

Sassypants?!

by Meladara

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Chapter 1 of 1

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This fic is a gift for the Review-A-Thon Champion, Anoesis. Congratulations on your win, dear!

"What the hell is this, Severus?" Hermione spat as she stormed into his classroom, the door crashing against the wall in her wake.

With a crumpled *Ars Alchemia* in hand, she stomped across the once-silent classroom in loud, clodding steps that were a sure sign of her anger ... she moved almost as quietly as he did otherwise.

His hand moved in a deliberate, constant motion as he wrote, never faltering or giving any indication that he was aware of her presence. With extreme concentration, he scratched his quill against a student's essay, marking it in blood-red ink with caustic comment after caustic comment. He knew that she was there, of course; how could he not? In fact, she had arrived exactly when he had expected. However, if there was one thing he enjoyed more than any other, it was a good sparring match with Professor Hermione Granger, and he knew well that the longer he let her stew, the better the sparring would be.

As she reached his desk and took in his demeanor ... one that clearly told her he was purposefully ignoring her ... she huffed and rolled her eyes. Instinctively, her gaze sought out his hands. It was always his hands that took her notice first. She watched them as they moved, her eyes locked on his long fingers as they manipulated the quill, the ink bleeding from it to the parchment entitled *The Proper Preparation and Steeping of Lace Nettle*. There was something about the way he held the quill ... with such delicate precision ... that she couldn't stop the bubbling up of desire that washed through her. *Oh, to be in those hands...*, she thought before she could stop herself. As reason came back to her and she remembered exactly what had driven her down into his dungeon domain, she schooled her face back into what she hoped was a look of cold indifference and waited for him to look up. As the minutes ticked, it became increasingly clear to her that he had no intention of acknowledging her, so seemingly intent was he on his grading. Hermione petulantly stamped her foot and the journal in her hand crumpled audibly.

Still, he did not stir from his work.

Eyes narrowing in frustration, she cleared her throat. As the 'Hem Hem' left her lips, her mind instantly supplied her with an image of a frumpy, pink-clad Umbridge. With a

wince, she silently reassured herself, *I do not sound like that toad. I am merely trying to get his attention.*

His lips twitched in amusement at her growing frustration. It took so little to rile the woman, and there was something about the way her eyes filled with fire and her hair seemed to vibrate with magic that he found irresistible, leading him to take every opportunity he could to reduce her to such a state.

Carefully, he finished marking the essay and then placed the quill to the side of his desk in a casual motion. As it slipped from his fingers, he raised his eyes to the waiting witch with a look of utter calm. It wouldn't do to allow her to see just how much he was enjoying this.

Her eyes widened as she took in his peaceful, almost questioning expression. *As if he doesn't know why I'm here. As if he hasn't been pushing my buttons this whole time. Insufferable man!*

He took in the sight of her, and something in his chest twinged. It always did when she wore her deep vermilion robes, the ones that hugged her hips and seemed to caress every curve of her body.

They were the ones she'd worn the day she had first arrived at castle. He remembered her walking through the door, hair flying and eyes alight with fervent fire for her new profession. She had completely taken his breath away. Then there was the day she had hexed Weasley from the castle. It was one of his favourites, the sight of her in those robes with hexes flying from her wand, the youngest Weasley boy running from the castle with a literal tail between his legs, flock of canaries in full pursuit. He often revisited that memory in his Pensieve to cheer him after particularly disastrous days of classes. Finally, there had been the day that she wore them to a staff meeting and managed to make him laugh. So acidic was her response to Albus' newest scheme and so close was it to the one that had been on his own tongue, he had been unable to hold in his amusement. His barkish laughter had startled everyone, himself included.

It seemed that every time she donned the enticing garment, she was destined to further endear herself to him. There was no stopping it; he knew it would happen as surely as he knew that correcting her latest journal article as if she were a bumbling student would cause her to storm into his dungeon in a full snit. She truly was a magnificent witch.

"Good evening, Miss Granger. What can I do for you?"

A low growl escaped her throat. *He wants to play that game, does he? Calling me Miss Granger... Well, then...*, she silently fumed as she tossed the offending document onto his desk.

