

That Singular Anomaly

by sc010f

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Prologue – I've Got a Little List

Chapter 1 of 6

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Sirius Black was dead – slaughtered by a drapery.

Snape permitted himself a smirk. The battle had been, from all accounts, a disaster, no matter which side one favored. He glanced around the dingy library. The battered clock on the mantle read 2 am. For some reason, Albus had insisted that he spend the night at Grimmauld Place, watching over Granger, Weasley (St. Mungo's being deemed too dangerous), and the now drunk-out-of-his senses Lupin, rather than preparing to invigilate the O.W.L. examinations.

Well, if he was to be stuck in London, he might as well do something useful. And the previous day's debacle had triggered something.

That could have been me. Snape shuddered. *Although I hope to Merlin that my death is slightly more dignified than wobbling, arms a-wave on a threshold before falling arse first into the abyss.*

Moody's account hadn't been very specific, but Snape was clever enough to read between the lines.

I need a list. My life is disappearing fast enough as it is. If I manage to survive this cock-up of a war – if Albus or the Deranged Lunatic don't manage to kill me off first...

Quill in hand, Snape began to scribble, and a song began to drift through his head. As some day it may happen, indeed – vengeance fantasies notwithstanding...

Item one: He wrote *Finally Get Laid. Even Molly Weasley's looking good at this point.*

Snape sat back and grinned. Hell, it was his fantasy – why not? His quill began to scratch. He did not at first notice the pale figure clutching the doorframe, wearing purple pajamas and ridiculously fuzzy slippers.

"Sir, I'm sorry to bother you, but you were humming, and I recognized the tune."

Snape jumped and slammed his knee on the underside of the desk. He swore, and Granger stumbled back, the glass of water in her hand sloshing onto the floor. She looked like absolute hell.

"Granger," he snapped, "I do *not* hum."

"No, sir. It's just, I know that song. It's from *The Mikado*. My parents had a video of it. It's ... where you have something taped off of the telly..."

"I know what a video is, Granger."

"Of course, sir. But, that song, it's what Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner sings. About how he has a little list."

"And they'll none of them be missed," Snape filled in the line without thinking.

"Exactly, sir! I hum it, too – when I'm writing things down sometimes." The girl nodded eagerly.

"Granger..." Snape pinched the bridge of his nose. It was high time to put an end to this ridiculous conversation. The girl had been seriously injured and should have been in bed. Minerva would kill him if she knew that her precious Granger was out and about like this.

"Sir?"

"Are you aware of the time?"

Granger's eyes got wide.

"It's twelve minutes past two in the morning, sir," she replied as if in class.

"Precisely."

"But sir, I couldn't sleep, after everything that happened today, and I wanted to do some revision in case Professor Dumbledore does make me take my O.W.L. s tomorrow, and the Blood-Replenishing Potion me thirsty and..."

"Granger..."

"Yes, sir?"

"What makes you think I care? Go. To. Bed."

"But, sir, the potion you gave me made me thirsty and..." Granger insisted, as her complexion, grew pasty and she began to sway dangerously.

"Granger!" Snape leapt from the desk, chair clattering to the floor, but not in time to catch her as her eyes rolled back in her head and she fell to the ground with a heavy thud. "Oh, fucking *hell!*"

Three Years Later

The first thing Snape saw when he opened his eyes were tatty curtains. The second thing was the worried face of the Healer. The third was the hostile face of the guard by the door, and the fourth and fifth were the stern visage of Harry Potter (blast him) and the intense frown of Hermione Granger.

Snape groaned. He was in hell.

As it turned out, he wasn't, but it was a near thing. St Mungo's recovery ward, guarded by a series of Aurors, all of whom seemed to have been either dear friends of Nymphadora Tonks or the family members of victims of Death Eaters, wasn't exactly a picnic in the Lake District.

Days passed and turned to weeks. And despite his best efforts, he began to heal. Damned phoenix! Damned Healers! Damned Potter and Granger and (Merlin save him) Weasley and their cheerful get-well-soon, thank-you-for-saving-us visits.

One rainy afternoon, Granger invaded his melancholy, brandishing a list.

"I found this, Seve- sir."

"Did you now," he managed, picking at the congealed mass of pudding in a cup that was left of his lunch.

"Yes, and I think it's the next step for you. I remember watching you write this and ... well, sir, you survived. I think you should do it."

"Granger, what in the name of Merlin are you babbling about?" Snape manfully resisted the urge to fling the cup at her.

"This list, sir. The one you were writing after the battle at the Department of Mysteries."

"The what?"

"The list of things you wanted to do if you—" Granger frowned at the battered parchment in her hand. "—managed to survive the magnificent Dumbledore-engineered cock-up". That list."

Oh, for fuck's sake.

"Granger, are you styling yourself as my *therapist?*" Snape demanded incredulously.

Granger blushed. "N-no, not exactly. We found your list in your desk, and I thought, well, you've been lingering here for months now. And ... I thought this might give you a direction."

"A what?"

"A direction, in case you were feeling a bit lost."

Snape stared.

Granger continued, "I can't really help you with number one, but my parents tell me that Australia is beautiful and a perfect spot for a holiday – that's number two." Her brow furrowed as she ran her inky finger down the battered parchment. "And as for number three, I'll talk to Arthur and Kingsley. They should be able to convince the Ministry to arrest you, at least, when you walk out of here and ..."

"GRANGER!" Snape shouted.

Granger's head snapped up.

"Let me make sure that I understand you correctly."

Granger nodded.

"One," Snape held up a thin finger, "you found this ... this list in my desk."

"Yes, Sev- sir."

"In my office."

"Yes."

"You and who else?"

"Me and, erm, Harry. It was Harry's idea, after seeing your memories. He wanted to find more traces of, well, you. And you have to understand, sir. At this point we all thought you were dead, and it didn't seem to be that much of a liberty."

"Oh it didn't, did it?"

"Well, no."

"Miss Granger, did you or did you not rifle through my desk with –" The name was ground out. " – Potter?"

"Well, sir, at the time it seemed appropriate."

"Miss Granger, it was highly *in*appropriate. And furthermore ..." Snape began to inform her in very clear and precise language not only what he thought of the propriety of her actions, but also his views on her, Potter, Hogwarts, and the rest of the Merlin-forsaken universe. It was an eloquent speech, and it felt damned good to give.

He wound up informing Granger what she could do with the list and offered several graphic suggestions as to how such actions could be accomplished, until she fled, face red with suppressed fury and tears starting in her eyes. He was fairly certain it was only the dignity afforded him as her former teacher and current hero that kept her from hexing him to smithereens.

She did, however, leave the list.

Recovering his composure, Snape reached out.

"*Accio*," he muttered and the parchment obediently fluttered to him.

Well, he thought, *why the fuck not? What exactly do I have to lose?*

AN: Not mine, no money. Many thanks go to Subversa, AnnieTalbot, and TalesofSnape for their help with this!

Please note, I have played with canon timeline – finding it more convenient that the battle in the Department of Mysteries took place *before* the O.W.Ls and not *after*. Additionally, I've played a bit with the geography of Grimmauld Place.

Chapter One: One Little Maid (not) from School

Chapter 2 of 6

Snape sets out to complete his list, but first, he asks Lucius Malfoy for assistance.

Finally get laid

"Lucius, I have a problem." The words were as appetizing as a cup of cold poison.

Lucius crossed his elegantly trousered leg and swirled his brandy. Snape hunched forward in the other wingback, studying his hands.

"Do you need my lawyer? He did a damn fine job with me, you know."

"What? No. Not a lawyer. I'm... I'm not in trouble. Not yet."

"Then what? By Merlin, Severus, you're looking as nervous as a virgin Hufflepuff."

"Exactly."

"What?"

"Exactly, that's the problem."

"You deflowered a Hufflepuff? I always wondered about the Headmaster's privileges. Tell me, is that what Dumbledore was doing closeted with Potter all that time? Is that why Potter's always so jumpy?"

"What?"

"Potter and Dumbledore, did they..."

"Potter and Prospero's prick, no, Lucius!" Snape's head jerked up.

"But your Hufflepuff, on the other hand ... Well, my lawyer's quite good, but ... Not your finest choice, my friend. *You know* Hufflepuffs don't know how to be discreet.

"What Hufflepuff?"

