

A Necessity

by anoesis

She *needed* this. Hell, her *career* needed this.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Thanks as ever to the delightful **Sixpence Jones** and to **Anna Scathach** for beta help. The following is PWP. That would be porn with Polyjuice . . .

Hermione looked around the scruffy hotel room. Apparently, the manager was used to this sort of arrangement and had agreed to bill by the hour. It all felt rather seedy to be honest, but glancing at her partner in this unusual venture, she could concede that it was entirely necessary.

She pushed her growing nerves aside; this had been *her* idea after all. Snape seemed utterly unfazed, but then he had almost twenty years experience on her and probably did this sort of thing all the time.

"I'll change in the bathroom, shall I?"

Once the flimsy door had clicked shut behind her, she resolutely began to shed her clothes, folding each item with care. Her fitted work robes were some of the nicest that she had ever owned, and she had no wish to see them ripped. The same was true of her slightly frivolous underwear, a matching set that she had worn specifically in the hope that they might boost her confidence.

Naked, she stared critically at herself in the mirror. She was pale, her eyes overlarge beneath a rather clammy brow.

"Suck it up, Granger," she muttered. "You *need* this. Hell, your *career* needs this."

Stern talking-to successfully administered, she shrank her neat pile of clothes and placed them in her handbag after retrieving a small glass vial and a bundle of cloth from within. Not giving herself a moment longer to think about what she was about to do it was like the deep-breath moment before pulling a wax strip away from delicate skin she uncapped the bottle and drank the contents in one swift gulp.

She had thought that she would never forget the hideous taste and sudden, sharp agony of Polyjuice, but apparently the last ten years had considerably dulled the memory. It was excruciating. The pain, the nausea, the cramping the horrible stretching sensation if childbirth was half as bad as this, then she was going to have to seriously reconsider her current ten year plan. When she found him, Mr Right would just have to content himself with adoption.

She could feel her bones shift and pop, her skin stretch and stretch as she swelled up like a balloon.

At least there was no tail this time.

By the time she managed to straighten enough to watch herself in the mirror, the change was almost complete. Belatedly she realised that she probably ought to have

redressed in the oversized robes before morphing into Augustus Squeers, an overweight, middle-aged used broom salesman from Croyden. She felt it was unlikely that she would ever have the joy of meeting the gentleman in question, but it felt horribly intimate to be suddenly confronted with his naked body.

A tiny, unprofessional part of her that she quickly shushed noted with dismay that his breasts were larger than her own.

She crouched with some difficulty, taking great care not to notice the flaccid penis tucked under her newly acquired paunch, and picked up her wand from the grubby tiled floor. She resized and donned the ostentatious green robes swiftly, grabbed her bag, and headed back out into the bedroom.

A twitchy looking twig of a man looked up nervously at her arrival. With his slicked-back hair and cheap robes, already going shiny where his arms brushed his sides, he reminded her of a junior estate agent. It struck her that he had got off remarkably easy.

"I don't see why I have to be the fat one," she wailed.

It was Ron's fault, she decided, sipping at her pint and trying not to grimace in distaste.

He'd been so wonderfully understanding when she'd broken things off between them and had actually agreed that they should still be friends to the extent that ~~they~~ were still friends that she had been plagued with residual guilt ever since. If he could have displayed just a tiny bit of the unreasonable temper or cruel jealousy that he occasionally had wallowed in at school, they could have had a blistering row and she could have walked away with the certain knowledge that she had made the right decision. Instead he'd chosen to be all grown up and understanding two of the qualities whose lack had led her to terminate their relationship in the first place and left her wondering if maybe she'd thrown away the best thing she'd ever had. She stubbornly refused to regret the decision, but she was left with the lasting impression that she had somehow been unreasonable and ought to, somehow, make it up to him.

So when he had come to her, almost in tears, terrified that he was about to be put under investigation at work, she had immediately promised to do everything in her power to help. Information was somehow leaking out of his department into London's magical criminal underbelly and the senior Aurors were starting to look for answers. Unluckily for Ron, the only recent change to the department was him.

