap bar. So either that hair belongs to an old skool pure-blood, or to a half-blood from Poole or thereabouts, shopping at the first Lush store during the hols.

So, while I do know more than I did twelve years ago, it's not enough.

And Severus refuses to brew Amortentia for me, much less teach me how it's done. He says since Professor Slughorn showed the potion to my class in sixth year, I know everything about it that I need to know.

Unfortunately, by now I know Severus well enough to realise when he won't be budged.

If I told Ron about my predicament, he'd snort and say: 'What do you expect? It's *Snape* we're talking about here!'

The thing is, it's not.

*Snape.*

I mean

Of course he's still Snape. His name is still Severus Snape (no frills, no middle name), and he still lives in Spinner's End, and he still dresses in black (mostly; ~~he~~ ~~does~~ have a dark blue dressing gown, and bucket loads of colourful winter socks).

His DNA is ... probably ... the same as it was before.

(Not that I have samples I could have tested; or that he would allow me.)

But he's not the Snape we knew.

That is Harry, Ron, and I when we were children when we when he

... if we knew him at all.

On the window sill behind my desk lies the perfume bottle Severus gave to me when he accepted me as a journeywoman, on my journey towards becoming a Perfume Mistress.

It is an antique double-ended bottle, a dodecahedron carved out of a ruby, with golden ends forming the head of a phoenix and the head of a sphinx.

I shiver.

It is a little too fitting.

He is the phoenix, rising from the ashes of his former lives.

He is no longer a spy, no longer a soldier, no longer headmaster, no longer pawn nor professor though still a teacher (this, I'm aware, the most uncomfortable part of his calling).

He is no longer hated, no longer reviled, though neither revered nor loved.

Still sad, I think, living with him as I do.

At least he smells like that: an almost invisible, flighty head note of ethyl alcohol which is perhaps the most common carrier medium for magical and Muggle perfumes alike; a heart note of sadness, bitter and astringent as Lamia's tears one of the most expensive ingredients of magical perfumes; and a base note of suffering, biting like phoenix ashes one of the darkest components of magical fragrances. A sad smell. And almost an *anti*-scent instead of a unique personal fragrance. Just like when I was a teenager, when he also smelled only of an echo of his work ... mutilated potions ingredients, potions spilled and spoiled. I remember mentioning that to the boys, who immediately brought up their pet theory that he really was a vampire after all. But even in sixth year, I knew exactly *what* Snape was, and where his loyalties lay. And I got very angry at the boys, not speaking to them throughout dinner and for the rest of the evening.

But he is not '*Snape*' anymore.

He is a Perfume Master now. The only one in Britain, and rumoured to be the best of all living Masters of magical perfumery, that most elusive and exclusive art of magical alchemy and potion making.

And I am ... well, I still have more questions than answers. Perhaps I am looking for them in the wrong places.

And the bottle?

Is still empty, although I began this stage of my journey more than a year ago.

... and now my Master calls.

~~~

'You did not join Potter and Weasley yesterday to see Teddy Lupin off.' A statement, not a question. Uttered softly, in a smoky voice. When I was a teenager, he whispered silk across my skin. Shivered syllables down my spine. Just by announcing our homework, or chastising Draco ever so softly. Since Nagini, Severus' voice has changed. Smoke and sand and stone. No longer silk and whisky and agony.

I nod.

I sent Teddy a gift voucher in time for his first Hogwarts shopping at Diagon Alley. He's starting school a year early. After working from home during Teddy's childhood, Remus has accepted the position as DADA teacher once more.

'Why?' Severus asks. His black eyes yes, they are black; I don't know what colour they were before, but ever since Nagini, they've been black, lightless focus on me. His gaze doesn't bore into you anymore. Sometimes I think all his aggressiveness was spent in that war. Just like Ron and George seem to have used up all their laughter and all their joy in its course.

Severus asks mildly. Almost kindly.

Yet there is no option of evading his questions. Those black eyes are like mirrors. All I see in them is myself. And that is not always a pleasant sight.

'Minerva invited me for tea last week,' I reply. 'So I've seen what Hogwarts is like now. I don't think a few hundred excited children and their no less agitated parents can improve the setting.'

The way Severus raises an eyebrow instead of actually resorting to the use of something as prosaic as words has remained the same.

I inhale. Exhale again.

We're in the living room.

Its scent has become one of my favourites. A head note of fire in such a small room, a regularly lit fireplace must be the first thing an educated nose experiences followed by a dusty, almost dirty heart note of books old books, cheap books, used books and a base note of sacrifice.

This conversation reminds me uncomfortably of the questions I pondered just a few minutes ago in my room in the attic.

His question is neither due to idle curiosity nor to cruelty, as Ron would claim.

Magical perfumery is a branch of alchemy vacillating between potions, Dark Arts, and Divination. Although we use the Muggle model of head, heart, and base notes for our daily work, magical perfumes have seven notes the notes of the chakra, or energy points, of the human body. Crown, brow, throat, heart, solar plexus, sacral, and base chakra have to be balanced to create a magical perfume.

And if the perfumer's magic is unbalanced, that will carry over into his or her art ...

'Friendships change,' I admit at last.

Not all friendships survive time, distance, and adulthood.

I don't bother suppressing the bone-deep sigh, since that's the whole point of having a Master. Without honesty including emotional honesty he cannot lead me, cannot teach me. There's a reason why the most famous alchemists in past ages were couples. Fiancé and fiancée. Husband and wife. Like Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel.

'I never thought this could happen to us,' I whisper and am astonished at how much this hurts.

He looks at me with that peculiar black, bleak gaze.

He understands.

Of course he does.

~~~

Later, I lie in my bed under the sloping roof of my attic bedroom.

Hogwarts was beautiful last Wednesday when I went to visit Minerva.

*Serene.*

So different from the memories that unto this day fill my dreams and nightmares.

I took a walk when I was there, visiting Hagrid and Neville or rather: 'Professor Longbottom'.

I also walked up to the library. Madam Pince is going to retire next year she's grown old and brittle, but her biting humour is as fierce as ever. And her book polish still smells like heaven: of beeswax, lanolin, and cedar wood oil. As always, she asked me if I'd like to be her successor. Over the years, that has become something of an inside joke between us. Irma is not a warm-hearted woman; neither am I. Still, we are not without feeling. And of all my friends at school, she is the only one who kept in touch throughout all of these years. She was also the only one who did not only know that my parents and I had planned for me to go to America for Muggle college, but *why* I went.

After the Final Battle I went to Australia as soon as I could to get my parents back. Aurors accompanied me; at St Mungo's, my parents and I got the red carpet treatment. Of course, my parents' memories were perfectly restored. We were supposedly reunited in bliss. At least that was the headline of the Daily Prophet.

Yes, my parents did remember everything again. And they even agreed with the hard choices I had made. Unfortunately, magical memory restoration only recreates factual reminiscences. It cannot conjure up the emotions connected with remembrances.

In other words, my parents recalled just fine that I was their daughter. Nevertheless, they felt nothing for me. They had a more meaningful relationship with their Muggle postman in Australia than with me.

We are friendly, even cordial nowadays. Therapy and distance do help. But they give me for my birthdays and for Christmas what I gave Teddy: gift vouchers. Useful, and convenient, to be sure; but also non-descript and neutral.

While at Hogwarts for the first time in twelve years I went hunting for scents.

The scents I remembered: the perfume of classrooms (the top note sweet and sour, from the laughter and the sweat of children, the middle note parchments and wands, the base note earthy, cheap ink), the scent of the Great Hall (with a head note of puddings served at the last meal, a heart note of laughter and the beeswax of many floating candles, and a base note of old, often cleaned stone), the fragrance of Gryffindor Tower (female and male scents mingling into a boisterous chaos of fierce, bright scents), the dark aromas of the Forbidden Forest, grass and woods and roots and danger ...

I smelled grass: at the lakeside, on the Quidditch Field, at the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

I inhaled parchmen: in the classrooms and in the library.

And even hair: the fur of Hagrid's creatures, Minerva's old-fashioned hair tonic, the sweet whiff of children's soap wafting towards me from the lower dorms in Gryffindor tower.

But I did not find a trace of hidden meadow, ripe with the spicy scent of herbs although at the beginning of September it was still the right time of the year for just that scent. And I only encountered the well-remembered odour of cheap Scrivenshaft's parchment in the classrooms and that of old, respectable tomes in the library. Never sweetly scented vellum or new treasures wrapped into shiny calf's leather, tinged golden with fresh polish. Much less that unique base note of oily hair washed with a solid shampoo of basil, mint, cilantro, and lemon.

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[1] Source: Chapter Nine, 'The Half-Blood Prince', in 'Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince' by Joanne K. Rowling.

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**Author's Notes (2):** Positively weeks of research went into this story before I wrote the first word of the first draft of the first chapter. I can't even begin to reconstruct which passage from which textbook inspired what take on olfactory magic so please feel free to ask questions if you don't understand something or if you are curious about any detail of my story. I shall do my best to answer them. The main textbook I relied on was 'Essence and Alchemy: A Natural History of Perfume' by Mandy Aftel, and I can heartily recommend it to everyone who is interested in perfume.

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# Ajna

Chapter 2 of 8

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

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## II. Ajna

*Misery and joy have the same shape in this world:*

*You may call the rose an open heart or a broken heart.*

*Dard*

~~~

From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

Muggle and magical perfumes have much in common.

They share ingredients essential oils stemming from plant, animal, and synthetic sources, from cinnamon to civet to compounds like calone. They use the same methods of extraction maceration, distillation, expression, and enfleurage. Their techniques of composition, of building the notes of a perfume from primary scents, modifiers, blenders, and bases is similar. Both Muggle and magical perfumes appear in different forms, liquid and solid, as perfume extract, eau de parfum, eau de toilette, cologne, or splash. The description of fragrances is based on their individual notes in both worlds.

Beautiful women and attractive witches use perfume to augment their allure. Stylish men and elegant wizards employ scents to increase the impact of their appearance. New cars and new brooms are delicately scented to emphasise their attractiveness for prospective buyers.

Yet, Muggle and magical perfumes could not be more different.

Magical perfume makers harvest scents that have proved elusive to all Muggle methods: even orchids or lilies magic can turn into natural essences. Magic used as a fixative will release each note of a fragrance over the course of an evening, perfectly timed a symphony of scents attuned not only to the physical, but to the metaphysical body.

Magical ingredients are more powerful and more dangerous than any Muggle bark, blossom, resin, fat, or musk could ever be. For the perfume maker, the wizard or witch wearing the perfume ... and those who smell it.

Harvesting the blossoms of Fanged Geraniums can cost you a finger. Collecting the ejaculations of Devil's Snare may maim you ... if you're lucky. Working with the raw magic of wand tree absolutes can sear your soul. A Lamia may eat your heart out literally before you ever get close to her tears. Gathering phoenix ashes will taint your magic forever. And not many wizards have returned from mining tocalonite inside a Fastitocalon's belly.

Mixing incompatible substances kills the perfume maker in a fraction of a second. Seductive scents conjure illusions so addictive the bewitched mind of the wearer never finds the way back to reality. Powerful perfumes ensnare the senses. In the past, lust-slaves have been imprisoned with just a whiff of magic. Today, St Mungo's uses enchanted fragrances to restore the faltering memories of aged patients.

And the perfumes of the wizarding world do not have just the three notes of Muggle scents, but seven: each chakra each focus of magical energy in your body forms its own many-petalled flower in magical fragrance compositions.

*Indeed, **magic** itself is supposed to have its own, unique scent ...*

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### 22 December 2008

On the longest night of the year, my dreams are dark.

Naked and alone, I walk through the Hogwarts of old nightmares: abandoned and broken and cold. Not even Crookshanks is with me. And while he has long since passed away in life, he is always at my side in my dreams.

At first I am thankful that at least the scents that used to accompany this nightmare are absent. No longer do I smell the perfume of war: sweat of fear, stench of blood and vomit and excrement, odour of pain. Nor the sweet fragrance of long lost illusions and obsessions. There is no hint of grass, lawn, or meadow, freshly mown, growing or ripe. No whiff of parchment or paper, simple or precious. Not a sniff of skin or hair or anything alive.

Nothing.

Like Jean-Baptiste Grenouille in his mountain cave, for the first time in years I am not only unaware of any odour surrounding me, I cannot smell anything at all.

I wake empty and exhausted.

Dressed just in my nightgown (a modest affair of blue cotton that billows around my ankles), I creep down to the library and sitting room.

Severus is awake. Wrapped in shadows, he sits in the gloaming near the unshuttered window. Sparks of twilight from dying embers in the fireplace glisten at his outstretched feet. Lurking outside, indigo tendrils of the small hours twine around his neck.

His right hand covers the scars on his neck. Old wounds still cause him pain. His left holds a kerchief or scarf I cannot recognise in the dark. He presses it to his face, to his mouth, to his nose, as if to consume the fabric or its scent.

But his posture betrays neither happiness nor content nostalgia at his indulgence.

Severus looks spent and sullen.

I don't speak, just curl up in the other chair.

We sit in silence together until a hesitant winter sun rises.

Solstice has passed.

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1 January 2009

With a deep breath, I straighten my shoulders and march up to Severus' desk to present my journal.

This diary is a fat, leather-bound tome, polished with cedar wood, rosewood and the essential oil of Fanged Geranium. It contains notes for everything I've done in the past year as Severus' journeywoman, everything I have attempted, accomplished, or worked on during the last 366 days.

And I really mean *everything*, from the smallest minutiae to the grandest projects: weekly schedules, order forms, shopping lists, scent descriptions, ingredient analyses, perfume formulae, marketing plans, price schemes.

When he doesn't even open the book for the ritual glance at the first and the last page, my stomach plummets. Chills run down my spine and shake my balled fists. Nausea uncoils lazily, snaking up to constrict my throat.

'You are failing,' he announces, each syllable dry and bright and brittle.

My eyes grow hot in their sockets. My mouth fills with saliva tasting of dread. I swallow hard.

Long ago I would have protested: 'But '

Not so long ago I would demanded: 'How? Why '

Today, I stay silent. That, at least, I have learned.

As journeywoman, he is my Master not the professor who teaches his student even which shoes to wear on her travels. Nor the apprentice's master who guides his tenderfoot every step of the way. I must be beyond such coddling. Not that he ever was the type to provide it. But this is *my* journey, and

'You do know that you are already an excellent perfumemaker,' he interrupts my self-flagellation, 'otherwise I would never have accepted you as a journeywoman. You are aware that I do not take in apprentices.'

He delivers that compliment with the scathing tone I recall from my student days. Suddenly I don't know if I am closer to tears or to laughter.

Severus notices. I can see how the corners of his thin, sensitive mouth quirk. Just a little.

'You have seen to it that your professional background is unique.'

I must have frowned. Too often have I been ridiculed for attending a Muggle college in America; too frequently have I been looked upon askance for the choice of masters for my apprenticeship.

He raises a slender hand to forestall any objections.

'I, for my part, hold the owners of Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab in high esteem, even if their ... shall we say ... idiosyncrasies and ... slightly ... unorthodox business practices of catering to Muggles as well as to the wizarding world ... disconcert the conservative members of the guild of alchemists. Their standards as potion and perfume makers are impeccable and that is all that matters to me.'

Snape puts the index finger of his right hand to his lips, slowly stroking over his philtrum to his upper lip. 'More interesting than your choices of Muggle college education and magical apprenticeship, however, are the two years you spent with Rolf and Luna Scamander in South America,' he says softly. 'At Hogwarts you never seemed to care much for magical creatures except for that orange menace that followed you around everywhere. And then you go off gallivanting in the jungles, playing hide and seek with wild beasts that would make Hagrid salivate.'

'I wasn't there for the creatures,' I reply defensively, which is true: Rolf was researching magnoliophytoid mammalia, magical hybrids of animals and flowering plants. I tagged along as a scent hunter.

'Of course.' A delicately raised eyebrow emphasises his gently derisive tone. 'I believe Luna Scamander is breeding some of those magical creatures you weren't there for rather successfully now. Orchid cats, discovered and named by one Hermione Granger. I hear they will be presented as one of the most prestigious projects of the Scamander Foundation at the May Fair this year.' That sounds almost like another compliment.

'The *passiflora mustelidae* didn't work out that well,' I remark dryly. Their strong scent and high fertility had inspired great hopes, but they turned out to be simply too unruly. Luna keeps sending me packages of their pleasantly fragrant faeces, though. I relax a fraction.

A swift frown, paired with a dismissive shake of his head, makes my pulse speed up.

'That you want to achieve mastery to further your ambition and your desire for perfection goes without saying,' he says coldly. 'Those were reasons ~~not~~ to accept your offer.'

My stomach twists into a sick knot. True, this journeywomanship is perhaps not what I imagined it to be dragging Severus kicking and screaming into a new era of marketing and range of products. But it was fun.

Of course, gaining mastery in magical perfume making was never meant to be 'fun'.

I *am* aware of that.

'And this ' He taps my perfume notebook with a single, scornful finger. 'Your always complete lists. Your exacting schedules. Your rigorous records of our experiments. Your insightful essays. Your accurate fragrance analyses ...' He shakes his head.

'Not worth the parchment they are written on, much less the ink wasted on them,' he snarls suddenly. 'This is not *journal*. This is not the story of a journey toward Mastery and its personal, spiritual, and ultimately magical transformation. This is *at best* the documentation for a perfume maker's "journées"; enough to prove that you have earned your daily wages, but no more than that.'

'Yet you *are* searching for something,' he says, his voice soft again, and his black eyes fixed on me with a penetrating gaze. 'You are looking for something beyond ambition, beyond successful marketing, beyond even the most beneficial or alluring creation of magical perfume.'

For a moment he holds his finger to his lips, as if to order me to remain silent. Then he lets his hand drop away.

'You never told me what you are looking for.' He sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. 'As a child, you were always so eager to share your ...' He hesitates, and I cannot suppress a shiver of fear. But instead, his voice softens even more. '... your questions and your answers, and your sense of wonder regarding the world, magic, and all its miracles. I never presumed that you would reveal your innermost secrets in a heart-to-heart the very first week. But since you *did* choose me as your Master, I expected you to approach me eventually. Why you failed to do so, I cannot fathom. Procrastinating like that is quite out of character for the Hermione Granger I know.'

He rises to his feet and crosses his arms in front of his chest, the black spectre of my childhood and youth risen once more. He narrows his eyes. 'You. Will. Tell. Me. Now. What the *fuck* you are looking for.'

I jump up to meet him face to face. Or chin to forehead, to be completely accurate. Concentrating on his upmost button, I somehow manage to throw up my Occlumentic shields. I think of pudding. All kinds of soft, warm, slimy, slippery pudding. Vanilla. Chocolate. Caramel.

But he doesn't even try Legilimency.

He just stares at me as if his eyes can burn me on the spot. I guess that's a pretty accurate assessment of the situation, too.

The problem is I don't know the correct answer.

I know when I started looking, of course. *2 September 1996*. When my world stopped smelling the way it was supposed to.

But I never believed in what I was searching for in the first place!

Suddenly he reaches for me, and his touch is shockingly gentle just a hint of a hold above my elbows, intended to control my attention, not to intimidate me.

'Tell me,' he asks. Severus Snape would never *beg*. 'I would have failed you if you do not trust me at least that much.'

'What?' The question escapes my lips as an indignant squeak. As if I'd ever but of course I have but of course now I'd never

'I'

What I am looking for is the recipe for Amortentia, because I want to know if it's for real. What I am searching for is what I smelled in Slughorn's Amortentia all those years ago.

Because if it was real, and I never find out what I smelled then, I will never know

He stares at me.

I hate clichés. But I could bloody drown in that black, smouldering, fathomless gaze. Yes *Smouldering* and *fathomless* at the same time. I am aware of the thoughts and emotions undulating somewhere far below the surface. But all I can *see* is black. Darkness. Mesmerizing, hypnotising blackness.

'Love,' I gasp.

And of course my tears are choosing that exact moment to overflow. I can feel them on my cheeks, childish, sticky, and hot, but I hardly dare to breathe, much less move.

'In that case,' he whispers, 'you have chosen the wrong Master.'

oooOooo

Vishuddha

Chapter 3 of 8

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

oooOooo

III. Vishuddha

Love is the magician, the enchanter, that changes worthless things to joy, and makes right royal kings and queens of common clay. It is the perfume of that wondrous flower, the heart, and without that sacred passion, that divine swoon, we are less than beasts; but with it, earth is heaven, and we are gods.

Robert Green Ingersoll

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#### From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

*Magical perfume making is nothing less and nothing more than a special branch of Alchemy.*

*Alchemy as in Nicolas Flamel, as in turning stone into gold, creating a Philosopher's Stone, producing the Elixir of Life, and reaching immortality.*

*However, for most alchemists that does not mean actually producing a Philosopher's Stone and the Aqua Vitae. For most of us the aim is a transmutation of our magic and our self, to reach a higher level of understanding of the world and ourselves, or to purify ourselves and our magic.*

*Just as there are potions masters and Potions Masters, there are perfume makers and Perfume Masters.*

*(Let's hear it for capitalisation of Important Titles.)*

*Perfume Masters, like Potions Masters, are alchemists alchemists with a specialisation.*

*They have both, in some manner, undergone the three (or four, depending on which lodge of the Guild they belong to) stages of alchemical transmutation of their magic:*

**nigredo**  the blackening or putrefaction; to allow knowingly the corruption and dissolution of self; cheerful Muggle psychologist Carl Jung believed that a moment of ultimate despair is necessary to fully develop as a person

**albedo**  the whitening or purification; to allow all impurities of magic or self to burn away; to submit to the waters of life, allowing them to wash away all corruptions

**citrinitas**  the yellowing or spiritualisation; enlightenment is achieved the quantum leap of magical power kicks in; one's magic is no longer influenced by 'outside' factors (like health, weather, menstrual cycle ...) but only the soul they are tied to; and

**rubedo**  the reddening or the mystical union of the human element with the divine, the magical marriage of male and female, the fusion of spirit and matter, the unification of the limited with the unlimited. When Severus Snape, Potions master, taught and wrought at Hogwarts during the war, he had already successfully undergone the first stage of alchemical transmutation. Partly by choice, partly by destiny or cruel coincidence. Whether he displayed the colours associated with his stage of initiation to mock the process or to show his true colours remains unclear.

*Through his darkest deed, the deed that pained him beyond all others by killing Albus Dumbledore Snape reached the next stage of enlightenment, th**albedo** ... nicely ironic, that. Of course at the time it was impossible for him to display the colours of his new status as an adept.*

*The final stage of transformation  **citrinitas**  and  **rubedo**  occurred after Voldemort tried to kill him with Nagini's bite.*

*I provided the female element, and Harry the male.*

*The idea that the male/female powers at work during that final stage are the ones of the adept and his lover cue Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel are (as far as I can tell, at least) nothing more than sentimental fairy tales. It could be just as well the male and female aspects of the adept himself. Or, as in Snape's case, a woman and a man magically and mystically connected with him.*

*I did my part by wrapping my scarf just tightly enough around his neck and throwing that self-made stasis spell over him.*

*Harry made it back to the Shrieking Shack after the Final Battle just in time to get Snape to St Mungo's. As luck, fate, or the gods would have it, Harry's blood and magic are compatible with Snape's, so he could have a transfusion of Harry's magically augmented blood to replace what was poisoned or simply burned up by Nagini's venom.*

*And Snape's soul cruising in limbo during his coma ... that took care of his spiritualisation. Literally.*

*When he woke up, he wasn't the Snape we knew anymore.*

*He was a Perfume Master.*

*The big difference between perfume makers and Perfume Masters is power, and control of that power.*

*A maker of magical perfume will use magic on the raw ingredients of perfume or during any part of the production process. They need some good, solid, non-magical objects to work on. And what they do is fairly down-to-earth. They manipulate characteristics that are already present in nature.*

*A Perfume Master, however, is a **very** different kind of wizard.*

*He enchants the very **scents** of perfumes.*

*Molecules.*

*Atoms.*

*Basically, he uses magic on thin air.*

