

# Tactus Amatoris

*by Shocabo*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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*AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is my first fanfic; I hope you enjoy it! It has been beta'd by a lovely group of beta readers, but it has not been Brit-picked. So if you see any British English errors, please accept my American apologies.*

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"Get away from me, Granger!"

Even given the circumstances ... Professor Snape sprawled out on the floor of the one-room safe house, still twitching from Bellatrix's vindictive curse ... the way he snarled at Hermione brought her up short. "Sir?" she asked uncertainly.

Snape glared at her. "Bellatrix can't follow us here. I don't nee..." But then his entire body convulsed again, cutting off his reply. Despite his protests, it certainly *looked* like he needed help. The Order's secret-kept location would protect them from any further attacks, for however long it took the others to realize they were even missing. But right now, the two of them had the aftermath of this curse to deal with.

Hermione reached out a hand to steady Snape's shoulder; his eyes widened and he barked out in a strained voice, "Don't touch me!"

She snatched her hand back. "I want to help," Hermione said stubbornly. "And we're very likely on our own for a while. What can I do?"

Snape groaned. "Nothing. I just have to let this curse fade on its o..." Another convulsion wracked his body. He squeezed his eyes shut against the pain.

Hermione frowned. She knew that some curses caused permanent damage, if left entirely untreated. Just because Professor Snape was in denial didn't mean that she was going to let him stay there. "I could help you up, at least," she offered, eyeing the two chairs by the small table versus the single bed in the corner. It would be more challenging to lift a full-grown man into one of those small, rickety chairs, but the bed would definitely be more awkward.

"Just leave me be!" he snapped between waves of the curse.

Not willing to be browbeaten into silence while this spell kept hurting him, Hermione persisted, "What curse was it, sir? Only I know it wasn't the Fulgara Curse because I saw Bellatrix cast a spell that gave off a bluish light, not red sparks. But I don't know of anything else that color causing convulsions like this... besides Tactus Amatoris, that is."

"Ten points to Gryffindor," Snape muttered darkly.

Hermione gaped at him. "But, sir! That's a sexual curse!"

He slit his eyes open to look up at her. "And now you can see why you can't help me." His focus shifted to the room's single door, next to the table and across from the bed. "Ward the safe house against anyone ... even Order members ... entering for the next twenty-four hours on your way out. The curse will wear off by th..."

The latest bout of convulsions seemed even worse than the others, and Hermione knew it was because of the nature of the Tactus Amatoris. The spell reacted to whether the victim ... or, rather, victims ... intended to... treat... the curse. The pain would lessen if they meant to deal with it, or worsen if they meant to ignore it. It seemed particularly cruel, Hermione thought, for a curse to get *worse* when the victim knew there would be no aid. But then again, it was a Dark curse.

She bit her lip, summoned every ounce of her Gryffindor courage, and deliberately touched Snape's hand.

He snatched it out of her reach with a hiss like her touch hurt worse than the curse, even as the convulsions suddenly ceased. "What have you done, Granger?!" he hissed. "I thought you understood what Tactus Amatoris meant!"

"Yes, I do understand," Hermione said. She plunged forward on nothing but bravado, quoting from *Curses Moste Dark*: "If left unchecked, Tactus Amatoris causes increasingly painful seizures, eventually followed by the complete and permanent loss of feeling to the g-genitals." She glared at him as she stumbled over the word, cheeks flaming but refusing to back down, now that she had set on this course.

"The first person to touch the victim will suffer the same effects of the curse. However, Tactus Amatoris is easily counteracted by s-sexual intercourse between the two victims." Snape's breathing took on a panicked note as she demonstrated that she did, in fact, understand the ramifications of what she'd done.

In a slightly more defensive tone, she stopped quoting and added, "It may be mere regurgitation of facts from a textbook, sir, but I believe you will find it to be correct in the essentials." She paused, fidgeting slightly as a thought occurred to her. "Presumably Bellatrix chose this particular curse deliberately. Um, a 'damned if do, damned if you don't' sort of thing. Since she knew I was the only one available to... help... you."

