

Valentine's Eyes

by SS Lupin

Hermione consumes a chocolate created by the Weasley twins and can't take her eyes away from Severus Snape. My response to GinnyW's "Valentine's Day Chocolates" Challenge at the Yahoo!Group, Potter_Place.

Chapter 1. A Prologue of Sorts

Chapter 1 of 9

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Harry Potter stared at the dancing flames in the fireplace. He counted the sparks flying from the logs, each one representing a day.

One, two, three, four more days until the worst day.

Valentine's Day was never Harry's favorite holiday; it was barely tolerated in his life. Growing up, the shower of love shared by the Dursleys was never extended to him. When he was twelve, the feelings of loneliness once associated with the holiday turned into utter embarrassment with Lockhart's mess at Hogwarts. His fifth year only heightened these feelings when he gaped at Cho Chang's sobbing face on his first date. Seven years later, Harry faced a bittersweet breakup with Ginny Weasley on the fourteenth of February. A relationship beginning in the midst of a war had never let the pair have a chance to know each other – and to love.

Valentine's Day had always symbolized embarrassment, the end of a relationship, the mangling of a relationship, or a miserable combination of the three.

Yet this year, things could be different. A new relationship had begun long after Voldemort's downfall, this one more confusing and hopeful than the past. Luna Lovegood was sleeping against him, her even breathing rising and falling against his chest. A ring was resting in his pocket, waiting for the holiday to come.

Harry wondered about the state of his friends around this time of year. Hermione and Ron, suffering from the same hormonal problems as Ginny and Harry's situation, had broken off their relationship once Voldemort was dead and their lives were ensured. Ron hadn't wandered for long before he found love and marriage with Lavender Brown. As for Hermione...

The flames changed from orange to green, jarring Harry from his thoughts.

"Seeking permission to enter, from the Floo Messaging Center," said a disembodied bearded head floating in the flames.

"Come right in," an awakened Luna said, stretching her arms from her nap.

The head entered the room, attached to a short, hairy body wrapped in a toga. The dwarf scratched his chest and pulled out a scroll of parchment and two pink cards. He handed the cards to Luna and Harry and tugged at his toga.

"Blimey, this thing itches," he muttered. In a louder voice, he said:

"An invitation from the Ministry of Magic,

Do not worry, we warn of nothing tragic.

Valentine's Day is almost here,

A time to hold your loved one dear.

Snuggling close in a secluded niche,

Nuzzling your beloved wizard or witch.

Come celebrate, one and all,

You are invited to the Valentine's Day Ball.

Held on the evening of Monday, the fourteenth of February

Bring your love- do not be wary:

Valentine's violets, red rosy hearts,

Come and learn of love at Hogwarts.

"Regards, Rufus Scrimgeour, Ministry of Magic, and Headmistress Minerva McGonagall, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." The dwarf rolled up the parchment and extended his palm to the surprised couple.

Harry turned pale at the display, but Luna squeezed his hand. *This Valentine's Day might turn out differently, after all.*

Luna smiled at the dwarf and stuck her hand into the sofa, where she found two Knuts.

Handing the coins to the surly-faced dwarf, Luna said, "There are a few Galleons that could go your way if you stayed for a cup of tea and answered a few questions about the relationship between dwarves and Crumple-Horned Snorkacks for the *Quibbler*."

"O' course...I have a few more messages to send, but a few Galleons now is better than a few Knuts in tips later," said the puzzled dwarf as he followed Luna into the kitchen.

Harry smiled to himself as he watched Luna boil the tea in a frying pan. The ball would most likely turn into a disaster for him, but he could always propose to Luna that evening. As he read over the invitation in his hand, Harry wondered who else would attend...

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Author's Note: If you feel this story sounds familiar, it's because I originally posted it about a year ago. It was my first completed fic, and even though it may have some faults, I'm still quite proud of the story after editing and posting it once more.

Chapter 2. Filia

Chapter 2 of 9

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Hermione sighed into her bathtub and watched the water ripple away from her. She shivered from the increasing chill in the air. Hermione reached for her wand on the nearby sink, but her fingers brushed against another object.

She sighed again and grabbed both items. As she muttered a warming charm to heat the water, Hermione reread the pink card in her hand.

The poem, for all its sickeningly sweet sappiness, had made its point. She was invited to some ridiculous ball for Valentine's Day, and at Hogwarts, no less. Hermione laughed. *How did Professor McGonagall agree to such nonsense?* she thought as she traced her finger against the Headmistress' signature.

Of course, Hermione would be socially obligated to attend. How could she not go to such a grand spectacle – she who had helped defeat Voldemort and his Death Eaters alongside the Boy Who Lived? Why should she bother with all of this silliness?

Perhaps to see your friends? A stray thought queried.

Ah, but there was no point in that. Ron and Lavender had their family, and Harry and Luna were probably on their way to starting one. Ginny would most likely get her into some trouble with a sore sight of a wizard...she always did when Hermione agreed to go out with her on an evening excursion.

If Hermione did go to the ball, she would have to use her accustomed post as a wallflower. Years of annual victory celebrations after the war and Order of Merlin ceremonies had taught Hermione to sit at the sidelines.

But what if I could find lo – someone I liked? Hermione snorted at the thought and set the invitation and wand back on the sink. She then reached for a glass of wine that was waiting to be consumed.

As if that was likely, she thought while sipping on the wine. *I have spent five glorious years on my own, and will spend another five years as such!*

"Cheers to being single!" Hermione hiccupped as she clinked her glass against the edge of the tub.

