

The Crooked Conundrum; or A Familiar Tale

by peppermint

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The Crooked Conundrum

Chapter 1 of 1

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When Penny first came to live with Severus, he didn't think she'd be staying long.

He had just returned to Spinner's End from his annual stay at St Mungo's. Venom from a dirty, great snake did not just work its way out of the body overnight, after all, and the healers liked him to come in for a week or two every year for observation of long-term effects, any treatment, and research. He wasn't ordinarily inclined to be so compliant, but it kept Minerva, Kingsley, and other nosy parkers from haranguing him about maintaining his health, getting out of the house, attending social engagements, eating properly, and drinking less.

While he had been gone, some do-gooder or another had spruced up the place. Likely Potter and his wife, although he wouldn't put it past Kingsley, either. The dust, cobwebs, and general air of disrepair were gone. He now had new furniture, fresh paint, polished woodwork, and a fully stocked larder. Did they think he couldn't take care of himself? True, he was thin, but he had always been so, and the Healers had given him a clean bill of health this year. And how had his mysterious intruders infiltrated his wards? He was getting complacent in his old age. Eight years since Potter had defeated Voldemort, and six since the last of the known Death Eaters had been rounded up had taken their toll. Peace had made him lazy.

He hung his cloak by the door, made his way across the newly-polished floor of his sitting room, sat down heavily in his previously-ratty-but-now-pristine armchair, and made to put his feet up on the coffee table. However, a little round basket impeded his progress. Sleeping peacefully in the basket, kept in place by a friendly Containment Charm, there was a bunny.

A young rabbit, just three months old, according to the note (from Potter, of course) left alongside the basket. Apparently (said the note) pets were supposed to ease loneliness, and the doe had been the friendliest and cuddliest of the litter of Holland Lops the do-gooding Boy Who Lived Twice had seen. Well, that wouldn't do. He certainly wasn't *lonely*. He was going to Floo Potter, and then he was going to send the rabbit back. If Potter wouldn't take it, he was going to use it for potion ingredients. Rabbit liver was useful in many brews and salves, and the fur would make him a very nice pair of mittens. Nothing else for it. He couldn't possibly care for a rabbit.

When he finally removed the Containment Charm and reached out a long, slender finger to prod the rabbit awake, he found that her fur was very soft. And when she looked up at him with her big brown eyes, he couldn't resist picking her up to cradle in his hands and brush his cheek across the inky, velvet blackness of her long, floppy ears. Sighing, he sat back, settled the rabbit against his chest, and contemplated the fresh hell he had just landed in.

A week later, he was still wondering why a rabbit, instead of a cat.

Two weeks later, he had to install physical fences around his potions garden when the rabbit had evaded the wards and almost gotten into the pennyroyal. Severus was very upset and had to drink a good deal of chamomile tea to calm himself, during which he lectured the rabbit on the dangers of nibbling unfamiliar plants. He was quite sure she had understood.

Three weeks later, Penny so named for her close call in the garden had outgrown her basket and was eating the grass from the front garden and leafy greens from the kitchen garden as fast as they could grow. Severus had gotten used to having the little doe around; after all, she was very intelligent. He wouldn't have let just any rabbit stay, but sleek, obsidian, affectionate Penny was *special*.

Before he knew it, months had gone by, and he and Penny had settled into a very comfortable routine. They spent their mornings in the potions lab, Penny safely ensconced in a makeshift run while Severus brewed various healing potions for St Mungo's, brews their in-house potions found too fiddly and precise. At noon, they'd have lunch, and Severus found (much to his consternation) that watching Penny eat healthy greens made him want to eat them too. The afternoons were spent on research, or pleasure-reading, or gardening. Tea was always at four, then errands if Severus had them to run. Dinner at seven sometimes just the Potions master and his rabbit, sometimes with others.

One day in mid-January, the post contained a rather interesting invitation.

Mr Snape,

The International Society of Potioneers' annual Symposium has a focus on anti-venoms and antidotes this year. We would be honoured if you would accept the nomination of keynote speaker and special guest at this year's event.

This year's Symposium will take place from 22-28 February at the Wizarding St Regis Bora Bora, and the Society is happy to offer you complimentary accommodations at the resort.

Please reply by 31st January.

M. Ferdinand

Executive Secretary

International Society of Potioneers

Snape set the invitation aside. It was an honour, but he couldn't fathom leaving Penny for six days. Who could possibly care for her in the manner to which she was accustomed?

