

Rhyme and Unreason

by dracontia

"Sev and 'Mione were hexed most severe
Not much space for plot there, my dear
Limerick form's not inviting
To logically writing
And still squeezing lemons in there"

One Shot Challenge Response

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer:

I can claim neither tittle nor jot

Of Harry Potter and his lot

Not one bit do I own

They're just here on loan

From their use I earn diddly squat.

My response to the Limerick Challenge on Potter Place. But you worked that out already, you clever little Ravenclaw.

Fortunately for Harry in his quest to destroy the Horcruxes, Voldemort had not caught on to his mission right away. Unfortunately, he had caught on eventually...and now it was a mad race to see who would find the last two. The race led both teams to a confrontation in Cadwalladr's Curios, a shop in a magical neighborhood in Aberystwyth that had a great deal in common with Knockturn Alley. The opponents were so evenly matched the outcome was far from certain.

One thing was sure; there wouldn't be much left of Cadwalladr's once they were through with it.

It looked like Light had the upper hand, with Harry in possession of the Ravenclaw Mirror and the Death Eaters a man down. All they had to do was get out the door and evade pursuit...when Harry recognized something familiar about the way one of his opponents moved.

"Snape!" he shouted in a voice that promised pain. The masked face involuntarily flinched towards the sound of his name, and in the very next motion, he was

disappearing through a door in the back of the show room.

Hermione noticed with alarm that, rather than taking advantage of the covering fire to get clear of the building with the mirror, Harry was redoubling his efforts to break the thin line of remaining Death Eaters and pursue his nemesis. "Harry, the Horcrux! *Focus!*" she yelled. Grabbing Neville, she began to hustle down a side aisle towards the door. "We'll follow Snape."

"We will?" Neville mouthed faintly, as Hermione dragged him along. One Death Eater was near the door. Neville cast wildly, causing a huge nearby urn to explode and shower his intended target with ceramic shrapnel...effectively clearing the way.

"Nice," Hermione said as she ducked through the door and made for the end of the hallway where a billow of fabric was just visible whisking down a set of stairs.

Neville would have been happier about the praise had he actually been aiming for the urn instead of the man next to it.

Perhaps it seemed a good idea at the time for both of them to come down the stairs at once...superior numbers, and all that. One blast from Snape's wand revealed the flaw in that strategy as the stairs collapsed beneath them, pitching Hermione to the floor of the basement. Neville (in a reversal of Sod's Law so incredible that it probably qualified as a sign of impending Armageddon) not only landed upright, uninjured, and in possession of his wand, but also in the excellent cover formed by the remains of the staircase. This was fortunate, because there were two more Death Eaters in the basement, both of whom immediately fired off offensive spells.

Evidently, at least one of them had aim to rival Mr. Longbottom's, for instead of striking anything in the vicinity of the protective wall of risers, he hit a jar on one of the shelves. The resulting explosion was literally deafening.

All Hermione (and presumably any other occupant of the room) could hear was a sort of tuning fork-like, high-pitched whine. The thought crossed her mind *Why is it called **ringing** in the ears?* She started to move from her landing place beside a collapsed shelf, crouching low behind debris and looking desperately for her wand.

In the midst of the confusion, Neville got off an extraordinarily lucky shot. Or depending on whether you were anyone else in the room, an extraordinarily unlucky shot.

Hermione saw the entire basement incandesce for one retina-burning second. She had a brief impression of a rainbow of flashing colors playing over the numerous shelves full of oddments before the world took on a violet tinge. A few muffled squeaking sounds (which might have been screams) registered through the constant whine in her sound-numbered ears before she stumbled into something cloth covered. The instant she caught it to keep from falling, she realized two things: the cloth was covering a person, presumably of the Death Eater persuasion, and that sickly, squishing sensation meant she had just Disapparated with him.

A series of crashes and shouts from friendly voices indicated that the skirmish in the shop had concluded in their favor. Lupin and Tonks clattered down the first half of the stairs moments later to find a panicked Neville in the company of two bizarrely incapacitated Death Eaters. One was chirping angrily about the small, useless wings that had replaced his arms; one was unable to walk except in tiny, dizzy circles, babbling baby talk.

Remus cast Body Binds on the culprits, though they appeared incapable of doing much besides embarrassing themselves at the moment. Tonks (unsurprisingly having fallen into the gap) was closest to Neville. Limping towards him as she waved off Remus' concerned inquiries, she asked, "Are you hurt?"

