

Words & Wool

by Ladymage Samiko

Hermione reminisces about what brought her and Severus together: botched knitting, a few insults, and an unexpected helping hand.

Part One

Chapter 1 of 2

Hermione reminisces about what brought her and Severus together: botched knitting, a few insults, and an unexpected helping hand.

It's a quiet night, the sort of night that we love best. Severus's potions are finished for the time being; they won't need tending until tomorrow noon. My deputy is slated to receive the emergency calls this week, so I shan't be bothered with work. So tonight we have tea and wine and books and each other, and I am content. Though my husband is a difficult man to read...even after all these years...I believe he is content as well. He is stretched out on the sofa now, reading aloud from the book in front of him, his voice still sending that same spiced warmth down my spine that it did when we began. (Which, I might add, is *not* the same as the frisson of near-terror that he inspired during my school years.) He will read until his voice tires and then pass the book to me. In turn, I will hand him the knitting needles, and he'll work on our project while I pick up the story where he's left off. My reading won't be *quite* as fluid as his; I get distracted watching his fingers loop and slide and perform all of those little, second nature movements. Then he'll look up at me and smirk; he knows precisely what I'm thinking. Sometimes, I'll smirk back. I used to blush, mortified, back in the day, but now I know that if *I'm* thinking it, *he'll* be thinking it, and that often leads to very satisfactory conclusions for both of us.

But perhaps, like a great many people, you're wondering how we got here in the first place. You'll have heard the stories, maybe even read the histories. You're familiar with the people we were when our world was at war and everything that was good was in danger of falling to pieces. You know of the times he rescued me and my friends from mortal peril and of the everyday exchanges wherein we couldn't abide each other. There will be that faint distaste from thinking of student-teacher relationships, and if you're Muggle or Muggle-born, from a girl being involved with a man old enough...though just barely...to be her father. The latter I can do nothing about. He *is* older than I am, with a life that was incredibly complicated before I was even born. It bothers him sometimes, and other times, I think he finds it a comfort; in the ordinary way of things, he won't outlive me. I don't know if he thinks I am stronger than him in this, or if I love him less than he loves me and so will not grieve as deeply. More likely, he simply doesn't think of it at all that way; he can be very self-centred at times. As far as the student and teacher, I would point out that our relationship didn't begin until several years after the war...and after the last time we'd seen each other.

After the war ended, there was a great deal of chaos, both generally and personally as we reshaped the bits of our world that had come apart, fixed what was broken, and tried to find new places that would fit the people we had become. This isn't a period in my life that I care to dwell on, and if it interests you, you'd likely be better served by referring to Harry's memoirs or some of the articles that appeared in *The Prophet* at the time. Draco Malfoy's introspective shows the view from the other side, and he's proven to have an unexpected ability to find the comic aspects. For my part, suffice it to say that when it was over, I was firmly ensconced in the Department of Magical Creatures and using everything I had to crusade for their rights. In the essentials, I hadn't really changed much. I did, however, become such a nuisance to my superiors, that in spite of the fact that they couldn't get rid of me altogether, they did manage to 'exile' me by making me the liaison officer to Japan and shipping me off to the British Embassy there.

As far as they were concerned, it didn't make me any less of a 'nuisance.' (At one point, I almost had the *kappa* in a wholesale revolution. But that, too, is another story.) At the beginning of this one, I was fairly well settled in both the country and my work, and I'd even set up a small guest house for British magical folk who were passing

through for one reason or another. Being the insular...and, dare I say, xenophobic...clan British wizards, and the Ministry in particular, are, the Ministry's accommodations were medieval in the worst sense. It was their way of dismissing anyone who might be inclined to 'go native'...which anyone who travelled outside of Europe was considered to have done. I dismissed their opinion by nudging Harry for funds and (volunteer) elves and creating a place for anyone who was 'weird' enough to want to be there.

Since I only had myself to consult, I chose a place in the deepest of forests, where there were no Muggles to be bothered with whatever magical experiments might take place or my 'colleagues' coming to call. *Tengu* and *kitsune* are not the most comfortable of neighbours whether you believe in them or not.

I'd had word to expect one or two visitors over the next several days, but was at that point alone. I was reading, leaning against the frame of the open sliding door, and my magical needles were busy with an ongoing project...

"Granger, please tell me this is some sort of avant-garde lace pattern."

My eyes shot up even as I straightened, and I was shocked to see Professor Snape there, large as life and just as capable of engendering mortification as he ever was. I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks to see that slightly pained expression on his face. I admitted with a great deal of reluctance that it was, in actuality, supposed to be a scarf. It looked more like a fishing net.

"A... scarf," he repeated. "I see..." And he infused those words with a degree of comprehension and derision such as only Severus Snape is capable of. "Perhaps, Miss Granger, you would do better to limit yourself to art forms that do not involve such... complexity."

He glided away before I could formulate any sort of retort, circling around to the front of the house. My heart dropped into my stomach when I realised that he meant to stay, and then I abused my brain for being slow, because of course, why else would he be *here*, in the middle of nowhere on the other side of the planet? It wasn't as though he would be in the neighbourhood and simply pop by for a chat. I snatched up my needles, yanked the yarn off, and jammed the mess into its bag. "And I suppose *you* can do better, Prof... *Master* Snape?" I growled, hauling myself to my feet and stomping noisily through the house so I could answer the door. Some fragment of a sense of humour reasserted itself; at least he proved that he could *knock* politely. The sound coming from the front door was nicely regulated. I opened it, smiling my company smile. "Welcome to Bluewood, Master Snape."

"Thank you, I..." He had stepped through the door before fully recognizing me. "Granger," he hissed, and then I heard resignation take over. "Good afternoon, Miss Granger. Am I to understand that *you* are my host?"

"Up to a point." My smile was a bit more genuine and decidedly more smug. It wasn't often a girl had *any* sort of upper hand on Severus Snape, who obviously hadn't thought to make any inquiries about Bluewood before coming here. "I oversee the place, and I'm the one you come to if there are any difficulties, but you won't have to see me if you don't want to. I just have a habit of greeting guests so you know who I am and I know who's about. Otherwise, it's elves."

"English elves?" He eyed me suspiciously.

I sighed mentally. Nearly every British wizard asked a variation of that question. "Yes, proper English elves." Actually, I'd considered the local equivalent, but they tended towards the impish, and if they could by the furthest stretch of the imagination misinterpret foreigners, they would. The results were too exhausting to keep sorting out matters every time someone got a tiger instead of a teakettle. "Does that mean you'd like a proper English room and proper English tea?"