As Hermione submerged her head underwater, she still hadn't answered the question –*would she go?*

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"Are we in it, or *are we in it?*" George waved the pink invitation in front of his brother's face.

Fred snatched the card from his brother's hand and read it over again. "Could I just think about this for a second?"

George took the card back and hid it behind his back. As Fred tried to grab it from him, George said, "It will be right fun, it will!" He used his other arm to wrestle Fred down to the floor.

"I never said it wouldn't," Fred gasped as he flipped George over and stood over him. "It's just that the antidote won't be ready for another week or so—"

"It was your plan from the start – you executed the first step before you even told me what it was that you were doing!" George pretended to get up and grabbed Fred's foot instead.

Fred shook off George's attack and sat on a chair. Their chair. The whole Weasley's Wizard Wheezes Shop and the flat above it were theirs. The Hogsmeade branch of the company, formerly known as Zonko's Joke Shop, was being renovated as a store and manufacturing centre. It would be a great risk to what they had to carry on with the plan... and yet... Fred placed his head in his hands.

"You're right – I'm just nervous, that's all," said Fred as George went over to him and placed his hand on Fred's shoulder. That was precisely what he needed.

George cursed, pulling remnants of the well-aimed water balloon out of his hair.

"It never gets old, George, it never gets old." Fred grinned and picked up the fallen invitation from the floor.

George shook his head, splashing water onto his brother before muttering a charm to dry himself.

"Neither will our plan," he said while staring at the dampened pink card in Fred's hand.

Chapter 3. Ego and Amicita

Chapter 3 of 9

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"This is ridiculous and absurd! Preposterous, dimwitted...and downright *stupid!*"

Headmistress McGonagall looked up from her breakfast and stared at Severus. She had always known him to be an articulate man. If he had ever used that word, it would usually be to describe his students...not for—

"—The ball will be a waste of time and energy," Snape muttered to himself. He held his breath and let it out slowly. He needed to handle this situation with more subtlety; outbursts were not like him. Neither was carrying a pink card in his robes without any intention of letting it go.

Snape waited until the end of breakfast before making a second attempt.

"Do you think that it is wise that Hogwarts will be used as a dance hall for the Ministry of Magic?" Snape asked as he walked beside Minerva through the corridors.

"When you say it in that manner, no I do not." The Headmistress huffed and increased her pace.

"Besides," she added, "Minister Scrimgeour made a good offer."

"And what would this offer entail?"

It was Snape's turn to stare when Minerva's cheeks turned a shade of pink.

"I assure you that Hogwarts' name will be upheld in the best light throughout the entire ball," said Minerva once she cleared her throat.

"This is an academic institution!" Snape said in frustration. "I cannot believe that you decided to host such a spectacle without speaking with me first. I am Deputy Headmaster, after all." Minerva did not respond. Snape looked ahead and saw that they were soon approaching the gargoyle statue. His mind raced to find another argument.

"And what of the students? You cannot expect them to be holed up in their quarters while hundreds of other wizards and witches enter the school."

"You're right, Severus. All the proper security measures will be in place the night of the ball. In addition to safety, the fifth, sixth, and seventh year students and their dates are invited to attend the festivities." They had reached the statue, and Minerva said the password: "Flèche Erronée."

As Minerva ascended the stairway, she said:

"If you are so concerned about the welfare of our students, then you must attend the ball as well."

Snape tried to follow the Headmistress, but he only succeeded in running into a stone wall where McGonagall and the stairwell had been.

He snarled, rubbing a hardening bump on his oily scalp. *The dunderheads will pay for this*, he thought as he headed for the dungeons.

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Several days after her intoxicated bath, Hermione sat at her desk writing a report for Department of International Magical Cooperation. She set her quill next to the parchment with satisfaction and watched the ink shine in the candlelight. It was her best yet, and Hermione smiled at her work. Her happiness faded, however, when she discovered that her conclusion could use a few more sentences...

A knock on the door startled Hermione from her work, making her jump and knock her scrolls and quills to the floor.

She rose from her chair and went to the door.

"Hullo, Hermione!" yelled Ginny once Hermione opened the door. She sobered somewhat when she saw the mess in Hermione's home. Ginny's twin brothers paid no mind to what was happening in front of them and proceeded to push their way inside the house.

"You see, Hermione," started George.

"—We had a bet on what would startle you the most, George and I—" continued Fred.

"I thought it would be Apparating and saying 'boo,' Fred thought knocking on the door would work better."

"I told you I was right, George. I tried Apparating here on her birthday last year, and the reaction—" Fred broke off, his blush outlining each of his freckles.

"I threatened to curse your bits off," Hermione remembered with a grin. While she was annoyed that they managed to make a mess of her work, she was glad that her friends were there all the same.

Ginny noticed the disorder on the floor and waved her wand to put things in order.

"Sorry about that," Ginny muttered as the last parchment settled on Hermione's desk.

"Don't worry about it. I was only working—"

"Working tonight?" Ginny couldn't help but interrupt.

"Why not?" Hermione asked.

"Why do you think we're dressed? Well, Fred and George are changing later..."

Hermione looked at Ginny's glittering red robes and remembered. "Oh right...the ball..."

"You aren't going?" George asked.

"Of course not. She didn't even know there was a ball." Fred frowned.

"Well, I have been busy." Hermione gestured to her desk. "You can Floo me later and tell me about it, Ginny."

"I was planning that you'd be there with us," Ginny said, grinning.

"I don't have anything to wear...and I have a report to finish!" said Hermione as she rushed to her desk.

"You mean this?" George held up the parchment over Hermione's head.