"Did I stutter, Mr Sassypants McSnapey? You know why I'm here," she cried, her hands moving to rest upon her hips and her voice slipping between anger and hurt. "What gives you the right? Do you get off on doing this?"

"I merely desired to point out..." he began.

"Bullshit! I know you get sick pleasure out of mocking me. I've ignored it in the past, but I'm not going to take it anymore, Severus. This is the final straw. First, my article in *Magica Academia*, then, my seventh-years' syllabus, and now, this!"

With that, Hermione turned and stormed toward the door. Suddenly, she knew she needed to get out of there. There was something about his treatment today that stung in a way that it never had before. Perhaps it was that he had belittled her by addressing her as if she were his student. It was as if he couldn't or wouldn't acknowledge her hard work and instead chose to nitpick at stupid grammatical non-mistakes just to bring her down. He harped on things that only the nerdiest of grammarians would pick at, things no one else really cared about. Furthermore, what he had written wasn't even new to her; she had heard every single one of his comments before from him. In fact, if she thought about it, his comments were what had solidified her staunch stance on said grammatical '*mistakes*'. After all, changing would be bowing to him, and that wouldn't do. Merlin, this man knew how to play her nerves to their very last.

True anger bubbled up in her suddenly, and her steps slowed. It wouldn't do to leave, to let him continue to get away with this treatment. Whipping back around, she bit out harshly, "It was one thing when I was your student, Severus. I took your shit then. I even understood why you treated me the way you did, or at least I thought I did. And I do enjoy our discussions, but this," she gestured to the crumpled journal which was notably turned to a page that was covered in his familiar scrawl, "I can't understand. The disrespect... I can't take it..."

Severus watched as her hand fell, and as it fell, so went her anger. It drained from her so quickly that her once-flush cheeks turned immediately wan, and the image of her being sick on his classroom floor flooded him.

There was something that went through her as the confession slipped from her lips. She couldn't take it anymore, and that was the truth. She had bantered before, come back at him and not allowed him to see how his words truly smarted. But she just wasn't willing to do so anymore.

"I thought better of you," she whispered. Her eyes glistened as she turned away from him and sought her escape.

It was the glint that struck him to the core. Somehow, that sheen in her eyes, that undeniable sign that she was wounded was far more poignant than her words ever were. She had always given as good as she got, striking him with sharp, witty repartee that would have torn through the hides of lesser individuals, but never before had she cried. Thinking back to their previous encounters, he recalled how she had stormed into his office all afire, ready to spar with him. It had been invigorating ... addicting even. In every instance he could recall, there had been no tears, no sign of any true hurt, just two intellectual people exercising their brains. And if he had found her exceptionally pretty when she was fired up, then it was only a bonus. What had changed?

Without realising what he was doing or the reason why he felt the action necessary, Severus' wand was in his hand and his classroom door was slamming closed and wards were falling into place. His eyes locked on the woman, and he knew that something was terribly wrong here, and it was up to him to make it right.

The door slammed in her face, and as she felt the magical wards slam into place, Hermione's stomach dropped. *No*, she thought. *He can't do this now, not like this*. Her hand wrapped around the knob and turned, only to find that it would not budge. Dashing away the tears that were starting to escape, she hastily pulled out her wand and began to cast charm after charm in frantic succession. She couldn't stay here. Not with him. Was it too much to ask to be allowed to escape so that she could cry in the privacy of her own chambers?

Of course it is, she told herself. *He enjoys toying with you, Hermione. This is what he does. It isn't his fault that you...* She shut that thought down before it could finish. Now was not the time to go into her odd fascination with Severus Snape ... not with the sound of him moving toward her in quick steps in her ears, not with these traitorous tears spilling down her cheeks.

Hermione squeezed her eyes closed and waited. It wasn't long before she felt the touch of his hand lightly resting on her shoulder.

Unable to turn and face him, she stood still, focusing on the heat and energy of him standing so near to her. If she could focus on that, then perhaps the humiliation inherent in the situation would lessen. She couldn't believe that she was crying.

"Hermione," he said in a low voice that was wholly unlike anything she had heard from him in the past. It vibrated around her, and before she could suppress it, a shudder rose up and then ran through her.

Severus looked down at the shivering woman. Her head was bowed and her shoulders slumped. Turning her to face him, he watched, mesmerised, as her eyes opened and locked on his.