~~~

2 January 2009

'I can't believe I said that,' I exclaim once more.

"*Especially to Severus of all people.*" Draco provides the refrain of my litany. 'Now hold still. You're beautiful today, all flustered and flushed, with that silly hair of yours frizzing all over the place.' He concentrates on the thick sheet of artist's paper resting against a wooden board on his easel, where a pencil, an eraser, and a quill with ink are engaged in a complex dance.

After Hogwarts, after the war, Draco decided he'd had enough of serious business for a lifetime and proceeded to become what he calls 'a Bohemian', which means nothing less and nothing more than that he spends his days painting, hanging out in galleries and art museums, and his nights sipping Absinthe and smoking hookahs, twined around beautiful wizards and witches, dress optional.

The most useful activity he engages in is painting labels, brochures, cards, and posters for Severus' perfumery ... and not for his father's big-bang cosmetics companies. That's how we've become friends, strange as that may seem.

Just friends at first. Until, one drunken night, it seemed like a good idea to go to bed together. I'm not in love with him, of course. At the ripe old age of twenty-nine, I've had my share of affairs: boyfriends, lovers, partners but I've never been in love. Looking back, I don't think I was even in love with Ron Weasley. Way back then, I guess I was in love with the *idea* of love, of falling in love, of being in love, of kissing and having sex, of marrying my Hogwarts sweetheart, of dancing at a beautiful wedding like Bill's, and of getting a precious baby daughter like Victoire. That is not love. It's not even infatuation. It's ... narcissistic self-indulgence. If you're lucky, you grow out of it.

What I have with Draco is much healthier. When we have time, we meet up; I talk, he paints, we get drunk; now and again we go out together, to opening nights at galleries or to see the newest W.A.D.A. production in the Wizarding West End, and sometimes we spend the night together. Luna has been hanging around with American witches too much: she calls him my 'fuck buddy'. Personally, I prefer the term 'friend with benefits'. Surprisingly, Harry is okay with our relationship ... or maybe rather unsurprisingly. We're just not close enough anymore. At least Ron has expressed his disgust for my choice in friends adequately by not speaking a word with me since he heard about it.

'I should have said "emotion",' I go on, probably for the hundredth time. 'Or something like that. I mean, that's what I'm really looking for, right? The connection between magic and emotion. Just look at that project with St Mungo's or the scent photography you and I have been working on ... "Love"! That just sounds so so corny. Cheesy. Melodramatic. Over the top! And as if ...' I wince. 'As if I am as if it's *uh...* about ... him. You know like ' I throw up my hands in exasperation.

'And you're not?' Draco quirks an elegant golden eyebrow.

'Of course not!' I jump up and start pacing.

Not enough that I'm in danger of losing my my

I stop walking and stand in front of the glass doors of Draco's studio. He lives in a huge attic flat in London. The front is all glass, opening to a roof terrace surrounded by brick walls. He has a little formal knot garden out there, herbs and perfume flowers, surrounded by tiny hedges of box tree. Some of the box trees are Charmed into odd shapes, depending on his mood. At the moment, cats and mice are chasing each other around his garden.

In danger of losing what?

My job?

Or my calling?

Suddenly I am close to tears again and sniffle noisily. Severus is right; if I don't know*that*, I don't deserve to be his journeywoman.

Aspiring to mastery means embracing the mystical and mythical aspects of magic. Striving for mastery in alchemy means a life-long search for wisdom and transformation.

Spiritual transformation, that is, not Animagus transformation. (Or I would never have considered the whole thing; I'm hopelessly stuck in my human form, as are most witches and wizards I know. The ability to become an Animagus is *really* very rare. Not even Harry can do it, in spite of his Dad being one of the youngest Animagi in wizarding history. Of all the people I went to school with, only two have managed to become Animagi: Luna is a white cockatoo, and Draco a white ferret. The others don't have the mental, magical, and spiritual flexibility necessary. And Draco got lucky; if Moody hadn't Transfigured him into a ferret that time, he wouldn't have accomplished the transformation either.)

'Didn't I ask you to hold still?' Draco complains, but turns his easel around. Frowning slightly, he tilts his head. 'Actually, that's even better. NOW hold still. And don't you dare start crying, you know what that does to your face.'

I ignore him but stay where I am, staring across his garden at the roofs of London and the muddy winter sky pressing down on us.

Not enough that I'm in danger of losing my chosen profession, I also made a fool of myself before the one man I

'Maybe I should just give up on the whole thing,' I mutter crossly, 'and admit that I'm just not cut out for transformation, transcendence, and a life-long passion for mystical truths.'

'... says the woman who has already spent twelve years trying to solve one of the great magical mysteries of all time.'

I turn around, frowning, possibly even scowling at him. 'Is it? Or is it a silly by now rather sick! schoolgirl's obsession?'

Slumping down in the pink and gold wingback chair Draco has positioned just so to catch the rosy glow of dawn, I hide my face in my palms. 'Sometimes I wonder if it was just my imagination. That it wasn't even Amortentia but some other draught, that I've built my life on an illusion.'

'You? Mistake some kind of bogus brew for Amortentia? In sixth year? Not to mention that I was there, too, and not exactly a failure in Potions, either ... or the fact that our dear Slughorn wanted to impress wonderboy Harry Bloody Potter. Only the best was good enough for that.' Draco rolls his eyes and with a wave of his wand sends his painting tools back to his worktable. 'Oh, come here already, Granger, you silly hen.'

With a moan I get up and join Draco on his chaise longue, allowing him to pull me into his arms until I lie spooned in his embrace. He just holds me close, sensing instinctively that I'm not in the mood for sex.

After a while, my breathing eases, and my eyes stop burning. My head still hurts, but panic and hysteria recede. I relax.

'What did you smell?' I mumble.

'*Hmm...*' Draco inhales pensively. 'Let's see. A head note of London smog. The good kind, getting high on exhausts on your way to a theatre. A heart note of butterflies.' The essence distilled from the powder off the wings of magical butterflies is a beautiful ingredient for magical perfumes, golden and sweet and flighty. Draco twirls one of my curls around an ink stained finger. 'And turpentine. I don't think what I smelled then was a person. It was the kind of life that I'd love. And I do.'

'You still haven't told him, have you?' Draco murmurs into my hair.

'Merlin, no! He'd throw me out on my arse before I can say "Amortentia"!' I shudder as nausea twists my stomach all over again. The situation is bad enough as it is; I can't bring myself to imagine what it would be like to end up the object of Severus' unbridled ridicule.

'Why would you think that?' Draco asks gently, stroking my shoulder in soothing circles. 'Severus is not exactly unfamiliar with the trials and tribulations of the human heart. And he hasn't asked you to pack up and leave yet, in spite of yesterday's altercation.'

'But he was at least infatuated with a real person! I'm obsessed with with a phantom, a chimaera I don't even know with what,' I complain miserably. I shake my head, tickling Draco's nose with my curls and making him sneeze. 'Which brings us full circle. Even if the journey is the reward, as long as I can't define what I'm looking for in my mastery, I'm stuck in place. I can't even begin that bloody mythical journey. I've been at it for a year now, and I'm not a single step further! And when I asked him about Amortentia, he told me I already know everything I'm supposed to, what with Slughorn's love fest in sixth year ...'

Draco sighs and tightens his hold on me. 'My stubborn little hen. Has it ever occurred to you that the idea of having a Master as a journeywoman is that you don't have to take every step all on your own? That you have a spiritual guide at your side? Hmm? How is Severus supposed to guide you if he doesn't know where you're coming from?'

I know Draco is only trying to cheer me up. And theoretically, his advice has merit. But practically Severus' words sound rather irrevocable as if I'm journeying on borrowed time already. At least we'll still be travelling to the May Fair together. A Great Horned Owl (the preferred messenger bird of the alchemists' guild) arrived with the confirmation of our registration three days ago. I was so thrilled!

... and now I wonder if the end of the May Fair will also herald the end of my time as a journeywoman with Master Severus Snape.

oooOooo

Anahata

Chapter 4 of 8

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oooOooo

IV. Anahata

'The way you can love a person for one quality despite myriad faults, you can sometimes love a perfume for one particular moment or effect, even if the rest is trash. Yet in the thousands of perfumes that exist, some express their ideas seamlessly and eloquently from top to bottom and give a beautiful view from any angle. A rare subset of them always seem to have something new and interesting to say, even if you encounter them daily. Those are the greats. By these criteria, one can certainly admire a perfume without necessarily loving it. Love, of course, is personal (but best when deserved).'

Tania Sanchez

'Does koala bear poop smell like cough drops?'

Tom Robbins

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#### From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

*Nicolas Flamel founded the guild of alchemists in 1382, after he had successfully Transmuted stone into silver. Alchemy itself is of course a much older art. But the powerful guild of the wizarding world is the brainchild of Albus Dumbledore's best buddy (apart from Gellert Grindelwald, that is). (Honi soit qui mal y pense.)*

*Hector Dagworth-Granger, a distant relative of mine five times removed to the left, made the whole rather medieval set-up more palatable for the modern wizarding minds of the nineteenth century by renaming the guild 'Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers'.*

*But that didn't change what they are.*

*Namely, one of the most exclusive elites of the wizarding world.*

*And 'the forty-two' the global community of Perfume Masters have always been one of the most influential factions within the guild. After the Stone Makers, that is, who possess veto-powers concerning all guild decisions, ever since Nicolas Flamel successfully created the Philosopher's Stone and brewed the Elixir of Life.*

*But in recent history there have been only three Stone Makers. Two of them, Nicolas Flamel and Albus Dumbledore, are dead. And the third, who made a Stone but failed at creating the Elixir of Life, has refused title and honour and is not named in any scholarly journal.*

*Thus, the forty-two Perfume Masters and Perfume Mistresses are now, hands down, the most important faction among the eighty-nine guild members.*

*And the most powerful among them is none other than Severus Snape.*

~~~

1 May 2009

The May Fair, the perfume trade fair of the wizarding world, is as much a veiled space of desire as any orientabazaar every word, every gesture, every wand twist redolent with magic, mystery, and marketeering. It is our modern Avalon; and like any respectable enchanted isle, it is only open to the public perfume makers, perfume

sellers, perfume buyers, the rich, the idle, and the curious for seven days a year.

On the first of May, the Portkeys activate and take you to Lake Island, in the heart of the Lake District, with its landscaped gardens, its manor house, gazebos, pavilions, orangeries, and hothouses. If you're lucky, that is. If not, you'll get wet, and the garden goblins will have to tow you ashore, dripping and cursing and grumbling.

As happened to Cornelius Fudge and his portly wife.

Ooops.

Severus' eyes glitter. He is trying to suppress a smirk. Fudge has a place of honour on the long list of people Severus doesn't like.

I curl my lips into my mouth, failing at the attempt to school my face to impassivity. I look up at Severus. Journeywomen even heroines of the war don't gloat over the misfortune of members of the Wizengamot and former Ministers of Magic. But they may smile at their Masters.

Our fingers are still linked over a small stone. Severus meets my gaze and his eyes crinkle at the corners and the tight line of his mouth softens. He is smiling at me. My fingertips tingle. When he folds my hand over the used Portkey, my heart speeds up.

Then he turns and walks across the sandy beach to the boathouse, where the reception of the May Fair is located, to handle the formalities of our arrival.

The underside of the stone reveals smooth ridges, tinged blue. It is not just a stone, but a fossil. An ammonite. As I follow Severus to Rose Manor House, I think of soft creatures sheltered in luminescent shells. And of life. Of the ossifying effects of fate, how they have turned a man into stone, a living fossil from a harsh past.

He has not spoken to me about the goal of my journey since January, but I feel that he is watching me full of expectation ... and disappointment.

~~~

After we have settled in our adjacent rooms at the far end of the Dawn Wing, we tour the grounds.

The Great Hall and the Entrance Hall are filled with the stalls of perfume makers.

Pride of place claim the stands of 'Lushious' and 'Narcisscents' Unlimited the companies that have made Lucius Malfoy rich again within just twelve years after the war, his trial, and the immense fines imposed on him. With 'Lushious' catering to a wizard's every fragrant need, and 'Narcisscents' targeting female customers, Lucius is the first magical perfume maker to veer away from the traditionally unisex scents of the wizarding world. With his stalls strategically situated just opposite the main entrance and between the high glass doors leading to the lake terraces, no one can get past him. And who'd want to? Golden-haired and charming, the widower is once more one of the richest and most influential wizards in Britain, and he wears the world-weariness of a dark hero of the war and the melancholy of bereavement like an attractive cologne. As we pass him by, he sighs a kiss at barely decent distance over my hand.

'My dearest Hermione,' he murmurs, 'every time we meet, you are more lovely. What must I do to free you from the clasp of the old bat of the dungeons?'

Severus and Lucius are not only fierce competitors in business, but good friends. Consequently, I have come to know Lucius Malfoy quite well during the last year. He is not as vile as he seemed to me as a child, but far from harmless and an outrageous flirt, especially since Narcissa died nine months ago. His repeated attempts to lure me into his lair business or bed or both are not made entirely in jest.

Now he takes my hand with a sly smile. 'You simply *must* dine with me tomorrow evening. The local merpeople have arranged a floating dinner on the lake.' Affecting an expression of regret, he turns to Severus. 'I am so sorry that your seasickness will prevent you from attending. I am certain it will be quite an event.'

Seasickness? *My arse*. But Severus gives an infinitesimal nod. We know that Lucius is up to something has been up to something for a while. Draco has tipped us off. But not even he knows what his father is planning. A new perfume? A completely new product line? Rolling the Muggle market? (Our tax consultant is certain that Lucius is involved in various lucrative ventures in the Muggle cosmetics business.) Or is it something even more sinister? We have no idea; not even the rumour of a rumour has reached us up until now. But since Lucius is the most important competitor of 'Spinner's Scents', we must keep our eyes on him. May Fair provides the perfect opportunity. My heartbeat quickens. While I have come to like Lucius as an adult, the memory of his library lingers indelibly in my mind.

'I'm delighted that you thought of me, Lucius,' I reply politely. 'How very gracious of you.'

'Anything to spend a night with you.' Lucius is still holding my hand, and now he lets his gaze drift over me in suggestive appreciation.

Severus scowls and elegantly frees my hand by taking hold of it himself. 'An evening, Lucius. You may spend dinner with her,' he draws. 'The rest of the time, she's mine.'

Lucius smirks and bows.

As we sweep past him, I don't know what causes my heart to beat more fiercely Lucius' or Severus' touch.

