

Father Figure

by TeddyRadiator

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 13

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This story is for the mighty and wonderful Subvers, whose stories inspire, delight and amaze. If this fic gives you a tenth of the pleasure your work has given me, I will count myself blessed.

Anti-Litigation Charm: The characters in this story belong to JK Rowling and Warner Brothers, who let my entire reason for reading the Harry Potter books and watching the films die twice...once on a dusty floor of the Shrieking Shack, and later in a boathouse we'd never heard of before. You can tell I'm a little bitter about it, but that's what happens when you mess with my friends.

Special thanks to stgulik - the best beta in the world.

And this story is dedicated to my beloved Dahlra, who is first, last and always, my Father Figure.

That's all I wanted, something special, something sacred in your eyes,

For just one moment, to be bold and naked at your side

Sometimes I think that you'll never understand me; maybe this time is forever, say it can be

That's all you wanted, something special, someone sacred in your life

Just for one moment, to be warm and naked at my side

Sometimes I think that you'll never understand me, but something tells me together, we'd be happy

I will be your father figure, put your tiny hand in mine, I will be your preacher teacher

Anything you have in mind. I will be your father figure, I have had enough of crime

I will be the one who loves you, till the end of time

If you are the desert, I'll be the sea. If you ever hunger - hunger for me, Whatever you ask for, that's what I'll be

So when you remember the ones who have lied, who said that they cared but then laughed as you cried, beautiful darling, don't think of me

Because all I ever wanted, it's in your eyes and love can't lie, greet me with the eyes of a child

My love is always telling me so, heaven is a kiss and a smile, Just hold on, hold on, I won't let you go, my baby

I will be your father, I will be your preacher, I'll be your Papa, I'll be your Daddy

I will be the one who loves you, till the end of time

Games lubricate the body and the mind.

Benjamin Franklin

"I quite like this game, my dears. We haven't gotten good enough at it to cheat yet," Narcissa Malfoy said, pushing down the lid on the board game they had just finished playing. "No, thank you, dear," she said, refusing another glass of wine from Hermione Granger-Snape. "I'm afraid Lucius has had far too much and I think one of us needs to be compos mentis enough for side-along Apparation home."

"My dear wife, you wound me. Are you impugning my ability to Apparate after a few glasses of this excellent Muggle wine?" Lucius asked, smiling beneficently. He placed an elegant hand on his breast. "I'm hurt. I am as bereft as a leaf blowing in mountain water."

Narcissa smiled complacently, and replied very sweetly, "No, my darling. I would never impugn, but then again, water doesn't blow leaves, no matter how poetic that sounded in your head." She turned to Hermione with a warm smile. "When he's in his cups, no metaphor is safe with him."

Severus Snape caught Lucius' eye, and the two men smiled knowingly. Lucius drew the tattered remnants of his dignity around him and raised his chin. "I might be a couple of sheets to the wind, but there's nothing wrong with my metaphors." He rose to accept his travelling cloak from Hermione and bumped into the end table, sending his other three companions diving to save the breakable items rocking precariously on top.

Hermione looked at her husband, and the deep glint in his eye was a warning not to laugh. It was a futile warning at best, and the quirk of his own lips belied any attempt on his part to quell his own mirth, and the four of them laughed until Hermione felt tears trickle from her eyes.

Finally, Malfoy senior put his arm around his lovely wife and sighed. "I think it's time we were away to pastures anew, love. Our fair-weather friends tease and mock me."

"Yeah, yeah," Hermione nodded, still grinning. "Big bad Death Eater, blah blah blah -"

"You see that, love?" Lucius turned dramatically to his smiling wife. "Reduced to a 'blah'. Severus, may I please remind you that I, Lucius Malfoy, am the product of over a thousand -"

"- years of Wizarding perfection," came the deadpanned answer in unison, from his friends.

"Honestly, Lucius, I'm going to stop giving you wine. You become positively insufferable," Severus drawled. He turned to Narcissa. "Good luck taking him home, Narcissa, and please remind him while he's removing his trousers, one leg at a time, like the rest of us, that he does, in fact, put on and remove his trousers one leg at a time, like the rest of us."

Lucius tried to look offended, but was too pissed. "Enough sordid talk of me removing my trousers." He shook hands with his old friend. "You really need to have a word with your dear wife," he whispered, sotto voce, burnishing Severus with alcohol fumes. "She gives me no respect."

"Oh, *I am* sorry. I'll try to do better, Rodney Dangerfield," Hermione said, accepting his goodbye kiss. It was a smeary, inoffensive smack, wet with wine.

He pulled back, just as Narcissa put her arms around him. "Rodney who? Is he that new chap on the Wizarding Wireless?"

"Goodnight, Lucius!" Severus and Hermione said in unison, laughing. Narcissa joined them, holding her slightly drunken husband steady.

"Come 'round next week if you can, Hermione dear," she was saying. "I'd really like a second opinion on the colours for the new wing. I can't make up my mind."

"By Merlin, Cissy, you are looking lovely tonight," Lucius declared, the picture of charming, drunken elegance. He turned to his friends with the complacent smile of a comfortably numb, contented man. "I'm the luckiest wizard in Britain, you know."

"Goodnight, old friend," Severus laughed, and put his arm around Hermione as they watched their friends Apparate home.

Severus looked down at his wife, and placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. "Bed?"

She nodded. "We'll tidy in the morning." They walked in companionable silence to their bed chamber and undressed, chatting about the evening.

Hermione watched Severus remove his clothing and felt a sweet contentment. She loved to watch him at the most mundane tasks: shaving, dressing, undressing, dipping his soldiers into a runny egg first thing in the morning. He was graceful in all things. He should be; he'd worked hard enough at becoming so. Hermione loved even that: the desire of the self-proclaimed mill trash boy to better himself and rise above his gauche, working class upbringing.

He caught her watching him, and lowered his head, as he always did while aware of being observed. Even that pleased her. Hermione loved her husband dearly; she admired his strength and courage and the way he'd succeeded against all odds to return to Hogwarts as Headmaster four years after the war.

When Hermione had first returned to Hogwarts, it was to replace an aging Minerva McGonagall as Transfigurations Mistress. However, it became quite obvious to all concerned that Miss Granger also went a long way to relieving the loneliness and sorrow in the heart of the newly-reinstated Headmaster. As for Hermione, she had not planned on Severus Snape falling for her, but she'd been all too happy to catch him.

For the last six years they had been happy, and enjoyed each other's company. Hermione grew more and more fond of her stern, angular husband every day. He had changed; he was not the complete bastard he'd been at school, but she also realized that so much of how she had originally perceived Severus had been through the filter of Harry's intense dislike for the man, as well as his own insecurities and necessities. The night of the final battle, when Hermione had stayed behind in the Shrieking Shack to keep him alive until help could arrive, had changed all of that.

"Tonight was so enjoyable," Hermione said, as she brushed her hair. "I'm glad Narcissa suggested it. Who would have thought the two of them could be so much fun when they let their hair down?"

Severus nodded, hanging up his robes. "Lucius was a right laugh when we were lads. Full of pureblood dogma, of course, but not rabid about it. That only came later." He said the last words with a sigh. He sniffed. "Lucius can be a pain in the arse, but all in all, he's not the monster everyone thought him to be. He likes you very much, and so does Narcissa." He smiled at her as he climbed into bed, and propped himself against the headboard with several pillows. "You're right, though. This was a good idea."

In marrying Severus Snape, Hermione had soon realized that she had also inherited his friends as well. Hermione, who had developed a warm friendship with Draco Malfoy during her Apprenticeship at Wizarding Cambridge, decided to give them the benefit of the doubt at Draco's request, as well as Severus'.

As Draco himself had said, "Mother and Father need friends, Hermione. They've got a lot of work to do to restore any semblance of normality back in their lives. I know you probably don't believe it, but Father still has nightmares about having to stand by and watch my dearly-departed aunt *Crucio* you on their floor."

Hermione was touched. "Really?"

Draco gave her a look that should have infuriated her. Almost kindly, he said, "How should I know? I don't sleep with him! But if he did, would you like him any more?"

Laughing at Draco's completely Slytherin approach to the problem, Hermione said, "All right, but one word about pureblood supremacy and he's out on his well-bred backside."

"Ah, I knew you wouldn't let me down, Granger!" The blond man sobered. "I know this doesn't sound very tactful, but they went through hell. It was a hell of their own choosing, but they're not bad people. And yes, having Hermione Granger on their side would be an advantage in political terms, but what's the harm in finding out that you might actually like them. I mean, you adore me, so it stands to reason you'll love them!"

"Modest to the last," Hermione had teased, but she saw the honest hope in his eyes, and she felt touched that the once-proud Draco Malfoy was so doting on his parents. It was that concern that made up Hermione's mind. She and Severus welcomed the Malfoys into their home and back into their lives, and they never regretted it.

The couples first met for a round of drinks. The next time it was for dinner at a favourite restaurant. They attended a concert together. Soon, they were meeting at one another's homes for dinner. Hermione often felt a little out of her element, as the three older people had a shared history that had nothing to do with her, but it was obvious the Malfoys tried as hard as Severus to include her as much as possible. After all, she had been the catalyst to bring them all together.

As they toasted the beginning of the New Year, ten years after Hogwarts' final battle and the end of Tom Riddle, Narcissa said, "I think we should make a resolution for the coming year. Let's resolve to do something together once a month, even if it's just to have a lovely dinner together."

Hermione was the one who mentioned board games. "My family used to play them all the time and they were very enjoyable. There are tons on the market now for wizards, and they're much more fun to play with four than with just two."

Narcissa thought it a lovely idea; Lucius, as always, deferred such things to his wife, and Severus scowled. "I'll agree to it on one condition. None of those silly Muggle games like Twister, and I absolutely refuse to play Snakes and Ladders." The other three looked at Severus for a stunned moment before Hermione burst out laughing.

It had turned out to be such an enjoyable pastime that they increased the frequency of their get-togethers to every other weekend, and decided to alternate weeks so that each couple played host once a month. Sometimes Draco and his *Amour of the Month* would join them, but it was usually just the four of them.

They established a routine of meeting around six in the evening for drinks, then eating a lovely meal, playing whichever game they chose (the guest couple always chose the game), and played until they were all too tired, which (except for one particularly drunken Halloween game of Wizarding Monopoly which lasted the entire weekend except for breaks and sleep) usually ended around midnight.

Severus and Hermione enjoyed Wizarding Scrabble, in which the tiles walked themselves to the appropriate squares and kept their own scores. Lucius hated it because he inevitably tried to cheat and the tiles seem to take great pleasure in screaming abuse at him when he got caught ("*nkplazq isn't a word, you ignorant berk!*"). He instead preferred Wizarding Cluedo, where the figures pranced around the board wielding weapons and killing each other off with far too much glee for Hermione's tastes.

Trivial Pursuit was fun, but got a little cerebral (Severus once picked the Entertainment question, "*Who was Cecilia Warbeck's Great-great-great Aunt and what part did she play in the Treaty of the Wand-Switching Inquisition of 1767?*"), and the only one of them any good at Win, Lose or Draw Wands was Narcissa, who had a real talent for art under time constraints.

On this particular June night, it was the Snape family's turn to host, and Hermione had asked the house-elves to help her prepare a really nice dinner, and as usual, they nodded and smiled and said, "Yes, Mistress Headmaster," a great deal. In the end, Hermione gave in and let them make whatever they wanted to make and it was wonderful anyway.

Tonight, the Malfoys had procured a new game called "What Say You?" *A game of Legilimency if you dare*. In spite of its lurid subtitle, it was quite fun. Each player moved on a board of squares toward an end goal by asking the other three a particular question. The questions, while quite innocent on the surface, could actually produce some quite risqué answers.

The object was to try to match your opponent to their answer correctly, and you moved toward the end by how many you correctly matched. Of course, cheating was employed from square one, with each person trying to throw the questor off the scent. Because Severus was the only skilled Legilimens of the four of them, they tended to look away from him during his turn, to level the playing field.

Some of the answers had been hilarious, and some quite telling. The last question of this particular evening had been a fill-in-the-blank. Hermione had been given the question: *My breath smells like -----?* Her helpful fellow gamers had given her the answers: spearmint, fairy farts and magic, and Dumbledore's arse. She'd not gotten a single correct match, but she'd spent a good ten minutes laughing until tears streamed from her eyes.

At the end of the evening, it was decided that this was the game to beat over the next few game nights. "I quite like this new game, don't you?" Hermione asked casually, as she changed into her dressing gown. She was still smiling about Severus' confession that his breath smelled of fairy farts and magic.

"It is quite enjoyable, but I hate that you all look at the floor when it's my turn. I feel like a pariah, or a cheat," Severus replied.

"You mean you wouldn't use Legilimency to discover our answers?" Hermione challenged, teasingly.

Severus smirked. "I would never presume to do something so dishonourable to you, dear. Malfoy, on the other hand -"

Hermione laughed. "I actually wouldn't blame you - he's a terrible cheater! Thank goodness he's not a sore loser, or I wouldn't play jacks with him. He's not even good at hiding it."

"What you must understand about Lucius, my dear, is that he has never felt compelled to hide it. That's why he's so unrepentant when he gets caught." Severus shrugged. "Who knows? Perhaps he wants to get caught so he can use his charms to get out of trouble."

"That sounds more like him."

Severus donned his reading glasses and was just delving into a new book from his bedside table when he felt his wife slide into bed beside him and snuggle close. "Your feet are freezing, Madam Snape," he said to the pages of his book. "Have you been wading in the Black Lake again?"

"Just keeping the Squid company until you got the bed nice and warm," Hermione replied, taking the book from his hands and removing his glasses. She placed them on the bedside table. "By Merlin, Severus, you are looking lovely tonight," she purred in a very credible imitation of Lucius Malfoy. She grinned up at the face of her husband. "I'm the luckiest witch in Wizarding Britain, you know."

Severus looked down at his wife of six years as if inspecting a particularly interesting variety of peach. His large hand slid to her warm breast, and found her nipple pertly erect and waiting for him. He smirked as he lowered his head to hers, and in a voice as soft as sin, replied, "You're about to get *very* lucky, Madam Snape."

Almost two hours later, Hermione lay wide awake, listening to the quiet almost-snores of her sleeping husband. As always, Severus had been a tender, affectionate, very giving lover. They knew one another's bodies well, and they knew what they liked. Severus had given her two very lovely orgasms, and she'd enjoyed one of her favourite positions, on top, looking down into her husband's face.

She loved watching him make love; he was observant and he paid attention. In all things, even this, Severus held himself in check, using his iron self-discipline to rein himself in. While he obviously enjoyed wringing every cry of pleasure from her, he himself was quiet, almost desperately so, as if afraid of expressing himself vocally.

It was only at the very peak of his pleasure, gasping, pumping up into her shuddering form, that he would sometimes give her the tiniest peek at what it would be like to watch him truly lose control and give himself over to his passions. His face would be taut, beautiful, and the ecstasy would etch across his face like that of a pre-Raphaelite painting, and Hermione would nearly come again at the look of pleasure and pain on his pale features. And then it would be gone so quickly she could be forgiven for thinking she'd dreamed it. He would come gasping, shuddering, turning his face away, or covering with his dark, shining hair. It was the only time in their marriage he was not an open book to her.

He would be very gentle with her afterwards. Sometimes, in the heat of the summer, he would bathe her with compresses saturated with mint to cool her heated skin, or bring her an iced drink to soothe her parched throat. During the winter months he would cuddle her in front of the large open fire and have the house-elves bring hot toddies. He was always caring, warm and giving in their bed, and when they were done, and cleaned and relaxed, he would spoon against her back, put his long arms around her, kiss her shoulder, tell her he loved her, and drift off.

He had suffered from nightmares in their early days of co-habitation, but as time had passed, the nightmares seemed to diminish, and Hermione wanted desperately to believe she had somehow helped to quell them.

Gradually, he slept longer and more deeply, and the haunted, fagged look he'd carried through most of her student days at Hogwarts smoothed and relaxed. She privately thought he looked younger now than he had ten years ago. He certainly took better care of himself and his appearance. He felt it was important to the student body to see a Headmaster looking every inch the part.

Severus twitched in his sleep, and she put a comforting hand on his thigh, and he settled before the dream could take him further into a place he no longer wished to go. He mumbled something in his rich, beguiling voice, kissed her back, and whispered her name. Hermione sighed. She loved her brilliant, complicated husband very much. His astringent personality appealed to her, and they were good together. He was a good husband, a good wizard, a good provider - a good man.

But Hermione remembered too well the angry, bitter, caustic professor of her school days; he was part and parcel of the man she fell in love with, try as he might to eradicate those parts of himself he no longer wished to be.

Hermione felt a pang of something like guilt. Because sometimes, just sometimes, when she was lying next to the good man she married, she wondered what it would be like to lie in the arms of the bad man he once was.

To see an awesome facsimile of the game, What Say You?, check out my lovely exchange BINGO prize by hechicera here:
<http://qalachaki.deviantart.com/art/TeddyRadiator-s-What-Say-You-game-278611986>

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

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No human being is innocent, but there is a class of innocent human actions called Games. W. H. Auden

"I don't care how many damn fools on the Board of Governors approved it, I still maintain it's a preposterous idea, and I, for one, have no desire to see that over-sensationalised twaddle implemented in this school!"

Severus turned away from the fireplace, angry at himself for losing his temper in front of the Minister of Magic, knowing that others would be with Kingsley Shacklebolt on the other end; knowing that Lucius, who was attending the meeting here at Hogwarts with Severus, would be thinking of ways he could use this outburst against Severus at a later date.

The Floo call had been expected, but Severus had hoped that Lucius would back him up and use his restored influence with the Governors to discourage the idea. It seemed that either Lucius' authority was not as compelling as Severus was led to believe, or Lucius was also encouraging this foolish scheme.

"Minister, I propose we table this discussion for now. Perhaps we can return to the motion at a later date. If I could speak with you for a moment in private," *Speak of the spider and the web takes shape!* thought Severus, as Lucius Floo-d into the Minister's office.

He was gone perhaps five minutes when he stepped back through the fireplace, brushing some residual Floo powder from his immaculate midnight blue robe. "I've asked them to resume this discussion next week, and they've agreed. Minister Shacklebolt's office will contact you regarding the time and place."

Lucius stepped forward, shaking his head. For once, his lighthearted indifference was muted. "Severus, why are you opposing this Installation? I, for one, believe it is a good idea."

"That's because you will no doubt use it to your advantage to improve your reputation," Severus hissed morosely, and felt a pang of conscience as Lucius winced.

Instead of growing angry, Lucius merely bowed his head in acquiescence. "As much as that intended to hurt, there is some truth in what you say, old friend. But this is not about my eagerness to embrace a positive concept - this is about your reticence to accept a very forward-thinking idea. Why on earth would you object to the school hosting a permanent Wizarding War Museum commemorating the ten-year anniversary of the Battle of Hogwarts?"

Severus ground his teeth. "It's ghoulish, that's why! It will be full of overly-romanticised, lurid displays, everything will be exaggerated, the heroes will be deified, the villains will be nothing less than monsters, and the truth will be tucked under a bunch of light shows and embroidered facts because it's not half as interesting as these idiots seem to recall it being!"

Lucius listened carefully as Severus' tirade turned pleading. "Lucius, do you honestly think they will portray us - portray *me*, as anything resembling the truth? I'll be reduced to some Byronic, brooding hero, who saved the day for Potter with my herculean sacrifice! I'll come across as looking like some sort of sanctimonious, love-struck, pathetic, martyrdom-seeking arse!"

Lucius rolled his eyes. "I've never heard such bollocks in my life, Severus Snape! You're actually telling me that you are afraid you'll come across as one of the good guys? Merlin forbid," he added airily. He shook his head. "You never could take praise for toffee. Has it ever occurred to you that Hogwarts needs you to be a hero? That for once, history has the chance to be rewritten for the right reasons?"

"Don't talk rubbish, Lucius," Severus bit back. "The victors always write the history books to make the heroes look properly heroic. Let Potter enjoy his day in the sun. I've got a school to run." He turned away dismissively.

Lucius pursed his lips disapprovingly. He decided to try a different tack. "You do realise, don't you, that the next generation of Hogwarts students are here, now? That those who saw it first hand, even as terrified first-years, have long since graduated?"

"Yes, thank you, Lucius, I do have a grasp of who is actually attending my school," Severus retorted testily. "I realise the current student body don't have any personal memories of those days, and I for one, am glad."

The chimes of the ancient clock rang five times, distracting the two wizards. Lucius looked at his own pocket watch to confirm the clock's accuracy. "Merlin, is that the time? Must be off," said Lucius, smiling.

He waved a careless hand around Severus' study. "These children don't remember how frightening this school was that year. *You* do. You can tell them, you can *remind* them. Severus, you can enrich the hearts of the innocent with the tales of valour and sacrifice and unspeakable bravery, so that no *new* Dark Lord can fill the minds of the disenfranchised with prejudice and hatred again. You can be the vanguard for the new generation, Severus."

Lucius grabbed a handful of Floo powder and left his friend standing by his desk. Before he could cast it into the fire, he turned back to Severus. "You know, that sounded rather good." He smiled patronizingly. "You should use it in your speech at the ribbon-cutting ceremony."

He threw the Floo powder into the massive fireplace. "Malfoy Manor!" He turned quickly to Severus. "Oh, by the way, do you mind if we play *What Say You??* again next week? Cissa simply adores that game. We'll see you then. Love to Hermione. Good night, Severus."

Severus opened his mouth to launch a withering reply that everything was a game to Lucius, then decided he couldn't be arsed. It seemed pointless to expend any energy with a retort that would fall on such deaf ears. With a sigh of resignation, he turned to look out the window onto the Quidditch pitch. There was a game scheduled on Saturday, and unless this rain abated, he was afraid his Slytherins might get roundly trounced by Ravenclaw. They were a good team in fair weather, but lacked the stamina for the truly foul stuff bucketing down out there now. He could see Alan Burleigh, the team captain, putting them through their paces, but they were sluggish, uninspired.

He sighed. He knew how they felt. It was his sixth year as Hogwarts' Headmaster, and he knew he had learned to be a good one. The sweeping changes made the year of his return had taught him more about what not to do, and he was determined that the graduating class as well as the first years received the best magical education the Wizarding world could offer, in spite of the ongoing repairs to the school. It had taken the better part of ten years, but shortly after Severus' last birthday some eight months past, the Wizarding contractors charged with restoring the ancient castle had signed off the last task, and the school was whole again.

Now that repairs were finally complete, the Governors had come up with this idea to commemorate the milestone by killing two birds with it. Ten years after the battle, they had voted unanimously to allocate a large portion of the East Wing for the sole purpose of building a permanent Museum to the Battle of Hogwarts. Severus knew in his heart it was a good idea, and for once he thought Lucius was right - they needed to be reminded why so many good people lost their lives, so that another Tom Riddle could not get a foothold in Wizarding Britain again.

The problem was that Severus did not want to see his own history romanticized. Already the Governors wanted a complete section dedicated to Severus' own efforts as the double agent and the lynchpin of the war. It made him queasy to think that his youngest students, who regarded him with a mixture of respect and intimidated awe, would discover just what an utter bastard he'd been in those days. If history was to be written here, under his very nose, then Severus wanted his chapter to be about who he was now, not back then. He wanted to believe he'd changed.

Ten years after the war, the Wizarding world was stable, and as a microcosm of their world, Hogwarts reflected it as such. Each student was treated as equal to the other, and the inter-house relationships were on a par the likes of which the school had never seen before. The Pureblood/ Muggle student ratio was steadily evening out to a respectable sixty/forty split. Severus had personally overseen the push to encourage more Muggle families to embrace their magical children and allow them to attend Hogwarts. He was proud of that.

He watched the weary Slytherins leaving the grounds, looking exhausted and dispirited. Burleigh stopped and spoke briefly with Joan Speckin, Ravenclaw's team captain, and Severus watched as she gave Alan a commiserate pat on the shoulder. Both teams chatted with each other as Slytherin left the pitch to the Ravenclaw team. Severus almost smiled; he could allow himself to be proud of that small, telling exchange as well.

It was a strange new world. Sometimes, Severus could almost forget those dark years after the end of Tom Riddle, when he was sure of facing a lifetime in Azkaban. His Dark Mark was nothing more than a ghostly shadow on his skin now. When Severus had received his pardon and was asked to return to run the school, he had almost refused, feeling that he didn't deserve it. But, then Hermione came back into his life. His precious girl. He allowed himself a smile this time. Another perk for being lucky Hermione.

He had been brutally honest with her in their early courtship. She often teased him of trying to frighten her away, and although that was the last thing on his mind, he truly wanted her to be completely aware of the man she was involving herself with. He didn't want her to hero-worship him, but she had. He had courted her with every weapon in his arsenal, and she'd surrendered without a struggle. Now she ruled this fine school at his side, as fierce and loyal as her House's mascot. He sometimes wanted to jab his wand in his leg to make sure it was not all a dream.

But it had a price. Once, he had been a warrior. Now he was a sedate headmaster. These days, his worries consisted of how well his former House's Quidditch team would perform this year. It was not that he missed the old days, he told himself - often. And yet, sometimes, especially at night...

Yes, the Dark Lord had been vanquished, the opponents of the Light gone or scattered or fawning, but then again, so were the warriors. They were gone; dead or neutered. That's how Severus felt most days - as indolent as a neutered tomcat.

He chastised himself; it would distress Hermione to hear him say that; it distressed him *to think* it. He didn't miss the darkness...

He thought of Hermione, and felt his body long for her sweetness. There *would* be a thrice-damned installation, he thought. And a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open it, as well. And as Headmaster and hero, he would have to make a speech about what an honour it was to have been part of it. He would be eloquent and use his sonorous voice to emphasise the bravery of the Order and certain individuals, and the *Prophet* would laud him.

It would be an excuse to buy Hermione lovely dress robes, perhaps in a dark wine colour, to bring out the colour of her eyes, her glowing skin. She would look stunning, and he would swell with pride when referring to her as 'my wife'. She would sit by his side as he spoke to students, dignitaries, press and politicians, and she would smile up at him with that smile that promised so many things a former student shouldn't know about, much less *do* to their former professor...

And afterward, they would come together, and he would revel in her, knowing their love would be the cause of their fierce, consuming passion. She would be soft and silky, and passionate and sweet, and her scent would be intoxicating, her touch devastating.

She would smell like lemons and honey, and her virgin-tight pussy would taste sweet as nectar, and she would be so wet and delicious, that he would remind himself it was not a dream, but a gift belonging to him alone. She would cry his name over and over on their bed, and his name would sound like an incantation on her tongue...

He allowed himself a smirk. Amazing, he thought, how the image of his wife panting beneath him drove all thought of anything else from his mind. How she would laugh at his train of thought, starting with his acquiescence of the Museum installation to bedding her with only the briefest detours at speech making and dress buying.

Where Hermione was concerned, Severus had to keep himself in check. She was such a distraction to the detriment of everything else around him. He had once vowed he would never allow his feelings for another woman to interfere with his duty; he should have known that to be a foolish vow, and one he had no hopes of keeping with Hermione. Every time they made love, it was all he could do not to turn into an animal, fucking her into the mattress. She deserved better than his ranging, uncontrollable lust for her.

He felt the tug of darkness whisper to him then, but he wouldn't sully her with it. He would keep his peace, and not frighten her with his baseness, as he had done... no. Those days were over and gone. He would bury himself in her heat and her desire, and forget that he didn't deserve it, that he wasn't good enough to lick her shoes, much less her...

Severus turned from the window with a mental shake. He needed to finish requisitions, and then he would join his precious wife in the Great Hall for the evening meal, and peg together some announcement about this infernal Exhibit. Instead, he returned to his reverie, his dark eyes gazing at the fire, his thoughts drifting to his little Gryffindor lioness, and her lovely warm body, her little mewls and growls, her hungry kisses...

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

If you're going to play the game properly, you'd better know every rule.

Barbara Jordan

Of course, Hermione loved the idea of the Museum. "Oh, Severus, I think it's one of the best ideas I've heard in ages! Oh, you *have* to do it, please!"

Severus suppressed a sigh of resignation. He was a man who seldom disagreed with his wife; she seldom gave him reason to. This would be one of the rare exceptions.

Severus had known she would be as enthusiastic about the Museum Installation as he was reticent. She was, after all, part of the Golden Trio, and was proud to have played her part in the destruction of the Dark Lord. On the other hand, Severus' emotions concerning the end of Tom Riddle fell more along the lines of grim satisfaction and relief.

Hermione was determined that he, too, would learn to take pride in his accomplishments during the war. "Reminding the Wizarding world what we fought against is a way to ensure it never happens again, Severus."

"You're starting to sound like ruddy Malfoy," Severus grumbled moodily, hating the feeling of being outnumbered.

Hermione rolled her eyes, refusing to take the bait. "Well, we'll overlook that little implied insult, but I do agree with him here, Severus." She put a placating hand on her husband's black-clad arm. "Severus, you are a hero. Now, I know you don't like that word," she added hastily, as he opened his mouth to protest, "and you don't like talking about those days, and I don't blame you on that account."

Her voice was gentle and respectful; the hand on his arm warm and caressing. She looked at him with eyes full of righteous indignation for her mate. "Merlin knows those years leading up to the end were simply awful for you. No one deserved being forced to endure what Tom Riddle and Albus Dumbledore put you through. But that's why I want the world to know about what you did. All of it. I want them to see the fine, courageous, strong man I married."

Severus turned away. His wife had always had a soft spot for the underdog, and it looked as though he would forever be her pet project on that count. He poured them both a cup of tea. Sipping the scalding liquid, he sighed. "Hermione, I cannot emphasise enough the pleasure it gives me to hear you say those things about me, of all wizards." Severus gave her a look of frustration. "But I cannot help but feel like a fraud. I was not brave, I was not honourable. My cowardice and betrayal were the catalysts for the deaths of James and Lily Potter."

It was no longer painful to say her name, Severus realized, and knew that meant something important, but it did not change the fact. "I don't see why I should be singled out. Many Order members were far more noble and courageous than I." He swallowed, hating the words he knew he must speak. "I don't want to be reminded of the fact I was a terrible teacher here. I was not a nice man, Hermione. I was a Death Eater -"

"Was being the operative word -"

"Once a Death Eater, always a Death Eater. It was a magically-binding vow. I shouldn't have to remind you of this; I've told it all before."

Hermione sighed. Yes, they had discussed this many times, and she wanted to remind him that the Death Eater in him was a distant memory, faded like the Dark Mark that once throbbed and burned like poison tattooed under his skin. He had only hinted at the degradation and agony he'd suffered the night he took it, the shame of enduring it and the horror of feeling it flare back to life after all those dormant years. She also felt he was not telling her the complete truth.

Knowing she was wading into very dark, potentially lethal waters, she summoned her courage. "Severus, you cannot have it both ways." At his scowl, she swallowed heavily and continued. "You either have to disregard your past and move on, or accept it as part of yourself and live with it. You tell me you don't want to acknowledge your life as a Death Eater, then turn around in the same breath and declare once a Death Eater, always a Death Eater. Alright, I accept that as fact. But you have to accept it as well, and let the story be told!"

Severus looked at his young wife and felt faintly queasy, knowing she was right, and that he was only fooling himself if he believed that he would ever truly be free of the man he once was.

Hermione was on him like a shot. "Oh, no you don't, Severus Tobias Snape! Don't start wallowing in self-recrimination and shame!"

"I thought you said I couldn't have it both ways," he grumbled, and looked away. Hermione touched his arm again, but he refused to look at her.

Whenever she caught him in this peevish sort of mood, Hermione knew she had to be careful or he would spiral into a day-long funk. She retorted, "That's not the same thing and you know it. Severus, look at me!"

Reluctantly, Severus faced his wife. She touched his face, and her hands felt like silk against his skin. Her warm, penny-brown eyes looked into his with absolute trust.

"I was there, Severus. I remember you, and no, you were not a nice man. There were times you actually made me cry, you were so cruel. And don't lie; you enjoyed it." He gave her eyes a searching look, but only saw the same sweet love shining through. "But you were also a brave and courageous man, who had to do terrible things. Some of it was a façade, and some of it was real. I forgave you for both years ago; now you have to forgive yourself for hiding behind them or taking pleasure in doing them."

"I had to do worse than merely insult students -"

"To survive, love! You had no choice!" Hermione shook her head, her lovely face full of empathy. "I know you did things I cannot begin to imagine, and since you won't tell me, I'll never know. And I'm fine with that; you don't have to tell me everything."

"I married the entire package, Severus. The good and the bad, the light and the dark. They are part of you, and what you are to me." Hermione touched his face again, and her voice was soft. "I may not have liked you very much then, but I respected the hell out of you. You made me think. You made me grow. You challenged me then, and you still do now, and I have loved meeting every challenge you have ever given me."

Severus looked away, abashed at her passionate declaration, and Hermione felt she had better stop while she was ahead. She tucked her hand in his, and he looked down at the small, slender hand trustingly encased in his palm. "I love every aspect of you, Severus Snape, and I don't care who knows it. Your integrity, your insecurity, your intelligence, your snarkiness, your sexiness -"

"I'll not display my sexiness for anyone," he pouted, but Hermione could see him softening, giving in. She smiled.

"No, I think I'll keep that aspect of you to myself, thank you," she said, and kissed his warm lips until he responded to her, bestowing a loving kiss of his own. Hermione looked at him, and her heart swelled, as it always did for this complex, intricate soul. "Accept it, Severus. You're a famous man in our world. Let them enjoy you; enjoy being given your due."

He did not protest, but his eyes remained troubled. "I still think I should just be included with the Order."

"They will have their own display, Severus. I'm not trying to say they don't deserve it. Tonks and Remus, for example. They gave their lives, and left their son an orphan." She knelt at her husband's side. He looked down at her with a mixture of love and uncertainty. It was a look she was very familiar with.

"I keep thinking about little Teddy; how proud he will be to see this tribute to Tonks and Remus. And Neville cried, when he was told there would be a part of the museum dedicated to his parents." Frank and Alice Longbottom had both died during the past few years, and Hermione knew exactly what this tribute would mean to Neville.

Finally, she played her last card. "But no one, *no one* did what you did," Hermione said, smiling up at him. "Severus, I won't try to make you do something you have no wish to do, but I will tell you this." She took his hands in hers, and kissed them.

"I adore you; and one day, we're going to make strong, beautiful, magical, brilliant little black-eyed babies together. And I will not hesitate to tell them every day just how blessed they are to have such an incredible man for a father."

"And when our babies grow old enough to understand, it would make me so proud to show them the exhibit dedicated to you, so they could see what a great man their father is in the eyes of the world they live in, and how great *they* can be, because they have his blood in their veins."

Severus looked down at his wife, and was surprised to see tears sparkling in her eyes. Her earnest, lovely face was open and honest, and love shone from it.

Severus reached for her, and pulled her into his lap, and kissed her lovingly. She lay against his shoulder with the trusting attitude of a child. "Sometimes I am fairly certain I don't deserve you." His voice was soft and wistful, and all the more beautiful for it.

Hermione smiled as she toyed with the buttons of his robe. "Who, me? The insufferable, buck-toothed know-it-all? Some of your old students would say you ~~got~~*exactly* what you deserved."

"I'd like to see them try," he growled, but his eyes were soft, and when he brought her hand to his lips and kissed it reverently, Hermione knew he'd made a decision.

Severus conceded with a sigh. "Alright. I cannot fight you *and* the Board of Governors. I'll owl them and tell them they can start their infernal Installation." He gave his wife a sly look. "I'll give you the happy task of helping me prepare the school for it."

Apparating onto the grounds of Malfoy Manor always gave Hermione an uneasy sense of déjà vu. In spite of the enjoyable times she'd spent there since, she never forgot what happened there on that hideous day near the end of the war when she, Harry and Ron were brought to the imposing house by the Snatchers.

The *Crucio* she'd suffered at Bellatrix Lestrange's wand was something that had haunted her for a long time; the blinding pain, the humiliation of soiling herself as her bladder, bowels and stomach emptied on the expensive carpet, the fear that she would break and give them all away ... Being the pragmatist she was, her nightmares had ceased a long time ago, but there were still moments when Hermione would first catch sight of the manor, and her heart would beat faster.

Severus never mentioned the change in her. It was subtle, after all. Instead, he would place his arm around her and protectively envelop her in his cloak, drawing her close as they walked up the path to the door. It was one of his many unspoken gestures of comfort towards her, and it always did the trick.

A house-elf welcomed them in, and Hermione smiled approvingly at the small elf, clad in an immaculate towel with the Malfoy crest embroidered on the front. Draco still teased Hermione about S.P.E.W., as did almost everyone who knew her, but he agreed with her that house-elves belonging to fine, Pureblood families like the Malfoys should at least have nice tea-towels to wear.

Draco had regaled his friends with a lively description of how he had had to remove all the old towels in the kitchens and replace them with the nice new ones, so that the elves didn't think they were being given clothes. The image of the aristocratic Draco sneaking around, picking up smelly, threadbare tea towels, holding his nose and stuffing the offending rags in a bag still brought a smile to Hermione's lips.

"Lovely to see you, dear," Narcissa said, kissing Hermione's cheek. She looked tired. "Come in to the drawing room; Luc is making drinks. Tiddle!"

A little house-elf with enormous blue eyes appeared with a little 'POP!' "Yes, Mistress?" she squeaked, looking up at Narcissa with hope-filled eyes.

"Take Headmaster and Madam Snape's cloaks. We'll be ready for dinner in half an hour."

"Yes Mistress!" Tiddle squeaked, her large round eyes brimming with happiness. She took the garments from Severus and Hermione and disappeared with a cracking noise.

"So, Draco and Astoria are back from the honeymoon now?" Severus inquired, as they walked down the hall to the Drawing Room. The big news of the past week was the wedding of Draco to Astoria Greengrass.

Everyone who was anyone in the Wizarding world had been invited. Severus teased Lucius that they had used the occasion as a massive photo opportunity, and Lucius blithely, unrepentantly confirmed it as such. But the machinations of the festivities had been long and exhausting, and showed on Narcissa's face. The honeymooners had just returned from Tuscany.

Lucius drawled with a martyred sigh. "Yes, and you should see Draco - brown as a berry! He looks positively common." He smiled. "Still, he's happy and healthy, so one mustn't grumble. Our meal times have suffered, though," he continued, his aristocratic face wrinkling with disdain.