"Yes, that! Give it back, George!" Hermione tried to get her work, but George simply spelled it to fly into Fred's hand.

"Don't worry, Hermione." Ginny's grin widened as she used Hermione's words against her. "By the sheer size of it, the report must be done already. And as much as an uptight, perfectionist prick Percy is, he doesn't want to read another beastly-sized report about cauldron leaks."

"It is *not* about cauldrons, thank you very much." Hermione tried to move past George to get to Fred and her parchment. "It is a study on creating antidotes for experimental potions. It will be largely useful for the Ministry, as well as other wizarding sectors throughout the world and—" Hermione broke off from her speech and noticed that Fred and George were giving each other odd looks.

"Give me the report, now."

"Why bother, when we can send it to the Ministry for you?" George moved to let Hermione pass him.

"And I can get you ready for the ball," Ginny said.

"What about Crookshanks? I can't leave him alone tonight without a sitter." Hermione advanced upon Fred and the parchment.

Fred took a step back with a gleam in his eyes. "George and I can watch him for the evening."

"Deliver my mail and watch my cat?" Hermione stopped and crossed her arms. She did not like the look on either of the twins, but Ginny's pouting face helped change her mind.

"Fine, I'll go." Ginny's face lit up. "But if I hear from your brother that the report has one smudge on it, I will hex you to hell and back."

"What about a tear in the paper?" asked Fred. When Hermione reached for her wand, he jumped back. George picked up a snarling Crookshanks, and the pair Disapparated.

"Thank Merlin they're gone! I have so much work to do with you." Ginny grabbed Hermione's hand and led her to the bedroom.

Hermione looked down at her old robe and felt her braided hair. "I guess you do."

"I didn't mean it like that — actually, I do," Ginny admitted as she examined Hermione. "Look what I got for you," Ginny said as she pulled out a sickle-sized piece of fabric from her pocket. With a whispered *Engorgio*, the fabric grew to be a set of bright blue robes with silver arrows embroidered throughout the garment.

Hermione smiled and said an inner prayer of thanks that the dress wasn't bright pink. "Gin, you are crazy."

"I know, I love you, too — now get cleaned up and dressed — quickly, please, I need as much time as possible to tame your hair."

Hermione hugged her friend and ran to the loo, her new robes clutched to her chest.

Chapter 4. Ego, Part II and Caritas

Chapter 4 of 9

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Snape was not enjoying himself that evening.

He would rather be called to have a few more raids with Voldemort's Death Eaters and a *Crucio* or two in the process when compared to the torture he was facing.

Everything was pink. The candles floating above the Great Hall were charmed pink, the benches and tables rearranged by the walls were pink even the bloody walls were pink!

And where there wasn't pink, there was red. Most of the guests wore in dress robes of different shades of the insulting color. It seemed that the witches and wizards had the same aversion to pink as Severus; except for Draco Malfoy, who sneered at the rest of the guests as he strutted about in raspberry-colored robes.

Snape couldn't help but have an inkling of pride for his godson when he came out of the cauldron soon after Voldemort's death. After so many oppressive years under the roof of his now deceased father, Draco lived a fulfilling life, enjoying his inheritance and dating as many gay wizards as he could find.

He conversed with Draco for some time, learning of the latest single wizards (whom Draco expressed extreme interest in), latest single witches (whom Snape dismissed with a grunt), and latest fashion trends for high-end wizarding society. Snape nodded in approval; he had been looking for a suitable new pair of dragon-hide boots for some time, and a few of the black low-heeled variety that Draco had described appealed to him.

When Draco had left him to investigate a "catch" on the other end of the hall, Snape returned to his sarcastic inner commentary on the Ball.

While sipping on a glass of red punch served by a house-elf clad in a red pillowcase, Snape scowled at its overly sweet flavor. He looked at the enchanted ceiling for some means of escape, but only saw a night sky twinkling with red and pink stars.

If only he had someone to converse intelligently with. Since he was forced to remain at the party, most of his colleagues were patrolling the halls for troublesome students. Snape found it amusing that his solitary work in catching delinquents required a small troop of professors.

Yet there was a chance he could find someone up to no good. With that idea, Snape scanned the ballroom there had to be a wayward student to deduct house points from.

Instead, Snape found his eyes locked upon those of a gorgeous witch in blue robes, who had just entered the Great Hall with a redheaded witch.

His lips thinned when he realised who he was staring at, but his eyes kept their hold on her.

~*~

"That was a great way to start the evening," Hermione muttered into Ginny's ear.

"So he's interested in you. It's been many years since you've been in the Potions classroom." Hermione frowned at Ginny. *It looked like he wanted to kill me or ravage- oh.*

While Hermione stood in the whirlpool of people, she felt herself being guided through the crowd. Ginny had dragged Hermione out of her confused thoughts and into the smiling faces of Harry and Luna. *Although Harry's face does look a bit strained,* Hermione admitted to herself.

Before hellos could be exchanged, Luna said in a dreamy voice: "We're getting married."

In the following minutes, Hermione and Ginny were regaled with the tale of Harry and Luna's proposal, which involved a kneeling Luna, a hooting Hedwig, and a mishap which included a poorly-timed visit by Luna's father via Floo and the ring bouncing into the fireplace.

Ron and Lavender appeared at the end of the engagement story, and the account had to be repeated again by the enjoyment of all and at the expense of Harry's embarrassment. After another showing of Luna's ring, Lavender revealed the news that she was pregnant for the fourth time.

