

Hexed!

by TeaOli

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Prologue: The Best of Magics

Chapter 1 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Prologue: A Long, Long Time Ago

"Da... How'd yeh an' Mam meet?" It wasn't an unusual question by any means. Kids the world over asked their parents every day. They reckoned it was part of their stories, after all, so why *shouldn't* they know? But most children seeking out the answer to what had led to their very existences didn't do it with a twisting tummy and trembling voice that held an oddly deep timbre for a six-year-old.

But then, Rubeus Hagrid wasn't most children.

"It were magic, Rube," his da told him. The funny little man's eyes were bright and happy. "Not th' kind yer seen me doin', but magic all the same. Yeh best ask yer mam when she come back how it werks wit' her people, like. All I kin tell yeh is it were th' best magic I ever felt!

"Knew from th' start it were meant ter be, like. Yer mam took a bit o' convincin', but a few *Engorgios* later, an' she knew it, too.

"It were the *best* of magics, Rube."

Author's Note: I owe debts of gratitude to the following:

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The makers of the *Shrek* films for a few inside jokes (see if you can spot them).

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Finally, to Kal-el – which is the name I've been calling the fantastic alpha- and beta-reading team that is karelia and linlawless (even though they don't know who that is). By your powers combined, I've enjoyed my very own Kryptonian!

Disclaimer: I own nothing you recognise, and much that you probably *don't* recognise isn't mine, either.

A Giant Miscalculation

Chapter 2 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Chapter One: A Giant Miscalculation

In the modest, moon-silvered valley, a dark figure stood still against a stark, mostly barren landscape. A breeze, unnaturally soft and warm, tried and failed to stir the edges of a heavy cloak. The lone person rotated in place, apparently searching the skies. But the bright moon overpowered any navigational assistance the stars might have offered. After several moments of worthless inactivity, heavy boots struck off in a south-westerly direction. Halfway across the vale, he...for certainly one so tall and broad *must* be a *he*...suddenly turned on his heel. With an earth-shaking *crack!* he was gone, leaving the desolate place empty again, save a lone stone bothan whose chimney gave off no smoke.

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Now, no one would ever accuse Rubeus Hagrid of being clever. Not even Rubeus Hagrid himself would make such a claim.

Whether that is a good or a bad thing is up for debate, but whichever way the wind blows, there's no denying certain events would not have occurred had a certain wizard *not* admitted just how *not clever* he thought a wizard-giant hybrid who spent a great deal of his time in the company of one of the most talented and powerful witches of the British Isles.

That particular wizard no doubt should have realised his error: it doesn't matter so much if one is not quite the cleverest when he has *absolutely brilliant* friends.

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"He ain't goin' ter come, an' tha's that, so he said!"

"Why ever not?" Minerva McGonagall arched her eyebrows at her guest and tilted her head towards the gleaming oak cupboard hiding some of her most precious possessions.

"If yeh wouldn't mind, Headmistress," he murmured, scratching at his scruffy beard. "Feels bleedin' cold after being' stuck in The Dell a coupla days." He illustrated his words with an exaggerated shiver.

Minerva crossed over to the cupboard and opened one of its doors to retrieve two glasses and an ancient jug of Blishen's Cask Strength single malt. She poured a wee dram for herself before replacing the cork. Casting a reproving eye at the cloak he still wore, she pulled out another bottle and spilt out several fingers of the regular thirty-nine-year-old stuff for Rubeus Hagrid.

"First, he claimed he was skint," the half giant explained as he stood and began shrugging out of several layers of outerwear. He was too busy talking (and increasing the size of the pile of clothing) to catch Minerva's frown at the mountain of wool and fur growing on her little sofa. "I knowed that were a fib, o' course, seein' as I bin keepin' the books an' all, and so I told him. But yeh know what he been like since St Mungo's said he could go home when he ain't had a home ter go ter! He jus' laughed, like, an' asked me could I count past ten and when did I learn."

Minerva sneaked a discreet sip and made sympathetic noises. Hagrid continued his tale of great woe.

"I pr'tended no' ter mind an' jes said the same about the books agin. An' so he starts goin' on about how me and Neville ain't doin' our part an' how could he take the time when Poppy were e'spectin' him ter fill the shelves complete-like? I'll not tell yeh what he said about Miss Luna teachin'!

"I di'n't let on I were cross wi' him 'cause I know he can't help it sometimes." Hagrid sighed heavily, shaking his head. "Oh, but, Headmistress, Neville an' me *work hard* on our parts! There's times I want ter throttle him, now an' agin, I don't mind tellin' yeh."

Closing the cupboard, Minerva walked over and handed him the fuller glass. "I know the feeling, Rube," she admitted, shoving aside the great heap of discarded clothing and sinking back onto her seat. He swallowed a noisy draught before settling across from her again. "Still, I'm happy you were able to restrain yourself."

Hagrid shifted in his seat, looking distinctly uncomfortable. "Well, as ter that..." he said after a swallow too large to give the expensive drink the respect it was due.

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This Is How It Really Happened...

"Minerva were right, yeh know. Yeh need ter be 'round people more. If the ball's too much fer yer outin', yer welcome at me birthday party! I'd be happy to have yeh, an' Minerva thought as tha'd be a good thing fer yeh ter do wi' the ball comin' up an' all."

Hagrid had to bent almost double to follow Severus Snape up the steep staircase. The bothan's humble ground floor looked almost derelict in comparison to the sophisticated and spacious underground laboratory. But Hagrid, hut-dweller he was, barely noticed the lack of amenities, and Snape...who thought any place that was neither a dilapidated terraced house in Cokeworth nor Hogwarts Castle was a vast improvement to his well-being...didn't care.

"I don't care what Minerva thinks," he informed his guest whilst attending to a bubbling cauldron. "I'm not an active member of the staff, so she can't dictate how I spend my time!" Snape extinguished the fire under the cauldron and gave the contents one last stir.

"Sure, if yeh don't mind breakin' her heart." Hagrid shook his head mournfully. "Don' really want ter hurt her, do yeh?"

"Which part of 'I don't care' is beyond your grasp of the English language?" Snape strode across the kitchen and pulled a bowl down from an open-faced cupboard hanging over the sink. He glanced over his shoulder, grinning nastily. "Besides, even if I did want to cater to the whims of an old busy-body who likes to feign unfulfilled mum fantasies, I am effectively destitute until trials are complete for the new headache remedy."

"Tha's a lie, an' you know it!" Hagrid snapped. "Minerva'd'a had kids if she'd wanted. An' *do* read the books, 'casionally."

For the first time that evening, he allowed an insult to completely overwhelm his good intentions. At the moment Snape had declared he "didn't care" for the second time,

two thoughts had converged to create in Hagrid a brainwave of previously unprecedented proportions. Two memories, really. The first was of a conversation more than seventy years old. The second, though of a far more recent vintage, was one of Minerva's oft-repeated laments.

Fortunately, Snape was back at his worktop, too busy ladling a delicious looking stew from cauldron to bowl to notice the wand tip hiding beneath the fat finger Hagrid pointed in his direction.

"Learnt to count past ten, have you?" Snape took his bowl over to a small rickety table set in a dark corner near the empty fireplace and sat in its single chair.

"Congratulations. The next number is *eleven*...if you weren't quite sure."

When Hagrid turned, the hurt on his broad face likely would have moved a kinder wizard to guilt. Unfortunately, Snape was the only other person in the room.

