

See Snape. See Snape Run. Run, Snape, Run

by expected aberrance

By the pricking of my thumbs, something goofy this way comes...Sequel to "Here Comes the Snake."

The Beginning

Chapter 1 of 8

By the pricking of my thumbs, something goofy this way comes...Sequel to "Here Comes the Snake."

Disclaimer: I own nothing here. I hope I don't get sued, especially by whoever makes those See Spot Run children's books.

Inspired by Hellboy, which is a kick-ass movie. This will have more of a plot than genital-endangerment, I promise. Anyway, this dedicated to all the wonderful people who gave me reviews (which are treasured like good dark chocolate). Thanks, you guys rock.

"You were *boiling water*, you idiot boy! How in Merlin's hairy unmentionables did you manage to *set water on fire*?"

To say that Snape was discontent with the events preceding his outburst would be like claiming the newly deceased Dark Lord had a minor ego problem. In a foolish display of optimism, he had assumed that the first ten minutes of his seventh-year Potions class would be explosion-free, for the students, who one assumed were somewhat capable of following basic procedure as participation in his NEWT classes hinged on their OWL results, were, in fact, working only with water and bronze cauldrons. Snape had uncharacteristically failed to account for the Longbottom effect, which produced results defying all natural and magical law by causing the worst of the impossible to happen. And so it came to pass, exactly seven minutes and thirty-six seconds from when Snape had told them to begin, Neville Longbottom's nearly empty cauldron belched green flame in a display rivaling the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, if on a slightly smaller scale. Crimson lava poured down the sides of the rapidly disintegrating cauldron, cutting deep paths of burning destruction among textbooks, quills, parchment, ingredients, and desk before settling into the now foaming stone floor, reminiscent of the ruin of Pompeii, only Christmas themed.

"*Longbottom!*"

Students leapt back from the miniature volcano with practiced ease, but a few nearer to the front of the classroom edged closer to the cauldron, fearing the wrath of their Potions professor more than a little inferno. The vehemence dripping from the uttered name contrasted with the unnaturally relaxed pose and calm expression Snape wore. The silence stretching between his initial declaration of the offender and query to the unfortunate young man was laced with trepidation, probably from the smoking cauldron, and broken only by its innocently merry bubbling.

His left eye twitched when a stray phoenix feather imploded with a bang, and he commenced a slow stalk to the frozen boy and his pet volcano. With a flick of the wand no one had seen Snape draw, the flaming-water-in-a-cauldron was no more, leaving only the steaming husk of wood in its place. Not a few of the students were surprised to see Longbottom still on this plane of existence rather than the potions vessel. Hermione, closest to Neville, having sat next to him before the impromptu fireworks production (which was hardly unusual in itself), attempted to sneak in between Neville and the predatory teacher advancing toward them, but a glare promising slow and

painful death forced her back. Snape glided around the ruined desk, removing Neville's only line of defense. The hapless and now vulnerable student, who, outside the Potions classroom at least, had grown in confidence and build so as to be a prime example of youth and manhood, could only shiver in place as his most irrational nightmare came close enough to scrutinize him at a cellular level.

"What were my instructions in the beginning of class, Mr. Longbottom?" his voice a whispered hiss.

"B-boil a half-cauldron of w-water for ten minutes and t-twenty-three seconds, then--"

"What was that?"

"You said to boil half a c-cauldron of wat-t-"

"Without the stuttering, please. It hinders comprehension."

Neville shut his eyes briefly in a desperate effort to find his spine. All attention in the room focused on the battle of wills (or to be more accurate, one will and a gibbering mass of psychic goo that had once been a will), so none took notice when a tiny spark left in the burnt desk behind Snape began flitting about, growing larger with each new touch of the wood.

"Boil half a cauldron of water for ten minutes and twenty-three seconds, then add the jade stone--"

"Your clarity has improved, but I believe you must have missed a step, Mr. Longbottom."

"Sir?" Neville dared a covert glance at his notes only to find they were ashes dusting the smoking desk.

"No need to consult directions." Snape forced Neville's eyes back to his, his smile unpleasant and barely this side of balanced. "You've already given us a wonderful practical demonstration of step two."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I d-don't--"

"You mean to say you don't recall the stage in the potion when one should destroy an expensive cauldron through ignorance and ineptitude?"

"Sir? Th-that--"

"Wasn't on the curriculum, Mr. Longbottom? I'm shocked, absolutely shocked, to hear it." His expression turned to mock concern, and his soft voice invoked the sensation of a blade gently tickling the entrails. By this time, the spark had grown to a green and red tinged flame, about the size of a Snitch and fast increasing, which bounced gaily between the desks, gleefully setting afire whatever it touched. Lavender Brown was the first to notice, as the cheerful conflagration had scorched a hole through the left nostril belonging to the distraught image of Claudio Fabio Narcissianus on the cover of her *Witch Weekly*, reducing the Man With the Most Perfect Nose in the Wizarding World (three times in a row) to papery tears. She emitted a small noise of shock and indignation, then made a move to save the object of her obsession from further fiery piercing. Without turning around or even breaking his standoff with Longbottom, Snape growled rebuke.

"Stay right there, Miss Brown. And be silent, if you wish to leave this room in the near future."

"But sir--"

"Twenty points. It will increase exponentially with every further syllable you happen to utter. The next person who breathes too loudly will wish that I had assigned them flobberworm cleaning with Hagrid."

The exchange had brought the blaze-in-the-making to the attention of everyone in the class except for the two locked in scholastic battle, and the students discussed the alarming happenings in silent gesture and subtle pantomime, none daring the ire of the Potions Bastard. Blaise Zabini made an admirable attempt to extinguish the multitude of small fires silently, but was thwarted when the largest grabbed his wand and began a bout of tug-o-war with him. This discouraged further foolish wand waving, and a few enterprising individuals tried dousing the flames with water from the sinks along the side of the classroom until the main fireball, now approximating the size of a Bludger, devoured their buckets. At this setback, most gave in, content to watch the pandemonium from the sidelines. Snape had quickly turned an alarming shade of maroon and was risking rupture of a blood vessel.

"Longbottom, I have *never* come across a more incompetent, bumbling, asinine--"

A bottle of pickled blue beetle gonads began popping like corn kernels from the nearby flame dancing across one of the desks.

"Fifty points from Gryffindor, Potter! Silence!"

Harry looked understandably confused at the accusation, but was prevented from questioning it by the hand Malfoy slapped over his mouth. Snape continued his tirade, oblivious to the chaos developing around him.

--disgrace to wizarding. Labeling you a Squib would be insulting to--"

"Ahem, Professor Snape." Only Hermione had the courage to try interrupting the flushed-vermilion professor from spitting on Longbottom with every consonant. The fireball skated between cauldrons in a lovely figure eight pattern before diving gracefully to the floor.

"A month's detention, Miss Granger, which you will not enjoy this time, for interrupting me. Now be quiet!"

"Professor--"

"I SAID QUIET!" None winced louder than Longbottom at Snape's explosion, but had little time to observe the completely unhinged professor. At almost the same moment, Sally-Ann Perks was forced to jump back into Parvati Patil as the fireball attempted to investigate her footwear, who, in turn, stumbled into Draco Malfoy, whose close proximity to Harry Potter initiated a class-wide domino impression worthy of any cause-and-effect enthusiast. Hermione, the last to fall as the ripple passed among the students, made one last attempt at drawing Snape's attention from the spittle-coated statue that had been Neville Longbottom.

"SEVERUS--"

"GRANGER, I NEVER GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO USE MY NAME OUTSIDE OF OUR BED--"

Whatever Snape had meant to say was lost in the confusion as the roughly-Flitwick-sized fireball discovered a large bottle of oil-of-skrewt-mucous, which immediately exploded with a BOOM just behind Snape that could not have been timed better with the ring of students hitting the floor, culminating in an entertaining spectacle beyond the limits of rehearsal or planning. Snape was launched over Longbottom and the ring of seventh years along with the fireball, and he hit the desks in the back of the classroom heavily.

The first to recover was, of course, the-Boy-Who-Had-to-Do-Everything-Disgustingly-Good-and-Admirable, who, after extricating himself from the mass of limbs, conjured a small hurricane that completely soaked everyone and everything in the room. As the steam settled, the students squelched to their feet to survey the damage. The classroom looked as if it had played host to a dragon orgy; not a workbench or tabletop had escaped splintering and blackening, ingredients and books lay in ruined piles of ash, clumps of metal scattered the floor. Once they had checked themselves for injury, the class stumbled among the wreckage to their teacher. They huddled around the mass of black robes, which, after much effort and aid from Granger and Weasley, sat up, leaning against the wall. Granger began examining the disoriented professor for

injury, but was startled when the bundle of black cloth in his lap began moving. She fell back in shock when a small red face with dark brown eyes poked out of the torn robes at about Snape's stomach, followed by the rest of the creature's horned head. The little fellow gazed fearfully at the speechless assembly before retreating further into the layers of black cloth. Snape, regaining some awareness, glared at the gawking crowd and raised his arm in a weak but unmistakably commanding gesture.

"Class dismissed. Get out."

It took a few moments for the pupils to digest then follow the order, gathering right outside the room so as comply with the request but still maintain opportunity for gaping. Only Hermione remained, supporting Snape and trying to determine what sort of being clung to him like a limpet almost hidden in his robes. Snape was about to speak again when the students in the doorway parted with enough whispering to wake the dead.

Albus Dumbledore stepped through (and over) the door to the Potions classroom solemnly, and eyed the scene with nary a twinkle or sparkle in sight.

"Oh, Severus, who have you done now?"

And the proud new parents are...

Chapter 2 of 8

By the pricking of my thumbs, something goofy this way comes...Sequel to "Here Comes the Snake."

Disclaimer: Nope, *still* not mine. Though I do hope.

"Oh, Severus, who have you done now?"

Snape was silent for a few beats while formulating an appropriate response to such a potentially incriminating question, an unusual reaction, as any Slytherin worth his sneer is usually counted upon to make at least a general statement malleable enough to be twisted into whatever suitable lie he concocts given ample time. Under the circumstances, however, Snape might be forgiven for his sub par obfuscation, considering that his disorientation was not an uncommon side effect of travel across classrooms by Longbottom Airlines ("We don't know when, we don't know how, we don't know why, but we'll get you there"). Hermione took advantage of the pause to cast discreet diagnostic and healing spells while slowly increasing the distance between herself and Snape, which, while not overtly suspicious, was still far closer than the minimum necessary for shouting most were comfortable with in their dealings with the dungeon bat.

"Headmaster, I'm not entirely sure what you're trying to insinuate--"

Dumbledore cut him off with a wave of his hand (which happened to put out the torch above Snape in the process) and a sigh (though small in volume) that held within it all the pain and weariness of Atlas himself.

"Save the explanation, Severus. I must go sort out your students at the moment, but when I come back, we're going to have a long discussion concerning your recent behavior."

The headmaster blinked, shook his head, and then refocused his slightly muddled attention on the girl kneeling next to Snape.

"Good morning, Miss Granger."

"Good morning, Headmaster." Hermione's response was polite but a bit cautious. Dumbledore seemed not to notice as he turned back to the gaggle of students huddling in the doorway and stepped over the desk-and-door-splinter-puddle, ushering the crowd down the hall in the process.

Hermione waited for the sounds of the migrating pupils to fade before turning back to her prone companion.

"Well, that was certainly close. Do you think he's figured us out?"

"Unless he's a daft, blind, old fool. Then most likely not. And just what were you on about, shouting my name in the middle of class like some bloody lovesick bimbo?" Snape grimaced. Hermione was fully prepared to counter with a scathing appraisal of Snape's teaching methods when the small being in his lap chose to rejoin the discussion by wriggling a head and a hand out from his torn clothing. Snape turned the sneer on the creature and extracted him from his robes to hold him at perusal level. Black eyes met brown as pale, aristocratically featured Potions master and red, horned, tailed infant examined each other. After a short interval, the imp, apparently reaching a decision favorable for Snape, curled his tail around the professor's right wrist.

"He looks like a baby demon." Hermione gazed upon the little devil with considerable interest.

"Tell me, was it the tail, or the alarmingly Gryffindor complexion?" Alas, Snape's implied belittlement concerning Hermione's House and intellect (a favorite pastime of his) went unnoticed, for she had fallen under the near *Imperio*-strong curse all females are subject to when presented with a screaming, drooling, defecating, inarticulate bundle of need.

"Isn't he adorable?" Her voice lacked its usual precision and clarity of thought, which prompted Snape to come as close to gaping as was possible for him. He looked from decidedly novel-looking infant to the (alleged) Most Brilliant Witch Hogwarts Has Seen in an Age in mild bewilderment.

"Are you feeling well? Any headache, nausea, hallucinations?"

"You're a cute one, yes you are!" she cooed, and Snape had a look of distaste as he got to his feet, juggling the object of misguided adoration in the process. "Oh, you poor thing! You must be freezing!" She cast a spell, diapering the baby in a neatly tied white nappy. Snape watched with suspicion.

"I thought you said you weren't pregnant..."

"I'm not, but it never hurts to be prepared."

"You always--"

"Ma?" The mini fiend gazed up at the man holding him with an expression that held much potential at becoming a cocked eyebrow.

"You must be mistaken, little one. I've never fathered anything, much less a baby as... unique... as yourself." Snape sneered in disgust at the unearthly infant he held at arms length, but the tiny creature merely giggled.