Things had been looking pretty bleak until the chance arrest for tax evasion had handed them two members of an information sharing ring. The pair her salesman and his son-in-law, Trent had blabbed half the story before realising that they'd been arrested for something completely different. They couldn't identify their informant, who was apparently a little cleverer than them and made liberal use of Ministry Polyjuice at their meetings, but they had admitted that a meeting was planned for that very afternoon.

Ron had no idea who on his team he could share the information with, so he had called in some favours. Hermione had immediately agreed to help, and with Harry currently training abroad, Snape was roped in to lend a hand. How Ron had managed to convince the former Potions Master to help was beyond her, but given his experience as a spy, not to mention his handiness in a duel, she was grateful to have him with her.

She'd hoped naively it was to appear that it might give her the chance to get to know him a little better. So far, working in the Ministry's funded research department had only afforded her tantalising glimpses of the man who had defied three masters: Dumbledore, Voldemort and Death, in that order. There was some slight overlap in their respective fields of study well, what little she knew about it and he had been quite generous in allowing her access to his non-restricted research material, but their contact was mostly limited to the odd snatched conversation whilst waiting for the lift and the even more infrequent shared table in the canteen. While he was now unfailingly polite in these few instances, he was as taciturn and withdrawn as ever.

Spending a full day in his company would surely allow her to see past his projected persona and learn a little about the man beneath?

Apparently not. It seemed that not everything about him had been an act. He had yet to speak more than three words to her, so far.

In fact, so far it had been a complete waste of time.

So far she had drunk two pints of flat, warm beer. No one had approached them and she was starting to need the loo.

So far she was staving off that necessity by reminding herself that not only would she have to confront her Polyjuiced genitalia, but that she would have to do so in the gents' loo. As the table, floor, and walls of the lounge bar all seemed to be equally sticky, she had no wish to explore the other facilities the Tipsy Elf had to offer.

She would just have to hold it. Time spent drinking with Ron and Harry had convinced her that men had an abnormally large capacity when it came to booze. Doubtless she would be fine. She just needed to concentrate on The Plan.

The Plan itself was simple. Certainly simpler than her previous plans involving Polyjuice and therefore hopefully less likely to go catastrophically wrong. She and Severus were to pose as the recently arrested Squeers and Trent and sit in the pub in the hopes that their contact would be stupid enough to reveal himself to them. As the mole was someone within the Auror service itself, Hermione was privately beginning to feel that this plan had very little chance of actually succeeding, but she kept her doubts to herself in the hope that things would work out. Ron had displayed such faith in her that she was determined to see it through, if only for the sake of nostalgia. Ron, unlike Hermione herself, had apparently never grown out of the belief that she somehow knew all of the answers.

Besides, there was little danger to either Snape or herself the pub was under surveillance, and Snape was confident that the modified Polyjuice would hold for a good four hours and the worst likely scenario was that they would just have to sit in a dirty pub for half the afternoon, drinking warm beer. She was itching to ask Snape about the changes he'd made to the traditional recipe and whether he'd considered doing anything about the taste but caution dictated she hold her tongue.

Snape *Trent* caught her gaze and glared at her. His normal intimidating scowl didn't translate particularly well through the smaller man's features, giving him the appearance of someone suffering from acute indigestion.

Really, they might not be able to talk freely, but that didn't mean he had to be so Snape-like. Especially when no one knew it was actually him.

She was beginning to wonder if taciturn and withdrawn had perhaps been an overly generous description, and that perhaps the man was just the *lightest* bit of an arse. She'd hoped that working closely together to expose Ron's mole would help create a sense of camaraderie between them and give them a chance to get to know each other a little better. Instead, she was spending the most boring afternoon of her life in a dirty pub with a man who only looked at her in order to have something to scowl at.

It would also be nice, she acknowledged, to have him realise that she was no longer an irritating little girl, but a mature and responsible witch. She'd come to understand that he was far more than the abrasive teacher she had known in school, and it would be nice if he could be made aware that she, too, possessed greater depths than he had seen far so.