Dinner that night was an unexpectedly disastrous affair. Burnt roasties, lumpy gravy, sprouts boiled to extinction, and a roast joint that, on closer inspection, could have easily passed for shoe leather. Narcissa was embarrassed but resigned. "I'm afraid our regular cook is currently in residence with Draco and Astoria, getting their household arranged. Tiddle is a very hard worker, but ..." she waved her hand as if to say, 'What can you do?'

"I wouldn't worry, Narcissa," Severus replied thoughtfully, sawing away manfully at his roast beef. "Miss Greengrass was a very resourceful witch; no doubt she will soon find her bearings."

"Yes," Lucius answered smoothly, familial loyalty winning out. "No doubt she'll soon find the... umm, her... umm," Both Hermione and Narcissa were starting to laugh behind their napkins.

"Way to the kitchen?" Narcissa giggled, and the four of them laughed.

"I really can't talk," Hermione chuckled ruefully. "I used to cook quite a lot. I never thought I'd hear myself say it, but Hogwarts does spoil you with the sheer amount of house-elves. It makes me feel like the biggest hypocrite in the world, but you can't argue with their cooking." Her eyes widened, and she turned to Severus. "Could we ask one of the house-elves to come here temporarily, to help cook, just until Astoria gets..." Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh, who am I kidding? Could we do that?"

Severus shrugged. "We could ask. What say you, Narcissa? Would you care for the loan of a better cook while your senior elf is off supervising the honeymooners?"

Narcissa beamed. "That would be lovely, Severus!" She turned to Hermione and gave her a warm look. "Awfully thoughtful of you dear! We'd happily accept one of the Hogwarts' cooks!"

"I'll see about it tomorrow," Severus said, elegantly lining his fork and knife upon his plate, to signal he was finished. He looked at his host and hostess. "I think pizza is in order, don't you?"

"Now, I'm sure you're cheating, Severus," Narcissa pouted. "You're using your Legilimency skills to a very unfair advantage." She, Lucius and Hermione watched as Severus' game piece skipped happily to the last square on the board, whistling 'The Winner Takes It All'.

Severus placed a long, pale hand over his heart, and gave his hostess a withering, offended look. "I assure you, Madam Malfoy, I would do no such thing." His lovely voice, rolling through the large game room, sounded as oily as his host's. "Can I help it that my gaming partners are so transparent?"

His wife was unimpressed. "Hmph." She looked at him with narrowed eyes. "I'm going to wipe that smug look off your face, Severus Snape!" Hermione declared triumphantly. She turned to her fellow players. "Now remember, he has to get all three answers matched correctly to win. I'm counting on you two to use your Slytherin wiles to ensure he doesn't."

Lucius eyed Severus with a fiercely competitive gleam in his eyes. "Rest assured, Madam Snape, our slippery friend will not triumph this evening. Do your worst, Headmaster," he gestured imperiously. "Ask your infernal question."

Severus, smiling at Lucius' gauntlet-throwing and his wife's locker room pep talk, drew his last card with a flourish. He smirked at the card, raising a dark, silken eyebrow. "Ladies, and Lucius, I ask, 'What Say You?'" With a deep chuckle meant to sound salacious, he purred, "At this precise moment, what is the biggest change you would like to make in..." he wagged his eyebrows like a villain in a Victorian melodrama. "The bedroom?"

His three opponents, he saw, all wore different expressions. Lucius and Narcissa carefully schooled their features - perfect Slytherins to the core. They would play cross and double-cross, trying to deceive with distraction; divide and conquer. Hermione would be the easiest to decipher; she had a terrible poker face.

Narcissa, Lucius and Hermione bent over their parchments and began writing. The game came with its own 'Recognise-Me-Not' quills; once an answer had been written down, the handwriting changed, and once Lucius shuffled the parchments under the table and presented them to Severus, each parchment would look as if written by the same person. It was up to Severus to use his ability and knowledge of his fellow players to deduce who had said what, and this time, he had to correctly identify all three to win.

Lucius solemnly handed Severus the pieces of parchment with the air of an undersecretary delivering a bill to the Wizengamot. Severus took them with equal solemnity, and looked down his large nose through his reading glasses. He smirked, and shook his head. Tutting at his companions, he drawled, "Oh, my. This *is* a broad church."

Clearing his throat, he announced. "At this precise moment, what is the biggest change you would like to make in the bedroom? And my esteemed and learned colleagues have answered: one, a better view of the Quidditch pitch; two, a new carpet," he pronounced, giving his audience a sarcastic, eye rolling look. Finally, with a voice pitched with silken sinfulness, he purred, "And three: uninhibited, bondage-and-discipline sex with a very Dominant Daddy."

Severus looked up, expecting to see three pairs of averted eyes, avoiding the possibility of Legilimency. Instead of looking at the tops of three heads, he saw two, plus the direct stare of the amber eyes of his wife. She had the most unusual expression on her face; it was expectant, almost pleading. He hesitated for a moment, and raised his eyebrow in question. She gave him a little enigmatic shrug, as if to extend the invitation to read her mind. There was a hint of challenge in her look, as well.

Just then, Lucius raised his head slightly. "Well, do I take from your silence that you have conceded defeat and are unable to match us with our answers?" He risked a glance at the couple staring into one another's eyes and huffed. "Oh that is unfair, Severus! Trying to coerce your wife into revealing her answer. I'm the cheat here, if you don't mind!"

Severus broke eye contact with Hermione and turned back to Lucius. Smugly, he replied, "There is no need to cheat. The answers are as obvious as I expected they would be."

Narcissa also risked looking up. "Well, then, Poirot, 'What Say You?'" she smiled.

Severus pursed his lips. "Well, it's quite obvious that both you and Lucius attempted to deceive me - one of you with the truth, and one of you by giving an answer that would sound like it came from Hermione. And I anticipated my dear wife would have an answer so off base as to attempt to completely throw me off the scent. Once again, I was correct."

"Oh, this all very interesting, Severus," Lucius drawled in his most bored tone. "But the fact of the matter is that you are stalling."

Severus looked at his old friends, then pointed at Narcissa. "View of the Quidditch pitch." Lucius. "New carpet." He last turned to Hermione. "Steamy, uninhibited Daddy sex."

Narcissa looked perturbed, Lucius resigned. Hermione's face was unreadable. Severus looked at the trio before him. "Am I right?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Narcissa sighed. Lucius also nodded in affirmation, which apparently shocked his wife. "Did you say that to throw him off the scent?"

Lucius shrugged. "I'm afraid our esteemed Headmaster was right. I was indeed trying to deceive with the truth, my dear."

Narcissa looked faintly hurt. "Why Luc, I thought you liked that carpet."

Lucius groaned. "Oh, Cissa darling, I loathe that Aubusson nightmare." They were both laughing and did not notice Hermione's gaze drop to the table. Lucius, however, noticed Severus gazing at Hermione. Turning to her, Lucius challenged, "And just who were you trying to emulate so that Severus would think it was one of us? Surely, Narcissa doesn't strike you as the type who'd need me to be any more Dominant than I already am!" He preened with an exaggerated swagger, and Narcissa caught Hermione's eye and winked. She leaned forward and spoke quietly to Lucius.

"My dear, I think she might have been suggesting you were the one in need of a Daddy, not I."

Lucius' pretended indignation made them all laugh. "Well, I never," he spluttered. "Cissa, call the house-elves. I'm sending this one packing!" He was smirking as he spoke.

Severus replied dryly, "Of course, Daddy dearest." He chuckled with his friends. "And on that rather bizarre note, Hermione and I must take our leave. The dunderheads at the Ministry are coming in the morning to talk about this bloody Museum Installation, and I've got to show them around and prepare a workspace for them."

Hermione was strangely quiet as they greeted Mr. Filch, who opened the large doors to welcome them back to Hogwarts. She smiled and nodded as Severus chatted about the meeting on the morrow, but he could see she was preoccupied.

As they prepared for bed, Severus let her be, but experience told him that whatever was bothering her would soon be too much to contain, and she would eventually tell him or burst. Finally, as they crawled under the covers, it was Severus who broke the silence. "What is troubling you, dear? You've been acting unusually quiet ever since we left the Malfoys."

For a moment, Severus thought she wasn't going to answer. She merely looked into his dark eyes, and he again resisted the temptation to look into her mind. This vague unease worried him. "Hermione, is something wrong? Have I said or done something to offend?"

"No," she replied evenly, and looked away, biting her lower lip. It was a gesture he knew only too well; it brought to mind a bright young student worrying away at her bottom lip, her only concession to the insecurities she had suffered during her early years at Hogwarts.

Severus frowned. "Hermione, I am starting to grow concerned. Please, talk to me."

Finally, she asked, "Why did you think the answer about sex came from me?"

"What?"

Hermione flushed slightly. "Tonight, the last game. You said you knew I had written the answer about uninhibited sex." She turned the full battery of her forthright stare on him. "How did you know it was my answer?"

Severus gave her a puzzled look and reached out to stroke her cheek. "Are you asking me if I cheated?"

Mildly, he answered, "I promise, I did not. I merely guessed at how I thought the three of you would answer. Lucius would be truthful, and you and Narcissa would try to deceive me by giving me answers that could have possibly come from each other."

"So, you think Narcissa would want wild, uninhibited sex?"

Severus smiled. "Actually, I was thinking more along the lines that the last thing you would want was any view of the Quidditch pitch." When she didn't return his smile, Severus grew serious again. "Hermione, what in Merlin's name is this about?" He sighed, and replied teasingly, "Surely you didn't expect me to believe you want us to engage in some sort of sado-masochistic, fantasy sex?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "What if I did?"

Severus propped himself on his elbow. "What? You want me prancing around in a black leather gimp mask, pouring wax all over you while shagging you tied up against the brick wall?"

Hermione made a small moue of consideration. "The mask I could do without, but the wax and the wall sound a bit exciting."

Severus sat up. He was no longer playful. "Are you trying to tell me I am unable to satisfy you in bed?"

Hermione jumped up and put her arms around her husband. "No! Severus, that's not it at all! You are a marvelous lover!"

"I see," he said, his voice cool. He looked down at his hands. "Just not a very interesting one."

Hermione tried to pull his unyielding body back down on the bed. Pleadingly, she cried, "Please don't twist my words!" Her voice was frightened. "I was so afraid this would happen. That's why I've never said anything. I didn't mean that at all, you must believe me, Severus! I would never say anything to hurt you!"

When he did not answer, Hermione jumped out of bed and knelt at his feet. He would not look at her. "Severus, if you don't believe me, please look in my thoughts. I've been trying to get you to do that all night!"

Severus looked down at his wife. He placed one hand on her shoulder and cupped her chin in the palm of his opposite hand. *Legilimens!* He whispered, and entered her mind.

He saw them, making love. He felt her passion, her absolute love and devotion to him. As they came together, another image of himself floated into her consciousness; she was standing behind him, sandwiched between the wall behind her and his broad back. She was pinned between them, and he was saying to an unseen person beyond his shoulder, "If you do not stop me, I can and will do unspeakable things to her, and I will enjoy doing it!"

She was looking at the back of his coat, and her hands pressed against his back, just as he spun around to face her, his expression harsh and unforgiving. Severus saw himself, bearing down on his wife, pitiless and powerful. He felt a sharp pang of desire lance through her mind, watching him...

Confused, he pulled away from her mind, but kept his hand on her shoulder. He was staring down at her as if he'd never truly seen her before. "What are trying to say to me, Hermione? That the idea of me hurting you excites you?"

She put her arms around his knees and drew close to him. "No! I don't want you to actually hurt me!" She lowered her eyes, and Severus understood. It came to him like a thunderbolt.

She had deceived him in the game with the truth. All her life she had looked up to him; he had been a dominant force in her teenage years as a stern disciplinarian, and of all her teachers, his approval was the one she had desired the most and received the least. He had been an ambivalent character in her later teens, a knight of both the dark and the light. And through it all, she had looked up to him and treated him with respect. She had ever been obedient; even when he fired insults and withering comments, she had put her head down, and obeyed.

Now they were married she had wanted, no, expected him to fulfill the same role in their bed as well. She had expected him to sexually dominate her, and she had wanted it; she wanted to submit to a lover who forced her to succumb to his dark pleasures. She was excited about the possibility that he could hurt her, if he so chose.

The implications of this realisation rocked Severus to his core. He took a deep breath, and schooled his thoughts. In his most neutral tones, he said quietly, "These can be dangerous games, Hermione. I know. I have played them in the past." He felt her shiver, and he closed his eyes. "Hermione, you're asking me to rouse a part of myself that I don't truly know is wise to awaken from its slumber."

Hermione pulled back and looked at him. "You wouldn't hurt me, Severus. Letting go and abandoning yourself to sexual pleasure is not something you should be afraid of! It's simply not in you to hurt me."

A scowl fled across his features. "Isn't it? You can't know that. I have hurt people in the past. I was not a nice man, Hermione." He looked away, and his voice took on a bitter, bleak tone she had not heard in many years. "Oh, yes, I've played those games, my dear. I've been the Master; I've been the Daddy -"

"I don't want to know what you did with those women!" she said vehemently, and he could see tears glistening in her eyes.

He cupped her cheek, and answered softly, "You see, Hermione? Already, I'm hurting you."

She rose to her feet and stood over him, angrily swiping away her tears. "You're not being fair. You want to tell me about these other women to frighten me! I don't know or care what you did with them! I want to know what you would do with me!" Her warm eyes seemed to burn in the light. "I want to know what it's like to see you lose control, to lose yourself with me!" She closed her eyes, as if savouring her words. "I want to hear you say those dirty things to me, to make me call you Master and obey you. To know *I'm* making you say and do these things."

Severus looked into the flashing eyes of his wife. "Hermione, you are asking me to say and do things that go against everything I have tried to become! You can't honestly tell me you want to be married to the hideous teacher of your youth! I don't want to be that domineering, cruel man anymore! I don't want to order you around our bedroom like a slave."

Hermione's eyes looked huge in the dim light. "Severus, what if I want you to?"

"You don't know what you are asking of me!" he hissed, and turned away.

Hermione stubbornly held her ground. "Yes, I do. I know you can give it to me. That you can make me feel helpless, that you could make me crawl on my hands and knees to you." He closed his eyes, and Hermione could feel him wanting to respond. She swallowed and continued huskily, "That you could make me beg you to do things to me. You could spank me, and tie me up and use your voice to -"

"Hermione, it's very late, and we both have a very full day ahead of us." He sighed heavily, and pinched the bridge of his nose. His voice softened slightly. "We will discuss this tomorrow, I promise. But I really need to sleep now."

Hermione, her shoulders slumped in frustration, knew better than to press the point. Blunt insistence only got you so far with Severus Snape. Instead, she nodded, and together they climbed back in bed. Severus spooned against her, and kissed her goodnight, and when Hermione whispered, "I love you, Severus," he replied in kind.

Hermione forced her breathing to slow, and pretended to drift off to sleep. After a moment, she felt Severus pull away from her, and turn over, so that his back was to her. Both lay awake for a long time.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Thank you for reading and reviewing. A special thanks goes to stgulik, my beta goddess, and to Subversa, who supplied the fantastic prompt for this fic. I will include the original prompt at the end of the story, so you can tell me if I fulfilled it properly.

This chapter contains explicit sexual content.

It's all fun and games 'till someone loses an eye, then it's just fun you can't see.

James Hetfield

"Have you lost what little mind you were blessed with, Orchid?" Severus roared. "Absolutely not! This isn't a bloody freak show!"

Pervis Orchid, the representative of the Wizarding War Museum, visibly cowed. He was vastly intimidated by the tall, imposing Headmaster, and it bruised his already fragile ego to have the man shouting at him.

The Headmaster had been barely polite from the moment Mr. Orchid arrived, but as he listened to the little man briskly telling him how *this* was to be exhibited and *that* was to be displayed, he grew more and more impatient. Finally, out of the blue, the Headmaster completely exploded in Orchid's face, turned on his heel and strode away from the Museum area.

Orchid followed him, of course. Headmaster Snape must be made to see reason, his supervisor had told him; establish your authority with him and be assertive! Orchid squared his shoulders and scuttled along beside the Professor. A short, dumpy little wizard who remembered Severus from his own school days, Orchid had to scurry to keep up with the taller wizard as he strode down the hall toward his study.

As it became clear that the Headmaster had no intention of shortening his stride, Orchid felt a rising indignation. He was after all, the Undersecretary to the Assistant Director of Satellite Museum Locations in the Greater Scotland Area. The man should at least give him his due, instead of bellowing at him as if he were just another dimwitted student.

"Now, see here, Headmaster "

"I will 'see here' nothing!" Severus roared, incensed, his long strides eating up the corridor. "I've been overrun, overturned, and overruled since this fucking thing began!" He turned on the shorter man with such sudden menace Orchid literally skidded to a halt.

Severus bore down on Orchid, his black eyes snapping fire. In a low, sinister voice, he hissed, "My cooperation is essential for this thrice-damned Museum, and you are in peril of losing it altogether. This is exactly the type of lurid shite I suspected this Installation would attempt to foist on the unsuspecting children of this school!" He spun away, leaving the undersecretary to scamper after him again, spluttering excuses as they raced down the corridor.

Neville Longbottom, Hogwarts' Herbology professor, was chatting amicably with a group of third years as the Headmaster thundered past, his dark robes billowing and snapping angrily behind him. Professor Longbottom froze, as did his audience, as Severus flew by in all of his furious glory.

"Professor, was that the Headmaster?" Morgana Wablock asked tentatively, her blue eyes wide. They stared down the hall, along with the other students and professors the Headmaster left gaping in his wake. "I've never seen him look so, so upset!"

Neville watched his former professor, now Headmaster and boss, and shook his head. "Well, I'm not sure, but," Professor Longbottom laughed shakily, to the concern of his students, "it sure takes me back to when I was your age."

The Headmaster's wife was also blown past as she headed in the opposite direction, and as their eyes met, she could see that her husband was angry, but it was more than just fury. It was worry, concern, guilt, humiliation; all the horrible things she associated with her DADA professor during her sixth year in school. Whatever the little tin god scurrying beside Severus had said, it was enough to cause Severus distress such as she'd not seen in almost ten years. Hermione's alarm soon turned to anger. How dare that jumped-up little jobsworth upset her husband so? Severus rarely lost his temper anymore; it was clear to Hermione that he had.

She bit her lip thoughtfully. Things had been a little strained as they prepared for the day; neither had had the courage to mention the conversation of the previous evening, and Hermione wondered if that factored into his present mood as well.

But time and class wait for no witch; Hermione reluctantly turned away and headed toward her last class of the day. Seeing his obvious distress, Hermione felt her own petty wants and needs were rather immaterial at the moment, and she was prepared to put them away for good if it restored her precious husband's peace of mind.

Hermione did not see him again until they met in the Great Hall for dinner. It was a tense affair; news of the Headmaster's uncharacteristic fit of temper had spread through the school, and being the haven for gossip that all boarding schools are wont to be, the Hogwarts' student body thrummed with speculation that evening. Some said that the Headmaster hated the idea of the museum so much he was sabotaging it; others said the designers had angered him because they wanted a display about the Death Eaters. Still others were certain that he was angry that there was no special exhibit about him.

When Hermione turned to him, the question in her eyes, Severus smiled tightly, and put a reassuring hand on her arm. "Later, my dear. This is neither the time nor the place to discuss my outburst. Our students are already so stirred up that I think my only option is to pretend the whole incident of little import."

Hermione returned his smile, and returned to her chicken. Whatever had happened, she would wrinkle it from him if it took all night. She had not seen him that angry since her own school days here. She could not tell him that even in the midst of his fearsome display, she felt a frisson of excitement; nor could she admit, even to herself, that seeing him blazing through the halls had given her a thrill of sheer want that had left her knickers decidedly damp.

It was not until later that evening that they were finally alone. There were a dozen or so important and unimportant matters requiring attention that evening, and it was almost ten o'clock that night before Hermione and Severus closed and locked the door of their bedchamber. As he sat down on the bed, Severus quietly removed his boots and socks. Hermione watched her husband carefully, as he pinched the bridge of his nose and rolled his neck, wincing a little as he stretched.

She climbed onto the bed behind him and began to massage his shoulders. She had a firm but gentle touch, and Severus purred as she found all the knots and kinks in his muscles and soothed them one by one. With each deep breath, he let go of the tension of the day. A loud moan marked the location of one particularly pernicious knot, and Hermione set about to banish it.

"I will inform you when you are allowed to stop," he groaned, as the aggravations of the day bled from his muscles. "A month or so should do it." He rolled his neck sensuously. "Ah ... I don't know what I would do if you didn't rub my shoulders at the end of the day."

Hermione smiled. "For one thing, you'd look pretty silly with your shoulders up around your ears." Once she felt him lean back against her, she knew he was completely relaxed, and the movement of her hands changed from massage to stroking. It was usually a prelude to love, sliding her hands over his skin, unbuttoning his crisp, white shirt, feeling the warm, smooth flesh of his chest. Soon his hands rose to cover hers.

"Are you going to tell me what happened, or do I have to force it from you?" she whispered against his ear, and he chuckled darkly.

"I'd be quite interested in knowing how you plan to 'force' anything from me, Madam," he drawled silkily.

Hermione smiled, and slid from the bed until she was facing him. She knelt down between his thighs, and finished unbuttoning his long robes. "It depends on your definition of the word 'force', my darling husband," she replied flirtatiously, parting his robes. Severus smirked, and leaned back, propping himself up with his hands.

"Do your worst, witch," he said thickly, his eyes growing dark with arousal. He looked at her expectantly, and hummed softly as she slipped his cock from its confines. His eyelids lowered, framing his dark eyes with impossibly thick, black lashes. He allowed himself a smirk as she slid her long, slender fingers over his rapidly swelling member, enjoying the look of anticipation on her face.

The first time she knelt before him and prepared to take him into her mouth, she looked up at him with flaming cheeks and said, "I really want to give you the best blow job of your life, but, I've never done this with a man this this," she stuttered, "I mean, Merlin, Severus, you're as big as a house! I'm a little intimidated."

To her surprise, he had laughed, then dragged her into his arms, kissing any available area he could reach. "It will be alright, Hermione," He'd smirked. "I would advise you to take it a bit at a time." It had taken her a while to get the hang of it, but Hermione was nothing if not an overachiever.

Hermione stroked him now with long, deft strokes, hearing his breathing quicken. It excited her to feel his body open to her, and as she flicked her tongue over the head of his cock, it thrilled her to hear him hiss his appreciation.

"I suppose I could tease you into telling me," she murmured, her breath warm against his sensitive skin. "Are you sure you don't want to talk about it?" She emphasised her words with light, tickling licks over the underside of his cock. She scraped her teeth gently against the sensitive little membrane, and when he gasped and his hips jerked upwards, she grinned lazily. "Perhaps I should torment it out of you."

He looked down at his wife with a look that made Hermione's already-damp knickers sopping wet. Grasping his swollen member with one hand and her chin with the other, he purred, "Let's do something more productive with that little mouth of yours, hmm?" He pulled her toward him, easing his cock between her warm, plump lips.

Hermione closed her eyes and took as much of his large cock in her mouth as she was able. She was more aroused than she thought possible. He almost never spoke during sex, and hearing him say something so lascivious was unbearably exciting to her. She closed her hand over his, and they pumped his cock into her mouth together.

"Ah, yes, much better," He sneered, shivering. He moaned as he thrust deeply, until he could feel the back of her throat close against the head of his cock. "Oh, yes, sweetness ... fuck, that's good ..." His long fingers tugged at her hair, and he moved in and out of her mouth slowly, enjoying the wet heat of her mouth sucking at his flesh.

Hermione looked up at him, thrilled at how vocal he was. She knew what he wanted. He wanted her to suck him hard, to swoop down on him, devour him, and bring him off quickly. He loved to lie back and let her take him over; it was the closest he came to letting go completely.

Hermione also knew that if she was patient, she would get what she wanted, and sucked hard, her tongue swirling over the slit of the head as it peeked from the foreskin. His hips churned up to meet her, and when she looked up into his face, it was slack and blank, and he was trembling. She pulled his cock from her mouth with a hard, sucking release that made him growl.

"Are you going to tell me?" she purred, licking him, her strong hand on the long, twisting downward stroke, and he whimpered, and began to thrust upwards. Her hand glided over his sac, and he gave a soft cry, a sound so vulnerable and boy-sweet it made her pussy clench. He was fucking her mouth now, his body taut, and his face was so open and abandoned Hermione felt something like power slide into her belly. "Are you?"

"Shut up and suck me!" he roared, and she almost came at his feral command. The feeling of sexual power over him was overwhelming, and she pushed harder.

"Will you tell me, love? Will you?" she cried, pumping his cock hard, rolling his balls in her hand, and his eyes slid closed as they rolled back. He was gasping, his silky brows arched in a scowl, and his tongue slid sensuously over the edge of his top lip. "Will you?" she cried, and began to suck hard, her hand sliding along his shaft with powerful, hard strokes.

Hermione watched him as she licked and sucked and stroked him; suddenly, his glassy eyes widened and his mouth formed a surprised 'O' of intense pleasure. She moaned deliriously, and the vibration reverberated through his groin, and he fucked her mouth with abandon. He was coming, and Hermione pulled back just as he passed the point of no return. His face was luminous with erotic intensity. She cried, "Tell me!"

He shouted, "Yes! Oh, gods, yes, I'm come ... coming ... oh fuck ... take it," he snarled, his voice full of sexual power. "Take... it... all, witch..."

He growled low in his throat as his orgasm raced through his groin, his come hot and pungent as it spurted from his cock into her waiting mouth. He cried out over and over as Hermione took him to the hilt, burying her nose in his delicious-smelling pubic hair. He was clenching her head almost painfully as he rode out each wave of ecstasy.

As the last of the spasms shuddered from his cock, Severus opened his glazed eyes and watched as Hermione leaned back, his milky issue smeared over her mouth. He groaned loudly as she licked it from her lips like melted sugar. She closed her eyes and swallowed the last of it, a smile on her glowing face. Exhausted, Severus fell back on the bed, his chest heaving, a light sheen of sweat glistening on his pale skin.

Hermione sat back on her haunches, watching her husband gasping, his flaccid cock resting against his thigh. Finally, with a heaving sigh, he rose from the bed, pulled her to her feet and over onto the bed with him, and enveloped her in his arms. He placed a fervent kiss of devotion on her forehead.

"Tell me again why I married you, my dear?"

Hermione laughed. "Because of my fellatious skills?"

"That, and I couldn't have allowed you to waste such an indecently tight cunt on some dunderhead too foolish to appreciate what you have hidden beneath those scandalous little knickers."

"Ah, I see," Hermione giggled. He rarely spoke so coarsely. It gave her a little tingle to hear him use lurid words like 'cunt' and 'knickers'. After the previous night, his increased vocality seemed like an apology, a gift of sorts, and she felt herself relaxing.

He tried to renege, of course. "Coercing a man under such extreme interrogation measures doesn't count," he said, and tried to cajole his way out of talking about the events earlier in the day. He knew he was stalling for time, but he could no more resist baiting his little lioness than a boy could resist popping a balloon. As she scowled at him, he found himself chuckling. Was it really so bad that he couldn't talk to Hermione about it? She, of all people, would agree with him.

He pushed himself back against the headboard of the bed and stretched. "That little pillock from the Museum told me they wanted to make the Installation as authentic as possible. I said, 'I couldn't agree more.' He went on to say that they had amassed a whole host of artifacts from the Battle, including some of the destroyed Horcruxes and a fang from the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets."

Hermione was very quiet. She herself had used one of those fangs to help destroy Helga Hufflepuff's cup; she was surprised at the depth of uncertainty she felt, knowing she would see those items again.

Severus watched the emotions play across his wife's face, and continued reluctantly. "I again agreed that these artifacts would be desirable, not only for those seeing them for the first time, but to those of us who witnessed it firsthand." Severus face darkened. "Then, he came to *my* display. I was told that among the artifacts would be a replica of my old Potions book, the one Potter used during your sixth year here -"

Hermione gasped. "Of course! The property of the Half-Blood Prince!"

Severus nodded, "The very one. He showed me various photographs, essays, and Potions journals I had contributed. The setting would be the Potions classroom, since I'd spent most of my career there. There will be a replica of my wand, my Order of Merlin ..." Severus' voice dropped, and Hermione looked at him expectantly.

"That doesn't sound so bad, Severus. Why would you get upset -"

"They want to have a mannequin charmed to look and sound like me walking throughout the display - wearing *my* Death Eater robes and mask, giving a lecture about the night I killed Dumbledore!" Severus burst out, with barely suppressed fury. "That gods-forsaken little toe rag from the Museum already has the Minister's approval to do it, so I was told to hand them over to the Artifacts Superintendent by the end of the week!"

Hermione was stunned. "That's just I mean, well." She was completely off guard. "That's just tacky." She looked at him, shocked. "You mean your robes your Death Eater robes - you still have them after all this time?"

Severus looked abashed. Gritting his teeth, he replied, "Apparently I'm the only Death Eater alive who hasn't had the sense to destroy the wretched things. After I-" His face darkened, and he closed his eyes to calm himself. "After Dumbledore, I Apparated to Malfoy Manor, and dressed in the robes to face the Dark Lord. When he

dismissed me, I went to Spinner's End. I stuffed them in a box and left them there. I never wore them again."

He paused, eyes narrowed in remembrance. "When I sold the place, right before I returned to Hogwarts, I just shrank everything in the house down, lock, stock and barrel, and moved it here." He looked resigned. "Yes, I still have them after all this time."

Hermione was completely nonplussed. A part of her, the part of her possessing good taste and tact, was shocked and wanted to give the Minister a piece of her mind. Having an effigy of the Headmaster of Hogwarts stalking around in a Museum display wearing Death Eater robes struck her as the epitome of poor taste. It would have been amusing, had Hermione not been aware of exactly how much the idea distressed Severus. Perhaps one day they could laugh about it; not now.

"Well," she began, having no idea how she planned to continue the sentence, "perhaps ... you ... could agree to let them use the robes on the proviso that the mannequin remain static. I can see why they would want to display them, but -"

"Why *my* robes, Hermione? Why does it have to be mine?" Severus let his head fall back against the headboard. "Any credibility I have here will be undermined to the point of non-existence if they do this."

Hermione bit her bottom lip. "We'll figure something out, Severus." She crossed the room and climbed into bed with him. "Please try not get so upset. There's always a way to fix these things."

Severus gathered his wife into his arms. "I wonder what it's like to have a quiet life," he grumbled, placing an absent-minded kiss on her head. "First our newly repaired gates are scaring away the magical creatures, and now my greasy image is going to be looming about, scaring away the students with ghost stories. Why can't they just leave me alone?" he hissed to himself.

"Stop. We will fix this." Hermione said, emphatically. "In the meantime, perhaps your Death Eater robes will meet with an unfortunate accident."

Severus made a frustrated sound. "I already told him I still have them. I had no idea he was planning such an asinine way of displaying them. I have to loan them out now."

Hermione rested her cheek against Severus' warm chest. "Then we'll just have to make sure the mannequin meets with an unfortunate accident."

For a moment, Severus was silent. Finally, he turned to his wife. "Are you sure you aren't a closet Slytherin?" For the first time, a ghost of a smile played about his lips. "You really are the brightest little witch, you know."

Hermione snuggled against her husband, and breathed a sigh as his arms wound around her. "I married you, didn't I?"

Severus kissed her deeply. "Thank all the gods you did," he said, then turned to the lamps and waved a careless hand. *Nox.*"

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

To be great we need to win games we aren't supposed to win.

Julius Erving

Severus had always had a lot of time for Hagrid. The gamekeeper had been a kind and discreet companion in the dark years during Riddle's return. Many was the night Severus had stumbled onto the grounds of Hogwarts, shaken and bleeding from Voldemort's *Crucio* practice, to be carried into the infirmary in the massive arms of the warmhearted half-giant.

On the rare nights he returned blessedly unharmed, Severus would see the huge bear of a man waiting patiently by the gate, lantern in hand. Hagrid's smile of relief was always a welcomed sight, and never failed to bring some small comfort to Severus' bleak existence.

However, as tolerant as he was of Hagrid's less-than-orthodox teaching methods, Severus did not appreciate the aggro he was receiving from Hagrid's latest specimen. Until the magical signature on the perimeter gates was re-calibrated, Hagrid had permission to bring his newest subjects into the castle, where he could teach in one of the spare classrooms instead of on the grounds. One creature in particular was proving a lot more provoking than Flobberworms.

"Rubeus," Severus began, determined to hold onto his patience with both hands, "Why on earth is this," his face pinched with disdain *thing* in my school?"

The thing in question, an obnoxious little ferret-like creature, spat up at him, "Piss off, konkface!"

Severus looked up at his Care of Magical Creatures Professor with an eyebrow arched so eloquently it looked capable of speech.

Hagrid at least had the decency to look a little chagrined. He glanced down at the subject of the day's lesson and stroked it gently. "Oh, Perfesser, it ain' nuthin' but a little Jarvey, ya know," he rumbled affectionately. "They don' mean no 'arm, and they're dead clever - ain' you just, lil feller?" Hagrid tried to tickle the Jarvey's chin, and pulled back with a hiss as the mouthy little furball snapped at his finger.

"I'll show you 'lil feller, you big gobshite!" it squeaked. The large man looked at Severus with a placating look of great tolerance.

"Jarveys are vastly misunderstood creatures, Headmaster," Hagrid said sincerely, as the sleek little animal thrashed angrily in his large hands. "I think tha's part of me job, to educate students that there's more t' these beasts than just chasin' garden gnomes."

"You're mother was a garden gnome!" shrieked the Jarvey, trying once again to escape from the prison of Hagrid's huge hands.

"I see," Severus drawled. "Not only have you brought a potentially dangerous creature into the school, but students can also experience the ignominious joy of being

insulted while he attacks them." Severus felt contrite at Hagrid's crestfallen expression, and added kindly, "Please make sure the classroom's protective charms are in place before the students arrive, Rubeus."

The Jarvey blew a raspberry at the Headmaster, who rolled his eyes. Testily, he added, "Just keep this overgrown ferret out of trouble, Hagrid." He nodded to the large man, and turned to go.

"Will do, Perfesser," Hagrid called after him.

"I'll 'Perfesser' you, you cocksucking hairball!"

"Oh, hush up, you," said Hagrid affectionately, as the Jarvey tucked himself in his arms, sniping all the way to class.

Hagrid and his Jarvey had been the start of a typical day of minor little skirmishes for Severus. As the Headmaster of the world's most prestigious Wizarding School, his days were filled with petty inconveniences, red tape and administrative bullshit, with occasional passing glimpses of nurturing and education.

Today was proving no exception. He had approved a mountain of purchase requisitions; everything from baby mandrakes to new potions ingredients to various school supplies, and had declined just as many. Hogwarts did not need another thousand crystal balls or broom polishing kits.

He had listened, Solomon-like, to an argument between Sybil Trelawney and Septima Vector, rival candidates for the latest Ministry Research grant, each extolling the virtues of their respective disciplines. He had promised to split the grant in half for each field of study, and the two women who had been nearly at each other's throats moments before had left his study chatting amicably with one another like old friends. "Glad to be of assistance," he'd muttered under his breath, watching the two witches cackling together like the old crones they were.

He had patrolled halls, looked in on classrooms, and admired the latest batch of Professor Longbottom's *Acromanta Hydrangeoidus*, or Spidergrangea. He had spoken to several board members regarding the Museum, grabbed a hasty lunch, and just happened to come upon his wife in a deserted corridor to steal a clandestine kiss before her last class of the day.

He approved the temporary transfer of one of his house-elf cooks to Malfoy Manor, with the directive of simply cooking something edible. "After Tiddle, they'll be happy for egg and chips if they're not burnt to a crisp," he'd told the plump little elf, who called herself Puffy. She'd been transported with joy at the thought of being able to serve a family again, and tears of happiness leaked from her huge brown eyes at the prospect.

Like so many of the house-elves who'd come to Hogwarts in the past decade, Puffy had once served one of the ancient Pureblood households that had backed the wrong horse. After Riddle's demise, most of the Death Eaters' homes were confiscated by the Ministry, their elves given clothes and turned out to wander.

One of Severus' first acts as the newly-reinstated Headmaster was to renew Dumbledore's old policy of offering every disenfranchised house-elf a home at Hogwarts; none were turned away. These creatures, with their sense of duty and love of service, had been just as instrumental in the rebuilding and repair of Hogwarts as the wizards themselves.

Having dispatched Puffy to Malfoy Manor, Severus felt the wards shimmer for his last meeting of the workday. He composed his face into tranquil lines as Undersecretary Orchid appeared, timidly poking his head around the corner to Severus' study.

"Come in, Mr. Orchid. Please have a seat." Severus waited as the little man settled into one of the visitor's chairs. Severus steepled his hands together and rested his chin on the pinnacle of his long fingers. After a moment, he spoke quietly.

"I wish to apologise for my outburst yesterday, Mr. Orchid. I'll admit I was somewhat taken aback by some of the more radical ideas for the Installation, but that is no reason to take my frustrations out on you."

Orchid cleared his throat importantly, then smiled, "That's quite alright, sir -"

"I should have never vented my anger on you, Mr. Orchid. We must work together on this project. There should be no animosity between us."

The dumpy wizard nodded eagerly. "Quite right, quite right, Professor-"

"Indeed," Severus said, turning the full battery of his large, liquid dark eyes on the younger man. "After all, if I wished to lodge a complaint, I should've referred it to the wizard in charge, and not taken out my dissatisfaction on his representative."

Orchid's smile faltered. "In charge? No, you see, I am actually -"

Severus shook his head regretfully. "It was very wrong of me to chastise the person who has no real authority to make any changes why should you be punished for something you have no control over? A classic case of hexing the messenger. Inexcusable."

Orchid began to stammer, "Headmaster you don't understand, I have the authority of the Ministry -"

"Who have sent you here, no doubt, as a whipping boy for my temper tantrums." Severus looked sheepishly contrite. His luminous eyes were full of sympathy. He shook his head at the injustice of it all. "It's not fair, is it? To have to put up with my moods and not be able to do anything about it, while the ones with the power to make the changes I require sit in their ivory towers and let you take the abuse!"

Mr. Orchid puffed up to twice his size. Severus privately thought the man was going to burst. "But but I have full authority here, Headmaster!" He drew himself up indignantly. "I don't know what they've told you at the Ministry, but I have the authorisation to make any changes to the original plan that you deem necessary, Sir! If anyone tries to tell you otherwise, you just tell them they will have to answer to Pervis Orchid!"