Neville heard only a faint cooing sound from Tonks. In any event, he was not worried about himself. "I don't know what happened to Hermione!" he wailed, hearing his own voice as if under water. "I tried casting a Stunner, but the light came out wrong...white and bright. It hit something and..." he took a miserable, shuddering breath

"...those two started doing *that*, but she and Snape disappeared!"

Remus and Tonks stared at each other wide-eyed for a moment. Lupin carefully made his way past the gap in the stairs, looking around the devastated room in hopes of finding Hermione alive.

"Where were they last?" he asked. Neville, still distraught, pointed. Remus studied the indicated area. There was no evidence of blood, greasy smudges, or other signs of magical dismemberment or disintegration. No burnt odors or ashes, either. To be certain, he cast several spells to reveal what magic, if any, may have been recently cast on the spot.

"Calm down, Neville," he tried to reassure the young man. "No one was killed here. It looks like the only thing that's happened recently is Apparation." With a sinking feeling Remus noticed something else. He bent down and retrieved a familiar wand.

"Snape's kidnapped Hermione," Neville whispered in horror as he saw what Lupin held. "And she's unarmed."

Hermione blinked back to reality in cold, outdoorsy darkness to feel a flap of fabric muffle her head and a strong arm sweep her close. As she was dragged along, the air felt closer and less brisk; they were going underground. She kicked furiously on the trip down the gradual incline, but the Death Eater's grip held like a steel band.

At least he doesn't have body odor, she thought, rather absurdly. That would have been adding insult to assault (or perhaps, assault to abduction, considering how closely her face was crushed against his torso). Actually, he smelled rather good, which was perhaps more disgusting. Wasn't it traitorous to find an enemy's personal aroma agreeable?

He stopped and seemed to say something, but the ringing in her ears hadn't subsided enough to make it out. Was it some sort of complex spell? There was an oddly familiar rhythm to it, and it almost seemed to... rhyme. Oh, my. His voice reverberated in his chest so that she could feel what he was saying rather than hear it. That was *far* too personal.

But evidently, not as personal as it could get. The next thing she knew, there was a cold, rough, earthen wall against her back and a hard, warm body against her front. He was far too quick for her to resist, kick, scream, or do anything to prevent him from pinning both of her wrists above her head. Her face was free, but everything happened too fast for fear to build or for anything to register except the overwhelming size and strength of his body compared to hers. He pulled his wand, wordlessly used it to open the door at the end of the passage, and unceremoniously shoved her through the opening.

Darting in behind her so quickly his robes whirled, he locked the door without a sound and turned his wand on her. They stared at each other, both wondering what would happen next.

Why isn't he gloating? she wondered. *He's got the perfect hostage for Voldemort...and yet, he just seems really, really, annoyed.*

"I seem to be trapped here by you

Sans wand, there's not much I can do.

But I'll not go meekly

Or bow to you weakly.

I'll get mine in before this is through."

As she made her statement of defiance, Hermione's eyes widened in surprise and chagrin. At least now she knew why that odd rhythm had sounded familiar.

Of course, Granger was defying him. And she just had to have been hit with the same bloody irritating spell that had made it so difficult to open the door. Being half-deafened did nothing to alleviate the agony of having to listen to limericks.

Snape's first instinct was to use a memory charm on the girl and dump her in some safe place where Order members would find her. But with the damned hex obliging him to talk in Limericks and nudging his mind to think of rhymes at every turn, he didn't trust himself to do any complex nonverbal magic. He didn't dare damage her. If only it had been a week or two later! It wasn't time to reveal all.

Reveal... there's titillating word... especially since your first instinct wasn't to Oblivate her, just to keep her pinned against the wall...

He hastily shoved that errant thought from the front of his mind to somewhere behind his left ear. He hated it when his mind conspired with his body; it wasn't conducive to maintaining his cool, controlled, image. Plotting, plotting, come on, something practical to think of...ah, yes. Perhaps he could employ that oversized brain of hers in removing the hex, *then* selectively Oblivate and offload her.

"Try not to let your head reel;

I'd like to propose a small deal.

First, clear up this mess

On my word, let me stress,

You may leave just as soon as you feel,"

he said, affecting boredom. Tiredly, he removed his mask. If he had to keep her any length of time, he'd just as soon not have the nasty thing on his face, and she had doubtless recognized his voice by now. The robes had to go as well. He knew it was just the power of suggestion, but he could swear the bloody things smelled like Voldemort's breath, and that wasn't exactly essence of violets.