"Jus' 'cause I ain't got all yer book learnin' don't make me a know-nothin'." He pointed again, his hand shaking.

"Certainly not! There's a great deal of stupidity between 'know-nothing' and 'know-little'." Snape scooped up another small forkful of stew, adopting a thoughtful expression as he chewed and swallowed. "I'd place you somewhere around 'dunderhead', actually. And to think it only took you three quarters of a century to reach that esteemed level."

Hagrid fiddled with his fingers for a protracted moment, then said, "I'll be eighty come Dercember!"

"Four fifths, then. Your maths *have* improved!"

"Yeh know, Sev'rus," Hagrid said, his deep voice giving away none of his inner turmoil, "me mam's people..."

Snape snorted. "People! Generous use of the word." He forked up more stew.

"Me mam's people," Hagrid repeated, still pointing, "had a sayin' about folks like yeh:*Bo moolie manoo, fasooley bo homie*"

Snape snorted again, but Hagrid was ready for that.

"It means 'A good woman at hand makes a good man.' P'rhaps yer jus' needs a good woman at hand to set yer ter rights."

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"Nothin'll come of it, o' course," Hagrid concluded...a bit uncertainly to the mind of Hogwarts' long-suffering headmistress. "I jus' wanted ter give him a piece o' me mind, like."

"Right," was McGonagall's non-committal reply.

"Lef' him a touch unsettled, I s'ppose." He took another nervous swallow of Blisken's.

"I'm sure."

"Ain't like anythin' I done could work on the likes of *him*, anyway. The man barely has a heart left."

McGonagall noticed his gaze didn't quite meet hers.

A Bird(?) in Hand...

Chapter 3 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Chapter Two: A Bird(?) in Hand...

Happily, consciousness came in stages these days. That the sun hadn't risen as it came upon him took away none of his contentedness. Waking on his own terms, and in his own time, was one of the many perks of having survived the war. He could do what he liked: there was no fear that one or both of the two megalomaniacs he'd called "master" would say him nay. He wished both the barmy bum-bandit and murdering madman happy in Hell.

Without even opening his eyes or pausing to stretch, Severus Snape fumbled under the luxurious duvet...another thing he hadn't been allowed before the war...intent on commencing his morning bollocks scratching. He was feeling good enough, he mused, that he might even engage in a quick wank.

Not hardly! his ego whispered. *Turning out that hairy, over-grown house-elf last night earned you a good, long hand-shag. Atleast that.*

Severus certainly had no argument with his ego. Only, he wasn't certain he could oblige. Mary Palm and Her Five Friends (his left hand, you understand) were as numb as that blockhead Longbottom's skull. He couldn't feel enough to get in a good scratch, let alone to start a long-term relationship with his fingers.

A muffled scream coincided with what felt like two small but tight bands wrapping round his pecker. A brief, sharp peck on it nearly made him scream in concert. Fortunately, the piercing sensation subsided before he completely lost command of his composure.

What the fuck?

The events of the night before came rushing back in bright, vulgar colour, and Severus's eyes flew open.

A mighty yank brought his whole arm out from beneath the covers.

"Rubeus bleeding Hagrid is a dead man!"

In his rage, he barely noticed how nicely bouncy were the tiny tits on the miniature naked woman now occupying the space where his left hand and forearm should have

been.

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The usual low din at breakfast wasn't enough to distract Professor McGonagall from the goings-on at the High Table.

To her right, Bathsheda Babbling was pretending...as usual...not to notice Filius Flitwick looking down her blouse. *Must remember to say something to her about the proper use of buttons. Again,* Minerva mused, her gaze already moving on.

Rolanda and Pomona were at odds again, and neither was attempting to hide her antipathy from the others. Luckily, a quick glance over the hall confirmed none of the children appeared to have noticed the rift. *Either that, or they are simply no longer intrigued by the Argument of the Week*

A glance to her left showed little that was out of the ordinary. Septima Vector consulted with Aurora Sinistra about some upcoming astronomical event. Her interim Potions mistress sat...staring dreamily as always at her plate...in her usual seat next to Hagrid.

Must start interviews for next year's vict... replacement. Or, perhaps Miss Lovegood will consent to doing another year?

"Feeling ill, Hagrid?" The soft query from the young witch in question pulled Minerva from her silent machinations.

"Wha' makes yeh say tha'?"

"Well, you've only had eight pieces of toast, three cups of coffee, twelve rashers of bacon and half a dozen eggs this morning," Luna said, her usually vague expression uncommonly kind as she looked from his plate to his face. "I wondered whether the glitter-fistles were plaguing you this morning."

Minerva tried not to show she was listening closely as the young temporary teacher went on.

"Glitter-fistles especially like to target you when you haven't enough sleep. I do hope it didn't take you all night to get the mardler toenails from Professor Snape."

"Er, no. I... I'm jus' watchin' me figure," Hagrid dissembled. "Savin' room fer me party! Losin' two stone in two months ain't easy. But, er, I weren't able to get them toenails fer yeh. I'm sorry 'bout that."

When he looked away from Luna to catch her interested gaze, Minerva gave up all pretence of not eavesdropping. She wondered whether his pained expression was down to guilt over failing to acquire the non-existent mardler toenails or if Hagrid was truly ill.

"Do I need to ask Wilhelmina to come?"

"Oh! No need to bother Deebie...I mean, Perfess'r Grubby-Plank, Headmistress," he assured her. "I'll be righ' as rain in time fer me party!"

But Hagrid looked as doubtful as McGonagall felt, and she resolved to keep an eye on him.

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"Oi, Hermione! You look like Hell. Haven't I warned you about going on benders before the weekend?" Ron leant against her chair and slung an arm round her shoulders.

Hermione calmly finished scratching out the last line of the memo she'd been writing to her supervisor before scowling at her visitor in mock annoyance and shoving him away.

"For your information," she said loftily, "I was up late redrafting Subparagraph Sixteen of Article Nine of Doxy Regulation Twelve. It's the new regulation on..."

"You two bickering already?" Harry Potter appeared at the entrance of her tiny office, still talking even as he quickly ducked his head to avoid the aeroplane whizzing off. "I hope you're almost through. I'd like to eat lunch before dinner this time."

Ron and Hermione exchanged glances and rueful smiles at that last bit. Half the time, they pretended to argue just to see Harry squirm uncomfortably. But for her part, his nervous interruption was welcome today. There was no way she was going to tell either of her friends the *real* reason for her sleepless night, but going on about new laws would only alert Ron to the fact that she had something to hide.

"Not really," she said, standing and stretching. "Ron was worried that I looked tired...and I am!" Tucking herself back under Ron's embrace, she went on, "But you don't want to hear about Article Nine till you have to start enforcing it, I think." She glanced at her watch in what she hoped was a nonchalant manner. "Let's eat. Mr Jellyby only likes me to be out for forty-five minutes at the most, and I'm hungry, too."

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This Is What Really Happened...

Long before her usual bedtime, Hermione closed the heavy book. It was the only extensive treatise available on doxy culture, and if her independent experts were to be believed, it was mostly wrong! Of course it was also the official reference her department had used when coming up with the current laws. She doubted Eugene Jellyby would welcome her assessment...especially not if he knew her independent experts were *giants*...but she meant to do her job properly. Even doxies deserved to be treated as more than pests and a source of potions ingredients.