This was Ron's fault, too. He'd survived their breakup with equanimity but decided that their brief, bewildering relationship had never stood a chance because they were such good friends. Hermione was a mate, not a love interest. At the time she'd been so pleased to retain his friendship that she'd encouraged this belief. Now, her relegation to sexless confidant was slowly reinforcing the idea that maybe he was right. Perhaps she wasn't sexual, to anyone.

It was impossible to know if they were being observed, so she refrained from making any of the number of pithy comments that had presented themselves to her during the interminable afternoon. Snape had made no efforts to entertain or reassure her and had spent most of the afternoon hunched over his pint, watching the rather matronly barmaid as she flirted with the customers.

For some reason, this in-character display of chauvinistic behaviour Trent was rumoured to be something of a letch was making her feel about as flat as the house beer.

She returned his glare. "My daughter's far too good for you, you know."

He didn't answer, but the slightest quirk of his jaw gave her the satisfaction of knowing that she'd managed to surprise him.

He opened his mouth to reply when the sudden screech of a chair being pulled backwards over the uneven floor made them both start.

The mole had arrived.

He had already been to the bar and held a glass of brackish looking beer in his hand, meaning that they would have to wait before plying him with the potion Snape had hidden somewhere inside his robes.

Hermione was suddenly incredibly conscious that she was wearing a borrowed face. Would she be able to do this? Surely everything about her must scream that she was really a woman in her twenties, sitting in a borrowed suit of flesh?

"Budge up, Squeers," the mole grinned. "You're taking up half the table." He settled beside her and took a long sip on his pint. "Deference," he nodded towards Snape. Snape nodded curtly back before returning his attention to his drink, and an uncomfortable silence settled over the table. Hermione gripped her pint glass tightly; what was she supposed to say? What sort of conversation did low level criminals engage in during their clandestine meetings?

The mole stretched his long legs out to the side and ran a hand through his thinning hair. Hermione knew she ought to be paying attention to his mannerisms in the hope of recognising something, but she was finding it impossible to see past his incredibly nondescript features.

Noticing her interest, he grinned. "Guess how I found me this looker . . ."

Thankfully there was little need to find anything at all to say. Moley, as she had christened him, didn't need any help in filling the silence, and Hermione guessed that this was how their meetings usually panned out. Trent would look bored, she would listen attentively, and the mole would waffle on about himself until he had finished his pint and it was time to leave. The story about his stolen face wasn't actually that interesting, but Hermione laughed along sycophantically, trusting Snape to kick her under the table if she strayed too far from character.

He didn't even need prompting to turn the conversation to the Ministry.

"They've no idea what's going on. Course, if they do nick the Weasley boy, we might have to keep things quiet for a bit; let them think they've got the bugger."

She didn't need Snape's less than gentle nudge to warn her not to overreact. She nodded in agreement, suddenly aware of just how desperately she wanted to get the ridiculous charade over with. Just sitting across the table from this man was making her feel as grubby as their surroundings. The mole still had nearly half a pint to go, but if they didn't act soon she was going to end up throwing it in his face.

"Quit your fidgeting, boy," she snapped at Snape, "go and get the next round in." She smiled at the man who would gladly send her best friend to Azkaban and smiled. "Same again, Moley?"

"Moley? Hah! I like that!" He checked his watch as Snape glared at her. "Why not? I've got a bit of time before I need to get going."

They had already estimated the time that he could spend with them, based on the standard qualities of Polyjuice. If he had any sense, he would have disguised himself before arriving in the vicinity, giving him another forty minutes of cover at most. He seemed relaxed enough though. Obviously he'd got away with this enough times before to have confidence in his plan.

Thankfully, Moley didn't need much encouragement when it came to incriminating himself either. Apparently he was secure enough in his actions to boast.

"I know everything that happens at the Ministry. I've got access to the whole place."

Really, it was too good an opportunity to miss. Hermione asked the question that had been bothering her for weeks.

"Has there been any word about what Snape's up to yet?"

The mole eyed her levelly. "And why would you want to know a thing like that?"

"Pure nosiness," Hermione admitted, straight away. "No one seems to know very much about him. Of course, if there's something that's worth a Galleon or two, that would whet my appetite for the subject matter."