Without a word, Severus leads me out of the house. He knows without asking that I need some fresh air now I will have to come back later to make my way through the Great Hall to the booth of the Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, to greet my former mistress and master.

~~~

In the conservatories, greenhouses, and orangeries, the purveyors of magical and mundane raw ingredients offer their wares, arranged according to the olfactive group their products belong to: Floral, Oriental, Woody, Fresh, and Fougère.

In the Floral Greenhouse we watch live flying roses float in serene clouds of scent. Only when I raise my right hand to my lips to smother a giggle at an especially acrobatic bud, do I realise that Severus is still holding my hand or I am holding his. Heat floods me as I let go, face, back, belly. 'I'm sorry,' I stutter. 'I don't know what came over me to'

'Never mind,' Severus reassures me wryly. 'Lucius has that effect on people, I'm aware of that.'

Moving on, we browse the stalls in the Floral Conservatory. More roses: fresh, as potpourris, essential oil, absolute, or attar of roses. Jasmine. Sweet Osmanthus. Plumeria, mimosa, tuberose, narcissus, scented geranium, cassie, ambrette. Delicate lemon and orange blossoms, as well as ylang-ylang. Clove and vanilla. Also the florals that cannot be extracted with Muggle means, but must be harvested with magic: freesia, gardenia, heliotrope, honeysuckle, lilac, lily, lily of the valley, orchid, tulip, and violet.

Bubble Charms are ubiquitous: no one wants the delicate aromas of expensive fragrances mixing randomly and impinging on each other.

In the Oriental Orangerie, we meet Luna, who has come from Brazil to show off a few of the orchid cats she's breeding. One of the cats is about to bloom. Exotic violet blossoms are unfurling from her fur. Already, her scent is amazing. I watch Severus, and maybe I am imagining things, but he does seem a little bit impressed.

'Madam Scamander,' Severus says solemnly.

Luna beams at him. 'Master Snape.'

'Any luck discovering the Crumple-Horned Snorkack?' he asks her, not unkindly.

Luna smiles, unfazed. 'One day, I will find it. I am sure of it.'

'Of course you are,' someone says, and a tall, plump witch in bright green robes steps next to Luna. On her head perches a multicoloured iguana.

'This is Lenara,' Luna introduces her friend. 'She breeds rainbow iguanas. Want to smell?'

Already she has reached for the animal on her friend's head. Obediently, I bend my head down to the lizard. The miniature dragon stretches its blue paws towards me lazily. A scent of mango and guava drifts up to me. 'Hmm... nice,' I declare appreciatively, though I am not sure what purpose a rainbow iguana may have in magical perfume making.

Lenara explains the riddle in a straightforward manner: 'Their shit is one of the best fixatives for magical scents we've ever worked with. I know sounds gross. But it works.'

I look up in time to see Severus' eyebrows nearly make contact with his hairline. Somehow I don't think we'll be using rainbow iguana fixative any time soon.

'Before I forget!' exclaims Luna. 'I have a gift for the two of you.'

She disappears in a storeroom. When she returns, she carries a large, round glass bowl filled with soil and water. It looks a bit like a big goldfish bowl.

'That's a ... very nice bowl, Luna,' I manage.

'That's not a bowl, silly,' Luna replies. 'It's *Nelumbo Nucifera Occaecata* invisible lotus flower. And of course you can't see it yet. Only Masters can.'

She smiles at Severus.

But Severus frowns.

~~~

From the outbuildings of the manor house, we walk into the gardens.

May Fair is the embodiment of English spring, three months wrapped magically into one short week. March's snowdrops have not yet wilted on Lake Island. Crocus and catkins still flower, while already camellias cover the walls and a rainbow of tulips colours the lawn. But magnolias also bloom. Rhododendron blossoms explode in colours, while sweet wisteria drips over wooden pavilions and in the orchards, cherry, apple, and plum trees are wearing bridal gowns.

The sheds, as well as the assorted gazebos, pagodas, and other follies of the gardens, have been claimed by merchants of all imaginable (and some unimaginable) scented products or craftswizards of various and sundry perfume making accoutrements.

'Rowena's Singing Crystals' proclaims a blue-white sign in beautiful calligraphy in front of a delicate white gazebo, surrounded by a sea of bluebells.

'What next,' Severus mutters, 'dancing pebbles? And what has that claptrap to do with perfumery?'

Dryly, I reply, 'They don't just sing; they smell, too.'

'For some reason I was afraid you'd say that ...*hrrmpf* ...' Nonetheless he scrutinises the displayed crystals and gems carefully and even picks up a piece of tiger's eye to smell it. He closes his eyes to concentrate wholly on his nose. Then he opens his mouth, just a little bit, and inhales, smells again, all senses alert. When he puts the stone down again, he doesn't comment for my Master, that is praise enough. And for Mistress Rowena, apparently, too. The witch beams a brilliant smile at his back.

In a moss-grown grotto next to a burbling stream and a peat-black pond adorned with golden-green uncurling fern, Lady Vonda offers a selection of darker scented draughts and perfumed potions. There's something hypnotic about the slender witch whose age I cannot begin to guess (forty? sixty? younger or older?). Scents linger in the air around her that I cannot fathom, and I have to shake my head to remember that I didn't actually want to buy something.

I have almost unstopped a flacon, when Severus's long fingers curl around my hand and hinder me.

'Stop,' he whispers. 'She sells "Intrigue". You have no need of this.'

I jump back as if burnt, and Severus gently deposits the sample on its black velvet cushion again.

'Intrigue' is a borderline Dark Draught, engaging all the user's or victim's senses, heightening emotions, intellect, sensations ... It is an old pure-blood potion, used by daughters desperate to marry, and highly addictive.

Again, heat rushes to my face. I should have sensed 'Allure' in the air, from the witch's incense burner. I'm not an apprentice anymore, to fall for cheap attempts to ensnare my senses. Embarrassed, I rush past Severus.

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For a while, I walk ahead, not looking left or right, the soft breeze cooling my face. What's wrong with me today? I shouldn't let the likes of Lucius fluster me like that, or strange witches inveigle me so easily. Normally, I'm not like that. What is it that's distracting and unsettling me today?

Then we reach the next stall.

Risa's 'Magical Dolls' smell, too, of course. The vivacious Portuguese witch is a wicked flirt, and I am not surprised to find Draco hanging around at her stall. Her full figure, sparkling dark eyes, and rolling laughter combine the qualities he loves best in women. Also, her stall on Island's End a little tongue of land dipping into the lake underneath a fragrant cedar is about as far away from his father's massive stand in the Great Hall of Rose Manor House as possible, considering the limited geography of Lake Island.

Severus nods politely to Draco. He may not approve entirely of his former student's lifestyle, but very much of the man Draco has become. I'm treated to an embrace and kisses on both cheeks. Only when I buy Risa's most expensive yellow dragon doll (which smells of different yellow fruit each day of the week) as a gift for Lily-Luna, does she stop scowling. As Severus and I move on, I glimpse from the corner of my eye how Draco pulls out his sketchpad. No doubt he will manage to talk her into posing for him before lunch.

When we reach the outbuildings again, Severus excuses himself the guild has invited its Masters to a business lunch.

'I trust,' he says and slants his right eyebrow dubiously, 'you will manage to stay ... safe ... and to keep yourself amused while I am busy?'

I manage not to wilt completely under his scrutiny. Somehow.

And turn to the sheds. I actually need some perfume making supplies for my private experiments. Also, there's the perfume phial I must gift Severus with, should I ever gain my Mastery ... which at the moment looks frankly more unlikely than ever.

Still, I enter the shed where the glassmakers and potters offer their finest vials and bottles. Aimlessly I prowl the aisles, my thoughts elsewhere, until suddenly, I'm staring at an impossible perfume bottle. It's a perfect circle, with redware ornaments that remind me of Etruscan vases I've seen in the British Museum. An Ouroboros coils around the hole in the middle of the bottle. On the outside, subtly obscene figures are entwined with each other all around the circle of the bottle. A man, a woman; a sphinx, a

phoenix.

As surely as I know my name, I know this is my gift.

Should I ever earn my Mastery, *this* is the vessel that will contain my first master-level perfume and which will be my farewell gift to my Master. *To Severus.*

When I look at it, my heart starts pounding.

'It's an extraordinary flask,' someone says. 'Even if I do say so myself.'

I look up, startled. The potter is smiling at me from behind her stall. She's a rotund witch, but shapely. Draco would like her, I think sourly. He always tells me to eat more. And she has the kind of presence Minerva has, the kind I still can only dream of.

'I'm Jinifer Arbor but you can call me Nip.' She smiles, and I notice there are golden flecks in her grey-blue eyes. 'So you're interested in that bottle there, yes?'

'Yes,' I manage. 'It's amazing. I've been looking for a Mastery gift phial for over a year now, and nothing has ever looked remotely right. But this ' I shake my head in surprise. ' this is it. No doubt about that.'