"The Hufflepuff you deflowered who's pressing charges. Don't tell me she was underage. I'm willing to help you, of course, but he usually charges double for ..."

"I didn't deflower anybody!"

"You didn't?"

"No."

Lucius looked a bit disappointed.

"Not even the Mud- the Muggle-born that follows you around everywhere? What's her name? Granger?"

"Not even the why her?"

"She looks at you as if you two are ..." Lucius shrugged an elegant shoulder and sipped his brandy. "Every time I see you in public, you're with Potter, and she's there, too. I understand why Potter needs her. According to Draco, that little prat couldn't wipe his own arse without instruction, but unless you're slipping one to Granger, then ..."

"Lucius. Shut up!"

"You've not deflowered a Hufflepuff, you're not enjoying the Muggle-born 'delight', Granger. Whom do you ... it's not Potter is it?" Lucius grew pale.

"Good God, no! That's just the problem! I've not shagged anybody. Ever."

Lucius pursed his lips, appearing to rely on generations of breeding, years of upbringing, the knowledge of just which fork to use, what spell works best for torture, and an all around sense of superiority not to spill his drink in surprise.

And then did it anyway.

"You're a..." he looked around to make sure no house-elves were in the vicinity with their obscenely flapping ears, *Virgin?*" Lucius whispered.

Snape glared.

"Yes."

"And you want me to *help* you?"

"Yes."

Lucius raised an eyebrow. Snape reflected bitterly that even Lucius' eyebrow was elegant. His hair suddenly felt more greasy and his nose more hooked and his teeth more discolored.

"Yes," he muttered.

Lucius harrumphed.

"This was a bad idea," Snape said, rising. "Forget it. I'll see myself out."

"No, it's not a bad idea," Lucius interrupted. "You just caught me by surprise. It's been years since anybody other than Narcissa wanted me to ... And how did you make it through Slytherin without an initiation into the rites of Salazar? Surely that tradition's been in place since ..." he trailed off and made an odd gesture with his hand.

"I didn't make it through Slytherin without being initiated. You saw to it that that tradition was quite *firmly* practiced. It took me years to eradicate it, by the way." Snape gripped the back of his chair. "I'm not talking about that."

"Who was it?" Lucius asked, eyes alight with curiosity.

"What?"

"Who Salazarred you?"

"Rosier. And I'd rather not ..."

"No, of course not. But, why do you need my help? I can't imagine you think I'd ... unless this is your way of calling in our family's debt, in which case, I'd really have to beg you to reconsider. I haven't topped in years, mind you, and frankly, I'm not sure that you, no offense, old man, are the person that I'd like to ..."

"God, no, Lucius." Snape hadn't realized he could blush any more furiously than he already was. "I don't want to shag *you*. I'm not interested in men. Or boys. Or goats." He strode to the door and back, fists clenched.

"You're not?"

"No."

"Really? Because it struck me that ..."

"No. I want to have sex. Consensual, heterosexual, no-strings-attached sex. With a woman. Not a girl. Not a student. Not somebody who's going to carry tales to the *Prophet*. Not somebody who's going to ask me to change their N.E.W.T. result. Not somebody who thinks that jabbing at my arse with his half-erect cock while the rest of the common room listens outside the door is an initiation ritual. Not with anybody but somebody who knows what the fuck she is doing."

Lucius narrowed his eyes. "If you keep pacing that way, you'll wear out the Axminster," he observed.

"So you won't help me." Snape's shoulders sagged. He should have known better.

"I didn't say that. In fact, I have no problem at all helping you."

Hope welled up in Snape's groin.

"But it's going to be difficult," Lucius finished.

Snape sighed. It was *always* difficult.

"Difficult because Narcissa is keeping me on a rather short leash at the moment and any sign of, well, infidelity could be interpreted as ... Well, any chink in the Great Wall of Malfoy Marital Bliss and ... But don't despair I think that I know somebody who *can* help you."

Hope rose again. "You do?"

Lucius frowned. "Yes, but you can't say no when you find out who it is. You do want to get a leg over, do you not?"

"Of course."

"Well then." Lucius snapped his fingers and a house-elf appeared. "Tell my son," he said to the elf, "that I have a job for him to do."

Hope took another careful look at the situation, laughed uproariously, and floated off.

"Severus, relax."

"Don't call me Severus." Snape manfully resisted the urge to fidget on the sofa which was festooned with large pink flowers. In the background, vaguely tribal music thumped.

Draco snorted and took a drag on his cigarette.

"Does your father know you smoke those?"

"Yes. Do you want one?"

"No." Snape nudged a magazine on the coffee table with a reluctant finger. The witch on the cover with breasts the size of planets winked saucily at him and demonstrated just how he could be expected to use his wand when the time came.

"Excuse me," Draco rose suddenly. "I have to see a Thestral about a flight."

"Go." Snape waved a weary hand.

The witch at the front desk, a crone who looked to be about eighty, with purple hair and a nose stud, knitted peaceably and nodded politely as Draco walked past.

"Have you been here before, dear?" she asked Snape.

"Wha er, no."

"Oh, so you'll be wanting a pamphlet then." She pushed a leaflet across the desk at him.

"Erm, thank you."

"It details our rates and the rules. But since you're with young Mr Malfoy, and it's your first time, we'll be offering a special. It's fifty Galleons an hour, and you can come as often as you like."

Snape was saved from complete collapse (and the receptionist from the hexing of a lifetime) by the return of Draco and the advent of the Madame.

"Come on, Severus," Draco prodded him. "I never pictured *you* as a shy boy."

Snape glared at the witches and wizard. "Can we get on with this?" he demanded. And then more plaintively, "Please?"

"Well, hello."

"Good afternoon."

"Is this your first time?"

"Miss..."

"Oh you can call me Fanny. Fanny Cockstuff."

"Miss Fanny, I..."

The prostitute laid a finger across Snape's lips.

"Why don't you get comfy, love? What's your name?"

"Snape. Severus Snape."

"Ooh!" squealed Miss Fanny (whose name was Claire). "The spy for the Order of the Phoenix! How exciting! Mister Draco doesn't always bring the nicest guests, you know." She pulled him onto the bed and bounced next to him, still chattering.

Manfully, Snape stared at her barely concealed tits, wondering if she'd let him touch them and how much it would cost him; Draco had assured him he was footing the bill, but ...

"I can't say, miss..." Snape tried to interrupt. "...that such things would be any concern of mine. As it stands, how would you suggest we proceed?"

"... there was that one time, oh, the year before last, when Mr Draco had his birthday party here, and there was that horrid boy, Crabbe, who did, in fact ..."

"Miss FANNY!"

"Yes?" Miss Fanny jumped back.

"Are we, or are we not, going to fuck?"

She pouted a bit.

"Well, I *suppose*."

"Excellent. How do we begin?" He glared at her, daring her to giggle.

Miss Fanny did not giggle, merely reached for a bottle and two glasses.

"Wine?" she asked.

Snape hesitated.

"Oh, don't worry about *that*. Mr Draco has all expenses covered."

"Is it entirely necessary?" Snape asked.

"Well, some find it necessary to relax. Try some."

Miss Fanny poured the wine and lounged against the headboard, allowing her negligee to slip and reveal a portion of thigh.

"Tell me," she said. "What would you like to do?"

Snape's cock, which, up until now, had been somewhat ambivalent about the whole procedure, took a more active interest as she put her wineglass down and stretched, thrusting out her breasts in Snape's general direction.

"I would like," Snape said, "to touch your breasts."

Miss Fanny giggled and shimmied out of her negligee.

Snape's cock perked up considerably.

"It's not unusual," Miss Fanny said, consolingly. "In fact, Mr Draco didn't last half as long as you did."

Snape snorted. On the long list of "Bad Ideas I Have Had", this had to be the worst. Next to joining Voldemort's legion.

"In fact," she continued brightly, "I think it's rather sweet. I didn't really believe Mr Draco when he told me that you were a virgin, but I suppose you are, aren't you?"

Snape grabbed for his wineglass, downed it, and then started pulling his trousers back on.

"Oh, now ..." Miss Fanny sat up behind him and began to rub his shoulders. "You know the House rules you can come as often as you can, and our hour's only just begun. If you like, we can wait a bit, and maybe next time you'll actually be able to get your cock near me."

