

# A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Victory Photo

*by Mad\_Chatters\_Tea\_Party*

Harry and company won, and Voldemort is no more. It went so well that almost no one is so much as scratched. What are our heroes going to do next? Why, party until they need medical attention, of course! (The following account thereof is what happens when several alleged adults start discussing the salacious potential of the HP-verse in a chat room--hence our group penname.)

## Prologue: When All Goes Amazingly Right

*Chapter 1 of 11*

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Disclaimer: This frisky little farce is based on concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who might very well freak out if she saw what we were doing with them. No one involved in this bold multinational venture makes any money off it, and at this point, we will consider ourselves lucky to escape a virtual stoning by the fandom at large.

Warning: You are unlikely to laugh hard enough to aspirate food during this chapter. We plan to change that shortly.

Prologue: When All Goes Amazingly Right

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*'Expecto Patronum!'*

Every few yards along the path, a student was shouting the spell for conjuring a Patronus. The road to Hogwarts was filled with a remarkable menagerie of misty, silvery beasts, and Professor Lupin called laughingly over the din that they were welcome to practice, but he couldn't give anyone class credit for Patronuses summoned here. Those who heard him laughed right back and summoned another. After all, they had to do something with all their surplus happiness, considering they'd all just helped accomplish the downfall of Voldemort...for good, this time.

Overhead, a handful of people performed jubilant aerobatics on brooms...barrel rolls, dives and loops...their wands emitting multi-coloured sparks which left comet trails across the sky as they flew back and forth to stay level with those on foot below.

Harry was the focus of a lot of attention, but that fact rather escaped him. He was focused on... focusing. Getting new glasses for Harry would probably go down in history as the single most important contribution Hermione Granger made to the war effort. This would no doubt annoy her no end, considering the many vital roles she had played throughout the course of the conflict; but at the moment, Harry couldn't think of anything for which he was more grateful.

Of course, he'd had serious doubts about the glasses when he'd picked them up in Hogsmeade not thirty minutes earlier. They made the world seem to curve away oddly at the edges, rendering the process of putting the younger students safely on the Hogwarts Express pretty surreal. But being able to see Voldemort quite clearly about twenty minutes after that had made it worthwhile...intensely scary, but worthwhile. And that was in large part how, as of five minutes ago, Harry had found himself staring at a smoking pile of robes, marvelling at how the steam made pretty twists over the neat folds of fabric.

He didn't have much time to marvel at the sight as he was very nearly knocked off his feet by two guided missiles of redheaded exuberance.

"You did it, Harry!"

Harry scarcely had time to register Ron's congratulations (had his best friend's eyes~~al~~ways been that blue?) before he found himself with a mouthful of tongue not his own. Ah, that would be Ginny. That had **better** be Ginny...it took him a moment to de-fog his glasses and make a positive identification once she let him up for air...oh, good, it was.

Really, really, good, in fact. Wow. Had he noticed before how beautiful she actually was, he would have had a hell of a time concentrating on the whole winning the war thing.

"How did you do it?"

Harry looked in the direction of the question and tried not to flinch. Headmistress McGonagall had gotten awfully old at some point, especially when seen from this close.

"Perdonaro."

"I've never heard of that spell... But I recognize the word 'forgive.'"

"Yeah. It sort of hit me... I remembered something I was taught once." Harry looked over to where he had last seen Snape and caught the professor's eye for a moment. The expression on his gaunt face quite defied interpretation. Harry hoped that it meant Snape understood whom, exactly, he'd forgiven in order to channel that unbearably merciful energy through Riddle.

By the time McGonagall followed his gaze, Snape was hurrying off towards the castle, hunched under his cloak as if walking against a heavy rain. "Och, he'll go off and brood somewhere if I don't stop him." Minerva's tone was tight with exasperation, which she dropped briefly to beam at Harry. "Well done, lad," she said, giving him a quick kiss (thankfully, on the forehead) before she attempted to catch up with Snape.

And so it went as they walked back to the castle. Everyone was laughing, shouting, singing, or at least trying to sing, even those who were being floated back on stretchers due to injuries, and an absolutely inordinate number of people were kissing Harry. When Bulstrode pushed up to him and planted a scarily forceful kiss right on his mouth, following it up with what could only be described as a leer, he gladly allowed Ginny to pull him to safety between the floating stretchers that were carrying Fred and George.

"Afraid you'll lose your hero to Massive Millie?" Fred teased, propping himself up on his unbandaged elbow to take in Ginny's angry expression.

"No chance of that," Harry said with a shudder, edging closer to Ginny as he glanced nervously in the direction he'd last seen Bulstrode. Ginny anchored her arm even more securely around his waist, though her expression relaxed.

"Oh, I don't know... she has some pretty impressive features, wouldn't you say?" George asked, making a crude gesture at about chest level.

"Not nearly enough to overshadow her personality," Harry countered. For good measure, he leaned his head against Ginny's hair, hoping it would discourage any more would-be kissers.

After all, a peck on the cheek from sweet little Luna was one thing. A would-be snog from someone who could leer like Bulstrode was quite another matter.

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Eventually, some tenacious soul would trace all that followed back to Professor Flitwick being hungry. Of course, a significant portion of the blame could be laid at Terry Boot's doorstep, shameful though it might seem to penalize him for rushing to the aid of his Head of House.

"Professor? Are you all right?"

Flitwick nodded, not having quite caught his breath, and allowed Mr. Boot to help him to his feet. "Just had the wind knocked out of me... why, thank you, dear boy. No more than a bruise or two. Hmm... and a bit of a welt there... perhaps I should have Poppy look at it in case it's something nastier than a Stinging Hex."

"Do you need anything for the pain, sir?"

"It's so minor I'd be embarrassed to ask. What I really fancy is something to eat, for some reason. Perhaps I can convince Minerva to have a re-welcoming feast for the younger students when they return," Filius joked.

Still, being a conscientious sort, Terry escorted him over to the mobile 'infirmary' where Madam Pomfrey was fussing over the all-too-walking wounded.

"Mr. Hopkins, will you please hold still! Believe me, you'll tire of those extra legs well before morning! And do lie quiet, Miss Jones. Your nose may not grow back quite right if you keep talking." Poppy spun around with a look like someone who was about to make an exasperated remark when she saw Filius and smoothed out her features into brisk professionalism again. "Filius, whatever have you done to yourself?"

"This welt wasn't self-inflicted, Poppy."

Terry decided to make good his escape before Madam Pomfrey could decide he needed checking over.

"Oi! Boot! Do you fancy kissing Harry as well?"

Even from one of the Weasley twins, this struck Terry as being a surpassingly strange thing to say. Though he almost slipped up and answered, 'You've obviously mistaken me for Finch-Fletchley,' which wouldn't be fair, really; he was pretty sure Justin wasn't out.

"Shut up, Fred," Harry muttered, turning remarkably red.

It was probably best to ignore all this. Being a prudent Ravenclaw, Terry did exactly that. "I was helping Professor Flitwick over to Madam Pomfrey."

"Is he all right?" Ginny asked.

"Oh, I think so...considering he was more worried about convincing Headmistress McGonagall to have a feast than he was about his injuries," Terry said with a laugh.

George grabbed the next passerby by the sleeve. "Did you hear? McGonagall's going to call for a feast back at the castle! All hail Harry the hero!"

"Stop it, George, you're embarrassing Harry!" Ginny hissed.

"Yeah, and a dance! The party to end all parties! Professor Flitwick said so!" Fred chimed in.

"You two are going to start rumours!" Harry protested...a little weakly, lest they start the hero thing again.

"Do you really think so?" Fred asked, trying to look innocent and failing miserably.

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There was a shadow on Minerva's happiness at the stunning victory; an approximately Snape-sized shadow, to be precise. She hadn't been able to catch up to him before his long legs took him well out of reassurance range, and now she felt quite sure that he was well on his way to hiding himself somewhere and wallowing in guilt. Unjustified guilt, to her mind...after all he had done to ensure that they were all safe...

Minerva almost said something very unprofessional as she realized they hadn't quite ensured that everyone was, in fact, safe.

"Aurora! Septima! A moment, please?" The Astronomy and Arithmancy professors were deep in conversation, walking almost hand-in-hand. McGonagall suppressed an oft-recycled urge to wonder at the exact nature of their friendship and instead briskly outlined her concerns. "I know it seems unlikely, given that the Death Eaters here were all either killed or incapacitated when Vol...Riddle...died, but I think it would be best to check on the people still in Hogsmeade. Your Patronus is a swan, is it not, Aurora?"

"A black swan, actually... and Septima's is a penguin," Sinistra said, seeing where this was going. "One of us will be sure to send one to the castle, if there are any problems."

"I would appreciate it if you would attend to it," Minerva said, relieved that was sorted. "Now, if only I could catch Severus before he decides to hold a pity party for himself!" She bustled away again, tutting and scanning for him with keen eyes, to no avail.

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"Professor Flitwick has been talking to Headmistress McGonagall, and there's to be a party as soon as we get back to the castle!"

"Yes, I heard her mention a party to Professors Vector and Sinistra!"

Hermione was hearing some disturbing rumours, and she thought it might be wise to take them to the Headmistress...duties as Head Girl and all. However, she wasn't able to track McGonagall down until they were at the very gates of the castle.

"Headmistress, is it true that there's going to be a feast? Or a ball?" she asked.

"Well, I imagine we'll have some sort of celebration once the younger students return, but as for tonight..." Minerva broke off, noticing for the first time the way the students were making their way towards the Great Hall, heedless of Professor Sprout's attempts to get their attention.

"Pomona, where did the children get the daft notion we're going to have a party?"

"I don't know, Minerva... but I don't fancy telling them otherwise," Sprout said, shaking her head at the yelling throng pushing its way into the Great Hall.

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Author's Notes:

Prologue is courtesy of dracontia, with contributions by DawnEB, shalimar1981, lux\_astraea, and Wonderfulchild, based on background developed by Aturia, DawnEB, dracontia, shalimar1981, and Wolfmoonshadow.

Please see our Bio page for a full listing of participating authors!

# 1: When All Seems To Be Going Right

## Chapter 2 of 11

A party has commenced in the Great Hall, and is rapidly rising to rowdiness levels impossible in the old days of rancorous inter-house rivalries. For some reason, the noise, youthful exuberance and (almost certainly) the groping, are driving the professors nuttier than usual. So much so that their consciences seem to be taking a wee holiday?

Disclaimer: Kids, we're going to break it to you gently: We never owned it. We never will. They would never in a million years be this naughty or have this much fun in canon. And we can prove we don't make any money... from this or anything else.

WARNING: This is potentially funny. Eat or drink while reading it at your own risk.

Authors' Notes: Feel free to amuse yourself further by guessing who wrote which sections. (Answers are at the end of this chapter.)

Chapter 1: When All Seems To Be Going Right

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The Great Hall was abuzz with preparations for an impromptu party; in the infirmary, not a creature was stirring save Madam Pomfrey. And if only she could get enough potions into her charges, she could be stirring elsewhere.

"There. Drink this down, dear, you'll feel much better." Poppy Pomfrey was bustling from patient to patient, administering a sleeping draught and always repeating the same words, while thinking, *and you'll sleep till dawn so I can finally get out of here!*

Poppy Pomfrey wasn't normally one to desert her post like she was about to. But all her charges were cared for and either down at the party or would be unconscious in a few minutes courtesy of a sleeping draught, including those infernal Weasley twins of course. They would be all out cold and should stay that way for the rest of the night.

To tell the truth, with all this fighting and Death Eaters everywhere, all she wanted right now was a drink. Nothing too strong, mind, for she was technically still on duty. A sherry perhaps. Or two.

*At least that You-Know-Who business is now over and done with. Honestly. What is the youth coming to these days?*

She could still remember young Tom Riddle back when she was nothing more than an Apprentice Matron with old Matron Teafeather, who had been quite the shrew. Riddle had always been so very charming...

*But, of course, full of evil and up to no good during his whole time at Hogwarts. Like the Weasley twins. Little demons, all of them. Children, pal* she thought while patting Fred encouragingly on the head, smiling beatifically.

She turned away to her next patient and therefore didn't notice Fred spitting out his mouthful of potion with a disgusted expression on his face. All of her patients had done so as soon as her back had been turned, having other plans for the night than simply sleeping.

