

# Walking Into Bars

*by michmak and zambonigirl*

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl. In this chapter: Hermione walks into a bar. Literally.

## The Limbo Rock or Who The Hell Is Jimmy Buffet?

*Chapter 1 of 8*

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl. In this chapter: Hermione walks into a bar. Literally.

It all started when Hermione Granger walked into a bar. Actually, that's not quite true. It all started when the ghosts of Hogwarts decided to throw their annual 'Start of Summer Party' in the main hallway that led to the library.

Normally, they would never do this of course, but it was the last day of school. How were they to know that their yearly game of Spectral Limbo would have such far reaching consequences?

Nearly Headless Nick had commented to the Bloody Baron after the dust had settled that it was a good thing they were all already dead, or Severus Snape would have killed them.

But let's begin at the beginning.....

\* \* \* \* \*

Severus Snape watched Hermione Granger's ascent towards the library with interest. While all the other students were enjoying their newfound freedom, he found it quite amusing that the Gryffindor know-it-all whose entire persona was wrapped up in the ability to know the most mundane fact about the most tiresome subject could not quite leave the school.

She had been Valedictorian, naturally, with a 497% out of a potential 100% on her N.E.W.T. scores. Her anger at not receiving the 500% she had been reaching for was heard for days.

This was the day that Snape had been waiting for: Hermione Granger and her incessant hand waving and answer giving and question asking would be gone from his life indefinitely! But, it seemed, not before she finished whatever task it was that drew her back to the stairs leading towards...the library? What could the tiresome little wretch need to do at the library? Kiss her precious books good-bye?

Snape smirked and looked around; making sure no one was looking his way as he slid into the hallway, following her. She was up to no good. Deep in the very marrow of his bones, he knew it. After all, why would she be sneaking away before the actual party began, if it wasn't to do something she shouldn't be? Perhaps she was going to 'borrow' a few of her favorite books without any one's knowledge. It wasn't very Gryffindor of her, to be sure, but he had often thought that Miss Granger would have made a fine Slytherin, much as it galled him to admit it. After all, she had managed to steal ingredients from his potions labs....and she didn't love Boomslang Skin nearly as much as he knew she loved books.

Who knew what the chit was up too? But he was going to find out.

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Hermione Granger was muttering to herself, an unfortunate habit Ron had told her actually made her look quite insane. Honestly though, she couldn't help it especially when she had done something as spectacularly stupid as forgetting to return a library book.

Pince's repeated warnings echoed in her mind as she rushed down the corridor towards the library the last time she had been late returning a book she had been told in no uncertain terms that if it ever happened again her borrowing privileges would be revoked. She certainly didn't want that to happen she may be graduating, but each book at the Hogwarts library was like a friend to her, and the thought of never being able to visit them again was quite distressing.

Perhaps hearing music in the hallway where she wasn't expecting it was her ultimate downfall. Two years as Prefect and one year as Head Girl had instilled a sense of duty in her to stop all wrong doings lest she be faced with another Fred and George Weasley. Quickening her pace, Hermione began running in earnest towards the sound of the noise, surprised to hear bongos and steel drums instead of the usual Wizard Instruments that accompanied the sort of music that was allowed at Hogwarts.

Rounding a corner, she had only a second to take in the decorations of the hallway-all done up in Caribbean chic-and the dress of the School Ghosts-in calypso style clothing instead of the robes and dresses they had died in-when her head hit against a bar that she didn't even see in her haste.

Snape didn't see the bar either. Not until Hermione smacked headlong into it, the sound of her delicate skull reverberating against strong metal causing a gong that would make any church bell proud.

The gong was followed by the sound of a phonograph needle scraping across vinyl and the steady "whoosh" of spectral beings congregating together.

"She should have ducked," Sir Nicholas moaned. "Now look at her!"

"Is she dead?" Moaning Myrtle moaned.

"Hardly," the Bloody Baron was staring at the unconscious girl at his feet in distaste.

"How would you know?" Nearly Headless Nick tried to sound intimidating, but the garish neon hues of his Hawaiian shirt belied his effort.

"I'm a ghost aren't I?"

"Who invited her, anyway? She's alive! She shouldn't be here." Peeves who failed to realize he hadn't been invited either and therefore shouldn't be complaining about party-crashers demanded peevishly.

"What in the name of Merlin is going on here?" Snape bellowed, walking amidst the spirits to where Hermione's nearly lifeless body lay. "And why is there a bloody great bar hung across the hallway?"

Nearly Headless Nick was the first one to 'step' forward. "Professor Snape! Well, isn't this..."

"He's not dead either," Moaning Myrtle moaned. "What next? Me in a Headless Hunt?"

"Shut up, you great whining ninny," the Bloody Baron hissed as Sir Nick tried not to look offended at this reminder of the greatest failure of his dead life.

"Would. Someone. Please. Tell. Me. What. A. BAR. Is. Doing. In. The. Middle. Of. The. Hallway." Snape gritted out angrily, bending over the supine form of Miss Granger and feeling for a pulse at the base of her throat. "You could have killed someone!"

"If she hadn't been barreling pell mell down the hallway, this never would have happened," the Bloody Baron sniffed. "And it's not like any of us can bang our heads on that bar we would simply go through it."

Snape was fast approaching critical mass. "I care less than nothing about the abilities of your 'bodies' to pass through things, and care even less for excuses. WHAT THE FUCK IS THE BAR DOING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HALLWAY!!!!!"

Nearly Headless Nick was chewing on his fingernails in dismay, "We were Limboing."

Snape stared at him blankly. "Limboing?"

"Limboing," confirmed Moaning Myrtle, "and I was winning! Why must every thing conspire against me in my moment of glory?"

The Bloody Baron rolled his eyes, "We are having our annual Start of Summer Party. This year's theme is the Caribbean, hence the Bermuda shorts and printed shirts. And the Limboing. Musn't forget that!"

"And the dreadful music I heard?" Snape muttered.

Nearly Headless Nick looked offended, "I'll have you know, Jimmy Buffet is a poet beyond merit. I have never been to Margaritaville myself, but his lyrical stylings make me long to go."

Snape found it hard to contain his rage, so he didn't even try. "I don't give a flying bludger about who was winning or where Margaritaville is! I want to know why you lot - spectral apparitions, non-corporeal beings, *ghosts* - require a bloody great, completely solid metal limbo bar!"

Sir Nick grunted and adjusted his collar. "Well. Just because we aren't corporeal doesn't mean that we deserve to be insulted in this manner. We appreciate being able to use solid matter to help us feel more human. Is that too much to ask?"

"You know," Snape grumbled, lifting Hermione to him, "I think it a great disservice that you have been given the nickname of Nearly Headless Nick. Nearly Brainless is more like it! Now, I am going to take Miss Granger to the infirmary, and if this bar isn't down by the time I get back, we're all going to find out if ghosts can die a second time!"

Nick sniffed as Snape stalked away. "Well...see if I ever invite him to my Death Day again."

Snape was muttering about limbo bars and Jimmy Buffet and bloody stupid ghosts when he kicked open the door to the infirmary and laid Hermione unceremoniously on a cot.

"Poppy!" he bellowed. "Where are you?"

"I'm right here, Professor Snape!" the old witch said in clipped tones. "Goodness, you'd think a student...Miss Granger! What happened?" She ran over to Hermione and whipped out her wand, intent on finding the source of the student's unconscious state.

"Miss Granger was running through the hallway and ran headlong into a bar, as far as I can tell," Snape muttered.

"A bar? What do you mean?" Poppy was diligently searching through Hermione's robes, and found the past-due library book in Hermione's pocket.

"The ghosts were having a...well, I suppose a limbo party." And listening to someone called Jimmy Buffet, Snape added silently. What he wouldn't give for a nice Margarita right about now...on the rocks...salt...and a shot of grenadine...

"I don't know what to make of this," Poppy said in a tone that Snape had never heard before.

"Make of what?" he was growing more and more uneasy as the moments went on.

"Well, she has quite a nasty bump on her head, but I dare say it shouldn't have knocked her out, I don't think."

"Especially since we all know how hardheaded she is," Snape agreed snidely. "So what do you propose we do?"

Poppy was tutting under her breath, her brow creased as she mumbled incantations over Granger's prone form, before she turned to him. "I think all that's needed is a small dose of 'Pepper-Up' and she'll be right as rain."

Snape shrugged and picked up the book Poppy had pulled from Granger's robes moments before, thumbing through it distractedly and trying to pretend he wasn't watching the medi-witch as she forced a dollop of the smoking potion down the younger girls' throat.

He tried to ignore the slight feeling of relief that washed over him as Granger choked and gasped and opened her large cinnamon eyes, blinking owlishly as the pupils dilated, before turning her focus on him. The hesitant smile that flitted across her face as he quickly schooled his features into their regular scowl did not go unnoticed by him.

"I trust you are feeling better now, Miss Granger?" he demanded, smirking as her eyes widened slightly at his sneering tones.

"Miss Granger?" she replied, "Severus, since when do you call me Miss Granger?" Her forehead creased in confusion, before a sudden blush flared across her face and her smile widened. He had never noticed the tiny dimple lurking at the left corner of her mouth before, and was momentarily entranced before it occurred to him she had called him Severus.

Poppy was watching the two of them keenly, eyes bright, as she carefully recorded the fact that Hermione Granger was calling her Potions Master by his first name and she had blushed in his presence. Snape scowled at her.

"When have I ever called you anything but, you exasperating chit!" he growled. "And who gave you permission to use my first name?"

Hermione grinned fondly at him. "What else do you want me to call you, Husband? You told me you *like* the way I say your name," her voice lowered huskily as she said this last bit, sending images of pale limbs tangled around his into his brain before he could stop them; her voice whispering his name into his ear; skin sliding against skin.

A painful blush flared on Snape's cheeks, twin flames of red against the pale white of the rest of him. "Husband? Husband??" he managed to gasp out, his eyes rolling wildly in Poppy's direction before landing on Granger's face again. "I would sooner marry a...a...Harpy..." he grasped for an appropriate insult, practically choking on his words before finding one that seemed to suit, "than tie myself to the likes of you! WHAT ARE YOU THINKING, YOU STUPID GIRL!"

Hermione bit her lip, unsure how to respond, until she noticed she was wearing her schoolgirl uniform. Playing thoughtfully with the pleats in her skirt she looked up at him again from under her eyebrows, her eyes gleaming. "Severus, if you wanted to play Potions Master / Student again, all you had to do was ask. However did you get me in my old school uniform without me realizing it? And why am I in the infirmary?"

Snape was so enraged that all he could do was open his mouth, but no words would come forth.

"Perhaps I should go and fetch Professor Dumbledore..." Poppy said quietly, sliding towards the door.

"What?" Snape asked, aghast. "You can't just...leave me with her!"

But it was too late Poppy had already left.

"Thank Nimue she's gone," Hermione breathed against Snape's ear. Snape wondered briefly how she had managed to slide from her bed so silently, but the feel of her pressing into him and the slightly husky voice against his neck was very distracting. "I want you inside me so badly..."

Snape jumped away from Hermione, ignoring the strange heat building inside him, and tried to put a rolling tray between them. "Oh, I think you have enough people in there already," he retorted.

"Severus, why are you acting so oddly?" Hermione was pouting at him as she advanced, zigging where he zagged. Her lower lip was pushed out deliciously, all wet and pink, and he briefly wondered what it would taste like if he sucked it into his mouth. Her eyes flared seductively as they tracked his movements, her hair hanging wildly down her back, the light from the wall sconces flickering over the brown curls, making the odd strand flare golden. She was hunting him like a cat hunts a mouse. If she wasn't his student, if she wasn't such an overbearing know-it-all he hated, if she didn't hate him in return when she wasn't start raving mad he might have been tempted to let himself be caught.

Obviously the madness was catching.

She finally managed to grab the small cart firmly enough to push it out of her way, her tiny hands grabbing him by the lapels of his frock coat before one slid up around his neck and anchored itself firmly in the hair at his nape. Her fingernails scratched against his scalp lazily, sending little sparks of electricity through his body. Almost against his will, he leant the weight of his head back into her palm and tried to convince himself he wasn't really enjoying her touch.

Her other arm slid down his chest, gliding around his waist before coming to rest against his left buttock and squeezing it gently. He could feel her breath as she giggled against his exposed throat and tried not to yelp when he felt her tongue trace the cord of his neck.

"Miss Granger, unhand me this instant!" he managed to grit out. His hands were now on her shoulder blades, clenching and unclenching spasmodically, as he tried to garner the will to push her away.

Of course, Albus would choose that precise moment to stride in. Bad enough that the silly, *delicious* chit had him cornered against the wall and was squeezing his ass and sucking his throat. Bad enough that his traitorous body seemed to be enjoying it, but to be caught by the headmaster in this position with a student, allowing said student to take such liberties with his person...well, that was beyond the pale.

With a deep breath, he forced his unwilling hands to push her away, before turning to face Albus. The Headmaster merely grinned at him. "Severus, you are looking somewhat...disheveled. The look suits you."

Snape grimaced and awkwardly adjusted his coat and ran his hands through his hair in an attempt to smooth it. Hermione had sidled up to him again and was grinning at him impishly, picking invisible pieces of lint from his clothes and trying to help him smooth his hair.

"Miss Granger..." he growled dangerously.

"Severus..." she growled back. Merlin's balls, but the growl was sexy. It hit him right in the solar plexus and reverberated through his being. The irresponsible little baggage was trying to kill him, or at the very least get him fired.

"Albus, I can explain..." Snape started, but the Headmaster merely waved his hands at him. "No need, no need. Poppy already told me about Hermione's unfortunate accident."

The older man twinkled at Hermione, "My dear, how are you feeling?"

Hermione smiled at the older man. "I feel fine, Albus," she replied, linking her arm through Snape's, "Although, I must admit my head is slightly tender."

"That's to be expected dear," Poppy bustled forth, "After all, you did walk into a bar."

"Sounds like the beginnings of a bad Muggle joke," Hermione grinned. "I'm sure the headache will go away with a little rest. Severus, if you wouldn't mind escorting me back to our quarters?"

That whole last sentence was laden with such blatant innuendo that Snape felt his eyebrows climb into his hairline. He looked at Hermione incredulously, "Absolutely not! If you think, for one moment..."

"Severus, a word if you please?" Albus interrupted firmly. Snape snapped his mouth shut and spun on his heel, following the older man to the other side of the infirmary.

"Lemon drop?" Albus twinkled at him, when they stopped walking. Snape glared at him. "No? Fine, fine...no need to be rude, my boy."

"Rude?" Snape responded angrily, "Rude? When I have to deal with that...that...bushy-haired know-it-all accosting me and claiming she's my wife? I'll have you know, Albus, I have never NEVER ever laid so much as a finger on that child until today and then only to push her away..."

"She's a young woman, Severus," Albus chided gently, "and no one is accusing you of anything. Although, from where I stood, it didn't look like you'd gotten around to pushing her away yet."

Snape knew the older man was teasing, but that didn't prevent him from practically choking on his anger. "She caught me off guard," his eyes flashed, "I wasn't expecting her to *grope my ass*." This last part was hissed, "Nor was I prepared when she licked my throat."

"Yes, yes," Albus teased, "Hermione has always been full of surprises." He placed a placating hand on the younger man's shoulders. "But I fear you cannot tell her that she is not your wife. You must play along in the role of husband until we can figure out how to cure her."

"Are. You. MAD?" Snape all but screamed, before lowering his voice. "Why in the world would you want me to do that?"

"Severus, don't you understand what's going on here?" Albus asked quietly.

"Yes sir, I do. Miss Granger has gone completely mad. What's more is it seems to be contagious!"

"No, no, my boy. She has a rare sort of amnesia. Poppy said that she hit her head, and you brought her in here, and then she gave her a Pepper-Up potion. When she awoke, she was acting this way. Is that correct?"

Snape nodded. "What has all this got to do with anything? Hitting one's head on a metal bar should be no more harmful than being hit by a bludger."

"But Severus, you're forgetting that Miss Granger is Muggle-born. Muggle ailments do not affect Wizards, but they most certainly will affect her. I believe that combining Hermione's head injury with the Pepper-Up potion created a sort of magical phenomenon. Severus, Hermione truly believes that she is married to you."

Snape gaped at the older man. "Why in the world would she think she was married to me?"

"Perhaps because you are the one that found her," Albus replied, "or perhaps she is merely expressing her subconscious desires to be attached to you in some way."

"I don't think so," Snape snorted. "And it's beside the point anyway. I refuse absolutely refuse to let this farce continue any longer. I will not pretend that she is my wife..."

"Telling her the truth may drive her quite insane," Albus interrupted. "It would be such a tragedy for the Wizarding world to lose a mind like hers..."

Snape sneered, "What are you talking about?"

"We cannot heal her magically, that is obvious," Albus replied. "We must let her heal in her own time. If we force her to recognize the truth before she is ready...well, she could suffer the same fate as my dear half-cousin Merriam."

"Who is Merriam?" Snape asked suspiciously. "I don't think I've ever heard of her before."

"No, you wouldn't have quite before you're time, I daresay," Albus replied sadly. "She was my mother's sister's daughter. My aunt had married a Muggle, and Merriam was their only child. Quite a beautiful girl, actually. She was very gifted magically. Like Miss Granger, she also suffered a blow to the head, which sent her into a coma. A doctor at St. Mungo's forced her awake and ever after, poor Merriam would have unfortunate bouts of well, let's just say when she became overly excited about anything she thought she was a cow. She would 'Moo' for hours."