As she finished talking, he seemed almost to stop breathing altogether. For the first time she could ever recall, Hermione read an honest, unguarded emotion on Snape's usually-controlled face: unmitigated horror.

"Miss Granger," he said in a strangled voice, "you certainly can't mean to..."

"It's just bodies, sir," Hermione interrupted him in a rush. She didn't need him enumerating all the reasons this was a foolhardy thing she was doing; she was well aware of that already. "I can't i-imagine it will really be so..."

"Imagine?" Snape sat up so violently that Hermione lost her balance crouching beside him and fell onto her hip with a squeak. He half twisted over her, the better to loom angrily. "Do you mean to tell me," he snarled, "that on top of everything, you're a bloody *virgin*?"

Hermione struggled back upright, incensed. "Not that it's actually your business, *sir*, but no, I'm not. I was *saying*," she said with a righteous glare, "that I can't imagine it will really be *so different with you*"

"Well." The fight suddenly drained from Snape's face. "Then you're a fool."

She looked at him in surprise; there had been no venom in his comment, only an unexpected tone of resignation. Her pulse suddenly leapt in her throat; this *really* was going to happen.

Snape stared fixedly at some point over her right shoulder. "For myself, I wouldn't have..." He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "But now it's not just me. I won't condemn you to the long-term effects of Tactus Amatoris. Not if *this*," here he waved his hand vaguely between them, "is your... desire."

She knew he didn't mean it like *that*, but the way his voice said the word "desire" did unexpected, unsettling things to her stomach. And other regions of her anatomy. It was as though their situation were *conjur*ing an attraction to him. "Sir, is there..." She licked her lips, noticing his eyes momentarily flick to her mouth because of the movement. Was he affected too? "Um, does the curse create a compulsion?"

Snape stared at her for so long that she thought he wasn't going to answer. But finally, he replied quietly, "No, Miss Granger, it does not."

Hermione held his gaze, unable to look away as they both realized what she had just admitted to. She had never thought of Professor Snape like *that*. But her existing admiration for both his intelligence (however scathing) and bravery (however unacknowledged) had transmuted into, well, *desire*, under the realization that she had committed them both to either sex or a lifetime of disability.

He was still looming over her, she realized. In fact, she was becoming increasingly aware of his physical presence. She felt unaccountably excited, if she was being honest with herself.

He was the one to break eye contact. Although it seemed impossible, he managed to look even more uncomfortable than she felt. "Miss Granger, if you're doing this under some misguided notion that you *fancy* me..."

"No!" Hermione protested. "I never thought of you *that* way before!" Snape's face froze. His eyes didn't look hurt, exactly; more like resigned. Hermione ached to think that he assumed she would merely be doing a good deed by him, while lying back and thinking of England, as it were. So she screwed up her courage and added, "But you're not... unattractive."

He huffed. "Spare me."

Daring greatly, she reached out and rested her hand against his chest. "I meant it," she insisted quietly. Beneath her hand, she felt his breath catch. It was only for a second, and she wouldn't have caught it had she not been touching him.

Touching Snape. How surreal.

She trailed her hand upward, intending to touch his face, but at the last moment her courage faltered and she settled her hand on his shoulder instead, just where it met his neck. The high collar kept her fingertips from coming in contact with his bare skin. Even so, the heat radiating from his body thrilled her. This man was powerful, brave, intelligent, noble, intense. What might it be like if his intensity were focused through passion ... onto her? She exhaled an unsteady breath and lifted her gaze from his neck to meet his eyes.

For a brief moment, she thought she saw a flicker of surprise and answering heat on Snape's face. But a second later, his mouth twisted down in disgust and he pushed himself to his feet. "We are breaking a curse here; we are not *lovers*," he spat.

On the heels of his words, an intense burning shot through Hermione's body. She cried out, the pain taking her by surprise. It felt like a million molten knives slicing into her, everywhere at once. The only thing she could compare it to was when Bellatrix cursed her with Cruciatus that day at Malfoy Manor. It knocked her flat on her back, then forced her body to arch against the waves of agony.