Severus could not have looked more innocently hopeful. "Oh, really? That is good news, Mr. Orchid. You see," he said, a note of regret in his musical, persuasive voice, "when I asked if you could charm the Death Eater mannequin to be static in my part of the exhibition, they told me you had no power to do so."

The Undersecretary to the Assistant Director of Satellite Museum Locations in the Greater Scotland Area drew himself up to his full five-foot three. He stuck out his chin defiantly. "Headmaster Snape, if you wish it, I will amend the blueprints this very moment, and you can tell those troublemakers at the Ministry that if they try to change it back why, I'll thrash 'em!"

"Oh, Mr. Orchid, that is a load off my mind," Severus said, and produced the binding magical contracts. In seconds, the changes were made. Not only would the mannequin not stalk around, telling his tale in Severus' own voice, but the figure would no longer be in his likeness. It was reduced, for all intents and purposes, to a dress-maker's rack which bore no resemblance whatsoever to any wizard, living, dead or otherwise.

After Orchid left, Severus sat quietly for a moment. He heard a familiar chuckle and turned in his chair to see Dumbledore's portrait smiling at him.

"A Slytherin to the core, eh, Severus?"

Severus' satisfied mood soured a bit, and he glowered at his former Headmaster. "Where manipulation is concerned, old man, I learned from the best." It gave him a grim sort of pleasure seeing the look of hurt on the portrait's painted face.

Mr. Orchid was smiling as he tripped down the hallway toward the Installation site. It was only much later that night when he recalled that the animated Snape/Death Eater mannequin had originally been his idea in the first place.

Severus entered the bedroom quietly, and removed his over-robe. He looked around guiltily, as if he were doing something forbidden. Their chambers were empty. As the Head of Gryffindor House, Hermione was meeting with her prefects over an incident during the last Hogsmeade weekend, and hadn't as yet returned for the evening. Severus decided now was as good a time as any to do this.

He pulled the small box from his pocket and laid it on the bed. *Engorgio*," he muttered quietly, and the box enlarged to its original size. Severus' hands were steady as he pried the lid off the top, and solemnly looked down into his past.

It was a robe made of fine material, a boiled wool that had held its shape and colour perfectly over the years. It was so black it made other black garments look dark grey; it had been spelled to blend with every type of darkness, from the physical dark night to the absence of light in the soul. It was without any embellishment, save a trimming of deep black velvet around the cowl and pointed cuffs.

The wide belt sashing was silk-lined velvet, garnished with black beaded tassels on either end. It was a decadent, hedonistic garment, and Severus remembered the sensual thrill of putting it on for the first time. Wearing it, he felt powerful, dangerous and alluring. There were nights when women would follow him with their cool gaze, and their eyes had told him they thought so, as well.

Sitting on top of the folded robe was the silver mask, which he'd hated more than anything, and could count on one hand the amount of times he'd actually worn. As a young man, blistering with defiant pride and ambition, he'd arrogantly wanted his face to be seen, to single him out as one of the Dark Lord's elite Death Eaters. Severus paused, and favoured that angry, lost, bitter young man with a sigh of regret.

In those days, he had been high on domination, and he had used his new-found skills to seduce and subjugate as he himself had been seduced and subjugated. He had learned to use his talents well; smarting from Lily's rejection and his own crippling insecurities, he'd channeled his abilities with whet-stoned precision, and his appetites and desires had been fostered and encouraged in order to keep him under Riddle's thumb. In his own lust for power, Severus had unwittingly surrendered all that power to Lord Voldemort, and then afterward, to Dumbledore.

Severus hated thinking back to those dark days. Hermione was right when she told him he either had to acknowledge them, or put them behind forever. He was stuck in limbo; to remember those days was to remember the darkness he'd cradled to his breast like a favourite child. To relinquish them would mean ... what? To embrace and cherish the good in himself? Why did he feel so unworthy of that?

And then there was Hermione. When she had breezed back in his life, it was as if she'd swept all the cobwebs from his heart and he could breathe again. He did not have to pretend he was someone he wasn't; she had known him almost all her life. There was no prevaricating with Hermione.

She never allowed him to wallow or sulk or guilt about the bad old days, as she called them. The first time she'd referred to his life as a Death Eater in such a dismissive manner, it had sounded like something akin to blasphemy. He had felt almost frightened to reduce that time in his life down to such a silly phrase, as if diminishing their importance would somehow diminish him as well. How trivial it all sounded, now.

But he hadn't been completely truthful with Hermione, either. The first night he had taken her to his bed, he had been determined not to give into those dark desires that had tainted his youth. He had lain down with her, and worshipped her body with his mouth, his hands, his body, and she had worshipped his.

He had been more than confident in his abilities to satisfy his wife without resorting to the coarse, fleshly earthiness that had once excited him. He had told himself that she was better off not knowing exactly what he was capable of doing what he would love to do to her, if he had the courage to admit those things, even to himself. He had not wanted to frighten or sully her with his dark talents, or corrupt her innocence with his more esoteric appetites.

Her confession after their last games night at Malfoy Manor both frightened and exhilarated him. In every aspect of their marriage, he and Hermione were the best of partners, friends, the most compatible of confidantes. In all aspects, he shared his heart, his mind and his soul. In all aspects but his secret yearning to do those things to her which she thought, in her innocence, she actually wanted him to do...

Severus sighed, and took the robe from the box, and shook it loose from its folds. It was a little dusty from storage, but a whispered charm made it look as if it were newly-made again. He stroked the velvet trim; it felt warm, almost alive beneath his fingers; it was as soft as the inside of Hermione's creamy, silken thigh. Almost trance-like, he turned and looked into their full-length mirror, and held the garment up to his shoulders. He shook his head at his reflection. *That was a long time ago, lad*, he thought, *and it's just a sodding robe* -

"Put it on."

Severus whirled around to find his wife standing in their bedroom doorway. She was unsmiling, and her eyes were huge. They met his with trembling intensity, and he felt a burst of spontaneous magic jolt between them. It immediately settled into his groin, and he saw from the look on her face that she felt it as well.

She nodded toward the robe. "Put it on, Severus." She licked her lips, and her eyes flicked over his body hungrily. "I want to see you ... I want to know what it looks like."

Something in her unsteady voice made his heart decide it needed to beat a little faster to keep up with the latest developments in his body. He stood still as stone as Hermione walked into the room, her steps soft and tentative, as if afraid to spook him. He could see the faint blush of her cheeks, and as she approached him, Severus realised her eyes were glowing, her pupils huge. His sensitive nose picked up the delicate but oh-so-welcome scent of arousal, and when he replied, "Why would you want me to do that, Hermione?" His voice was pitched low, and so deep that it sounded seductive to his own ears.

She stepped closer, and looked up into his face. She bit her bottom lip. "I've I've never seen you with it on ... before," she said, her voice husky and soft. She ventured a smile. "Please, Severus?"

Severus straightened. He knew he had about three seconds to make up his mind how far he wanted to take this. He could refuse, or he could comply. He could change the dynamic of their relationship forever. He could enhance it, or damage it permanently, and that frightened him. But something in her eager eyes told him to risk it; he could take the first steps toward something he now knew they both wanted, even though Hermione did not possess the vocabulary to truly name it.

"Very well," he said, softly, and made a little twirling motion with his finger. "But you must turn around." When she didn't move, Severus lifted his chin, and gave Hermione her first command. "Obey me, pet. Now."

Hermione's face was instantly wiped clean of expression. She blinked, then lowered her head and turned around. Severus smiled.

For perhaps five minutes, Hermione stood still, listening to the faint rustle of fabric behind her. The room was quiet except for his soft breathing, the sounds of clothing and her heavily beating heart.

Obey me, pet. Now. Hermione felt amazed that four little words, spoken in her husband's mellifluous voice, could drive such an intense thorn of arousal into her abdomen. It literally made her knees weak, and she felt hot and flushed, almost feverish. It was as if she'd never heard him speak to her before. It was as if she was standing in a room with an exciting, forbidden stranger, and Hermione was Imperused to obey his every command.

His voice made her jump. "You may look now." He sounded carefully neutral, as if afraid of her reaction, and Hermione took a deep breath and turned around.

Hermione gasped as she looked up into the face of her husband. Coming face to face with Severus as a Death Eater was to come face to face with her past. It was as if she was looking at him over the span of their years together, and she whispered his name reverently.

She saw her husband, but it was more than her husband. Merlin, so much more!

He radiated power. He stood tall and proud; his long black hair, freed from its silver clasp, flowed iridescent and sleek over his shoulders like black water. The robe was so dark it looked as if cut from negative space. It made him look imposing and arrogant. He held the silver mask in his hand, and she was glad he had not put it on as well. Seeing his haughty face, his long, angular body encased in unrelieved black, was frightening and exciting enough.

Severus' eyes bore into hers, and as she walked toward him, he grew rigidly hard, his erection blindly beckoning Hermione like a divining rod. As she neared him, he reached out and caressed her cheek and her lovely, long neck. The latent power that he had resisted since the night of her confession reared its head, and he could no more deny it than he could his need for her. It was as if the robe itself was imbued with the dark lust that slid into his veins, tattooing his heart with the rich ichors of dominance.

She grasped his hand in hers and kissed his palm feverishly, her eyes never leaving his. She was trembling. "Look into me, please," she whispered hoarsely, pleadingly. "Look into my mind."

Severus Snape was, without conceit, the greatest living Legilimens, and he used his ability well. He had learned that invading someone's mind could be used in any myriad of ways. The mind could be raped, or it could be caressed. It could reveal its secrets to him, each layer revealing more, like Salome's veils; they could be ruthlessly ripped from the mind without regard for safety. He could and did master the intricate labyrinths of an accomplished Occlumens, who could set up a minefield of mazes and traps so diabolical in design as to drive a skilled Legilimens insane.

And, of course, the discipline could be used to seduce, and to prepare the mind for the midnight-stained joys of submission. This was the first step toward that aim, and the fact that Hermione herself had begged him for it was enough to thrill any dominant Legilimens. It was tacit permission to strip her bare and build her to heights she'd never experienced. It filled him with a desire so potent it made him giddy.

With a faint sneer, Severus stepped closer, until their bodies were touching. She made a soft noise in her throat as his erection pressed into her belly. His face hard and unsmiling, Severus looked deeply into her eyes. "*Legilimens*."

As Severus quietly stepped into the highly organised mind of his wife, she opened a door for him and beckoned him through. It was a familiar door, and he realised with a start he remembered this moment well; he had, after all, been an active participant in the memory she wanted to share with him.

All around, he could hear her whisper, "*This is what I wanted you to see ... this is what I've tried to tell you..*"

The year before he killed Dumbledore, Severus had finally been given the job he had coveted since his early days as a Hogwarts' professor: the Defense Against The Dark Arts position. It was the only year as a professor in which he actually felt he was imparting to the students skills they needed to survive, and he was ruthless in his pursuit of their ability to defend themselves against the inevitable. He was still convinced that his teaching had ultimately saved lives; it was the only thing he could recall from that year that gave him any sense of worth.

He'd only had a passing acquaintance with the so-called "Dumbledore's Army," but he'd been impressed with the performances of many of his pupils - not that he'd told them. Their improving abilities only made him push them harder.

He remembered Hermione, of course, her brow furrowed, lower lip chewed to raw meat, ducking, diving; her reflexes had been excellent, but her skill was tainted with the tendency to question the moral implications of the spells and hexes she was forced to cast. It was a problem with many in her House. "Integrity," he told the disgustingly earnest Gryffindors, "will get you killed. Hex first and ask questions later, if you have any."

She had actually attended the wrong class on this day in her memory. Minerva had asked Severus to excuse her during her regular DADA class for a Careers Seminar, and to be allowed to make up the class later in the day with the Ravenclaw/Hufflepuff sixth years. The lesson was on learning to parry blocking spells. He had paired everyone off, placing Hermione with the odd but capable Miss Lovegood. Luna Lovegood, while perfectly fine at defense and blocking, was atrociously slow on parrying a blocking while renewing her shielding spell.

"Class, stop," he'd droned, irritated with her sluggish response. "It appears Miss Lovegood doesn't truly understand the purpose this exercise." Far from looking embarrassed at being singled out, Luna had turned her rather protuberant blue eyes at him expectantly.

"I think I understand it in theory, Professor," she answered serenely, "but I'm just not that good at it. Would you please demonstrate it for me?"

Impatiently, Severus had stepped between Hermione and Luna. His voice was the very essence of suave menace as he intoned, "Miss Lovegood, you have been ambushed by a Death Eater, who is kidnapping your friend, Miss Granger."

He glanced over his shoulder at Hermione, and deftly plucked her wand from her fingers, tucking it into his robe. "She is wandless and defenseless." Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but a look from him silenced her.

With the entire class' attention on him, he continued matter-of-factly. "As a Death Eater, I have been instructed by the Dark Lord to bring her to him at all costs. I will stop at nothing, including harming her and you, to obey his commands."

He raised his wand in a defensive posture and cast a shield charm around himself and Hermione. "Your challenge, Miss Lovegood, is to break down my shields by battering away at them until they fail; I cannot risk Apparation while you do this, in case I splinch myself or Miss Granger, but you must also keep up a steady and unpredictable attack."

Luna had nodded, and raised her wand. "I think I understand now, sir.*Protego!*"

Severus allowed the shield to fail, then struck back with a minor hex, which Luna blocked easily. "Now Miss Lovegood," he said, "Speed and rhythm is vital; I will not hesitate again." He cast the shield, and they began. Every time Luna threw a spell or hex or jinx, Severus parried it and immediately cast another, which she doggedly blocked, casting her parry at the same time.

"That is the idea, Miss Lovegood," Severus said. "Now you must keep up your shields and defenses. Nothing will stop me from claiming my prize." The two of them began to duel in earnest, with Hermione as their ultimate goal.

Lovegood was consistent, her magic strong and at times uncontrollably powerful. As her rhythm and confidence grew, Severus was forced to take a step back, which obliged Hermione to step back with him. When the young Ravenclaw hesitated, Severus sneered. "Is that how you protect your friend, Miss Lovegood? I don't think you realise what is in store for Miss Granger. As a Death Eater, I do not plan to show her mercy or kindness."

The blond girl's eyes narrowed and she increased her speed, making her aim less precise. Severus played with her for a few rounds, then was forced back several more steps as Luna adjusted her grip. Severus felt Hermione stumble as he moved away from Luna. By now, every pair in the class had stopped and was watching this exhibition of parry and thrust with rapt interest.

"Miss Lovegood, you must not think very highly of Miss Granger if this is all you can do to protect her," Severus had taunted, throwing off her hex easily. "I know I don't. Once I disarm you, I will take her by force and it will be your fault, knowing you let me have her so easily."

Two more steps back, and Severus felt Hermione, unyielding, behind him. He had been forced back until he was pressing her against the wall, fending off Luna's increasingly assertive attack. Still he jeered at her. "You may think you are winning, Miss Lovegood, but I have been ordered to bring Miss Granger to the Dark Lord. I will be rewarded for my exertions, perhaps with Miss Granger herself. I will fight you until I am either outnumbered or you are too exhausted to continue. I am a patient man, and I take what I want."

By now, Luna was sweating, her aim and magic tiring, but Severus still pushed, secretly pleased at her mulish tenacity. He idly wondered if Granger would last this long. She was standing behind him, sandwiched between the wall and his broad back. She had made no sound, other than her rapid breathing. He could feel her hands pressing against his back to prevent him from crushing her, but Luna was relentless to the point that he barely acknowledged the girl behind him other than to use her as a reference to provoke the young Ravenclaw.

As a final goad, he said in his most menacing tone, "If you do not stop me, I can and will do unspeakable things to Miss Granger, and as a Death Eater, I will enjoy doing them!"

In Hermione's mind, Severus saw her, her heard gasp at his deliberately sinister declaration, its obvious meaning. She was looking at his back, and he felt the heat gather in her core, and her hand reached up to touch his shoulder just as Luna's rhythm faltered and her depleted magic left her too exhausted to continue. She held up her wand to concede defeat, and leaned down, winded, hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath.

"Ten points to Ravenclaw for your work, Miss Lovegood. You show potential, but I would suggest you work on your stamina." He remembered feeling the gentle hand on his shoulder, and in Hermione's memory he watched himself spin around to face her, his expression harsh and unforgiving. Severus saw himself, bearing down on his not-as-yet wife, pitiless and powerful.

She was looking up at him with eyes enormous and dark. Her breath was coming in pants, as if she, too, had been dueling. Her hands were still raised, as if to push him away, and on her face was an expression of what he mistook for fear. As he returned her wand, he noted the shaking hand that retrieved it from his fist. He scowled at the young Gryffindor girl and snapped irritably, "Merlin's sake, Miss Granger, it's just a lesson! Kindly stop gaping at me as if I were the Big Bad Wolf!"

He looked over his shoulder to Luna Lovegood, who was still hunched over, panting as if she'd run a race. She gave Hermione what could only be considered a sympathetic glance, which irritated him further. "Miss Lovegood assessed the situation correctly and responded properly, Miss Granger; I suggest you learn to do the same when your usual class reconvenes." He turned to the other students, who were watching Luna recover. "Class dismissed! Lovegood, get some chocolate in you, now!"

He had been winded himself from his duel with Luna, and because the air was full of the smell of sweat and the pine-scented ozone of cast spells, Hermione's scent had not been easily distinguishable or identifiable. He had dismissed her reaction that day as one borne of fear and weakness.

Pulling gently from his wife's mind, ten years later, he caught the scent again, and he knew. Hermione had not been childishly frightened by his performance that day she had been painfully aroused by it.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

This chapter contains strong language and sexual situations.

You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else. Albert Einstein

Almost reluctantly, Severus wrenched his will out of Hermione's mind and stared in her eyes, slightly disoriented, shocked at the revelation of what he'd seen. It was then he realised she did not want the darkness of the man; she wanted the man of the darkness. It was not the robes that excited her; it was him *in* them. For several seconds, wizard and witch stood, staring at one another, eyes hot and dark, breathing hard. Severus swallowed. "And you never told me."

Hermione lowered her chin. With a weak smile, she countered, "I didn't *knowhow* to tell you. I certainly couldn't say anything that day." She tossed her head in a parody of her teenaged self. "'Oh Professor Snape, thank you for that impressive display of defensive magic, and by the way, could you roger me in technicolour, because you're so fucking sexy when you're scaring me into knicker-soaked oblivion?' You would have ripped me into so many pieces I'd still be looking for them." Her smile took the sting out of her words, but her eyes still burned into his.

Severus looked down at his lovely wife. She was so beautiful, and fine and good. Too good for him, he thought, and then decided to stop worrying about her in those terms. *She thinks I'm good enough. She's here, now, wanting this* He would be lying to himself if he said he, too had not been aroused, sharing the memory of that long-ago moment.

He realised had been allowing his own insecurities to draw some rather inaccurate conclusions about her. Seeing her now, sharing her thoughts, he knew he could have her the way he'd always wanted, and that she would allow it because she wanted it as well. He was now convinced a part of her needed it as much as he did.

He favoured her with a slow smile. "So, the good little Gryffindor girl was wet for her greasy professor?" A shard of lust slid into his spine and bloomed, dark and malignant, in his blood, making his heart beat hard and heavy against his skin. It made his voice as sinister and as dangerously soft as the velvet belt of his robe. "Were your wet that day, Miss Granger?"

She closed her eyes in a slow blink. "Yes, sir," she whispered. She unconsciously swayed toward him. Her eyes flew open as his large hands grasped her arms tightly, and she looked up into eyes that blazed with black fire.

He looked down at her haughtily. "And are you wet now, Miss Granger? Shall I see for myself? Better yet, why don't you show me?" It was not possible that a man's voice could hold so many colours, and scents and flavours, but Hermione felt as if she could see and scent and taste them all. She had never felt so much pure, distilled lust trickle-feeding under her skin.

With a hot little smile, Hermione gathered her robes in her hands and slowly pulled them upward, revealing her low heels and her every day, ordinary knickers. She kept her eyes locked on his as she stood, waiting, silently begging him to find out for himself.

For a moment, he looked at her, unsmiling. His hand slid over her skin, down her flat belly, and down to her knickers, where he eased a single fingertip into the waistband, enjoying the satiny skin that rivaled the softness of the fabric. Hermione closed her eyes and waited, breathless with anticipation.

"I gave you an order, pet," he murmured, his voice deceptively sweet and soft. "Show me how wet you are."

He could hear her breathing increase as she tentatively slipped her hand down past his, to the dark patch of curls between her thighs, and gasped as her fingers brushed over her slick folds and teasingly flickered across her distended clitoris. She was shamefully wet, as randy as a teenager, and thought she might come with a few whispered words and a single, insistent finger.

Severus scowled. In a mildly reproachful tone, he reprimanded, "I did not give you permission to pleasure yourself, Hermione." At the sound of her name, she reluctantly withdrew her fingers, slick with the evidence of her arousal. He caught her wrist in his hand, and with a smile of anticipation, he sucked the moisture from each finger slowly, his eyes closed, as if enjoying the most delicious delicacy.

Whimpering, she watched him as he rolled and cradled her fingers with his tongue, the warm slippery muscles gliding over her fingertips with practiced sensuality. The saddle between her thighs grew thicker, and that sweet little ache in her cunt made Hermione shudder. She nuzzled against her husband's neck, his scent making her mouth water. "Severus, please, make love to me."

He finished his sensuous repast, then allowed her hand to drop by her side. Looking into her eyes, he cupped her chin, so that she had no choice but to meet his fathomless gaze.

"Is that really what you want me to do? To lay you down like an empty dress, feeding you sweet kisses and ending out the evening with the simple satisfaction of a man coupling with his woman?" His hand on her chin was gentle but firm. "You led me to believe you wanted ... more."

Hermione froze. "You know what I want. You know what I need. You've always known, haven't you?"

"Yes. But I had to be certain you knew, as well."

Hermione closed her eyes, and an almost painful expression clouded her features. In desperation, she knelt at his feet, and in his Death Eater robes he seemed twice as tall. "Do you want me to beg? Do you want me to be your slave? I'll do it. I want it, too." She felt close to tears. The thought that he might spurn her again was almost unbearable.

"Severus, I love you, and I'll do anything you ask, just please, please allow me in. Allow me to be what you need as well. I want to know what it feels like to completely surrender to you. I want to know what it feels like to be your slave." When he did not answer, she cried recklessly. "Please say yes, Severus, please! I promise I'll do anything you want!"

He knew he should stop this; he had vowed never to feed that sleeping tiger again *But this is Hermione*, that slow, sludgy voice insisted, the one that still had power over his cock and balls. *She wants it, she craves it, give her what she wants she wants you she'll do anything you ask make her make her fuck get her*

Severus looked down at her for a long time. When he at last spoke, his voice was cool, distant. "What about what I want, Hermione? Do I want to dominate, humiliate and demean you? Do I want to hurt you, break your spirit? Do I want you to crawl to me, so that I may punish you and reduce you to an automaton, existing only to do my bidding?"

She looked at him, her face full of doubt and conflict. Finally, Severus shook his head. "No. I wanted those things once. They were given me, and they were as irresistible as a drug, and I took them. But it is a shallow, hollow power, to force someone to do those things in spite of their will to do otherwise."

She slumped briefly, and he could see the confusion mixed with worry clouding her eyes. Severus took her by the arms and pulled her to her feet, his heart aching to see her obvious apprehension at the thought of displeasing him. He gentled his trembling wife.

"I would never subjugate your will to mine. However," he hesitated, and sighed. "I would be lying if I said the thought of playing these games with you doesn't arouse me. But you must understand it would be on my terms. If you truly wish to submit to me, you submit to me completely. Can you do that?"

"Yes, sir," she said immediately. "Please give me the chance to prove it. Please," she whispered, and leaned her head back and closed her eyes. She had done and said all she could. The rest was up to him.

Finally, he touched her face, his fingers warm and familiar, and Hermione turned her head and pressed her lips to them. He made a soft little sound.

"Yes, pet," he soothed, his voice dark and honeyed, "If you choose to submit to me, I will give this to you. If I deem it necessary to discipline you, you will consent to it or it will not happen. I will spank you and reward you, and give you the pleasures I should have given you long ago. You will be pampered and petted as well as dominated and punished. I have held back in fear and doubt. I will not do so now."

Weak with relief, Hermione put her arms around him and pressed against him; rubbing against his robes shamelessly, inarticulate with the need to touch him, to be touched. Inexplicably, she felt tears prick her eyes. "So you will do this? You won't hold back from me?" She pulled back and looked up at him. "Will you be my my..." Her face flushed. "My Master?"

He brushed a stray curl from her forehead, and traced her delicate brows with his long fingers. "I can be. But you must trust that I know best." He began to stroke her hair, her arms, her waist, and suddenly he lifted her in his arms, and carried her to the edge of the bed. He sat down and enfolded her in his lap. "Oh, yes, my little one. I know exactly what you want." His large hand caressed her cheek, and he pulled her down to his lips in a searing kiss.

He had never kissed her this way. In ten years, never like this!

It was a kiss that made her fully aware of her entire mouth, and his possession of it. There was no teasing, cajoling glide of tongue against lips, requesting entrance. It was a kiss that broke her open like a treasure chest bursting with secrets. He plundered her mouth greedily, his tongue hard and penetrating, stealing her breath and her will. There was no pulling away from it; he wouldn't allow it. She felt lightheaded; she needed to breathe ...

Somehow he was laying her down on the bed, punishing her with kisses that tasted of fire and burnt sugar and elf-made wine, and she could do nothing but revel in them and pull him closer.

She made a startled, gasping sound that frightened her, especially when she realized her fingers were wrapped in his long hair, pulling him deeper into her mouth with an eager desperation that left her writhing, held down by his embrace. When he finally pulled away, she tried to follow him, but he would not allow it. They were both panting like runners.

She put her arms around his neck to bring him closer, but he held her back. "My kiss, my pace." His lips were so close to hers she could feel the movement of them as he spoke; she could feel the soft puff of his breath. He smiled. "I think I'll have to fuck that mouth." His tongue flicked across her bottom lip and darted away elusively. "It's so very sweet; all pink and plump and swollen from my kisses. Would you let me fuck your mouth, pet?"

She tried to insinuate her hand into his robes. "Yes, please, fuck me -"

His large hand closed on her wrist and pulled it away. "It is enough that I know what you want. You have to trust that."

Hermione undulated against him, and reached for his buttons. Almost gently, he pushed her hand away, his tone mildly admonishing. He had never denied her before.

"No, no, my girl. This is not the time to give in to weakness. We have to talk about this. You must exercise a bit of self-control."

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but quickly shut it. She had just declared she wanted him to dominate her, and now she was about to challenge his decisions. She took a deep breath and laughed shakily, again fighting unexpected tears. "Well, you certainly have my attention!"

He nodded sagely, and she could see that he, too, was forcing his needs in check; he was making a much better job of it than she.

He allowed her a few moments to calm herself before he rose from the bed, and pulled them both into a sitting position. When he spoke, his voice rolled through her like the deepest river, and she allowed herself to be swept away, even when his words troubled or shocked her.

"Hermione, before we proceed, I will tell you now that outside these walls, we are the same wizard and witch we were yesterday or the day before. You are a strong, passionate, caring woman, and I would have you no other way. You are stubborn, willful and intelligent, and I will stifle none of that. Those are reasons I love you. But here, in the sanctum of our privacy, you will be my treasured babe, my little one. And I will give you what you need so badly."

His hands drifted across her skin, and parted her robes with a wandless spell. She shivered to feel his hand caressing her collarbone, her soft thigh. "First and foremost, this about trust. You must trust me to give you everything you need. Secondly, this is about obedience." He trailed his fingers over her breasts with a touch so feather light her skin goosebumped. "Are you ready to trust and obey me?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes." She felt painfully aroused. Before she could stop herself, she whispered, "Will you talk dirty to me?"

To her surprise, he graced her with a knowing smile. "I won't be calling you a little slut, if that's what you want." Without warning he pinched her nipple, causing her to yelp in surprise, and he bared his teeth in a lecherous sneer. Purring like a large black cat, he smirked, "I will tell you your cunt smells delicious, and if you are very good girl, I might just have to give it a little lick."

He pronounced each word with the slow, compelling click of a stiletto on a stone floor, a mélange of tongues and teeth and lascivious intent. When Hermione licked her lips, he pinched her bottom lip between his thumb and forefinger, forcing her mouth open. He sneered as her tongue darted out to lick the tip of his finger.

His eyes narrowed slightly at her flushed face. His voice grew cooler. "Tell me the truth, Hermione. In this bed, do you truly wish to be stripped bare of everything but the desire to trust me, to submit to me?"

Hermione was shaking; she had not been this nervous the first day she arrived at Hogwarts. Finally, she swallowed, and whispered, "Yes, sir."

Severus hummed his approval. "Very good, little one. And will you consent to be punished and soothed by my hand when I deem it necessary?"

Hermione could barely move. As concerned as she was by this aspect of their games, she spoke as if compelled. "Yes, sir. I promise I will."

He took her hand, and turned it face up, and placed a warm, soft kiss in the centre of her palm, touching his tongue to her flesh. "I am pleased. You're a good girl," he crooned lovingly.

Hermione whimpered at his praise, and Severus knew he had her. Hermione could not resist praise, and when he repeated that she was his 'good girl,' her eyes dilated and her nipples grew rock hard.

He leaned toward her, and she moaned softly as he caught her earlobe in his teeth and bit gently. In a voice silvery as smoke, he purred in her ear, "Will you allow yourself to be seduced and rewarded by me? To be subdued and pleased by my cock? To come at the sound of my voice?"

She felt like a butterfly, pinned to him by a hypnotic, seductive spell. "Please," she whispered, her voice almost whining with need.

"Very good, pet. I do so enjoy hearing you beg." He made a motion for her to stand, and Hermione rose to her feet on unsteady legs. Severus held her until she was able to stand on her own. He looked down at her, and began to slowly unbutton his robe. "Then we will begin soon."

Hermione fell back to earth with a thud. She looked up at him, her eyes bewildered. "S-soon? But-"

The eyes that looked down on her were no longer snapping with fire. They were her husband's eyes, dark, liquid and patient. "I want you to think about this and be sure, Hermione. If this is what you truly want, I will give it to you. I want only your happiness."

He stroked her face, his long fingers trailing across her cheek softly. "If you say no, it will be as if none of this had happened. We will be as we always were, and I will love you as I always have and always will with my whole heart.

"If, however, you say yes, then from now on, when we come together as lovers, you will submit to me. I will give you this gratification, and you will give me your trust and obedience." He managed a smile. "However, I am not such a bastard as to give you reason to disobey. But if I wish to spank you, I will, with your full consent. You will trust me that I know what you need, and I will reward you with pleasure."

Hermione shivered. How could one man give one word so many facets and possibilities?

He placed a warm kiss on her forehead, and stepped back. "Three days from now, Hermione. Between now and then, you will do something for me."

"Yes, sir." She looked up at him with such breathless anticipation, waiting for instructions, and in spite of all the years that had passed, Severus could still see the eager, young Gryffindor who had irritated him with her endless hand-waving, and had later earned his grudging respect with her relentless, stubborn resourcefulness.

A wave of affection filled his heart, and at that moment, he fell in love with his wife over again. She was such a lovely little swot. Even being assigned homework excited her. It made his heart nearly burst with the knowledge that this gorgeous little witch loved him so much. He came very close to pulling her back down onto the bed with him.

Instead he said. "For the next three days, you will have a writing assignment. If you complete it each day, then we will proceed."

Hermione bit her lip. Tentatively, she replied, "Yes, sir." He nodded, then walked toward the bed. Unable to stop herself, she blurted, "Does this mean we won't you won't-"

"Make love to you? No, I won't. Until you give me your answer, yes, or no. Then we will. The way you want." He saw her shoulders droop, and he smiled indulgently. "It doesn't mean I won't touch you, or kiss you, or be any less of a husband to you." He held out his arms to her. "Come here, little girl."

She all but leapt into his arms. He embraced her, enfolding her completely against his chest. His embrace told her so many things; his warmth soothed her and eased her agitated mind. The hands that stroked her back reminded her that he desired and needed her as much as she wanted him. The warm mouth that slid against her cheek promised so many delights, and when she pressed hard against him, he was hard and hot and familiar against her belly.

"Yes, witch," he crooned, acknowledging the evidence of his arousal. "Yes, I want you. There are moments in my study in which I am overwhelmed at my need, my craving for you. Do not mistake me, Hermione. I have held myself in check for the last six years, afraid of frightening you with my own base urges. I want this as well."

He pulled away from her, and his cock surged painfully at the sight of her upturned face, her trusting, hopeful expression. At that moment, he wanted her so badly he almost broke his own rule. With a mental shake, he pulled himself together.

He favoured her with an indulgent smile. "Tomorrow evening, I want a foot of parchment. I want you to tell me, in detail, a fantasy you would like for us to enact. I require

place, time, dialogue, clothing. Leave out no detail." He watched her absorb this information, and nod her agreement.

He continued, "Each night for three nights. A different fantasy. I want you to be completely honest. There are no taboos here, Hermione." He stroked her cheek, "You will be safe in the knowledge that nothing you say or do will shock or repulse me; nothing will be denied you. I will make all of your fantasies come true. There is no safer place to explore your desires than with me."

Hermione nodded, thrilled at his words. "Thank you." They were actually going to do it. "I understand, s -" She stopped, confused. "I'm not sure what I'm supposed to call you." He chuckled, and she felt a little less foolish. "Well, I don't! I feel like such a neophyte, all of a sudden." She sobered. "I'm afraid of doing something wrong."

He tilted his head again, a gesture she found imminently sweet. "Don't be. Call me Severus." His eyes grew warm. "I have always enjoyed the sound of my name on your lips, especially when you are coming undone around my cock."

Hermione felt her face grow warm. To distract him from her blushes, she replied, "Just Severus? Not Master, or Daddy, or sir or professor -"

He smirked. Silently, he drawled, "Do feel free, my love. Call me as you see me. Call me what fits your fantasies and your need at that given time." He stroked her cheek. "Whatever I am called, that is how I will respond."

"And how would *you* like to be addressed? Miss Granger? Pet? Little one?" His voice dropped slightly. "My very good girl?" Her eyes told him his answer. He turned away from her, and began to remove the Death Eater robes.

"At the end of each day, for the next three days, you will turn in your written assignments to me, and then I will ask you if you wish to proceed. If you say no, we will put the matter behind us, and we will return to our old life."

Hermione chewed on her bottom lip. "And if I still say yes at the end of the three days?"

Severus turned the full battery of his stormy eyes on her. They glistened like hematite in the dim light. "Then we will begin. I confess, pet, I find the idea of presenting our normal selves out there," he gestured toward their door, and to the rest of the world beyond, "and knowing the unspeakable things I am going to do to you in here, to be very ... arousing."

She watched him hungrily as he dropped the robe from his shoulders, and stood bare-chested in the middle of their bed chambers. The robe still hung from his waist, from the velvet and satin belt. He looked like a decadent, debauched version of Merlin, pale and ascetic, with appetites too deep too fathom, too tempting not to explore. He seemed to glow in contrast to the deep black of the robe, and Hermione looked away.

Sometimes Severus Snape was too beautiful to look at.

That night, when they went to bed, he spooned against her and kissed her gently. "From now on, pet, no knickers under your robes. Not even while teaching."

He felt her stiffen, and almost laughed. He could almost see the wheels turning in her head, and he mentally counted to five.

At four and a half, she blurted, "May I ask why?"

Severus smiled, and caressed her flat stomach. His fingers slid down to her labia, and it parted effortlessly, coating his fingers with her moisture. She whimpered, and thrust against him. As she rubbed relentlessly against his fingers, he murmured soothingly, "No, no, no. Mustn't come yet. That will be later. Self-control. Not wearing knickers will remind you that you have been obedient, and you will be rewarded for it. It will also remind you that I will make you come the moment you tell me 'no' in the next three days, as well."

Hermione tried to calm her taut body as his fingers slid from her. She turned to watch him lick his fingers, a look of orgasmic satisfaction on his face. She could feel his erection pressing against the cleft of her arse. He was rock hard. She muttered ruefully, "You're making it very tempting to say no."

He smiled and put his arms around her again. "This is one-time offer, Hermione. One 'no' is all you get. But if you are willing to be patient and self-disciplined, I promise you I will ensure it will be worth the wait, in every way."

Hermione grew quiet again, and just as Severus reached nine, she blurted, "This is part of it, isn't it? You have already begun, haven't you? This is a test of my submission!"

To her surprise, he laughed. "Is it?" He rewarded her with another warm kiss on her shoulder. "Goodnight, little girl." She heard his whispered, "*Nox*", and the light was extinguished.

Soon after, Hermione heard his breathing slow down and deepen, and as much as she wanted to rest and sleep, she could not. Her mind raced. She thought of everything she knew about her husband. Severus had never disappointed her, never lied, never even looked at another woman. He was quiet, fair and blissfully virtuous. Their marriage was solid, serene and stable to the core.

He had changed since the dark days of the war. He had grown into a calmer, less volatile version of her former professor. It was true, he had never managed to suffer fools gladly, and he could be positively snarky when the need arose. Oh, yes, he could still be the biggest, most belligerent, obstinate, unreasonable git in the Wizarding world, when he so chose. Still, male students sometimes emulated him, and female students often crushed over him.

Did she trust him? Yes, more than anyone - more, even, than Ron and Harry. Did she want to give herself over to his ultimate sexual control? She thought she might. She also thought of his past and realised he might truly be capable of doing some rather degenerate things to her without worrying too much about them.

Three days didn't seem to be enough time to settle her turbulent mind over something that could affect the rest of their lives.

The next day Hermione and Severus rose with no discernable deviation in their usual routine. They rose and dressed as always, except that Severus caught her arm as they were about to leave their rooms. "Wait, Hermione."

She turned to him, puzzled, and he held out his hand imperiously. Hermione stared at him blankly, then made a little "oh!" sound, as realization dawned. Sheepishly, she gave him the hem of her robe, and he raised the edge diffidently, almost clinically. Beneath, he saw her lovely little flat shoes, and nothing else.

He nodded. "Good girl, well done. I am very pleased." The robes dropped from his hand, and he kissed her; soft, enticing, slow kisses that caused her crotch to throb in time with her heartbeat. He pulled away very gently until she was clinging to him. His obsidian eyes were soft, but there was a heat behind them that made Hermione shiver.