Hermione's bravado faltered into puzzlement and suspicion at the oddly lenient offer. Guiltily, she felt prickle of relief at realizing her captor was Snape. She knew it shouldn't make a difference; by all the evidence, he was a murdering traitor. Yet still, she was less frightened than if she were at the mercy of some anonymous Death Eater. Uncertain how much help she could or would offer, she let the hex make what it would of her words.

"I don't know which spell Neville spoke.

But I wish I could give him a poke.

This intransigent hex

Lives to bother and vex;

It's a most unamusing joke."

Snape stared at her intently, trying to prize open the doors of her mind with a wordless 'Legilimens.' Evidently someone had been giving her lessons in Occlumency. Before her mind closed, all he got was an impression of confusion and anxiety at the present situation, and... a flicker of bitterness? She'd had a falling out with that Weasley twit? Oh, joy. How enlightening.

Hermione shouldn't have been surprised at his attempt to pry into her mind, which made it all the harder to understand why she felt so hurt about it.

"This place isn't much more than a pit,

Yet you've got quite a library in it.

Have you all the selection

From the Restricted Section

Or did not quite all of it fit?"

She really needed to keep her mouth shut, no matter how angry he made her. That had sounded absolutely foolish, not to mention awkward.

He really should have ignored that, since it wasn't worthy of a response. Unfortunately, once he opened his mouth, the hex took over.

"Why, Miss Granger, I might have to worry

That your fabulous mind has gone furry.

I took nothing at all

From chamber or hall

As I left in a bit of a hurry."

He gripped the bookshelf, wincing. She couldn't tell if it was from the limerick or the topic it referenced. With a particularly sour expression, he gestured her towards the table and stool in the middle of the room.

Hermione was not inclined to oblige, but was also unwilling to open her mouth again. Their next 'conversation' consisted entirely almost entirely of a series of spectacularly rude gestures. Ultimately, however, she sat at the table, tacitly acquiescing to his bargain. *If* he kept his word...which was a very large if, indeed...she'd be free of both the hex and the gloomy confinement of 'the hole' as she had begun to think of it. Aside from the books, it had about the comfort of an animal's den.

"Speaking of jokes, this sad bind

Isn't the worst we could find.

Things could have been worse

Than a mere limerick curse...

Knock-knock jokes do come to mind."

Why had that slipped out? Had she *missed* drawing absolutely withering looks from Snape? Though her inclination was to stick her tongue out at him in response, she managed to restrain herself from such a puerile display...settling for shooting him a withering look of her own.

Disgruntled, he unceremoniously dumped a stack of books on the table and shoved them across to her. *What the hell is going on here?* he pondered. *As far as she knows,*

I'm a murderer...yet she doesn't seem frightened. Am I no longer threatening now that I lack the authority to mark her down to 'Acceptable'? He didn't care to get close enough for her to make a grab for his wand. If this degenerated into a physical confrontation, he'd have to answer to the old man.

Halfway through the first book, Hermione realized two things: one, the stool she was sitting on was about as comfortable as a nap in an iron maiden; and two, she needed the loo. Bother. She got up to explore which of the curtained alcoves concealed the facilities, which brought Snape to his feet, wand in hand.

Hermione sighed, and put her hands on her hips. She was in no mood to ask leave to find whatever passed for the toilet via Limerick. And nothing on earth could compel her to mime her request. Impatiently, she grabbed a quill and scrap of parchment, hoping to write a pointed little note. Unfortunately, what her hand involuntarily scratched out was,

'Though comforts in here are few,

There are things without which one can't do.

Of those curtains three

I ask you to tell me

Which one of them is the loo?"

She grimaced at the parchment, but started towards him with it anyway.

A little less than an hour into his session as jailer/protector to the Brains of Potter's Little

Triumvirate, Severus realized two things: one, he needed sleep; and two, it had been far, far too long since he'd been with a woman. Oh, and a third thing: Miss Granger was definitely, in addition to being a brain, a woman. These realizations could all be distilled into a few potent drops of profanity, but alas, the hex would not permit him to let said drops fall and relieve some of the discomfort. So he reflected upon them in silence, which was far less satisfying. That was, until he began to doze...only to find himself rudely awakened by the dull scrape of three wooden legs on the packed earth floor. He popped up as quickly as if the hexed spring in that absurd armchair had done its job.

Snape almost Stunned her as a knee-jerk, sleep-deprived response to her approach. However, some part of him managed to wake sufficiently to reason that she had to hand him the note if they were to communicate. He hardly blamed her for preferring not to speak at this point; for the sake of his reputation, he snatched the parchment from her hand when she reached arm's length and glowered condescendingly after reading the vile little verse. He gestured curtly at the rightmost curtain.