Dimly, she was aware of Snape swearing. If she had had the attention to spare, she would have made more note of the fact that he was now kneeling beside her in a reversal of their previous positions, cradling her head so that she didn't slam it against the ground during her convulsions.

"Bloody hell, alright, you win," Snape muttered. Then added, so quietly that Hermione almost didn't catch it, "Bellatrix will pay for this."

Just as quickly as the pain had set upon her, it lifted. Breathing in great gulps of air to steady herself, Hermione slowly returned her attention to Snape.

"I apologize, Miss Granger," he said stiffly.

She realized with a shock what the pain signified. "You were chickening out!" she accused him.

His awkwardly contrite expression morphed rapidly back to a more familiar scowl. "I was remembering the absurdly inappropriate nature of all this," he snapped. The way he still held her head only highlighted the truth of his words. His scowl deepened as he helped her to sit up.

"It is *not* inappropriate!" she objected.

Snape simply raised an eyebrow.

"It's not," Hermione insisted. "Not given the circumstances." She glared at him. Then, for good measure, she glared at the ground. It wasn't especially comfortable for either convulsions or... other activities. Anger abruptly deserted her.

Snape obviously noted the change in her demeanor, asking, "What now?"

Repressing an urge to fidget, she suggested, "Perhaps we should relocate." She eyed the bed in the corner of the room. This safe house was rarely used; the bed seemed clean enough.

He grimaced but nodded, standing and automatically extending his hand to help her up. The warmth of his hand caught her by surprise. If something as innocent as the feel of his palm sent this sort of reaction sparking through her...

Evidently she let her hand linger too long, for Snape pulled his touch away with a scowl. "After you," he said, gesturing to the bed.

With her back to him as she led the way, Hermione focused on taking several deep breaths to calm herself. She tried not to think too hard about whether it was trepidation or anticipation that had her pulse racing. Only she rather suspected that she *did* know which it was. She sat on the edge of the bed, and now she did fidget.

The bed dipped as Snape sat beside her. "You are familiar with the contraceptive charm?" he asked.

Hermione nodded. "Go ahead," she encouraged him.

For one long moment, neither of them moved. She nearly panicked when she felt the telltale prickles of the curse licking at her nerves again. Then, with a sigh, Snape closed the distance between them and gingerly splayed one long-fingered hand across her abdomen. The curse quieted instantly, before it could develop into a full-blown attack.

Her breath hitched at his touch, somehow both intimate and chaste at the same time. He began murmuring the charm wandlessly. As his rich voice flowed over her, so too did the tingle of magic. And then it was done.

The air grew heavy between them. It was one thing to say they were going to have sex, and quite another to cast a contraceptive charm while sitting on a bed together.

"How do you want... expect this to proceed, Miss Granger?"

"Hermione," she corrected on impulse.

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Hermione?"

"Yes." She licked her lips nervously, then flushed when she caught his gaze flickering again to her mouth. She slid closer to him, so that now her thigh was flush against his. The hand that had been on her belly slid around her hip. She set her hand on his chest again, acutely aware of how both their breathing had increased at the contact. "Only it seems we have a bit of..." she cast about for the right phrase, "...natural chemistry."

Snape scowled and drew breath to protest, but Hermione surprised him into sputtering silence by swinging her body to face him fully, curling further into the curve of his arm and straddling his legs. His second hand automatically joined the first on her hips, steadying her even as he sucked in a shocked breath.

Inspiration struck. Hermione leaned forward and murmured in his ear, "Why make this an unpleasant task, when it doesn't have to be?"

Something like despair, or shame, crossed his face. "You're still my student. *Inever...*" His words trailed off in an exhalation as Hermione pressed herself closer to him, arms around his neck and breasts brushing against his chest. "Hermione..." Snape's voice was now full of warning and self-recrimination, both.

"Shh," she admonished. "I *know* you've never... taken advantage. Even now, you're not. You were going to suffer Tactus Amatoris alone, without even telling me what it was, remember? Prof... Severus..." His hands on her hips gripped her more tightly for a moment, and she struggled to think straight. "Don't ever doubt that you are a brave and noble man, Severus."