Minerva came by a couple of days later at the weekend and noticed the envelope sitting on the side table as she and Severus were having tea.

"Severus, what's this?" she asked, gesturing with a Ginger Newt toward the invitation.

"An invitation from the International Society of Potioneers. They want me to be their keynote speaker at this year's Symposium, but I don't think I can accept," Severus explained, one hand stirring his tea and the other idly stroking Penny's soft fur as she sat in his lap, nibbling a bit of cast-off watercress.

Minerva's eyes grew wide, and she set her biscuit down. "Whyever not? What an honour! Write them straight away and tell them you'll be there!"

"What about Penny? I can't possibly leave her alone for six days, and I don't know anybody capable of taking care of her!"

Never had Minerva's many years as Gryffindor Head of House served her so well. Severus was no better than an ickle firstie she remembered who had misplaced his toad. "Why not board her with Miss Granger? You remember Hermione, I'm sure."

"Why would I send Penny to stay with the know-it-all?" said Severus, sneering. "Isn't she busy attempting to work her way up the ladder at the Ministry, fighting injustices, breaking glass ceilings, and whatnot?"

Minerva chuckled, shaking her head. "For all I know, the only time Hermione sets foot in the Ministry is to apply for the odd permit to handle or transport a dangerous magical creature. She's an animal Healer rather well-known, actually. She also specializes in matching people with familiars using Arithmancy. She runs a small boarding facility alongside her clinic in the Lake District. You ought to owl her straightaway."

"I think Penny would be very lonely in a nasty cage in an impersonal *kennel*." Severus sniffed, offering Penny a bit of shredded carrot.

"If you asked nicely, perhaps she'd board Penny in her cottage instead. Shall I write to her for you? I'm sure she'd be very amused to hear that a bunny is the centre of your affections these days."

The chuckle she got from the glare Severus levelled at her was worth the bellow that came a moment later.

The Lake District was, overall, a very pleasant place. Hermione felt quite at home amidst the scenery, and her clinic was thriving. Taking her A-levels as a "homeschooled" student and tackling Bristol's Veterinary Medicine programme alongside her magical animal Healer training had been a very stressful time, but it was paying off.

She was just finishing up feeding her chickens when she saw an owl swoop down toward her. Hermione held out her forearm for the arriving owl, intercepting it before the bird could set the clinic's aviary all aflutter. She smiled, recognising the smooth ivory parchment and neat copperplate handwriting of her former Head of House on the letter attached to the owl's leg. She untied it, dug in her smock pocket for a couple of owl treats, and offered them to the Tawny.

"I'll send her a letter later today with my own owl," she explained before lifting her arm and sending the owl winging its way back to Hogwarts.

A little while later, Hermione was settled at her tiny kitchen table with her teapot, mug, and a stack of wholegrain toast. She had fed her familiars, a rather spectacular Eagle owl named Doctor and a Havana rabbit, Sheldon. The two were munching away at their breakfast and were startled when they heard her shriek of amusement as she scanned Minerva's letter. Doctor hooted disapprovingly and sailed out through the open kitchen window, and Sheldon skittered under the potato bin. Hermione could just see the tip of his brown tail sticking out. She chuckled to herself and turned her attention back to the letter.

Dear Hermione,

First of all, I hope this letter finds you well. I relish your letters and love hearing how your practice is thriving in both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds. I can't resist bragging about your successes in the staff room and to my students.

I paid a visit to Severus today. He's been invited to the Potioneers' symposium as the keynote speaker and distinguished guest, but he has a small issue. He has recently acquired a rabbit. Yes, a rabbit. Potter bought it for him last summer, and he's become rather attached. To be honest, it's rather sweet to see him doting on Penny, but he's worse than a firstie with a wayward toad, bless him. He needs someone to look after Penny while he's at the symposium. I suggested he owl you, but he seems to think that Penny would be far too lonely in a kennel situation. Therefore, I promised I would ask if you might care for Penny personally.

Please consider it, Hermione. I'm sure he'd be willing to pay any reasonable price, and I could think of no one better to ensure Penny is treated well.

Minerva

It was all Hermione could do to set the letter down on the table before she buried her head in her arms, howling with laughter. She wasn't laughing at Professor Snape, precisely, but just at the situation. She had had no idea that the cuddly, snuggly Holland Lop doe she'd sold Harry and Luna back in August was meant for Snape. She had honestly thought Luna was looking for something small to love and cuddle while she convinced Harry it was time for sprogs. Or, perhaps, the other way around. One could never tell with those two. But to hear that Snape had bonded with a sweet bunny and was so attached to her that he didn't want to go anywhere without her?