He shook his head, and his voice was slightly less steady that he would have liked. "I will expect your assignment to be completed and handed in to me at the end of the day."

Hermione smiled at him. "I'll work on it during my break, sir." She favoured him with a cheeky grin. "I trust I will not disappoint."

He smirked. "It never occurred to me you would, my little swot." He kissed her again, and together they headed for the Great Hall for their breakfast.

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Special thanks to all of you for sticking with the story thus far - all your comments are wonderful!

Jules, my beta, deserves special recognition for being so good to me.

This chapter contains fantasies that include explicit sexual content.

A game is like a mirror that allows you to look at yourself.

Robert Kiyosaki

The owl brought the parchment to him shortly after two in the afternoon, and Severus allowed himself a laugh. He might have known she would be too abashed to bring her first fantasy to him herself. Then again, he thought, warding his study door, it might be even more enjoyable to read her fantasies in the solitude of his own study. He recalled that she would often be the last student to leave her assignments on his desk, simply to avoid seeing his often withering reaction to her work. His heart swelled. Reading her assignments had never been this eagerly anticipated.

In her precise, crisp handwriting, she wrote:

It is the dead heat of summer, and the castle is quiet, now that the students are gone for the holiday. I have graduated from Hogwarts, but I have not yet returned to teach. I have come to visit Professor McGonagall and to escape the stifling heat, I wander down to the cool halls of the dungeons, and almost automatically I drift into the Potions lab. I find myself approaching my old work bench, and I look up at your desk and see your robe draped over your chair. It never occurs to me that you might actually be about during this time of year. I call your name; there is no answer.

I cannot help myself. I have seen you in that robe so many times. I think about it floating behind you like angel's wings as you marched down the hall, how powerful and menacing you were. I look around; no one is there but me. I cannot resist - I pick up your robe. It smells of you: patchouli and cedar and black pepper, and I bury my nose into the collar, intoxicated by your scent and the knowledge that you will never know I was here, shamelessly rubbing your robe over my chest ...

"Miss Granger? Might I inquire as to the exact reason why I find you here?" I freeze, and when I look around you are standing in the doorway, glowering at me. You are wearing a crisp white collarless shirt with your black vest and trousers. As I watch, you slowly roll up your sleeves, as if in preparation ... for what, I can only imagine.

My mouth is dry. I cannot answer you. I just stand there, watching you approach me, silently pleading for the ground to swallow me, to do anything but what I am anticipating. I fully expect you to rip me to shreds for touching your property. In just your shirtsleeves, you seem at once approachable and more sinister.

When you are mere inches from me, I lower my head, hoping you will take pity, but it does not come. "Answer me, Miss Granger," you hiss, and I can smell you - it is the same scent as your robe, but with an undercurrent of your own musk, and my mouth starts to water.

"I'm sorry, sir," I whisper. "I couldn't help myself."

"I see. Turn around, Miss Granger," you command, and I obey you instantly. I feel your hands slide up my thighs and I shiver. I'm so wet, just from the scent of your robes. "What a dirty little witch," you whisper in my ear, and I close my eyes as your hand slips into my knickers. Your fingers tease my clit and I start to shake. "Such a naughty girl, so very wet." My knees buckle, and you catch me around the waist.

"Bend over, Miss Granger," you command, and you force me down onto the desk, face first. The robe is still in my hands and it ends up draped on the desk, and I am lying on it. You throw my skirt over my back and yank my knickers from my body, literally tearing them away, until my bottom is exposed to the room. You place your feet between mine and widen your stance, forcing my legs far apart, and I know you can see and feel how wet I am for you. I can feel you stroking my bottom, and your fingers brush against my clit, and it feels like my pussy is on fire.

You are purring in my ear, "Such a tender little bottom, Miss Granger. I wonder what it would be like to spank it, until it's warm and rosy beneath my hands? Would that excite you? Your cunt is already dripping wet, my girl. Such a dirty girl."

Your hand comes down on my backside, hard, and I cry out, and I'm panting. "Oh, did that hurt, Miss Granger?" you say, pretending to be concerned. "You don't seem too hasty to flee. You can, you know. You can just stand and leave. But that's not what you truly want, is it?"

When I don't reply, you smack my bottom again, harder. "Answer me, Miss Granger! Do you wish to leave?"

I can barely speak, but I manage to whisper, "No."

Another smack. "No, what?" Your hand comes down in a different place, making me cry out.

"No, sir!"

"I didn't think so, Miss Granger. What you want, you shall receive."

You spank me, hard, until I'm sobbing. It hurts, but it feels good, as if it's something I needed and didn't know it, or it's something I knew I wanted but couldn't ask for. When you finish, my bottom is sore, and you make little comforting noises as your fingers slide into my cunt. "Now, you must be a good girl and come for me." You are teasing my clit and I'm shaking and it feels so good. "You like this, don't you, Miss Granger? You like having your professor finger fucking you, don't you? Say it!"

"Yes!"

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, I like you finger fucking me, sir!" A hard smack on my sensitive arse makes me cry out, "I love it!"

"I know," you say, almost as if you are baby-talking to me. "I'm going to make you come, witch, and when I do, I'm going to fuck you until you scream. Now, there we go ... let's see you come... oh yes, such a good girl ... that's it ... come for me!"

You make me climax on command, and as I'm lying on the table, I can sense you are unbuttoning your trousers. I feel your cock against my pussy; it is hot and hard and so big I know it will fill me, and I want it so bad I can almost taste it. You thrust into me, hard, and I scream.

"Take it, witch! Milk my cock," you growl. You fuck me hard, pounding into me. You are moaning my name, telling me to be a good little girl and come for Daddy, and I scream as I obey your command.

"Are you my little toy? Yes, oh, yes, you are. My tight, wet little toy. I'm going to enjoy fucking you, you delicious tart. Everyone thinks you're so innocent - what would they think if they saw you, bent over my desk, screaming my name as I fuck your sweet little cunt?"

Suddenly you pull away from me and pull me upright by my hair. "I'll bet a bad little girl like you would let me come in your mouth, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you look delectable with my come all over your face? Turn around, now!"

I turn around to see you stroking yourself. Your eyes are blazing, demonic with lust, and you whisper, "Get on your knees."

I obey you and I open my mouth like a baby bird, ready for your essence. I am thirsting for it. As you stroke your cock, I reach out and cup your balls in my hand. They are heavy and tight, and I know you will orgasm soon. Your eyes grow wide, and the look of helpless abandon on your face nearly makes me swoon.

You hold onto my hair as you come in my mouth, and the force of it spurts it onto my cheeks and my chin as well. You shout hoarsely as you climax; calling me a good girl. Your face is beautiful with pained pleasure. You pull me to my feet, and grasp my head in your hands. The look on your face is so intense; for a moment, I think you are going to insult me and call me dirty names, and I don't know if I want you to or not.

Instead, you take a deep breath, and lean toward me. You kiss my forehead and whisper my name, and then you say the dirtiest, filthiest thing you've said since I walked in the door.

"Hmm ... Outstanding. Ten points to Gryffindor, Miss Granger."

I whimper with a combination of lust and humiliation. You smirk at me. "While I do enjoy seeing my semen dripping from your pretty face, you may wish to perform a cleansing charm before resuming your visit with Minerva."

Finally, you move away from me, and I lean back on the desk, trembling. I can feel your spunk on my chin. As you walk away, I can only manage to say, "Sir, I still have your coat."

You turn back, and gesture to your coat, sneering, "You will return tomorrow night, wearing that. Wearing only that. Be here at eight o'clock." You turn to leave. "Do not be late, Miss Granger. Tardiness will entail certain ... punishment."

I compose myself, and perform a hasty cleansing charm before I leave. I search the room, but my ruined knickers are nowhere to be seen. You must have taken them.

Severus carefully folded the parchment, his face immobile and calm. In reality, his cock was straining; he'd have to masturbate. He knew from experience this kind of erection would be impervious to thoughts of Pomona in a swim suit or Albus leering in the prefects' bath. It wouldn't meekly back down; it had been awakened by the siren's call of an illicit, dirty fantasy involving his young, nubile wife, spanking, coming on her face and dirty talk. It wouldn't leave him alone until he either threw her down on the bed or took matters in hand.

He walked quietly into his private loo and quickly took care of his problem, picturing Hermione over his desk, her red arse quivering as he drove into her. In his mind's eye, he saw her looking up at him, expectantly, readying herself to receive his cum. That vision alone was enough to send him flying over the edge.

As he came, gasping silently, he realized the simple major truth: she might be submitting to him, but he was the slave making it happen.

Later that afternoon, he welcomed Undersecretary Orchid into his study. "Good afternoon, Headmaster," the little dumpling of a man squeaked. As he took his seat opposite Headmaster Snape, he flinched in anticipation. Everyone in the Ministry had warned him that, even after all these years, the subject of Harry Potter was not a pleasant one for Headmaster Snape.

Orchid pursed his lips primly. "Sir, I wonder if you might consider allowing us to annex a bit more of the school? W-We were hoping to increase the footprint of the Potter display to make room for a triptych, featuring your wife and Ronald Weasley on either side you know, the Golden Trio?"

Severus thought of his wife, bent over his Potions desk, her luscious arse his to fondle. He smiled.

"Mr. Orchid, you're in luck today. You've caught me in a very ... expansive mood."

That evening, Hermione and Severus sat propped up in bed, reading. Turning a page of her novel, Hermione asked, "Did you receive my parchment today?"

"I did," was the laconic reply. Hermione glanced at her husband. He was reading a copy of the *Daily Prophet*, late edition.

She returned to her novel. Three pages later, she asked, "Did I please you?"

Without looking up from the editorial, he answered, "I allowed Orchid to increase the size of the Harry Potter exhibit today. It has its own wing now."

He turned the page, and she returned to her novel, a tiny, happy smile dancing at the edges of her lips.

On Thursday, as they sat down to dinner in the Great Hall, Hermione placed a folded sheet of parchment on Severus' plate. He looked at her, a question in his eyes, and after the rest of the room began to tuck into their evening meal, Severus boldly opened the parchment and began to read:

Snow is falling. It has been the reason for a thousand different frustrations this day, involving reckless and distracted students, and I've spent most of the day attending sprained ankles and nursing bruised egos. It is late, and I enter our bed chambers tired and irritable. I have had a terrible day; everything has gone wrong, and I just want to have a drink of wine and read until bedtime.

As I enter the bed chamber, you greet me with a kiss. You are naked, and I pause to enjoy the slender planes of your body. You know the kind of day I've had; I am looking

forward to your special method of relaxation.

"I have a treat for you, pet," you say, holding me tightly. You give me a deep kiss, and as I melt in your arms, I feel another set of arms encircle me from behind, and I whirl around to see you again!

I look from one Severus to another. I can see little difference, except that one of you is vibrant, warm and alive; the other is paler, quieter, the skin cool to the touch. I turn to the Severus behind me, because I can tell it is you, the real Severus.

"Polyjuice?" I say uncertainly. I don't like the idea of being shared with another man; more to the point, I am frightened. Are you trying to tell me you want me to share YOU with another man?

"No," you smile, answering both the spoken and unspoken questions. The other Severus caresses my hair and my arms. "This is a Tulpa, a homunculus. I have created him for one night, to give you pleasure."

The Tulpa undresses me as you stroke and caress me. The two of you share a silent telepathy that I cannot fathom, and as he removes my clothing, your hands fondle my breasts. I feel the cool skin of the SeverusTulpa against my back; his erection is hotter than his skin, and he cups my breasts as if to present them to you as a gift.

You respond, leaning down, suckling me, licking my nipples until they are so hard they ache. All the while the SeverusTulpa kisses my neck, my shoulders, and my back. Soon, he releases my breasts, and lifts me in his arms, and together you take me to our bed.

You lie on either side of me, and while your fingers slide into my pussy, he is kissing me. His kisses feel like yours, but his skin is still cool. I am almost outside myself, between the two of you. It feels like the ultimate magic, being pleased by two Severus Snapes.

Two identical mouths close over my nipples, melting my will and my thoughts. As you suck and nip, another set of fingers join the first in my pussy. Knowing fingers tease my clit, while others slide into my cunt, my rectum. The SeverusTulpa mounts me and begins to fuck me. It feels like you, and I am almost mindless with pleasure. I look up into his face, and he smiles at me.

"He is fucking you, my pretty one," you whisper in my ear, your hand between us, rubbing my clit hard. "And it will be my turn next. He will not cease to be until you beg us to stop, and only then will he disappear." Your kisses are hard and demanding, and he fucks me harder as you whisper your dirty promises to me.

At an unspoken command, he rises from me, and I beg you not to stop. The two of you turn me over, until I am on my hands and knees, and he thrusts into me again. You kneel before me and guide your hard cock into my mouth. "Suck me," you say, and you sound decadent, like some pagan prince commanding a slave girl for your pleasure. "Suck my prick, little one. Take it all. Milk my cock with that sweet mouth of yours."

I can hardly concentrate. The Tulpa is gentle, but I want more; it's like an itch that needs to be scratched, and you are both teasing me to the point of insanity. You are pleased with how I'm sucking you, but soon you pull away from me, and another unspoken signal is given between you and the Tulpa.

He lies down beside me, and you gently guide me over him until I am impaled on his cock. You push me down onto his chest, and he puts his arms around me and rocks me gently, murmuring soft sounds to me. From behind, I feel your hands parting my bum cheeks, and I almost scream as I feel your breath against my bottom and I know you are about to lick me. It is wrong and taboo and I should feel shame, but all I can feel is your warm tongue flicking against my little hole, and the Tulpa's cock filling my cunt. It feels beyond pleasurable, and I am moaning your name with each breath.

Soon your tongue is replaced by your long fingers sliding into my waiting rectum. It hurts at first, but you are patient, and so is your Tulpa, who is nuzzling my nipples and sucking at them like a baby.

I feel your cock at my entrance; I cannot imagine I will be able to accommodate you both, but you are rocking against me as well. "Pant," you say, sliding your hands over my back. You are aroused and your voice is ragged, harsh. "Pant, little girl, like the bitch in heat you are." Your voice is hoarse, and it has a note of warning on it, which only excites me more. I obey you and pant. Finally I bear down and you slide into my tight little hole, and the two of you fill me until I feel I will die of ecstasy.

You instruct me how to move between you, and the two of you fuck me, moving me like a delicate doll between you. "My beautiful girl," you whisper, playing with my clit. "You're such a good girl, letting us fuck your pretty little cunt and your tight little arse, letting me fuck you with my own likeness."

Your voice is rough and I can hear you losing control, wanting to give over to your need and your pleasure, and I plead with you to let go with me, to do whatever you want with me. You growl, "Use us. Fuck us. Come for us!"

I beg you to fuck me harder, and two sets of hands hold me in place and drive into me until I am incoherent with pleasure. Both of you are thrusting into me, hard, and it feels as if I'm floating between the two of you. I feel my orgasm burst within me, and you hold me against your chest as I scream and shudder with the intensity of this climax.

When you come, I hear your shout of completion, and feel your hot seed pulsing deep within me. I feel helpless, trapped between you, and I collapse against the Tulpa as you pull away, panting, spent. You gently lift me from the bed and take me in your arms, crooning to me, praising me, telling me that I've pleased you.

Together we lie on our bed, and I nestle in your arms. I feel the SeverusTulpa nestle against my back. I am surrounded by warmth and love, and I fall asleep in this tangle of limbs and soft kisses, the object of your complete and total domination and concentration.

Severus was at once shocked and thrilled by the audacity of his wife. Coupled with his stunned admiration for her deviant imagination was a certain pleasure in being able to read and absorb this informative missive while calmly tucking into his Shepherd's Pie. Beside him, Hermione lifted a forkful of spinach salad to her lips, and he watched intently as she licked a droplet of viscous dressing from her bottom lip with both evident enjoyment and false innocence.

You dirty little Gryffindor, he marveled. Imaginative, I'll give you that. And entirely possible. Not for the first time Severus was grateful for robes. He had risen and hardened almost the moment he started reading the fantasy, and knowing his wife was sitting beside him, nonchalantly eating her dinner as he read her most lascivious thoughts was intoxicating. It smacked of the forbidden, the shameful.

Wicked little vixen. He wanted to fuck her on this table. One day, he would do it. Soon.

His hand drifted under the table, to her robes, and he stroked her thigh gently. She rewarded him with a brilliant smile, and he returned to his dinner. Who would have thought the bookish Madam Snape capable of sexual fantasies involving her husband and a conjured, magical double of himself, pleasuring her in such a depraved, wanton fashion?

He whispered a spell as one finger traced a line along her thigh, and Hermione felt Severus' hand slide into a newly-made slit in her robe. She obediently parted her legs to give him access to her slick labia. She was almost constantly wet these days; she wondered if she should be more ashamed of it than she actually was.

Severus' thumb and middle finger peeled back her labia while his index finger circled her clit, then tapped against it gently, causing her to drop her fork against her plate. The clatter went unnoticed in the general noisiness of the Hall, but it served to make his point, and Severus idly withdrew his hand. The slit in Hermione's robe sealed itself

the moment he took his hand away.

On Severus' left side, Filius Flitwick dabbed his mouth and sat back with a sigh. "Lovely meal tonight, wasn't it, Headmaster?"

Severus, licking the tip of his right index finger, nodded. "An excellent repast indeed, Filius." He risked a glance at Hermione's flushed face, and stroked her thigh soothingly.

Hermione smiled as she sealed the last parchment. For the last three days, she had been in a constant state of arousal. This, she thought, must be how animals on heat feel restless, distracted, irritable, uncomfortable. She had been perfectly beastly to her fifth-year Hufflepuffs today she'd even called poor Donall Peasall a dunderhead, for Merlin's sake! Of course, she'd apologized to the class later, but she couldn't exactly tell them the reason for her snappish behavior.

I'm sorry, class, but my sadistic husband, your beloved Headmaster, has kept me in a state of heightened sexual frustration since Tuesday evening, and I'm going to spontaneously combust into a cloud of orgasmic confetti if he doesn't shag me rotten very, very soon.

Oh, Severus had been the soul of sweetness for the past three days. Hermione would have accused him of duplicity, had he not cheerfully confessed that while he enjoyed petting his wife, this was a deliberate attempt on his part to stir her into a state of madness. She couldn't chastise him or make demands. Wasn't that the entire point of this exercise - to learn to trust him, to obey and submit to him?

She had been obeying, and the look of promise in his dark eyes at the end of each day had given her a wonderful sense of accomplishment. He had worked very hard throughout their marriage to make up for the lean years during which he'd gone out of his way to deflate her ego, but this was different. This was meeting him on terms she'd never tried to master; seeking his approval and not finding it wanting was heady stuff. She smiled. He knew her so well.

And there were the moments when their eyes would meet, and she could see the fire. It was not a soulful smoldering ember; she had felt that warmth many times in their marriage. This was something uncontrollable, only a little tame, that made his eyes look both darker and more luminous.

It made him look like the professor of her youth. It was the possessive, hungry look of a man who could and would commit acts upon her that few men would dare, and she would submit to them, give in to them, revel in them and thank him for them.

Hermione sighed. Three of the longest days of her life. It never occurred to her to question whether or not it was worth it. Hermione smiled, and shivered at the thought of him.

Severus Snape was always worth it.

Undersecretary Orchid had, in the past two days, completely revised his opinion of Hogwarts' dour Headmaster. His contemporaries scoffed in disbelief when he defended the taciturn, formerly uncooperative man. Now, he touted him as a helpful, pleasant wizard with a great deal of personal charm, and, Orchid also blushing mused, a great deal of sexual magnetism. Severus would have torn the little wizard's arse into new and interesting shapes had he discovered that little revelation, and instinctively the Undersecretary kept that opinion to himself.

He would illustrate his point when next he had a pint with his cronies by describing this current meeting. Here it was, early Friday afternoon, and the Headmaster was relaxed, calm and accommodating. From behind his desk, Headmaster Snape was the very picture of pleasant cooperation, and ground-breaking on the installation would actually commence ahead of schedule.

Unbeknownst to the officious little man, the Headmaster was languidly stroking his swollen cock behind the desk, having finished reading Hermione's third fantasy only moments before. Severus was practically oozing good will, but there was a certain tension in his face that Orchid mistook for fatigue at the end of a long, trying week. He was not far from wrong.

"Everything seems to be in order, Secretary Orchid. I look forward to the workers arriving a week from Monday. That will give us time to arrange their accommodations." The Headmaster glanced regretfully to his desk. "Now, I really must give these other documents my undivided attention," he said, batting his long lashes. "I'm afraid I've been focusing all my energies on the Installation, even to the detriment of academic matters."

Orchid jumped from his chair, apologizing profusely for monopolizing the Headmaster's time, all the while assuring him that everything would be done according to his wishes.

"Lovely. I have perfect faith in you, Mr. Orchid. I trust you can see yourself out." *Unless you wish to seeme with myself out*, he thought.

"Of course, sir! Please have a lovely weekend, and do pass on my regards to your lovely lady wife, sir!"

"I will. Good day, Mr. Orchid." As Severus watched the portly little wizard mince from the room, he sighed, and reluctantly gave his cock a firm, final stroke. He closed his eyes with a stifled groan. *If I continue this, I will accomplish nothing, and there is much to be done.*

Later that evening, Hermione tried to hurry down the corridor without actually looking as if there was any urgency. Severus had sent word to the faculty that he and Hermione would be unavailable for the weekend. In fact, he had not dined in the Great Hall that evening, but had asked her to preside over the meal in his absence, as he had preparations to make. He had looked at her archly as he said this, making her heart beat a little faster. She had picked at her food and fidgeted for an acceptable amount of time, then excused herself, bidding her colleagues a pleasant weekend.

She could not get to their rooms fast enough. She flew into the door of the suite and warded it with everything she could think of, including several Silencing Charms and Muffliato as well. She was breathless and a little giddy, and tried to calm herself. It would not do to appear like a giggly school girl next to her poised and controlled husband.

She was surprised to find their rooms empty. She felt a bit disappointed, and looked around despondently. It was obvious that Severus had somehow been detained.

As she entered their bed chamber, she spied a small black box sitting on her side of the bed. She approached it carefully and, almost without thinking, whisked out her wand and checked it for Dark Magic. Satisfied that the box was safe, she picked it up to inspect it. It was a stunningly lovely box made of hematite. The lid was held in place by a tiny, silver heart-shaped lock. Finding no key to open it, Hermione tapped the top of the box with her wand and murmured, "*Alohamora*."

Nothing happened. Sighing, Hermione was about to try a different, more aggressive charm when something fell from the underside of the box a letter with her name written on the front in her husband's tell-tale, spidery handwriting.

Grinning like a kid on a treasure hunt, Hermione set the little box on her bedside table and tore open the letter. Within was a small piece of parchment, and she read it quickly, her heart racing:

My dearest little girl, you have pleased me more than I can say. For three days you have obeyed me well. I have one last request of you a question. This is the final, most important assignment of all, and you must answer the question aloud, in kind.

Will you, Hermione Snape, completely and utterly submit to my will?

With a pounding heart, Hermione closed her eyes, childishly counted to three, and whispered, "I, Hermione Snape, will completely and utterly submit to your will." The

hematite box began to hum, and the heart-shaped lock sprang open and fell to the floor. The lid flew open with a clicking noise, making her jump a little. Hermione looked inside, breathless with anticipation.

On a bed of deep black velvet lay a tiny silver key. It was intricately wrought, with scrollwork and engravings running down the spine, and it gleamed like a jewel in its ebony bed.

Enraptured, Hermione reached into the box and picked up the little silver trinket. The moment her fingers closed over it, Hermione felt the sudden terrifying lurch around her middle, and she was whisked from the room in the split second it took for comprehension to dawn and for the word to form in her mouth: *Portkey!*

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Thank you to everyone who has read and reviewed so far - you've made my day!

I want to just put in another thanks to stgulik, my incredible beta, for making this particular chapter flow. She instructed me to craft it like 'an Aleister Crowley incantation', and I tried to do my best.

Please note that this chapter contains very graphic sexual content involving light bondage and discipline. The acts are safe, sane and consensual, and intended to give pleasure, not to inflict harm, but this is totally unsuitable for persons under eighteen years of age.

The only thing I would like is to have more control of the game in terms of possession. Jose Mourinho

Hermione landed on her hands and knees with a muttered "Shit!" under her breath, still clutching the tiny key. Portkey travel was the least enjoyable of Wizarding modes of transportation, even if it was the most efficient.

Standing up and brushing off her robes, Hermione looked around with a gasp. She was in what could only be a large cave, buried deep in the rock. The air was fresh, and left a salty tang on her tongue. She could hear the distant booming of surf, leading her to believe the cave must be on the coast.

The walls glittered with geodes, and the floor was so even as to appear magically leveled. Torchlight refracted gemstones in every corner; crystals of quartz, amethyst, citrine, aquamarine, emerald, ruby. Every colour of the rainbow was represented - warm, soothing kaleidoscopes of light and shade that could only be produced with powerful magic. A faint sound echoed throughout the space, like low, deep bells chiming in the wind, lulling her. Hermione had never seen or heard anything so beautiful.

As she turned toward the inside of the cave, her breath caught. Deeply cut into the side wall, a huge fireplace stood, its mantle made of crystal geodes. A roaring fire blazed within, giving the enormous space warmth. The firelight reflected in the crystals, making them gleam with unspeakable splendor.

A massive bed stood guard in one corner, its ebony posts rising impossibly high. Carvings of vines and flowers magically bloomed and shifted on the tall beams and the head and footboard, entwining over the bed itself. It was heaped with pillows and quilts of fine silk and velvet in shades of green varying from deep emerald to sage. They simply begged to be touched and laid upon. It was the most hedonistic bed Hermione had ever seen; it was all she could do not to tear her clothing from her body and lie down upon it.

Above the headboard was a huge picture rendered in stained and coloured glass. It illustrated a couple making love on the same bed that stood before it. As the man's head turned toward her, Hermione gasped with shock. It was her husband, his face transported with rapture. He lowered his lips against the woman's throat, and Hermione recognised her own countenance, alight with passion. Her body in the picture arched into her lover's kiss, writhing against Severus in erotic torment. She could not take her eyes from the sight of the dark wizard rearing above her body. It was so real as to appear like a Muggle movie projected onto a stained-glass screen.

Finally, tearing her eyes away from the two lovers, she peered down into the darkness. The cave was vast; she could not see the far end of it, even though torch-like sconces marched down the walls toward the inner walls deep inside.

"I trust you're unharmed from the journey." Hermione jumped with a little squeak of surprise, and from the impenetrable depths of the cave emerged her husband.

His pale face seemed to float from the misty gloom around him, and as he appeared, the sconces behind him blazed into life. His robe was the same unfathomable black of his eyes, and he moved with somber, unsmiling grace, his face haughty and ethereal. He looked like a pagan Prince of Darkness; proud, cruel, fierce.

No one knew how to make an entrance like Severus Snape.

To cover up her nervousness, Hermione laughed shortly. "Yes, I'm fine!" she replied, taking a shaky breath to calm her racing heart. Looking around, she asked, "What is this place? It's incredible!"

He was as still as a stone, watching her intently. Finally, when he spoke, his beautiful voice raced around the cave, until it felt as if it surrounded her on all sides. "I will answer your questions in time. For now, you are required only to speak when I give you permission. Do you accept this?"

Hermione's heart stuttered in her chest. In her initial excitement, she had almost forgotten why she had been Portkeyed here. "Yes, sir."

"Good girl," he purred, and held out his hand to her. "Come." She gratefully melted into his embrace, and gave a soft cry of fulfillment as his long arms wrapped around her invitingly.

As she pressed longingly against his lean frame, she asked breathlessly, "Did I please you?"

She could hear his voice vibrating like a low bell in his chest. "You have pleased me very much, Hermione. This calls for a special reward. We will begin." He stepped away from her, and turned to escort her deep into the back of the cave. Obediently, Hermione followed her husband into the depths. Never had she felt so feverish with want.

This was it. The moment she had longed for. She had no doubt that whatever she needed, Severus would make it so.

They walked through a long, narrow tunnel, the lights blazing into life as they passed. As they walked, Severus explained, "This cave once belonged to Dumbledore. We are on the coast of Ireland. Years ago, when you were still in school in fact, Dumbledore brought me here after my first summons when Riddle returned."

He continued as they walked, "During the war, I would often come here to recover from my meetings with Riddle and the Death Eaters. This cave became my refuge, my sanity-preserver."

Hermione watched him as they moved deeper into the recesses. Severus kept his eyes forward, moving slowly, down into the depths of the cave. "Dumbledore deeded me the cave. I found myself drawn back to this spot upon his death, and for awhile, after I recovered from the war, I actually lived here."

There were so many questions Hermione wanted to ask, but he had not as yet given her permission to speak. Severus continued, "When you and I agreed to enter this ... agreement, I knew this was the perfect place; away from the prying eyes of Hogwarts, away from everything you had ever known, so that I was your only fixed point of reference." He stopped, and took her hand in his. "I had never considered bringing you here before, because until now, this was a place that I only associated with pain, anger and despair. I did not want to expose you to those things."

"Many nights after having to bear witness to the atrocities performed in the Dark Revels, being forced to participate or to observe, I would retreat to this place. I would weep, scream the walls down, drink myself to insensibility, all the while cursing Tom Riddle and Dumbledore. Sometimes, even Potter and you," he said, a note of regret in his voice. "Mostly myself. This cave became my counselor; it has listened to my ravings and my plots and my hurt, and the walls have absorbed them. There is darkness here; but it is *my* darkness. I knew this would be the place in which to initiate you."

He looked down at her. "The darkness has changed, but the passions and desires I left behind remain here. They are waiting for you, and some of them will frighten you." His voice was a low throbbing whisper. With a smirk, he added, "Are you afraid?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, sir," she replied, her voice suspiciously hoarse. If she were a betting witch, she would have laid odds he was thinking one word: Gryffindor.

He tilted his head, his eyes narrowing. "Perhaps you should be. We'll see." The smile that had played on his lips faded, and he added, "What have you decided will be your safe word?"

Hermione, momentarily derailed at this seemingly non sequitor, blankly replied, "Safe word?"

Severus nodded, a look of haughty disdain in his eyes. "A safe word is used when "

"F-forgive me, sir," Hermione answered, her voice unsteady. "I understand the concept of a safe word, but I didn't think-"

"No, you did not. Hence, the interruption," he drawled. With exaggerated patience, he explained, "Our interactions here together will cause you to experience a heightened... intensity, shall we say, which may overwhelm you. I will assure you, Miss Granger, begging me to stop will not be an option. Your cries for mercy will only make me ..." he smiled wolfishly. "Push. You. Harder."

Hermione suddenly felt very young and inexperienced next to his cold elegance. She tried to speak, but her mouth was dry.

"Well, pet? What is your safe word?" Each word was spoken with trip-hammer precision, as low and deadly as a viper. Hermione felt a sense of déjà vu that was frightening and exciting in equal measures. It was like being eighteen again, alone with her Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. *I will do unspeakable things to Miss Granger, and I will enjoy doing them.*

She looked up at his face; he waited with thinly disguised impatience for her answer. Fearful that her hesitation would further displease him, she said the first word that came into her head. "Bumbershoot."

Severus looked at her through heavy-lidded eyes. "Indeed."

Hermione felt confused. "Does this mean that, if I say my safe word, we won't umm," she hesitated, unsure how to word her misgivings correctly. Finally, she said, weakly, "Does this mean we would leave and never return to this?"

Severus regarded her thoughtfully. "That remains to be seen, pet. For now, it means we will stop what we are doing, and try to redress the balance, as it were. Do you understand?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes, sir."

Severus nodded, and raised his arm, like a conductor preparing to give a downbeat. The last of the wall sconces flared to life, and the walls of the cave were bathed in warm, flickering light. Severus beckoned to her. "This is your last chance to turn away, Hermione. Enter this chamber with me, and you accept all that is contained therein." He held out his hand, his cool dominance surrounding him like smoke and vapour.

Hermione could feel her hand shake as she placed her smaller hand in his. The light in the very back of the cave rose, bringing the room into view, glowing with a deep, crimson light.

She gasped. It was like looking into a medieval torture chamber.

A huge, X-shaped cross stood on one side of the floor, bristling with restraints. On one wall hung several different floggers, ranging from small paddles to a cat-o-nine tails, made from strips of soft leather. There were silken scarves, leather straps, and chains made of heavy links. An unusual chair sat on the side of the room, its arms seemingly floating independently from the rest of the chair. In the middle, a large, padded table stood waist high. It looked like something that would be found in a Muggle doctor's surgery. It, too, was covered in restraints, straps, and buckles.

Hermione stepped into the room, her heart pounding so fast she felt close to hyperventilating. So absorbed was she that when Severus placed his hand on the back of her neck she jumped a little, and he chuckled darkly.

"Afraid now, Miss Granger?"

After a moment's hesitation, Hermione nodded. She was afraid to speak, afraid she might cry. In that moment, she was as close as she would ever come to turning around and telling him she had changed her mind.

The hand on her neck was firm, and he whispered into her ear, "You should be afraid. Fear will feed my desire, pet. If you are frightened, it will be because you wish to be frightened. Do you honestly believe that anything in this room will be done without your consent?"

Hermione shook her head, relieved. "No sir." She tried to stop trembling, but he was right. The adrenaline that had been fueled by fear was turning to lust in her blood, rushing through her veins with spiky anticipation. "I want this. I want everything you wish me to experience."

"Good girl," he breathed in her ear, caressing it with his lips, and Hermione's pussy clenched almost painfully. From behind, Severus held out his hand. "Your wand."

Obediently, Hermione placed her wand in his waiting palm. At that moment, she turned and glanced upward into his eyes. He looked imperious and a little aloof, and this excited her as well as worried her a little. He knew better than most how frightening it was for anyone to relinquish their wand to another. He also knew how intimidating he could be, and he did nothing to alleviate her unease.

He stepped back, and Hermione heard him whisper, "*Lavestitusi!*" A strange movement at her shoulders made Hermione shiver, and she watched in surprise as her clothing literally melted from her body, as if it had turned to chocolate and was sliding down her skin, leaving Hermione completely naked. The air in the cave seemed to drop several degrees, and she began to tremble, whether from fear or anticipation, she was not sure. Instinctively, she crossed her arms over her breasts from the cold and her insecurity.

"Arms down." His voice was not loud, but carried such silken menace that Hermione obeyed instantly. She stood very still as he walked slowly around her, hands behind his back. It reminded Hermione of her old professor, stalking through a Potions lecture; wary and watchful, in his element, in command.

"Lovely. Skin like alabaster," he murmured, his voice soft and sinister. Warm fingers glided across her back, down over the smooth skin of her thighs. His large hand cupped her bottom, and she closed her eyes, reveling in the touch he had denied her for the past three days.

"So soft," he purred, and his drifting fingers traced the cleft of her bottom from the top of her spine to her thighs. "And so wet I can smell it." His voice sounded coldly ragged, then it changed again, became menacing, more velvety as he leaned in close. "Have you abstained? Have you saved yourself for me?"

"No. I mean, yes, I have abstained," Hermione added hastily, and fought the urge to beg to be touched.

He nodded slowly, as if trying to make up his mind about something. "It seems you are trying very hard to be a good girl." He could see her shiver at his soft, silvery tone. As if on cue, he stepped out of arm's reach, holding out his hand. He was quiet and unsmiling. "We will see how long that will last. Your key, Miss Granger."

Hermione looked at him blankly, then understanding dawned, along with a quiet, "Oh! Of course." She placed the tiny key in his hand. It looked positively miniscule in his large palm, and when he closed his hand over it, she felt a burst of magic emanate from him in a long, rolling wave that almost made her knees buckle.

To Hermione, feeling Severus' magic ripple over her body was liminal, subtle and elegant. It was like the minute trace of a Northern accent that gave a smoky tone to his mesmeric voice. It was the scent of him, fresh from bathing, warm and spicy. It was part of him, and now, concentrated as it was on her, it had the visceral impact of a lust potion, making her vision double and her thighs dampen. He smirked knowingly, and Hermione felt a rather fraught yearning, exhausted as she was from a mere three days of this dark, insidious initiation into submission.

Severus lifted her chin with a long, slender finger. In his darkest, most seductive tone, he purred, "Now, my slave, are you ready to wear my chains?"

Hermione glanced into the room at the large chains hanging innocuously on the walls. She shivered, and her voice shook as she answered, "Yes, sir."

Severus chuckled, and when he opened his hand, the key was gone, and in its place were two bracelets, made of impossibly tiny, perfect chains.

"These are very old, goblin-wrought bracelets. They were once used by Masters to identify slaves." His dark eyes bore into hers. "I place them on your wrists as a reminder of my ownership of your heart, and of your submission. Once they go around your wrists, only I may remove them again. Only you and I will know their true meaning." His eyes glowed like black opals; she thrilled to see such fire in them. "Do you accept my chains, Hermione?"

Hermione nodded quickly. "Yes, sir."

He looked down his large nose at her. "Then accept them as a slave accepts them. By paying honour to your Master." She looked at him blankly, and he sneered and placed a heavy hand on her shoulder. "On your knees, little girl. Head down, arms up, palms facing upward." He pushed gently. "Down."

She felt lightheaded, almost outside herself, as she knelt before her husband on the cold floor of the cave. It was surreal; as if they were performing an ancient ritual, whose magic was long lost to all but themselves. Severus looked down on her, his face stern, his breathing slow and measured. He looked at once like the younger man she'd known as a student, and the eternal dark, pagan Lord of the Underworld; Persephone's mate and Master, offering his dark pleasure at a price.

Hermione bowed her head submissively. She could only really see the bottom of his robes and the soft leather of his boots as he finally approached her.

"I am pleased. Look at me." Hermione obeyed, and watched as Severus placed a bracelet on each wrist. They weighed absolutely nothing; it was as if they weren't there at all.

"So delicate," Hermione whispered, knowing that goblin-made jewelry was stronger than any other in the world. As fragile and insubstantial as they seemed, she knew they would never break. Severus' large warm hands closed easily over her wrists, and with his whispered incantation, Hermione felt the chains mold to her wrists. When he released her hands, Hermione looked at her 'chains.' The bracelets gleamed softly, as thin as cobwebs, as dainty as gossamer, encircling her possessively.

She looked up at him, smiling her gratitude, and he pulled her to her feet. For a moment, they both stood, simply looking down at the silver bracelets; Severus, with arrogant pride and ownership, Hermione, as if only now realizing the full implications of their significance.