Standing in frozen fright, Severus stared into her dark brown eyes. He didn't know what to do. *How does one handle a crying woman? Even more important: How does one handle a crying woman whom one veritably adores?* He wasn't even sure how he had come to be by the door and staring into her eyes. Somehow, it had just happened.

Hermione studied the man as he stood, stock-still, before her. He was obviously alarmed and uncomfortable, and well he should be. He had messed up and gone too far this time. Waiting patiently ... it was his move as far as she was concerned ... she saw him raise an unsteady hand again to her shoulder and then pat as if it were the head of a puppy. Then, in a slow, hesitant motion, the hand moved to her face.

Hermione steadied her breathing, repressing the gasp that had nearly escaped her as he cupped her cheek. A part of her wanted to laugh; it seemed he was trying to be tender. But there was an unsure awkwardness about him that she couldn't seem to place.

A calloused thumb firmly rasped over her cheek, brushing away the tears. His touch, so lacking in the finesse she had come to expect in him, almost caused her to wince. His thumb dug into her cheek, pulling at her skin. Confusion shot through Hermione. *Is this him trying to be comforting? Is this an apology? It he really so discomfited that he is trying to comfort me and make amends by scrubbing the tears from my cheek?*

It was her sudden proximity that had unbalanced him so. She was so close to him. Her cheek was cupped in his hand ... how had that happened? He could see the glistening of her tears on his fingertips, and he wondered if it was odd that he wished he could have kissed them off. But what truly disconcerted him were her eyes; they were locked on him, burning with intensity, and it was clear that this was his moment to act. She hadn't turned away from him even though he had upset her, and he had no doubt that if she had found his touch repugnant in the least, she would have let him know. Trusting in this understanding, he began to close the space between them.

And this was the moment that clarity washed over her. With his face lowering toward hers and the ache in her heart at his caustic comments, slights, and disrespect still burning, Hermione finally understood the situation for what it was. Severus Snape, in typically boyish fashion, had opted to pull her pigtails instead of just coming clean and admitting he liked her.

Excitement flared to life with in her. ***That's*** what this has all been about!

A part of her wanted to be irritated about it ... that he would be silly enough to try and get her attention through such means ... but she couldn't seem to summon the required indignation. His method had worked, after all. *Plus*, she told herself, *he tastes of peppermint, and cloves, and home.* For his lips were upon her now, his tongue hot, his breath spiced. As she stood pressed close against him, locked in a tight embrace, she knew that, though he had managed to hide it well, this erstwhile man was as crazy about her as she was about him. His comments on her article no longer mattered. Not when his lips were devouring hers. Not when the possibilities for the future seemed so bright. What did it matter that he disagreed with her writing style? It wasn't as if she ever intended on bending to his will when it came to her writing, and if his actions had managed to get them here, then it was all worth it.

~*~*~*~*~

"Hermione," he whispered into the hair of the woman who was cuddled up at his side, reading one of his rarer potions tomes.

"Hmm...", she replied as she turned the page absently and snuggled herself deeper into his embrace.

"It *really* is a *mylion* of foxflies, not a *mylius*. Mylius is a modern-era mistranslation that first appeared about 50 years ago. It gained popularity through its inclusion in *Strathmore's Magica Fauna*, which came out shortly after it first appeared ... horrid book, if you ask me. Furthermore, I am rather shocked that you think it acceptable to use an en-dash when offsetting nonrestrictive relative clauses. It is clear, established practice that em-dashes are to be used to offsetting parentheticals. I won't even deign to comment on your lack of serial commas. However, your argument that..."

"Severus!" she huffed, both amused and irritated that he would bring up his indecorous treatment of her article.

"Yes, Hermione?"

"Shut up."

Severus watched as her brow furrowed in a mix of frustration and concentration and she went back to her book. He waited until her face relaxed and she was thoroughly engrossed in reading. Then, at just the right moment, he deftly plucked the book from her grasp and pulled her into his lap.

As the startled woman growled, he wrapped his arms around her and drawled out wryly, "Did you really call me Mr Sassypants McSnapey?"

My sincerest thanks to linlawless and Laralee for betaing for me. ~squishes~