Well, now that she thought about it, it made sense. Snape hadn't grown up in a very loving home, and from what she knew, he hadn't formed any lasting relationships, other than a few wary friendships with colleagues and Order members. He was probably starved for affection. She glanced over at Sheldon who had made his way back out from under the potato bin.

"It looks as though you're going to have a little friend to play with for a week or so, Sheldon."

Sheldon merely twitched his nose and went back to his bunny pellets. He didn't seem too impressed, but he'd just returned from being out for stud services at the weekend. Perhaps he needed some relaxation.

Hermione finished up her breakfast and dashed off a quick note to Minerva, confirming she'd be happy to care for Penny for the week. Indeed, the more the merrier, two rabbits could entertain each other better than one alone. She sealed up the note and went to the door to whistle for Doctor who came sailing in, chased by a chorus of irritated barking.

"Doctor! You weren't out bothering the Cooper's dogs again, were you? You leave poor Dalek alone. I know he's been badly named, but it isn't his fault in the least!" she scolded, giving him the letter. "That goes right to Minerva. Don't leave it in the Owlery."

Doctor hooted scornfully and flew off.

"Honestly," she muttered to herself, "these animals have too much personality at times."

Severus double-checked and triple-checked the pile of luggage by the front door. He had his suitcase and his satchel on one side, the Portkey to Bora Bora resting atop the suitcase. The other side was occupied by Penny's basket, her bag of food and toys, her travel crate, her blankie, and the Portkey to Granger's clinic. He supposed he could have just taken Penny through the Floo, but Granger had sent the Portkey, and he would be gracious and use it, especially since she was doing him a favour. She wasn't even charging him above the regular kennel rate.

Penny, unused to all the commotion, was hopping to and fro behind him, stopping to sniff at the piles of luggage every few hops.

"Time to go, Penny," he said, stooping down to pick her up. "You'll be just fine. Healer Granger has probably grown out of most of her irritating traits by now, so I don't expect she'll annoy you too much. Besides, she was always a very meticulous student, and I imagine she directs the same attitude to her professional life. I'm sure she will take excellent care of you."

Penny didn't look at all convinced, but she allowed herself to be put into the travel crate with only a token kerfuffle. Severus shrank the rest of the luggage, slipped it into his pocket with the other Portkey, and made sure to lock the door. A slash of his wand set his wards, and he activated Granger's Portkey, whirling away into the early morning fog.

The Portkey deposited him right in front of what he supposed might be called a "charming" two-storey cottage, complete with thatched roof, dormer windows, and dormant English ivy upon the walls. There was a picturesque garden gate set into a low stone wall which surrounded the cottage and a flagstone footpath leading to the front door and then off to the side where he presumed the Wizarding clinic was located. The cottage garden was occupied by raised beds, empty now in February's grey chill, but in late Spring and during the summer, he imagined they would only add to the storybook charm of the place. He only hoped there weren't also seven dwarves in residence.

He shifted Penny's carrier to his right hand and opened the gate. It swung open easily and stayed such as he manoeuvred Penny's crate through and closed behind him with a soft click. Well, Granger had always been good at Charms. He strode up the walkway and had just raised his hand to knock at the door when it opened for him. He expected he looked a bit of a prat, standing there with a bunny crate in one hand and the other raised in a fist.

Hermione opened the door all the way and smiled, "Professor Snape, and Penny. The gate chimes when it's opened; sorry if I startled you. Please, come right in."

As Snape ventured further into the cottage, Hermione closed the door behind him and took a moment to appreciate the sight of her surprisingly fit former teacher. He looked better than he ever had at school. Whether that was seven years of distance talking or his enjoying a life unbehind to anyone, she wasn't sure, but she appreciated it nonetheless. He was even dressed a bit more casually: a lightweight suit instead of dour, black robes buttoned up to the neck. She supposed dressing the part of a keynote speaker would be important, and it was far warmer in Bora Bora than it was in England in February. Shaking her head to clear it of thoughts perhaps better left buried, she began looking around for Sheldon in his likely hiding spots.