Hermione found the facilities a little better than she had feared, but still not exactly on par with modern plumbing. At least there was a working charm to allow everything to be neatly Banished.

To her horror, she noticed a certain slickness as she was cleaning up. *Please, just let me die right now rather than have to say or write a limerick asking Snape to transfigure a tampon for me*, she thought frantically. Her relief on seeing nothing but clear discharge was short-lived. *Why am I so drenched?* she wondered, appalled. For the sake of her remaining sanity, she looked for a distraction as she washed up.

She glanced around the little alcove, noting the shelf above the basin held a number of bottles...including one which contained a potion the exact color of a particularly powerful strengthening draught. That was curious. Snape didn't seem to be ailing, and only someone quite old or ill would need a potion so strong. As she exited the space, she spied a downy feather of interesting hue on the floor. Bending to pick it up proved her second tactical error of the night. Her jeans caught on the roughness of the arch and ripped a good six-inch gash, exposing her thigh. To top it off, the hiss of breath that escaped her blew the mystery fluff away.

Meanwhile, Snape was darting furtive glances at the curtain, adjusting his trousers and wondering if the blasted girl would spend long enough in there that he might do something more palliative with regards to his problem. When she exited far too soon for his comfort, he reflected that the last time he'd had to suppress so much profanity had been during the staff meeting when Albus had announced that Harry Potter would be attending Hogwarts.

Neville took Remus Lupin and Kingsley Shacklebolt through his memory of the fight via Pensieve, hoping one of them would see something that made sense of the peculiar fate of the two Death Eaters and suggest where to find Hermione. Withdrawing from the memory, Shacklebolt offered his analysis.

"You saw the stuffed vulture, and the humorous memories of that, combined with relief at landing uninjured, must have changed your intent. Instead of casting a Stunner, your mind focused on laughter, and you cast some form of *'Rictusempra'*," Kingsley said, explaining his take on the events they just witnessed.

"Do you know what this means?" Neville interrupted, practically quivering with excitement. "I actually did nonverbal magic!"

"Yes...and now that you know you can, it should be easier to do it intentionally," Remus replied.

Kingsley cleared his throat to ensure their attention before he continued. "The spell hit that prism-like object and was somehow altered so as to cause incapacitation in a non-violent...and amusingly absurd...manner. We'll take the prism to the Secure Ward at St. Mungo's and bring in a specialist in Dark artifacts to evaluate the object and the prisoners. So far, both of them seem to be suffering some sort of speech impediment coupled with a physical restriction. Hopefully we'll know how to counteract the effects by the time we find Hermione."

"I'd like to see Harry, if it's all right," Neville faltered. He knew he'd eventually have to face his friend with the full story. Remus had prudently intercepted Harry at Headquarters and slipped him a Dreamless Sleep Potion before he could inquire too closely into what had happened in the basement. Tonks reinstated the search for Snape, previously on hold due to the priority given to finding Horcruxes. It was fortunate Ron hadn't been on the mission...they'd have had to hit him with a Stunner and sit on him to prevent any rash, guilt-fueled action.

Remus vetoed this before Kingsley had the chance. "We don't dare wake him. Unless some emergency dictates otherwise, Harry stays sedated until we find Hermione...for her sake *and* his. As long as she returns unharmed, it might be better he never knows what happened. The last thing we need is for him to go off again, should he see Snape in a combat situation."

Neville's face fell. "Do you think she's all right? I mean, the spell... Snape?" he asked worriedly.

"I wish I knew," Remus said with a frown. "So far, speculating about Snape hasn't proved very productive. But as for the spell, I wouldn't be too worried. After all, the effects don't appear to be life threatening or painful."

A few more miserable hours passed with the pair communicating only when absolutely necessary...and without speaking or writing, if at all possible. Hermione fidgeted from the stool at the battered table to the floor and back again. Books, and notes written in gruesome rhyme, were arranged around her. Snape managed to resist the urge to likewise display nervous energy by occupying the one upholstered chair. The hexed spring on one side of it reminded him to keep stonily still and focused on the three stacks of books around him...yet to be read, discarded, and promising. They hadn't found a single reference to a Limerick Hex, nor much in the way of similar spells; but at least the silence, no longer punctuated by the whine of tinnitus, offered some relief.

Until...

Hermione slammed her book shut with a squeak of dismay. Snape looked up and frowned interrogatively. He wasn't about to open his mouth for anything short of a life-

threatening emergency.