"What is it with your family and farm animals?" Snape muttered. "Was she ever cured?"

"Of thinking she was a cow? Yes, eventually. But we could never seem to rid her of her propensity to break into show tunes at the drop of a hat."

"Show tunes?"

"Yes...you know, *'Oh, what a beautiful morning! Oh, what a beautiful day!'*" the older man warbled at Snape, much to the younger man's dismay. "Oklahoma was a particular favorite of hers."

"And you're telling me that exposing Miss Granger to the truth could send her over the edge?" Snape sounded faintly incredulous, as one does when one can't believe what is happening to them.

"She could become mad as a hatter," Albus agreed. "It is imperative you play along, Severus."

"But what about her parents? Her friends? Won't they tell her the truth?"

"I've thought of that," Albus agreed, "and I think the best thing to do right now is to send you on a little vacation. I have a beautiful little villa, completely unplotable, in Greece. You can take her there for a little while, and I'll explain the situation to everyone here. By the time you are ready to return, no one will tell Hermione the truth about anything."

"But...but...Albus," Snape finally managed to choke out, "She thinks we're married. What if she expects...well. Hmphf. What if she wants..."

"Conjugal relations with her husband?" Albus twinkled at the younger man. "I'm sure you'll do whatever is in Hermione's best interests."

"Albus!"

"Just tell her that Poppy told you in no uncertain terms that...that part of your relationship is strictly off-limits until her concussion is no longer an issue. And if you can't put her off...well, let's just say I have every belief that you could both be pleasantly surprised by what you discover."

Snape gaped at the older man, "She's my student, Albus."

"Not anymore she's not," Albus retorted, twinkling merrily. "Really, Severus. I know you will do your best not to harm her, but a little bit of physical affection might not be

amiss. As a matter of fact, it might even be necessary to play along with her belief that you are married. If you withhold from her completely, it could send her into a tailspin from which she'll never recover."

"So you're saying I should..."

"I'm not saying anything," Albus interrupted. "But it won't kill you to hug her, or hold her hand, or even kiss her if it's something she needs. You've been a spy for me for over twenty years, Severus. Surely, in all that time, you've learned how to act the part. So act the part of the doting husband with her. Let her believe that you are married; that you do love her and hold her in high regard if that's what's required to keep her mentally sound."

"And when she recovers?" Snape queried, "What then?"

"I'm sure she'll realize that everything you did was for her benefit, dear boy. After all, you are both adults."

Snape rolled his eyes, "I sincerely doubt that."

Albus clapped him on the shoulder. "We've been standing here too long. I'll have the house-elves pack your things and send them to the villa. Fortunately, I have a portkey with me in one of these pockets..." Albus started patting himself absently. "Why don't you go gather Hermione, Severus, and tell her of your plans to whisk her away on a romantic honeymoon."

Snape tried to ignore the older man's chuckle as he did just that. Damn Miss Granger and her clumsiness! Damn her brown eyes and sweet lips and seductive little growl. Most of all, damn himself for realizing that even if he did hate her and he did, he assured himself he also found her oddly intriguing and sexy.

He hoped they wouldn't need to stay in Greece for too long. If she continued in her sexual assaults on his person, he would more than likely hex her into the next century, Azkaban be damned!

TBC

Author's Notes:

Zambonigirl! I'm happy to be writing with my friend Mich again. I thought I'd lost track of her after she took me to Vegas and got me drunk on Yard-Long Margaritas, but now we're back and as indestructible as ever! Thanks to all the wonderful readers who look at our stand-alone stories, as well as this combined effort.

Michmak- Zamboni and I have a strange propensity for putting characters we love in strange situations (i.e. men in thongs and ladies underwear) I'm not saying that's gonna happen to Snape in this fic at all, but I'm warning you now - things could get weird.

## Son Of A Beach or Slippery When Wet

*Chapter 2 of 8*

Hermione and Snape arrive in Greece.

Chapter Two: Son of a Beach or Slippery When Wet

Authors: Zambonigirl and Michmak

*ANs: Michmak: sorry for the delay I've been ill with pneumonia. Anything truly odd in this chapter can be blamed on the drugs I'm on and Zamboni's complete willingness to humor me.*

*Zambonigirl: I wrote only a few pages of this, Mich needs to be on psychedelic drugs more often if it gets her to write this much. I did, however, proofread and fix the garish grammatical errors that my pissed counterpart made in her drugged-out stupor. I hope you all like this and have a Merry Christmakwanzukkahstice!*

Albus Dumbledore's villa in Agios Stefanos, on the island of Mykonos, Greece was situated rather prettily on the beach, not up farther on the hill like most of the homes were. It was bright and airy and cheerful, decorated with Greek flair in bright colors and sturdy furniture and cool marble floors.

They had arrived in the evening, just as the sun was setting. The horizon was ablaze with oranges, reds and pinks and the evening sky, where the sun no longer touched, was a light purple. Hermione was enraptured.

"I can't believe you agreed to this, Severus!" she exclaimed happily as she opened a set of louvered doors that led out to the beach. "You've always told me you hated beaches!"

He scowled at her. "I do," he responded. "Too much sand and too bloody hot."

She ignored him however and ran down the beach to stick her toes into the azure waters that gently lapped against the shore. Before he knew it she had waded out above her knees, the tops of the small waves soaking the edges of the skirt she was wearing. The material clung to her legs wetly, giving him a rather erotic view of her slightly plump thighs. He gulped.

"What are you doing, you silly girl?" he managed to grit out, as he approached the edge of the beach warily. "Get out of that water at once!"

"Come in a make me," Hermione replied saucily. Her lithe fingers were making quick work of the buttons of her shirt. "I want to swim!"

Snape blinked at her, trying to ignore the shadows her half open shirt were making. He could easily see the slim column of her throat, and the rather prominent collarbones at the nape of her neck. He wasn't sure whether he wanted to snap them or stroke them, and the ambiguous feelings she was illiciting within him were making him angry.

"I shall not tell you again, Miss Granger! Get out of that water immediately!"

"No," Hermione retorted. "For one thing, you are not my professor anymore, so you can't order me about. Furthermore, this 'Miss Granger' crap is getting rather old. I refuse to respond to you if you cannot call me by my proper name."

"GET. OUT. OF. THE. WATER!" Snape bellowed. "Do not make me come in there after you!"

Hermione ignored him. Impossible little minx! What the hell had Albus been thinking, sending them there? He would kill her for sure. Grumbling, he sat gingerly on the beach and removed his boots. His socks were next to go. Just who did the chit think she was? The feeling of the sand between his toes was slightly off-putting. How dare she refuse to listen to him? She thought he was her husband! Weren't wives supposed to do everything their husbands demanded of them? That's the way it had been in his family. When his father Merlin rot him - said 'Jump,' his mother always responded with, 'How high?' Miss Granger...Hermione...was definitely not behaving like a proper wife.

The water was warm warmer than he had been expecting. Gritting his teeth, he stepped further in, ignoring the way his black woolen pants clung to his calves. By the time he was within striking distance of her, the tails of his frock coat were sopping wet.

She was laughing at him. "Severus, why didn't you take off your coat, at the very least? The salt water is going to ruin it for sure."

"You are an irritating little baggage," he responded tightly, "and how I ever ended up saddled with you is beyond my comprehension. Now, get your delectable little ass out of the water!"

Delectable? Did he just tell her she had a delectable ass? What the hell was wrong with him?

"Make me," she cooed, as she lunged to the side, trying to move herself out of striking distance.

"I intend too," he retorted, as he followed, easily grabbing her around the waist. "You forget my dear, I was a spy I have the reflexes of an asp. You won't get away from me that easily!"

Hermione grinned up into his sneering face, throwing him off guard when she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Who says I want to get away," she murmured, suddenly flinging him off-balance by throwing her entire weight onto him. She did not weigh much, but the surprise knocked Snape off his feet, and they fell into the water.

They both went completely over and under the water and when he emerged from the unexpected dunking, she was straddling him and laughing. "You should see the look on your face," she giggled, lifting a hand to gingerly push some of his wet hair to the side. He could feel a droplet of water sliding down the edge of his nose and lurched when she leaned forward and gently licked it away. Her hair was clinging to his arms and his face as he sputtered at her in surprise, trying to ignore the sudden hot rush of blood through his system.

"Miss...Hermione," he managed to grit out, "I must insist you stop this at once."

"Whatever for?" she smiled at him, "I rather like the wet-look on you."

"This is not appropriate behavior," Snape responded icily.

"I've licked more than your nose before," Hermione teased. "I don't see what the big deal is."

Snape closed his eyes. How to respond to that? The maddening wench thought they were married. What's more, with her clothes clinging to her wetly, and her clinging to him like a limpet, his body was starting to wonder why the hell he wasn't just playing along. He groaned when she tilted her face to the side and traced her tongue across his jawbone.

"Hermione," he murmured. "Hermione...have you forgotten Poppy's explicit orders that you get some rest? You have a concussion, if you recall. I fail to see how ... accosting me in the water is following those rather pointed instructions."

"You want me to stop?" she whispered into the shell of his ear, her warm breath causing shivers to run up and down his skin.

"You must," he replied. "I don't want you becoming ill..."

"Fine," Hermione pouted at him. "But I have to tell you, I feel marvelous. I don't think I have a concussion at all and if I didn't know better I'd think you were trying to ...delay the inevitable." She smirked at this last part as she let her bottom slide down a bit more firmly into his lap. "It's fairly obvious you want me."

Snape was confused at the air of confidence and prowess she was currently exuding. While Hermione had been an assertive student, she had never let on that she had a more sensual side and Snape wondered briefly how many of her classmates had enjoyed the pleasure of her lascivious company. There had never been any rumors, but Snape found it difficult to believe that this much sensuality had been bottled up for the past few years.

"Hermione, stop this at once," he groaned when her hands moved between them in the warm salt water.

"If you insist," she said a little tartly. Then, to his relief and displeasure, she disentangled herself from him and began to walk back towards the villa, her school shirt clinging to her peachy skin and leaving nothing to the imagination.

As though some alien force was pulling him, Snape found himself following her. His eyes were fixed on her full bottom, shown delectably underneath the gray skirt that had risen above her rear end. She was wearing white cotton panties which were now clinging wetly and translucently to her buttocks and he found his fingers itching to trace the shaded cleft of her bottom. Her arse was enticing.

His reverie was short lived however, as with every step sand and grit found its way into places that he had heretofore been ignorant of. "Good lord!" he shouted, stopping in his tracks, his thick woolen clothing sticking to him like concrete bandages. He felt three hundred pounds heavier, and every movement rubbed the wool and sand against his skin even harder. Twenty odd steps so far, and he already felt rubbed raw!

"What is it, love?" Hermione asked, running towards him, her breasts bouncing against her skin-tight blouse.

"I'm suffocating!" he snapped back at her angrily, trying to look at her face and not her bosom. Was she even wearing a bra under that wet shirt? It appeared the answer was no.

"Here, take off your jacket," Hermione suggested, pulling on the back of his collar.

Snape was about to protest when the cool evening air hit his shoulders, allowing his skin to breathe for a few moments. Scowling mutely, he allowed her to pull it off of him the rest of the way.

"Now your pants," she decided, her hands going for his buttons.

"That's quite enough," he growled, grasping her hand tightly.

"But Severus! You..."

"Are naked beneath," he whispered through gritted teeth, his hand still holding hers to him.

Hermione looked up at him with a very mischievous gaze, her brown eyes full of lust. "Of course you are," she mumbled, moving her hand even closer to the bulge in his pants. "I want to help you with that, too."

Snape sighed and released her hand, practically pushing her away from him in the process. "Hermione, we can't. If anything horrible were to happen to you, I'd never forgive myself." Damn Albus and his brilliant ideas! Damn his twinkling eyes! Damn Hermione!

Moving stiffly, Snape began his trek back to the villa, attempting to ignore his physical discomfort. Unfortunately, there was little that was graceful or swift about his movements.

Once inside, he tried to move himself to the bathroom in order to remove his wet clothes and dry himself off with some semblance of privacy. Hermione, however, was too quick for him, entering the bathroom on his heels and removing her clothing and swathing herself in a towel before he could find the words to protest. He managed to look away as her skirt came off, and only turned around when she announced herself as covered.

"Really, Severus! One would think that you've never seen me naked before!"

Snape didn't comment, he only sighed and wondered how long it would take before she left him alone. He then managed to suppress a surprised epithet when she began to undress him once more, her body pressed intimately to his.

"Hermione, need I remind you that this is completely inappropriate behavior?"

Hermione chuckled as she plucked the buttons to his vest open. "Inappropriate again, Severus? I've only hit my head, nothing too dangerous. I don't see why we can't have a little bit of fun, as long as we don't get too rowdy."

Snape sighed a long-suffering sigh. This was going to be impossible. Did she think of anything other than sex? "Hermione, please. I wish to shower. Give me some time alone."

It was torture to push her away from him, but it was torture keeping her there, as well. She gave him a slightly hurt look before she left, but he tried to ignore it. He got hurt looks all the time. He wasn't about to relent because of a Gryffindor know-it-all. Just because she thought he was her husband didn't change anything between them. He still found her insufferable, and extremely annoying. Sure, she was beautiful, and her breasts were pert and probably softer than a baby's bottom. Not that he'd ever touched a baby's bottom. Or a baby for that matter. But that was the saying, wasn't it? There was no questioning her intelligence everyone knew she was the brightest witch of her age, perhaps of the century. That didn't change the fact that her personality was lacking in the basic social skills or that she had a depraved mind.

Snape realized with a disgusted snort that he was practically describing himself, aside from the "beautiful" part, and the part about the breasts.

Suddenly very confused, he stripped down completely and turned the shower on as hot as it would go. Working very hard to remove himself of all the itchy salt, grit, and wool fibers that were currently plaguing him he vowed to push thoughts of Hermione from his mind.

If only it were that easy.

What in the world had Albus been thinking, sending him to this tropical paradise with Granger in tow? Albus knew him KNEW HIM for Merlin's sake. The old geezer knew the depravities to which Snape could sink. Twenty-odd years as a spy for the man, twenty-odd years of trying to live down his decision to become a Death-Eater....hell, Albus knew the things he had done. Why in the world would the crazy old codger think Hermione would be safe with him, of all people?

Grabbing a loofah he started rubbing his already raw skin viciously, closing his eyes and resting his head against the cold tile. He had only been with her here less than an hour and he was already at his wits end. The girl was throwing herself at him at every turn, reaching out to touch him and stroke him at every opportunity. She was teasing him, laughing at his scowls and ill-humor...she was actually smiling at him....

When had anyone smiled at him before, in genuine pleasure? When had anyone ever willingly reached out a hand to him, to stroke his hair? He was not a man used to gentleness, or tenderness not from anyone. And for this...irritating, obnoxious...brilliant, lovely young witch to think she was married to him? That they frequently shared each others physical company? That she found him as sexually stimulating and attractive as he was suddenly finding her? It was too much to fathom.

And he had hurt her feelings. He had rebuffed her oh, he knew he had to do it, but couldn't he perhaps have been more gentle? After all, it had been fairly obvious that his body was responding to hers. Would it kill him to play the concerned husband and lover for just a little while, until she was back on her feet again and in charge of her mental facilities?

He didn't have to actually ...sleep... with her, of course. He wouldn't take things that far but would it hurt him to perhaps treat her a little more kindly? To perhaps further her in her belief that they were married, that he was indeed her husband? Albus himself had said he needed to act the part he could do that.

And if, by allowing this little pretense to carry forth, he was recipient to more of her gentle touches and brilliant smiles wasn't that the least he deserved? He was only human after all, and despite what anyone might think, physical contact was not something he shunned. Nor was the company of a beautiful woman...he had just become so used to shutting out other people before they could shut him out that it had become something of a habit.

Could he break the habit of decades to help Hermione retain her sanity? Dare he not?

Could he help her without losing himself in the process? Or would allowing himself to pretend that this marriage was real; that they did share a life together...would that break him in the end?

Regardless, it was something he must do and do convincingly. He had never balked at a job Albus had assigned him before and he wasn't about to allow the Granger chit to become the first. Turning off the shower, vowing to himself that he would treat her more gently in future, he stepped from the stall and wrapped a towel around his lean waist.

Mumbling a quick anti-steam charm, he studied himself morosely in the mirror. Why ever would any one want to pretend to be married to him? He was nothing to look at, this much he knew. He was a foul, loathsome human being the great bat of the dungeons. It was an image he had taken time to build over the years; one that served him well. If he went against his very nature and did as Albus asked, when Hermione's memories returned what then? Would she have a good laugh at him behind his back and mock his eagerness to act the part of her besotted husband? Or would she curse him for not telling her the truth immediately? Would she accuse him of taking advantage of her?

He didn't know what to do. Sighing, he finished drying himself off before stepping out into the darkened bedroom. He could vaguely make out a decidedly Hermione-like lump in the middle of the bed and wondered if she was sleeping.

Moving silently to her side, he looked down at her intently. Her bushy hair was in disarray around her and she was clutching a pillow to her stomach. In the soft moonlight barely lighting the room, he could make out the shiny track of tears down her face. He had made her cry.