"Yuck!" Fred whispered, trying to be as quiet as possible.

She turned to her next patient after giving the twins a stern look. *Those two. Always up to no good. Thank heavens I don't have to deal with them on a daily basis anymore!*

Then there was Hooch to consider, who had given her quite a meaningful look before the Quidditch instructor had left her to tidy up the hospital wing and tend to her patients.

*Now there is a fine piece of...* Poppy blushed faintly at the thought while stoppering the vial of sleeping draught, all her patients taken care of for now *And this behaviour at my age!*

Looking around the ward one last time, it seemed all her patients were already asleep. Now was the time to leave. So it was settled. She would go over to the Three Broomsticks for a drink and would come right back. No dallying about. Really.

As she tiptoed to the door of the hospital wing, she was followed by a dozen pairs of eyes, which were fixed on her form until the door closed itself quietly behind her.

So Poppy Pomfrey snuck out of the hospital wing, and subsequently out of the castle, with a skill to make even the Weasley twins proud, and headed to Hogsmeade.

In the hospital wing, several forms sat up and threw their covers to the floor.

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Harry wondered if hindering students from snogging (and more) came naturally to Hogwarts' professors, or if it was something they were trained to prevent. He strongly suspected he wasn't the only one who would rather be looking for a spot of privacy right now instead of having a party, especially since he never had gotten the hang of dancing. But McGonagall had steered him towards the Great Hall...and away from Ginny, who had wanted to see Fred and George up to the infirmary. While Harry waited for her to return from tucking her brothers in, he debated taking bets as to how long the twins would actually *stay* in the infirmary. Neither he nor Ginny believed they were as hurt as they had pretended to be.

It took a special sort of person...or pair of people...to guess at the password, 'I solemnly swear that I'm up to no good.'

"Potter, a moment... if it fits into your busy schedule, that is?"

With considerable effort, Harry restrained a sigh. As good as it had been to have Malfoy and his oversized shadows on their side rather than with the opposition, he still didn't exactly find them charming company. Even when Malfoy wasn't saying something specifically nasty, he seemed about as able to refrain from speaking in an obnoxiously snide tone as a skrewt was able to refrain from emitting noxious, incendiary vapours.

Harry was aware of the expression, 'Into each life a little rain must fall,' but as far as he was concerned, the forecast called for it to be pissing down Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle inordinately often.

That made it a bit of a surprise when he turned to find Malfoy quite alone, with only his longer-than-usual hair to hide behind. There was an odd sort of tension about him, as if he felt like he needed to be ready to run at any moment.

*Probably nervous, going it alone while his bodyguards stuff their faces.*

"I think I'm free for now...but if you want a duel, you'll have to look elsewhere." Harry couldn't imagine for a moment where that sarcastic remark had come from. Well, he wasn't surprised at the sarcasm, but why was duelling the first thing that came to mind?

"I do owe you one, don't I? I think, though, since I didn't make the original offer in good faith, honour might be better satisfied if I withdraw it." He hesitated before adding in a quiet, strained voice, "Sorry."

It would only make his head ache to attempt to figure out why Malfoy was apologising for that particular incident. After all, he'd amassed a thousand or so other things to apologise for between the day they met and the trauma on the Astronomy Tower...though admittedly, nothing worse than the odd snarky comment over the past two years. So Harry refrained from analysing it and decided to accept the apology with as much grace as he was able.

"Okay, sure. I'd just as soon not have to duel anyone again. Besides," he said, fighting down the awkwardness that seemed to take over every time he opened his mouth, "I think I owe you a handshake." There. That was something he could deal with by simple, straightforward action rather than by tripping over his own tongue.

For a slightly tense moment, he wasn't sure Malfoy would take his hand. It was impossible to tell what the other was thinking, hidden as his face was behind an icy blond curtain. Hesitantly, Malfoy's hand slipped forward, strikingly evoking the image of a white snake gliding along the ground with its leaf-shaped head slightly elevated. Harry was almost tempted to say something in Parseltongue, but he managed to take the collection of delicate fingers and knife-thin tendons coated in blue-veined white flesh into his own solid, squarish hand without flinching or saying anything foolish.

For a handful of seconds that felt like forever, Harry wondered why Malfoy seemed to be trembling, his pale skin turning slightly pinkish where they were touching, as if Harry were rubbing off colour on him. By the time Malfoy slipped his hand free, brushing their fingers past each other and uttering a shaky, "Thank you," then fleeing as if a flock of Hippogriffs was after him, Harry was as confused as all hell.

"Harry!" Hermione's voice indicated that she was preparing to launch into lecture mode. At least that much was back to normal. "I hope you were being civil to him. I know Malfoy is still mostly a pillock, but he really has done everything possible to redeem himself over the past two years. And you promised to set the past aside."

"Hermione, I know what he's done and what I've done over the past two years," Harry said, exasperated. *No wonder Ron and Hermione lasted all of one month. At times he must have felt like he was dating his own mother!* That was a shudder-worthy thought. "We were actually apologising for some of the stuff before that."

"Oh..."

Harry decided all his confusion was worthwhile just to see Hermione so at a loss for words.

"Well... Good! Oh, I think Headmistress McGonagall is calling me. Have fun, try to stay out of trouble!" she babbled before scurrying off in response to McGonagall's beckoning.

Hermione's absence cleared the way for a gaggle of giggling sixth-year girls, emboldened by their recent experiences in battle (and the fact that they were all of age due to the one year the school had been closed) to advance on him en masse. Fortunately, it didn't come to either duelling or an ignominious retreat on his part; they skittered off upon seeing Ginny approach with a fierce look in her eyes.

*Weird... they ran off in almost the same way Malfoy did.*

He didn't have time to ponder the implications of that as Ginny pulled something from behind her back...a bowl, piled high with...

"Is that what I think it is?" Harry couldn't keep the glee from his voice.

"Chocolate Snitch ice cream," Ginny said, smiling. "And two spoons."

He kissed her impulsively, neither of them mindful of the bowl of ice cream between them until a spot of cold wetness soaked through each of their shirts.

"Oops," Harry said, sheepishly fishing for his wand to take care of the mess.

"Never mind that...let's get some punch before we eat this. I'm thirsty, and it won't taste right after the chocolate." He followed her willingly, thinking that chocolate would do until they could find some time to be alone.

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Minerva McGonagall wished, for approximately the two hundred and ten thousandth time in two years (not that she was keeping count, mind), that Albus was still alive and Headmaster.

She missed his sense of humour, as odd as it had been. She missed his wisdom, though his judgement hadn't always been perfect. She even missed his damned sweets (although only in a detached, nostalgic sort of way). But what she missed the most was the fact that the only way to get the man out of a party...no matter how raucous and immature the party...was by ending it. It had meant that she never had to feel bad about taking a nice, long, leisurely break from the combined din of adolescent revelry and angst, and from the wafting clouds of pubescent pheromones. She couldn't even take perverse pleasure in guarding the punch bowl against spiking, as...

"Severus!" she gasped softly to herself. "I'm so sorry...I forgot ye for a moment, lad." Minerva glanced about the room. There appeared to be a full complement of professors on duty in the Great Hall. In particular, she noted that Pomona was in the vicinity of the punch bowl, and Filius was arranging Charmed musical instruments and several responsible ghosts to supervise them. Everything was perfectly under control...no reason why she couldn't look for him.

Still, there were precautions she should take. "Miss Granger! Mr. MacMillan! A moment, if you please." She issued a few crisp orders to her dutiful Head Boy and Girl before setting off for the dungeons.

Fortunately, Severus was in the second place she looked for him...locked in his office. Unfortunately, a great deal of knocking, yelling, unlocking spells, direct orders and assorted threats later (Minerva knew better than to bring up sacking...it would have had quite the reverse of the intended effect), he was *still* in his office.

"Please come out, Severus. I'm not asking you to join the foolishness upstairs, I just want to talk to you. Face to face," she amended hastily.

Severus' voice sounded strained. "Can't you leave a bastard to drown in peace, Minerva?"

She sighed. *Bloody melodramatic Slytherins*. She decided to take a different tack. "At least tell me you're not drinking cheap Firewhisky. That isn't death by drowning, it's slow torture of the taste buds."

A muffled glugging sound and a distinct 'thunk' of glass on wood was the only reply.

"Will you step out for a moment if I offer you a bottle of the decent stuff? If you're going to be drunk, at least do it correctly, lad."

"Prove it's the genuine article."

"I'll take that as a 'yes,'" Minerva said and set off briskly for the nearest exit. The last thing she wanted to deal with were a bunch of house-elves trying to jam their hands in doors in case there was nothing of the sort to be found in the castle. If Severus was going to be difficult...so be it. She would march right into Hogsmeade and get a bottle of whatever Rosmerta's finest happened to be.

And if that didn't convince him to come out willingly, she'd blast the door down. By the time she got back, he should be too drunk to put up a fight.

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Sparkling fairy lights, fairly loud music, people in constant motion...perfect conditions for two Disillusioned master pranksters to sneak up to the unguarded punchbowl and make their contribution completely unnoticed.

George was certain this was one of their most brilliant inventions, not only in design but in execution. Anyone who could earn an OWL in Potions might eventually have been able to modify a Calming Draught into a potion that actually reduced shyness. It took an actual genius to turn the resulting potion into an almost flavourless, colourless suspension that would linger in the bottom of the punchbowl, slowly releasing a steady dose of the miracle elixir into the target potable all night long.

Still, he had one small misgiving. "I don't know about this, Fred. I think we should have held off until after Harry and Ginny had their share. There's no telling what might happen."

"Yeah, you're right...maybe he'll loosen up enough to actually dance with her. Come on, brother, we had to do it while McGonagall was gone. Do you really think the bowl will be so vulnerable at any other time tonight?"

George had to admit that his twin had a point...though he wasn't going to do so with unreserved enthusiasm. Ginny loved to dance, and unless Luna happened to let go of Neville for more than two minutes at a time, she would end up sitting everything out with Harry yet again.

"All right, point taken. But let's keep an eye on them while we wait for the professors to take their doses."

"You watch them, I'll watch the bowl. We should at least wait until McGonagall, Sprout, and Flitwick have had some of the potion before we reveal ourselves and give our fellow escapees from the infirmary the 'all clear' signal."

"You do realise, brother of mine, that we're the best examples in the universe of the idea that two heads are better than one."

"Definitely."

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*Thud.*

*Thud.*

"Rolanda?"

*Thud.*

"What's wrong?"

*Thud. Thud.*

"Do you really want to know?"

"No, I'm just pretending so you'll stop abusing that table."

Silence.

"For heaven's sake, Hooch, sarcasm? Ever heard of it? I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want to know!"

Hooch sighed, head still resting on the table.

"It's Poppy. She's driving me insane."

"Why? Does she want to poke you with something?" If that was the case, Sprout could commiserate. She hated needles. What were potions for after all? Sadistic Muggles and their infernal inventions.

Hooch looked up at her and eyed Pomona strangely.

"No, she doesn't. But I want to poke her, if you know what I mean."

*What the hell is she on about? Why would anyone want to... Wait, Hooch wants to poke.... Poke. OH!*

Sprout did her best to hide her blanch. Well, she certainly hadn't seen that coming! She'd never have suspected either Hooch or Poppy of being lesbians. Not that there was anything wrong with it.

"Well," was all that Sprout got out at first, then added with an exaggerated smile, "Then what's the problem?"

Rolanda looked at her as if she was not quite right in the head.

*Hmph. I'm only trying to help.*

"I don't know if she likes me back, of course," Hooch lamented miserably, head banging against the tabletop again. "She probably hardly knows I'm alive."

*Thud. Thud.*

"Well."

She definitely needed to work on her eloquence. This wouldn't do at all. With an internal rolling of her eyes at herself, she edged closer to the distressed Flying instructor and patted Hooch awkwardly on the back. Hooch responded by hugging Sprout...tightly.

Hooch either didn't notice or ignored the way the Herbology teacher tensed up before patting her awkwardly on the back again *Oh, dear, I hope she is not 'coming on' to me now as a replacement!* Sprout thought, panicking.

When Hooch finally released her, Pomona immediately put some distance between them, smiling nervously. *What to do? Maybe inventing a crush of my own will help?*

"Don't worry, I'm sure she likes you. And if not, you shouldn't fret too much. You're not the only one with unreciprocated feelings."