To my surprise, he shrugged. "As long as the room is clean and the tea hot, I don't much care."

It was then that I took a proper look at him, a man I hadn't seen since the war trials years before. In the basics, he was much the same: his hair still hung limply around his face, which naturally still had that massive beak of a nose. His robes were still black, still all-enveloping. He'd lost that... vibrating tension I remembered from my school years. While he looked miles better than the last time I'd seen him, there was a tired gauntness in his face that I didn't like. Had it always been there? The schoolgirl in me couldn't remember. Without any further consideration, I invited him back to the kitchen, a large, sunny room that blended aspects of both cultures.

He simply watched me as I bustled about. I couldn't tell what he thought, nor could I figure out how to start a casual conversation with him; I couldn't imagine him having a casual conversation with anyone. I pulled things out of the magic-fridge and pantries. There was a standard spiel, and I trotted it out with a bit of relief, explaining that the elves cooked if wanted, but they also left finished food in the pantries as well as ingredients if he wanted to cook for himself.

I set out a veritable feast of small things and after some thought, made a pot of jasmine tea. The tea received a raised eyebrow, but he didn't make any complaint, and the food certainly disappeared quickly. I had a scone and drank my tea while leaning against the counter; I stared out the window instead of staring at him, though I was pretty sure I could feel his eyes on me.

"Thank you for the meal, Miss Granger." I turned back to him, startled as much by the mere sound as by the unexpected courtesy.

"You're welcome." I offered then to show him a room, and when he agreed, I took him to the Western-style side of the house. He would be more comfortable there...I very much doubted that he was here in order to immerse himself in the culture...and there was less chance of us running into each other, since I had a traditional room. When I opened the door, I would have sworn he looked pleased and perhaps a bit surprised. I returned to my room feeling pleased as well.

The feeling didn't last very long. I spent the next day in Hokkaido, negotiating some points with a *kami* who lived there. The details have long since escaped me, but I was tired and disgruntled when I returned home, and my mood was not improved when I discovered a parcel on the kitchen counter with my name on it. Inside was a finished scarf done up in the wool I had been using, complete with a swirling pattern and long fringes. Pinned to it, written in that spiky writing I remembered so well...though it was in deep black instead of the vivid crimson of the past...was a note that said simply, *You're welcome*. I had no doubt that its effect on me was precisely the one that he'd intended. Fortunately for my self-respect, I had the presence of mind to cast a silencing spell before I let loose with an extensive catalogue of swear words. It was just as well that we didn't see each other that night or for the few nights following. I might have severely hexed him.

A pair of married witches arrived, interested in the flora on the islands in the southern Pacific, but unimpressed with the magical facilities there. (They weren't any better than what I had been given on my arrival in Japan.) Another wizard was consulting with Master Yamada, an authority on written charms. So there were periods of busyness interspersed with periods of deep silence. It was during one of the silent periods that I surprised Master Snape in the kitchen, tea caddy in hand. Actually, I think both of us were surprised. He, or we, had been so adept at avoiding each other that I, at least, had nearly forgotten that he was in the house. He raised an eyebrow in the way that he has and gestured in an unspoken question. I recognised the caddy as my everyday *sencha* and nodded. "Please." He added another spoonful of leaves to the pot. I tossed my things in the direction of my room...they were enchanted to make their own way there...and settled gratefully onto a stool.

We didn't speak; I simply watched him, absorbed the way he looked and moved. I suppose it was a strange thing to do. Certainly I would have been too in awe of him before to stare so blatantly, and there was no reason now to be particularly interested. I had come out of the war with a great deal of respect and awe for him as well as...yes, I admit it...pity. He made it quite clear to everyone that he wanted nothing to do with us and our changed opinions, and I, at least, respected that. I was curious, I guess, which shouldn't surprise anyone, least of all myself. He was very fastidious, which, when I thought back, was of a piece with the teacher I had known. His movements had always been painfully precise, and...his hair and teeth aside...he had never been a slovenly man. His robes no longer billowed...was this because he no longer needed to swoop down upon ill-behaved students?...but were graced with knife edge seams and mirror-shined buttons. He'd changed the collars, too, I noticed: wider, circling a simple, black neck cloth. In a facetious sort of way, I wondered what he would look like with a beard, or even simple five o' clock shadow. (The answer, I discovered later, is something close to Vincent Price in a horror film: not bad, but you start expecting maniacal laughter any moment.) The house must have agreed with him, for he looked better rested and though it may have been my imagination, better fed. More relaxed. Beyond that first surprise, he didn't seem to mind my being there.

He found the small, handle-less cups that matched the pot...pretty things, with designs that changed according to the season...and poured the tea. With the pot between us, he settled on a stool not terribly close to mine. I reversed my earlier impression and took it as a sign that he didn't really want to acknowledge my presence. A bit annoyed, I

broke the silence, asking, "Why did you act like that? About my knitting?"

He set down his teacup and steepled his fingertips, staring over them at the kitchen range. "You mean," he said finally, "why did I act like an arse."

"If you want to put it like that, yes."

"Habit, mostly." He made a dismissive gesture. "Rudeness is a difficult habit to break after several decades, and as everyone expects it of me anyway, I don't really have a reason to try."

"That explains why you spoke the way you did," I pursued, "but not why you chose to speak at all. It's not like you had to acknowledge my presence in any way; you could have gone around front while cheerfully ignoring me."

He sighed and reached for the pot. "If you must know, Miss Granger, I hate to see simple tasks performed badly. If you paid a fraction of the attention to your knitting that you do to your 'causes,' that 'scarf' of yours would not come out looking like the work of a deranged spider after a weekend-long heroin binge."

I think the sound I made could best be called a frustrated growl. "I *do*," I informed him. "I've *tried*. Tried for *years*, under every condition I could think of. I'm just rubbish at it, all right? There, I admitted it. It's a sore point. I don't mean to do it badly, I don't want to do it badly, but I can't seem to help but do it badly, and then *you* pop up and do in less than a day something I haven't been able to manage in a decade. And you simply *have* to rub it in, and to top it off, I can't even take advantage of your work."

"Pop up?" he repeated, handling the phrase as one might a dead rodent. "I do not 'pop up,' Miss Granger. And what, may I ask, is *wrong* with my work?"

"Nothing is wrong with your work; it's a lovely scarf, damn it. But I need something that *I've* made with *my* magic in it. And anything else I've tried comes out even worse, because I don't know anything about it in the first place. I can't paint or sew or draw stick figures. I can't even cook anything more complicated than spaghetti noodles or scrambled eggs."