Sighing to himself, he reached out a hand and gently stroked her hair, arranging it a bit more tidily on the bed. When she suddenly opened her eyes to look at him, he didn't allow himself to flinch.

"You shouldn't be crying," he whispered hoarsely. "Not because of me."

Her hand reached up, her fingers tangling gently with his own. "I shouldn't have been teasing you like that," she responded sleepily. "I know you would never do anything to hurt me...I know Poppy told you not to make love to me again until she gave the all clear."

Snape felt his heart pounding in his throat. When had he ever made love to anybody? He didn't even know what that meant.

"Hermione...I want you to know, I would never willingly do anything to hurt you."

"I know that Severus." She pulled on his hand gently. "Please tell me you're at least going to join me? We haven't slept apart since we got married and I don't want to start now. I promise to keep my hands to myself."

Snape sighed, even as he let her pull him down beside her on the bed. "Please Severus, I don't want to sleep alone."

It was the please that did him in. How could he refuse her? Hadn't he just vowed to himself to act the part of the doting husband? Unmindful of the fact that all he wore was a towel, he allowed himself to slide under the sheets with her, sighing as she inched closer to him and threw her leg across his. Her free hand wrapped around his waist as she snuggled into him, never letting go of the other hand she had clasped firmly in her own.

TBC

*AN: Michmak is insisting on a song. She's got pneumonia. Everyone be nice to her and read the song. It's called "If We Try" by Don McLean, one of my favorite guys as well.*

*When I see you on the street, I lose my concentration.*

*Just the thought that we might meet creates anticipation.*

*Won't you look my way once before you go*

*and my eyes will say what you ought to know.*

*Well I've been thinkin' about you day and night...*

*and I don't know if it'll work out right...*

*but somehow I think that it just might...*

*if we try.*

*Faces come and faces go in circular rotation.*

*But something yearns within to grow beyond infatuation.*

*Won't you look my way once before you go*

*and my eyes will say what you ought to know.*

*Well you've got me standin' deaf and blind...*

*cause I see love as just a state of mind...*

*and who knows what it is that we might find...*

*if we try.*

*You're walking a different direction from most people I've met.*

*You're givin' me signs of affection I don't usually get.*

*I don't want you to pledge your future the future's not yours to give.*

*Just stand there a little longer and let me watch while you live.*

*'Cause when I see you on the street, I lose my concentration.*

*And just the thought that we might meet creates anticipation.*

*Won't you look my way once before you go*

*and my eyes will say what you ought to know.*

*Well I've been thinking about you day and night...*

*and I don't know if it will work out right...*

*but somehow I think that it just might...*

*if we try.*

*Somehow I think that it just might if we try.*

*Yes somehow I think that it just might...*

*if we try.*

## Zorba The Geek or Tipping Isn't Just A City In China

*Chapter 3 of 8*

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl. In this



chapter: exploring the shops of Greece as told by two people who have never been there, and had to look on the internets in order to ascertain what it might be like.

*AN: Mich: Sorry for the delay - all my fault, as I've been sick and lazy. Unfortunately, I can no longer blame this wacky story of drugs. I suppose I will have to blame the booze.*

*Zambi: Michie let me write most of this chapter I think because she was upset that I "blamed" her for most of last chapter. The joke will be on her, however, as all of the dear readers will come back asking that she continue writing without my help. As to the question of when the hockey season will continue again, the answer is: "sniff" I don't know! I miss my Duckies! And I'm sure Mich misses the Maple Leafs.*

~\*~\*~\*~

As the first rays of dawn entered his room, Snape awoke blissfully, feeling content for the first time in ages. He felt warm and slightly drunk, though he knew he had not imbibed in the past month at least. Not even to celebrate the graduation of The-Boy-Who-Just-Wouldn't-Die-And-Be-Done-With-It.

He couldn't remember the last time he had slept so well, even with the help of a sleeping potion and wondered in his hazy half-asleep mind if Hermione might be willing to spend every night in his bed, if it meant he would wake this well-rested.

It really was remarkable how warm the girl was, how the feel of her body pressed against his back and the sleep-heavy weight of her arm draped around his waist was a comfort. Her hair had gotten tangled under his head at some point during the night and just the slightest shift of his head buried his nose in her soft curls, taking in the subtle scent of her: lemons and tangerines, heat and Hermione.

He had never realized how wonderful she smelt. She was intoxicating. His eyes felt heavy; his body lethargic. There was something wrong here, but for the life of him he couldn't remember what it was. He drifted off to sleep again, allowing his body to sink more firmly back into Hermione's, smiling as she murmured his name in her sleep.

It was several hours later before he awoke again, and when he did it wasn't with the sleepy contentment of his initial awakening at dawn it was with the sudden gut-wrenching realization that his hand was caressing something it most definitely should not be. He was afraid to open his eyes and look, because he knew the soft breast his hand was currently squeezing did not belong to him.

In his sleep, he had somehow managed to get his hand up Hermione's rather skimpy tank top. He could feel the soft material pressing against the back of it and could feel the stiff poke of a nipple into his palm, almost as if it was branding him. She was murmuring in her sleep again, her hand reaching behind her to caress his hipbone. Her hair was all around them, drifting over his chest and against his face, enveloping them in her delicious scent. She was writhing slightly in her sleep and her cotton-clad bottom was firmly pressed into the juncture of his thighs, nestling against his length. He groaned silently to himself, even as his body over-rode his mind momentarily and his hips twitched. He could feel the cleft of her ass through her underwear and sighed involuntarily as his body cradled itself against her.

He knew with the clarity that had eluded him earlier this morning this was wrong. It was not good. She had no right to press against him like she did it regularly and his body had no right reacting as if the feel of her flesh against his own was welcome. It wasn't welcome...or, it shouldn't have been. He wondered briefly if perhaps Hermione's madness was catching, because the old Snape the one from yesterday would have already jumped from the bed and stalked calmly and coldly from the room. She had somehow in the space of less than 24 hours bewitched him. He found himself oddly reluctant to remove himself from her heat. Even her fingers, alternately gripping and tracing his hipbone, felt wonderful. He never realized how sensitive his skin was. His. Skin. Was...his skin...

Merlin's balls, he was naked. And Hermione well, she was barely clothed.

A million thoughts began coursing through his head at once. The first response was completely inappropriate, but naturally expected. The second thought was to make an excuse and run into the bathroom for a cold shower right away. Knowing that it wouldn't do-Hermione was every bit the doting wife with him whether he wanted her to be or not-he began to formulate a plan to remove himself from this predicament before it grew too awkward. Hadn't he fallen asleep with a towel on? Where was it?

It was time to get wise, and he knew it. He taught potions to complete idiots every day, spied for Dumbledore, and managed to keep Harry bloody Potter alive for seven years. Surely finding a way to get out of bed and away from the lovely girl who currently had herself wrapped around him should be a piece of cake.

Unfortunately, it was turning into a situation where the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Actually, he couldn't even admit that his spirit was willing, but rather, the logic center of his mind was reminding him that for proprieties' sake, he must get up and dress himself, and by all means NOT look at his mostly-nude student no matter how tempting it was.

In his panic, his hand clenched convulsively against her breast, eliciting an earthier groan from her. His brain stilled and his heart started pounding that groan had traveled straight to his balls. Good lord the chit was going to kill him he was going to die of a heart attack right here in this bed. He could picture the obituary now: 'He died with a smile'.

Gingerly, he slid his hand free of her shirt, trying to ignore the way his fingers involuntarily teased her nipple as they slid by it. The skin on her stomach was very soft and he realized he was memorizing its suppleness against his palm. Her hipbone was well padded, not bony like his own, and his mind flashed him a quick mental picture of his hands sinking into the soft flesh there as they made love. He had never imagined that this minx of a girl one-third of the banes of his existence would feel so...right...against him.

Oh so slowly he angled his hips away from her, his legs shifting under the thin covers as he gingerly moved towards the edge of the bed. Her hair trailed across him like electric silk, flaying his nerve endings with their softness. Had he ever realized how supple and sensuous those bushy curls of hers were?

Finally, after agonizing moments, he was free of her. He still couldn't see the towel he had gone to bed wearing last night, but he managed to wrap a loose sheet around himself for proprieties sake. He allowed his gaze to linger on her still-sleeping form, noting the rapid flutter beneath her eyelids; the sweet curve of her lips as she whispered his name again. Closing his eyes against the delicious warmth seeping through him at the sound of her voice, he choked back on his natural response to whisper her name back to her and return to her side.

Instead, he turned reluctantly on his heel and headed for the bathroom. A cold - very cold shower was in order. He needed to clear his head and figure out how he was going to avoid sleeping in the same bed as her again this evening. He didn't think his resolve not to touch her would last long if this kept up.

"All right, old boy," he mumbled to himself. "Get a grip here-it's no good turning all Touchy McGropy on Miss Grang-erHermione. Oh, dear lord, I'm starting to sound like those half-wits! I've been teaching them for so long, their abhorable slang is beginning to rub off on me. And when did I start talking to myself? It's the first sign of insanity, and I am *not* interested in farm animals in the *least*!"

He pulled the faucet handle roughly, and cold water immediately came pouring out of the showerhead. After his warm awakening, partial arousal, and heated tantrum, the cold water felt like needles against his skin, and he did what any man would have done in his situation.

"Oh holy fuck!" he yelled, jumping out of the shower cubicle. Wet feet hit marble tiles, causing his legs to veer wildly out of control and his arms to pinwheel, desperately seeking something to grasp. He slipped around for a few seconds before his feet finally lost their traction, crashing down onto the unforgiving floor with a grunt as his boney ass protested sharply.

"Severus? Severus, are you all right?" Hermione's worried voice put an image of her eyebrows pulling together in a concerned manner into his head.

"I'm bloody fine," he spat, standing more steadily and throwing a towel on the floor. "Just bloody terrific."

He turned off the shower and pulled on a robe from the closet. It was white. WHITE!

"Bloody great," he sulked, making a silent vow to kill Albus Dumbledore when they returned to Hogwarts. He was still grumbling and rubbing his butt when Hermione burst into the bathroom, wand in hand, looking like an avenging banshee.

"What happened?" she demanded. Her hair was huge, tousled and swirling around her small face, which was marked on one side with lines from her pillow. She was still wearing the bloody camisole and the breasts he had been trying so hard to forget were pressed against the soft cotton, looking as if it were possible even better than they had felt. His hands twitch with the sudden desire to touch them again, when she was aware he was doing it.

His gaze drifted downwards, noting her slightly curved belly and the flare of her hips, where two tiny white bows appeared to be the only thing holding her panties on. It would be so simple to reach out and pull on those dainty strings. Her legs weren't long, but they were pleasantly shaped; her thighs weren't as skinny as he had thought they might be and he was assaulted by the mental image of himself sinking into their softness.

"Severus..."

Her voice snapped him back to instant reality and he scowled when he realized where his mind had been. Turning his back to her he stalked to the sink and grabbed his toothbrush. "I'm fine," he snarled.

"You don't sound fine. It sounded like you fell."

Snape became very interested in flattening out the end of his toothpaste tube. "That may very well be what it sounded like, but I assure you that I have the balance and agility of a cat. Now if you'll excuse me, I have my teeth to brush."

Snape was suddenly surprised and overtaken when he discovered that Hermione had not recognized, or possibly ignored, his dismissal. "You look horrible in white. It makes you look even paler than you already are," she murmured. Casting a quick spell, she changed his robe to a deep green and grinned at him saucily. "I would have gone with burgundy, but you don't appear to be in the mood for teasing right now. Besides, you look so...sexy...in green."

Snape gaped at her. Sexy in green? Him? Before he could sputter a suitably cutting retort, she turned on the shower and stripped off her camisole. Mesmerized by her smooth white skin, he stood there staring, his toothbrush hanging out of his open mouth until she moved one hand to the tiny white bow at her hip.

Closing his mouth abruptly, Snape turned back around and spit a mouthful of foam into the sink, trying not to look at her reflection in the mirror as she stepped into the shower and pulled the curtain.

"Severus, darling! This water is freezing! No wonder you were yelling..."

Snape gripped the sides of the sink and counted to ten before he turned the cold water faucet on and stuck his head under the stream. She had a tiny mole just below her left shoulder blade. Her skin looked as smooth as silk. Her ass was...delectable. The cold water wasn't working.

Growling as he came up for air, he stalked back into the bedroom, trying to ignore the water dripping wetly down his back. This situation was intolerable. What had he done to deserve a punishment like this? Sure, there was the whole 'Death eater / Spy' thing, but he had reformed. He had paid his dues for twenty-three fucking years he had been paying them and for the gods to torment him this way was totally uncalled for. He felt like that poor bastard Tantalus, always longing for something just out of reach. Albus-fucking-lemon-drops-Dumbledore and his bright ideas.

Reaching for his trunk, he popped it open and stared into it in disbelief. "This has got to be either a very large mistake or some kind of sick joke!" he said in an irritated tone. In his trunk - and he checked it several times to make sure that it was indeed his trunk - were neatly folded white linen shirts and khaki colored pants of the sort that a Muggle would wear. To make matters worse, for his feet there were two pairs of sandals - one dark brown with straps on the heel, the other a light brown with no straps.

Snape slammed the lid of his trunk closed and sat down on it, his head in his hands, cursing Dumbledore in earnest. Where were his black wool trousers and vests and frock coats? Where were his boots, for Merlin's sake? Didn't the old fool know that you never mess with a man and his boots? He knew he could at least charm the colors of the clothes different if he wanted too no blousy white shirts for him, thank you very much but he could do nothing about the sandals. One could not create material where there wasn't any.

He was still sitting there, lamenting his fate, when Hermione walked out of the bathroom wearing an indecently short towel wrapped around her. "Severus, I have to tell you that I'm really feeling this bump on my head. It's so odd...I don't remember bumping it at all, yet this spot is very painful."

Snape looked up at her, keeping his eyes firmly affixed above her shoulders, and rubbed his fingers along his lips. "You hit it pretty hard, though I am surprised that you can't remember having done it."

She walked over to her trunk and pulled out some lacy-looking undergarments. "The last time I remember hitting my head was four years ago when I graduated from Hogwarts. Do you remember?"

Snape suddenly felt very hot. "I remember as though it were yesterday," he answered sardonically.

"Poor Nearly Headless Nick - you scolded him so meanly." She pulled a blue skirt and white-eyelet peasant blouse out and laid them on the bed.

Snape was so caught up in wonder over Hermione's words that he didn't notice - much - as she dropped her towel and started dressing right in front of him. She remembered walking into the bar, but thought it happened four years ago rather than the day before? What in the world was going on? He certainly hadn't expected that.

"Severus, aren't you going to get dressed? I'm hungry, and you know how cranky I can be when I'm hungry."

Snape knew how cranky she could be, but he had never attributed it to hunger. Perhaps if he had told his class to work on their culinary skills rather than their potion skills, his seven years with the insufferable know-it-all would have passed more smoothly.

But he said none of this. His own words from the previous night came back to him, and he remembered that he had promised himself that he would be a good and doting husband to Hermione during her madness.

Opening the blasted trunk yet again, Snape pulled out a pair of the khaki pants and a white shirt with a heavy heart. He hadn't worn anything but black since he was ten, and he didn't feel like giving up his favorite color, even for Hermione. Still, she would expect him to try to blend with the locals and he knew black was not an option.

"Who packed this bloody trunk?" he grouched.

"Albus and Minerva," Hermione answered sweetly as she clasped a beaded necklace around her neck.

"Remind me to thank them."

"Oh, it's not that bad, love! Let's just change the color of this shirt to a lighter green. I think you'll look marvelously sexy in those pants."

Snape didn't want to look marvelously sexy. He wanted to look like a greasy bastard who wore all black and scowled at people. And he certainly wanted to go back to looking like a man who would have walked away when faced with the request that he sleep with an eighteen-year-old half-naked woman.

He turned his back on Hermione and pulled his shorts on, then reached for the hated pants and likewise set them in place. Finally, he removed his robe and buttoned on the now green linen shirt, trying not to stiffen as Hermione smoothed the material down his back. Where her hands touched him, his skin tingled and burned. He was in hell.

"I was right again. Aren't you glad you have such a clever wife?" Hermione asked cheerily as she wrapped her arms around his waist.

Snape sighed and rubbed her arms. "Very glad," he answered flatly.

"All right, so lets go."

He looked back down at the sandals he had been supplied with. No matter what, he would have to expose his long ugly toes and thick yellow toenails to the world. Deciding that the ones with the straps would probably be more practical for walking, he chose those and shoved his feet into them, ignoring Hermione's amused giggle.

"I saw a lovely café down the road when we arrived," Hermione began to prattle. "I'm sure that they'll have breakfast. And then there's a market place down by the beach..."

Snape only hoped that the day would go a lot quicker than the morning seemed to be.

\* \* \* \* \*

Snape could not discern anything overly special about the small café Hermione and he stopped to eat in. It looked like most Muggle establishments - warm, friendly, and run-down. He was sure that it was owned and operated by two older people who most likely had a slew of children who waited the tables. It was also more than likely packed to the gills with annoying tourists and locals and overrun with seagulls and cockroaches.