As she stood, waiting, Severus placed his hands on her shoulders and quickly spun her around to face the room. "It is time for your first lesson, pet. It is about obedience and trust." He leaned toward her, whispering in her ear. "You must trust me, Miss Granger. I know what you want. I know what you *need*."

"I trust you, sir," she said, and clenched her fists to calm her trembling. He noticed, of course, and awarded her with a complacent smile.

"Good girl." He rewarded her with a careless smack on her bottom, and propelled her forward with a gentle pushing motion. "Lie down on the table, face up, with your head at the far end. Go now." He was in full Master mode, and Hermione moved rather unsteadily over to the table, fully aware of his eyes burning a trail down her back.

The surface was wide and covered with padded leather. Metal studs held the padding in place. After a moment's hesitation, she climbed onto the table and lay down, feet together, hands crossed over her stomach, trying fruitlessly to calm her pounding heart.

The lamps lowered slightly, and Severus appeared in her peripheral vision. He gazed down on her, his dark eyes sweeping over her naked body. In all their years together, Hermione had never felt so *exposed* before him as she did now. She shivered, and was not surprised that her legs were trembling. She closed her eyes, forcing herself to relax. Her flesh was peppered with goosebumps, and she thought she must look hideously unattractive, lying here so stiffly.

She closed her eyes, and jumped slightly as his hands closed over hers and stretched her arms over her head, making her feel even more vulnerable to his gaze. Even with her eyes closed, she could practically feel the heat from his intense concentration of her body. In that moment, as she glanced up at her husband's detached, unreadable expression, Hermione would have given anything to know what he was thinking.

As if sensing her thoughts, Severus' expression changed; his eyelids took on a heavy look. His parted lips spoke of an underlying arousal as he caressed her face gently, then allowed his hand to glide sensuously down her throat, her collarbone. His feather-light fingertips blazed a trail of fire over her skin. She was actually surprised not to see any mark left in their wake, like a vapour trail across the sky.

His slender fingers traced the old scar she had received from Dolohov's curse during her fifth year at Hogwarts, following it as it twisted across her chest. A well-trimmed nail scratched across the top of one painfully taut nipple, and she hissed and exhaled a shuddering breath. She forced herself to watch him as he caressed and rolled her nipples between his fingers with clinical detachment.

A gentle tug here, a tweak there, and Hermione felt lightheaded with arousal. He leaned down, and, without allowing any other part of his body to come in contact with her, he closed his warm, wet mouth over a nipple, and she mewled helplessly. Her hands fluttered up to touch him, but he moved away from her before she could caress him.

"No." He looked down on her with a small, disapproving frown. "You have not earned the right to touch me. Place your arms back over your head." He smiled sensuously. "That position does very nice things for your breasts."

Hermione closed her eyes and slowly returned her arms above her. Unconsciously she arched her back to him. He smiled. "Very nice," he drawled, and bit his lip as he flicked her nipple. She whimpered at the sudden combination of pleasure and pain. "That's it. Present them to me, Miss Granger." Hermione whimpered softly under her breath as he repeated the act with both breasts. She cried out and squirmed restlessly.

"Such impatience, Miss Granger. One would think you wanted to be disciplined," he purred, sounding every inch the menacing, dark Death Eater of old. His dark chuckle made her shiver. "If it's discipline you crave, then discipline you shall receive." His voice took on a more steely edge. "Knees up. Part your thighs."

Hermione obeyed him instantly, trembling as the cool air came in contact with the moist heat of her sex. She was shivering, and looked at him beseechingly, but he met her eyes with the same flat, haughty stare she had often received from him in Potions class. The heat of his gaze alone seemed to increase the temperature of the room.

For almost a solid minute, Hermione lay quietly, feeling alternately nervous and aroused, and Severus merely watched her. He did not touch her, or speak, only watched. As she grew accustomed to the awkward position, her thighs relaxed more. This must have been what Severus was waiting for, and he began to circle the table like a bird of prey. "I would ask if you were aroused, but I don't have to. I can smell you." He gave her a wolfish grin.

Hermione felt almost out of her body. In the long years she had known Severus Snape, he had never said things like this to her before. Tears threatened. He leaned over her, his raven hair curtaining his face, and whispered another spell. Magical ropes slid around her wrists and held them fast. She felt a moment's panic as the coiling restraints pinned her to the table, and she pulled against them. Severus watched her intently, his soft voice ominous and precise. "I would advise you not to struggle, Miss Granger. I would not be pleased if you hurt yourself."

She forced herself to remain still as the magical bonds wrapped themselves around her thighs and calves. They pulled her legs apart until her knees almost rested on the table. She was pinned open like a specimen in a lab.

And through it all, Severus circled, unsmiling, his eyes fierce and unreadable, his demeanor intractable. His robes seemed to move of their own accord, graceful as a dancer. In spite of her trepidation, Hermione marveled at him; he was, in his own austere aesthetic way, so beautiful it awed her.

He reached the end of the table and looked at her. From her perspective, he looked ... displeased. His eyes met hers, and he crossed his arms. Another hissed spell and her entire body shifted down to the end of the table, until her bottom was perched on the edge. Hermione gasped, as he looked down at her, open and waiting.

Severus drew his wand from his sleeve, and pointed it at the soft nest of curls on her mound. Hermione felt a tingling sensation, followed by a shock of cool air. The hair on her pubis was gone. He stepped back, as if to admire his handiwork. "While I do not prefer you shaved, for our purposes tonight, your cunt will be bare." He sounded at once decadent and detached, and this ramped her excitement up to a painful peak.

Severus reached forward and caressed the newly bared flesh with the back of his hand. Hermione whimpered shamelessly; she had never felt so exposed, yet so aroused. She could only imagine what she looked like, her labia wantonly wet and invitingly open.

His voice echoed through the chamber. "I find I am ... disappointed at your lack of trust." He looked solemnly at her, and moved around to the side of the table, and he sighed. And waited. Hermione watched him, breathless.

He was as still as the rocks surrounding them. In spite of the chilling air, Hermione felt sweat bead at her temples. Severus remained unmoved. Except for the rise and fall of his chest, he could have been a statue.

The blow came from nowhere, so lightning fast Hermione screamed before she registered it. It was a hard, flat smack, with the full force of his hand. It landed in the cleft of her labia and the epicenter was her swollen, distended clitoris.

Hermione gasped as the stinging sensation made her pant; another blow, in the same place, and the wet, smacking sound of his hand against her drenched sex both shamed and thrilled her. Another two slaps fell in rapid succession.

It was pain and it was not pain. It stung her labia and jolted her clitoris with deep, electrical vibrations, causing her folds to swell and engorge with blood until her entire quim was aflame with sensation, causing her heart to pound and her thighs to tremble with each blow.

He struck her without emotion, merely watching her face as his large hand smacked her over and over, until she whimpered and tears slipped from her closed eyes. She lost count of the blows, until she was arching up from the table to meet them. Her labia felt thick and she could feel each burning heartbeat in the bare, exposed flesh.

"Look at me." Hermione looked up into the eyes of her husband, and whispered his name.

It was still Severus, but augmented to the point that Hermione shook her head to clear her vision. He looked down at her with eyes that were on fire. There was a faint glow to his pale skin, and he was breathing hard, as if his exertions had winded him. He sneered at her with a look of pure, raw, sexual power that made Hermione mewl at him. He laughed, and it was not her husband's laugh.

"What a lovely sight," he purred, and he leaned forward toward her, and pulled back sharply, as if warring with himself. Hermione shook. "Your little wet cunt is so plump and red."

It occurred to her that her husband could make any word sound like a benediction and an obscenity at once. The word *cunt*, spoken in his clipped, smoked voice sounded like a Dark incantation.

He stopped spanking her, and played with the swollen lips of her pussy, pursing them together and peeling them apart with detached, primitive fascination that bordered on profane. An innocent, curious smile teased at the corners of his mouth.

He tilted his head, and ran a slender finger down the seam of her labia, smiling as Hermione thrashed helplessly on the table. "Would you like more?" he crooned, sounding like Lucifer himself.

Hermione writhed on the table. "Please," she mewled weakly. "I want more. Please give me more ..."

His smirk was epic, as was the silken eyebrow that accompanied it. He sobered, and his face changed, grew more intent, less like the husband she knew. He bit his lower lip, and made a low, snarling sound that made Hermione's toes curl.

"As you wish, pet," he drawled, and stepped back to spank her again. Four more hard slaps and she was thrusting her hips up to meet them, riding against his relentless hand as if it were his cock. His hand grew wetter with each smack, and the tremours within her seem to build until they caused a chain reaction that hurtled her toward a conclusion that was as welcome as it was inevitable. Her core began to melt and draw inward, like the taut string of a bow.

"Oh, fuck, I'm gonna come," she slurred, closing her eyes, her pelvis twisting to meet the punishing smack of his hand. Even as she rose to meet the next blow, his mouth dove to her drenched and burning cunt, searing her like a brand, and he moaned loudly against her primed core.

She climaxed almost immediately, her scream echoing throughout the cave. Her orgasm lifted her impossibly high into the air, impaling her on his sharp, crooked teeth, his long, silver tongue. He sucked her bursting clit into his mouth as he thrust two, then three fingers inside her pulsing channel, curling them upwards. She cried his name into the darkness, and the answering call of her voice in the echoes made his name sound like music.

He watched her carefully as he gently teased her rectum, giving her no time to recover, and her eyes flew open as he pressed inward. "Bear down," he barked, watching her face, holding her trembling body down with one arm. "Let me in, oh, that's my baby," he purred obscenely, smiling lasciviously as she opened to him like a flower.

She cried out, a helpless, strained sound of expectation. A second finger joined the first in her waiting passage. His fingers started a slow, sensuous dance within her, and

her hips moved with him, until she was bucking against him wildly. He had only to lave his pointed tongue from her perineum to her clit for her to cry out, and when he sucked the little nub into his mouth and suckled it like a nipple, flicking his tongue hard against it, she flew apart beneath him for the second time.

She could not recall when pleasure turned itself inside out and became pain, nor the moment the agony tipped sweetly back into ecstasy. At times it felt like punishment that morphed into reward. She only recognised his ravaging mouth, and her body obeyed its Master implicitly.

Again and again he dragged her to the edge of an impossibly high precipice, taking a running start with her before flinging her from the edge, letting her fall screaming, wailing his name, cursing him, terrified, gasping helplessly as the ground rushed up to meet her, then diving and catching her seconds before she crashed, only to start again.

At times, he would simply stand up and walk away, his eyes never leaving her shuddering, trembling form as he promised other, dirtier things he planned to do. At times he would lean over her breasts and tease her nipples with the softest, gentlest flicks of his tongue, turning every teasing suck and biting kiss into a sonata of sensory overload, even as he spanked her again. His moans, his growls, his frightening promises vibrated against her pussy until she strained against her bonds, questing for him and his domination over her senses.

He kissed her with breathtaking, suffocating kisses, coaxing, demanding her supplication, overwhelming her with sensations that left her pleading for release, pleading for respite.

And then he would begin again, slowly, his fingers deep within her, his opposite hand teasing her puckered hole, and his tongue as gentle and sweet as a sprite licking the dew from the wings of a butterfly.

He pushed her harder with each passing second. His hands, his mouth, his voice, forced her to rethink the words bliss and torment, until they melded into one last overpowering, beautiful, horrible conscious thought that this man was turning her into an addict, with him as her drug, her needle and her withdrawals, all at once.

She was soaring higher and higher, suspended in air until she could no longer breathe, and then he growled, "Come for me, now!" and the force of it rushed down upon her with an intensity of sensation that drove rational thought from her. Each bursting, throbbing pulse felt like its own orgasm, steeling the breath from her body until she was deaf, dumb and blind to anything but the release.

She howled brokenly; giving tongue to this overwhelming ecstasy was her only hope of remaining sane, of surviving this onslaught of pleasure and pain and submission and madness. She cried out his name, his title. He became in that moment lover, master, jailer, daddy, judge and executioner, and she called him by all those names. All coherency was destroyed, save one thought: the fearful realization she would seek this out the rest of her days, on her knees if need be, until he forced her to shatter the crystals with her screams ...

Hermione's eyes fluttered open, and for a moment, she looked around dazedly, completely unsure of where she was. She was no longer bound on the table; rather she was lying beside Severus in the huge ebony bed, curled up against him. He enfolded her in his arms, murmuring soothing non-words to both calm and stir her senses.

The soft fabric of his robe whispered against her bare skin, causing a delicious friction. The somehow forbidden, sensual image of a young, untested woman lying naked in the arms of a fully clothed, experienced older man was not lost on her, and it made Hermione feel curiously decadent and blameless all at once.

"How do you feel, pet?" he asked, his voice low and neutral. Hermione looked at him, her heart filled with helpless yearning. He was watching her carefully; his face a mixture of several emotions Hermione could not quite define. Instead, she took a mental inventory of herself, and her own feelings.

"Weak. Sore." She looked back at him and pressed closer. "Needy."

He smiled. "In that order?" he drawled sleepily. He lay back, and pulled her closer until her head was resting on his shoulder. She ran her hand over his chest and placed a fevered kiss on his jaw line.

"I'm not sure. What exactly happened to me?"

Severus chuckled. "I believe the term is 'la petite mort' the little death." When she did not reply, Severus actually looked smug. "In other words, my dear wife, I made you come your brains out."

Hermione looked at him for a moment, shocked at his crudity, then laughed. She flopped back against his arm. "You did, didn't you?" She sighed. "There'll be no living with you now." They both laughed, then she sobered. "Of course, there's no living without you, either."

Almost instantly his eyelids lowered, and his face softened. He looked beautiful like this; relaxed, aroused, unfettered by the daily pressures of his position, completely in control of the situation at hand.

"Did my my little death please you?"

Severus smiled. It was a smile full of promise. "Very much so, pet." He stroked her face, purring, "You tasted divine. It was like splitting open a ripe peach and devouring it." His eyes were glowing. "I must remember to spank you thoroughly and often."

Hermione stretched luxuriously. She felt wonderful; drained and sore, to be sure, but excellent. She had met Severus on a new ground, in terms she had asked for, and she had passed the test.

He uncorked a vial of Pain Potion and held it to her lips. "Open for me." She looked up at him and saw a glimpse of the dark man who bore so little resemblance to her husband, and Hermione found she it was a bit afraid of him; of what he would do if she allowed it.

Obediently, she opened her mouth, and he poured the potion in, gently drawing a finger against her lips to catch some of the escaping liquid. "There we are," he breathed, as she swallowed. Warmth flooded her limbs, and instantly her soreness abated. She relaxed against him with a little hum of contentment.

"Better?" he murmured. He watched her closely and his intense concentration on her made Hermione smile complacently.

"Yes, Master. Very much so," she said, rather mischievously. He regarded her silently for a moment, then returned the vial to the bedside table. Hermione snuggled against him with a contented sigh. "This has to be the most comfy bed," she said, stifling a yawn. "Almost as comfortable as our bed at Hogwarts."

Without warning, she was wrenched onto her back against the mattress. The carved vines and tendrils covering the bedposts and headboard came to life and sinuously wound around her wrists and ankles, pinning her down. She gasped in sudden fright as the vines tightened.

Severus was smiling down on her, his eyes glittering hard and merciless in the candlelight. "If I were you, little girl," he growled, "I wouldn't get too comfortable."

Chapter Nine

Chapter 9 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Many thank yous to everyone who has given this fic a read. I hope you will continue to enjoy it, and remember that a Dominant/submissive relationship should always be safe, sane, and consensual. D/s is not about harm or abuse. It is supposed to be a beautiful, symbiotic relationship - not to mention a whole lot of fun.

This chapter contains explicit sexual content, between two consenting adults, involving light bondage and disciplining.

Love is the only game that is not called on account of darkness.

Thomas Carlyle

Hermione stopped struggling against the viney bonds that held her fast in place. Severus rose from the bed with a fluid, graceful movement, and leaned against one of the tall footposts. He tilted his head as if surveying his work. With a quick flick of his wand, the vines pulled her feet further apart.

"That's better," he drawled, grinning rapaciously down at her. Hermione closed her eyes and felt the warmth of anticipation creeping across her skin, like a feather being drawn over her sensitive flesh.

To Hermione's surprise, Severus leaned over and rubbed a gentle, callused finger over her taut nipple, making her gasp. "Sweet little tips," he murmured, teasing the nipple until it was as stiff as a little cock. He smirked down at her, and pulled and milked it with care and control, until the combined sensations of pain and pleasure caused Hermione to whimper and arch her back toward his hand.

He lowered his mouth onto her aching, taut flesh, wrenching a cry of pleasure from her. His mouth was honey-sweet and she could feel his warm tongue flicking at the tip. As he suckled her, his teeth nipped within, sending stinging little pulses racing along a shining wire of pleasure that extended from her nipples to her groin. He was tender and skilled, and soon she was moaning and twisting, silently begging him to favour the opposite breast, until he pulled away from her with a little sucking motion that made her hiss and thrash in disappointment.

He looked down on her with liquid black eyes that promised things for which Hermione didn't have a name. One finger teased against her bottom lip before he slipped it into her eager mouth. He watched her carefully as she suckled on it, desperate to maintain contact with him, desperate to show her submission to his will. Hermione kept her eyes locked to his, begging him silently.

"And what do you want, Miss Granger?" he asked softly as he removed his finger and encircled her nipple with the moistened tip, leaving it to cool and pucker painfully in the cold air.

A soft sound escaped her throat before she could reply. "I want to please you," she said, hoping it was the right answer. She felt an almost painful ache in her chest; it was more than just wanting him to make love to her. She wanted to hear his praise for her, uttered in that dark, sinful baritone voice she knew so well. The thought both aroused and troubled her. Looking into his eyes, she could tell he knew what she was thinking, and she wondered how she could be so transparent without him Legilimising into her mind.

"All I want is to give you pleasure," she repeated, and closed her eyes, ashamed of how needy she was for his praise.

"Good girl. And so you shall," he crooned, his voice so full of dark seduction Hermione felt her pussy grow hot. She felt a feral type of joy. In that moment, she understood why submissives gave themselves so freely to their Masters.

He had plundered her with his mouth, he had made her orgasm until she lost consciousness, and still she craved him. She was entranced by him. He was so beautiful. It was as if she was looking at a god whose very sight could scorch and defile her, yet she was loath to tear her eyes away. Every fiber of his being seemed concentrated on her, and it excited her to be the object of the fierce, demanding attention of this particular wizard.

She was actually panting, her body aching with need for him. She had imbibed lust potions before, but the sensations they produced were nothing compared to this. This was pure want; pure need. She'd never felt this gnawing, temple-aching desire before. She tried to stifle a sob as tears sprang to her eyes.

"Why are you crying?" he asked diffidently, as if he knew the answer but wanted her to confess. He watched her struggle, smiling down at her. His arrogance undid her, and she wealed.

"It hurts!"

"The bonds?"

"No! No," she whispered weakly, turning her face away. "It hurts to want you so much. What have you done to me?"

To her surprise, he laughed, and climbed onto the bed. "Merely all you asked of me, pet. You wanted to submit to me. Now you understand the power you have given me; the power to enslave you to pleasure." Severus stroked her body proprietorially, starting at her shoulders, moving down to the very soles of her feet.

This was not the calming, soothing stroke of a man gentling his witch; it was the calculated, rough touch of a man who knows how to send his woman over the edge easily, on command. It was the sure, tormenting hand of a wizard who plans to wreak havoc with his wife's body and soul, and Hermione jerked like a fish on a line beneath his knowing, skilled ministrations. She arched her back to meet his touch, and his fingers danced away from her capriciously.

"I can make that sweet ache worse, or I can make it better, pet." He looked down on her imperiously. "Either way, you'll thank me.

"But first, a little compensation, I think, for my exertions on your part." He looked down at her, his expression unreadable, and she shivered at the silken danger in his

words.

Without preamble, he straddled her until he was kneeling over her chest. She gazed up at him hungrily as he eased his cock from the confines of his robes. He stroked it slowly, as if savouring the feel of it in his large hand, and Hermione thought she might come just from watching him touch himself. Gods, he was a dirty devil, enticing her with his cock, like the serpent tempted Eve with the apple.

He was hard, his cock so blood-engorged Hermione could feel the heat of it as it jutted toward her mouth. She watched in fascination as a drop of pearly seed oozed from the tip, and her mouth watered as her lips parted to take him. She looked up into his face, and saw the desire smoldering in his eyes.

His voice was as velvety and hard as his cock. "I told you I wanted to fuck this luscious little mouth." His breathing quickened with barely-controlled arousal. His thumb brushed her bottom lip, tickling it gently. He leaned forward. "Refusal is no longer an option. Satisfying me is." He purred. "This would be an opportune moment to demonstrate your appreciation, Miss Granger."

The delicious scent of his sex permeated into the visceral centre of her brain as she strained upward for him. He stroked himself slowly, as if enticing her. He whispered, "Kiss the tip." He was breathing hard, as if she was exciting him against his will. Hermione closed her eyes and placed a soft, reverent kiss on the head of his sex. She licked the pre-cum from the tip, moaning rapturously that she was finally able to touch him, to taste him, and he sighed harshly as he pressed his straining member between her lips.

"Oh, yes. Lick it. Suck it for me," he said, his voice sinful and coaxing, as if enticing an innocent. There was barely concealed ferocity in his tone. "Show me how a slave worships her Master." He looked down on her with an expression that would have made a devil blush - all sloe-eyed power and sneer.

"Open up."

He took her head between his warm hands and eased his cock into her mouth, and Hermione whimpered as he filled her utterly. His sharp groan of pleasure made her impossibly wet, as if the sound itself had painted the slit of her own sex.

His movements were controlled and slow as he churned his hips, sighing with each disciplined thrust. Hermione tried to keep her eyes open; it was beyond erotic to watch his hips rotating his cock in and out of her mouth, and she sucked hard, even as her tongue swirled over the head of his rigid member. As he moved, he held her face in his hands, and his head fell back in abandon as he fucked her mouth.

Hermione felt her passion straining with each graceful plunge, and she grew greedy, trying to take him fully into her mouth. She moaned harshly; all her thoughts simmered down to one base instinct - she wanted to give him the pleasure he had given her earlier. She no longer cared about her own wants and needs; it was about Severus, her Daddy, her Master... she looked up at the man crouched over her, and tried to convey this with her eyes. He snarled softly, looking down at her with an expression of drugged power. He looked as if drinking in the sight of her like this freed the lust he had always kept hidden, simmering beneath the surface, and was now given free rein.

Without warning, he pulled away from her mouth, panting, clutching the sides of her face with his large hands. Breathless and narrow-eyed, he rasped, "You're very good, pet, but so very greedy. I'm not ready to come yet. We must work on patience where your desires are concerned."

Gasping, licking her lips, Hermione gasped with a sobbing little breath. "I'm sorry," she moaned, closing her eyes.

He rose gracefully from the bed, and tucked himself away in his midnight robe. For a moment, he simply watched her, as he'd done before. He seemed to be weighing a decision. Hermione waited, bound and aching for him, but something told her the pleasure might be superseded by something else for the moment.

As with everything Severus did, he used the silence skillfully to heighten the tension, until Hermione felt like a rubber band pulled and stretched to the breaking point. Just as she was about to give in and snap, the vines loosened and fell away, and he intoned, "Rise, Miss Granger."

At first, Hermione thought she would not be physically able to obey him. Her arms and legs felt like leaden weights. He watched her carefully, patiently; he merely stood quietly, waiting for her to stand. Eventually, Hermione had to roll onto her side and drag herself from the bed. She finally managed to get to her feet, and stood beside him, waiting for him to command her.

He gestured with a quick nod of his head. "Stand by the bedpost. It will guide you."

Mystified by this cryptic order, Hermione turned and moved back until she was standing by the tall post at the right foot of the bed. As she stood facing him, the vines and tendrils once again wrapped around her hands; this time, they pulled them high, over her head, until once more she was captive of both the bed and her husband. The vines pulled her until her hip rested against the post, and she stood sideways against the bedpost, her arms suspended above her. When she looked up, the vines ascended out of sight; up into the black ceiling of the cave.

"I will not force you to stay in this position long, but I believe being bound is necessary for our first lesson together. It is easy to surrender when you have no choice." He sounded as matter-of-fact as he had in the classroom, and in spite of her less than comfortable position, Hermione felt a sense of reassurance from the familiar timbre of his voice.

"And so, we return to the subjects of trust and obedience, Miss Granger," he murmured, as he stood by her side. She could feel the soft fabric of his robe brush against her hip, and his warm palm slid down her belly to the apex of her thighs and cupped her pussy expertly. Hermione knew he could feel her, wet and aching, and she mewled helplessly as he teased her labia open and gently fondled her.

"It has occurred to me you have been a very naughty little witch over the years, haven't you?" he crooned, his finger teasing her clit. Hermione whimpered as he moved away, and she closed her eyes, waiting for his next move.

"Look at me," he ordered. Hermione obeyed him immediately. A leather flogger dangled carelessly in his fingers. It was a simple whip, made like a cat-o-nine tails, of perhaps a dozen buttery leather strips attached to a long handle studded with large-headed smooth, silver hobnails. In spite of its soft appearance, it looked lethal in Severus' strong hands.

"Do I frighten you, Miss Granger?"

When Hermione swallowed heavily, he chuckled darkly. ""Would you like me to?"

How could she answer? He seemed to understand, and he laughed again, a sound that was so full of sin Hermione quivered like a bowstring.

Severus smiled grimly. "Oh, yes, Miss Granger. Tonight, you atone for your sins, even while committing a few new ones."

He pressed against her and grasped her head, and as Hermione looked up into the face of her professor, her husband, her master, she was both ashamed and thrilled at how hot and aroused she felt, looking into his unsmiling, cruel face. "Now, let's start at the beginning, shall we, pet?" he sneered, as he teased and pinched her nipples. Hermione was soon so inflamed with lust she was struggling feverishly against the bonds that held her arms above her head.

Finally, his fingers returned to their wicked task, working her folds so pitilessly Hermione was forced to rise onto her tiptoes. She relaxed and tensed at the same time, as his fingers danced over her swollen and sensitive clit.

As he tormented her, he hissed, "Miss Granger, you set fire to my robes when you were a First-year student, did you not?"

Confused, Hermione replied, "Y-yes, sir." She moaned as he toyed with her straining clit. The flogger came down on her backside, fast. It was a subtle, stinging sort of pain, but coupled with the slow, teasing pleasure of his fingers in her cunt, it sent a message to her brain that nearly made her orgasm. Another stinging slap of the flogger

made her jerk her hips toward his seeking fingers, but he pulled away.

In a chiding tone, he chastised, "Ah ah, Miss Granger. You are mine now, to play with. And I will play with you as I please." Hermione shivered as his fingers grew more insistent. The flogger came down again, first on one arse cheek, then another, stinging, caressing. Hermione's bottom felt as if it were glowing. "I believe you also stole from my potions stores your second year making Polyjuice potion, wasn't it?"

Hermione was panting now, pinned between the punishing flogger and his gentle fingertips fluttering delicately over her clit. She was barely cognizant of his words. His seductive tone, the deep, sinful silk of his baritone voice; it was her only link to her rapidly disintegrating reason.

"And the subsequent years, pet? When you knocked me unconscious in the Shrieking Shack?" Hermione felt the jolt of memory merge with the expectation of what was to come, and she gasped in anticipation. The flogger sang in the air, and Hermione cried out as it blistered her already sensitive bottom. She was trembling now, her hips surging against the pain and the pleasure, when she heard her own voice cry, "Harder!" Hermione looked up at him, stunned at herself, then felt the tears come. "More," she said, almost against her will. She dropped her head, shuddering. "Please, professor, I want more."

Severus brushed a tear from her eye, and raised the handle of the flail to her face. "If it's more you want, Miss Granger, show me." His smirk was the stuff of legend, bristling with power. "Kiss the rod that punishes you, and I will give you more." His eyes were huge and so dark they looked demonic.

Hermione looked at her husband, and felt her moisture trickling down her thighs. She was nourished only by this deeply rooted, all encompassing want. She feverishly kissed the handle of the flogger, and when he moved his hand, she rained kisses upon it as well. He had reduced her to this creature of sensation, and she knew she would do and say anything to show him how much she wanted this.

"Excellent, pet," he purred, then kissed her forehead. "Let's give you a little respite, yes?" he whispered lasciviously.

His fingers intensified their light, fluttering teasing, and Severus brought her effortlessly to the peak of an orgasm. Hermione felt something pressing against the back of her thighs, and a smooth rod slid into her primed and eager pussy. She began to keen as he masturbated her with the handle of the flogger. Her wanton cries both humiliated and grounded her as he coaxed, "Come for me ... ah yes, that's a good girl..."

Hermione felt the gathering of her body, caught in the vicious undertow of sensation and need and she screamed into the air as the first wave of her orgasm broke over her like a torrent, buckling her knees and sending a gush of wet and warmth over the handle. She cried out with each pulse of her traitorous body as Severus relentlessly pumped the studded phallus in and out of her slick and quivering pussy.

She sagged against her bonds, and whimpered as he held her to his side and petted and stroked her. He laughed as she mewled and shook against him. "Poor baby ... Calm yourself, Miss Granger," he admonished in a teasing tone, and she moaned as his fingers returned to their teasing. She keened softly, her body twitching, overly stimulated and spent.

"Wicked little girl," he sneered, "You have soaked the handle of your flogger. What sort of shameless little witch comes on the instrument of her punishment?"

Hermione took great, sobbing breaths, straining at the bonds. "Do your shoulders hurt?" he asked mildly.

She nodded. "Yes, sir." Suddenly, she was afraid. "But I want to take my discipline properly!" she blurted, afraid he would be disappointed. "Please let me!"

Severus smiled down at her, and it was a carnal, smile of power. "So the little Gryffindor is afraid she won't be found worthy, eh?" His smile changed, became predatory. "Not to fear, little lioness. I have no intention of letting you go now." With a whispered incantation, the vines dropped, so that her shoulders were no longer straining upward.

"Thank you, sir," she whispered, holding onto the vines as if she were their bonds and they her captive.

"Good girl," he purred, and stepped back, his arm raised to strike her again. Five times the strips of the lash descended on her burning backside, and she hissed and thrashed. It felt wondrous.

"More, pet?" he asked, placing a biting kiss on her shoulder. His fingers found and tortured her nipples, and she nodded wordlessly, afraid she would scream if she tried to speak. "We still have more punishment to mete out, my dear. Do you know why?"

"Yes, sir," she whispered, her body tense and ready for the next blow.

"And why is that, Miss Granger?"

"Because of all the times I angered you," she rasped, tears sparkling on her lashes.

"Incorrect."

Surprised, Hermione opened her eyes and looked at her husband. "What?" she managed, with a sniff, and then he stepped toward her again.

The whip sang in the air. "Do you know how long I have desired you, witch?" Severus began, his voice smoky and rich, like chocolate. "Do you know the first time I looked on you and wanted you, and hated myself for it?" Hermione, helpless, rode out the storm of his heavy, burnt-sugar voice, the sting of the flail and his insistent fingers. His mouth was at her ear now, his breath hot and moist against her skin. His sweet whisper sounded fraught with longing. "You were fifteen, and dressed like an angel for that oaf, Viktor Krum. I saw you at the Yule Ball, and my heart split open, and I wanted you so badly I could not form a fist in which to stroke my own cock."

Hermione was stunned. He had never told her this before. She looked up at Severus, and was almost fearful of the lust and the fire she saw in his eyes. He was looking at her with a mixture of shame and arousal that excited her unbearably. To know she was the cause of this was like an addictive drug.

She smiled at him. "Even then? You never said "

He crashed his mouth against hers, forcing his warm, slippery tongue into her mouth, draining her of her will. He pulled away and then began to bite at her bottom lip, sucking it in a frenzy, moaning loudly as he devoured her. His breathless, suffocating kisses frightened her, but she leaned into him even as she gasped for air. Their tongues battled, and his mouth echoed his fingers and the whip to form a mosaic of pleasure that drove the last coherent thought from her mind.

He released her mouth with a soft suckling kiss that made her whimper. He smiled coldly. A whispered spell later, and the vines unwrapped themselves from her wrists. Severus stepped back and pointed to the bed. "Do you want proof, witch? Get on your hands and knees," he growled.

Hermione quickly climbed onto the mattress. She put her head on her arms and lay with her bottom in the air, eager, waiting for him, and she growled and pushed back at him as she felt the head of his cock sliding between her slick, dripping folds. She was shamelessly, almost angrily aroused. "Show me," she pleaded, lightheaded and sick with want. "Show me what you would have done to me that night."

He hovered over her, his possessive hands grasping her hips. He burned a trail on her back with his kisses. "Such a beautiful girl, and I had no right to you! I wasn't worthy of you, and I had to watch those fools hurt and humiliate you!" He teased her with the head of his cock, sliding it into her entrance, promising her more with the pressure of his hands on her hips.

"I had to sit back and do nothing, say nothing when Potter nearly got you killed at the Department of Mysteries. I snuck into the infirmary while you were recovering and watched you, praying to gods I no longer believed in that you would be well." Again, he pushed the tip into her hungry sex, and she tried to push back on him, but he eluded her maddeningly, taunting her like an incubus with his hot, rigid cock, his hard, grasping hands.

Hermione, panting against him, cried, "Severus "

"Having to turn my heart away each time I saw you at Grimmauld, with Sirius Black sniffing around you-" He played with her, rubbing his cock over her distended clitoris, sliding halfway inside her, only to withdraw, leaving her writhing for him. "Oh, they wanted you as well, witch, never doubt it! That mutt and his werewolf taunted me about you every chance they got, when they weren't slobbering over each other!"

Hermione's arousal soared out of control as she heard the swift, frantic urgency in his voice. She tried to turn in his arms, but he wouldn't allow it. "Severus, please "

"This is what I would have done!" He slammed into her, balls deep, a hard, driving thrust that made Hermione howl. His cock was diamond hard and so hot it burned, and it felt as inexorable and glorious as his desperate voice and as he pulled back, she thought she might die from the anticipation of the next hard, selfish thrust.

When he ploughed into her again, she wailed her thanks into the room.

He began to fuck her, hard, pitilessly, emphasizing his words with each driving plunge. "Do you know how frightened I was, when you were on the run? Do you know afraid I was that you would be killed? Do you know how much I wanted to capture you hide you away in Hogwarts so I could have you all to myself, so I could tie you to my bed and fuck you every night?" He roared his pleasure as he slammed into her.

His passion-fueled confession shocked and thrilled Hermione. His driving, merciless hips rammed into her, bruising, tearing her apart until she could feel the hot, pulling tide of her impending climax, and she threw back her head and howled, her cunt pulsating and throbbing around him.

Finally he slowed and pulled her from her hands and knees, until she was sitting back against his lap. Sharp, biting kisses stung her neck and shoulders, only to be soothed by his soft tongue. His hands skimmed her ribs and his fingers rolled her nipples sweetly, tenderly. "Oh, Hermione," he groaned, and the sound of her name in his mouth made her shudder. With a voice silvery and boyish, he crooned, "Little girl, I've waited all your life for you to be ready for this."

With a cry, he pushed her forward onto all fours again, and rocked inside her in long, slow deep strokes, his hips rolling and churning, locking her against him, bottoming out just as he pulled away for the next plunge. Hermione rocked back to meet him in a sensuous dance, her legs spread wide to feel his balls slapping against her clitoris.

"So good," she moaned, as their bodies' rhythm quickened, as desire met need met pleasure. She felt his hand tangle in her hair and tug gently, moaning in bliss as the muscles of her pussy clenched around him, making him shiver.

"I wish you could see yourself, pet," he growled, sounding every inch the pagan god she had come here to worship. "I wish you could see how beautiful you are, impaled on my cock." A large hand came down hard on her backside, rewarding her with the pain/pleasure she craved. "How beautiful your rosy little arse looks as I pierce it."

He pushed her arse cheeks apart and teased the little hole of her rectum, making her cry out and shudder. Hermione swirled her hips, making Severus moan and growl. "Lose yourself," she sobbed, their bodies crashing together. "Do whatever you want with me. I want to feel you lose control," she babbled, and pushed harder against him.

"Don't come yet," he growled, his controlled demeanor lost in a haze of dark lust-fueled power. "You'll come when you beg for it, witch." He sounded demonic and cruel, and Hermione had to fight to keep from climaxing at that moment.

They fucked one another like animals, his hips pounding into her in lightning-fast thrusts that made her shudder and mewl. And still Hermione begged, "More... Master... please... Daddy," she keened into the room, feeling her orgasm rising again.

She heard Severus moaning again and again as he plunged into her wildly. He growled deeply in his throat, his voice harsh with pleasure. "That's it. Be a good girl and beg me..." he groaned.

"Please let me come!" she wailed, so close...

He laughed and roared, "Again, little girl! Beg me to let you go!" With those words he roughly yanked her hair. Hard.

Hermione's nerve endings turned to ice; she jangled to a halt, and her rhythm faltered. Severus didn't seem to notice. As if overcome with passion and power, he pulled her hair again, even harder, forcing her neck to arch backward. Suddenly Hermione cried out, and terror replaced pleasure...

She heard a thin, childish scream rend the air. Only later did she realise it was herself. She took a deep, ragged breath, like a drowning man coming up for air.

"Bumbershoot!" she screamed, her voice high-pitched in her ears. "Please, stop! Please..." She was barely aware of her own voice as she tried to claw her way out from under him. "Bumbershoot! Bumbershoot! Please!"

She was crying as she felt Severus leap from the bed. Hermione swallowed, and dared to turn and look at him.

He was white with shock; his beautiful face was glistening with sweat, and flushed from their frantic coupling, but beneath his stunned confusion was anger and revulsion and something like fear. He was staring at her as if he'd never seen her before.

Suddenly, to Hermione's horror, he reached for her wrists, and with a gentle, jerking motion, he wrenched the bracelets from her wrists. "No, please," she said, shaking her head. She was torn by remorse and fear flooded her heart as she looked into the stony face of her husband. "Please, don't, Severus, I didn't mean to do it, please!"

Weakly, she tried to reach for him but he backed away. Hermione could not identify the expression on his face. When he spoke, his voice was quiet and expressionless, and he would not meet her eyes. "You said the safe word, Hermione," he said and she could hear the accusatory disappointment. He gave her a formal little shrug. "I was not aware I was harming you," he added flatly. He shook his head, and turned away from her. With a flick of his wand, she was dressed.