Snape glanced at the hourglass by the door. Only fifteen minutes had elapsed. He groaned.

"That's the spirit!" cheered Miss Fanny poking at a stubborn knot in his shoulder.

"So?" Draco demanded.

Snape glared at him and stormed down the stairs to the street.

"How did it go? Fanny is really one of the best, don't you think?" Draco persisted loudly as they prepared to push their way through the throngs of Saturday shoppers and into Diagon Alley.

Snape flexed his shoulders. Her sexual prowess notwithstanding, his back *did* feel better. Still, the less Draco knew about his performance (or lack thereof), the better.

"Draco ..."

"Father told me you were looking to lose your virginity," Draco bawled. "And I lost mine to Fanny officially, that is. Pansy really, but nobody counts ..."

"Draco!"

"What?"

"Do we have to discuss this in *public*?" Snape hissed.

"Discuss what, Malfoy? Oh, hello, Snape."

Ronald Weasley, his arm slung around the shoulder of Hermione Granger, slouched towards the arguing pair.

"Weasley," Draco greeted them. "Granger."

Weasley dropped his arm from Granger's shoulder and began to circle Draco. Draco circled back, sneering. The men fingered their wands. Granger seemed oblivious to the behavior.

"Professor Snape," Granger greeted him. "Nice day?"

"Yes. Lovely," Snape snapped, looking for an exit. Either he could duck back into the brothel or hex Granger and grab Draco, before the dunderhead got into a duel with Weasley, and make a run for it.

"Oh!" Granger exclaimed before he could decide the more prudent course of action. "Did you just visit Rachel's?"

Snape snapped his neck around and read the nameplate on the brothel's door.

"It's okay if you did," Granger continued. "Were you taking care of the first item on your..." Her voice dropped conspiratorially. "...list?"

Snape said nothing.

"I wondered how you'd go about that. It's fine, you know," Granger said in the tones of a deeply supportive social worker. "George tells me that they're the best in town, and that they have the highest standards of care and hygiene for their workers, both male and female. And that's important, you know, to be sure that even the workers in the sex industry have a high standard of care"

"Granger ..."

"Rachel's is apparently nicest place around," Granger continued. "Even for men. If that's your ..." she trailed off, blushing. "Erm, anyway," she began again, "Ronald and I were going to Florean's for tea; would you like to, erm, join us?"

Snape glanced over Granger's shoulder. Behind them, Weasley and Draco were now standing toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose, each trying to stare the other down. He saw his escape.

"Granger, as tempting as it may be to join you and engage in such invigorating trivialities as discussing the *weather* and the current deplorable state of the Chudley Cannons not that I give a good Thestral's turd about Quidditch I must decline. And Granger," he paused and smirked, "you might be well advised to remove your *boyfriend* from the clutches of young Mr Malfoy. Before he gets hurt, that is."

Granger spun, her uncontrollable hair smacking Snape in the face, and uttered a gasp of horror at the tableau of Weasley and Malfoy practically eyeball-to-eyeball, yet neither one of them daring to draw wand. She leapt forward and grabbed Weasley by the elbow. Weasley uttered a dismayed squawk and stumbled after her.

Draco was not so lucky to keep his footing and would have fallen face first onto the cobbles if Snape had not yanked him back by his collar.

"Thank you, Severus," Draco said, "but I was handling that nicely on my own."

"Harpy shit," Snape sneered, and set off towards the Leakey Cauldron, trying to ignore the niggles that were the scent of Granger's shampoo.

AN: Still not mine. Yes, I am aware I am playing with certain fandom cliches that might not be to everybody's taste. But in this little universe, Snape is an aging virgin, and Draco occasionally smokes. Just go with it. :)

Chapter Two – Beauty in the Bellow of the Blast

Chapter 3 of 6

After his disastrous experience with the first item on his list, Snape moves on.

Go on Holiday

"What you need is a holiday."

Snape glared over the rim of his Firewhisky glass.

"Did I ask you?"

Rosemerta flipped her wand at a puddle of water on the bar and sniffed.

"You have the opportunity, and frankly, Snape, you're looking seedy."

"Thank you for that assessment. Has it escaped your notice that the school year is in progress?"

"Don't be ridiculous. What school year? You've been lurking upstairs for the last three weeks like some sort of ghoul. You don't even have *job*."

Snape shrugged.

"Don't you have somewhere else to be?"

Snape shrugged again. Nobody seemed to notice him, and he didn't much care.

"Even if you didn't," Rosemerta tried again, "surely you need a break."

A break from what? His days revolved around lurking upstairs in the Three Broomsticks, duty visits to Kingsley and Potter, and trips to St Mungo's for what Granger called "physio-magio therapy".

Fair enough. He could use a break from Granger. The girl had decided to train as a Healer. Of course. And since she was also an official War Heroine, she got everything she bloody wanted.

Everything she bloody wanted apparently included the right to romp through the training program at St Mungo's without regard to order, scope, or sequence. Every time he saw her cheerfully prancing about the corridors with a clipboard, Dicto-quill hovering behind her, he wanted to howl. It was so bloody unfair.

Unfair because Kingsley looked at him like something on the bottom of his shoe. Unfair because here were rumors going around that he was going to be prosecuted for the murder of Dumbledore. Unfair because he was forced to lurk in the Three Broomsticks, drinking his days away, hoping to Merlin, Circe, Hecate, or anybody who would listen that the next person who lurched their way through Rosmerta's door wasn't an Auror out for his blood.

He needed to get away.

"You're right," he said to Rosmerta, draining his glass and slamming it down on the bar.

"Of course I'm right."

A thought occurred to him, and he dug in his back pocket for the list.

"Humph." He squinted at his scrawl. "Oh, fuck."

"What?" Rosmerta asked.

"Nothing." Snape groped for his reading glasses and glared around the pub to make sure nobody was watching him, and he perched them on his nose:

1. *Finally Get Laid . . .*, he read *Yes, well, we'll not strike that one yet.*

2. *Go somewhere nice on holiday. Go alone.*

Outside, rain lashed against the windows and a cold draft blew beneath door, tickling Snape's calves. He looked down at the list again.

Go somewhere warm.

"Rosmerta!"

"What, Snape?"

"Where's someplace warm and far away?"

Rosmerta shrugged her shoulders.

"Ibiza?"

Snape pulled a face.

"Well, what about Key West? If you're not going to drink anymore, there are customers who need that barstool, Snape."

Snape tried to freeze her with a glare, but he knew that of all people, Rosmerta was un-freezable.

The Portkey spun him into existence at approximately ten-thirty am behind Sloppy Joe's.

A drunk, trying to urinate discreetly in the alley, saw him, tripped over the curbstone he was watering and fell heavily to his knees, splashing urine over Snape's feet.

In an effort to enjoy himself and look inconspicuous, Snape had invested in a pair of Bermuda shorts, several black, short-sleeved button-down shirts and sandals.

He had chosen to make the trip in his holiday clothing.

Filled with rage, he drew his wand and cut off the flow of urine.

The drunk pitched forward into the curb and began to mutter happily to himself.

Contemplating the benefits of the *Cruciatus*, Snape cast the most powerful Cleansing Charm he could on his feet and then turned to the drunk.

Cruciatus was too kind.

"*Soberius*," he cried, pointing his wand at the unfortunate man. "*Ebrionius Morbiorum Perpetuum!*"

The drunk, now stone cold sober, sat up, blinked at his surroundings and clutched his head.

"I think I'm going to vomit," he declared.

"Good," sneered Snape. "Do it over there."

"Fuck. I've never been so sick in my life." The drunk crawled against the building wall and sagged to the sidewalk.

"Even better. Perhaps you'll find a profession other than worthless drunk," Snape observed.

"Blargh! I'm an accountant from Cleveland!"

Snape had no idea where Cleveland was, nor did he care.

By this time the no-longer-drunk accountant from Cleveland was vomiting helplessly.

"Have a nice day," Snape wished the man, feeling cheerful for the first time in ages.

Carefully stepping over the suffering man, he emerged onto Duval Street. Perhaps this holiday wasn't going to be so bad, after all.

As he headed south towards South Street and Papa's Wizarding Inn, thunder rumbled in the overcast skies and big droplets of rain began to spatter the sidewalk.

By the time he reached Papa's, it was pouring, and all the other tourists had long since scattered for cover.