At least breakfast was good yogurt and honey, with a sprinkle of muesli on top although the tea he was served left something to be desired. Why was it no one outside of England knew how to make a proper cup of hot tea? Hermione chatted happily with anyone who came within 2 meters of them while he ate his food and sulked. After a while, she grabbed his hand and pulled him from the small table, watching him in amusement as he wrestled with the Muggle wallet full of Muggle money Albus had given him. She insisted he leave a generous tip for the waitress who didn't know how to make tea, before grabbing his hand and dragging him down the street towards the market.

On the way, they saw street vendors with shell jewelry and hair ornaments displayed on dilapidated card tables, along with various other sundry goods. Some of the tables were nicer and set up in brightly colored tents or on the porches of cool-looking houses.

As they drew closer to the town, the number of tents increased, and the goods that were sold inside began to vary to include fruits and vegetables and some different sweetmeats that neither of them recognized. It was noisy and smelled. Snape hated it. Hermione of course loved every minute of it, cooing over this stall or that, stopping to admire shell jewelry a talented three-year-old could have made.

"Oh Severus! Look at this beautiful skirt!" she would squeal, or, "Isn't this the prettiest piece of coral you ever saw?" She smiled indulgently at him when he scowled at her, and rushed on to the next stall.

They were about halfway through the market when she finally spotted a vendor that had something they were both interested in books. His feet dragged a little less as she pulled him along when he realized where she was taking him now one could often find small literary treasures in stalls such as these. Hermione was already eagerly sifting through stacks, a small pile of books growing at her side, chatting happily with the proprietor. Snape kept an eye on her as he moved to the opposite side of the stall and idly began digging. Judging by the covers of the books, it seemed that most were putrid Muggle romances. He hoped Hermione wasn't planning on buying any of those!

He glanced at her again, noting the rose flush on her cheeks and the way her eyes sparkled when she caught him looking at her and smiled. Saucy wench even dared wink at him, and of gods, what now? Was she purposely letting the shoulder of her blouse slide down her arm? And just who the hell did the Zorba-the-Greek running the stall think he was, leering at her in such a fashion?

Snape quit rifling through the books and quickly approached her side, gripping her elbow in a proprietary manner as he deftly slid her shirt collar back up over her shoulder with his other hand. "Is it to much to ask you to keep your clothes on?" he hissed in her ear, "People are staring at you!"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders, and the collar dropped again. "It's a peasant blouse, it's supposed to show-off the shoulders."

"I don't like the way that man is staring at you. He's getting the wrong impression!" Snape growled back. "If you can't keep your shirt on, I'm taking you back to the villa right now."

"What in the world is wrong with you?" she hissed back, jerking her arm out of his grasp angrily. "Are you implying I'm dressed like a...a...slut or something?"

Before Snape could reply, the other man interrupted. "Iz thiz man bothering you, beautiful girl? Perhapz I can be of zervice?" The leer in his voice was unmistakable.

Hermione turned her glare on him, "He's my husband I think I can handle him myself, thank you very much."

The other man's eyebrows cocked in amusement. "You're huzband, iz he? Where iz your ring, then?"

Hermione looked at her hand, before turning back to Severus in shock. Her eyes were suddenly luminous with tears, "Severus, my ring...your mother's family ring...it's gone! I've lost it!"

His mother's ring? How in the world did she know about that he kept it safely in his vault at Gringott's.

Hermione was working herself up into a fit, "I'm so sorry I don't know where it could have gone...did I have it on this morning? Do you remember?"

Damnit. What to do? He couldn't have her panicking in the streets of Greece Poppy had specifically told him she was supposed to stay calm.

"Hermione...Hermione...calm down," he reached out and grabbed her by the shoulders. One was still bare, and her skin was warm and soft under his palm. "We're having it cleaned, remember?"

"I don't! I don't remember! Oh, Severus, what's wrong with me?" the irritating girl threw herself against his chest, wrapping her arms around his waist. "Why can't I remember anything?"

"It's the bump on your head," he tried to murmur gently, tentatively running his hands in what he hoped was a soothing manner up and down her back. "Poppy said to expect some memory loss, remember? The ring is safe, I assure you."

"But I feel naked without my wedding ring on," Hermione sniffed into his chest. "I don't remember taking it off I haven't removed it since we were married, not even when I wanted to! And that man...he doesn't believe you're married to me!"

"He doesn't believe a beautiful young girl like you would saddle yourself with an ugly old bastard like me," Snape replied sardonically.

"You're not ugly or old," Hermione retorted angrily.

Snape laughed softly against the top of her head, "But you don't deny I'm a bastard."

Hermione lifted her head and rested her pointy chin on his chest, "You know what I meant. My hand still feels naked without your ring on it."

"Would you like me to buy you one of those silver and turquoise rings we saw a few stalls back? You could wear it until we returned home." He didn't know what had possessed him to say that, but judging from Hermione's smile it was the right question to ask.

"Really? You'd really do that for me?"

"Isn't that what doting husbands are supposed to do?" he replied sarcastically, but without bite. "I wouldn't want to be remiss in my duties."

Hermione leaned up suddenly on her tip-toes and quickly kissed him, catching him completely off guard. Her lips were very soft against his, and he felt the tip of her tongue against the seam of his mouth before she retreated. "You take your duties very seriously," she whispered breathily. "I have no complaints."

Of its own volition, his hand lifted to tangle gently in her hair, his fingers stroking through the thick curls, before running down her arm and gripping her tiny hand firmly in his own. "Shall we go then, Hermione?"

As they walked away, Snape deftly flicked his wand so that the bookshop's sign read "Zorba The Geek" instead of "Zorba The Greek".

TBC

## Baa Baa Black Sheep, Have You Any Wool Trousers?

### *Chapter 4 of 8*

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl. In this chapter: Snape has a blast from the past in more ways than one.

AN: Zambi- Wow, this chapter got done quickly! I really don't have a lot to say about it. I enjoy this particular chapter, but I'm not sure if it's something that everyone will enjoy. I hope you do, though.

Mich I warned you all in advance Zambi and I tend to veer wildly out of control when we write anything together. Blame the idea for Flavius on The Sims 2 my daughter got it for Christmas and I'm addicted. My husband helped me make Snape house and it was his suggestion Snape have a gay older brother. LOL. He's feeding my obsession!

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Snape pulled Hermione into a jewelry tent they had passed earlier, one which he had noted at the time seemed to have real jewelry in amongst the strings of shells necklaces Hermione seemed to admire so much. The silver and turquoise rings he had seen were prominently displayed near the front of the tent and, he was pleased to note, seemed to be of fairly good quality. Glancing at the rings, he was immediately drawn to a delicate band of silver, hammered into an intricate Irish knot, with turquoise and coral inlaid into it. It was a pretty piece, one delicate enough for Hermione's dainty fingers, yet with an underlying strength to it that reminded him of her.

Removing it from the display for a closer look, he noticed that Hermione was also looking through rings. She was currently studying one that looked remarkably similar to his mother's ring, except silver and malachite instead of platinum and emerald.

"Look, Severus. It's almost a copy of mine, don't you think?"

He merely nodded at her, carefully hiding his surprise. Earlier, when she had mentioned his mother's ring, it had been a shock. However, it wasn't unheard of for family's to pass down rings from one generation to the next and he had decided she had just assumed he would have a family ring. It was the only thing that made sense but now, for her to pull an almost duplicate design out of a grouping of rings...how was that possible unless she had somehow seen his mother's ring? And why would she have seen it unless he had shown it to her? He would be flooing Albus Dumbledore the minute he had a chance to let him know what was going on. Perhaps the older man would have some insight.

"These rings here are beautiful," she added, placing the ring she had been holding gently back on the tray and removing another, more masculine one, in its stead.

"And here's one for you," she said quietly, grabbing his left hand and sliding the thick silver band onto his finger. It was an eternity ring, a silver snake eating its own tail, it's emerald eye winking at him.

"With this ring, I bind myself to you," she murmured silkily.

Snape took a deep breath. "Hermione..."

"I know, I know. You can't wear it all the time, but you're not going to brew any potions for the next few weeks, and I enjoy marking you as mine." Her eyes took on a gleam that caused Snape to take a step back. "You know that you enjoy it as well."

He held up the coral and turquoise ring. "I like this one for you, but if you would rather have that one..."

She smiled. "No, I love that one. I already have your mother's ring and it's much nicer than this one. I'd rather have the one you chose."

She held out her hand, and Snape took it tentatively, silently sliding the ring onto her finger and bringing her hand to his lips to kiss her knuckles. He knew that she wanted him to repeat the vow she had given, but he just couldn't. She had no idea what she was saying and while he knew she meant it now, he was equally aware that she would rescind the statement as soon as her right mind came back.

Silently paying too much for the rings, he walked out of the tent, twisting the ring on his finger with his free hand. Across the street, someone was arguing with another vendor and he looked up to see what was going on in the hopes that he would be distracted from his suddenly melancholy thoughts.

He was distracted, all right the man arguing with the merchant looked almost exactly like him a little taller and much stouter, with gray hairs twining through the black on his head but the Snape nose was unmistakable. Gasping, Snape stepped back into the shadows of the jewelry tent, pulling Hermione against him reflexively as he did so. The other man did not see him, he was sure of it. That thought was the only one that kept him from going back for a second glance.

He had only a moment to reflect that his doppelganger was wearing all black and a lot of leather before Hermione asked what the matter was.

"Are you all right? You look as though you've seen a ghost!"

He looked down at her and nodded abruptly, "I did. Come, let us go back to the villa..."

"But Severus, we need to buy food," she began to protest, but he cut her off.

"Lower your voice!" he hissed, grabbing her hand. "Now is not the time to argue with me. We must go back to the villa. Is there a back way out of this tent?"

He watched as her eyes searched his for a moment, but he never saw a hurt expression, only that of concern. "Very well, Severus - if you need to leave, we will."

Snape sighed with relief. Thank Merlin! He looked around the tent until he spotted a small opening in the back. Dragging Hermione back through the market much the same way she had dragged him to it, he breathed a small sigh of relief when they reached their unplottable stretch of beach.

Once back inside the cool villa, he watched as Hermione made use of the low fountain by the front door and rinsed the dirt off of her feet. Her shoulders dropped tiredly and her hand was back to rubbing the bump on her head.

"Too much sun for me," she remarked quietly, "I think I need a nap."

Snape merely nodded and watched her retreat to the bedroom, waiting for a few minutes to make sure that she didn't return. Once he was satisfied, he went back to the main room and quickly started a small fire in the fireplace.

"Albus Dumbledore's office, Hogwarts," Snape said, dropping floo powder into the embers and plunging his head into the green smoke.

"Severus!" Snape heard Dumbledore before he saw him, blinking against the spinning office and fighting the sense of vertigo he always got whenever using the floo network over long distances.

"Albus," Snape answered.

"To what do I owe this honor?" Dumbledore pulled one of his chairs nearer to the fire and leaned down, elbows on knees, eyes twinkling madly.

"I am very concerned about Miss Granger, Albus," Snape said. He didn't even attempt to hide the worry in his voice. Albus would be able to see it regardless.

"Why?" Dumbledore now looked equally concerned. "Has she taken a turn? Where is she?"

Snape shook his head. "No, not like that. She's fine, she's resting. We walked a long way today. I'm tired as well. No, I'm concerned because of what she's been saying."

Quickly, Snape relayed Hermione's revelation from earlier that day, when she had mentioned bumping her head at her graduation four years prior. "I can find no logical explanation for her behavior," Snape finished. "She just seems to have jumped forward four years, with nothing in between."

Dumbledore sat back in his chair and templed his fingers in front of his lips. "Perhaps it's just the head injury playing tricks with her mind," the older man offered. "The human brain is a marvelous thing, Severus. Why, just the other day, I was reading in a Muggle magazine..."

"Yes, yes," Snape interrupted, "I was willing to write it off as that as well, but she also - she knows about my mother's wedding ring, Albus. She thinks it's hers - and she knows what it looks like, well enough to pull an almost exact design from a jewelers tray in the market..."

"Your mother's ring?"

"The only thing I have left of her," Snape offered quietly. "I've kept it in my vault and haven't even thought of it for years. Its design is fairly unique - or was, at the time it was made...I've never seen anything like it in the Wizarding World, to say the least. But she knew about it, Albus! How could she know about it?"

Albus had steepled his fingers together and was staring intently into the flames, "I honestly don't know. You're sure she wouldn't know about it?"

"How?" Snape retorted, "It's not something I keep with me and it's definitely not something I would show one of my students."

"Hmmm..." Albus tapped his lips thoughtfully. "This is indeed an interesting conundrum. Perhaps you should ask her what she remembers about the four years since she graduated. Tell her Poppy wants you to test her memory, and let me know if she says anything else odd."

Snape snorted, "That's all you have to say? Nothing insightful to add?"

Albus shrugged, "I'm not omnipotent, dear boy. Now, is there anything else you need?"

Snape was about to decline the offer, but then a thought struck him. "We were about to buy food when..." he paused. "When we decided to come back and rest. Could someone send us a few things to tide us over?"

"Of course, my boy! Of course!" Snape shuddered as the twinkle in Albus' eye increased ten-fold, before saying his goodbyes and removing his head from the fireplace. As he extinguished the embers, he briefly wondered what he had just gotten himself into. Who knew what Dumbledore would send - that damn twinkle boded nothing but evil.

Sighing, he determined to put the thought out of his mind and went to the sofa, performing a quick cleansing spell to get rid of the soot before sinking into it and flinging his arm over his face. The sofa - like the rest of the house - was too damn bright.

Even without the skylights - three large rectangles of glass set high in the ceiling - it would have been too bright. Perhaps if it hadn't been painted with so much white and decorated with white furniture with only sunlit yellow and cobalt blue as the accents, it would be more habitable. As it was, he hated it. He hated the airiness and openness of it. He hated how very cheerful it was.

Most of all, he hated that Hermione was napping in the bedroom, and he was in the living room seeking comfort on the World's Whitest Sofa.

He especially hated how he was entertaining the thought of going into the bedroom and napping with Hermione, despite how ethically wrong it would be. He remembered all too well how soft and warm and fragrant she had been against him the night before. His body practically ached to be near her again.

Angrily, he kicked off his sandals and performed a cleansing charm on his dirty feet. He didn't need her, he decided, grumbling to himself. He didn't need her or her bushy hair, her soft skin or her delicate fragrance. He didn't need anyone. Never had - never would. But he was lying to himself and he knew it.

He didn't even jump when a body slid against him and came to rest on top of him. Her hair still smelled sweet and clean despite their long walk and day of shopping. Unconsciously, Snape's hands came to rest against the top of her head and on her arm.

"Are you all right?" he asked, his fingers working lightly against her bump.

"I can't sleep without you," was Hermione's mumbled reply. "Why didn't you come in with me?"

The answers - and there were many - were all on his tongue, but he could not bring himself to say any of them. "I didn't want to wake you," was what he settled on, "and I needed to let Albus know you were doing well."

Her response was a cross between a hum and a sigh as she pulled his hand off of her arm and twined her fingers around his, shifting against him until he parted his legs slightly, allowing hers to sink between them.

He almost jumped when he felt her press her lips to the back of his hand and his mind frantically searched for something to say to her, before he did something completely unforgivable and switched their positions.

"Hermione...have I ever told you about Flavius?" It seemed like a safe subject change, and he knew she would not be able to rest until she knew all the particulars.

"Flavius?" she lifted her face from his chest and his hand slid from her hair to her shoulders.

"Obviously not." Snape felt a little better. If she didn't know about Flavius, then she certainly was not seeing into the future. "Flavius Snape is was - is, I suppose, my brother. My elder brother."

He watched as questions flitted across her face, her Gryffindor mind as easy as ever to probe into, not that he would need to. Slowly, she sat up and faced forward, away from him.

"But you don't have any siblings," she said.

Snape sat up next to her. "Not legally, no. Legally, I am the rightful heir to the Snape name. My brother was disowned."

She turned back to him. "Why? Why do that? What happened?"

Snape thought for a moment, unsure of how to explain it to Hermione. "He and father...well, they didn't get along."

"From what you've told me about your father, he didn't 'get along' with anyone. So why disown your brother?"

Snape sighed, "Flavius was...he was...the black sheep of the family."

Hermione looked at him incredulously, "The black sheep? Your brother was the black sheep of the family? What does that make you?"

Snape chuckled dryly, "The dutiful son. I always did what father told me to, despite the fact I detested the man. Flavius, on the other hand...well, he wasn't what father expected."

"Are you being deliberately unclear? Why did your father disown him?" She was starting to get huffy with him, and he bit back a grin. With that little bit of color in her cheeks and her eyes flashing angrily at him, she really was quite a sight.

"I'm just...there's no way to say this without being blunt, but Flavius liked to wax his wand, as it were, in places wands aren't intended to be waxed." He waited.

She looked at him blankly for a moment, before sudden understanding dawned in her eyes, "Are you trying to tell me you have a gay brother?"

"Gay?" It was his turn to be confused. "Gay?"

"Yes, gay as in, swinging for the other team homosexual GAY!"

"Ah, yes. That is what I am implying. Father was less than pleased that his eldest son preferred wizards. When he found out, he demanded that Flavius quit...doing what he was doing...and find a nice young witch faithful to the dark arts, or course to settle down and have lots of little Snape's with. When Flavius told him it was never going to happen...father disowned him."