Hermione, sick with fear, slid off the bed and tried to approach him, but he moved away from her again. He picked up a loose crystal from the ground and muttered another spell, and pressed it into her hand, along with her wand. "It would be best if you go now."

Hermione sobbed, "Don't send me away, Severus, I'll be good! Please don't send me away. You don't understand "

The Portkey began to activate and she screamed, "Oh, please don't, Severus! I'll be good- Severus!" She felt the sickening, pulling, spinning feeling of the Portkey transporting her away from the cave, and the last thing she saw before landing ungracefully on their bed in Hogwarts was the stark, white face of her husband, turning away from her.

Chapter Ten

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

I'm thrilled so many of you have enjoyed the story so far. It is complete, and I will be uploading the remaining chapters this week. Your comments are lovely and I'm really enjoying reading them.

As always, thanks to stgulik for her sterling beta magic, and in this case to darklotus1211, who literally rescued this chapter from the pit of despair when my pc corrupted the file. To this day, I still don't know how she did it, but bless her for doing it. It would have killed a lot of momentum, not to mention my self-confidence, to try to start this chapter over.

These characters are the property of JK Rowling. I make no money on this story.

It's unbelievable how much you don't know about the game you've been playing all your life. Mickey Mantle

As Hermione Portkeyed away from the cave, Severus dropped onto the bed, sickened by what he'd done. The delicate bracelets still dangled in his fingers, and he fought the urge to throw them into the fire. After a moment's thought, he stood and quietly placed them on the mantle. No. He had destroyed enough tonight.

In that moment, Severus felt blind panic seep into his veins. How could he have been so stupid as to agree to this? He should have known he would fuck things up utterly, and he had. He knew he would eventually have to face Hermione and beg her forgiveness, but he could not right now. He didn't deserve it.

Coward. You've destroyed your marriage with your sick, twisted perversions. Serves you right if she hexes first and asks questions later.

Oh, but it had been glorious. He closed his eyes. Seeing her strapped to the table, screaming his name as he lapped at her delicious body like a starving man ... feeling the power as she knelt before him to don his bracelets ... seeing that mixture of fear and lust as he sneered, "I wouldn't get too comfortable." It was like the most potent drug - powerful, addicting, and free from consequences.

Hermione had been everything he'd ever wanted, even when she was still his student. It had been a dark secret in a lifetime of dark little secrets; one he'd kept hidden even from himself. He had known it would be a mistake to confess the feelings he'd harboured for her, but he couldn't help himself. Feeling her come undone beneath his fingers, seeing her plump little pussy grow blood red as he spanked her on the table - it had excited him like nothing he'd ever known.

Gods, he'd never felt such crippling, overwhelming lust, even as a callow youth with a libido like a freight train. All propriety and sensibility had been driven from his brain and replaced with dominance, and he had been powerless to prevent the truth from coming out.

And she'd been so deliciously responsive, giving in to him, allowing the submission to carry her along to the places he had mapped out especially for her. All he had to do was keep control of the situation. All he had to do was excite her, and plant the suggestion that he could possibly hurt her. Then he would give her pleasure. The only thing *she* had to do was allow it, and she had done so with the ecstasy of a martyr, willingly and gratefully - the perfect submissive.

Severus felt gall rising from his gut. He had been so close - so wrapped up in the sex that he had not realized the moment he started hurting her. His vision had been clouded with a dark, erotic mist so overwhelming it had reduced him to an animal, and the thrill of fucking her had saturated him with her scent, her taste, her subjugation, and he was hurtling toward the best orgasm of his life when she screamed her preposterous safe word into the air, and reality dropped on him like a bucket of ice water.

She had been shaking, sobbing, and he came to his senses to see his hand wrapped around her hair, yanking ruthlessly, as he drove into her like the worst sort of rapist. She had been scrambling to get away from him while he held her down.

Severus scrubbed his face with his hands. And the most pitiful thing of all? She had apologized *to him*. In the short time he had been dominating her he had conditioned her to believe it was her fault. He felt like the worst sort of bastard, and what was worse, he would have to face the music.

He had been the worst sort of hypocrite.

He was no longer the man who simply stalked away exuding a brittle, false superiority, blaming others for his misfortune. Those days were long gone. His new life had brought him the gift of self-esteem honestly earned, honestly deserved, but with that gift came responsibilities. He would have to face his fears and face himself; he would have to acknowledge the dark professor who loved his wife with the same intensity as the man he'd learned to be.

He had to make this right with Hermione, even if she spat in his eye and hexed his balls to Barcelona.

Severus fought rising tears. He couldn't lose her. He'd loved her too long and too much. He needed to talk to someone; he needed advice on how to fix this, and as unsavoury as the thought was, he knew exactly the person to go to.

"Severus! A bit of a surprise seeing you here! Come in," Draco smiled, welcoming his godfather into Malfoy Manor. "Mother's at the flat helping Astoria plan our first dinner party, but Father's in his study. How's Hermione?"

Severus arranged his face in pleasant, expressionless lines. "Fine, thank you, Draco. How is Astoria?"

The young blond beamed. "She's lovely. She and mother have this mad idea about inviting half the country to our little flat, and apparently I'm in the way."

Draco chatted amicably as he led Severus to the door of his father's study. "I'm off home, Father, but I've left behind a substitute." He winked at Severus in farewell, and Lucius turned and spotted his old friend.

"Severus!" His smile of surprised welcome was genuine, and he crossed the floor to shake his hand. "Lovely to see you! Come in and keep an old man company in his hour of need. I've been abandoned by my family for the evening and left to my own devices."

Lucius poured dark red wine into two glasses and invited Severus to sit. "Ah, that's lovely," he said, sampling the wine. He looked over at Severus as if observing no more than the cut of his robe. "Now, Severus, what's wrong?"

Startled, Severus took a large gulp of wine. "Wrong? Why on earth would you surmise anything wrong?" He frowned. "Can't I visit an old comrade without there being something wrong?"

Lucius shrugged elegantly. "Well, you could, I suppose, but not at half eleven at night. And you never call me a comrade unless you're brooding over the old days." He fixed Severus with a look almost Dumbledore-ish in its scrutiny. Lucius' gaze softened. "What is troubling you?"

Severus took a deep breath. Without preamble, he told Lucius what had transpired with Hermione. He did it with the cringing knowledge that Lucius would take every opportunity in future to use the information against him, but he accepted it. The stakes were too high. He was afraid for his marriage. He told it quickly, without the details,

but enough to convey the seriousness of the situation.

For a long moment, Lucius watched him silently. Save for a slight tic in his left eye, the blond aristocrat was still. Finally, he sighed, rose from his seat and walked over to the liquor cabinet. "I think we need to graduate to something a little more substantial." He poured brandy into two cut-glass snifters and handed one to his friend, resumed his seat, and leisurely crossed his legs.

"So, let me get this straight," Lucius drawled, after what seemed to Severus an interminable silence. "Your lovely wife has finally grasped the fact that her husband was a former bad boy with a dominant streak a mile long and she's expressed a desire to explore this with you. But you were afraid that the darkness, which was so much part of your misspent youth, would eventually take you over to the point where you could not return to the mild-mannered pussycat you are now? Does that just about cover the first part?"

Put that way, Severus had to admit it did sound a bit ridiculous. Rolling his eyes, Severus nodded curtly. "Indeed," Lucius purred, smirking. He took another sip of brandy. "And furthermore, you decide to indulge your wife's submission fantasies, she loves it, your sex life becomes the most thrilling joy ride since your first dark revel, and she even calls you 'Daddy' in the throes of passion?"

Grimly, Severus nodded again. Lucius tutted, shaking his head.

"Severus, are you *further* telling me that, in a very fiery moment of said passion, you experienced an outburst from your wife which you didn't understand and didn't bother to investigate. You then had a bout of conscience and you sent your lovely wife home, crying, begging you not send her away, and you then proceeded to come here to pour your blackened heart out to your old comrade, and reassure yourself you weren't in imminent danger of becoming Wizarding Britain's next Dark Lord?"

Severus could feel colour rising in his face. He felt twelve times a fool, hearing his situation described so baldly. Quietly, he said, "I didn't mean to hurt her, Lucius. She's everything to me. I can't lose her."

Lucius gazed at him for several seconds. In his most slippery voice, he replied, "Then what in the name of Circe's seven tits are you doing here? Why aren't you at home reassuring the woman who means everything to you ... that she means *everything* to you?"

"But what if she's so traumatized she can't stand to be around me? Or worse, what if she takes me back, and the next time, I actually do something to harm her?" Severus could hear the desperate fear in his voice and hated himself for it.

Lucius made a dismissive gesture. "You won't. It isn't in you to harm those you truly love."

"Of course it is!" Severus snarled, running a hand through his hair. He knew his argument was flawed, but he couldn't help himself. His breath exploded from his body in frustration. "You remember the early revels! We were like animals!"

Lucius stifled a belch with such impressive elegance it actually distracted Severus for a moment. "You know, Severus, for a man of your brilliance, ability and intelligence, I do believe you are the most emotionally stunted man I've ever known." Lucius rose from his chair and began to pace. "We were little more than boys in those days, with the world dangled before us like toys before the eager paws of kittens. Depravity is for the young, if they are dark enough to seek it and have the juice to carry it through!"

"I did some pretty depraved things."

Lucius looked down at his friend. "Yes, you did. And most of the time you enjoyed it, as did the ~~the~~*consenting* witch you were debauching. You had imagination, I'll give you that.

"But the rest of the time, you were as thestral-shit with fear as I was. Our biggest tragedy is not the things we did, but why we did them. We were too frightened not to. We had to survive."

"That is no longer the case. I was enjoying myself with Hermione." Severus flushed with shame.

Lucius looked mildly exasperated as he refilled Severus' drink. "Don't think I'm as vapid as I look."

Severus bit back, "You couldn't be."

Another long suffering sigh escaped the blond man. "Thirty years later, and you are still wounding me with the same insults." He took another sip. "I saw you at the revels - you know, the ones we were subjected to when *he* returned." Lucius did not need to clarify who 'he' was. "You had no real stomach for rape any more than I did. Pretending that too many potions had rendered you impotent; an Order meeting which must be attended; a head cold, I believe, was the excuse you gave for the last one. *He* may have accepted these transparent excuses as truth; who knows? I never really knew what was going on the man's head. Now, I'll admit we might have enjoyed a little rum, sodomy and the lash in our youths."

Severus shot him a sour look. "I was never one for sodomy, Lucius. And I'll thank you to remember that the 'rum and the lash' part are the reason I came here in this predicament."

"Always so literal, you are." Lucius rolled his eyes heavenward. He leaned forward, and in his best 'pay attention, boy' tone of voice, declared, "My point is that you were never evil. Any real darkness was only ever put on and taken off with your Death Eater robes, my friend."

He sat back, his eyes bleak with remembrance. "I knew true darkness; I saw it often enough in those last, awful days here. It was in the face of my sister-in-law. It was in the eyes of Tom Riddle." He turned back to Severus. "It was never in yours. You were a good man, Severus. I've had ten years to analyse it, and I know I'm right. You hid it well, but in the end, your light brought me back from the brink more surely than you'll ever know."

Severus stared at Lucius, stunned. "I know," Lucius smiled. "Who would have thought me capable of such depth of understanding? I can scarce believe it myself." He sat down, and brushed a speck of lint from his immaculate trousers.

"So, on our last games night Miss Gryffindor was deceiving with the truth," mused Malfoy pensively. He smirked, "I never got Cissa that hot and bothered prancing around in *my* Death Eater robes, I can assure you. Mind you, they were so heavy I was always the one hot and bothered "

"Don't talk about it that way!" Severus spat. He looked at his friend disgustedly. "That's the whole problem with all of this! Treating those robes, those ... symbols of evil, like they're some sort of kinky costume."

"And what, pray tell, is wrong with that? That's all they *were*, Severus. I don't know why you kept the moldy old thing, anyway. Cissa put mine to the torch the moment this mess was over."

Severus, who had finished his brandy while Lucius was speaking, made a gesture toward the brandy snifter. Lucius nodded toward his own glass, and watched as Severus refreshed their drinks.

The dark-haired man took a long pull. "I kept them because I wanted to remember what we fought against. Playing house with them is wrong! It mocks those who died! It defiles the sacrifices people made on both sides in the name of all those robes stood for! It ... cheapens it."

To his surprise, Lucius laughed. Really laughed, like during a heated play on games nights when the drinks were flowing and everyone was having fun. He was holding his sides, and tears spurted from his silver eyes. "Oh Severus! Merlin, if I didn't know you were serious I would call Hermione and tell her what you just said." He managed to gain control over himself, ignoring Severus' glowering form standing over him.

With a last chuffing laugh, Lucius sat back and sighed as he wiped his eyes. Severus was fuming. "It's not amusing in any way, Lucius."

"But it is, Severus. That's the difference between my upbringing and yours. I know the significance, the *true* significance of those robes. Thank Merlin one of us was brought up to know better."

Lucius shook his head and gave his friend a look of pity and understanding. "Severus, nothing was more low-rent than being a Death Eater. Those itchy old deathtraps cheapened *us*, Severus. *The significance you place on them* is what mocks those who gave their lives in this mad war."

Severus slowly sat down, shaken. Lucius' words had struck home. "You see, Severus?" he implored. "Nothing good on this earth came from you wearing those robes, except giving your hot-blooded, Gryffindor wife the thrill of her life. What could be more redemptive than that?"

Severus frowned into his glass. He saw so clearly in his mind's eye Hermione's face when she turned around and saw him wearing the robes for the first time. It had not been some kinky game to Hermione. She was on fire for her wizard, the dark side as well as the light. She wanted him, in all of his shades of imperfection, not a Death Eater. *And you sent her away, as if she'd been the one in the wrong ...*

"But returning to more recent events," said Lucius briskly, "if Hermione desires for you to continue this sexy little role playing with her, why not? She's a very strong witch capable of hexing your bollocks off if you take things too far, which you won't- "

Severus made a low growling noise. "That's the point, Lucius! I did! I made her say our safe word! She was screaming it!"

"What is it?"

Severus stopped pacing. "What is what?"

"Your safe word," Lucius replied, his eyes as wide and innocent as a young boy's. "I'm merely curious."

Impatiently, Severus replied, "Bumbershoot, but "

"Huh. Odd little word, isn't it?" Lucius mused. "Then again, it's not the sort of word one would usually scream during sex, so I suppose it's as good as any "

"It doesn't matter what the fucking safe word is! That's not the point, Lucius!"

Lucius stood and crossed the floor to stand by his friend. "Yes, it is." He laughed. "Honestly, Severus. Sometimes I think you actually believe that what you truly deserve is to end up an old, half-breed wizard, in a squalid little bedsit in Purley, huddled around a tin of Voldie's Revenge for warmth and comfort. Keep believing it and you'll turn it into a self-fulfilling prophecy!"

He reached forward and gave the dark-haired man a shake. "Safe words are there for a reason! You got carried away with your own dark fantasy she said the safe word what did you do?" When Severus did not reply, Lucius cocked his head and pursed his lips. "Well, go on what did you do?"

Severus muttered, "I stopped."

"You stopped. *And* you turned tail and ran away." Lucius tutted again. "Poor form, Severus. Being the big, bad, irredeemable Death Eater you are, why didn't you just keep going and hurt her some more?" He gave Severus a cuff around his ear.

Severus growled warningly, "Lucius ..."

Lucius tilted his head. "Do you honestly think a true Death Eater would even *give* his victim a safe word, much less *honour* it when it was spoken? Stop self-flagellating yourself over things you were forgiven for years ago and for things you had no control over. Everyone knows the measure of you, Severus, except yourself."

Severus looked at his friend for a long time, seeing the truth behind Lucius' foppish exterior. Finally, he sheepishly answered. "I've been the biggest sort of fool, haven't I?" The hopeful note in his voice was almost painful to hear, and Lucius' felt an odd sort of affection well in his breast. It reminded him of how he often felt for Draco.

He smiled smugly at Severus. "You're not as stupid as you look."

Severus sighed. "I don't know, Lucius. Once a Death Eater "

"Always a Death Eater, I know. I took the oath too, my friend." Lucius' smile turned wistful again, as they spontaneously pushed back their sleeves to reveal the faded smudge of the Dark Mark both had taken in their youth.

Quietly, Lucius said, "I wanted to believe that my family name and bloodline would be secure; you wanted to believe that power could make up for a lifetime of helplessness. We both had the means within to accomplish what we sought, but we didn't have the confidence we needed to do it. We wanted it so badly we ransomed ourselves to the manifesto of a madman."

"But we love, Severus. And as hideously Hufflepuff as it sounds, my family is my life, and in the end, I got my life back." Severus could hear the emotion in his friend's voice.

Lucius added, "So did you, Severus. Don't throw it away because you think you're not *supposed* to deserve it."

Severus nodded in acceptance. He looked at Lucius with new eyes and replied ruefully, "When did you go and get so deep on me, Lucius?"

"Oh, I've always had depth, Severus. I just found it easier to hide in the shallow pool. You were always the one drowning in the deep end."

He gave his friend a fond pat on the back. "Go home. Apologise to that lovely wife of yours and flog her into a mass of insensate lust." He prodded Severus to his feet and turned him toward the door. "There's a lovely little shop in Knockturn Alley called Pandora Spocks. You know the type - just bristling with all sorts of treats for your kinky little lioness to play with. Go and buy her something nice. Tell them *I* sent you."

Genuinely intrigued, Severus asked, "Why? Will they give me a discount?"

Lucius looked pained. "No, but the Malfoy name still carries weight in this country. If you mention me, *I'll* get a discount."

Severus chuckled, his heart suddenly lighter. "Still scrounging freebies. Quintessential Lucius."

His friend saluted him with his glass. "Still refusing to believe the best of yourself. Quintessential Severus."

Lucius opened the door. "Severus, don't screw this up. I'm counting on you not to break up our 'Golden Quartet.' Go and beg your little girl for forgiveness, then roger a Hermione-shaped dent in the mattress. Or the bed of nails, or whatever you degenerates are using as a surface nowadays."

"I will. Do pass on my love to Narcissa."

"I will. Tell Hermione I look forward to our next games night."

Severus Apparated to the grounds and walked toward the school gates. He wanted to give himself time to plan exactly what to do and say to make things right with Hermione. He entered the castle, feeling a renewed sense of optimism. Hermione was the brightest witch of her age. She knew he had ballsed up royally, but she loved him; she would forgive him for being such a berk. Severus increased his stride, his long legs eating up the miles of corridors to their bed chamber.

He would be tender and gentle, but still dominant and in control, just enough to test the waters, to see if she wanted to continue with their experiment. Merlin, he hoped so. It had been fucking amazing.

Mentally, he retraced his actions in the cave, right up to the moment she'd screamed the safe word. It was difficult; he had been so caught up in the sheer rapture of the moment he scarcely remembered his own name. He had unrepentantly taken liberties with the definition of pleasure, to be sure, but she had reveled in that. The little forays into punishment and discipline had excited her unbearably; he could sense it, taste it on his tongue, scent it in the air.

She had begged him for more and he had willingly given it, drinking in her pleas and cries as he pounded his urgency and his lust into her body. It was only when he realized he was holding her hair like the reins of a horse had he come back to himself. Something about her hair, perhaps?

He frowned. He loved dragging his hands through the wild, untamable mane of her hair. How many times in the past few days, leading up to the cave, had he buried his hands in her impossible tresses, kissing her feverishly, as she opened her mouth and allowed his domination?

He quietly opened the door to their bed chamber, and approached their bed, thinking she would be asleep. He would undress and slip in behind her, using all his formidable powers of persuasion to entice her to forgive him. She had to; she simply *had* to.

The bed was empty.

For a moment, Severus stood staring at the bed. He was disappointed, but not unduly concerned. He looked at the time; it was just past midnight. Perhaps she'd taken a walk around the school. She sometimes did so after a difficult day, just to work off some tension. Perhaps he'd corner her in a deserted classroom and make a detention fantasy come true.

Severus took out his wand. "*Accio Headmaster's Map!*" A small scrap of parchment flew into his hands, and he laid it on the bed.

When Hermione had told him about the infamous Marauder's Map that belonged to Harry Potter, he had been reluctantly impressed with the magic needed to imbue the map with the ability to track each and every person in the school - even though it had rankled him at the time to admit it.

When Hermione had returned to Hogwarts as a professor, Severus had enlisted her, along with Minerva and Filius, to create something similar for himself and future Headmasters and mistresses. It not only showed the whereabouts of each person in the castle, but everyone on the grounds, and could switch from House to House and from Wizarding Folk to other Magical Creatures. It could also zero in on one particular person or one particular part of the castle.

It had become an invaluable tool; it had also cemented his reputation with students as being able to appear out of nowhere at the very moment a student was in a part of the school they shouldn't be in performing acts of mischief they shouldn't be doing. He often wondered if Dumbledore had owned something similar, but if he had, the old poof wasn't telling.

Severus tapped the parchment with his wand. "Show me Hermione Snape." He watched the map swirl and change like smoke moving over the parchment. Lines formed and dissipated, names flickered over the surface and vanished.

Severus frowned. The words, "*Hermione Snape is not at Hogwarts*" appeared on the parchment.

Scowling, Severus tapped the parchment again. "Show me Severus Snape." Within seconds, the shapes and words shifted to reveal the line drawing of their quarters, and the legend, "*Severus Snape is in the Headmaster's Bed Chambers*" flashed over the parchment.

His heart pounding, Severus tried to think where Hermione might be. They had several friends, but he could not imagine her with them. In fact, knowing her, there was really only one place she might be.

The cave was dark and cold; the fire had died, leaving the room dank and gloomy. The bed was empty there as well. Feeling the first vestiges of apprehension blooming in his chest, Severus called her name, but heard nothing but the echoes mocking him, tossing her name back to him in his beautiful voice.

Chapter Eleven

Chapter 11 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Play the game for more than you can afford to lose ... only then will you learn the game. Winston Churchill

Severus returned from the cave, back to Hogwarts, trying not to panic. He was sure there was a perfectly reasonable explanation for Hermione's absence. There was no cause for alarm. Yet.

He stood in the middle of the room and tried to calm his pounding heart. It embarrassed him that he, of all people, allowed his fear to unsettle his reason. *For fuck's sake, Snape, you used to be a sodding spy use that supposedly brilliant mind of yours to think!* He chided himself, and took a deep breath to quell the rising anxiety. She had to be *somewhere*. Riding on the coattails of that thought was a new, insidious notion: what if she didn't want him to find her?

He looked around their bedroom for clues. Nothing was missing; all her clothes were in place. He opened the wardrobe and breathed a cautiously hopeful sigh at the sight of her beaded bag. Hermione never went anywhere for any length of time without that bag. It had been with her since her year on the run before the end of the war, and even Severus admitted it was a thing of pure genius, even if it was a trifle shabby now. If it was still here, Hermione wasn't seriously thinking of leaving. Yet.

Severus stepped into their bathroom, and breathed a final sigh of relief. Her toothbrush was still here. Hermione, daughter of dentists, never went anywhere for longer than a day without it next to her wand and the bag, it was her most indispensable travel companion. Hermione hadn't left him. Yet.

Feeling slightly dizzy with relief, Severus sat down and tried to gather his thoughts. He honestly didn't think they'd crossed paths going to and from the Malfoys; Lucius, knowing Severus' anxiety, would have insisted that Hermione Floo-call him. He honestly couldn't see her showing up at Grimmauld Place or the Burrow at midnight, asking if she could stay the night. Her parents were living in Australia and had been since before the war; both Hermione and Severus had long ago sold their childhood residences. Hogwarts was their only home now.

Severus leapt to his feet, fighting the urge to slap his forehead. Of course! "Winky!" he bellowed. Instantly the little house-elf appeared, twisting her hands in her Hogwarts tea towel. Her round eyes were huge and troubled.

"Is the Headmaster needing anything, sir?" she asked, her squeaky voice fraught with concern. The Headmaster never bothered house-elves this late at night.

"Winky, could you please find Mrs. Snape, and tell her ask her to please return to Hogwarts with you?" Severus fought to keep the irritation from showing in his voice. Here he'd been, running about like a headless chicken, when he could have located her in five seconds had he been thinking straight. House-elves, with their own powerful magic, were expert in locating people and objects. It only occurred to Severus afterward to be grateful for their legendary discretion as well. The gossips would have a field day with this if they found out.

Winky nodded so enthusiastically Severus was afraid she would bang her head on the floor. She squeaked, "Yes, sir. Winky will be finding Mrs. Headmaster in two ticks." The house-elf disappeared with a small "POP!" and Severus sat back and waited, praying to the gods Hermione would agree to return. He'd purposely chosen Winky because of Hermione's well-known affinity for the once-abused elf, and Severus felt smugly sure Hermione would come back if only to spare the house-elf's feelings. Once she was here, Severus would take over. He'd do whatever it took to keep her here. He'd get down on his knees and beg ...

It occurred to him that Winky was taking an inordinately long time to return. Most house-elves could locate someone within seconds. If she was taking this long, perhaps Hermione wasn't inclined to return with her. What if Winky couldn't persuade Hermione to come back to Hogwarts? Severus began to pace. What if Hermione *had* left him? What if she was planning on coming back in the morning to pick up her things, her bag, her toothbrush?

The "POP" that signaled Winky's return made Severus actually jump, and his heart fell to his feet at the sight of the house-elf. She was alone, and she looked worried. She ran to Severus' side.

"Headmasters, Winky is finding Mrs. Headmaster, but Winky can't get her to wake up!" Tears stood in the house-elf's enormous round eyes. "Winky shake and shake her arm, and then Winky tries magic to open her eyes, but the Mrs. Headmaster doesn't wake up! Winky thinks Mrs. Headmaster is poisoned!"

Severus felt a rush of adrenaline like a ball of fire running through his system. He forced himself not to panic. "Where is she, Winky? Take me to her." Even as he spoke, Severus strode to a special cupboard in his study, and grabbed a standard potions kit from the shelf. It contained several non-specific poison antidotes, and Severus could easily create something for a more specific need. He would not allow himself to think further.

Winky was nodding. "Yes, sir, Winky can take you there!" She took the Headmaster's large hand in hers, and together they Apparated with a loud "CRACK!"

Severus found himself back in the cave. He frowned. "Winky, I've looked here before. Are you sure "

"Winky is finding her in the red room, sir!" The little house-elf was dragging him back to the far unlit wall of the cave, to where he'd taken Hermione on the examination table. He cursed himself for not checking. Damn him and his blind panic! He should have torn the entire cave apart, instead of giving the opening a cursory glance and racing back to Hogwarts like a dunderheaded first-year.

He lit the wall sconces, which bathed the back of the cave in lurid red. He could make out a figure, lying on its side on the table, as still as death. It was Hermione.

Fear and urgency gave Severus wings, and he ran to his wife's side, leaving the little house-elf behind. "Hermione!" he called hoarsely, but the figure on the table didn't move. Severus moaned softly as he reached her side, and took her in his arms. "Hermione, please ..." he whimpered, more afraid that he'd ever been, even the night he faced his own death.

He gathered her in his arms, looking at her closely. In the dim, scarlet-hued light she looked waxy. Severus laid her gently back down on the table to run a diagnostic spell. As his shaking hand made the first pass, Severus noticed a small potion vial near her head. He recognized it immediately: Draught of Dreamless Sleep.

Feeling almost lightheaded, Severus looked down at Winky, who returned his gaze with worry-filled eyes. "Is the Mrs. Headmaster going to be alright, sir?" the house-elf queried, her voice shrill with fear as she twisted her long fingers in her tea towel.

Laughing shakily, Severus held up his hand to reassure the tiny creature. "Mrs. Snape will be fine, Winky. She's taken a powerful sleeping draught, but it will wear off in a matter of hours."

He looked back at Hermione really looked at her. She had been crying, hard. Her eyes were terribly swollen, tears had dried on her cheeks like lines of salt, and her nose was running. Quietly, he lifted his wife in his arms. She felt so small and vulnerable, and he pressed a kiss to her sweaty forehead.

As she settled into his arms, another small vial fell from her fingers. Winky scrambled to pick it up. "The Mrs. Headmaster is dropping this, sir," she said. "Shall I carry it for the Headmaster?" she added helpfully, her large eyes blinking rapidly.

Severus turned to the little house-elf. "That would be most helpful, Winky, thank you. Now, will you return us to Hogwarts?"

Relieved, Winky nodded enthusiastically. "Oh, yes, sir! Winky will be happy to!" With a sharp "POP!" Severus found himself back in his bedchambers at Hogwarts, his sleeping wife in his arms.

After gently cleansing Hermione's face and making sure that she was safely ensconced and sleeping peacefully in their bed, Severus retrieved the vial from Winky, dismissing the elf with a celebratory bottle of Butterbeer. He sat down and allowed himself a moment to contemplate what had happened.

From what he could deduce, Hermione must have blind-Apparated back to the cave shortly after he departed. She must have been truly distraught to try something so foolhardy. For reasons he could not fathom, she took a vial of Dreamless Sleep with her. His heart cramped when he realized that, while he'd been selfishly pouring his heart out to Lucius, trying to get someone to tell him what an utter bastard he'd been to his precious wife, Hermione had returned to the scene of the crime, been unable to find him and had simply taken the potion and cried herself to sleep. Looking down at her now, his heart swelled with the joy that she hadn't left him, coupled with a desire to take every point from Gryffindor House for scaring him so. He didn't know whether to hold her or spank her. He wanted to do both.

He wanted her to *want* him to do both.

He examined the vial that Winky had retrieved. As he turned the bottle this way and that, he saw silvery-white wisps of memories churning within, like strands of unicorn hair suspended in liquid. He could only deduce that the memories held the clues as to what had happened, and why.

Severus approached the bed and sat down beside his sleeping wife. In the huge bed she looked even more vulnerable and fragile. Her lovely face, though swollen and blotchy from her tears, was so dear to him. It shone with fierce intelligence, and love, and more than anything he wanted her to open her eyes and show him that love again. He was terrified of her waking and turning away from him in disgust.

Once upon a time he could have survived such an encounter by shutting down his emotions and walking away, telling himself that his pride was all he needed to survive.

He had almost convinced himself that love was a weakness, that denial of it was the true sign of strength.

That was before Hermione came into his life and made him want to be a better man before he'd learned how strong love truly could be. He looked at her again, and tugged his earlobe. *Love's got a lot to answer for*, he thought. No. Love was doing just fine until lust and power games slithered into the picture.

Severus leaned down and placed a chaste kiss on her forehead, and reluctantly rose from the bed. He glanced down again at the little vial of memories. She had extracted them for a reason. He straightened. What the hell. He was a Slytherin. He'd just have to ask for forgiveness later, rather than risk permission now.

The memories slid from the vial into his Pensieve, and he swirled them into the bowl, using his wand, before lowering his face into the churning matter.

He was in a very familiar place; he'd left it not two hours ago. Malfoy Manor.

He could hear the sounds of a scuffle and from his vantage point, Lucius, Narcissa and Draco Malfoy stood off to one side. All of them looked as if they were there at the request of Lucifer himself. Lucius looked hollow-eyed and disheveled, unkempt and unshaven, his blond hair dull and greasy. To his right, his hated sister-in-law Bellatrix Lestrange was ordering several Death Eaters to 'bring in the fugitives.'

It all gave Severus a sense of time and place. It was over ten years ago, shortly before the Battle of Hogwarts. The day the so-called 'Golden Trio' was captured by Snatchers and brought to Malfoy Manor.

With a sudden ache in his chest, Severus narrowed his eyes as he saw his wife being dragged into the room by two dirty, unkempt wizards he didn't recognise. Fenrir Greyback was practically drooling over Hermione, and even ten years later, Severus felt the murderous compulsion to hex the long-dead werewolf.

Behind Hermione, he saw Ronald Weasley and someone so swollen as to be unrecognizable. Severus remembered Hermione saying she had temporarily disfigured Harry with a Stinging hex so he could not be identified. After a fruitless attempt by Bella to get Draco to confirm the unknown boy as Harry, he and Weasley were dragged to the cellar.

As Hermione prepared to follow them, Bella turned on her with a smile that was predatory, almost sexual in its evil intent. "Why don't we have a chat, my dear just us girls."

Severus felt sick as he watched Bella Crucio his precious wife onto the ground. To make matters worse, Hermione was being tortured for information about the very sword he'd delivered to Potter on Dumbledore's orders.

Severus made himself watch Hermione's torture, as if it were some sort of penance. Her screams tore through his heart, as Bella screeched insanely

"CRUCIO! You're a lying, filthy Mudblood, and I know it! Tell the truth! What else did you take? What else have you got?"

"Nothing!" Hermione screamed, writhing on the Malfoy's carpet. "I don't know what you're talking about, I swear!" Severus felt sick with pity as Hermione pissed herself helplessly, moaning in pain and humiliation.

"Tell me the truth or, I swear, I shall run you through with this knife! What else did you take, what else? ANSWER ME! CRUCIO!" Bella laughed maniacally as Hermione wailed pitifully, the pain turning her inside out, wracking her body with horrible, rictus-like spasms.

As Hermione tried to rise onto her hands and knees, Bella jumped on her in an obscene parody of riding a horse. Hermione was screaming for mercy, and Severus cried out as Bella grabbed her hair, ruthlessly pulling on it with both hands like the reins of a horse.

"I wish you could see yourself!" Bella crowed madly, her voice high-pitched, as Hermione's scream split the room in half. "Every Death Eater alive is going to take you for a ride soon, Mudblood! You might as well confess, you dirty little Mudblood bitch!"

"I don't know anything!" Hermione cried, as she began to vomit. She took great lungfuls of air, choking on her own tears and spit. "Please stop! Stop!"

Severus caught movement out of the corner of his eye, and saw Lucius and Narcissa. They were holding hands, their knuckles white. Blood dripped from Lucius' hands where Narcissa's nails had dug into his palms. He stared straight ahead, and Severus could see the haunted, desperate looks on their faces. Still the laughter went on, the hair pulling, the Crucios, the torture, the maniacal laughter of Bellatrix Lestrange.

"Please," Hermione sobbed, her eyes mad with pain and fear. "Please, no more..." Bella's laughter was so grating Severus actually reached for her before remembering this was, after all, a ten-year-old memory about a person thankfully dead. He turned back and watched his brave girl, tears streaming down his face.

Hermione tried to crawl away but she was too weak ... her pleas for mercy went unheeded ... and still Bella held onto her hair, screeching, "That's right, little Mudblood! Beg! Beg me to let you go!"

Severus pushed himself from the Pensieve and stared into the room in shock and horror. "Oh gods, Hermione," he sobbed. "I didn't know! My poor, brave girl." Like a sleepwalker, Severus walked back into their bedroom, wiping his eyes. He felt exhausted by what he'd seen, numbed by the implications of what he'd heard.

I wish you could see yourself ... Beg me to let you go... he remembered very clearly saying those words verbatim, while taking his wife, while tugging at her hair ...

You didn't know, Severus he could almost hear Lucius telling him. *You couldn't have known ... it was all a misunderstanding ...*

Severus went into the bathroom and splashed water onto his face, the cold shocking his senses back into life. Hermione would awaken soon, and he knew he had to be there when she did. She needed him.

Hermione drifted awake, feeling warm and safe. The feeling of the soft mattress beneath her was in sharp contrast to the dank cold of the cave. She rose with a start and looked around. She was back in Hogwarts, in their bed. She sat for a moment, confused to the point of wondering if she had dreamed returning to the cave. No, she thought, giving herself a mental shake to clear her head. She *had* returned to the cave, praying Severus was there, hoping to explain herself.

"How do you feel?" Hermione whirled with a little gasp, and saw her husband standing in the doorway of their bedroom. He looked tired and worried, and unsure of his welcome. Hermione felt the tears threaten again.

"I - I went looking for you." She knew it sounded foolish to her own ears, but he nodded.

For a moment they remained still, and the silence hung between them like an apparition. Hermione took a deep breath and said quietly, "Please don't be angry with me. I can explain."

Severus walked into the room and sat beside her on the bed. He took her hands in his and kissed them softly. "There's no reason to be angry with you. I saw the memory."

Hermione closed her eyes, and when Severus took her in his arms, she felt her tears fall again. "I'm sorry, Hermione," he whispered, his sweet, silvery voice another kind of caress. "I completely misunderstood the situation, didn't I? You've never really told me about that night."

"I never really thought about it!" she cried, pulling away from him to look into his eyes. They were her husband's liquid black eyes, red-rimmed and swollen, full of concern

and love. The relief she felt at that moment was her undoing. She threw her arms around him and sobbed against his chest. "I didn't mean to spoil everything!"

For several moments Severus rocked her in his arms, shushing and crooning to her, calming her with his gentle hands, his beautiful voice. "You haven't spoiled anything, pet. Shh. You'll make yourself ill," he soothed. "Hush now. It's alright. Don't cry now."

"Thank you," she whimpered. "Thank you."

She felt him stiffen, and pull away from her. He cupped her chin in his hand and lifted her face to his. "Why on earth are you thanking me, Hermione?"

She sniffed, and he produced a snowy handkerchief. "For not leaving me."

The stricken look on his face was enough to convince Hermione of his next words. "Leaving *you*? Pet, I thought you had left *me*! I was frantic when I couldn't find you! I was so distraught I sent Winky to locate you!" There was fear in his voice, seasoned with a tinge of anger, but it disappeared when he added, "I thought I had ruined our marriage, and I was terrified."

Hermione looked up in his eyes and was shocked to see tears standing in his eyes. "But but you sent me away! You removed my bracelets!"

Severus swallowed uncomfortably. "I thought I was hurting you, Hermione. Out of the blue, you started screaming the safe word, and the only thing I could deduce that was that I'd been so caught up in dominating you that I wasn't even aware of harming you. I thought oh, I don't know what I thought. I was just so frightened that I'd done some sort of damage and you were afraid of me."

He looked away, feeling more foolish by the second. "If I'd not been so ready to believe the worst in myself, I would have calmed down and had you explain what really happened." He looked ashamed. "I wasn't worthy enough to dominate you. I didn't take the responsibilities that I should have taken."

For a moment, they sat in silence. Finally, Hermione said, "It seems we were at cross-purposes, weren't we?" She tried to smile. "I think I need to explain everything."

Severus nodded, and when she pulled him close, he acquiesced and joined her in bed. Hermione relaxed against his chest, and when he gathered her in his arms, she felt as if she could continue.