At Hooch's interested look, she elaborated quickly, "Well, not anyone here at the castle. *He* works in Hogsmeade, you see," she explained, but felt that her putting so much emphasis on the 'he' had been too obvious.

"Really? Oh, spill, who is it? I told you who I like, now it's your turn."

This was getting too adolescent for her taste, but Pomona had to admit she couldn't get out of this gracefully. She had to invent someone and quickly. Just not...

"Aberforth, actually." Sprout cringed even as the words slipped out of her mouth.

*Oh, no! What have I done? Am I absolutely crazy? Why, oh, why did she have to confess the all too real crush of hers? And it is just a crush, mind. It's bound to go away sometime. Just because it hasn't gone away in the past three years doesn't mean anything.*

Hooch looked at her strangely again, and no wonder. Who wanted to be in love with someone famous for a fixation with goats? She certainly didn't! Not that her feelings ever listened to her *mind*.

"Aberforth! Well, I never..." Hooch started to say, completely surprised, voice unusually deep for once. "And I thought I had a problem."

"Well, thank you so much, Rolanda. Now I'm feeling *much* better," Sprout replied, sarcasm fairly dripping. But she was also slightly hurt. She had taken the whole lesbian thing rather well, she thought, and Hooch had made fun of her.

"No, I didn't mean it that way. I meant here I was fretting about Poppy, and I see her every day. But you only see him on weekends, don't you?"

"Not really. I try to avoid him as much as possible."

"Why?" Hooch asked, genuinely confused.

"Do I have to mention the goats? That's enough of a reason for me to avoid him. Honestly, goats! Why couldn't it have been a nice flesh-eating monkey tree? That would be understandable at least. They can be very prickly, but if they are treated right, they can be devilishly charming!" Sprout was babbling, and she knew it, but stopping had been out of the question.

Now it was Hooch's turn to pat the woman's back. "There, there, goats aren't that bad. It could have been a Flobberworm. Now *that* would be a problem. Imagine that thing in your bed?"

Sprout gaped at Hooch. "I don't do bestiality, Rolanda! That's the main problem! Not which species! Are you out of your mind?!"

"Well, I don't think it's that bad. If you're not in the mood, he could just visit his goat. A definite plus if you ask me," Rolanda remarked thoughtfully.

Sprout couldn't manage to close her mouth. Rolanda couldn't actually be serious about this?

"Besides, I don't think the rumours about those goats are really true. If you remember, they are quite vague; more like he was experimenting on them with spells or potions or something, rather than actually having sex with them."

"Well..." Hooch had a point. What if she had misjudged him because of a simple rumour? Pomona felt very guilty all of a sudden, but also a twinge of hope resurfaced from where she had kept it hidden all these years. Since he had first helped her out with acquiring some Clabberts for her flesh-eating monkey tree, she'd been completely enamoured with him.

"Maybe you're right, Rolanda." *Change the subject, Pomona, change the subject...*

"You know, come to think of it... Poppy is always talking with you about this or that after all, and she's always sitting beside you during meals... and always cheering *you* on at Quidditch games," Sprout finished, palming her face in dismay at the realisation of what had been going on directly in front of her. It had been all so obvious, and she had spilled her guts... unnecessarily. Great.

"So you can be sure she doesn't hate you. She probably even likes you back by the looks of it."

Hooch's head whipped up and looked at Sprout hopefully. "Really? Do you think so?"

Pomona nodded with a slightly bemused smile on her lips.

"You know, we could go to Hogsmeade to see if he's there," Hooch replied much too nonchalantly, studying her smooth fingernails. "Then you could ask him yourself. And we could have that drink we'd been talking about earlier. There are more than enough teachers left to deal with the party. It's about time we did something about these crushes of ours, don't you think?"

"What about Poppy? She's bound to stay here with her patients."

Hooch blushed delicately, which looked very strange on the robust Flying Instructor. "Uh, I checked the infirmary already. She's gone. To Hogsmeade, probably. So, what do you say?"

Sprout blushed as well at the thought of seeing Aberforth again and maybe finally doing something about her long-buried feelings for the long-bearded man. She didn't even notice that she sighed wistfully at the thought.

"All right."

Hooch smiled conspiratorially and said, "Follow me."

And so Hooch and Sprout set out for Hogsmeade on a mission for love.

---

It was a merry bunch that clustered around in a semicircle, giggling as they passed around a couple of bottles of butterbeer. Jenkins, a sixth year Ravenclaw, shook a bowl with some folded squares of parchment and held it out. "Your turn now, Micklethwaite." A rather skinny boy with an unfortunate haircut stood up and grabbed a slip, read it, then started to make odd gestures to the others.

"Okay, so it's one word with... two syllables"

"It's a Magical Creature? Big or Little?"

After the standard signs to set up the rest of the charade, Micklethwaite stood for a moment with a blank look on his face (it was a face suited to such looks) before launching into a series of frenetic gestures. After waving his hands at his audience with both two and one finger salutes, he went on to bend over and wiggle his bum as he looked over his shoulder and winked suggestively.

The others all looked puzzled, although the suddenly shouted guess of 'Firenze!' after this last raised an eyebrow or two. The strange gesticulations continued with things like loosely curled fingers shaken with a rapid wrist movement, a forceful pelvic thrusting and a fist raised sharply with a bent elbow, the opposite hand holding the bicep. Whilst the gestures had raised a few laughs, no one seemed to have any idea what animal the boy was trying to mime.

Micklethwaite paused for a moment, then started to make slinky body movements, sashaying up and down in front of the bench. He smoothed his hands back over his hair and then made movements over his nose and chin to indicate a pointiness. From in the huddle came a small cry, "Veela?" A girl shot up, waving her hand. "I know, I know! Draco Malfoy!"

There was a peal of laughter, then someone else called out. "That's four syllables. Besides, Malfoy isn't a Magical Creature."

"Oh, I don't know," someone else drawled. "Although perhaps Divine is a better description?"

After the giggles and 'ewwws' died down, Jenkins stood up. "As we haven't a clue, I think it's time to invoke the 'Hufflepuff Ordinance'." He turned to Micklethwaite. "You can now add an audible clue to the charade, so long as you don't directly tell us...something like a snatch of song that reminds you of the animal, or the mating call or something." He sat down again as Micklethwaite's face scrunched up in thought.

"Bum, boobs, knickers, twat." His audience sniggered, and he grew more adventurous. "Arse, tits, *merde*, prick, shit." As the giggles grew, the audience still seemed none the wiser, so he continued. "Wanker, fuck, \*\$@#~+\*."

A boy called out, "That last one was Gobbledygook, is it goblin?" which gave rise to the expected comeback.

When the laughter began to die down, a girl called Veronica had a flash of inspiration. "Jarvey! Is it a Jarvey?" It was with great relief that the now red-faced Micklethwaite indicated the correct guess, and he was passed a bottle as he took Veronica's place on the bench.

---

Professor Flitwick's desertion wasn't planned. At least not at first. He'd simply wanted to make a quick trip to the loo. On his own. Away from this racket. And away from the dares!

Why didn't students get any more imaginative with the passage of decades?

*Always the same. First they get a little lively. Then the punch is spiked. Next some couples decide to test out various corners, niches, and the solidity of various surfaces, while the ones without a partner start the games. When they get bored with that, the dares start. Usually something silly like impersonating teachers or stealing someone's knickers. Honestly.*

*No one ever fancies a nice card game anymore.*

So he fled to the loo at first.

Due to his diminutive size, it was quite easy for Filius Flitwick to sneak out of the Great Hall.

Passing through the doors of the Great Hall and around the corner, Flitwick ducked into an unoccupied alcove, waiting. When no one came looking for him after a few moments, he heaved a sigh of relief and scurried quickly down the hallway and up a flight of stairs in the direction of the staff bathrooms.

Once inside the men's bathroom, Flitwick sighed in relief and went to the wall opposite the sinks. He took care of business the usual way, with a little stool, taking care not to step on the tentacles of the...

Well.

It was a little-known fact that up until 1866, Hogwarts had no toilets. Only then were some installed because a few teachers had protested against the waste of lesson time it always took for one of the students to wander out to the Forbidden Forest to relieve themselves.

Not to mention the frequent accidents.

But although it was a very useful invention, they were only installed amid loud protests from upset parents and teachers alike, complaining about one thing or another. Flitwick couldn't imagine why.

*It's such an advancement, not to mention a very practical inven...*

Flitwick sighed, then yelped and swatted away one of the tentacles.

So as a sort of compromise, only the student lavatories had been remodelled; all private quarters and the staff bathrooms had been left as they were and kept on the Wurly Worms.

Although it was surely a fascinating creature, it was no wonder no one (save Hagrid) ever wanted to study Wurly Worms.

While they were highly effective and lived to a high age (no one really knew for sure, but a hundred to three hundred years was the best guess so far), their function wasn't exactly an appropriate conversation topic.

*Not to mention the fact that those tentacles have a habit of grasping things they shouldn't!*

And they smelled unnaturally of honeysuckle.

So when Flitwick freed himself from the tentacles' grasp, he'd really had enough of all this racket.

He was ready to call it a night. *Let some of the others run after those unruly children for once.* He would go and get himself one of those nice colourful drinks with an umbrella and relax. After this whole war business, he'd deserved it. And all of the other teachers were still in the Great Hall.

He snuck out of the staff bathroom and down one of the staircases far away from the Great Hall. Then he edged around a corner, looking left then right before he left through a side entrance heading to Hogsmeade.

---

"Luna, what are you doing?" Neville asked as Luna Lovegood took his hand in a remarkably strong grip, considering her willowy dimensions.

"I'm taking you to the punchbowl so you can get me something to drink," she answered in the same gentle, matter-of-fact voice she used to explain that Ron was saying unkind things. "I'm not terribly thirsty, but I thought we should get it out of the way so that you could ask me to dance. If that's all right with you."

Neville allowed himself to be dragged to the punchbowl, thinking that life would be much easier if all girls were as direct as Luna.

---

At last it was over. After almost two decades the war against Voldemort and his Death Eaters was over.

Remus didn't really know whether to laugh or cry. It was certainly a time to rejoice, but so many had lost their lives in the process. All of his best friends, Dumbledore, Hagrid and many others.

But he knew that the survivors deserved a night of celebration, Harry and his two best friends most of all.

*Harry... James and Lily would have been so proud of him,* Lupin thought as he was looking at him now. *Sirius, Dumbledore and Hagrid, too. And they should be.*

He had exceeded their wildest expectations in fulfilling that deadly prophecy in such a unique manner. It had bothered Remus more than just a little to think that Harry, a nice and still fairly innocent boy, or rather man, would actually have to kill Voldemort. But he needn't have worried, it seemed. Harry found a way to defeat Voldemort without actually committing murder, thus sparing himself the agony and responsibility for the villain's death.

*All of us have done more than enough to bring the end of this war about, so let them have their night of harmless fun* Remus thought, smiling indulgently at the crowd of students celebrating loudly, with his back to the punch bowl. *The cleanup and the trials of Voldemort's followers will have to begin soon enough. They can forget responsibility for one night.*

The thought of forgetting responsibilities called to mind Nymphadora, and how they could celebrate later on. His smile broadened. *Nymphadora.*

He had been so stupid to try to resist her. She was a force of nature, one who brightened his oftentimes lonely existence. He couldn't imagine living without her anymore.

He watched some students passing, laughing loudly with glasses of punch in their hands. He hadn't had any yet. Punch was normally not to his taste. He much rather favoured a good elf-made wine. Madam Rosmerta usually had the best for miles. But he had to chaperone of course, and at the rate this was going, the party would continue till dawn.

Usually he only splurged on elf-made wine on very special occasions. But if winning the war against Voldemort didn't count, then what did?

He sighed. That elf-made wine sounded really good for celebrating later with Nymphadora... in his quarters... preferably in his bed.

For a split second a scowl over-shadowed his face at the thought of being trapped with hormonal adolescents all night long without being able to celebrate properly with his girlfriend.

But it vanished as soon as the thought appeared. They had a right to party. He just wished he could as well, and wouldn't be stuck here to make sure they didn't do things they shouldn't.

Still, they were all legally adults and obviously capable of taking care of themselves. They even seemed to be getting along rather well at the moment.