He stared at her, and Hermione fought the urge to squirm under his gaze, convinced that she'd just tipped her hand and that he would leave without ever tasting his spiked beer. Would there be another way of letting Ron know who they had spoken with? Would she and Snape be able to subdue him here without finding themselves at the sharp ends of a pub's worth of wands?

Moley sighed. "There ain't that much to tell. He's doing exactly what he did before the war: hiding away in a basement, playing with potions. Only this time he's being bankrolled by the Ministry, rather than Dumbledore." He sniffed. "Tax payers' money."

Trent, who had held himself very still for several long moments, seemed to relax again and allowed his gaze to drift back to the barmaid who was currently leaning over to wipe a table near theirs with a sticky looking cloth, affording most of the pub a generous glimpse of her ample cleavage.

"Some people make allowances for war heroes," Hermione muttered. Moley raised an eyebrow.

"War hero!" he scoffed. "Nasty piece of work and everyone knows it. They only gave him a job at the Ministry so they could keep an eye on him."

Trent was smiling slightly to himself, watching as Betsy turned to lean over another table. Really, was it fair for a woman to be so generously endowed in every direction?

"He even managed to get himself a lab right next to the Granger girl. I notice things, see?" Hermione nodded as her attention drifted back to Snape. The barmaid had drifted back behind the bar and he was scowling as a result. "I know how he watches her. Always sniffing around her, letting her use his lab, chasing after her so they have to share the lift."

Warming to his subject, he took a long draught of beer and smacked his lips together in appreciation. Hermione watched his throat bob as he swallowed, taking the potion down into his stomach. Any minute now . . .

"Of course, he's absolutely besotted with her."

"Is he?" Hermione asked distractedly, watching in amusement as the man's hair began to darken.

"Of course! Well, he doesn't show it, because why would he? Whole world thinks he's pining away after Potter's mum. He's ever so shy," he added conspiratorially. "Didn't even kiss a girl until after he left Hogwarts."

It was fascinating watching Snape's potion at work. The man's hair was thickening and his skin was smoothing and growing ruddy around the nose and cheeks.

"Well, Miss Granger is rumoured to be very clever," Hermione interjected, not really listening but worried that Snape was about to blow their cover quite literally, judging by

the grip he had on his wand. Moley seemed unaware of the changes taking place across his physique, and she rather felt that Snape's distress was misplaced.

"Bout all she is. Not very pretty, if you ask me. No tits to speak of."

Hermione felt her grin freeze as his words sank in. She knew him from somewhere; he had a job in the Ministry somewhere but she couldn't say where. He knew who she was, though. Or rather, he knew of Hermione Granger. Apparently he'd paid a fair bit of attention to parts of her that she rather hoped people didn't focus on.

"Anyway, I'd best be off. Here's the info you wanted, thanks for the pint. I'll see you next week?"

"Course," Hermione muttered. "See you around."

"Well!" Hermione exclaimed once he had gone.

"It's not true!"

"So I should hope," she answered tartly. "Just because I don't wear inappropriate clothing to the office doesn't mean that I'm in any way lacking. Honestly, the gall of the man! Is that really how men talk about women when they aren't around?"

Snape had gone a funny colour.

"We'd better get back to our room," she decided, glancing at him with concern. "I think the potion might be wearing off."

"Who was he?" Hermione asked as the lift doors closed and they began the jolting ascent to their floor. "I recognised him from work but..." she shrugged.

They'd agreed to head back to the hotel without contacting Ron, just in case they were being watched. She hadn't seen any Aurors on the way, but then most of her efforts were in keeping up with Trent's easy stride.

"Colin Berryman. He used to be in Magical Maintenance, but since they barred owls from the Aurory, he's been in charge of delivering inter-department mail."

"So the other change to the department was that someone was able to read all their files?"

"Not just theirs. Any memo that was too large to be twisted into a plane."

"Huh."

Hermione stripped off the musty robe and examined herself in the mirror. The pudgy, middle-aged man squinted back at her in suspicion, his midriff spilling over the waistband of his trunks.