Nip smiles. 'Then you're almost done with your journey. May the Goddess smile upon you.'

~~~

Mistress Nip has promised to see to it that the flask is safely delivered to my room in the attic of Spinner's End. Dazed, I wander away.

A card-carrying introvert, I find even Muggle trade fairs overwhelming. Wizarding affairs tend to be ten times worse. And after the way our talk in January went, I have not expected to receive any indication that I might yet successfully finish my journey and earn my mastery. At least not any time soon.

But now ...

If finding my Mastery phial is not a sign, I don't know what is.

I may not be comfortable with the more mystical or divinatory aspects of my chosen profession and craft, but I cannot deny they are there. Divination is not like Muggle astrology. You can't just shrug it all off and proclaim it doesn't exist. Prophecies are as real as the law of gravity and a worse pain in the arse than any apple.

Just as I did smell something special in Slughorn's Amortentia, whether I like it or not.

I should be thrilled at the discovery of my Mastery bottle.

At the impression of progress attending the fair gives me this year.

Last year was my first time at the fair, and my memories of that week still consist of a jumbled heap of smells and sounds and tastes. Not much of a well-organized mind inside my skull yet, it seems.

This year, I feel as if I'm almost Severus' colleague ... or at least he makes me feel that way. In spite of January and my persisting cluelessness. How I long for the easy know-it-all days of Hogwarts! When all questions had an answer, and all answers were predictable.

Though not even that is true, of course.

Not all questions were asked in class. Nor did books provide all solutions.

I shudder as nostalgia and remembered dread and agony mingle in my memories.

*Merlin, why so morose, Hermione?*

'Here,' a friendly voice interrupts my musings, 'smell! I think you will love this tea. It is an herbal infusion against heartache. Lavender from the Abbaye de Senanque, chamomile from Ostia, peppermint from Tintern Abbey, lemon grass from Shangri-la, orange blossoms and rose petals from Capri.'

Startled, I look up and into the kindly face of a slender, middle-aged witch with dark hair and soft eyes who stands in front of her stall, a long table filled with mixtures of healing teas and infusions. 'I am Rikki,' she says. 'A healer from Jerusalem. That tonic is not precisely magical,' she continues while she fills a triangular paper bag with fragrant tea. 'But it is laced with love and steeped in sympathy. I pray it will succour thee.'

When I try to pay her, she refuses and just touches my forehead in a quick gesture of blessing.

Turning back to Rose Manor House, I am close to tears.

I don't know if it's the shock of a random stranger being nice to me, or the sudden, crazy inkling albeit based on empty clay that I may gain my Mastery after all. And leave the life I have come to ... what? love? cherish? in the last fourteen months.

But there's no rest for the wicked; already it's time to get ready for the traditional May Fair banquet and reception.

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A robe at the May Fair banquet is not just a robe.

It is a statement.

A fashion statement, of course, but more importantly, a political statement. Of affluence as well as influence.

Transfigured robes may be flashy and more impressive than custom-tailored gowns, but even Transfigurations done by a Master and with excellent fabric inevitably end up looking ... Transfigured.

Colour-coordination is a nightmare, of course.

Masters flaunting their red; adepts proudly displaying their white; initiates sombre in black. Moreover, many Masters and a number of Mistresses have their own coat of arms. So naturally, they and their family are decked out in their own colours. National colours play their part, as well. Then there are the colours of the Forty-Two and the other factions of the guild depending on your standing, you'll want to show that you belong ... that you're not alone in this sweetly-scented cesspool of magic and intrigue. And beneath this kaleidoscope of colourful affiliations, school colours. Not just the four Houses of Hogwarts; also the black and white of Durmstrang, the pink and white of Beauxbatons, the blue and gold of Salem, the red and white of the Japanese Institute of Sorcery, to name but a few.

And that's not counting the multi-hued fopperies and vanities of special guests and invited dignitaries. Let's put it this way: Augusta Longbottom's choice of dress and hat is actually rather restrained very nearly boring.

Severus' colour preferences make more sense now than ever before.

Draco has chosen my dress and my accessories. I may not like primping and dressing up any more than I did at sixteen, but I've learned a thing or two over the years. Including whose advice to follow.

The gown looks very much like a long Muggle formal dress, though it's actually custom-tailored magical wear. Ron's wife sewed it for me; Susan is one of the best dressmakers in Diagon Alley nowadays. The fabric is soft, the top is snug, hugging my rather generous curves. Alas, I'm not the thin teenager I was, and the genes of Granny Granger appear to be rather dominant though thankfully I'm taller, and thus not quite as dumpy as I could be. The neckline is not quite revealing, but certainly not concealing. But my shoulders are demurely covered, and the sleeves are long, flaring wide around the wrists. The dress's colour is warm bronze, bringing out the highlights in my hair and the copper flecks in my eyes.

The robes I wear over it are sleeveless and wide. Even Severus should be satisfied with how they billow. The colour is called 'golden fern', though golden is not quite right. It's a muted, gentle olive green with a touch of bronze, as if every fold of the fabric is traced by rays of sunshine.

Only light make-up that picks up the colours I wear. Less is more. I learned that the hard way.

No perfume.

That is the rule.

Not one drop, mundane or magical.

(I believe they tried it once, at some point in the fifteenth century. Half of the attendants suffocated. Many of the survivors never really recovered.)

Of course the guests circumvent and subvert the rule; that's part of the game and half the fun.

They carry perfumed handkerchiefs, wear scented gloves or fragrant jewellery. The polish they use on their shoes, purses, belts, and even wands is redolent with a thousand aromas.

But they keep it toned down enough to pass the tamed Nifflers at the entrance to the banquet hall without getting bit.

(Nifflers find their shiny treasures with a magical sense of smell, and they don't just smell precious metals but *everything*. While they don't make good pets, they *can* be trained. For example, to go for scents, rather than gold. Thanks to those cute little beasts and their long snouts, it's possible to breathe at the May Fair banquet without immediately succumbing to anaphylactic shock due to the high concentration of mundane and magical perfume in the air.)

I wear skeleton leaf jewellery, delicate, iridescent vine leaves in gold and copper, earrings and a necklace. They are scented with a Charmed Muggle BPAL scent *Umbra [1]*: 'The deepest, darkest point in a shadow; the area contained within the shadow of an eclipse. East African black patchouli, cedarwood, vetiver, and a dribble of cinnamon.'

It is a dark scent, and a deep scent. A *male* scent. And it speaks to me on levels I cannot fathom or express with words.

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Severus is scentless tonight, but stunning all the same.

His austere black suit looks almost like those he used to put on under his robes at Hogwarts. Only this one has an even higher collar to hide his scars. However, he doesn't boycott the elegance of the occasion completely. Silver threads are spun into the inner side of his robes. When the robes billow, a subtle glint of silver draws the eye. The only colour he wears is his Master's ruby, pinned to a silver cravat.

When he passes the Niffler at the entrance to the banquet hall, the beast raises up on its hindquarters and wrinkles its long snout. Quizzically, fascinated as if it can't believe that Severus, of all guests, comes in the 'nude', odouriferously speaking, that is. Or maybe Severus' natural scent is just that amazing for the small magical creature.

The Banquet Hall is on the left side of the Entrance Hall, opposite of the Great Hall.

Arcades of rose marble surround a banquet area dotted with a dozen tables, seating a dozen guests each. Behind the columns to the right, French windows open to the lakeside terraces. Dusk flushes the surface of the lake. Above darkening indigo, amethysts sparkle in the water, the light of many torches lining the shores. And the reflections of four chandeliers with no less than eighty-nine candles apiece glitter in the glass doors like diamonds. The three archways on the other side of the hall lead to the ballroom. At the moment, gently unobtrusive chamber music twirls its way around the pillars to the intricately carved rosewood ceiling.

Lost in my appreciation for the architecture of Rose Manor House, I barely notice how Severus leads me toward the bar in the far corner of the lakeside arcades.

When he closes my fingers around a chilled glass of champagne, I startle and come back to myself. Dazed, I stare at him. Although this is my second time attending May Fair, I still feel as if I've woken in a magical dream.

I almost expect a snide remark, but Severus only raises his glass to me with a quirk of his right eyebrow and a hint of a smile. The chilled champagne sends a shiver down my spine and makes my stomach quiver.

Severus smirks.

'Hello there,' murmurs a husky female voice behind me. I jump and spill champagne over my breasts.

'I am Mystery de Medici,' a witch in the ruby robes of a Perfume Mistress introduces herself. But her dark eyes are focused on Severus; she's all but ignoring me. 'But my friends call me Misty.' She draws the nickname so that it sounds like 'Miss Tee'.

I glare at her, irrational anger coiling up inside of me, strangling my throat and wit. Like a sulking child I scowl at her long legs, her grace, her sultry costume, and most of all at how Severus quirks his eyebrows in appreciation. Not much. Just a hint of a curl. But I know him too well. He *likes* what he sees. And I, I don't like that at all.

Then she suddenly bends close to my cleavage and sniffs. I recoil, and she asks, dainty and disdainful, 'Severus, you allow your journeywoman to wear one of those *half-Muggle* scents? Tonight, of all nights?'

He doesn't look at her. He looks at me, and his gaze could freeze a volcano.

'I allow my journeywoman to honour the Master and Mistress of her apprenticeship,' he says softly. I know he's daring her to argue. Not even Draco dared to contradict that tone when I was a child!

'But they are catering to *Muggles*, Severus!' she whines and tugs off long black silk gloves in a cloud of Jarvey musk.

And somehow I know she's saying that only for me to hear. For some reason I'm important enough for her to try and hurt me. Because my parents are Muggles? Because I fought in the war, because I belonged to the Golden Trio, because I am who I am? Or *what* I am?

Severus just stares at her. And I learn that even Mystery de Medici can flinch.

'*Et tu, Velia?*' he whispers.

She hides her reaction behind aggression: 'And you Severus, completely in the nude tonight! I know you're a stickler for the rules, but to attend completely scentless ... *Really*. One would almost think that you have nothing to show off.'

'Or that I am so well equipped that I have no need to show off at all,' he drawls, seemingly bored. But he quirks an eyebrow, and she laughs delightedly.

Heat suffuses my face in an embarrassed rush and trickles in a cold sweat of jealousy down my back. Thankfully, at that moment I spy an acquaintance entering the hall with the Australian delegation.

'Excuse me, please. Mistress de Medici, Severus. I see an Australian friend of mine whom I haven't had the chance to talk to in years.' I make my escape without meeting their eyes. Mystery's deep-throated laugh trails after me until I'm far enough away to sink gratefully into the general melee of the reception.

'Hello, Lissa!' I exclaim, more cheerfully than I actually feel. 'How are you? It's been what? Ten years? I can't believe it! What are you doing? How is life treating you?'

Lissa was a junior staff member of the Australian Department for Magical Law Enforcement when my parents decided they wanted to stay in Australia, but of course under their real names and with their real money. Lissa was my contact at the Ministry of Magic in Australia when the subsequent legal hassle had to be straightened out. I can't even count the number of Obliviates on my account. I think it's a safe bet that at least ten perfectly innocent Muggles will develop early onset Alzheimer's as payment for my parents' safety.

Everything in life comes at a price. And sometimes you're only billed decades after you ordered.

I try to listen to what the pretty young witch tells me about her job at the Ministry and her fiancé, and her plans. I try to ignore Severus and Mistress de Medici.

But I'm just no good at this game.

Once again I wonder if I truly belong here not just as a journeywoman aspiring to Mastery, but as myself, as Hermione, the Muggle-born witch.

I join Severus at the dinner table just in time for the first course. But the deliciously fragrant meal passes me by almost without notice. I pick at my food, and after the desserts have disappeared, I do not wait for a coffee, an *espresso*, or a digestive, but slip out on the terrace, ignoring both Draco's disapproving shake of his head and Lucius' predatory smirk. I do not look at Severus or Mistress de Medici, who managed to snag the chair on Severus' other side.

Outside on the lakeside terraces, the temperature has been raised magically to twenty, twenty-five degrees Celsius. On the lake, water lilies are illuminated by magical light. At regular intervals a couple of George and Ron's FFS ('Fantastical Falling Stars') light up the sky.

I have no one to blame but me, I tell myself. I could have encouraged Ron all those years ago. It would not have been difficult to stay his girlfriend in spite of his betrayal during that infernal camping trip. It would have been so easy! The arms of the Weasley family were open, needy, even; their embrace generous, soft, suffocating, and so inviting. My career at the Ministry of Magic would have been only marginally more demanding.

So why didn't I stay?

Maybe just because there's something wrong with my nose. That's a possibility. Not very probable, but not completely implausible.

I wish Draco were here ... he has that special Slytherin knack of making sense of all the things I don't get. But he's still flirting with that doll maker, and I wouldn't be surprised if that flirt does not stay limited to the ballroom tonight.

Oh, damn it all to hell and back, I think. Why must this be one of those nights when I look back and all I see are the wrong decisions, the clumsy turns, and awkward stumblings I've taken in life?

Resolutely, I decide to enjoy the remainder of the evening. And I start that endeavour by spreading my robe over the balustrade of the terrace and pushing myself up to sit on it.

This is May Fair, after all. Our modern Avalon, as the Daily Prophet calls it so fancifully. One of the best parties of the whole wizarding world.

'I am sorry,' a soft voice murmurs suddenly behind me.

Only Severus' quick reflexes save me from taking an unplanned dip in the lake. I end up wrapped in his embrace, inhaling his warmth, the scent of his robe and his skin and his hair, and

'So sorry,' he repeats, interrupting my muddled thoughts and shocking me all over again. 'I failed you '

'No ' I interrupt him.

We stare at each other, and for a moment I can't shake the impression that we both feel adrift and out of our depth tonight.

'You have nothing to fear from Velia Blanco,' he assures me.

'Velia Blanco?' My frown is audible.

'Mystery de Medici. At least that is what she *should* call herself, if she had one honest bone in her body. Or Velia le Florentin.'

'What?' Now Severus has my full attention. I must admit that the idea of speaking to a descendant of the powerful Tuscan family did intimidate me. Now I want to know who I actually talked to.

'She is a direct descendant of Renato Blanco, or René le Florentin, as he was called in France. Catherine de Medici's perfumer and poison brewer. The connection with the Medici clan is of a much later date. At Blanco's time, the family de Medici were still Muggles, one and all. And Velia's ancestor was more than happy to ... how did she put it ... *cater* to Muggles. He killed one of his queen's rivals with magically scented gloves.'

'Merlin!' I manage, remembering Mystery's black gloves.

Severus smirks. 'Quite.'

... Severus has such a wicked sense of humour, that's what I

my nose, cold from the evening breeze, suddenly twitches

*Achoo!*

'Sorry!' I pull my handkerchief from my sleeve.



When I turn to him again, he interrupts my train of thought ruthlessly before I get one word out by pushing himself up on the balustrade behind me. I can feel the heat of his body even through his suit and robe. Suddenly, I shiver.

'They could have put up better Warming Charms,' Severus mutters crossly. 'Lean back.'

'What?'

'You're cold. I won't have you sneezing and sniffing all over expensive ingredients next week just because of this silly reception. Therefore you will now lean against me so *my* Warming Charms will keep you from catching a cold.'

I'm too shocked to protest, and obeying Severus when he uses *that* tone has been too deeply ingrained in my mind from too young an age. So I simply let myself sink back, and he catches me, wrapping me in his embrace.

After five minutes have passed, I'm still trying to wrap my mind around my present situation, and failing.

I stop trying. Instead, I look up at Severus. He is looking down at me with a strangely wistful, bittersweet expression in his face.

'You were her lover, right?'

'Gryffindor tactfulness at its best,' Severus remarks dryly, but only tightens his hold on me. 'I was; but only for a short time, when I was younger than you are now and more foolish than you ever were.'

I lie in his arms and look out on the lake. Somehow it's good to know that there was someone besides Lily Potter. Even if it must be beautiful, powerful Mystery de Medici. Behind us, the music and the lights from ballroom and banquet hall twirl and swirl. The moonlight caresses both of us, foolish or not. Suddenly I wish I had another glass of champagne and that Severus would dance with me. It must be the moon that makes me so foolish. Or perhaps Severus' Warming Charms.

Thinking back, I'm not sure how many chances I got to do really stupid things. Of course I can't shake the impression that I made good use of the opportunities I got. On the other hand ... without knowing more than I did then, I'd most likely do everything all over again.

My nostrils flare. There's something about Severus even scentless *something*

Well, that's why he is a Perfume Master, and I am not.

Probably he has enchanted the breeze from his billowing robes to carry a scent. Maybe even coded for a special recipient. I wrinkle my nose. Not Mystery, or Velia, or whatever her name is, though. Not after what he told me. He's had enough of power play for two lifetimes. And a wizard lives a very long time.

I shake my head and relax. Silently, we sit and look out on the lake. I bet he's thinking of water lilies. Of what might have been, had life been kinder ...

And I?

I have no idea what I'm thinking of.

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[1]'Umbra' is a scent from the Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, from the line 'Bewitching Brews'

**Author's Notes:** This chapter contains cameos of fandom friends as a little thank-you for their support and friendship over the years. Strictly in order of appearance I give you:

Aranel Took as Lenara, the breeder of rainbow iguanas, Bluestocking79 as Rowena, seller of magical crystals, Annie Talbot as Lady Vonda, selling "Intrigue" and other dark scented draughts, Zauza as the magical dollmaker Risa, Juniperus as Jinifer "Nip" Arbor, the potter who sold Hermione the mastery phial for Severus, Machshefa as Rikki, the healer from Jerusalem, Mischievous\_T as none other than the mysterious Mystery de Medici aka Velia Blanco, and Paisley Snail as Lissa, the junior staff member of the Australian Department for Magical Law Enforcement.

A thundering round of applause for my daring friends who visited the May Fair at my invitation, please!

oooOooo

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## Manipura

Chapter 5 of 8

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

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oooOooo

### V. Manipura

'Can anyone remember love? It's like trying to summon up the smell of roses in a cellar. You might see a rose, but never the perfume.'

Arthur Miller

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From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

'How to make a woman beautiful forever: Take a young raven from the nest; feed it on hard eggs for forty days, kill it, and then distil it with myrtle leaves, talc, and almond oil.'

Master Alexys knew what he was talking about, if his portrait in the Paris guild house is anything to go by. Unfortunately, while the recipe for his beautifying perfume has been preserved in the weighty tome 'Les Secrets de Maistre Alexys' from 1555, the incantations were not included and the portrait doesn't know them. Thus, unto this day, all mortal beauty remains ephemeral.

However, Master Alexys illustrates nicely how much perfumes, like potions, rely on murky ingredients. And I am not talking about ordinary carcinogenic compounds or the odd ounce of rats' spleens. Not even about the magical equivalents of civet or ambergris, Jarvey musk and phoenix ashes, or tocalonite and wandtree absolute.

What I mean are the ingredients harvested from the human body. 'Blood, sweat, and tears' is a mnemonic trick the masters of my apprenticeship taught me. Forget about hymens or the blood of defloration as a potions ingredient; the mucus of a virgin's orgasm is a hundred times more potent when distilled into a lust perfume. 'Blood of the enemy, forcibly taken' is a classic [1], of course. But how about an extraction from the caul of a Sunday's child for a whiff of luck stronger than Felix Felicis?

And why are **tears** such a common ingredient of magical perfume?

Widow's tears in the wizarding version of Chanel No. 5, changeling's tears for carnival scent as effective and a lot more palatable than Polyjuice, Lamia's tears in lust perfumes and the darkest of them all, Dementor's tears.

Why has no one ever tried to distil laughter, I wonder, or to create the extraction of a smile?

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## 2 May 2009

'Don't you dare move now, Granger,' Draco orders.

'But I'm allowed to keep breathing, am I?' I mutter. However, I do endeavour not to twitch a muscle. I'm lying naked in the noon sunshine on the gnarled root of a Whispering Willow. Transfigured into the shape of a chaise longue, it dips into the lake in a secluded cove. 'I still can't believe that I let you talk me into posing for you here ... like this.'

Draco smirks, sketching furiously.

The willow lowers her branches, a caress of catkins. The sky smiles, powder blue and pretty. And the sun warms my naked skin so much more delightfully on this enchanted island than anywhere else in England at this time of the year. It feels wrong, how much I enjoy this forbidden pleasure.

'Are you sure that your Do-Not-Notice-Me Charms will hold?' I whine, rather *pro forma*.

Draco shrugs. He wouldn't care if Rita Skeeter found us and put us on the front cover of the Prophet tomorrow. Actually, he'd relish that attention.

I must have started. Draco shakes his head. 'No, Granger. No one is able to see us. Unless you specifically *want* them to be able to see you.'

My heartbeat quickens, and my nipples harden.

Draco's smirk deepens.

*Bloody hell.*

Do I *want* someone to see me like this?

Naturally, I think of Severus first. A shiver runs down my spine, and a delicious ache thrums through my body. My breasts are heavy with awareness, my skin suddenly sensitive to the slightest breeze. Involuntarily, my right hand slips between my legs.

*Merlin.*

Of course there's a part of me that wants him to see me like that. I'm just a woman, after all! Severus will turn fifty next year. Entering that golden decade of wizarding lives, he's easily the sexiest man I know my relationship with Draco notwithstanding.

But I respect him! There is a *reason* he still wears only black after all these years, and it's not just to snub the snobs at the perfume fair.

'So who should see you like that?' Draco inquires, cocking an eyebrow suggestively. 'Severus or Lucius?'

I shoot up from my seat, flail

fall

*Cold!*

*Water!*

Not a thought, my body *screams* at me: 'Cold! Water! Death! *Bloody fucking hell!*'

And my magic kicks in.

The next thing I know, I'm lying next to Draco on the shore, coughing and sputtering and cursing.

'Wow, Granger, that was impressive!' Draco has the nerve to giggle. 'I didn't know you had it in you!'

I'm not quite sure if he means my spontaneous self-elevation or the cursing. Normally, my language is pretty mild, compared to some of my contemporaries *Whatever*. Uncontrolled magic takes a lot of out you. I am limp as an overcooked noodle can barely move, much less use my magic, or come up with witty repartee.

'Fuck you, Malfoy,' I manage to croak.

'Happy to,' he whispers at my ear, his breath hot and arousing on my cold, wet skin. 'But I don't think it's me you really want to fuck.'

He rips a sheet off a sketchpad and Transfigures it into a huge, fluffy white towel to wrap me into. Holding me close, he settles down on the willow root with me. 'Silly hen,' he murmurs. 'If I'd wanted to paint a mermaid, I'd have invited one.'

I don't reply, just pout a 'mpf' into the towel and his chest.

'However,' he goes on, probably because I'm unable to do anything but listen to him right now, 'you *must* promise me to take care tonight. Lucius is up to something. I haven't seen him this cheerful since before mother fell ill.'

'I know, I know.' I draw away from Draco, so I can face him. 'But what can I do? He's a friend ... and our most important competitor.' My date tonight does make me uncomfortable, but I'm trying not to show it. So I accuse my friend instead, attack seemingly the best defence: 'Admit it, you're just jealous.'

Draco glowers at me. 'You know as well as I do that the whole thing is fishy,' he says. 'Never mind Lucius' new-found love for Muggle-borns and all things Muggle since the war. That dinner invitation? It stinks.'

I relent with a sigh. 'I can always wear nose plugs, if that makes you happy just to be on the safe side.'

'Just remember that your *Master* does not wear any scent at all when he comes to dinner to Malfoy Manor, never smokes there, and only ever drinks water.'

'Severus is paranoid'

'And for good reason,' a familiar voice comments behind me, dry as any desert sand.

If Draco hadn't held on to me, I would have tumbled into the lake all over again.

'Shite,' Draco curses softly. 'Your magic must have unravelled my Charms, Hermione!'

'So it would seem,' smirks Severus.

I jump up, flustered, flushing, desperately clutching the slipping towel to my chest.

Severus stands next to the willow behind us. He ignores Draco and leisurely allows his gaze to trail the contours of my body, from the tip of my toes to the top of my towel. His eyes darkly veiled at the best of times appear as smooth and inscrutable as obsidian.

Feverish heat suffuses my body. My perplexed mind supplies all kinds of explanations, but I realise they would only suffice to make this scene seem even more sordid.

I feel Draco get up to stand behind me. His hand at my elbow does little to steady me.

Especially when he whispers, 'Did you know that you blush right down to your nipples?'

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Thankfully, as Severus' journeywoman, I can dress conservatively for dinner with Lucius.

Conservative according to ancient wizarding etiquette, of course.

Long, black robes. I should actually dress in white. And not just because I'm now a journeywoman and an adept. Severus has explained it to me: mystically speaking, I have the right to dress in white since I survived the Final Battle. That day was a magical crucible for all who directly defied Voldemort. That's why they dressed Colin in white for his burial. And why Harry dresses in white for all official V-Day ceremonies. But I get away with wearing black because that's Severus' colour, and I belong to him ... at least until he asks me to return the phial for my Mastery's perfume to him and orders me to break the one I acquired only yesterday to gift him with. And Severus gets away with wearing black because ... well, because he's Severus. So: long underrobes with a tight corset-top and a high collar, covered by billowing outer robes. High-high silk stockings in knee-high leather boots. Black silk gloves up to my elbows. If it were cold enough, which it unfortunately is not, an ankle-length black cloak.

... but no underwear.

I'm wrapped up as tightly as Severus ever was. Yet I still feel exposed.

If Ron were here, I'd stuff his shabby drawers down his throat, right along with the proverb of 'healthy breezes 'round your privates'.

I have a headache and still an hour to kill until Lucius will meet me and Severus at the entrance to the Dawn Wing. Lucius insists on playing his game strictly by the cards just to drive me crazy and to remind Severus that he still has some strings left to pull. So he's going to be all prim and proper and ask my Master for permission to take me out tonight.

After such a gruelling day (it didn't improve after I ended up in the lake this morning), what I really want now is a whisky; Muggle single malt, or even better, a dram of Ogden's Finest. And a good book. And not having to talk to anyone or listen to anyone until tomorrow. Except maybe to Severus if he feels like it, he can be the best company

Maybe Ginny is right after all, and Severus' crabbiness is beginning to infect me. Or maybe I always was as antisocial as he is, and they just never noticed until now. Or maybe that's just her excuse for not owling me anymore.

Whatever.

I decide to use my free time for good purpose and visit the Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab stall.

The Mistress and Master of my apprenticeship have one of the best stalls in the Great Hall, between the main part of the hall and the arcade of columns circling the doors to the terrace. That way they can serve customers on both sides of their booth. They are both dressed very much like I am. Together, we look like runaways from a Muggle Goth concert. Hugging my former Mistress and Master, who are much more easygoing than their austere style of fashion might lead you to believe, I'm struck by how much I miss them. Them, and America. American witches and wizards move so casually between the magical and the Muggle spheres of their lives. Doing anything the Muggle way is not frowned upon there the way it is here. The laws regulating magic in the Muggle world are more relaxed, too.

Of course they expect me to scrutinise the perfumes they are showing off at the May Fair. Boldly, they have split the two long tables that make up their stall into Muggle and magical perfumes. No other perfume maker at May Fair is presenting non-magical scents this year. I have to suppress a grin. The guild may frown upon where I apprenticed, but I'm proud of my time at the Lab. And now I know that Severus Snape thinks highly of them as well.

Although I actually prefer their Muggle lines of perfume oils, I step to the magical side of their stall first. Differently coloured Bubble Charms are spelled to reveal the three main notes of each perfume head note, heart note, and base note to the tester, one after another, until the whole bouquet can be tasted.

'Nimue's Eggnog' is rich, compelling scent. Mooncalf milk, to bestow a scented, ethereal glow to the wearer, along with vanilla, nutmeg, rum, and something *some thing* that goes straight to my head.

'Whisky-fire!' I exclaim. 'I've never heard of it being used in perfume before!'

Beth nods with a smug smile. 'A new technique we've developed.'

Ideas rush through my mind. Does the technique work on ordinary fire, too? On fen fire? Sunlight? Moonlight?

I hope there will be time to discuss that new method before the fair is over. Turning to the next magical perfume under a purple-tinged Bubble Charm, I have to grin at its name before I delve into the bubble to smell it. 'Mugwump Specifici', it's called. And it smells like that, too. Dumbledore would have loved it.

I surface from the Bubble Charm and cleanse my nose with a quick Charm of my own. 'I just love the names you come up with. No perfume maker in Britain is even half as witty as you are!'

'Oh, I think "Spinner's Scents" is doing quite well, too,' my former Mistress replies. But her wide smile tells me that she's pleased with the compliment.

'Fairy Farts' makes me chuckle aloud. Especially when a whiff tells me that the name must be taken quite literally. Like the Muggle indole a chemical compound that occurs naturally in human faeces, but is also a constituent of many flower scents and provides a beautiful, flowery odour at very low concentrations extraction of fairy excrement forms an excellent ingredient for magical perfumes. It has a delicate, magical scent of its own, but most of all it is one of the best magical fixatives, holding Charms perfectly, and for decades, not just for months.

'Unicornsilver' is made with Leprechaun's gold. It makes your skin sparkle in the sunlight and smell of immortal innocence. An elegantly composed scent, but not my kind of thing. I imagine, though, that the Lavenders of the world will fall for it by the dozens.

Turning to the perfume in pride of place on the narrow front table of the stall that is positioned between the long tables with the magical perfumes to the left and the Muggle ones to the right, I have to laugh again.

'May Thing?'

My former Mistress grins and shrugs. 'When we composed it, we kept calling it "that perfume for that May thing in England". Somehow that name stuck.'

Bending into the pale green Bubble Charm, I inhale the sweet, clear scent of spring.

It *is* a magical perfume, but only just magic was used to harvest the essence of lily of the valley that makes up the heart of this perfume, and to capture a head note of spring sunlight sparkling on a little stream. The base note is a deeper, warmer, woodsy aroma. A forest at the end of a warm day in May, everything green and growing, full of life and hope.

'May Thing' is the perfect name for the perfume. It is the best of May combined in one tiny phial.

It reminds me of this morning, of the sense of wild abandonment when I posed on the willow root, of Draco's fluffy white towel, of dark eyes fixed on me, and heat flushing my body in the golden light of a morning scented with spring.

I come up again. With a deep sigh, I have to blink several times to clear my mind. That's when I realise that there's a magical ingredient in the scent after all.

'Wish upon a star,' I whisper. I look at Beth. 'Really? Essence of the light of shooting stars?'

She just smiles.

Shaking my head, I comment, 'Now I'm glad that Spinner's Scents doesn't have a stall this year. There's no way we could beat your offerings this year.'

'Not that I want to complain about the absence of a serious competitor, but why is that?' asks the owner of BPAL.

'During the last year we have been working on healing scents mostly, a project with St Mungo's. And we've been involved in a project of the Department of Mysteries. In between, we've created only a few ordinary perfumes, and those were all special orders for weddings or birthdays and the like. So this year we simply don't have enough to offer to justify the fees.'

'Oh, you have to tell me more about that!' Beth's eyes sparkle with excitement. 'How about a dinner date later this week? A girls' night out, so we can catch up on everything properly?'

'Gladly,' I reply.

Research into the powers of magical scents has made great progress in recent years. Our great breakthrough may be lurking just around the corner, and I long to talk to someone about that who cares as much as I do and Beth, who supports a number of Muggle and wizarding charities, definitely does.

Soon it may be possible to restore not just factual memories but the emotions connected with events. Neville is hoping that maybe one of the new combinations of scented, charmed potions and memory restoration charms can be used to heal his parents at long last. For my parents and me, it's too late. Everything they ever felt for me when I was a baby and a child is lost forever. But it's still one reason why I care so much. I turn away, suddenly discomfited I hate coming across all emotional instead of behaving like the professional I should be.