What would be the harm in a quick trip to Hogsmeade? He would be right back after getting some of that elf-made wine. And all the other teachers were there after all. It wasn't like anyone would miss him if he left for a bit.

He could see at least... well, there was Ernie and Hermione, this year's Head Boy and Girl. And the other teachers had to be around somewhere. Ah, wasn't that Filius he heard? Then the others wouldn't be far away either. They were very responsible and took chaperoning duties very seriously indeed. Snape and Trelawney had to be around here somewhere as well, and Filch was always patrolling the corridors. So there would be really no harm in leaving for a bit. And he'd be right back.

With his conscience admitting defeat, he crept out of the Great Hall and out of the castle to make sure the preparations for Nymphadora's and his private party later would be taken care of.

---

After Ron accompanied Fred and George to the infirmary and made sure they were more or less all right, he made his way down to Slughorn's former quarters. He was tempted to stop in the Great Hall first, to see if anyone would take the bet that his brothers would escape the infirmary in less than an hour. But Ron had a mission; besides it was a safe bet anyway.



*Until they arrive, the party in the Great Hall could use some livening up,* he thought with a smirk.

Which was why he was now up to his elbows in the private stores that the former Potions professor had left behind in his hurry to flee. They hadn't been cleared out yet for some reason.

*What treasures!*

Crystallised pineapple (now gone), the finest firewhiskey fudge (he hiccupped), a large selection of Honeyduke's finest, some delicious-looking but curious-smelling fruitcake and some dried Billywig wings which were supposed to be a rare delicacy, but the smell of which made his stomach churn, although that could have been the Fizzing Whizbees earlier, and the alcohol, of course.

Wines, meads, Firewhisky, icevodka, some minty liquor that had him breathing mint leaves, as well as various other potent beverages *All of them very delicious*, he thought with a smack of his lips as he licked the remnants of the alcohol off.

Ron didn't know much about alcohol even though he was already nineteen, thanks to his mother, but here was a stunning array of some of the best stuff he'd ever drunk, which admittedly didn't prove much.

"Now what to use to spike the punch?" he muttered thoughtfully under his breath, surveying the treasures. He was so deep in thought about this weighty issue that he didn't hear the approaching footsteps until it was almost too late.

He started and whipped his head around in a panic, almost hitting his head on the open cupboard door and decided to just pick one. *hm, why not two? Or perhaps three?* random bottles and the sack of Honeyduke's finest before scuttling over to the door.

Just as he had managed to flatten himself and his loot against the wall beside the door, it opened. It only barely avoided hitting him squarely in the face as it revealed Nymphadora Tonks walking determinedly toward the cupboard he'd fortunately flicked closed with an unencumbered finger as he fled.

He shook his head in combined disbelief and dismay that someone else had the same idea as him; and that it was Tonks, of all people! It had been such a good idea, too.

Ron shook that thought off quickly and, edging around the door as quietly as possible with his heavy load, he escaped with Tonks none the wiser.

---

While Remus was still busy convincing his guilty conscience into leaving for the Three Broomsticks, Tonks had done some exploring on her way down from the infirmary and had found Slughorn's special stash in his quarters.

She hadn't been looking for it. Uh-uh, not her.

*He must've been in quite a hurry when he left,* Tonks mused as she surveyed the cupboard full of sweets, rare delicacies and some very fine wines and meads from all over the world. Of excellent vintages, she noticed to her delight. She couldn't imagine the teacher who was best known for indulging in creature comforts abandoning his treasures otherwise.

*It's not as if he's going to miss them...* she thought, looking at the bottles greedily. *After all this hubbub, he won't ever set foot in the castle again.* Thus she saw no harm in taking one of the mead bottles out of the cupboard while partaking of some really excellent firewhiskey fudge.

"Mmh..."

While not the bravest of souls, Slughorn had some really good taste.

Her mission accomplished, she made her way in the direction of the Great Hall, sampling some of that excellent mead on the way. By the sounds of it there was already quite a party going on.

She loved parties. It was a shame that throughout the war most of her friends hadn't been in the mood to celebrate. Not very logical in her opinion... when would they need their spirits lifted more? Only the Weasley twins seemed to agree with her on that.

*Oh, well. But now that it's all over, we're all free to enjoy ourselves a little again. Splendid! Mmh, that mead is really tasty, you gotta hand old Sluggy that.*

With that thought in mind, she only just managed to round a corner. But instead of entering the Great Hall, she found herself in a dark tunnel.

Intrigued and more than a little tipsy, she had already forgotten what she had been about to do. She decided to follow said tunnel instead. Could be great fun!

---

Ginny thought it was funny, in a way, that she felt so flattered and excited that Harry was escorting her to the punch bowl and filling her cup for her. They'd spent nearly a year on the run once he'd broken down and let her help with the Horcrux hunt, been in several battles together, and shagged at least twice (though Harry probably still thought it had been three times; she wasn't about to disappoint him by confessing they hadn't, um, interlocked completely during one of the attempts). Still, walking across the room together...unmistakably together...in front of all those eyes was actually sort of thrilling. Hmm, the punch was quite good tonight. Not overly sweet, and with a nice sort of tingly aftertaste to it.

"Come on, let's sit down. I want to get to the ice cream before it starts melting and the chocolate snitches fly away." Ginny was surprised at where, exactly, he meant for them to sit.

"Why are we at the High Table?" Granted, he'd chosen a spot at the end, but still...normally, Harry didn't like to be so conspicuous.

"Why not? I have the right to show off the fact that I'm with the prettiest witch in the entire castle, if not the world," he said, grinning at her through punch-stained lips.

"Who are you, and what have you done with Harry?" she asked, only partly feigning shock. He just laughed and fed her a spoonful of ice cream.

"Let me find one of the snitches for you," he offered, picking around in the creamy pile with his spoon...only to have his search interrupted by Ginny handing him his cup.

"We should finish this first...don't want it to taste off, remember?"

"Right." They clinked their cups together and downed the rest, the liquid going down warm.

She scarcely gave him time to set the cup down before she pushed a scoop of ice cream, a partially free chocolate snitch waving one buzzing wing above the creaminess, into his mouth. It left a smudge on his lips, which she wiped with her finger. Impulsively, she sucked the chocolate from the digit in question, wondering at her own boldness and delighted at the way he watched her as she did it. "I think it tastes better on you," she breathed.

"That bears investigating." He fed her some more, then carefully licked the real or imagined drips from around her mouth.

About halfway through the bowl, the goal seemed to be to get as much chocolate as possible on each other's faces so as to have an excuse to nibble it off. "Are you cold?" she asked, noticing him shiver.

"Maybe a bit. But I'm sure you could warm me up," he said, curling his arm around her waist.

Ginny settled herself into his lap, past caring why Harry was acting this way and noticing that, far from being cold, he was quite deliciously warm. Even hot. "Who are you, and what have you done with Harry?" she asked again, purring in his ear. "Not that I'm complaining, mind."

They separated just long enough for her to slip another spoonful of dripping chocolate into his mouth. Then they sealed their lips together and caught the fluttering, melting snitch between their tongues.

Which made it seem all the more appropriate that everyone in the Hall who witnessed it was cheering.

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Authors' Notes:

The charades scene is courtesy of DawnEB.

The scenes with Poppy, Filius, Remus, Tonks, Ron, Hooch, and Sprout are all courtesy of shalimar1981.

The remaining scenes...student follies, Minerva's mission, and the spiking of the punch...are courtesy of dracontia.

Thanks to lux\_astraea and ladyinthecloak for Britpicking!

## 2: When There Is a Distinct Possibility of Something Going Wrong

*Chapter 3 of 11*

So, a few teachers have stepped out for a bit. So, the twins are out and about. So, Snape is drunker than a pickled eel. So, everyone and their cousin has spiked the punch. So... you know, this could be fun... So long as you don't have to clean up after it.

Disclaimer: We don't own it, but there's little doubt that they have much more fun playing with us. If only they could remember it.

WARNING: Since we don't make any money from these characters or their setting, we can't afford to replace your computer equipment. Save the food and drinks for later, just to be on the safe side.

Authors' Notes: Feel free to amuse yourself further by guessing who wrote which sections. (Answers are at the end of this chapter.)

Chapter 2: When There Is a Distinct Possibility of Something Going Wrong

As Hermione looked around the Great Hall, everything seemed to be going smoothly, at least at first glance, but she sensed something was off. She had been put in charge and was determined to make sure that the castle was still standing by morning. She made her way to the punch bowl for a better vantage point.

Hermione had just barely taken a sip of punch when Ernie MacMillan approached her.

"Would you like to dance?" he asked.

Everyone else seemed to be having a good time, so she acquiesced. After two songs, Hermione noticed that there seemed to be a lot of (too) close dancing and quite a bit of snogging going on.

*Well, we did just win*, she thought and dismissed it. Even though McGonagall had put her in charge, she had told herself she would not be a complete prude and busy-body at the celebration. She smiled at Ernie, relaxing and enjoying the rhythm of the music. Ernie took this as his cue and leaned in to kiss Hermione. Hermione stumbled backwards, tripping over her own feet, and maybe even one of Ernie's. When she was thinking of enjoying herself, kissing Ernie was not on her list.

"I think I'm overheated and need some punch," Hermione explained as she quickly exited the dance floor and left Ernie staring after her, a perplexed look on his face.

Hermione made it to the punch bowl without further incident and quickly drank a cup, refilling it for no other reason than to have an excuse not to go back on the dance floor. She could not believe how well everyone was getting on; it seemed the House rivalries were finally being put aside. She sipped her punch, watching the party over the rim of her cup.

---

As the students were celebrating the end of the war, it was perhaps not particularly surprising that the older adults, too, were beginning to feel restless.

After years of being alert almost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, plotting and trying to keep the students in their charge safe or in one case wiping up after them, none of them were very eager to chaperone what was quickly turning into the party of all parties.

They were all rather in need of a stiff drink. Or rather in need of several stiff drinks. And one in particular had a good reason to get plastered, er, to celebrate. Although he didn't get much support on that front.

"No, Mrs. Norris."

"Meowwww."

"You can't really expect me to stay here, after what happened today!"

"Meow."

"But... But it was amazing! Something like this doesn't happen every day! I need to celebrate, can't you see that?"

"Mrrrewwww."

"You never let me do what I want to do! It's always the same... When I want to put my feet up, you want to go mousing or hunting after students. When all I want is some peace and quiet and a nip from the bottle, you want to go out. And what do we do? What you want, every single time. It's just not fair."

"Mreowwww, meow... grrweow."

"Yes, yes, I know. It's my own fault that we always end up doing what you want. But not this time. ~~It~~*will* go out and celebrate and try out my newfound powers! See what you make of that!" And with that a disgruntled, but very determined Argus Filch made his way around the corner and down a flight of stairs without a backward glance.

---

Mrs. Norris was swishing her tail to and fro erratically, fuming inside.

*How dare he? He's behaving as if he is suffering my presence these days and not the other way around!*

She would show him... There was that furry half-Kneazle, who was such a delicious shade of orange. Not a dull grey, as was her pet, Argus.

*I wonder if he would care for a nice, dead mouse...she thought with a warm purr...*

---

"Ech! What sort of absolutely disgraceful, plebeian swill is this?" Draco held his cup at arm's length, spanning the rim with thumb and forefinger as if he were unwilling to touch it. From his facial expression, one would have thought he'd just been told it was a troll's urine sample.

"The punch is spiked," Crabbe said, knowing what sort of reaction it would yield, but also knowing it was wise to give Draco the lead-ins he wanted. It worked out much better for everyone that way.

"Yes, brilliant observation. But whoever spiked it seems to have access to some sort of heinous Muggle vehicle fuel or something. It's undrinkable!"

Greg downed his cupful. "Tastes fine to me."

Draco set down the cup to make a dramatic 'give me strength' gesture. "Please. All this is fit for is starting fires. No, this needs something more sophisticated... something with class, to bring it into the realm of potability. Come on."

"Where are we going?"

"To the dorms, of course. This punch is just pleading for that bottle of cognac in my trunk."