Still, she knew she wasn't going to get any more work done without consulting her boss, so she put aside *Seekrit Dookzee Libbeeng* and picked up a neatly disguised copy of the latest Ellen Morley novel. It wasn't that she was *ashamed* of her fondness for bodice rippers, but enjoying the amorous "adventures" of half-clad heroines hardly went with her image as an intellectual, did it? All right, so maybe she was a bit embarrassed, but shame wasn't enough to stop her sending her mum into Flourish and Blotts to stock up whenever Jean Granger wondered if Hermione might "fancy a nip to Diagon Alley". Fortunately, since returning to England, Jean had become rather more fascinated with her daughter's world than she'd been before she'd spent nearly a year as Monica Wilkins, so the visits occurred often enough to keep Hermione in regular supply of unrealistic romance.

Wouldn't hurt to have more of my own mindless smut in my own life Hermione mused as her heroine (finally) shagged the (wrong) bloke at the start of chapter six. *Even if it was with someone completely unsuitable.*

By chapter nineteen, not even Clementine Colgan's on-going indecision about which man...her traditionally handsome-but-too-steady-to-be-exciting boss, or the unemployed sex-god she'd pulled in a pub three months prior...was Mr Right could keep Hermione's eyelids from drooping. Like the good dentists' daughter she was, Hermione immediately went to clean her teeth and scrub her face before stumbling off to bed. She was asleep almost before her head hit the pillow.

To her delight, her dreams were more straightforward than the book had been. The plot, however, was nearly the same. In fact, the dark-haired sex-god was so familiar...both from her recent dreams and the books she been devouring for the past few years...that at first she failed to notice everything about him loomed larger than ever.

His large nose was on an epic scale. The black lashes feathering his cheeks were impossibly long.

But it wasn't until she somehow found herself beneath the grey folds of whatever he was wearing that she finally realised *everything* was a bit larger than life. At least, life as her dreaming life liked to make it.

"More for me then," she murmured. Then she leant forward to do what she always did.

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"So, Robarbs said now we're almost off probation," Harry whispered after giving a furtive look over each of his shoulders, "we can partner each other on our latest assignment. It's really Wizard Squad stuff, actually, but still good training."

"That's nice," Hermione murmured. She didn't look up from the remains of her sandwich. More than half lay uneaten.

"Are you going to finish that?" Ron wanted to know just as Harry asked, "Are you even paying attention to me?"

"No." She slid the plate to her ex-boyfriend.

"What?" Indignant at first, Harry coloured deeply, but when he noticed Ron happily munching away, he caught on. "I see," he said. "But you really weren't paying attention, were you?"

"I was!" Hermione protested. "You and Ron get to do Wizard Squad work till you're off probation."

Both men exchanged glances and smiled at that.

"Doesn't mean she was paying attention," Ron observed around a mouthful of sandwich. "Not much, anyway."

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The sun was already making its downward journey, and not even the combined brilliance of both his and Miss Granger's intellects had got them any closer to working out how the hell she'd come to be attached to him.

"Well, I don't know what's happened, either!"

Snape was sceptical, and surely it showed, because the little woman where his hand should have been glared at him and seemed to put her hands on her hips. It was hard to tell since she was covered from neck to... his elbow in an old grey mitten that had once been black. For some reason, she'd belatedly become shy about her nakedness that morning. It might have something to do with the urge he hadn't been able to suppress, an urge to pluck at her pert little...

"Don't flatter yourself that I *wanted* this to happen!"

He was sure her little hands were covering her breasts again.

"And don't you *dare* try to touch me!"

He refrained from pointing out that since she was seamlessly fused to his body, he had no choice but to touch her. Instead, he pointed out, "*You bit* me!"

"I... I d-didn't mean to!" The expression on the hand-witch's little face lacked the anger he heard in her voice. If anything, she appeared worried, biting her own lip as she was. "I was t-trying to..."

Severus held back a smirk as she cut herself off, obviously having thought better of her confession.

Exactly what were you trying to do with your teeth on my todger, woman? He wondered.

My Friends Are Like Mushrooms: I Try to Keep Them in the Dark and Feed Them Bullshit

Chapter 4 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Chapter Three: My Friends Are Like Mushrooms: I Try to Keep Them in the Dark and Feed Them Bullshit

A month into term was no time for a headmistress to be skulking about, spying on her teachers. But the situation was dire...or it soon would be, so what choice did she have, really?

On cat's paws, she headed towards the clearing where Care of Magical Creatures was being held for third-year Ravensclaws and Slytherins.

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If he'd been a more fortunate man, Severus would have awakened to find it had all been a horrible dream. Fortune had never exactly looked fondly on him, so he wasn't the least bit surprised to wake with a mouth full of bushy brown hair...and a more pressing problem.

He often used his right hand to steady his aim, first thing. The left was for bracing against the tiled wall those mornings when screaming need was the *only* thing that finally drove him from his bed.

Of course, even with much of the weight on his long legs, her spindly arms hadn't the strength to support him *Of course*.

"I won't!"

"You had better. I cut up my best wool mitten for you!"

"I *won't*! And that mitten should have been binned decades ago!"

Stubborn bint! "It was my *favourite* mitten. And if you *don't*, I might end up going on you!"

"You wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I?"

"If you hadn't spent last night drinking yourself..."

Swaying, Severus freed himself from the threadbare y-fronts and took haphazard aim.

She glared at him, muttering something that sounded a lot like "disgusting git", but she did as she was told.

"Don't know what your problem is with touching it," he murmured. Sweet relief was sweetening his mood. "Yesterday, you bit it."

Severus didn't mind her lack of response in the least.

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"But... leave the grounds during *term*, Headmistress? Other than to Hogsmeade?"

Minerva closed her eyes a moment. "Yes, Mr Longbottom. With my permission, you can go just about anywhere you like. *Undemy express order*, you *will* go to check on your colleague and business partner."

Longbottom didn't say a word...didn't even nod. He didn't tremble, exactly, but she could see something of his old fear beneath the confidence he'd been carrying since the end of the war.

"*Someone* needs to ascertain the nature of Severus's injury. I'd send Hagrid, but I think he's got something to do with it. Whatever 'it' is. You're the only other person who can get through The Dell's wards without incident."

"Right." She saw his courage settle back round his shoulders. "I'll make sure Snape's all right, Headmistress."

"A fortnight Saturday, Neville. Be ready to leave soon as the children are in bed."

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Her screech ended in an alarming burble. Severus shut off the shower.

"You said you didn't breathe, " he accused.

"I said I didn't seem to *need* to breathe!"

"So don't breathe."

"When I don't breathe, I feel as bad for it as you *look*."

"Oh, for fuck's sake!"

He Summoned his wand, cast the Bubblehead Charm, and reached for the soap.

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"Ms Granger..." Jellyby frowned, but she was too far gone to notice. "Ms Granger!"

Hermione jumped. Her cheeks burned.

"I'm sorry, sir." She resumed her seat...she hadn't even realised she was standing and couldn't work out why she'd been feeling so woozy. "Did you need something?"

He slapped a thick sheaf of parchments onto her desk. Her shoulders slumped at the sight of her latest revisions to Article Nine marked up in red ink.

"I need you to work these into your next draft," her supervisor grumbled.

"All right." She couldn't exactly tell him where he could stick his "corrections", could she? Besides, he was already walking away.

"Ms Granger..." Jellyby watched her from the doorway. "Why did you think you needed a Bubblehead?"

"Thinking aloud, sir," she lied. "About the best protective gear to use when getting rid of Doxys."