"Merlin knows how we'll be able to manage this brood...I'm grateful that Molly can withstand the occasional babysitting. And can you believe that this here will be twins?" Lavender said whilst Ron laid a proud hand on his wife's stomach.

"I hope they don't come out like those two," Ginny said with a glance at the entrance. The twins had arrived, and no one could tell them that they hadn't dressed for the occasion. They wore scarlet Muggle tuxedos, pink ruffled dress shirts, and pink ties with a pattern of candy conversation hearts.

"Don't you look like something," said Hermione as the hearts on Fred's tie sang, "Be mine, Valentine. I want to make your heart shine."

"You look like idiots," Ginny said.

"Why thank you, dear sister...fair Hermione," said George, handing a red rose to the woman in blue.

"I believe we're at the party," Fred said in a low voice. "Let's go."

Hermione stared at their retreating figures and barely noticed as her friends began to leave the circle formed. The first to go were Ron and Lavender, eager to share their news with the rest of the wizarding community. Ginny left soon after, one arm linked with Neville Longbottom. When Hermione realised the thinning group turned into an unbalanced trio, she urged Luna and Harry to find a secluded niche of their own as stated in the invitation.

When she was alone, Hermione found a vacant chair and nursed a drink offered to her by a house-elf.

Here we go again, Hermione thought as she downed the contents of the glass in a single gulp.

~*~

Snape saw the Weasley twins split to opposite ends of the Great Hall and knew that they were up to something.

Fred was conversing at the far wall with Minerva and Scrimgeour while George walked toward an uncomfortable Miss Granger. *Most likely to ask her to dance, the sod.*

Hermione kept shaking her head in a definite 'no,' but Weasley continued to talk to her. Snape decided to use the situation for his amusement and strode in the direction of the couple. He stopped his movements, however, when Minerva's voice, heightened by a *Sonorus*, boomed throughout the room.

"Good evening, witches and wizards. Welcome to the Valentine's Day Ball, hosted by Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in cooperation with the Ministry of Magic." Minerva paused and let Minister Scrimgeour stand, her hand gripping his.

"As you know, Fred and George Weasley, former Hogwarts students, were invited and are in attendance at the ball tonight. Please give your undivided attention to Fred Weasley," Minerva indicated a bright red platform in the middle of the hall, "who has a speech for us in spirit of the festivities."

When the applause had subsided, Fred spoke. "Hullo all. Tonight, George and I bring you a delight, courtesy of Weasley's Wizard Wheezes.

"If you look above your heads, you will see a floating heart above each of you." The crowd looked up to view their individual pink and red foil hearts. Snape scowled at what appeared to be a foil-wrapped bat flapping its wings above his head.

"Each of the hearts is a chocolate filled with the strongest love potion...haha, only kidding," amended Fred. He eased the nervous faces of most of the guests, save for a once-hopeful group of fifth years.

"In fact, there are only chocolates and nothing more, though you may find a surprise in one of them. You won't be able to keep your eyes off of it! And to top it all off, this has been pre-approved by Minister Scrimgeour." With a flourish, Fred pulled out a parchment with the Ministry's seal stamped on the bottom of it. Scrimgeour's face went pale, but Minerva maintained a giddy smile on her face as her hand *and* arm were entwined with the Minister.

Snape's eyes widened in response to the display. *Who is that woman, and what has she done with Minerva? Snape wondered with alarm.*

~*~

Hermione watched Fred with mild amusement and Professor McGonagall with a stronger sense of alarm. *What in Merlin's name has gotten into the woman?* she asked herself as the Transfiguration Mistress ran a finger along Minister Scrimgeour's arm.

A sparkle in the air caught Hermione's eye, and she realized that the little red heart was lowering itself into her hand. Her fingers closed around the chocolate when Professor Snape approached her.

"I would strongly suggest that you wouldn't consume that, Miss Granger. Only Loki and his minions would know what sorcery is hidden in those chocolates," Snape said while sneering at George.

Hermione had every intention of telling Snape where to put his words when she saw Snape's bat-chocolate hovering a few inches away from his ear. She smirked and replied, "You're only sore that your chocolate is a reflection of your true character." With that said, Hermione unwrapped her little heart and popped the chocolate into her mouth.

With the last melted bit of chocolate sliding down her throat, Hermione's smirk turned into a full-blown smile as she felt nothing happening to her. She met Snape's dark eyes and laughed. "See? Nothing wrong with them."

"Everything is fine. Right George?" Hermione turned to face the redhead, but only found her eyes still focused on Snape.

He was the only thing she could lay her eyes on.

Chapter 5. Vereor

Chapter 5 of 9

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Hermione glared at Snape, even though she wanted to focus her anger at George.

She wasn't the only one; cries of frustration, anger, and fear echoed throughout the Great Hall.

"What did you do?" Hermione cried.

Fred and George looked slightly terrified by the chaos around them, but their grins remained on their faces as if they were going to crack without them. Fred leaped off of the podium and began to counsel couples or trios affected by the spell, and George provided a sequel to his brother's speech.

"The chocolates only have a temporary spell on them – there is no need to worry," he said as he tried to reach the podium.

"The potion within the chocolates only causes those who consume it to gaze only upon their loved ones."

"Or upon the first person they happen to see," Snape remarked.

"The spell is only temporary, as said before, it's broken with the kiss of your loved one."

"If I hear 'loved one' one more time..." Hermione said through gritted teeth.

"Well, Miss Granger, would you get on with it?" Severus looked down at Hermione with a bored look on his face.

Hermione leaned into Snape with a look of hatred in her eyes. "Never," she spat. Snape took a step backwards, for the smell of liquor in Hermione's breath almost made him dizzy.