Crabbe and Goyle had developed an ability akin to Legilimency over years of dealing with Draco, whereby they could exchange pained expressions behind his back and each could know exactly what the other was thinking...in this case, *Shite. If he gets to his trunk, he's going to want to change his clothes. If he starts faffing about with his clothes, trying to put together the perfect ensemble, we'll be waiting in the common room for him all bloody night, surrounded by absolutely no food.*

They also knew, from long experience, how to handle such situations.

"You've already had a long day... let Greg and me handle it," Vince said solicitously.

"Yes, you don't want to miss any of the party. We'll fetch it here while you enjoy yourself." Vince wondered why everyone thought Greg was slow. He was always quick enough to pick up on Vince's cues.

"Well..."

Time to seal the deal. "What are those pastries you like so much, the oval-shaped ones with the marzipan?" Vince knew very well what they were called, but it always helped to let Draco show off.

"Mazarin Tarts." Draco's face lit up. "Did you see any?"

"On the platter at the end of the table," Greg said, pointing them out helpfully.

*Wait for it... wait for it...*

"Here, take my ring...you'll have to match it to the seals next to the lock, otherwise the traps will go off when you try to open it."

Crabbe and Goyle pretended this was news to them. "All right, we'll be back as quickly as we can."

Once they returned, they didn't even need to be told to stand in front of the punch bowl to block the view while Draco did the honours. If it pleased Draco to think he had them well trained... so be it.

"Ah, much better." Draco swayed beside the table like a willow in a gentle breeze, and Crabbe and Goyle hastened to take their places on either side of him. They hadn't protected him all these years so that he could drown in a punch bowl. (Or even fall on his arse next to it and look like an idiot.)

Greg and Vince each obediently took a taste and nearly gasped at the strength of it. Still, they both nodded in feigned agreement. They watched in amazement as Draco downed an entire cupful, refilled it, sipped some more, and began to giggle. He glanced around the room with bright eyes and flushed cheeks as if looking for something long-anticipated. Whatever he saw, it must not have been what he'd hoped for, as his expression dropped into despair just as quickly as it had risen with excitement. Finishing the glass, he sniffled loudly and disappeared into the crush on the dance floor.

Greg carefully set down his cup without drinking another drop. Vince followed suit.

It might have surprised some of their professors, but the boys had definitely learned one lesson perfectly while at Hogwarts: be careful what you eat.

---

"Puff, the magic draaa-gooooon lived by the sea

And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee..."

"Tonks? Is that you?"

"Remus! Spiffy, you had the same idea as me!" she yelled a little too loudly and staggered up to him with a big smile on her lips. He was about to say something when she planted a wet kiss on his mouth, and was temporarily distracted.

"Um, and what idea is that?"

"Uh, well, walking. To Hogsmeade. Or whatever," she waved around vaguely.

"I actually wanted to get some of Rosmerta's excellent elf-made wine. You know, for later," he replied, trying to be as nonchalant as possible and glad that the night was so dark to hide his blush.

"Oh, goodie. Wicked, wicked Remus," she replied and winked at him. "But a really good idea. Let's go then," Tonks continued and made to grab his arm to pull him with her.

"But we can't go together. One of us has to go back and chaperone," he said, sounding very much like the voice of reason.

She laughed more loudly than was warranted in his opinion.

"Oh, Remus, everything is in hand back there. Don't worry. It's all right for us to go to Hogsmeade."

"Do you really think we should go? I mean, Severus isn't in the best of moods..."

"His problem. Just because people everywhere want to kill him is no reason we can't go to the pub tonight of all nights."

"Er, if you word it that way..."

"Exactly. Now we're talking. Besides, he's not alone. Flitwick and Trelawney and the others are still there after all."

"Well, I did hear Filius speak before I left. And the others are bound to be there, too."

"Goodie! Now come on and sing with me! 'Puff, the magic draaa-gooooon..."

"Have you been drinking already, 'Dora?"

"Just a tiny bit. Really, we are going to celebrate and naturally we are going to drink something, especially later..." she gave him a sultry look that somehow only served to make him look even more concerned instead of tempted. She pouted. "Don't be such a stick in the mud, Remus. Now sing with me: 'Puff, the magic draaa-goon..." she sang again, and Remus took her arm to keep her from swaying too much.

So they made their way to Hogsmeade in a slightly wavy line.

---

A cheer erupted from the vicinity of the High Table, causing all heads to turn that way. Before Ernie MacMillan could react, Hermione was bustling over to the source of the disturbance.

"Fred! George! What are you two doing out of the hospital wing?"

"All better now, Mum," one of them (Fred?) said, cheekily.

"Yeah, Poppy's a miracle worker."

From Ernie's perspective, Hermione was rapidly losing ground against the Weasley twins. It didn't help that nearly the entire population of the room was evidently solidly in favour of chaos, particularly the other escapees from the infirmary. He looked around the Hall, seeking professors who could reinforce the side of order... and came up empty.

"Hermione! Hermione, could you come here? It's urgent!"

Loath though she might have been to leave the twins unattended (and un-scolled), Hermione had her priorities straight: maintain the appearance of solidarity between the Head Boy and Girl. "What the devil is it, Ernie? You look as if you've seen a Boggart!"

Ernie knew better than to argue with her verbally. "Look around, Hermione. Tell me how many teachers you see."

Her mouth opened with the apparent intent to retort, but she closed it again and did as requested. By the time she'd made a third desperate scan of the room, her face had gone pale.

"They all must have... stepped out for a breath of air... or had something they needed to fetch from somewhere... or gone to the loo," Hermione said, a tinge of hysteria in her voice. "I know I saw Professor Flitwick, not ten minutes ago!"

"Oh, that was me!" Terry Boot wandered by, his face flushed and his eyes oddly bright. "Hopkins dared me to impersonate my head of house...hey, if I fooled you, I win the bet!"

Ernie and Hermione breathed a collective sigh of relief that Terry was distracted enough not to notice that the professors had gone missing. The pleasant feeling was short-lived.

"Do you want to go looking for them, or should I?"

"No... Fred and George must be behind all this, I just know it." Hermione fingered her wand as she spoke. "Bother! They were right over there a minute ago. Where did they go?"

Ernie decided that he was quite glad he wasn't one of the Weasley twins. Judging by Hermione's expression, she would be biting something other than her lower lip when she found them.

"I'm going to have a talk with them...and they're going to tell me how they sidetracked the professors, and where they are now. Why don't you continue to scan the Hall for problems, and maybe round up a few of the Prefects to help?"

"Right." Ernie felt relieved that he wouldn't be forced to sort out the Twins. He began searching for trustworthy Prefects, failing to notice Hermione detour to the punchbowl for a drink and frown after the first sip. He likewise failed to mark that she finished only about half of the cup before stalking off with both a reddish hue and a determined look on her face.

Even if he had noticed, he might not have realized just how important it was to steer clear of the punch...

---

A card.

"Oh, no."

Another card.

"No. No, no, no, no, no."

Yet another card.

A screech as if from a dying bird followed. "I won't, I tell you! I won't."

Another card hit the table. Then the formation of cards was swiped off the table and onto the floor beneath with an angry huff.

No, she wouldn't; and they couldn't make her! It wasn't anywhere in her contract.

She was a seer, not a *babysitter*!

She would never, not in a million years *chaperone* at a party. A true seer would never degrade herself so. She immediately suppressed the nagging thought that always accompanied statements like this: what kind of true seer had never made a correct prediction?

But after all these years with impudent students, wars and ministry officials who thought they could just sack her, this was really too much. She wouldn't chaperone at this monstrosity of a party. *Let Snape do that! He's always so very fond of blasting those infernal rustling rose bushes!*

She needed something stronger than that cooking sherry. A Firewhisky was too dry and hot for her, but a nice Flaming Mint might do.

Yes! She would leave before anyone would be able to ask her to help out.

*Let's see how they'll deal with that horde of hormonal students on their own* And with that thought, she huffily flipped one of her many shawls about her and lifting the trap door to her tower room, made her way from the castle and out into the dark of the night.

---

"Is she gone?"

Seamus could just as well have looked about the Hall and seen for himself whether or not Hermione was there, but Dean indulged him. It was actually a rather good idea for someone to stand lookout during the spiking of the punch. As far as protecting the integrity of the refreshments went, Hermione had obviously been taking lessons from Snape. "As far as I can tell."

"What about Ernie?"

Dean snickered. "On the other side of the hall, trying to stop Smith from singing."

"Best of luck to him in that," Seamus replied, for some reason finding that funny to the point of hysterics. He laughed to the point that he managed to get a liberal dose of his libation of choice on his robes as well as in the punchbowl.

"Why are we doing this, again?"

"Because we need to cancel out that sweet swill I saw Ron dump in here, that's why, me good mate," Seamus said cheerfully, splashing himself again due to inattention. "There! That ought to do it." He Banished the empty bottle and ambled around to the front of the table.

"Phew...better stay away from candles for a bit, Seamus," Dean said, not entirely facetiously.

"Very funny...now, drink up!" Seamus poured them each a cup. They toasted each other on a job well done and tasted the fruits of their labours.

Dean coughed and spluttered, his eyes tearing over. Gasping, he asked, "What ever-living fuck was in the bottle?"

Seamus' eyes were running as he answered, "Why, jus' a lil' (hic!) Irish cheer!"

---

Hermione hadn't been the only one feeling not quite herself. In fact, nearly the entire population of the Great Hall was quite industriously engaged in feeling persons other than themselves, and no one seemed to be complaining. Nor was anyone besides Hermione wondering why all the shyest people in the school were suddenly nominating themselves to run what was rapidly becoming a dissolute bacchanal, with Neville Longbottom and his chosen consort Luna Lovegood campaigning enthusiastically for the titles of King and Queen of Misrule. Currently, they were well on their way to dominating the impromptu 'sexiest tango competition,' which bode well for the success of their bid.

However, Harry and Ginny were offering stiff competition in the form of 'most creative non-culinary use of desserts.' Which they were demonstrating on the High Table, with lots of Chocolate Snitch Ice Cream and hot fudge, to wildly enthusiastic applause from the assembled guests.

Ernie McMillan had the vague feeling he was supposed to be doing something about all this, but he couldn't quite think of what. Where was his chaperone partner?

Wait a minute... partner... pairing... there were still assorted non-snogging, non-coupled persons out there. Maybe that was what he was supposed to be fixing?

"Who's up for a dare?" he bellowed enthusiastically, garnering a surprising amount of attention considering the attraction inherent in watching permutations of the tango (either on the dance floor or on the serving platter).

"Me! Oh, let me!" Somehow, it didn't surprise him that Colin Creevey managed to make his screech heard over...well, over everything.

"Come here." He whispered the terms of the dare and the necessary password for completing it, whereupon Colin nodded eagerly and took off like a shot in the direction of the Headmaster's office.

The staircases must have been with Colin in a remarkable way, for he was back in less than twenty minutes, carrying...

"Is that what I think it is?" Mandy asked, gaping in astonishment.

Ernie jumped a little, not having noticed her arrival but glad of it. He smiled, electing to interpret her expression as one of admiration. "Absolutely."

Just then, the piece of tattered fabric in Colin's hands seemed to perk up, and a familiar voice rang out:

I'm the Hogwarts sorting hat and I'm feeling quite elated

To see the houses thus united is simply much belated

Slytherin with Gryffindor combines the cunning with the bold

I'm seeing things that make me wish I weren't quite so old

Hufflepuffs with their loyalty will make you feel so grand

While ever brilliant Ravenclaws know how to take things in hand.'

"Did Colin tell you why we wanted you?" Ernie asked the hat. On some level, he thought that he should feel a bit odd addressing a piece of clothing, but it was too hard to

hold onto such disagreeable thoughts.

"Oh, yes, my good Hufflepuff. Step right up, youngsters! If you don't have a partner yet, just leave it to the old Hat...I'll sort you!"

Ernie grimaced. Mandy cringed slightly and muttered, "Hats really shouldn't attempt comedy."

---

Minerva hmphed loudly into the warm night air.

*Where are those two? I sent them to make sure everything is all right, and now they are not to be found!*

She hmphed again for good measure, tapping her foot impatiently.

At least everything really was all right in Hogsmeade, though Vector and Sinistra had neglected to report it.

*If you want something done, it's best you do it yourself.*

A third *hmph* was rudely interrupted by a familiar voice calling her name quite loudly from the other side of the street.