"But you are *opposed* to Doxy extermination."

"Right, sir." She gave him a weak smile. "But, er, better prepared, and all that."

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Two weeks and two days after McGonagall had ordered him to turn spy in a rare, Dumbledore-like abuse of her authority, Neville Apparated to The Dell, ready with an excuse about checking the spells that kept their plants-for-profit...his end of the business he shared with Hagrid and Snape...growing in tropical warmth.

He even checked the spells so he wouldn't have to lie to a known Legilimens. Not that it mattered, since both the gardens and the greenhouses proved empty.

Against his instinct for self-preservation, Neville took a deep, steadying breath that didn't steady him at all, reminded himself that he'd killed Voldemort's...at least now he could think the evil wizard's name without wanting to shit himself...great snake, and pushed open the bothy door.

Not even killing Nagini had prepared him for the sight of a towel-clad Snape ignoring the cauldron of porridge about to bubble over behind him as he did his best to snog what appeared to be a shaggy ball of brown hair growing out of the place where a left hand should have been. Neville couldn't stop a tiny sound of dismayed shock from escaping his throat.

Snape heard him, just his luck, and put off making out to look up.

"Tell anyone and I'll have your guts for garters."

That was when Neville saw the hairball was really a miniature...and nearly (was that *afacecloth* barely preserving her modestly?) naked...Hermione Granger.

Without answering or even asking for an explanation, Neville Apparated back to the castle gates. So he didn't hear the hand-witch teasing his old Potions professor with "Honestly, Severus! 'Guts for garters'?"

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The ramshackle hut sat at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. She padded closer with grave caution...one never knew what one might encounter there...but also with the aloof nonchalance only her kind could achieve.

Once she was certain it was safe to approach, she leapt to the lighted windowsill and tapped gently on the glass.

He welcomed her enthusiastically, of course...he *wasn't* very bright, after all...and even gave her the choicest bits of his latest catch. "Just this evenin' afore dinner, puss!" And she deigned to accept his largess before getting down to business.

The purring tabby disappeared and the stern headmistress said, "A word, Rube?"

Though he'd spend the next hour pleading ignorance and innocence, it was impossible miss the guilty tic of his right cheek. She left after another two hours had passed, satisfied she knew *everything*.

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As both Severus and Granger had cause to know...and be reminded of over the next several weeks...it's frankly amazing what one can get used to. So, nearly a month into their shared existence...despite having learnt they had a few frustrating limits and obstacles which just wouldn't be overcome under current circumstances...neither was entirely discontent.

She only *pretended* she wasn't watching every forkful he lifted to his mouth. He knew it and made sure to display as much delight as was Snapely possible for each bite.

By the time he got to the cake he'd baked for pudding, she was nearly drooling. He licked a bit of errant chocolate frosting from his lower lip.

"Bastard," she muttered.

Severus knew she didn't really mean it because she was smiling at him.

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This Is How That Happened...

Day Three

He discovered letting her "help" was easier than listening to her whinge about having nothing to do. (It helped that her "help" eventually turned out to actually help.)

"I could hold down ingredients for you."

"You might lose your head, you fidget so much." He gave her a feral grin. "Or should my knife slip."

"Your knife *never* slips, and I only fidget because I'm bored!"

"That's as may be, but... no." (The "no" wouldn't last, but first she had to prove herself, and *that* didn't come till later.)

"I could stir your cauldron." She demonstrated with the glass rod he'd used to stir his morning porridge. "Just like a witch in a fairy story!"

"We're not in a fairy story." Then he offered her a smile as nasty as she'd ever seen. "A day ago, you could barely tolerate touching a todger, but the precise art of potion-making is no trouble at all."

She blushed and sputtered so long, he ended up piling a stack of books on the kitchen table and shrinking half to a size she could easily handle.

"Make yourself useful," he ordered.

Day Nine

Severus ordered an expensive doll...Mary Muggle arrived with fourteen outfits tied to various Muggle careers that were "suitable to ladies"...from Diagon Alley's finest toy shop. And when his constant companion complained of the cold nights in the bothan, he owled for two black (left-handed only) mittens from Madam Malkin.

He also asked Poppy Pomfrey to send a sling, claiming he'd wrenched his left shoulder whilst fighting off a brace of Hagrid's latest experiments.

Day Fifteen (not long after Longbottom's visit, as it happened)

"I don't think I'm really here." She was half-dozing in her sling whilst he threw food at Hagrid's disgusting beasts.

"I beg to differ."

"No, I mean... I don't think *Hermione Granger* is really here. I don't think I'm her. Or... Well, whenever I'm feeling sleepy like this in the middle of the day, I start thinking of Harry and Ron and Mr Jellyby and Doxys. That's what I was doing *before*, you know. Reforming...attempting to reform, anyway...laws about Doxy-removal. And it's all so vivid, as if it were real. My dreams, too."

"Maybe your subconscious is trying to hold on to your old life."

"I don't think so," she whispered. Her voice was so faint, he knew she was nearly asleep. "I used to dream only about *you*."

Day Twenty-seven

She really *could* stir his cauldron.

Day Thirty-five

"Go to sleep."

"What? It's not dawn for ages yet!"

"Go to sleep or I'll hex you unconscious."

"Why?"

"*Why?* Because I haven't had a decent toss in more than a month, and I mean to have one soon. And I don't need an audience for it!"

"Why not? You do everything else with me around. If we're going to be stuck like this for the duration, why shouldn't I get to enjoy myself, too?"

At that, his eyes gleamed in an entirely different way, and he lost no time in racing up the stairs to his narrow bed.

"Take off your dress."

For good measure, she also removed the black ribbon she'd been using as a makeshift bra.

His trousers were off, and his right hand was already delving between his skinny legs when he brought her to his mouth.

Days Two through Forty-three (not that either of them acknowledged it)

Severus woke with his left arm slung across his chest and a mouth full of hair.

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"May I have a taste?"

"You don't eat." He savoured the first bite.

"I haven't yet," she told him, smiling cheekily. "Only because I don't think *I* need to eat, but..."

"You probably haven't got a digestive system. Anything you take in via that unstoppable mouth is likely to come straight back up." He scowled thoughtfully. "Or worse. Think about it...even if you *have* guts and such, there's no other end on you. I don't plan to die of sepsis because you can't resist having a mouse's portion of chocolate cake."

"We're *magic*, Severus. I doubt there's a danger of that happening."

"No toothbrush, then. Aren't your parents dentists? You might die of shame if you can't clean your teeth."

She was inexplicably delighted to know he remembered that much about her. But she wasn't at all thwarted. A moist crumb was clinging to the corner of his thin lips, and as she knew from experience, when he was distracted...

Before he could realise what she was about, she took nearly full control of his entire arm and launched herself at the delectable titbit.

"Mmm."

Severus smiled the tiniest bit. "Mmm, indeed."

A Little Help from My... Friends?

Chapter 5 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Chapter Four: A Little Help from My... Friends?

Six weeks later, the only real signs of the time passed were dark smudges under Hermione Granger's eyes.

"You look like Hell again."

Hermione clenched her teeth, but kept poring over Mr Jellyby's latest "corrections" to the changes that needed making in Article Nine.

"It's all right if you don't want to tell me about it," Ron continued cheerfully. "Me and Harry'll just talk about you behind your back till we either work out what's wrong, or till someone overhears us talking and comes up with a really good rumour!"