"Do you mean to tell me you escaped Molly Weasley's home economics course?" He sounded amused, the bastard, though he still looked at the kitchen rather than me, and his hair therefore screened his expression.

I made a face. "I got the abbreviated version; we didn't have the time for more. And I think there was a disconnect between the housewitch of twenty generations of housewitches and the Muggleborn daughter of a professional feminist, not to mention Great-Grandma Mimi, who was a professional flapper." I smiled to remember the feisty old woman, who'd taught the tiny me the Charleston instead of the omelette. She'd also told me to be who I was and tell the rest to go fuck themselves. (In those words and out of earshot of my grandmother, who was rather more conservative.)

I would have sworn...still would, for all that he denies it...that the corner of his mouth started twitching.

Finishing my tea, I slid off the stool with a sigh. "So, in the end, I never managed to master any of the things she tried to teach me. They just didn't work. I don't know what else to do, but... Well, you're hardly interested in my little problems, Master Snape. I have a few other things to catch up on before I go to bed. Good night."

"Good night, Miss Granger."

Severus Snape returned to England a few days later; I didn't see him again for another two months. And even then, I hadn't expected to see him at all.

I was at the Embassy itself in Tokyo...a place I tried to be as seldom as I possibly could. The city itself was well enough, though it made me miss London, but the Embassy staff were always a pain in the arse to deal with, the magical staff in particular. Like myself, the majority of them were 'volunteered' for their posts. Unlike myself, they wouldn't do well in a life outside the Ministry, so they were stuck until misdeeds had been forgotten, superiors left or passed on, or until they themselves went toes up. It was a small department, but a maliciously bitter one; I had known reports not only to go astray but to be defaced or completely rewritten. They resented the fact that I had improved my exile and could, in fact, chuck the lot whenever I felt like it and not suffer eternally.

I never accepted any sort of food or drink within a mile radius of the bloody building.

On that particular day, I had been forced to argue my way through five people just to get to the floor that housed the Owlery and yet another one to have the use of an owl without having to pay for it...as though I would trust personal correspondence to the Embassy prats. (I would send it through good, old-fashioned Muggle mail to Harry, who would then owl it to anyone else.) Made thoroughly annoyed and ready to hex the next person who interfered with me, I heard the ever-familiar, cold, sneering voice that so perfectly mirrored what I felt. I followed it down the hall with, I admit, evil-minded anticipation. If these mental adolescents couldn't remember their *actual* adolescent years, I was quite certain that Severus Snape would spare no pains in reminding them.

Bartleby the Bone-brain was busy trying to refuse Master Snape entrance to the country on the grounds of frequency. No magical governing council seems to like witches and wizards moving about as freely as they might; I never have found out why. And Bartleby, having nothing better to do than memorize old laws, was stubbornly contending that unless Master Snape wanted to become a resident, he could visit Japan no more than once every six months for a total of no more than four weeks in a year. Snape was not amused by this limitation on his movements, and I was in complete sympathy with him. His movements had been more than sufficiently limited already; Professor Dumbledore had kept his dog on a very short leash, even when it was a detriment to his goals.

Master Snape had a few choice words that whittled Bartleby's officiousness to the smallest of whinges; it was a delight to hear. He turned briskly on one heel...oh, I missed his old robes at that moment...and found me leaning against the door frame. I was Disillusioned, naturally, so that I could eavesdrop properly, but I did not for one second believe that I could elude Snape. He smirked, and I smirked back.

"Going my way, sir?" I asked, dropping the invisibility. Bartleby jumped and glared, but I didn't much care. As a technical member of the Embassy, I didn't have to deal with him directly.

"Indeed, Miss Granger," Severus replied, with remarkable civility and a distinct glint in his eye, "if you are returning to the guest house."

"I am."

"Excellent. If you would be so kind as to lead the way...?"

"Certainly."

If you have never attempted it yourself, I have to tell you that double Apparition is a far more intimate activity than you would suppose. I hadn't realised it before, since the few times I had practised it had been with friends. I was used to them. With Severus Snape, with whom I was accustomed to strictly limited and well-defined interactions, it was quite a different matter. When you Apparate with another person, you have to be hyper-aware of their existence in order to avoid splinching the two of you. Somewhere in your mind you must know where every part of him or her is, from the hairs on the head to the fingernails, toenails, and... and their most personal bits. With the boys, it's almost automatic; I've seen most of them anyway, and it's easy for me to separate the 'me' from the 'them.' But I'd never thought of Severus Snape in that... in that context, as physically male, though of course I knew it intellectually. For that matter, I had never even taken his hand the way I had to do, and I had to be conscious of each finger interlaced with mine, the way his palm pressed against my hand... Neither of us meant anything by it, not then, and I doubt he felt uncomfortable since he merely had to hold my hand and wait, but it was as disconcerting for me as if I'd suddenly seen him getting out of the bath.

I was ready to thank every god I could think of when we arrived at the guest house no worse for wear. I didn't even forget his satchel.

I let him know that his old room was empty if he wanted it. He nodded cordially and left me to find my own room and collapse in private.

I'd recovered my equilibrium by dinner time, and was reasonably composed when I found him already at the table. I was curious as to what had brought him back so soon...I didn't think there were any new seasonal plants to be harvested, though I could have been wrong...but I didn't want to ask. I doubted he would have answered such questions anyway. Instead, I tried to make conversation by asking about home. I heard from everyone regularly, but it was something to talk about, and being Severus Snape, he might think of things that the others hadn't thought to mention.

He was more cordial than I would have expected, and the conversation was pleasant. I tried not to tax his civility too far, asking too many or too intimate questions. I knew from before I left that he had refused to return to teaching, but still stocked Hogwarts's 'medicine' cupboard. From the things he said, I learned that he was a supplier for several other individuals on a private basis and was somewhat involved in his own research. I couldn't be sure, but on the scale that I inferred, I didn't think he was earning enough to live on, and I wondered how he managed. Perhaps he had sufficient savings? Or an inheritance? That was a question I *certainly* didn't dare to ask. If he was satisfied, then it was none of my affair.

And yet... I wasn't sure that he was satisfied. He'd lost the little weight I thought he'd gained two months before. I couldn't put my finger on it exactly, but there was just something not quite *right* about him. The war, perhaps, I thought. We were all glad it was over, but I couldn't deny that it had given me a *purpose* that was distinctly lacking in the following years. I imagined that it had to be more severe in *him*, who had spent twenty years or more for that same goal. Perhaps his life was a bit... empty?