His expression slowly softened. It was as though she could *see* him transfigure from Professor Snape to *Severus* before her eyes.

Hermione had never seen him do anything tentatively before. But that was precisely the word that came to mind as he traced one hand from her hip, up her back, along her neck. It was her turn to breathe unsteadily as he threaded his fingers through her hair and gently cupped the back of her head.

She had expected him to kiss her then, but he didn't move any closer. She realized with a shock that he was actually nervous, too. She licked her lips again, suddenly feeling bold.

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"Kiss me."

He raised an eyebrow at that ... how had she never noticed before how sexy that gesture could be? ... and finally *finally* leaned forward.

His lips pressed against hers, not fluttering and uncertain like her first kisses with Ron, nor brusque and demanding like Viktor's, but confident and patient. Like he was sure now of his welcome. Like they had all the time in the world.

Severus pulled back to look at her face. A smile flashed across her face before she put her own hands behind his head and pulled him back to her. She caught the brief look of surprise on his face before she closed her eyes and concentrated again on their kissing. The hand still on her hip tugged her closer to his body; the hand holding her head felt like an anchor in a situation increasingly unmoored from normal reality.

She suppressed a whimper, or at least she thought she did.

He pulled back sharply to study her. "Everything alright?"

Hermione couldn't help the throaty laugh that escaped. "More than alright," she answered. She experimentally rocked against his thighs. "Surprisingly so."

Heat returned to Severus's eyes, this time without the taint of self-disgust. She felt him twitch beneath her and her eyes widened.

"You *did* say you've done this before, Hermione?"

She heard the request for reassurance and permission, cloaked in his accusation. "Yes," she said. "Yes." And rocked against him again, more confidently this time.

He groaned and tugged her even closer. His kisses this time were insistent, aching, *wanting*. She couldn't help but respond in kind, in the face of his reactions. Still both fully clothed, Severus slowly leaned back on the bed, leaving his lower legs dangling over the edge while pulling Hermione to cover his upper body.

She followed him down eagerly, hands now roaming over his chest, up to his shoulders, down along his arms. His answering groan electrified her. Without further thought, her fingers flew to the many buttons of his coat. She had already undone half a dozen in her haste, before noticing that Severus had stilled beneath her.

Hermione paused in undressing him to look up at his face. Surely he wasn't rethinking things? No, the Tactus Amatoris would have sent her reeling by now, were that the case. "Severus?" she asked, uncertain how to read the intense look she found on his face.

His hands skimmed her sides slowly, tantalizing, and she relaxed again. "You surprise me," he said at last, "when very little does."

Hermione grinned at him. "I trust that's a good thing." She kissed him, intending for it to be gentle, but the heat they kindled together was soon crackling between them once more.

She renewed her attack on his buttons. This time, his own fingers joined her quest, working on the smaller buttons at his cuffs. Together they made quick work of it, so that in a satisfyingly short time she was parting his coat, sliding her hands along her previous path. Chest, shoulders, arms ... then he was rising up to shrug out of the coat entirely.

Hermione took in the white lawn shirt beneath the coat and shook her head. "So many buttons." She cocked her head to the side, thinking, then grinned wickedly.

"What?" he bristled.

A murmured charm, then suddenly all his remaining buttons literally popped off in unison.

"You...!"

She squealed in delight as Severus twisted, throwing her off balance. She landed on her back with a laugh.

A laugh that died in her throat when she caught sight of Severus' shirt gaping open as he held himself above her. Her mouth went dry, while other parts of her body became decidedly wet, as she took in his bare skin. Her obvious appreciation seemed to appease his outrage over the ruined shirt.

Rather than reach out to him again, Hermione propped herself up with her hands behind her and pressed a line of kisses into his skin. Severus buried one hand at the base of her hair and pulled her head back so he could kiss her hard. He pulled away just as abruptly, leaving Hermione gasping and needy.

He grabbed onto the edge of her jumper and looked at her, judging her reaction.