Well, that did it. She turned her head towards the magic window struggling to light her tiny office. Maybe if he couldn't actually ~~see~~ her face...even just the profile...

"Ron..."

"I don't want to hear more of your crap about Jellyby and laws, Hermione." Forgetting she wanted to hide her face, she turned at his sharp tones. He peeled himself way the doorjamb and, crossing the office in four steps, planted his hands on the back of her chair. "Saving vermin never kept you up nights for weeks at a time before."

It was no use, Hermione realised. Ron was too clever and she was too tired. If she wanted to keep anything from Harry...and keep everything from the gossiping Wizarding society...she'd have to come clean with Ron. But...

"Doxys are sapient beings, and I mean to keep at it until they are considered *Beings*, and oh, *God*, Ronald!" She sighed and leant back against his strong arms. "I've been having these... *dreams*. Every night for the past month or so. I barely get any rest even those nights I sleep soon as I get home."

"You can tell me everything over a couple of sandwiches."

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Evening came early, just as it did every autumn. That was doubly true in The Dell, but the coming of darkness wasn't his only consideration. Severus still rose when he chose...albeit deep into the night instead of just before dawn, or at noon, or any of the other times that had been his wont at some point or another...but these days he had more than one reason for remaining in bed.

In bed was where he and the hand-witch spent their *days*. Only when night arrived, and his subconscious noted the peculiar numbing of his left ante-brachial region that meant *she* was falling asleep, did they climb out of their diurnal sanctuary and *work*.

If they happened to wake a bit early... Well, if that happened, they had favourite ways of occupying the time.

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Ron pulled out a pen and a little leather-covered notebook.

"Did you know Muggle coppers don't really carry these? Everyone thinks they do, but they don't. But Kinglsey thinks they should, and he told Robards, and Robards gave 'em to us."

Hermione stared.

"Right." He uncapped the pen and opened the notebook. "Tell me everything."

~O~

"...almost as if I were in a fairy story."

"Mmm, yes. I see. Giant cauldron, giant wand, giant house, giant Shrivelfigs, giant meals..." He looked up at her with a grin that didn't reach his eyes. "Think there's a theme here?"

Too agitated to give more than a shrug for an answer, Hermione bit into her sandwich.

Ron tapped his pen against the table. She noticed...in a vague sort of way...that he hadn't touched his own meal.

"Listen, Hermione." He leant forward and lowered his voice. "I don't want to scare you or anything, but these dreams... It sounds like you've been hexed."

Her eyes widened, but her mouth was full.

"Well, you've been reading that Doxy book in Giant-speak a lot, yeah?" He stared into the distance over her left shoulder and said, as if to himself, "Maybe it's connected somehow."

"Maybe." She wondered if he was going to eat his sandwich. In the dreams, the giant...she hadn't revealed her giant's identity...never shared any of his giant meals with her.

"Where did you get the book, Hermione?"

"Books," she corrected around another bite of sandwich. She really *was* hungry! "I have several, and I get them from... My procurer gets them for me. Please, Ron, I can't tell you any more about him than that."

"It's not Hagrid, is it?" He looked sceptical, and he nodded when she shook her head. "I'm not saying you shouldn't trust this bloke...you shouldn't call him your procurer, by the way. Makes him sound like a pimp...but even if there's nothing *Dark* to this, I think we had better get you checked out at St Mungo's."

Things moved rather quickly once she'd reluctantly agreed to his cautionary measures. Less than ten minutes later, they stood in front of Purge and Dowse, Ltd. Hermione handed over the keys to her flat, and Ron had to shrink down the sandwich he'd stuffed into his pocket so they would fit.

Neither one of them had noticed the slightly disreputable-looking woman sitting in a darkened corner of the restaurant...or that she'd had a Quick-Quotes Quill scribbling furiously.

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One of Minerva McGonagall's orders of business as headmistress of the newly reopened Hogwarts Schools for Witchcraft and Wizardry had been to officially ban all Owl Post deliveries to the Great Hall after the morning meal. She firmly believed having owls fly about during dinner was inherently more vulgar than having them do so at breakfast. House-elves were usually used to deliver the *Evening Prophet* to the few professors and even fewer students who subscribed to that edition.

Minerva didn't take *any* edition of the wizarding rag, so she was perplexed, but not overly concerned when...halfway through his supper...her Care of Magical Creatures professor turned grey upon receipt of his. She didn't particularly notice, truth be told. But when he tried to shove back his chair, and succeeded in shoving the staff table *forward*, her attention was well and truly caught. (As was that of everyone else in the Great Hall.)

"Sit *down*, Professor Hagrid." Once he'd complied (immediately, of course), she issued a second and a third order. "Explain yourself. Quietly."

"I... Er, that is..."

Knowing it could take the half-giant half the night to fumble out an explanation, Minerva sped things up by Summoning the offending newspaper to her hand.

Who Hexed Hermione?

The article itself...written by "special consultant, recently out of retirement" Rita Skeeter...was long and twisting (not to mention doubtlessly full of half-truths and prevarications), but the gist was simple enough: The Auror Office were investigating a case of an attack...possibly perpetrated by giants...on Hermione Granger. She'd been rushed to St Mungo's that very afternoon, and she hadn't been seen at the Ministry since.

Minerva stood and walked behind three other teachers till she stood at Hagrid's ear.

"And just *what* did you intend to do about this?"

~O~ ~O~ ~O~

For the fiftieth or sixtieth time that week, the rich odour of fecund soil saturated Severus's olfactory epithelium as he crouched at the end of a row of diminutive trees. As others had been just over an hour before, this final tree was fairly bowed under the weight of its fruit.

"But why is it always so *warm*?" she asked, tiny hands grasping a stalk and tugging.

"Try thinking instead of asking inane questions, and you'll have your answer." He nodded at the basket of stalks and fruit at his feet. She yawned...he was adjusting to their new semi-nocturnal schedule far more easily than she was doing...and harvested another stalk. He sighed. "Where did Shrivelfigs originate, Granger?" (She preferred "Handmione", but he couldn't bring himself to use such a ridiculous name; deciding on "Granger" had stopped them arguing, at least.)

"Abyssinia," she said, grabbing at another branchlet. The fruit on that one was ripe to the point of bursting, and he pushed it out of her reach.

"Your hands are small enough," he told her.

"*Too* small for some things, according to some."

"According to *one*. And they do well enough...now you've had some practice...at the things that matter. Now tear your mind from the gutter and tell me: The climates of Ethiopia and the Scottish Highlands are similar *how*?"

"Oh." The little hand-witch yawned again. "That makes sense, then. But how do you maintain the ligh...?" Another yawn cut off her query, but he'd had enough of her chatter anyway. Besides, their basket was teeming.

"Enough!" he told her. "Enough questions and enough harvesting. As it is, I'll be hard-pressed to process what we have now if you mean to spend the night skiving."

"Skiving! I..." Her protest was shortened by a yawn that nearly split her face in two.

Severus smiled while her eyes were squeezed shut. He thought it adorable, almost, the way her little face scrunched up with exhaustion. But there was no need for her to know that.

~o~

A loud *crack!* announced the arrival of the first guest they'd had in weeks.

Severus shoved Handmione into her sling and raced towards his little cottage, leaving the basket behind.

A red-faced Longbottom was rushing in from the Apparation point, clutching a bunched-up newspaper in his hand. "Hagrid... Headmistress... Coming," he panted as he reached them. "I think they *know*."