Whatever it was, I told myself sternly when I retired, it was not something I would be allowed to fix. Snape was a master at putting up walls; it would be a miracle if he even admitted to me...a *child*, likely, in his view: a former student...that something was wrong. If, indeed, something was. It was just as likely that I was reading too much into my impressions and the most that was wrong was him spending too many days in extended brewing sessions, forgetting to eat as he pursued whatever discovery he was after. Certainly, without the regimentation of Hogwarts's schedule, it wouldn't be difficult to ignore things like lunchtime and bedtime. Perhaps *my* life was the unsatisfactory one, if I was dreaming up bogeys in a closet that wasn't even there. The only thing I could do was what I would do for any guest who fetched up on 'my' doorstep: make sure he was fed, comfortable, and if we were both inclined, entertained.

The following day was a Thursday...which I know because it was a day I was in the habit of taking off of work. I woke early, prepared a large pot of Earl Grey, and enjoyed the benefits (and detriments) of the full English breakfast the elves whipped up. They informed me that Master Snape had already had his breakfast, and indeed, I finished only just in time to see him walking away from the house in harvesting robes...close-fitting, of abbreviated length...and an enormous sun hat. I blinked a bit at the hat.

I spent much of the day with all of the little chores around the house: laundry, airing my *futon*, a bit of dusting. Later on, I read a bit, both for pleasure and for information. Towards the end of the day, I took up my knitting bag and sat down for an hour or two of frustration. In the generally vain hope of improving my mood if not my skill, I placed myself on the back porch, leaning against the jamb of the sliding door. I laid my book on the floor beside me and attacked my latest project. I was sufficiently engrossed so that some time later, I didn't notice Severus's approach until I heard him speak.

"Granger," he sighed, his voice exasperated, "you've already massacred your cast-on, and your stitches are tighter than Minerva's knickers. Haven't you anyone to show you how to knit *properly*?"

My head shot up; my fingers tightened on the needles. "No, I don't," I replied, mortified. "And I don't see that you have any grounds for criticism. Have *you* ever tried Muggle knitting?"

Piling his bags and boxes on the ground, he plucked the project from my hands and settled, ramrod straight, on the edge of the deck. With efficient tugs, he pulled apart the mess and rewound the wool. "I began knitting...*in* the Muggle fashion," he informed me pointedly, "more than a decade before *you* were born, Miss Granger, long before I applied myself to the magical method. I know *precisely* how to work these *infernal tools*."

"Pattern?" He raised an eyebrow and held out a demanding hand.

I could feel my face heat. "I don't have one."

He rolled his eyes. "Even walking requires its introductory lessons, Miss Granger. Are you still attempting a simple scarf?" I nodded. "Very well."

I watched, speechless, as he made his initial loop, threaded it on the needle, then wound the yarn's tails around his thumb and forefinger. It was a shock to me that he knew something so mundanely Muggle as knitting, but then there was also a resigned inadequacy, because *of course* he knew how to do it and *of course* he knew how to do it well, for he was Severus Snape, who knew how to outdo everyone at everything. The needle in his hand dipped and caught up the yarn from the simple web between his fingers, smoothly pulling stitch after stitch onto itself.

"Casting on," he said, and immediately I was eleven years old again, in awe and doing my best to absorb every syllable, "is one of the most difficult skills for a beginner to master. One must judge the necessary tension and accurately maintain it until the full count of stitches is created. *You*, Miss Granger, were piling on stitch after stitch so tightly and so close together that your subsequent rows would balloon out into deformity."

I pulled my knees up, setting my chin on them. "I thought mundane knitting might be easier for me to manage," I explained. "I have so much trouble channelling my magic through other objects, it seemed like a good alternative." I caught the swift, side-long glance, and as I didn't think it could be any worse, I added, "I feel like an idiot."

His lips twitched, but whatever scathing comment he might have made...he certainly wasn't going to mouth any conciliatory platitudes...was kept behind his teeth. Instead, he simply turned the needles, slipped the first stitch, and swiftly knitted across. Over and over, the needle slid in, the wool swept around, the needle ducked out, the stitch eased off: a quick, fluid dance of movements that recalled to mind watching classroom demonstrations of brewing skills and, however briefly, duelling techniques.

"The idea is simple, Miss Granger, but you cannot gallop ahead in that wild horse fashion you are so fond of. You must attend to every stitch in its turn." Finishing the last stitch, he passed the needles back. "Every skill *in its turn*. Practice. You are to slip the first stitch...and your instruction book should be sufficiently useful if you did not follow my example...and *knit* the rest. Pay attention to the tension of each stitch. If you attempt anything more complex..." He left the threat open, and I took it seriously, but only up to a point. I didn't doubt he could think up something unpleasant, but it would be a bit silly if he decided to hex me over a stockinette rather than a garter stitch.

He rose and picked up the baskets I hadn't realised he still had, then mounted the deck and disappeared inside the house.

I reapplied myself to my knitting.

He reappeared some time later, presumably after storing whatever treasures he had found. "This," he remarked sourly, "is a vile climate, Miss Granger. Merlin's nads, what possesses you to stay here?" It was the height of summer, and high temperatures were only enhanced by the muffling blanket of humidity. You might remark that we're wizards, so what was the big deal? And you'd be quite right. I didn't keep the whole house cool, but I had charmed the deck to make the most of what little breeze there was, and my guests generally tended to their own magical thermostats. Master Snape, however, had been out harvesting magical plants and such, and they didn't take well to foreign magic. I'd forgotten that little detail, and was sympathetic to a man who had just spent several hours in the stifle with just that hat. I peered at him, but however he'd managed it, he'd been sensible enough not to sunburn. He did look rather tan.

"The Ministry, naturally," I answered him. "They take great delight in thoughts of my misery. Come, sit down. It's nicer out here."

He did, to my surprise, but not before he plucked the knitting from my fingers, his lips thinning. I'd managed to drop stitches, or something of that nature, and once again, he started unravelling the wool. I hadn't gotten very far, so I suppose it was easier than trying to pick the stitch back up. "I don't suppose it's occurred to you to quit the bloody Ministry," he said. "Why should you be the one to fulfil their baser urges?"

I leaned back. "Well, for one thing, I'm not miserable. I miss home, but on the other hand, I'm closer to my parents here, and I like Japan well enough. For another, I'd like to finish the jobs in hand, leave things better than when I found them...and preferably in a state that irritates the hell out of the Ministry. After that, I haven't really decided

whether I want to fight it out and take over the department, or chuck it altogether and find other ways of annoying the Wizarding World as a whole."