She gestured at her left hand, which was resting on the table. He stared at her, then at it, wondering what in blue blazes was going on. As he waited to see the phenomenon causing so much consternation, his foot began tapping.

Her fingers were tapping on the table.

Both his foot and her fingers were tapping out, "Tap tap-tap Ta-tap-tap Ta-tap..." and the rest of the (by now) excruciatingly familiar rhythm.

Snape grimaced in sheer anguish, wishing desperately that he could swear without having to rhyme it. A tear of frustration leaked out of Hermione's eye as she complained,

"It's more than a person can stand..."

Having to speak in this plan.

Making sense is a pain,

Rhyme proves reason's bane

And rules over both mouth and hand."

Snape decided that if he were once more obliged to watch her flitter from the stool to the floor, walk to his seat with something for him to peruse, then start the whole fidgety process over again, he wouldn't be responsible for his actions. The next time she rose, he glared at her and gestured at the arm of the chair in which he was seated.

"Miss Granger, I shall now insist

That you sit where I say...don't resist!

Take the arm or the floor

Ere you read any more

Lest your damnable squirming persist!"

Hermione would have made more of a fuss had she been free to speak, well, freely. At this point, she'd have gladly exchanged the Limerick Hex for a Free-Verse Curse. Since they'd not yet found a way to do even that much, she settled for glaring at him as she primly gathered her portion of the remaining books and marched over to the chair.

She didn't appreciate having to sit on the arm of the chair with her legs dangling short of the floor. However, she didn't care to subject her backside to additional time on the ground, nor challenge his possession of the chair's seat with its protruding spring. She could have brought the stool over, she supposed. But that was almost as uncomfortable as being stuck with a spring in a place that didn't bear thinking about. It was especially disquieting to think about such a place when sitting within body heat sensing distance of a man who smelled far more deliciously, enticingly, masculine than a bitter enemy had the right to smell.

She squirmed on the arm of the chair, and not entirely from the lack of a place to put her legs. Glancing out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the part line of Snape's hair. For some reason, that ivory divide between the two cascades of glistening black looked... God help her... alluring. *Why must the man smell positively edible? Must control breathing... Must control squirming...*

Neville was going to owe her once she got out of here.

Snape was not thrilled with the situation. Actually, he was a little too thrilled, and that was the problem. He hadn't recalled any of his female students having such plump, shapely thighs. Then again, he had always made a point of looking only at faces, and never at bodies, unless there was an injury to assess. Bless whichever founder or governing board member had wisely decided to swaddle all those incipient succubae in shapeless, bulky robes. *Don't think of that moment in the corridor...he admonished himself. The traitorous thought sidled through his head, Yes, especially since she has other nice, plump, rounded parts besides her thighs...*

As his annoyance of the evening shifted on the arm of the chair, he could feel the heat of her body near his shoulder. Damn. He could ask her to sit on the chair's other arm so that the clearance he was giving the spring would separate them; but that would expose the rip in her jeans. He didn't know which was more trying...almost touching that shapely warmth, or having to glimpse forbidden, silky, skin. It was enough to make him wish that his 'deep down' good character were buried just a little deeper...

Brilliant. Now he was speaking in limericks, thinking in double entendres, and feeling like a hormonal sixth year while sitting next to a well-developed seventh year.

If he and Longbottom both survived the war, he'd find a way to make the idiot pay.

The only reference they had found so far that seemed to pertain to their hex was mention of a warlock struck by a backfiring wand who had subsequently been limited to speaking in rhyming couplets of increasing rudeness until his wife hit him upside the head with a hot frying pan. Of course, the side effect of the cure had been a rather flat, well-toasted head. Neither of them was that desperate...yet.

"I concur you are on the right track,

But there's still information we lack.

Contact seems key.

It's a shame you're a lady,

Otherwise I'd just give you a smack,"

he muttered, glaring pointedly at her.

A pleasant surprise is that

You turning that option down flat

You're not altogether a churl

Since you won't hit a girl.

You're just a colossal prat,"

she fired back, turning on him with such vehemence she managed to flop off the arm of the chair and right into his lap.

He *would* have tossed her to the floor and left it at that. She *would* have pushed away and perhaps spit an indignant limerick at him. But as soon as they came into contact, a wave of violet light rippled over them, causing both to freeze in that indicting position.