She closed her eyes as she spoke. "It was oh, Severus, what you did was wonderful. I have never felt so alive, so enthralled by you, so important to you, as I did in the cave. It was as if we were in a sort of sensual heaven, and everything you did and said to me excited me.

"We were on the bed, and I was just so far gone, so close to coming unglued," she marveled, remembering the feel of him driving into her, the pleasure of it overwhelming and welcome. "I was just on the brink of coming, and then you pulled my hair. It didn't even hurt," she added hastily, then shook her head.

"And suddenly it was as if I was *there* again. Suddenly, I just felt like I was encased in ice. It was like the world had disappeared and I was at Malfoy Manor on the carpet, wallowing in my own vomit, and Bellatrix was riding me like a fucking horse, screaming for me to beg her to let me go, and all I could think about was getting away." Hermione felt Severus' grip on her tighten. "The night it happened, I just remembered thinking; nothing I say will make this stop. She's going to torture me to death. I'm going to die here, and nothing I say will stop it."

Hermione felt Severus nod against the top of her head. "And then you remembered that you *could* say something to make it stop. Your safe word."

Hermione turned in his arms and looked up at him. "Yes! That's exactly what I was thinking." She leaned forward and kissed his cheek, and he held her tighter. "Severus, you must believe me. I hadn't thought of that night in years. I mean, I attended counseling to help me learn to deal with it, for Merlin's sake!"

She sighed in frustration. "I thought I had learned to accept it and deal with it. I mean, Bellatrix is dead, and I hadn't really even thought about it for ages." She looked at him imploringly. "Why would I have a flashback in the middle of the most glorious sex of my life?"

For a moment, she thought he wasn't going to reply. Finally, he said, "I'm no expert, but I believe that the moments were similar enough to cause them to merge in your mind."

"But but, you weren't hurting me!"

Patently, Severus continued, "No, but you were physically in a very similar pose. You were experiencing intense physical sensations, you were in an extremely submissive state of surrender, and your guard was down. I said things that triggered the memory, albeit accidentally, and suddenly you were reliving the moment."

He placed a tender kiss on her forehead. "There's no shame in it, Hermione. What you were made to endure that day was an abomination. It was just an unfortunate set of coincidences that you were made to relive it during our lovemaking."

He held her closely, and Hermione felt safe, and even more importantly, understood. Severus' voice was dark and rich with emotion. "I forget, love, that my wife, whom I regard as the epitome of bravery, a fierce Gryffindor warrior-witch, was once a terrified eighteen year-old girl who was thrown into the middle of a war with only her wits and a beaded bag as her weapons against the greatest Dark force of our generation."

He turned her in his arms until they were facing one another. "I don't think this is something that will happen to you often. But it serves as a reminder that this type of sexual relationship isn't just a physical one it affects us emotionally and mentally as well.

"When you called out the safe word, I thought I was hurting you without even realizing it. I thought the darkness in my life had brought you harm. I was so afraid I'd done irreparable damage that the coward in me fled." His voice was so low she could feel it vibrating in his chest. "I couldn't face you kicking me out of your life."

Hermione looked at him, and her heart ached. "Oh, Severus, this *has* been a tragedy of errors! If only you had stayed and let me explain!" She sighed again. "I thought you were disappointed in me that I wasn't worthy of you and the time and trouble you'd gone to in order to make tonight so incredibly special."

She nestled against him again. "I came back here to see if you'd returned, and I grabbed a Calming Draught and a spare bottle from the cabinet to place my memories in. I was determined to show you what was going on in my head, in hopes you would forgive me and help me to understand why I reacted the way I did. When you didn't return home, I went back to the cave "

"That's another thing, Hermione. How on earth did you go back?" he said, with a frown.

Hermione looked up at him rather sheepishly. "Well, I just closed my eyes and visualized the cave and Apparated."

Severus looked at her with such incredulity in his face Hermione felt as if she'd done something illegal. Finally, he stammered, "That's that's incredibly dangerous, Hermione! Promise me you'll never do something so - so "

"Stupid?"

Severus pressed his lips in a thin line. "I was about to say 'Gryffindor', but the same difference."

When she did not protest, Severus pulled her back into his arms. "We'll discuss that little infraction later, Miss Granger." When she did not react, he relaxed somewhat. So, not averse to the thought of punishment, then. Hastily he continued, "I apologise for interrupting you. You were saying you'd returned to the cave, and...?"

" And? Oh! Well, I started filling one of the bottles with the memory, and then I took the Calming Draught." She looked slightly embarrassed. "Only it wasn't, was it? I

misread the bottle, I'm afraid. I didn't realise until I was falling asleep on my feet that it was Dreamless Sleep! I had taken the entire bottle." She looked up at him with her large, amber eyes and Severus slumped with relief.

For the next hour, they held one another, filling in the blanks of the past hours apart and together. Severus felt almost giddy as the realization dawned that he had not destroyed his marriage. Followed closely on the heels of this epiphany was the knowledge that he had also not destroyed their sex life, their friendship, and most importantly, his wife's peace of mind.

In a particularly long silence, Severus summoned his courage to the sticking place and asked, "Hermione, do you forgive me for sending you back?"

She turned and looked at him carefully. Slowly she said, "There is nothing to forgive, Severus. Do you forgive me for insisting we embark on this," she waved her hand as if to draw it in the air, "experiment we started in the cave? I'm sorry about what happened but for your sake, not mine." She lowered her eyes bashfully. "I loved what you did. I wanted it." She took a deep breath, and dared to look him in the eye. "I still do, if you wish to continue."

Severus felt the corners of his mouth twitch. "Again, pet, there is nothing to forgive. I was the one too concerned with protecting myself. I allowed my pride in the man I have become to overshadow the man I was; the man I am. I honestly thought that in trying to become a better man that I should erase the past."

He relaxed. "The things that happened all those years ago they can't be erased, even if we place all the memories of them in a Pensieve. We just have to learn to live with them, as you did." He pulled his ear thoughtfully. "As I was reminded earlier this evening, I have a lot of self-recrimination to make up for."

The smile on Hermione's face was all the answer he needed. Severus kissed her forehead again, and paused to enjoy her downy skin, her soft, milky fragrance. "I have made my peace with the past." He stroked her face, brushing the last remnants of her tears away. "I can take pleasure in this, in you, in any way you desire. I too, want this to continue."

Hermione looked into his eyes, and felt her heart swell until it felt as if it would burst from her chest. She leaned forward and pressed her lips to his, and sighed into his mouth. "I couldn't agree more," she said, smiling.

He pulled her closer and kissed her again, his lips warm and slow, a gradual, tender pressure against her mouth, deepening by inches, until his mouth suckled against hers, and she whimpered her appreciation, allowing his soft, insistent tongue entrance.

These were not the exhilarating, suffocating kisses of a Master, but the tender, overwhelming kisses of a man making love with his mouth, his lips, his tongue; a man seducing his witch, ensnaring her with her own arousal. These kisses were just as devastating, just as mind-robbing. Hermione felt his hands thread tentatively through her hair, and she broke away from him.

Seeing the uncertainty in his face, she added hastily, "May I do something for you, sir?"

The change in his demeanor was immediate and unsettling. He seemed to grow at once darker and more solid, but the fire in his eyes sent Hermione's heart thudding hard in her chest. He tilted his head. "And what would like to do for me, little girl?" To sweeten his words, he dialed in just enough silken menace in his voice to make the saddle between her legs grow hot and wet.

Hermione smiled, and felt the invisible bond between them slip back into place. "I would like to finish what we started, which was rudely interrupted earlier."

He smiled sensuously, with just a whisker of a smirk playing about his lips. "Nothing would satisfy me more, Miss Granger." He reached for his wand and magically removed their clothing.

Hermione shivered with delight at the feel of his marble-cool skin against hers. Suddenly, the thought of wrapping her hand around his already-rigid member was maddening, like an itch she was dying to scratch. Hermione moaned, "May I touch you, sir?"

His heated gaze only served to embed the precious ache deeper into her core. His fingers found her erect nipple, waiting for him, and he moaned. "I have no will left in which to deny you, pet," he murmured. The soft desperation and relief in his voice was unbearably sweet. "Please touch me. Do whatever perverse acts you want with my body, and I'll beg you for more."

With a smile on her lips, Hermione moved against him, sliding her hands over his smooth, pale flesh, nuzzling against the warm, fragrant skin at his throat. She nipped against his neck, knowing how much he enjoyed it, knowing it would leave him moaning with longing. She urged him with soft entreaties, and soon he was looking up at her as she straddled him.

She moved languidly down his pale body, placing slow, caressing, biting kisses on his caramel-coloured nipples, his stomach, his hipbones. She paused at the tip of his cock, and placed a loving soft kiss on the tip, licking a dollop of pre-cum from her lips. Humming with appreciation, she whispered, "Tell me what you want, Master, and I will do it." She smiled and reluctantly moved away from the temptation of his rigid member, and rose to mount him.

The heat in his gaze turned molten, and the hands resting lightly on her thighs pulled at her firmly. "I want you to fuck me," he breathed, a long slow exhale of satisfaction as she hovered, poised, over his straining cock. "That's it. Ride me."

Hermione would have liked to have teased him; a gentle, playful punishment for his earlier heartless demands for patience and discipline. The truth was that she couldn't. Her desire wouldn't allow it. She had to have him, and with pure Gryffindor eagerness, she impaled herself on his raging prick in one long, deep stroke, making them both cry out into the room.

"Gods!" she moaned, gasping, riding out the urge to let her orgasm go, even as Severus hissed and bucked beneath her.

"Merlin's bollocks, girl," he swore, licking his lips. His eyes rolled back as she clenched around him. He grasped her hips. "Move on me. Do it." Hermione obeyed by rising from his slender hips, then dropping down, keeping her hips tilted back so that he could watch his shaft pulling away from her needy body. He moved with her, hissing with pleasure each time she received his sharp, upward stroke.

"Why is it that every time I fuck you it feels like the very first time I entered your silken cunt?" he growled, pouting with the exquisite pleasure of tapping against her tender cervix.

She gasped in delight with the growing intensity of each downward rock of her hips, each upward thrust of his cock. "Why is it that I'm always so wet for you, love?" She countered huskily.

He gave her a smile of pure, heated bliss. "You really are deliciously wet ... and so hot ... you could burn me to cinders and I'd still beg for the privilege." His fingers drifted to her clit and began their dance. He watched her face as it changed, grew slack with pleasure. "Oh, yes, pet, I am addicted to you."

Her hips rolled sensuously as she ground down on him. "I want this so much," she moaned, watching his face intently, watching it gradually slacken as he gave himself up to the pleasure. "Because you're my Daddy and my Master, and I want you to enjoy it, to give into it." His hips rose to meet hers, and his eyes grew darkly glazed with need. "Let go, my love," she whispered, her nails gently scoring his chest, making him shiver. "Show me how much you want it."

As she moved, Hermione reached around behind and cupped his balls in her hand, stroking his perineum as she rocked into him. He whimpered, his face growing soft and blank, as if he were releasing the moorings within himself and allowing her to take him where she chose. Hermione understood the dark power of dominance a little better when Severus opened his glowing eyes and whimpered; a look of complete, innocent abandon on his face.

Hermione smiled down at him, and reached forward ostensibly to give him access to her breasts, but in reality she retrieved a small object from her nightstand. A silent spell later and she rose back over Severus, a goddess of light, smelling of sex and need and power, and he rolled her nipples in his long fingers as he felt her reach behind

and slide her slick hand beyond his perineum. She tenderly circled the ring of his anus, then slipped a small plug into his waiting hole. "Bear down," she crooned, and his eyes rolled back. A sigh of pleasure washed over her, and she leaned over to reward his mouth with her nipples again.

Severus felt the device in his rectum pressing against his prostate, and his groin was instantly flooded with the most melting, delicious pleasure he'd ever experienced. He mewled softly, "Baby ... my good girl, that's it ... that's it ..." He grasped her hips and began to buck up into her. "Oh, fuck," he moaned, his balls aching for release. He had never felt so vulnerable, or so ready.

He looked into her eyes with such feral joy Hermione could feel her skin tighten. Dark, demonic lust flushed his face, and he grew more abandoned. Hermione could feel her own climax pooling in her core, a gathering of nerve endings and emotions and the best, purest magic, and when Severus cried out, "Come, now! You must come with me, Hermione! Oh yess ... girl, please!" Hermione shattered into a million pieces, each as crystalline and perfect as she would ever be because she was one with her wizard, her man, her lover, her master, her daddy, her slave ...

She looked down at him, her face glowing with unspeakable pleasure, as she twitched and mewled her little cries with each thumping pulse of her sex. He had given her everything she wanted and now he was receiving it back a thousand fold, and it augmented him to the order of the angels. It didn't seem possible to come this hard for this long. He would surely rupture something if his cock continued its spraying, spitting dance in his beautiful wife's body. He was quivering all over, crying out desperately as he rode out the last waves of his orgasm.

Hermione collapsed against his heaving chest, gasping harshly for breath. They were both shaking, laughing, crying. The blood that finally flooded back into his body from his exhausted erection was so oxygen-deprived that for a moment Severus felt on the verge of losing consciousness. Hermione slowly slid from his body, and he pulled her to him with the fervor of a drowning man clutching a life preserver. "My good, good girl," he gasped, kissing her passionately. "My babe."

As Hermione reached under and gently removed the toy, Severus shivered and hissed. Several quick cleansing spells later, and Hermione was back in his arms, melting against him lovingly.

"That little stunt was incredibly presumptuous of you, Miss Granger," he rumbled, his voice sounding sated and sleepy. With a whispered *Nox*, the room was plunged into darkness. He stifled a yawn as he added, "I can see that more time in the cave is needed. I shall have to punish you most soundly for being such a wicked girl."

In the darkness, Severus felt Hermione smile against his chest. "Thank the gods for that."

He chuckled; a low sensuous sound that even in Hermione's exhausted state had the power to make her shiver. "I shall retrieve your bracelets in the morning, pet." He grew still. "That is, if you still wish to wear them."

Hermione's grip tightened on his waist. "Very much so."

"Good," he rumbled sleepily. "But I have an idea."

"And what's that, love?"

Again the dark little chuckle vibrated in her belly. "I see we need to re-examine the consequences of your lack of patience, Miss Granger."

Words in bold are actual quotes from Deathly Hallows.

Chapter Twelve

Chapter 12 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kinder, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

Thank you so much for your amazing comments! You have no idea how much they mean to me!

As always, massive thanks to stgulik for not only her sterling beta work, but for her constant encouragement and dedication.

This is for the great and mighty Subversa, who loves Regency fics, and for DMuse, who loves me.

One cannot fix one's eyes on the commonest natural production without finding food for a rambling fancy. Jane Austen

Being the governess of the Slope household was not the most unpalatable position for a woman of her age and class, but she had nevertheless been thrilled to be given five whole days alone while her employers went to the coast to visit Mrs. Slope's sister and her new baby.

Five days of solitude and quiet how blissful that sounded to the young governess. She had already spent the first day reading to her heart's content, vowing to read until she was sick of her beloved books what a luxury!

She had walked the grounds, feeling like the queen of the castle. She had wandered the home like a happy little ghost, safe in the knowledge that she was quite alone and away from prying eyes. Only the cook and her jolly husband, the stable hostler, remained in residence, and they were just as pleased as she for the days of respite. Except for mealtimes, she saw them not at all.

But she heard them. Oh, she had heard them. Off in their room, like animals, grunting and banging the headboard against the wall! It was disgraceful; she really should find some tactful way to let them know their wanton noises had been heard but

But she could not. She had listened with complete and utter concentration to cook's moans and cries, her husband's deep answering growls and endearments, and had felt a sharp, hungry yearning. It had been so long since the furtive fumbings of her own youth, but she still remembered. She could close her eyes and still see the young stable boy who had classically seduced her when she was but an eighteen-year-old girl. Oh, yes, she still remembered the stolen caresses, the short, sharp shock of the

loss of her maidenhead. Sometimes at night, she would picture his dark hair and flashing dark eyes, as he pulled the pleasure from her untouched body, and she would burn ...

She shook her head to clear her licentious thoughts. Such wicked musings were inappropriate for a woman of her position, in this day and age. After all, she was eight and twenty now, an enlightened woman; her body should be long past the age for the mindless drives of the flesh. And yet, at night, hearing the strained sounds of her fellow house servants, the rhythmic slap of the bed against the wall, it would take all her will not to raise her nightclothes and touch herself.

Such thoughts in the bright light of day alarmed her. She was not a woman of bad breeding or ill fame why on earth was she thinking like one? "Another read, I think," she said aloud, heading quickly toward the library. Perhaps a walk through the garden after supper wouldn't go amiss, either. Nothing like fresh air and a good book to prepare the body for a night's sleep - a long, dreamless night's sleep.

There was a knock at the door, and she sighed fretfully. She had hoped there would be no callers while her employers were away. Even cook and her husband were absent from the house at present; when she returned from her walk, they had asked if she would mind spending a few hours alone while they visited friends in the nearby village.

Visiting the pub, more like, she'd thought to herself, but she nevertheless smiled and sincerely wished them a pleasant evening. Although it was strictly improper to leave a young, unmarried woman alone in the house, she had assured them she was quite capable of taking care of herself, and would be happy to while away the hours by the fire in the library amongst her beloved tomes.

The weather had conspired to make it a strange sort of day, and thunder and lightning had been threatening since the afternoon, leaving her feeling discontent and unable to sit still. So the intrusion of another was not welcome. For a moment she thought of simply ignoring the rather polite taps on the door, but propriety would not allow it. The roiling clouds meant that, whoever her guest was, they would soon be caught in the storm if she pretended they did not exist.

She opened the door just as a flash of lightning formed a corona of light around the tall figure silhouetted in the opening, making her gasp and jump. In the seconds it took for her to calm her pounding heart, she took the measure of the man in the doorway.

He was tall and thin, dressed in unrelieved black, except for his white collar. The paleness of his face and hands stood out in stark contrast to the severe robe and his raven hair. Instantly, she recognized the gaunt, stern features of their village vicar. He looked surprised that the governess would be answering the door.

"Father! Forgive me the lightning gave me a rather childish fright," she said, blushing prettily. She held open the door for him. "Please come in before the storm truly takes hold."

She stepped aside as he entered Slope Manor, brushing the rain from his shoulders. "I'm terribly sorry to have alarmed you, Miss, but I had hoped to outrace the storm," he explained in his lovely voice. It was deep and melodious, with just a lilt of the North in its inflection, and it gave weight and charm to every word of his weekly sermons.

He turned to her, ramrod straight, still and somewhat diffident, looking down his large, rather prominent nose at her. "Unfortunately, I'm afraid my horse threw a shoe, and I was forced to walk it here."

She led the priest into the library. "How dreadful for you! Please warm yourself by the fire, Father. I'm sure our hostler would be only too happy to have a look at your horse." She poured the priest a glass of sherry. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait until he returns from visiting friends, however. You see, he and his wife are out for the evening, and the Slopes are down South visiting relatives."

The priest nodded politely. "I was surprised to see the stables empty when I entered therein. I am doubly sorry I have inconvenienced you, Miss."

She smiled. While she had engaged the priest in conversation only once before, she found him to be serene, pious, and only slightly aloof. He accepted his glass of sherry with a formal nod of thanks, and waited until she was seated before he took his seat. For a moment they looked at one another, the silence strained and uncomfortable. Finally, the priest cleared his throat, as if preparing to launch into a Sunday missive.

"I had hoped to pay a visit with your employer this evening, and now have disturbed you and placed you in the uncomfortable position of receiving a gentleman caller alone. Forgive me." He placed the glass of sherry on the table and stood to take his leave. "I will return during a more opportune time."

Just as he rose, there was a deafening crash of thunder, causing her to jump again. Rain began to pound at the windows in torrential sheets. She turned to the priest with an apologetic smile.

"It appears that Providence has other plans, Father." She motioned for him to resume his seat. "I could not send you out in this storm to walk back to the vicarage on foot, regardless of propriety."

The priest blushed to his hairline. "I will assure you, Miss, I could not bear the thought of possibly compromising your situation here."

As if to answer, the thunder and lightning flashed and crashed overhead, and she actually cried out in surprise. Pressing a hand to her thumping heart, she laughed shakily. "If I were to be perfectly frank, Father, I would rather you stayed here. As dire as the elements are tonight, I think I would feel much safer with a man of the church here to protect me from them!"

To her surprise, the priest ducked his head. In the lovely voice that had charmed and infatuated more than one female parishioner, he said, "I do not pretend to have divine influence over the elements, Miss, but I will gladly stay if I can act in the role of protector of the house."

She smiled at him, and the priest's stern heart leapt. He knew of no lovelier woman in this part of his parish. She was innocent and virtuous, to be sure, but with such a serene countenance as he had seldom seen.

As the tempest raged outside, they gradually forgot the worries of propriety and spoke easily with one another of city life, their vocations, and their families. It became clear that the gale had settled in for the evening, and that cook and her husband would be hours away from returning to the manor; the priest was equally as long away from returning to the vicarage.

As the clock chimed ten, she rose and said to him, "I simply could not allow you to risk your health in this torrent, Father." She looked doubtful, but added, "I'm sure cook and the hostler will understand when they return, but won't you retire here at the Manor for the evening?"

His eyes were shocked, and for a moment, she felt as if she'd proposed something brazen. Hastily she added, "The South Wing is empty, but for a few dusty bedrooms. You would be most welcome there."

He frowned, and placed a pale hand over his heart. "I am not sure that would be seen as prudent, Miss "

She looked at him imploringly. "Please, Father! I understand your reticence, but I pray you don't leave merely on this account! I would never forgive myself if harm befell you!"

The priest looked at the fire, and back at the lovely governess. Finally, he nodded reluctantly. "Very well, then. I accept your generous hospitality, Miss." He graced her with a smile that lit his austere features.

She took him to the South Wing of the manor, which was in actuality a small set of rooms off the main hall.

As the oil lamp passed from her hand into his, their fingertips brushed one another's, sending a jolt racing through her system. His eyes shot up to meet hers, and he

acknowledged her with a little, formal bow. "Goodnight, Miss. May your dreams be as full of innocence and sweetness as you yourself."

Blushing, she replied, "Why, thank you, Father. May *your* dreams be pleasant as well."

She stood watching the door as it swung closed.

The storm battered fruitlessly against the stone house, and she lay on her bed, restive, craving sensations she did not dare name. Thoughts of the most indecent nature played in her head, and she was both ashamed and frightened of the arousal they caused. In her mind she saw the ascetic priest, his dark, dark eyes watching her intently, the feel of their fingers touching. He so reminded her of her stable-boy, with his black hair and dusky body, pressing her onto the hay, humming a sweet tune to seduce and arouse her.

He had been so patient and beautiful, readying her with his warm, rough hands, tangling them in her long, wanton curls, pressing his pale, hot member into her waiting womanhood. It had been the slightest sting, then the most delicious pleasure, and she had moaned into his mouth as he rode her body knowingly, blissfully ...

She thought of the priest, somewhere in the house, like a pale spirit. He's in the house with me, alone, she thought. What would it be like to know such a man

"Stop it!" she whispered fiercely. She was a woman grown she should ~~and~~ could hold sway over her base desires. "What on earth would he think if he knew your wicked thoughts?" she chastised herself, and turned scarlet with the shame of the imagined look of revulsion he would wear.

She fell asleep, fitfully, yearning...

The priest lay in his large bed, trying to pray. Each time he closed his eyes and tried to summon the Infinite, the lovely face of the Slope governess replaced the angelic hosts with something much more real, so much more accessible ...

He was not a man given to flights of carnal obsession; like many men of the cloth, he wished to eventually marry well and have sons, but he had never felt the need to daydream about this landowner's young daughter or that spinster parishioner with the child-bearing hips. True, he had noticed them, but had not panted over them; they had never tempted the flesh as did this lovely governess, with her intelligent eyes and curvaceous body, made for sin ...

For perhaps two hours the priest prayed for strength and guidance, for forbearance, for forgiveness against temptation. But every time he thought he had managed to quell the old Adam of his heart, he could picture her face, turned up to his ...

He rose from his bed and began to pace.

In her bed, the governess fell into an uneasy slumber, tossing restlessly to and fro, her body feverish and flushed. As true deep sleep descended, her taut limbs relaxed, and she began to dream ...

It was no use; he was not getting any sleep. He simply could not get her out of his mind. To know that somewhere in the house she lay invitingly in a bed, made his traitorous body rage, and the priest felt an unholy desire to seek her out. He told himself he would just watch her serene face, soft in repose. *Of course that's why you want to go to her*, the imp at his left shoulder hissed. *Don't you really want to pull off the bed sheets and push up her nightclothes ...*

"Enough!" he growled softly. He hastily donned his robe and headed for the library. Slope's brandy was there - perhaps a glass or two and he would find sleep at last ...

In the dark, she rose from her bed, slowly, as if being summoned. Her eyes were glazed and heavy-lidded. She walked with slow, measured steps, toward her books, her beloved books ...

The priest had lit a solitary candle to show him the way to the library, and had just located the liquor cabinet when he heard the sound of the door open. He whirled about, almost dropping the candle in surprise as she entered.

"Miss - ?" he said softly, but she walked past him, unseeing, and sat down in a chair, staring at the fire. He looked at her carefully, his brow furrowed in a confused frown. She sat, gazing at the dying embers, heavy-limbed and silent. She was clad in nothing more than a thin nightgown, and he could see the outline of her body in the light of the fire. Her hair was loose; long, honey-brown tresses curled and flowed unfettered down almost to her waist; she looked like a peaceful angel.

Except no angel had ever sat so indecently clothed in her employer's library in the middle of the night, her soft skin glowing in the firelight, her lovely, pert breasts pressed against the thin fabric, exposing her tender nipples to his riveted gaze.

Moving on silent feet, the priest approached her side. His heart was pounding, and the candle in his hand was shaking. He knelt down beside her chair.

"Miss?" When she did not respond, he looked carefully into her face, and when he saw the curiously blank look in her eyes, he realized with a certain fascination that she was sleepwalking. He had once read that abruptly waking a sleepwalker could have dire, possibly fatal consequences, and a rush of protectiveness flooded his heart. He placed the candle on the table, and gently grasped one arm to pull her onto her feet. "Come with me, Miss," he whispered, gently, intending to find her room and guide her gently back into her bed.

Obediently, she rose with him, but once on her feet, she seemed to melt against him, and suddenly, she was in his arms, and her warm, soft, lovely breasts swelled against his robe. Tender fingers slid around his neck trustingly, twining in his hair, and she made a soft sound of surrender as she pressed against him.

"You're here," she murmured in her sleep. "You're here with me. You came back to me."

He could barely breathe. His wicked, sinful heart was betraying him in the basest way imaginable, and he found his own arms sliding around her waist, pulling her to his hard and needy body. His manhood swelled so quickly it seemed to leave no blood in his brain with which to think, and all awareness narrowed down to the feel of her soft flesh pressed to his.

A thought stole unbidden into his heart. She was there, alone with him. No one else was in the house, only him, only her. And she was deeply asleep.

You could do anything you want to her, and no one would know said the little imp sitting on his left shoulder.

He pulled slightly away from her, and tipped her face up to his. He could see her heavy-lidded, unfocused eyes in the soft candlelight; they were such a lovely amber colour, and her lips were plump and waiting ...

"Kiss me," he whispered.

She smiled in her sleep, raised her face to his, and kissed his cold, trembling lips. She felt warm and alive, and her soft mouth moved against his with an innocent sensuality that almost drove him to his knees. He cupped her cheek in his large hand, and drank from her sweet mouth.

Finally, breaking the kiss, he stepped back again, burning with a helpless lust that he could not break. She stood before him, a sleepy smile on her lips, swollen from his kisses.

The priest's blood boiled; he had never felt this way, and he was powerless to stop himself. Tomorrow he would resign, tomorrow he would run away, pray for forgiveness, anything to atone for the sin he must commit tonight.

"Would you -" he rasped, and licked his suddenly dry lips. "Raise your gown for me."

She silently grasped the sides of her thin, summer nightgown, and slowly pulled it up a few inches. "More," he urged, his eyes growing dark and full of power. Without any reaction other than to obey, she raised the gown until he could see it. She was bare beneath. "Oh, yes," he moaned, as the dark patch of soft curls appeared, peeking from the hem of her garment. Without conscious thought, the priest sank to his knees and gazed at it longingly, this tempting garden, this triangle, this gateway to paradise, and he was face to face with it. He looked up at her, but she merely gazed down at him, silently regarding him like an acolyte, poised at her womanhood, readying for worship.

He gently touched her soft, milky thighs, and trembled at how smooth, how velvety they were to the touch. Tentatively, he brushed the backs of his fingers against the soft thatch, and before he could stop himself, he leaned forward and pressed his large nose against it, seeking her out with the innocence of a pagan.

The scent of her intoxicated him; he almost swooned at the heady perfume of her sex, and he buried his nose into her curls and sniffed hard, flooding his brain with her, memorizing the musky, clean smell of her. His tongue darted from his mouth like that of his old enemy the serpent's, and slid into the soft slit of her pussy. She was shamelessly moist and the taste of her was as sweet and as heady as wine, and he knew he must have more.

"Sit on the sofa," he commanded hoarsely, and she silently obeyed, still clutching her gown. He approached her warily, checking for signs that she might awaken, but she was still as deeply asleep as she'd been upon her arrival. With a thumping heart, the priest once again knelt before her, silently cursing himself for his lack of control. "You're so beautiful," he crooned, and she smiled in her sleep.

"You are beautiful," she murmured in reply, and when he placed his cool, pale hands on her knees he felt no resistance.

"Open your legs," he entreated, and she sighed in her sleep as his large hands pressed her thighs apart, revealing her lovely, glistening womanhood, and he begged his God for forgiveness, even as his serpent's tongue slid into her lovely secret place, and began to lap at her.

She moaned above him, and he glanced at her still-sleeping face. He was drunk with pleasure and desire and the taste of her sweet juices. Within her folds, his tongue slid over a tiny little button, no bigger than a grape seed. He felt it swell against his lips, and she whimpered softly and began to shudder beneath him.

Understanding, he licked harder, lapping at her folds hungrily, feeling her twitch each time his hard tongue laved over the little bud. When he drew it gently into his mouth, she stiffened, and when his tongue flicked sharply over the surface, she trembled and mewled uncontrollably with her climax. She bathed him in pulsing warmth and moisture, sweeter still.

He drew back from her, his cheeks drenched from her juices, and watched her face intently. It was glowing with her release, but still in its deeply dreaming state, and he panted as his long fingers, seemingly of their own accord, slipped into her exquisite passage.

She closed around his middle and ring fingers tightly, and when he pushed gently he met no resistance. She was not a virgin, then, and his heart flooded with lust and overwhelming desire. He had to have her. He had to bury his sinfully swollen member into this velvet-lined haven.

No one would know.

He reached for the satin bow at her throat and pulled the knot free, pushing her gown from her soft shoulders until her luscious breasts were revealed to him. With eager hands he cupped the tender flesh, marveling at their shape, their texture. The little rosy tits beckoned to him, and he leaned between her parted thighs and captured one in his mouth.

She made a little sound, and her hands fluttered at her side. The priest fought down his urge to moan, still afraid of awakening her, and sighed as he cradled the little hardened bud in his mouth. It was a delectable mixture of smooth and rough, of hard and downy, and he contented himself with gently sucking at it. His fingers found its mate, and he rubbed it between his middle finger and thumb, just to feel it pucker and grow rigid between his fingertips.

He felt her hands sliding through his dark hair, pulling him closer in an almost maternal gesture. His mouth traveled hungrily to the other breast. Her soft, little sleepy coo inflamed his body, and the imp on his left shoulder bellowed for him to take her. The angel sleeping on his right shoulder was curiously silent.

Reluctantly pulling away, he carefully took her into his arms and, with a whispered command, coaxed her down onto the floor with him. Pulling her useless little gown over her head, he marveled at the beauty before him, all delectable curves and curls. For a moment, he held her against him, reveling in the forbidden.

The candle sputtered and caught his eye. The devil on his left shoulder whispered a dark suggestion into his ear again, and something like a sneer crossed over the priest's face. He reached for the candle stub, and blew it out, plunging the room into blackness. He would be a good man again tomorrow. But tonight ...

He moved to kneel beside her, and he gently pushed her neck toward the carpet. "On your knees, my sleeping beauty." He felt wondrously free and full of power. "Don't be afraid, my babe. I won't hurt you."

Quietly, with her eyes closed, she obeyed. He placed a cushion beneath her head. She crossed her arms and laid her head on them, like a child falling asleep on a windowsill.

The priest's hands were trembling as he stroked her round, baby-smooth bottom, offered to him so enticingly. Without conscious thought, he opened his robes and freed his aching member from his clerical robes. On his knees, he approached her waiting body from behind. His cock surged as he pulled her back against his loins and slid sweetly home, shuddering helplessly at the unspeakable pleasure of it. Ah, here was his true heaven, his grateful prick seemed to cry. Not there, in the prim confines of priestly wool, but here in the velveteen, tight quim of this precious babe, this beautiful woman ...

He lowered his hips and rose again, filling her with his manhood, and she whimpered in her sleep. "Yes, my babe," he moaned, her pussy like a tightly woven, silken glove around him, "You were made for me, and I for you."

The candle in his warm hand felt almost as fleshly as his own raging cock, with the same slightly tapered end. Suddenly, it was in his mouth. Making it slick with his own saliva, he gently inserted the butt of the candlestick into the unfurling little hole of her back passage. It was wicked and wrong, but he was so outside himself with such carnal, earthly desire that he no longer cared that he was damned forever. It would be a privilege to be damned to burn in eternity for her.

He moved the phallic candle in counterpoint with his own increasingly rapid thrusts. He could feel his completion rushing down upon him, and he crooned to his sleeping beauty, "Come for me, come with me, my angel, my babe, come for daddy ..."

She shuddered, moaning in time with his thrusts, and he felt her pussy ripple around his cock, drawing them together like interlocking souls, perfect in their imperfections, joined as only those blessed by God can join, and he began to thrust hard, heedless of waking her, oblivious to thoughts of God or man or angels or demons. Mindful only of the crippling, blinding pleasure of a man losing himself in the body of his woman, his angel, his goddess, and his roar of ecstasy rivaled the thunder and lightning that raged around him ...

He collapsed against her, spent, and removed the candle from its passage. It was shockingly hot; he was surprised her body hadn't melted the wax. Gasping, he looked down at his beauty, his issue seeping milkily from her tiny entrance. Without thought, he knelt and lapped her clean, grimacing at the bitterness of his seed; reveling in the sweetness of her quim.

When he had finished partaking of this sacrament, he rose to his feet slowly, wincing at the pain in his knees. Tenderly, he took her in his arms and carried her back to bed. Her face was pressed against his neck, and he could feel her soft breath against his skin. As he lay her in her bed, he shed his robes, and climbed in beside her and curled around her, protecting her from the storm, and protecting himself from tomorrow's retribution.

She awoke alone, stretching, feeling marvelous and relaxed - and naked. She sighed with a little frown. She had hoped he would still be lying with her, so that she could repay the delicious ministrations he had bestowed upon her during the night. *The slave, awakening from her torture, only to wake up the Master from his torment ...*

She padded softly into the library, and found him sitting by the fire, reading a small book with a green cover.

"Good morning." Without looking up, he held up her nightgown. "Looking for this?"

She smiled and crossed the library to retrieve her gown. He looked up and her with a smile. "Frankly, I prefer you without, but we mustn't ignore propriety."

Her grin made his cock twitch in his priestly garb. "No, we mustn't." Instead of donning the gown, however, she merely tossed it back upon the sofa, awaiting his pleasure.

"I had hoped to find you in bed when I woke up, but I see you are already dressed," she remarked with a little pout.

He continued to study his little book. "Yes, it's actually quite a comfortable garment. I'm thinking of changing professions."

Hermione laughed. "I can just imagine how confession would go." In a high-pitched whine she mimicked, "Bless me, Father Severus, for I have sinned". She then switched to a very credible imitation of her husband. "For Merlin's sake, you dunderhead what are you telling me for? Get out, and don't do it again!"

He smirked. "But think of the fun we could have, role-playing as Frollo and Esmeralda."

"Hphm. You just want to see me doing the dance of the seven veils."

"Actually that was Salomé, but who am I to argue semantics if you're willing to give me a strip tease on a regular basis?"

Hermione pretended to be shocked. "And you call yourself a man of the cloth!"

He set his book aside and patted his knee. "Come here," he purred. Obediently, she sat in his lap and lay against his shoulder with a sigh. She placed a soft kiss against his throat, inhaling his wonderful scent, and he rewarded her with his dark, soft chuckle. "Did you enjoy yourself, pet?"

She grinned in appreciation. "It was a challenge to pretend to be asleep, I'll admit "

"It was the fantasy you wanted most to enact," he said, his voice faintly chiding. "I will remind you of this the next time, my little overachieving Gryffindor."

She laughed softly; there was no point in arguing, as he was correct. "Still, you were ... amazing," she sighed. "You were sexy as sin in those clerical robes." His sardonic, raised eyebrow gave lie to the fact that her words pleased him so much. She placed a tender kiss on his temple.

"You missed your calling, Severus. The stage lost a great actor when you chose to live in the Wizarding world."

He looked smugly pleased with himself. "Your performance as Sleeping Beauty was quite adequate as well."

He forced himself not to laugh as he heard her give a little sniff of indignation. "Quite adequate? I was trying my best not to scream while my dirty daddy rearranged my psyche." She pouted. In her best Lucius imitation, she declared, "Sir, you wound me."

He smirked. "Well, I was trying my best. And I will remind you it was-"

"I know, I know. My idea. I should have known you'd push the envelope until it exploded." They allowed themselves a quiet chuckle, before Hermione mused, "I wonder what Lucius and Narcissa would say if they knew what debauchery we'd created in Malfoy Manor while they're away on holiday?"

"'Bravo', probably. And 'Brava' of course," he added, feeling her preparing to protest. He pulled her back into his arms comfortably. "In all actuality they'd be a bit jealous. From what I recall of Lucius, he's remarkably pedestrian. Of course, he might be in for a rude awakening should he try to use that candle."

Her delighted giggles definitely made his cock sit up and pay attention. "I have to say that little bit of improvisation nearly made me break character," she grinned mischievously.

His expression was almost boyish in its pleasure. "I did mention payback for your little plug incident, did I not?"

"Be honest, now. You loved it."

"I do not recall any protestation from you last night either, pet." For a moment they sat quietly, listening to the fire crackling in the grate. In an uncharacteristically expository mood, he asked, "What was your favourite part?"

