

Hermione Granger and the Taciturn Shopkeeper

by PlaidPooka

Now complete. A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

One

Chapter 1 of 25

Now complete. A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Well, I seem to be back again, don't I? While I enjoy writing the books I publish, I can't seem to entirely leave the Potterverse. It's just so much fun. I've been a bit bogged down in book three of my series, and I felt a little break to have some fun was in order. A wee little plot bunny was nipping at my heels and I simply couldn't ignore him.

I'm not sure how long this fic will be. We'll see. I've decided there will be lemons, but don't expect us to jump straight into Lemontown. I'm Slytherin, through and through, and I love to make you wait. This story grew out of a couple of well-worn tropes I'm fond of. I always wanted to make my own spin on them. We should have fun, if you want to come along for the ride.

I'm posting without a beta, so any mistakes are my own.

Obligatory Disclaimer: They are not mine, I only take them out to play.

The rain did not fall so much as ooze out of the leaden sky as Hermione Granger hurried along the sidewalk in the Muggle part of London. She wondered again if she was mad to be taking classes at a non-magical University. It was far from any point safe enough to risk Apparating in front of veritable herds of non-magic folk. On most days, she was quite content with the walk from the Leaky Cauldron and back again at the end of the day. It gave her time to think about what she truly wanted to do with the rest of her life, now that she was single and owed no one and no place anything at all.

Working at the Ministry had not been the exciting career she'd hoped it would be. With Voldemort long dead, and the rest of the Death Eaters either deceased or in prison, the wizarding world was enjoying a glorious period of peacetime. The Ministry ticked along with little problem. Working under a plethora of older male wizards who didn't want a young upstart witch upsetting their ponderous applecart, Hermione did little more than tedious paperwork and never-ending filing. Her many attempts to improve the lives of minority magical beings were met with stalwart resistance from elders more than content to leave things the way they were.

When her relationship with Ronald Weasley had ended in the most spectacular row of their entire courtship, Hermione had spent several weeks in her small flat crying into assorted pints of ice cream. Eventually, she had surfaced from her frozen dairy-filled haze of sorrow and regret. The very next morning, she had walked into the Ministry with her head held high to turn in her letter of resignation.

At loose ends, her parents had encouraged her to take a few classes at a Muggle University. At first, she had balked at the idea. She was a witch and uninterested in returning to the Muggle world full-time. Her parents understood this but insisted the experience would be good for her. She could revisit her Muggle roots and have something interesting to do with her days that provided her with a little structure and a reason to leave the house.

A little structure and normality never hurt anyone, her practical mind had reassured her. With her entire life turned on its ear, a return to classwork seemed strangely comforting. She signed up for a brace of classes which interested her, one was of English folklore and the other an intro to botany, and found that she enjoyed both enormously. Though she had no plans to get a formal degree from a Muggle institution, the classes were interesting to her and the normality of schoolwork a balm to her bruised soul.

This then was how she found herself walking down a sidewalk in such dreary weather, having second thoughts about her Muggle studies. Though only three o'clock in the afternoon, the day was gray and foggy. The heavy mist falling from the heavens made it even more difficult to see more than a few feet in front of her. It was little surprise that as she hurried around a corner, her thoughts on getting to the warmth of the Leaky Cauldron, that she ran right into a tall man coming from the other side.

Indeed, the man was so much taller than she was, it was a bit like running into a wall. She practically bounced off his chest, losing her footing on the wet pavement. She might have tumbled onto her arse if it hadn't been for strong hands that gripped her by the elbows as she found her balance.

"In weather such as this," the man grumbled, irritation clear in the clipped syllables, "things would go much more smoothly if people could possibly look where they are bloody well going."

The voice was brusque, but the hands had been gentle and firm when they saved her from taking a tumble. While her first instinct had been to snap back that he had run into her equally as much as she had run into him, she bit back the quick retort. Raising her glance to his face, her apology died on her lips. A soft exclamation of surprise huffed from her mouth. Realizing her jaw was gaping open, she quickly closed it with a quiet click of teeth.

The man still holding her elbows regarded her with a slight scowl on his angular features. His eyes held an expression of impatience, but there was no hint of recognition as he stared down at her. Her glance flicked to his neck, but the man who bore a startling resemblance to Severus Snape was wearing a black Muggle turtleneck under his dark brown trenchcoat. If he had a scar from Nagini's fangs, she couldn't see it. The scowl deepened further as Hermione stood trembling, and she hastened to find her tongue as well as her manners.

"I'm so very sorry, sir," she managed to squeak out. Clearing her throat, she tried again. "I was in a hurry because of the rain, but that's no excuse to go careening into people. Are you quite all right? I didn't hurt you?"

The scowl softened immediately at her solicitous words and the voice that followed was far less sharp.

"I am fine. I'd like to think I am made stoutly enough that a tiny slip of a young woman such as yourself couldn't cause me an injury, even if you...hmm...careened into me."

A soft chuckle ended the statement, and Hermione had to use all of her wits not to gape at the poor man again. However uncanny the resemblance, this could not be her stern former potions professor. It was clear he didn't recognize her at all, and she hadn't really changed all that much in the five years since Voldemort was defeated and Severus Snape had died. Despite all the allure of such logic, she remained gobsmacked by the resemblance. The eyes were as black as those of her former professor. The hair was a bit long, hanging in slight waves just past the man's ears, but nowhere near the length Snape had worn it. There were matching streaks of gray in the dark hair at each temple, which made him look quite distinguished. The face was as angular as Snape's and the nose as large, but his features were not nearly as gaunt and laugh lines at the corners of his eyes softened his expression considerably. It was uncanny, this resemblance to a dead man. Still staring, she felt herself tremble again in reaction.

He remained steadying Hermione with a firm but gentle hand on both her elbows. One of his eyebrows rose in a distractingly familiar gesture as he felt her shiver.

"You're freezing," the man remarked, his tone of voice clipped but not unkind. He clucked his tongue at her and shook his head gently. "Little wonder with only a sweater in this rain. Come along with me then."

There was no possible way Hermione could explain to this man that she had a shielding charm on her long, form-fitting cardigan sweater. He seemed to be a Muggle. Before she was quite aware of what had happened, the tall man had tucked one of her hands into the crook of his arm and was leading her down the sidewalk. He drew her up to the stoop of a shop with a cheerful yellow and white exterior. As distracted as she was, she didn't realize what sort of shop it was until he bustled her inside.

"You work at a bookshop?" Hermione blurted with little finesse.

"Oh, it's much worse than that, my dear," he said, and then chuckled softly again. "I own this bookshop."

Motioning her to an easy chair in a comfy reading nook by the front window of the tidy shop, the man then hung his trench coat on a hook near the door and turned to the smiling young woman standing behind the counter.

"Marta, could you get my friend a cup of tea, please? The poor girl is chilled from our lovely spring weather."

"Of course, Steven. Happy to help."

Turning back to his visitor, the man walked to the reading nook and took a chair near her. He was wearing dark blue jeans along with the black turtleneck, and a pair of faded and worn black boots.

"Steven?" Hermione inquired politely.

"Of course, where are my manners? My only defense is that I am little used to having a pretty young woman pressed against me in the rain. Steven Sondheim at your service."

He leaned forward, offering his hand and clasping hers warmly for a moment before leaning back again in his chair.

"Steven Sondheim, really?" Hermione couldn't help smiling at him.

Leaning forward again, he murmured, "Not the famous one, I'm afraid."

Then he winked at her, which made a giggle burble out before she could quell it. She couldn't help it. The man was the spitting image of Severus Snape, right down to the voice, and he seemed to be flirting with her.

"My name is Hermione. Hermione Granger. Very pleased to meet you."

"Likewise, I'm certain. Hermione...hmm...it's lovely, of course, but I hardly think it gives you any right to giggle at someone else's name."

The words were teasing and his tone was light. She laughed right out loud and his answering smile made her heart skip a beat. He could not be Severus Snape. Never had she seen her frightful professor smile like that. Perhaps he was some relation? Had Snape had any brothers or even a cousin? His father had been a Muggle, so it was certainly possible Snape had non-magical relatives. Which such a strong resemblance, she rather thought his having a twin would be more likely.

He hadn't recognized her name. Why should he? Steven acted as if he had never seen her in his life, and he probably hadn't.

The tea arrived and they chatted as they sipped. He told her about running a bookshop and she spoke of her university classes and her lifelong love of reading. The

conversation turned to favorite books and they discovered they had several in common. Though she enjoyed the conversation immensely, Steven's resemblance to Snape was disquieting. It was a puzzle she wanted an answer to. Making her mind up about a suitable course of action, she excused herself, saying she had a previous engagement with a friend.

"A boyfriend?" he asked, as he walked her to the door of the shop. His tone was light, but the look in his eyes was more serious.

"No, not a boyfriend," Hermione replied with some feeling. "Er...there was a boyfriend, but we broke up several months ago."

"Sorry to hear it."

"Are you sorry?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Not particularly," he admitted bluntly. "But I'm sorry if you're sad about it."

"I was, but it's funny, I don't seem to be at all sad about it at the moment."

"Good." Lifting her hand, Steven pressed his lips to it briefly. "Until next time, then."

"Until next time," she agreed, then turned and swept out the door.

Forget slogging to the Leaky Cauldron. She had to get out of here and find out what the hell was going on. Visibility was still dismal on this dreary day, and the sidewalks were even emptier than before she had run into a man who looked far too much like Severus Snape. Hurrying towards the nearest alleyway, Hermione glanced around before slipping into it. When she was far enough into the empty alleyway to be reasonably certain she would be unseen, she made a graceful turn and disappeared with a loud pop of sound.

Two

Chapter 2 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

Unlike London, the skies above Scotland were clear, though the early spring evening remained a bit chilly. The sun was setting, making Hermione realize she'd stayed at the bookshop talking to Steven far longer than she had been aware. He'd been so easy to chat with and when he had kissed her hand, she'd had the strangest feeling in her chest. As if her heart had been replaced with a live frog which had slowly turned over.

It was a much stronger reaction than she had ever had with Ron, and she couldn't help speculating what it would be like to go to bed with the shopkeeper who looked so like her former professor. If he'd garnered such a reaction from only kissing her hand, what would it feel like to have him truly kiss her, to have his weight pressing her down into the bed as he...

Shaking her head to clear it, she put the fantasy on hold, enticing though it was. To be honest, it was more than a little disconcerting to be sexually interested in a Muggle who looked so much like someone she knew. She wasn't even certain she would be willing to date a Muggle. Not that it mattered whether someone was magical or not, that wasn't the issue. If Hermione only liked people who were like herself, she'd hang out with no one but rabid bibliophiles.

Steven was that, at least. Their literature discussion had been passionate and interesting. Hermione hadn't enjoyed a conversation that much for a very long time. That was part of the allure, she supposed. Having someone like-minded to talk to. Merlin knows she never had that with Ron.

But dating a Muggle? She was a fairly straight-forward and honest woman, direct in her dealings with others, often to the point of bluntness. If she were to date a Muggle, she'd have to tell them about being a witch before the relationship got serious. She wasn't about to go hiding any part of herself. Never again.

Not like with Ron. Letting him prattle on and on about Quidditch and Aurors, doing her best to take an interest, only to have him go cross-eyed with boredom anytime she spoke about her own interests.

Honestly, between dating Ron again and dating a magicless Muggle, she'd take the Muggle. The problem would be if he would take her. Steven seemed a rational, down to earth fellow. He mightn't be able to handle having his entire worldview turned on its ear.

Shaking her head again, more forcefully than she had before, Hermione strode through the gates of Hogwarts and walked towards the castle.

The evening meal was over and the castle quiet. Drawing her wand, she sent a silvery otter in search of Minerva. For cheerful inspiration, she needed to look no further in the past than a pair of warm lips on the back of her hand, and dark eyes that gazed straight into hers with more than a spark of interest.

The otter returned to invite her to the Headmistresses' office and the gargoyle readily slipped aside as she stepped to the moving staircase.

"Hermione!" the older witch greeted with enthusiasm. "Such a pleasant surprise."

Minerva clasped both her hand and kissed her on the cheek in welcome.

"It's good to see you, Minerva. It's been too long."

Waving Hermione through the office and into a comfy sitting room, Minerva ordered a tea tray, which appeared in a flurry of house elves. After Hermione attacked her third biscuit with a little too much enthusiasm, the kind witch ordered sandwiches as well when Hermione admitted she had skipped dinner.

"I heard about you and young Weasely. Is that the reason for your visit? Are you quite all right?"

"I'm fine, Minerva, fine," Hermione hastily reassured her, then balked a bit at the real reason for her unannounced arrival. "Can't a girl just pop by to see her friend?"

"Certainly, certainly. But generally, a friend doesn't rush so much that they forget their own dinner."

She never could hide anything from the wily woman. "Well, it's not Ron. Honestly, that was over long before we ended it. It was hard at first, and I still find myself a little at

odds now and then, but I don't really even miss him. Is that horrible of me?"

"Not at all, my dear." Minerva reached over and patted Hermione fondly on the hand. "Sometimes it happens that way, especially if the people in question have grown apart. What is bothering you, then? And no trying to duck the question, young lady, or I'll find some way to dock points from a former student."

Hermione chuckled at that before her face grew more serious. "Minerva, did Professor Snape have any brothers?"

"No, thank Merlin for that. Don't mistake me, Hermione, I quite liked Severus...at least until he...and then I liked him again when it was too late to do the lad any good. Poor, Severus. I expect he had few friends after Albus was killed."

Hermione noted that her friend worded it in a way where she didn't have to speak of Snape being the one who killed Albus. It had been a hard thing for any of the teachers to believe at the time, and after Harry cleared his name, most of the staff had returned to their attitude of gruff affection for the difficult man.

"Then for the poor lad to die alone in that dirty shack. He deserved better."

"He did. I wish I could have stayed with him, but..."

"There was a battle on. Severus understood that more than anyone. At any rate, what I meant is I'm glad only one child had to grow up in that horrible house. Not to mention I can't imagine Hogwarts would have survived two young Snapes in school at the same time."

"Trouble, was he?" Hermione asked, and then smiled.

"Constantly. And the rows between him and Potter's gang, good Merlin. Even with only one Snape, I'm shocked the walls still stand."

"It was four against one," Hermione muttered. Ever since Harry had finally confessed what he'd seen in Snape's Pensieve, Hermione's kind heart had been rather incensed on the young Severus' behalf.

"It took four of them to bring him down, the very few times they managed it. Oh, it was still terribly unfair, and I was so angry at Albus for not punishing those boys more severely, but Severus was fierce and powerful, even back then. And sneaky, good heaven's but he was cunning."

"It sounds as if you liked him, even when he was a student."

"I did," Minerva admitted, and then chuckled. "Oh, he was just as unmannered and vindictive as he was when you knew him. Hardly surprising, what with how he was raised. He was also intelligent, hilarious in a nasty sort of way, and fiercely loyal to the few friends he had. That is until Riddle got his hands on him. I was never so disappointed as when Albus told me that, and never so relieved as when Severus came back to us."

Hermione pondered this for a moment as she refilled her teacup. She had never realized any of the professors had actually cared for Snape when he'd been a student. She'd always assumed that everyone had loved Harry's father and his friends and hated their Slytherin enemy.

"If he had no siblings, did he have any cousins, maybe? On his father's side? Muggle relatives."

"No, at least, I don't think so. His father was an only child, that I am certain of. If he had any cousins, they would be quite distant relatives. Severus certainly admitted to no family besides his parents, and he wouldn't speak of them often."

"It simply doesn't make any sense," Hermione said abruptly, giving her head another shake for good measure.

"Hermione, lass, what is all this about? Why this sudden interest in poor Severus?"

As succinctly as possible, Hermione explained her literal run-in with Snape's doppelganger.

"Ah, I see now. It has to be a coincidence, lass. We were all upset when Severus died, and so close to the end of the war when he would have finally been free. Sometimes when we miss people, we see what we want to see."

"It wasn't like that, Minerva. He's the spitting image. At first, I thought it really was Severus. When I ran into him, he was standing there scowling at me, with one eyebrow raised, like he was about to deduct points for manhandling a professor. It wasn't until after he smiled at me and flirted a little that I wondered if Severus had a Muggle brother. Even then, I kept waiting for him to recognize me or something."

Minerva sputtered around a mouthful of tea. "The Muggle man flirted with you?"

"Yes...a bit. He was actually rather dashing for a slightly older man."

"Slightly older my knickers," huffed the older witch. "If you mistook him for Severus, he must be a couple of decades your senior."

Hermione shrugged her shoulders in reply. Age had never been a priority for her when it came to dating. While she remained embarrassed about her schoolgirl crush on Gilderoy Lockhart, it had nothing to do with the difference between their ages.

"Well," Minerva continued with a sigh, "that puts paid to any hope that your Muggle man is somehow Severus."

"What do you mean?"

"Severus couldn't have flirted to save his soul."

"Was he not interested in romance then?"

"Oh, he had the interest, but not the ability. He was an unmannered heathen when he arrived at Hogwarts. Lucius Malfoy took him under his wing and taught him enough to keep the child from being hexed every other day, but that association led him to the Death Eaters. But flirting? Absolutely not. I'd bet my Gringotts account that the poor lad was unicorn bait when he died. I doubt very much that he'd ever so much as kissed anyone."

"Really? But...I've heard so many stories...about..."

"Dark revels?" Minerva added when Hermione's voice trailed off. "Naughty stories written by and for imbeciles. There was nothing sexy about the Death Eaters. Pain, torture, and murder were all they were about."

"Then Steven really can't be Severus, can he?"

Hermione didn't realize how sad her voice had sounded or how wet her eyes had become until Minerva scooted closer to her on the small divan and enfolded her into a warm hug.

"I'm afraid not." Minerva withdrew from the embrace and conjured a dainty handkerchief to wipe at her own eyes. "I wish he was, I really do, but I think it has to be an uncanny coincidence."

"They never found his body."

"True, but I think that's more a cause for sorrow than hope. We searched everywhere. I'm convinced someone did something despicable to Severus' body. Either left it on a moor somewhere to be eaten by crows or transfigured it into a stick or a stone and left it lying somewhere in the mud."

The kind woman dissolved into real tears then, and Hermione pulled her tightly into her arms. Tears ran silently down her face as she thought about having a friend's body treated with such disrespect.

They calmed themselves and refilled their teacups. When Hermione prepared to leave, Minerva returned to the subject.

"You'll be careful, won't you my dear?"

"Careful? About what?"

"I'm not certain getting into a relationship with a Muggle who looks like a former professor is the healthiest idea in the world."

"And dating Ron Weasley was?"

As Hermione flew through the floo on the way to her cozy flat, the echo of Minerva's laughter followed her.

Three

Chapter 3 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Things begin to move along, but don't expect it to be all smooth sailing. :) Big thanks to everyone kind enough to review. As before, I'm working beta-free these days, so any mistakes are my own.

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With her classes meeting three times a week, and Hermione having run into Steven on a Friday, it was Monday before she caught a glimpse of the man again. While she had considered visiting the bookshop over the weekend, she was afraid it would make her seem desperate or something. No, it would be much better to drop by on her way home from class. Much more casual, or so she had told herself over a weekend that seemed to last forever.

On her way to class, she peeked in the big window of the cheerful shop, pausing on the sidewalk as she caught sight of Steven. He stood behind the counter, standing close to the girl, Marta, as they went over some sort of paperwork. Marta looked up at him, her mouth moved and then she grinned. Steven threw back his head and laughed so loudly that Hermione could hear him out in the street.

Suddenly uncomfortable, and more than a little worried he'd look out the window and catch her gaping at him, Hermione gave her head a small shake and hurried on her way. It was only a few more blocks to the University, and she had a class to catch.

The folklore class was interesting, but her mind wandered. More than once her imagination treated her to the memory of a man that looked identical to Snape laughing with abandon. An amused snort, or a low and slightly nasty chuckle, is all she'd ever heard her former professor engage in. It had been shocking to see that visage shaken by mirth.

It wasn't the only thing on her mind, though. Marta. Did they have more of a relationship than mere coworkers? Surely he wouldn't have kissed Hermione's hand in front of the young woman if he was in an intimate relationship with his employee. And wasn't the girl a little too young for him?

She snorted at that and then blushed that she had made such a ridiculous noise in the middle of a university lecture. Her professor, an older woman with hair that would rival any Weasley's, ignored the rude noise and carried on.

Too young for him. The girl was likely only about five years younger than Hermione herself. Not that big a difference, to be sure. But Hermione determined Marta was indeed too young for Steven, even so.

She'd give anything to make him laugh like that.

After her botany class, Hermione strolled slowly down the sidewalk towards the bookshop. Her pace slowed further as she neared it. So nervous was she, that she nearly decided to go home instead. The memory of a weekend spent wondering and impatient at last turned her feet towards the door of the shop. She'd been a Gryffindor in school and fought in a war. A Muggle girl wasn't going to frighten her away from seeing Steven again.

No matter how pretty she was.

For the first time, Hermione noticed the name of the shop, painted in a flowing, elegant script at the top of the big window. Persephone's Books. An odd name. She wondered why he had called the shop that.

The small bell on the door tinkled as she entered the shop. Marta was once again behind the counter, and the girl smiled brightly at her as she entered.

"Miss Granger, how nice to see you again."

"Please, call me Hermione," she replied, and couldn't help but smile back at the cheerful girl.

"And you must call me Marta. Damn! Oops, sorry," she said, and blushed about the small profanity. "I'm not supposed to swear in front of the clientele."

"Not to worry. I'm not easily offended."

"It's just that Steven will be so sorry to have missed you. He's gone to pick up a shipment, and I'm not certain how long it will take."

"Oh," Hermione muttered, suddenly deflated at this news.

For some reason, this made Marta smile even wider. "He really enjoyed talking to you the other evening. All weekend it's been 'Hermione said this' and 'Hermione said that.' I was hoping you would stop by again. I haven't seen Steven this...er...interested in a new acquaintance in a long time. It's adorable."

The kind girl's words made Hermione blush slightly, and with sudden clarity, she realized that Marta was more of an ally than a rival. She couldn't stop the slightly goofy grin that spread across her face.

"Well, I had rather a hard time not thinking about our conversation as well," she admitted.

"Excellent!" Marta accented the statement with a brief fist pump. "I don't know how long he'll be away, but you are welcome to hang out...you know...if you've no pressing engagements."

"What? Spend time browsing in a bookstore? What torture!" The goofy grin was back, and Marta's answering smile was equally as wide.

For the next hour, Hermione happily wandered through the store. She enjoyed Muggle literature equally as well as wizarding and soon had a small pile of purchases. Marta rang them up and even gave Hermione her employee discount.

The girl sighed as she tucked the books into a yellow bag with the shop's name emblazoned on one side. "He'll be so sorry to have missed you. You will stop by again?"

"I will," Hermione promised.

"It's just that he doesn't date much, or at all really, and I'd so like for him to go out with someone nice."

"He doesn't date? Why? Bad breakup or something?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. The truth is, I don't know if he's ever been in a serious relationship." At Hermione's shocked expression, Marta quickly continued. "Don't get me wrong, he's lovely. Smart as a whip, funny, and kind of cute for someone older than my dad. He just, well, he doesn't seem to know what he's doing around women."

"So, I'm going to have to make the first move, then."

"Yes. First move, second move, and maybe all the moves."

They were laughing when the bell on the door tinkled and Steven swept in, carrying a large box. Hermione turned towards him, her laugh turning into a happy smile.

"Hermione! What a pleasant surprise. Let me put this in the back and I'll be right with you."

He was wearing another turtleneck, this one a dark green, which suited his coloring. It did nothing to hide his form as he walked towards the back of the shop. Broad shoulders narrowing to slim hips. Biceps pronounced as he carried the heavy box easily. No, not near as gaunt as Snape had been. Her chest did the frog roll again. What was it about a man carrying something heavy that so easily made a girl sit up and take notice?

"Told you," Marta leaned towards her to whisper. "He's lovely."

She had no time to reply as Steven reentered the room and walked up to her. His eyes noted the bag containing her purchases.

"I trust you gave her a discount," he said to Marta.

"Of course, I did, Steven."

"I see you are on your way out, Hermione, but perhaps I could persuade you to stay for a cup of tea?"

"I'll get it," Marta said cheerfully before Hermione could even answer.

The next thing she knew, Hermione was once again sitting with Steven having a lovely discussion about *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*, as well as the trend of all the monster classics that had come out over the past few years. Marta had slipped into another room and was nowhere to be seen. An ally for certain.

"Well," Steven eventually said with a small sigh. "I really shouldn't keep you any longer."

He walked her back to the counter to get her bag of books. He hadn't said a word about seeing her again, though she was convinced he was as interested in exploring a possible relationship as she was. There had to be a way she could see him more regularly without looking as if she was hanging about his shop mooning over him. The last thing she wanted to do was move too fast and frighten him off. A moment's thought, and she had the answer.

"Steven, I wanted to ask you a favor, actually."

"What can I do for you?" he asked curiously, leaning toward her slightly.

She balked for a second, as her brain came up with a sudden list, every point of which was completely inappropriate and decidedly naughty.

"My friend I told you about, we study together for our folklore class, but it's awkward because we live in such different parts of town." She kept the pronouns vague on purpose, not certain which of her friends she could rope into pretending to be her classmate for a little while. "Your shop is so close to the university. I was wondering if we might study here, if it's not too inconvenient?"

"But, of course," Steven said readily. "We have a small room in the back where patrons often come to read and study. Your friend and you are welcome to make use of it anytime."

"Thank you. That's very kind."

"It's nothing. Oh, hold on a moment. I almost forgot I have something for you."

Ducking around the counter to lean down and grasp something, he soon returned, holding out a book. It was old, the thick deep red cover faded and cracked. The embossed title and simple drawing were difficult to read.

"A small present," he murmured as she took the book from his hands.

"Oh, you found it!" Hermione smiled happily as she gazed at the copy of *Daddy Longlegs*."

"The other night, you sounded so disappointed that you had lost your own copy. I thought..."

Hermione set the book on the counter, wrapped one hand around the back of the tall man's neck, and tugged him down slightly as she rose on her tiptoes. She kissed him right on the lips. Not a passionate kiss, but not quite chaste either. Her lips were open and warm on his own.

He froze, his lips tight and unresponsive beneath her mouth. Afraid she had made a huge mistake, Hermione drew back to look at him. Steven's eyes were slow to open, and they widened with astonishment as he stared at her. His lips were slightly pursed and he remained frozen in place.

Words spun through her head. Someone saying something about a man who had never been kissed. Had Steven never been kissed, then? Well, if that was the case, he deserved better for his first time than that brief meeting of lips. His irises were far too dark for her to see if his pupils had widened with desire. Hermione moved her free hand up to touch his throat and felt the racing of his pulse. Not unmoved, then, only unsure.

Putting light pressure on the back of his neck, she tugged him down far enough that she didn't have to strain upward. This time, he bent to her far more easily. Again she placed her mouth to his. Her mouth open and moving, nibbling softly on his lower lip and then teasing the seam of his own with the point of her tongue. His lips remained still, but they softened under the gentle onslaught. She could feel his body tremble slightly under her hands.

When she withdrew, he looked even more gobsmacked than the first time she had kissed him. He slowly straightened, still staring.

"Thank you...for the book...it was very thoughtful." Hermione's voice was low and sultry, her thoughts slow to take form in words.

"You are most welcome," he murmured, the sound low and rough.

It caused a shiver of anticipation to shoot down her spine and reside in a more intimate spot.

As Hermione gathered her purchases and set the gift from Steven carefully into the bag, Steven seemed to find his equilibrium.

"When is your next class?" he asked softly.

"Wednesday."

"Perhaps after you and your friend are finished studying, you might...hmm...would you care to have dinner...with me?"

"Yes." She placed a hand on one of his lovely biceps and gave it a little squeeze. "I would love to."

He walked her to the door of the shop, and once again he clasped her hand, raising it to his lips. This time, his lips were slightly open as he kissed her skin, his mouth hot and damp on the back of her hand. The frog in her chest rolled again and she could feel her toes begin to curl.

"Until Wednesday," he said.

"Until Wednesday."

Stepping out into the street, she hurried down the sidewalk, a thousand thoughts whirling in her head.

Four

Chapter 4 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: I'm having big fun writing this. Yesterday, I wrote chapter 3, 4, and most of 5. That's more words in one day than I've done in a while.

I'm working without a beta, so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, I only take them out to play.

So distracting were those strange, one-sided kisses, that Hermione was halfway to the Leaky Cauldron before she remembered who had been telling her about a man who had never been kissed. As her mind made the connection, she stumbled and then staggered to a nearby bench to gratefully sink down and give her suddenly weak knees a rest.

The odds of Severus Snape having a Muggle doppelganger were astronomical. The odds of both men having never been kissed were nonsensical.

"Sweet buggering Merlin," she whispered. "I don't know how, but I do think that has to be Severus."

How could it have happened? How could Severus have been left dying in the Shrieking Shack, and then turn up with a Muggle life and no memory of who he had been before? Was he tricking her for some reason? Pretending not to remember her for some wicked plan of his own?

No, that couldn't be it. She remembered the sight of him laughing and the endearingly honest reaction he'd had to her kisses. Besides, Snape had never been any sort of actor. His emotions had always been clear to see on that stark face. Minerva was right. He had only rudimentary manners, let alone the acting ability to pull this kind of scheme. He'd been a good spy due to his ability to occlude, not for his skills as an actor.