If Snape didn't say something quickly, he imagined he'd have trouble keeping his lips from finding something else to do. Oh, for a lapful of lovely, intelligent young woman at a more opportune time! As it was, he found himself leaning tantalizingly close to the wide-eyed beauty in his lap as he murmured,

"There are forms of touch I could choose

That you'd also deem churlish abuse..."

Abruptly, she cut in with,

"If you mean by this,

A caress or a kiss,

How do you know I'd refuse?"

They stared at each other in shock; whether it was more from the suggestive bent of the exchange or the fact that they had conversed within a single limerick, neither of them cared to examine. The violet shimmers became more pronounced.

Get her off your lap before she notices something under that pert little bum of hers besides your legs screeched a consortium of highly prudish and slightly ethical neurons.

"I cannot succumb to lust.

I would be breaking a trust."

Like dominoes forming a pattern, his oddly accommodating behavior, the presence of the strengthening potion, and the familiar feather, all tumbled into place in her mind.

"You don't teach anymore

It's not as if Dumbledore..."

You mean he's alive! You must!"

Hermione exclaimed and flung her arms around the neck of a very shocked Snape. He was even more shocked when she poured all the enthusiasm of her conclusion out through her lips, and into his.

She's worked it out. Relief, fear, elation, guilt, and increasingly, arousal were surging wildly through him, and he just wanted, if only for that delicious moment, to let go and be swept away. *She knows. And she might even trust me.* The thought was almost as heady as the kiss.

He didn't betray us. Dumbledore is alive! Professor Snape is still on our side, and wow... can he ever kiss... she thought giddily.

A minute ago, all she could think of was how to take advantage of the situation to get his wand away from him and use it to escape. Now, all she could think of was how to get his clothes away from him and relieve the tension that had been building since she first caught his scent. She tried to worry that it was only a side effect of the spell that was causing her to feel this way, but a practical (and randy) part of her mind argued that worry down.

The shimmer of violet intensified, clinging to both of them as surely as they clung to each other. Without much conviction, Snape tried to remove her hands from his neck. She only complied far enough to cup his face, leaning in to whisper with her soft lips against his ear,

"Contact is the answer, indeed.

We've read all there is here to read.

With every touch bold,

The hex loses some hold.

Some action is what we now need."

If the rather sizeable lump she was sitting upon was any indication, Hermione knew exactly what sort of action he was up for. And at the moment, she felt incredibly accommodating in that regard, to the point of happily going at the buttons of his shirt.

For his part, Severus decided that the bed was looking much more practical than the chair under the circumstances. Scooping up his violet-limned vixen, he deposited her on the narrow but functional pallet and forced himself to ask at least one more pertinent question before giving in.

"My dear, if we thusly continue,

I'll soon be all the way in you.

But I will desist

Though you're hard to resist

If you've not taken precautions as due."

He pointedly caressed her smooth belly, sincerely hoping she was using a Contraceptive Potion. Not that he wouldn't have settled for a dash of the venerable sixty-nine if that would suffice to break the hex; but he decided he'd prefer to see her lovely young breasts and expressive face while enjoying what she had to offer, rather than the more impersonal view along her legs.

Reflecting fleetingly on the fiercely passionate expression on Snape's face, Hermione decided that it had been worth it after all to fumble around cluelessly with Ron in the interests of 'not dying a virgin.' The contraceptive effects of the potion she'd used were good for three months at a stretch, and since her last dose was just before their falling out, she still had a month to go. It would have been a shame not to let that handsome cock she had just freed from its well-buttoned coop have free run of her range.

"I dealt with that well before;

It's a foolish step to ignore.

One may go in betting

On not exceeding petting,

And still find it progresses to 'more.'"

Limerick or not, that was the best thing he'd heard all week. It would have been an absolute bitch to try to hold back once he'd seen all that clever young Miss Granger had to offer. *Calling her Hermione seems rather in order*, he reflected, shoving clear the last inconvenient bits of fabric. *There's nothing prosaic about that name, and it goes so nicely with her classical shape. Her very tasty classical shape*, he corrected himself, sampling a tender bit of breast.

Hermione decided that Severus (he wasn't her professor any more, and 'that bastard' seemed awfully uncharitable for the man who was doing such nice things to her happy little body) was most unfairly underrated. A man whose lips could do *that* wasn't skinny, greasy-haired, or ugly. *Let's see... wiry would do for the body. Oooh, and lustrous...definitely lustrous for his hair.* She had both hands buried in it to her wrists, and it was actually quite enjoyable. *As for overall appearance... oh, my... oh, wow... such a lovely mouth, Severus... How about 'unconventionally attractive?'*

Having to do all this in silence was maddening, especially as one hot button after another was enthusiastically discovered and pushed on either part.