Despite identifying the mole, the day had been a distinct disappointment. She'd hoped to have the opportunity to show Snape how competent and resourceful she was, but had instead spent an afternoon in growing discomfort and boredom, and had been insulted by a petty crook. Snape had barely even looked at her and would probably forever associate her with a fat salesman whose thighs rubbed together when he walked.

She dealt with her aching bladder by dint of perching awkwardly on the toilet and thinking determinedly of Other Things. By the time she had cast several cleansing and freshening charms and wriggled awkwardly back into her underwear, she had got as far as Moley's face as he had begun to morph back into Colin the caretaker.

"That's about all she is. Not very pretty, if you ask me."

The smug prick.

She didn't really care for his opinion, did she? And there had been that nonsense about Snape being shy? No one could have been on the receiving end of one of his lectures and believe the man to have been capable of anything other than complete, almost arrogant self-assurance.

And what was all that stuff about Snape liking her?

Just because the Colin knew the Auror's secrets inside out, that didn't mean he knew anything about Snape, did it?

Did it?

Stepping back into the bedroom, she found Snape, still in the form of Deference Trent, still stood awkwardly by the door. He looked as though he had been waiting for her return.

"What did he mean?" she demanded.

"Hermione..."

She brushed his interruption away with a wave of her hand. "About your liking me?"

"Hermione, please..."

"You needn't be embarrassed, you know," she assured him. "If anything..."

"The potion" he gestured, frantically. "It's wearing off."

"Oh." She looked down in time to watch her breasts lift and shape into their usual, smaller selves. The stomach rose and shrank, the feet grew dainty and arched, and she felt her long hair grow to brush her shoulders, then slither down her back. She decided not to question what was going on inside her suddenly loose underwear.

She stood like that for a moment more, watching the transformation in fascination. She'd never had the chance to transform back naturally before and the sensation was beyond bizarre. It took a quiet cough from Snape for her to remember he was even there. She raised her hands to cover herself and ducked into the bathroom, feeling her face begin to flame.

Her bra was lost somewhere in the magical depths of her bag. Feeling incredibly self-conscious, she pulled her work robes back over her head and stepped into her heels. She would go straight home after this and have a bath, she decided. She'd already taken the day off for independent research there was no need to return to the Ministry looking and feeling like this.

Returning to the bedroom, it took all her courage just to face him.

"I'll be off then." She tried to keep her voice light.

It appeared that Snape had just transformed and was still dressed in Trent's clothing. It was odd to see him wearing anything other than his usual, sweeping robes. It was

strange to be able to clearly see the lines of his body beneath his robes. Oddly, he seemed taller without his habitual layers.

"Very good," he replied. His eyes flicked to her chest then back to her face.

So much for hoping that he might have not noticed the incident.

Yes, home, definitely. Maybe a bit of a cry in the bathtub. And a glass of wine.

A large one.

What a horrible day. She'd been bored and lonely to begin with, insulted by a petty criminal, then quite possibly ogled by a co-worker. Although, by the sound of things, there really hadn't been that much of interest for him to see.

"Are they really that small?"

"What?" He looked confused.

She hadn't meant to ask the question out loud, but as there was little chance of the day becoming any worse, she repeated the question. "My breasts, Severus," she sighed. "Are they ridiculous?"

The change in his demeanour was instantaneous. Gone was the sullen, sulking Trent; gone was silent, shifting Snape. The man before her blushed and stared at the floor.

"Oh dear, is it that bad?" She smoothed her hand over her skirts, wishing that she had a cardigan or something to wrap around herself. Holding herself as straight as she could, she moved towards the door.

"No," he answered finally as she reached for the handle. "I would say that they're the perfect size."

She paused. Well, that was nice, but hardly helpful. "For what?"

"They look the perfect size to..." He broke off. Hermione found herself fascinated by the flush at his cheeks. She'd only ever seen him red in the face with anger before. Suddenly she found herself reconsidering Colin's gossip gossip that had seemed so implausible just a few short minutes before.