There was a tiny rumbling that grew in volume until I realised that it was Snape himself, laughing. I grinned.

"That's a Granger I recognise: seven years of being a burr in my arse." His eyes glinted at me in an amusement that took any sting out of the words.

"I was only your student for six years," I objected.

"Trust me, Granger, you were as big a burr outside the classroom as in. Still are." He'd finished casting on again and passed the needles back. "Now, begin again with all due deliberation."

I did, and of course, found myself being far more careful under his scrutiny than I had been before. It also occurred to me how difficult it was; my mind kept wanting to hare off after one thing or another: the Arithmantic equation I was working on, the tea date I had tomorrow with several of the forest *yukai*. (They were generally polite and quite curious, especially about the odd foreign delicacies like scones or Indian tea. I tried to stay on their good side, as I knew they were capable of a good bit of damage if displeased. When I was feeling particularly bitter, it used to amuse me thinking of what would happen when my successor arrived and...as was likely...refused to be hospitable.) I found myself wondering about what Master Snape had collected in the forest, though I didn't dare ask. Finally, I growled in frustration. "How do you do it?" I demanded. "How do you keep your concentration on your work?"

"I don't," he smirked. "I know what I'm doing, well enough that I don't have to pay the same kind of attention that you do."

"This," I informed him, "is tedious."

"Naturally," he replied blandly.

"Why in the hell did you learn?" I demanded.

"My grandmother tied me to the chair." This was said deadpan, and knowing what little I did about his family life, I wasn't sure whether I should take him seriously or with a very large grain of salt. He read my expression and elucidated. "My grandmother had very strong ideas about raising children. She considered my father an abysmal failure, and when I was left in her hands...which was relatively frequently...she endeavoured to correct the gaps in my upbringing. One of her core beliefs was that a man who couldn't put food on his stomach and clothes on his back was a useless pillock. Therefore, she used every means available to make me learn basic cooking, knitting, and mending. She found bribery more effective than physical restraint, though, until I went to school and learned the value of these skills; the only reason I didn't go about in piecemeal robes was that I taught myself the equivalent spells and could fix them up myself." He scowled at some awful, associated memory, I assumed.

It seemed so normal, the idea of a child Severus and his grandmother, and yet so alien when I thought of *him*. Severus Snape was such a self-contained entity that it was difficult to imagine him having any sort of family connections. I knew he'd *had* a father and mother, naturally, but I'd never thought of him having any relations beyond the necessary, nuclear ones. Had he ever had siblings? Aunts? Uncles? I knew of Eileen, but what had *her* parents been like? Had they ever evinced any interest in their grandson?

Or was his grandmother Snape the only one who had bothered to care? "Is she still alive?" I asked softly, wanting to know, but not wanting to shatter this mood of confidences.

His eyes became a bit distant, but he smiled. "Oh, yes," he said, "and will for a while yet, if I have my say. Granny Snape is a tough old bird, as tough as they make them." What he didn't say then...and not until much, much later...was that he'd taken advantage of some of the opportunities presented by the Philosopher's Stone to lay aside a diluted Elixir that would extend her life. He would also recount the measures he'd taken during the Wars to keep her safe away from the Death Eaters. He'd left his parents to fend for themselves, as they had left him.

But that was later. There, on the deck of my guest house, I smiled. "I'm glad," I told him, and the look we exchanged carried something of understanding. I continued under his stern eye, and did better, though he had to intervene a few times to avert mistakes. But I liked the thought that he considered me sufficiently worthy of being taught his grandmother's skills.

When he left, that time, I truly believed he was gone from my life for good, at least for so long as I remained on this side of the world. Perhaps we would meet again when I returned to Britain. And perhaps he would consider me a friendly acquaintance, someone with whom it would be no hardship to sit at Miss Lowglass's for tea or the Ebon Squirrel for a pint.

Or I could screw up my knitting again as an excuse.

Part Two

Chapter 2 of 2

Hermione reminisces about what brought her and Severus together: botched knitting, a few insults, and an unexpected helping hand.

Winter, and I was bundled up against the cold, the deck abandoned in favour of the common parlour in the middle of the house. George had come to visit, both as a sort of Weasley emissary and in search of new things for the joke shop. In that regard, I recommended him to the attentions of a local *kitsune*, one of the more prankish of creatures. They got along famously.

Molly had sent along one of her famous jumpers, this one with a sort of froggy-looking creature that I supposed was a *kappa*, and I had to ask myself if she had more of a sense of humour than I had ever given her credit for. After all, the twins must've gotten it from *somewhere*. More Weasley gifts (as well as Potter and Longbottom gifts) were waiting in the corner, as I hadn't put up a tree just then and wanted to save them for Christmas. Both George and I knew that Molly's was a jumper, and I was cold, so I'd opened that one right away. Besides, George could then take pictures of me wearing it and reassure Molly that I was both fine and pleased with her gift.

We were curled up in a pair of very cushiony chair before the fireplace, the rain a background to George's highly coloured account of a mishap involving Harry, Ginny, and a hapless photographer. I remember I was laughing when the door opened. Shocked, I saw that it revealed a darkly scowling Severus Snape trailed by a rather distressed house elf. I stood.

"Granger, why does this... *Weasley* have my room?"

The smile I'd had dwindled, and the hands I'd raised to greet him fell. "If you'd given me notice, I would have reserved it for you," I replied coolly. "As it is, it's a very comfortable room, and I thought George would appreciate it, as it's the only Western-style room available right now. The Ministry's been weeding out its problem children of late. There's a traditional room next to mine that you can have. Or you can spend the night at the Embassy and go home in the morning." I was very close to being angry, and I couldn't say why. He glowered at me a moment longer, then spun on his heel.

"Very well." He gestured impatiently to the elf to show him the way, and that just made me madder. The door slammed shut behind him.

"Phew!" George whistled. "Shades of our Hogwartian youth, eh? *He* hasn't changed."

A bit of a smile tweaked the corner of my mouth. "Did you expect him to?" In fact, I thought he had, a bit, and was disappointed to see that he still could be-was?-a complete git, however admirable in other areas.

"Can't say as I did," George admitted, "but I'd think he'd have some manners for the innkeeper. Used to be as nice as he was capable of to Rosmerta."

"Oh?" I said and managed to keep it neutral. "I never noticed." I returned to my chair.