I move to the 'black' section of the stall. BPAL is not only famous for cavorting with Muggles in the wizarding world, but for its twilight scents.

'Manticore's Sting?' I raise my eyebrows.

Another shrug. 'Just Billywig stings, for a bit of a bite.'

I grimace. I don't like pain in my perfume. 'Well, I guess using real Manticore venom is out; that would hurt only once, even in a perfume.'

Beth's answer is a throaty, rolling chuckle, and I realise that I miss her, her and BPAL, my second home away from home. At the Muggle university I never felt that I belonged.

I refrain from smelling 'Naga's Blood', in spite of the challenging grin from the owner of the Lab. I dislike the genre horror in all forms; I've had too much experience with the real thing in my life. Warily, I approach the far end of the stall. A sombre, black Bubble Charm protects the other highlight of BPAL's presentation for this year's May Fair.

'Darkest Kiss', the silver plaque announces, and a shiver runs down my back.

Taking a deep breath, I dip into the Bubble Charm.

It is a scent of winter and sadness, so much is clear at the first sniff. A cold, acrid head note whispers of stale incense, doused candles, and forgotten prayers. Then I choke back tears at one of the most desolate scents I have ever tasted. The heart of this perfume is deeply narcotic. Funeral flowers. The ashes after a wizarding burial. The darkest night of the soul. When I have to gasp for breath, blinking back tears, the base note fills my mouth with the bittersweet flavour of old grief, of remembered laughter, and reminiscences of a bright and shining spirit lost to the black kiss of death.

I am shaking when I emerge from the Bubble Charm. And I have no idea what the key ingredient of this perfume is.

I exhale heavily. Inhale. The clean, neutral air of the Great Hall.

Smelling perfume, Severus has taught me, is a meditation on the fluid state of the soul and its journey through time and space and beyond.

That is also the secret to discovering the ingredients of a perfume. Sinking back into the impressions that scent has left me with, grief and death are foremost in my mind. But just the absence of life would have caused the perfume to be just that: lifeless, flat, stale. This is something different. The presence, the absence, and the loss of a *soul*. Impossible.

Illegal, is my second thought. Followed by: Probably not, because it shouldn't even be possible, so there's most likely no law extant that covers use of this substance.

'Dementor's tears?' I whisper my question.

My former Mistress nods.

'But how?' I stammer. 'How's that possible? And which Dementor would?'

Cry. And not only cry but allow anyone to collect its tears. No ordinary perfume maker would be able to perform such a feat. I realise that I am gaping.

A smirk, a twist of her wand, and the Mistress of the Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab reveals the true colour of her robes: a deep golden hue, the third step towards Mastery according to the old rites. Of course, the *coniunctio* in the guise of the Sacred Marriage, would pose no problem for her, with her husband so deeply devoted to her.

'There is one Dementor who would cry for lost souls,' she says in a low voice. [2]

I shake my head, bewildered. So far, I thought that was a fairy tale. Apparently not.

I offer my congratulations but cannot suppress a moment of jealousy, chokingly bitter like Bunidmun secretion. They are just one step away from *rubedo*, while for me Mastery seems more unattainable than ever before. And not just because I lack the partner for the easiest form of the *coniunctio*.

Unsettled, I make my way to the other side of the stall and browse the comparatively harmless Muggle perfume oils presented there, from 'Ars Amatoria' to 'Bewitching Brews'. When I look up from Defututa [3] (Good Gods, what a night that was, the bed was so soft, and how we clung, burning together in olive blossom, honey, smoky vanilla, cinnamon, jasmine, sandalwood, and champaca flower), I notice two familiar figures at the far end of the Great Hall, standing in the sheltered corner next to the right wing of the huge doors. Frowning, I step back to hide behind a column and watch Lucius Malfoy, engaged in an animated discussion with none other than Mystery de Medici.

'What's Himself up to, chatting up that scarlot?'

I snort at the derisive designation that was invented one drunken girls' night a few years ago, when I shared the anecdote of Ron and the 'scarlet woman'.

'No idea,' I reply. 'But if I hadn't already believed that Lucius is up to something, seeing him that cosy with ~~her~~ would have convinced me.'

I keep staring at the pair. She is as dark as he is light in colouring, and together they make a striking couple. Beautiful, powerful, and plotting. And very definitely up to something.

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The water of the lake, at the moment still rose-tinted by the last rays of the setting sun, glitters with magical candles at the shore and below the surface. The air is soft with water and Charmed warm, like a summer night, for the Perfume Dinner [4] of the May Fair.

Gondolas with elaborately decorated dinner tables are floating on the lake. In the distance, a classical orchestra is playing ... so softly that you could almost mistake the sound for the natural sounds of the night, the liling waters of the lake, the whistling of the wind in the willows, the chorus of crickets. But I recognise the melody. It's Debussy's Claire de Lune. Not the tune your average crickets chirp.

Right now we're at this awkward stage where I can't quite hide that I'd like to be anywhere else but here, and ~~if~~ there, then with anyone else but Lucius. I'd love being here with Draco then I could pretend it was a romantic dinner. Or with Severus ... because then, well, then I wouldn't have to pretend anything, and we'd just enjoy the evening.

I press my knees tightly together. The air drifting up from the surface of the lake is cool in spite of the temperature Charms, and I definitely don't like a healthy breeze 'round my privates.

'A woman's perfume tells more about her than her handwriting,' Lucius announces, resplendent in night blue robes trimmed with silver. Taking my hand, he delicately sniffs my wrist. 'Christian Dior,' he attributes the quote and actually manages to surprise me.

'And your scent tonight, my dear, is extraordinary. Many of the best perfume makers of the wizarding world eschew wearing perfume tonight, of all nights, so as not to interfere with the delicate aromas and extraordinary flavours served for this occasion. But you ...' He laughs, a low, delighted laugh that sounds almost natural. Maybe it even is. Not even Lucius Malfoy can plan and prepare every breath he takes and every sound he utters with cunning and artifice. Then he claps his gloved hands, and I roll my eyes.

'Water,' he announces, as if there is an audience to listen to his verdict about my fragrance. 'A head note of dew, a heart note of rain, a base note of lake. And ... a hint of rainbow. Magnificent. However did you accomplish that, Hermione?'

If I told him that I asked the Mistress of my apprenticeship for an emergency Charm to impress him, he'd probably be less than impressed. So I shrug and attempt an enigmatic smile. Too bad I can't return the favour. But that's just not the done thing. I bet, though, that he's not in the nude tonight, either. However, I cannot catch even a whiff of whatever perfume or eau de toilette he's used. Lucius one, Hermione nil. And Lucius smirks.

Thankfully, the first scent is served, and I'm off the hook for the moment.

A delicate glass dome the size of a Bordeaux glass covers a delicate glass dish. For other diners, the dome is empty but for the scent trapped within glass and Charm. For Lucius, that was obviously not enough. A tiny golden trinket, the kind you wear on a charms bracelet, lies on my plate. A miniature rose. When I lift the dome, that is the scent that envelops me. Finest attar of roses. A rose garden at the height of summer, at that magical hour before noon when the fragrance of roses is at their fullest, warm, yet fresh, and utterly tantalising.

I am not surprised when I find Lucius tempting me with an aperitif of rose champagne as I look up.

I admit it, I am tempted. It's bound to be vintage champagne. But I remember Severus' warning, and as I slide my hand around the glass, I substitute champagne with water. Now *that's* what I call advanced transubstantiation.

'I'm glad you approve of my *err...* personal touch, Lucius,' I say and take a sip of rose-perfumed water. *Urgh*. Champagne would have tasted better.

He just sighs.

Apparently my wordless and wandless Transfiguration is up to scratch, but my sleight of hand skills not so much.

I can see that he is really disappointed; since Narcissa's death, his perfect mask has developed fine cracks he cannot seem to cover anymore. I hate that I'm feeling guilty.

Maybe we are sort of friendly competitors now, but it was his house I was tortured in eleven years ago. But that feels petty, too. Not even Lucius was happy about Voldemort's arrangements at that point.

I'm relieved when the next scent arrives. This time, a tiny golden bee. The fragrance she symbolises is honey lavender honey, to be exact.

And that's also the aroma of the first course. Lavender and honey ... along with roasted rounds of goat cheese nestling into beds of spring salad, drizzled with honey-vinaigrette and sprinkled with lavender blossoms.

Apparently Lucius has given up on making me drink ... While he gets a goblet of white wine, a glass of water with a piece of lemon appears in front of me. I relax a little.

'How sad that a woman as young as you are is so distrustful,' Lucius remarks.

I just shrug. 'Surviving a war will do that to you.'

I'm struck by how weary both of us sound. It's been eleven years, and I realise just how true my words are. It's been eleven years, and we are still just survivors.

But the goat cheese is delicious.

When we are done, the plates vanish. I'm wondering how the house-elves manage to keep track of all those gondolas without dumping anything into the lake. Then I ruthlessly banish all thoughts of house-elves. I do not want to remember the days of easy friendship and straightforward enmity that bolstered my failed campaign of elfish welfare. Or the not at all easy day when Dobby died for us. (Yes, in spite of everything, both friends and foes were still easy in the heyday of SPEW, easy to have and to hold, and most of all, to distinguish from each other.)

The next trinket is a tiny coconut. Unsurprisingly, the fragrance under the small glass dome is coconut ... and effervescent ginger, tickling nose and tongue, inviting a giggle and a sneeze.

The food to go with the scent is baguette soaked in a sauce of ginger and coconut milk, roasted and adorned with pâté de foie gras. Lucius sticks with his white wine. I cling to my glass of water.

The conversation is no longer forced. We're locked in silence.

The next perfume served is a floral scent again. Another miniature blossom. White-golden jasmine, this time. I inhale deeply.

'Narcissa loved jasmine,' Lucius comments, and I can see how tears blur his clear grey eyes.

I try to remember her, but it's been too long. When I returned from the States to work for Severus, Narcissa was already ill, and I never met her again. So all I have to draw upon is the vague memory of a haughty woman looking down her nose at a bushy-haired, rebellious little girl.

'A passionate scent,' I say at last. 'I'm sure it suited her.'

Lucius laughs. Genuine laughter, a laughter that makes him throw back his head, loosens the black velvet ribbon that fastens his queue and leaves him breathing hard.

'No,' he says when he has calmed down. 'It didn't suit her at all. She was much too aloof and too elegant for such a lush, hot-blooded scent. But she loved it all the same. And I, I loved her for that.'

'I'm sorry,' I whisper. And I am.

The soup arrives. Pumpkin, melon, and jasmine; it smells and tastes of summer, with a hint of golden autumn. I drink the soup gratefully. Warm and smooth, it soothes my nerves. But Lucius barely tastes it.

'Have you ever loved like that, Hermione?'

I squirm under his scrutiny. In the light of all those candles and the full moon, his eyes don't look just grey anymore, but instead like shining, piercing silver.

Luckily, at that moment the plates disappear again and the next fragrance arrives, saving me from having to reply just yet.

I frown at the bauble under the glass. In the flickering light of the candles, accompanied by the slight movement of the gondola, I have to look twice to realise what it is. It is a cocoa pod, cut in half to show off the cocoa beans ensconced in their shell. At least I think that's what it is.

When I lift the dome, I'm proven right. The rich aroma of chocolate envelops me. Calms me.

I look up and meet Lucius' gaze without flinching. 'I thought I did, once, a long time ago. But I was just a girl then. And I was wrong.'

The appearance of a slice of lamb roast served in a rich chocolate sauce accompanied by tart, fresh fennel spares me from the opportunity to elaborate and denies Lucius the chance to ask nosy questions.

For this course, Lucius switches from white wine to red. He lifts his glass in a toast. *'Can there be too many perfumes, too many open rosebuds, too many nightingales singing,'* he declaims. *'Too many green leaves, too many dawns in life? Can you love each other too much? Can you please each other too much?'*

'Victor Hugo,' I provide the author. My mother likes his works, and that's how I recognise the quote.

'Not everyone *can* love like that,' I add. Once again I wonder what exactly I smelled in Slughorn's Amortentia. Did the potion really scent so different from Ron? Did it really mean that at that time I had at some point of my life smell the person who could have been my true love? If my nose had been better? At least I know that I never wanted the kind of life Ron has now. Or the kind of man he has become. The chocolate sauce is too rich all of a sudden, the taste of lamb too strong in my mouth. 'And I think we *both* know very well that you can love someone too much.'

I shouldn't sound so bitter talking about the saintly love of my Master. I avert my eyes, ashamed of myself, and look out across the lake. It has grown dark. The merpeople's candles and the reflection of the stars are dancing in dark waters. The orchestra is still playing, but I no longer recognise the tune.

Lucius shakes his head. 'But Severus did not love Lily like that. He was infatuated with her. He idolised her. He did not love her the way I love Narcissa.'

I remain unconvinced, but silent anything I could say would be incredibly awkward and possibly insult Lucius, Severus, or both.

Lucius takes another swallow of red wine, swirls it in his mouth, before gazing meditatively into the glowing depths of liquid ruby. 'No, he didn't love Lily like I love Narcissa. Cissa is my twin flame. Lily was his obsession, the demon of his guilt, the angel of his atonement. That has little to do with love, and everything with mistakes he has no one to blame for but himself. Well, and me but enough of that. Let us enjoy the evening. The food, the perfume.'

Of course he stops speaking exactly when it gets interesting. He sighs and examines the wine as if it's a crystal ball. Though it's not the future he's interested in tonight, but the past. While I busy myself with the lamb roast on my plate, I keep watching Lucius closely. He may act the maudlin, sentimental widower tonight that may even be how he really feels these days but that doesn't mean he has no other agenda. I catch a sly glint in the corner of his eye and have to hide a frown in my water glass. No doubt, Lucius is up to something. And it's not appointing me his personal agony aunt.

The rest of the lamb disappears, leaving behind a whiff of chocolate. The enchanted gondola turns around. The zenith of the evening has passed, and we're on our way back to the jetty.

The last course arrives. First, the fragrance. An orange blossom, scent of southern springs. I toy with the delicate pendant. 'They are accessories for your line of natural scents at Narcisscents, aren't they?'

Lucius beams and nods. The conversation turns light, like the Panna Cotta scented with orange blossom essence that is served as dessert.

We talk shop, about Lushious, Narcisscents, Spinner's Scents, BPAL, the guild. New techniques Lucius has had his perfume makers experiment with, new applications of magical scents that Severus and I have been concerned with. With these topics, I know exactly how much I may say, and what I have to keep mum about. Of course Lucius tries to draw me out, but we both realise he won't manage. It's a game we both excel at.

The last fragrance appears on the table. This time, the bauble is a tiny fig. The aroma I release from its glass prison is fig and cinnamon, fruity, spicy, sweet. Like the kiss goodnight of a long-time lover.

The scent belongs to an after dinner cocktail, rum and soda with fig, cinnamon, vanilla and sugarcane syrup. Within view of the landing, I throw all caution to the winds and raise my glass to Lucius. The evening is almost over. And while I still have no clue what Lucius was up to with this dinner invitation, I have survived it none the worse for wear.

'Cheers,' I say. 'Thank you for a lovely evening, Lucius.'

'It was a pleasure, my dearest Hermione, a perfect pleasure,' he very nearly purrs. For once I see Draco in him, or perhaps him in Draco? Whatever. I smile at him. Maybe it wasn't some dastardly scheme à la Malfoy after all that prompted Lucius to invite me to dinner tonight, but just a desire for female company a little easier on one's nerves than Mystery de Medici, for example.

I enjoy the sweet rush of sugar and alcohol that the cocktail provides. Now, at last, I can relax a little and enjoy the lake and the night and the moonlight. We sip our cocktails in silence. When the glasses are empty, we reach the shore.

Lucius, ever the gallant gentlewizard, climbs up on the landing first, then extends his hand to help me step ashore. Although the boat is neatly moored, it's a bit of a scramble. And of course at exactly that moment, a breeze swirls around the jetty and lifts the hems of my robes, Marilyn Monroe style. I don't think it can have exposed more than my knee-high boots. Of course Lucius smirks as if he got to see much more. I just roll my eyes. It's good to be back on solid ground.

When I turn around to walk down the jetty toward the shore, Lucius raises his cane a little to indicate that I should wait a moment. With the other hand he reaches inside his night blue robes and produces a simple perfume phial that contains a dark, pearlescent liquid.

'Allow me to present to you the traditional farewell gift of the May Fair Perfume Dinner,' he says and offers the phial to me. 'A special sample from Lushious & Narcisscents.'

My curtsy may be awkward, but it's honest. Lucius' special samples are worth more than whole lots of expensive perfumes by other producers. Maybe I'll be able to discover something about those techniques he's been raving about when I analyse the scent. I don't ask what scent it is - it's part of the game to find out on my own. And he'll have done his best to make that task as difficult as possible for me.

'I look forward to hearing about your reaction to that fragrance.' Not even a smirk. He's damn sure I won't be able to unravel the riddle of the fragrance, then.

'I am sure that I will be thrilled,' I reply. Cocky Slytherin bastard.

'Oh, I am certain you will be.' Now he smirks. 'It's special.'

Only when we have reached the entrance of the Dawn Wing of Rose Manor House and Lucius bows over my hand, ghosting a kiss a few inches above my glove, do I finally catch a hint of the scent Lucius is wearing tonight. He has used the perfume so sparingly that it was unnoticeable outside even to my experienced nose. I am wondering now how much of the melancholy mood that weighed down our conversation tonight was due to the presence of that unconsciously perceived fragrance.

Lucius is wearing BPAL's Darkest Kiss. The scent of grief and lost souls. He's wearing it for Narcissa, who loved jasmine though it was not even 'her' scent. And who died of the after-effects of an old curse nine months ago.

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[1] Source: Chapter Thirty-Two, 'Flesh, Blood, and Bone', in 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire' by Joanne K. Rowling.

[2] The Dementor who would cry is an allusion to the story 'Pumblechook' by wartcap.

[3] 'Defututa' is a BPAL scent from the line 'Ars Amatoria'. All other scents are completely fictitious.

[4] The Perfume Dinner is based on a menu created by perfumer Jean-Michel Duriez in 2004.

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## Swadhsthana

Chapter 6 of 8

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

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## VI. Swadhisthana

*'Odours have a power of persuasion stronger than that of words, appearances, emotions, or will. The persuasive power of an odour cannot be fended off, it enters into us like breath into our lungs, it fills us up, imbues us totally. There is no remedy for it.'*

... Patrick Süskind

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From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

'Tamper with the deepest mysteries the source of life, the essence of self only if prepared for consequences of the most extreme and dangerous kind.'

*That is the first of the Fundamental Laws of Magic as formulated by Adalbert Waffling, the founding father of magical theory. Like the Muggles who've preserved Einstein's brain, you can visit Waffling's brain in the brain room in the Department of Mysteries. With the notable difference that you can still make **his** brain talk to you while Einstein's grey matter is mostly mess in a jar.*

*What I dislike most about truisms is that they are so very frequently **true**. Even a journey of one thousand miles starts with the first step. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Or as Ron prefers to put it: A little knowledge goes a long way.*

Similarly, the problem with those fundamental laws of magic is that they are so damn fundamental.

We cannot even fathom how much we do know or do not know.

*(Not to mention the added difficulty that **one** of the deepest mysteries is exactly **what** those deepest magical mysteries are in the first place.)*

Apart from that mystery of mysteries, we know for sure about six: the source of life, death, the essence of self, time, music, and love ...

I bet there's at least one more, though.

The mystery of olfaction.

*Muggles can't get a handle on it **and they** only have to deal with the chemical, physiological, and neurological aspects, not with the magic of it all.*

They do know, though, that olfaction is connected with one of the oldest parts of the brain, the limbic system. And I believe the same is true of olfactory magic.

*This is the primeval magic that covered the early human's scent trails and protected her from predators. Or in the case of the predator **this** is the sweet smell of magic that lured unsuspecting human prey into his trap.*

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## 10 May 2009

Sunday after May Fair.

I'm sitting at my desk in the attic of Spinner's End, sorting papers, souvenirs, and memories.

Severus is already back at work in the perfume lab. Raising my head, I look out the window to the other side of the road.

Muggles see the crumbling brick walls of a run-down factory there, complete with crooked chimney, closed and fallen to ruins decades ago. They keep complaining that the city council should finally get their arses in gear to do 'something' about this disgraceful blot on their cityscape. Visiting witches and wizards wander around Hagrid-sized walls of red stone set with white mortar, pass a solid wooden delivery gate and entrance door both painted red to match the walls and wonder what exactly lies beyond. The sign next to the door is exquisitely crafted: solid, cast brass with an oil-rubbed bronze finish and raised and polished bronze letters. 'Spinner's Scents', it reads, and the doorbell forms a stylised spinning wheel.

Richly rewarded after almost laying down his life for wizardkind, Severus bought the factory that ruined his father's health and most of his childhood in 1999. The chimney and most of the ruins were torn down, the grounds decontaminated and Muggle-proofed. All that remains now is the beautifully restored main factory building surrounded by storage sheds, knot gardens, and illusions of decay for Muggle passersby.

Looking down again, I notice that I've been shuffling and reshuffling a few wizarding photographs from the May Fair.

Beth, the Perfume Mistress of the Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, is waving at me enthusiastically. Her husband stands behind her, interspersing his smile with saucy winks.

They've offered to take me back if things don't work out here.

A job, another shot at Mastery, or just a place to stay. Much like a family that would welcome you back, no matter what. And **they were** like a family for me when I tried to find my way back to the wizarding world after Muggle college. When I had to admit not even pretending to be Muggle would bring back the feelings for me that my parents lost when only their factual but not their emotional memories could be restored. When old friendships didn't stay the distance, and remembrances of the home of my teenage years bred nightmares instead of fond nostalgia.

It's good to know that I have somewhere to go if ... that there are other options if ... that ...

But ...

... looking around my attic room with its subtle and well-crafted niches of wizard space that form a little used kitchenette (most of the time Severus and I cook and dine in the spell-enlarged kitchen downstairs) and a small bathroom ... gazing at the wide window sills of the dormer window where Luna's invisible lotus flower is supposed to get enough sunshine and moonlight to thrive, the shelves lining the walls, packed with folders of carefully Bubble-charmed scent samples, lined with tiny phials of perfume samples, stacked with my books ... thinking of the way my books feel at home up here and of the library downstairs, where I feel at home, with Severus ensconced in his favourite chair and scowling at me over a tattered paperback as if daring me to comment upon his reading preferences (classic whodunits, usually) ...

... my throat constricts, my chest grows tight. Too tight to breathe properly.

Oh, here's a picture Draco took.

Severus and I, on the terrace after the guild banquet, the first evening of the fair. For once, Severus is not scowling. Instead, he almost smiles. Not quite, just almost. Such a wistful expression.

Heat rises to my face, suffuses my cheeks.



When I was a student, his grudging approval, often expressed not in praise but simply in the absence of castigation and chastisement, meant more to me than the enthusiastic and garrulous praise of other professors. Just to meet his high standards *barely* was more of a challenge than to excel in other classes. I admit: the opportunity to prove the boys wrong in their assessment of his character provided additional allure. And after being told how 'stupid' I was over and over again, it may have been less than modest but certainly satisfying to be right about *some* things. It was even worth being labelled 'know-it-all' by my so-called best friends. (Yes, yes, of course that was just for 'fun'. Only *they* never used the term with a delicately raised eyebrow and a slight wink, the way Severus did even then paying me the compliment he could not offer in any other form.)

When Luna in her unfathomable wisdom started dropping not so subtle hints that it was time for me to make a decision about what to do with the rest of my life (she put an Ariranha-Sim-ou-Não a giant 'yes-or-no-otter' in my bed) in spring 2007, I read in the *Aulde Alchemist's Annual* that Severus Snape had claimed the rank of a Perfume Master in the guild. For the first time in years, magical ambition stirred without question or hesitation.

Now I'm here, living in Spinner's End, working for Spinner's Scents, working *with* Severus, and the past seventeen months have been more demanding, more challenging, and more satisfying than I dreamed life could be in a very long time.

Yet I'm about to fail. My Master. And myself.

I don't know what's worse.

But apparently for all my talent how I've come *to hate* that word! I lack the depth of desire it takes to achieve Mastery. Talent is not enough. Ambition is not enough. Not even an *obsession* of more than twenty years seems to suffice.

Curling my fingers into fists, the nails bite into the softer flesh of my palms. But even the resulting sting of pain cannot suppress the hot shudder of shame rushing across my back as I recall my explanation of the goal of my spiritual journey toward Mastery, and Severus' answer:

*'Love.'*

*'In that case, you have chosen the wrong Master.'*

How could I put it like that? It sounds so ... so ... starry-eyed ... sentimental ... simplistic. Naïve. Trite. Not at all like me. Not like the answer of an adept with years of experience in magical philosophy and theory. And besides, it's not *love* I'm looking for! My grail is the magical connection between olfaction and emotion. That's what I should have said, and not just because it sounds more professional. The situation that spawned my obsession originally is mere circumstance, and Merlin knows I've had enough therapy to cope with the trauma of effectively losing my parents' love.

*'In that case, you have chosen the wrong Master.'*

I release a shivery breath. I'm lucky he left it at that brittle reply and didn't flay me alive with that sharp tongue of his! He may have mellowed since the war, but that doesn't mean he suffers fools gladly even now.

But I have not chosen the wrong Master, I think stubbornly. He's the only Master I ever wanted. And besides, even if love was truly goal and agent of the spiritual and magical transformation I am striving for who could be a better Master to teach me than Severus? There's a bloody *film* about his love for Lily and subsequent, darkly heroic deeds thanks to Weasley's Wizard Wheezes Entertainment, damn it!

In the photograph, Severus keeps smiling. And I

Blindly I grasp for the next item I've poured on my desk with the other odds and ends of the perfume fair.

A small phial. The 'special' sample Lucius Malfoy gave to me on the second evening of the fair. Still safely sealed and untouched.

A sign? Telling me that I should be working, not moping?

It *is* a strategy that has always served me well in the past. I close my eyes. Take a deep breath. Turn around that photograph and pull over my journeywoman's diary 'Hermione Granger's Perfume Notebooks'. Yes, in my idiocy and arrogance I chose *plural* for the title. So sure was I that this would be just the next step on my way, *Vol. I* of many notebooks to follow.

I clench my teeth, open the book, and my eyes.

*It's not too late.*

I still have my Mastery phial. And work to do.

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First I run some standard tests on the phial, which prove the perfume to be borderline Dark, but not beyond the Ministry-approved standards. Nothing I didn't expect. To be honest, if any potion, perfume, or other magical object given to me by Lucius Malfoy had passed my scan and come out clean, I doubt I would have even contemplated trying it. As it is, I'm staring at the phial and wondering what the heck Lucius wants.

Me?

Could it be that simple?

Never.

And not just because I'd never believe that a wizard like Lucius would want a very nearly middle-aged (at least by Muggle standards) and fairly frumpy Hermione Granger *like that*. He has turned his affiliation with his old House into a life-long vocation. Unlike Goyle Junior, whom you could mistake for a Hufflepuff by now. But wouldn't Lucius be smart enough to know that I'd expect Slytherin wiles from him and put just enough magic into his perfume to fool me anyway? *Ack!* That way lies madness and a massive headache. It's past time to put this wartime paranoia behind me. I'm a licensed perfume maker with years of experience. I'm journeywoman to none other than Perfume Master Severus Snape. And Lucius may be a competitor to Spinner's Scents, but he's also Severus' friend. And he hasn't been my enemy for a long time.

All right.

I pull out the Ministry form for a standard analysis of magical perfumes, although I know it by heart. However, anal retentiveness paves the way to perfection.

Analysis of a perfume sample obtained from Lucius Malfoy, May 2 2009.

The first set of questions deals with preliminaries. I write down how, where, and when I acquired the perfume. Then I move on to its exterior presentation.

The phial is very simple. If challenged to label it, I would have said standard student issue, ca. 1975. Inside the flagon, the perfume is dark, almost black, with a pearlescent, almost metallic sheen and thickly viscous. Resinous. More like balm, less like liquid perfume. But it's not quite not yet? a solid perfume. *Semi-solid*, I write.

The analysis of the actual fragrance follows the magical classification system for perfumes that is based on the seven chakras. Though each chakra has its own mystical and magical meaning, in perfume lore the chakras mostly provide an organisational tool, like the Muggle periodic table.

Upon unstopping the flask, I perform some basic spells to gather a few first impressions of the fragrance.

I begin with a spell that reveals what the Muggles call head, heart, and base note. I will still need to let them develop the natural way to perceive all nuances of the scents. But the spell is standardised; the interaction of the perfume with the chemistry of my body and my magic is not. Like every good perfume maker I'm interested in both: objective results as well as subjective reactions. I must be a scientist and an artist at the same time.

Ajna, the chakra of the brow or forehead, symbolises the Muggle head note, the first fleeting, intuitive perception of a scent. This head note almost makes me sneeze. Herbs, but in a condensed, concentrated form. Thick and pungent. Like cough drops or syrup.

Anahata, the heart chakra, unveils the Muggle heart note, which emerges when the short-lived scent of the head note dissipates and presents the complex balance of a perfume's heart. For a second, I think of parchment. But no this is leather. Acerbic and mellow at the same time. Smoke and honey. An intoxicating, exhilarating masculine smell that makes me inhale deeply, again and again and again.

Until the base note, connected with the Muladhara, base or root chakra, slowly surfaces. An intense, unsettling scent. Rich. Deep. *RedMusk*. Hair drenched in sweat ... from running. Or sex.

My heart is racing as I perform a quick Charm that reveals the presence of a substance whose effect on human beings is still disputed by Muggle science: pheromones. Tied to the sacral chakra, Svadhisthana, pheromones have been a traditional ingredient of all erotic magical perfumes since the days of Cleopatra. The spell only shows what I already know: this perfume is brimming with pheromones. Interestingly, the pheromonal balance of this perfume consists in equal parts of male and female components. Yin and yang, dark and light.

Curious from the start, I am fascinated by now as Lucius knew I would be, damn that man. I love perfumes that unveil themselves slowly, gradually, that cannot be understood immediately. And this scent promises a bouquet of fragrant mysteries ... starting with the question of why the composition feels familiar although I am certain that I have never smelled it before.

However, to discover more, I have to actually apply the perfume.

Standard detection spells only reveal the Muggle scent notes, which answer the question of what you can smell when and that within limits. Only the heat of naked skin allows precious perfumes to divulge those secrets.

Magical notes form the chord of how and how much enchanted scents affect a person. Manipura manipulates a person's appearance and its perception. Vishuddha affects the senses of those who wear and those who smell a perfume. Its power ranges from playful creativity and communication to guilt, wisdom, and immortality. But it is Sahasrara, which is supposed to grant control of the deepest mysteries by scent alone, locking in a person's consciousness or elevating it to the next level of mystical awareness ... And no perfume maker worth their salt will allow the mysteries of their magical fragrances to be exposed by minor spells.

And *Bindu* forms the pinnacle of the art of magical perfumery, the complete cadence of notes and effects. To understand powerful magical perfumes with body, mind, and soul is the treasure we are truly seeking, one of the Great Works of alchemy. That scent closest to skin and soul, the heart of sensuality ... *and the true scent of magic*.