What a mess. Because her feelings were already too involved in the matter, Hermione no longer trusted her own instincts. Every fiber of her being shouted that Steven was somehow Severus Snape, but could she trust her own judgment? She needed someone else to observe him and help her figure this mess out. Minerva? No. The kind witch had wept at the thought of Severus' body left lying in the mud somewhere. Minerva might be the best person to figure out if Steven was who she thought he was, but it simply wasn't fair to get the woman's hopes up. Not when Hermione could be very wrong about the situation.

She sat and considered her options. It wasn't long before she came up with a plan. There was, after all, someone she knew who would recognize Severus almost as easily as Minerva.

Jumping up from the bench, Hermione hurried the last few blocks to the Leaky Cauldron. Once inside the safety of the wizarding inn, she sent her Patronus off with a fairly breathless message. The reply came almost at once. A brief shake of her head and she strode with determination to the floo.

When she stumbled out on the other side, strong hands gripped her upper arms to help steady her.

"Hey, Hermione," Harry said. "Why the sudden visit? Anything wrong?"

"No, Harry. At least, nothing urgent. I need to speak to you about something important, though. That is if I'm not interrupting."

"Of course not. You know you're always welcome."

Ginny popped her head out of the kitchen. "Hey, Hermione! I'll be right out. I'm just getting a tea tray together."

"In that case, I'd better borrow your loo. I seem to be drinking way too much tea lately."

"Would you rather have a butterbeer," Harry asked, as she headed for the nearby facilities.

"That would be lovely. Thanks."

"I'll tell Ginny."

When she returned to the living room of Harry and Ginny's cottage, she gratefully accepted the glass of butterbeer after settling onto the sofa between her two friends.

"Where are the kids?"

"Having dinner with mom and dad," Ginny answered. "They take them a couple times a week, as well as for the odd weekend. Mom just dotes on them. Say, Hermione, I heard you tell Harry you needed to speak with him. If you need some privacy, I've got work to do in the back garden."

"No, stay, please. I'd like your input as well."

"It's not about my dunderheaded brother, is it?"

"No, it's nothing to do with Ron. And you don't have to call him names on my account. We really didn't suit each other all that well."

What's this about then?" Harry asked.

As quickly as possible, Hermione filled them in on Steven and how she had come to meet him. While she didn't exactly hide the fact that she was interested in the man, she stopped short of telling them that she had kissed him. By the time she had finished, Harry's eyes were round as saucers behind his glasses.

"Merlin, Hermione. How could a Muggle look so much like Severus? And you made it sound like you thought it was nothing more than a weird coincidence until today. What changed?"

No. She wasn't going to talk about kissing him. That was private. Nor did she want to spread the information that Minerva considered Snape unicorn bait. That was also private, and her surly ex-professor wouldn't have thanked her for spreading the rumor.

"I can't really explain it, Harry. It's just a hunch. The truth is, I can't be certain that my suspicions are anything more than wishful thinking."

"Ah, you need another pair of eyes." Ginny was always quick on the uptake. "But which one of us? And how are you going to work us into the situation?"

"Nothing easier. I've already arranged for me and a classmate to study in his bookshop after class. One of you could pose as my classmate and go with me, that is if you don't mind."

"Muggle university, Muggle class, Muggle bookshop, and Muggle Muggle." Ginny ticked off each point on the fingers of one hand. "Better take Harry with you. He'll know what he's doing."

How would Steven react to a handsome young man of her own age? He had been so pleased to see her again, and so adorably lost when she kissed him.

"I don't know, Ginny. Maybe it would be better if my study partner was a woman."

"Nonsense. Take Harry. The last thing you need is some witch acting all weird in Muggleland." Ginny paused for a moment, looking at Hermione's face. "You like him!"

The exclamation came complete with a pointing finger and a gigantic smile.

"Oh, Merlin's knickers," Hermione muttered before hiding her blushing face behind both hands.

"You do. You fancy this Steven fellow. No wonder you want to take me instead of Harry. But it's no use. You have to take Harry. I simply can't pass for a Muggle, no matter how you dress me up."

"Do you really fancy him?" Harry continued when she nodded slowly without removing her hands from her face. "Even if he is nothing more than a Muggle man who resembles Snape?"

Again she nodded, and then managed to put her hands back in her lap and look at her friend.

"What if he ends up being Severus? What if he has amnesia or something, and he gets his memory back? You know I cared about him Hermione, there were a ton of reasons to admire him, but he wasn't exactly a nice man. What if it's him and we get him back? Would you still fancy him?"

Thinking of a pair of warm lips on the skin of her hand and hot breath ghosting over her knuckles, Hermione dropped her eyes to look at the table and slowly nodded again. "I rather think I would."

"All right," Ginny began, "what if we find out he is Snape, but we can't do anything about his condition. Still fancy him?"

"Then he's Steven again, and I already know I...er...fancy him."

"But he's a Muggle!" Ginny blurted.

"That doesn't bother me, except for being worried he won't be able to accept my being a witch. I won't keep that from him. Not if we end up having a relationship."

"You couldn't," Harry agreed. "Not when it caused so much trouble between his parents. If it is Snape, he might get his memories back at some point, and then he'd be furious. Not the sort of reaction you want in a boyfriend."

"Can you imagine?" Hermione shook her head slightly. "It would be ghastly. He'd never forgive that. No, whether he's a Muggle or a Wizard, I will have to tell him the truth."

"You needn't do it right away," Ginny said. "Yes, by all means, tell him before the wedding, but there's nothing wrong with letting him get to know you a little first."

"Wedding? Honestly, Gin, we haven't even had our first date yet. Carriage before the thestral ring any bells?"

"Oh, I know. I was just speculating. But you really do have to take Harry. I'm useless with Muggle things."

"But what if Steven gets the wrong idea? I don't want him seeing Harry and making any crazy assumptions."

"So," Harry said, "you must think he fancies you as well, if you're worried about it."

"I do think he fancies me, at least I hope so. He asked me out to dinner after our fake study session. I don't know why I'm so worried. He asked if my study partner was a boyfriend and I already told him they were just a friend."

"He fancies you," Harry said with a quick nod of his head. "A man doesn't ask about boyfriends if he isn't interested. Not to worry, Hermione. We'll study, we'll act like we are strictly friends, and it'll be fine. But about this study group, what exactly is it that I'm supposed to be taking a class in?"

"English folklore."

"Great, whether he's Steven or Snape, he'll think I'm a complete dunderhead. I don't know anything about folklore."

"It's all right, Harry." Grabbing her handbag, Hermione found her shrunken textbook and enlarged it with a flick of her wand. "You don't have to know all of it to fake a study session or two. I'm ahead on my reading. Take this and read chapter four, and that will give us enough to talk about."

"Hermione Granger, ahead on her reading, what a shock!" Harry teased as he took the volume from her hand.

"Cut it out, you. Read the chapter and meet me on Wednesday at four thirty. If that's all right? Is that too early?"

"No, it's fine. I can get off work a little early. Things have been quiet these days, and the Aurors don't have as much to do as they used to. Where shall I meet you?"

"It would be best if you met me at the University. Then we could walk to the shop together, as if we've just come from class."

After giving Harry precise directions to where they should meet, Hermione flooed to her flat. It was dinnertime, and she didn't want to impose on her friends any longer, not when they had a night free from the children.

Making a sandwich for her own supper, Hermione wondered where Steven would take her on Wednesday night. What should she wear? She had no idea where he would choose to take her. She didn't want to dress too fancy, but she couldn't go in jeans and a t-shirt either. A simple cotton sundress, maybe. With a cardigan over it, in case the evening was chilly. Not too dressy, not too casual.

What is Steven truly was Severus? Would he still fancy her if he regained his memory? Minerva had said Snape had the interest in romance, just not the skills. Even so, would he want a woman so much younger than him, who he used to teach in school?

There was no use in wondering. She'd have to jump those hurdles when she got to them. Steven seemed to like her, and that was enough to be going on with for the present. She slipped into bed a little early, but it was a long time before sleep claimed her. The memory of a couple of rather one-sided kisses made her restless.

Well, if the man was Severus Snape, no one could say he'd never been kissed now. For some reason, that thought was comforting, and Hermione finally dozed off.

Five

Chapter 5 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: The writing of this fic is buzzing right along. I finished chapter eight last night and am raring to go on chapter nine, so I ought to be able to keep up the daily updates for a while. Honestly, I'm having so much fun, the fic is practically writing itself. Oh, and if you wonder when this bus pulls into Lemontown, chapter eight gives us a good start. ;)

Thank you for reading, and sloppy kisses to those who have reviewed. No beta, so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, I only take them out to play.

It seemed that Wednesday would never come. Then when it finally arrived, her classes dragged on and on. At last, she was free and practically skipped on her way to meet Harry.

She'd worn a feminine floral print sundress with a rust colored cardigan hanging unbuttoned over it. The color brought out the slight copper tint to her eyes and hair. She'd even worn a little makeup, though she kept a light touch with it.

Harry was more casually dressed in jeans, a polo shirt, and a light jacket. He had a knapsack full of books slung over one shoulder, which Hermione thought was a nice touch.

Walking with Harry, she tried to prepare him for what he was about to see.

"I'm telling you, it's not like he looks a bit like Snape, he looks identical. It's going to be a shock."

"I'll be fine, Hermione. I am an Auror after all. We have to hide what we think constantly."

At last, they were walking through the door with the little bell heralding their arrival. Steven was alone behind the counter, and when he saw her smiling at him in greeting, his entire face lit up. It made it especially astonishing when he caught sight of her companion and his expression dropped into a slight scowl.

Refusing to do anything but soldier on, Hermione strode up to the counter and introduced her friend from class. Steven nodded at Harry brusquely, but neither offered his hand nor met his eye. Instead, he seemed strangely fascinated by Harry's knapsack, staring at it through the introduction.

Steven's gaze softened slightly as he dragged his eyes off of the book bag to look at her, but his manner remained short and his voice was nothing like the warm tones she was used to.

"The reading room is in the back. You and your *friend* may make use of it. I have work to do."

As Hermione and Harry walked past the counter, she could have sworn Steven reached his hand out as if to touch Harry's knapsack before the scowling man yanked his hand back.

Once they were ensconced in the small reading room, after Harry had taken the folklore book out of his bag for pretense's sake, he gave her a hard look.

"That isn't a Muggle who looks like Snape, that's Snape," he hissed.

Sneaking a peek out the open door of the reading room, Hermione could see Steven still standing at the counter. He was glaring at some paperwork in his hands, but he didn't seem to be actually reading it.

"Look at him," Harry whispered. "Even as a Muggle, the man still hates me."

"He doesn't hate you, Harry. He's just..."

"So jealous he can't see straight?" Harry murmured, and then giggled at her. "No doubt now that he fancies you. I swear that man could scowl for England."

"How do you know it's Severus?" Hermione kept her voice low. She didn't want Steven, or Severus, or whoever he was to overhear them.

"Aside from the obvious? Trust me, Hermione, I know, but I don't want to explain it here. Pop round after the two of you have dinner and I'll explain then. What I want to know is how the man got turned into a Muggle, and why he can't remember anything."

At that precise moment, there was a soft explosion from the other room. The two friends peered out of the open door to see that one of the fluorescent bulbs in a fixture hanging over the counter had exploded, raining glass down over the countertop and onto the floor.

"Fucking hell, not again!" Steven snapped loudly. "Bloody electric system."

Shaking bits of the thin glass from his hair, Steven strode towards a small broom closet near the reading room.

"So, what did you think about those legends of the Woodwose, Harry?" Hermione asked in a normal tone of voice.

"Great hairy brutes, weren't they?" Harry easily caught the bait. No wonder he was such a good Auror. "What I don't understand is why they carried a staff when they were big and strong enough to drive people away by hand."

That was enough folklore to get Steven back out to the counter where he began sweeping up the glass with a broom and dustpan.

"Harry," she whispered, "I don't think Steven is a Muggle at all. He was out there, seething with emotions, and then the light bulb exploded. Remind you of anything?"

"Of course it does. I wasn't the only Mugglborn that had strange things happen before I knew what was going on. So, he hasn't gone Muggle, he's just forgotten he's a wizard. Damn, Hermione. What are we going to do?"

"I don't know, Harry. We'll figure something out. Right now, I'm going to go see if he's all right."

With stories about braving the dragon in its cave running through her head, Hermione left the reading room and warily approached Steven.

"Steven, what's wrong?" she asked softly.

"It's just a broken light bulb, I assure you I can manage." Setting the broom against the counter, he turned to face her. "Listen, Miss Granger, I'm afraid I will have to cancel our date this evening. Something has come up."

"But I was so looking forward to it," she said with all honesty. "If you can't make it tonight, perhaps tomorrow evening?"

"I don't think so, no."

This would never do. The poor man wouldn't even meet her eye. With all the bravery in her gallant heart, Hermione stepped up to him and took both of his hands in her own. He blinked at her, his expression openly showing her his unhappiness.

"Steven, what's wrong? Please tell me."

He blinked again, and then the scowl fell back across his face. He attempted to take his hands away, but she held firm.

"I cannot go to dinner with you. Perhaps your young *friend* would escort you," he snapped.

"No, I don't think so. His wife is at home alone with the kids, and she's my friend too. I don't want to get her miffed at me because I kept her husband away for too long."

"His wife?"

The scowl melted away, and now the strangest expression came over his face. Hermione decided it was a mixture of confusion and hope with a dash of yearning. The frog in her chest rolled over again. Releasing his hands, Hermione put both her palms on the sides of his face and tugged his head down until their foreheads were touching.

"I don't want to go to dinner with Harry. I don't want to go to dinner with anyone else. I want to go to dinner with you, Steven."

Then she kissed him. He was too shocked to respond much, but his mouth immediately softened beneath her own and when his lips parted with a soft gasp, she took advantage shamelessly and slipped her tongue into his mouth. After a moment, she released him.

His eyes were huge and filled with heat. His lips remained open slightly as he gazed at her. His mouth closed and he swallowed so hard she could see his Adam's apple bob with the motion of it.

"Hermione, I'm a complete ass. I've behaved terribly to you and your friend. Can you please forgive me?"

"On one condition."

"Yes?"

"You take me to dinner. If not tonight, anytime is fine."

He smiled at her then, and she realized that she'd missed that smile terribly.

"I'm free tonight...if you wish," he said softly, looking slightly embarrassed.

"Good. Steven, I get the idea you aren't much-used to...er...dating."

A soft, self-deprecating snort and he shook his head slightly. "No, Hermione, I'm not at all used to dating."

"I've done it before," she said, and then grinned at him a little. "I'll guide you around the curves, I promise. But you have to learn to tell me when something is bothering you. I'm not a mind reader."

"I will try."

The look he gave her was so affectionate, Hermione wanted desperately to kiss him again. She held back. This was all so new to the man, she didn't want to go too fast and risk unsettling him again. He must have seen her glance at his mouth, because he leaned toward her, and for a second she thought Steven would kiss her. He wasn't quite that brave yet, but he pressed his lips briefly to her forehead. It was a start. She'd have him snogging before too long, she was certain of it.

He escorted her back to the reading room, where he offered his hand to Harry and apologized for his earlier lack of manners. Even as emotionally upset as he had been, there was certainly nothing cowardly about the man.

When Steven turned back to his clean up, after taking another confused look at Harry's knapsack, Harry goggled at her.

"You kissed Professor Snape!" he hissed, and then he grinned at her.

"No, I kissed Steven," she whispered back.

"Same thing," he said with a shrug.

"Harry, what the hell are we going to do?"

"I don't know, Hermione. All I've learned from the Aurors about memory issues is that we are never to try to do anything about it ourselves. We're to take the victim straight to St. Mungo's."

"We can't do that with Steven. He'd freak."

"That's not the only issue, though that's bad enough. With memory stuff, you have to be careful not to do much to try to jog the memory. It's often best to let things happen naturally. Too much too soon can throw the victim into shock, even into catatonia."

"We can't simply leave him as a Muggle. It's not right."

"I agree. But we have to be careful, and we have to move slowly. For his sake. It's dangerous, Hermione. He hasn't recognized you at all?"

"Not a bit." She sighed and stared at the open folklore book. "We're going to need help. I don't think we can handle this on our own."

"Can you talk to Minerva tomorrow? She might have some good ideas."

"I'm free all day tomorrow. But is that wise? She really cared for Severus. I hate getting her hopes up when he might never remember who she is."

"Nonsense. Minerva will be thrilled he's alive. She won't care that he's living as a Muggle."

"I expect you are correct."

Worried that their continued whispering would be misconstrued by the touchy man at the counter, the two friends returned to talking about chapter four. Peeking occasionally through the open door, they could see that Steven seemed to have returned to normal. He'd cleaned up the mess from the shattered bulb and cheerfully assisted the trickle of customers who came into the shop.

When they'd decided they'd pretended to study long enough to look good, Harry took his leave. Steven bid him goodbye pleasantly enough, though Hermione could see him glance at her friend's bookbag again. What was that about, anyway? She supposed Harry would fill her in later, but it was difficult to wait patiently. At least she had her date with Steven to distract her.

When Marta arrived to take over the counter, Steven tucked Hermione's hand in the crook of his arm, much like he had the first evening they had met.

"Shall we?" he asked softly.

"Oh, yes."

Arm in arm, they walked through the door of the shop.

Six

Chapter 6 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Hello awesome readers! I'm afraid you'll have to wait one more chapter to solve the mystery of Harry's knapsack, but I trust this chapter will be suitably distracting. I'm having such fun writing this! I've already finished chapter eleven, and ready to start on twelve. I am updating pretty quickly, so make sure you don't miss a chapter. Sloppy kisses to everyone who has taken a moment to review.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, I only take them out to play.

Hermione was a trifle shocked when Steven led her over to a navy blue car parked on the street, unlocked it with the click of a button on some device held in his hand, and opened the passenger side door for her like a gentleman. As he settled in behind the wheel, she recovered enough to find her voice.

"You drive?" She tried to keep the shock out of her voice but was only moderately successful.

"But of course." He pulled the car out into traffic with grace and skill. "I may not have much experience with...hmm...dating, but I assure you I am not pants at everything."

"I never thought you were," she hastened to reassure him. "I was only a little surprised. I don't drive at all."

"Really? I find that rather difficult to believe. Why did you never learn?"

"Oh, I don't know. When the time came, I was very busy with schoolwork and such. It never seemed all that important."

Steven accepted this with no further question and she was glad of it. There was no way to explain to him that witches had other ways to travel, or that when she might have been learning to drive, she was embroiled in a wizarding war.

"I could teach you sometime. If you'd like."

"I would enjoy that, Steven. Thank you."

By the time this conversation was finished, they had arrived at the restaurant, Lalibela.

"Oh," she breathed, as he tucked her hand into the crook of his arm and guided her inside. "It's an Ethiopian restaurant."

"I hope that's all right. Do you like Ethiopian food?"

"Never had it, but I've always wanted to try it."

"Well, it will be a little adventure for you then."

The place was fairly casual. With its cream-colored walls and shiny woodwork, it looked more like a nice pub than an ethnic restaurant. The aroma of the food was spicy and exotic, making her mouth water.

The food wasn't the only thing making her mouth water. Severus sat across from her at a small, intimate table for two. He had on another one of his turtleneck sweaters, this one a deep burgundy. His neck must be badly scarred by Nagini's fangs if he so consistently covered it up. Though she felt sorry he felt it necessary, she wasn't complaining. The soft knit clung to his form, showing off every muscle of his trim frame. She'd never been attracted to the big, body-building type, but Steven's more lithe frame was very distracting indeed.

"Will you trust me to order for you?" he inquired politely.

A little overwhelmed by a menu filled with things she had never heard of, Hermione readily agreed. While she would never allow any man to make all her decisions for her, it was rather sexy to have Steven order for them both with quiet assurance.

He was certainly not the unmannered heathen Minerva had described. Was this quietly charming man the result of Lucious Malfoy's work, or had his manners improved in his years living as Steven the Muggle? He still wore his emotions on his sleeve, as he demonstrated earlier in the evening. But he was so strikingly different than her former professor, it was difficult to remember they were the same man.

She never would have imagined the fastidious Severus Snape going to a restaurant where one ate with one's hands. When the food arrived, he did exactly that, with a grace and tidiness she never would have imagined. Their food arrived on one gigantic communal plate, an equally large flatbread with different piles of delicious smelling food scattered over it. One broke off a bite of bread, scooped up a bit of something, and popped the lot in one's mouth. Hermione was not quite as neat as her companion. It was little wonder. She was constantly distracted by his strong hands as they ate, as well as his lips as he delicately cleaned off the tip of a finger.

In her defense, Steven seemed equally distracted by her. His dark eyes watched her bring her fingers to her mouth to consume another spicy morsel. No, she would never have thought that Snape would pick a restaurant like this. Instead of it being messing and embarrassing, as she had feared it would be, the meal was romantic, erotic even. As Steven slipped another finger into his mouth and sucked gently, she felt a sensual shiver that ran all the way to her toes.

The conversation was light until the meal was nearly at an end. Over a last drink, Steven grew a little pensive.

"What is it?" she asked softly.

He looked at her with an expression of slight anxiety. "You read me far too easily. Marta always says that I can keep a secret like nobody's business but I can't hide my emotions to save my soul."

"Nothing wrong with that," she reassured him. "It's rather nice for a girl to have a good idea where she stands with someone."

He chuckled at that. "How kind of you to turn my fault into a virtue. Please feel free to do so with all of my many faults."

"Not so many, I dare say," Hermione murmured.

The man actually lowered his eyes and blushed slightly at that. The sight of Severus Snape blushing made her want to snog him silly and give him something to truly blush about. She'd never really been the aggressor in a potential relationship, if aggressor was the right word. Never set out to woo a man. Settled for dropping hints and trying to look good. It never occurred to her that being the instigator would be such a turn on for her. She wiggled in her seat a little as she waited for Steven to speak.

"There's something I should tell you about myself...hmm...if we are going to see each other. But I find myself...concerned."

Reaching out, she covered his hand in her own and squeezed gently. She knew all too well what he wanted to confess. A past obliterated. Life memories which only went back five years. There was no way she could tell him that she already knew. She was unwilling to make her own confession this soon in the relationship as well, and she had much more to hide.

"Steven, we aren't in a hurry here. The truth is, we don't know each other that well yet. If we did, we never would have had that misunderstanding earlier." He blushed again at that, but she ignored it and continued. "I have things I should tell you as well...before things get too serious. I'd feel better if we got to know each other a little better before I went rattling all my skeletons out of the closet. Why don't we carry on for now, and when you feel comfortable telling me about yourself, I'll be ready to listen."

"You are really the most amazing creature I have ever met," he murmured.

"I find you rather amazing as well."

They left the restaurant shortly after that. Hermione's head spun for a moment when he insisted on driving her home. There were so many things that could go wrong, and a sudden introduction to magical events could have serious results for the Wizard who had lost his memory. In the end, she relented. Her flat was on a Muggle street at the edge of a wizarding neighborhood. It should be safe enough.

He walked her to her door and then stood staring down at her, a slight look of anxiety on his dear face.

"Steven, have you ever kissed anyone before?"

"Not until you," came the whispered reply.

"Why don't you give it a try?" she whispered back.

"I don't know what I'm doing." A frustrated huff of breath.

"It's not brain surgery, Steven. Certainly, it takes a little practice, like anything worth doing. But it's kind of like practicing to eat chocolate cake."

He leaned down, so slowly, stopping with his mouth a scarce inch from her own.

"Cake?" he breathed against her lips.

"Yes, you might not eat it perfectly correctly the first time, but you still get cake."

One of his hands came up to cup the back of her head and the other wrapped softly around her waist. Hermione brought both hands up to his temples to clutch them in his hair. Then his mouth was on hers, lips parted, moist and hot against her mouth, moving with hesitant slowness. She responded immediately, her tongue darting into his mouth to slide against his and lick at his palate. When her tongue retreated, his followed, mimicking her actions with devastating effect. She groaned into his mouth and his arms suddenly tightened around her, squeezing her into his body so tightly that she could feel the hard length of his arousal pressing into her stomach.

As if suddenly concerned about the obvious proof of his excitement, he tried to back his hips away from her, but Hermione was having none of that. Sliding her hands down his back, she gripped his tight, denim-clad arse and tugged him back against her. He pressed his hard cock to her with a throaty moan that made certain parts of her anatomy clench in reaction. He was big, by the feel of him. She longed to have that hard length pounding into her, but it was too soon. A virgin should be wooed, petted, made out with. They should take all the steps he had missed when he was young, so that when the big event finally arrived, he was ready for anything.

His mouth was becoming more skilled by the second. At first, he had only mimicked her own actions. Now, he was expanding his repertoire as he explored and tasted her. Hermione's entire body trembled in reaction, her toes curled, her heart pounded. It was all she could do to ignore her mission to take things slowly and not drag him bodily into her flat and straight to her bed.

Eventually, the desperate need for air forced them to stop. Hermione wound her arms around his waist, leaned against his chest, and listened to his thundering heart. His arms remained around her and he leaned his face into the hair on the top of her head.

"That was...hmm...unprecedented," he murmured into her hair.

Lifting up, he placed one palm under her chin and raised her face to him. His gaze traveled with clear affection as he studied her eyes, her mouth, and the soft swell of her breasts at the neckline of her sundress.

A tiny worry wrinkled the flesh between his eyebrows. "Was it...hmm...was I..."

"Fabulous," she said with complete honesty. "Your first real kiss and you curled my toes. Good Lord, Steven, when you get a little more practice, I'll be a puddle at your feet."

He grinned at her, relief and pleasure shining from his face. "You truly are the most amazing creature. When shall I see you again?"

"I'll be studying again with Harry on Friday. Perhaps you would like to come here? I could cook us dinner."

"I'd be delighted."

Then he kissed her again. It was shorter this time, and more tender, but no less devastating to her senses. When he bid her goodnight, again he kissed her hand, this time with an open mouth and a slow, deliberate swipe of his tongue. She trembled again and watched him from her open doorway until he returned to his car and drove out of sight.

Once inside, she flopped on her sofa, feeling boneless and as if she still wasn't getting enough oxygen to her brain. Even with no experience at all, the man was sex on legs. It would take an iron will not to rush this. She had to, though. There was no way she was going to go the full Monty with him before she confessed the magical side of her life. If that drove him away, so be it. She had to be honest if she stood any chance of having a real relationship with the man. Wouldn't that be something? Having him waiting at home when she was done for the day. Snuggling on the sofa smooching while he asked her about her day and told her about his. Having real conversations instead of boring dissertations on Quidditch.

So distracted was she by the thought, Hermione almost forgot her promise to go see Harry and find out about the weird fascination Steven had with Harry's knapsack. Taking a moment to fix her hair, she headed for the floo. Harry teased her enough already, she didn't want to show up looking like she'd just been snogged within an inch of her life.

Seven

Chapter 7 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: You've all been so patient, and you'll be rewarded for your patience next chapter, when this bus makes its first stop in Lemontown. If you don't like explicit sexual content, well, why the heck are you reading this? :D

As always, big sloppy kisses to those taking time to review, and many thanks for reading.

No beta, so all mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, I just take them out to play.

Shortly after Hermione tumbled through the floo at Harry and Ginny's cottage, she realized the fixing of her hair had done nothing. Harry gaped at her, his mouth opening and closing like a fish trying to breathe air, and Ginny dissolved into a fit of giggling. Hermione rolled her eyes at both of them before she flopped gracefully onto the sofa.

"Date went well, I take it?" Harry asked dryly as he sat beside her.

"Was he any good?" Ginny asked, wagging her eyebrows at Hermione.

At the sharp memory of Steven's kisses, Hermione couldn't help the slightly goofy grin that appeared on her face. "Devastating."

"You'll have to tell me all..."

"No," Harry quickly interrupted. "Absolutely not. I care about the man, I'm thrilled he's alive, but I do not want to hear about what you two get up to in the sack."

"Well, we haven't made it to the bedroom...yet," she added with a wicked grin.

"Don't want to hear it!" Harry restated, looking for all the world like he was about to put his fingers in his ears.

"Had a lovely snog though."

"Stop!" Harry growled.

"Do you want a deflating drought for those swollen lips, Hermione?" Ginny asked, and then giggled again.

Hermione raised a hand briefly to the lips in question. "No. Makes me remember."

"Ugh!"

Both women giggled then until Harry stopped making disgusted faces. Seeing Harry's knapsack on the coffee table, Hermione remembered the reason for her visit.

"Harry, what was it with Steven and your book bag? It was almost as if he was hypnotized."

"Simple, really. Easy way for me to figure out if that was Severus."

Unzipping the bag, Harry reached his hand in and drew out a wand. It was clearly not Harry's supple holly wand. The wood was so dark it appeared black, the surface shiny, the grain of the wood so dense that it looked molded out of plastic. Ebony, thirteen inches, firm. She'd ever only seen one wand like it.

"Harry," she whispered, still staring at a wand she'd seen countless times, "how did you come by Snape's wand?"

"After the last battle, they couldn't find Snape's body. When things had calmed down, after the funerals, I went looking myself. Minerva was so upset about having to bury an empty casket and worried he'd been left lying around somewhere. I started in the Shrieking Shack. Merlin, Hermione, but that room was terrible. Blood all over the floor...so much blood. I cast a strong Lumos, thinking that if someone had transfigured the body, it might still be in the room. I didn't find it, and now we know why, but I did find his wand tucked up next to the wall. I'm not surprised no one had found it. I almost missed it myself."

"Why did you keep it?"