She tried to turn away, but a feeling of extreme nausea came over her. Her stomach jumped, her throat tingled, and her tongue began to produce excess amounts of saliva with every extra moment her eyes were not upon her former Potions teacher.

"My, my, Miss Granger has grown so ill at the very sight of me," the man said sardonically as he watched her retch at his feet.

Hermione could do nothing but revert her gaze back to him and wipe her mouth with the sleeve of her robes.

George sighed and cleaned the mess before him with a wave of his wand. "Now he'll never kiss you...as disgusting as that scenario is."

Hermione cursed at George and wished she could do some other curses in his direction. "Don't you have an antidote for this?"

"Still in development," George said beside her.

Hermione wanted to say a great many things to George but held her tongue. She clenched her teeth and bared them in what appeared to be a smile.

"George, would you please stand next to Professor Snape for a moment? Oh yes, that's right, just a little bit closer...perfect." Hermione's lips widened in a real smile as a bolt of golden light came from her outstretched wand, and George fell to the floor holding his crotch.

"That takes care of that," Hermione said as she pocketed her wand. Snape couldn't agree more.

~*~

After a few minutes of yelling and hex-dodging, Fred and George brought the situation to peaceful, or at least a less chaotic state. Most of the guests were looking at their dates when the chocolates were consumed, and so a kiss was not much in the scheme of things. There were other individuals beside Hermione and Snape who had uncomfortable predicaments, including a sixth year boy who was staring at another boy's date, and Professor Flitwick, who was in a compromising situation with a house-elf. "I only wanted a sherry!" he squeaked once the deed was done.

Hermione and Professor Snape remained to be the only two people in Hogwarts unwilling to break the spell. She set her mouth in a firm line after viewing the scene before her to the best of her ability. For the most part, this employed a technique in which she would look at Snape and dart her eyes amongst the crowd before setting her eyes back on Snape once more.

"You'd better get back to work on the antidote," she said quietly.

"Then we'd best be off then," Fred said anxiously as he appeared next to his brother and prepared to escape the wrath of Hermione.

"There is no way in Hades that you both are leaving here unharmed," Hermione said.

"George, you will go to continue working on the antidote. Fred will stay here so that we know that George is coming back." She crossed her arms, waiting for the twins to follow her orders.

"All right, Hermione, I'll be sure to come up with an antidote soon," George said as he escaped through the crowd.

"Are you sure that there aren't any other ways to break this curse?" Hermione turned toward Fred while keeping her gaze upon Snape's shoes.

"The potion was developed in an experimental stage," Fred said, his gaze upon his own shoes.

"But you made it anyway, without a finished antidote, and distributed it to the public masses."

"You could always kiss him, Hermione – that *is* another option." Hermione shook her head vehemently, and Fred sighed in response.

"In that case, I could always assist George."

"Don't you dare," Hermione said. She suddenly smiled at Snape and clapped her hands together.

"Professor, I need access to your Potions lab," she said, her once angered eyes twinkling in delight.

"Ah, being ordered around by an annoying girl on the greatest of holidays," the professor remarked, narrowing his eyes.

Hermione bit her lower lip in a final effort to hold back the worst of her anger. "Sir, I know that you do not want me in your company this evening. The feelings are mutual; however, we have a curse to break."

I could take her now. Just push her into the wall, crush my lips against hers, and get it all over with.

With a sigh of resignation, he turned away from her and headed for the dungeons.

Chapter 6. Agape

Chapter 6 of 9

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As Hermione kept her gaze upon the billowing mass of Snape's robes, she frowned. *This is a cruel reenactment of all the detention fantasies I had in my sixth year* she thought, her eyes following the swish, swish of the fabric.

The short and misguided crush she had on her Potions professor had been a mistake, surely. Yet the way he had looked at her when she first entered the ball...

She shook her head, still keeping her eyes on the man. She sensed someone looking at her, and realised that the figure in black had stopped in front of an unfamiliar corridor in the dungeon. Another pair of eyes was trained upon her; Fred, despite his hostage-like situation, was grinning at her. A quick glance at him that made her head spin confirmed her suspicions. *What else is the prat up to?* she wondered as Snape murmured unintelligible words to reveal a door leading to his private lab.

Hermione wished she could take in her surroundings fully; instead, she peered at the many shelves of glass jars and bottles, long wooden tables, and empty cauldrons

through the corners of her eyes.

I can do this, she thought, shutting her eyes to experience the calming darkness of her closed eyelids.

Opening them once more, Hermione saw more black – this time it belonged to the impatient gaze of the Potions Master.

"Miss Granger, are you adequately rested at this point in time?" He crossed his arms, his pale long fingers vanishing in the darkness of his frock coat.

"Wonderfully so, Professor," she snapped back. Focusing back on the matter at hand, she asked, "Fred, what ingredients did you use to brew the potion in the chocolates?"

"Er... it was produced in a very complicated procedure that I am sure will be extremely difficult to—"

"Don't you try to defend your trade secrets now, Weasley. Just tell the girl what you used." Snape kept his arms crossed, waiting.

Fred nodded, yet Snape's warning did not fully register in his mind. "First, we used a cauldron, some water, and a stirring rod... er, ingredients, right." Fred's grin faded as he saw the growing ire in Snape's face.

"We used a large bowl of lovage, three or four foxglove plants, a pinch of ground vervain, and about *this* much of salamander blood." Fred made a gesture with his thumb and forefinger to give an approximate amount.