~~~

I am most painfully aware that true understanding of a *single* powerful magical perfume can make the difference between gaining my Mastery and losing all hope of ever reaching that lofty status. Yet I am strangely reluctant to anoint all chakra points of my body with the mysterious, dark liquid from that quaint phial.

Shivering, I stare at the small flagon on my desk, lying so innocently on the Ministry of Magic's standardised form for perfume analysis. I cannot remember the last time I have encountered a perfume that strong if I ever have. It must be ten minutes since I've cancelled my detection spells. But I'm still gasping for breath, and my pulse is still throbbing my ears.

A syrup of herbs. Leather and musk, pheromones and power.

Why does that mixture of scent and magic seem familiar to me? And why did bloody Lucius Malfoy give it to me?

I reach for the phial as if caught in a dream. Rationally, I know it cannot possibly affect my mind yet. So far, I've barely sniffed it! My perceptions and impressions are based on carefully controlled detection spells. It is impossible that it should affect me already. There is no perfume that can achieve that.

I shake myself. This is a test, no doubt about that. And maybe Severus is even in on it. I wouldn't put it past him.

A deep breath.

No prayer.

I pour a single drop of perfume on my left index finger. The liquid is so thick that it looks like a dark pearl on my pale skin.

For a second I hesitate. Then I part the curls on top of my head with my right hand, reach up, and clumsily smear the first drop on my scalp.

Before I lose my nerve, I follow up that first drop and swipe the second across my forehead.

The first drop seems to have no effect, and I exhale deeply in relief. I did not expect Lucius Malfoy to dabble in the deepest mysteries. On the other hand, I wouldn't put it past him.

The head note fits my detection spell. Only it's even spicier. And for some reason, I think it's delicious.

Vishuddha has a definite effect on me. As soon as the perfume touches my suprasternal notch, I'm aroused. As if somewhere deep inside me a switch has been flicked. *Damn Lucius Malfoy*. He has slipped me a lust perfume. I should have known. What would he regard as 'creative self-expression' besides nipples pressing painfully against the heavy fabric of robes and a hot, wet, and inappropriate rush of desire ...

For a few minutes I remain frozen, fighting for control. Waves of heat and magic sweep me along. And when I manage to ride the crest of their power, the thrill is like nothing I've known so far. But it's not enough.

And so I reach for the phial once more.

The heart chakra brings the scent of leather, enveloping me like the most intimate embrace.

Moving on to Manipura, I suddenly feel ... exposed and self-assured at the same time. As if I'm sitting naked in a sauna, and the world and all its doubts are drifting away in a haze of heat and sizzling steam.

Without hesitation I move on to Svadhisthana. My mistake. I cannot contain a gasp when the fragrant liquid touches the skin of my lower belly. Pheromones have no effect on human beings? I want one of those damn Muggle scientists to bloody try this perfume. I'm nearly squirming in my chair to rub my clit against the leather upholstery in

order to alleviate the urge that has gripped me even stronger than before.

I don't know if it takes me another five minutes or an hour to thrust my hand inside my panties. But thankfully, Muladhara only floods me with the expected base note of musk.

Then I wait for the full impact of the perfume to hit me.

But it doesn't happen.

I can feel it working its magic within me and without me. But it's waiting. *Waiting.*

Oh, bloody fucking hell!

It's one of those interactive perfumes that need to be smelled by another person to unleash their full power on both parties.

... I should have known.

For a while I sit not still, but rocking slightly to accommodate the throbbing between my legs and contemplate my options.

I could go to bed and wait for the effects to wear off. Boring, but safe. I could Floo away and visit Draco. Not boring, and still safe. But for some reason, I find this option unappealing. I could also Apparate to Malfoy Manor and confront Lucius. Not boring. And not at all safe. That I still consider that possibility beyond the pale reassures me.

... I could also visit Severus in the lab.

That my mind comes up with no reason why this is a bad, bad idea should worry me. I know that. But it doesn't. And not even *that* worries me.

I'm in trouble.

And I don't mind at all.

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Walking across the road to the lab and inhaling air cooled by a blustery spring breeze calms me. In front of the red door, I halt and hesitate, my gaze focused on the bronze spinning wheel of doorknob and bell. The fateful symbolism is not lost on me.

But I rather doubt that even Lucius Malfoy would slip me a lust perfume strong enough to land himself in Azkaban or worse. Even without Dementors, Azkaban is not exactly the kind of place you want to spend a decade or two if you can help it, especially if you're a slave to a life in luxury like Lucius. And while his grief for Narcissa is fierce and brutal, I don't think he's suicidal. Last but not least, while the sample *is* a strong erotic perfume, toeing the line of legality, it's not precisely Dark. To be honest, I haven't a damn clue what exactly I'm dealing with, which is all the more infuriating because I cannot shake that hint of familiarity the perfume exudes. I remember Lucius' smirking promise of how 'special' that sample would prove to be and scowl.

Still I dither and do not reach for the door. Fragrance analysis is an essential part of our work, of course. During the last seventeen months, surprising each other with sample testing both with concoctions of our own and samples from competitors has become almost a game for Severus and me. Submitting a sample that has me stymied for his scrutiny is also standard working procedure. But springing such a potent, reactive perfume on Severus without warning ... I waver. However, he's more than powerful enough to contain the effects of any perfume. He is a Master, after all. The air itself obeys his command. And recalling the day I acquired this perfume sample, I also remember the way Severus' gaze dipped down to my towel-wrapped bosom that morning at the May Fair and how his long, languorous look travelled over the curves of my body. With the strange and compelling scent I'm wearing right now, I have the singular opportunity of yanking his chain. Perhaps my one and only chance to truly challenge him. Thanks to Lucius Malfoy, of all people.

Now I am smirking, and the red door swings open at my unspoken command. The wards do not consider me an enemy or a source of danger. Relief floods me. Exhilaration replaces panic. A sense of adventure fills me and drives me onwards. Determined, I walk down the path through the knot gardens toward the main entrance of the lab.

I love the gardens that surround the lab and intersperse the sheds. The pollution of the city around us prevents their use for magical perfumery, but their plain Muggle odours, colours, and symmetry are pleasing for their own sake, especially now, at the height of spring. Approaching the lab, I find that I am still able to appreciate the large, round-topped windows and their Victorian cast-iron frames that run along the sides of the building in spite of the excitement rushing through my veins. Reassuring! And now I can barely wait to see Severus' reaction. I throw open the door with an exuberant gesture and enter the lab with a gust of wind propelling me forward and tugging on my curls.