"Severus, I believe that was a nasal phoneme rather than alveolar. He clearly considers you his maternal parent." Hermione grinned as Snape emitted a refined snort.

"Come off it."

"Perhaps there were lasting side effects from that gender-switching potion we tried a couple weeks ago. Are you feeling more feminine?"

"You tell me; you're down there more often than I am."

"Though generally not for the purposes of finding a vagina."

"Mama?"

"There! He did it again. Congratulations, Severus. I'm sure you'll make a wonderful mother."

"I hate to derail your amusement, but would it be possible for you to focus that vast intellect on helping me determine where this thing originated?" Snape began to rotate the baby in search of clues; if they were lucky, there could be a note pinned to it somewhere.

"Da?" The hell-child was now staring at Hermione in an expectant manner.

"Sorry, little one. I'm afraid you're a bit confused." She started tickling the baby, causing him to squirm in Snape's hands.

"Oh, that's productive--"

"Ahem." Dumbledore cleared his throat from the doorway in one of his trademark sudden and timely appearances. He studied the trio for a brief moment before letting out a sigh even more epic in volume and gravity than the last. Snape made a valiant attempt at salvaging the situation.

"Headmaster, Miss Granger was just aiding me in caring for this--"

"Severus." Dumbledore let a moment of reflection and dread pass before continuing. "I haven't been this disappointed in you since you showed up at my doorstep with that ridiculous tattoo. How could you abuse my trust and put the welfare of the students in your care beneath your own selfish desires?"

Snape looked somewhat guilty at the accusation and remained silent, so Hermione stepped up to his defense.

"Headmaster, Severus and I share equal blame in this relationship. I don't consider myself wronged in any way because of it, so I think--"

"Good morning, Miss Granger," Dumbledore looked at her with surprise through his spectacles.

"Headmaster?"

Dumbledore turned back to Snape, seemingly oblivious. Snape drew the infant closer to his chest while exchanging a covert glance of confusion with Hermione.

"As I'm most likely correct in assuming the creature you're holding is your *Eventum de Concubitus*, we should make arrangements for you to sponsor counseling for the unfortunate young woman--or man--which--"

"Albus, this is no child of mine!" Sensing his fate was being debated, the tiny demon shifted in Snape's arms to observe the strange white-bearded wizard conversing with his parents.

"Of course it is, my boy! Says right on the paper I have in my office for that very purpose. I don't know why you're putting up such resistance; you knew I would find out, after all."

"What in Merlin's name are you talking about?" The child decided that the discussion was not as interesting as it had promised to be and went back to drooling on Snape's robes, with the professor too busy glaring at the Headmaster to notice.

"The *Intactilis* spell of course. Or have you not reviewed your teacher handscroll recently?" After his query and while walking toward Snape, Dumbledore became distracted by the baby and began making cooing sounds eerily similar to Hermione's. "He certainly is very... red, Severus. Not a bad color, if I may say so. Are those horns..."

Hermione seized the opportunity granted by the Headmaster's inattention and whispered furiously to Snape. "What did he mean by *Intactilis* spell?"

"Bugger all if I know. I didn't read the blasted thing! It was longer than your midterm of last semester," Snape managed a triple-victim scowl as he hissed back.

"Could you enlighten me as to why not?" Hermione held her own in returning a glower.

"I only felt it necessary to check over it for any clauses concerning the forfeiting of my soul or first-born and then signed it. What else of importance could I have expected to be in there?"

"Obviously, there was at least one!"

"Well clearly it wasn't of such significance that you as Official Know-It-All would--"

"As I was saying, Severus, about the spell." Dumbledore brought his attention to Snape. "This beautiful and fashionable baby is the direct consequence of your indiscretion within the last nine months with at least one student enrolled at Hogwarts this year. Of course there will be more if you've played the field, so to speak, but this particular creature is now your responsibility. His behavior toward you will reflect your relationship with the student, whoever he or she may be, and I must warn you of the severe consequences of mistreating said student beyond what you've already done."

"Consequences?"

"Oh, yes. There've been several *Eventi de Concubitus* throughout Hogwarts history that have eaten the offending staff." Dumbledore fished a lemon-drop out of his robes and gave it to the little brute. Snape eyed the infant holding the sweet with some wariness and moved him away from his chest slightly.

"Are there any other effects of this spell, Headmaster?" Hermione asked.

"No, I don't think so. The Founders decided that the public humiliation, threat of devouring, and permanent reminder of the affair were punishment enough."

"How effective has that been? It doesn't seem to be very practical, sir."

Snape was too engrossed in the conversation to notice his child's dissatisfaction with the lemon-drop and attempt to find something a bit more substantial. He absentmindedly pulled the squirming child closer and missed the rather mischievous grin of his offspring.

"That's true, Miss Granger, but the ways of the Founders are mysterious indeed--"

"Aaargh!" Snape let loose a howl of expletives in several languages as the demon baby bit down on his left nipple. He removed the parasite as expeditiously as possible without causing further damage and shoved him at Hermione.

"You're female, you take this satanic monster!"

"Me? Right now I'm just about as likely to start lactating as you are!" Hermione held the laughing boy well away from any threatened areas. "Oh, look! He has your teeth! Perhaps he follows family tradition and drinks blood."

"This will be a difficult time for you, Severus. Adjusting and all. I remember when I'd just received my own *Eventum*--"

"You had an affair with a student?!" Hermione and Snape turned as one to stare in shock at the Headmaster.

"Yes, not my finest moment. But she was such a lovely girl..."

"Ahem, sir, if you don't mind me asking, what was the form of your punishment?" Hermione asked, hoping to steer the conversation away from the love life of one of the most venerable father figures she knew. Dumbledore appeared to consider the question as he wound his beard in his fingers.

"Hmmm. There was something about... Filius..."

"Professor Flitwick was your *Eventum de Concubitus*?"

"No, my dear. Filius and Rolanda are expecting. I must remember to announce that at lunch today. My apologies, I didn't catch your question."

"That child will desperately need hair dye and require a Charmed toothpick to play Quidditch." Snape smirked, and Hermione aimed a kick at his shins in response.

"Ow!" The tiny red bundle gazed raptly at the pained expression of his brand new parental figure and emitted a promising attempt at snickering. Hermione repeated her inquiry to the Headmaster, ignoring Snape.

"My own was Fawkes, and I consider him to be a blessing rather than a curse. I will never forget the love of the latter half of my life..."

"A bird that shits brimstone, sheds ashes, and never dies. I'd say that's fairly severe castigation." Hermione kicked Snape again in the same leg.

"What happened if you don't mind me asking, sir?"

"She caught me with the cute knobby coat rack in my office. I'd forgotten my spectacles that day."

"In the name of all that is holy and good, tell me you didn't hear what I heard, Severus." Hermione looked to Snape for some sort of assurance, but he merely took time out of rubbing his ankle to be nauseated.

"My gods. I've used that coat rack."

"I believe that was about the same time that Fawkes brought me my first lemon drop..." Dumbledore's eyes misted over in remembrance.

"Excuse me, Headmaster. Would you like to hold the--ahem--baby?" Hermione passed the crimson terror to Dumbledore.

Silence permeated the dungeons for the first time since the beginning of class as Dumbledore was preoccupied with the infant, and the infant engrossed in pulling on his beard.

Snape broke the peace with a rather pensive, "I'm not ready to be a father."

"Or mother..." Hermione couldn't resist teasing him, but matched his serious tone when she continued. "I'm sure you'll be fine. You're resourceful; you've got plenty of experience with children when you're not eating them of course..."

"...Siegfried the Sullen had a giant naked mole rat with psoriasis..." Dumbledore interjected, though no one but the baby took any notice.

"Have you given any more thought to what I asked yesterday?" Snape asked, his voice a tad less smooth than usual.

"About the floral set? I really don't think it's really your style, if you know what I mean."

"Not that! I was talking about our situation... making it a bit more... permanent."

"Oh. Severus, I don't know about... well... I don't think I'm prepared at this stage in my life to make those sorts of decisions. I wasn't expecting..." She trailed off apologetically.

"Does that mean you won't marry me?"

"...hippopotamus with rickets..."

"I was under the impression that it was a heat of the moment thing, like the rest you were screaming last night..."

"I meant it." Snape actually sounded rather hurt. "So you were just using me for sex?"

"What? No, of course not--"

"Then it wasn't good enough for you?" If it had been in the realm of remote possibility, Hermione would have admitted to witnessing Severus Snape's thin, pale lower lip tremble to match the suspicious sheen of his eyes.

"Yes, no, I--but I'm not--I love you, you big tit! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Hormones, Miss Granger." Dumbledore finally re-entered the discussion.

Snape scoffed at the Headmaster, incredulous. "You're daft."

"Severus, you've just given birth to the child you carried for nine months. Though entirely magical in nature, it still is quite a bit of stress on you."

"You have been very moody recently. No wait, that's normal."

"Severus, I believe it's high time you name this charming little son of yours." Dumbledore beamed at the boy in question, who was beginning to seem uncomfortable. Hermione latched on to the change in topic with enthusiasm.

"I agree, Headmaster. Have you any ideas?"

Snape was dissatisfied, but didn't press the issue. "I've always been partial to Adolph."

"Absolutely not."

"Why not? It's a family title. There were at least three Adolphuses and two of the shortened form before that mad little tosser had to ruin the name."

"No. Anything else traditionally Prince or Snape-ish?"

"I remember Minnie the Mendicant named her elephant with perpetual colic and separation anxiety Wibbles." Sadly, Dumbledore's example went ignored. The as-yet unnamed baby struggled in the Headmaster's grip and began to whimper.

"Genghis?"

"No."

"Fidel?"

"No."

"...Crumple-Horned Snorkack... invisibility..."

"Nero?"

"No!"

"Vladimir?"

"No. Good lord, your family has horrible taste in names!"

"Don't blame me. At least your initials aren't a hiss when sounded aloud. Caligula?"

"A possibility. As long as his middle name is something noble like 'Aurelius'."

"Wonderful. Our child now has large shoes to fill as the mad philosopher."

Hermione was prevented from retorting by the commotion as the possibly named Caligula Aurelius Snape answered the call of nature with style, setting afire both the garment clothing him and the Headmaster's beard.

"Oh, look, he has your pyromaniacal tendencies!" Snape admired his son's talent with amusement.

"We'll have to ask Mrs. Weasley where she acquired those non-flammable nappies." Hermione sighed as she attempted to extinguish the flames, by which neither Dumbledore nor Caligula seemed very affected or concerned.

"...leech... flatulence..."

"This is completely your fault, you know," Snape remarked off-handedly.

"It takes two to violate the code of student-teacher relations."

"You started it!"

"You fell on me, you great git!"

"You tripped me!"

"...great horny toad with the clap..."

"You fell over my bag, around which you had no trouble navigating for the past six years, because you were trying to look down my shirt! And you assigned the detention in the first place!"

"You provoked me."

"I BLINKED! No normal person would ever consider that a punishable offense!"

"That was your five thousandth blink of the school year. You were guilty of excessive blinking in my class. It was highly annoying to witness such a gross misuse of facial muscles."

"...nundu with whooping cough..."

"It didn't occur to you that half the time I was protecting my eyes from Longbottom toxic waste?"

"I had thought you'd be capable of preventing that boy from causing too much damage. Clearly, I was mistaken. And it's hardly my fault that you chose to take advantage of me under the circumstances."

"Severus, for some mysterious reason, having you come shouting 'centaur urine' when I accidentally touch you whilst trying to regain the ability to breathe was not high on my list of detention fantasies."

"...dog-sized boll weevil with the chicken pox..."

"As if the Gordian knot atop your head were irresistible."

"As long as we're discussing faults, you should know that holding the record for the shortest point and shoot time of a male over thirteen is not something to take pride in."

Snape wouldn't have looked more hurt if she'd physically struck him. "You promised never to bring that up again."

"Only with the provision that you'd cease mocking my hair, an agreement which you've just broken."

"Ahem." The Headmaster apparently decided that the conversation had gone on long enough and managed to appear official and dignified even though the fire had spread to the ring of hair around his bald spot in a halo effect. "Miss Granger, you should rejoin your classmates before lunch. Severus, let's get you and the little one settled in. We can put him in that nursery near the Hospital Wing during classes and get a house-elf to watch over him..."

The Headmaster exited the classroom, still planning. Hermione and Snape followed, Snape whispering in her ear as he held the remains of the door open for her, "We

aren't finished discussing this..."

"We haven't used it since Filch had his cat." The Headmaster's voice echoed down the hallway. Snape and Hermione winced.

Whew. Done. Thanks and hugs to all my lovely reviewers for the last chapter. I hope you liked this one just as much. Please review, if it's not too much trouble. Thanks again! :)

Baby Rearing 101

Chapter 3 of 8

By the pricking of my thumbs, something goofy this way comes...Sequel to "Here Comes the Snake."

Disclaimer: If JKR really has a problem with this, she can sue me for all I'm worth. At the moment, that amounts to one gerbil. Good luck.

AN: Infinite thanks to all who reviewed. Your input and kind words were read more times than I could count. Much apologies for the inexcusably long delay in updating.

"How about Longbottom? He's always after that poor boy."

