

Nor did she bother him at lunch or dinner, choosing to sit at the other end of the table and converse with other members of the staff. He nearly tore off Flitwick's head when the little professor asked him a question.

The week continued to drift by slowly. True to her word, the only conversation between the two had been just prior to lunch on Thursday when Hermione had stopped, standing by the empty chair, to ask if he had any Colour Changing Potion. She wanted to show her class the difference in colours that resulted from using the potion rather than the proper charm.

"I can have a batch ready for you tomorrow at lunch time."

"Thank you, Professor. If you'll excuse me..."? In seconds she was off to the other end of the table, taking her now customary seat next to Weasley. Idly, Severus wondered what would happen to their camaraderie when Weasley's wife and child returned to the castle.

The rest of the week passed much the same. The silence seemed to loom out at him from every corner; where he once found the quiet soothing to his nerves, it now seemed to amplify how alone he'd become.

One week turned into the next, and still the witch remained true to her vow, never more than a polite nod or gesture in his direction before quickly and quietly moving on.

It'd been almost three weeks now, and she was all he could think about.

He was loath to admit it, but he missed her company. Where he had berated her for her inane chatter about books and articles in the staff room, he now found the silence oppressive, the quiet stifling. He'd almost bookmarked an unusual article on the combined use of charms and potions, thinking Hermione might be interested in it. It was the type of article she used to share with him.

He stopped himself before marking the page. Silently, he cursed his existence and the world around him. How had it come to this? Was this her plan all along? Seeds of doubt, the barest hint of a suggestion, tended to grow once they were planted. He had only to replay her comment in his mind, accompanied by the images he'd conjured to fit various scenarios, to know he was becoming obsessed with the witch. Now that she was no longer around, she was all he thought of.

I could be tied naked to your bed, begging you to take me; I doubt you'd even notice me.

He was absolutely positive he'd notice her. He would fuck her within an inch of her life before demanding she release him from this... spell, this geas, this whatever she had him under. Then he could be done with her once and for all.

Thursday night's rounds found him in rare form. He'd deducted eighty-five points total, four from his own house, during the course of the evening. He'd seen Granger duck into the library in an effort to avoid him. *She* was avoiding *him*! He would have followed, if only to give her a piece of his mind, but he was blindsided by Peeves, the idiotic poltergeist topping the suit of armour to his right while cackling loudly before zooming off in the opposite direction. By the time he'd righted the armour, Hermione was nowhere to be seen.

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Severus barely glanced at the house hourglasses as he made his way to the Great Hall for breakfast. It was a sure bet the other Heads of House would be annoyed with the amount of points he'd deducted last night. A quick glance, followed by a slower look, showed something was not right. The totals were still the same as they had been at dinner last night. None of the points he'd deducted were reflected by the totals.

"Would you care to tell me what the problem is?" McGonagall's thick Scottish brogue accosted him from behind.

"You restored the points."

"What is going on? For almost a month now, you've been betwixt and between. Eighty-five points? Really, Severus, what is the matter?"

"Headmistress." Severus bowed stiffly to his friend and colleague before heading into the Great Hall, choosing not to answer the angry witch. Not even sure if he could explain the reasons for his current behavior to himself, let alone her.

Minerva shook her head, watching the 'tail' of Severus's robes disappear through the open doorway. "What has gotten into him?"

A familiar chuckle rang out from the painting to her right. "I'm sure he will be just fine, Minerva. Give the boy time."

Minerva snorted. "Boy? He's over forty, Albus, not exactly a child."

"He'll be fine, trust me. He just needs to forgive himself before he can join the living."

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The return of Weasley's wife, Fleur, and their infant child, back from an extended visit to her parents, did little to dampen Hermione's spirits. The two could be seen at the High Table cooing and aching over the insufferable infant.

McGonagall tapped her goblet, the sound amplified to attract the students' attention. "Quiet, please. As you know, tomorrow is the last Hogsmeade weekend before the Christmas holidays. I know many of you will be shopping for gifts for your families. Please refrain from purchasing items from Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes as gifts. Most of the products in their store are on the forbidden list and will be confiscated by Mr Filch should he find them. Once confiscated, the items will be disposed of. The forbidden list is located in Mr Filch's office for those wishing to read it. You can be sure Professor Snape and Professor Weasley will keep a sharp eye on those entering the joke store."

Severus groaned. He was stuck with Weasley. Was he forever destined to be the butt of some cosmic joke? The bell sounded, signaling ten minutes until classes began. Reluctantly, he rose to his feet; to make matters worse, he had double potions with fourth year Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs to teach this morning.