"I don't know. It was too late to bury it in his tomb. We couldn't find the body...I guess I felt like I needed to keep it safe, make sure it didn't end up lying in the mud somewhere."

"I understand. Merlin, no wonder Steven felt drawn to it. The wand chooses the Wizard. I'm surprised Steven didn't snatch that backpack right away from you."

"He was a bit distracted, being all jealous and all."

"I can't believe he's still alive," mused Ginny. "Not only alive, but snogging Hermione's socks off"

"Enough with the snogging talk!"

Hermione had a sudden thought and interrupted her friends before they got to arguing again.

"Harry, have you tried casting Priori Incantato on it?"

"Are you mad? I haven't done anything with it. It's an angry wand. Honestly, it doesn't even like me touching it. Either Snape had it warded, or it just hates me."

Gingerly, Hermione reached out a hand and picked up the black wand. She could immediately see what Harry meant. While the smooth wood didn't hurt her, she could feel the magical energy thrumming angrily beneath her fingers. As she held it, it bucked slightly in her hand.

"No, I'm not about to try a spell with this," she said, laying it back on the table. "Besides, Harry, if you can't manage it, I expect no one could. Pity though. The last spell cast might shed some light on what happened to Severus."

"It might at that," Harry agreed. "But you're wrong about no one being able to cast something simply because I can't. If it's warded, it could be warded against certain people or a group of people."

"Like students, for example?" Ginny said.

"We were in the Order, but we were still students technically." Hermione reached out a finger to touch the dark wood again and felt it thrum with power. "He lost it at the final battle. He wouldn't have had a chance to reset anything."

"Take it to Minerva tomorrow," Ginny said. "They were friends, even though he had to play the spy until the bitter end. Minerva might have warded her wand against him, but I doubt he would have done the same."

"Harry, do you want to come with me?" Hermione asked.

"No. I've got a day planned at St. Mungo's tomorrow. I'm going to find out all I can about memory losses, by both physical and magical means."

"What about your work?"

"I took some time off. We're not busy and I have time coming. Once we knew Steven was Severus, I wanted to be free to try to figure this all out."

"How about you, Gin?"

"Sorry. Unlike some slackers, I do have to work tomorrow. I'm afraid you're on your own."

After reminding Harry about their fake study session on Friday, Hermione headed home.

The next morning, she found herself back at the gates of Hogwarts. She hoped that the Headmistress wouldn't be too busy to see her. While it was true that Steven was in no danger, she felt the need to hurry and find answers. It wasn't her usual joy at puzzle solving, it was the heartbreak of a Wizard separated from his wand. Even though Severus didn't realize what he was missing, he wasn't complete without his magic.

After a brief message and reply from her Patronus, Hermione was once again settled in the comfy sitting room.

"Minerva, there's no easy way to say this, no way to break it gently. Severus Snape is alive."

The kind woman's teacup rattled on its saucer as Minerva hastened to place it back on the table. Her face had gone abruptly pale, and Hermione quickly grabbed one of the wrinkled hands and held it tightly in both of her own.

"Your Muggle man?" Minerva asked. "You're certain?"

"I'm certain, and so is Harry."

Minerva let out a shaky breath and raised her free hand to her forehead, closing her eyes for a brief moment. "And he remembers nothing?"

"Nothing. He doesn't recognize me, he doesn't even recognize Harry."

"Damn, how are we going to help the poor boy?"

"I have no idea, but I thought we might start with a *Priori Incantato* on this." Hermione reached into her handbag and pulled the wand from it, handing it to Minerva.

"Severus' wand! How did you come to have this?"

"Harry had it...found it in the Shack years ago. We didn't try the spell because the wand clearly doesn't care for us."

The older witch chuckled at that. "Severus Snape's wand? You bet your arse it doesn't care for students, not even former students. It feels like a normal wand to me, not as comfortable as my own of course."

"Then Harry was right. It's warded."

"Of course it is." She gave a little sniff but did not cry. "Not warded against me, not even after all that happened. Not even after I tried to kill him."

"Did you really try to kill him?"

"Oh, yes. Professor Sprout, Professor Flitwick, and I drove him from Hogwarts. Though I have long thought he allowed us to. Oh, he made it look good, but he didn't truly hurt any of us. I've felt very badly about trying to kill him."

With a flick of the wand in her hand, Minerva silently cast a spell with Snape's wand.

A grey fog spilled from the tip of the dark wand. A ghostly image appeared. a robed man in a pool of dark liquid. He dragged himself to his feet, tried to turn as wispy letters spilled from between his lips. The man staggered, his wand flying from his fingers as he began to fall. Before he hit the floor, he vanished.

"Deletius," Minerva muttered, and the ghostly image dissipated.

"He tried to apparate."

"He succeeded. But the poor lad wasn't himself enough to be clear. He didn't say St. Mungo's, he just said hospital."

"So, he could have ended up at any hospital, even a Muggle one."

"Which he evidently did. Oh, Hermione, how are we ever going to help him?"

"We'll find a way. Hell, even a diagnostic spell might help us find answers."

"Certainly. So would a nice visit with the healers at St. Mungo's, but how in the world are you going to get a Muggle man to let you point a wand at him?"

"I'm going to have to tell him at some point that I'm a witch. If it goes well, I don't see why he wouldn't let me do a simple diagnostic."

"You're going to tell him you're magical? Are you mad as a drunken badger?"

"It's not without precedent. There are other such couples in the world, Muggles who have gotten together with magical folk. It could work."

"Or he could drop you like the proverbial hot potato." Minerva studied her thoughtfully for a moment, a gleam in her eye. "Couple, eh? Can I dare hope that my abrasive friend has finally lost his status as unicorn bait?"

"Minerva! That's none of your business!"

"Not yet then, poor Severus. I'd wager by that blush of yours that it won't take long, though."

Hermione couldn't help it. She giggled. Knowing that her former professor wasn't exactly the staid and solemn woman she'd seemed as a teacher had changed their relationship to that of friends long ago.

"He is one hell of a kisser," Hermione admitted.

"Is he? Ah, yes, just look at that smirk of yours. Like the cat who's been at the cream. Did he even know how to kiss?"

"He does now."

"Good for Severus. I tell you, Hermione, I wish I could see the lad. Even if he didn't know me. I've missed the grumpy bugger, and that's a fact."

"Are you any good at playing Muggle? He does own a bookshop. Absolutely anyone could stroll inside."

"No, lass. And I'm a bit old to go learning now. However, I don't suppose anyone would think a stray cat too odd if one happened to be there on the street."

"You're a clever woman. That's a perfect idea."

For the rest of their chat, Hermione filled her friend in on Harry's plan to do some research at the hospital. Giving the woman the address of Steven's bookshop before she left, she returned home. She had homework to complete, though it seemed a foolish thing to waste time on when she should be trying to figure out how to help Severus.

Eight

Chapter 8 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: It's been ever so long since I've written a nice naughty story. Hopefully, I'm not too out of practice. I love my original fiction, but they are mostly supernatural mystery. Certainly, almost all of them have an element of romance, but they are not romances themselves. And none of them are erotica. So it's been lovely to dip my toes back into those waters again. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I am enjoying writing it.

Some answers chapter after this, and then a nice dip into naughtiness again. I'm being unrepentantly sweet to our Severus with this fic. I can't help myself. The poor man has been through enough, don't you think?

No beta, so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine, I only take them out to play. Sometimes they play with each other.

Friday was sunny and warm. Hermione dressed with her date in mind, another sundress that showed off her modest cleavage. She hadn't forgotten how Steven had stared at her curves.

While she wasn't quite used to cooking completely Muggle, she could manage a nice roast with potatoes and carrots for her dinner with Steven. A frantic visit to her mother first thing in the morning, and she knew exactly what to do, even how to leave it in the oven on a low temperature so it would be ready at the right time. She even remembered to block the floo so Steven would be shocked by unexpected people tumbling out of the fireplace.

On her way to class, she saw a grey tabby cat sitting on an upturned rubbish bin, staring into the window of Steven's shop.

"Good morning, cat," she said as she walked by.

The cat's only response was a small nod of its head.

Classes dragged on and on, but eventually, Hermione and Harry walked through the door of the bookshop. Hermione was not surprised to note the cat still lingering outside. It seemed that Harry was not the only one taking some time off work.

Marta was helping a customer, but Steven came from behind the counter as soon as he saw her. He shook Harry's hand in greeting and then kissed hers, his black eyes never leaving her own. Damn, but he was getting good at this. She already felt all shivery inside.

Instead of studying, Harry filled her in on what he'd learned the previous day. They kept their voices low, but the bookshop was busy with customers and Steven not likely to overhear them.

"I talked to several healers about our situation."

"You didn't tell them who it was about, did you?"

"No, Hermione, I kept his name out of it. Severus is a war hero. If the wizarding world found out he was alive, everyone would start looking for him. He doesn't need that."

"What did you discover?"

"Well, I was right that it's no good trying to force his memory. In fact, if he's lost it because of magical mishap, that's the worst thing we can do. It's all right to show him familiar things, and it's actually good for him to have us around. These things might naturally remind him who he is. But we can't press him on it."

"I understand. It's all right for me to be around him as long as I don't start badgering him about remembering me."

"Exactly. The other thing is that there's a good chance his memory could be restored, depending on exactly how he lost it. But it depends on magical diagnosis and magical treatment. He has to be awake and aware as well. The magics need his active cooperation to work. It won't work if he's unconscious or sedated."

"Wouldn't that be easy." Hermione huffed out a frustrated breath. "A little dreamless sleep and he wouldn't even be aware."

"I know, but it won't work. I have no idea what to do. If we start going on about magic, even if we show him demonstrations, he's going to have an eppy."

"Oh, I don't know, Harry. Steven and I are growing closer. I'll have to confess my magical nature soon. Maybe he'll be able to accept it, you know, if he doesn't throw me out on my ear or call some hospital to have men come to fit me into a nice straightjacket."

"Are you sure you want to tell him at all?"

"I am, but I can't tell him just yet. I'd like him to get a better chance to know me a little first."

"It's up to you. Tell him or not, that's your own business. But it would allow us to help him if he can accept it."

They spent the rest of their study time talking about less serious things and chattering about the vampires of Drakelow anytime Steven wandered near them. At five thirty, Hermione said goodbye to Harry and Steven escorted her to his car.

On the drive to her flat, he couldn't seem to stop touching her. Little caresses anytime he wasn't busy shifting gears. A hand on her knee. Fingers touching hers. A lock of her hair tucked behind her ear. By the time they entered her flat, Hermione's libido was in overdrive. The moment the door closed behind them, he pressed her against it, his mouth crashing against hers.

Wet heat enveloping her mouth, a clever tongue delving inside. Sweet Merlin but the man had forgotten nothing from their earlier lesson. He pressed her firmly into the wood at her back, his hips thrusting lightly against her.

He didn't speak until they came up for air. "I'm sorry, pet, I didn't mean to attack you. I could think of nothing all day but touching you again."

"In case you didn't notice, I wasn't complaining." Tangling a hand in the hair at the back of his head, she dragged his head back down into another toe-curling kiss.

Sometime later, he broke away from her mouth with a groan that she could feel as his chest vibrated against her hardened nipples.

"Dear Lord, Hermione. If we don't stop soon, I'm going to come in my pants like a schoolboy."

Hermione looked him over, speculating. "Would you like that?"

He looked a bit shocked, then his eyes lit with heat and his nostrils flared with a sudden snort of breath.

"Heaven help me, yes I would."

Grabbing his hand, Hermione fairly dragged him to the sofa. If Steven was going to press that hard cock against her until he came, she wanted it hitting her where it counted, not rubbing against her belly. Lying on her back with her legs spread in welcome, she motioned for him to join her.

"Come, show me then," she murmured, her voice husky and low with desire.

He fell over her, scooting quickly until his cock nestled right up against her core. When he saw that she had too much trouble catching her breath, he lifted some of his weight onto his elbows without her having to direct him. Steven took to lovemaking easily; he was a natural. It wasn't such a surprise, considering how he watched for her every reaction. A considerate lover was a good one, in Hermione's opinion.

Then his mouth fastened to hers as his hips began to thrust against her core with greater confidence. Each push caused a little twitch in her clit, and she raised her hips to his, meeting each thrust, delighting in the feeling of his body against hers. She couldn't remember the last time she had wrapped herself around someone with all her clothes on and humped away at them in innocent abandon. She'd probably been in school. It felt more arousing doing this with Steven than anything she'd ever done with Ron.

She moaned and whimpered against his mouth and he thrust even harder, pounding against her with force enough to make her bounce against the cushions of the sofa. His hips began to lose their rhythm, and press into her in smaller jerking motions. His mouth left hers as he threw his head back, eyes closed, mouth hanging open.

"Come for me, Steven...yes...that's it...come for me."

Her name left his slack lips, a whisper of sound which turned into a deep groan. She could feel his cock, pressed so tightly into her core, twitch against her. Warmth spread against her mound as he found his release.

He collapsed on her then, breathing like a racehorse, still taking some of his weight on his elbows so he wouldn't crush her. She rubbed her hands up and down his back, murmuring nonsense as he recovered.

"You're so sexy, Steven...so beautiful in your passion. I love the way you feel on top of me, love the way your mouth tastes as you plunder mine. You feel so good, I can't wait until I can feel you thrusting inside me."

He groaned again at that and then lifted his head to stare into her eyes.

"Show me how to please you. Show me how to make you feel good."

"You already please me."

"Show me," he practically growled, reminding her very much of the Wizard he used to be.

"Yes." she managed, a breathless sound.

Shifting them so that they were pressed side by side on the narrow sofa, Hermione lifted the skirt of her dress, and then guided Steven's hand down and into her panties.

"You'll have to show me," he growled again. "I don't bloody know what the fuck I'm doing."

"I will. For now, just touch me. Explore me."

With a look like a man granted his dearest wish, he did exactly that. He rubbed his hand gently among her curls and then let one of his fingers slip between her lips.

"Merlin, Hermione. You're so hot and wet. Beautiful...beautiful."

Merlin? Not exactly a Muggle phrase. She had little time to wonder about it, because Steven slipped two fingers into her channel, distracting her thoroughly. She began to thrust her hips, fucking herself on his long fingers.

"Lord, you're so tight, Hermione. How am I ever going to fit inside you?"

"You will, Steven, I promise you. Oh, Gods, please kiss me."

He fell on her mouth, devouring her as she continued to rock on his fingers. So good...so sweet and good. It wasn't going to take long. She was still so excited from when Steven had been thrusting against her. Impatient for more, she reached down and guided his fingers to her clit.

"Feel that, Steven? Feel that bump?" she whispered against his lips.

"Yes." A soft, drawn out sound.

"It's like the head of your cock...most of my nerves are there. If you rub it like this..."

She showed him, guiding his fingers with her hand. As with all things sexual, he caught on quickly, his fingers dancing over her as he stared into her eyes, intent on her reaction.

"Oh, yes, Steven, yes, just like that. So good. So fucking good. I'm going to come, Steven...oh, yes, I'm going to come...you're going to make me come."

And with the last syllable, she did. Throwing her head back with a keening cry, she bucked against his fingers as the waves of pleasure flowed over her. She couldn't remember the last time she'd come so hard. There was something so sexy about Steven, about the intense focus he had when touching her, the wonder in his eyes when he looked at her. There was also something primal and thrilling about knowing he'd never done this with anyone else. Something inherently exciting about being the first to show him the pleasures of the flesh.

As she watched him, dazed by her orgasm, he gently pulled his fingers from her and slid them into his mouth. Licking off her juices, tasting her.

"You are the sexiest man I've ever met," she told him.

He snorted. "I don't know anything about sex."

"I don't think you can say that anymore."

He kissed her then. A sweet, quick kiss. And then he smiled a wide, happy smile that made her heart melt.

"I should borrow your loo and get...hmm...cleaned up a bit," he said with a glance at the crotch of his jeans.

"You do that, and I'll get dinner on the table, if I haven't ruined it by leaving it in too long."

He stood, and then gave her a hand to help her up before heading to her small loo.

Dinner was not ruined by having spent a little extra time in the oven. The food was good and the conversation lovely. Hermione wondered again what it would be like to live with this man, to have this companionship every single day. It made her wistful. While she desperately wanted that sort of relationship with Steven, there was so much that could go wrong between them. She would do everything in her power to restore the man's memories, but would Severus even want her when she did? What if Steven could not handle the fact that she was a witch? Would she leave the wizarding world for him? As much as she cared for him, she didn't think she had it in her to live as a Muggle for the rest of her life.

After the dishes were cleared away, Steven took her by the hand and led her back to the sofa. At first, she thought he was ready to explore their passion some more. But he sat on one end of the couch and asked her to lay her head in his lap. When she looked at him, a question in her eyes, he explained.

"Hermione, for one thing, I've always wanted to sit with a pretty woman's head in my lap. For the other, I have some things to tell you, and I think it will be easier if we aren't staring at each other."

She laid her head in his lap then, and he stroked her curls as he began to speak.

Nine

Chapter 9 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: A few questions answered, but not too many to keep us from having more fun. Writing is going well. I'm in the middle of writing chapter 17, so the daily updates will continue.

I planned this fic to be a fairly sweet romance with a sprinkling of lemon. I have to say, Hermione and Severus have other plans. Once they make it to Lemontown, they seem ready to set up shop and stay there for a while. While I wouldn't call this fic PWP, we are certainly going to end up a bit heavy on the first P and a little light on the second. ;)

Smooches to all my awesome readers and big sloppy kisses to those kind enough to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

Steven's voice was soft and hesitant as he began his tale, his hand brushed her hair, fingers twirled in her curls. As the story unfolded, his voice grew confident. Hermione noticed him watching her face carefully from time to time, gauging her reaction to his words. She made certain to keep her expression open and engaged, no matter how his words plucked at her heart.

"Five years ago I woke in a hospital bed with no memory of who I was or how I had come to be there. The doctors and staff were very kind, but I was quite physically ill in addition to the memory loss. I had lost so much blood they feared I'd never wake up at all. And I had a great wound on my neck that resisted healing. They thought it was infected with one of the nastier, antibiotic-resistant bacteria."

The poor man. Of course, the bite from a magical creature had been resistant to mundane means of healing, but there was no way for Muggle doctors to know this.

"Because of that wound and my weakened state, I was in the hospital for most of the next six months. The first four of which I was confined to my bed. No one there knew who I was or where I came from. They'd found me lying outside on the pavement, nearly dead."

One of his hands was in her hair, the other arm draped across the back of the sofa. Hermione didn't want to interrupt him, but the image of him alone and bleeding tugged at her heart. She reached up, drawing his free hand down and pulling it onto her chest, between her breasts, where she clutched it tightly in both of her own.

"It's all right, pet," he said with obvious affection. "I'm quite all right now."

"I know, I'm so sorry you had to go through that, though." She brought his hand up to her mouth and softly kissed his palm before returning it to the place between her breasts.

He gazed at her with warm affection, and then cleared his throat and began speaking again.

"Not only was my memory gone, but I didn't know how to do the simplest things. I had to be taught everything, how to brush my teeth, how to shave. The most mundane tasks were quite beyond me."

Of course, a Wizard was very dependent on his wand, even for such tasks as cleaning one's teeth. And Steven would know nothing of the potions and charms used for keeping one's skin free from hair.

"I had a roommate while I was convalescing, an elderly man named Franklin. He was very kind to me. When he realized the extent of my memory loss, he spoke to me about everything, from politics to sports and television shows. All of it was alien and new to me, but with his patience, I began to become more familiar with the world around me. We watched the telly together, and he began asking a young friend of his to start bringing me books, which I devoured with enthusiasm."

His eyes had closed, and she could feel a slight tremble run through his frame.

"With my memory gone, it was as if Franklin was my only friend...the only person I knew in the world...and he was dying."

Hermione was driven to action then. With a soft sound of distress, she jumped from the sofa, straddled Steven, and wrapped her arms tightly around him, pressing her face into his neck. He trembled in her arms. When the trembling passed, he gave her a soft kiss and bid her to lie back down. She returned to her previous position and he clenched one hand back into her hair. The other he pressed flat against her chest and she covered it with her own.

"He had cancer...a nasty, lingering, incurable sort. Towards the end, the pain was very bad, despite the morphine the doctors gave him. I would read to him for hours, trying to distract him from the pain. The time for my own release from the hospital was nearing and I was terrified. To be thrust out into a strange world without even Franklin to guide me, without a penny to my name. Oh, the hospital spoke of some sort of half-way house run by the government. There I would be guided back into society and taught to do some menial job. I was grateful that I would not be left on the street, but the entire idea was horrifying."

Hermione raised a hand to his cheek and he leaned into the caress.

"Two weeks before I was to be released, Franklin passed away. I was so distraught, the hospital was considering delaying my release. A week later, Franklin's young friend, Marta, came to visit me. She brought Franklin's solicitor with her. Franklin had no family, no children, or nieces, or nephews. His life-partner had passed away long ago, and he was alone in the world. My only friend left his bookshop to Marta and me, and he left me the flat above the shop and the rest of the estate, including a car I didn't even know how to drive. At first, I was concerned that Marta would be offended that Franklin left so much to me when she had known him and worked for him much longer. She hugged me and cried on my chest, saying it was perfectly sensible for Franklin to leave everything to his two closest friends."

Again Hermione raised a hand to his face, and he turned his head to kiss her palm.

"Marta adores you, you know," Hermione said softly. "She was absolutely scheming with me when she found out I fancied you."

"Marta is a kind young woman and an absolute godsend. She taught me how to run the business with her, taught me how to drive, taught me everything, really. All with a patient sweetness and a stubborn streak a mile long."

"Not that I'm complaining, mind you, but I'm surprised that the two of you never dated. She really is a sweet girl."

"Honestly, I never even considered it. I never felt that way about her, and she's always treated me as if I'm an uncle of sorts. She's the closest thing to family I have, and I love her like family, but there's nothing romantic about it."

They sat in silence for a moment, the fingers of Steven's hand caressing her gently in the valley between her breasts. For once, his expression was unreadable, almost perfectly blank.

As his hand stilled, he spoke again. "Hermione, the thing you are afraid to tell me, is it that you know who I am? That you know who I was before I lost my memory?"

When she gaped at him, her mouth hanging open, her breath caught in her throat, his expression softened slightly.

"How...how did you know?"

"When we first met, that night in the rain, you looked at me as if you'd seen a ghost. Since then, every once in a while, your expression gives away your thoughts."

He always watched her so carefully, it was little wonder he'd figured it out. Even as Steven, Severus Snape was a very intelligent man.

"I did know you before," she said, her voice coming out in a whisper. After a deep breath, she continued. "I was worried to tell you. I did a little research when it was clear you didn't recognize me. Forcing memories can have a very negative reaction to someone who has amnesia."

"While that is true, simply telling me you knew me shouldn't have been dangerous. Why have you kept it from me? Was I so horrible in my former life?"

His expression had gone blank again, and this time she sorted out why. He was terrified. Apparently, fear was the only emotion he was capable of hiding. With a soft cry, she launched herself from the sofa and straddled him again, hugging him tightly and kissing him all over his face before clamping her mouth to his.

The tension in his body relaxed, no match for her passionate onslaught, and he kissed her with equal enthusiasm.

When they broke for much-needed air, he gazed at her with honest affection. "Tell me, please. There must be some reason."

This time she settled in, sitting next to him on the sofa, cuddling against his side, one of his arms holding her tightly to him.

"There is a reason," she admitted, "but I'm not certain where to start or how much to say."

With a groan, his head tilted back onto the back of the sofa so that he stared at the ceiling. His free hand came up to cover his eyes. "Good Lord, Hermione, please tell me that we are not related."

She giggled at that, and then quickly put his mind to rest. "No. Steven, we are not related. Merlin, with everything we've gotten up to, and on this very sofa, no less. I would never do the like with any sort of family."

While he blinked at her use of the word 'Merlin,' he let it pass without comment. "So, I'm not secretly your father?"

"No, of course not."

"Thank heaven for that," he muttered and then kissed her briefly again. "Hermione, please tell me what we were to each other. There must be something...well...when we first met, you looked scared. As if you thought I would do something to hurt you. It's long worried me. What sort of man could I be that you would think I would hurt you in any way?"

"Steven, it's not like that. The truth is, I did not know you that well. The people who did know you, your friends, they mourned when they thought you had died. They speak of you even now with great fondness." There was so much more she could tell him, but her worry over pushing him to remember was strong.

"But there must have been something or you wouldn't have reacted like that."

It was clear she had to tell him more. "Sweetheart, you were my *teacher*. I was a schoolgirl and you a strict taskmaster who tolerated no disorder in your classes. I did not know your personal self at all, only who you were in the classroom."

This confession seemed to relieve him greatly until his head thunked down again onto the back of the sofa and the hand returned to cover his eyes.

"Please tell me nothing of an untoward nature occurred between us while you were a student."

She giggled again, which allowed him to uncover his face and look at her.

"Heaven's no, Steven. We could barely tolerate each other when I was in school. I respected you and envied your intellect even then. But you were stern and I was an annoying bundle of curiosity, asking you questions at every opportunity. It was only after I met you as Steven, and got to know you personally, that I became quickly smitten."

He relaxed again, tugging her closer to his side and resting his cheek against the top of her head.

"What was my name, pet?"

"I'm not certain I should tell you."

"Tell me. I've longed to know, and it isn't the same as trying to get me to remember."

"Severus," she turned to whisper in his ear. The frog that had replaced her heart had a fit of rolling as she finally voiced the syllables she had been longing to call him.

"Severus?" he barked. "What a ridiculous name! Who saddled me with that monstrosity? Or is that my surname?"

"No, it's your first name, and I quite like it, by the way. Your full name is Severus Tobias Snape."

"Gods, what an unholy mouthful. I think I'll stick to Steven Sondheim for the present."

"And how came you by that name?"

"Franklin named me. He and his lover had seen every musical that came to London back in the day. I was a little taken aback to be named after someone famous, even with the different spelling. However, Franklin had been so kind to me that I could deny him nothing. Now, I'm quite used to it."

"So, the name Severus means nothing to you?"

"I'm afraid not. It's just a strange word to me. Listen, pet, you've told me you had a few skeletons in your closet. I'm sure the fact that you knew me before we met was one, but is there anything else you would like to tell me?"

Suddenly tense and afraid, Hermione untangled herself from Steven's embrace and rose from the sofa. Stepping to the window, she gazed outside as she tried to figure out what to do.

Ten

Chapter 10 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Ready for some fun? Hang onto your hats because off we go. :)

Smooches to everyone for reading and big sloppy kisses to those who have reviewed. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

As Hermione stood at the window, staring out into the night, she felt the heat of his body behind her and a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"I've shared so much with you this evening," he said, his voice gentle, without even a hint of reprimand. "Can't you tell me what's worrying you? Can't you trust me? You must know that I would rather cut off my own arm than do anything to harm you."

"Of course you would never harm me," she stated with quiet conviction. Turning to him, she buried her face in his neck as he wrapped his arms around her.

"I'm terrified," she confessed, her voice muffled by his neck. "But not of you. There is something I'm frightened to tell you...about myself. Oh, Severus, I wanted you to get a chance to know me better before you found out. I don't want you thinking I'm some sort of freak. I would be devastated to have you ever turn away from me in disgust."

"What could you possibly tell me that could get me to turn from you?" His voice rumbled and she could feel the vibration on the skin of her face. "You, who have so patiently showed me the ways of love and caring. You, who refused to turn from me, but stubbornly loved me, even when my petty jealousy overwhelmed me and I treated you abominably. There is absolutely nothing you can tell me that would make me stop loving you. I need you like I need my next breath."

Trembling in his arms, she sobbed quietly into the fabric of his turtleneck sweater, while he held her close and stroked her back with gentle hands.

"I love you so much," she managed when her tears had quieted enough for speech. "I'm just so frightened."

"Hush, sweetheart, hush. What could be so terrifying? Let's see...hmm...you're an alien from outer space? No mind then, I don't care if you are. You are deliciously shaped for an alien."

A giggle slipped out before she was even aware she was laughing. "No, Steven, I'm not an alien."

"I've got it. You're a black widow, stealing men's hearts and killing them in their beds. No problem. I find I'm quite willing to die so long as I get to lie in your bed with you first."

A full-throated laugh. "No. You're in no danger of murder at my hands."

"You were secretly born a man? I don't care. Your surgery was a resounding success, as I discovered for myself earlier this evening."

Untucking her head, she grinned up at him. "I was born a woman, but that's very accepting of you."

"Thank all that's holy," he muttered, "though I meant what I said." Dropping his mouth to hers, he kissed her passionately. "Now, let me think, what other deep dark secret can you be keeping from me? I've got it. You're a lesbian, and I am nothing more than a brief fling on the other side of the fence."

"No, I'm not homosexual. I'm beginning to think I'm Stevenosexual."

That response earned her another of his drugging kisses. "Whatever it is, my love, I swear to you that I couldn't give a fuck about it, not so long as your heart is mine."

"It is," she replied, a little breathless.

"And mine is yours. Nothing will change that. Tell me or don't. Tell me now, or five years from now, or never at all. I'm not concerned about it either way. It only bothers me that you are worried about it when I know that you needn't be."

"I will tell you, Steven, and soon. I need a little more time to think about it, though."

"You called me Severus before."

"I know, but you don't like it much, do you?"

"I neither like it nor dislike it. Call me that again."

Hermione brought her lips to his ear and whispered the name with all the love in her heart. "Severus."