"That's it?" Hermione found it hard to believe those were the only ingredients for such a horrible potion.

"Well," said Fred, "We did use a carrot or two."

"Carrots?" Hermione looked at Snape in disbelief.

"Do not mock the magical properties of carrots. Miss Granger. They are used in many healing potions for the eye, or their orange pigment is harvested for color-changing potions. Besides," he added, his lips twitching upward into a smirk, "carrot roots can be used as a powerful aphrodisiac in some lust potions."

"We were also hungry when we made the potion," Fred muttered, trying to pretend he did not just hear Snape say 'lust' and 'aphrodisiac' to his friend in suggestive manner – and see Hermione enjoy it.

"Good," Hermione finally responded, her gaze resting on Snape's hooked nose. "We should have all the inhibitors we need here."

"Inhibitors?" Snape raised an eyebrow in question.

"Well, I've been doing research on antidotes for the Ministry," Hermione elaborated, occasionally pausing to scrunch her eyebrows together in thought. "Although we already have the traditional ways to brew the more common antidotes, one could theoretically create an antidote for a new or modified potion based on the ingredients of the original potion. The inhibitors, or the ingredients countering the effects of the potion, could specifically work with a new, untested potion, which leads us back here." At the end of her lecture, Hermione tried to walk to a clear table, but her head swam. She turned back to Snape as she perched herself on the table's edge.

"Professor, could you please fetch some moonstone? The calming effect would overcome the *Levisticum officinale*."

"Lovage," Snape translated out loud as he searched through the shelves in the front of the lab. Hermione felt a jolt in her spine as he said the word *If only he could remove the last syllable*, she thought as she stared at Snape's back. When he returned to her, he set up a cauldron on the desk in front of hers.

"I think that we also need some poppies, Professor – although a concentrated amount can cause blindness, a few could go against the carrots in the potion. Could you bring some eel eyes as well? We'd have to damage them so that it will bring a weakening effect on the potion."

"With pleasure." As Hermione stared at Snape's retreating figure gathering more ingredients, she couldn't help but shiver again at his words – even though he said them with his usual biting sarcasm. Imagine if he said those words kneeling before her in bed...

Hermione's thoughts flew out of the gutter as a knock sounded on the door. Fred left her limited line of vision and reappeared with another redhead and an unfamiliar head of untidy brown hair.

"What are you still doing here, Hermione?" Ginny's voice sounded throughout the lab. "Don't you know that there's a cure?"

"A cure?" Hermione asked hopefully. "Did George come back with the antidote?"

"No. All you have to do is ki—"

"I know about that already, Gin. I'm not doing it."

"Why not? Fred isn't going to snog you or anything..." Seeing that Hermione wasn't not even looking at her and her brother, but at the smirking man over a simmering cauldron, she said, "It's perfect, though. Remember what I told you earlier?"

"Ginny, we cannot discuss this here," Hermione said with a nervous glance at Snape. "If the cure works so well, why is that wizard so 'attached' to you?" Hermione noticed that the brown and red heads of hair were blurring together.

"Oh, he never ate a chocolate – he's just my new date for the evening."

Now she has a date, and I'm stuck in the dungeons Hermione thought with a grimace.

"Come on, Hermione, don't be that way. Just kiss him, and Fred can go home," said Ginny.

Hermione threw her hands up in the air. *I picked his brains the best I could.* "Professor Snape and I can put our heads together for this," she admitted.

"It will work out for the best. I'll go to George now," said Fred, eager to escape.

"I suppose you could use the report I was working on; you know, the one you ogled a few hours ago," Hermione murmured, staring at Snape's sallow features. *hope he wasn't offended*, Hermione thought, remembering her repeated refusals to kiss him.

She shook her head. "Ginny, please go and drop off Crooks before you acquaint yourself with your date."

"I can't, Hermione. Crookshanks is... preoccupied."

The brown-haired wizard spoke up.

"You mean that old orange cat?" After receiving a nod from Hermione, he continued.

"It was shagging another cat. They were going at it in a corner of the Great Hall." Before Hermione could ask what cat Crookshanks was "going at it" with, Ginny let out a

giggle.

“Mrs. Norris.”

Fred laughed, Hermione had a concerned look on her face, and Snape's lips twitched to show his amusement.

“Mrs. Norris was licking a chocolate – we didn't think it was one of those 'spiked' ones – it was wrapped in black foil. The next thing you know, they can't keep their paws off each other. Sure there was lots of snarling at first, but then nature took its course... I should go now, shouldn't I?”

“Oh yes, Ginny, please. I'll see you when I get out of this mess.” Ginny left the lab, walking hand in hand with her companion. Fred gave Hermione a kiss on the cheek, said goodbye, and shut the heavy wooden door behind him.

And with that, two floundering souls were left together in the dungeons.

Chapter 7. Delectio

Chapter 7 of 9

Hermione consumes a chocolate created by the Weasley twins and can't take her eyes away from Severus Snape. My response to GinnyW's "Valentine's Day Chocolates" Challenge at the Yahoo!Group, Potter_Place.

Her eyes darted from place to place once the door closed, although there weren't many places for Hermione to dart her eyes. She made a path with her sight from his nose to the slight wrinkles above his brow... and to his nose again. Sometime during her visual course, her eyes stopped below his forehead and rested upon his intense gaze.

It was too much for Hermione; she couldn't help but look down again and count the little black buttons of his frock coat.

“We also need some basic ingredients for this, including armadillo bile—”

“I am quite aware of what we will need, Miss Granger. I did 'fetch' all the other ingredients, after all.”