Snape gave vent to his emotions with a gusty sigh and a drawn out,

"Oh, fuck."

It rained for the remainder of his stay.

Still, Snape had made the effort: He spent a deafening evening in Margaritaville, trying desperately to get drunk. All he got was a headache.

The next day, he visited the Hemingway house where he had a nasty, potion-resistant allergic reaction to all the cats.

Papa's Wizarding Inn had, at the very least, some nice views. When he could see them through the driving rain and when he could see them after his eyes had stopped watering from his visit to the Hemingway house. The food, however, was terrible.

In disgust, he Portkeyed back to England, spent the remainder of his "holiday cash" on a nice hotel, and set about taking a tour of the museums and libraries that he had wanted to visit in his youth.

It was outside Tate Modern that he bumped into Hermione Granger.

"Oh, fuck, Granger, what are *you* doing here?"

Granger gaped at him and he repented of his previous bad temper.

"I apologize," he said stiffly, "you startled me."

"It's quite all right, *Professor*," Granger said with dignity as she swept past him. "Some of us enjoy the culture of Muggle London."

"Apparently," he said to her back as she strode down the slope to the ticket booth, "you are not the only one. I'm sorry if I offended you."

She turned.

"Is that so, Professor?" she asked with some asperity.

"It is." He spread his hands. "I apologize," he said for the third time. "I was taken aback. You didn't strike me as the type who would be interested in ... *art!* *I thought you'd*

be swotting at St Mungo's.

Granger sniffed, apparently only slightly mollified.

"Well, it's my day off," she said as if she'd heard his last thought. "And Ronald has to work, so I thought I would enjoy some time alone. The Surrealism exhibition seemed a good place to do that."

Above their heads, the giant banner that adorned the massive edifice flapped in the breeze. The silence stretched between them. Granger's hair whipped into her mouth, and she batted at it with a moue of annoyance.

Snape bowed slightly and gestured to the door.

"After you," he said. "I shall try not to intrude upon your solitude."

The look she gave him was startled.

"Thank you, sir."

Snape smirked at the banner. *Surrealism, Desire Unbound* was an intriguing exhibition for Miss Follow-the-Rules Granger to be attending.

But then, he reflected, she *had* attended the Yule Ball with Krum all those years ago, and she *had* spent all of her school years with Weasley and Potter. Shuddering away from the frightening image of Potter and Weasley fornicating, and choosing to focus more on the idea of Miss Granger, unmanageable hair unbound, indulging a taste for the erotic, Snape allowed himself a moment of quiet reflection.

Where the fuck did that come from?

He had intended to visit the Chagall exhibit. Perhaps a change of plans was in order.

He found her, head tilted to one side, staring intently at Paul Delvaux's *Dawn over the City*. He paused as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other, noticing that she was wearing attractively tight Muggle jeans. He was strongly tempted to run his hand over her pert little arse. His conscience poked him. His libido taunted him:

Come off it, you pedophile, she's your student!

Former student.

Just because you couldn't get it off with Fanny-by-the-hour doesn't mean that you should even start thinking about seducing Granger!

Why the hell not? Isn't it about time I got a bit of my own back?

If you like being the laughingstock of the wizarding world his conscience observed.

Snape told his conscience where it could get off, and taking advantage of years of practice, glided noiselessly up to her.

"Mesmerizing, isn't it?" he murmured in her ear.

She jumped slightly and blushed. Served her right for wearing trousers like that.

"As a matter of fact, sir," she said, "it's quite interesting how the Surrealists have managed, over the twentieth century, to engage the emotions of the time."

"Or," he said squinting at the card beside the painting, "it could be that Delvaux understood the base erotic desires that lie deep within the human soul, pulling us together and tearing us apart."

He was rewarded with a blush and a cleared throat.

"When was this painted?" He followed up his advantage. "Ah, yes, 1940, ten years after the idea that desire was a compelling force, that people had no true concept of control, that even found objects incorporated unarticulated expressions of hidden desires."

"Yes, well," Granger replied somewhat breathlessly. She did not, he noted, shift away from him. Her eye fell on the card. "You git!" she cried, pulling away from him and shoving him back. "You were *reading!*"

"Indeed, Granger, I am literate," he acknowledged.

"Literate, my arse," she grumbled, looking at him suspiciously. "Just what's this in aid of, Snape?"

Snape. It was, at least, an improvement on "sir" or "Professor".

This had been a bad idea. Granger would probably blab to Kingsley some nonsense about sexual harassment, and he'd wind up trussed up by the balls in Azkaban.

Serves you right.

He took refuge in a smirk. "Merely expressing an appreciation for art."

"Art," Granger snorted. "Right."

Snape shrugged and affected to study the painting. Granger watched him for a long moment. She opened and closed her mouth several times as if she wanted to say something. Snape steadfastly ignored her.

Finally, she turned on her heel and walked away. Snape watched her walk. More specifically, he watched her arse.

AN: Still not mine. And many thanks still go to those mentioned in the Prologue!

Chapter Three - A More Humane Mikado

Chapter 4 of 6

Can nothing go well for Snape?

Hex Dumbledore several times over

The lift was, thank fuck, empty but for two aimless paper airplanes that circled above his head.

Snape hated these duty visits to Kingsley.

"Hold the lift, please!" A strident voice rang through the corridor, accompanied by the sound of running feet.

Snape sighed and shoved his hand between the doors, and they snapped open.

"Thank you." Breathless and disheveled, Granger slipped into the lift. "Thank you, Professor."

Snape sighed inwardly: the last time she'd addressed him, she'd at least called him by his *name*.

"Granger," he said with a stiff nod. "Floor?"

"Fifth floor, please. It would appear that we're going to the same place."

"I doubt that." Snape jabbed at the already-illuminated button.

"I'm going to see Kingsley," Granger volunteered.

"How absolutely fucking fascinating," Snape drawled in tones of heavy sarcasm.

"Well, where are you going?"

"None of your business, Granger."

Granger harrumphed.

The lift doors finally sighed closed, but the lift did not move.

Snape jabbed the button again.

"For fuck's sake."

"Do you mind?" Granger asked.

"Mind what?"

"All the swearing. It's quite uncouth."

Uncouth? What was this, eighteen-oh-four?

"Uncouth, Granger? What the fuck is this, eighteen-oh-four?"

Granger looked prim.

"I don't usually object," she said, "but coming from you, it's inappropriate. Especially when you're in the Ministry."

Snape looked at her in wild surmise.

"What? Granger, you're babbling."

"It's simply that you're a role model, an example. You didn't swear in front of the students, and now that you're a hero, you have people looking up to you. Can't you be a better example when you're in public, and people know who you are?"

"A what? Granger, just what have you been putting in your pumpkin juice?" Snape demanded.

"Is it me, or has this lift not moved?" Granger asked.

"Don't be ridiculous, it's mov" Snape stopped. The lift wasn't budging.

"*Momentum!*," cried Granger, the typical spell to unstick unmoving objects. The lift shuddered and refused to budge. "Well, that's odd," she frowned.

"Odd indeed. I suppose you didn't think to press the button again?" Snape demanded.

"Try it yourself, *sir*."

Snape jabbed at the button again.

Nothing happened.

"Oh, flaming Salazar's festering fucking piles!" Snape bellowed, kicking at the lift doors. The lift shuddered again, and Granger grabbed for the handrail.

"Do you mind?" she asked acridly. "When you do that, the whole bloody lift shakes."

"Now who's using foul language?" Snape sneered.

"For your information, I don't like enclosed spaces like this, and you're not making it any better."

"Well, *excuse* me!"

"*MOMENTUM*," cried Granger again. The lift didn't even bother to shudder that time. Granger sighed. "I suppose we're stuck," she announced.

Snape wanted to bang a head on the doors. Preferably not his head. Surely Granger wouldn't feel it with all that hair.

"I'm sure somebody will come and rescue us eventually," Granger continued. "In the meantime, *Expecto Patronum!*"

Her silvery otter slid from her wand and chittered at them.

"Get help, boy!" Granger told it.

The otter chittered again and slipped through the crack in the door.

"Get help, *boy?*" Snape demanded. "Is it a sheepdog or a Patronus?"

"He's a Patronus, and his name is Skip."

"You're fucking joking."

"What's wrong with Skip?" Granger asked.