"To what, exactly?" she pressed, fascinated when he wouldn't meet her gaze. "Come on, I'm asking for an honest opinion here. I've no idea what it is men look for and would very much appreciate a straight answer."

"They look the perfect size to cup in each hand," he ground out, staring fixedly at the carpet. "Like they'd fit warmly into your palm."

She made her way back to the mirror. "Really?" Later, she could never say what devil drove her to do it, but she brought her hands up to her unbound chest. "Like this?" she asked, watching her reflection.

Snape appeared in the glass behind her, the cheap fabric of Trent's robes brushing against her own.

His face was slack as he reached around her, watching her in the mirror the whole time. She could feel the heat of his hands through her robes. "Like this," he answered.

"Oh."

It was hard to drag her eyes from the reflection of his face. She'd never seen concentration quite like this, even in the potion's lab. His eyes were hooded, his hair falling across his face, his lips slightly parted.

They stood there, her neither moving nor questioning, as her heartbeat began to speed up. Then his fingers began to move, and her eyes flickered shut. His breath was hot against her neck.

She forced her eyes open and met his in the mirror. He flushed once more, the ugly red staining his cheeks as he pulled away.

She wondered if, perhaps, she ought to be offended. That was a step beyond mere ogling; really, what he had just done should have been tantamount to an assault.

"Show me again," she whispered.

There was no hesitation this time. His hands moved to her breasts at once, his clever fingers tracing subtle patterns through the cloth. She tried to watch him, determined to catch every expression that chased across his face, fascinated with what she saw, but her eyes wouldn't stay open. Each new sensation rippling through her robes caused her eyelids to flicker shut.

He released her, his long fingers moving to the pretty buttons of her robes. Finally, without the distraction of his extraordinary touch, she was able to watch him properly. There was a tiny crease between his eyes as he frowned in complete concentration on his task. Slowly he pulled at the cloth, sliding her robes down her shoulders. Slowly oh, *so slowly* the fabric slipped past her collar bones, past the silvery trace of an old scar, as her breasts were slowly revealed. The bunched cloth caught upon her peaked nipples, and she gasped as he tugged it free, the feel of linen sliding across over-stimulated flesh somehow too much to bear. When the fabric pooled around her waist, she was certain she felt him shiver behind her.

He stood there, hands still caught in her robes; his gaze, as it flickered across her reflection, almost as caressing as his touch. No one had ever looked at her quite like that before.

Then he was pulling at her robes. He had missed one of the buttons, and she felt the fabric catch and tear as he pulled the robes roughly down over her hips. Distantly, she remembered that she hadn't wanted to get her robes damaged, but the thought dissipated as his hands returned to her breasts.

She'd never know a touch quite so gentle. He was right; his hands moulded to her perfectly, and she could feel the pad of each finger as they whispered across her skin.

It was then that she realised that she was leaning back against him, letting her weight rest against his chest. What had started as a genuine if unusual enquiry, had somehow become something else altogether. Somehow she was stood in nothing but lace knickers and heels, naked desire undisguised in the reflection of her face. In *his* face.

It wasn't until his harsh features had been hidden beneath the Polyjuice that she had realised just how much she'd come to enjoy his familiar face. She'd spent long enough staring at Trent's uniform features to appreciate that he was fairly handsome, in an unmemorable, weak-jawed sort of way. Snape wasn't the least bit nice-looking, but then he didn't need to be.

He was so much more.

Hermione twisted in his arms, mourning the loss of his hands against her skin the moment that she turned, but desperate to finally touch him. She stumbled in her haste and his arms were there again, holding her up, pulling her towards him.

His features blurred as she leaned forwards to press her lips against his.

Of course she wanted this. She wanted it like she had wanted her first wand or for her parents to finally relent and agree that yes, she could take a train to an invisible

castle and learn about magic rather than maths, or science, or geography. That same feeling of instinctive need was twisting at her stomach.

She wanted this. She *needed* this.

Lips moved against hers, soft and inviting.

She pulled at his borrowed robes. There were just two buttons at the shoulder but her hands shook as she undid them. His hands cupped her lace-clad buttocks, fingers sliding beneath her knickers, pulling her towards him. When she felt him hard against her belly, the buttons simply slipped from their stitches and tumbled to the floor.