"Would that of this hex I were free

the range of my verbal talents you'd see,"

he purred seductively.

"Oh quit with the teasing

And give me more pleasing.

I want you all the way in me,"

she pleaded plaintively. Limericks, the telephone directory, who cared...as long as it was delivered by that voice, it was gorgeous.

He was happy to oblige, indeed, was unable to restrain himself from obliging. *Must hold out a bit longer, can't let the violet light subside without...*

"Unnh... Hermione," he gasped thickly, forcing his body to make a few more thrusts before he stiffened over her.

Frantically, she ground against him just a little harder, felt the last firm twitch of his cock inside her. "Severus!" she shrieked.

The violet glow exploded into white light and they collapsed together, panting and clutching each other close.

"Did it work?" she asked, breaking into an even wider grin when she felt no compulsion to add a rhyme.

"On several levels, it would seem," he purred, reveling in soft, warm woman and the restoration of his verbal acuity.

"Good. Then let's do that again. I want to be free to vocalize where appropriate, this time." And with that, she fastened her lips to Severus' again, initiating a second, less constrained, encounter.

They dozed briefly afterwards, each occasionally making some weak protest that it was high time Hermione left to reassure the rest of the Order that she was still in the land of the living. She evidently couldn't be bothered to let him up, and Severus was having difficulty summoning the motivation to remove her from his chest.

"Gods, you've turned into a wanton creature," he remarked. His tone was more appreciative than anything else. "I don't want to know what it would have been like to have you in my classroom with all this passion stirring beneath the surface."

"Speaking of Hogwarts... How did Headmaster Dumbledore, well...what happened, anyway?" she couldn't help asking.

"I suspect that if he told me, I still wouldn't understand. I trusted him when he insisted everything had to be done that way, but the reality..." He swallowed hard. "I might have killed myself over the whole sickening incident, except that he saved me the trouble by showing up and scaring me half to death. Of course, now that I've allowed myself to... give in to temptation with you, *he's* going to kill *me*. Assuming I survive the war."

"I'm an adult, and you're not my teacher. I'll vouch that it was all my naughty idea."

"Oh, yes. The sweet little Gryffindor good girl suddenly went wild and seduced the big, bad Death Eater/Spy. Of such likely stories the *Quibbler's* publishing juggernaut was built."

"Well, that was how it happened."

"Hmph."

Still moving reluctantly, he slid her aside and began to drape her clothes over her body, gently fastening hooks and buttons and straightening as he went along. Equally reluctantly, she submitted to being dressed. Her token defiance was to insist on returning the favor, slightly drawing out their remaining time.

"One moment." He detoured to the table and quickly scrawled several inches worth of messages, rolling the parchment quite small and sealing it with his wand. "Minerva will need this information. It's a little ahead of schedule, but it will save you some explaining. And I think you could use this." From a warded cabinet behind one of the other curtains, he removed a wand.

"It's not his, is it?" she asked. Even without trying it out, she could tell it was a man's wand, with a rather different magical feel to it than Severus'.

"Just a backup wand. Not to worry, it can be spared." He walked her to the mouth of the tunnel, but rather than Apparating, she stood looking at him as the woods turned from black to slightly grayish.

She procrastinated a moment longer, repairing the rip in her jeans. "I don't want anyone to get the wrong idea," she explained.

"It's going to cause an uproar if anyone gets the right idea," he retorted. "You really do need to leave," he added, then paradoxically gathered her close and caressed her hair and back.

She sighed against his chest, her warm breath puffing into a gap between buttons and causing him to hum softly with pleasure. "I know," she replied sadly. "I just don't want to. I feel so safe with you... Severus. I don't remember the last time I felt safe."

"Safety is an illusion right now, Hermione," he said, tilting her face up to dust it with light kisses as a reward for how appealing his name sounded on her lips.

"I know." She could have stayed all day just to hear him say her name. His voice was the perfect setting for it, like a frame made to complement the painting.

"We each have our work to do."

"At least I know now our goal is the same."

"Yes, but I'd like to delude myself into thinking that you are less likely to get killed in the process."

"If it makes you feel better. Can I delude myself into believing you're indestructible?"

"Consider me as tough as a cockroach, if you like."

She giggled. "Why do I have a difficult time seeing you in a roach motel?"

"Possibly because you haven't seen my house."

That elicited another squeak of laughter from Hermione, and Severus managed to favor her with a genuine smile, albeit a slightly rusty one.