"Minerva! Fancy meeting you here! You also out for a drink? After those unruly hordes, I need something to sustain me. Care to join me?" Poppy Pomfrey let loose her barrage of questions, grabbed her arm and proceeded to drag Minerva McGonagall in the direction of the Three Broomsticks.

No one was going to bully her like this! "Poppy! Unhand me. I really need to go back to Hogwarts. I'm surprised at you! I thought you were responsible enough to keep to your post."

"The war is over, Minerva. The kids are partying like there's no tomorrow, and my patients are all fast asleep. It's time that we celebrate a little as well," Poppy said determinedly. "Now what say you? Are you going to join me or go back to sit in on the loudest and most obnoxious party Hogwarts has ever seen?"

"What about Severus? I told him I would come right back with...er, I meant to bribe him out of his office."

"We'll bring him a nice Hangover Relief Potion in the morning and talk him through it. He's a lost cause tonight, and you know it very well."

Minerva hemmed and hawed a moment longer. "Well, one drink. But no more!"

---

Pomona and Rolanda made their way through the crowded streets of Hogsmeade as best as they could, dodging the sparks sent in the air by newly christened war veterans and sideline sitting civilians. As one jet of green light grazed Sprout's hat, she ducked and shouted with alarm.

The flying instructor only laughed. "It was only a Jelly Legs. Look!"

Sprout watched a wizard holding up a broken bottle fall to the ground on wobbly legs.

"Saw him yelling and waving that about," Hooch explained, deftly stepping over a couple snogging horizontally on the floor.

"That could have been a Death Eater," Pomona said as she wondered how one could possibly get in that position on the cobblestone road.

"Not here," Hooch said firmly. In a more cheerful voice, she added, "Ready to go for him?"

Pomona blinked, realizing they had arrived at the grimy door of the Hog's head. "Erm... I suppose I"

"Good." Rolanda opened the door and snatched Pomona's hat.

"Why'd you do that?" Pomona whispered. Hands flying to fix her hair, she stepped into the pub. It was no secret that the Herbology professor's hair was a mess, and she knew about the stories her students told about the plants she grew within the tangled bundle she'd cover with her hat. Though she kept it clean and plant free, Sprout preferred her wrinkled brown witch's hat to cover it all.

"The hex ruined it," Hooch replied, stuffing the hat into the nearest rubbish bin before Sprout could examine it further.

"But... my hair!"

Hooch led the distraught witch to the bar. "Looks better without it. Hullo, Aberforth!"

Pomona sat on a stool and tried not to stare much at Aberforth's hands as he placed stained coasters in front of her and Hooch. A quick glance showed her the Runes tattoos he had on his knuckles, the straight and callused hands that now lay flat on the dull brown counter.

"What will it be?" Nodding at Hooch, Aberforth then leaned in Pomona's direction.

"Gillywater," she said weakly. She couldn't look away from the bartender. Despite his dodgy practices, his eyes were a clear direct blue, not shifting away from her. Pomona gulped.

"Good...and for you?" Aberforth asked Rolanda.

She crossed her fingers and brought her hands up to her chin. "I dunno. What have you got?" Hooch asked.

Aberforth took out two battered glass mugs and set them on the bar. "Made a new beauty this morning."

*Not only is his goat history unclear, but he mixes drinks before noon* Pomona mentally sighed. Focusing on the iron grey hair that ran down his back, Pomona thought of his eyes and hands and the way he spoke to her somewhat harsh but attentive, as if he was actually interested in what she had to tell him about the plants she worked with.

"I'm game," Hooch said.

"Don't you want to know what it is?" Sprout asked.

"I call it Three Mile Island Iced Tea." Aberforth took the mugs and mixed the drinks, handing them to the professors. Pomona took hers with a shy thanks and then stared at the smoking green concoction in Hooch's hands.

"To... victory," Pomona said, her glass raised.

"And a good shag!"

Somehow Pomona's and Aberforth's eyes met during Hooch's toast. She coughed and clinked mugs with Rolanda.

Pomona sipped her drink and grimaced. She had never liked gillywater, but it was the first drink name that had slipped from her lips.

A loud belch sounded from her right, and she saw a glowing green Hooch burping out a mushroom cloud into the air.

"Rolanda... your skin!"

The flying instructor held a hand up to her face and examined it. "Fetching colour, green. How long does it stay on?"

Aberforth turned from the hag he was currently serving. "I'm not sure yet. You're the first one to try it out."

Hooch still smiled, but her eyes went wide. "Best be off to the loo, then."

While feeling concerned for her colleague, Sprout couldn't help her nervousness rise when Aberforth approached her.

"Hello," she managed to say.

He leaned into the counter and brushed a stray lock of hair away from her face. "Hello, yourself."

In her giddy nervousness, she blurted, "Whatever happened to that goat, anyway?"

---

Rolanda stepped into the loo and found that the mirror had nothing to offer by way of reassurance.

*How the hell am I supposed to chat up Poppy looking like the bloody Wicked Witch of the West?*

Looking at the dismayed green face in the mirror was getting discouraging. *Here goes nothing...damn, I hate having to point my wand at myself...*

*"Infucatus Novum!"*

*Success!*

Hooch almost cheered...until the Wicked Witch of the West reappeared in the mirror.

Admitting defeat for now and hoping Filius or Severus could do something about this back at Hogwarts, Hooch left the loo and searched for Pomona, who wasn't sitting at the bar.

Glancing at Aberforth, who was mixing a drink and facing the back of the bar, Hooch frowned. *The poor woman must be outside. Maybe she wasn't able to take on the goat*

Rushing outside, Hooch found her against the wall by the door, looking up at the fireworks exploding in the sky. The lights illuminated the cheerful expression of her face that didn't change upon seeing Rolanda's epidermal predicament.

"He said he'll meet me after his shift," Pomona said breathlessly.

"Did he now?"

"And we almost kissed."

"Almost?"

Pomona blushed. "I didn't think it would be proper."

"Then you haven't drunk enough yet."

"To the Three Broomsticks? Poppy should be there by now."

Hooch's stomach lurched at the mention of Poppy's name. "To the Three Broomsticks!" She said aloud, matching the witch's tone as they faced the rowdy crowds once more.

---

Harry was feeling a bit out of sorts.

No sooner had he and Ginny gotten within the vicinity of the dance floor than Neville and Luna (of all people) had swooped down upon Ginny and pulled her into a very complicated three-person dance. Harry admired the technique involved. He appreciated that Ginny really enjoyed dancing. But he suspected that he was more than justified in feeling that it could bloody well have waited until the Graduation Ball.

"I'll see you there!" she called over her shoulder, winking as she was swallowed in the crush.

*That settles it. The universe is seriously fucked up. I save the world from the most evil wizard imaginable and **still** can't get a moment alone with my girlfriend.*

A flurry of red hair bobbed into view. To Harry's disappointment, it didn't belong to the Weasley he was looking for. "Harry! Harry, I need to borrow the Cloak. There's this dare, and the Patil twins agreed to..."

"Yeah, sure, Ron," Harry said absently, continuing to scan the room. *Where the hell is Ginny?*

"Thanks, mate!" Before running off, Ron slapped Harry on the back so hard that he had to clutch at his glasses to keep them from falling off.

After several long minutes of fruitless looking, Harry concluded that either he was too short, or Ginny was. The mystery of her location wasn't solved until he ran into Neville...or rather, Neville ran into him (literally).

"Sorry, Harry! Brilliant party!"

"Sure, Neville. Where's Ginny?"

"She left us somewhere on the other side of the floor...she needed a bath," Luna said, as if that explained it all. Which, knowing what Harry knew, it did.

Harry bit back a curse. "Thanks," he yelled into the crowd as Neville and Luna swung away again. He pushed determinedly toward the nearest exit.

*Time to see a witch about a bath.*

---

*And this is Lucky Sev.*

He clung to his one and only friend in his pitch-black room...a very large bottle of Firewhisky...for moral support. He poured yet another glass.

*gulp*

Voldemort was finally dead.

*gulp*

He looked blearily at his unmarked arm and made a strangled sound resembling a giggle. It threatened to rise to hysteria, but...

*gulp... gulp... gulp... gulp*

he managed to suppress that.

*Hmmm... why isn't this bottle getting any emptier?*

*gulp*

Neither he nor the Brat-that-wouldn't-fucking-die had even a shallow cut after the battle.

*gulp*

The Ministry of Magic would possibly generously decide not to lock him up in an adjacent padded cell next to his buddy Lucius at the Azkaban Home for Difficult Children.

*gulp*

All his Death Eater 'friends' were dead, mad or soon-to-be incarcerated.

*gulp*

Lucky, lucky Sev.

*gulp*

All the Teachers at Hogwarts had decided that he was a good fellow after all, considering his 'heroics' in the final battle.

*gulp... gulp.*

Missed out on DADA again!

*gulp*

Dumbledore...

*gulp*

...at least, his portrait...

*gulp*

...told him that he never gave up on him.

*gulp... gulp... gulp...*

The HAT...that fucking Hat had decided that he had been sorted wrong... Gryffindor? Severus hiccoughed laughter and tears. He had fled the scene of the final battle, not really thinking of a destination. Somehow he had ended in the Headmaster's Office. Hands shaking, he tossed down a large glass of McGonagall's finest. He knew she wouldn't approve. Whiskey should be savoured, but he didn't give a damn. Then the sorting Hat had addressed him, and a certain portrait chimed in!

He shuddered as he recalled the banter between Albus' portrait and the Sorting Hat. The Hat had displayed an almost humanly impish sense of humour, which had seriously weirded him out. He fled the Headmasters' office to the ghostly laughter of his friend and the maniacal Hat.

*gulp... gulp... gulp*

And Lucky Sev was alive.... What god had he royally pissed off? Was Fate so fucking vindictive that she allowed him to live? Why the hell was he still alive?

He didn't notice the house-elves replacing his bottle whenever he placed his head gently on the table, rapping his forehead on the hard surface.

His mind relived the chaos of the final battle. Snippets and snatches whirled around in his addled brain. He saw Longbottom go down, howling in anguish. As an observer after the fact, Severus laughed as Neville turned the curse back on Pettigrew.

He saw flashes of the Weasleys and Granger darting in and out, curses and counter-curses having a life of their own... deadly arcs of power vaulting over the verge. He saw bottles flying, smashing, erupting great gouts of purple and green, choking entire groups of Death Eaters. In the centre, in a deceptively dead-calm pocket amongst the chaos, he was at Voldemort's shoulder, in the absence of Lucius. This was Voldemort's one and only mistake. Not even the legion of Dementors that Voldemort had sent to Azkaban could bust out his 'Lord's' 'trusted' lieutenant. The Dementors were late, and were evidently going to remain so.

Voldemort was focused solely on Potter, heedless of all his 'beloved' Death Eaters either dying or dead. Like so many megalomaniacs in history, Voldemort had a blind spot, and in this case, it was his unbending belief in his immortality and the fact that no-one could harm him, no matter who he had by his side. Hence Severus' unique perspective in the final battle. Snape was near enough...and underestimated enough...to calmly stab Voldemort in the back. Even the most powerful wizard in the world could be inconvenienced by six inches of tempered steel.

He recalled the almost comical look of betrayal on Voldemort's face as Potter administered the coup de gras. It was almost anti-climactic. Tom Riddle never said a word as he held Severus' arm; just looked at him with a mix of horror and hate as he died... this time for the last time, his body collapsing into a gooey, black ichor, his robes gently smoking in the cool night air. He remembered the blinding pain as his arm, as if it was severed, before collapsing into Potter, who inadvertently broke his fall. He vaguely remembered a frizzy-haired witch looking down on him, forcing his lips open to take one of his viler concoctions.

Lucky, lucky Severus. He had survived. He pounded his head gently on the scarred surface of his workbench.

*Bloody know-it-all should have let me die...*

The mental shock of Voldemort's death should have been the end of him. By the sounds around him, it had been the end of quite a few of his 'fellow' Death Eaters. For



some reason, he couldn't get the frizzy haired girl out of his mind...

Her frizzy hair mixed in with a definite fuzzy aura to his thoughts. He tried to clear his head, but the Firewhisky resisted. His brain felt like... well, felt... It was one of the weirdest feelings he had ever had. Flashes of her intruded on his sozzled mind, the all-encompassing robes not hiding the fact that she was, in fact, quite curvy in a boyish sort of way. Severus reeled in shock as his thoughts wandered down *that* path, but the fuzziness refused to go away; in fact it got worse. He forced his head from the bench, and tried to focus on his Slytherin coat-of-arms on the wall. His Slytherins... despite the officials... *his* bloody Slytherins.