“Oh, *my apologies*,” she spat, getting off of her perch on the table. This movement was enough to send Hermione into another spell of dizziness. She fell, but never reached the ground.

Hermione felt thin arms support her. The ends of his lank hair tickled her cheek; his nose was so close from her own. And his dark eyes were burning with something more than annoyance or anger.

“I must wonder, Miss Granger, whether I am so repulsive that you couldn't kiss me.”

She was taken with his smell and the feel of his dark warmth surrounding her. She ~~could~~ kiss him, couldn't she?

Then in one fluid motion he helped her up and set her to rights.

Her chance was over, but she couldn't help but stare at his thin lips as he got to work on the potion. Long fingers carefully measured amounts of poppies and ground moonstone. As he turned to retrieve another jar from one of the shelves by the far wall, Hermione held back a gasp. With enough squinting, she was able to get a good view of his bum. *Those robes don't do him justice.*

He had some good physical attributes, but not even the face of Gilderoy Lockhart could overcome his cold personality.

His eyes weren't cold at all when you were in his arms. Hermione smiled at the thought.

~*~

Midway through grinding moonstone, Snape knew that she was staring at his hands. He also knew that Hermione needed to have her eyes on him – but did she need to move them over his person so often?

She was more than what he thought her to be. She was, of course, an intelligent witch, and likewise, an outsider. He had seen her many times at a requisite celebration from different vantage points in a shadowed corner or while he was engaged in dull conversations with even duller guests, her gaze upon the partygoers as she looked on with a drink in hand.

Snape now noticed that she wasn't just an anti-social know-it-all; she also had a range of emotions that revealed to him the subtle facets of her personality, all of which were facing him – both directly and otherwise.

While heading for the shelf for armadillo bile, Severus couldn't help but wonder.

Is she staring at my bum?

~*~

Snape had almost reached the half-way point in the creation of the antidote when he noticed that Hermione didn't have her eyes on him. He groaned inwardly, preparing to vanish the vomit on the floor after checking on her condition.

Her eyes were drooping.

He rubbed his temple in thought. Was she slipping into unconsciousness? A negative side effect of the chocolate? When she opened her mouth to yawn, it dawned on him.

“Miss Granger, if you are inclined to rest for the remainder of the evening, do not take the liberty to do so on my workbench.”

Her eyes opened and rolled to quickly face him.

"Where should I rest then?" she snapped. Taking a deep breath, she added, "It's been a hard night for the both of us, Severus." Her voice softened at the use of his given name. She never noticed her slip, and he neglected to correct her.

"My chambers," Snape said, casting a stasis charm on the cauldron. Hermione stretched and was about to leave the table when a pale hand was stretched out to her.

"I wouldn't want to see you sprawled on the floor of my laboratory." Despite Snape's sarcasm, Hermione could see *something* in the darkness of his eyes.

She smiled up at him and grasped his hand to slide off the table.

They remained hand-in-hand on the way to his chambers.

Chapter 8. Eros

Chapter 8 of 9

Hermione consumes a chocolate created by the Weasley twins and can't take her eyes away from Severus Snape. My response to GinnyW's "Valentine's Day Chocolates" Challenge at the Yahoo!Group, Potter_Place.

Hermione sat on the edge of Snape's bed, transfiguring one of her inner robes into a cotton nightgown.

"You don't have to do this – I could've slept on the couch."

"No, I cannot let you do that... I must go and check on the potion." Snape strode out of the room but came back moments later.

He cleaned the vomit on the floor and conjured a towel and a bowl of water.

Her eyes widened in shock. "Thank you," she said while reaching for the towel, "I-"

"You will lie down and cease your chatter." Snape dipped the towel into the water. "Seeing as you must keep your gaze upon me at all times, I need to stay here as well. I should do something to keep myself occupied." Yet as he cleaned her chin with utmost care, he seemed to be speaking more to himself than to Hermione.

When Snape wiped the last bit of mess from her face, he held the towel in the air and stared into Hermione's eyes as if he was debating something. She was about to lean in when he turned away to vanish the bowl.

"You know, Severus," she said, disappointed, "the spell doesn't seem to affect me when I am asleep."

"Perhaps we could try a Dreamless Sleep Draught... no, the combination of the potions would be too much of a risk."

"Or maybe-" Hermione broke off her theory with a yawn. "I am tired." She smiled. "Goodnight."

Asleep. Finally. Hermione had rolled over to the edge of the bed, her eyes closed and her breathing even. Severus smirked and turned to go until he saw the towel in his hand.

Maybe he should stay with her in case she woke up. They could continue the potion tomorrow – the stasis charm would hold until then.

Snape removed his boots and outer robes. He rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and lay down on the opposite edge of the bed.

Who knew that after all of these years, a potion has gotten a woman into my bed?

With that thought, Snape drifted off to sleep and dreamed of a woman who only had eyes for him.

~*~

Hermione rubbed her eyes after waking up and gazed at the walls of the dungeon. As she noted the various cracks and lines in the stone, she grinned.

The curse is over! I can see whatever or whomever I want! I can –

"Miss Granger, must you vomit this early in the morning?"

~*~

An hour or so later, Hermione and Snape were hard at work on the antidote. Hermione sipped a cup of tea – she couldn't eat in fear that she would lose another meal again – and took her perch on the same table as the night before.

"Thank you," she said, stretching her legs.

"For what?"

"Helping me."

"I can't have you with me all the time, can I?" Snape reversed the direction of his stirring.

"You weren't so disgusted by the idea when you propositioned me last night."

"I was of a different mindset then, affected by-" He spooned the antidote into a vial.