Severus set Penny's crate down on the floor and enlarged her belongings, putting them alongside the crate. At first glance, the cottage seemed well-protected against the dangers a small rabbit could get herself into, and he nodded approvingly. He looked around for Granger and saw her crouched down near the kitchen table, attempting to coax something out from under it. The girl's hair was still curly, but it looked as though she'd learned to manage it better; it wasn't flying everywhere. She didn't wear robes, but Muggle clothing - denim trousers and an oxford shirt in a soft green. Perhaps she dressed more professionally at the clinic - this was her home, after all. And the trousers were nicely fitted. He shook his head; he really had to start getting out more often. He opened Penny's crate and convinced her to come out by offering a carrot he'd stowed in his pocket.

Hermione finally managed to wriggle Sheldon out of his hiding spot under the table and brought him over to where Snape was standing with Penny in his arms.

"Hello, Penny! It's very good to see you again. You've grown up rather nicely!" Hermione crooned, watching for Penny's reaction. She simply twitched her nose and continued eating her carrot, and Hermione nodded, radiating approval. "You've done well with her; she can tell she's utterly safe with you."

Severus groaned. "I ought to have known you were behind Potter's idea to saddle me with a pet."

"Actually, I had no idea she was going to you," Hermione admitted. "I thought Harry was looking for something for Luna to love and cuddle until they were ready for children; but Minerva says you've gotten on very well with her." That wasn't all Minerva had said, but he didn't need to know that.

"She fit into my life surprisingly well, although I didn't expect her to at first," Severus said. "Is this your rabbit? He's not quite the same breed as Penny, is he?"

Hermione nodded. "This is Sheldon. He's a Havana. Still a small breed, and somewhat related, but different ears and colouring. He's a bit wary of new people, but I'm sure he and Penny will get along just fine. The only other animal I have here at the house is Doctor, my owl. There's a hip-level ward preventing him from deciding that house-rabbits are a lovely dinner, and there's a covered outdoor run, as well," she explained, extending an arm toward a small, flap-covered opening near the back door. "She'll have full run of the first floor; there are also wards keeping little rabbits away from the hearth and stove and from being underfoot in the kitchen."

Severus's eyes followed Hermione's movements as she pointed out the various bunny amenities of the cottage, and he hoped she hadn't done all this just for Penny. "This wasn't any trouble? I have no idea what Minerva wrote to you to make you agree to keep Penny, but I assure you, I am most appreciative."

"No trouble at all, sir, as I'm already set up for rabbits. And even if I weren't, I understand the bond between a familiar and her wizard. Maybe I'll go on vacation soon, and you can keep Sheldon for me!" she said with a grin, setting the buck rabbit down. "Here, let's move her things out of the way. Put her basket in her crate, so she has somewhere to hide if she feels nervous, but I think we'll get along just fine."

Severus moved the crate to where Hermione indicated, which was close to the large hearth for residual warmth, and stood looking a bit ill at ease, cradling Penny close to his chest.

"I'm just going to put her food and things away, if you'd like a moment to say 'see you soon'," she said softly, taking the other bag Snape had brought in and moving into the kitchen area.

Severus leaned against the wall and held Penny so he could see her face. "Penny, I expect you shall be on your very best behaviour for Doctor Granger. You will play nicely with Sheldon. Give him the benefit of the doubt if he is surly to you. Males of any species are often surly; it is how we are programmed to behave on our home ground. I will be back in eight days, at which point we will resume our normal routine. I expect I shall miss you a little bit." He had to pause for a moment, to swallow the lump in his throat. "Be a good rabbit." He rubbed his cheek against her ears one last time and set her down on the floor where she hopped over to her basket and curled up. He thought she looked sad.

Hermione busied herself putting Penny's things away in the kitchen, including a two-foot roll of parchment on the rabbit's routine. She skimmed it quickly, wondering if she'd find a treatise on the ideal ratio of mixed greens or to stir the pellets counter-clockwise seven times before feeding. She glanced at Snape out of the corner of her eye, then looked quickly away. She felt badly watching such a tender, private moment. It was clear that Severus Snape had changed at least a bit, and as far as she was concerned, it was all for the better.

"All done! Now, you've been here, so you can Apparate back any time you like," she offered. "And if you'd like to Floo while you're gone, it won't be any trouble. I'm at the Muggle clinic in the mornings, but you can Floo the Wizarding clinic in the afternoons - it's 'Crooked Cat' there, and the house here is 'Crooked House'. Ishbel Tish - is my receptionist at the clinic, and she minds Sheldon for me in the back room as well, so she'll be happy to update you."