"You named your Patronus."

"So?"

"Granger, do you have any idea how tacky that is?"

"Who cares? He's *my* Patronus!" Granger crossed her arms in front of chest and glared at him.

It was the absolute limit. He was trapped in a lift with a woman who was actually madder than Bellatrix. He was trapped with a woman who had named her fucking Patronus after a sheepdog.

"Oh for fuck's sake," Snape exploded. "This is the last fucking thing I fucking need! It's so bloody typical, isn't it? After everything, all the suffering, all the bloody drama, all the stinking shitload of playing nice, doing what that pimply wanker Shackbolt tells me to, pretending that I actually give a Thestral's fwoop about the Good of the Wizarding World, after pretending to Minerva that I want my Merlin-forsaken job back, having to bow down to that sharp-tongued Scottish harpy so that she can gloat, and now *this!*"

"I'm stuck in a bloody lift with a bushy-haired harridan who named her Patronus, the heroine, the bloody . . ."

"Snape! Will you please shut the fuck up!" screeched Granger in the middle of his tirade.

Startled, Snape fell silent. *Please? She said please?*

"When are you going to learn, you Dragon-Pox-ridden, skinny-arsed excuse for a wizard, that you were not the only one to suffer during the War?"

"I spent all those Circe-cursed months with Ronald and Harry and then just Harry, traipsing across the bloody countryside because he couldn't sit still and do some fucking research!

"I had to listen to Bill and Phlegm shag every fucking night when we were imprisoned at Shell Cottage!

"I had the fabulous, mind-blowing opportunity to gnaw on the Malfoys' Axminster carpet while that pox-ridden bitch, Bellatrix, entertained herself with me!

"I have to get up at a fucking four a.m. just to make a cup of bloody tea and check my vitals just to make sure I'm not dead somewhere, or dying, because I've just woken up screaming blue fucking murder because of the nightmares! So don't you tell me about suffering, Severus fucking Snape! Because you are not the only one, you ... you ... *arsehole!*"

Granger stomped to a corner of the lift and slithered down to the floor, head resting on her trouser-clad legs.

Snape stared, more than a little gobsmacked.

"I'm sorry, Granger, Hermione," he said. "I knew, of course, that Bellatrix had managed to get her slimy claws on you, but I didn't realize that it had gone so far..."

"Oh, fuck you, Snape. I don't need your bloody pity." The words were muffled by her trousers.

"It's not pity. And don't you think, Granger, that I'm the last person on earth who would pity *you*? I'm expressing regret that that bitch Bella did you harm, that you had to listen to *any* Weasley mate, that you were stuck in that festering tent for as long as you were, that you endured what you had to endure because Potter doesn't know his arse from a hole in the ground."

Granger didn't respond.

"Well, it's *true*," Snape grumbled.

"Really?" Granger's head came up. "Because it just seems that ..."

"Contrary to what you might think, Granger oh, hell, Hermione I'm not incapable of feeling regret. Especially regret over things that I might have been able to prevent."

Hermione sighed. "I know it's not like you've ever shown that. And besides, if I couldn't even keep Harry from going off half-charmed, what makes you think you could? I know what you tried to do for us; I know how much Harry hated you; and I know how much you hated him."

"Not *hate*, exactly," Snape said, sitting down beside her. "Derision, yes, resentment that he always managed to get away with mischief when others were severely punished, absolutely, but not hatred; that died with his father. After a while, it simply wasn't worth the effort."

"And what about me?" Granger asked.

"Oh, you." Snape sighed heavily. "Well, an accomplice? The voice of sense? I don't know, Gr- Hermione. You were always there, and in retrospect, I ... I don't suppose Potter would've survived without you. Doubtless, you deserve every ounce of praise. And yet, even you don't know what it is to have your accomplishments passed over."

"You're the bloody *heroine*. It's different for you."

"That's not true."

Snape ran his fingers through his lank hair, pushing it out of his face.

"No, it is," he replied. "You worked hard, swotted away, put yourself in danger, but think about it. You're the youngest Healer in the history of St Mungo's, you're probably going to see Kingsley to free the house-elves, you certainly don't lack for anything with your Order of Merlin stipend, you and the young Weasley are going to be married, and you'll have your perfect life.

"And what do I get?" Snape fished his List, now a dog-eared piece of parchment, from his back pocket. "I've managed to get pissed on by a drunk, made a laughing-stock at the most exclusive brothel, and now who the fuck knows what Kingsley's going to make me do this afternoon to keep my sorry arse out of Azkaban. If I ever get out of this woooping, shit-soaked lift."

"We just have to be patient, I suppose," Hermione said, though she didn't sound convinced.

"Oh, fucking *hell!*" Snape rose and kicked at the door.

The lift shuddered again and lurched on its intended course.

"Oh, my," Hermione said, scrambling to her feet. "That was..."

"Surprising as hell?" Snape asked.

Hermione grinned. "You could say that," she admitted. "As a matter of fact, I was going to see Kingsley about you. And what about the house-elves?"

"What about me?"

"About your Order of Merlin."

"What Order of Merlin? Just when I thought you were beginning to talk sense, Granger, you start babbling again."

"I'm *not* babbling! Wasn't it on your list? 'To get the recognition you deserve?'"

"It's always about the list with you, isn't it? Can't you just leave well enough alone?"

"No, not always," Hermione said. "I do have other interests."

"Right," Snape sneered, "the house-elves."

"What? What house-elves?" Hermione frowned as the Sickle dropped. "*Those* house-elves? Snape, do you think I'm that naive? Honestly," she huffed, "of course the welfare of the house-elves is important to me, that they not be abused by their families, but if you hadn't noticed, Snape, I'm not fifteen anymore. Or have you not noticed?"

Snape scoffed and then looked more closely at her. She was, indeed, no longer a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl. She had the breasts and hips of a woman a young woman, a former student but she wasn't a skinny, bushy-haired, buck-toothed swot.

And you were ogling her arse the other day. His conscience reminded him.

"Oh," he replied, looking her up and down, "I noticed." And he again had the pleasure of watching her blush.

"Anyway," Hermione said, filling the awkward silence between them as the lift slowed to a halt, and the doors slid open, "Kingsley asked me to compile a report for him regarding your role in the War."

"Oh, he did, did he?" They stepped from the lift whose doors snapped shut behind them.

"Okay, I complied a report and bullied Kingsley into looking at it," Hermione confessed.

Snape chuckled. "That sounds more accurate."

"And in any event, surely you'd prefer not being banged up in Azkaban?" Hermione demanded, turning to face him outside of Kingsley's office.

"Well, obviously. But did it not occur to you, Granger, to consult me first?"

"Since when has Hermione Granger ever asked permission before starting a crusade?" Kingsley asked, opening the door.

Hermione grinned.

"I won't be a charity case," Snape grumbled. "I don't need your pity."

"Nobody's talking about pity, Severus," Kingsley said, drawing him into his office. "What we're talking about is righting a wrong or two, or three. Hermione agrees with me, and we've arranged for a special hearing of the Wizengamot."

"A *what?*"

A familiar, and loathed, chuckle echoed in the office. Snape jerked his arm from Kingsley's grasp.

"What the bloody fuck is that oily lunatic doing here?" he demanded.

Before the portrait of Dumbledore could answer, before Kingsley could grasp his arm, before Hermione could scream, Snape drew his wand.

A stream of turpentine shot forth, followed by bright orange flame.

"Eat hot death, you manipulative, Giant Squid bugging, stinking fascist son of a syphilitic she-knarl!"

"*Aguamenti!*" Granger screamed.

"Don't you dare, Snape! *Expelliarmus!*"

"Fuck you, Kingsley!" Snape grasped for his wand as it flew from his grip. Fist met jaw with a satisfying smack. Kingsley sat down heavily.

"Professor! Severus! You can't hit the acting Minister of Magic!" Granger gasped, racing for the door.

"Aphrodite's arsehole, Severus. That hurt!" Kingsley staggered to his feet.

"What the fuck did you expect? Granger, call off the fucking Aurors. I didn't hurt him that much." Reluctantly, Hermione returned to the office to survey the damage.

"Is he still smoldering? Ouch." Kingsley gingerly rubbed his jaw.

Hermione peered at the blackened frame. Snape joined her to admire his handiwork.