Nuzzling near her own ear, his voice low and rumbling, he said, "Will you call me so when you are overcome with passion? When my fingers dance over you, and you fall apart in my arms, will you moan that name as you come for me?"

"Oh, yes. Severus, my Severus."

"Then I imagine I could get used to that name from your sweet lips."

He was kissing her again, moving to press her against the wall near the window, his hips gently thrusting against her, his arousal obviously renewed.

When she could breathe, she found his ear again and whispered into it, "Would you like to learn something new, my love? Should I show you?"

"Yes, my sweet siren. You may teach me anything you like."

Leading him to the sofa, Hermione kissed him as she slowly unbuttoned his jeans and undid his zipper. He muttered against her lips as he felt her hands brushing against his hard shaft, a needy, pleading sound. She slipped her hands under denim jeans and cotton boxers to squeeze his bare arse.

"Holy fuck," he muttered. "If I hadn't already come once, I think I could again only from that."

"Good thing you did already then because I have other plans for you."

Sliding his clothes down far enough to free his hard cock from the fabric, she let them fall to the floor before sitting him down on the sofa. Pressing his knees apart, she knelt on the floor between them and then happily grasped his length in her eager hands. She stroked him lightly before leaning down to take him into her mouth. His hips bucked up against her and a wordless, startled exclamation flew from his lips.

Putting one hand on his hip to control his unconscious thrusting, she concentrated on the task at hand, bobbing her head as she used gentle suction and twirled her tongue around the underside and head of his cock. Her lover seemed to have been shocked speechless. A plethora of delicious noises fell from his mouth, but no words at all were among them. For a second, she worried that she had moved too quickly. Perhaps this intimate act had come too soon for her inexperienced partner.

Then she felt his hands tangling into her hair, clasp tightly but not forcing her down. Not too much too soon then, though perhaps a little overwhelming, as it should be if she was doing this correctly at all. He was better endowed than she was used to, and she used the hand not holding his hip down to stroke what she could not fit in her mouth. By the noises the man was making, he found nothing lacking.

Merlin, he was big. If the witches of the world had known this about the surly Professor Snape, he wouldn't still be a virgin. She was glad they had not known it, for she found herself fiercely possessive of him. Increasing her efforts, she hummed around him with pleasure.

That was as much as her inexperienced lover could take, even with his earlier orgasm. She felt his hard shaft begin to twitch as Severus shouted out her name. His seed filled her mouth in long spurts as she continued to move around him. She swallowed the slightly bitter fluid down as she slowed her movements, knowing his shaft would grow too sensitive quickly after his release.

When she gently slid him from her mouth and lifted her head, she saw that he had collapsed bonelessly against the back of the sofa. His mouth hung open and he stared at her with wide eyes. He was completely gobsmacked. Merlin, but he looked adorable. She wanted to kiss him but was unsure how her inexperienced man would react to kissing her after where her mouth had been.

Sliding up to sit next to him on the sofa, she slipped a hand under his turtleneck and gently rubbed his bare chest as he recovered. She delighted in the feel of the crisp chest hair against her palm. Ron had been practically hairless.

Steven soon stirred himself. Lifting her head with a gentle hand under her chin, he kissed her breathless, obviously unconcerned that she had just had that mouth wrapped around his cock.

When he spoke, his voice was a sultry rumble that traveled straight to her clit. "I have no words to describe how wonderful that was. I used to think I wouldn't care for that sort of thing. It seemed rather distasteful, having someone put their mouth on me there. I'm happy to have been proved very, very wrong."

Then he was kissing her again, his hands restless and exploring her entire body. Gently squeezing her breasts, and then sliding down to curve around her hips and cup her arse through the fabric of her sundress.

"Show me," he murmured against her lips. "Show me how to please you with my mouth."

For the first time since she began teaching Steven the ways of physical love, Hermione balked. Ron had gone down on her rarely and with protest, saying she tasted weird. Her few schoolgirl encounters before Ron had never progressed that far. When Steven searched her face, she blushed and dropped her eyes.

He placed both palms lightly on her cheeks. "What is it? Tell me."

"Well...er...some men don't like doing that. They say that the taste isn't pleasant."

"I already know that I love the way you taste."

The memory of his slick fingers sliding into his mouth returned to her. Her heart began to pound and her breathing quickened at the thought. He'd done that. He'd taken his fingers from her sopping channel and licked her juices from them with not even a hint of distaste or revulsion.

"I don't know how to show you," she admitted. "I could show you what to do with your fingers because I do that to myself."

His eyes lit with fire at the mention of her touching herself. "Then I shall have to sort it out on my own," he said with a wicked smile.

He stood and pulled his jeans up, though he didn't bother to zip them. Then he laid her down on the sofa, slowly slid the skirt of her dress up, and removed her silk panties. Gazing at her sex with obvious desire mixed with wonder, he spread her lips so he could see all of her secrets. He stroked her with his hand, circling his clever fingers

around the nub of her clit and then sliding them down, watching avidly as two of his long digits sunk into her depths.

"Oh, yes," he muttered. "I think I'm going to like this. I think I'm going to love it."

Spreading her lips apart with one hand, he dipped his head down and licked her from channel to clit, making her shiver with expectation. He dived into her channel with his tongue for a moment, flicking it in and out of her passage, fucking her with his tongue. Her legs moved restlessly on the sofa and her breathing became more ragged.

Pushing two fingers back into her channel, he slid them in and out as his tongue returned to dance against her clit. She had no idea exactly what he was doing with it, only that every time she pressed up against his face or moaned in reaction, he repeated whatever he was doing at the time. He was studying her, learning from her every reaction, a willing and enthusiastic student.

When Ron had grudgingly done this for her, it had seemed to take ages for her to orgasm, as he fumbled around down there. With such speed that she was startled, Steven had her on the edge of bliss.

"Oh, gods...don't stop...don't stop...you fucking wonderful man...oh, yes...I'm going to come...going to come so hard...Severus!"

His name came out as a small shriek as her orgasm thundered through her.

"Hmm..." he said, lifting his face. "Yes, I think I could get used to that ridiculous name being spoken like that."

She giggled with pure happiness as she looked at his smug smile, so pleased with himself that he had figured out how to make her babble in pleasure.

"I'll call you whatever you like as long as you do that again."

"I'll see what I can arrange," he practically purred as he bent his head to her dripping sex again.

He refused to stop until he had brought her to completion a total of five times, and each time he seemed more and more deft at the business. At last, she had to beg him to stop. Her legs were jelly and her clit over-sensitized, not that she was complaining in the least. When he stood, she could see by his rock hard cock that he'd been enjoying what he'd been doing. Sitting up, she drew him to stand between her knees and enveloped him in her mouth once more.

Eleven

Chapter 11 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: With this chapter, we're about halfway through our tale. I've just finished chapter 19, and I think there's 2 or 3 more to go before I'm finished. We've got some pesky plot to get through at the moment, but I promise I'll make it up to you. Oh, yes, I will. ;)

Smooches to my awesome readers, and big sloppy kisses to those who take the time to review. No beta- all mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

They snuggled on the sofa for a time, sleepy and sated. Eventually, Steven looked at his watch and groaned.

"It's late, Hermione. I'd better go."

"You could stay."

"Not tonight, sweetheart. You're exhausted and so am I, but if I stay, I daresay neither one of us is going to get any sleep. I have the bookshop tomorrow morning until four. Then Marta relieves me."

"Will I see you tomorrow?"

"But of course. I'll buy you dinner and then let you take me home so you can have your wicked way with me."

His expression was so sultry that she laughed with pure joy. "I'll miss you, but I'll pass the time making a list of all the things I want to do to you."

"Good Lord," he groaned. "You're going to be the death of me, but what a delightful way to go. If you miss me, you can always come by the shop early. You'll be dreadfully distracting, but I can't say as I'd mind."

"I will come early. And I will miss you."

She walked him to the door and he kissed her sweetly.

"Until tomorrow," he murmured.

"Until tomorrow."

As much as she wanted him to stay, he was correct. She was exhausted. And he did have to work. Co-owners of a shop couldn't call in sick like other employees. Dragging herself to bed, she undressed quickly and slid under the covers. She was asleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow.

Despite her late night, she woke at her usual time. Always a morning person, she rarely slept in unless she was ill or up to all hours reading. She puttered around the house for a while, tidying up, making and eating a simple breakfast, and mentally making a list of every sensual thing she wanted to do to Steven, or have him do to her.

She showered and dressed with care, thinking about her upcoming dinner with Steven. She chose trousers and a blouse today, not wanting to show up in yet another sundress. The trousers showed off her curves and were made of a soft material that she thought would feel good against Steven's hands if he caressed her. The top was a

simple knit but it had a daring neckline that showed off the top swell of her breasts. Checking herself in a conjured full-length mirror, she decided she looked good.

Good enough to eat.

She snickered out loud at that thought, memories of Steven's talented tongue making her squirm in anticipation. It was going to be so difficult to wait until after dinner to get her hands on him again.

Looking at the clock, she was shocked and disappointed to see it was only quarter past ten in the morning. There was no way she could go to the bookshop this early. Much as she wanted to see Steven, that was his place of business. It wasn't appropriate for her to lurk around his shop all day like a besotted mooncalf.

Well, if she couldn't see him yet, she could at least talk about him. A nice heart to heart with Ginny would be exactly the thing. That is if it wasn't too early for her redheaded friend.

Unwarding her floo, she fire-called the Potter's.

"Hey, Hermione," Gin said cheerfully. "What's up?"

"I could really use a cup of coffee and some girl talk. You have the time?"

"Are you kidding? The kids are with mom and dad, and Harry's out researching something to do with Snape. Your timing is perfect! Come on through and I'll put the kettle on."

The floo tumbled her out and she followed Gin into the kitchen.

"So," Gin began, waggling her eyebrows, "You get further than snogging tall, dark, and snarky yet?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I did. No main event yet, but sweet Merlin."

"Hang on. Let's get this coffee sorted and get settled on the sofa and you can tell me all the gory details."

"Thank heaven Harry isn't here."

"I know, right?"

Giggling they filled their mugs and Ginny grabbed a plate of chocolate cupcakes before they headed back to the living room.

"All right." Ginny grabbed a cupcake and settled in. "Tell me everything."

"He went down on me," Hermione blurted, and then slapped a hand over her mouth as she blushed.

"He did, did he? Any good?"

"Fuck yeah. Bloody brilliant. Bloody brilliant five times."

"Five times?" Ginny squealed. "Damn, woman, Harry's only managed three, and that was a record-breaking night."

"Nothing wrong with three."

"I wasn't complaining. But five? I had the feeling Severus, or Steven, whatever, was inexperienced. Harry said when you kissed him in the bookshop, Severus acted as if he'd been at the wrong end of a basilisk."

It was different talking alone with her girlfriend than talking to both her and her husband. Hermione didn't mind being honest with her friend. She knew Ginny wouldn't tell anyone else, not even Harry. Well, that was mostly because Harry truly didn't want to hear about it.

"He was, Gin. He hadn't even kissed anyone before I got a hold of him. He was so unsure at first...more than willing, but frustrated because he didn't know what to do."

"He must be a fast learner," Gin said with a wicked grin.

"He's really motivated to learn," she replied with a grin of her own.

"But five times? And that was the first time he lowered his hot, hard tongue to the pearl of pleasure that guards your hidden caves?"

"You've been reading those trashy books again."

"I love those trashy books."

"Yes," Hermione said. "That was the first time he ever went down on anyone. And I couldn't even tell him what to do, you know?"

"Oh, yeah. I have no idea at all what Harry's doing down there with his mouth. I just know it feels awesome. So, he just figured it out like that? And then, bam, five orgasms?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"You lucky bitch!"

"I am. I really am."

"But he hasn't entered your hot, wet cave with his throbbing, rampant dragon yet?"

"Enough with the purple prose! And no, we haven't gone that far yet. We were pretty busy last night."

"I guess so, what with all the oral sex. You do him?"

"Oh, yeah. Twice. He really liked it."

"Of course he did. They all do. Is he hung, or what?"

"Yeah...he's big, I think. You know I don't have a herd of penises to compare him to, right?"

"Is he bigger than Harry?"

"Gin! I don't know that and I don't want to know that! Harry's my friend."

"Well, how big is he? Come on, spill!"

Hermione held her hands apart at what she thought was the proper distance.

"Bigger than Harry," Ginny admitted, her eyes going a little wide. "But not by much. Harry's hung for a man his height. I mean, really."

They both dissolved into giggles at that.

"You know, Hermione, normally all the oral sex would lead immediately to wet caves and rampant dragons. So, what's the holdup?"

Hermione filled her friend in on the talk she had had with Severus. How he'd ended up in the hospital, the dying friend, the bookshop. Then she told her about Steven figuring out that she knew him from before, and how she had balked at telling him about her magic.

"You should have told him. It was the perfect time. He was open and willing, not to mention all relaxed from the oral sex."

"I know I should have. He deserves to know. I freaked out, Gin, and blubbered all over him. I'm so frightened I'll lose him."

"Sweetie, Snape was a bastard at school, but he was fucking brilliant and brave as a hippogriff. I can't imagine he's all that different as Steven. The brilliant and brave part, not the bastard part. I truly can't imagine him giving up something he wants because he's afraid of your magic. He might need some time to get used to the idea, but I don't think he's going to run away screaming like you have the black plague."

"He said there is nothing I can tell him that would make him turn away from me."

"You need to trust him."

"That's what he said."

"Hermione, you'll have to tell him if we have any hope of restoring his memories."

"Yeah, I know," Hermione said with a sigh.

"Don't you want him to remember?"

"Of course I do, Gin. He deserves to have his life back. I'm just afraid, and I'm not used to being a coward. I love Steven. I'll love him if he's a Muggle. I even believe he could love me if I was magical and he wasn't. I'll love him if he's Severus Snape. But what about Severus? If he's Severus Snape again, powerful Wizard, cunning spy...hung like a horse, apparently...why in the world would he want me?"

"Because he's in love with you, you dope. You really need to learn to trust him. I can't imagine Steven ever letting you go, and Severus Snape is as fierce and stubborn as you. He's going to latch onto you with both hands, and I pity the witch or wizard that ever tries to hurt you."

Their conversation was interrupted by a flash of green light from Ginny's floo. Ron tumbled to the floor, and then stood and dusted himself off.

"Hermione! I've been looking for you!" The redhead gave her an affectionate leer. "Looking good, as always."

"Hello, Ron." Her voice was civil but held little warmth.

"You know, I wanted to talk to you about us. I know we were fighting, but I really think we should put our differences aside and give it another try. I tried to come see you last night, but your floo was off. You having trouble with it?"

"No Ron, I turned it off. I had company." Give it another try her arse. Now she had a man that actually paid attention to her. She wasn't about to lose that for the likes of Ronald Weasley.

"You had company? But it was almost midnight?"

"Yes. I had company. In my flat. At night. I'm sorry, Ron, but I've moved on. You should learn to do the same. I am not interested in getting back together with you."

"What?" Ron practically shouted. "You had company, in your house all night? But you're my girl!"

"In case it has escaped your notice, I haven't been your girl in some time. You no longer have any right to dictate who I do and do not spend time with."

She could feel her anger building. His attitude was ridiculous. The man had always done what he wanted, when he wanted, and simply assumed she would go along. Their breakup had saddened her, but it had also been a huge relief. She'd been happier alone than with Ron, and there was no comparison where Steven was concerned. Steven made her feel joyous. She wouldn't give that up for anything or anyone.

"Damn it, Hermione!" Ron shouted.

Ginny was a demon when it came to jinxes. Before Hermione even realized the wand was in her friend's hand, there was a flash of blue sparks and Ron slumped unconsciously to the floor.

"Sorry about that, Hermione. I've told the stubborn idiot that he's to call first before coming over, but you know what he's like when he's got an idea in his head. Harry and I told him last night you weren't interested in getting back together, but he's like a dog with a bone. I didn't think he'd show up today, though."

"It's not your fault, Gin. He's spoken to me a couple of times since we broke up, and I've told him it's never going to happen. He keeps talking like it's already decided and won't listen to a word I say."

"He's my brother and I love him, but he's an idiot. You'd better go before the spell wears off. I'll try to talk to him again when he comes round, not that it will do any good. Next time, we'll talk at your place. Oh, and Hermione, ward your floo after you get home. He's stupid enough to go straight through. We wouldn't want him to interrupt any oral dissertations."

"Merlin, no. We wouldn't want that."

After thanking her friend, Hermione headed home, turning off her floo behind her. She had lunch and then puttered around a little more. At one o'clock, she decided it was time to go to see Steven at last. It was still early, but not ridiculously so. With a happy smile, she apparated to the Leaky Cauldron.

Twelve

Chapter 12 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: A couple of readers liked the last chapter so much, they begged me to post a two-chapter day. I declined. I worry that if I post multiple chapters in one day, folks might accidentally skip one. However, I did promise to post today's chapter early. I think 3:30 in the morning is suitably early.

Of course, I'm only doing it because it's completely evil of me to do so...

Smooches to all my readers and big sloppy kisses to those who take a moment to review. No Beta- so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

Steven was ringing up a customer when she walked in. He looked up when he heard the little bell on the door and stared into her eyes for a moment before giving her a wink and returning his attention to the cash register. The shop was busier than she'd ever seen it, with perhaps a dozen customers browsing the aisles. It was Saturday. Folks had more time for shopping on the weekend.

Though she had the copy of the book Steven had given her... safely tucked into a handbag that was a little larger on the inside than it appeared-- Hermione found herself too fidgety to sit down and read yet. It was so good to see him again, but now all she wanted to do was run her hands all over him. She browsed a bit herself, taking a look at a section of books on Muggle psychology.

She was trying to reach an interesting book on group dynamics, standing on tiptoe to reach the top shelf, when she felt a tall man press gently against her back.

"Do let me fetch that for you, Miss Granger," Steven said, his voice coming out slightly low and rumbley.

As he reached above her, she couldn't help but press back slightly into that delicious heat. Steven radiated heat like a furnace. She wondered how it would be to snuggle up to his naked body on a cold winter's night. She felt one of his hands briefly cup her bottom.

"Why, thank you, Mr. Sondheim. You're very kind."

Leaning down slightly, he murmured, "Is this what people do, Hermione? Stand chatting as if nothing is going on when only last night I had my tongue thrust completely up your..."

"Steven!" she nearly squealed, spinning to grin up at him. "People act all sorts of ways. But this is your shop and I'm not going to behave like a lovesick hinny and embarrass you at your work."

"And are you a lovesick hinny?"

"Oh, yes, I certainly am."

"You worry too much," he said. Handing her the book, he kissed the back of her hand before going to help another customer, throwing a final comment of "Nice trousers," over his shoulder.

Sweet Merlin. The way he always stared into her eyes when he kissed her hand always got her juices flowing. She'd once thought it a quaint, old-fashioned gesture, but it was nothing of the sort when Steven did it.

It was sexy as hell.

Hermione settled into one of the chairs in the reading nook and read her book. She read happily as she waited, taking many short breaks to gaze at Steven or chat with him when he was between customers.

The rush of shoppers trickled and died before Marta arrived to relieve Steven. The cheerful girl ran directly up to Hermione and gave her a big hug.

"You're wonderful," she whispered to Hermione. "Steven couldn't stop smiling after your date the other night."

"Neither could I," Hermione whispered back.

It took only a moment for Steven to hand the store over to his co-owner.

"Almost ready, pet," he said to her. "I just have to grab something from the reading room."

Taking her hand, he led her into the small room and pulled her inside. Then he was kissing her, his hands drifting from her hair, down her back, where they came to rest squeezing the globes of her arse.

"It was pure madness trying to keep my hands off of you for hours," he said when they came up for air. "Will it always be like this? How do people manage?"

"It's not always like this. I've never felt quite like this, not until you. But I think it's worse now, when everything is new and exciting. Eventually, we should be able to be in the same room without wanting to rip each other's clothes off."

He kissed her again before replying. "I don't know about that. I can't imagine not wanting to touch you. Damn. I have a lovely dinner planned, but all I want to do is whisk you to your flat and rip your clothes off. Hold your hips down and bury my tongue in your delicious heat."

"You say the sexiest things," she said, breathlessly.

Lifting up, she bit him softly on the neck, just above where his ever-present turtleneck covered. He growled at her, a rumbling sound that traveled straight to her core.

"We could pick up some take away and go to my place."

"Why Miss Granger, you're brilliant."

One last kiss, and he tucked her hand into the crook of his arm and led her to the front door as Marta giggled at them and wished them a nice time.

They were on the sidewalk, arm in arm, when a furious shout stopped Hermione in her tracks.

"Hermione! What the fuck is going on? What the hell are you doing with *him*? I knew there was a reason you've been acting so weird. He's done something to you!"

She spun around, her wand already in her hand, a reflex born from years of war. Ron Weasley stood ten feet away. He was in a ridiculous powder blue tuxedo with a ruffled shirt. His face was red, his expression furious. His wand was pointed directly at Steven's chest.

She raised her wand to hex him before he could do any damage to a man who could no longer defend himself. Before she could cast, Steven thrust her behind him with one strong push.

"Sectumsempra!" Ron roared.

A flash of wand light, and Steven crumpled to the pavement at her feet.

"I'll kill him," she muttered as she cast a shield around herself and the still form at her feet. But she could not waste time killing him yet. She had to get Steven to safety. She needed time. Silently she cast a jinx that put a bubble as thick as treacle pudding around the crazed redhead.

Marta flew from the door of the shop and immediately helped Hermione drag a limp Steven back inside. She propped him up, sitting on the floor and leaning against the counter. Fucking hell, there was so much blood.

His eyes were open, though shuttered with pain. Always so damned brave, even as a Muggle.

"You stupid, stupid man," she sputtered, as she lifted his turtleneck to get a look at the damage. Three deep gashes in his chest, bleeding freely.

"Love you," he whispered.

"You are not dying on me, you stupid wonderful man."

"Hermione!" Marta shouted. "Ward the door! The murdering bastard has broken through your hex. Use your wand, woman!"

Without even thinking, she flicked at the door several times, a different color of light flowing from her wand with each movement. Then she turned back to Steven, running her wand over his wounds, softly singing the simplest of healing charms. She was no healer. The flow of blood had slowed considerably, but she could not heal the wounds completely.

Marta appeared at her elbow with a clean towel from the loo and quickly pressed it to Steven's chest. "Can't you heal it?"

"No. I need help."

"Then get it!"

Another wand flourish, and her silver Patronus appeared, dancing around her. "Get Minerva first, tell her bring Poppy, inside the bookshop. Severus is hurt. Tell her to hurry. Then get Harry, tell him to come. Tell him to fucking kill that crazy Ron Weasley."

The otter flew through the walls of the shop and vanished.

Looking to Steven, she saw that he watched her, his face carefully blank. He was terrified.

"Steven," she said, sliding up to him and throwing an arm around his shoulders, leaning him against her. "Don't be afraid. I've sent for help and you're going to be fine. I know this all looks insane. That secret I was afraid to tell you. This is it. But it's going to be all right. You're going to be fine. I promise you. You're going to see some crazy things, but I promise you it will be all right. Please trust me."

"Hermione," he whispered, his voice weak. "Never turn away...from you."

One of his hands slipped over to grasp her own. She held it so tightly she feared she'd hurt him and forced herself to loosen her grip.

"What if that madman breaks in before help comes?" Marta asked.

"Then I'll kill him," Hermione growled. "I'll kill him for daring to touch what is mine."

"Will Steven be all right?" Marta asked, tears in her eyes. "So much blood..."

"Help is coming. We won't let him die. I won't let him die on me, not when I finally found him."

A loud pop, and two women in wizarding robes appeared in the room. They both rushed to Steven, pushing Hermione and Marta aside so they could get to his injuries.

"What hex, Hermione?" Minerva asked, her voice stern and commanding.

"Sectumsempra."

"Oh, Severus. One of your own, and a nasty one as well."

Though the older women had moved them, Hermione sat on the floor as closely as she could get without being in the way. Marta sat at her side. A disjointed memory had Hermione confused.

"Marta, you told me to get my wand."

"I'm a squib. Raised by Muggle relatives. I don't really know much about the wizarding world, but I know magic when I see it."

A piercing shriek came from the door of the shop. Her wards. Her wards were falling. Hermione sprung to her feet, wand in hand, ready and willing to kill to protect her love. Her eyes flashed fire and her expression was fierce.

The wards fell, the door opened, and Harry walked in, his hands held open in front of him to show he had no wand. She almost hexed him anyway, so ready was she to do battle, but she checked the impulse at the last second. When she managed to drop her wand arm, he hurried forward and clasped her in a tight hug.

"How bad is Severus?"

"I don't know," she said her voice ragged. Then she burst into tears, burying her face against her friend's shoulders.

Minerva rose from the floor and came to detach Hermione from Harry. "He's going to be fine. Poppy needs a few more minutes. Come see him, Hermione. Come see him. He's calling for you."

Though he was flat on his back with the mediwitch still working over him, he looked much better already. He raised his hand to Hermione the moment he saw her. She slumped to the floor next to him, clasping his hand in both of hers and pressing it against her mouth while tears ran freely down her cheeks.

"Hermione." His voice was already stronger. "Don't cry, love. I'll be fine. You heard these...hmm...ladies say so. I admit I'm a trifle confused by what's happened, but I expect you will help me sort it out. Please don't cry."

A small sob escaped her, and she squeezed her eyes tightly shut, bowing her head over the hand she clasped tightly in her own. He's almost been killed. Almost died because he couldn't protect himself without his magic. With all he'd been through and witnessed, he wasn't turning away from her, he was trying his best to comfort her.

She opened her eyes, brought his hand to her lips and kissed it. "I do so love you, you brave stupid man."

He smiled at her, a small tired smile, but Hermione felt true hope for their relationship for the first time since it had begun.

"He needs to be monitored for a few hours," Poppy said, "and I'd feel better about it if I had him back at Hogwarts with a fully stocked infirmary around me."

Worry about repercussions to his memory made Hermione hesitate.

"Steven, the things you saw tonight, did any of it seem familiar?" she asked him.

"No, nothing. I feel like I've been dropped into a fantasy movie with a ton of special effects."

"Mentally, are you experiencing any ill effects? That is, except for this all seeming a little fantastical?"

"I'm in no distress, Hermione. You asked me to trust you and I do."

"No flooing," Poppy ordered. "Not with those wounds barely healed. Not that there's a floo here, anyway. Someone will need to side-along apparate with him."

"I will," Hermione said.

"Are you certain that's wise, Hermione?" Harry asked. "You're pretty upset."

"I will apparate him," Hermione growled. "I will not be separated from him for one second. Have I made myself clear?"

When she looked at Steven, he was smiling at her again. He seemed nearly his normal self, which relieved her somewhat, but she still wasn't ready to let him out of her sight.

Steven got to his feet with little assistance, wincing only slightly as he stood. The first thing he did was to draw Hermione into a firm hug.

"You are truly the most amazing creature," he whispered in her ear.

Giving him a quick kiss, she looked into his eyes. "Trust me?"

"Yes, with everything that I am."

She turned him gracefully and they vanished from the bookshop.

Thirteen

Chapter 13 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: I just finished chapter 22 this morning. I've quite close to the end, I think. Only some fun, juicy bits left. :) I'll keep up with the daily updates. You know, I've had such fun writing this, I'm considering de-Pottervesing it and publishing it as a bit of erotica. I'd have to do it under a pseudonym though. I've got a couple of children's books out under my name, and while I enjoy writing more than one genre, I don't want to mix erotica into it. I haven't decided for certain if I will do it. Wouldn't mind hearing what my readers think of the idea.

Smooches to my awesome readers, and big sloppy kisses to those who choose to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

He stumbled when they appeared at the gates of Hogwarts, and then stood goggling at the gigantic castle before him as she helped him catch his balance. She let him look his fill, watched him as he strove for some sort of mental equilibrium.

"All right, Steven?"

"I strongly suspect that I have run completely mad, but other than that I am fine."

Well, she hadn't splinched them at least. While she knew doing a side along was difficult at the best of times, she simply hadn't been able to bear the thought of being apart from him. He'd nearly been killed. It was impossible for her not to touch him, look at him, and prove to herself that he remained very much alive.

Harry, Poppy, and Minerva popped into being near them.

"Let him take his time," Poppy advised, "and float him if you have to. We'll be in the infirmary."

Hermione put an arm around Steven's waist and supported him as they slowly walked up the path to the main gates. He stared at everything, from the castle towers, to a ripple on the water of the lake as a large tentacle broke the surface, to the swishing limbs of the Whomping Willow.

About halfway to the castle, he paused, tugging Hermione to stop beside him.

"What is this place, pet? Where are we?"

"It's a school, love. A school for children to learn magic. We're in Scotland."

"In the blink of an eye, we've gone from London to Scotland." He snorted softly and shook his head. "And this is a school for magic. A place, I take it, where you went to school."

"Yes."

"So, if I was your teacher, then I must have taught at this place. I must have been some sort of magician."

"A wizard. Yes, Steven, you were a wizard before you lost your memory."

"I find that difficult to believe."

"Steven, have you ever had odd things happen around you when you were angry or upset?"

"I suppose so. Seems like anytime I get angry, one of those bloody fluorescent tubes explodes."

"That's your magic, Steven." She placed a hand against his chest over his heart. "The magic is inside you. You've forgotten it, but it's still there, dormant, powerful. Escaping in little bursts when you have strong emotions."

"What happened to me, Hermione? How did I end up alone in that hospital?"