"Crooked House and Crooked Cat?" Severus asked, cocking an amused eyebrow.

"Well, the village pub is called A Crooked Sixpence. I thought I'd keep the theme, and it also allows me to honour my first familiar," explained Hermione.

"Ah yes, that pansy-faced, ginger menace that used to stalk the halls of Hogwarts. Assisted me more than once in catching a miscreant or two. He seemed to have a notable dislike for your friend, Mr Weasley, especially when he was spending his time with the ever-delightful Miss Brown."

Hermione wasn't sure, but she thought Snape had smiled. It was just the corner of his mouth that was upturned, but that had to count.

"Well, he was half-Kneazle. Pretty smart and all. Your nocturnal reprimands couldn't have deterred them too much; Miss Brown will be Mrs Ronald Weasley in early May," she explained as they walked to the door. "Thank goodness. Otherwise I might have had to live up to the idiotic promise I made to marry Ron if we were both still single when I turned thirty. There's a lesson for you. Never make promises when you've had most of a bottle of elf-made wine..." She trailed off, realizing she was babbling.

The corner of Severus' mouth crinkled up again. Wonderful, now he was laughing at her. She opened the door, and they stepped out onto the front walkway.

"Sound advice, Miss... Healer Granger. Might I advise you to not make an Unbreakable Vow while drinking elf-made wine? You see, I don't think the outcomes of that are any better than maudlin matrimonial pacts," he dead-panned.

Hermione gaped in surprise at Snape's revelation, but recovered quickly. "Call me Hermione, please. I'm still not used to being called Healer, and Miss makes me feel as though I'm back at school. And I shall keep that in mind, if I ever consider making an Unbreakable Vow."

"Hermione. Thank you again for looking after Penny for me. Is there anything I can bring you from Bora Bora?"

"I'd love any information from the symposium on uses of medicinal potions in magical animals or familiars." *And warm weather and sunshine*, but she felt that crossed the line too far into flirty banter. Feeling comfortable talking to Snape was strange enough for one day.

"That shouldn't be a problem at all."

"Excellent. Well, have a lovely time, and try not to worry about Penny too much," she said, stepping back inside the house.

"I am certain she'll be in the best of hands." He bowed slightly at the waist. "Farewell, Hermione." He brought the Portkey out from his pocket, tapped his wand to it, and was gone.

Bora Bora during the wet season is gorgeous, but very rainy. Holding a symposium in the off-season has two motives. One, the cost is far reduced, since the resorts are desperate for guests. Two, there's very little lovely weather to tempt attendees away from seminars and onto the beaches.

Of course, being the Keynote Speaker and Honoured Guest, Severus could escape from the dull sessions as often as he liked, but being stuck inside the resort didn't do him much good. He had managed to restrict himself to one Floo call a day. When he was preparing for the day's morning plenary, Hermione was making dinner and seemed happy to chat about Penny, the symposium, the infernal weather (both British and Polynesian), and everything else while she chopped, diced, and simmered. Besides, he was happy to start his day watching Penny trying to figure out just how his head was in the flames of the hearth. Her looks of puzzlement were amusing, and it was easy to see she was thriving in Hermione's care.

He had been surprised to find the symposium as enjoyable as it was. He met many promising young brewers who had excellent ideas, and renewing acquaintances with established Masters was very satisfying. His keynote speeches were well-received, particularly the symposium's Closing Plenary speech on venoms and poisons augmented by Dark magic.

Severus thought he might prepare a paper for next year's symposium. Being back in the world at large wasn't bad at all, especially when he had something nice to go back to at home.

A couple weeks after he returned from Bora Bora, Severus thought Penny looked different. Fluffier, particularly around the middle. And she seemed a bit testy. He wasn't sure he could bear it if she were ill. What should he do? He didn't know anything about ailing rabbits!

What should he do? Did he *not* know a very capable Animal Healer? He shook his head in disgust at his panic and knelt in front of the fireplace.

"Crooked House!" he shouted, tossing a handful of Floo powder into the fireplace. "Hermione! Hermione!" he called, his head and shoulders thrust through the flames.

He heard cursing, a splash, then footsteps pounding down the stairs. Hermione appeared, dripping wet and tying her bathrobe. "Severus? Whatever is wrong?"