"You weren't there often or long enough," George pointed out. "Fred and me used to be there *regularly*, so to speak. When we started the shop, we'd do a bit of spying on the professors there, see how our work was doing out in the big world." I rolled my eyes. "Still go with Ron, but Snape's never there any more, of course. Wonder what he's doing here."

I could feel my eyes widening in alarm. "George Weasley, don't you *dare*," I hissed.

"Nah, I won't. Too much work, and I wouldn't risk both you and Snape mad at me. I'd disappear, and whatever was left after would end up on old Snapey's shelves. Don't want to spend the next fifty years with just my eyeballs watching his laboratory, me. I've plans."

"Would those plans involve Fiona Dappledeedew, by any chance?" I asked with faux innocence, and the conversation veered back to something close to its original character.

For someone who had the room next door, Severus was certainly very talented at playing least in sight. I wondered if he was even there at all, if somehow George and I had had a collective hallucination, or even been visited by Snape's ghost on the way to his afterlife. Weird, but not impossible. Magic, you know. But the house elves reported that he was being served his meals in his room and occasionally left (to where, they didn't know) so they could clean and air the room. They said this rather pointedly, for they were always aggrieved that I never let them clean mine. I was a bit surprised that *he* let them clean his, but then reasoned that he likely did not travel with anything unduly volatile, personal, or incriminating. Or that if there was anything so important, he would keep it on his person, not leave it for house elves (among others) to meddle with in his absence. There were certainly a few items that *I* did not care to let out of my control.

George left a few days later, more than ready to leave these heathen shores for those of Merrie Olde England and eager to get to work on the next generation of Weasley prank inventions in concert with Fred's ghost. Other witches and wizards came and went, none of whom were of any importance. Severus remained resolutely isolated, and I was beginning to worry. It wasn't any of my business, I suppose, but after all, there had to be *some* reason for him to travel around the globe, and it wouldn't be to hole up in my guestroom for days on end. He could do that at his home, wherever that was, if he was so inclined, and probably find it more congenial than the smallish space I'd allotted to him. But when I asked, the house elves reported that his health and well-being were satisfactory, so I had to content myself with being on the other side of the door. It wasn't until a week later that he reappeared with no explanation and as much warning, simply sitting down to breakfast like any other 'normal' wizard. It was his own affair, I told myself firmly, and bit back any annoyance I was feeling. Instead, I simply said, "Good morning," just as I had to the two or three others present. They, being naturally daunted by the presence of one they had believed and prayed to have left behind, didn't even say that much. Breakfast was a very silent meal. So was the following lunch.

In the hours before dinner, I retired to the parlour and picked up a book I had been reading in lieu of more stimulating company. I was certainly not expecting Master Snape to appear, still less to inquire about my progress with my knitting. Unfortunately for my ego, I am by nature a truthful woman, and I had to admit to him that while I had made considerable progress up to a point, I had been stymied by a dropped stitch that had gone unnoticed for several rows. With no one to help fix it, and at a loss on how to do it myself, I had set it aside to gather metaphorical dust until the situation changed.

He demanded I produce it immediately.

The majority of the work itself apparently passed muster, for he made no comment about it, good or bad. The mistake itself likewise escaped. He instead informed me curtly that as my instructor, he would have expected me to apply to him for assistance in such a case.

I pointed out that his instruction had been a casual matter of less than an hour of his time, without any remuneration, which I did not believe left him under any obligation to me, though possibly the reverse was true.

He replied with no little rudeness to the effect that his time was now his own, and he could incur as many gods-damned obligations as he bloody well pleased.

I might have then mentioned that he could at least have the fucking courtesy to apprise me of the fact. And while he was about it, he could bloody well make the damned effort to show his face now and then.

I might have.

I don't remember the exact phrasing.

I don't really remember what we said after that, either, except that it grew increasingly heated and quite often profane. I do remember him being very much in my face, his complexion livid, his eyes narrowed in fury. And I remember what he *didn't* say, in all the back and forth of our shouting; he didn't speak one word of insult. Not one. I can't say that I understood, or even contemplated, the implications of that at the time, but it *did* register with me.

It's difficult to describe what happened next, not with any real clarity. One moment we were inches apart, screaming to high heaven, and the next he had pushed himself that little bit forward (he says *I* am the one who moved), and there was a clash of lips, noses, teeth, and probably even hair. His hands affixed themselves to my shoulders with such ferocity that I had finger-shaped bruises the following morning. My own hands were trapped between us, somewhere around the bottom of his ribcage.

My husband and I both have difficulties articulating our emotions, being so much more skewed to the cerebral rather than the emotional. In this case, I can only describe my feelings as a... a wellspring of impossibilities. I knew Severus Snape could be passionate in the general sense of the word; hadn't he demonstrated that time and again, and just finished demonstrating it again? But in the man-woman, love-lust sense of the word? And towards *me*, of all people? And somehow, I was engaged in reciprocating? Not to mention every other sensation that was flooding through me.

Impossible. Verging on absurd.

And yet... I couldn't deny that he was kissing me violently, any more than I could that I was kissing him back with equal fervour. Nor that on some indescribable, semi-conscious level, I was spinning castles in the air about *more*. More in every sense of all those impossibilities. *More* such that afterwards, I had to reluctantly abandon the excuse that I was merely sexually frustrated, which would have simplified everything so beautifully. Then I might have resolved matters myself, so to speak, or found an obliging fellow who wouldn't have been remotely as complicated. But there they were: *feelings*. And for Severus Snape of all people. It left me absolutely flabbergasted. (I could, my husband points out, use a more elegant term. I could, but 'flabbergasted' describes my state of mind with the greatest accuracy. There wasn't anything in the

least bit elegant about it at the time. In any case, back to the kissing, which I'm sure you find much more entertaining.)

Severus slipped away from my mouth, but before I could complain, he found the oh-so-sensitive spot just behind my ear and was kissing and nibbling and licking *just there*. (See? More entertaining, even if, like *some people*, you merely find it amusing or revolting.) I jolted forward and clutched at him. Unfortunately for the mood, I had managed (don't ask me how) to clasp my arms around his neck, and naturally, I *squeezed*. He gave the most incredible yelp of agony, poor man, and leapt away, curling defensively against the pain of scars that had never quite healed. He swore-not that I blamed him-like an entire fleet of sailors and their mothers. But just as I was about to see what I could do to help, not to mention apologise, he straightened, and I could *see* the mantle of 'Professor Snape' enveloping him like an Invisibility Cloak.

"My apologies, Miss Granger," he said. "It will not happen again." And he left the room, the cloud of his dignity swirling about him.