"Sounds right in keeping with what you've told me about your father. No offence, but your family doesn't sound very tolerant of differences..."

Snape snorted, "To say the least."

"I bet your father would be spinning in his grave if he knew you'd married a Muggle," Hermione added. "The thought of mixed-blood grandchildren would probably make his head explode."

Snape practically swallowed his tongue, "Mixed-blood grandchildren?"

Hermione laughed at him, "After we have children, Severus. Regardless, I bet a gay son wouldn't be so shocking to him now."

"I suppose not," Snape replied weakly. Hermione was still grinning at him.

"When was the last time you saw your brother?" she asked.

"The day father kicked him out," he replied, "Twenty-seven years ago or so."

"So you haven't seen him since you were fifteen?" Hermione was aghast. "Is he even still alive?"

"Since I was eleven, actually," Snape nodded, "and I'm pretty sure he's still alive - I saw him today, in the market."

She looked at him with a shocked expression. "And you didn't say anything to him? Severus!"

Snape looked down at their clasped hands. "You don't understand how things are, Hermione," he replied seriously. "He was disowned - his name was stricken from our family records. For all intents and purposes, my brother never existed! There is no way to change that."

"Would he want you to?" she retorted. "Perhaps it would just be enough for him to see his brother again."

"He probably doesn't even remember he even had a brother," Snape protested, "He's several years older than me and..."

"Of course he remembers you!" Hermione interrupted. "Severus, you're not the one who disowned him why are you making this so difficult?"

Snape shrugged, "I'm just thinking rationally. What purpose would it serve, letting him know I was here? I can't change the past. I can't give him back his birthright..."

Hermione scotched towards him suddenly, leaning her head against his shoulder and sighing. "Why are you always so hard on yourself?"

Severus stiffened, "What are you talking about?"

"You always think the worst; never the best. I know why you didn't talk to him today and it's not because you didn't want to...you're ashamed."

"Ashamed that my brother is gay? Hermione, I assure you..."

"Not ashamed of your brother, ashamed of yourself. You didn't say anything because you didn't want him to react badly to you."

Snape scowled at her. "Ashamed of myself? What are you talking about, you irritating girl?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about - you never stood up to your father. You never stood up for Flavius. You yourself said you were the 'dutiful son' and look where it got you caught up in some war you didn't really believe in, all because your father wanted a son who followed the dark arts. You were just a kid when your brother left,

Severus - he could not possibly blame you for what your father did to him."

"No, how could he?" Severus replied bitterly. "He wasn't there father kicked him out and he just...left."

"Therein lies the crux, then. You're mad at him for leaving you behind."

"He couldn't very well take me with him, could he? For one thing, Father would never have allowed it."

"That doesn't mean you didn't want him to try. Did he ever attempt to contact you after he left?"

Snape shook his head and Hermione bit her lip. "I'm sorry."

"Not your fault," he replied gruffly. "Not his either. I'm sure if he had tried, he wouldn't have succeeded anyway."

"It's okay to be a little angry at him, you know. But if that really was your brother at the market today...what if we go back tomorrow and he's gone? What will you do then? Forget you even saw him? Pretend he doesn't exist for another thirty years?"

"I was a Death Eater, Hermione. He'd never understand something like that."

"You were young and you made a mistake which you repaid a hundred-fold by becoming a spy. You're a hero. I bet he's proud of you."

"Then why-" Snape began, but Hermione silenced him by placing her finger against his lips.

"Perhaps he's never contacted you because he's afraid you don't want to see him. Perhaps he's ashamed, that he left you by yourself to face everything alone. Perhaps he thinks he let you down."

Her finger traced up his face, opening against his cheek and caressing it. "You need to find him tomorrow, if he's still here. Life is too short to be held back by feelings of remorse and guilt. I know you want to talk to him."

"How can you know that when even I'm not sure of it?" Snape tried to reply sarcastically, but realized he failed dismally when Hermione leaned forward and kissed him lightly.

"Oh, Severus," she murmured against his mouth, "I learned long ago how to read between the lines of what you say and look at what you mean. How do you think I've managed to put up with you for so long? Why do you think I fell in love with you?"

Snape didn't know how to answer that. She didn't know him that well at all or at least, she shouldn't have. She only thought they were married, she only thought she understood him. Oddly enough though, he could admit she had 'read him.' Somehow, against all logic, she did know what he meant despite what he said.

The thought was terrifying and oddly comforting at the same time. He sat there staring at her, locked in a moment of perfect clarity and crystal understanding. Her hand was warm against his face; her lips parted slightly only inches from his own. He didn't know whether to push her away or pull her to him. He didn't know how to acknowledge her, or even if he should. Somehow, somehow she knew him. She believed she loved him. No one had ever told him that before. The thought that perhaps...just maybe...he could make it true suddenly held a strange sense of appeal. How different would his life be if she did love him? If he loved her? Would it really be so wrong to invest fully in this fantasy of hers, grab a little slice of the life she offered him while the chance was there?

Was it wrong to take love when it was so freely offered?

His raised his hand to brush her hair behind her ear, his fingers tracing the shell of it gently, marveling that she didn't flinch at his touch but seemed to welcome it. Her hand had moved to caress the back of his head, her fingers threading through the hair at his nape.

"Will you try to find him?" she whispered breathily, "Will you, Severus, for me?"

"Yes," he replied softly, "if that's what you want."

"You're a good man, Severus. One day, I'll make you believe it."

Thankfully, he was saved from comment when a large basket appeared on the white coffee table before them. A note was attached in Albus's familiar handwriting. "For The Honeymooners" was penned on the outside, "Have fun."

TBC

## Snacks On The Beach or De-Nile Ain't Just A River In Egypt

*Chapter 5 of 8*

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl. In this chapter: Stargazing and conversation followed by a reconnection with a Very Important Party.

*AN: Zambi: I snuck an Alan Rickman movie line into this story. Brownie points and a big French kiss to whoever finds it and names the movie correctly. Sorry, Mich, you're disqualified from the running on this one. Besides, remember what happened the last time I French kissed you?*

*Mich: sorry for the delay in getting this written - real-life kicked me in the pants last week, and Zambi patiently waited for things to subside. She's a very good friend. And Zambi, you realize I can't let my husband read this story now that you mentioned the 'issingka'. He doesn't know about us, yet. LOL*

~\*~\*~\*~

Snape knew it had been a mistake to ask Albus to send food. Glaring at the basket as if it was a time bomb, he scowled at it and would have poked it suspiciously if Hermione wasn't already pawing through it.

"Severus, this is so fantastic! Look champagne...and oh my God, a chocolate fondue...lots of fresh fruit...oysters..."

"I'm going to kill him," Snape scowled under his breath.

The basket was even comprised of silver, green, crimson, and gold. Snape reflected for what seemed like the millionth time in his life that subtlety was not Albus Dumbledore's forte.

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'How in the world did that girl manage to talk me into this?' he wondered, as he snapped open the large blanket Albus had included in the basket. Snape hated picnics. He especially hated picnics on the beach, in the increasing gloam of dusk. The sky was already dark enough that he could see Venus, just over the horizon.

Hermione was rhapsodizing about the romance of it all as she placed the basket to the side of the blanket and quickly removed a few candles to light.

"Isn't this wonderful of Albus?" she was chattering away, "I've always wanted a picnic on a beach. Why haven't we ever done this before?"

"I hate beaches and I hate picnics," Snape replied succinctly, trying to ignore the exasperated grin she shot his way. "Why anyone would want to take the chance of getting so much sand in their food is beyond me."

"And yet, here you are with me, having a picnic on the beach. Why's that, do you suppose?" The little minx was purring at him, her brow arched and her lips pursed teasingly.

"I need to eat, Hermione," he retorted stubbornly, even as he reclined onto the blanket. "You absconded with the food before I could prepare a plate for myself."

"You are so full of shit it's no wonder your eyes are brown," Hermione teased as she reached into the basket and set up the fondue pot. "Why can't you just admit you like the idea of a romantic picnic on the beach with your wife?"

"I will admit no such thing," he replied shortly. "Shall I open the champagne?"

Hermione was giggling at him and he had to admit he was acting decidedly un-Snape like, despite his words. He allowed a small smirk in her direction as he popped the cork, before adding devilishly, "I think I'll need all the liquid fortification I can get if I'm to make it through the night of star-gazing I'm sure will follow this impromptu picnic."

Hermione placed a plate of sliced cheeses and crackers next to the fruit tray and accepted the small glass of champagne he offered her. "Do you remember the last time we 'star-gazed'?" The question was innocent but she had managed to infuse it with such innuendo he knew immediately she was talking about something else entirely. He decided to ignore her question as there was no way he could answer it, and instead speared a strawberry from the fruit tray and dipped it in the simmering chocolate.

"It was just last February, remember? Albus had asked you to make sure the astronomy tower was locked tight at midnight, the morning of Valentine's Day? You were so angry about it. You didn't realize it was all part of my elaborate plan to get you to the top of the astronomy tower." She popped a piece of cheese into her mouth and grinned at him, expecting him to continue in some fashion.

"The top of the astronomy tower in the middle of February in Scotland? Not one of your better thought out plans, I dare say." He kept his voice deliberately light, and hoped he'd hit the right note of teasing.

"Thank God for warming charms," Hermione giggled. "Remember, we stood there and looked at the sky there was a meteor shower that night. It was like the heavens were putting on a show just for us. And then, just before dawn, we returned to our chambers and..." she blushed. "You yourself said you would never look at Valentine's day the same way ever again."

Snape grunted, but felt his blood heating at her words and the look of remembered satisfaction on her face. He wanted so much to share these 'memories' with her to believe, as she so obviously did, that they had actually happened. He had never had anyone as sweet as Hermione in his life didn't deserve to but he couldn't deny that the idea was beginning to appeal to him more and more.

Pulling another piece of fruit from the simmering chocolate, he offered it to her gallantly, watching intently as she leaned forward and took it from his spear, licking the chocolate from her lips as she did so. "It seems I've made you happy?" he was curious. Just why did she think she was married to him, of all people.

"Not at first, no you didn't," Hermione replied suddenly serious. "Don't you remember how angry you were how angry we both were at being forced to marry? If I recall, you had no desire to marry some 'stupid girl who would not only bore you to death with her insufferable know-it-all ways but expect you to kow-tow to her every whim like the Potter and Weasley whelps did.'" She did a fair impression of him, he had to admit.

"Forced to marry?" He raised a supercilious brow at her, "I don't believe I was forced to do anything."

"What would you call that damned Marriage Law, then? At the time, you were ready to kill someone. Admittedly, you weren't forced, per se you were trying to protect me from the Crabbe's but I know you felt as if you didn't have much of a choice. I felt the same way. It's amazing how well everything worked out, in the end."

Snape was staring at the waves as the hit shore, watching the moonlight reflect off the water as he took in her words. His head was spinning, as it often did when she revealed things about their 'marriage' that had too much the ring of truth to it. He knew the ministry had been bandying about the idea of a Marriage Law in the months since the end of the war. They believed it was a way to repopulate the Wizarding World, and by forcing pure bloods to marry half bloods and Muggle-borns, they also believed it would put an end to the ridiculous prejudices that still existed among many of the older Wizarding lines. How could one be prejudiced against their own family members, if they were half blood?

As far as he knew, the Marriage Law was still something being pushed forward, albeit slowly, by a determined faction of the Ministry. He would need to find out from Albus if there really was a possibility of this actually becoming a mandate.

He stiffened when she scooted closer to his side and rested her chin on his raised knee, "Where have you gone to?" she asked him softly.

"Just thinking about the Ministry and how they invariably try to fuck up everyone's lives," he replied. "What were the idiots thinking?"

Hermione shrugged, "They were probably thinking 'no more squibs' and no more nonsense about pure blood and half blood. I think their intentions were good just the way they went about it was wrong. I know at the time we hated it, but if it weren't for that damn law, I never would have married you. And if I hadn't married you, I never would have realized what a wonderful man you really are I wouldn't be in love with you now."

Snape smirked at the irony, but decided to drop the subject. Instead, he reclined back onto his elbows and looked up at the night sky. Hermione quickly moved up his side fitting herself to him, the press of her body delightfully warm against his side, as she joined him in looking at the stars.

~\*~\*~\*~

Snape lay in bed, Hermione's lovely weight pressing him into the mattress. He could not sleep, no matter how exhausted he was. They had been in Greece for one complete day, and it felt like years to him.

As they had stargazed, Hermione had pointed out constellations to Snape. The Three Sisters, Orion, Ursa's Major and Minor. Then, they had both fallen silent as their eyes rested on Draco, the constellation that Snape's godson had been named after.

Snape decided that it was miserably unfair how the death of Draco was four years old for Hermione and she had never liked him anyway, while the memory was only a few



weeks old for him. It was true that Draco had died trying to save Voldemort, but Snape still regretted his death probably more so than anything else. Draco had been a horrid little sot, but Snape had always recognized that was more due to Lucius' influence than anything else. The boy had tried too hard to be everything his father wanted, to the point where he had lost himself somewhere in the mix. Snape recognized that the same thing had happened to him, except he had been lucky enough to realize it and rectify it while he could. If it hadn't been for Albus...Snape shuddered and tried not to blame himself for Draco's loss. Draco had been the only person he had ever allowed himself to show any sort of affection for. As a boy, the affection had extended to ruffling his hair and the occasional smile, but as Draco grew older their affection turned to handshakes and brief nods. But there was still affection.

A hundred excuses could be thought up to redeem Draco's behavior. Certainly there was a lack of nurture at his home, and he was taught to be cruel and bigoted. But Snape knew that Draco was still his own man, and he knew the difference between right and wrong. Draco could have attempted a better life, he chose not to.

Knowing that the boy had been wrong did not dispel his grief at his passing. Now there was no chance for redemption, no hope for recovery. Draco was gone like so many others, his father included. It was a loss that was still so confusing to Snape, so bittersweet.

"You miss him, don't you?" her sweet voice broke his contemplations but he didn't answer her. She seemed to accept this, and slid closer to him, adjusting her arm more firmly around his waist as they continued to look at the stars. "There was nothing you could have done for Draco, Severus. He didn't want to be saved."

Snape stifled his response and allowed himself to turn his head, burying his face slightly in her mass of hair and inhaling her clean, comforting scent. Hermione's hand traced his own softly, and after a moment she started pointing out other stars and constellations. They lay like that for a long time, her soft voice washing over him like a benediction as the warmth of her body and the touch of her hands seeped into him, warming his soul.

It was the absolutely stillness that woke him up. He was enveloped in warmth, one of Hermione's legs twined through his, the weight of her head heavy on his chest. He could feel the rhythm of her breathing, her breath warm and moist against the nape of his neck. They were still on the beach.

He could feel her stirring beside him, her head nuzzling into him as her arm the one that had been thrown across his chest tightened infinitesimally, the dainty hand on the end tracing the contours of his ribs through his shirt. It all felt wonderful.

Sighing, he gingerly slid away from her, ignoring the drift of her hand across his chest as he slowly sat up. The stars were still out, but the horizon was slightly tinged with celestial blues and pinks it was almost sunrise.

He tilted his head and looked at Hermione, still lying on the blanket. One side of her face was creased with lines and he realized they were from his shirt, where her head had been resting. The skirt she had been wearing had hiked up over the course of the night, leaving her legs bare to his gaze. He briefly regretted the loss of their weight between his own, before firmly pushing the thought from his mind.

He supposed he should wake her and get her back into the villa. It was really too early to be up and about, and a couple of hours sleep in an actual bed would probably be good for her.

"Hermione," he leaned forward and spoke her name softly, "Wake up. Let's go back to the villa."

"Severus?" she murmured sleepily.

"We fell asleep on the beach. I think it's about five in the morning."

"Hmmm?" her voice was slightly gritty with sleep and the sound of it sent little frissons of electricity through his system.

"Poppy would have my head if she knew you slept on the beach all night long while recuperating from a concussion."

"Sleepy," she replied.

He leaned closer, allowing his hand to trail up her arm, trying to ignore how soft and warm her skin was. "Hermione, you must wake up and move inside. I don't want you to catch cold."

"Severus," she sighed back.

He looked at her, slightly bemused for a moment, before allowing a small smile to flicker across his features. "Definitely not a morning person," he muttered to himself. "I suppose I'll have to carry you in."

She was a little heavier than he had anticipated, but it was a pleasurable weight. Grunting slightly, he adjusted her so that she was nestled securely against him and headed slowly up the beach.

The colors along the horizon were more brilliant now, streaks of purples and oranges joining the blues and pinks. If Hermione had been awake, she would have been rhapsodizing over them. He made a mental note to tell her about them later in the day when she was awake, and it occurred to him suddenly that he had never even noticed the colors of a sunrise before, let alone wanted to share them with anyone. What was she doing to him?

When he finally reached the bedroom, he gently placed her on the bed and pulled a light cotton sheet over her. He supposed he'd go and lie down on the sofa.

"Severus?" her soft voice caused him to freeze, "where are you going?"

"I thought I'd go lie on the sofa, Hermione, and let you get some sleep," he replied softly. "I think that's best."

'Best for her,' he thought wryly. He wanted nothing more than to join her and feel the warm weight of her against him. He was developing surprisingly sexual feelings for her in short amount of time and it didn't help matters that, in her current confused state, he knew she wouldn't turn him away.