"Penny is... not herself. She looks bloated, and she's irritated, and do you think she's sick, and did I disturb you? That was not my intention, but I don't know what to do."

Hermione glanced upward, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Severus, I do have office hours every afternoon. I doubt Penny is dying, okay? Just give me twenty minutes to wash my hair and get something else on, then come on through. I attended an Abraxan foaling today, and you don't even want to know how much... goo... I was coated in

half an hour ago." She stalked off, mumbling something about being bloated and irritated herself.

"Oh. Yes. Yes, all right. Thank you." He withdrew from the Floo, leaning back against the coffee table and pinching the bridge of his own nose. "I'm an idiot," he said to Penny, who grunted at him and wrinkled her nose. "Lucky for us that she likes *you*."

He waited half an hour for good measure, and then he and Penny spun through the Floo to the cottage. Hermione was sitting at the table with a teapot and two mugs. "Tea? Sorry I snapped at you. It's been... well... it's been a day. Let's just leave it at that." She spread a towel out on the other end of the table. "Now, Miss Penny, let's see what trouble you've gotten yourself into. Has she eaten anything unusual? "

Severus shook his head. "No, she's been with me all day. She's had rabbit pellets, water, some carrots, and some cress. Nothing out of the ordinary."

Hermione took Penny from him with a gentle hand and set Penny on the towel facing her. "Let's see what's going on with you, young lady." She looked at her eyes and ears, smoothed her hands over Penny's back, and tucked her thumbs under to check Penny's abdomen. Suddenly, her face turned ashen, then she scowled.

"She's pregnant," she said, handing Penny back to Severus.

This was not the answer Severus expected. "She's WHAT? Can't you keep your buck contained?" he snapped, cradling Penny close.

"My buck? You're blaming this nonsense on Sheldon? On me?! How dare you!" bellowed Hermione. "When I sold Harry that rabbit, it was with the understanding that she'd be *properly* cared for, and that includes spaying, you daft git! She should have been fixed months ago! Had I known she wasn't, I would never have even kept them in the same house, much less the same room!" She stood with her hands on her hips, visibly quaking with fury.

"Weren't you curious when she never came back to your clinic for that service, or has that frizzy hair of yours wound its way into your brain and prevented rational thinking? And furthermore, didn't you notice your pervy little Sheldon humping my poor Penny the entire week she was here?" Snape argued, using his superior height to tower over her in an attempt at intimidation.

"He's not pervy, Snape! He was just doing what comes naturally! Merlin and Morgana, he's just a rabbit! Half the human males I know aren't any better about not humping everything that moves, and they have higher brain functions to guide them!" Hermione shrieked, poking his chest for emphasis.

"Madam, kindly remove your pointy finger from my person, or you will regret it! I would like to know what you propose ~~to~~ about this ridiculous problem!" He snarled.

"Well, I tell you what. I won't charge you for an emergency after-hours visit, and I'll give you a booklet on how to care for your pregnant rabbit. If you have trouble finding homes for the surviving kits, let me know. Ugh! I can't believe I thought you'd actually *changed*! You're still the same rotten bully! And now, this consultation is over!" She dug around in her bag next to the table and shoved a thin booklet at him. "Good evening!"

There didn't seem to be anything else to say. Severus whirled on his heel, sorely missing his billowing teaching robes at that moment. He stalked to the Floo and was gone within seconds.

Hermione screamed in frustration at his success at baiting her and threw the extra mug into the fireplace where it broke with an incredibly satisfying *mash*.

Severus spent the better part of the next few days storming around the house in a snit. What did she possibly mean by "thought you'd actually changed"? And how dare she call him a bully! He was just standing up for Penny, which he considered his duty as a responsible pet owner! Oh, all right, maybe he had used some underhanded intimidation tactics that he hadn't pulled out since his teaching days, but he was justified.

Wasn't he?

After all, Granger refused to admit responsibility. No doubt she thought she was getting away with something, just as she had her entire Hogwarts career. It wasn't him who hadn't changed, it was *her*!

He was so busy thinking about Granger, and her curly hair, and her ridiculous attitude, that he didn't notice it was past teatime. Nor did he notice Penny lunging for him until he felt her teeth sink into his small toe.

He shouted, grabbing his foot and hopping around on the other. "Penny! My foot is not food!" he roared, collapsing into his armchair to inspect the damage. "You drew blood, you little savage!" he grumped, reaching for his wand to heal the damage.

Penny merely sat there, ears twitching and nose wriggling.