Then he was tugging at his robes, impatient with her fumbling, casting them aside as he pulled her gently away from the mirror and towards the bed. By the time they reached it, her knickers were gone and she was held flush against him, skin upon skin.

They fell back onto the cheap nylon sheets. "Perfect," he told her, trailing his fingers across her stomach. "Just perfect."

When he finally replaced his fingers with his mouth, she felt herself melt beneath him.

When it came, the first gentle touch of his tongue against her core caused her to arch off the bed. His mouth was so hot hotter than she could have imagined from such a cold, closed man. But then, she could never have imagined the sight of his dark head between her thighs, his long fingers curled around her hips, holding her gently in place.

All the frustration of the long afternoon, all the tension held in her body, seemed to spike suddenly, caught somewhere between bliss and disbelief.

She flew apart beneath him, her breath leaving her in short, agonised moans as she twisted his long hair between her fingers.

He lingered, drawing out her pleasure until her overwrought flesh couldn't take any more, and she pushed him away. While she recovered, he returned his attentions to her breasts, teasing her nipples to stiff attention as she lay boneless beneath him.

"Perfect," he murmured quietly with a look on his face so intense that Hermione found herself believing him. Perhaps, just *perhaps*, he was right. That somehow, in this moment, she really was worthy of the almost reverent expression upon his face. His attentions almost felt . . . *deserved*.

Ron might not have seen it, but she could be perfect for Snape.

For Severus.

It occurred to her then that she was being rather selfish. If she was perfect in his eyes, what did that make him?

She looked at him then, really *looked* at him. His lean body and pale skin. The sparse hairs that dusted his chest, thickening in a trail that drew the eye down his stomach to the graceful cock that jutted forwards from his hips, straining towards her.

He had a strange beauty, she realised, one made up of sharp angles and hard planes and marble smooth skin. She reached out to stroke his chest, running her fingers down his sides, watching as the taut muscles of his belly jumped at the glide of nails over skin. She fell forward, kissing and stroking his torso, determined to take in as much of him as possible before he hid himself away under the cloaking formality of his robes. Somehow she knew that she wouldn't be given an opportunity like this again.

He seemed a little surprised at her enthusiasm, watching her through hooded eyes. Then her hand grasped his cock, plying it with uncertain, gentle squeezes, and his eyes fell shut. Sliding down, she caught him in her mouth.

His ragged moan seemed to set her blood on fire.

Why had it never been like this before? How had it taken Snape, of all men, to show her what it was to be worshipped? Who inspired this worshipful response in her? She licked and suckled and teased him, burying her face in the dark thatch of hair at the base of his cock, rubbing her cheeks against his belly and thighs. He was glorious, and for the next few moments, he was entirely hers.

He hissed then and pulled her gently away. She let herself be brought up into his arms so that he might kiss her again. His mouth was hot and possessive, his kisses demanding and generous.

Oh gods, she wanted it all. His mouth on her, his cock within her, his warm, masculine weight pressing down upon her.

"Severus," she moaned.

When he replied, the silken whisper of her name upon his lips made her shiver. She couldn't press herself close enough to assuage the new need growing inside her and so, holding him tightly, she used her weight to carry them back down to the bed.

Cradled between her legs, he raised himself up onto his elbows and looked down at her, his eyes soft and warm.

"Yes," she answered, unasked. "Please, yes!"

She had wanted to get to know the man. Never had she thought she might learn the feel of him inside her or the way his skin seemed almost luminous when pressed against her faded summer tan. She hadn't considered how those uneven teeth and vicious tongue might feel against her flesh.

Well, maybe she had hoped.

All musing was forgotten at the feel of him pressing home. He filled her slowly, exquisitely, his eyes still locked onto hers. She heard herself cry out in welcome as her body moulded itself to his, her hands cupping his buttocks as she reached to pull him closer still.