"Don't be silly," she protested sleepily. "The bed is much more comfortable than that silly sofa."

"Hermione," he started to reply, but she cut him off.

"I don't feel right, in the big bed without you. I know what Poppy said, Severus. I know. I promise I'll keep my hands to myself. Don't you trust me?"

"Hermione," he started again, "of course..."

"Or is it you don't trust yourself? That's it, isn't it? Severus...I'm not made of glass you know. How could loving you ever hurt me? Come on, please. Come to bed."

Snape grimaced at her. How could the girl read him so well? He didn't trust himself, not to do what was best for her, instead of what was best for him. He was being sucked into this little imagining of domestic bliss far too easily for his peace of mind. If he allowed himself to play his role too well, he knew he would be hurt in the end. He had to protect himself from the way she made him feel; couldn't allow himself to become used to her presence or to rely on the comfort of her body against his in the nighttime.

He must have stood there silently for too long, because she suddenly sighed heavily and rolled towards the wall, facing away from him. "Don't you love me anymore?"

The worry in her voice the slight hitch of tears was devastating to him. He moved closer to the bed and pinched the bridge of his nose, "It's not that - "

"Poppy's just an excuse, you know. To stay away from me. What's going on, Severus?"

"Nothing...it's just...you're right. I don't trust myself." It pained him to admit it. "But...I suppose I will join you, if it will help you sleep better. Just promise me, Hermione..."

He didn't need to say anything else. Instead, he quickly slid out of his pants and pulled on a pair of cotton pajama bottoms he had found in his bag earlier, before climbing into bed beside her.

Hermione turned to look at him. He could feel her eyes burning against him in the gloom of the room. "I love you, Severus," she murmured as she slid against him, "Loving you could never hurt me. You would never hurt me."

"I'd never want to," he admitted softly as he drew her more firmly against his side, allowing one of his hands to tangle in her soft curls as she nestled into him.

"I know," she sighed sleepily. He could feel her lips curl in a smile against his bare chest and shuddered at the heat of it, "and I'd never want to hurt you, either."

'But you will,' his heart whispered, 'It's already too late to stop it.'

~\*~\*~\*~

The next morning followed much the same pattern as the day before. They walked down to the shops again, determined that nothing would keep them from buying food this day. Zorba The Geek still stood in his tent, oblivious to his new title. Hermione stayed away from the bookseller this day, and she told Snape that it was because he had made her so angry. Snape smiled to himself that even with all the untapped treasures Zorba might have had, Hermione would not deign to grace him with her presence again.

"He's not the only bookseller in Greece," she mumbled, more to herself than him, he suspected.

"Indeed not," Snape answered. "I'm sure that his books are full of dust, mold and silverfish. Not fit for reading at all."

Hermione gave a derisive snort, but looked longingly at the books. Snape made a mental note to ask about a bookshop at their next stop, which turned out to be a fruit stand.

"You have been keeping your eye open for Flavius, haven't you?"

Hermione referred to his brother as though they were old friends. "Yes, of course. Here, I'll take the basket. We need some more grapes..."

"Oh, Severus! Clementines!" Hermione squealed with glee, holding up a fruit that looked a lot like a tangerine. Or perhaps an orange. "They're wonderful, we need some."

Snape shrugged and grabbed five to add to their basket, already laden with grapes, cherries, fresh olives, and grapefruit.

"Do you know of a bookshop here, aside from Zorba's," Snape asked the proprietor as Hermione looked through his billfold for the correct amount of the strange Muggle money that was made from paper.

"Ah...yes..." the man answered with a thick accent. "It tis very close to *here*, by de med-ee-cine store." His sing-song voice and pauses might make one think that he was not as intelligent as a fluent speaker, but Snape knew better. He could tell by the man's eyes that he was very intelligent, and more than likely made a good living at this small fruit stand.

"Thank you, sir," Snape said with a smile, taking his change from Hermione's hand.

"Your fruit is beautiful," Hermione said as she took the basket from Severus while he put his Muggle money away and smiled at the older man. It looked like she was about to say something more when she paused suddenly, tilting her head to one side.

Someone else had entered the fruit stand and his voice was quite loud in the sudden silence. "Oh, honestly, Flav, you can be so stuffy sometimes."

Turning, Snape found that the owner of the voice was a flamboyant-looking man with short blond spiky hair and way too much eyeliner. He wore a white and lavender shirt with a large silver star in the middle of it. Next to him stood a tall, stout, older replica of Severus Snape, dressed in black save for a plain white tank top under his black leather vest.

"Not in the least, Xan. Come along, we need fruit."

Neither man paid attention to the stunned couple standing by the proprietor, who looked equally shocked, but for different reasons.

"We *are* fruit, my dearest love...oh my!"

The last part was spoken directly to Snape when the blond turned and came face-to-face, or face-to-chest, considering his small stature, with him.

Snape looked from the man in front of him to his brother, unsure of what to say, his chest feeling tight as though his heart and lungs were suddenly too big for his ribcage.

"Flavius," he whispered.

TBC

## Guess Who's Coming To Dinner, or, What Does Xana\*du\*?

Chapter 6 of 8

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl

*AN- Mich: I really wanted Hermione to use a 'Swifferuswetjetius' housecleaning spell, just because my Swiffer Wet Jet is my favorite battery operated toy at the moment, but she kyboshed the idea. In other news, sorry this chapter is sorta short, but Z. is going away on vacation and wanted to get something up before she left. Next chapter will be twice as long, promise.*

*Zambi: Yeah, I'll be in North Carolina, without a Swiffer Wet Jet, which wasn't even invented in 1998, the year that Hermione will graduate from Hogwarts. I did, I want you all to know, offer several Latin phrases that would have cleaned the floor and straightened the cushions more than amply, but we decided that instead of fighting over semantics, we'd just post the bloody story. I'm also sorry that it's so short; we have a lot to say, and not enough time to say it in. Next chapter will be very long, though. I promise.*

Snape was rarely at a loss for words, but facing his brother after so many years seemed to have momentarily stripped him of his mental faculties.

Flavius looked....good. Healthy. Although pale, he wasn't as white as Snape had been since time immemorial. He wasn't as tall as Snape had remembered, which made sense considering Flavius had left when Severus was still a boy. The tell-tale Snape nose seemed slightly more pronounced than normal, obviously broken at some point and left to heal on its own instead of being repaired magically. Flavius' hair was long - well past the middle of his back - the dark black shot through with steel gray, and it appeared that the lines around his mouth were etched there by laughter and not pain.

Studying his older brother intently, Snape wasn't even aware that Hermione had moved to his side until her tiny hand slipped into his, gripping his fingers warmly. His brother had not said anything to him at all; instead merely staring at him with trademark Snape intensity, his dark eyes glittering with some unknown emotion.

It was Hermione who finally broke the interminable silence, stepping forward and holding out her hand to the younger blonde man who was staring at Severus as if he had seen a ghost.

"I'm Hermione Snape," she offered brightly, "and you are?"

The younger man blinked slowly, as if breaking out of a trance and turned to face her. "Hermione SNAPE?" he replied. "Flav! Did you know your brother was married? I don't recall you mentioning that to me when we talked about him."

"I didn't realize he was married," the older man responded gruffly, his gaze never leaving Severus' face even as he suddenly demanded, "What did you say your name was, girl?"

"Hermione," Hermione replied sweetly.

"As in, Hermione Granger, the Mudblood witch who's best friends with Potter?"

"One and the same," she grinned back, even as Severus stiffened at her side at the term 'mudblood'.

Flavius cracked a light smile at that, "If father wasn't already dead, news that you married a half-breed would have killed him for sure, Severus." As far as acknowledgements went, it wasn't much of one - but it was a start.

Snape snorted, "Indeed. If he were alive, that would have been a good-enough reason to marry her. And keep a civil tongue in your mouth - if you call her a Mudblood again, I shall have to rip it out."

"Duly noted," Flavius retorted. A brief silence ensued, in which no one said anything, before Flavius offered, "It's good to see you again, Severus. You're looking well."

"You also, Flavius." Again, the conversation came to an uncomfortable end. Snape knew that beside him, Hermione was rolling her eyes.

"Well....I suppose we better get going then," Flavius again broke the silence. "Have you decided what you want Xan?"

"Go?" squeaked the young man in question, "Just like that - you haven't seen your brother in over twenty years and now you want to go?"

"Severus, say something," Hermione hissed at him. "Are you going to just let him walk away, after all this time?"

When he didn't reply, Hermione shook her head, "You promised me you'd try..."

"Alright, alright," Snape muttered, glancing up at Flavius and noting with amusement that the blonde who was with him appeared to be lecturing him as well. "I just don't know what to say to him."

"Invite him for dinner!" Hermione admonished. "For goodness sake, he's your brother."

Before Severus could actually say anything, though, Flavius had turned towards him again. "Severus..." he began, stopping suddenly and scowling at his young friend, before starting again, "Severus - I am glad to see you again. I would like to...I mean, I was wondering..."

"I'm pleased to see you as well," Snape interrupted stiffly when Hermione nudged him in the ribs with her boney little elbows. "I have often wondered how you were faring over the years and it is pleasant to see that you seem happy."

"You as well," Flavius responded, but his shoulders relaxed fractionally.

"I'm so sorry," the man named Xan said sweetly. "I forgot, I'm Madame Xanadu deMarche. But you can call me Xan."

Hermione smiled. "Just don't call me 'Mione, or I'll have to hurt you."

"Not quite the threat anymore, is it?" Xan asked, laughing.

Snape watched as Hermione blushed a beautiful crimson before breaking down into laughter. "You and Flavius simply *must* come for dinner tonight!"

"Yes," Snape said rather quickly. "Yes, you must, Flavius."

"Where are you staying?" Xanadu asked. "We could Floo over to you."

"The Blue Sun Villa," Hermione responded. "But it's unplottable, we'll need to meet you up a ways from the beach. If you walk directly up this path, and then stop at the white house with the Greek Orthodox Cross on it, we'll meet you there. Come around two this afternoon. That way we'll have plenty of time to catch up."

"Oh, that would be lovely," Xanadu said happily, clapping his hands. "Oh, I'm so happy to meet you, Hermione. I always wanted a sister!"

Hermione smiled. "So have I!"

Snape finally managed to tear his eyes away from the spectacle that his "wife" and "brother-in-law" were making to look at his brother. He realized that they both had rather pinched, put-upon faces from being forced to observe such a spectacle in public, especially since they were involved in it. He felt better, but just a little. Flavius seemed to, also, as he gave his brother an understanding half-smile.

"See you later, then, Severus," he said, holding out his hand.

"Yes, around two," Snape agreed, shaking his brother's hand firmly.

Hermione practically skipped back to the villa, babbling the entire way about how wonderful the afternoon and evening would be. She loved Xanadu already, and Flavius

seemed so much like him that she was sure she would love him, too. Then she started talking about all the work they would have to do when they got home-especially cleaning up.

Snape then inadvertently began their next argument.

"Clean up what? We've hardly been inside at all!"

"We've been living in there for two days. Your sandals are in the living room, the morning paper is strewn on the coffee table, and there are dirty dishes in the sink from last night! Not to mention all the sand."

"Of course there's sand. We're staying on a beach."

They reached the door and Hermione washed off her feet in the small fountain. "Fine. Have it your way. If you want your brother and his husband to think that we live like pigs, then that's what we'll let them think."

Snape stalked into the house in her wake, and stopped abruptly in the living room. Cushions from the sofa were strewn here and there from where he had been sleeping on it intermittently. He sighed. Now he would have to apologize to Hermione for being wrong.

"Hermione?" he asked as he walked into the bedroom, which had clothes strewn here and there, and the bed clothes were all disheveled. Hermione was sitting in the middle of the mess, seemingly oblivious to it, her small pert nose buried in a rather thick book.

"What is it, Severus?" She didn't even look up.

"It's just that I uh...well...the house is a bit unsorted at the moment..."

She looked up. "Are you saying that the house needs cleaning?"

Snape decided that he really didn't want to answer that question. "I...er...I find that your initial assessment is correct, and I agree that we should perhaps straighten up a bit."

"Do you?"

He could tell that he wasn't going to win by simply telling her she was right. "I'm sorry for my reaction."

What was he doing? Apologizing? What was wrong with him? He never apologized!

"That's all right, my love," Hermione whispered. She then did something so wholly unexpected that he never quite understood it.

She stood up on the bed, walked over to him, and jumped into his arms. Snape was too surprised to do anything other than catch her, and found himself even more surprised when she leaned close and kissed him soundly on the lips, a chaste kiss, but filled with meaning.

He set her down, still staring at her in wonder.

"I love you, Severus Snape. Even when you're being unreasonable."

The corners of Snape's mouth lifted ever so slightly, and he wondered how long before she began kicking herself for saying something she did not mean like that. He also wondered how he would explain Hermione to Flavius.

"Come along, Severus, your brother and Xanadu will be here in only a few hours!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"You really expect me to wear...*this*?" Snape practically threw the 'this' in question into Hermione's face and scowled at her when she wagged her eyebrows at him.

"You can't spend an afternoon on the beach wearing linen trousers," she responded reasonably. "You need to wear a bathing suit. And these aren't bad at all they're black, and they're shorts. Albus could have packed you a speedo or something, so count your blessings and quit complaining."

"What in the world is a speedo?" Snape sneered.

"I'm sure Xan will be wearing one. They have to be seen to be believed." She calmly handed him back the bathing suit. "Now, can you put this on please we have to go meet them soon."

"Hermione, there is mesh on the insides."

Hermione grinned at him. "Don't worry, they're all made that way. Keeps your dangly bits secure and all. I promise you it won't hurt and if it does, I'll kiss everything better for you later on tonight."

Snape could feel a surge of heat rushing to both his face and his groin. The chit had managed to make him blush something no one had ever been able to do for as long as he could remember and turned him on at the same time. His gaze drifted to her lush mouth.

"Hermione," he managed to grit out with as much dignity as he could, considering the situation, "You shouldn't say things like that."

"Can't help it. You make me think naughty thoughts. Now, are you going to change or are you waiting for me to help you?"

"You are an irritating bossy chit, you realize," he scowled at her again, turning his back as he headed to the bathroom to change. "I can't believe I'm actually going to put these things on."

Her answering giggle was cut off when he slammed the door behind him.

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TBC

# Is That A Banana In Your Hammock, Or Are You Just Happy To See Me?

Chapter 7 of 8

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl

*AN: Michmak: Sorry for the delay in getting this to you, but we did promise an extra long chapter - so, here you go. This is still an incredibly fun/ridiculous story but since I live for puns and outrageous comedy and Zambi likes to humor me, I'm really enjoying myself on this one.*

*AN: Zambi: Actually, I like to think that I contributed a bit to the comedy. Okay, who am I kidding? I give the bones, Mich gives the meat. Of course, I give the bones while Mich yells at me on AIM. I kid. Anyway, here it is, without further ado! Enjoy!*

Snape couldn't tell if he was uncomfortable because of his swimshorts, or if it was because his brother was sitting across from him, looking incredibly comfortable in his own shorts, drinking a margarita that he had expertly prepared. In the midst of his discomfort, however, Snape found himself intrigued by his brother. Flavius had explained as he mixed the drinks that he had tended a Muggle bar after their father had thrown him out of the house. He even went so far as to impress Hermione (his "lovely sister" as he called her) by throwing the tequila bottle around as though it were a baton. He finished off her drink by throwing a slice of lime over his shoulder from behind his back, and it landed perfectly in the middle of her glass.

Xanadu, he found, was flamboyant when he was nervous, but as he relaxed into his company, Snape was relieved to find that his exaggerated persona was put on the backburner, and a very nice, intelligent man took over in its place. He still said things that made him and Hermione blush, but not quite as obnoxiously as he had been.

Hermione for her part was doing everything she could to kill him. He still wasn't sure if what she was wearing could be construed as a bathing suit, as it seemed to show more skin than it covered up, and he was more than aware that a small flick of two of his hands would have the two skimpy pieces of cloth falling away in a matter of seconds. Her hair was another story all together. In the humid sea air, it took on a life of its own, curling even more wildly than it did in the mists of Scotland, framing her valentine-shaped face in a very becoming way. He didn't have to imagine how it felt against his skin, as she was constantly leaning against him, her flesh against his, her silky curls tickling his shoulders and neck. Every time she touched him, his shorts grew that much more uncomfortable, as did his mental discomfort.

"How did you two ever meet?" Hermione asked, breaking Snape from his reverie.

Flavius and Xanadu eyed each other before breaking into laughter.

"You tell them," Xanadu insisted.

"No, you tell it better."

"You're his brother."

Flavius laughed again, his tanned skin turning a deep shade of red. "You tell it, Xan. I insist."

Xanadu rolled his eyes and set his glass down, as if preparing to tell an epic saga instead of just a simple story about how he found Flavius.

"Flav and I both found a group of Muggles in America, in a town called San Francisco. There are other places in America that gays and lesbians meet up at, but they call San Francisco the "Mecca"."

"We had to look up what "Mecca" meant, and it had us laughing. That's what the Castro was like to us, more spiritual than anything else," Flavius added in.

"So true," Xanadu agreed. "Well, it was obvious to both of us that we weren't Muggles like so many of the other people in the group that we joined. There were a few other wizards, and two witches, but Flavius and I just totally hit it off. Plus, we were both from Europe while most of the others in our group were from the American continent."