"This is why I never married, much less wanted to! You females are all alike; all teeth and claws to get what you want," he scolded, sitting back in the chair. "I suppose it's too much to expect that you act like a lady, now that you've got up the duff by Granger's brute." He was about to launch into a full-scale lecture on propriety and good behaviour, probably complete with grumblings on the state of today's youth, when he noticed the time. Almost five. He hadn't made any tea. No wonder Penny bit him; she was hungry.

"All right, vampire bunny. Into the kitchen. Bunny pellets await thee."

He poured some pellets into Penny's dish, added some carrots and a sprinkling of parsley, and made himself a sandwich. He thought he might deal with the pile of post while he ate.

The letter on top was from Potter. Probably a reprimand for yelling at Granger. Couldn't she fight her own battles?

Dear Severus,

What in the world did you do to Hermione? She sent me a Howler about your rabbit, responsible pet ownership, and spaying and neutering! Whatever it is, could you please fix it? She won't even speak to me if I Floo. Luna's been over there, but she just tells me that I don't need to know everything.

Confused,

Harry

He set the letter down, shaking his head. He must have really gotten under Granger's skin if she was taking it out on Potter! He didn't envy Harry one bit; Granger was scary when she was mad. And her finger was really pointy. He still had the shadow of a round bruise on his chest.

The next letter was from Minerva.

Severus,

I don't know what you did to Miss Granger, but she was here helping Hagrid with the Thestrals earlier today. When I asked how her week with Penny had gone, she glared at me and said she didn't wish to talk about it. You had better apologize!

Minerva

Why did everyone assume it was his fault? Granger was at least halfway to blame!

The rest of the post seemed to be the monthly bills, all but for a small card which slid out of the middle of the pile. It was green - the same colour green as that shirt Granger had been wearing the morning he left for the symposium. It had his name on the front in her neat, round handwriting. An apology? He eagerly slid his finger under the envelope flap, breaking the wax seal.

Snape,

I'm only writing this because Luna wouldn't leave unless I did; I suspect she's perturbed at me for taking my anger out on Harry.

I should have asked if Penny was fixed, but you didn't offer the information, either.

I ought to charge you Sheldon's usual stud fee. He's a champion, and his having sired mixed-breed kits is going to bring his prestige down. I'm not trying to insult your rabbit; it's just fact. I haven't heard of any Holland-Havana crosses; the kits may all inherit double dwarfism and not survive. Best case scenario, three or four families get adorable house pets with sweet dispositions.

If you like, I'll come to your place and help you set up a nesting box for Penny in a week or so. If not, the instructions are all in the booklet I gave you. Just write or Floo to let me know if you'd like my help.

In any case, I do apologise for my unprofessional behaviour. I allowed personal feelings and history to get in the way of my job, and that was unacceptable.

Sincerely,

Hermione Granger, DVM, HAW

Personal feelings and history? What did she mean by that? History he could understand he had never been kind to her at school. But what did personal feelings have to do with anything? Did she... fancy him? No, certainly not. Perhaps a bit of a friendship had been developing over those international Floo calls. That must be what she meant. She had gone out of her way to help him after hours, and he threw it back in her face. He hadn't been friendly at all.

Oh.

This was his fault, wasn't it?

Hermione contemplated the meagre contents of her refrigerator and sighed. It had been a busy week, what with Abraxans, Thestrals, and Muggle standard horses dropping foals all over the country. She ought to have left it at specializing in small animals instead of being a ruddy overachiever. She had had no time to get to the market, and the leftovers from the last night she had actually had time to cook didn't look too appealing any longer. There was nothing for it; she'd have to run out for food.

Before she could get her boots back on, there was a knock at the door. Oh, come on! It was after six on a Friday! She stomped over to the door and threw it open. "I'm off. All weekend. Emergency calls are being taken by Healer Miller i Snape!" she said in surprise and then stood there, looking at him.

"Speechless? I never thought I'd see the day," Snape remarked in a sardonic tone, but Hermione barely heard him. She only had eyes for what he held in his hands.

"Is that for me? Us?" she said, nodding at the pizza box and the six of Carlsberg.

"Yes. It occurred to me approximately forty-five minutes ago, when I read your letter, that I owed you, at the very least, an apology. I thought a peace offering might carry it further?"

Hermione beamed. "I am *starving*, and I was just about to run out for food. I'd forgive you just about anything right now, including acting like a prat because you were concerned about your bunny. Come in, please."