He pulled back, just as slowly, and she cried out again ... this time at the near loss of his body from hers. Returning, he pushed deeper, leaving her mewling beneath him, establishing a slow, torturous pattern of depth and departure that seemed to stroke each nerve within her. It was too much, too perfect, and her breath began to catch in her throat as her hips rose to meet his.

"Please," she sobbed, her throat aching with frustrated need. "*Severus*."

He began to move in earnest, and she was lost to the harsh rhythm of his hips and the heat of his kisses. Thought span away as she bucked her hips against him, determined to meet his every thrust. He raised himself up onto his elbows, changing the angle of his hips and driving her ever higher, a look of complete concentration on his face.

That look was her undoing.

She came, his name on her lips, waves of sweet, sharp pleasure coursing through her. His rhythm faltered, and then he was there with her, praise and profanity mingling in his gasps. Hermione clung to him, holding him tightly as he spent himself inside her, trembling with her own release.

She could lie there forever, she decided; lying in his arms, her fingers tracing idle patterns upon his chest, his lips pressed against her hair. Even the nylon sheets and the

faded curtains wouldn't upset her if she was allowed to stay, hidden away like this.

For a moment she entertained the fantasy staying here, with him. Their whole world reduced to one room, one bed, one another.

Reality intruded rudely in the form of a silver terrier scampering through the open window. "*Bloody hell, Hermione, what's keeping you? Things have gone a bit tits up down here . . .*" The Patronus sniffed at the large mirror in interest but thankfully dissipated before deciding to cock its leg.

The mattress shifted as Snape rose from the bed. His face had become closed and he was already pulling on his black robes. Her lover had vanished, hidden behind the heavy sweep of his hair and the stiffness in his shoulders. So, this had only been for one afternoon. Hermione felt the heavy weight of grief press upon her at the thought.

Ignoring the sharp sting of regret, she swung her legs off the bed and scooped her knickers up off the floor, glancing round.

"Here." He handed her the missing bra.

"But how?" He met her accusing gaze without flinching, the slightest smile twitching at the corner of his mouth.

She realised then that she hadn't been wrong; the man was something of an arse. He was probably capable of being every bit as vicious as Harry and Ron had believed at school. He was also completely and utterly beguiling.

She couldn't help herself. Despite the careful distance he had maintained between them while he dressed, she stretched up onto her toes and kissed him.

"Thank you ever so much," she breathed. "I can't tell you how much gods, you have no idea I thank you. *Thank you for showing me that I could feel like that. Be like that.*" Just . . . thank you."

"You needed to know," he answered simply.

Unable to ignore the way his words twisted at her stomach, she dropped the bra on the bed. "What if I ever need reminding?"

His eyes were so dark that she was certain, if she were to lean too close, she might be swallowed up by them.

And wouldn't that be wonderful?

Ron was waiting for them outside the pub, hands sunk deep into his pockets.

"What a waste of time that was," he griped by way of greeting. "Mervyn went and eyeballed him the moment Berryman left the pub and he Disapparated before we could get close. The information he's been selling was used to buy a house outside Benidorm. We'll never see him again." He sighed, then brightened. "At least they're investigating Merv now, not me. Still, I'm sorry you had to waste your day. "

Snape shrugged. "I wouldn't call it wasted, precisely."

"No," Hermione agreed. "I'd say it was just about perfect."

"Yeah," grinned Ron. "I suppose we cleared my name. I knew you'd know what to do!" He pulled her into a tight hug. She sensed Severus stiffen beside her as she wrapped her arms around her best friend and former lover. "What say we celebrate? Pub?" He nodded back to the Elf.

"Gods, no," Hermione shuddered. "I'd be grateful if I didn't have to drink anything in that place ever again. Besides, I have plans."

"Fair enough." He turned to Snape. "Thanks so much for offering to watch over Hermione, Professor."

The two men shook hands and Ron swaggered back towards the bar, his old confidence evident in the way he hailed the remaining Aurors on the scene.

Hermione watched him fondly before turning to her waiting partner.

"Well," she mused with more daring than she would have thought possible, "my plans for this afternoon mainly revolved around a nice long soak in the bath and a large glass of wine. I don't see why they couldn't be extended to include you."

"Perfect," he smiled.

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