As a contrast, I let my dignity flee like Daphne from Apollo and sank to my knees, trembling. The most intense experience of my romantic life (such as it was) and the man was apologising. *As well he should!* my mind told me, though in my opinion, he would be apologising for very different things. And I certainly intended that we would do this again...though next time without inflicting the physical agony.

By some stroke of either divine favour or extreme luck, I managed to pull myself together sufficiently to get through dinner without alerting anyone that something was... odd, though admittedly this wasn't the most difficult task, as most of the residents were too intent on their own woes to bother much about me. We tended to be cordial, but not friendly. I retired to my room immediately after and was highly conscious of the occupant of the room on the other side of the wall. I recalled suddenly that he could move back into his regular room now if he wished. And if what had happened this evening was merely sexual frustration on *his* side, then that would probably be for the best. As foreign an idea as sleeping with *Professor Snape* was, the idea of doing so casually was positively abhorrent.

It took some time to turn what were really nebulous thoughts into ones as coherent as I've expressed them to be, and then I had to settle in and turn my whole attention to them in order to digest the ideas and give them the attention they deserved. Our history and my preconceptions had to be brought out and examined and evaluated as well as all of the 'impossibles' my mind (and body, to be perfectly honest) were producing. This was Professor Snape who had kissed me and whom I had kissed in return. My former professor, many years my senior, and honestly, not very attractive. The first two felt like heavy baggage that would have to be dealt with if I was to deal in impossibles. The last made the situation a bit strange(r) to me, but I'd learned the Lesson of Gilderoy Lockhart and could set it aside. When it came down to it, I was no Cleopatra myself, though I considered my looks reasonably pretty. So that was neither here nor there. But there was the bit about our age difference and our former relationship which would complicate matters far more than if I had met a random wizard in the Avalon Library, for example. I set myself to the task considering them and figuring out what I wanted, and telling myself the entire time that I was assuming a lot on the basis of one angry kiss.

But it was one hell of a kiss.

I fell asleep without having come to firm resolutions. Well, maybe one or two.

It turned out that any resolutions I made were of little consequence; Severus decamped before I even awoke the next morning. My knitting, neatly repaired, was sitting on my knitting bag, unobtrusive but, to me, obvious. This time, there was no note.

I got through breakfast much as I had dinner the night before and niggled at the situation over the course of the day. The simplest solution was to allow the roused dogs to lie. They would naturally return to sleep, and life would continue much as it had before. By all evidence, that would be Severus's solution. But how did *he* really feel? Had it merely been the mistake of a moment, one that he would prefer to forget? Something more intense? Had he already been attracted to me, strange as the thought was? Was he then somehow disappointed in my reaction? Or was it something he had never intended to act upon? I had to face the fact that I didn't know him well enough to guess. I had known the man most of my life, and yet I really knew very little about him. It was part of why I was so off-balance about being attracted to him.

Another possibility would have been to return to England. After all, I hadn't been formally banished from the United Kingdom or anything like that, merely reassigned. Simple enough to pack it in and return. But my original reasoning still held: I wanted to complete my tasks, both Ministry- and self-appointed, before I went back. I didn't even want to go back for a visit until then.

I decided upon some hopefully discreet surveillance and intelligence gathering. I still corresponded with Minerva and Madam Pince, and though I knew he didn't teach any more, I *also* knew that the two women were the closest he had to actual friends. (Unless Rosmerta... but I resolved to let *that* lie, at least. It was a bit early in the game for jealousy, particularly over someone who like as not was innocent, not to mention that I had been a child at the time.) I wrote to them, introduced Severus into the epistolary conversation, and...with some delicacy, I hoped...began pumping them for information. Both were extremely obliging; though he naturally said nothing, I think they had an idea of where the wind was blowing so far as he was concerned, which I considered an encouraging sign. Minerva recounted any number of anecdotes from over the entire span of their acquaintance. It was nice to know that his childhood had not been *entirely* bleak, and that his enjoyment did not consist solely of getting back at the Marauders for anything they had done to him.

I continued my knitting, and when the day came that I made another mistake that I could not fix, I...having finally managed to worm his address out of Minerva...mailed the thing to him with a short, non-committal note. It was returned to me...fixed, I should make certain to say...with an even shorter, equally non-committal note. He wasn't taking any chances and was likely hoping that I would drop the whole matter.

More fool he. You'd think he'd know me better, wouldn't you? Though such was my state of mind at that point that I found it rather sweet. I replied with a thank you note that took me a great deal of time to write and should have expressed a bit more than simple gratitude. What he thought of it was impossible to tell; he sent no further reply until I had another problem. I was sorely tempted to manufacture them just to have an excuse. I'm still not sure that I didn't a time or two. As it was, I finally succeeded in establishing a correspondence that was somewhat on par with the conversations we had had when he was visiting: generally casual, always interesting. He wrote of his current experiments; I replied with my adventures with *mu-onna* and the house's *zashiki-warashi*.

In one letter, I asked after George Weasley. There were some weeks before I received another letter, which was written as though I had never asked the question in the first place. I considered that, too, a positive sign. Though from my perspective, the idea of George and me was simply silly, Severus had seen us getting on well, and George was, after all, my contemporary. I didn't want to overdo, or give Severus a firm foundation for that sort of wrong idea, so in my next letter, I wrote, *You didn't answer my question last time, so do you mind if I inquire about Ginny Potter, née Weasley? I haven't heard from any Weasley...or Harry...in a while and am anxious to know how the family is doing*. Which was actually true in that no one had written since George's visit; they weren't terribly reliable correspondents. My news had to come from other sources. He replied with a curt, and likely truthful, *I have only had a brief encounter with Arthur of late, who reports that the family is well. No detailed intelligence of my own knowledge*. Thereafter, I let the subject drop.

I did not bring up the night he had kissed me. Neither did he.

I have implied that a good bit of time passed after Severus left Japan, and I won't disillusion you. I will only admit that yes, I was a slow knitter, and there was the further complication of what I had needed the scarf for. In truth, that could be a story in its own right and may actually be read if you delve into the Ministry archives where, after being treated with an Unalterable Print charm, my report was filed. It would be a bit unwieldy to include here, and likely not at all interesting for you Readers who are more interested in my romantic pursuits, such as they are. (Given the parties involved, you might expect it to be a great deal more exciting, wouldn't you? I certainly would have.) I shall, however, to satisfy basic curiosity, mention that in order to meet certain Spirits and treat with them, I needed to bring an offering. This offering had to be the work of my own hands, well-made and well-intentioned. Severus's contributions, the casting on and later corrections, actually muddied the waters a bit; they debated whether he had to be included in our negotiations. He didn't, in the end, but they read his intentions as well as mine, and imparted certain truths to me that he probably would not have admitted of his own volition.