"There was a war, Steven. A fight against a vicious dark wizard. You were a spy in his circle, working to bring about his defeat. It was very dangerous. At the last battle, the dark wizard was ended for good. You were badly hurt, but we couldn't find you anywhere. Until I ran into you on the street, we all believed you dead."

That seemed to satisfy his curiosity for the moment and they continued their walk to the castle.

Once in the infirmary, Poppy directed him to one of the beds. Hermione sat in a chair she pulled up to the bed and held his hand tightly in one of her own. Steven balked briefly at Poppy pointing a wand at his head, but Hermione reassured him that Poppy meant him no harm, and he allowed her to run her diagnostics.

"Good," Poppy said after she read the ticker tape that flowed from her wand. "Nothing a little rest won't cure."

Poppy went to a cabinet and returned with a vial made of blue glass. Steven looked at it with suspicion, but Hermione assured him it was all right. Drinking it down with a grimace, he closed his eyes and slept.

"There's something here I need to check," the kind mediwitch muttered and then hurried away in a flurry of robes.

Harry pulled a chair up next to Hermione, and for a time they sat watching Steven sleep.

They were roused from this pursuit by Ginny bursting into the infirmary and rushing over to them.

"Did you get him to the Aurors all right?" Harry asked.

Hermione interrupted before Ginny could reply. "Didn't you kill him, Harry? I really wanted you to kill him. I would have done it myself, but I was busy."

"No, Hermione, I didn't kill him. I hexed the shit out of him and then bound him. He was still shouting about how he was going to kill Severus before I gagged him. He was drunk and furious. I called Ginny to take him to be arrested, and then went to find you."

"Should have killed him," Hermione muttered.

"I took him to the Aurors, Harry, but they charged him with magical mishap. Said he was an Auror, and a war hero, and never would have tried to kill a Muggle on purpose. I couldn't tell them it really was Snape."

"What?" Hermione shouted.

"Damn it," Harry hissed. "Aurors closing ranks, protecting their own. It's an ongoing problem. I'll see what I can do tomorrow, but the truth of the matter is that he'll probably be released in a few days."

"Well, if you don't want him dead, you'd better convince him to stay away from me. The next time I see him, I'm drawing my wand."

Ginny patted her shoulder. "He's my brother, and I love him, but I don't blame you. He hasn't been acting right since you two broke up. And now he's gone and tried to murder someone. I don't understand what's wrong with him."

"Neither do I, Gin," Harry agreed. "He's been like a stranger."

Poppy and Minerva returned to Steven's bedside. Hermione sat up straighter when she saw the witches' serious faces.

"We know why he lost his memory." Poppy still held the tape from her wand. "I had to check a few arithmancy figures because I didn't understand what I was looking at. It says that Severus has suffered an Occlumency mishap."

"What do we do about it? How do we fix it?" Hermione asked.

"I have no idea," Poppy said, shaking her head. "There's no medical way to heal him. I only know one living person who is a skilled Occlumens, and he's lying in that bed."

"Harry?" Hermione looked at her friend.

"No, Hermione. I never was any good at it. And it might take a Legilimens to get in there and see what's happening. I have no idea how to do that with any skill."

"Draco," Ginny muttered to herself.

"What?" Noticing she was holding Steven's hand too tightly again, Hermione loosened her fingers.

"Draco Malfoy is an Occlumens. His crazy aunt Bella taught him. Percy used to talk to him after the war, you know, when they were trying to figure out whether to charge him or not."

"But would he help us?" Harry asked, sounding doubtful.

"He'd never help us," Hermione said with a snort. "But he'd help Severus."

"I'd best go find him then. Come with me, Gin. Maybe if you're there, he won't go straight for his wand when he sees me."

Hermione didn't know how long had passed when a hand on her shoulder gently shook her awake. She opened her eyes blearily, her shoulders and neck cramped and painful, to find that she had been sleeping in the chair, head and shoulders slumped forward to rest on the bed where Steven lay sleeping. His hand remained tightly clamped in her own.

"Hermione," Poppy said softly, "you need to get some rest. Why don't you take the bed next to his?"

"I won't leave him," she hissed quietly.

"Well, tuck yourself into the bed with him then. His wounds are healed, you won't hurt him. He only needs a little more sleep, and so do you by the look of it."

The kind woman walked away, and Hermione quickly took her advice. Slipping gently onto the bed next to Steven, she threw an arm over his waist, cuddled tightly against his side, and sleep dragged her back into its thrall.

She woke the second time slowly, reluctant to give up the warmth she felt around herself. She heard murmured voices but paid them no mind. She was lying on her side and Steven was spooned tightly against her back. One of his thighs was thrown over both her legs and his arm was a tight band around her waist, his hand reaching up so that it was settled cozily between her breasts.

"You might have warned me," muttered Draco Malfoy. "I had no idea they were this good of friends."

"Shhh, you prat," Ginny whispered. "They look so tired. Let them sleep."

"By all means, do shut the fuck up," Steven growled. "Let the poor woman rest."

She could feel his voice rumbling against her back and she snuggled closer to him.

"Merlin, it sounds exactly like him," Draco said softly. "Are you certain he doesn't remember?"

"He doesn't remember anything," Hermione said, opening her eyes and giving up on sleeping any longer.

Sunlight shone through the windows in the infirmary. It was well into the morning then, if not early afternoon. Much as she enjoyed her present position, she'd rather not do so in front of an audience that consisted of Ginny, Harry, and Draco Malfoy.

Turning in Steven's embrace, she gave him a quick kiss on the end of his nose. "Good morning."

"Good morning," he returned, his voice deep and gravelly from sleep. He stared at her mouth a moment, but then glanced at the three people standing at the foot of the bed. "Bloody inconvenient."

She giggled at that, then kissed his nose again and unwound herself from his embrace. "I need the loo. Be right back."

When she returned, Steven was sitting up against the headboard of the bed while the others sat in chairs around him, talking quietly.

"It won't hurt, Severus," Draco was saying with some feeling. "It's the only way I can find out what's been done to you. You can trust me."

By the small scowl on Steven's face, she could see that the man didn't trust the blond wizard speaking to him at all. Steven's eyes lifted to hers, and the scowl dissolved, a soft smile brightening his features.

As she sat near him and took his hand again, he spoke, "They've been explaining to me about this mind reading thing. I can't say as I much like the idea of that young man rattling around in my head. What do you think?"

"I think," she replied with a small sigh, "that you should let him try."

"You don't sound very certain."

"Steven, you know how I told you that when you were my teacher, we couldn't really stand each other?" At his nod, she continued. "Well, Draco and I hated each other with a fierce and burning passion while we were at school. To this day, I don't like him especially, though I no longer hate him. That said, you and he were close...you cared for each other. No, I don't much like him, but I know damned well he'd never do anything on purpose to hurt you."

When she glanced at Malfoy, she found his expression almost friendly.

"Thanks, Granger."

She shrugged. "We aren't children anymore."

"Oh, all right." Steven scowled slightly again, but he seemed resigned. "Do your worst."

Draco sat primly on the edge of the bed, wand in hand. "You'll have to let go of his hand for a minute, Granger."

When she reluctantly complied, Draco leaned over to gaze into Steven's eyes.

"Legilimens," he murmured. "No, Severus, don't fight me...let me in...like I give a weasel's arse what Granger's knickers look like. Oh, I see. We're friends, Severus, and I'm trying to help you. Don't worry about that stuff...just relax."

Steven did relax then, and the expression in Draco's eyes sharpened as he gazed through the black eyes and into the mind beyond for long moments.

Finally, he leaned back, breaking the spell's connection. He squeezed Steven's shoulder firmly and said, "See? That wasn't so bad."

Steven rolled his eyes with a huff of breath.

"Do you know what's happened to him?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, I think so, but I need some information. I know Severus was left for dead in the Shack, but what exactly happened?"

"We've been afraid to say too much in front of him," Harry said. "The healers at St. Mungo's told me that trying to force him to remember could have dire consequences."

"No, you don't have to worry about that. Believe me, nothing you say is going to get him to remember anything."

Hermione began explaining the incident in the Shrieking Shack. When she got to the point where the snake had attacked Severus, her voice broke, and Harry continued the narrative. Steven reached out and grabbed her hand, squeezing it.

"I don't know exactly what happened after we left the room," Harry admitted. "I only know his body disappeared."

Hermione had calmed enough to find her voice. "He tried to apparate, but he was so near death that it didn't go well. He ended up outside a Muggle hospital."

"That makes sense," Draco mused, steepling his fingers and pressing them briefly against his lips as he thought for a moment. "He was desperately trying to get Harry to Voldemort, as Dumbledore had instructed him, so that the final engagement could take place. He had to have Occluded greatly for Voldemort not to have read this plan from his mind. Couple that with his determination to give Harry only the memories he had to, instead of dumping his whole life out of his head, and then a botched apparition attempt. Yes, it makes sense."

"Is he in there at all, Draco?" Hermione asked, her anxiety making her voice a little high and squeaky. "Please, tell me it isn't hopeless."

"Oh, he's in there all right. He's Occluded himself right into a nice, neat little box. Hidden his entire being right away. Unreachable by Voldemort, unreachable by his own self. Trapped in a little pocket of his mind."

Fourteen

Chapter 14 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: This is perhaps my favorite chapter in the entire story. Well, this one and the next. :) Big sloppy kisses to those sweet enough to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

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"If even Voldemort couldn't get in there, how will you ever get him out?" Hermione's entire body was trembling in reaction.

Steven tugged at her hand, drawing her to the bed to sit beside him as he put an arm around her and held her close. "Hermione, it's all right. Don't worry so. I hate not knowing so much of my life, but I've managed well so far. I imagine I'll be fine."

"But I can get the walls to drop," Malfoy said. "I'm sure of it. Severus Occluded himself to protect his mind from magical attack. That isn't the same thing as a friend coming in to gently encourage the walls to open up."

"But what if it goes badly? What if I lose what memories I have?" Taking Hermione's hand, Steven raised it to his lips and kissed it. "I won't take a chance of losing that, love. Not even to get my old memories back and be complete again."

She kissed him right on his mouth, a quick, hard kiss. "I understand, Steven, I truly do. But it isn't as easy as all that. Harry? Do you have Severus' wand?"

"I do," Harry answered, and drew it from a pocket of his robes. "I stopped by home to fetch it after we found Draco. I was hoping we'd need it."

Hermione plucked it from Harry's fingers, feeling it hum angrily at her touch. "Steven, would you hold this, please?"

Hesitantly, Steven reached out and took the dark wand from her. A gentle breeze stirred his hair and a soft glow of light flashed from the wand.

"Dear Lord," he whispered, gazing at the wand in his hand.

"Steven," Hermione said softly, "magic runs through your blood. You can't turn your back on it. You were the most fierce, terrifying, amazingly wonderful wizard I've ever met. If you'd had your magic, the likes of Ronald Weasley would never have been able to hurt you. He'd never have been able to touch you."

When he looked at her, still obviously disconcerted, she continued. "Draco knows what he's doing. He's not going to take the memories you have. Please trust me."

"You know I do." He handed the wand back to her and she set it on the nightstand. "All right, boy," he said to Draco. "Do your worst."

Hermione went back to her chair, the spell was chanted, and grey eyes locked to black. After only a few moments, Draco disengaged again.

"It's no use. He's too distracted. Hermione, can I see you by the door for a moment?"

She followed Draco to the door and asked him to explain.

"Granger, with you so near, you are absolutely all he can think of. I'll never get those walls to drop unless you give us some space."

Though she hated to leave his side, Hermione knew she had to give Severus the best chance he had to recover everything he had been. With a sigh, she agreed and told Malfoy she'd be in the library.

Draco began to turn away and then faced her again with a wide grin. "Severus was right, Granger. They are very nice knickers."

As she huffed in indignation, he turned and walked away, muttering to himself, "Five times...holy hell!"

She made her way to the library, blessedly free from students on a Sunday morning. It was no use trying to read, not even in the coveted restricted section. Too wound up and worried to focus on any book, she paced for a while before she finally settled into a quiet window seat and stared out at the grounds of Hogwarts.

What would it be like to have Severus restored? The frog that had replaced her heart certainly liked the thought and rolled contentedly as she considered it. Steven had been a version of Severus who had been tempered by kindness, both from the elderly friend he had lost, and Marta, who loved him like he was her own uncle. She couldn't possibly imagine the man would turn into a complete stranger when he got his memory back. Steven would still be there after all.

Hermione also rather thought she would have taken to her surly former professor even without the memory mishap, though she imagined he wouldn't have given her the chance to get close enough to woo him. He had always been intelligent and fierce, and the man knew how to wield a wand. To defend against three enraged Hogwarts

professors, all the while making it look good while not causing them any injury, was a feat of skill only the likes of Harry could hope to duplicate.

And the man could fly. Dear Merlin, the man could fly without a broom. Hermione knew of no other wizard or witch who had ever managed that bit of magic. Great power, tightly controlled by force of will and determination. Magically, the man was a stud. It was enough to make a girl flustered.

No, there was no doubt that she found the memory of Severus infinitely more intriguing as an adult than she had as a schoolgirl. His power and demeanor had frightened her then, now it only made her want to rip his clothes off. It might not be all smooth sailing, to have a relationship with Severus Snape, but she felt she could handle it. She was every bit as stubborn as he, after all.

The sun had set and the moon risen above the lake before she heard footsteps in the library. Hermione rose quickly and turned towards the sound. Draco Malfoy strode to her.

"Is he--?"

"He's fine...he's him. He's Severus again, I mean."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He thanked me, grabbed his wand to conjure a set of robes, and flew out of the room like all the devils of hell were chasing him." At her shocked look, Draco's voice softened as he continued. "I doubt he's gone far, not without speaking to you first. Listen, Granger, when you find him, don't let him be a bloody great git, all right?"

"I'll do my best."

Rushing out of the library, Hermione could hear the sound of students in the Great Hall. It must be dinnertime. Good. She didn't want to have to deal with a bevy of students getting in the way of her finding Severus. Starting in the hall outside the infirmary, she asked the portraits breathless questions, following their directions as they led her from one painting to the next.

She tracked him down, finding him outside on the Astronomy Tower, the highest tower of Hogwarts, and the place where he had followed Albus' directive and thrown the old wizard to the ground below. He was sitting in a puddle of black robes, his back against the wall, staring at the moon.

Saying nothing, she went to his side, sitting close against him and taking one of his hands in her own.

"You held my hand as I lay dying," he murmured.

Before she could speak, he dropped her hand, climbed to his feet, and went to stand a few feet away with his back to her.

"You were very kind, Miss Granger, in your attentions to me. However...clearly now that I am once again myself, there can be nothing between us."

Startled, Hermione gaped at his back for a moment, trying to pull her scattered thoughts together. She hadn't been certain what his reaction would be, but she didn't expect him to brush her aside with harsh words spoken in clipped and calm tones. It was as if he felt nothing for her but annoyance.

Jumping to her feet, Hermione walked around to face him, ready to give the damned bastard a piece of her mind. When she saw his face, the angry words died on her lips. Still staring at the moon, his expression was completely blank of emotion. The man's words had been gruff and dismissive, but she knew that blank look. He was terrified.

"Severus, you idiot," she said bluntly.

Then his eyes, at last, met hers as his face twisted in rage.

"How dare you!" he shrieked, spittle flying from his lips with the strength of his emotion. His hands clenched into fists at his sides.

Crossing to him, she grabbed both his hands in hers and held tight as he tried to pull them away. He succeeded only in pulling her flush against his chest.

"Severus, I believe you've forgotten something."

"I remember everything, you harpy." He stared down his nose at her with a furious scowl on his face. "Release me!"

"I won't. No, you don't remember everything. I think you've forgotten that while your memories were locked away, I knew exactly who you were, practically from the second I ran into you. I'm arse over tits in love with you, Severus Steven Sondheim Snape."

The rage fled from his face and there was that gobsmacked expression she loved so well. His eyes were wide, his mouth slack, the struggles to release himself from her grasp had ceased.

"Merlin, but you are so fucking adorable when you do that," she whispered breathlessly.

Then his mouth was crashing down onto hers, his kiss nearly violent as his tongue plundered her mouth. This time, when his hands tugged at her own, she released them. His arms came up to crush her so tightly to his chest that she could scarcely breathe.

Who needed breath when that wicked tongue was sliding around hers so passionately? A moan escaped her lips and she felt his entire body shudder against her. When the need for air finally broke them apart, he picked her up in his arms. Stepping back to the wall, he sat down, cradling her tightly against his chest. She could feel the length of his hard cock pressing delightfully against her bottom, and she couldn't help but wiggle a little, which made him clutch her even tighter.

"You said you would kill Weasley for daring to touch what was yours," he murmured against her neck.

"I might be a wee bit possessive of you," she admitted with a slight blush.

"It made me hard," he growled into her ear. "There I was, two old witches fussing over me, with a cock so hard I felt it could penetrate granite. Then the wards were falling, and you stood with your wand in your steady hand, your face fierce. You were like an Amazon, a Valkyrie, an avenging angel. You were magnificent, and I've never seen anything more beautiful in my life."

Then he was kissing her again, leaning her over his arm as he made love to her mouth, her jaw, her neck.

"I might be a wee bit possessive of you as well," he murmured against the skin of her throat.

The frog in her chest rolled furiously. "Good. Severus?"

"Hmm?" he replied, the noise vibrating over her skin as he sucked her neck.

"You feel hard enough to penetrate granite right now," she purred, wriggling again on his lap.

"Shall we do something about that then?"

"Merlin, yes. Please, Severus."

"Oh, I do so like my name spoken in that sultry tone."

He surged to his feet, still cradling her. A feat of strength that made her clit twitch so hard it almost felt like an orgasm. Grabbing his face between her two palms, she kissed him, thrusting her tongue into his mouth wantonly. One of his hands shifted away from her, and she felt a flicker of magic over her skin. When the kiss ended and she opened her eyes, she saw that they were in her flat.

"How...we were on Hogwarts grounds...how could you apparate us?"

"I was a Headmaster, Hermione," he muttered, as if that explained anything.

Then Severus gently placed her on the bed before he flung himself on top of her.

Fifteen

Chapter 15 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

Second Update Today

A/N: Please note, I have decided to take a wee bit of pity on my awesome readers and post chapter 15 today. Do make sure you've read 14, as it's my favorite one.

Thanks to all and big sloppy kisses to those reviewing. No beta- so any mistakes are my own. Now, hang on to your britches, because we're headed straight to Lemontown. :)

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

Her thighs cradling his hips, her mouth attached to his, she writhed against him. He groaned as he thrust himself against her. This was delicious, but she wanted to feel him inside her at last. If she didn't distract her inexperienced lover, he was going to come in his pants again.

Releasing his mouth, she rubbed her hands softly up and down his back, gentling him.

"Severus? May I undress you?"

"Merlin, yes. Please."

"Stand up for a moment, sweetheart. Let's get these robes off of you."

He climbed gracefully off her body and stood beside the bed. His chest heaved with panting breath and his black eyes followed her every move. She stood up and considered the many buttons on the front of his robes. Taking her wand from her pocket, she slid it slowly down the line of buttons as they popped open one by one. Muggle clothes were so much easier, and she was pleased to see he still wore his jeans and turtleneck sweater underneath.

Sliding the robes from his shoulders, she let them fall to the floor and reached for his sweater with eager hands. He lifted his arms so she could slide it off, and she threw it behind her. The first thing she saw was the scar on his neck. It was ragged and puckered, but certainly not so awful that he should feel the need to always cover it up. Tugging him down towards her, she kissed it gently and then swiped it with her tongue.

He gave a small sigh, and she felt tension suddenly leave his shoulders. He had been worried about it then. Leaning back, she finally got a look at his chest. A lean, muscular chest with a lovely amount of black hair in a tidy triangle that became a line down his stomach where it disappeared into his jeans. She ran her hands through it, delighting in the way it tickled her palms. She bid him kick his boots off, and she bent down quickly to remove his socks and get rid of her own shoes.

She guided him back onto the bed, lying him on his back so that she could explore that lovely chest. She started at his mouth, snogging him soundly before she ran her tongue and lips over his jaw, down his throat, and into that lovely patch of soft hair on his chest. Then she detoured to each of his small, flat nipples, kissing them and tugging them gently with her teeth.

He'd gone speechless again, but by the sounds he was making, he was enjoying her attentions. She followed that sexy trail of black hair with her tongue, all the way to the waistband of his jeans. A button unfastened, a zipper glided down, and she had him lift his hips so she could slide the denim down his legs and off. His cock sprung free, tenting his boxer shorts, and she paused to suck him through the fabric for a moment.

His legs moved restlessly on the bed, and he canted his hips up against her mouth in unconscious reaction.

"Good Lord, Hermione," he hissed.

Her hands reached for his boxers then, and after she removed them, she threw them over her shoulder. There was that lovely, big cock of his in all its glory. Gliding back up, she slid her hands under him so she could squeeze his tight, bare, arse and then swallowed his cock down as far as she could without choking.

He shouted, and then lay panting as she bobbed her head. Soon he was reaching for her, pulling her off of his cock and lifting her up to meet her mouth with his own.

"Hermione, that feels divine," he muttered against her lips. "But I so want to be inside you."

"I want that too. You have no idea how much I want that beautiful cock of yours inside me. Thrusting inside of me until you twitch and come."

"Merlin, love, you are going to drive me mad with that wicked tongue of yours. Will you show me?"

"I will, but listen, sweetheart, the first time is likely to be a bit fast."

"The excitement of unknown territory?" he asked and then grinned at her.

Good heavens. That grin was all Steven, but the raised eyebrow and narrowed eyes were pure Severus. The combination was dead sexy.

"Yes, love. So, we aren't going to worry about lessons or anything fancy. This first time is for you, all for you. I want you to enjoy yourself without worrying about me."

"But I want to please you," he practically growled.

"Severus, the truth is I rarely come from penetration, though I love how it feels. You know, of course, there's nothing wrong with ladies first, though."

The smile he gave her was pure sexy wickedness.

"Love, may I undress you now?" he purred.

"Oh, yes. Please undress me."

There had been something incredibly hot about learning Severus' body while she stayed fully clothed, but she was ready to be naked now. She longed for bare flesh rubbing against bare flesh. She also thought that by his predatory smile, she knew where he was going, and she simply couldn't wait to have his mouth on her again.

Sitting up so he could slowly slide her knit top up and off, she then reached back to unhook her bra. Then he was sliding the lacy thing off of her body and pushing her to lay on her back. He studied her bare breasts with hungry eyes, caressing them with his hands before lowering his mouth to a puckered nipple.

He began by mimicking her earlier actions on his own nipples. Squeezing one breast in the palm of his hand as he licked and nipped at the other. Hermione realized that even as he enjoyed her earlier attentions, he had been carefully cataloging her ministrations so he could reciprocate. Then he began to explore on his own, noting her gasp when he rolled a nipple with his fingers and discovering she liked it when he nipped her a little harder than she had bitten him. Every time she made a sound of pleasure or arched her back to press her breast into his mouth, he continued the action that had garnered such positive results.

By the time his hot mouth wandered down her stomach, tongue briefly dipping into her navel, she was panting and her heart was thundering in her chest. He slipped her trousers off and then stared open-mouthed at her brief knickers.

"What is this called?" he asked her.

"It's called a thong. Women wear them when they don't want knicker lines under the tight trousers they wear to try to impress their man."

"Consider me suitably impressed. I approve of this thong."

He slid the scrap of lace off of her body, pushing her thighs apart, and lowering his hot, talented mouth to her sex. He simply licked her at first, from channel to clit, dipping every now and then into her warm depths.

"So wet," he muttered. "Merlin, you taste delicious."

Then his fingers were pressing into her, stroking her as his mouth and tongue latched onto her clitoris. He'd forgotten nothing of his earlier lessons on this particular subject, and Hermione came so quickly it shocked her. He let her rest only a moment, then returned to his task, pushing her over her next peak and then gentling her with his tongue and lips. When he seemed to be gearing up for round three, she stopped him.

"No, Severus. Please, I need you inside me. I can't wait another moment."

A sweet uncertainty came over his face, but she encouraged him to slide up over her, and then reached down a hand to guide his hard cock inside. His eyes fastened on hers, he pressed slowly in until he was buried to the hilt.

"Hermione," he whispered, "so tight and hot. Good Lord, you're so tight around me."

"I knew you'd feel good. I knew it would feel wonderful to have your big cock inside me."

He obviously liked it when she talked dirty. Drawing his hips back, he pushed in again with a soft grunt.

"Good Lord," he muttered again, and then began to thrust in earnest.

When he drew back too far in his excitement, and popped free of her, she quickly reached down and guided him back inside. He learned how far he could withdraw without slipping out of her tight channel, and thrust with growing confidence, lowering his head to swipe his tongue in her mouth in time with the motion of his hips. Lifting his head, he stared again into her eyes.

"That's it, Severus. Fuck me harder. Fuck me hard."

As if waiting to find out it was all right to do so, he slammed into her, over and over, bouncing her on the mattress. Keening and growling sounds fell from his lips. God, how he excited her. And that cock pounding into her, she felt she could almost come from this, though such pleasure had been a very rare occurrence for her.

Soon, his hips faltered, jerking against hers in short, arrhythmic bursts.

"Yes, Severus," she crooned. "Come for me. I want to feel you twitching inside me. I want to feel you fill me up with your heat. Come for me, love. Come in me."

With a hoarse shout, he slammed into her as she clutched him tightly to her body. His hips slowed their motion as his cock jerked inside her. He stretched her so tight that she could feel every spasm, and then liquid heat poured into her.

He collapsed onto her, his chest heaving, his hands fisted in her hair. She ran her palms gently up and down his back, murmuring to him that he was wonderful, that he excited her, that he was loved. She felt powerful, that she had brought this fierce man his first taste of true passion. She felt possessive. Now she had him clutched in her arms, she would never let him go.

Lifting his head, he gazed at her, then dipped down to kiss her softly. "I will never let you go," he growled.

"Funny," she replied. "I was just thinking the same thing."

They kissed and petted, murmuring nonsensical devotions to each other for about half an hour, then Severus was ready for round two. Lying on his side with his head propped up on one hand so he could look at her, he ran his other hand down her chest, over her belly, and over her mound. Watching his hand, he took two fingers and slowly slid them into her.

"I've made you so delightfully wet." He looked back into her eyes, a tiny furrow of worry between his eyebrows. "I want to suck you again, even after what we just did. Even after I filled you with come. Does that make me disgusting?"

Her passage clenched so hard at that thought, he could feel it with his fingers. Both his eyebrows rose as he looked at her in shock.

"Apparently, I don't think that's disgusting at all. In fact, some parts of me seem to think that's very, very hot."

He grinned at her then, the truly wicked grin, and it made her clench his fingers again. After a brief but enthusiastic snog, he dove down to lick and suck at her dripping core. He must have liked what he found, because he slurped at her eagerly before he turned his attentions to her throbbing clit.

She managed to wait for two glorious orgasms before she dragged him up her body with impatient hands, demanding that he fuck her.

And fuck her he did. With the sharp edge of his desire eased by their earlier coupling, he took his time. Exploring, experimenting, studying her closely for her every response. She gasped when a clever twist of his hips ground his pelvic bone into her aching clit, so he did the move over and over. Pushing balls deep inside of her and then grinding against her.

"More, oh yes, more. Fuck me, Severus. Harder. Oh, good heavens."

Grinning his wicked grin, he complied, staring into her eyes as he thrust harder and faster, every stroke hitting the point of her pleasure. With shock, she realized she was fast approaching the point of no return.

"Oh, you wonderful man. I'm going to come. You wonderful wicked man...I going to come with you buried inside me. Now...I'm going to come now. Severus!"

His name was a full-throated howl as her orgasm roared through her. He bit his lip until it almost bled as he rode out the contractions of her flesh around him.

When she came back to herself, he was still gently sliding in and out of her, his cock hard, his expression enthralled.

"You didn't...?"

"Oh, no." His eyes were lit with desire, his grin borrowed straight from the devil himself. "Not yet. I'm going to do that again. I'm going to make you scream my name again."

"Severus," she whispered.

Grabbing his head, she pulled his mouth to hers, pushing her tongue inside, fucking his mouth as he fucked her. She writhed beneath him like an animal in heat, slamming her hips into his with his every thrust. When he toppled her over the edge of her desire, she screamed his name. He pounded into her one last time and spilled into her still clenching passage.

At last pleasantly exhausted, they climbed under the covers and fell asleep, their limbs tangled together in sated abandon.

Sixteen

Chapter 16 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: This bus will be making frequent stops in Lemontown from here on it. I do hope that's quite all right. ;) No Beta- any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

She woke in the night, Severus spooned against her back. His hand was cupping her breast, his mouth pressed tightly against the back of her neck. He whimpered with need as he rubbed his cock against the soft skin of her buttocks.

"I'm sorry, Hermione," he whispered against her neck as he realized he had awakened her. "I need...I need...oh, Merlin, please. Please help me."

"Shhh, love. I want you. Always want you."

Reaching behind herself, she grasped his cock and guided him, showing him how to enter her passage from behind.

"Yes," he hissed in pleasure. "Need you. Need you around me."

His hips surged as he plowed into her with strong slow thrusts.

"Gods, Hermione, how can you feel so different? How can it be so different like this?"

"Oh, Severus, I have so many wonderful things to show you."

His response to that was a fierce growl and a mighty push inside her. He'd taken to lovemaking so readily and been so adept, she had to remind herself that the total of his experience was what they had done so far.