Closing the door behind me, I lean against it for a moment to catch my breath and to find out what Severus is working on. I certainly don't want to disrupt or endanger delicate work. But it looks as if he's doing what I did when Lucius' perfume sample caught my attention sorting the material he acquired at the May Fair. At least he's standing at his huge desk at the far end of the lab, with stacks of paper and sample phials piled up in front of him.

The noise of my impetuous entrance has alerted him, and now he's turning toward me. About to inquire what has precipitated this unruly behaviour, he must have caught a first hint of my mysterious scent. With an audible crack of teeth clicking together, he closes his mouth. I can almost see how his long nostrils flare. Staring at me, his already pale face turns ashen. For a moment he seems frozen in place, struck immobile by the merest whiff of perfume. For a moment panic grips me again have I miscalculated the strength of the sample that badly? I take two, three faltering steps toward him, then hesitate, scared.

No he is moving again. But now he jerks back his head, as if struck. With long strides he crosses the room toward me. As he comes closer, I can see that he is clenching his hands into fists so hard that his knuckles stand out bony and white. His lips are thin and tight with tension. I can see that he's gritting his teeth so hard that a muscle has started twitching at his jaw. My heart is pounding so hard now that I can feel it in my throat and in my ears. Merlin, Nimue, and sweet baby Jesus, whatever is this perfume *doing* to him? Then he's standing in front of me, and I can see that he's close, so close, to losing control.

He is staring at me as if he's never seen me before. Dazed, he is shaking his head. But now, with him within arm's reach, the effects of the perfume increase for me again. My breasts are tingling, and a diffuse ache pulses low in my body. The scent of herbal syrup, leather, and musk is almost palpable. The urge to rub myself against him, to wrap myself into this into *his* smell is almost irresistible. But his eyes, so beautiful and black, are wide and shocked, and his lips curl helplessly, as if he's torn between crying and screaming.

'You ' he whispers, instead. 'You how how could you *you*'

He falters, and very slowly, as if it is happening against his will, he raises a shaking hand, uncurls his fist, and reaches for me. Capturing my wayward curls with his fingers, he inhales a shuddering breath, and I feel a hot flush of desire flowing through my whole body, leaving me weak-kneed and gasping and bathed in a fragrance of herbs, young grass in spring, hay at the height of summer, distilled into a pungent potion in winter followed by another scent, warmer, and more intimate, which only naked skin pressed against naked skin will reveal fully: the powdery odour of new parchment, the delicate flavour of exquisite vellum, and leather. The living, masculine scent of leather

'What the fucking hell is *that*?!' I shout, jump back, stumble backward, and collide painfully with the closed door behind me. Trembling, I lean against it to stay on my feet, although my legs want to buckle.

I *know* those scents

For a second, Severus stands like a statue, hand still raised, still reaching for me. Then he, too, starts shaking. Colour flushes his waxen face, burning in bright red spots of agitation high on his cheekbones.

'As if you don't know, traitress,' he snarls, advancing upon me.

'But I don't,' I protest. 'I have no idea what's going on'

Except that I want you. Naked. *Now*. And

'Lion-faced *snake*,' he hisses, and a fine drop of his spittle hits my neck. 'Just like her, just like her I should*never* have trusted you!'

He's so close that I can smell his hair now, the strong, piercing scent of hair that tends to greasiness, with an undertone of spices from his shampoo soap, sweat from his excitement and arousal, and musk. And I can feel the effect of pheromones. His own, or the ones from the perfume I cannot tell. But they keep me from moving as his hands close around my neck, his long fingers trembling over my pulse, as he gasps, but not for air

The power of the perfume and the pain in his eyes combine and mesmerize me. I do not move, barely breathe. I feel light-headed and strangely disassociated from the scene that is playing out between us. With the sick clarity of a fever vision, I realise what I am smelling and what he must be smelling to react the way he does.

'It's a perfume based on Amortentia, isn't it?' I ask. 'Lucius Malfoy gave it to me, the second evening of the May Fair, when I went out to dinner with him. He promised that it is special and that I ... that I would enjoy its ... effects.'

I raise my head to face him. I know my lips are quivering as if I'm a child trying hard, so hard not to cry. No vows will make him believe me now, no promises will ever convince him that I haven't betrayed him. But maybe Legilimency will unveil all that lies within my mind. Without a second thought, I meet his eyes and hope and pray that my mind will lie open before him, orderly kept, like my perfume notebooks.

I lose myself in his eyes I've always loved dark eyes, and his are truly black and fathomless. Like a lake at midnight. Or the sky without moon or stars. Or like that perfume ...

Abruptly the tension drains from his body, and he slumps toward me or draws me into his embrace, buries his face in my curls, gasping, panting, inhaling my scent so fiercely that he is hyperventilating his whole body is shaking with the effort. I try to hold him, and onto my sanity at the same time, when all my senses urge me to get as close to him as two human beings can be, and he clings to me as if he's drowning, drowning. But I must, I must know *everything* before I before we

Then his lips find mine, and all rational thoughts flee my mind. Scents and sensations mingle until I feel like I'm floating. Until nothing remains but a frenzy to get clothes off, to get my hands on skin, my hands on *him*

Suddenly, Severus breaks the kiss with a muffled curse. A strange spell, accompanied by a jerky gesture, and all at once the dizziness recedes as I stare into the face of a Great Horned Owl, which looks surreally out of place connected to Severus' body, wearing his typical black frock coat.

When I open my mouth, an astonished 'Who-hooo!' escapes. My shaking fingers find feathers and a pronounced beak. *'What the fuck?!'* emerges as mellifluous hooting.

'I'm sorry,' Severus apologises, his voice sounding deeper and silkier than ever through his impressive black beak. 'That's the first thing I came up with Great Horned Owls have a really, really bad sense of smell.'

'Ah-hooo,' I hoot and glare at him, never mind that I know as well as he does that Bubble Head doesn't work for Amortentia (or any other potion or perfume containing Ashwinder eggs). Now that I can think straight again, I remember that there was something I wanted to know before we *if we*

Severus ducks his head. The way he ruffles his feathers and blinks his owlish eyes, I gather he's ashamed.

'Who-hoot?' *What?*

He looks up. His pupils are huge and black in the golden orbs of the owl's face.

He clears his throat in a series of short, hooting noises. But when he speaks, he sounds like Severus again. *'Brewed this perfume,'* he says. 'In spring 1977. I wanted to force Lily to realise that I, and not James, am ' He turns away, walks with uncertain steps to the nearest worktable. 'That I was her true love, as she was mine. Above everything else, I wanted to win her back.' He leans heavily on the table. Then turns around with slumping shoulders, as if weighed down by a world of guilt all over again. 'It wasn't as strong then, Hermione! You have to believe me! I would never have done that to her, not even to impress Lucius or the ' He closes his golden owl's eyes in agony.

'Whoo-hooo-ho-ho!' I reply, irritation warring with compassion within me. *Why does/he* get to talk like a human, and I get to hoot? Clicking my beak, I wish I could tell him what I think. I may never gain my Mastery now, but I *do* know a thing or two about Amortentia in spite of his refusal to teach me how to brew it. Like the fact that the potency of Amortentia increases with age. If this perfume works even just *sort of* like Amortentia, it was nowhere near strong enough to serve as the equivalent of a Muggle date-rape drug in 1977. However, after letting it age and gain power for thirty-two years, it's a miracle that we're still able to have a somewhat reasonable conversation right now, owl heads or no.

... but if he brewed it for Lily, why did he never use it? And how did Lucius Malfoy get his hands on the perfume?

Either Severus has read my mind again, or those questions are so logical that he knows I would have asked them next. 'Lucius and Narcissa tested the perfume for me.' He hoots a sigh. 'It worked; it revealed them to be what another extremely Dark spell had already proven beyond any doubt: that they were "soul mates" in the sense of magical theory, uniquely compatible in their essential magical make-up. And that, even more than Lucius' money or political influence, was what made them, both of them, so invaluable for the Dark Lord and why he chose Draco to ' He shakes his head, unable to continue.

Well, that answers some very old questions. But what about Lily?

But suddenly, before he can say another word, I know the answer to my question. Because there is only one explanation for how he reacted to whatever it is he smelled when I entered the lab. And because I feel *have felt*, almost thirteen years ago the same.

'te Incantatem,' I hoot-cry. 'When you tried your Amortentia perfume all those years ago, it wasn't Lily you smelled!'

I gasp as the potent perfume ensnares my senses all over again. His scents, the way they have matured and changed over the years, envelop me. An eerie feeling of vertigo grips me as the full impact of what this of what *I* smell, and of what *he* smells hits me.

'It was *me*,' I whisper. 'You smelled *me*. All those years ago before I was even born! you smelled me.'

His proximity appears to increase the potency of the perfume, and I know I have to act quickly now, or I'll get really, really bad ideas concerning that magnificent black beak and those fluffy feathers ...

But he just stands there, stiffly, shocked, and blinks at me with his beautiful golden owl's eyes, expecting revulsion and recrimination, or at the very least, that I turn around and walk away without looking back.

'Come,' I order. 'If you want me, come with me. Come with me. Now.'

When I extend my hand to him, he takes it, and I lead him outside, lead the strange owl-man at my side through the fragrant maze of the knot gardens, out the red door, across the street, and inside Spinner's End. The drumbeats of my heart reverberate in my steps. Scents and sensations swirl around me and I feel as if I can fly, fly without wings.

At long last.

oooOooo

Muladhara

Chapter 7 of 8

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

oooOooo

VII. Muladhara

'Come, come, whoever you are

Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving

What does it matter?

Ours is not a caravan of despair.

Come, even if you have broken your vows

A hundred times

Come, come again, come.'

Rumi

'No one has ever attained by suffering

The Infinite Treasure of Union

Yet, strangely, without suffering

No one ever saw that Treasure.'

Abu Said

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### From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks:

*The basis of any powerful perfume are distillations that Paracelsus calls 'quintae essentiae'. A 'quinta essentia' is the essence of an ingredient, the extract that remains when the relevant substance has been freed of all impurities, refined to highest purity, and separated from all other elements interfering with its inherent quality. In this inherent quality, says Paracelsus, the true nature of a substance is revealed, pure power without any foreign, distracting admixtures. It is the soul of a scent and alchemically equals the spirit of life itself.*

*That refinement is not only the quality Perfume Masters look for in their raw ingredients, but the quality they demand of their own souls.*

*Only from the absolute of a soul can arise the power that allows a Perfume Master to understand magic on a molecular level, to enchant fragrances instead of ingredients, and to perceive the scent of magic itself.*

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10 May 2009

By the time we stand in the library, I'm desperate. My mind is reduced to nothing but need. Frantic, pathetic need that makes me cling to Severus and has me clawing at his coat, fumbling for his buttons.

Severus grabs my wrists to keep me at a distance, but I fight him. I squirm, I flail, I thrash. He has to push me back against the closed door and use the full weight of his body to keep me from trying to tear off his clothes. As he leans against me, his erection presses into my stomach. He wants me, too. Even with the head of a Great Horned Owl, and almost no sense of smell. I moan and grind my hips against him.

'Not like this,' he growls. His feathers tickle my throat, and I gasp.

'No,' I agree, inhaling deeply. I am already drunk on his scent, but I want more. I want to taste his skin, his lips. 'I want you to kiss me.'

'That's not what I meant.' With a groan, he presses even closer against me, and I am drowning in his beautiful, beautiful smell it will be a happy death! 'Not. Like *This*.'

Without relinquishing his hold on my hands, he drags me to the door, stumbling up the stairs, and to his bathroom. With a crash he flings open the door to this private sanctuary, and I follow him willingly. But when he attempts to shove me into the shower, clothes and all, I dig in my heels. '*Not like this!*'

The tuft of feathers above his left eye twitches. 'No?'

Suddenly his wand is in his hand. '*Evanesco!*'

Clutching my own wand, I find myself undressed. Shivering and naked, I stand in front of him. The cool air makes my skin prickle with goose bumps and my nipples pucker pertly. But it also calms this insane need that has gripped me, and I'm able to look around instead of trying to rip the buttons off Severus' frock coat and shirt.

More than a few square feet of wizard space have gone into the creation of this bathroom: the shower, neatly inserted into a closet in the wall to my right is as big as my whole bathroom up in the attic. Peeking inside, I glimpse a wide wooden bench lining the right side of the shower. The showerhead is a height-adjustable nozzle and as big as a soup bowl. A shelf on the left holds a selection of soaps, shampoos, and potions, as well as a full set of sponges and bath brushes. The glass door and the wooden bench make me wonder if the shower doubles as a sauna. Not bad, not bad at all. Clearly, the rumours about Severus' habits concerning his personal hygiene banded about at Hogwarts so many years ago were absurdly off the mark. And the huge bathtub at the centre of the room behind Severus looks even more inviting than the shower ...

Severus is wearing far too many clothes for my taste. I twirl my wand at him in a suggestive gesture and return the favour '*Evanesco!*' To see him naked and very much aroused right in front of me increases the urgency that burns in my veins once more. And Merlin, the smell! I can see it, rays of green and gold, radiating from his body. I already regret washing away that delicious magic, but Severus is right our first time shouldn't be like this, distorted and blurred by a magical drug. And besides, I think, smirking a little, there's still enough left in my phial for fun and games at another time.

'Get rid of that bird head now!' I command, pulling him into the shower closet. 'Or your feathers are going to get wet.'

He manages just in time before the jet of hot water hits him. Shaking his head, he sprays me with warm droplets and sends a few downy feathers tumbling down to the floor, where they swirl away into the drain.

'Wench!' he mutters and grabs the nozzle from my hand. 'Time to get you clean!'

'*Oooohh!*' I gasp and undulate in the stream of heated water, trying to get closer to him again. I want to touch him! Feel him *Now!*

'No, Hermione,' he reminds me, his voice stern. But I can see that the hand that his holding the showerhead is shaking. Now that he's no longer protected by an owl's weak olfactory senses, he is affected by the perfume again, too. 'Remember what we agreed upon not like this.'

'*Not like this*,' I echo feebly and start shivering again in spite of the hot water rushing over my body. My knees are so weak that I wonder how long I'll be able to stay on my feet without collapsing. The effect of the perfume is definitely stronger for the one who wears it than for the one who smells it.

'*Shhh...*' he soothes me. 'Lean against me. I'll hold you. And tilt your head back ...'

I obey. He is slender, almost slim, but at the same time more muscular and stronger than I expected he supports most of my weight without any apparent effort. The way he presses between my buttocks from behind, hot and solid and deliciously slick with water, makes me marvel at even more hidden assets. Instinctively, I throw back my head, not bothering to suppress a moan.

'Yessss,' he hisses, but makes no move increase the friction between us and to alleviate his own need. Instead, he fastens the shower nozzle to the wall somewhere above my head, lowers the intensity of the spray, and plucks a soap from the shelf.

There is an ease, an intimacy between us that amazes me and fills me with deep delight. I feel as if we've done this a hundred times, when in fact we've only ever touched each other casually so far, perhaps not even a dozen times, all in all. At the same time, I revel in the thrill of discovery as I watch how his long, slender fingers deftly spread fragrant suds over my skin.

'Lotus, wintergreen, and vervain,' he explains. 'A soap I made for purposes of spiritual purification. It should work for that perfume, too.' I should think so especially lotus, as a flower of divine purity and physical asceticism. He starts with the top of my head, the crown chakra. 'Careful now, you don't want to get soap in your eyes.' The forehead. A caress of his right palm, thumb and index finger at the base of my throat. I arch back my neck and sigh with pleasure. But he's already moving on, hands gliding downward, cupping my breasts, teasing my nipples with slick, gentle pinches. 'Glorious,' he murmurs. 'So full. *Hmm...* so heavy ... so lovely ... When I saw you with Draco last week, I could have killed the boy for envy. To be allowed to touch and revel in such bounty when he has no more than a passing interest in your beauty ...' Now he rubs both hands downwards between my breast, soaping the chakras of heart and solar plexus, until he lets his hands rest on the sacral chakra, the pubic bone.

'Draco's a friend' I manage, before I have to gasp for breath as Severus rubs the soap into the curls at the apex of my thighs with his left, frothing up the suds with the heel of his right. It's a miracle that the warm drizzle of the shower doesn't go up in steam. I writhe against Severus and whine, producing incoherent noises of need. 'Severus, please!' I beg. 'Have mercy!'

Breathing hard, he involuntarily thrusts against me from behind. I wouldn't mind even that, which is not my idea of an ideal first encounter, but I'm desperate now. How Severus manages to restrain himself is a mystery to me. My whole body is pulsing with need, vibrating

'Don't move now,' he orders. And I obey; I hardly dare to breathe while my heart beats out a wild, irregular tattoo and his left hand glides down to the root chakra between vagina and anus, while his right index finger slides between my wet, slick folds and finds the swollen nub of my clitoris.

For a moment, he just rests his fingers on my skin. Then he presses down and moves his fingers in tiny circles. Once. Twice. Three times. I have no breath left to scream. Silent, gasping, I convulse as the absolute pleasure of orgasm surges through my body. Distantly, I notice Severus thrusting against me, groaning with the power of his own release. But although he must realise that I would welcome him inside my body, he does not enter me.

Then my knees buckle. Severus catches me. Arm in arm, we slide down on the bench of his shower. Away from the warm sprinkle of water, it is noticeably cooler. When I shudder against him, he reaches a shaking hand for the showerhead, and turns the water on full again, hot enough to steam up the cabin.

When we finally emerge from the shower, all my muscles feel like jelly, but there's not a hint of perfume left to affect my senses or my mind. Only Severus and I are left, in full possession of our senses, wet and flushed with the heat of the water and our passion.

'The tub next?' I suggest, grinning.

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Silent, he stands before me, his black hair clinging wet and slick to a surprisingly graceful skull. He stands tall and pretends to be at ease, but I notice a certain tightness to jaw and eyes, and the slightest quivering of fingers that betrays his nervousness. And yes, down there he's trying his *err...* hardest to disappear, a feat made rather impossible by grace of girth and length.

Severus can't possibly think I would ... I frown. Yes. That's exactly what he's thinking.

'You're thinking I'm going to turn around and walk out on you now,' I state. 'Without looking back.'

He just stares at me.

I know that Lily let him down, and that Dumbledore didn't give a rat's arse about his soul. I cannot fathom what else is hidden in his painful past besides what the Prophet and the Quibbler and Time Magazine (the wizarding edition) printed. And I don't trust any of those publications as far as I can throw them without magic. Which is not far I suck at sports.

For a moment I contemplate kisses, vows, and promises. Then I remember the months of therapy I spent talking to no avail, and I just shrug and walk to the tub. Big enough for three, it's sunk halfway into the floor, wrapped into a wooden platform shaped like a leaf.

'I like bubble bath,' I announce decisively and turn on the tap, hot, strong, full power.

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Apparently, so does Severus. At least he has an amazing selection of bubble baths to choose from. Or maybe he's just one bored Potions Master, besides being a very busy Perfume Master. In the end I randomly choose a mixture of linden flowers, honey, and lemon. Mellow and fresh at the same time.

When I sink into foot-high foam of finest bubbles, I know I've chosen well. And Severus proves himself to be a romantic at heart by conjuring up a bottle of Prosecco and two long-stemmed, delicate glasses. He has refrained from adding a vase with a flower probably because he's afraid I wouldn't believe his veracity in that case.