"Oh-I've noticed that you don't have an English accent-where are you from originally?" Hermione asked, straightening up and making her breasts more prominent. Snape looked away.

"Deutschland," Xanadu said proudly. "I'm just a big bratwurst underneath," he giggled, looking over at Flavius who was smirking and attempting to look disapproving at the same time.

Snape stifled a sigh, and Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Go on, Xanadu," she said as she brought her glass to her lips.

"Well, the group we were in-mostly Muggle-started talking about going to see a wizard in Oz."

Snape noticed that Hermione stifled a giggle behind her hand as she brought it to her mouth.

"Oz?" she asked incredulously. "As in The Wizard of Oz?"

Xanadu frowned at Hermione. "Exactly. You know about that?"

"She's Muggle-born, remember?" Flavius countered.

"What is all this?" Snape asked aloud, feeling very put-out all of the sudden. The other three at the table seemed to be a part of a joke that he did not understand.

"Don't tell him yet," Xanadu said. "Let's wait until the end of the story so that he'll understand how his Pureblood brothers felt."

Snape couldn't fathom how going to Australia could bring about mortification.

"So, we thought we were going to Australia.. And of course, we all had to pretend to be Muggles and travel the Muggle way, which was how Flav and I found out the thrill of riding about on a motorbike."

"Not quite as thrilling when one is riding cross-country, mind."

"No, but I love the chaps. Anyway, we went from San Francisco to someplace called Oregon-Portland, Oregon-with a large group, all dressed up in costumes. There were many parties where we were dressed in these costumes, and let me tell you, they weren't parties that you could get angry because someone else chose your outfit, there were only four to choose from."

Hermione's giggles turned into all-out laughter. "You were Dorothy, and Flavius was the Tin Man, right?"

Flavius frowned. "How did you know?"

Snape felt his temper rise. "Who is Dorothy, and what does a tin man have to do with anything? And what's all this about four costumes?"

Xanadu held up four fingers and ticked them off as he spoke. "Dorothy. The Tin Man. The Lion. The Scarecrow."

Snape raised an eyebrow.

"Can I continue now, dearest brother?" Xanadu asked sweetly. Snape gave a nod of consent. "At each party, they talked about how we had to find Glinda The Good Witch and the Wizard of Oz. It sounded odd to Flavius and I, and we began to wonder if there were fewer Muggles in our group than we originally suspected. Eventually, we ended up in someplace called Kansas where we met up with Glinda, a drag queen with *far* too much makeup, and a wand that had a *star* at the end of it. Talk about your disappointments."

"And this wizard?" Snape prompted.

"Well, this is the part that found Flav and me blushing from cock to brow, apparently, the entire thing is a Muggle movie called "The Wizard of Oz", which they showed us while playing *Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd. While interesting, it had nothing to do with magic, and I couldn't see how watching it, as interesting as it was, could be worth going all the way to *Kansas* in the middle of winter!"

Hermione finally erupted into giggles. "I just have to know," she breathed, "if you kept your ruby slippers?"

Xanadu crossed his arms over his bare chest and attempted to look affronted. "One does not give up his best accessories simply out of disappointment. I have many fond memories of those slippers." He looked over at Flavius with extreme devotion written on his face.

"As do I," Flavius answered, kissing his husband's hand.

Hermione turned to Snape and kissed his shoulder before she rubbed her nose against it in an affectionate gesture.

"So," Flavius said after a moment of comfortable silence. "How did you two meet?"

Severus looked at Hermione and cocked an eyebrow at her. If anything, this should be interesting. Keeping a purposely bland look on his face he looked at Flavius. "I better let Hermione tell that story."

The witch in question grinned at him. "I tell it better than you anyway you suck all the romance out of it!"

Xanadu laughed, "Romance? I didn't know Snape's knew how to be romantic..."

Flavius smirked, "Keep it up, Xanadu and you'll find out how true that is."

Hermione leaned forward and squeezed Severus' knee, "Severus is a huge romantic at heart he just won't admit it."

Snape scowled at her, "Get on with it, woman. We don't have all day."

Hermione turned to Xanadu and Flavius, "Well, I suppose you both know that Severus was my professor at Hogwart's..."

"Oh, kinky!" Xanadu interrupted. "But I shouldn't be surprised he is a *Snape* after all. Did he ever spank you for acting up in class?"

"Xan..." Flavius warned.

Hermione just laughed, "No, he never did. He yelled an awful lot though still does, truth be told."

"So Hermione, where you hot for teacher?" Xanadu wiggled his eyebrows at her outrageously when he asked this, and Hermione laughed.

"I was eleven. The very first day of class, he completely ignored me and the rest of my time at Hogwarts he either ignored me or yelled at me or insulted my teeth."

"Sounds like a match made in hell," Flavius commented. "You must have hated him."

"Actually, no. I never hated him at all. I couldn't figure out why he was so harsh all the time, but he was a brilliant professor. I respected him."

Severus snorted, "You can tell the truth, Hermione. It won't hurt my feelings."

She turned to him, eyes wide and guileless, and squeezed his leg with her hand. The feel of her fingers gripping the lower part of his thigh was electric, and he cursed the mesh inside his swim trunks.

"I am telling the truth, Severus. I never hated you. Sometime you made me angry, of course. You could be very insulting...you often made me cry...but I never hated you."

Her words made him feel strangely warm and he glanced surreptitiously at his brother, only to see Flavius watching them intently.

"Anyway," Hermione turned back to the other two men, keeping her hand on his leg as she did so, "I'm not sure what you two know about what happened after Voldemort was finally defeated, but Wizarding Britain was in a mess. There had been many casualties, on both sides and, on top of it all, the birth rate had been in decline for years. There were some Wizards who believed that unless drastic measures were taken, there would be NO Wizards left in Britain within the next two or three generations. So, they introduced a 'Marriage Law.'"

Severus found himself as enthralled with Hermione's story as the other two were, although the hand stroking his leg was very distracting. Making mental notes of some of the more important things she was saying he found himself wondering, once again, what was going on.

"Marriage Law?" Flavius sneered, "what did they want to do force people to marry and propagate?"

"Exactly that," Hermione answered. "Not only did they want to force marriages, they wanted to make sure that Wizarding blood was made stronger. The MoM decided that Half-bloods and Muggles could only marry Purebloods and vice versa. AND every Witch and Wizard over the age of 18 had to marry within six months, and anyone turning 18 had to marry within six months of their birthday. Lastly, in this preposterous plan, the MoM determined that only Purebloods could decide who to marry and make offers of marriage. If someone received an offer of marriage from a Pureblood family, they had to accept with three weeks unless other offers of marriage came in, in which case the person in question could choose."

"Bloody fair of them!" Flavius interjected, "Almost like auctioning people off to the highest bidder, as if they were pieces of meat."

Hermione heard Xanadu mutter under his breath, "You are a piece of meat," and tried to ignore it, even as a blush stained her cheeks.

"Are you telling me Severus put an offer in for you?" Flavius grinned at his brother, "Perhaps you were harboring secret affections for your student after all, eh?"

"No. It wasn't like that at all he only agreed to marry me after the Crabbe family had put in an offer. I couldn't marry into that family they're all Death Eaters. They would have killed me. Severus married me to save me, and he wasn't too happy about it at the time. Neither was I. The first few months were horrible he rarely spoke to me and I was so upset about being forced to marry I'm afraid I wasn't too pleasant to be around either. But, eventually...we started talking. He let me help him with some of his research and gave me access to his library. We would have the most interesting conversations. I realized that he was as much a victim of the marriage law as I was...he hadn't wanted to marry me either, but he did because he seems to always be saving me. I realized, after about six months, that I had actually fallen in love with my husband."

"When you married, did you have to..." Xanadu stopped when Flavius kicked him under the table, but not before Hermione turned brilliant red and Severus scowled at him.

"Technically, yes we were supposed to and the Mom was monitoring all marriages to make sure they were 'real' marriages. They had some type of charm placed in the contract, so they would know if the participants weren't...uh...participating. But Severus was too smart for them and he came up with a counter-charm to fool the first. So we never had to..." she blushed again.

"Not that it's any of your business," Severus growled at the younger man. "If you weren't my brother's companion, I would have hexed you for asking a question like that."

Xanadu grinned contritely, "Just curious, is all. But now that I know you won't hex me, when did you two actually -"

"Xanadu!" Flavius snapped, "If you don't shut up, I'll hex you myself!"

Hermione giggled at that, before continuing. "After I realized I loved him, I went out of my way to get him to love me too. I didn't think he ever would, actually, and was losing all hope and then the marriage law was repealed. It seems calmer heads finally prevailed and the MoM realized what a mistake they had made. They immediately agreed that all couples affected by the law could divorce if that's what they wanted. Severus, of course, immediately offered to divorce me.

"I was devastated. I was so sure I would lose him, I didn't know what to do. I decided to yell at him I was so angry that he thought he could just get rid of me and pretend the marriage had never existed. I wanted to know if I meant so little to him he could just throw me away and he told me he didn't want to keep me locked in a marriage I had never wanted in the first place, to a husband I could never love.

"Imagine his surprise when I screamed back at him that I didn't want a divorce and that I did love him. And then I we he.... I don't think he believed me until he actually woke up the next morning and I was still curled up next to him. It took him a little while to actually admit he loved me too, but I knew it that night anyway. We haven't been apart since."

When she finished she burrowed her face into him, smiling and blushing as she kissed him on the neck. "He's a wonderful man."

Severus noted that Flavius was watching them shrewdly, almost as if he suspected something was not quite right with Hermione's story. For some reason, Snape didn't want his brother to know the truth didn't want him to know Hermione didn't really love him and only thought she did because she'd walked into a bar and had all the sense knocked out of her.

Besides, he was becoming used to the feelings she stirred in him. He realized he actually enjoyed the ever-present heat that seemed to live in him when she was nearby; enjoyed the way her hair tickled against his skin and the pleasant weight of her body against his own. He knew that at least part of her story was true he did love her. It came as more of a surprise to him than actually finding Flavius after so long. How could he Severus Snape fall in love with Hermione Granger, whom he'd always disliked after a mere two days. It was unbelievable.

He was still contemplating it when he felt her pull away from him. "I'm going to go lie in the sun for awhile, now that the food is gone. It would be a shame to come all the way to Greece and go back to Scotland without a tan."

Xanadu grinned at her, "A girl after my own heart! I'll join you and we can leave these two pasties to talk."

Snape watched as Hermione and stretched, her lithe young body on display for practically the whole world to see. Xanadu rose quickly too, stripping off the mesh shirt he'd been wearing and tossing it aside, before stepping out of his jeans. It took a moment for Severus to register the younger man was wearing a bright purple, very tight, pair of underwear with 'Kiss My Ass' written across the butt in silver glitter.

He gawked at the boy, before turning to Hermione and cocking his eyebrow. "I assume Xanadu is wearing the 'Speedo' you referred to this morning?"

Hermione giggled, "I told you you'd be thankful Albus packed regular swim trunks for you."

"Never thought I'd be glad for anything the old fool packed for me..." Snape agreed. When Hermione bent down to kiss him, he allowed himself to enjoy it for a change.

"Will you join me later? A little sun would do you good. You'd be dead sexy with a tan, I think."

"He's dead sexy now, love. All the Snape men are," Xanadu interjected. "So, down the beach then?"

Hermione nodded, and Snape watched as she walked off arm-in-arm with his new brother-in-law. They were only a few feet away, but Snape felt a little empty without her leaning against him. Although, he reflected, it could easily be the wind blowing against his side that she had been blocking up until then.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Flavius asked after a moment.

"Amazing what?" Snape replied, still staring after Hermione, who had her back to him and was stretching a towel to fit over a lounge chair.

"How we both found people who are so much alike."

Snape snorted and crossed his arms. "So much alike. If Hermione began now and did not end until we went to bed tonight, she still wouldn't manage to drop as many sexual innuendos into the conversation as your husband did in ten minutes."

Flavius waved his hand. "Don't be so thick, Severus. I mean personality-wise."

Snape was beginning to feel very affronted by his brother's insisting that Hermione could be as annoying as he found his brother-in-law. "Hermione is nowhere near as flamboyant as Xanadu, and she wouldn't be caught dead in a pair of ruby slippers."

"And no offence, Hermone," Xanadu piped in, craning his head in the direction of the two on the sundeck, "but my hair is*far* more manageable than yours, and I've had a recent manicure. These are obviously things that you just don't hold in high importance."

Snape stood up and pulled his wand from the back of his shorts. "Now see here, Xanadu, I'll not have my Hermione talked about in this manner! Her hair is glorious, and she doesn't need to worry about such superficial things as manicures as her mind is fortified with the highest knowledge. She is the greatest witch of her age, and we are..."

He had just called her "his" Hermione. Sweet Merlin...what was he thinking? Why didn't he just rip his heart out of his chest and hand it to her right here and now?

He noticed a very smug look on Xanadu's face as he lowered his wand. He had been duped. Flavius and Xanadu were clearly attempting to see how far he would go to protect this woman, and now they knew.

"You're almost as beautiful as Flavius when you're angry," Xanadu remarked cheekily before turning back on his stomach, leaving Snape grasping for words as he held his wand tighter.

"Let it go, Severus," Flavius called, leaning back in his chair. "Just come back in the shade with me and finish your drink."

He was about to protest, but a thought struck him, and he relented. "All right," he agreed, hiding his smirk. He would have his revenge.

Hermione was smiling at him, the look on her face one of devotion as he returned to his seat, mind milling with wicked ideas for revenge.

Appearing meek, he walked back to the table and lifted his glass once more to his lips.

"Perhaps Xanadu and Hermione have a certain cheekiness in common," he consented as he watched the pair on the beach.

"Not to mention their youth and vigor. I can't tell if we're dirty old men, or simply lucky bastards."

"You'd be dirtier than me at least, as the age difference between you and Xanadu is obviously much greater than the difference between Hermione and I," Snape replied.

"True," Flavius agreed. "I know Xan told you the story of how we met, but he failed to mention that it took me longer to realize what he was offering than his version implies. We were the only European Wizards on the trip that much was true. But when we first met, I didn't want to have anything to do with him. He was loud and laughed way too much. I thought he was making fun of me. Everyone on that trip adored him and I stuck out like a sore thumb. But, for whatever reason, he wouldn't leave me alone he kept talking to me and getting me to participate in what ever misadventure he concocted. He became important to me very quickly but, much as I suspect you were with Hermione I was afraid of letting him know. I thought he would eventually tire of me or find a younger, better looking Wizard."

"Impossible!" Xanadu interjected from his spot on the beach.

Flavius smiled at the younger man, "Trusting him was the hardest decision I ever made, but I'm glad I did. I feel like my life began the moment I gave in. We've been together eight years now."

Severus listened to his brother intently, eyes drifting every once and a while to the young witch on the beach. He wondered if perhaps, in time after Hermione got her memory back - she could really come to care for him. He wondered if he should just give in to the little fantasy she had been weaving around him; that she loved him and he her; that they were happy together. It would be easy to do - he just needed to let his guard down and pretend she was telling him the truth. What would it be like, to be loved by someone as brilliant and passionate as her? What would it be like to feel her lithe young body wrapped around his as he buried himself inside her?

He flushed slightly at the thought, frowning when he remembered that in reality, he was nothing to Hermione. He was just her old teacher and he could not take advantage of her that way. If she ever did come back to herself, she would think so ill of him he would never be able to recover her confidence.

Of course, he could always just hit her on the head again and keep her with him. After all, if Hermione thought they were married, why shouldn't they be happy together? As he thought about it, Flavius poured him another margarita, which Snape accepted with a nod.

He never used to care for Muggle tequila, but he had to admit that Flavius had done something to the mixed drink that made it exceptional. He could hardly taste the alcohol at all.

Glancing at Hermione again, he scowled as he saw Xanadu rubbing some sort of lotion into her back. The younger man was making his regular outrageous comments and Hermione was giggling at him as if she thought he was brilliantly funny. A hot burst of jealousy tightened his stomach, and he recalled his earlier vow of vengeance. Taking a sip of his drink, he surreptitiously muttered a silent incantation and, with his wand hidden under the table, pointed it at the younger man.

He tried not to grin as Xanadu lay back down on his towel, shifting about in an attempt to make himself comfortable, before sighing in exasperation.

"I'm getting sand in my banana hammock," Xanadu exclaimed, sitting up abruptly.

Snape smirked. "Banana hammock? That's obviously a Muggle euphemism. Besides, how could you?" he asked. "You're not lying directly on the sand."

Xanadu stood up and with all the dignity and class of a Deutschmann raised on a nude beach, pulled the crotch of his "speedo" away from his genitalia, dumping a good teaspoon of sand as he did so.

"Must've been in the blanket," he mused as he lay back down, on his back this time.

"It happens," Hermione mumbled.

Snape drank the rest of his glass down. "Excellent margaritas."

"We need more," Flavius decided, standing with the pitcher in his hand. "All right if I go in and make some?"

"Mi casa es su casa," Snape drawled amicably, waving his hand in front of him theatrically.

Flavius regarded him for a moment. "On second thought, I'm cutting you off. I'll just get us some water."

"What ever suits your fancy, brother."

Snape turned his eyes back to Xanadu and Hermione, who was now also on her back, her breasts jutting up to the sky.