"But how can I please you like this?"

"Nothing easier," she assured him. "Give me your hand."

She grabbed his hand and pushed it down, bringing his fingers to her clit.

"Oh, yes, that's brilliant," he muttered against the back of her neck.

Then his fingers danced over her as he took her forcefully from behind, there was heat and bliss and murmured devotions before sleep dragged them back under.

The next time she woke up, the sun was shining through the bedroom window and Severus had his head propped up on one hand, staring at her with a gentle smile on his face.

"Good morning," he said, dipping his head briefly to kiss her smiling lips.

She stretched like a cat, not able to wipe the smile off her face. "Good morning."

"I'm sorry I disturbed your rest last night." His smile faded and he looked concerned.

No. Her darling wizard was no kind of actor at all. Thank Merlin. She'd never be able to figure the clever bastard out if he was.

"Severus, why do you think your attentions were unwelcome?"

"You were so tired. With all that happened and then all we did, I should have let you sleep."

"I slept fine, thank you. Love, let me explain this to you, so there's no possible misunderstanding. I was fast asleep. Then I started having this beautifully wicked dream that you were making love to me. I woke up and felt your hard cock rubbing against my skin, your hot breath on the back of my neck, your strong hand on my breast. My heart started pounding. My sexy lover wanted me and I wanted him, desperately. Then he was inside me, right where I wanted him. He made me sing out in bliss before I fell back asleep. Then I slept the lovely deep sleep of the truly shagged."

He chuckled then, the deep, slightly nasty chuckle that she remembered from her school days. It had been frightening back then. Funny how that sound now shivered down her spine and curled her toes.

Laying on his back, he tugged her over so that she reclined half over his chest. He buried his nose in her hair and breathed deeply.

"Damn, witch, you even smell delicious. Your passion...your kind heart and brilliant mind...your ferocity when protecting those you love. What man wouldn't wake up with a raging erection with you in his bed? I have no idea what you see in me, but Merlin, I love you."

This was a different sort of love than Hermione had ever had in her life. It was a fierce, passionate, almost violent love. She was shocked to find tears in her eyes. When Severus gazed at her with confusion and obvious concern, she buried her face in his chest hair and cried.

"What is it, love? What did I say? Tell me and I swear to you I'll never fucking say it again."

"What you said was beautiful. I just love you so much."

He wrinkled his nose up at her then, making it quite clear he thought she was mad. She laughed even as she was crying, and he brought both his arms around her to hold her tightly to him.

"Let me tell you," she said into his chest. "Let me tell you about the sad excuse I had for love before I met you. I had a man who talked about Quidditch and who he arrested last night. Who went cross-eyed with boredom if I so much as mentioned a book or an idea. Who said he loved me but ignored my wants and focused on his own. Who thought eating me was a distasteful chore to be saved for times when he was trying to get back in my good graces after a particularly bad argument. A man who wanted sex no more than once a week, and would never even think of waking me up in the middle of the night for passionate embraces. A man who gave me a single orgasm per engagement, if I was *lucky*."

She crossed her arms over his chest and rested her chin on them so she could see his startled face.

"Let me tell you about my new lover. He is fierce in battle, clever as a bastard, so powerful he can fucking fly. He talks to me for hours of books, and ideas...listens to my every word. He's not content to sit idly by, but studies me, watches me, so quick to find any way to please me, in bed and out. And he's sexy as hell, this man. Eager to do anything for my pleasure. Merlin, he's good too. With his big cock and his strong hands and his wicked, wicked tongue. He eats me like I'm the most delicious thing he's ever tasted. He's made me come so many times in our short acquaintance that I'm addicted to him like a drug. I've never felt like this. I literally can't keep my hands off of him. And the very best thing, he can't keep his hands off of me either. He wants me so very badly that he wakes me up in the middle of the night, desperate for me, and makes me scream his name in joy as I come. I don't ever again want to hear you say that you don't know why I want you, why I love you."

Looking down, she could see his cock proudly tenting the coverlet. She rose up and threw the covers completely off the bed. Straddling him, she dropped down on him so fast she engulfed him to the root. Then he was tugging her down, devouring her mouth as she snapped her hips, burying him inside herself, over and over.

She straightened, crossing her arms on the top of her head as she wiggled her hips in tight circles around his shaft, posing for him, watching him gaze at the bob and sway of her breasts before he reached those big hands up to squeeze and beautifully torment her. She ground against his pelvic bone, her movements became frenzied as she chased her pleasure. Then she was clenching around him, stars going off behind her closed eyes as she sang his name.

A rush of movement and she was on her back with Severus plowing back into her. His mouth everywhere, his hands everywhere, panting her name over and over as he followed her into heaven.

They didn't go back to sleep but snuggled in each other's arms. For once they were silent, enjoying the sweet post-love lassitude and the feel of their bodies resting against each other.

"What do you want to do today?" she eventually asked him.

"I need to go talk to Marta. Let her know I'm all right. I should have done it before now, but I was distracted."

Hermione chuckled at that.

"I was also supposed to work today," he continued, "but she's probably made other arrangements. She has a couple of cousins who help us out when one of us is indisposed. Do I remember her saying she was a squib?"

"Yes, raised Muggle."

"I had no idea. Of course, I had no idea about any of it. Then I should go see Minerva. We left rather suddenly last night. What will you do today?"

"Well, I was supposed to go to class, but I think I'll skip them."

"Why Miss Granger! Skipping class. I rather think I'm a bad influence on you."

"Isn't that wonderful? Honestly, exams are next week, and I've finished the reading. I could skip this week and take my exams and do fine. I'm not even trying to get a Muggle degree, it was something to do after I quit my job at the Ministry. I haven't decided what I want to do yet, really. What about you? What do you want to do, now that you're yourself again?"

"Honestly, I like my bookshop. I have no desire to return to teaching. And Franklin left it to me...I don't want to give it up. Though I could expand to sell rare magical texts to the wizarding part of the population."

"You could charm the broom closet into a bigger space," she mused. "Hook it to the floo, give it a charmed entrance to the street only wizards can see."

"Sounds like a lot more work. Want a job?"

"Really? Work with you and Marta?" She grinned at him. "I think I'd like that. And I do happen to need a job."

"Even if you decide later that you wish to do something else, you could help me get it all sorted."

"I'm not sure I will want to do anything else. Work in a bookshop, have time to do some private projects of my own, see my sexy lover every day. Sounds brilliant."

"Let's give it a try, then." He wrinkled up his nose. "We need a shower. We stink. And then something to eat. Merlin, I'm starving."

"Not surprising, what with the shagging like mad bunnies. And we skipped dinner last night. Ever shower with a slippery naked witch before?"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't. It sounds delightful."

Would this raging desire she had for him ever calm down? They managed to get clean first, but then he was hard again, rubbing soapsuds over her flesh, taking her nipples in his hot mouth, sliding his fingers into her secrets. And she felt as rabid for him as well. It couldn't be natural. Next thing she knew, she was bent over, her hands on the tile walls of the shower to steady herself as he thrust into her heat and rolled her clit between his fingers.

When they were through, she flinched as she sat on the lid of the toilet to dry her hair. Of course, he noticed and immediately asked what was wrong.

"I'm a little sore," she explained. "We have been quite busy and you are magnificently blessed."

She punctuated her words by running a finger down his shaft, still an impressive length, even when not erect. It twitched in reaction to her touch.

"Down boy," he said to his cock, so seriously that it made her giggle. "The lady is sore. You know there are potions for that, pet. After I speak to Minerva, I'll stop by and see Poppy."

"Do you have to tell her why I need it?" she complained.

He flashed her that devil's grin and had the audacity to laugh.

They ate breakfast, an easier task now that Hermione could use her wand. They sat together eating with occasional breaks for quick kisses and gentle touches. Hermione had never been happier in her life, and she told him so, which earned her a much longer kiss.

"What will you do while I'm gone?" he asked.

"Harry is probably back at work, but I'd like to go see Ginny if she's available. I never know what her schedule is, she works making racing brooms."

"Difficult work, but with her talent in charms, I imagine she does well."

"She does, and she really enjoys it."

She walked him to the door when he left, giving him another long kiss. He promised to send his Patronus to her when he was finished with his errands. Then he was gone, and she leaned against the door for a moment with a goofy smile on her face.

Seventeen

Chapter 17 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Here's that plot rearing it's head, but not to worry, we'll have plenty of fun before this tale is over ;) Smooches to all my lovely readers, and big sloppy kisses to those taking the time to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

Ginny responded quickly to her message, saying that she was at work but could leave early and meet Hermione at her flat. Hermione had time to tidy the place up and do a few charms to freshen the air and make it smell less like rabid niffers had been shagging in it.

Ginny popped into being just as Hermione determined her flat smelled normal enough. While Harry and Ginny's cottage had complete anti-apparition wards, Hermione's wards were not so strict, and allowed a select few access. It was understandable The Boy Who Lived needed stricter protections than she did herself.

"So, what's up, Hermione?" Ginny accepted a glass of wine and sat on the sofa. "Your message made it sound like this was an emergency girl talk."

"I suppose it is, it's just that I'm a bit confused about something."

She stopped there, blushing, which made her best friend's eyebrows rise.

"Spill it, Hermione. You're hardly a blushing virgin like Snape."

Hermione couldn't help the smug smirk that bloomed on her face at that remark.

"Oh, I see." It started with a giggle and then grew to an all-out laugh. Ginny had to take a minute to calm down before she could speak again. "So, no more unicorn herding for Snape then, I take it."

"Absolutely not."

"And by that smirk, I take it the proceedings went well?"

"Merlin, yes. He certainly crushed his previous record."

Ginny had unfortunately been taking a sip of wine during that remark and choked as she tried not to spray it out of her mouth. "More than five? You are a lucky bitch. But Hermione, he hadn't even kissed anyone before. How is it he can be so good at it?"

"He pays attention. It's like I'm some fiddly potion he's trying to brew. I swear, he pays attention to every sound I make, every move I make, until he sees what pleases me. Then he takes what he's learned and...wow. I mean, really."

"Well, if he's as good as all that, what's the problem?"

"It's hard to say, I mean, I'm a little embarrassed to tell you."

"Hermione, I know how big your lover's cock is. I think that proves we tell each other nearly everything. Spit it out."

"We can't keep our hands off each other!" she blurted. "I mean, last night we finally got to—"

"Hidden caves and rampant dragons?" Ginny supplied when her friend hesitated.

"Yes. Damn your trashy books, but yes. And then again in the middle of the night, and then this morning...twice! Even after all of that, it was difficult for me to let him leave the apartment to run errands. I think the only reason I could is because I've gotten sore, you know, down there."

"There are potions for that."

"I know, Severus is fetching me some. But Ginny, as much as I'm enjoying it, this level of attraction can't be normal. We've got to be able to have a life outside of the bedroom. I thought it was nothing more than the newness of it all making everything really exciting, but it's not calming down, it's getting worse."

Ginny stared at her for long enough that Hermione began to become uncomfortable. "Oh, great bugging Merlin. That's it. You're a Muggleborn."

"Yes," Hermione said, the single syllable drawn out, seeming to suggest her friend had gone suddenly stupid.

"I just mean that you wouldn't know, is all."

"Know what?"

"Um, sweetie, a wizard's or witch's libido is directly tied to the strength of their magic. Stronger the magic, stronger the libido. If I had to guess, Snape's probably in the top four or five strongest wizards in the world right now, and you may not be that high, but you are no slouch yourself."

"What? So, you're saying our passion is magically compelled or something? That's disgusting!"

"Don't be daft. There's no compulsion, it's just a fact of life. Powerful wizards are a randy lot. Think about it, you're sitting here having a nice chat with me. Feel any need to rush out and go find Severus to jump his wand?"

"Well, it does sound nice, but no, I don't feel compelled at all. All right, we're powerful, which seems to make us sex fiends. Is it always going to be so...I swear, if he's in the same room as me, I can barely control myself. How can we live like this?"

"No. Right now, it's like your magical power is rubbing up all over his, getting acquainted and settling in. After a week or two, it should calm down a bit. But Hermione, it won't ever go away. You're talking about a life with someone where you're going to be shagging at least once a day."

Hermione had no reply to that except a wicked grin, which made her friend giggle.

"Gin, how is it that you know so much about this?"

"Growing up wizarding, you hear things. And Hermione, I am married to Harry fucking Potter. What do you think?" When Hermione's eyes widened, Ginny chuckled and continued. "First couple weeks were something, let me tell you. I'm not in his league, magical power-wise, but I'm strong."

"And now?"

"We have plenty of time to live our lives, work, raise children, but we still shag like rabbits every chance we get. Thank heavens my parents love the kids so much and give us time alone. Hermione, I'm thrilled you've found Severus, and not only because we got him back because of it. I never understood why you got tangled up with Ron. I didn't realize you didn't understand. Certainly, couples can get by, even if they have different levels of libido, but you are a very powerful witch. I love my brother, but his magic level is average. He isn't strong like Bill and me."

"Bill?"

"You have to be strong magically to be a curse-breaker. And he married a woman that's part Veela. I mean, it's rather obvious."

Hermione stopped a moment to think about what she knew of Severus and Harry. "Gin, is Bill hung like a horse too? I mean, how much is our magic affecting our bodies?"

"He's my brother!" Ginny snapped. Then with an uncharacteristic blush, she put her face in her hands. "Yes. Yes, he is. Fleur *talks*. But, think about it. Magic isn't only in your mind or in your wand, it's humming through your entire body. Of course it affects it. It's part of your physical self."

"That sounds like an interesting field of study," Hermione mused.

"What? Comparing magical strength to wand length?"

After a snort of laughter, Hermione answered. "No, gutter-brain. How our magic and physical bodies are intertwined. I'll have to look into it."

"Oh my God, I just realized why Draco had to have you leave the room when he was trying to heal Snape's mind. This early in the relationship, just having you in the room would make you all Severus could think about. He must have suspected what the issue was."

"Suspected my arse," muttered Hermione. "He'd been in Severus' mind. I expect he got a movie in Technicolor of what we'd been up to, even if we hadn't gotten to caves and dragons yet."

"Nimune's knickers. I'm surprised he didn't fly off the handle about you defiling his friend like that, Muggleborn scum that you are."

"He wasn't like that at all. He didn't even embarrass me about what he'd seen, or at least, not much. And after, when Severus ran off, Draco told me to go after him and not let him act like too much of a git."

"Well, that's something. Maybe he's growing up after all. You know, I still can't believe you were able to take it so slowly with Severus. Once Harry and I really snogged for the first time, we were practically tearing each other's clothes off."

"I wanted to," Hermione admitted. "When he really kissed me for the first time, all I wanted to do was drag him into my flat and attack him. It took every ounce of strength I had not to."

"Why? Why fight it?"

"He'd never even been kissed, Gin. I didn't want to rush him. I didn't want to skip straight to the shagging. I wanted to give him a chance to enjoy getting there."

"Was he...well...did he give you any reason to believe he felt less than you did?"

"No, not at all. Er...he got hard almost immediately. I mean, really. You know, there's something he said. Not then, mind you, later when he was Severus again. When Ron attacked him, we got him in the shop and I warded the doors. Harry broke my wards, but I thought it was Ron. I was standing there, wand raised, ready to kill him to protect Severus. Severus said—"

"Spit it out. Girl talk is sacred and doesn't leave this room."

"He said it made him hard. Seeing me standing there like that."

"Of course it did. He still had magic, even if he didn't know it at the time. His magic responded to your display of power, and his body responded to you looking dead and probably dead sexy ready to defend him like that."

Their talk was interrupted by a shining form slithering through the wall and dancing around Hermione before swimming up to her face. She stared at the otter in shock before it began speaking. When she heard what Severus' voice said, she was glad Ginny couldn't hear the private message.

"I'll be finished at Hogwarts soon. I wouldn't object to finding your delicious body naked in our bed. I have something from Poppy for you that needs to be...manually applied."

By the time the voice stopped and the otter disappeared, Hermione's heart was pounding and she felt a little breathless.

"Merlin, Hermione. It's an otter! He truly loves you, you know."

Her smile lit the room. "Yes. Yes, I know he does."

"Well, if he's on his way home, I'm out of here. This is the first time you've separated since caves and dragons?"

"Yes."

"Uh-huh. I love our girl talks, but I don't need a front row seat to the main event. Bye!"

With that, her friend rose from the sofa and abruptly disappeared.

As soon as Ginny had left and Hermione began thinking about Severus returning soon, she began to feel tingly, squirmy, aroused. Though it had only been a couple of hours, it suddenly seemed to have been far too long since she'd had her lover in her arms, lying over her, pressing her into the bed as he entered her.

Sweet bugging Merlin, indeed. She'd felt her usual self while she talked to her friend, but now she was on fire for her lover. Though she considered his request that she be naked on the bed, she wasn't at all certain she could wait long enough for him to get to the bedroom. Not when she was this focused on getting her hands on him.

Then she thought about the look on his face when he had removed her trousers and seen her thong. A wicked light came into her eye as she considered her options. Scampering into the bedroom, she quickly got undressed and slipped into something a little more appropriate to greet her wizard.

Severus appeared in the middle of her living room, his robes swirling around his legs as he finished his turn. Hermione was standing near the door, one hip cocked in a pose as old as Eve herself. She wore a black lace push-up bra, a matching tiny thong, and a pair of high-heeled black pumps.

His expression when he saw her was everything she had hoped. Eyes growing wide, his lips parted and his tongue peeped out to swipe at his bottom lip.

Then he pounced.

Eighteen

Chapter 18 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: I won't keep you. Enjoy the show. ;)

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He was up against her in three strides of his long legs, lifting her until her feet were completely off the ground. As she twined her arms around his neck, he used his strong hands to encourage her legs to wrap tightly around his waist. Her back hit the door as his mouth crashed into hers. A whispered word against her lips and her bra vanished only to appear in the middle of the room, hanging in midair for a moment before it drifted like an autumn leaf down onto the sofa.

Then he lifted her further so he could feast on her nipples, already crinkled and stiff with rampant arousal. His hands clenched and flexed on the muscles of her thighs as he supported her. His hungry mouth left her breasts to weave a hot trail of breath and tongue, up her neck and to the lobe of her ear. She was at the perfect height now for him to press his hard length against the heat of her desire.

"Need you." His voice was low and ragged with the strength of his desire. "Need to be inside you. Need you pulsing around me."

"Always want you. Always need you." She barely recognized her own voice as she rasped out the words.

Growling, he took one of his hands from her thighs, she felt a spark of his power, and the buttons on his robes came undone all at once. The flare of his magic made her react with even greater hunger.

"Leave them on," she commanded. "Leave them on and get inside me. Now...need you now."

She could feel his hand work its way between their rocking bodies and his fingers moving against her sex as he fumbled with the fly of his jeans. Then she could feel his

freed cock against the lace of her tiny knickers. He was doing something else with his hand now, and she grew impatient.

"What are you doing?" she hissed as she ground herself against him. "Get that big, beautiful cock inside me."

"Stop your wriggling, you demanding harpy," he growled in reply. "I got that thrice-damned potion for your tender bits, and I'm going to bloody well administer it."

The clink of a vial hitting the floor, a small rip as he tore her thong from her body. Then he was pushing his cock inside of her and the ache she had felt from their previous coupling faded into nothingness.

"Yes, you clever man," she purred. "You certainly know the best way to give a girl a potion."

"I'm glad you like that, because I'm about to give you another. And this one is a potion of my own making."

She laughed with joy at his naughty joke, and then put her mouth to better use, kissing him hungrily and thrusting her tongue into his mouth to the rhythm of his hips. Even standing up, he gave his hips a little twist to grind himself against her clit in the perfect way she liked.

He loved for her to talk dirty to him, and she had been too silent, the pleasure of being joined again to her lover was so all-encompassing.

"Oh, Severus, I love how you fuck me. And this is so naughty, so wonderful and naughty. Being naked while you are still dressed. I love my nipples rubbing against the fabric of your shirt, love that you desire my heat so badly that you can't stop to strip off your clothes. Love how you fuck me, Severus."

"Merlin, woman. Seeing you standing there, white skin and black lace, like the sexiest wet dream a wizard can imagine. Who can spare time to undress with such heaven waiting for him? I can feel your high-heels digging into my back even now."

When she tried to loosen her grip, afraid of hurting him, he growled again.

"No, don't. I like it. Oh, fuck yes, Hermione, I like it."

She clamped her legs back around him and he groaned into her neck, the pace of his hips increasing so that he rattled the wooden door in its frame. She felt the pleasure, spiraling up in waves as he moved within her.

"Fuck me, love. Yes, fuck me."

Then she was flying, her orgasm blossoming from one thrust to the next, her channel spasming around him. He took two steps away from the door, falling to his knees, leaning back to sit on his heels, his cock never losing its snug haven. With his hands on her hips, he lifted her and slammed her back down on his shaft. Three times, a fourth, and then his head tipped back as he shouted his release to the ceiling.

He held her there for several minutes, face buried in her neck, his slowly softening cock still inside her. When, at last, it slipped free, he guided them down to lay on the floor, he on his back with Hermione sprawled on top of him. Her arms were crossed on his chest, her chin propped on them, as she gazed at him adoringly. He had one arm behind his head and one hand stroking her hair.

"Merlin how I love you...witch...sorceress...siren."

He could hide love no better than his other emotions, and it shined from his face, making her sigh in delight. His deep voice was the most gentle she had ever heard it. He was Severus still, but tempered somehow. Perhaps through his experiences as Steven, perhaps by the influence of their love and passion, or maybe it was both. She wasn't worried one whit about their future together, where such love was, they would find a way to cling to each other. Nor was she worried about pitfalls of his temperament. He neither frightened her when he lost his temper nor insulted her when he called her a harpy. Instead, she found comfort in the fact that she was witch enough to handle him at his worst and sorceress enough to handle him at his best. He was kind to her, and that was enough. He had manners with her, and that was enough. Even should he revert to his unmannered heathen ways, she really didn't seem to give a damn. He belonged to her now, he'd freely given her his heart and she would face any foe to keep it safe.

"You're mine, you know," she said. "You are mine and I'm never letting you go."

"Believe me, pet," he brushed his fingers over her cheek as he gazed at her, "I am your willing possession. Happy in my servitude. Enchanted slave to your pleasure. And you are mine. My love, my passion, my witch."

Uncrossing her arms, she scooted up to put her face in his neck, slipping her hands into his hair.

"Do you think, Severus, that you could magic away these clothes of yours now?"

His hand slipped into the pocket of his robes, the magic shivered along her bare skin, and then she was resting on his nude form, feeling the heat of his body sinking into her skin and the soft crinkle of his chest hair on her breasts. She sighed against him, utterly content now that he was naked beneath her.

When the floor became too hard, Severus moved them to the sofa and they took up the same position with him on his back and Hermione lying on top.

"I never thought I would have this, Hermione. Oh, the Slytherins spoke of it, teased about it. About power and sex drive and passion. And I was powerful, even when I was in school. I knew nothing about how to behave. Lily Evans befriended me when we were children, but eventually, my acid tongue drove even her away. Lucius had taken me under his wing, you see. He was older than me, blond, handsome, pureblood, well-spoken, and charming. He seemed everything that I was not. I learned from him and thought that perhaps then I could find a witch for my own. I was powerful but feared. I had to fight so hard against Potter and his band that the female students were frightened of me. Even if one could have looked past my awkward looks and hand-me-down robes, none would approach me."

Hermione snuggled closer and lifted her head to kiss him softly on the lips.

"Then Malfoy led me to the Death Eaters," he continued. "I would have followed him anywhere at that point. I thought if I could not be loved, then I would have power instead. I was a young fool. The activities of the Death Eaters disgusted me, even before Potter and Lily were killed. I spent many nights curled over my toilet, vomiting from what I had seen, what I had done."

At her soft sound of distress, he brushed his fingers through her hair. "Hush, love. This is ancient history. It seems as if it happened a lifetime ago. I explain only so you can understand how very precious you are to me. So unlike the women of the Death Eaters, who disgusted me. If they were my choice, then I would rather have no witch at all. Instead, I would cling to the image of a childhood friend who never even belonged to me. Then, Voldemort fell to the magic of a baby. My life became easier for a time, but I refused to consider love an option. My mark had faded from sight, but it still burned beneath my skin. My insane master would return and I refused to drag any witch into his clutches. I had all of the desire, but no outlet save my own hand during a multitude of dreadfully lonely nights. Then the monster was back, and you know what happened from that point further."

Hermione's hands moved across his skin. Over his shoulders, down his arms, until her fingers found his and twined into them.

"I am very glad that I lost my memory after the battle, that I had a slice of normalcy to temper my broken spirit. I think this is the only way you could have approached me where I wouldn't have pushed you away. I'd long given up on dreams of love and a passionate witch in my arms. Then we were standing on the tower and you called me an idiot. I screamed at you, falling too easily into old habits for fear of you turning from me."

"I will never turn from you," she said fiercely.

"So I saw. I gave you my worst, and you walked up as if it was nothing and took my hands in yours. Still, I struggled against you and you refused to give ground. Now I know what it is the Slytherins whispered about. Now, at last, I have a lover who will not be denied. As we lay in our bed, you told me what I meant to you. This is what you mean to me. You are precious to me, Hermione Granger. I would kill for you. I would die for you."

As he spoke of his love, his cock grew hard against her stomach. She raised up and took him inside her hungry body and she showed him her passion for him, her need of him, her mighty and fearless love for him.

In perfect contentment, as their passion cooled, they fell asleep, naked on her sofa.

Nineteen

Chapter 19 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Another update for you, my darlings. Yesterday, I finished chapter 25 and the end of this fic. I'm sad to see the end of it, I've had so much fun. So, we'll continue with the daily updates until it's completed. Smooches to you all, and big sloppy kisses to everyone who's taken a moment to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

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There was no food to speak of in the house. Neither of them relished the idea of having to put on clothes. Once their passion had momentarily settled, they ventured out to get Indian takeaway, and then sat naked on the rug in front of Hermione's sofa, eating out of containers.

Hermione was charmed by the fact that Severus was perfectly shameless in his nudity. He had been adorably unsure about the ways of sex, but there wasn't one iota of shyness about the man. She happily stared at his naked form as he got up from the rug to pad into the loo. When he caught her staring on his return trip, he simply grinned at her, seemingly pleased to catch her looking.

He did his share of staring as well. He couldn't get enough of her. His eyes were always on her, even while they were eating. It was often accompanied by a blatantly adoring expression that made Hermione feel like she was a goddess instead of merely a witch.

"How was Geneva?"

"She was good. We had a nice talk. It was good of her to come over. I was concerned about something and she helped me understand it." At his patiently raised eyebrow, she continued. "I was worried about the fact that I cannot keep my hands off of you. I'm not at all complaining, but I would eventually like to be able to read a book or something."

Far from being offended, Severus threw back his head and laughed as if this was the funniest thing he'd heard in ages.

"We are well mated," he managed when he could speak again. "It should calm down in a week or two. You could have asked me. I didn't realize you would have no understanding of this."

"I know I could have asked you," she said, blushing a little.

"It's of no import, Hermione. I know that sometimes a witch wants to discuss things with her girlfriends. And by all means, do tell her that I'm a demon in the bedroom if you like. Merlin knows, I've never had that sort of reputation before. I find that I rather enjoy the thought of it."

"Hmm," she mused, smiling. "In the bedroom, on the sofa, against the door...you seem to be a demon just about everywhere."

He laughed again at that, and she loved that she could make him laugh.

"I shall leave my reputation in your capable hands, then."

"How was Marta? Had she been worried?"

"She was happy to see that I was well. Shocked that I was a wizard and she didn't know it. Her magical family lives in Kent, and she still sees them, though she lives with Muggle cousins. So, she knows of magic, but little of our world. She thinks you hanged the moon, by the way. She told me that if I didn't latch onto you, I was three kinds of fool. I agreed with her."

"I think she is wonderful as well. She ran out to us on the street, you know, to help me get you to safety. There was fucking Ron throwing hexes around, and Marta didn't even hesitate. I already loved her for scheming with me to get your attention. I love her even more now."

"You didn't have to scheme to get my attention, witch. You had it from the second you ran into me on that rainy street corner. I don't make a habit of dragging women into my shop, you know."

She snogged him silly then, and enjoyed his gobsmacked expression while she nibbled on another pakora. Her need for him was increasing, a nice slow burn she could feel in her belly. Severus was already hard and had been for a while, but he seemed content to eat and chat, letting the arousal build.

"Did you tell Marta about your idea to expand into magical books as well?"

"I did. She thinks it's a grand idea and a sound business decision as well. She also wants to learn more about her wizarding roots. She's concerned she may have magical children, and not understand the world they will live in. We talked about you and me taking over the magical side of the shop and her cousins coming onto staff permanently. They already know the shop and will be a good addition. Marta also told me in no uncertain terms, that I am not to even think about working at all this week. I felt no need to argue with her."

Happiness bubbled up inside Hermione as she had never felt it before. It must have shone on her face, for Severus put a hand to the back of her neck and tugged her forward until their foreheads rested together as they stared in each other's eyes.

"Good thing I decided to skive off classes this week, then."

"Indeed."

Then he was kissing her, so gently, as if she was the most precious thing in the world. His free hand came up to tangle in her hair as she wrapped her arms around his neck. When she opened her mouth, he hummed in pleasure and deepened the kiss. The leftover food was magically swept away and he was gently laying her down on the rug. This time, their lovemaking was slower, sweeter. Skin was worshipped and caressed. Words of love softly exchanged. When he entered her, she told him that nothing in the world could possibly be better than having him in her arms. He sighed against her lips, slipping his arms underneath her so he could press her against him. Stared into her eyes as he rocked them to completion.