"Oh, that's a question," she said, her brow furrowed in thought. After pondering for a moment, she brightened. "Probably the part where you charmed a spoon to vibrate and placed it on my clit. That was just before you took my virginity."

He frowned, and looked at her carefully. "While I can't honestly claim to have a photographic memory, I'm quite sure I would have remembered that particular part of the evening, my beauty," he said, his voice silken and dark, and honey-sweet with anticipation.

She grinned mischievously, and with a wave of her wand, she felt the subtle change in her lower region. "That's because I haven't told you my fourth fantasy yet."

Epilogue

Chapter 13 of 13

In the ten years since the Battle of Hogwarts, Severus Snape has worked very hard to free himself from his old life in order to become a respected Headmaster. Of course, his wife Hermione loves him regardless, but will an innocent board game change the entire future of their marriage, not to mention Severus' view of his own kindler, gentler self?

Written as a gift for the incomparable Subvers in the LJ 2011 SSHG Exchange.

And now we come to the end. I hope you enjoy the story, and enjoy the Author's Notes at the end, which explain a lot of things, including some of the actual correspondence between stgulik and me as we hammered out parts of the story. This was a wonderful journey for me. Thank you for coming along for the ride.

As I stated at the beginning, I do not own these characters. Hell, even the original idea wasn't mine, but I want to thank Subversa, who told me that this was the fourth year she'd asked for this prompt, and I was the first to take her up on it. A true privilege, indeed.

Thanks to stgulik for never giving up, and DMuse for allowing me to take his dictation.

And a special thank you to stgulik, who sent me into hysterics when she said that the phrase I used in an earlier chapter should be the tagline on Severus' business cards:
Severus Snape: I Wouldn't Get Too Comfortable.

Thank you, Jules, for everything.

The game is my wife. It demands loyalty and responsibility, and it gives me back fulfilment and peace. Michael Jordan

The weak January sun shone through the mullioned windows of the East Wing, casting hundreds of shadows. The area was absolutely heaving with witches and wizards. Standing at the entrance, passing out commemorative programs, were twenty very proud and excited students - five from each House, each chosen for their scholastic excellence.

As a reward for their performance during the first semester, they were the first to tour the brand-spanking new Hogwarts Wizarding War Museum; in turn, they were acting as stewards and ushers to the multitude of dignitaries, luminaries, press and politicians assembled to witness the grand opening of this first exhibit of its kind in Wizarding Britain.

The Headmaster of Hogwarts watched the swelling crowd from the periphery of the assembly area. He had signed off on the final work three days ago, and was now inspecting the final handiwork of the contractors; the large murals over the door of the Museum, depicting the final battle of Hogwarts. Across the huge frame of the door hung a plaque with the words, "*Animus, Sapientia, Dolosus, Fidelitas, Diligo - Nunquam Alieno.*"

The phrase 'Bravery, wisdom, cunning, loyalty, love - Never forget', was chosen by the students, reflecting the character traits of their respective Houses. The word *Love* was suggested by Severus himself - the word that encompassed everything about that final victory, and those who had given their lives for the cause of the Light.

Severus gave the long, twisted scar at his throat a rueful scratch. While he no longer thought of it as a horrible disfigurement, he also no longer thought of it as a badge of honour. It was what it was - a war wound. Worse than some, but it beat the shite out of the alternative.

Severus thought of his poor, lost Lily. He had let her go in his heart long ago, but he knew he would always be grateful to her. She and Hermione stood as the bookends to his life. Lily had taught him how to grieve for a lost friendship; Hermione had taught him how to rejoice in finding love. He still sometimes marveled how much his little witch loved him. He looked at the thin, perfect silvery bracelet that snugly adorned his left wrist. He had requested they each wear one of the bracelets, a reminder of this new aspect of their marriage. It had surprised him how much it pleased him to wear it. Already he was planning their next trip to the cave.

He looked around this world he'd helped to shape. Several students passed by and acknowledged him with respect and affection. He saw Hermione chatting with Potter and Weasley as only old friends who have literally been through the wars can do. If he squinted his eyes he could see the eleven year-olds they were when he first met them; too young, brash, green as gillyweed and more trouble than they were worth.

He could still picture Hermione and her untamable hair, her tough love approach to keeping her 'boys' out of trouble with passable grades, and her steely, naïve determination to prove herself and be the best at everything. Looking at her now, he remembered those days without guilt. He wanted to kiss each vicious little corkscrew curl on her head and whisk her off to the dungeons. They had some serious detention fantasy time to make up as well.

As he watched them laughing and talking, he felt his old self make a feeble attempt to rear its ugly head. For a moment, in his mind, he was *Snivellus* again - the mill trash, dirt poor boy with a chip on his shoulder visible to the naked eye, always on the outside looking in. Before the feeling could dig deep enough to snag on the last vestiges of his insecurities, Severus pushed it aside. He knew he no longer had a need for it.

Hermione caught his eye and gave him a private smile he felt all the way down to his boots. The two men flanking her looked up at Severus with friendly smiles and waved him over. From where he stood he could hear the sounds of their laughter and good natured jokes, and found he was not the least bit tempted to involuntarily suspect the laughter was at his expense. He was, after all, a frequent guest at both their houses, and their first-Thursday-every-month poker night with Draco and Lucius was sacrosanct.

He composed his face, approached the Golden Trio, and prepared for the lovefest.

An hour later he stood on the dais in front of the great doors to the Museum and held up a hand for silence. In spite of the number of people present, the hush was immediate and everyone leaned forward to hear Headmaster Snape's speech. Looking out on the group, Severus realized he'd taught more or less everyone present, and those he hadn't taught had taught him. With a final glance at his wife, Severus began, his beautiful, beguiling voice commanding the very shadows of the room.

"My dear friends, dignitaries, honoured guests, and students. Thank you for coming today to join us in commemorating one of the most seminal moments in our shared history. This Installation has been the result of many hours of hard work and planning, but sadly, it is nothing more than a gallery of oddities, trinkets and pretty pictures - if the story they tell is allowed to be forgotten. Here at Hogwarts, we pledge to you, Wizarding Britain, to never allow our students to forget the reason this museum is here.

"There were many lost boys who found their way into these hallowed halls. Tom Riddle was one of them. So was Harry Potter, and, if I may say so without sounding immodest, I include myself as well. Hogwarts nurtured us, but it could not protect us from the darkness, and the more insidious clutches of destiny.

"We were denied the loving homes that would have saved us from the lure of evil. Evil found us during our formative years, just as we were looking for answers even this school could not provide. Many children orphaned in the war are already attending Hogwarts this year; we need you to help us guide them for their future happiness, that they may be armed against the temptations that befall them.

"For some, it might be the promise of power; for some, a belief that purity is an aspiration that should be protected against something that ceased to be a threat to our world centuries ago - the acceptance of Muggleborn wizards and witches as viable members of our society."

Severus looked out at the audience with flashing eyes. "It all comes down to fear, my friends. Fear made me a Death Eater; fear made Tom Riddle into Lord Voldemort -" he paused and rolled his eyes as some witches and wizards still winced at the name. "Fear makes you cringe at the name of a Dark Wizard who has been dead for ten years! We can no longer afford to allow our fear to create a door for another Voldemort to waltz through and once more seduce our children with lies!"

The applause was deafening. It vaulted to the ceiling, and Severus held up his hand for quiet. When the room was still, Severus began again, his low voice rolling over their ears like a symphony. It was quiet and darkly beautiful, gently passionate and rich. "This is my home. I am proud of it. I am honoured to steer it into the next millennium, but we alone cannot prevent another Dark Wizard from tainting the minds of our youth. That will start with you, the parents, the community and the world at large. Hogwarts cannot save us; it can only strive to mold and shape us if it is allowed to do so."

With a nod to Harry and his extended family, he said, "Mr. Potter and I did not join this fight together, but we ended it together." Severus turned to his wife, whose eyes glistened with tears. He felt his own emotions rising to the surface. "Purebloods, Muggleborns, Hufflepuffs, Gryffindors, Ravenclaws and Slytherins, I beg of you, remember that we are not so different. We all want the same thing: for our future generations to grow up in a Wizarding world free of prejudice, misinformation and mistrust, so that another Tom Riddle will never gain a foothold in the minds and hearts of our future.

"And when you bring your children here, remind them that the light and the darkness must always co-exist; one cannot live without the other. It is up to them as to which

one will rule." Severus' voice trembled with emotion. "For myself, I will always choose the light, and it will be my greatest honour to be the torchbearer who brings that light to the students of Hogwarts. Thank you."

Severus stepped down from the dais to thunderous applause, and walked over to the large multicoloured ribbon that stretched across the door of the Museum. "Mr. Orchid," Severus called, his voice ringing through the crowd.

The little wizard, who had personally overseen the Installation from start to finish, scurried forward. "Yes, Headmaster Snape?"

Severus's mouth twitched. "I was hoping that you, as our Museum's newly named Curator, would do me the honour of cutting the ribbon seeing as none of this would be here without your hard work and dedication."

Orchid looked as if he was preparing to faint, scream, cry, or do all at once. "The honour would be all mine, Headmaster!" he squeaked, puffing out his chest until Severus could see the buttons of his waistcoat straining to hold their master in check.

"Then, on my mark, sir," Severus replied, and turned back to the crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, witches and wizards, I declare this Museum of the Battle of Hogwarts to be open!" Orchid sliced neatly through the ribbon with his wand, and a collective cheer rang through the halls as the doors swung open for the first time to the general public.

In the midst of the general melee, Severus looked over the heads of the crowd until he found his lovely wife. She was crying openly, clapping as though her life depended on it. He made his way to her side and accepted her embrace, returning one of his own. She laughed as he produced a handkerchief. "I'm sorry, love, but I was so proud of you I could hardly breathe." She looked up at him with eyes brimming with love. "That was beautiful."

He nodded to her tribute, warmed by her words. "At least it's done. Perhaps now I can get back to the task of running this school."

"Well, that will have to wait, Headmaster," she retorted, nodding at the throng of people lining up to speak to him. "Your public awaits."

He looked back at the sea of faces looking at him expectantly. He turned to his wife, and gripped her elbow. "You are going nowhere, Madam Snape. I insist you remain here in case the hexes start flying."

"What hexes?" She smiled, waving across the room to Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy. "You're a hero, remember?" To Hermione's surprise, Severus reached for her hand, and tucked it into the crook of his arm.

His liquid, dark eyes looked into hers imploringly, and he poured every ounce of honey-sweet seduction into his voice. "Then stay by my side if for no other reason than you love me, and I would be lost without you."

Hermione looked up at his austere, angular face and grinned. The old silver-tongued devil could sell ice to Eskimos. She squeezed his arm reassuringly. "You just try and get rid of me, Severus Snape."

After the obligatory rounds of well-wishers had shaken their hands and asked questions, Severus and Hermione finally took the opportunity to view the entire Installation. There were moments that made her smile wistfully, such as a tableau depicting Remus Lupin demonstrating the taming of a boggart, and a life-size figure of Luna casting a Patronus in the Dumbledore's Army display. There was Professor McGonagall, trying to teach the Gryffindors how to dance before the Yule Ball, and Professor Slughorn's magical hourglass, critiquing the passing hours.

Hagrid had a section dedicated to him, not only as Keeper of Keys and Grounds, and their Care of Magical Creatures Professor, but as one of those who attempted to bring the giants into the alliance. Hagrid stood by the display, proudly signing autographs and having his photo taken with friends old and new.

There was a photo of Hermione, Ron and Harry taken at the beginning of their third year by the late Colin Creevey, whose photos had provided a bounty of visual backdrop for the entire installation. There was a separate alcove dedicated solely to Colin and his photographic history of Hogwarts during the turbulent years before and after Riddle's resurrection.

The original Order of the Phoenix was featured in a separate display, side by side with photos of the new Order. There were pictures and biographies of the Longbottoms, the Potters, Sirius and Regulus Black. Dumbledore had his own tableau, complete with portrait; it gave Hermione a grim satisfaction that his display was rather indifferently attended. And, of course, the huge wing dedicated to Harry. Flanked on either side were smaller displays dedicated to her and Ron, which pleased and embarrassed Hermione in turns.

"God, why didn't anyone tell me my hair was such a fright?" she queried, as they walked past a life-sized photo of her in the D.A. casting her otter Patronus.

"We all thought you knew, pet," Severus intoned, nodding sagely. He was rewarded with a playful swat on his bicep. He scowled at his wife, but his eyes were kind. Suddenly he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it quickly. "As if I would have you any other way." He tucked her hand in his arm as they continued through the installation.

Hermione's eyes filled with tears as she passed the photo tribute to all of the casualties of the war. Their birth and death dates were painfully close together: Moody, Tonks, Remus, Vincent Crabbe, Cedric Diggory, Colin, Chastity Burbage, Fred Weasley.

Hermione saw George Weasley and his wife standing by the exhibit featuring the entire Weasley Family. He was proudly showing his son the photo of himself and Fred in Quidditch gear, beater bats in hand, saluting one another as they eternally flew over the Hogwarts pitch.

"Professor, good to see you!" George beamed, shaking Severus' hand. He turned to the lovely woman by his side. "You remember my wife, Angelina."

Severus bowed. "Of course, Mrs. Weasley. Née Johnson, I believe." He gave a nod at the photo. "I seem to recall you were a formidable chaser as well."

Angelina, a beautiful woman Hermione remembered as being a few years ahead of her in class, smiled at her former professor. "I'm very flattered you remembered me, sir. This," she said, taking the hand of a little girl with Angelina's eyes, "is our daughter, Roxanne."

Roxanne, a lovely child, stared up at Severus as if beholding Zeus. Severus bowed gravely, and said in a warmer version of his impressive voice, "It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Weasley. I look forward to seeing you at Hogwarts soon." He looked up at George. "I understand her older brother Fred will be joining us next year."

George looked back at the photo of himself and his twin. Hermione's heart ached. George had never really been the same after losing Fred. "Next year, yes, sir." He turned and smiled at Severus. "I will warn you, sir, he's already living up to his namesake in terms of mischief."

"Is he ever!" Angelina laughed with her husband. "Like two peas in a pod, these two," she said, fondly, and George's smile faded a little. He looked at Severus thoughtfully.

"I'm glad you're here to teach them, sir." He looked back at his brother, laughing triumphantly as he volleyed the Bludger back to his unseen opponent. George's voice was thick with emotion. "I don't want anyone to forget."

Severus felt his eyes fill suddenly. He placed a hand on George's arm. His own voice was slightly unsteady. "They will not be forgotten, Mr. Weasley. I will promise you that."

Severus was about to leave when he felt a little tug on the bottom of his robe. Young Roxanne was looking up at him expectantly, pulling on his robe to gain his attention. He looked down at her from his stunning height. "Yes, Miss Weasley?"

When she finally got up the courage to speak, it was so soft that Severus could not hear. Raising an eyebrow to Roxanne's parents, Severus knelt gracefully down. "Now,

you must speak up, Miss Weasley. When you come to school, you will be expected to make yourself heard."

Shyly, she nodded. He said, mildly, "Now, what is it you wish to tell me?"

She took a deep breath, and leaned over, cupping her hand to his ear. His mouth twitched as her silvery little voice whispered her secret. When she had finished, Severus nodded sagely, and to Hermione's bemusement, Severus turned and whispered something back to the little girl in the same fashion. Her eyes lit up with delight, and as Severus rose to his feet, she looked up at him and giggled, "I won't, I promise."

Severus was solemn, but his expression fooled no one, least of all the child. "See that you don't, Miss Weasley." With a nod, Severus took Hermione's hand and they continued their promenade throughout the installation.

Hermione looked up at her husband, nodding here and there to friends and dignitaries. Severus silently counted to eight before she said, "Alright, you know I can't stand the suspense. What did your little friend tell you that was so secretive?"

Severus smirked. "She merely informed me that 'Daddy says you are very scary, but I think you are very nice.'"

Hermione grinned. "Did she now? Oh, dear. I have competition, it seems. And how did you answer?"

Severus flicked a minute speck of dust from his sleeve. "I told her that she was correct, that I was an extremely nice person, but that I would prefer she keep that a secret between the two of us, because I didn't want to make my harri-dan of a wife jealous and ruin my reputation as a greasy git."

Hermione grinned. "Heaven forbid."

He awarded her knuckles with another swift kiss and a flash of a smile. "Indeed, Miss Granger."

'*Severus Snape: The Reluctant Hero*' display was by far the most popular display in the installation, and it was some time before they could actually get to it. It was truly impressive, from the imposing Death Eater robes and mask standing sentinel in one corner, holding a replica of the Sword of Gryffindor, to the photo of his reinstatement as Hogwarts' Headmaster, and receiving his Order of Merlin. There were several animated Wizarding photos, including a breathtaking shot of him, broom in hand, swaggering onto the Quidditch pitch to referee a match. Hermione vowed to request a copy of that one. He was sex on legs in that photo.

Several shots were taken of him in DADA class, demonstrating blocking, and one very unexpected photo of him in Potions class, glowering over the cauldron of a very young Hermione Granger. Neither of them could remember the photo being taken and had no idea who had taken it. "It must have been Colin," Hermione sighed, wistfully. "Poor, dear Colin."

"You were so young," Severus mused. He sighed wistfully. "I feel like a dirty old man, after seeing that."

"A man, most definitely. Dirty, indubitably, but old?" Hermione shook her head, grinning mischievously. "I don't buy that." She blushed. "Not after that performance last night."

"Performance? Do you mean you went to a show and didn't invite us? I'm hurt," the voice of Lucius Malfoy drifted over her shoulder, and Hermione turned and kissed the cheeks of her friends. "So, what was the name of this performance that had Hermione so entertained?"

"Don Juan," Severus replied, dryly, and Hermione blushed. Lucius and Severus raised matching eyebrows, and Hermione laughed.

"Congratulations, Severus," Narcissa beamed. "The museum is marvelous." She turned to Hermione. "You must be so proud."

"I am, Narcissa, thank you." Hermione returned the smile with a warm smile of her own. She looked at her friends, and waved as Draco and Astoria entered the room. Turning back to Lucius and Narcissa, Hermione added, "I think we all have a lot to be proud of."

"Yes, well," Lucius purred lasciviously, "We can't all have our own little corner of the Museum." He tried to sound petulant.

Watching him, Hermione laughed shortly. "You can stop twirling your moustache, Lucius." She looked at him carefully. "You know, I can't help but think you're a bit relieved not to have to chronicle those last days before the end."

Lucius shrugged elegantly, then raised his chin imperceptibly. "Well, as you know, we weren't exactly playing Happy Families at Malfoy Manor in those dark days." He looked at Hermione carefully, and something in him changed. They were all thinking of that horrible day Bellatrix tortured Hermione in their home, while they had to helplessly stand by and watch.

Lucius looked from Severus back to Hermione, and the old insouciant mask dropped. Quietly, he said, "Hermione, if I could have stopped her without "

Narcissa, distressed by her husband's anguish, quietly pleaded, "Lucius "

Hermione interrupted soothingly, "No. Not necessary, Lucius. It was a long time ago." She smiled sadly at the blond couple. "Severus is right; we should remember the past, but look to the future. We have a very special friendship now that's all I need. That," she added, smiling, "and an anti-cheating spell on all our games. You really are the worst cheater in history."

Lucius' mouth twitched, and he looked at Severus, then his wife. "I I do not cheat," he declared, the picture of Pureblood indignation. His pale face relaxed, and he added with a wink, "I merely look for ways to escape the dreariness of fair play."

The Hogwarts dungeons were quiet when school was not in session. Most of the faculty had followed the Installation Party down to Hogsmeade, where the Three Broomsticks was playing host to a huge crowd of well-wishers, gate-crashers and the general motley crew of party-goers who love to celebrate, if for no other reason than an excuse to raise a glass.

The Headmaster and his wife were conspicuous by their absence. The dungeons were quiet but for a diminutive figure striding toward the Potions master's classroom. There was only the briefest of hesitations, then she knocked upon the door.

"Enter," came the terse reply.

The door opened and the young Gryffindor walked into the room. Upon seeing the dour Potions master at his desk, she swallowed hard. He was a dark sorcerer in black, his teaching robes draped gracefully over his frock coat and trousers. His high collar gave him a courtly air, and his hair curtained over his face, so that his students could never quite tell if he was looking directly at them or not.

For a moment longer, he ignored her, concentrating on an essay before him. Marking the last red 'X' on the parchment, he sat it aside and clasped his hands together. "Miss Granger, what is the meaning of your conduct earlier today?"

She ducked her head shyly. "Well, sir, I "

Her professor stood and moved toward her in that unnerving quickness that always startled her. "You made some very inappropriate remarks concerning me, your professor, in front of several witnesses, did you not?"

She blushed and stammered, "No - well, yes, but I "

She jumped as slammed his hand down on his desk. "Answer me, girl! What did you say to your little friends today?"

She bowed her head contritely. "I said that I thought you might be happier if you ..." she swallowed. "If you got if you had "

"I believe your exact quote was, 'I've never known such a tightarse Merlin, he needs to get laid worse than I do.'" He leaned forward and drawled, "Is this what you said, or have I misquoted you, Miss Granger?"

Hermione blushed. Slowly, she nodded. "Yes, sir. I said it. It was very inappropriate and unkind, and I said it out of anger, and I'm sorry." Her words came out in a rush, making her look even more childishly flustered against his seething, cold anger.

Before she could react, he was standing over her, a black raven, preparing to strike. His voice was deadly quiet. "That is correct, Miss Granger. It was both inappropriate and unkind. And impossibly inaccurate." She shot him a look of surprise, but before she could reply, he continued frostily, "You leave me no choice but to punish you." His silken threat made her shiver. "Severely, Miss Granger."

Suddenly he pointed to a small cauldron sitting on his desk. "Your detention will be served scrubbing cauldrons, Miss Granger. Starting with this one." He smiled maliciously. "Without magic."

She stared at him in such shock it was all he could do not to burst out laughing. Instead, he deepened his scowl and gestured impatiently. "Well, what are you waiting for? It's not going to clean itself."

Hermione gave him an incredulous look, as if waiting for the end of the joke. When he raised his eyebrow in challenge, as if to say *are you disobeying me, pet?* She shrugged, picked up the cauldron and headed for the sink.

"No," he said. She turned to see a bucket of water and a scrub brush appear on his desk. "You will do it here, where I can observe."

Hermione took a deep breath, nodded uncertainly, and removed her school robe, tossing it on a nearby desk. With a sigh, she dunked the small scrubber into the warm water.

It was a tiny, round-bellied cauldron which sat atop three stubby legs. It was only the size of a soup bowl, the kind housewitches used to make homebrew potions, and it seemed minuscule and out of place here in the classroom. It was caked inside with something that was proving almost impossible to remove. Hermione gave the cauldron a surreptitious sniff, but could not identify what had been baked on the cauldron. It seemed the harder she scrubbed, the more solid the residue became.

As she worked, she felt beads of sweat forming on her forehead, and so intent was she on her task, she did not notice her professor rise from his chair and move to stand behind her.

"Interesting items, cauldrons," he said, softly, his voice only inches from her ear. He reached past her and cupped the little round belly of the cauldron in his large hand, his touch as intimate as if he were stroking a soft breast instead of hard metal. It was a caress so knowing it made his student blush.

As his fingertips grazed over the surface with a lover's touch, he intoned silkily, "For those skilled in the subtle art of potion making, they are receptacles of great magic. But they should not be abused. In the wrong hands, they can be ruined beyond use."

"For instance, Miss Granger," he purred, moving to stand behind her again. "You have forgotten your cauldron-cleaning procedures. I'm very disappointed that, during your time away from brewing, you have forgotten the first, simple step to ensuring a pristine, clean cauldron."

Hermione gasped as he flicked her skirt up over her back, and knelt down behind her. "An acolyte to the art will first and foremost examine the cauldron carefully." Long fingers trailed lightly over her bare skin. Hermione's legs trembled as he pushed her thighs apart. From behind, she could feel his breath against her vulnerable bottom.

"A master of the art will use his senses to discover the secrets of the cauldron." Hermione was still as a statue as his long pointed tongue slid between her cleft and licked a warm line from top to bottom.

There was a sharp clang as the brush fell from her nerveless fingers into the cauldron. Severus spread the cheeks of her bum apart and lapped at her, teasing her, his tongue flickering from her cunt to her tightly furled hole, causing her to shake helplessly.

He chuckled softly as she clutched his desk. "Sight, taste, scent. These are tools to be used to assess your cauldron." He rose, ignoring the twin popping of his knees, and wiped the juices of her delicious pussy from his mouth. He slid his arm around her and pressed his heavy, engorged erection against her bare bottom. "And then there is touch, Miss Granger."

He reached around and found her distended, stiff clitoris, as pointy and hard as a little nipple, bathed in her slick heat. He teased and played with it while she held onto the table, her soft moans and sighs inflaming his already stupendous lust. He pressed down hard and began to rub the little bud intently, and she growled and pushed back against him. "My, my, we are very dirty today, Miss Granger."

Hermione shuddered as first one, then two fingers slid into her aching core, until she was pinned between his hands, fucking her, teasing and plucking at her clit.

He watched her face intently. "Of course, hands can only clean so much, can they not, Miss Granger?" When she did not reply, he intoned, "Answer me!"

"No, sir!" she gasped, and he turned his hand until she felt him ruthlessly teasing the spongy tissue inside. For a moment, it felt as if she needed to urinate, then the dark, rich pleasure flooded her groin and she knew she would come.

"And why aren't my hands enough, Miss Granger?"

"W-what?" She mumbled, too caught up in his ministrations. To regain her focus, he spanked her, a hard, sharp slap on her bottom that both startled and excited her.

"Because you're a dirty little girl who needs my cock, aren't you? That's why my hands aren't enough. Say it."

Hermione moaned, "I'm a dirty little ... gods ... oh ..." He finger-fucked her mercilessly with hard, driving insistence, in counterpoint to the gentle, teasing fingers of his other hand, which was teasing her clit with maddening, perfect precision. Hermione leaned forward onto the desk, unable to support herself on her trembling legs.

"Say it, girl. Tell me how dirty Daddy's little girl truly is," he crooned, and she cried out her pleasure into the room.

"I'm your dirty little girl! Oh, gods, don't stop! Don't stop!"

"As if I could," he growled, pinning her between his large hands, sending her spiraling higher with each stroke, holding her at the top of her peak, never allowing her to let go.

"Oh, no, little one, my hands aren't enough for a dirty little girl like you," he hissed, and barked an incantation that removed his clothing. "Only one thing is strong enough to scrub you clean."

Hermione felt his cock teasing at her entrance, felt his arms around her, pulling her shirt open. He eased her breasts from their confines, and another muttered spell later, and Hermione could see their reflection in a mirror behind his desk. She looked like a complete wanton - breasts pushed up from her clothing, her nipples rock hard.

Severus' long fingers rolled and tugged her right nipple expertly, and she looked up and caught his eye in the reflection. He was naked, pale and luminous, his eyes glazed with enough inflammatory, carnal lust to melt the mirror into liquid fire. Hermione mewed helplessly as he pushed her down and whispered, "You're ready to come, baby. Do it," he breathed, his fingers driving her expertly toward his aim. "Do it for Daddy."

Hermione screamed as her orgasm burst from her, and it was joined with his answering cry as he thrust into her quivering, rippling pussy. "Merlin wept ..." he moaned, and held himself still as her walls shuddered and milked his cock, groaning loudly at the sheer pleasure of feeling her illegally tight cunt melting and pulsing around him.

In the reflection, Hermione watched his face slacken, a smile tickling the corners of his lips, eyes closed. She clenched her muscles around him, and he opened his eyes and sneered at her.

"Oh, yes," he nodded, his voice ragged and feral, "There's only one way to scrub you clean." He pulled back, biting his lip in anticipation, then slammed into her with the force of a battering ram, and Hermione's cry threatened to shatter the glass jars in the room.

He started slowly, painting her cunt with his large pole of a muscle; long, hard strokes that tapped her cervix and threatened to end her sanity. He laughed as she tried to speed up his maddening pace, and rewarded her with another playful smack on her arse. "Patience, pet. You are mine to clean; I'll scour your dirty little pussy any way I choose."

"Please," Hermione moaned, her fingernails scraping on the desk. "Faster."

Her throaty cries were incendiary; the primitive part of his brain took over, and he gave over to it, allowed it to drag him toward the inevitable end faster than he wanted. But she felt so good... so good... He began to fuck her hard, fast and deep, pulling her hips back onto his. She would have bruises tomorrow, he would be sore and his knees would ache, and he couldn't care less. He felt as if he could fuck her forever...

Hermione, insensate with passion, looked up into the mirror. Her husband was beautiful. Head down, eyes closed, he pounded into her, moaning with each breath. "Professor, please," she begged, "Fuck me harder!"

Suddenly he looked up; his eyes wide, his mouth open in an astonished O of pleasure. He drove into her, churning his hips, corkscrewing her against the desk until she was yowling like a wildcat, and he felt every growl and snarl from his little lioness race down his spine like a livewire attached to his groin. His balls started to spark and tingle; his pelvis felt as if it were melting into a puddle of magma.

His eyes rolled back and he howled. Hermione felt her spine crash into her skull as he slammed into her. Suddenly he gasped, "Merlin... oh fuck... I'm coming... oh yesyesyes... Hermione..." He caught her gaze in the mirror, his expression a mask of intensity. His eyebrows rushed together in a scowl, and he cried out, "Come with me... oh baby... come on Daddy's cock "

Severus felt the lava roaring in his veins, and it erupted deep within him, sending him blistering over the edge into an orgasm that threatened to short-circuit his brain into a frayed, shredded mess. It was an orgasm singed with heat and lust, drugged with power and dark as brimstone. He reared above her, growling his pleasure it was the triumphant roar of a beast, as if his wife had subjugated a demon with her body and this was the proof of it.

She answered with a wail of inarticulate pleasure all her own. Severus felt every milking, pulsing pull of her cunt as it sucked him dry of his lava-hot seed, and he cried out his release, calling her beautiful, dirty names as she wrung every last bit of passion from his body.

He collapsed against his wife, his sweat-drenched body shivering in the cool dungeon air. He could practically see steam rising from Hermione's uniform. They were panting as if they'd run from the dungeons to the towers, and for several moments neither could speak nor move.

Finally, Hermione's mind cleared enough to transfigure the desk into a large sofa and together they collapsed on it gratefully. Severus gathered Hermione into his arms and she held onto him for dear life. The aching sweetness of knowing she'd made this strong, self-disciplined man lose control was overwhelming, and she turned in his arms and covered him with soft kisses, until he was laughing at her frantic ministrations and gentling her with a soothing, affectionate kiss of his own.

"I love you so much," she whispered between kisses, reveling in his flushed face, his glowing eyes. He held her almost suffocatingly close, and Hermione felt as if her heart would burst with happiness.

"Hermione," he rumbled, his voice sweet and silvery. He placed a tender kiss on her lips, and looked into her eyes. "Don't ever stop loving me." To her astonishment, his eyes filled with tears.

"As if I could," she smiled, pressed her lips against his sternum, as if supplicating an idol. She kissed the tears from his cheeks.

Suddenly he turned her in his arms. "I want to put a child in here," he said, pressing his large hand to her belly. He looked up at her with complete conviction, and thrilled to see the expression of happiness his words had wrought. "I want us to have children, and when they are old enough, I want to be able to tell them what a goddess their mother is, and how I fell in love with her, and how blessed their father is to have her." He looked into her face with eyes fervent with longing. "Tell me you want to carry my children. Please."

Hermione's face alone would have told him his answer. She threw her arms around him and cried, "Of course I do!" Her face was as radiant as the sun. "We're going to have amazing babies, Severus!" She was kissing his chest, his neck, anywhere she could reach. She was laughing and calling his name, calling him Daddy, as he engulfed her in his tight embrace.

Her glorious smile was suddenly overshadowed by a look of apprehension. She took his hand, and placed it over her bracelet. "This... these won't change, will they?" She looked at him searchingly. "I don't want the love we share, and how we share it, to change."

He cupped her cheek in his hand, and she leaned against it. "No, pet. I have no desire to change it, either." He smiled, sloe-eyed and complacent. Long fingers pursed around her nipple and tugged gently. "Just because I wish to be a father, doesn't mean I won't continue to be... Daddy."

Hermione laughed breathlessly, and snuggled against him with a little soft sound of contentment. "You really are a sexy old beast, Master Snape."

He smirked, and placed a careless kiss on her forehead before drawing her securely into his arms. "Call me old, will you? My, what a very naughty girl," he drawled. "Another trip to the cave is in order, I see. We must work on the concept of respect. I think you will need to wear a collar for that one." It gave him a little thrill to see the hot little glow in her eyes at the thought.

He stroked her face and brushed an unruly curl from her forehead. His expression softened. "Thank you for wanting me."

Hermione grasped his hand and kissed his fingertips. "Thank you for waiting for me."

He allowed her to kiss him, then grasped her hands and pulled them over her head. The sofa resumed its original shape, and Hermione found herself lying back on his desk.

As the magical bonds tightened around her wrist and pushed her lovely breasts skyward, Severus nuzzled her face with his unspeakable nose and purred, "I wouldn't get too comfortable, pet."

Mischief Managed

Here is the original prompt. I hope, Subvers, that I did it justice, and that you enjoyed it:

Severus and Hermione are reasonably happy in their committed relationship, but Hermione senses he's holding something back - something she needs. Severus has been careful - too careful. She believes that somewhere, he is holding his darker passions in check out of fear of losing the one woman who has loved him.

What Severus doesn't realize is that Hermione, too, has been keeping a secret - that her true needs can only be satisfied with a surrender of control and the sound of Severus' voice demanding her total obedience.

Dom!Snape fic. This can be AU or canon compliant through HBP. Can include mental/psychological domination and/or light spanking and/or gentle bondage and/or verbal humiliation with a consenting, desirous Hermione. No bloodplay or involvement of body fluids other than those commonly associated with sex. Snape is a snarky bastard, Hermione is strong-willed and stubborn. Rating R to NC-17. As this will make them both happy, we'll call it a very Happy Ending@.

Chapter 10 is dedicated to DarkLotus1211, who rescued it from death when the file got corrupted and I was unable to retrieve it. She worked very hard to retrieve it, and kept my momentum going. Thank you.

Chapter 12 has a triple dedication firstly to Subvers, who loves Regency fics. This was as close to one as I'm capable, I'm afraid! It is also dedicated to my dear beta, Stgulik, who not only gave me the prompt within a prompt for this particular chapter, but also the Jane Austen quote at the beginning, which she dared me to use. Never dare a Southern redneck. She wanted a consequence-free PWP chapter, and I hope it fill the remit. It is also dedicated to Loyd1957 (Cindy) for the best line in a review ever. I told you I would use it one day, and give you credit for it, and I did!

The game "What Say You?" it is actually based on a real Muggle board game called "Loaded Questions". If you are a true board game fan, this is a winner it also comes in Junior as well as Adult versions as well. The almighty Hechicera actually made me a real, working version of the What Say You game, complete with all the parts including Recognise-Me-Not quills, ink, game pieces and hundreds of questions. The next time the Malfoys come over, we are soooo playing!

When I was writing this fic, I knew there were two distinct roads I could travel. I could make it very dark and angsty, pulling on the darkness of Severus' Death Eater past, or I could keep it light and frothy, with occasional forays into angst to give it contrast and balance.

At one point, I was dangerously close to merging the two roads into a dark, ponderous mess, and I had a little crisis of faith. I sent the chapters in question (Chapters 8 and 11) to my beta and all around hero Stgulik, who stated that I was in serious danger of turning this into Dom/sub 101, which, she pointed out, I had already managed in my fic The Sensual World.

I either had to go the whole hog angst deluxe or lighten up. It was just getting too heavy, and as I had already written the first five chapters and was happy with the tone, the fic was starting to sound a bit schizophrenic.

Stgulik, or Jules, as I call her, knew I was approaching a meltdown of sonic proportions, and with typical intelligence and wit, she wrote me an email that was to become the final outline of the story, more or less. So much of the ponderous stuff that I'd thought necessary to explain the lifestyle was discarded on the cutting room floor, and what remained was sufficient to explain everything I was trying to say. Jules will be the first to tell you that I tend to overwrite at the best of times. It is a rare day that she will say, 'you need to add more to this'.

The following is the transcript of the email that she sent me to help me get back on track. Chapter 8 in particular was tacked to the corkboard on my writing table every day while I wrote this fic, and I'm convinced it helped me to put this story back on track because it made me laugh every time I saw it:

Date: Sat, 18 Jun 2011 15:45:28 -0700

From: stgulik@XXX.XXX

Subject: stgulik's idea for FF chs 6 - 10

To: teddy_radiator@XXXX.com

Take in the spirit it is meant - from your biggest fan.

* * * * *

Chapter 7

Hr is Portkeyed to the Cave, where they 'consummate' this agreement with lots of smutty, kinky sex blah blah.

Chapter 8

That's where the Chapter between him and Lucius comes in. Once he realises he's sort of left her alone, he returns to their bedroom, but she's gone. He goes to the cave, but she's not there either. He becomes frantic. He asks a house-elf to locate her, and the house-elf sends him back to the Cave. She has gone deep in the recesses because she thinks he has left her and that's she was the one to screw up the relationship.

When they make up in the cave, it could go like this:

SS: I'm sorry I almost severely hurt you and then left you in a damp cave all alone.

Hr: I forgive you. I'm sorry I made you try this at all - but for your sake, not mine; I still really liked it.

SS: No, don't be sorry I finally want to come to terms with my past. I need this.

Hr: I need this too. Don't worry, we can make this work.

SS: I couldn't agree more. [Make-up sex starts normal, ends kinky, everyone's happy]

{LOL - I told Jules that I was going to write the dialogue verbatim from this exchange. If you read that particular chapter, you'll see that most of it made it in the final draft, in one way or another :)}

Chapter 9

A whole chapter of guilt-free, smutty sex if not for your sake, then just for mine! Including (?) a fantasy one of them has never told the other, so we're all learning it at the same time. She sets the conditions but he is completely dominant over them.

Chapter 10

The 'ribbon-cutting ceremony' of the installation, some after-ceremony spanking followed by a hot shag because it was a stressful day? and happily ever after, etc.

As you can see, Jules had my back and the story got back on track and became something I was proud to give to you. I hope you enjoy it for many years to come, as I have so enjoyed your stories.