Without warning, he was knocked back into his chair, the air knocked out of him as Hermione landed unceremoniously in his lap, the sound of ripping cloth the only noise breaking the sudden quiet.

"L'Oh mon! Re you all right, 'Ermionee?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm sorry, Professor Snape; my heel must have caught on the hem of my robe. Are you all right?"

He could feel the soft curve of her buttocks, *his* own body responding as she wriggled in his lap. She had momentarily fallen back, a warm weight against his chest, her hair riotously hitting him in the face. The smell of her shampoo, Herbal, gently teasing his nostrils. Reflexively, Severus's hands closed around Hermione's waist as Bill tried to pull her from his lap. It only lasted for a few seconds, a gentle tug of war between the two, before Severus realized what he was doing and reluctantly helped the witch to her feet.

"Professor Snape?"

"It's... I'm fine." His voice was gruff, even to his own ears. Severus watched, spellbound, as Hermione drew the hem of her robe up to inspect the tear. He was treated to a shapely leg disappearing under her knee-high skirt. His blood pounded in his veins as he added this new image to the current catalog of pictures he had of Hermione in his head. Other parts of his anatomy chimed in, lest he forget the feel of a 'lapful of wriggling Hermione'.

"Ripped." A two-minute warning bell sounded somewhere in the building. "And no time to fix it now. Sorry, Professor." Hermione gathered up her robes and was off. "Bill, Fleur, see you later."

Bill looked questioningly at Severus. "Snape, are you all right?"

"Quite." Straightening to his full height, Severus pulled his robes around him. "I hardly think a mere girl can hurt me. Weasley, don't you have a class to teach?"

Fleur smiled. "Girl, no. But what of zee woman she has become?"

Severus huffed as he pushed past the two. "Really."

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It had to stop. His traitorous mind continued to bombard him with images of Hermione when he least expected. He'd thought of going to her and asking her to release the spell. Still, she'd kept her promise. Staff meetings were infinitely more boring now that she didn't speak to him. He found himself listening for the sound of her voice and then berating himself for acting like a hormonal teenager.

Mealtime had become routine, merely a process for his body to acquire nourishment. Even attempts at discussing journal articles with Flitwick were a disaster, the little professor not interested in reading the current literature.

True, his scheduled patrols went faster than before, but he no longer found the routine relaxing, merely tedious now as the quiet assaulted him from every corner.

Life had become quiet, colourless, and he wasn't quite sure what to do about it.

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Reluctantly, he set out Saturday morning for Hogsmeade with Bill.

"Minerva asked that we watch the students entering and leaving my brothers' shop." Bill clapped his hands in front of him, the cold tearing at the edges of his dragon-hide gloves.

Severus raised a brow questioningly. "You're really going to stop students from purchasing your own brothers' products?"

Bill smiled. "I've already told Fred and George about the ban on their jokes. Fred thought they could owl home whatever purchases the students make. The store makes its sales, and Minerva doesn't have to deal with exploding products and giant chickens."

"I see. Well, far be it from me to stand in the way of commercial success. I've an order to pick up from Flourish and Blotts before waiting out the remainder of today's sentence at the Three Broomsticks." With a nod, Severus set out for the bookstore.

Bill chuckled as he watched Severus's robes flowing out behind him. There were days he thought the Potions master almost tolerable, if the sarcasm wasn't directed at him.

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A stack of new books caught his eye. Their titles left him to wonder if he really needed another compendium on potion ingredients when the sound *of* her voice caught his attention. Quietly, he moved to the end of the aisle, staying back from sight.

"This is wonderful. I can't tell you how long I've been waiting for this book."

Severus could just make out the book the witch held in her hands. The title, embossed in gold, along the spine of the book read *Forbidden Brews: The Ancient Art of Potion Making* by E. Tryson.

"We've had several calls for it. Unfortunately, this is the only copy I've been able to locate so far. Your name is first on the list, so the first choice goes to you. If you don't want the book..."

"No, I want it. Thank you. Did you get any of the other books on my list?" Hermione clutched the ancient tome to her chest as the young man pulled a small stack of books out from under the counter.

"I was able to find two of the books you requested..."

He'd heard enough. Severus moved away for the end of the aisle. His name, he knew, had been on that list, too. When had the witch requested the book? And now she had the only copy? He would just have to figure a way to get her to part company with the book. Severus's mind moved into automatic, selecting and rejecting scenarios as he walked to the Three Broomsticks.