Snape sneered and snatched his left arm free of its confinement. "Of course they know, you twit! I'm sure you lost no time tattling to mummy after last time."

"I didn't! I told her your hand was disfigured...sorry, Hermione...but you seemed to have found a way to use it!"

"Handmione," she corrected as Severus said, "Right! And that's why the Harpy of Hogwarts and Tweedledum are on their way."

"Read it!" Neville pushed the pleated paper into Severus's right hand. "I was only trying to warn you!" With that, he stalked back to the centre of the vale. Moments later, he turned on his heel and was gone.

As it turned out, he was only just in time.

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"I ain't sure what's happened, Headmistress," Hagrid said as he and Minerva steadied themselves after the Side-Along-Apparation. "It weren't a proper spell, like. Only, you said, 'Severus can stand ter allus have someone at...'"

"You'd better leave this to me," Minerva told him. She *wanted* to ask him how he'd been so awesomely stupid, but she firmly believed in keeping up staff morale by not brow-beating her professors, so she resisted that urge. "Give me fifteen minutes alone with him. I'll call if I need you sooner than that."

"Aw right, Headmistress. I'll jus' go an' check on me babies, then."

She was too busy working out how she was going to excuse her presence to care that Hagrid sounded utterly dejected.

~o~

"Now, you're just being a parsimonious old codger! New robes aren't *that* expensive, and both Neville and Hagrid say the business is doing splendidly."

"Well, of *course*! If those two bastions of intelligence say so..."

"They showed me the ledgers! Ledgers which, you might recall, *you* spelled to copy *exactly* figures *you* put down in the originals."

"And in reading those ledgers, you apparently neglected to consider that this is currently my only source of income." Snape fixed her with a put-upon glare. "Unlike your two pet idiots, I don't have another job that comes with food on my table and a roof over my head!"

Minerva snorted inelegantly, casting a disdain glance around the small, barren room. "I hardly think you spend more than a handful of Knuts on your monthly upkeep."

"I beg your pardon, madam!"

She matched him glare for glower. "You cook your meals in a cauldron!" The fierce stare twisted into a devious smile. "That is, if one can call the inferior potions ingredients you seem to survive on 'meals'."

"Just because you never learnt to cook anything edible, you old..."

"Need I remind you, Professor Snape, that I am still your employer, and I can order you back to the castle to receive medical care at any time? It's in the contract for your sabbatical." She folded her arms across her chest and nodded at the arm he was supporting in a sling. "It's in my best interest to ensure my Potions master is able to perform his duties once he returns permanently. And speaking of your sabbatical, you are supposed to assess Professor Lovegood's progress before the end of term. I could order you back to do *that* just as easily."

~o~

Severus knew when he was defeated, and Minerva McGonagall had thoroughly outclassed him simply by virtue of outranking him. That didn't stop him fighting.

"Fine! I'll just go back with you tonight. We'll all just ignore what your pet idiot has done to me. I'm sure no one will say *word* about it!" He yanked his arm from the sling and showed her what the half-giant, whole-imbecile had wrought.

Her jaw dropped, and for several seconds silence ruled until she found her voice. "Oh...*dear*." She leaned in for a closer look, but Severus snatched a heavy wool mitten

from one of his trouser pockets and quickly covered the evidence of Hagrid's misdeeds.

I'll be damned if I'll let the meddlesome beldam leer at my little.. Unwilling to finish the unbidden thought, he said, "Whatever idiot decided that barbarian should be given a new wand..."

"Just be glad I never said 'under foot'!" McGonagall barked, having got over her shock. "I shudder to imagine what he might have left you with then."

Snape snorted, and a nasty-looking smile darkened his already saturnine features.

"If only he *had*," he groused. "A stout boot would do a lot more towards shutting up the annoying wench." Ignoring the muffled protests coming from beneath the mitten, he added a darkly muttered, "With any luck, she might even suffocate."

"Severus!" McGonagall glared at him as Hagrid lumbered through the door to stare stupidly at the pair.

"Heard yeh have a guest, Sev'rus. How's she suit yer, then?" His toothy grin was begging to be *Crucio*-ed off his face.

Severus could feel...the other Granger must be fully awake, then...his hand-witch squirming beneath the mitten. If the tiny fists he saw forming beneath the black wool were any indication, she was as cross with the imbecilic half-troll...Severus grinned at the idea of Hagrid having troll ancestry...as he was.

"Hrggggeddd! Werdderuddyherrerooheeking?"

"I beg your pardon!" said McGonagall as Snape asked, "What in Hell did you just say?" and Hagrid said, "Well, I weren't thinkin', as such. Not at the moment, like."

Hagrid grinned, even though Snape's hand...or the Handmione that had taken its place...was still covered. "Worked it all out before, but I dint 'spec~~y~~*you'd* be the one, H'mione!"

"Nueryeneuw, urdoorit!"

"I dunno," Hagrid said, frowning. "See, I was tryin' *terhelp* Sev'rus, an' I don' know as it would be all that helpful if I were ter do that."

Severus exchanged glances with McGonagall. She shrugged. He sneered. They continued in this manner as Hagrid kept up a lively debate with Severus's screaming hand.

"Seberus? Weraberme?" Her increasingly shrill voice assured Severus that she was very angry indeed.

"I'm sorry, H'minoe. Th' thing is, I don' ackyully*know* if I kin."

"Doaneuw? Huerkintyeneuw?" Now she sounded frightened.

Severus wasn't prepared for the wave of protective anger that suddenly washed over him. *I'll make the idiot ogre pay for hurting my... The girl. Hand. Whatever. He'll pay for what he did to her, too!*

"Well, you an' Sev ain't giants, are yeh?"

In the end, McGonagall was the one who dared to interrupt. "Hagrid, do you mean to say you actually understand what, er, Miss Granger is saying?"

Hagrid beamed a stupid-looking smile at the old harridan. "Course!" he assured her. "It's a bit like Giant-speak, ain't it? Most folk don't know Giants talk English jus' like normal people, only it's hard fer yer ears ter hear it. Jus' like Giant maguses talk their spells in Lat'n!"

Jaw dropping, McGonagall harrumphed and spun round to face Snape. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, Severus! Take off that mitten!"

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What Handmione and Hagrid Said Was...

"Hagrid! What the ruddy Hell were you thinking?" Handmione knew the gentle half-giant couldn't possibly have meant her any harm, but knowing that didn't quell her annoyance as much as it might have done.

"Well, I weren't thinkin', as such. Not at the moment, like." Hagrid grinned. "Worked it all out before, but I didn't 'spec~~y~~*you'd* be the one, H'mione!"

"Now you know, undo it!"

"I dunno," Hagrid said, frowning. "See, I was tryin' *terhelp* Sev'rus, an' I don' know as it would be all that helpful if I were ter do that."

"*Severus?* What about *me?*"

"I'm sorry, H'minoe. Th' thing is, I don' ackyully*know* if I kin."

"Don't know? How can you not know?"

"Well, you an' Sev ain't giants, are yeh?"

~o~ ~o~ ~o~

An hour later, Hagrid and Minerva were chased from the bothy.

Severus were right cross, Hagrid could tell. But little Handmione weren't lettin' him act too rough. She were good for the ill-tempered wizard, aw right.

Minerva hadn't needed to make all those threats she'd made. Handmione had everything in hand.

Bo moolie manoo, fasooley bo homie, and all that.