"What is this?" Xanadu exclaimed, standing up quickly, an annoyed expression on his face.

There was an unmistakable lump in the back of his "speedo", and Snape had to keep himself from laughing out loud at the outraged expression on his brother-in-laws face as he dumped even more sand out than the last time.

Hermione sat up and surveyed the situation, then looked straight at Snape. He looked away, but not fast enough.

"Severus Saloniuss Snape, whatever you've done, *reverse it!*"

Snape finally lost his countenance and burst out laughing just as Flavius came back with a pitcher of water. Snape knew that it would take his brother only a second or two to figure out what the joke was, and when Flavius had surveyed Hermione's outraged expression, Snape's glee, and Xanadu's overflowing bathing suit, he began to laugh along with his brother.

"Okay, Severus. You've taught us a lesson. No more playing tricks on your Hermione."

Snape muttered a counter-curse with a triumphant grin that faltered only slightly when he realized Hermione knew his middle name.



# Love is a Fire, Burning aka Cream: It's Good on Top

## Chapter 8 of 8

In answer to the "Hermione Walks Into A Bar" challenge. A combined effort between Michmak and Zambonigirl. In this chapter: We get a little sunburn, a lot of snogging, and one Very Important Question.

Title: Love is a Fire, Burning aka Cream: It's Good on Top

The evening with Flavius ended, in Snape's opinion, all too soon. He was sorry to see his brother walk back down the beach, arm wrapped firmly around Xanadu's shoulders. They had made plans to meet the following day to explore the Wizarding areas of Greece. Snape and Hermione stayed at their little table on their lanai for several hours after their guests left, watching the sunset and stargazing for a few moments.

"I'm cold," Hermione said, standing up. "I think I'll take a shower and turn in."

Snape followed her into the house and watched her as she headed for the bathroom, before going back into the sitting area and extracting the pertinent parts of the day into a glass bottle. Hermione had said so many unusual things, and Snape was worried. More than worried, really. He flooded Albus and handed over the bottle.

"I take it that she isn't doing any better?" Albus asked in a concerned voice.

"She knows my middle name, Albus. She knows all about my mother, and the most about my father that I would ever be willing to divulge. It's frightening to say the least."

Albus rocked back on his heels, fingers steepled before his lips. "I'll investigate, Severus, and I'll have Poppy analyze your memory as well. I won't lie, Severus. I am also quite worried. But I am hopeful. Now you run along and have a good night's rest. Perhaps that's what we all need right now, and we'll give this a fresh perspective in the morning."

Snape nodded and extricated himself from the Floo. He felt the weight of Hermione's illness on his heart and his mind, and could in no way block the uneasy feeling he had that everything would end so very, very badly.

Rising, he made his way barefoot into the bedroom and found Hermione laying face up, wrapped only in a towel, eyes wide open and pained. Her skin was an unhealthy shade of pink.

"What have you done?" he asked, sharper than he meant to.

"Oh, Severus. I was so silly. I don't think I put on enough sunscreen earlier and now I'm in so much pain. I didn't realize how hot I was until I got in the shower...too distracted by our wonderful day, I guess. Please, can you help me?"

He sighed. "Hopefully Albus thought to pack sunburn cream."

"I'm sure he did," she mumbled. "I *hope* he did. Ugh, my skin feels so tight."

"It doesn't look very pleasing, that's for certain." Snape agreed, as he fumbled through their bags. "All right, here's the cream, and thank goodness it's a large jar. What were you thinking? What was I thinking? I should have forbade you to lay in the sun like that."

Hermione managed a small chuckle that Snape did not share.

"I jest not, Hermione. It was a stupid thing to do, and now you are in pain and ill."

A tear escaped her eye and she drew a deep, shaky breath. "I didn't mean to ruin our honeymoon."

Snape sat beside her on the bed and brushed her hair away from her face. "Hermione, we're not on a honeymoon. We've been married for years. This is just a holiday." He suddenly realized how foolish he felt. He had just played into her fantasy. Her madness really was catching. Rallying himself, he managed to say the only thing that seemed to make sense. "Where should I start with this?"

Hermione look miserable. "Anywhere. Everywhere. My entire body aches."

Snape sighed as he studied her intently. She really did look horrible. Her hair was a still-wet mass of snarls from the shower she had taken, and he could feel the heat radiating from her skin from where he stood. Dipping his fingers into the jar, he loaded them with a copious amount of the orange burn cream, lighter in color than the cream used for fire burns, and modified to heal the effects of the sun. The following morning, aside from some fatigue and a little stiffness at the skin covering her joints, Hermione would more than likely be fully recovered. He hoped.

He started on her arms, lightly applying the lotion in gentle strokes, and trying not to notice the tiny goose-pimples that appeared on her skin as he stroked it. Her skin, despite its heat, was soft and tantalizing. He wondered where, exactly, she expected him to apply the cream and tried to ignore the sudden heat sizzling through his veins.

"That feels so good, Severus," Hermione sighed, "but I think my arms are done now."

Snape blinked at her, before looking at his hands as if he couldn't believe they were free of burn cream. He dipped into the jar again and watched in fascination as she slowly undid the towel wrapped around her slight frame and opened it. The skin under the towel was just as pink as the skin on her arms, but the color did nothing to distract him from the sight of her. He had already seen her naked, of course just the other day in the shower, as a matter of fact but he hadn't let himself dwell on that. It was hard not to dwell now. Her waist was narrower than he remembered, her legs shapely, even though they weren't overly long. His gaze traveled over her, taking in her contours, memorizing every inch of her, before they slowly drifted to her breasts, which were a painful red.

"How did your breasts manage to get so burnt when they were covered," he demanded, hoping that she would mistake the gruffness for anger and not lust, which it most certainly was.

Hermione turned her head to the side and bit her lip, her eyes suspiciously bright. "I bought one of those swimming costumes that you can tan through. I-I thought it would be sexy to have a tan all over."

Snape simply could not help himself. He began to laugh. "Sexy?" he managed to spit out between breaths. "Sexy? My dear, I have a pallor to my skin that only a Vampire could envy. What in heaven's name could possibly lead you to believe that I would find brown, sun-damaged skin sexy?" Her eyes were still moist with tears, but to his surprise, she began to laugh at her own stupidity. "Oh, shut up," she said, giving his chest a little kick with her foot. As she did so, she gave another yelp of pain.

"Keep still." His hands moved forward and dropped softly across her collarbones, fingers skimming across her skin as he applied the cream. His hands took on the same gentle movement they had when he'd rubbed the cream into her arms. She sighed in pleasure as they drifted down her sternum and smoothed across her stomach, spanning her ribcage. He couldn't believe how very white his hands looked against her.

"Severus," she whispered, "I need..."

"I know what you need," he replied just as softly, his voice low and hoarse. His left hand drifted up, skimming across a heated breast, before lifting away to reach for more cream. Instead of digging into the jar to get some, he tipped it over and watched in fascination as it dribbled on to her skin. She shivered at the cold feel of it, and shivered again when he returned his hand to her breast. His other hand drifted up as well, until both palms cupped her. Her nipples were so hot and tight they branded him. He gritted his teeth against the sudden sharp pleasure stabbing his gut, but could not ignore how perfectly her breasts fit his hands as he smoothed the cream over them.

She was shivering lightly under his touch and her hands had come up to grasp his wrists. She didn't try to push his hands away, however. Instead, she held them there. When he looked at her face, her eyes were glowing with pleasure and desire, despite her pain. "How long does it take this cream to work?" she whispered.

"The burn won't subside until the morning," he answered.

"I don't want you to stop touching me, though," she murmured. "I've missed you. I've missed ~~us~~."

Against his better judgement and all rational thought, Snape found himself drawn into her fantasy. "You should have thought of that before allowing yourself to get burned all over," he growled. "Turn over and let me get your back."

"My back isn't burned," she replied, "just my front. You can keep doing what you're doing."

Snape grinned at that, his teeth flashing quickly before he could prevent it. "You're a tease, Hermione."

"You always say that," she pouted at him, her eyes flashing with happiness. "You like being teased."

"Do I now? And what else do I like, hmm?" He couldn't help responding to her gentle flirtations. She was beautiful to him, even red as a lobster and radiating enough heat to roast a marshmallow. More beautiful, in fact, because she was letting him touch her and stroke her. He was imprinting the feel of her skin in his brain, so that when this was over and she was hating him again, he'd always be able to remember.

He jumped when one of her hands released his wrist and dropped to the bare skin of his knee, just below where his swim trunks ended. She grinned up at him, her mouth wide and ripe. "Now who's teasing?"

Her fingers traced swirls and patterns around his kneecap, before tracing down the front of his leg as far as she could reach. After a few moments, she drew her digits back up his leg and allowed them to drift under the cuff of his trunks, until they moved restlessly against his inner thigh. He hissed in a breath, and teased her nipples with his fingers, smirking at her when she gasped and arched her back slightly, pressing herself into his hands. "Don't start something you can't finish, Hermione," he murmured.

"I always finish what I start," she gasped back. "Gods, that feels so good, Severus."

Her breathless moan brought him back to himself with a start, and he pulled his hands away from her as if she'd burned him. Her hand was gripping his thigh now, and she looked at him in confusion. "Severus, why did you stop?"

Her eyes were wide and confused, and he wanted so badly to touch her again he almost gave in to the silent plea in them.

"We can't do this, Hermione," he replied instead. His voice had gone cold and stiff again, and he watched as she flinched back from it. "You...you're still recovering from a concussion, and now...this damnable sunburn. We...I...You...I just can't do this to you, Hermione."

"Do what?" she demanded, suddenly peeved. "Touch me? Love me? I'm your *wife*, Severus. Your *wife*! Is it...is it something I've done?"

"Of course not," Snape retorted. "It's...me. I don't...I refuse to hurt you, Hermione. I won't...can't...take advantage of you that way."

"Every time you push me away, you do hurt me Severus! It's like...you're acting like you did when we first married; when you didn't want me." She was sniffing at the thought. "You're acting like you don't *love* me anymore!"

Snape watched in dismay as Hermione suddenly drew away from him and wrapped her arms around herself, hunching into the covers. He reached towards her, placing a hand against her back, unable to bare the thought she was crying over him. "Of course, I...love...you, Hermione. How could I not? But I am...I'm responsible for you, and you're still recovering and...I can't...Why must you make this so hard, damnit?"

"Why must you be so noble?" she retorted. "I'm telling you, I'm fine. I miss you. Just because I bumped my head doesn't mean the rest of me is broken. I want to make love with you again. I need to feel you against me and inside me. It's...I *miss* you!"

His hand rubbed soothing circles against her back as she spoke, and he tried to ignore the way his heart jumped and his body surged at her words. "I just want to make sure. Please...Hermione..."

She turned again, facing him, eyes awash in tears. "If you won't make love with me, Severus, at least...please...kiss me. Hold me. I know I'm being foolish and you're just trying to take care of me, but...I hurt more when you pull away from me. Please..."

He lifted his free hand to her tear-stained cheek and rubbed the moisture away with his thumb. "Hermione, what do you want of me?"

"I want you to promise me you'll stop worrying so much and trust me to know what I need, Severus. You can only use the excuse of a concussion so long, and tomorrow this burn will be gone. What then?"

When he didn't reply, she sighed. "If you won't make love to me tonight, will you at least relax and lie down beside me? Perhaps...kiss me? And tell me that you love me again, Severus. I really need to hear it right now."

Snape sighed and leaned down, kissing her very gently on the lips. She tasted of the margaritas they'd been drinking earlier, and smelled of the sea and the burn cream. Her mouth opened against his, her tongue darting forward and licking across the seam of his lips hotly, before sliding inside it. He bit back the groan building in his chest and allowed her to shift to her side as she pulled him down beside her naked body. Her mouth drifted from his and across the hard contour of his jaw, before she reached his ear and bit the lobe softly. "I love you, Severus."

"I love you too, Hermione," he replied against her hair as he gently pulled her against him. "Gods help me, but I love you too."

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, Snape awoke to a feeling of foreboding. He couldn't quite put his finger on what had happened, but he knew that something had gone terribly, horribly wrong. Calming his first burst of panic, he managed to calm his mind and start again at the beginning. The bar. The concussion. Albus. Greece. Flavius. Xanadu--had he

dreamed him up? Hermione. Sunburn. Far too many margaritas. I love yous. Kisses. Lots of kisses. He hadn't been kissed so much in the whole course of his life, and certainly never by one so eager. Or talented. If he didn't know better, he really would have believed that they had been married for seven years.

A pain started in his left temple and shot all the way down his side to his feet. He groaned, and a soft hand immediately wound around his chest and started stroking the fine hair between his pectoral muscles. He closed his eyes and relaxed a moment. He loved being rubbed there. He loved the way her young, naked body felt cradling him, comforting him. The pain began to subside.

"Hmm, good. You're awake," she hummed against his back.

Snape wondered, not for the first time, why he couldn't just turn around and make love to her the way she wanted him to. Hell, the way he wanted himself to. Was his damnable honor so important?

Yes, he knew that it was. Eventually, he reminded himself, Hermione would come out of this, and she would hate him even more than she already did because of what he would do to her. There would be no way around it then, no way to claim insanity, however temporary. No way to claim he was doing something for her own good. He was already in up to his neck with no way to turn around and go back to shore. All he could do was continue to tread water and hope he didn't drown.

"So," she mumbled, "I've been thinking."

"This does not bode well." He turned to her and instinctively pulled her against him, tangling his hands in her hair, and gazing into her lovely brown eyes. "Looks like your skin wasn't the only thing the sun damaged yesterday," he murmured, gently combing his fingers through her hair, now a shade or two lighter than it had been when they arrived.

Hermione's hand went to her curls, and she gave a little smile. "Is it horrid?"

"Oh, no. It's rather fetching. I think it suits." The smile she gave him was almost enough to melt his heart.

Snape was an average male in that he awoke every morning half-mast from whatever hedonistic fantasy decided to play about in his subconscious whilst he slept. When his bed-mate decided to pull him closer and kiss him, he went from half-mast to full salute in a matter of seconds, and there was absolutely no way to hide it. Oh WHY did she have to be naked and alluring? Hadn't he managed to get her into some clothing the night before? Oh, that's right. They were snogging then, too, and clothes really would have gotten in the way of that. At least, her clothes would have. He had fallen asleep in his swim trunks...had insisted on keeping them firmly in place, despite Hermione's best efforts to divest him of them, much as she was attempting again.

"Hermoine, I" he started, his voice rough and breathless as her hand slid under the elastic at the waist and stroked the skin on his back.

"What was I saying? Oh. Right. I have an idea." She grinned at him as she squeezed his left buttock firmly and darted her head forward to kiss his collarbone. He lurched against her at the sudden wet heat of her mouth against his skin, and fought to keep his voice even as he spoke to her.

"Well, if it involves more margaritas and sunbathing, you can really count me out, because I am *done* with this tropical life. In fact, I would rather just contact Albus and go back to Scotland."

"Severus," she breathed into his ear. He could tell from the tone she was pouting and flirting with him all at the same time. "You don't really want to leave, do you?"

"Well, I won't, obviously, because you're so happy here, and Flavius is here. But it is rather tempting. I feel useless lazing about all the livelong day. A wizard's mind could turn to mush out here."

"With all the fresh air and the sea breezes, you mean?"

"Precisely. Damned unhealthy, if you ask me, all this sunlight. Now, what about this idea of yours?"

"Oh, well, I just thought that we should get Flavius and Xanadu together, and go down the shops, and maybe...maybe," her courage failed her for a moment, so he gave her a gentle nudge on the shoulder with his nose. "Well, I know you said that you didn't want to do it again, Severus, but talking with your brother and his partner yesterday really got me thinking about it... I want to find a little church, any church along here, I don't care if it's Greek Orthodox or not, and I want to renew our vows. For real this time. For keeps. Forever."

Snape tried...really tried...to ignore the possessive thrill that raced through him at her softly spoken words, but found that he couldn't. *For keeps. Forever.* Sounded good to him.

Bloody hell.

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Mich A/N: Sorry for the delay, peeps. We haven't forgotten this story, but we've been really busy. I got sucked into a brand new fandom, (Firefly) and have just been generally lying low. Thank Zambi for this chapter, because she finally tracked me down and kicked my ass. I promise there won't be as many delays in getting the next one out.

For those of you who aren't in love with B flicks from the 80s, "Eddie and the Cruisers" is a great little movie with the everhot Michael Pare and some kickass tunes by the Beaver Brown Band. We snagged half the chapter title from the awesome "Season in Hell".

Zambi A/N: Hey, sorry for the delay. It was hard going from totally AU to completely AU with this story, and Book 7 sort of kicked us both in the butt. I was worried that Mich wouldn't want to finish, but I'm glad she did! I know I couldn't have gone on without her. Hopefully the next few chapters will go up without a hitch.

## **A Season in Hell**

### **by the Beaver Brown Band**

*See the writing on the wall*

*I think I was bound to fall*

*Voices whisper in the wind*

*I can hear them calling*

*Love is the fire, burning*

*And I want to burn*

*Darkest now before the dawn*

*Times we've known will soon be gone*

*Flames of freedom fill the air*

*I can hear them calling*

*Love is the fire, burning*

*And I want to burn*

*Can you see the light*

*Can you hear the sound*

*Can you feel this ol' world turning around*