In spite of the thick walls and the isolation of his quarters, he thought he heard... no... that wasn't possible. He concentrated harder, still pouring glass after glass... then a particularly loud giggle...and it *was* a giggle...intruded on his morose musings. The glass went flying and shattered against the wall as Severus hauled himself up unsteadily. Thinking of Granger also brought forth thoughts of duty, and he staggered towards the door, intent on doing his rounds.

---

"Draco..."

Draco literally jumped. Not a start, shudder, or jerk, but an honest-to-goodness jump. "Fuck it, Vince! Don't sneak up on me like that!"

Vincent sighed inwardly. *He really is twitchy*, he thought, half in fondness, half in frustration. "Draco, you can't hide from Pansy all night."

"It's a big castle," Draco muttered.

"Why don't you just end it cleanly? She'll probably be glad for the chance to just let herself go and flirt a little. You can both enjoy the party, if you'll just clear this up."

"Don't care about the stupid party." He was doing a poor job of hiding the fact that he was wiping his eyes.

Crabbe didn't bother trying to hide his sigh this time. "Oh, hell, Draco! This, from the only person in the room who wanted to hurry back to the dorms to change into formals, instead of just starting the party as is? This from the man who christened the punchbowl with 20 year old cognac so that we wouldn't be forced to drink absolute swill?"

"Absolutely disgraceful, plebeian swill," Draco corrected, a little plaintively. He was sniffing openly now.

Vince rolled his eyes. "Never mind all the time you spent fixing Flitwick's charms on the instruments and haranguing the ghosts so there would be a perfect mix of fast and slow music. Draco, I know you don't think much of my brain, and I admit, I'm not half as quick as you are...but after all that, you couldn't convince a troll you don't care about this party." *Or that you're not trying to impress someone*, he thought, but refrained from saying it aloud. It wasn't quite time for that yet.

Sniffing turned to out-and-out crying. "Y-you're not dumb, Vince. Y-you just have t-trouble with b-books and stuff. You're m-my b-b-best friend."

Draco sort of collapsed on Vince's shoulder, and the bigger boy summoned a handkerchief. It had been a good idea to leave Greg behind in the Hall to run interference. Considering what they were quite sure they knew of their unofficial leader's preferences, Greg always got a little nervous when Draco hit the 'clingy and maudlin' stage.

Considering Draco was now in the maudlin and clingy stage, it had probably been a very bad idea to comply with his demand to fetch the alcohol. But the Thestral was out of the stable now, and Vince had to deal with it.

"You're the bright one, Draco. But sometimes, you sort of outsmart yourself...you know what I mean? know you don't like her. Greg knows you don't like her. I'm willing to bet *she's* got a pretty good idea that you don't like her, and we all know *why* you don't like her. Don't look at me like that. It's not the rumours. Greg and me know better than to believe those. But we've listened to plenty of your rants over the years, and frankly, it's more than a little obvious."

Draco changed colours very interestingly for what seemed like a good many minutes. "I couldn't stay out there and watch him with...with her...and the *chocolate*..." Draco broke off with a little wail, as if the chocolate had somehow done something to personally affront him.

Vince patted him on the shoulder. "It's pretty much now or never, you know. NEWTs are in two months, and he'll never be in a better mood."

"He's not interested. I saw the two...t-two...of them..."

"Obviously you didn't see Justin come over and slap his arse," Vince began, only to be interrupted by Draco's indignant shriek.

"Why, that little tramp! I've had my eye on that inspiringly gorgeous backside, second only to mine in perfection in all the wizarding worlds **since fourth year**, and he thinks he can just walk up and put his filthy little paws on it?"

*Since first year, by my count*, Vince thought dryly, but merely continued speaking where he'd left off. "The two of them just laughed and blew him a kiss as he went on his way. They sure didn't seem to object."

Draco went back to sulking. "*She's* still there. Don't wanna share."

Just then, Goyle burst through the door into the corridor. "Vince! Did you...oh good. Hey, they're leaving now, and he kind of lost her on the dance floor! If you hurry, you can get to him before he catches up to her again!"

Draco hurriedly dabbed his eyes one more time with the handkerchief, blew his nose and returned it to Vince (who banished it with a long-suffering expression). "Is my hair okay? Oh, I must look a fright right now! I have to..."

"GO, and NOW," Vince said firmly, steering him back into the room by one elbow. Greg gave him a little shove for good measure. Draco hurried off in the direction they'd sent him, leaving Crabbe to reflect that he finally understood what 'all a-twitter' meant.

"About bloody time he went for it."

"Think he'll get hexed?" Greg had agreed to Vince's plan, but that didn't mean he wasn't still worried about it. After all, Draco usually had the plans. Still, it seemed like anything was possible tonight.

Vince thought hard. "No... I don't think so. Everyone seems in too good a mood for that sort of reaction tonight. Who knows? Maybe he'll get a snog out of it and get it out of his system."

Greg shrugged. It was almost a hopeful gesture. "He was all weepy, wasn't he?"

"Yeah."

"And clingy?"

"Isn't he always...at least, once he's had a snootful?"

Greg shook his head solemnly. "Better you than me, mate."

Vince's turn to shrug. "Oh, it's not that bad. Not like he'd come on to either of us. Not his type, and all that."

"S'pose. Say, some of those dares sound right interesting. Want to give any of 'em a go?"

"Only if it involves something REAL to eat. I'm through with all this sweet stuff."

"Sounds good."

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Authors' Notes:

Hermione's dance courtesy of broomclosetravenclaw.

Trelawney, Remus & Tonks, and Filch making their escapes from the castle, and the beginning of the teachers' adventures in Hogsmeade (Minerva and Poppy), courtesy of shalimar1981.

The scene with Hooch and Sprout in the Hog's Head courtesy of SS Lupin.

The drink in the scene with Hooch and Sprout in the Hog's Head courtesy of Hubby\_of\_Drac.

Angsty, drunken Snape courtesy of JustDesmond.

All other student scenes, including any and all punch-spiking, courtesy of dracontia.

The verse sung by the Sorting Hat courtesy of Droxy.

It's even funnier if you read it while slightly tipsy or sleep-deprived, according to Hubby\_of\_Drac.

## 3: When Things Go Just a Bit Wrong

*Chapter 4 of 11*

When they're good, they're very good; when they get together and get drunk, they are very, very bad--and when they're very, very bad, they're ever so much better! (At least, to read about.) This could either be a summary of this chapter, or a description of The Mad Chatters.

Disclaimer: We only make the mess. We'll give the castle, the town, and all the inhabitants thereof, back to their rightful owners to clean it up.

Warning: Unless you want your monitor to resemble the floor in the Great Hall, we suggest you save the snacks until after you read this.

Chapter 3: When Things Go Just a Bit Wrong

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Madam Rosmerta felt a cool breeze coming from the entrance of the Three Broomsticks. The noise of the celebrators outside (not to be outmatched by those within her establishment) lasted only a few seconds as the door was opened and shut, but it caused her to glance at the people who entered.

*Pomona and Rolanda too?* Rosmerta thought with surprise. *At this rate, who's going to be left minding the castle?*

A flash of white at the corner of her eye confirmed that Rolanda headed for the booths at the back. *Finally having a go at Poppy then*, the bartender thought with a small smile. She charmed some drinks to a group sitting at the other end of the bar and greeted Pomona, who had arrived at the bar, with her usual grace and charm.

"Evening, Pomona."

"Hullo, Rosmerta. I'll have a... well, something strong that won't turn me green."

Rosmerta chuckled and poured Pomona a shot of something that tasted warm and fruity when she swallowed it. "What happened to Rolanda, anyway?"

Pomona blushed at the memory of Aberforth's hands. "The bartender at the Hog's Head served her a new concoction."

"That man," Rosmerta muttered. "Will he ever settle down?"

"He isn't all that bad, Aberforth."

"Who said I was talking about him?" Rosmerta winked.

Pomona flushed red and downed the rest of her drink.

Noting the professor's discomfort, Rosmerta changed the subject as she wiped some mugs clean *after washing them*, unlike some other bartenders she knew.

"Is there anyone still at the castle?"

"Sure, there are... the students are having a party in the Great Hall"

Rosmerta shook her head. "I mean... are there any chaperones?"

"I'm sure there are chaps there," Pomona said with a happy slur of words upon having another shot of the fruity drink.

Rosmerta wasn't sure about that. Besides Poppy and Rolanda talking in the booth in the back (she made sure to keep the bottle of sherry ready for them), Professors Vector and Sinistra were in a room upstairs, Minerva had come in with Poppy, and she really did not want to know what Filch was up to, nursing his drink with a lusty eye.

She sighed as she refilled the glass in front of Pomona the woman was intoxicating herself at a remarkable rate...and wondered if any more of Hogwarts' staff would be

coming in.

---

When George noticed that the objects of his surveillance had disappeared...not long after he last observed them removing clothing...he swore loudly and liberally.

"What's gotten into you? Playing charades?"

"Hilarious, Fred. Where are Harry and Ginny?"

"You were supposed to be watching them."

"I couldn't focus on them and put off Hermione at the same time. I swear, she's worse than Mum. And the last I saw, our baby sister was short at least one undergarment."

For once that night, Fred looked less than amused. "Well, come on...let's look for them. The party can survive a few minutes without us."

---

"Pansy, I hope you don't take this the wrong way, but I don't think we're suited and I think it's best if we not see each other any more," Draco said, doing a fair impression of his usual haughty self...so long as you ignored the tear-swollen eyes and the odd sniffle.

Pansy rolled her eyes. "Merlin's arse, Draco, it's been over between us for months, assuming it ever really was. Just go already."

A heartfelt 'thank you,' and he did just that.

Millicent watched his retreat. "Camp as a row of tents, that one."

"No kidding."

"Why were you with him, again?"

Pansy gave Millicent a 'are you really that thick?' look and made an exaggerated finger gesture.

"Right. Money."

"Yeah, but not anymore, from what I've heard," she said dismissively. "I'm going to go fishing for something more profitable and less flaming. Care to join me?"

"Lead on. I hear Summersby's parents have a villa in Tuscany. He's as good a place to start as any."

---

"So this is where you all are!" Flitwick observed dryly.

The other teachers tried to look guilty for deserting their posts en masse, but the effect was marred by the fact that they were all in various stages of inebriation. Poppy even had a hiccup, causing her to bounce up and down dangerously in her seat.

"Remus, Tonks, Sybill, Snape and Hermione and Ernie are still there to keep order."

Just then Remus burst through the door, heading with a determined expression toward the bar, Tonks trailing after him in a sort of wavy line, smiling beatifically.

"Well, okay. Sybill, Snape, Hermione and Ernie, then. They are very responsible. And Snape... Well, at least he won't let anyone have too much fun in any case. You know what he's like."

"Hey, Remus! Tonks! Come over here!"

"What are you all doing here?" Remus asked when he reached their table.

"The same thing you are, celebrating! Join us for a drink," Hooch said to him cheerfully.

"I just wanted to buy some elf-made wine for later..."

"For later, huh? Well, you can still do that. Join for us for a drink. We'll only be here for another round anyway," Minerva said primly, the effect marred somewhat with her speech becoming a little slurred.

*Hm, maybe I'll have some of that nice elf-made wine...* Remus thought, his resolve weakening rapidly. "Right, we'll stay for one drink and then we'll leave."

"Of course!" Tonks said with a huge smile, plumping down in a chair.

Remus sat down much more slowly in a chair directly across from Minerva and beside Tonks.

Another one of the villagers came over to congratulate them and thumped Remus on the back.

"You lot defeated You-Know-Who? I wouldn't believe it if old Flimpfruit hadn't told me! Well done! Have a round on me!" and off he was again, embracing a particularly plump witch with a huffy pigeon on her shoulder.

Madam Rosmerta came over then to take the orders of the newly arrived.

"I'll take one of your colourful fabrications again, Rosmerta," Flitwick piped up, bouncing excitedly in his seat.

"With an umbrella of course," Rosmerta said with a wry smile.