Lost in Translation

Chapter 6 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Chapter Five: Lost in Translation

"...scarcely believe you *both* acted so irresponsibly!" McGonagall's ire coloured her face a deep red. Her green glare pinned the two men to the chairs before her desk. "Yes, Severus is your partner in this potions scheme of yours, but Hermione Granger is supposed to be your *friend*! Did neither of you think of the poor girl when you were keeping your secrets?"

The two professors exchanged glances, neither of them possessing the courage to answer despite their Gryffindor pasts. For his part, Neville wasn't certain the headmistress *wanted* an answer. Hagrid was hoping young Longbottom would do the brave thing for them both.

"Well?"

Hagrid's mouth worked silently, stupidly. Neville sighed. No sense in trying to play "idiot in too deep" if his colleague had already claimed the role.

"She...Handmione, I mean..."

"She, *what*?"

"She seemed... happy. And I didn't know... I didn't think she had anything to do with ~~Hermione~~."

"Didn't *think*, did you? Seems there's been rather a lot of that going round this term." She looked away for the first time since the interview had begun half an hour earlier. "You obviously thought about warning *him*." Neville realised his shock must have showed because she said, "Yes, Mr Longbottom, I knew the moment you left the grounds. And since it was no trouble at all to be so reckless for the sake of Professor Snape, it seems to me you shouldn't mind going to inform Ms Granger."

Neville's stomach churned. As scary as the headmistress could be, Hermione was truly terrifying if you got on her bad side.

"It's I-late, Headmistress," he said, not caring that his voice trembled. "And she might still be in hospital..."

Her lips thinned into a straight line, and he hardly dared to breathe. "Right," she said at last. "Then you'd best get to bed now. You've an early morning ahead of you. I'll have orders from the Auror Office waiting by dawn."

It was clearly a dismissal, and she didn't acknowledge his hasty bow or mumbled "Yes, Headmistress"; she was too busy glaring at Hagrid, who'd heaved himself to his feet as well.

"Sit *down*, Rube," she ordered.

Neville hurried towards the safety of the winding staircase.

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Auror training was vigorous and meticulous, and it had allowed Ron Weasley to vastly improve in many areas in which he had once been severely lacking. Precision Apparation was only the least of those areas. So, it was no trouble at all for him to Apparate Hermione from the secure location inside St Mungo's...where Healers had determined that there was no evidence that she had been recently hexed...to her eerily immaculate flat in the night's darkest hours.

"I think maybe I should take you back," he declared after a quick glance round the place *He* certainly hadn't left it so well-ordered after collecting all of her books in Giant-speak for further investigation. Even the plate he used earlier...he'd finally got a chance to eat that sandwich...was gone from the coffee table in the living room. "I don't know what happened; it's like one of those Muggle magazines about rich people's homes in here."

Having got over her second Side-Along of the day far more quickly than she would have thought possible...Ron really *had* improved!...Hermione focussed on blocking out the alarming sensations threatening to leave her (happily!) moaning on her pristine floor and let her own gaze scan the room. Everything looked normal to her, as long as she didn't count the gaping holes in her bookshelves. Had she had *that* many Giant-published books?

"You happened, Ronald," she told him. "Your mum taught me a self-tidying charm back when we were together. But it needs at least eight undisturbed hours to start working, so there was never any use trying it at the Burrow."

She moved closer to the largest bookcase and carefully viewed the titles. *Something* was telling her something wasn't right. Something that *should* have been missing wasn't actually missing. If she could just...

"Perfect!" she said, stretching up on her toes to reach a large tome on the top shelf.

Fortunately, Ron's training hadn't erased all of his faults!

Several hours later, she was doing her best to translate Giant-speak to English...it was as if her mind was in two places, and in one of those places her mind was ~~very~~ happy...while Ron scribbled notes into his little notebook when her doorbell rang sometime after dawn.

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"We'll have to go, you know," Handmione murmured.

"I don't see why." Severus took advantage of her sleepy lack of co-ordination to pull her back against his cheek. "The ogre admitted he doesn't know his wand from the stick up Minerva's arse."

"True, but *she* knows." He knew the "she" in question wasn't the Headmistress of Hogwarts. "Or she should by now. At least I think she should...it was hard to concentrate on her thoughts while you were doing... what you were doing yesterday."

He felt his lips tug into a smug smirk. "I take pride in *all* of my work, Granger."

Her little tongue flicked out at him...which had the opposite effect on him to what she was probably hoping for...and he took it as an invitation. Once their mouths were free again, she said, "You've earned that pride, Snape, but that has nothing to do with why we have to go to Hogwarts. Hermione can't come here, and *you* certainly won't go to

her."

Severus didn't want to admit that he'd just as soon have neither happen, so he said nothing.

"I know it's not what you want just yet...it's not what *either* of us wants...but we can't do this forever... can we?"

Again, Severus had no easy answer. Not one he wanted to give, anyway. He fell back on his old friend Avoidance, instead.

"Well, there's still no reason to make a special trip," he grumbled. "Not when she's not likely to go there before the troll's birthday, anyway."

"That's still a month away." Her voice was more hopeful than chastising.

"So it is," he whispered. "I suppose we'll have to wait."

And so they did.

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"She said we're not to worry...she's got a plan." Neville couldn't read the stern expression, nor could his nerves stand the silence, so he pressed on. "She said everything will be set to rights at Hagrid's party. At the Yule Ball if not then."

After that, there was nothing more to tell, and it seemed like for ever before McGonagall said "All right" and waved him off.

But not before he saw a satisfied smile touch the corners of her mouth.

"Happy birthday, Hagrid!" Hermione shrugged out of her cloak before stretching up as Hagrid bent down so she could kiss his hairy cheek. "Sorry I'm so late. I had a bit of a disagreement with my wardrobe."

Grimacing at the kiss, Severus told himself the burning in his stomach was *not* jealousy. He told himself everything about Hermione Granger was too big, even as a voice at the back of his mind noted that she was just the right size. Ignoring the voice, Severus listened as the bloody imbecile laughed as though he had any idea what the witch was talking about.

Severus knew: *his* Granger had nearly been reduced to tears by his inability to transfigure the doll-sized party frock in purple sateen into the flattering ankle-length dress of sage green wool that he could now see was an exact replica of the one the other Granger was wearing. Obviously, there was more to his Granger's "shared consciousness" theory than he liked to admit.

Unaware of that at the time...though he supposed, now anyway, that he shouldn't have been unaware; she must have been right *sometimes* to still be a know-it-all more than ten years since she should have left school...he'd argued to no avail that it didn't matter since no-one else would actually get to *see* the thing. In the end, he'd been forced to resort to Legilimency and McGonagall's assistance to get the hand-witch what she wanted.

He turned away from the goings-on at the front of the room, hoping to lose himself in the crowd before the full-sized Granger spotted him. Luckily, Hagrid's hut was small enough that the twelve people squeezed inside *were* a crowd. Unluckily, she seemed to look straight through Lovegood, Longbottom, Hooch, *and* Vector to catch his gaze.

"Hello, Severus," two voices whispered when she reached his side.

Fortunately, that meddling busybody of a headmistress saved him having to answer.

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The group that gathered in McGonagall's rooms after the party was much smaller than the one that had just celebrated the eightieth anniversary of Rubeus Hagrid's birth. Severus reckoned he wasn't the only one who could barely believe a word he was hearing.