To hell with this slow-moving permission-asking, was her reaction. He'd proven himself a gentleman already; she didn't want *gentleman* any longer. She shifted her weight onto just one hand, then grabbed the opposite edge of the jumper and helped him tug it up over her head. She tossed it aside, uncaring where it landed.

He chuckled quietly at her inelegant eagerness; the deep rumble sent feelings of desire skittering over her skin. "Now you," she demanded breathlessly.

Severus complied without a word, shrugging out of his unbuttoned shirt. Hermione knew she should slow down, appreciate this first ... and probably only ... time together, but she felt an overwhelming need to feel his skin against hers, along her entire body, *now*.

He huffed in surprise when she grabbed for the buttons at his trousers, but merely shifted his hips to help her slide them down his legs. The way he stared hotly at her as she shimmied out of her jeans on her own set her blood on fire with wanting. "So eager?" he asked.

"Complaining?"

He smirked in silent reply.

"I thought not."

Hermione urged him down on top of her. They both groaned at the sensation of skin on skin, only their pants and her bra in the way now. Between kisses, she hooked one leg over his hip; he slipped a hand under her knee, the better to keep her wrapped wantonly around him. She could feel him, hard and hot, pressing into her.

"Severus, please," she begged.

"So eager," he said again. As though he couldn't quite believe it.

They helped each other out of their undergarments and now they did pause to admire one another, finally naked. When she had been with Ron, Hermione had felt horribly self-conscious about her scar, courtesy of Dolohov during the battle at the Department of Mysteries. But now with Severus, who was marked with scars of his own, she felt unexpectedly, defiantly proud. They each had played their parts in the war; neither were bystanders. Their eyes met in a moment of understanding that transcended the frantic rush of desire.

"Beautiful," he whispered. Her heart swelled to be truly *seen* by someone. She knew full well he referred to more than mere looks.

"Magnificent," she replied solemnly.

His kiss was searing.

Somehow, through heady kisses and inflaming caresses, Hermione found herself rolled on top of Severus rather than under him. Trapped between them, his cock throbbed against her thigh. She rocked her pelvis against him, drawing a ragged breath from Severus. In response, he grabbed her hips and guided her to repeat the movement. They both shuddered.

Hermione felt a momentary pang of nervousness; she may have had sex before, but in truth it was only a handful of times, all with Ron. With a partner she'd lusted after for years, the sex had been mediocre. How would it be with a partner she'd never even considered sexually until a less than hour ago?

But Hermione wasn't a Gryffindor for nothing.

She shifted slightly to position herself directly over Severus. She held his hot gaze while she grabbed his cock and slowly lowered herself onto him.

Oh. *Oh*. Whatever this thing was between them, this un-looked-for mutual attraction, it was what Hermione had been missing from her unsatisfying fumlblings with Ron.

Hermione heard an animalistic groan, but she couldn't have sworn in that moment whether it came from her or Severus.

His hips flexed upward involuntarily, making her gasp. He misunderstood, apologizing, "I didn't mean to..."

"More," she gasped, interrupting him. Hermione tentatively ground against him; they both groaned again at her movements. "More," she said again. "Please..."

With a look like wonder on his face, Snape flexed his own hips again.

"Oh, yes..." Hermione hissed.

"Merlin," he whispered in response. And then he thrust up again.

It was everything she had hoped it would be like, yet nothing at all like she had expected. Everything should have been all wrong, yet everything was perfect.

"Hermione," he groaned. He then confused her by holding her still. "Hermione, the curse... We've satisfied the curse, you can stop now."

She looked him in the eye and slowly slid herself up his shaft. A conflicted look of relief and regret stole across his face. And then she let her own weight pull her back down onto him. They both gasped at the pleasure of it.

"Don't you *dare* stop now," she nearly growled.

She had never in her life seen anyone look at her with such answering desire.

He tilted her hips just so, a subtle thing, making her gasp and arch off the bed as the change in angle drew new sensations from her body.

"Oh! That, yes, more!" she cried, only half-coherent and not caring in the slightest. She cared only that Severus keep thrusting at this new angle. A stray thought flitted through her mind: perhaps he was a gentleman after all, maintaining this position for her benefit. And then she had very few thoughts at all in her mind, for the next little while.