He'd certainly done a thorough job. All that remained was a wisp of purple robe, a portion of white beard and a twinkling blue eye.

Snape felt an immense sense of satisfaction, even as several burly Aurors tramped into the office.

"Severus Snape, you are under arrest for assaulting the Minister of Magic, as well as damaging a national treasure. If you will step this way," announced the heaviest of the Aurors.

"You're not going to arrest him!" Hermione sounded incensed.

"Sorry, miss, duty is duty."

"Kingsley!"

Snape glanced to Kingsley, who was gently massaging his jaw.

"It will probably be easier this way," Kingsley admitted, nodding at the Aurors. "We can..." the door swung shut behind them.

Neither the fact that he was being dragged off to prison, nor the realization that Shackbolt and Granger were obviously plotting something troubled Snape. On the way down to the bowels of the Ministry in the lift, he was permitted to fish his List from his back pocket and check off one item at last.

Finally hex the shit out of that turd-eating ponce, Albus Percival Brian Fucking Dumbledore.

AN: Still not mine!

Chapter Four – And it's Greatly to His Credit (that He is an Englishman)

Chapter 5 of 6

Snape faces trial with unexpected (to him) results.

Get the recognition I deserve

"Severus Snape, you are hereby charged with destruction of Ministry property, assaulting the Minister of Magic (acting). How do you plead?"

"Oh, you're not going to charge me with murder and conspiracy and associating with Voldemort?" Snape demanded sarcastically.

"We can if you'd like, Mr Snape," the Mugwump commented, looking over his glasses.

"Shut up, you idiot," hissed Granger from the witness bench.

"By no means," Snape said, bowing deferentially, "I have no desire to sink myself further in the mire."

The Mugwump harrumphed into his brief.

"How do you plead, Mr Snape?"

"Not guilty."

"You deny that you assaulted the Acting Minister of Magic in his own office without provocation?" The Ministry's legal eagle (the only *registered* Animagus other than Minerva McGonagall) preferred to conduct his cases in his avian form. Nobody dared object his winning record far outstripped anybody else's.

"I do," Snape said calmly. A surprised murmur spread through the courtroom. "I had plenty of provocation. He brought Dumbledore."

"Mr Snape, possession of a portrait cannot be considered provocation."

"I object!" Granger leapt to her feet.

"Miss Granger, you are out of order. Sit down," declared the Mugwump.

"He had plenty of provocation Kingsley *knows* that Albus Dumbledore was a manipulative, goat-buggering, sherbet-lemon-sucking piece of harpy dung!"

"MISS GRANGER, sit *down*!"

Granger subsided, grumbling.

"Setting a good linguistic example, Granger?" Snape scoffed at her from across the courtroom.

"Shut up, Snape, I'm trying to bloody help you."

"I'm going to strike that outburst from the record," the Mugwump mused. "Another outburst, Miss Granger, and you will be forcibly removed from the courtroom."

Granger glared at the Mugwump.

"So you admit to attacking the Acting Minister of Magic," the eagle commented.

Snape crossed his arms in front of his chest and glared at the eagle.

"Wimblethorp, I refuse to answer any more of your questions until you change back into the wizard that you are," he said.

"If you don't mind, Mr Snape," Wimblethorp replied, "I will stay in my Animagus form to question you."

"Wimblethorp, you're a *moron*." Snape growled. "You were when you were a snotty nosed first-year who nearly cut off his own thumb the first time he picked up a knife, and you are now. So change back and let us get on with this ridiculous charade."

The hearing went rapidly downhill after that.

"Three days in the cells under the Ministry, and then another hearing," Granger observed from outside his cell door.

Snape grunted and rattled experimentally at the bars.

"Could be worse you're lucky that Kingsley's not pressing charges."

"Shut up, Granger."

"Why do you have to be so nasty?" Granger demanded.

"I thought we'd been over this."

"Well, I'll set Harry to work on your defense, I suppose. I have a practical this afternoon, so I can't be there, but he's been dying to help you."

"Keep Potter the hell away from my case! Is that young twit not content with being an Auror?"

"He wants to be a lawyer, now. He's a pupil of Guthrie Erskin-Trant, the best defender there is. And he wants to help you."

"Tell him and Mr Erskin-Trant to mind their own business."

"I will not. You need his help, so for once in your life, be gracious, you git!"

Snape resisted the urge to grin. Not only had Granger developed a lovely arse (and some rather nice tits, if he were being honest about it), she also seemed to be acquiring an attitude that he rather appreciated.

"Fine," he said, affecting an air of great world-weariness, leaning against the bars of his cell. "Far be it from me to interfere with the plans of the Boy Who Lived to Help Us All."

Granger smiled and stepped up to him.

"Thank you," she said, leaning over to kiss the top of his bent head.

Snape jerked his head up, just in time to see her make a face as she drew back, rubbing her lips with the back of her hand.

He smirked. That would teach her to put her mouth on his greasy scalp. He had other, better places he wanted her mouth. Much better places.

After Granger left, Snape settled himself on the narrow bench that served as his bed and gave himself over to a thoroughly satisfying fantasy about just how he intended to *finally* cross the first item off of his list.

She has a boyfriend His conscience reminded him, just as he was getting to the good bits.

"Bugger off," he muttered.

Three days later, Snape sat in the dock, hair neatly brushed and tied back (Granger had insisted upon it), hands folded, listening, first with suppressed fury and then surprise to Potter's speech on his behalf.

"...Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot," he was declaiming, "Severus Snape is seen by many as a complicated man. Many people believe him to be many different things. But I am here today to present to you the *real* Severus Snape. The real Snape is not a criminal, not a conspirator, not a victim, but a hero.

"He is a man who has sacrificed everything to ensure the safety of his students, the success of the Order of the Phoenix, and most of all," Potter paused and took off his glasses. The Wizengamot held their breath. From his position in the dock, Snape could see that Potter had played the august body like a stringed instrument. The boy man now was rail thin, looked as if he would shatter at any moment. But from his wiry frame, there radiated a sense of power and confidence. Anything that Potter said would be believed, cherished, even. He was The Boy Who Lived. And the Wizengamot were falling for it. Snape watched, fascinated. Grudgingly, he admitted to himself that the boy would have made a *perfect* Slytherin.

"And most of all," Potter continued, clutching the railing before him, face pale, "Severus Snape saved me. Did I deserve it? After I mistrusted him? After I believed, time and again, that he hated me? Perhaps he did. I am the son of James Potter, a man who did terrible things to him. I am the son of Lily Potter, a woman who sacrificed herself for me, but rejected him in a fit of unreasoning anger."

Snape's head jerked up. In the gallery he could see Gran- Hermione staring intently down at the scene. What was she doing here? Had she skived of her Practical *fohim*? Her lips were moving as Potter spoke. Snape permitted himself a smirk of course Potter could *deliver* the speech, but it was, as always, Hermione who'd done the boy's homework.

There was no way on this earth that Potter would ever have known the word "unreasoning" if Hermione hadn't sat him down before a dictionary.

Snape also noticed that Hermione was *not* accompanied by the youngest male Weasley.

Interesting.

"...But despite that, despite my continued persecution of a fellow student entrusted to his care, a student of whom the impossible had been asked, despite my reckless endangerment of myself and my friends to suit my own purpose, Severus Snape watched over me, protected me."

Snape continued to watch the gallery. Hermione's focus was searing. She recited with Potter:

"Severus Snape, the man who gave everything, but was given nothing. Is a lifetime of ridicule, a prison sentence, willful abandonment to be the thanks of a grateful nation?"

Potter shoved his glasses back onto his face, his voice rose. Up in the gallery, Hermione was on her feet.

"Let it not be! Let it never be thought that Severus Snape did not receive the respect and recognition and *glory* that he is due!" Potter thundered.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot, there can be, there *must* be no other verdict that you can return than that of *ohot guilty*." The last two words were a husky whisper as Potter, apparently exhausted by his effort, sank to the bench, running a hand through his already tousled hair.

In the gallery, Hermione sank down as well, face pale and set.

Potter stole a glance at Snape as the Wizengamot murmured among themselves. Phrases such as, "deserving" and "hero" and "tragically abused" floated from the cluster of witches and wizards. Gravely, Snape nodded at Potter. The boy had done well. Perhaps, Snape thought, perhaps he owed him an apology.