Two weeks passed, and Severus was still unable to come up with a plausible way to part the witch from her copy of *Forbidden Brews: The Ancient Art of Potion Making*. The students had left a few hours ago, those still remaining for the Christmas holiday tucked away in their common rooms until morning. The castle was blessedly quiet, a quiet that Severus now welcomed.

His mind was still turning over the puzzle of Hermione as he made his way toward the library. He tried to speak with her on more than one occasion over the previous weeks, only to be answered politely before she swiftly moved on. He supposed it was his own fault. She was merely mirroring his normal attitude toward ... well, pretty much everyone.

'Yes, but you don't harbor nude images of the others in your mind,' he reminded himself. 'Damn, the witch!'

Severus turned down a little used corridor, a shortcut between the second and third floors, when he ran smack into Hermione. "Professor Granger?"

Hermione sighed; it figured. After all the time she'd spent avoiding him the last few weeks, who should she run into, now, of all times? "Professor Snape."

Severus stepped back. Or rather tried to step back. Questioningly, he looked at Hermione before following her gaze to the mistletoe hanging over their heads.

"This is ridiculous. There hasn't been any spelled mistletoe since Albus was Headmaster. Minerva always found the practice childish."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "While that might be true, we seem to be trapped. I suppose there is only one way out of this. Perhaps a quick kiss on the cheek will satisfy the spell. I promise you, I have no intention of foisting myself on your good nature any longer than necessary."

She blushed as she felt the rumble of his laughter, the spell forcing them to stand close together.

"Perhaps I was a bit... hasty when last we spoke."

"Hasty? You were happy to see the back of me!"

"Professor Granger, while I may not have appeared to enjoy your constant chattering, there were times that I found the conversation ... interesting."

"Chattering? Fine, just kiss me so I can get out of here. I don't want to spend time with you any more than you want to spend time with me."

"Granger..."

"Just kiss me already, Snape."

Who was he to deny the lady's request? Severus wrapped his arms around Hermione, one hand tangling in her hair, the other at her waist, pulling her tightly against his body, and lowered his mouth to hers. Gently, he brushed his lips against hers before increasing the pressure. His tongue snaked forward, dancing erotically against the seam of her mouth, requesting entrance. Her quiet moan was all the assurance he needed that the witch in his arms was willing. Slowly, he deepened the kiss.

It was several minutes before the two broke apart. Hermione's eyes glazed with lust as she viewed Severus in a new light.

"Perhaps we can retire somewhere more private and discuss when talking is appropriate and when it is not?" Severus leaned in for another kiss, chuckling softly as Hermione pulled him to her.

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"I still don't approve of spelling mistletoe, but it did serve its purpose. I'll retrieve it as soon as they've left the corridor." Minerva sat back, the surveillance globe glowing faintly on her desk.

"I told you it would work. Severus has been dancing around her for weeks. It just took a nudge in the right direction to start the fireworks going." Albus smiled as he watched the couple kiss; it was good to know that Severus might find happiness at last. "Aren't those surveillance globes something? Arthur Weasley said they were based on some type of Muggle device, closed circuit globing or something."

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"Why don't we go back to my quarters? I picked up a new book a few weeks ago that I've been dying to show you. I was finally able to find a copy of Tryson's *Forbidden Brews: The Ancient Art of Potion Making*." Hermione wound her arm through the crook of his as they moved along the corridor.

Stopping, Severus pulled her to him. "I think," he said, lowering his voice to a silky purr, "this may be one of those times when talking is overrated. Perhaps we can examine the book... later?"

"Mmm, later is good." Gently, Hermione nipped along the line of his jaw. A shudder ran through her as she felt him cup her arse. A ripple, starting somewhere around her navel and running south, took her breath away. The sudden realization that he wanted her, his erection hard against her hip, sent a new round of electricity flowing through her blood. "Later. Maybe tomorrow. Or next week."

At some point they would have to move to his quarters. He had every intention of seeing her tied and spread out on his bed. He was sure the reality of seeing her naked would far surpass any image he had conjured if the feel of her through her robes was any indication. "There's no hurry. We have two weeks until the students return."

Severus smiled; for the first time ever, he was going to get the girl.

And the book.

Finally, the world was in balance as far as he was concerned.

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A/N: Ah, can't say exactly where this plot bunny came from. The first few lines popped into my head, and the rest seemed to follow. Something light for the coming holidays. I believe there is a mish-mash of the Xmas challenges all stirred to together here, specifically the idea of spelled mistletoe. Hopefully, I've presented it in a new light.

To one and all Happy Holidays!

A grateful thank you to Southern_Witch_69, who beta'd this piece of holiday fluff for me. The mistakes, however, are still mine.

Pearle