Armed with those truths and the knowledge of a job well done, I packed a few items, donned a lovely, fringed scarf, and set out for home: England.

The house looked shabby, but judging from his letters, I knew the inside would be anything but. It wasn't really cold enough to justify the scarf I was wearing, but I didn't take it off. Instead, I fought my way through all of the layers of spells that encouraged me to believe the house wasn't really there and that I should much prefer to go home. Unfortunately for the spells, Severus's house was the only home I had (or didn't have; I couldn't take my reception for granted). By the time I made it to the actual door, Severus had set aside whatever he was doing and cleaned up enough to answer my knock promptly and personally.

"Granger," he nodded, as brief and impersonal as his first note.

"Snape," I replied, just as cool.

After that, any observer would have found chirping crickets more entertaining. He eventually recognised the ridiculousness of the situation and allowed me in. He conducted me to a carefully polite room before remarking, "I was not expecting you; you gave no indication you were returning to England." He took my scarf...and I was sure he recognised it...and my jacket.

"No, I didn't. It's more of a flying visit, really. I finished what I set out to do, but I haven't decided what to do next." I glanced around, noting the carefully neutral art on the walls, the upholstered chairs that were probably only mildly comfortable. I decided to remain standing; he wasn't being antagonistic, but this was hardly a warm welcome, either.

"And that includes your scarf? You haven't made such a hopeless bungle of it that it had to be personally delivered?"

Now that was a trifle annoying. What had I done to deserve a warning shot across the bows? Still... "I finished that one, yes, and I'll tell you all about it later," I informed him before pulling a shrunken box from my pocket. "I brought you another one."

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, Granger," he huffed, enlarging the box and opening it.

"A Granger original," I said proudly as he pulled the yards of knitted fabric from the box like a magician's handkerchief trick. Simple stockinette, nothing fancy, but about twice as long as he was tall and in a soft, dark russet wool I thought would work with his skin tone instead of against it as Slytherin greens tended to do. The casting on had taken forever to do properly, but I thought I had the trick of it now. As for the rest, well, the negotiations had taken a very long time and a good deal of patience.

"It is... well done, Granger," he said, carefully looking at the garment in his hands, passing it over and around, feeling its softness, maybe looking for a flaw.

"It made me think of you." I approached slowly, deliberately. "As you can see, I thought about you a lot."

"You didn't need to. I would have been satisfied with a pound or two of that *hojicha* you keep in your kitchen."

I stopped, just beyond wand's reach. "No," I agreed, "I didn't need to. I could have sent you a pound of tea or a set of dishware or a little paperweight in the shape of Mount Fuji. I *wanted* to. I didn't have to write to you, either. But I wanted to." His was looking at me now, eyes hooded, trying to disguise their intent. I continued, "Just because I haven't *mentioned* the night you kissed me, *Severus*, doesn't mean I've forgotten about it. And if I haven't forgiven you for it, it's because I didn't think it was something you needed forgiveness *for*. If anything, I was more pissed off that you *stopped*."

He gaped at me, wordless. I resolved to have him visit a denti-wizard as soon as I could possibly convince him. A dentists' child develops a few quirks.

"Your... overtures," was the word I chose, "were a bit abrupt, yes. But you can't accuse me of making a hasty decision at this point, or giving way because of undue influence. Unless you've been doping your letters with love potions, of course." Smiling, I took the step into arm's reach. I disengaged the scarf from his hands and draped it carefully over his shoulders, around his neck. "Just so we're quite clear," I said as casually as I could, and now it was I who was avoiding *his* eyes, "I have a reply to those overtures that I'd like to give you now." I knew from experience that his neck was not the best idea, so as he had before me, I hauled on his shoulders, pulling him down to meet my mouth.

Wow.

I have no other words for it.

I have no intention of going into further detail, as this is neither *Witch Weekly* nor *The Daily Prophet*. I will only disappoint you by letting you know that no, we did *not* shag each other silly on that occasion, nor will I tell you when, where, or how we did. You might infer, however, that as we are now an old, married couple with one son, we, at some point, *have*. But back then, after we managed to recover some of our propriety, we talked, as you might expect Severus Snape and Hermione Granger to do. When we had cleared up a few points and made a few mutual decisions, we returned to the kissing. We had a lot of months to make up for, after all, which we continued to make up for in the months to follow. We went to...and were seen at...plays, concerts, and national events. We spent a number of nights at home, by which I mean both his house in Dover and the guest house in Japan. Minerva and Irma were our frequent guests and hosts. My other friends, and a few of his that I hadn't expected to exist, were introduced to the idea gradually. George still teases the two of us. A little while later, and probably with a good deal of *persuasion* from Severus (I have never asked either side), the Ministry grudgingly transferred me back to the U.K..

And then, to quote another, better author: Reader, I married him.

And contrary to all expectations...and curse-spells...we lived happily ever after.

A/Ns:

So... This was written for the 2016 sshg promptfest, in reply to dragoon811's prompt:*Hermione's knitting has always been lumpy and uneven. Deciding that the magic way is the problem, she tries the Muggle method. Snape ends up being the one to teach her, and they fall in love stitch by stitch. (Or perhaps he wants to learn to get closer to Hermione. Up to you!)* Many thanks to her for the inspiration.

There were a few different prompts I was seriously considering this year, but when it came down to it, this one had the clearest scene to start with: when Severus first sees Hermione's knitting. That bit, at least, wrote itself. And then rewrote itself when I realized that the third person POV, slanting to Severus and located in Grimmauld & Hogwarts, was dragging like a dead cow pulled by an inch worm. Hermione took charge then, scrapped a good bit of the original, rewrote the remainder, and this is the result. Perhaps a bit rougher than I might like, but definitely tighter and more interesting.

You can find all of the Japanese spirits mentioned on wiki for a casual glance. Hojicha is roasted green tea; I prefer it cold.

'Plays, concerts, and national events' is from the movie/play *A Majority of One* by Leonard Spigelgass and is used by the male lead, Asano-san, to describe courting. (I recommend the movie with Alec Guinness & Rosalind Russell if you can find it. I usually have to lie in wait to catch it on TCM.)

'Reader, I married him' is from the end of *Jane Eyre*. (I recommend that, too.)

I think that's everything, except to say, as usual, that I hope you've enjoyed this and a token in the little box below would be greatly appreciated.