Potter met his gaze and winked at him. Snape registered a double-take. What the fuck did the little ponce think he was on about, for fuck's sake?

"Your histrionics were... impressive, Potter," Snape said carefully. They were back in the cells below the Ministry, waiting for the verdict to be returned.

Potter stopped pacing and ran his hands through his hair.

"Harry, don't do that," Hermione chided. "You'll muss it up."

"Thank you, Severus," Potter replied. To Hermione, "Sorry. I'm just a little nervous. I flubbed that bit in the middle there."

"I don't think anyone noticed," Hermione said with a smile.

Snape's heart sank. Obviously, Weasley had been left by the wayside for the Hero of the threesome.

What chance did you ever have?

"I don't see how *she* can sit there, cool as a cucumber," Potter remarked to Snape.

Hermione looked at both of them Potter still pacing, and Snape lounging against the door to his cell.

"As it happens," she said, straightening her skirt primly, "I'm just as nervous as you two are. But I hardly see the use in wasting energy pacing. What we should be doing is..."

A burly Auror, the one who had arrested Snape for slugging Kingsley, lumbered up to the door.

"They're back," he said.

Snape stole a glance at Hermione.

She's such a little liar, he noted. She's just as nervous as Potter. Well that makes three.

"...We the Wizengamot here find that the blow that Mr Snape dealt Minister Shacklebolt was delivered under extreme provocation, and, in light of the sacrifices that the defendant has made over the years, Mr Severus Snape, formerly Headmaster of Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry is not guilty."

Snape released the breath he had been holding. Not guilty. And it was all thanks to bloody Harry Potter.

Shite.

The Mugwump continued to read the judgment:

"Furthermore, we, the Wizengamot, in cooperation with the Ministry of Magic, at the special behest of the acknowledged Heroes of the War against You-Know-Who, it is our great pleasure to award Severus Snape an Order of Merlin, Second Class."

Applause tore through the courtroom. Snape stood, buffeted by it as Potter pumped his fist in the air and members of the Wizengamot and spectators thronged them, pumping their hands in congratulation, slapping their backs.

"We did it, Severus!" Potter exclaimed above the tumult, flinging his arm around his shoulder. Snape turned to glare at the boy. Obviously, in Potter-tongue, "we" meant "I".

Potter caught his gaze and stepped back, confusion flickering across his face.

There was a disturbance as Hermione, hair flying from its clip, burrowed and shoved her way through to the two men.

"Severus!" She cried, hurling herself at him. Snape held out his arms, to stop her from falling and somehow wound up with an armful of rejoicing, warm, sweet-smelling witch.

Let her go. She doesn't belong to you.

Potter was shouting something at him,

"Dinner? Severus?"

"Please, join us we'll have everyone there," Hermione seconded.

At least do it for her.

"Yes."

AN: Still not mine!

Chapter Five – A Maiden Fair to See

Chapter 6 of 6

With the result in, Snape faces dinner.

Fall in love with someone who actually wants me

Grimmauld Place had changed. Snape suspected the influence of Molly Weasley in the painfully clean floors and the removal of the hideous umbrella stand. But the kitchen was a sight to behold the stone-flagged floor had been replaced with white tiles, the long, dank, narrow room had been expanded to incorporate a solarium at the back.

The counters were highly polished wood, the cabinetry a creamy white. The ancient, dingy fireplace had been replaced with a beautiful cobalt blue Aga and sunflowers rioted in a large vase on the scrubbed pine table that dominated the area between the kitchen and solarium.

"Do you like it?" Potter asked as the two men paused in the doorway. "We decided that we were going to fit up this place properly, starting with the kitchen. Kreacher didn't like it much, but Winky did and..." Potter trailed off with a blush and Snape cringed inwardly neither of them cared to dwell too much on what powers of persuasion Winky had over Kreacher.

"It's very... modern."

Potter grinned. "I know but it's an improvement over what was there."

Snape inclined his head. "Undoubtedly." Of course, with Potter's millions, he and Granger could afford to fit up the house any way they chose.

"The others will be here soon, but, Severus, I wanted to talk to you first."

"Indeed."

"Please sit down erm would you like some wine?"

"What do you want, Potter?" The boy was fidgeting as Snape had never seen him fidget before.

"I wanted to talk to you about somebody. And erm it's kind of personal."

"Potter..."

"I, oh, God, Snape, this... I can't believe I'm saying this to you."

"Potter, if you do not start speaking sensibly in the next five seconds, I will..."

"UmgayandwantoshagDraco.Canyouhelpme?"

"Excuse me?"

Potter took a deep breath and poured a glass of wine with trembling hands.

"I'm gay," he said. "And I want to, erm, begin a relationship with Draco. I can't ... I can't approach his father, because of the whole Death-Eater-who-hates-my-guts thing, but I really, really want to, well, you know..." Potter trailed off.

"Has it occurred to you to ask Draco yourself?"

"Well, erm, couldyouapproachhimforme?"

"Potter..."

"Hermione invited him today. That's why Ron's not coming. They hate each other. Lots. But Hermione invited Draco and told me that if I really fancied him I should say something, but!mscaredhe'lllaughatme."

"And you expect me to make your advances? Potter, you're a fool."

"Well, when you put it like that..." Potter replied. "But what am I supposed to say to him? If I tell him I fancy him, he'll say he fancies me, won't he? He is gay, right?"

"Potter, I don't know! How the hell would I know if Draco is gay? I don't know if he fancies you. And furthermore, I don't care if he does! Ask him yourself, for the love of Salazar's arse!"

"But... You're his godfather, and you should know..."

From above, the scuffling of feet interrupted the argument as Draco, Hermione, Ginevera Weasley and several others burst into the kitchen.

Potter went very pale and then very red.

"Potter!" Draco shouted. "Pour the wine."

"Yes, Harry, before the rest of them get here," Hermione chimed in. "Have you served Severus, yet?"

Oh, so I'm Severus now?

Hermione shoved a glass into Snape's hand and pulled him onto the bench.

Kreacher and Winky appeared with trays of hors d'oeuvres and popped out again as there arose more scuffling on the stairs.

Into the room burst Minerva, Kingsley, and most of the Weasley family, minus Ronald, bearing trays of food, bottles of wine, and triumphant countenances.

"To Severus Snape!" Potter cried, after being nudged quite hard by both Hermione and Draco.

"To Severus Snape!" chorused the company.

Snape inclined his head and noticed that while Potter had immediately returned to his intense and apparently intimate conversation with Draco, Hermione remained watching him as Molly approached her.

Snape didn't need one of George Weasleys' Extendable Ears to know what was being said. He clearly heard the words "Ronald", "sorry", and "breakup" from Molly and could see Hermione's lips move to form a phrase that looked suspiciously like "fuckwit" and distinctly heard the phrase "never again in this lifetime."

Molly stalked away, looking more than a little miffed as Hermione caught Snape's eye and raised her glass.

Snape took a chance and winked conspiratorially.

It was late. Snape was pleasantly drunk. Not completely pished, but gently floating. Any feelings of bonhomie that the wine might have produced were compounded by Hermione's proximity. She had been sitting beside him the whole evening, occasionally touching his leg with hers, smiling at him, laying a hand on his arm.

He rather thought he could get used to that and was congratulating himself on his extraordinary luck when Kingsley came up to them.

"Severus," Kingsley began, "I'd like to talk to you."

"Excuse me," Hermione said, slipping away, "I'll get you another drink. "

Alarm bells began to go off in Snape's mind, but he did his best not to overreact again.

"Severus, I wanted to talk to you about what your plans for the future are?"

Snape studied the remains of his meal. What were his plans? Minerva hadn't said a word to him that evening about returning to Hogwarts, and he was damned if he was going to approach her; Rosmerta might offer him a job washing up if he asked her nicely, or he could take the money from his Order of Merlin and disappear somewhere. That last option was probably the one Kingsley was looking for.

"I don't know," he replied.

"Well, if you're free," Kingsley said, "I'd like to introduce you to somebody tomorrow."

"Oh?"

"Yes, Mrs," there was in indistinct mumble, "works for the Department of Mysteries and they're very interested in you and your work with the Dark Arts."

"Kingsley, I don't do that anymore. Don't you remember what happened the *last* time somebody wanted to use my *expertise* in the Dark Arts?"

Kingsley chuckled and massaged his jaw.