The past half-hour had been, quite simply, a lovely slice of hell itself. Snape had grudging new appreciation for the Founder's mode of punishment as he'd been forced to suffer through his colleagues' speculation as to the identity of the student half of his liaison--in alphabetical order, by house--while attempting to shove sustenance of any sort into the uber-finnicky Caligula Aurelius Snape. The child had refused the breast milk procured by Poppy, cooled milk from the Head Table, pumpkin juice, sugar water, Worcester sauce, creamed carrot, potato, banana, peas, squash, tomato, crumbled bread, applesauce, oatmeal, and lemon-drops.

Snape had developed a massive headache midway through the listing of the sixth- and seventh-years of Hufflepuff, specifically, the argument for Hopkins, Wayne vs. Jones, Megan as prospective objects of his affection before both were discarded in favor of MacMillan, Ernie. The specks of partially chewed food marring the intimidating effect of his normally stark-black robes did nothing to improve his mood. He ignored the guesswork as it progressed from Longbottom to Patil and tried coaxing the obdurate child on the table in front of him to ingest a bit of pudding. For an infinitesimal period of time he allowed himself hope as the spoon actually entered Caligula's mouth, but his optimism was dashed to bits when the infant spat globs of pudding at him with enough force to send the utensil bouncing off of his nose. The demon giggled in proud accomplishment and looked eagerly around the table in search of a smaller, more challenging olfactory target. Snape barely resisted the urge to pound his head against the tabletop, and the incessant scrutiny he received from the professor assigned to watch him for any hint as to a correct guess only added to the throbbing behind his eyes. At the moment the look-out happened to be Sinistra, and she was studying him with quiet expectation as if at any moment he'd spontaneously lose the instincts honed by decades of spying and confess enthusiastically when the roll arrived at the right name. He started to offer to fetch her telescope to aid her observation, but was interrupted when a new candidate was enthusiastically introduced by Sprout.

"My guess would be Harry Potter. Hate is a powerful emotion, but love is always triumphant in the end!" The Herbology professor beamed at him with such trust in the goodness of the world that Snape was unable to endure any more.

He summoned an unlabeled dark green bottle from his rooms that, upon opening, emitted alcoholic fumes of such strength as to nearly knock his closest neighbors, Flitwick and Hagrid, unconscious. He poured the brew near to full in a large mug, added the tiniest bit of pumpkin juice to prevent the noxious liquid from eating through the container, and then downed the concoction after dismissing Dumbledore's concerns for the infant with a brusque, "Nurse my fucking arse, Albus."

He felt immediately better in spite of knowing that Hermione would not approve of his sudden chemical dependency; indeed, he noticed, she was covertly shooting him her version of the raised eyebrow as best she could from her place at the Gryffindor table. However, she was unable to take further action as Dean Thomas and Ron Weasley, who had been discussing the pros and cons of adapting Muggle fighter jet tactics for Quidditch, decided to physically recreate the right/left arm bracket maneuver over her plate. Dean's buttered roll and Ron's forkful of blancmange had managed to steal the couscous off the spoon of Seamus Finnigan, spilling her drink in the process. He almost grinned at her unique expression of tolerant irritation toward the boys before he noticed McGonagall eyeing him with suspicion. He glared back, desperately trying to suppress the hiccup that suddenly bubbled up, until she looked uncertain, blinked twice, then broke off the confrontation and went back to her meal. Snape hadn't known whether to be smug or insulted when the Inquisition had almost immediately dismissed as a possibility the woman he was determined to shackle himself to for eternity, but had not deigned to interrupt the proceedings to correct the mistake. Though at the moment, he was almost prepared to take drastic measures to end the torture.

Meanwhile, mini-Snape had taken a keen interest in the mysterious liquid his 'mother' had so rapidly consumed, and was in the process of dragging the almost-empty mug toward him with his tail. Snape turned his attention back to his offspring and, noticing the child's curiosity, addressed him with no small amount of skepticism. "You want this?" He placed the mug in front of Caligula and watched as the infant dipped a hand in the dregs at the bottom of the cup and licked his fingers greedily.

"Very well." Snape emptied one of the failed baby bottles and filled it with half pumpkin juice/half mystery alcohol. The container was immediately wrenched from his grasp by the baby, who proceeded to suck at the bottle with all his might, chugging the drink as fast as his tiny throat could swallow. Snape watched with a combination of amusement and pride. Strangely, no one else at the Head Table noticed the dire breach in infant care protocol until Snape burped his son in Flitwick's direction, causing the Charms professor to sway in his seat from the effluvium.

"Severus Snape! What have you done to that baby?" McGonagall and Poppy rose in tandem from opposite sides of the table and marched toward him in a fair imitation of the aforementioned bracket maneuver. Snape, not overly concerned with impending matronly doom, examined the baby for any signs of trouble, such as death or dyspepsia. Finding none, he addressed those with the unction to question his parental skills with disdain. "Fed him, apparently. I apologize if that proved disagreeable in the least to your sensibilities."

Indeed, the infant was displaying a far lower level of inebriation than his parent and gazed curiously up at the old woman in white when she plucked him off the table. Snape took the opportunity for another couple of swigs from the bottle of fortification as McGonagall began berating him at close range. Fortunately for Snape, she had gone beyond the stage of comprehensibility in her ranting, and he was easily able to tune out the steady stream of impenetrable brogue until she thwacked him upside the head with one of Hagrid's extra-large drumsticks. At that very instant, Vector leapt to her feet from her place next to Sinistra holding a long piece of parchment adorned with much scribbling.

"I have it! He's shagging Ronald Weasley!" All seated at the Head Table turned toward the Arithmancy professor in varying states of disbelief. A large portion of the student population also tuned in to the spectacle as Vector began outlining her various calculations and formulas.

"Quantifying Severus's recent behavior as a function of his level of happiness--i.e. the amount of time he has spent not scowling, which is roughly ten times what it was last spring--and put it in bijection with the set of all people towards which his attitude has significantly changed, or those who bore the brunt of his wrath most within the last nine months, partitioned by the relation on X, the set of all detentions assigned by him in hours per day..."

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of the Great Hall, this last blow to his reputation--the assertion that he would even consider a Weasley in a vaguely romantic fashion--pushed Snape far beyond the limits of his patience. Amid the mathematical dissertation, he rose, assured himself that his offspring was adequately safe in the arms of Poppy, then stalked around the crowd surrounding Vector before marching toward the Gryffindor table, robes a-billow. All attention turned away from the aborted lecture and refocused on the Potions master as he stopped directly in front of two-thirds of the Golden Trio, with Potter having chosen to dine with Malfoy for the meal. Granger and Weasley stood up slowly to face Snape and the Hall grew silent.

Whether alcohol, the pounding behind his eyes, irritation, or all combined, what motivated Snape to act as he did next cannot be known. Whatever it was, the moment Ronald Weasley reached for his wand, Snape struck, stunning Weasley before he could arm himself then swooping down on Granger in a decidedly non-platonic fashion. While his original intent was to remain vertical as he ravished her, in his state of tipsiness, Snape misjudged his momentum and sent himself and the girl he was wrapped around straight into and subsequently on top of the table behind her. He quickly welcomed the change in trajectory as she responded with alacrity, and the pair soon became oblivious to all but each other amid the tableware and food.

Seamus Finnegan, having the misfortune to be seated right next to Hermione before Snape's spontaneous show of affection, promptly lost his lunch (his ham and sweet pepper on rye sandwich and crisps were crushed beneath his Potions professor's left knee) and could not decide whether to simply stare at the spectacle or vomit theatrically in his neighbor's lap. Said neighbor, Dean Thomas, was, like a great deal of the hall, trying to determine if he should poke his own eyes out with a dull spoon or Obliviate himself, or both simultaneously. Ginny, as a disciple of Molly Weasley, a much greater threat to Snape in the hexes-to-punish-male-naughtiness department than her brother would have been, was prevented from coming to the aid of her friend by Neville Longbottom crushing her in a hug in the midst of his panic attack. In addition, Malfoy held Potter at bay at the Slytherin table as an unquestioned favor to his Head of House. The staff appeared transfixed at the Head Table, so none intervened as the passionate embrace approached an indecent time span.

Fortunately for all involved, Snape's cloak had billowed just enough to obscure the specific placement and movement of body parts, and the unwilling spectators were spared most of the details when the kiss grew even more affectionate. Indeed, when it seemed the entwined couple had come to an unspoken agreement to demonstrate that the physical side of their relationship went far beyond snogging (as enthusiastic as it was), a visual that would have discouraged half a generation of witches and wizards from ever considering procreation, Hermione rolled Snape over into the salad bowl and straddled him, finally breaking the lip-lock in the process. The expression of pure happiness on Snape's face proved to be beyond the faculties of the entire house of Hufflepuff, which fell in a dead faint en masse into the lemon custard desserts in front of them.

Long moments eked by as the couple stared at one another and attempted to regain normal breathing patterns, sauce dripping from hair and robes and salad dressing slowly crawling its way across the table beneath them. The audience likewise remained motionless, including Potter and the youngest Weasley, who had ceased their struggles due to lack of oxygen. A crash from the front of the room broke the stillness and the spell of rapt attention as the spectators collectively blinked and looked rather muddled for a bit, some longer than others. A few turned to the Head Table in time to see Caligula Snape throw another large serving dish, this time of Dumbledore's haggis-refried-bean-casserole, off the table with all his might and a quickly improving evil giggle. The nearest members of the staff subsequently lunged or spelled for the mischievous infant to prevent the demise of another innocent plate of food. Snape took advantage of the distraction to move himself and Hermione off the table and into a standing position.

"What the bloody hell happened to you?"

Seamus Finnigan was looking at the pair in shock, and his exclamation drew the attention of the rest of the Gryffindor Table. Snape tried to appear dignified despite the chunks of mashed potato he could feel dripping from his left ear and his mild confusion at the statement.

"Fifteen points from Gryffindor, Mr. Finnigan, for swearing."

The mass hysteria and retching that Snape had been expecting upon disclosure of his relationship with the Head Girl never materialized. He was quite disappointed (though he would never admit it) and fairly suspicious at the mild reaction of the Hogwarts population. Hermione was equally puzzled at her classmates' apparent obliviousness after she'd exchanged a large amount of saliva with the wizard over whom most would choose a rabid porcupine, if the issue of sex was involved. Before the pair was able to pool their investigative abilities, Dumbledore cleared his throat loudly to garner the attention of the students.

"Ahem. I've just realized that in the wake of our happy announcement at the beginning of the meal, I've neglected the less pleasant matters. I must warn you that Professor Snape has recently overstepped his bounds as teacher and guardian. If he has made any sort of unwelcome advances on your person in the past or tries anything in the future, remember that a double swish and two flicks to the left will quickly take care of the problem. We will also provide counseling and voluntary Obliviation. In addition, it appears that the lemon custard has not agreed with the Hufflepuffs, so eat at your own peril. Professor Snape, Miss Granger, please see me after the meal. Thank you, and have a wonderful Two-hundred-forty-out-of-two-hundred-seventy-fourths Day."

Snape and Hermione were nearly lost under the stampede following the Headmaster's dismissal, but managed to fight their way to the Hufflepuff tables, where the staff had begun the process of reviving the stricken children. After most had been put to rights, with the few stragglers sent to the Hospital Wing to recuperate from the shock, the couple retrieved their child from Hagrid and presented themselves to Dumbledore for punishment, only to have him peer at them befuddled. Again. As he could not remember what he'd requested their presence for, he decided to continue the discussion on the way to the Nursery.

Baby Rearing 102

Chapter 4 of 8

By the pricking of my thumbs, something goofy this way comes...Sequel to "Here Comes the Snake."

Sorry for the delay in updating. Real life and all that. Muchas gracias to Miffled for the wonderful beta job. Any remaining mistakes are mine alone.

"You're saying that no one will remember anything of an improper nature between teacher and said student?" Snape juggled his son and the bottle containing, after much debate and experimentation, approximately ninety-percent-milk/ten-percent cauldron cleanser, in an attempt to feed the boy as he walked beside Hermione with Dumbledore leading. The quartet had already traveled through several unfamiliar passages and one inexplicably placed swimming pool, leaving Hermione and Snape fervently hoping that the Headmaster knew, if only in a vague, approximate sense, where he was taking them.

"Yes, that seems to work in a rather curious way. I think Salazar Slytherin came up with the variation on the Fidelius and Oblivate Charms used in the spell." Dumbledore halted abruptly in front of an utterly blank wall and gazed at it in concern, stroking his beard thoughtfully.

"Did he?" Hermione questioned, taking advantage of the brief pause in motion as Snape handed her the uncooperative infant. "Headmaster, was there any chance Slytherin himself came to be under the influence of *Eventum de Concubitus*?"

"Strangely enough, he did." Dumbledore progressed in his study from the wall to the damp, moldy, but otherwise nondescript floor.

"What form did his punishment take?" Hermione managed to insert the bottle in Caligula's mouth and coax the child into taking a few sips. Her victory was short-lived, however, when she was forced to duck as the baby spat the concoction back out at her. The liquid projectile struck the wall behind her with a hiss, obliterating several bacterial colonies that may have possessed an instant cure to Dragon Pox.

"Hmm. Let me see. Began with a 'b' I think. Bird? No. Beagle? Blender? Blowfish? Blackbird? Bagel? No, no..." Dumbledore began to analyze the dripping ceiling.