"I want to see that smile again," she said softly.

He understood what she was trying to say. "I'll save it for you," he promised.

They kissed again. It was the richest kiss they'd shared yet, all soft brushings of lips and gentle touching of tongues. Although they could speak freely now, it seemed more appropriate to part without words, their final exchange being this act of eloquently silent sensuality,

She stepped back and Disapparated before she could change her mind.

Snape stared at the spot where Hermione had Disapparated, lost in thought...though not nearly so much so that he failed to notice the sound of fluttering wings, soon replaced by that of footsteps. Much younger sounding footsteps than he'd ever heard from that particular wizard, but something about them still unmistakably proclaimed 'Dumbledore.'

"How much of that did you hear?" Severus asked, when the sounds stopped just behind his left shoulder.

"Offhand, I'd say... all of it," Albus replied, his voice steady. "I trust that none of it was premeditated. I imagine if you had been planning a tryst, you would hardly have chosen to bring the young lady to one of my hiding places."

"Hmm."

"Haven't you anything stronger than that to say, my boy?"

"Yes, but I think I'll refrain for the moment."

"You do realize that if she were still your student..."

"...you'd remove my pertinent bits and present them to me, along with my walking papers?"

"No. I'd let Minerva do it."

"And yet you insist that skillful delegation of tasks is the least of your leadership abilities."

"However, since those conditions are not in effect, I will settle for asking your intentions towards Miss Granger."

"Truthfully... at this point, I just want both of us to live long enough to discover the answer to that question." He reflected on that a moment, then added, "Together."

"I believe I can accept that answer. So long as you invite me to the wedding."

Snape turned to offer an appropriate retort, but Albus was already walking off, chuckling. "It won't be long now," he called cryptically over his shoulder.

Hermione Apparated to the designated point near Grimmauld Place and hurried in...only to be ambushed by a hug from a very relieved Minerva McGonagall.

"We were worried sick, lass," she almost wept. "How did you manage to escape?"

"Professor McGonagall," Hermione said in a low voice, withdrawing the parchment from her pocket, "This is... an update on the situation."

Whatever else McGonagall had meant to say faded into a hard look. Before breaking the seal, she checked the parchment for traps. As she did so, a sweet, pure note sounded, so briefly they might have missed it. Gasping, Minerva unrolled the note and read it hungrily. Her eyes were oddly bright by the time she finished. Quickly, she took up quill and parchment to copy down a list. "Give this to Remus, but be subtle about it," she said to Hermione. "He's likely in the kitchen. And, my dear... thank you for confirming..." she couldn't quite bring herself to finish.

Hermione nodded and embarked on her errand. She realized as Remus greeted her effusively, and she slipped him the message from Professor McGonagall, that perhaps she should have washed thoroughly before getting within range of his sensitive nose.

"Hermione," he asked hesitantly, "When you were hit with the hex, what were your symptoms?"

"Limericks. I'd rather not talk about it," Hermione said truthfully.

Neville heard Hermione's voice and nearly fell over himself making his way into the kitchen. Plainly, it was her night to be hugged. "Thank Merlin you're safe!" he all but whimpered in relief. "Just in time, too. Harry is waking up...that's what I came here to tell you," he said, addressing this last bit to Remus.

"It might be best if he doesn't find out the circumstances of your little misadventure," Lupin interjected quietly, still looking Hermione over with an expression of disbelief.

Remus, you have no idea she thought. *Actually, judging by the look on your face, maybe you do.*

"Speaking of which, how did you get away? And what was the physical component of the hex? We discovered that some sort of action needed to be done to lift it." Neville allowed himself a relieved chuckle. "Macnair had to lay an egg to get his arms and voice back. I'd have paid good Galleons to have seen that."

Remus' expression said, plainly, he'd pay good Galleons to be as oblivious as was the young man with regards to the evidence of her solution to the hex.

Hermione smiled apologetically at the shocked werewolf, not exactly reassuring him with the faint blush and shy glance that seemed to confirm his suspicions. Ignoring the first part of Neville's question, she replied glibly, "Oh, it was quite all right, actually. Sort of an... itch... that just needed to be properly scratched."

Author's Note:

I apologize deeply for the lack of logic, literary merit, or Jarveys in this story. I solemnly swear I will never again answer a challenge unless I can come up with a better idea than this. I especially apologize for the chicken coop analogy. All I can say is, there was a poultry vibe going on with this story. Perhaps that's how it came to be so fowl.