I raise my glass to toast him from my end of the tub and refrain from toeing the line ... or rather, the as-yet-unchartered territory under the water and his waistline.

For a while we just sit in the hot water, the foam fizzing around us, sipping the sparkling wine.

It's almost too comfortable to be true.

'Sooo,' I drawl. 'Do you do this kind of thing often?' I gesture at bottle and bath.

Living at Spinner's End for over a year I know that he doesn't get private visitors often, and even fewer of the female persuasion. Apart from Minerva and Poppy, who visit regularly but neither of them stays for the night. However, I just can't shake off the memory of beautiful, powerful Mystery de Medici. The idea of her long legs twined sinuously around Severus' body makes me stretch my own legs along the sides of the tub, until I can almost touch his buttocks with my feet. How can I feel so ... *possessive* about him when we've only made out in the shower, not even had sex yet?

Severus smirks. 'I will tell you about Velia if you tell me about Draco.'

'Unfair!' I cry and throw a handful of foam at him. 'Legilimency should be illegal!'

'It already is,' Severus replies dryly. 'As you well know.'

Indeed, I do. That moment in the lab posed a risk for both of us and a test of trust.

'Well, what about Velia?' I prod, unable to hide a tiny smirk of my own at his interest in my relationship with Draco.

Raising his glass, Severus stares into the pale golden liquid as if it's a Pensieve taking him many years into the past. Curtly, he shakes his head. 'That was over before I started teaching at Hogwarts. When I went to Dumbledore in August 1980, he decided it wouldn't be safe for me to stay close to Voldemort and my ... former friends. He didn't trust me or my abilities as a spy at that point. For good reason. So he sent me as far away as possible, to Italy. To all appearances I conducted Dark and arcane research for Voldemort while gaining my Mastery in Potions and working for Velia's Master. But in truth, Dumbledore's goal was simply to keep me out of harm's way. And even more important, to prevent me from causing more harm than I'd already done.'

Dark memories carve lines into his face that were invisible before. He closes his eyes for a moment, exhales, and his features relax into that expression of bittersweet wistfulness I've noticed now and again during the past seventeen months of living and working with him. He's made peace with his past, but that peace is hard-won, and hard-kept.

When he opens his eyes again, there's a new softness to them, and I realise that wherever we go from here, I need not fear Mystery, or any other shadow from the past to come back to haunt us.

It is a gift I can return. 'Romantic breakfasts in bed Draco reserves for his current boy toy,' I explain with a smile. 'I think he only keeps up with the female side of the game out of perfectionism ... and because he hasn't met the right man yet. Although he himself claims that his heart of hearts will always belong to his art and no one else.' After a pause, I broach a more difficult subject than Draco could ever be. 'What about Lucius? Why do you think he kept that perfume for such a long time? And why did he give it to me now?'

Thoughtfully, Severus slides a slender finger over his lips. I have to concentrate to listen to him and not to become mesmerised by the way he strokes his sensitive lips. 'There is a matter of ... guild politics that he, Velia, and I do not see eye to eye with. They think I should exercise certain ... powers. For our greater good, of course.'

'Uh oh.'

Severus snorts. 'Exactly.' Then he shrugs. 'Maybe he just wants to yank my chain, maybe he thinks that a nice shag would do me a world of good, maybe he wants to save my soul, or maybe he's simply bored. With a man like Lucius, you never know.'

When it's time to refill the glasses, I somehow end up on Severus' lap. The tub is deep enough that I'm floating and barely put any weight on him. He cradles me in the crook of his left arm, using his right to clink his glass gently against mine. I wonder what kind of toast would be appropriate, but somehow words seem unnecessary. After taking another swallow, I put my glass aside on the leaf-shaped wood that frames the tub and turn to examine the man whose scent has haunted my life for the past thirteen years. Boldly, I slick back his damp hair with both hands, then trace the contours of his face with my fingertips. I discover that his eyebrows bristle, that there's a tiny black mole at the centre of his left temple that begs for kisses, and that there are tiny golden specks in his iris when you look really, really closely. And his teeth may be crooked and off-white, but perfectly flossed and brushed. When I've expressed my approval with long, languorous kisses, it's his turn.

I am not surprised that my corkscrew curls draw his attention. That doesn't surprise me I have yet to get acquainted intimately with a straight-haired man who's not fascinated with my recalcitrant hair. But even more than that, he adores my ears, especially with the way the earlobes are attached to my skull. He caresses the curve of my ears and nibbles on the lobes until I squeal and squirm and that only seems to spur him on!

At last he stills my breathless, helpless laughter with a kiss and tightens his embrace, allowing me to notice that in spite of wine and warm water, his stamina lives up to the legends of a wizard in his 'golden years'.

He inhales deeply and offers me the opening I've been waiting for. Resting my head on his shoulder, I murmur, 'So what do I smell like for you? And has my scent changed much over the years?'

It must have been so painful for him when I entered his life, not only a child, but a Muggle-born. What a cruel, cruel joke fate played on him!

'And how come I couldn't smell *you*? When Slughorn's Amortentia didn't smell of Ron, I spent weeks and weeks sniffing after every living soul in the castle, including Filch and Minerva!'

That makes him cough and sputter, and finally, laugh a wonderful, deep-throated laugh that rumbles through his body, making him shake and shudder and the water spill over the edge of the tub.

'So *that's* what you were up to that term!' He tilts back his head and groans. 'And I was worried that Potter and Weasley had finally succeeded at alienating you and driving you into the arms of the Dark Lord.'

'Oh, Merlin! No! How could you think that?' But even as that cry spills from my lips, I know why and I turn around to kiss him. 'I'm sorry,' I murmur. 'I didn't mean to worry you. And besides, it's all worked out all right now.'

'A head note of Linden blossoms in a warm night,' he says, replying to my first question instead of reacting to the rather Gryffindor affirmation of my last statement. 'A heart note of honey, fresh from the extractor, warm and fragrant with summer. And a base note of the holy grove on the other side of the Forbidden Forest, at noon in August.'

'Wow.' I lower my head and inhale the delicate scent of the remaining foam of our bath. 'Wow.'

'Indeed.' He tightens his hold on me once more. But I'm not ready to be completely distracted quite yet.

'But what about your scent?'

'A spell,' he replies simply. 'A soul mate searching for me based on my smell was the least of my worries at the time. Apart from my conviction that I didn't deserve to have one anymore or at least none who'd ever be within my reach ... I couldn't risk to be identified by smell. By either side. And besides, what would you have done had you realised then that you were smelling your nasty, greasy, old Potions professor?'

While I don't think I would have reacted the way he imagines, I do realise the complications this would have caused. I was a teenager then, after all. And a Gryffindor to boot.

'Is that why you accepted me as your journeywoman?' I ask. 'Because '

'Of course that aspect influenced my decision. But frankly I was more interested in the work you had done with BPAL and the Monell Center than the scent of your soul when I considered your application. And in the time you spent in the jungle with Luna. That was quite unexpected.'

'Luna will do that to you.' I think of the invisible lotus flower that is supposedly blossoming on my window sill upstairs. 'How about getting out of here now, before we turn into prunes?' I tug on a limp strand of black hair. 'There's a nice big bed up in the attic, and I assume you don't sleep on the floor normally, either, or do you?'

'Dinner first, I think,' replies Severus, climbing out of the tub. He turns to watch me emerge from the foam. 'You will need your strength,' he adds suggestively.

'Is that a promise?' I ask, lust coiling and uncoiling low in my body. Severus just smiles.

So we traipse down to the kitchen first to prepare a light supper that we eat on the terrace out back in the light of many candles. Tomato mousse, salad with fried green asparagus, and for dessert a bowl of fresh strawberries, with a thick, smooth sauce of cream cheese mixed with whipping cream and flavoured with vanilla, along with the remaining Prosecco.

We haven't bothered with dressing, instead warming the air of kitchen and terrace with Heating Charms. Time slows down with languid looks and leisurely caresses. The balmy evening enfolds us in the sweet embrace of spring while anticipation adds spice to our dinner.

When I suck a long, green stalk of asparagus into my mouth, Severus swallows hard. Smirking, I observe the hard growth of a very different stalk. Black eyes glittering, Severus accepts the challenge as we move on to the dessert. But instead of making a show of licking sweet juices off a berry, he draws me down on the wide wooden bench next to him. A quick, long finger spreads vanilla cream around my nipples. My squeal of protest turns into low moans when he strokes strawberries over my skin and licks off cream. Each caress swirls with a scent of vanilla and vellum around me, teasing me with teeth and tongue, torturing me.

'Bed,' I gasp when he sucks a nipple deep into his mouth, making me writhe with near painful passion. *'Please!'*

We Banish the dishes into the kitchen. Running up the stairs, I hear the crash of a bowl that didn't make it to the sink, but neither of us cares.

In the attic, we tumble into my bed. Urgently, I press myself against him. Dinner has done nothing but feed this hunger ...

This time I do not have to beg his need is a great as mine. Still, he slides himself into my body with sinuous strokes and excruciating self-control. Draws back again. Thrusts almost too gently. Leaves me. Fills me. And again. Until I clench my hands into fists to keep myself from clawing at his back and almost whine with need. A fine sheen of sweat glistens on Severus' forehead. But he keeps up his rhythm relentlessly. This is glorious torture. When a still damp strand of hair falls forward, and I smooth it back behind his ear, the smell of musk envelops me. Hair, his hair, clean and damp, scented with linden blossoms and lust. Uncurling my fingers, I arch up against him and grip his buttocks.

'More,' I urge him. 'Har-der!'

Pushing himself up on his left elbow to adjust the angle of his thrusts, he moans but increases the force of his movements. Then, with a wicked smirk, he slides a hand between our bodies and gently down until my gasp tells him he has reached the right spot. Alternating stroke and thrust, he sends the fiery shudder of almost there, *almost there*, coursing through my body with each movement.

'*Now, now, now!*' I want to cry, but all that emerges are incoherent sounds *ngh, ngh, nrrgh!*

But Severus understands. With a grunt he pushes himself even further up, to thrust even deeper, harder

Abruptly, the exhilaration of orgasm rushes through my body. I scream and moan and now I claw at Severus' back after all, in the rhythm of those sweet contractions that grip my body, and now his, too. Until I don't know where I end and he begins, until we lose ourselves to each other and to this union ... until he collapses on top of me, until we roll to our sides and lie, limp and spent, clinging together in sweat and fulfilled passion.

Hours, days, or minutes later, my frantic heart rate slows down. I can hear Severus' ragged breathing even out until only gentle exhalations cool my heated skin. Softly, he slips from my body. Turning on his back, he draws me against his side. My curls must tickle his sensitive nose, but he doesn't seem to mind.

Later I revive enough to light some candles. In their flickering golden light I admire the man in my bed and marvel at how right it feels to be together with him this way.

'Like what you see?' His lips curl in a self-deprecating smile.

'Oh yes!'

He laughs at my fervid assertion but allows himself to be convinced with kisses and caresses. And it's true; I have always liked men with striking features, and there's an intensity to his expressions that is more attractive to me than conventional handsomeness. Then I sit up and turn my attention to his body. Amused, he suffers my hands-on scrutiny. *Hmm...* Nice ... Long lines. Lean. A few old curse scars, blue-white and long since faded. Well-toned muscles, but not too pronounced. A sinewy, subtle strength

that I have come to appreciate tonight. My fingers follow the pronounced treasure trail. He lies flaccid on a thatch of black curls and only twitches when I slide my index finger over silky skin and bristly hair drenched with the remnants of our lust, sweat and shared fluids. I inhale deeply. Ahhh, yes ... Musk.

When I look up, Severus is blushing. Awkwardly, he clears his throat. 'You never said what I smell like for you.'

I curl into his embrace again, the intimate odour of our encounter still strong and strangely delicious in my nose.

'It's a bit of a story,' I warn him while my heartbeat quickens and my stomach flutters. It is *our* story now, no longer the lonely tale of my obsession.

'I expected Slughorn's Amortentia to smell like Ron, of course. Only it didn't,' I begin. 'It was a mature scent, quite different from that of a boy or even a young man.' And I wonder if Severus ever smelled like Ron did way back when, of innocence and impudence and Quidditch lawn. 'You smelled of herbs then. Of a grassy meadow on a hot summer's day. Almost like hay. Of parchment, to be exact, of finest vellum, lightly scented with lilies. And there was a distinct smell of hair, hair washed with a shampoo with basil, mint, and lemon.'

'Amazing.' Severus shakes his head. 'Not only that anyone would feel attracted to the smell of *my* hair, which is really more than miraculous enough. But those are the herbs I used in my shower soap then. I had little time to devote to such an indulgence as the finer details of personal hygiene (and sometimes it was quite useful to come across as the greasy, unattractive bat of the dungeons), so I used solid soap which has a long shelf-life, but is considerably less effective than freshly made liquid shampoo.'

For a while, we lie there in silence, watching the shadows the candle flames are chasing across the sloping walls and ceiling. With his thumb, Severus draws leisurely circles around the nipple of my left breast. 'And now?' he prompts. 'You mentioned that my scent has changed.'

'Hmm,' I agree and stretch with pleasure under his caresses. 'Condensed. Refined. The herbs smell more like a potion now, an herbal syrup, perhaps. The scent of parchment has changed in the opposite direction, though, back to the raw ingredient. As if you've become truer to yourself, maybe. It's leather now. Warm. Masculine. Very much alive. And the base note ...' I trail off, thinking of how the day developed. From the frantic, crazed confrontation in the lab to the barely contained release of passion in the shower. From bath to bed. I inhale deeply. There's still a hint of the base note in the air.

'Musk,' I say with a satisfied sigh. 'Composed of sweat and hair and orgasm.'

Another deep breath.

'In short,' I murmur, closing my eyes, 'you smell of paradise.'

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### 11 May 2009

When I open my eyes, I am perfectly relaxed and pleasantly sore from our vigorous lovemaking the previous night. Severus is already awake. Lying propped up on my pillows, he has barely moved. He still holds me in a half-embrace with his right arm a feat he has only managed because my favourite sleeping position is curling up on my left side ... and because I was so wonderfully exhausted when I fell asleep. There is none of the often experienced awkwardness of the morning after. Everything he I *we* feels simply *right*.

'Good morning,' I mumble. Only when I blink fiercely and rub the sleep out of my eyes, I realise that Severus is staring fixedly at something in the distance.

I follow the direction of his gaze.

In a spot of spring sunshine on the window sill, Luna's vase mere hours ago beautiful but empty overflows with very visible lotus flowers in full bloom.

Had I still needed a sign, I could not have asked for a better or more poignant one.

'It seems I have chosen the right Master after all,' I murmur and smile at him.

He shakes his head as if he can't believe what he's seeing, and I'm not sure if it is my presence in his arms or the sudden appearance of the lotus flower that surprises him more. Then his eyes and his smile are all for me.

'And I the right Mistress,' he vows.

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## Bindu

*Chapter 8 of 8*

Hermione Granger and Severus Snape enjoy a cordial working relationship, specialising in an exclusive branch of magic as journeywoman and Master of the ancient alchemists' guild. When a secret obsession interferes with Hermione's goal of reaching her Mastery and Lucius Malfoy takes an interest in her, her relationship with Severus is put to the test ...

oooOooo

### VIII. Bindu

*'Can vows and perfume, kisses infinite,*

*Be reborn from the gulf we cannot sound;*

*As rise to heaven suns once again made bright*

*After being plunged in deep seas and profound?*

*Ah, vows and perfumes, kisses infinite!*

– Charles Baudelaire translated by Frank Pearce Sturm

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From Hermione Granger's perfume notebooks, vol. II:

The ingredients of the Amorlatio perfume are similar to those of the Amortentia potion.

Frozen Ashwinder Eggs, Alihotsy leaves, Mooncalf milk, powdered pearls, and Occamy eggshells are used in both distillations, though the amounts differ. Different from Amortentia, Amorlatio does not ask for Lamia venom, crushed Spiralling Corals from the Solomon Islands, or the extract of Devil's Snare roots. But as the source for the essential pheromonal note of the perfume, Siren's sweat is added.

Patented by Spinner's Scents in March 2010, the perfume was first presented to the public at the 2010 May Fair, where it won the first place in the competition of magical perfumes.

A lightly arousing erotic perfume, Amorlatio stimulates the senses with scents based on whatever or whoever is most attractive to the wearer. In extremely rare cases (ten in ten thousand test subjects) Amorlatio may reveal to the wearer of the perfume a mate whose magic is uniquely compatible with their own.

According to Ancient Greek tradition, wizards and witches who share such an extraordinary magical compatibility are 'soul mates'. The alchemists of old called this union 'Mystic Marriage' or 'Chymical Wedding'.

*In modern applied alchemy, the so-called 'coniunctio' has come to scholarly attention as a part of the magical, spiritual, and personal transformation adepts undergo when they gain Mastery. Their exceptional compatibility increases both the strength and the sensitivity of such a couple's magic. This allows them to complete the final stages enlightenment (**citrinitas** and **rubedo**) at the same time, and they gain true Mastery – not only the ability to produce a Philosopher's Stone, but the power to create the Elixir of Life.*

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#### **1 June 2010**

A wreath of miniature invisible lotus flowers crowns my curls. And Severus wears a single invisible lotus blossom tucked into the lapel of his tuxedo as a boutonnière. Tomorrow the Daily Prophet will certainly remark upon the *unremarkable* floral decoration of bride and bridegroom of the year.

The holy grove is filled with the honeyed scent of Linden blossoms from the ancient tree at its centre, which serves as the altar for today's ceremony. Beyond the circle of trees, the Forbidden Forest dreams in the heat of the day, adding a hint of resin and spices and warm wood to the perfume of the day.

I stand barefoot on the freshly mown meadow. My white dress clings to my ripening curves in a way that leaves little to imagination. That should guarantee at least a scandalous headline for Witch Weekly. And the decadent banquet that Lucius Malfoy (proud and self-styled matchmaker of the 'bridal couple of the year') and Mystery de Medici have organised for us as their wedding gift should take care of all other headline needs of wizarding tabloids on both sides of the Atlantic for the foreseeable future. But I couldn't care less.

Professor Flitwick's orchestra of Transfigured owl heads and student choir begin a new melody that twirls and swirls around us like a summer breeze. On the altar I glimpse the red dodecahedron of my Mastery's phial next to Severus' redware flagon – both filled to the brim, so much more powerful than the typical, purely symbolic gifts exchanged at a traditional handfastening. At the last moment, Draco puts down his sketchpad and steps back to join the circle of family and friends surrounding the grove to bless us and wish us the best of luck upon our wedding day. Then my father takes my arm and leads me to where Severus is waiting for me under the Linden tree.

Fragrant notes of herbs and leather and musk envelop me, and Severus' kiss tastes of eternity.

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'And all my soul is scent and melody.'

– Charles Baudelaire, translated by Alan Conder

oooOooo

FINITE INCANTATEM

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Author's Notes:

Hechicera has created an awesome manip of Hermione's perfume notebook (Thank you so much!!!). You can see it here: <http://qalachaki.deviantart.com/#/d2x95ft>

oooOooo

There are no words to express just how grateful I am to everyone who helped me with "The Scent of Magic", listened to my woes while writing, my wibbling while waiting for it to post during the SS/HG Exchange, and at last to my elation when it finally posted and was well received. Therefore, a huge, heartfelt THANK YOU goes to:

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