"Was it a basilisk?" Hermione tried allowing the infant to drink from the bottle again, only to have Caligula repeat his previous action in Dumbledore's direction, this time devastating a primitive civilization of beings distantly related to slime mold. The poor creatures, having only recently achieved sentience, had just declared the neon-pink-colored lint on the Headmaster's robes King of the Mold-People when the deadly alcohol hit, snuffing out a war-less and utterly innocent way of life that could have taught the world much about peace and the ancient art of ham boning. Caligula giggled.

"Oh, that's it! Well done, Miss Granger. You really are quite bright, my dear." Dumbledore smiled absently at the wall behind her.

"Thank you. So the creature from the Chamber of Secrets was the result of Slytherin's affair with a student?" Hermione gave up on feeding her child and settled for attempting to keep him from jumping out of her arms.

"One of them. I think he lost track after seven."

"Seven?"

"Yes, the poor things. They started out quite happy creatures, you know. Didn't used to kill. Made you burst into your favorite song and bubbles came out your ears when they looked you in the eye. Or was it butterflies? Dear me, my memory gets worse every year..."

"What happened to them?"

"The witches caught on and were less than pleased, as you can imagine. Hence the deadly stare. And his subsequent departure."

"I thought that Slytherin left because of the dispute with Godric Gryffindor over Muggleborn students."

"That was the official story, I believe. At the time, they considered it better he be thought of as discriminatory rather than bear the consequences of his indiscretions. Parents would hardly have sent their virginal young girls to the institution after that. And Slytherin hadn't wished to advertise his near-unmanning at the hands of Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff."

Hermione was unhappy with this new information, as it conflicted directly with her beloved *Hogwarts: A History*, but was willing to put her dissatisfactions aside for the sake of gaining more knowledge. "Headmaster, does the protection charm apply to elves also?"

"No, I don't think so. More convenient that way. Though hard on the elves. In fact, there was one elf last week... what's her name... tried to tell me something for the longest time, but I had no idea what she was getting at. Bibby? Wibby? Libby? Tilly? ..."

Meanwhile, Snape, who had ceased listening to the conversation right after the Fidelius Charm was mentioned, looked as if his birthday and Christmas had both just arrived, bringing not one but two Orders of Merlin, First Class, and the werewolf head of Remus Lupin on a silver platter, presented to him by temporarily resurrected James Potter and Sirius Black while the two were suspended upside down showing off uninspiring charms in graying Tightie Whities. In actuality, he was occupied with bestowing upon the founder of his house every word of praise he could think of and imagining the myriad ways his NEWT class could now be more pleasurable than the normal routine of preventing Longbottom from killing everyone in the room. Snape had never considered himself an exhibitionist (though everyone else could spot it miles away) and was astonished to find just how many extremely public places in which he wanted Hermione. Several times. *Give Longbottom an empty pot; assign tea-making to the rest... Earl Grey Restorative Draught... my desk... all the other desks ... again... floor (with Cushioning Charm)... all four walls... Hell, why not? Ceiling... storage closet... Great Hall, didn't quite get all the way there... ceiling too... Library, Restricted Section separate... that trampoline room on the fourth floor... everyone else's classroom... all their desks... perhaps not Trelawney's... Quidditch pitch, during a match... kitchens, she does have a fondness for house elves... note: Avoid Nilly... every window sill in the castle... Whomping Willow, very carefully...* His eyes had not traveled the height of Hermione's shoulders for about the same length of time.

"Severus?"

"Nipples..." His eyes glazed over as he licked his lips.

"Excuse me?"

"Nippy! That has to be it! She was quite upset about something." Dumbledore's epiphany impressed no one but the infant, who had almost fallen asleep in Hermione's arms after the conversation had taken such a boring turn. After realizing he had the baby's attention, Dumbledore threw his hands up in a gesture of belated emphasis, and promptly forgot to move them as he attempted to discern the significance of his newfound knowledge.

"Wha--yes dear?" Snape had intended the uncharacteristic endearment to distract her from his previous misbehavior, but Hermione was not fooled one bit.

"Up here, please. Have you been listening, or was all your blood busy elsewhere? If I found that blank stare attractive, I'd still be dating Ron. We have to find a way to get around the Memory Charm. Or do you want to be known for the rest of your life as the Man-Who-Shagged-King-Weasley?"

As could be guessed from Snape's previous behavior, under most circumstances, being mentioned in the same sentence as a Weasley tended to leave him in a state of mild apoplexy. However, he was willing to put aside his principles for the sake of matters of higher importance.

"Why not enjoy it while we can?" He sidled up to her with what he felt was a disarming smile. In reality, it held all the reassurance one felt witnessing a shark grin at a guppy. Hermione eyed him warily.

"What happened to 'let's get married'?" Hermione queried as Snape began subtle movements to take the inconveniently placed baby away from her.

"Will we ever get this sort of opportunity again?" Hermione relinquished her child, and Snape passed the infant into Dumbledore's conveniently outstretched arms. Fortunately, Dumbledore retained just enough awareness of his surroundings to not drop him.

"We can't--the Headmaster's right there!"

"So? It's not as if he'll remember. Pull you leg up--no, the other one."

"The poor man gages the days of the week by the volume of crumbs in his beard. He does no...~~hmm~~~~not~~ need active attempts on our--ooh--part to worsen his condition!"

"What difference will five more minutes make?" Snape inserted both hands beneath her top layer of clothing, working his way inward.

"Severus, the experience of Albus Dumbledore offering me a lemon drop mid-coitus would scar me enough to enter a nunnery."

Snape pulled his head out of her now open shirt just enough to ascertain that Dumbledore was, in fact, searching his beard with one hand for something--Merlin knew what--and weighed the advantages of relocating the tryst to a safer venue--not losing his baby momma (or daddy, depending on one's point of view) to Dumbledore-induced religious conviction being the main point--against having to temporarily relinquish his very comfortable current position. He made his decision promptly after the Headmaster pulled a not-very-appetizing sweet from the vicinity of his chin.

"All right. Move left. No, my left!"

"Well you didn't specify, did you? What's to the left?"

"A broom closet." Snape fiddled with the door handle briefly before retrieving his wand and applying a strong *alohamora*. The door crumbled to dust, leaving the lock and handle suspended happily in mid-air.

"Why is there a broom closet here? We aren't near *anything*." Hermione bit her lip in that adorable, deadly sexy manner, causing Snape to lung for the doorway while grunting, "Does it matter, woman? Always with the bleeding questions." The pair disappeared into the closet, leaving Dumbledore and the baby alone in the dark hallway. A few thumps, a bang and several moans emitted from the door-less room before a silencing spell was uttered. Nanoseconds later, a broom and a few dust bunnies fled the closet in terror. Dumbledore kept himself occupied in lecturing Caligula on the intricacies of flossing, giving the youngster a head start on what was likely to be a rigorous dental regimen once his maternal grandparents were made aware of his existence.

After an undeterminable amount of time, as those present were either unable or utterly disinterested in keeping track of it, the couple stumbled out of the closet, narrowly avoiding nasty bruises from the levitating door handle. In keeping with past events, the reappearance of his trusted employee with a tousled student had no more effect than to further damage a once brilliant mind as a single wave dislodges a grain of sand, until wave upon wave reduces a formerly mighty shoreline to two square meters of beach that one was forced to share with a toddler with one hand occupied in excavating his nasal cavity and the other tossing sand in one's eyes despite the warnings from his chain-smoking parents, and the sun-bathing presence of a corpulent man attired in a single scrap of clothing that would have been barely decent on its intended wearer but now made one wish for immediate visual incapacitation and a reduced gag reflex. In keeping with the metaphorical contents of his addled brain, Dumbledore merely grinned at them and suggested a continuation of their journey. After numerous corridors, arteries, halls, and atria, a few seeming disturbingly familiar, they came to a stop in front of a door etched in phosphorescent symbols.

"Here we are. This is a security measure I had placed during lunch; it's an Uncertainty Door. One cannot know both the location and purpose of the portal. In addition, this is a half-door, made up of little bits with spunk one-half, so you have to pass it exactly once and come back around before it will look the same. Idea of that lovely young man, German I think--"

"That's idiotic." Snape frowned. "Are we to endure this inane expedition every time we require a nanny?"

"We muddled through it just fine. I knew the direction we were supposed to travel, and you two knew we were going to the--where are we?" Dumbledore glanced around distractedly.

"The nursery." Hermione and Snape responded in burdened tandem.

"Ah, yes. Shall we?" Dumbledore tapped shave-and-a-haircut on the door, and it blinked "two-bits" back as it opened. Though the room had undergone vast improvement merely in becoming slimy-creature-and-cat-litter-less, the décor left much to be desired. In fact, Hermione's first thought upon seeing the room was that the color choices and layout had come directly from the Stevie Wonder/Liberace Home Furnishing catalogue. Snape merely assumed he was suffering retinal detachment as an aftereffect of his morning head injury. Caligula wriggled out of Dumbledore's grip and bounced to the floor, excitedly crawling over to the flamboyantly-painted miniature medieval torture play set.

"Are you sure he'll be safe in here?" Hermione blinked rapidly against the sensory overload.

"Absolutely," Dumbledore replied. "Hephaestus and Slippy will take excellent care of him."

An elderly, stern-looking elf appeared from behind a magenta four-foot replica of the Pyramid of Giza, complete with miniature sarcophagus and accessories, and walked over to next to Caligula.

"Hephaestus?" Snape inquired, dubious.

"It's Slippy," the venerable elf intoned. "That be Hephaestus." He pointed to what had seemed to be a portion of the wall that was, under further scrutiny, another elf in a bright green sequined pillow case. The elf nodded to them and continued his vigil over the infant, who was busy pulling apart little figurines with a gaily-hued rack.

"Well then," Hermione cleared her throat, not entirely comfortable with the values being instilled in her offspring but, new to parental responsibilities, willing to keep an open mind as long as Caligula behaved. "I suppose we should be going. Caligula, honey, we'll see you at dinner." She went over to hug the baby and received barely a grunt for her efforts. Snape gave his son an awkward pat on the head and moved toward the exit, only to be stopped by the Headmaster.

"There's no need to go that way, Severus. Those two egresses will take you where you want to go." He pointed toward two doors in the back of the room.

Snape looked murderous. "We just spent the better part of an hour--"

Hermione stepped in front of him, put her hands on his shoulders, and directed him to the third door with a few consoling words. The couple parted at the doors, one-half still somewhat grumpy, and left to face the remaining classes of the day.

Hope you enjoyed reading, and as always, feedback would be adored!

The Calm before the Mild Meteorological Event...

Chapter 5 of 8

Snape and Hermione endure their respective classes, and Snape gets a visitor...

AN: Sorry for the delay. Been busy attempting to gain life. As always, much thanks to Miffled for the beta.

"Now that you have mastered the containment spell, we will begin on the actual lesson for today. This will be one of the most difficult transfigurations you will undertake for the NEWT."

Hermione waited until McGonagall turned and began walking to the front of the classroom before slipping through the door, not in any real hope of not getting caught, but out of the subconscious instinctive belief held by all rule breakers that any dirty deed done quietly is somehow not quite as bad. McGonagall continued lecturing, momentarily oblivious, as Hermione made her way to her seat and took out her books.

"The hippopotamus is an ugly, bad-tempered creature, and so makes for a particularly challenging inanimate to animate transformation. The desk will not wish to be a hippo and does its best in preventing you from doing so. In fact, the desk will dislike it so much that if you are eventually successful in turning it into a hippo, it will resist all attempts to transform back into furniture until it has exacted revenge--you're late, Miss Granger. Ten points from Gryffindor, and see me after class." McGonagall gave a disapproving look, which Hermione was not accustomed to receiving.

"Sorry, Professor."

"Now, we will continue with the transformation of--where is Mr. Weasley?" She stared at the seat next to Hermione as if she'd not noticed its vacant state previously.

Hermione hadn't seen Ron since lunch--bollocks! "I think I can find him, Professor McGonagall."

"Hmmm. You seem uncharacteristically eager to be missing class time." McGonagall appeared skeptical, but soon relented. "Very well. Go check with Professor Snape first, as he is most likely to know of Mr. Weasley's whereabouts." McGonagall turned to address the rest of the class. "You will notice that the desks in front of you today are particularly unattractive..."

Hermione spent the journey back to the Great Hall contemplating the odd happenings of the day, not the least of which being her new role of parent. The responsibility was frightening, as she really hadn't pictured herself with a child--magically created or no--right out of Hogwarts. Or when still enrolled for that matter. Almost as strange was the universal insistence that Ron was having an affair with Snape, a ludicrous idea seeing as Snape would hardly be inclined, much less have the *energy* to--

Her musings were interrupted by the staircase's arrival at her destination. Upon entering the Hall, she saw Ron still petrified next to the Gryffindor table. She walked over to him, peering apologetically into his frozen, panic-stricken face.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Ron! *Finite Incantatem*." Ron immediately sagged, staggered toward her and began mumbling.

"S-s-sn-snu-sh-sha-g-g-muh--" Hermione threw her shoulder underneath Ron's left arm in an effort to maneuver him to the exit.

"It's all right. You're free."

"B-but sn-s-s-sna--"

"Snape? He's not here. We should get back to class before Professor McGonagall decides to take off more points."

"I ... I have to Floo me mum." Ron halted their progress just outside the Hall. Hermione resisted the urge to scold him, as he didn't look up to it, and instead merely sighed as he wandered off to Gryffindor tower.

"I realize it would be far too much to hope that at least one of you completed the reading from last class, so I ask this in bleak expectancy of not receiving an answer. Can anyone tell me what roles shrivelfig and sneezewort play in a Blood-Replenishing Potion?"