"By what? I'm the one who's been slipped a potion."

"And now you will be given another one," he said, holding the vial out to her.

Hermione took the vial from Snape and set it on the table.

"Do you know how long I've been without a man in my life? Don't you dare interrupt me," she warned as he held up a hand.

"Five years. For five horrible, lonely years I have worked and worked. Mind you, my career is going well, and I'm *alive*. Thank Merlin, I'm alive.

"But I'm missing something, and when I finish my reports for the Ministry, I spend my time with my cat, a book, and a glass of wine or two...

"And whenever there are one of those functions, gatherings, balls, whatever – it's like I'm at home, only there – here – I'm wearing dress robes.

"Then last night with you... I've been so stubborn, and I'm sorry for refusing you... I really did want to kiss you – I was just so stupid..."

Severus had always been a listener. He never liked talking too much; sharing a bit of himself in an occasional chat *might* be tolerated, but heart to hearts in his old Death Eater gatherings, staffroom meetings – even in a lover's bed couldn't be tolerated. And as much as he could listen or at least tune out Hermione's incessant chatter, he was becoming undone by the sight of her pink lips moving so rapidly.

"Miss Granger," he interrupted. "Do you want to kiss me?"

Hermione stared, surprised again by his beautiful dark eyes. She knew her answer.

Chapter 9. Amor: The Epilogue

Chapter 9 of 9

Hermione consumes a chocolate created by the Weasley twins and can't take her eyes away from Severus Snape. My response to GinnyW's "Valentine's Day Chocolates" Challenge at the Yahoo!Group, Potter_Place.

George and Lee Jordan did a jig in the back room of the joke shop.

"That was brilliant, mate," Lee said, pausing to catch his breath.

"Yeah, but Fred has to take the credit – he created the plan."

"Of course he does. But let's not forget that while you two were clowning around in the Great Hall, I had to go down into Filch's office to get back all of our old confiscated items. Do you know how many cabinets I had to empty?" Lee gestured to the many sacks lining the office.

"And I had to make and wrap up all of those chocolates, as well as drugging Mrs. Norris so that Filch would be too preoccupied to go to his office." George pointed to the long scratches on his hand.

Lee laughed. "Ah, the bloody cat still gives you trouble after all these years. At least we got back all of the lost research items. Besides, you're right – Fred did have it the worst. He's the one who spent an hour with Snape in the dungeons, is currently working on the antidote... and he's the one who Polyjuiced himself as Scrimgeour to get the Ministry's approval for the chocolates and the ball."

"The seduction of McGonagall," George stated solemnly. The pair made faces of pure disgust and horror.

"We've done it! We've done it!" Fred yelled.

Lee and George ran into the adjoining room. "How do you know it will work?" Lee asked.

Fred held up two chocolates. "Heads up!" He tossed the chocolates at them.

George and Lee looked at each other with alarm.

"I added the final ingredient and have been watching this thing brew all night. Go on, get to it," said Fred with a wicked grin of amusement.

~*~

Several more antidotes later, the trio entered the Dungeons and opened the door to the potions lab.

"Sorry we took so long," George said.

Fred continued, "McGonagall made it hell for us to get back in – whatever happened to her last night, she is back to ~~normal~~..."

All voices were silenced at the sight of Hermione and Snape snogging on top of the potions table.

~*~

Hermione stretched out on the couch, opening her eyes after a long, glorious nap. She noticed that the fireplace's flames were dwindling and muttered a spell to revive them.

"My lioness awakens."

Hermione broke out into a lazy smile and waited for her fiancée to sit next to her. "I was dreaming about you, Severus," she said, leaving a gentle kiss on his lips.

"Nightmares, I'm sure," he said dryly, but he let an arm snake around her waist and pulled her closer to him. "Are you sure about this?"

"Positive," she said sleepily, nuzzling into his side. Wedding plans were a nightmare to be sure, but her engagement to the man she loved... she kissed him again.

"What was that for?" he asked after kissing her back.

"For your proposal, again," she said with a dreamy smile rivaling Luna's.

"I thought you reciprocated wonderfully this morning, and last night, and the night before and..." He trailed off, a smirk on his face. He held her hand.

"Are you sure about this?"

Hermione looked at her band of diamonds and smiled again. "Yes, yes, yes. This is the fourth time you've asked me today." She remembered the first time he had asked her, in January – on his birthday. He later admitted that he wanted to avoid February altogether, with a proposal in January and a wedding in March. Hermione felt the same and had accepted.

"It's been a year today," she murmured.

"I know," he said tersely.

"What is it now?"

"I was just wondering." He stroked her hair. "Do we have to go?"

"Fred, George, and Lee Jordan all apologized a long time ago, Severus. Besides, if it wasn't for their spell, I would have never realised what a great man you are."

"And I you – as a woman, of course," Snape added in response to her raised eyebrow.

She kissed his large nose. "Of course. Now come, future husband. We have to pick out robes for Fred and George's party. Draco's going to be there – don't you want to see your godson? He's with Lee now... I wonder when *he* decided to come out of the cauldron."

"Hermione," Snape said in an agonized voice. "If I come with you to 'pick out robes,' could I help you get out of them as well?"

She smiled and got up from the couch; Snape followed her. Hermione turned around, wrapped her arms around him, and cupped his arse. "You bet. But we can't delay; Harry and Luna invited us to tea this afternoon."

Snape groaned. "That woman makes her scones in a waffle iron! How could I possibly—"

A look into her eyes changed his mind, and he kissed her again and again.

- end.