He walked forward, mostly on instinct. Hermione smiling because she was pleased with him did funny things to his gut that he hadn't expected. The last time his stomach had fluttered in such a fashion was... well... he couldn't remember. He generally was not given to stomach fluttering over a woman's smile. After all, the mediwitches at St Mungo's smiled at him all the time, and he didn't feel anything but annoyed. He nodded as she chattered and fetched plates and napkins, but he didn't really hear anything she said.

"Severus? Are you all right? I asked how Penny's doing?" Hermione said, waving her hand in front of his face.

"Hm? Penny? She's fine. Bit me earlier, I forgot tea. Was too busy being angry at you."

Hermione frowned. "She bit you?"

"Right on my little toe. I've been less than attentive the past couple of days. And I was, well... I was misguided to take out my surprise and frustration on you, especially after you were doing me a favour, seeing Penny after hours," he admitted, taking his plate of pizza and joining her at the table.

"I must have really gotten up your nose, if I took your attention away from Penny," teased Hermione with a smile, knowing that Snape admitting to being 'misguided' was the closest to 'wrong' he'd ever get.

"You did. It was all I thought about for three days." He mentally slapped himself in the forehead. *Way to lay it on thick, boyo.*

"I suppose I'm flattered," she replied. "I don't know the last time I was on anyone's mind for a moment, much less three days."

"I'm not sure you should be flattered at all. Most of those three days were spent cursing your name and the virility of your rabbit."

"Hmmm," Hermione mused, "if I'm ever on your mind for three days again, I hope it's for a more positive reason." She smirked. "I know I'll be thinking of Sir Tall, Dark, and Surly who rescued me from starvation with pizza in a positive light indeed." She took a bite of pizza, closing her eyes in satisfaction as she chewed.

"I suppose it's good you have the entire weekend off, so you won't be distracted by less pleasant thoughts," Severus slyly remarked.

"Cheers!" Hermione said, clinking her bottle of beer against his.

The next weekend, Hermione went to Spinner's End to help Severus with Penny's nesting box. She found that his talents did not extend just to retrieving excellent pizza and decent beer, but to actual cooking as well. They collaborated on a meal and again on several good-night kisses at the door.

Penny kindled four kits the next week. All survived, two with long lop ears, and two up-eared. They found homes for all of them without much fuss. Penny had her kit factory removed the week after, as Severus felt that one sleepless night over rabbit reproduction was enough.

Hermione took Severus as her 'plus one' to Ron and Lavender's wedding a few weeks later, causing Harry to pay a default on a bet to his wife. Luna just looked smug, although Hermione wasn't sure if that had to do with winning the bet or the announcement she had seen in the Sunday Prophet's "Matches, Hatches, and Dispatches" section that 'Mr and Mrs Harry Potter' were 'expecting in the fall'.

Bora Bora is also gorgeous in the dry season. Vacations scheduled there are usually lazy and blissful, spent lounging on the beach and splashing in the clear azure waters of various coves and inlets. Naturally, Bora Bora is also an excellent location for quiet destination weddings and subsequent hedonistic honeymoons if the bridegroom can relax enough to enjoy them.

"Severus, I'm sure Penny and Sheldon are just fine with Healer Miller," Hermione insisted, standing between her new husband and the fireplace. "We're going to miss our dinner reservation."

Severus set the pot of Floo powder down on the mantle. "Very well. But I am going to check up on them when we return from dinner."

"I think you'll be too busy. Wait until morning," Hermione countered, trailing a fingertip down his arm before she turned and sauntered toward the door.

All of a sudden, rabbits were the last thing on Severus' mind. He might check up on them tomorrow.

If he had time.

A/N: Not getting paid. Don't own it.

Many thanks go to my fantabulous beta pyjamapants, who tames my dashes and commas. She's nothing short of awesome.

The title is a play on episode titles from the CBS sitcom 'The Big Bang Theory', which is also where the rabbit names came from. Doctor and Dalek, of course, come from 'Doctor Who'.

The following websites were used to verify rabbit-related information, in addition to rabbit-beta slytherinlaurel:

<http://www.threelittleladiesrabbity.com/pregnant.php>

<http://www.threelittleladiesrabbity.com/careindex.php>

<http://www.corkyscave.net/Fact%20Sheet.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_rabbit

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havana_\(rabbit\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havana_(rabbit))