Snape stepped around the newly repaired desks with the patience of a kneazle. He noticed the students were shrinking away from him more than usual, in particular--

"Mr. Nemhauser, would it be an imposition to request that you remain in your chair for the duration of this period?" Snape approached the terrified boy, who had been inching his way out of his seat toward the door. Snape leaned over his desk, sneering at the young man's poor attempt at taking notes before addressing him again. "Mr. Nemhauser? Can you answer me?"

Nemhauser moved back in his seat as Snape inched forward until his damp, shaking back was pressed against his seat. Beads of sweat ran down his pale face, dripping unattractively into spots on his robes.

"Since you seem stricken dumb at the moment, I'll be gracious enough to assist you. The correct response is..." Snape stopped just short of Nemhauser's face before continuing at a whisper. "Nothing."

Nemhauser could take no more. With an incoherent cry, he tipped his chair over, hit the ground with *æcrack*, somehow fumbled his wand out of his pocket and began waving it about in desperation.

"*Mr. Nemhauser--*"

Snape leapt back as, in freakish coincidence, the boy's random movements transfigured the desk in front of him into a very confused hippopotamus. The class shifted quickly away from the animal, though its creator remained quaking on the floor. Snape cast a spell that froze the irate beast in place, barely. As he attempted to reign in the pandemonium plaguing his classroom for the second time that day, Dumbledore appeared in the doorway in a repeated show of timely omniscience.

"Did someone wave for assistance?" He surveyed the room carefully over his spectacles, the twinkle in his eyes faltering as he took in the hippo and the trembling boy next to it. He leveled a gaze at the Potions master specifically designed as inducement to immediate confession.

Snape raised his hands in a gesture of innocence. "I did absolutely nothing to the little ninny."

"I think we'll leave that decision to Mr. Nemhauser. Schemdrick? Are you feeling well, son?"

Nemhauser stuttered through what might have been an affirmative as Dumbledore assisted the hapless boy to his feet.

"Did Professor Snape hurt you?" Dumbledore, in a rare episode of lucidity, studied Nemhauser with concern. The young man shook his head, though he glanced at Snape nervously from the corner of his eye.

"Still, I believe you would benefit from a bit of rest. Off to the Infirmary with you." He patted the boy on the shoulder in an avuncular gesture and ushered him out the door. Snape watched, clearly irritated.

"Headmaster, I believe I will be able to resist Mr. Nemhauser's *charms* at least until the end of the period."

"No matter, Severus. Oh, and you might as well send this on up to Minerva. She'll already have a roomful of them by now." Dumbledore left with all the dramatic flair of his entrance, and Snape abandoned all hope of getting anything constructive accomplished for the day.

Everything was perfectly normal. Fine. Couldn't possibly be better. Unremarkable even, if one was to ignore the entire population of Hogwarts alternating their not-so-covert glances between Snape and the second-youngest of the Weasley clan. Snape was doing just that quite well, in fact, enjoying his supper of barely-dead lamb and still-gasping potatoes. Ronald Weasley, however, was failing miserably in the simple task of sipping water. He'd deposited most of the pitcher in his lap while pouring and decorated his tie with the remainder.

The large doors at the back of the Great Hall boomed open, announcing the entrance of a motherly whirlwind of fury. Tables of students scattered, benches overturned, and food and drink flew in terror as she marched to the Head Table like a plump, flightless Valkyrie, flanked by Aurors rushing to keep up, and stopped before the only man not showing fear. He raised an eyebrow as the woman's hair, which had been blowing majestically behind her despite its shortness, caught up with the rest of her. She slammed her hands on the table in front of her and gazed pointy knitting needles into the Potion master's eyes.

"My poor ickle Ronniekins has been Snaped!"

If you liked, please let me know. And also if you didn't. Thanks!

The eponymous chapter

Chapter 6 of 8

By the pricking of my thumbs, something goofy this way comes...Sequel to "Here Comes the Snake."

"My poor ickle Ronniekins has been Snaped!"

Snape stopped chewing, blinked, swallowed, blinked once more for good measure, and then replied into the near silence of the hall (one obstinate bowl continued to spin at the Ravenclaw table).

"I beg your pardon, Madam!"

"I'll say you'll be begging after what you've done to my poor, defenseless baby! Auror Braidwood, arrest this despicable excuse for a wizard!"

She turned her maternal death glare on the Lead Auror behind her. The grizzled, eye-patched man hesitated a breath too long and was yanked forward by his uniform robes. He cleared his throat in an effort to regain some dignity, but his deep, raspy voice became less formidable as it wavered when he glanced at Molly Weasley.

"Severus Snape, you are charged with endangering a minor, inflicting grievous psychological harm to a minor, corrupting a minor, unlawful sexual conduct with a minor, abuse of a position of dependence, misuse of the controlled Obliviate charm, several instances of using banned Dark magic, and multiple miscellaneous violations of the International Treaty for the Prevention of Cruelty to Magical Beasts and Whatnot. You are hereby sentenced to indefinite incarceration in Azkaban."

Snape pushed his chair back slowly, only to be met with a squad of wand-points held by jumpy Aurors.

"Easy, Snape. No one wants trouble."

"This is complete and utter rot!" Hermione Granger pushed her way to the front of the cowed Gryffindors. One of the younger Aurors flinched, shooting sparks at the nearest faculty.

"You can't possibly send him to jail without a fair trial. That's illegal, not to mention grossly unjust." She marched up to Braidwood, heedless of her once-again goggling audience.

"This man is a known associate of Dark wizards, long suspected of being a Dark wizard himself, with the capability to elude capture if given the opportunity. Because of these circumstances, special emergency arrest powers have been authorized by the Minister. Haven't used them since Sirius Black, come to think of it..."

"And we all know how well that turned out, don't we?" Hermione managed a spot-on sneer. The seasoned Auror recoiled, and Snape shifted his lower portions out of sight under the table.

"Well..."

Up to this point, Mrs. Weasley had been remarkably patient, but her face was coming dangerously close to matching her hair color. "Stop this dawdling and drag his arse to Azkaban!"

In a feat of Gryffindor brashness unequalled since the Vanquishing of the Dark Lord, Hermione broke through the arc of Aurors, slipped past the grasp of Mrs. Weasley, scrambled over the Head Table, and launched herself into Severus Snape's lap. As she attached herself to his face, the thoughts running through Snape's mind were, roughly--*Oh Great Merlin again third time today Great Hall again had no idea she was into this I'm really not very well if you insist*--and progressed little further except to then wonder if Hermione was still wearing those knickers from earlier. He was therefore confused when she pulled back and began prodding him in a rather non-arousing manner when he didn't follow suit. His normally whip-quick mind was sluggish in processing auditory stimuli, and so it took several repetitions for him to get that she was telling him...

"Severus, *run*." Hermione punctuated her plea by hopping out of their co-occupied chair and tugging him to his feet. Snape almost put in a protest, but was shoved to the door before he was able. He soon recognized the urgency of the situation and sprinted out of the room as if a gaggle of werewolves were in hot pursuit. The Aurors, highly trained in the resisting of Dark magic as they were, broke the charm of temporary idiocy plaguing witnesses of such Snape-Granger interactions quite a bit faster than normal and rushed out of the Great Hall after him.

They chased him down the long hallway before organizing themselves into striking position. The formation of Aurors took aim and with trained precision, fired just as Snape dodged to his left around the corner. To be entirely fair, the swatches of cloth at the tail end of Snape's cloak had little intent of moving anywhere on their own, but nevertheless dutifully halted when spelled to. Snape himself, only mildly inconvenienced by the separation of the detained fabric from the rest of his garment, continued down the hall, spelling hindrances, such as stone-to-glass charms, in his wake whenever possible.

Several of his curses hit home. A brave, manly Auror collapsed with a shriek beneath the crushing pain of a stubbed pinky toe; a hulking epitome of masculine pride fell to his knees clutching the elbow that was brutally banged against the blunt side of an ax from a suit of armor thrown in his path; his twin, an equally gargantuan, overly muscled fellow, staggered with hands plastered over eyes that'd gotten a bit of dust in them from blasted plaster fixtures, and little Suzie Fignottle, Auror First Class, who was limping gamely along at pace with the rest whilst trying not to completely tear the ragged shreds of gristle holding her mostly severed leg (a more accurate suit of armor) to the rest of her body, supported and guided her more severely injured fellows in the process.

By the time he'd reached the stairwell that had been a hotbed of activity recently, Snape had gained a few yards and several turns lead over his pursuers. He paused for a few seconds preparation, oblivious to another threat: a vengeful beast closing in on him. She had a score to settle with the man who had set the False Cat-Woman on her beloved, and now would take the opportunity offered her with zeal. As he was occupied with retrieving a small container from his robes, Mrs. Norris pounced with a fury that would have engendered pride in her feline ancestors. Snape felt her attack before he heard it, as she waited until her claws were in the process of being firmly planted in Snape's behind before declaring her intentions to shred him to tiny Potions master bits. Snape emitted an undignified bellow as he attempted to dislodge the determined cat manually with little initial success before casting a Repelling Charm on her while looking over his shoulder. Mrs. Norris landed nimbly a few meters away and readied for a second assault. Before she could strike, however, Snape had conjured a heavy cloth sack and sent it toward her. At first, the container was poised to envelope the feline, but seemed to change its mind mid-flight and instead wrapped itself firmly around her middle. The cat paid it little notice and leaped toward him. Or attempted to, as her hindquarters moved perpendicularly to her intended trajectory. Her efforts at simply walking toward him were equally successful; former grace and power had abandoned her limbs to a state of useless, uncoordinated flopping.

Snape briefly watched the distraught animal flounder about and growl in frustration with vindictive glee, then got on with the business of evading Magical Law Enforcement. Opening the small tin, he removed and swallowed a small pill-like object contained within, spat into box, tipped some dust onto the floor, then hurled it down the chasm. He made a careful leap to one of the staircases passing nearby, and as soon as he left the landing, a dark-robed form *bamfed* into existence behind him. The Snape doppelganger climbed down to a lower staircase, and was immediately replaced by yet another duplicate. More Snape-forms popped into being on the lower levels just as the Aurors arrived.

"Halt, Snape, or we'll be compelled to use excessive force!" The replica Snape ignored them and headed for the dungeons like the rest. Braidwood swore with alacrity that caused a pirate in a nearby painting to blush and made good on his promise, sending a crippling hex toward its retreating back. The near-Unforgivable had the unintended effect of doubling the amount of Snape to contend with, and though the Aurors took in the initial surprise with admirable equanimity, they were shocked into immobility upon encountering the swarm of faux-Snapes descending the lower staircases. Braidwood immediately spurred them into action again, setting them to the utterly exhausting and equally pointless task of catching the snarky equivalent of geometrically-reproducing smoke.

"He split in two again, sir!"

"We've got even more heading that way!"

"Hold him there!"

"How the fuck do you fucking expect..." The excessive use of expletives seemed to bring Snapes raining down from the ceiling, and the cacophony of the resulting (increasingly black-robed) scrum hindered any further communication beyond cries of pain and frustration.

After several minutes, Braidwood discontinued the fruitless endeavor, separating the remaining bits of his Aurors from the pale, greasy pack of ugly Hogwarts Potions professors.

"You lot head down to his rooms. We've got all the entrances manned and his quarters sealed. He's not going far. Haglund, follow me. We'll need Dumbledore to track him down."

From his Disillusioned perch above the melee, the true Snape blessed Mad-Eye Moody for being somewhere, anywhere else at that particular moment, and was, for the first time, thankful for the existence of the Weasley twins and their Multiplying Mints (improved upon by Snape for his own personal use, of course). As the last steps of the harried Aurors faded away, he made his way to Gryffindor Tower with leisure.

The portrait of Sister Hildegard von Bingen reluctantly admitted him entrance to Hermione's rooms, grumbling uncouth aspersions concerning the inverse relationship between the chastity of the room's regular occupant and the average nocturnal clamor emitting from it, all of which Snape successfully ignored as he had been doing for the past several months. First order of business was to retrieve everything he would need for protracted Auror avoidance and concurrent defense against the charge of bugging the Minister of Magic's youngest boy.

"Nilly!" he called into the empty fireplace. Inconveniently (though justifiably so), after the small incident in which she had declared a one-elf war on his testicles, Nilly no longer had access to his rooms, nor the emergency supplies he had stored there. She could, however, fetch his son before the Ministry poked its collective head out of its collective arse and realized the child might be useful in drawing Snape from hiding. He had no fear Hermione would be retained for the same purpose, but he sincerely hoped the Weasley boy had been taken to a secure, and, as was Ministry habit, very uncomfortable, location.

Just as he was about to call for the house-elf again, she appeared in the middle of the room behind him, heralding her arrival with a constant stream of apologies.

"I's sorry to be late sir, but I was shining Professor Trelawney's crystal balls, and she was saying they was dirty when they wasn't, and made me clean them over and over and she was seeing things in them and saying it was dirt and Nilly is so sorry..."

Out of what had become automated self-defense, Snape moved until at least two articles of furniture were between them before interrupting her.

"Never mind! I need you to retrieve my son from the nursery. Bring along some toys and such for him to play with, also. And get some milk and any alcohol we have in the kitchens."

"Yes, sir! Nilly is always happy to help Professor Snape..."