"Yes, but Mrs Mumble isn't Albus. Just meet with her, Severus, you might be surprised."

"But not pleasantly surprised."

Kingsley shrugged. "That's up to you." He rose, catching sight of Hermione returning. "Think about it."

It was late. Arthur, Molly, and Minerva had since departed. Minerva with a fierce hug and a "Please, Severus, come see me, soon." Snape, Draco and Potter, and Hermione were left alone in the kitchen.

"Severus," Potter said, disentangling himself from a very smug looking Draco, "I've been meaning to ask you, will you stay? Kingsley said you had an appointment here in London tomorrow and we Hermione and I were talking, and your old room is still upstairs. I hope you don't mind, we've refitted it, it's nicer now and the ceiling doesn't leak."

"Stay, please, Severus," Hermione begged, her leg brushing up against his.

If she's asking you...

Snape nodded. "I will stay."

Potter was right the room was nicer than it had been. New plaster, fresh paint, refinished floorboards it was almost home-like. On the freshly made bed was a set of pajama pants and a robe, the work of Kreacher, Snape assumed.

The thought of *home* reminded him of the house in Spinner's End, decaying, stinking of blocked drains and failure. He wondered if he could refit the house and sell it he certainly had no reason to stay there.

"Maybe it's time to start over," he observed to the silent room.

A knock on the door startled him.

"Severus?" The voice was soft, almost hesitant. Or it would have been if it had belonged to anybody but Hermione Granger.

"Come in," he said, turning.

She was wearing a robe, and Snape indulged himself with the fantasy that she was wearing very little beneath it.

"I, erm, came to see if you needed anything," she said.

Snape decided that she was, in fact, nude beneath the robe.

Think, old man, if she's in your room, naked but for that rather fetching robe, she must be wanting more than to see if I need a drink of water before bed.

"Well, he drawled, making sure that she could tell he was scrutinizing her from head to toe and then back again, "it is rather lonesome in here."

Somewhat lonesome? What shite is that?

Despite the scorn of his conscience, Granger blushed a becoming pink.

"I was hoping that you might like some company," she whispered and stepped up to him.

She was of average height, the top of her head coming up to his forehead and it was such a simple thing, Snape observed, to merely bend his head and find her lips with his own.

Her lips were soft... and was that *hertongue* tickling his mouth?

Should I remind you now, old sport, drawled his conscience, *that not only she is a former student, you do not have the most successful history with the opposite sex.*

Snape growled in frustration, and Hermione took advantage of his opened mouth, sliding her tongue in.

Snape's conscience gave up the struggle as Hermione wrapped her arms around him and pulled him towards her.

"That was, mmpfh," Snape mumbled into his pillow.

"I'm glad you think so," Hermione replied, sounding a bit smug as she snuggled up beside him.

Snape considered telling her that he was hot and could he please have his personal space back, but the pleasant pressure of her breasts on his side and the gentle tickling of her leg, flung over his, eradicated that desire.

It had been so *easy*. Fumbling, yes, a little awkward, without finesse, but Hermione had been patient, gentle, and he had mercifully maintained enough control to perform convincingly. He hoped.

"Was that..."

Hermione smiled.

"First times can be awkward," she said. Looking at him closely, she narrowed her eyes. "*It* was your first time, wasn't it?"

Snape rolled away from her.

"You weren't coming out of Rachel's, that day, were you?"

Pride, humiliation and weariness surged through him. He'd just been bedded by a willing, beautiful witch. Why fight?

"Yes, I was coming out of Rachel's," he admitted. "But, and if you ever tell Draco about this, I'll... I'll..."

"My lips are sealed." Hermione sat up and tucked her knees under her, breasts bouncing.

"Fine," Snape huffed, trying not to stare at her chest. "I was coming out of Rachael's but I wasn't able to... perform."

"So," Hermione whispered, "I was your... first?"

Snape's face grew hot. He ducked his head, hair falling around his face.

"Yes."

Hermione leaned over and tucked a hank of lank, greasy hair behind his ear. Gently, she kissed him, first on the forehead, then on the cheek, and then on his lips.

Unbidden, his lips parted for her, invited her tongue into his mouth as he felt his desire for her stirring again.

She pulled away and looked into his eyes, seemed to invite him into her mind.

He looked away but peeked back.

"No," he said, "I won't..."

She smiled again.

"I know," she said, "but I wanted you to know that you were welcome."

"Hermione..." It was too much. The stresses of the day, the week, the last *year* threatened to undo him in that moment.

"Severus."

And then she was kissing him again, wrapping her arms around him, pulling him close to her, pressing him into her as she sighed and murmured his name.

Sunshine was peeping around the blinds when Snape awoke. It wasn't the sunshine that had roused him; it was the ticking of Hermione's hair.

"Mfph," he muttered, discovering an urgent need for the loo.

Hermione shifted and mumbled as he slid from the bed and he swore to return quickly.

When he did return, Hermione was, disappointingly, clad in her robe and frowning over the slip of paper that Kingsley had given him.

"Do you know who Mrs Mumble is?" she asked.

"Yes." Snape bent to retrieve his clothing.

"She's the head of the Department of Mysteries!"

"I said I knew who she was," Snape reminded her.

"I heard you. It's just... Severus, this is the opportunity of a lifetime!"

"Hermione, I've finished bending to the will of others. I'm not going to kowtow anymore because some alleged spy-master, or mistress, thinks that he, or she, can use me to defeat the next Dark Lord."

"Oh, for fuck's sake!" Hermione exclaimed. "Severus Snape, you are such stubborn git! For once in your life, you're being offered a job *on your* terms, given the opportunity to work on something that fascinates you and *this* is your response? Fine, don't go to the interview, but you'll be a fool not to!"

"And why should you care?"

"Because," Hermione said, bouncing off the bed in a cloud of uncontrollable hair. "I like for those I love to have the opportunity to succeed. Why do you think I told Kingsley to get in contact with her for you? But if that's the way you feel about it..."

She flounced from the room.

Hermione had done this? She *loved* him?

"Hermione! Wait!" Snape bound to the door and banged into the hall.

Draco's head poked out from behind a door.

"Isn't your interview in an hour?" he asked.

Snape glared at him and slammed back into his room to finish dressing.

She loves me.

Oh what the hell what do I have to lose, anyway, if it doesn't go well, those bastards will just Oblivate me.

Buoyed by the thought that he didn't, in fact, have anything to lose, Snape sought out the Department of Mysteries.

In later years, he never would be able to recall exactly what had happened in his interview.

She loves me.

She's angry with me.

She loves me.

Maybe I should buy her some flowers on the way home.

*Oh, Prospero's pimply prick and all the todgers of hell, I'm going**soft**.*

He found her in the kitchen, head bent over a medical tome, scratching notes on a battered slip of parchment.

"You were right," he said, holding out the flowers as if they were Muggle dynamite.

"I'm glad you realize that," she replied, not looking up.

"I was wrong."

"Correct again."

"I ... Oh, fuck it, Hermione, I don't know if I love you or not. All I know is that you were right, and Merlin damn it, for what it's worth, I love fucking you. You're clever. You're not frightened of me the way all of my other former students seem to be, you don't hate me the way all of my colleagues seem to, and for some strange reason, I want very badly to make you happy. Isn't that enough?"

Hermione turned and stared at him for a long moment.

"It will do," she said, holding out her hand. Unthinking he took it. "Now," she continued, "why don't we go up to your room, and you can tell me how your chat with Mrs Mumble went, and then you can prove to me just how much you do, in fact, love fucking me."

Snape smirked.

"Gladly," he replied. "After you."

Cheekily, Hermione swayed out of the kitchen and up the narrow stairs.

Behind them, the parchment lay on the table. It now contained annotations:

One: Finally get laid. Check.

Two: Go somewhere nice on holiday Go alone. Go on holiday with Hermione The Seychelles?

Three: Finally hex the shit out of Dumbledore. Check. Would've been nice to avoid prosecution, but one can't have everything.

Four: Finally get the recognition I deserve. Order of Merlin? It will do.

Five: Fall in love with somebody who actually wants me. A work in progress.

AN: I do not own Harry Potter, HMS Pinafore, The Mikado, or The Pirates of Penzance. I also do not own Rumpole.

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This is for Bluestocking79 who knows why.