On one particular stroke, she rocked a bit too far forward, and he slipped out of her with a wet sound. She groaned in disappointment. Severus encouraged her off him, panting from their exertions. "On your back," he said. Hermione hurried to comply.

When he sank into her again, now on top, they both sighed in unison at the feelings. Hermione stretched up to kiss him, sloppily now; neither seemed to mind. The force of his thrusting made kissing difficult, so she dropped back down onto the mattress. They could kiss later, she decided pragmatically.

For now, she wanted more than kisses. She dug her heels into his ass. "Harder," she demanded. Severus obliged, dropping forward onto one forearm and applying himself to the task. He slipped his other hand between them, searching until his fingers found her clit. Hermione may have been inexperienced, but he clearly wasn't. His fingers seemed to know exactly what they were about. Between his pelvis pressing against her with every thrust and the insistent stroking of his fingers, she felt her orgasm building, growing, until she was poised at that knife-edge instant where the inevitable was about to crash on her but it hadn't yet, not *quite*...

With a wordless cry of release, she came apart under his touch. She spasmed around him, but he kept thrusting even as she relaxed down the other side of her orgasm. Hermione grinned wickedly, leaned up, whispered, "Come for me," into his ear... and bit his earlobe. With a cry of his own, he did just that.

A few more jerking thrusts, one final shudder, and he fell, half on her and half off. His head dropped forward to rest against her shoulder. She smiled at the boneless way he had collapsed. His exposed neck was right in front of her; she couldn't resist lightly kissing the skin there.

It was as though a spell had broken. Hermione almost laughed ... yes, they had indeed broken a spell, that was the entire *point* ... but her amusement changed to alarm as she felt Severus stiffen his muscles and push up off of her, suddenly awkward again. She watched his face rearrange itself into its usual distant, cold expression.

"What's wrong?" she asked with concern.

"Miss Granger, I must remind you that..."

"Hermione," she snapped. It seemed patently ridiculous that he revert to formalities, while his cock was still inside her, while his semen still dripped from her.

He blanched, as though recognizing the absurdity too. "This whole situation was the result of a curse," he said doggedly. "There was nothing between us, except, perhaps, this *natural chemistry*."

"And what is *attraction*, if not another name for chemistry?" she retorted. "And isn't that what draws two people together, to see if there is anything worth pursuing? I'm hardly prepared to declare my undying devotion to you, Severus, but... If you think I'll just forget this, you don't know me at all."

She kissed him again, defiant and desperate in equal measure. After one agonizing second, he whimpered ... whimpered! ... and kissed her back.

When they finally parted, Hermione said gently, encouragingly, "I don't believe you'll just forget this, either."

He opened his mouth to speak, to break the moment between them, but Hermione interrupted him.

"Don't."

"What..."

"Don't," she repeated. "Don't pretend, don't lie. Not about this. Not to me. Not now."

His mask slipped. "Hermione..."

"I know," she interrupted again. "I *know*. We have to go back to acting like nothing has changed. But, Severus," here she brought a hand up to touch his face, still hovering over her, "things *have* changed."

Snape looked away, clearly uncomfortable. "There was nothing between us before," he repeated.

"But now there is."

He turned back to stare at her intently, and Hermione held her gaze steady, trying to infuse it with all the roiling, conflicting things she currently felt.

"Now there is," she repeated for emphasis.

Unexpectedly, Snape bowed his head. "Yes." Hermione felt a thrill of triumph rush through her at his admission. "This was..." He swallowed and looked away again, more nervous and exposed than she had ever seen him. "This was *unexpected*."

"Unexpected, but... not so unwelcome, in the end, yes?"

Severus pulled out of her finally, a small frown forming on his face.

"Oh, don't look at me like that," she huffed in annoyance. "I'm not trying to make this into any more than it is."

"And that is..?"

"A mutual attraction." His raised eyebrow goaded her. "*A mutual* attraction, don't you dare deny it." She glared at him as effectively as she could while still lying naked under him.