Afterward, he sat naked on the sofa with her head in his lap. One hand tangled in her hair as he read to her from *Daddy-Long-Legs*. Hermione closed her eyes, enjoying the caress as well as his deep, lovely voice as he read one of her lifetime favorite books. A book about a younger woman and an older man. A secret identity, a love revealed. And on top of that happiness, the knowledge that he did this for her. She had made an offhand comment about wanting someday to be able to read a book, and here she was, being read to. Severus Snape was a man who could scream in her face for calling him an idiot, yet he listened to every word she said and read to her now, simply because he knew it would please her.

He read to her for an hour. It was she who stopped him, wanting rather desperately to show him how much he was also loved. He did so much for her, she wanted him to know how deeply he was cherished. Holding him by the hand, she led him into the bedroom.

"Shall I show you something new?" she asked, looking up at him through her lashes.

His eyes flashed with heat as he replied. "I spent many years teaching you, Hermione Granger. But, oh, how I love the lessons you give me. Shall I suck you first?"

"Not yet. After. After you've made me wet and dripping."

He growled as he joined her on the bed, obviously taken with that idea. For a while, they simply rolled on the bed, kissing, groping, caressing each other into a frenzy. Their earlier joining had been sweet and gentle, this one rough and passionate. Hermione could not decide which was better, as each thrilled her in its own way.

She no longer had to guide him, he lined up his cock and entered her in one fast thrust, making her gasp in pleasure. His endurance was also increasing. Their first couplings had been fairly fast. As he got more experience and got more used to the needy way her flesh gripped him, he lasted longer. He stroked into her for long minutes, drawing almost completely out of her channel before pounding back into her.

"What do you want to show me?" he whispered into her ear. "How can I please you? Please show me."

"Raise up so you support your weight on your palms, love, arms straight."

He did as she asked, his face showing his curiosity, his hips still rocking against her own. He was so much taller than she, his arms so long, that she had little trouble bringing her legs up through his arms to rest them on his shoulders.

"Now, lean forward a little, love. Bend my legs towards my torso."

He followed this instruction, then his eyebrows rose in surprise at his next thrust into her.

"Lord, Hermione. The way you rock with me now, the way you take me in so deeply. You are the most amazing creature."

"Look down, Severus. Look down and see how deliciously you fill me."

He did as she bid. Hanging his head down, he avidly watched his hard shaft as it slid in and out of her body.

"Look at us, pet. Look how beautifully you surround me. Look how I fuck you. Merlin, Hermione, I'm going to come."

"Yes, Severus. Fuck me. Fill me up."

Then he was pounding into her, still staring at their joining until his hips began to lose their rhythm. Throwing his head back, his eyes squeezed shut as he groaned out his release.

His arms were shaking with the effort of holding himself up. Sliding her legs back down to the bed, she drew him down to her and he pillowed his head on her breasts. She ran her fingers through his hair as he panted, but he was not still for long. With his devil's grin, he slid down her body, burying his face between her legs and eagerly licking up the combined juices of their desire. Turning his talented tongue to her clit as he fingered her. Bringing her to the peak of her desire again and again.

She fell asleep with him wrapped around her. Spooned at her back with one leg thrown over hers, one arm banding her waist, one of his strong hands pillowed between her breasts. She'd never felt so safe and content in her life.

He woke her again in the middle of the night. His face buried between her thighs as she hovered on the edge of orgasm and moaned his name as she came. Then she reached for him, grabbing him, tugging him on top of her and sighing in relief when he sank into her depths.

"Oh, my beautiful man, need you, need you so much."

"I'm yours. Always, always yours. Love that you need me...love that you need me as desperately as I need you."

Then she was flying again and she felt him twitch and throb inside her as he followed her to bliss.

As they settled in for sleep, his husky voice spoke in her ear.

"We will live together, won't we? You will live with me?"

"Of course. I couldn't bear to be separated from you."

"Good. We'll sort it out in the morning."

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: More fun ahead. I won't keep you. Thanks for reading and big sloppy kisses for those taking the time to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

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Severus brought the subject up again over breakfast the next morning, as they ate a simple meal of eggs and toast while Hermione vowed to get to the grocers one way or another.

"Where would you like to live, pet? My flat above the store is convenient, and we could get the permits for magical expansion at the same time as the shop's. However, if we're going to have a floo connection in the magical side of the shop, we could certainly live anywhere you fancy. Cabin in the mountains? Cottage by the sea?"

"I think I'd like living in your flat. At least for now. If we're going to both be working in the bookshop, it makes perfect sense. That is if you would like that."

"I'd love it. As a matter of fact, I'd love it as soon as possible. Not only because I want us to settle in and live together, but also because I don't much like leaving Marta unprotected. Not after what happened the other night."

"I can't imagine Ron being stupid enough to cause more trouble. If he wasn't a bloody Auror, he'd be in Azkaban right now. Even so, I'd wager the Aurors aren't very pleased with him at the moment. But you're right. We can't leave Marta unprotected in case he completely loses his mind and comes back."

"We can set some protective wards on the shop this evening after closing. In the meantime, why don't we get you packed and move your things over? We can scrunch my things together to make room for yours until we get the charms in place."

"We could, but what if we're working away and I find I suddenly can't keep my hands off of you?" she asked with an expression that could only be called a leer.

Pushing away from the table, he came to her side, plucked her off of her chair, and lifted her into his arms. "I do have a bed, pet. A nice big bed."

They'd never bothered to put on any clothes. In no time at all, she was on her back with his head between her thighs. Merlin, but she loved how he made love to her with his mouth. He could do this every day for the rest of her life and she'd never tire of it. That thought, the sweet joy of a lifetime of passionate moments with her man, had her calling his name as she toppled over the edge of bliss.

"Do you want to try something new?" she said before he could start licking and sucking on her again.

He lifted his head to give her a heated look. "I love the things you show me."

"Stand next to the bed for me. There's something I'd like to try that I couldn't do while you were Steven."

He readily obeyed her, standing next to the bed with a look of startled curiosity on his dear face.

"Nothing too fancy," she assured him. "I just want to transfigure the bed a bit."

The startled aspect faded, though he continued to look curious. Grabbing her wand from the nightstand, Hermione scooted towards Severus until she was lying on her back with her bum just over the edge of the bed. She flicked the bed with her wand and the legs of it grew longer, raising the mattress higher. As she rose, Hermione wrapped her legs around Severus' hips.

"Can you reach me now?" she asked.

When he had to stoop slightly to enter her, she raised the height of the bed another two inches. Perfect. She dropped her wand onto the bed and her hands tightened in the sheets as he began to fuck her. His hands gripped her roughly by the hips as the speed of his thrusts increased.

"Merlin, Hermione. I can fuck you so fast like this. I barely have to move. You feel so good. Good Lord, I could fuck you forever."

"And you can look down and watch yourself fuck me. Look, Severus. Look at you disappearing into me over and over. Look at you fucking me so fast and hard."

Dropping his eyes, he groaned as he did exactly that. His hips moved even faster as he watched his hard flesh pushing into her heat. She knew he had loved watching them couple when she'd had her legs on his shoulders. In this position, it was even easier for him to enjoy the view.

"Damn it, witch. You'll drive me mad. This is going to be embarrassingly short."

"I don't care. You always make me feel good and I love it when you lose control because I excite you so much."

A groan turned into a growl and Hermione suddenly felt his fingers on her clit. Rubbing, stroking, pinching.

"Severus, yes. Fuck me, lover. So fast and hard and oh--"

He managed to wait until she came, still muttering "fuck me fuck me" under her breath. Then he was pulsing inside of her, shouting "witch" and "sorceress."

He was able to get them both properly on the bed before he collapsed at her side, his eyes closed and a somewhat silly smile on his face.

"You know the most marvelous things," he murmured.

"That was good, wasn't it? I always wanted to try that."

His head lifted and he peered at her with his eyebrows so high he looked comically surprised. "You've never done that? You never did that with anyone else?"

"No, I read about it in one of Ginny's trashy books."

When he remained staring at her with the silly shocked expression, she finally figured out what was going on. She pushed him over onto his back, fell half over him, and sprinkled kisses all over his face.

"Sweetheart, I knew this was all new to you. I love teaching you how we can please each other...it makes me so hot to know you've never done any of this with anyone else but me, only me. I should have thought to tell you that half of what we've done I've never done with anyone else but you. I had a single lover before you, and he was very boring. He never fucked me up against a door or took me in the shower. When I told him I wanted to transfigure the bed, he said it was a waste of time. You have no idea what it means to me to have a man who not only is a wicked lover, but takes such joy in me exploring the many ways I want to make love to him."

He held her close, burying his face in her neck, wrapping his long arms around her.

"You pay such attention," he said softly against the skin of her throat. "There are things I am reluctant to say, words I have difficulty finding, but you always know. You know what I need and you give it to me so freely. I don't know much about love, but I do so love you, Hermione Granger."

"And I love you, Severus Snape. Do you think I don't notice? Do you think I don't realize that I have but to make an offhand comment, and there you are, doing it because you know it will please me? From the very day I met you as Steven, you have treated me so. Finding a book I loved since I was a girl because I told you I lost my copy. Reading it to me because I mentioned I missed reading. Don't tell me you don't know about love, Severus. You're the only man I've ever loved who does."

Then he was kissing her, his mouth hot on her own, his tongue twining with hers. She felt her arousal rising again, so quickly it took her by surprise. They had just finished loving each other, but it was never enough. She would never get enough of him, with his wicked mouth, grasping hands, and hard hungry cock. With his gigantic heart full of love for her.

He pulled her back to the edge of the bed, thrust inside her, and then fell over her so he could reach her mouth to kiss her again and take one of her breasts in each hand. She let her legs dangle over the side of the bed, and found that in this position, with her body bowed over the edge of the bed, he hit all the good places with every stroke. Her desire was a tight ball, spiraling higher and higher. With no other help but the delicious stroking of his shaft into her heat, she burst into bliss.

"So good," he growled into her mouth. "Never tire of feeling you clenching and pulsing around me. Never knew anything could feel like this. Never knew I could love anyone like this. Oh, Hermione, never leave me. Never, never leave me."

"Never!" she shouted, as the ball of her desire wound up again. "Never. You are mine. Mine, do you hear me? I'm never letting you go."

"And you are mine. I may not be your first lover, but I'll bloody well be your last. My Hermione...my witch...mine."

She fell over the edge, crying out wordlessly at the powerful sweetness of it. Vaguely, she heard him call her name as he pulsed inside her. Then there was a peaceful contented darkness washing over her.

"Hermione! Hermione! Good Lord, what have I done? Hermione?"

His worried voice dragged her back to consciousness. Opening her eyes, she smiled at him. He sat on the edge of the bed and she was cradled tightly against his chest.

"Hermione, are you all right? What's wrong? We're never doing that again."

"We bloody well are! Severus, I'm fine. You loved me so fucking fabulously that I passed out from the pleasure of it for a moment."

There was that sweet gobsmacked expression she loved so well. She wound a hand into his hair and rubbed her cheek against his.

"You were fantastic," she purred into his ear.

"You are unharmed?"

"Sweetheart, I am the exact opposite of harmed. I feel like I could fly."

"Are you going to do this fainting thing often?"

"I don't know. It's never happened before. I never had a lover like you before. Let me up now, though. I need the loo."

"Are you mad? You just fainted. I'm not about to let you go traipsing all over the wizarding world, you foolish woman."

Standing up with her, he carried her to the loo, sat her on the toilet, and stood staring at her with a slight scowl on his face while she urinated. It was both adorable and rather embarrassing. Ron had always insisted on closed doors where the loo was concerned. She'd never had a man watch her pee before.

After she'd finished, he allowed her to stand long enough to wash her hands, then carried her back to the bed. Tucking her under the coverlet, he scowled at her for another moment, and then bent to kiss her on the forehead.

"You are going to take a nap," he said in a voice that brooked no argument. "I'm going to go get some food in this house so you don't go fainting again."

"Severus, I'm fine, honestly. Let me go with you."

"You will rest, you stubborn harpy," he snapped, as he tugged on his jeans without even bothering with his boxers. Boots with no socks followed, and lastly his turtleneck. "I won't have you fainting at the grocers."

She giggled at him, which made him roll his eyes.

"Fine, but come and kiss me goodbye."

He did, and then strode to the door muttering, "How can I intimidate you when you insist on snickering at me?"

He returned with a grocery bag in one hand and a takeaway bag in the other. He fairly flew through the door, glaring at where she obediently sat in the bed, her back against the headboard and a book in her lap.

"I'm fine, really. Severus, you shouldn't worry so. I'm in perfect health. Honestly, just because a girl faints for a second when her man has made the most perfectly amazing love to her..."

He set the bags on the table and stopped her prattling with a kiss. "You're going to eat."

"Yes, dear."

"I was worried."

"I know, sweetheart."

He put the groceries away, conjured a small tablecloth to put on the bed, and produced a picnic of chicken and leek pie, mushy peas, and cauliflower cheese. She happily dug in with enthusiasm. Eventually, the scowl left his face as he realized Hermione seemed her normal, healthy self. When they had finished eating, he sat next to her on the bed and cuddled her close.

"Can one really faint from sex?" he asked softly.

"On rare occasion, but only if it's amazingly perfectly brilliant."

She turned to kiss his red cheeks as he blushed.

Twenty-One

Chapter 21 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Big sloppy kisses to those kind enough to review. No beta- so any mistakes are my own.

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They finally got around to packing Hermione's things. Boxes were conjured and labeled. With a wave of Severus' wand, her clothes danced off the hangers in her wardrobe, neatly folded themselves, and packed themselves away. Hermione busied herself with her potion ingredients and other magical artifacts; things which must be packed without magic. He got her books into boxes labeled in alphabetical order by author, which she appreciated. Then he packed her kitchen, leaving out only a few things they would need for dinner. He wasn't about to have her go without eating again, no matter how she prattled away about wonderful lovemaking.

While he packed the kitchen, she worked on what little remained, the bits and bobs of twenty-three years of life. She didn't have that many things, to be honest, if one didn't count her book collection. She'd left the cottage she'd shared with Ron with only her personal effects. Left all of the furniture with him in her haste to be away. Her flat was furnished with odds and ends from her parent's house and mismatched second-hand purchases.

The evening grew late, so they left the bedding on the bed. The morning would be soon enough to move. A leisurely shower together where they did no more than kiss and cuddle, and then Severus cooked them a simple but filling dinner. An omelet to share with cheese and herbs, and a rasher of bacon. Toasted muffins with lemon curd, her favorite. She swore the man took note of every single thing she said.

After dinner, they went to miniaturize the furniture into one small wooden box of things she wanted to keep and a larger box for the things she would give back to the second-hand shop. Her grandmother's secretary and carved wooden bookcases she would keep, along with the oak wardrobe and matching chest of drawers. Everything else she intended to get rid of, but Severus balked over one item.

"We're keeping the sofa."

"But, Severus, it's a giant shabby thing. Why should we move it when I'm certain you have a nicer one of your own?"

"We're keeping it, and that's final. You may as well concede the fact, you tiresome harpy. I've quite made up my mind."

His fierce scowl and dictatorial manner had no effect on her at all. She giggled at him, which made him roll his eyes. Skipping up to him, she hugged him tightly around the waist and kissed him on the cheek.

"All right," she said. "We will keep it. But why on earth do you want the ratty old thing?"

"Hermione," he began, the scowl fading to exasperation, "that sofa is where I first had an orgasm with another person in the room. It's where I first touched your delectable body...where I first tasted your sweetness. We're keeping it and that's final."

"Yes, love." Her eyes grew moist with sudden emotion and she kissed him sweetly.

"Witches," he huffed. "Always crying at the drop of a hat." The tone was brusque, but she could see the emotion on his dear transparent face.

"I love you too," she said simply.

They fell into bed at last, too exhausted for anything more than a cuddle. They had the entire week to move her things, but Hermione understood why he seemed in a hurry. Now that she had a man she wanted to spend the rest of her life with, she wanted to start that adventure as quickly as possible. The sooner they were settled in together, the happier she would be.

She woke in the middle of the night. One of Severus' hard thighs was tight between her legs and she was grinding against it. Small gasps of need fell from her lips as she pressed her heat against him. One of her hands reached for his chest and she rubbed and petted the soft hair and flat nipples. With a groan, he awakened.

"Severus," she whined, shocked at her neediness. "Please...please."

Then he was kissing her, his mouth hot and hungry on her own. Her hand rubbed down the trail of hair on his stomach and found him already hard for her. She stroked his cock as she ground herself against his thigh.

"So close," she whimpered against his lips.

He forced a hand between his thigh and her clenched legs and his fingers rubbed against her clit. Her orgasm crashed through her and she sighed in relief.

"More," she begged. "Need you inside me."

Throwing herself on her stomach, she grabbed a pillow and thrust it beneath her hips. Wiggling her hips at him, she begged again. "Take me, take me, Severus. Please."

Then he was a warm weight on her back, his hard length sliding into her needy flesh. His hands ran up her arms to grasp her fingers in his own. His hard cock hit some delightful spot inside her over and over. His speed increased as she bucked her hips up to meet his every thrust. She felt his tongue slide up her spine between her shoulder blades. His hot mouth came to a rest at the nape of her neck, kissing and biting at her. His warm breath stirred her hair, sending shivers down her spine. Then she was flying, calling his name as the pleasure washed over her. A dozen more thrusts and he was groaning against the back of her neck and spasming inside her.

She was almost back asleep when she felt him withdraw. He tugged the pillow out from under her and gently lifted her head to slip it underneath. Then he wrapped his limbs around her and she fell quickly into a peaceful sleep.

The next time she woke, Severus was lying next to her, pure adoration in his expression. He snogged her thoroughly before he spoke.

"I understand now why you were not bothered by me waking you in the night. It is a singular pleasure to awaken with one's witch rubbing against one. Even after all we've done, I couldn't quite believe that I could be so wanted."

"I will always want you," she said fiercely.

Her passionate words made him smile. "And I shall always want you, my witch."

"You know, Severus. I believe I could use a little more of that potion of Poppy's. Perhaps you would be good enough to...administer it. You did such a fine job of it last time."

With a happy growl, he left the bed to fetch the potion from the loo. He then administered the potion in a most thorough manner, which made them rather late to breakfast.

Severus cooked again. There were eggs and sausages, muffins and lemon curd.

"You're trying to make me fat," she complained as she took a second sausage.

"Nonsense. I only want to keep your strength up. I have many, many plans for you."

His expression could only be called a leer, and Hermione giggled as her happiness bubbled out of her.

After breakfast, they tidied up the last of Hermione's things and apparated straight to Severus' flat above the shop. It was a lovely flat which took up the entire second floor of the building with the shop and had a nice sized attic as well. Tall ceilings and gigantic windows to let the sun in. It was decorated simply with cream-colored walls and dark woodwork. The strangest thing by far was how very Muggle it all was, and she told Severus so.

"It's strange," he agreed. "Now that I'm myself again, it seems alien and very comfortable all at once. Minerva told me that she still has some of my old belongings tucked away, though the little I kept of value at my old house is long gone. Luckily, most of my books and personal effects remained at Hogwarts after I fled. I'm rather astonished she didn't make a pile of them and burn them on the great lawn."

"She always liked you, you know. Even when you were a student. I can understand why she could try to kill you, but then be too sentimental to destroy your things."

"I'm shocked she cared for me as a student. Scarcely anyone did. You would have hated me."

"I'm actually not so certain about that," she said, which earned her a kiss.

"If you will help me set the wards, we could go to get the permits we need this afternoon. Once we expand our living quarters a bit and put in a floo, we'll have plenty of room for both my old things and your belongings."

"Where are you going to put that ratty old sofa of mine?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

"In the bedroom, of course. I have many plans for it."

This time she didn't giggle, she shrieked with laughter from the pure joy of it.

So wrapped up in each other, neither one realized the spectacle they made when they reached Diagon Alley. They were headed to a small office of the Ministry where they could get the permits they required without going to the giant underground warren in Whitehall. It was not the simple errand they had hoped.

When the third witch ran up to hug Severus, telling her how happy she was that he lived and thanking him for his service to the wizarding world, he finally lost his temper.

"Unhand me you ridiculous hag!" he sputtered in rage, pushing her bodily away from him. Then his wand was in his hand. He addressed his next comment to the street at large. "I swear I will hex the next imbecile who dares to touch me. Pay your respects from a distance and cease pawing at me."

He tucked Hermione's hand in the crook of his arm then, after slipping his wand back up his sleeve. They continued their walk, he with a fearful scowl on his face, she with a gentle smile. When wizards they passed bowed to him, he managed a nod of his head.

"Are you not going to reprimand me for my rudeness?" he eventually asked.

"Why should I? You are saving me the hassle of having to beat witches off of you with a large stick. You can hardly think I enjoy watching them paw at you, can you?"

He chuckled at that, the low and wicked one, and then she felt some of the tension leave his body.

"I'm not very nice, pet." He threw her a slightly worried look, which melted her heart.

"You are nice to me. I don't need you to be nice to all and sundry. You can be more mannerly if it suits you to be. It makes no difference to me. And you can certainly feel free to hex any witch who gets too free with her hands."

He stopped right in the middle of the street and kissed her hand.

"Whatever my lady witch wants," he murmured for her ears alone.

Thus distracted, neither of them were aware of the danger that threatened.

"Stupify!"

Severus did not lose consciousness, but he froze in place, his expression going slack. Hermione's wand was in her hand immediately, but it was plucked away by invisible fingers and a strong hand clamped onto her wrist, pulling her away from Severus.

Twenty-Two

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: I know the ending of the last chapter was a naughty little cliffhanger, so I won't keep you. Big sloppy smoochies, no beta, and all that.

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Hermione fought as hard as she could, but she was a small woman and her invisible assailant seemed large. Punching wildly at the bastard did not stop her being spirited farther away from her love, nor did she have any idea how long Severus would be dazed by the hex he'd been hit with.

"Severus!" she shrieked at the top of her lungs, hoping to rouse him.

The wizards and witches they passed stared in shock as Hermione was hauled down the street. Several drew their wands but looked on in confusion. Her kidnapper was invisible and they seemed too worried about hitting her to try to take down an assailant they could not even see. For all they knew, Hermione was being rushed along by some strange hex, and not a flesh and blood person at all. Only the bruising grip of the hand on her wrist proved to Hermione she had a foe to fight.

She had to do something. She would let no one and nothing separate her from her wizard. Her place was at his side. He belonged to her, and no force on this earth was going to make her leave him. True, she had no wand, but she'd be damned if she would let that stop her.

Redoubling her efforts, she dragged her feet, all the while trying to land a punch or several dozens on her kidnapper. One lucky shot connected, and she heard a small grunt of pain, though not enough to tell her who the bastard was. A man, surely, based on strength alone. Her striking fist felt loose fabric slide against her hand. It had a strange cold and slippery feel to it. Wait a minute. She knew what felt like that.

Determined, she flung her arm out, grabbed a fistful of the slippery stuff, and tugged with all her might. The invisibility cloak slid off its wearer and snagged on where his hand still clenched her arm, dragging on the pavement as it trailed behind them.

"Ronald Bilius Weasley, unhand me you bloody stupid bastard!"

"Oh, hi, Hermione," he said as if they had met by accident at a wizarding pub.

There was something very wrong about her ex. His skin was pale and had a gray tinge to it. His glassy eyes rolled wildly as he continued to drag her down the street. A reeking stench assailed her nostrils now that the cloak was off of him. It smelled of soapwort mixed with valerian in an overly full septic tank. Once again, she yanked at the hand that held her, but he remained clamped on so tight he was starting to grind the bones of her wrist together.

At least she could see her target now. With as much force as she could muster, she slammed the palm of her free hand right against his ear with a resounding smack. He stumbled and reached the hand not holding her wrist up to cover his ear, which had to be ringing with the way she'd boxed it.

"Dang, Hermione. What did you do that for?"

"Let me go you fucking imbecile! I'm going back to Severus."

"Oh, no, 'Mione. I can't do that. I can't let you go back to that blighter, Snape. You're my girl and he's been dead for years anyway."

"I'm not your anything, you insane bastard. I'm Severus Snape's witch!"

She hit his ear again then, and he tugged her so hard that she lost her footing. She landed on her arse on the pavement, facing back the way they had come, with Ron stopped beside her. He was tugging ineffectually on her arm, trying to make her stand up. Her attention caught by something else, she ignored him.

An ink spot of black robes twisted through the air and raced down the street. Her wizard was coming to her. Severus was flying. He landed twenty paces behind them, wand in hand and an expression of pure fury on his face.

She'd never seen anything more magnificent in her life.

Witches and wizards who had been cautiously approaching to help Hermione now scattered out of the way, tripping over themselves to give the stalking wizard in black robes plenty of room.

"Weasley!" Severus roared.

The tiniest movement of his wand and Hermione was free. Ron spun towards Severus, a hex already winging its way toward the furious wizard, but Severus deflected it with a negligent flick of his wand. The duel had begun.

Hermione sprang to her feet, wanting to help, but Ron had her wand. She hovered as close to the action as she could without getting hit in the crossfire.

It was no contest. Ron quickly gave ground, firing hex after hex at the figure stalking him with swift, sure strides. Severus deflected them all effortlessly and kept coming. Then he began throwing some hexes of his own. Ron was blasted off his feet, rolled by blow after blow. He tumbled across the pavement until he fetched up against the gutter on the other side, landing in a bruised and bloody pile of limbs.

There Severus stood staring at him, wand pointed right between the redhead's closed eyes.

Hermione rushed to Severus' side. He pulsed with such wild magic that she could see it swirling around him like the air above a hot fire. His wand hand trembled slightly with the mighty effort of keeping himself in check. Ron looked like hell, but he still breathed. Looking up into Severus' face, she could see Ronald Weasley's death in his eyes. She put a hand on his arm, slowly sliding it up until it rested on his wand hand.

"My love, think of Molly. Think of Arthur. Let it be over."

"I want to kill him for daring to touch what is mine," he growled.

"Believe me, I know the feeling. Look at me, Severus. Please, look at me."

With painful slowness, he shifted his eyes to her. His expression softening only slightly as he locked eyes with Hermione.

"You want him to live?" The growl had not softened at all.

"I couldn't be arsed one way or the other, love. But for his parents' sake, yes. They have always been kind to me."

"You'd best take my wand then. I cannot trust myself not to finish what I started."

Reaching her fingers up, she gently took the ebony wood from him. Expecting to feel the thrumming anger of a wand warded against her, she was shocked when the thing

lay quietly in her hand. She looked up at him, a question in her eyes.

"Nothing of mine shall ever harm you," he muttered.

He still glared at the pile of Weasley, shaking in rage. Hermione used his wand to cast a silent calming spell.

"I don't want to be calm," he sputtered. "I want to kill him."

"I know, my darling. I know."

She wrapped one arm around his waist and hugged him to her. At last, she could feel the tension begin to leave his body. Her love's wand was being very cooperative, but she wanted her own.

"Accio Hermione Granger's wand."

When it flew from the gutter straight towards her face, Severus plucked it from the air with a movement of his hand so fast that Hermione could barely see it. He handed it to her and she held it and tucked Severus' up her sleeve.

Another soundless spell and her Patronus appeared. "Fetch Harry, emergency." The otter took off like a shot.

The people from the street were beginning to reappear. They gathered in a loose circle around them, keeping a respectful distance and babbling to each other. One brave older wizard approached them, his palms out and empty to show he had no wand.

"Sir, Madam, are you quite all right?"

"We're fine," Hermione assured him. Then she looked to her love. "You are fine, aren't you, Severus?"

"He could not touch me," he said as if the very idea was ridiculous, which it was.

"A foolish young man," the older wizard said. "Trying to take a witch from her mated wizard. You showed great strength of character in not killing him, sir. I admire you for that. We've called the Aurors. You've plenty of witnesses to tell how that ruffian was treating the young lady, as well as how he hexed you first."

"Thank you for your kindness, sir," Hermione said.

"Not at all. Not at all. You let us know if you require anything. And may I say, Mr. Snape, that I am so pleased you survived the war after all."

His eyes remained glued to Weasley, but Severus managed a polite nod.

A shimmer of magic in the air, a loud pop, and Harry appeared. He saw Ron unconscious and Severus still looking daggers at him while Hermione remained pressed up against his side.

"What happened?"

"That idiot tried to take me bodily away from Severus. He had your cloak, Harry. He managed to slow Severus down, take my wand, and drag me halfway to Timbuktu. Look." Raising her arm, she showed Harry her bruised wrist.

"You're hurt!" Severus thundered. "Why didn't you tell me, you witless harpy? Give me my wand."

With one look at his face, Hermione slipped his wand from her sleeve and handed it to him.

"Er...Hermione," Harry said. "Is that wise?"

"It's fine, Harry. He's calm now."

"He doesn't sound calm," Harry muttered.

Severus snatched his wand from her hand, picked her up in his arms, and strode to the opposite side of the street. He sat on the curb with Hermione in his lap.

"Let me see that wrist," he demanded gruffly.

"Yes, dear."

As the Aurors arrived, spoke to Harry, and carted Ron off to St. Mungo's, Severus gently cradled Hermione's wrist and softly sang healing charms to it. By the time Harry came over to plop down on the curb next to them, her wrist was no longer bruised and she could wiggle her fingers without pain.