"Yes, yes, I'm well aware of that. Now go." Snape followed the order with a few choice words that would not be in keeping with the core values of S.P.E.W., but Nilly seemed not to notice, smiling (demoniacally, still, to Snape) as she set about her mission.

Snape began moving furniture around to compensate for the bassinet, then, considering how cramped the space was going to get very soon with three occupants, created a tastefully un-Gryffindor divider between bed and desk, planning to enlarge both spaces at a point soon in the future. After making several (highly illegal) Portkeys out of useful objects about the room, Snape collapsed in the comfortable chair he'd Transfigured for his own use. With accommodation and emergency escape measures thus put in place, he settled in for a long siege, deftly snagging a Firewhiskey bottle as Nilly deposited a dipsomaniac's wet dream over every available horizontal surface.

AN: Been a long time, but I hope this was worth it. Reviews and feedback are much appreciated! Thanks for reading.

One Malfoy, two Malfoies?

Chapter 7 of 8

Unexpected arrivals and somewhat-welcome returns...

AN: Hello all! Much apologies for neglecting this story for so long. It's now hopelessly AU as well. Many thanks to Ash for the beta! Any feedback would be greatly appreciated.

"Grrr."

The bright morning sunlight intruded rudely on Severus Snape's sleep, as it had every day for the past week. He still wasn't used to Hermione's preference to greet the day awakened by the first rays passing over the castle, seemingly focused to a laser with pinpoint accuracy on wherever his eyelids happened to be by the large, bright windows of her room. He rolled over in protest with another grunt, nestling against his bedmate, and tried to fight the encroachment of the morning on his rest. It was to be a losing battle, however, as his partner was slowly waking up herself. She stretched, and the resulting sight of the sheet slipping down her body in the action seemed adequate compensation for the blissful sleep to which he would be unable to return any time soon. The unexpected arrival of their magically spawned child, and the consequent time and effort in care it brought, had severely hampered their sex life. Snape, who never turned down exploitable opportunities such as this (they were both in a bed, naked, breathing, and mostly awake, which was good enough for him) set about convincing Hermione of the same. At first, she seemed receptive to his attentions, letting out a yawn that turned into a hum of pleasure as she turned toward him. As soon as she looked at the clock, however, she frowned and started to pull away.

"Not now, Severus, I've got to get ready. And it's your turn to feed him." She attempted to extricate herself from his embrace, but he tightened his grip.

"It's barely five in the morning. Feed who?" he asked, certainly not petulantly, as he would never stoop to that. On cue, a faint murmur built up into an inquiring cry on the other side of the divider. She looked at him pointedly.

"But, last night, we agreed...we made a schedule," he entreated in his most persuasive tone, generally reserved for needling favors from those who didn't like him very much (most people) or mercy from irate mad wizards bent on filleting him alive. Not even this appeal to his lover's obsessive attention to detail and planning could dissuade her, though, and she sighed.

"Yes, *last night*. Remember, when you said to start without you?" She drew her hand in small circles on his chest.

"Mmm, yes," he mumbled into the nape of her neck, drawing the bed sheet further down and regaining the ground he'd lost when she'd stopped him earlier.

"Well, I did."

"Yessss," he hissed, more to her tits than her face now, as he made his way down her body while pretending to participate in the conversation.

"And then those first years came to the door while you were showering." He didn't much like the term 'first years' being brought up in the current context, so he latched on to 'showering' instead, memories of her associated with it in particular, and rumbled an affirmative in between her breasts.

"And I had to convince them that there was nothing under any of their beds, that they weren't in the supposed 'trick dorm room' which disappear from the castle whenever its occupants fall asleep simultaneously, vanishing them forever, and furthermore, that they wouldn't be sucked out a window due to air pressure differences from the height of the tower. I suspect Dennis Creevey was responsible for at least the last one." She scowled, but he was too involved in the attempted seduction to notice. He had stopped paying attention to the discussion altogether, which made her next words and actions a complete surprise.

"Then I came back to our room, and found you asleep. I had to finish without you too." Her accusation was punctuated with a push, not terribly forceful, but enough to dislodge him from her person.

"You should have woken me," he growled in dissatisfaction as she escaped his grasp and left the bed.

"I tried. You were dead to the world." She set about her morning routine with more cheerfulness than she had any right to, in his opinion.

"With not a lot of effort, apparently," he grumbled, trying to summon the will to get up in the face of such a disappointment. His child was making contented noises next door, but would soon be demanding sustenance, by the sound of it.

"You don't take being startled awake very well." She paused in her preparations to give him an amused look.

"You have my official permission to use whatever methods you need to should the situation arise again. Water, loud noises,*Enervate*, anything!" He was certainly not whining now, either, as that was also something he would never, ever do.

"I'll try to remember. Still, there is something particularly...appealing...about a man slumped over, vulnerable, having passed out mid-wank," she teased. He didn't appreciate the grin she gave him before stepping into the bathroom.

He muttered complaints under his breath, resolving to attempt a few more precious moments of sleep in protest to her decision to put routine and responsibility above his needs, and promptly let out an undignified yelp as he rolled over onto a large book entitled *The Extremely Thick Guide To Breaking Very Hard Things: Curses, Charms, and Memory Loss* that was cunningly hidden under the sheets on her side of the bed. Snape was in no position to appreciate humorous coincidence mislabeled 'irony' and shoved the twelfth volume in the critically acclaimed Suggestive Titles series to the floor with one hand while cupping his bits in belated protective gesture with the other. Resigning himself to defeat, he gingerly sat up, popped various joints into place, and stood, ready but not at all excited (in any sense) to go about his day. First on his agenda was ensuring that his progeny didn't set the rooms aflame in a fit of hunger.

For the last week, the Snape family had settled into a routine. Severus would watch his son, assisted by Nilly, during the day, and Hermione would take over parenting duties at night, with the odd minute or two not occupied by the infant dedicated to togetherness time. Which generally consisted of the two new parents collapsing in undignified heaps around each other. As he retrieved his wand from the bedside table, dressing casually with a quick spell, Snape reflected that, aside from infant-enforced celibacy, lack of sleep, danger of discovery, threat of Azkaban, and the general messiness that seemed to follow the child everywhere, life as a new parent wasn't half bad. And, he reflected, having another being, small and demonic though it may be, who actually looked happy to see him was quite novel, and not at all undesirable.

The sight of his son grinning with wide, welcoming eyes as he entered the infant's room stirred something deep within him, and almost made up for the chore of feeding and cleaning the little beast. He mixed a small amount of vodka with a bottle of orange juice and retrieved the boy from the crib. Immediately, the child began suckling

merrily away at the concoction, snuggling into him in the process. Despite himself, he found he actually rather liked the child, beyond feeling responsible for its continued existence. Unsurprisingly, aside from his duties as godfather cossetting the Malfoy prince (from a distance, mind), Snape had had little interaction with children under the age of first-years. He intensely disliked and distrusted all those old enough to wave a wand, particularly second-years no longer shocked and terrified into submission by the novelty that was Hogwarts. He considered the little bastards fully capable of murder by that age, and of covering it up afterwards by their fifth year. Seventh years were to be treated with the same level of trust as would be appropriate for underfed dragons. He trusted less even his Slytherins, whom he cared for in his own way, protecting, teaching, nurturing (after a fashion); he was more likely to turn his back to a pack of rabid hippogriffs. His son, however, was beginning to establish himself as an exception.

The noise of Hermione exiting the loo drew his attention, and her smile at beholding the unusual pair caused the warm sensation in his chest to resurface. It might have been contentment, but he wasn't entirely certain. He watched as she gathered her things for the school day.

"So what exactly necessitates commencing your study at this ungodly hour?" he asked quietly, but with a hint of knowing mirth. She shouldered her bag and walked over to stand in front of him, ruffling the child's short black hair between the sharp points of his horns.

"With all this, I'm terribly behind in revision," she answered, only a little sheepishly.

"Even Potions?"

"Especially Potions!" Her pout was adorable, and he had to stop a soppy grin from forming on his face. "We haven't done anything for the past week. The Headmaster didn't even assign the homework in your lesson plans."

Snape supposed he should be concerned about the disastrous state his classes would most likely be in, were he ever able to return to actually teaching them, but really couldn't be bothered.

"You mentioned yesterday that someone had been engaged to cover them?" he asked more in curiosity than concern.

"I think he or she is supposed to arrive today. It's hard to tell, the way Dumbledore's been recently." She frowned, letting the baby grasp her fingers with the hand not occupied by the bottle of spike sustenance. "I should be back before lunch. Is there anything I can bring you from the library?"

With the pain from his encounter with one of the many books that had invaded their rooms fresh in his mind (and other areas), he declined. She kissed them both goodbye and left, ignoring the huffing judgment of the doorway's guarding portrait as she passed. Upon her exit, Snape returned to enjoying a silence that was guaranteed to be temporary. Soon, the last liquid in the bottle would be finished, and he would face the unenviable task of cleaning up after the child. Serving both his masters might have interfered with his sleeping schedule, but he'd never, by the great fortune of neither being named Peter Pettigrew nor holding the post of Deputy Headmistress, had to wipe their asses for them. Despite their reputation for depravity, the Death Eaters had not subjected Snape to such variety and quantity of bodily fluids, not even when the Dark Lord had caught sick with a cold no one was allowed to acknowledge or treat. He had a strong stomach, as evidenced by his complete willingness to disembowel and pickle anything that would prove useful in potions making, but flinched when faced with the noxious substances the baby was capable of producing. Hermione disapproved of using *Scourgify* directly on the infant itself, but after several inquiries and bouts of research they had assembled a series of spells tailored to childcare. He cringed imagining what it would be like being restricted to Muggle methods. Finally, the boy was finished, and after burping (from experience, directed away from anything flammable) and cleaning him as thoroughly as possible, Snape put him under the care of a summoned Nilly and went about preparing himself for the day.

"Ron!" Hermione had finished catching up on her assignments and scheduled revision just in time to catch the end of breakfast, and was pleasantly surprised to see the familiar shock of red hair seated next to Harry at the Gryffindor table. She rushed to them, giving the second-youngest Weasley a friendly embrace before setting down her things.

"Hello," he replied, rather subdued. Hermione seated herself between Harry and a newly arrived Ronald Weasley, greeting the former and giving the latter another supportive hug in the process. "How are you? Where've you been?"

"It was horrible, Hermione." Ron looked haggard and worn despite his week-long hiatus from school; his red hair hung limply in his face, and even his freckles looked paler than usual. "I had to live with Moody." He gestured to the Head Table, and Hermione was startled to see the mad Auror standing next to Dumbledore, and behind him seemed to be...

"Is that Lucius Malfoy?" she asked, bewildered. Harry nodded unhappily. Ron just took a morose bite of toast. "But why? What is he doing here?"

Harry took a deep swig of pumpkin juice, swallowing his poached egg whole distractedly, before replying, "I think he's going to be covering Potions."

The man in question, who had been in Azkaban for most of the past year (and to Hermione's knowledge, should've remained there), looked a bit bedraggled in plain black robes but kept the air of haughtiness that seemed to naturally hang about him. He didn't even appear to condescend to participating in the conversation being held between the Headmaster and Moody, instead occupied in looking around the hall with an unwaveringly cold expression. She saw his attention reach his own son, seated at the Slytherin table, before his countenance softened almost imperceptibly. The younger Malfoy seemed determinedly occupied with his breakfast, refusing to meet his father's gaze.

"That seems like a horrid idea. How could they have let him out?" Hermione asked, not a little perturbed and confused. Harry shrugged his shoulders, his expression darkening as he looked at Draco as well.

"I dunno what's going on, but this is bollocks. He's got no right to be out of Azkaban after what he's done," Harry practically growled, ripping his toast to bits with more force than the wheat product deserved.

"He still sleeps in a trunk," Ron interjected morosely. Harry and Hermione turned their attention belatedly back to their friend.

"Who? Mad-Eye?" Harry asked. Ron was quiet at first. Hermione intercepted a passing plate of fruit while waiting for a response. After a few more beats of silence, she snagged a slice of toast, her attention still mostly on her clearly traumatized friend as she began to surreptitiously consume her breakfast. Finally, Ron spoke, still showing an uncharacteristic lack of interest in the pile of his favorite food on the plate in front of him.

"I can't talk about it," he mumbled. Hermione put a concerned hand on his shoulder, and Harry tried cajoling him into eating something. The rest of the table appeared interested in the strange happenings as well, but were polite enough (or too intimidated by Harry's visibly poor mood) to restrain themselves to whispering amongst each other. Neville and Ginny helped form a protective circle around their newly returned housemate.

"Did they...catch Snape?" She stumbled over the words only a bit, but no one seemed to notice.

"No, I'm supposed to be the bait." Ron's tone was still close to dejection, but he'd had to form the sentence around a mouthful of bacon buttie, indicating some improvement in his condition.

"So Malfoy's here as a distraction, and Moody's real purpose..." Her thought was interrupted by Dumbledore's *Sonorus*-enhanced polite cough. The discussion at the Head Table had reached its conclusion, and all attention now turned to the rising schoolmaster.

"Ahem. I would like to introduce Lucius Malfoy, who is on parole from his life sentence and here to fulfill community service hours as your temporary Potions professor." Malfoy gave a slight bow paired with a sneer toward the assembled students at the Headmaster's gesture. Dumbledore continued, unconcerned. "And this is Auror Alastor Moody, who some of you may recognize from his imposter's term as Defense professor." Moody's grimace nearly matched Malfoy's, his magical eye jittering about menacingly. "He will be accompanying Mr. Malfoy as his...well, to ensure he behaves. I've been informed that Mr. Malfoy is unable to carry a wand or perform magic, and

his presence here will be carefully monitored by Aurors. If you have any questions, please feel free to approach the Aurors or your professors. That is all; have a wonderful day."