"Indeed," Snape eventually conceded.

"One that we can't safely explore... for now."

"And later?" Snape asked. That damned eyebrow again, taunting her. But she swore she heard the faintest hint of wistfulness in his tone.

"In less than a year, I'll have graduated. Or maybe there won't even be a school by then. Either way, I won't be your student and you won't be my teacher. I'd very much like to... to *see* you again. To find out, like I said, if there's anything worth pursuing."

He was scowling again. Perhaps reminding him of their relative positions at school had been a mistake.

She tried to reassure him. "I promise not to speak to anyone about this. I'll even take a wand oath." His face hardened, although she didn't understand why. "Or not. Only, while it's just you and me here, could you... drop this defensiveness?"

He laughed, but was a harsh, bitter sound. "Just like that?"

Now it was her turn to frown. "Is it really so hard to trust someone?"

"Yes," he said simply.

Hermione sighed. "You'll just have to see, then, that nothing I do will hurt or endanger you. You *can* trust me, even if you don't know it yet."

Severus watched her with solemn eyes. "Perhaps."

She nodded and handed him his shirt. She knew that admission was the most she could expect from him right now. In fact, it was already more than she had expected. They gathered up the rest of their clothing and dressed in silence.

"Hermione..."

She glanced sideways at him, hardly daring to move, or in any way risk frightening him into clamming up again. "Hm?"

"I..." He cleared his throat, tried again. "I do. Trust you."

Her breath caught. "Severus..." She didn't know what to say. So she said nothing, opting instead to kiss him. Fully clothed and sated now, they were not driven by lust like before. Instead, this kiss was sweet and full of promises neither knew how to put into words.

A stray thought struck her and she abruptly broke the kiss, burying her head against his neck to muffle a giggle.

"What now?" he asked in indulgent exasperation.

Hermione pulled back from him to reveal a mischievous grin. "If Bellatrix survives the war, I may have to send her a thank you card."

Severus blinked in surprise, and then slowly, slowly responded with a matching grin. "Were you to do that, she would surely die of shock."

Her smile was broad now. "Then it's settled." He smirked back at her.

Pulling back further still, Hermione noticed his shirt wasn't actually buttoned. "*Accio* buttons," she said, and they flew to her. Methodically, she spelled each one back onto the shirt she had attacked in her earlier haste. But then she paused, holding onto the last button, not yet reattaching it to his cuff. "*Geminio*," she said, duplicating the button. She cast a Protean charm on the pair of them, then handed one to Severus.

"What is this for?"

She transfigured the second button white to match her own blouse and spelled it onto her cuff. "For if you ever want...*me*, her treacherous heart thought, "...someone to talk to. Someone you can trust."

He took the button from her without a word and attached it back to its cuff. The gesture had been impulsive, and now she felt out of sorts at having risked so exposing herself emotionally. He had said he trusted her, not that he actually wanted to see her again. In any capacity.

"It's probably safe for us to return now," Severus said shortly.

Well, that was that, then. After a final look around, Hermione unwarded the safe house.

As Severus led them out the door, her cuff warmed. Surprised, Hermione glanced at Severus' back: he showed no indication now of there ever having been anything between them. It was as though they had shared a moment out of time, but back in the real world, there was no place for *them*.

But as she peered at the tiny letters scrolling past the surface of her button, a smile spread across her face. Before the charm faded from view, her button had read just two words:

*Thank you.*

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*Additional thanks go to redditor MyBoySokka of /r/latin, for the Latin phrase "Tactus Amatoris". I really hate naming things. ;)*

*If you liked this story, I also recommend a couple other delightfully smutty stories in a similar vein: ["A Knock on the Door"](#) & ["Twenty-Four Little Hours"](#) by Severusgirlx, ["Phlebotonium"](#) by littlelizzyann, and ["The Fourth Unforgiveable"](#) by Abby. I swear I hadn't even heard of Abby's story when I came up with my idea! ;)*

Finally, a shout-out to the fic ["A Beach in Ireland"](#) by Bambu; bonus points to reviewers who catch the small quote. :)