"Thank you, love," she said. Then she kissed him.

The people on the street cheered madly and then finally began to disperse.

"I don't understand it, Hermione," Harry said. "Why would Ron do that?"

"Do you doubt the word of my witch, Potter?" Severus snarled. "Are you taking that repugnant imbecile's side?"

"Of course not, Severus. Calm down." Harry rolled his eyes at the man sputtering beside him. "I'm not saying that Ron isn't an idiot, only that he isn't normally completely suicidal."

That seemed to placate Severus, and he dropped his eyes to re-check Hermione's wrist.

"I don't know, Harry," Hermione said. "He wasn't acting himself at all."

"Imperious?"

"No, not like that. His eyes were rolling, he looked peaked. He stank like herbs in a sewer."

"Which herbs, pet?" Severus asked, his voice returning to his usual tones for the first time.

"Soapwort and Valerian."

"Harry, have the healers at St. Mungo's check for wizarding recreational drugs. There are several that produce a stench such as Hermione describes if taken in high doses."

"Thank you, Severus. I'll do that. Will you two be all right?"

"We'll be fine, Harry," Hermione answered. "Go ahead, and don't forget your cloak."

Harry apparated away, and Severus stood up, still holding Hermione in his arms.

"I fear I am not up to dealing with the permits today, love."

His eyes burned with fire, and Hermione understood completely. She was having difficulty keeping her hands off of him. After his display of power and love, all she wanted to do was rip his clothes off.

"Take me home, Severus. I want to show you exactly how magnificent you are."

A wizard and his mated witch kissed in the middle of Diagon Alley and then disappeared with a loud clap of sound.

Twenty-Three

Chapter 23 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: Well, after Severus was so lovely and protective last chapter, I expect he's entitled to a little reward, don't you think? Two chapters left of this fic, after this one, and not much plot to speak of. :) Thanks for reading and big sloppy kisses to those who reviewed. No beta- all mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

The sparkle of magic against Hermione's skin faded. When Severus turned his hungry mouth from her lips to the delicate skin of her throat, she saw that they were in the main room of his flat. Another flare of magic against her body and Hermione heard a sound like a box turning over in another room. A small object flew into the middle of the room and abruptly re-sized itself.

Then strong arms lifted her and laid her down on the object, which turned out to be her ratty old sofa. He fell atop her, returning to her mouth for greedy kisses. One last spell and their robes were unbuttoned. As his fingers fumbled at the placket of his jeans, she raised the skirt of her cotton sundress. With one strong hand, he wrenched the crotch of her knickers to one side and thrust home.

Now that his cock was buried in her heat, his need to rush abruptly fled. Gentle, slow strokes of his hips as he glided in and out of her flesh. His hands buried themselves in the hair on either side of her head, and he kissed her as if she was the most precious thing in the universe.

His mouth wandered to her ear, and the warm rush of his breath made her shiver.

"Oh, Hermione, you're so soft." His voice was so low, it was as if he breathed the words rather than spoke them. "So soft around me. So many nights with only my bony hand for comfort...I never knew anything could feel so soft and sweet."

Slipping her hands down his back, Hermione pressed them under the loose waistband of his jeans, under his boxers, so she could cup and squeeze his tight buttocks. He groaned in her ear. His mouth drifted down to her neck and he nipped and licked at her flesh. One of his hands moved to the low neckline of her dress, slipping under the fabric and into the cup of her bra. He kneaded her gently and rolled the hard nipple between his fingers, making her gasp.

"So soft," he murmured again.

Hermione wrapped her legs around his, her feet tucking under his shins. Her hips rose to every slow glide of his flesh into hers. When she squeezed his buttocks again, he growled low in his throat.

Still, he refused to increase the speed of his hips. Over and over, in and out, so slowly. Her orgasm snuck up on her, suddenly breaking over her in gentle waves that seemed to never end.

"So good," she sighed. "Oh, my love, you are magnificent."

Raising up on his elbows, he stared into her eyes as he continued his slow thrusting. He bit his bottom lip, and Hermione realized he was riding on the edge of bliss, prolonging that moment of no return.

Letting go of his lip at last, he whispered, "I could do this forever and want nothing else. I could fuck you forever."

"Oh, yes," she whispered back.

With his weight still on his elbows, he slid his hands under her back until he was clasping her shoulders from underneath. One last thrust deeply into her heat, holding her so tightly to him that his entire body clenched. There he held in perfect stillness as his cock finally began to pulse and pour his bliss into her.

"Hermione," he breathed into her ear.

He stayed there, caressing her shoulders and giving her an occasional sweet kiss until his cock eventually softened and slipped free of her. With some wriggling, they managed to switch positions. Severus laid on his back with Hermione draped over him on her stomach.

"Hmm...I do so like this sofa," Severus said, and then kissed the top of her head.

"Severus?"

"Mmmm?"

"I've never been so perfectly happy in my life."

He kissed her head again, and then reached blindly over the side of the sofa to find the wand he'd dropped to the floor in his earlier distraction. With a flick, a red-covered book sped into the room and into his waiting hand.

"Let's see...where were we? Here we are. Fifteenth of December. Dear Daddy-Long-Legs, Listen to what I've learned today."

Hermione realized she'd been wrong. Every single time she decided she was perfectly happy, Severus did something even more brilliant. With a contented sigh, she tucked her face under his chin and settled in to listen to him read.

Several chapters later, his reading was interrupted by an owl grumpily pecking on the window in the living room. It was Harry's, a lovely barn owl that had replaced Hedwig after she fell. She opened the window and the owl settled onto the window ledge, clicking its beak at her.

"Hello, Apollo," she said, tickling the feathers under his beak the way he liked. "Sorry for the delay. We'll get one of these windows magicked for you."

Apollo seemed to accept her apology and held a rolled bunch of paper out to her with one of his strong talons.

"Here you go, Apollo," a deep voice said behind her as Severus reached around Hermione to hand the owl a bit of cheese.

Apollo gobbled up the cheese, bobbed his thanks, and flew off. Hermione unrolled the papers and smiled.

"Look, Severus, the newspaper has put out a special edition."

His only reply was a snort. Going back to the old sofa, they sat side by side as they perused the paper. *Ruffian Attacks War Heroes!* the paper proclaimed in giant lettering at the top of the first page. Hermione only skimmed the article...she'd been there after all... but she was very interested in the four wizarding photographs that accompanied the piece. She hadn't realized there'd been a photographer on the street.

The first one was captioned *Alive and in Love!* A tall wizard in black robes looked down with adoring eyes at a small witch as he lifted her hand to his lips. That was right before the trouble started. The photographer had most likely been excited about being able to prove Severus was alive. Not that Hermione minded. It really was a lovely photograph.

The second shot showed Hermione sitting on the pavement facing away from the camera, a wild-eyed Ron Weasley tugging on her arm. A black spot of twisting robes flew up and transformed into Severus, his face furious as he raised his wand.

"Magnificent," Hermione murmured as she watched the picture go through its actions for the third time.

Severus turned her head away from the paper with one hand so that he could kiss her thoroughly as she hummed with pleasure.

"I knew you would come for me," she whispered against his mouth.

"I would go straight to hell for you," he growled back.

The third picture showed the tall wizard, his wand pointed at a pile of limbs, death in his eyes. Beside him, the small witch moved her hand down his arm until her hand rested on his. He turned to her, and with only the slightest change in his features, the deadly expression changed to one of ferocious love. This one made Hermione sigh, but it wasn't her favorite. That honor went to the last picture.

Harry Potter sat on a curb near where a tall wizard held a small witch on his lap. His head was bowed to where he studied the dainty wrist he held in one hand while he used his wand in the other. He lifted his head as she wiggled her fingers, gazing at her as if she were the most precious thing in the world. The witch gave him a beaming smile and then placed her hands on both sides of his face. As she kissed him, the crowd at the edges of the photograph clapped and cheered.

"I'm getting a copy of that one." Hermione sighed happily and ran her finger over tiny photograph Snape as he kissed his witch. The image raised its hand as if to shoo her away. Perfectly understandable. He was quite busy with the little witch in his lap.

Their perusal of the article was interrupted by Severus' stomach grumbling loudly.

"Come on, now," Hermione said, getting to her feet and offering him a hand to tug him off of the sofa. "We need to feed you and keep your strength up."

"Do we now."

"Oh, yes. I have many, many plans for you."

His laughter rang out as they headed to the kitchen.

Somehow, as Hermione made sandwiches and put them onto plates, she ended up naked. It seemed like every time she turned from one task to the next, clever fingers had divested her of another article of clothing. By the time she put their plates on the table, he was deliciously nude as well. He'd put their chairs quite close together, and could not seem to stop touching her, not even to eat.

She knew why. Proof of life. Proof she was right there, safe and sound. After Ron had attacked Severus outside the bookshop, she hadn't been able to stop holding his hand. The moments she had been forced to let it go had been agonizing. Now, she leaned into his every caress and did some touching back as well.

She did her share of looking also. Even after all their naked games together, she didn't think she would ever get enough of looking at him. Soft skin over a nicely muscled frame with delightful hair here and there. She often found herself stroking the hair on his chest as if he were a cat, but he didn't seem to mind it.

A glance at his lap...no, he didn't seem to mind it at all. What lovely games could she encourage him to try now? They'd managed quite a lot of her original mental list of what she wanted them to do to each other, but there would always be new things to explore.

There was one thing. An often read scene from one of Ginny's trashy novels. It never failed to get her hot, though she'd never had a chance to try it herself. The one time she had talked Ron into trying it, he hadn't been able to stay hard. He thought it was disgusting, and the unspoken thought was that she was disgusting to even want that. No, he'd certainly not been very adventuresome in bed.

Would Severus think she was disgusting? Merlin, she'd hate to see that sort of look on his face aimed at her. But would he? He was actually rather delightfully nasty at times. He adored it when she talked dirty to him and eagerly went down on her after he'd finished filling her with his come, lapping at their combined juices as if he could never get enough. She remembered his worried face when he'd asked her if he could do that the first time. Afraid she'd think him nasty for wanting to do it when the truth was that she found it very, very hot.

Perhaps she should admit to herself that she was a trifle nasty herself.

Remembering his anxiety, Hermione decided he was not likely to think badly of her for asking him about anything. He might not want to do it, but she couldn't imagine him holding her fantasies against her, no matter what they were. They got on so well because they were honest with each other. She should be honest about this too.

"I won't bite, you know." He sat with his elbow on the table, chin propped on his hand, gazing at her through half-lidded eyes. "Well, not much, at any rate. What's going on in that lovely head of yours?"

Merlin, but she couldn't get away with anything around him. He always knew when she was up to something.

"There's something I want you to do to me...with me...and I'm a little embarrassed to ask you about it."

He stood then, plucking her off of her chair and carrying her to the bedroom. She stroked the curve of his bicep and made a little hum of pleasure. Reaching the bed, he laid her down on it, then lay on his side facing her, his head once again propped on his hand.

"I'm afraid you'll think I'm disgusting. I've never done it before, though I have wanted to. The one time I tried before, well, it didn't end well. He couldn't stay hard. He...er...thought I was gross."

"Imbecile," Severus growled. "Hermione, pet, don't be daft. I don't know if I will want to do this or not until you tell me what it is, but I'll hardly hold your wanting it against you. Hmm...let me see...your previous poor excuse for a lover thought it was disgusting, did he?"

Then he was kissing her, rolling them so that she lay on top of him as he made love to her mouth. One of his strong hands moved down her back and to the cleft of her arse. A fingertip found the ring of tight muscle there and stroked it. She moaned into his mouth, canting her hips back into his finger as he teased her with gentle rubbing motions.

Ending the kiss, he looked up at her. "Nothing disgusting about it, pet. Had my fingers up my own arse during some of those lonely nights I used to have. Certainly wouldn't mind you doing that to me sometime, if you've a mind to. And the thought of making love to that sweet little arse of yours? Well, let's just say I won't be having any trouble staying hard."

Her responding grin was almost as wicked as his.

Twenty-Four

Chapter 24 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

A/N: If you read the last chapter, then you know where this is going. If it's not your cup of tea, you can safely skip ahead, because this chapter is going to be all about *that*.

No beta, so any mistakes are my own.

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play. Sometimes they have anal sex. I really can't control them anymore.

Soon, Severus wiggled half out from under her so that he could fumble around in the nightstand drawer.

"I don't know how to do this any more than the other things we've tried," he said, "but I know we'll need this. It's Muggle, of course, but it works quite well...as I can personally attest."

He presented her the bottle of lubricant for her inspection. Of course, the man had lube. He might have been a virgin when Hermione got a hold of him, but he'd mentioned wanking to her on more than one occasion. She opened up the bottle and squirted a tiny amount out so she could rub it between her fingers. It was nice and slippery.

"How would you like us to do this, pet?" he asked.

"Well, there's this scene..."

"In one of Mrs. Potter's trashy books?" he supplied when she faltered.

"Yes, if you must know. Where else do you think I get all my naughty ideas from?"

"I couldn't care less, so long as you keep having them," he said with a leer. "Perhaps after I finish reading *Daddy-Long-Legs*, we should find a more inspiring book for me to read."

The thought of him reading one of the hotter scenes from one of Ginny's books had her staring at him with parted lips. That deep, sexy voice, reading about throbbing cocks...oh, yes. She'd like that. Her tongue came out to wet her lips as she thought about it.

"Indeed, my lady seems quite taken with that idea. I'll keep that in mind, pet. But for now, I have something else in mind." Pinning her to the bed, he snogged her enthusiastically for a moment before growling in her ear, "Tell me how you would like me to fuck that sweet arse of yours, Hermione."

"Spooned behind me to start," she explained, a little breathless. "Gentle at first...I've never done this before."

"Believe me, pet. I'm well aware I'm about to fuck you where no man has gone before me."

His next kiss was possessive, nearly wild, and altogether wonderful. When he released her, she turned on her side facing away from him, drawing her knees up to present her backside to him. She heard the cap of the lube bottle and shivered in anticipation. Then he was pressed up against her, his chest hair tickling her back, his hard cock brushing her buttocks, his hot mouth kissing and nibbling the back of her neck in that perfect way, making her shiver again. Cool wetness at her arse, and then his finger was sliding inside.

She moaned so loudly that she was a little embarrassed. She had been worried she might not like it, especially since he'd been so taken with the idea. But no, it felt a little odd, but good, and just the thought of him replacing his fingers with his big cock had her moaning again.

"That's it, pet. Good, isn't it? I'm going to put a second finger in now. Yes, pet. Lord, I thought your other channel was tight. We're going to slide these fingers in and out until you're nice and relaxed. I know that from my own explorations. I'm going to fuck you with my fingers, then I'm going to thrust my cock right up this delicious tight arse of yours and fuck you good and properly."

That wicked voice. Hermione wasn't certain if it was that wicked voice or those wicked fingers making her pant for it. She only knew she couldn't wait another second.

"Now, Severus. Fuck me now." Reaching behind herself, she grasped his cock and tried to pull it where she wanted it.

"Patience, you insatiable harpy," he growled, slapping her hand away. "We're starting this gently or we aren't doing it at all."

"Please, Severus. Now, please."

"I do so like it when you beg me," he purred into her ear.

Then his fingers were withdrawing and something much larger was taking their place. She could feel him tense behind her as he slowly, so slowly slid into place. It didn't hurt, exactly, but she felt uncomfortably stretched. But, Merlin, he was there. He was balls deep in her ass.

When she moaned again, he withdrew slowly and gently pushed back into her. On his third gentle invasion, Hermione could feel the passage of her arse suddenly relax, softening around him.

"Oh, that's it, pet," he breathed into her ear. "That's it. So fucking tight, Hermione. You're so fucking tight around me."

Then he was thrusting slightly faster, withdrawing nearly all the way before surging back inside. The too full feeling was gone and it began to feel good, oh so good.

"More, love. More. Fuck me harder, Severus. Fuck me."

He increased his pace, fucking her ass with even more force when she begged again for it. How could this feel so good? He wasn't anywhere near her clit, but it felt so good and hot.

"Severus?"

"Hmm..." He slowed his pace.

"I want to turn you over on your back now, so you can reach me with your hand."

"Yes. Yes, I want to touch you."

He thrust in and held himself there as she rolled him over on his back, still attached. Now she was face up, lying over him at a slight angle, bowed over his hips. Using her legs, she lifted up and rammed her ass back over his cock. His hand flew to her clit and his fingers began to dance over it as she fucked herself on him. Then she found that if she held herself up a little, he could thrust up into her, which he did. Hard and fast.

"Merlin, Severus. I'm going to come. I'm going to come with you fucking me right in the arse. Oh, yes, Severus!"

It was like an avalanche, an earthquake. Never had an orgasm thundered through her with such force. She crooned with the power of it, her eyes widened with shock as wave after wave crashed over her. Then for the second time in her life, she passed out for a few seconds.

When she came to, she was on her stomach with Severus heavy against her back. Her hips were canted up and he was still gently thrusting into her. His mouth was at her ear.

"Please, Hermione, please tell me you are all right. Please, because I don't think I can stop. I don't think I can stop fucking your beautiful tight arse."

"Fuck me! Fuck me, Severus, you fucking brilliant fucking wonderful bastard!"

His hips slammed against the cheeks of her arse, over and over as he pounded into her. His hands worked under her so he could grasp a breast in each hand. His mouth was hot on the back of her neck, his teeth biting at her. The headboard of the bed banged against the wall with the force of his thrusts.

"Yes, Hermione, Yes!"

Then he was pouring into her, his entire body shuddering with the force of his release. He fell limply over her.

While Hermione normally loved keeping Severus' cock inside of her until it softened and slipped out, she found that now that the fun was over, her arse was having none of it. She rolled Severus onto his back, disengaging him in the process. He flopped onto his back bonelessly, and she snuggled up to his side.

"Hermione, while I shall never tire of your other charms, that was extraordinary."

"It was, wasn't it? Maybe not for everyday use, but we are absolutely going to do that again."

"My lovely little wanton woman," he murmured, leaning up to kiss her on the temple. "How I do love you."

"I love you too, you wicked wonderful man."

They lay snuggling until Hermione suddenly needed a trip to the loo. Apparently, while vaginas were built to keep certain liquids inside, her bottom was telling her it would like to get rid of the stuff rather quickly. Severus, shameless as always, followed her into the loo and stood washing his cock off at the sink while she sat on the toilet.

When she farted, he gave her an arch look and then burst into laughter.

"Stop laughing at me," she grumbled, embarrassed.

"It's a perfectly normal reaction after what we've been up to, I imagine." He laughed again. "Do you know that you blush all the way to your pert bubbies?"

He caressed one of the breasts in question as he reached to the cabinet above her to get a small towel to dry himself off. She giggled. She couldn't help it really. He was just so shameless and wicked. In all her wildest imaginings, she'd never believed she'd find a lover like him.

Later, after they'd rested, he begged her to put her fingers up his arse while she sucked him. She'd never done it before, but she'd read about it, and it seemed simple enough. She could hardly say no after he'd been so ready to satisfy her every wish, not that she really wanted to say no. He was always so focused on her pleasure, she'd love a chance to make him go wild.

She sat him on the edge of the bed and put a pillow on the floor before she knelt in front of him. He leaned back on his arms, watching her as she leaned towards him. Mouth hanging open, he was already breathing hard, the anticipation of what she was about to do for him making him pant.

Using one hand at the base, she took as much of his cock into her mouth as she could, bobbing her head and using her tongue on him. She locked eyes on him, enjoying that gobsmacked look she loved so well. He watched her avidly, his eyes never leaving the sight of him disappearing into her mouth. She knew how excited it made him to watch himself fucking her. If she didn't get to his arse soon, she might not have time.

Slicking her fingers with lube, she pushed one under his balls, sliding back until she felt the tight pucker. When she pushed it slowly inside, his deep groan told her how much he enjoyed it.

"Oh, Lord, so good," he said, a little breathless. "Another finger, pet, please."

Well, he did say he'd done this before to himself. On her next pass in, she added a second finger while she continued to stroke his cock with her hand and mouth. Now, if she crooked her fingers in a 'come hither' motion, that was supposed to rub his prostate.

She tried it, and easily felt the rounded form of his prostate, rubbing it gently with the tips of her fingers. He gave a short shout, and his hips thrust up a little in reaction.

"Do it again...oh, pet...do that again, please. Oh, sweet Merlin."

He was starting to babble. She repeated the strokes of her fingers as she sucked him. His head fell back, and he thrashed it from side to side. Then he was spurting into her mouth with a wordless shout. He collapsed back onto the bed.

Hermione gently withdrew her fingers and he sighed at the feeling. Her hand was slippery with lube and she didn't want to wipe it on the sheets. Making a brief trip to the loo to wash her hands, she decided they really should keep a towel next to the bed for their messier experiments.

Severus had recovered enough to get fully back onto the bed by the time she returned. He tugged her down into his arms and kissed her breathless.

"That was bloody brilliant, my beautiful witch."

Then he was sliding down her body, his mouth delving into her eager sex while his wicked fingers slipped into her arse. It wasn't as good as having his cock there, but it was still exciting. She called out his name in bliss three times before he finished showing her his appreciation.

They slept for a while, waking only to grab a quick dinner before they returned to the deep sleep of the truly shagged out.

Twenty- Five

Chapter 25 of 25

A hurried journey through the rain, a hastily turned corner, and Hermione runs right into a man she never thought to see again. No. That man is dead, so who is this doppelganger?

The next morning, Hermione and Severus were sitting naked at the table eating breakfast when they were interrupted by a shining deer. Hermione listened to the message and then asked for Harry to wait five minutes. In a flurry of foolish wand waving, she retrieved both her own and Severus' dressing gowns. He rolled his eyes and scowled at her, but put his robe on before sitting back down to his eggs and toast.

"I trust we will not have Potters about the place at all times of the day," he grumbled.

"Of course not, love. We haven't got the floo in place yet, or I'm certain Harry would have simply called."

His only reply was a snort.

Harry waited ten minutes before apparating in. When he did appear, he had his eyes closed. Ginny must have warned him.

"Everyone decent?" he asked.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Potter," Severus snapped. "Stop playing silly buggers and get on with your business. I do have plans for the day."

"I'll just bet you do," Harry muttered as he took a seat at the table.

"Have you eaten, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, could use a cup of coffee though, if it isn't any trouble."

"No trouble, we've got a pot on."

More foolish wand waving and a mug of coffee with two sugars and a drop of milk floated out to Harry.

"Tell me, Potter, what matter is so important that you must darken our doorstep so early in the day?"

"For Merlin's sake, stop scowling at me, Severus. I won't be long, I promise. I only came to tell you about Ron, and that you were right. The healers found a high level of Mistique in his system. Nearly fatal dose, they said."

"Ah, that makes sense," Severus said, the scowl finally fading. "A sneakily dangerous drug that. Some of my Slytherins had trouble with it towards the end of the war. In small quantities, it is quite effective in treating anxiety. However, it's highly addictive and to keep up the effect, one must use stronger and stronger doses. Often a user is in trouble before they even realize it. Good Lord, Hermione, do stop mooning over me. We have a guest."

She couldn't help it. His voice had fallen into the tone and rhythm he'd used in the classroom. Thank all that was sacred that she'd been too intimidated by him at school to notice the true effect of that voice. She was getting wet just listening to him.

"By all means, Hermione, give it a rest," Harry muttered, clearly uncomfortable.

She stopped her staring, but not before she noticed Severus shift slightly in his chair. He seemed to be more affected by her 'mooning' than she had guessed. She'd bet anything he was hard for her.

"How is Ron doing?" she asked, trying to get them back on subject before she pounced on Severus right in front of Harry.

"Much better. They've got him detoxed, and they're working on a way to help him with his emotions that is safe and healthy. He's really horrified by what he did, Hermione. Doesn't blame you at all, Severus, for hexing him to within an inch of his life. Said he'd have done the same. He'd like to see you, though, Hermione. He really wants to apologize."

Severus growled and Harry stared at him with wide eyes.

"That's not a good idea, Harry," Hermione said, calmly. "I find that I still want to hex him on sight for what he did to Severus, and Severus, well, he very nearly did kill him, and at that point, I may have applauded."

"Nonsense," Severus grumbled. "You are far too kind to applaud anyone's death, pet. It's you who stopped me and I am grateful for that. I'd rather not have any more blood on my hands."

"Now who's talking nonsense, love. I would have killed him myself if I hadn't been so busy taking care of you. In any event, I truly think it will be a long while before Ron is safe in my presence. Tell him I'll await his owl if he wishes, but he'd better give us a wide berth for now, at least."

"Now that you've told us your news, Potter, perhaps you'd be so kind as to bugger off."

"I will, Severus, but I haven't even finished my coffee yet."

"Suit yourself, but I warn you that I am going to finish eating my toast, and then I'm going to throw Hermione over this table and eat her."

"Arrrgh!" Harry got to his feet so quickly his chair fell over.

Putting his fingers firmly in his ears, he chanted "La la la" over and over as he dashed to the center of the room. When he had to take one finger out of his ear to grasp his wand, he said "I'm not listening!" three times very loudly. Then he turned and disappeared with a loud pop.

"Severus! There was no need to be that rude to poor Harry!" Hermione tried to chastise her love, but the fact that she was giggling probably spoiled the effect. "He might have splinched himself."

"Why be polite when being rude gets me what I want faster?" Severus stared at her as he popped the last bite of toast in his mouth and chewed slowly.

Next thing she knew, the dishes were magically clearing themselves and strong arms were lifting her to place her on her back on the table with her legs hanging over the side. Hands opened her dressing gown and pressed her thighs apart before his mouth descended on her.

"Mmmm...I do so love you, you rude bastard."

He hummed in pleasure against her clit, which knocked her right over the edge into bliss. She'd never come so fast in her life, but she'd wanted him so very badly while they'd sat talking to Harry.

Always noticing everything, as he worked her up to her second orgasm of the day, he hummed, stroking her channel with his fingers as she ground her sex against his face. Delighted with the new sensation, she chanted his name over and over as he brought her to her peak again.

"Fuck me, you rude bastard! Fuck me!"

Then he was there. Falling over her as his mouth found her breast. Thrusting into her in one powerful push. Winding his fingers into her hair as he pounded into her.

His lips made a hot trail up to her mouth where he kissed her breathless. Then his hot breath was on her ear.

"Couldn't wait. There my beautiful witch was, absolutely mooning over me, and I couldn't wait to get inside of her. I'd have told the Minister himself to bugger off. Had to have you. Never get enough of you."

With her legs dangling over the side of the table, he was hitting all the good spots with each forceful crash of his hips against hers.

"Oh, Merlin," she muttered. "Merlin I'm going to come, Severus. I love it. I love it when I come with you inside me."

He growled into her ear. "Yes, pet. Yes. Come for me. Come for me now because I am about to fill you."

She felt his cock begin to spasm. He stretched her so deliciously tightly. She felt the first rush of liquid heat against her walls and the sweet sound of him moaning her name. Then she was trembling in his arms as she followed him into bliss.

After a few sweet kisses, strong hands plucked her from the table, set her gently on her feet, and belted her robe back around her.

"You know, pet," Severus fairly purred as he padded into the kitchen to set the breakfast dishes to cleaning themselves, "you once told me that you rarely achieve orgasm from penetration alone. I do believe you need to revisit that hypothesis."

"I think you may be right, love. Obviously, my subject pool was too...small."

Merlin, but she loved that nasty low chuckle of his.

"I feel like having a nice long soak in the tub. Would you care to join me, Severus?"

"I need to pop down to the shop and have a quick word with Marta. If you are still in the bath when I return, I'd be delighted."

As she prepared her bath, Severus threw on some clothes and headed down to the shop. Hermione took her time getting things ready. She really hoped that if she delayed a bit, she'd have a naked and wet wizard in the tub with her.

He must have felt the same and hurried his errand. She wasn't in the tub long before Severus was slipping into the water behind her. She snuggled back against him. That's when she noticed the paperback he was holding. It obviously wasn't her copy of *Daddy-Long-Legs* and she wondered why he had decided to switch books.

"Lord Falken galloped his stallion down the lane to the manor house. His manly thighs rippled as he clenched the lathered sides of the horse. Perhaps he shouldn't have ridden the poor beast so hard, but it had been far too long since he'd been home. All he wanted was a stiff drink and a busty wench to warm his bed. Indeed, so hard pressed was he that the motion of the horse had his cock throbbing."

"Mmmm. First paragraph and we've got throbbing cocks already. This is going to be a good one."

"I do believe it will be, pet." One of his strong hands came around to fondle her breast as he continued to read.

"I love you, Severus."

"I love you too, pet. Now hush, I'm reading."

Hermione settled against his chest with a happy sigh to listen to her wonderful man read trash to her

A/N: That's the end of this one, my awesome readers. I can't tell you how much fun I had writing it. Having a return to Lemontown was fun as well; haven't done that in a

while.

I am in the process of adapting this into an original work (mages and a drug war). Should be done in a week or so. If you are interested in that, you'll have to go to Amazon and look for Forgotten Magic under J. A. Curley, my pen name. I have a couple of children's books under my real name, so I can't go putting erotica under that.

If you enjoy my writing style, you would probably enjoy my books. Almost all of them have a touch of romance and humor. Most have a speculative element. There's only one I would consider an all-out romance and none are erotica. You can find me on Amazon and Kindle under Julianne Q Johnson, and my books are in Kindle Unlimited as well.

I don't know when or if I'll get another Potterverse plot bunny, but I've certainly learned never to say never. ;) Until then, thanks for reading!