Hermione tried not to let her inner panic show. They'd been quite lucky so far, escaping the clumsy grasp of the Ministry with ease, but Moody's presence threw everything into jeopardy. She wasn't sure what defensive measures he'd be able to develop, but she had to warn Snape. Finishing her breakfast with more speed and less decorum than she normally displayed, she gathered her things and turned to her friends.

"I'll meet you in Transfiguration. I've got to..."

"Miss Granger." She was again interrupted by the kindly voice of the Headmaster, now standing behind her, accompanied by Malfoy and Moody. Malfoy looked disdainfully bored, and Moody was examining her with suspicion. Dumbledore smiled at her, though his eyes appeared to narrow for a split second before he shifted his attention to Harry. "Good morning, Harry. And how are you, Mr. Weasley?"

Ron muttered indistinctly, glancing at Mad-Eye in fear. Dumbledore appeared not to notice. "Would the two of you please make sure Mr. Weasley settles in today?" He looked over his spectacles at Harry and Hermione. "I'm sure he'll be back to his old self soon enough." He patted Ron on the shoulder before continuing down the aisle toward the exit. Moody and Malfoy followed with much less cheer. She sighed, waiting for her friends to ready themselves. She wouldn't be able to stop by her rooms now, not when she seemed to have drawn the attention of both the Headmaster and the overzealous Auror. She took out a small, unmarked book from her bag and a quill, opened it, and hastily scribbled a message. She could only hope he'd read it before Moody had time to find him. Draco approached them cautiously, making sure his father had left the hall, and she gave him a reassuring smile as he slung an arm around Harry. She discreetly returned the book to her bag as they departed, again trying to engage a reluctant Ron in conversation.

Fabio and Popeye have entered the castle. Take evasive action.

Mapping Indiscretions

Chapter 8 of 8

Transfigurations, speculations, confrontations...

AN: Finally an update! Much apologies for the delay and many thanks to all who've offered feedback and stuck with me. As this was started pre-HBP, all is now hopelessly AU. I won't really attempt to reconcile events to canon, but might borrow bits and pieces. As always, reviews are greatly appreciated!

Disclaimer: Nothing recognizable is mine. Including the disclaimer.

The journey to the Transfiguration classroom was short but not terribly productive. Ron still refused to talk much (not even an inquiry into the current state of his beloved Chudley Cannons could draw forth any enthusiasm) so Hermione occupied herself in catching him up on the various goings on in the castle in his absence. She finished telling him of Seamus and Dean's nocturnal brewings in one of Sprout's greenhouses, and the subsequent pandemonium caused by the accidental administration of the illicit liquid to the Herbology professor's leaping toadstools by unsuspecting second-years, just as they entered the room. Ron failed utterly to appreciate the sublime hilarity of the anecdote, so she gave up on engaging him in anything resembling conversation. She settled herself in between Ron and Draco, with Harry seated on the other side of the blond Slytherin.

"Good morning. Before we begin today's lesson, I'd like to resolve an issue that was brought up last class. Miss Granger asked some very interesting questions regarding the nature of the relationship between transfigured objects and their properties as defined by Muggle investigative methods. Unfortunately, we do not have time to go over these during class—" an anticipatory groan interrupted her, but she continued undeterred "—and so I have assigned several extra readings on the subject. I expect summaries of each by the end of next week." She gave a smile and nod toward Hermione, who was busy sinking lower into her chair to dodge the glares and grumbles being hurled in her direction by her classmates. Even Draco muttered, "Damned swot," under his breath with a mixture of familiar annoyance and grudging affection, and she elbowed him with less force than she would have previous years in retaliation. McGonagall silenced any further protest with a wave of her hand. "Now, today we shall be undertaking a series transfiguration. You have all been given objects and a set of targets into which to transfigure them. You will be graded on the success of each change, and the integrity of the resulting object. For example, Miss Brown, you will begin with rake/snake/cake/lake..."

The students set about their appointed task with varying levels of enthusiasm. Seeing an opportunity to talk to Draco for the first time that day (he and Harry had been rather occupied with one another after breakfast), she leaned over to whisper to him while appearing focused on the pocket watch in front of her, "How are you doing? Did you know he was being let out of Azkaban?"

Draco poked the slug on his desk with disgust before answering in a low tone. "I'm fine. The Ministry informed my mother—without giving her any say—of my father's release yesterday, and she owed me last night."

Hermione expertly transfigured the watch into an impeccably boring rock. "Do you know how he did it?"

Draco winced at the lingering mucous in the bottom of his newly made mug. "Gobs of money, I'd expect. He must have Galleons stashed somewhere my mother doesn't know about."

Harry used the meanderings of the furred, legged, and tailed hat on his desk as pretence for joining the conversation. "What are we whispering about?"

"Lucius." Hermione's rock morphed into a complicated brass padlock.

"Oh." Harry grabbed his bowler by the tail, pulling its head out of Draco's slimy cup. "What are we going to do about him?"

"What do you suggest? We all know he'll be up to no good. He's had more than enough time to plan something." Draco transfigured the drinking vessel into a small, ornate but equally gooey Persian rug.

"It's been what, nearly half an hour since they showed up?" Harry added leathery wings and pointed ears to his object, but didn't manage to reduce its hatty-ness.

"As I said, more than enough time," Draco sneered at his damp miniature floor furnishing, equally disgusted with it and his bastard of a father.

"Do you trust Moody to keep him in line?" Hermione asked, her rock shifting into a lovely fluffy blue sock with yellow ducks in a wandstroke.

"Not a chance, especially if his real mission is catching Snape."

"We need to do something." Harry corralled his creature, which now might have passed for a usable (if furry) doormat if it hadn't still been sporting wings. The only sound from Ron's direction thus far was a plaintive *rib-bet* from the green, pebbly, wooden shoe hopping pathetically toward the edge of the desk. Ron absently pushed it back in front of himself, and with a wave of his wand, added a pink, curly tail. Hermione winced in sympathy for the poor thing and considered their options. The only good one she could come up with risked exposure of Snape and their son, but they hadn't much choice. She sighed, "At the very least, we can keep track of him. Where's your map, Harry?"

"Up in my room. Shouldn't take long to get it." In a louder tone, addressing their teacher, he asked, "Professor, may I be excused?"

McGonagall was too busy restraining Neville's growling, snapping chaise lounge while he attempted to placate it with honey to do more than motion Harry to the exit. Hermione and Draco exchanged amused eye-rolls as Harry left. She noticed that Draco's mood and focus seemed to be improving; he'd managed a perfectly dry three-pronged plug with accompanying wire. He saw her look of mild surprise and answered with a condescending huff: "What? I can pay attention in Muggle Studies if I *want* to."

Her equally tart reply was interrupted when her lap suddenly became full of half-transfigured monstrosity. The clog's bleary, bugged eyes pleaded for mercy, its tongue hanging limply beneath its pig snout, a flowing, furry Alsatian tail curled dejectedly around the wooden heel. As Ron poked at it with his wand, it cowered pathetically, trying to bury itself in her robes for safety.

"Ronald! You can't just lop the bits off that don't belong on it! Here, let me..."

"Snip! Snap! Snip! the scissors go;

And Conrad cries out - Oh! Oh! Oh!

Snip! Snap! Snip! They go so fast;

That both his thumbs are off at last.

Mamma comes home; there Conrad stands,

And looks quite sad, and shows his hands;

'Ah!' said Mamma 'I knew he'd come

To naughty little Suck-a-Thumb."

Snape finished his performance of the sadistic children's poem with a theatrical flourish worthy of any pantomime hack, and little Caligula giggled happily, making an absent grab at the half-kneazle who'd been observing the reading with equal attention. The elderly cat leaped aside disdainfully, and the child contented himself with chewing on the nearby table leg instead. Reading to the boy seemed to be one of the few ways of calming him, particularly when Snape did it. Happily, he was a man no little enamored of his own voice and so could occupy himself quite well in lecturing and engaging in one-sided conversations with his young son. When he tired of the drivel passing itself off as children's literature, he often moved on to his research and marking with little protest from his audience; in fact, his best reviews seem to come from vitriolic interjected criticism of rubbish journal articles and devastatingly accurate impressions of the dimmest of his students. Besides, the boy's typical response of drooling and falling asleep really wasn't much different to what he faced in the classroom daily, except perhaps with a bit more attention from the infant.

Snape had never imagined himself in the role of 'house wizard,' but had settled into a routine resembling such with surprising aplomb. He'd taken up the new hobbies of reading all the places where he'd been 'sighted' by watchful members of the general public in the previous day and listening to the Wizarding Wireless. He enjoyed eviscerating the misguided advice dispensed during *Toots, Shoots 'n' Roots* and had developed a rather embarrassing addiction to *The Bowmans*, whose derivative soap plotlines brought back fond memories of his mother listening to Radio 4 in the kitchen when he was very young.

Snape would read to the boy, and the child would attempt to set the books on fire. Together, they played with animated wizard dolls and mini-brooms, which the boy would set on fire. He set the child to play with Crookshanks, which Caligula would first attempt to bite, then set on fire. Both parents had by now become experts at the Flame-off Charm Hermione had gotten from Ginny Weasley (Molly Weasley having been far too occupied running the manhunt for Snape to spare the time) and could apply it broadly and without looking. Currently, Caligula appeared to tire of further mangling the unfortunate piece of furniture and turned his attention back to a wary Crookshanks. Snape was not overly fond of the animal, but intervened nonetheless, spelling an indestructible stuffed bear to provide a more suitable challenge. He smiled softly as he watched his son tenaciously hunt the toy throughout the room, but then he noticed an insistent buzzing sound coming from his discarded robes on the armchair. He summoned the small book with apprehension—Hermione wouldn't employ the alert charm without good reason. The hastily scrawled note did nothing allay concern.

Moody and... Lucius? Bugger.

He would need to build on the already impressive set of wards currently guarding the room to keep the mad Auror at bay. The elder Malfoy's presence was a mystery and an unwanted complication, but a lower priority. Washing down the last bit of his toast with bitter black coffee, he made sure the baby was sequestered away from the door before focusing his attention on foiling the Ministry's latest scheme.

By the time Harry returned with the Marauder's Map, the classroom had descended into a chaos atypical of seventh-year classes. Professor McGonagall was far too busy attending to all the horrors the sequential transfigurations had produced to notice the two Gryffindors plotting with their former nemesis. Hermione panicked briefly as Draco unfurled the map under the desk; would the bargain she'd struck with it hold? She tried to surreptitiously get a glimpse at her rooms in the upper corner of the enchanted parchment, but that section was curled over closest to Harry.

"There's the Potions classroom." Draco poked the bottom portion of the map. "He's still there, at least."

"Where's Moody?" Hermione frowned. Malfoy's name hovered where Snape's desk could be found, by her calculations, but 'A. Moody' was nowhere to be seen.

"Is that him?" Harry pointed to a smudged name moving in a nearby hallway toward the classroom.

Draco squinted. "No, that's Maughn, Arya. She's a Slytherin first-year."

"Keep looking," Harry said as he unfolded the map further beneath the desk, and Hermione was finally able to peek at the area representing her quarters. Mercifully, it seemed that the map considered Caligula to fall under the category of 'Hermione's mischief to be managed' and her rooms appeared devoid of fugitive Potions master and offspring. She sighed silently in relief and began her own search for Mad-Eye. The nearest corner of the map seemed to wink knowingly at her, and she resisted an oncoming blush. She suspected that the Marauders would be surprised to discover just how sentient their creation had grown. When she'd begun her ill-conceived (so to speak) relationship with Snape months ago, she'd borrowed the map with the intention of spelling it to obscure their activities. The parchment had cheekily shrugged off the charm and asked her what she was hoping to hide. As curious, mischievous, and randy as its teenage creators, it heartily approved of her naughty intentions (though certainly not her choice of paramour) and agreed to cover up any suspect movements in exchange for juicy details of the same (she blamed the map's unsettling penchant for voyeurism on the influence of Peter Pettigrew). Snape would be furious were he to discover the length and breadth (ahem) of knowledge of his personal life now known to the parchment, but it had seemed necessary at the time. Had she known about the Memory Charms governing Hogwarts student-teacher relations, she of course wouldn't have bothered.

"Isn't that your room, Hermione? What would Moody be doing there?" Harry gave her a confused look. He pointed to the dot signifying the paranoid Auror's location just outside the door of her chambers.

"I've no idea." She hoped her tone leaned more toward puzzlement than panic, though the latter was certainly threatening.

"Didn't he say something to you this morning?" Draco's sideways glance was more suspicious than Harry's. She would have more trouble fooling the perceptive Slytherin.

"N-no, I don't think so. He and Dumbledore were just checking on Ron—"

"He's gone!" Harry blinked, peering more closely at the now-vacant area of the map.

"What? Where'd he go?" Draco pulled the corner of the map down between the three of them. They combed the nearby passages and rooms, finding no trace of Mad-Eye Moody.