"Don't you mean 'true love's first kiss'?" Handmione and Hermione asked as one. "According to *Comnee-Faseendaz Stooltooroom's 'Arse Amatoreez Prideetay'* chapter..."

"No. It's 'best lust's first *shag*'. Grawp must've got yer a clean copy." Hagrid smiled indulgently. "Giants ain't much fer monogmee. It's babes they want ter have ter keep the race goin', like."

Hermione and Handmione gasped. Severus appeared about to be sick. McGonagall looked livid.

"'Course, the baby part ain't really ne's'sary, but the shaggin' is." Hagrid grinned suddenly, quite obviously pleased with himself despite McGonagall's patent disapproval. "The other way ain't as easy, but I s'pose it can be done."

"*Other way*?" That was the other four all at once.

"'T'ain't easy," Hagrid cautioned, "but if yeh don' mind waitin' a while, t' spell'll wear off."

"How long?" Severus asked.

"Now, I ain't sure 'bout that. Giants ain't much fer countin'. A year? Mebbe three? I ain't sure."

"My career won't survive another three years!" Hermione was furious, and it showed in her tone. "Isn't there any other way?"

Hagrid eyed Severus sceptically. "Yeah, but...beggin' yer pardon, Sev'rus...I don't think it's likely."

The other four treated him to expectant looks. Severus's had a dash of surliness.

"Er... yeh'll have ter get another witch ter, ahh, take H'Mione's place."

Severus's eyes flashed rage at the implied insult, and he gripped his wand in a menacing manner. Minerva opened her mouth, no doubt readying herself to issue a stinging dressing down.

But Handmione and Hermione were quicker than either of them. "Over my dead body!" they shouted.

~o~

That seemed to settle it. In spite of Minerva's (half-hearted, Severus noted) protests, the Grangers refused to change their *single*...mind. Severus was at once flattered and flustered: it was gratifying to think any witch was loath to leave him to the arms of another, but he was unsure of how he felt about *his* witch disappearing in an act of torrid lust and tangled limbs.

"One more thing, Hagrid," Handmione and Hermione called over their shoulders as Severus stepped through the gates with them. Hermione whipped out her wand...Handmione mimicked the motion, but was empty-handed...and both Grangers chanted, "*Bo moolie-feelie manoo, fasooey bo homie!*"

Perhaps it was because they'd spoken so vehemently, or perhaps it was down to there being two of them...maybe it was because even one of them was a much stronger witch than he was a wizard; magic gives no easy answers. But in that instant, magic gave their hex a much quicker result than Hagrid's had done:

Where his right forearm had been, a largish cat with silvery tabby markings appeared.

Appearing almost Confunded, Hagrid raised his arm to get a closer look. The tabby swiped at his cheek. A livid-looking Minerva also made a clawing motion. Severus bit back a laugh.

"That was not the hex Hagrid used on me," he whispered.

"No. The incantation wasn't related to any spell at all." She looked up at him, mouth serious, brown eyes full of mischief. "But by the time Minerva calms down enough to work out it's only a recurring compound transfiguration, I think they'll both have learnt their lessons. That is, if Professor Grubby-Plank hasn't hexed them to bits by then."

"You'll end up paying for that one."

"Perhaps."

Severus felt guilty for enjoying this other witch's cunning, so he gathered her close...telling himself it was to keep from splinching...then with a turn on his heel and a soft *pop!*, they were in The Dell.

"It's all right," his witch assured him as they entered the bothan. The other Granger wisely remained silent. "I'll *stilbe*; I'll just be back where I belong. And the right size too."

Her impish grin was reflected on the big one's face, but Severus didn't smile back at either of them. He wanted to tell the hand-witch that she belonged where she was and to Hell with the other Granger. *She*...his own hand-witch...was just the right size to suit his needs.

He didn't tell her any of that, however. "This is just sex," he told the witch he wasn't attached to, and two smiles grew on identical faces.

"Of course," agreed the other Granger. "The sooner we get started..."

The dress that his witch had taken such pains to have copied slid from her shoulders to pool at her feet.

It was odd, having a Yule Ball without a Tri-Wizard Tournament, but Harry supposed Professor McGonagall had been right: it was ridiculous to use risking children's lives as an excuse to celebrate. *At least these kids will have better memories than I had* he thought.

Not just the kids, it seemed. Harry's eyes...like most other eyes in the Great Hall...followed the single couple dancing round the room, blithely unaware that the orchestra had been resting for the last few minutes.

Ron laughed, not for the first time, and nudged Neville. "You must be pretty chuffed, seeing it from the start and all."

Neville rolled his eyes. "I didn't want to go after them," he protested, also not for the first time. "I'd like to see *you* telling Minerva 'no' after everything, and her thinking it's at least part your fault."

"Imagine if she'd sent Hagrid?" Harry shivered at the thought.

"He'd have stayed to watch the whole thing. And taken notes!" Ron laughed at his own crude joke.

Neville flushed at how close it came to the truth.

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This Is What Neville Had Found Three Weeks Earlier...

A green puddle of wool was on the floor just inside the cottage door.

Sounds of female delight falling from above left more than just his face hot.

A triumphant male roar chilled him to the bone, even as he rushed up the stairs to Snape's attic bedroom.

Finally, the moon-glow showed him twisted white sheets that barely covered tangled white bodies. There was Hermione Granger's blissfully smiling face...held in a rapturous Severus Snape's two hands.

Try as he might, Neville couldn't tear his eyes from the pair or from the nimbus he now saw wasn't moonlight at all. They glowed in one another's arms, oblivious to his presence.

Only when they began to slowly, reverently, make love again...*Lust's first shag, my arse* Neville scoffed...was the spell broken, freeing him to leave.

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"They'll probably call their first Hagrid Neville," Ron teased.

"I doubt it," murmured Harry, eyes still on Hermione and Snape, but his mind on his own unfortunate Albus Severus.

And then Ginny and Hannah and Katie were back from wherever they'd gone to gossip, and the men were ordered out of their seats and onto the dance floor.

Harry and Neville dragged their feet, pointing out the lack of music, but Ron shrugged and let Katie wrap herself in his arms.

"Can't leave the lovebirds to face all that attention alone," he said. "If we do, Snape'll turn nasty soon as they come to their senses. Hermione won't be much better."

Waltzing Ginny round the room, Harry wondered if they ever would.

Epilogue: And They Lived Happily Enough...

Chapter 7 of 7

Severus Snape learns the hard way not to cross a half-giant. Hermione Granger gets caught in consequences of his gaffe.

Epilogue: And They Lived Happily Enough...

"An' tha's how yer mam and da' fell fer th' other."

"But that's not right, Uncle Rube! Dad said it was 'an incompetent imbecile wielding an ill-gotten wand' who hexed him!" The little boy with a long nose and dark greasy curls smiled lovingly at the half-giant. "You're the wisest person we know!"

Two other little faces—one identical and the other nearly so—nodded in agreement. Hagrid hated to destroy their fantasies, so he didn't.

There is no guarantee that exceptionally clever persons will have offspring whose intelligence even approaches their own; nowhere was that truth made more evident than in the steadfast devotion of the Snape twins, Fénius Neville and Goídel Hagrid, to their godfather. And though their younger sister, Perugia Minerva, continued to exceed their parents' (much lowered after the twins' second birthday) expectations, no one would call her brilliant either.

"Don' allus take yer da' serious," Hagrid advised them. "Yeh know he like ter tease. He knows it were the best of magics what brung them tergither."