"He's not anywhere in the castle. How'd he leave?" Harry spared a glance toward McGonagall, but fortunately she was now occupied in separating the irate creations of Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil, who had managed to transfigure their objects into Acromantulas with political differences. The webbing and biting rhetoric flew about the classroom in equal density and stickiness.

"He must have Portkeyed out." Despite her optimistic verbal supposition, Hermione winced internally. Snape must have finally done it. She wondered how hard it was going to be to scrape Moody's crispy remains off her doorstep. The portrait guarding her door was probably a lost cause.

"Wait, there he is. Coming through the gates now." Draco pointed, having unfolded the bottom half of the map. Indeed, 'A. Moody' appeared on the path, moving at a quick pace until, inexplicably, seeming to swing about in a tight circle before continuing toward the entrance to the castle. The odd behavior was repeated several times as the dot approached the entranceway.

"Your dad's on the move." Harry pointed toward the dot labelled 'L. Malfoy,' which had relocated—rather far away from the Potions classroom—to the second floor. "What's he up to?"

"Haven't a clue," Draco answered, sounding glum and frustrated. They studied the map, exchanging puzzled glances over the dot hovering nearby a room labelled 'Girls Lav.' Hermione noticed that Moody had made his way into the castle.

"He's heading back toward the dormitories," she said, pointing toward the marker making smaller periodic pirouettes on an upper floor of Gryffindor tower.

"What the fu—"

"Mr. Potter!" Harry's understandably confused and off-color outburst was disrupted by the arrival of a very harassed and put-upon Transfiguration professor. Luckily, she was distracted by the to-scale miniature IKEA-furnished flying hat claiming an address in a Swansea tower block on the desk in front of them, and they were able to hastily fold the map away before she noticed. As McGonagall began a lengthy and brogue-inflected critique of the specimens in front of her, Hermione cast one last suspicious glance at the wayward dots of the nutty men under surveillance before letting out a resigned sigh. Whatever they were (separately) up to, it couldn't be good.

It would have taken some convoluted logic on her part to convince the boys that splitting forces for the lunch hour was the most effective way to investigate the mysteries posed by the mad Auror and his wayward charge, but fortunately the problem sorted itself. Ron refused to have anything whatsoever to do with Moody. Draco, who was best equipped to figure out what Lucius could possibly be up to, refused to babysit an increasingly irrational Ron in addition to his father. This left Harry torn between accompanying her to her rooms to see what Moody's fixation with them might be and making sure his best friend didn't walk off of an unconnected stairwell in the clutches of a melancholy fugue. Hermione managed to beg off his assistance by promising to not engage Moody directly, take the invisibility cloak, and give them frequent updates by enchanted Galleon.

"Severus?" The portrait guarding her rooms had stared at her in speechless horror and the wards spelled around it had glowed a sickly puce, but both admitted her nonetheless. As the door swung shut behind her, they seemed to shimmer, re-sealing the entranceway with a low hum. She took stock of the room, half-expecting to see evidence of an epic duel, but aside from some slight burn damage to an end table it appeared just as she'd left it that morning. Though, judging from the height of the marks and coinciding teeth impressions, the fault most probably lay at the feet of her offspring and his penchant for mauling her furniture.

"In here." His voice travelled to her from the next room, accompanied by the demonic giggles characteristic of a happy Caligula. She made her way to the bedroom, stopping in the doorway at the sight of Snape attempting to change the baby's nappy, a dangerous undertaking at the best of times. Staying well out of the line of fire, she asked, "How is he?"

"The usual." Those not familiar with Snape's many variations of 'grumpy' might have missed the subtle note of affection in his voice.

"Absolute terror, then." Hermione smiled. Snape grunted an affirmative. She set her bag down by the bed. Snape finished cleaning and diapering the child and picked him up. Caligula giggled and reached for his nose, capturing it easily. Hermione hit the makeshift changing table with a cleansing spell as she moved to join them next to it. He turned to her with a raised eyebrow, extricating his nose in the process. The baby shifted his attention to the young woman next to him. Snape handed the eager boy over to his mother and gave her a brief kiss.

"What happened with Moody? Did he find you here? Is everything all right?" Hermione tried to keep her tone light for the child's sake.

"I—" Snape's reply was interrupted by a horrific bang from the next room. Hermione balanced Caligula on one arm and drew her wand, looking at Snape in alarm. He gave her an incongruous smile as he made his way toward the loud crashes with something like eagerness. Even more wary at his entirely inappropriate reaction to the threat on their lives, she followed him into the sitting room, cradling the baby protectively. The rumbling had now been joined by muffled shouting, and the door shook with all the politeness of a battering ram. Snape waved a hand, and the door became transparent and the ranting more audible. The spitting, outraged visage of Senior Auror Emeritus Alastor Moody at full froth hurled hexes and imprecations toward them, the former bouncing harmlessly off the doorway and the latter washing unpleasantly over the ears of the room's occupants.

"... felch a Dementor you slimy, rotten, bugging..." the door and jamb shook with each word "... shit-licking, cock-sucking, knob-less, smeg-collecting cunt! Step away from the defenseless children!"

She noticed that, rather than showing concern, Snape seemed to be placing ticks next to a litany of expletives, curses, and generally foul language written on a slip of parchment he'd picked up from her desk. He'd even subdivided alternate spellings and pronunciations. The speed of Moody's delivery had Snape still marking off profanity a few seconds after Moody's rant was cut short by coughing. He paused, twirling the quill in thought as the Auror's hacking subsided into pained wheezing.

"Hmmm... I'm forgetting something..."

"Cun! Cun!" From his perch on her shoulder, little Caligula punctuated his helpful suggestion by poking his mother in the stomach with his tail.

"Ah, thank you." Snape rewarded his offspring with a pat on the head, right between the horns, before adding the final tally.

"Severus!" Being the expert in multi-tasking that she was, Hermione, in one swift movement, took a scandalized kick at Snape's nearest limb and belatedly covered her child's ears with a conjured set of earmuffs, all the while somehow managing to keep her wand trained on the wheezing menace now propping himself up against the transparent portrait.

"Ma, Da, cun! Ma, Da, cun!" Caligula bounced happily to his new favorite chant, which seemed to optimize maximal parental reaction with economy of syllable, and

manage to be damn catchy in the process.

"Ouch! He was going to learn it sooner or later anyway," Snape complained, glaring at her petulantly.

"That doesn't mean it should be his third word!"

"SNAPE!" Moody pounded on the door with the fist not clenching his wand. He was staring at Hermione and the baby she held in transfixed horror and rage, the physical manifestation of Snape's iniquity too much to bear. "I'm going to pull your testicles out of your *eye sockets*—"

"Yes, yes, Alastor, get on with it already," Snape interrupted with a nonchalance Hermione found astounding. Moody's head whipped around to glare monocular death at his foe. Magic eye spinning wildly, he roared, "AVADA—"

A flash of mauve and an almighty 'pop' exploded from the doorway into the hall, knocking Moody on his back several yards away. As Hermione blinked away the blinding aftereffects of the triggered wards, she noticed something off about the felled Auror's appearance. When Moody struggled to his feet, lurching against the corridor wall, he was visibly... *pink*. Neither of Moody's legs could pull off the blush tights suddenly clothing them (though the wooden one was making a valiant effort) and the bodice failed to flatter his stocky figure despite greying chest hair peeking fetchingly over the top, but the rose ruffles of the tutu might, had they not been singed, have looked quite nice. The disoriented man shook his head, refocused his attention on the abhorrent Snape family, and advanced in a hobbled, lilting prance toward them, pirouetting on the peg leg two steps from the door (which accounted for the mysterious circular motion she and the boys had observed on the map earlier). With an unholy grin and a wave of his hand, Snape banished the Auror in a burst of magenta.

Hermione blinked to clear the spots from her vision. "Well that explains a lot. How many times have you done that to him?"

"Thirteen. Surprisingly, it hasn't gotten old yet." Snape removed the earmuffs from the baby, who seemed delighted with the proceedings. Caligula made a grab for the earmuffs with a pointy smile, managing to capture Snape's forefinger in both of his hands. "Your cryptic note this morning was quite helpful. Aside from the obvious," Snape threw a disdainful eye roll toward the burned and blackened doorway, "do you know what Moody and Lucius are doing here?"

"Well, they showed up at breakfast, along with Ron. Apparently, the Ministry is hoping to tempt you out of hiding."

"By dangling Weasley in front of me?" Snape's palpable disgust suggested less than favourable odds of success. "What part was Lucius supposed to play in this?"

"We're not sure. Draco thinks he bought his way out of Azkaban. He's allegedly here..." she hesitated. He was not going to like this.

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Here to what?"

"To cover Potions. As a sort of parole or something."

"*What?*"

"He's rubbish at it too, apparently. Instead of your review of boil cure preparation, he handed these out to the first-years." She withdrew a slip of paper from her pocket and gave it to him.

"This looks like the *Times* crossword."

"It does."

"With half the answers scribbled out."

"Yes."

"And," he turned it on its side, "a footprint."

They stared at the travesty of an assignment with matching expressions of distaste and affronted scholarship. Caligula didn't know what the piece of paper had done to deserve such ire, but gamely joined his parents, managing the beginnings of a rather decent Snape Glare. Finally, Snape tossed the offending bit of rubbish into a bin and sighed, "So, Moody's supposed to be watching Lucius."

"Yes." Hermione frowned as Caligula started squirming and set him down on the floor.

"But he's been here all morning instead."

"It would appear so."

"And they recalled the rest of the Aurors who had been on patrol?"

"Yes. As part of the trap, from what we can tell."

"Then who's keeping an eye on Lucius?"

"The boys and I have been trying to. Oh, that reminds me..." Hermione retrieved her Galleon from a pocket and sent an 'all's well' message.

"The boys?" Snape looked at her skeptically. "What was that about?"

"Harry and Draco. We've been tracking him on the map, and they're monitoring him over lunch." The Galleon warmed in her hand with a message. "He's still there. Oh, no..." Her brow furrowed.

"What now?"

"They noticed Moody was here. What should I say happened?"

Snape shrugged. "You could inform them that he has somehow found out our illicit relationship, discovered me here in your room with our illegitimate offspring, snapped, attempted to kill me, thus engaging the defensive spells I put in place to send him away to any one of several remote, inhospitable places, whereupon he immediately forgets what has occurred, returns to Hogwarts, then rediscovers me here, attempts to kill me, thus repeating the process *ad infinitum*, or until my wards manage to deposit him somewhere from which he is unable to escape."

"If I tell them that, Ron will likely vomit, Harry'll attempt to kill you, and Draco...well, Draco will be smug and pretend to have known all about it." Hermione frowned, folding her arms pensively.

"Until the memory spell engages..." Snape drawled, raising an eyebrow.

"At which point they'll forget they asked in the first place. That's just..." Hermione huffed.

"Bloody convenient?" Snape drew her into an embrace.

"I'm trying to decide between tragic and devious." She couldn't hold back a reluctant grin, her hands travelling lightly over his chest, her right stopping to play with the buttons at his collar, the left continuing to the nape of his neck.

Snape chuckled, pressing her closer and letting his hands wander. "I've always found the latter perspective more useful," he rumbled into her ear before kissing his way down her neck. Grinning into the hollow between her neck and shoulder at her shivered response, he was reminded just how much he found the way her obsession with rules conflicted with her delight and skill in breaking them incredibly arousing and not a little adorable. Though he would never admit to the latter, even under torture. When she used the hand on his neck to bring his mouth up to meet hers, her other hand slipping lower to a much more interesting set of buttons, he began calculating the best way to ensure a mutually satisfying conclusion to current activities. They'd barely had time in the last week to attempt a good snog, much less anything more advanced. He started the somewhat complicated process of maneuvering around furniture toward the bedroom while removing layers of clothing, but all progress was immediately halted by an insistent tugging on his trouser leg by tiny, demonic hands. The pair broke apart with a groan and turned their attention to the baby, who was looking up at his parents with a triumphant expression. He pointed to the half-Kneazle familiar occupied with cleaning himself on the couch and exclaimed, in his clearest pronunciation yet, "Cunshits!"

In the pause that followed, the insulted animal managed to convey with narrowed eye and squished face a complete lack of amusement. Snape broke the silence with a loud guffaw, and his offspring joined him with high-pitched giggles. Hermione was torn between disapproval and mirth, finally giving in with a chuckle. Crookshanks decided he'd put up with enough nonsense from his humans for the day, jumped off the couch with a haughty sniff, and exited the apartments to lick his wounded dignity in peace.

"I really am starting to worry about the vocabulary he's picking up," Hermione sighed, gazing at said child with some concern. Caligula wandered off to find other objects to label inappropriately.

Snape, realizing that they'd yet again lost all romantic momentum, grumbled, "He'll be fine. We'll read some of those swotty baby books after lunch."

"I suppose." She checked her watch. "I've got to leave for Double Potions soon."

"There should be sandwiches on the table. I've learned to never face Lucius Malfoy on an empty stomach." Snape grimaced. "Or an overly full one, either."

"Any advice on how to handle him?" Hermione asked, grabbing an egg-and-cress.

"Always assume he has a wand, don't believe a single word he comes out of his mouth, never turn your back to him, even for a second, and..." Snape grinned maliciously "... remember his greatest weakness—the hair."

Hermione looked skeptical. "Somehow, I was hoping for something more helpful."

"Little Suck-a-Thumb" was taken from *Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffman, the rest can be found here:

http://germanstories.vcu.edu/struwwel/daumen_e.html

Recital to actual children not recommended.