He nodded vigorously, and she chuckled. "And you'll be having a glass of my elf-made wine for this special occasion, Lupin?" Rosmerta asked, when Remus opened his mouth to speak. He nodded happily and shook Tonks' shoulder (she had drifted into unknown spheres, it seemed).

"What? Oh, I'll have some mead, Rosie."

A few minutes later Rosmerta reappeared, levitating a full tray in front of her. She settled the drinks in front of the newest arrivals, and bustled away back to the bar.

Just when everyone was about to drink, Minerva coughed loudly to get their attention.

"Now that we are all here and have a drink, I want to make a toast. To all those who died so we could live," Minerva said in a sombre voice.

The others fell silent at once, and one after the other raised their glasses for the toast.

"Sirius," Remus said, holding hands with Nymphadora.

"Bones," said someone else, not of their party.

"Vance."

"Hagrid," said Poppy, sniffing a little. She'd been very fond of the Half-Giant.

"Dumbledore," Minerva finally said and the whole tavern was silent. Then all of them took a large gulp of Firewhisky, and the sound of glass hitting wood was heard throughout the pub.

Then someone started to chuckle softly. It was Pomona Sprout. She looked contrite as everyone whipped around to her at the unexpected sound, but couldn't contain her laughter. Hooch was smiling as well.

"What is so funny, Rolanda, Pomona?" Flitwick asked, very curious.

"Well, you see, we just visited Aberforth at the Hog's Head, and he finally cleared up the mystery of the goats, you see."

"It wasn't him at all, experimenting with those goats, it was Albus! Imagine that. Pretty harmless what he did with them as well. Sounded like he wanted to find out if he could make goats do magic as well. But 130 years ago, Wizarding society was not so forgiving about unauthorised experiments, so Aberforth spread the rumour that it had been him all the while, so Albus could become a teacher."

"To make goats do magic!" Flitwick chuckled now as well and quickly the rest of the table and the pub really joined in.

"Do you remember the time old Bones set those Quidditch robes on fire in an attempt to draw attention to the fact that the catching gloves were made from the Dragon-hide of those rare Dragons in Africa?" That raised another round of laughter, louder this time.

"That wasn't all she did if I remember correctly," Minerva threw in, chuckling now herself.

They all looked puzzled until Poppy started laughing loudly. "The... business... with the... referee!" A look of understanding dawned on the older staff members' faces and loud laughter broke out once again.

"Do you remember the time that Sirius and James broke into the... Well, never mind." Remus started, then finished with an embarrassed cough.

"No need to censor their misdeeds. I did see those four boxes of detention records Filch has on them alone," Minerva remarked with a wry smile.

"It was the trophy room, painting the Slytherin trophies green," Remus finished with a smirk, taking another sip of his Firewhisky.

"He... that was them? I've always wondered. Wished I could've awarded some points to them."

"Filius! That is..."

"Minerva, you can't tell me you didn't want to as well. The look on Slughorn's face!"

"Yes, well. Do you remember the time Potter and Weasley went after that troll in their first year?"

Now heavily lubricated, their tongues continued in this vein for quite a while, recounting one embarrassing story after another, were they of the fallen or not. Villagers coming and going, glad the fighting was over and generally buying the Order members more drinks than they should consume, but couldn't really bring themselves to refuse.

They had fought Voldemort for years, decades really if you counted his first rising, and now they all bloody well deserved a party of their own.

And if that meant they got so drunk they couldn't remember their own names, so be it.

---

One of the last to leave (but who passed by unnoticed as usual) was currently rubbing at an imagined spot of dirt with a soft cloth on one of her precious books.

"Hmph."

No one ever noticed her, and the other teachers certainly didn't know her. To them she was just Irma Pince, librarian and spinster, dry and uninteresting. Unworthy of their attention. They were always very polite, but she could tell what they thought of her. And her books.

She always had to remind everyone how to treat her little darlings. Well, aside from some Ravenclaws and that Granger girl. Miss Granger seemed to be one of the few who appreciated books, and she always spent a good amount of time daily here in the library. Even more when one of her *friends* was behaving oddly again.

"Book defilers!" she muttered under her breath, rubbing even harder at the spot. She hadn't forgotten that that odd boy had *written* in a book once. *With a quill! Honestly. Books were too precious to be written into. A book desecrated like that! The boy should've been expelled!*

She stopped thinking along that line immediately and began her breathing exercises, just like the nice man at St Mungo's had told her to. It worked.

She breathed in deeply, calming down again. She stopped rubbing at the spot and looked at it. She had rubbed a circle through the patina of ages on that particular book, no spot visible. She'd have been rubbing for a while. She sighed, leaned back in her chair and put the book away, before she succumbed again to acting her frustration out on one of her poor books.

If she was perfectly honest with herself, she needed a drink. She had never been one much for drinking, but she supposed if there ever was a time it would be now. Not that there was any special occasion for it. Everyone was always busy, and all teachers had been absent for quite a long time.

*Shocking, that. To just leave all at once!* Then they had all returned a while ago with many of the students in tow. She had stayed at Hogwarts trying out a new cataloguing system.

The lot of them had been very tense, snapping at each other all the time. Especially Professor Snape, but then he was never one for polite conversation. Never wanted to hear about the latest archaeological discovery in the Hebrides. Unpleasant man, to be so derisive about her favourite subject!

"Hmph." She really needed that drink. She got up from her chair, placed the book she had been maltreating into a drawer (with a loving caress across its cover) so she could repair it later, and shut the drawer with a determined *thud*. She straightened her back and briskly walked out of the library, responsibly turning the 'library is open from ...to...' sign around to show 'library is closed'.

One had to keep up standards after all. Even if the rest of the world was being sloppy.

---

Hermione spied the twins ducking into the room at the back or the Great Hall. She had not been in there since the year of the Triwizard Tournament. It was dark and it took a few minutes for her eyes to adjust. The room seemed empty.

"Lumos."

The room was empty.

*Where have they gone off to?* she wondered. She walked around the room studying the paintings, all landscapes, and a few wall hangings. She tapped the paintings and a few stones with her wand. As she turned to leave, she noticed a small niche with another tapestry. As she drew closer, the pattern seemed familiar... *So, that's where they are.*

"Nox." She extinguished her wand and slipped behind the tapestry. When she peeked out the other side, she could see the Trophy Room, the awards shining in the soft moonlight through the window. She could hear murmuring.

"Well, they'll get married right out of school."

"I suppose... I'd rather not think about it, y'know?"

"Do you think I would?"

She edged her way around the perimeter until she saw two shadows crouched behind the largest trophy in the room (at least, until someone decided to make one for Harry).

When she thought she was close enough, she shot ropes out of her wand to bind the twins so that they couldn't get away from her again. But, the light and the shadows distorted her aim.

"Oi! Who's there?" shouted Fred.

Hermione turned in the direction of the voice. George came up behind her and grabbed her loosely by the shoulders.

"It's just Hermione, Fred."

"What's the idea, Hermione?" Fred asked.

"What are you two up to?" she answered his question with a question.

"Just enjoying the victory celebration," said George.

"No, you're both hiding in here for some reason. What have you done? Specifically, where are the professors?"

"We haven't done anything with them, 'Mione," said Fred.

Hermione was impressed with Fred's acting skills. He truly sounded surprised.

"Don't call me 'Mione."

"We have to lay low...we're supposed to be in the infirmary," said George.

"Well, then if you're supposed to be in the infirmary, what are you doing sneaking about...if not causing trouble?"

"We were just trying to liven up the party a bit..." George started.

"Yes, how much fun could you really have without us?" Fred added.

Hermione crossed her arms, glaring at them.

"George?" She tried to coax him to continue. He kept quiet, looking rather the way he did when Molly was lecturing. Hermione tried the binding spell again on Fred, feeling reckless and in no mood for diplomacy. One way or another, they would talk.

Fred blocked her spell and the ropes fell at their feet. George cast the binding spell at Hermione; she ducked, and it caught Fred around the legs. Fred shot wildly while trying to free his legs and caught George's right wrist. Hermione spun around and caught the rope tethered to George's wrist and pulled him away from Fred as Fred toppled, his legs still bound, and dropped his wand. Hermione managed to get in one last shot at George, binding his free hand before he could grab her.

"Enough!" she screamed, still holding George captive.

She tied the end of the rope to a wall sconce, feeling a sense of accomplishment at having prevailed two against one (though admittedly, they had done more damage to each other than she had done to them). Hermione gathered up some of the ropes from the floor and finished tying George up, stretching to wrest his wand from his bound hand. That she had to practically climb his body to do so was purely incidental.

"Oi! Hermione, watch it there with my wand."

Hermione wondered which wand he was talking about, but shook off the thought. She still had Fred to take care of.

Fred turned out to be harder to handle than George. He had managed to get himself standing, but Hermione couldn't get him near a wall to finish binding him; she pushed, she pulled, she tugged, and Fred just held his ground and held onto her.

"I had no idea you were into bondage, Hermione."

She looked up at Fred, shocked.

"If you'd just have let us know, we would have made it easier on you," George said flirtatiously.

Giving up on the wall, Hermione tied Fred to a trophy case. Without magic, it was no easy feat...his hands were mostly free, and with encouragement from George, Fred had more moves than the Giant Squid.

"Come on Hermione, give us a go."

Hermione paused, pressed up against Fred, and...reluctantly?...wrestling his hands away from her arse. What was she thinking...no! Although she didn't resist the temptation to press herself closer still as she finally got his hands secured.

"There," she said, stepping away.

"What are you going to do with us now?"

"Don't tease us, Hermione."

"I plan to keep you tied up until you tell me what you're up to."

"What's in it for us?" Fred asked, still acting as if he had the upper hand.

"What's in it for you? How about, I'll untie you?" *The twins really are frustrating*

George was ready to get back to the party, so he was the first to speak. "All we did was put a bit of our latest invention in the punch."

"Completely harmless...just something to get everyone in the mood. Worked well enough on you, didn't it?" Fred asked, with a trace of a leer.

"What?" Hermione was unsure which emotion was taking over, but the twins were lucky not to get hexed then and there. But, in the end, logic won, and if she was to find out exactly what they had put in the punch, she had to keep her wand in check.

"Yes, interesting how much you seemed to enjoy a little rope play with the help of lowered inhibitions. I wonder if the alcohol helped? We hadn't considered if that would change the effects," George said, looking remarkably thoughtful for someone who appeared to be caught in mid-bondage scenario.

"Don't worry, 'Mione," said Fred, "it just relieves shyness, so everyone, even the Hufflepuffs, can have a little fun."

"I told you not to call me 'Mione," she said. "I'm going back to the Great Hall make sure everything is okay, and just for good measure, I'm leaving you two here."

"But, we told you what we put in the punch...you can't leave us here."

"Can't I?" she asked archly as she slipped back through the tapestry.

---

Snape rested at the door for a while, wondering at the sudden vertigo that assailed him. With a heroic pull, he managed to get the door open. He used the doorjamb to haul himself up again, and he looked around the corridor. The giggling stopped and he heard a *Crumb*s from somewhere. The giggling continued, which segued into a low moan. Someone was out there... invisible... and he was pretty damned sure it wasn't a ghost.

"I should have burnt that fucking cloak. Potter! Potter, where are you?" He flailed about, knowing that his archenemy was near. He stumbled to his knees, and the giggle erupted into laughter.

"I can *hear* you, Potter. I'll find you, and you'll have so much detention that I'll be mouldering in my grave before you get out of Hogwarts!"

Some part of Snape's brain which was not entirely impeded by alcohol consumption remarked, *Severus... that would be completely counterproductive...*

"Shut it," he muttered, wondering if it was too late to find his voice of logic and give it a good, stiff drink.

---

Ron Weasley concluded that it was a great deal more fun to try to share the Invisibility Cloak with the Patil twins than it was to do so with Harry and Hermione.

For one thing, Hermione never would have slipped her hand into the back pocket of Ron's trousers while they were walking (as both Padma and Parvati were both doing), even if Harry hadn't been around. The expression 'cock blocking' floated drunkenly to the top of Ron's mind, and he pushed it down with an audible and embarrassed chuckle. For some reason, this set the twins to giggling, and they had a noisy interlude of kissing and fumbling with the buttons on each other's shirts until they all recalled that not only were they not at their destination, but that the cloak didn't make the wearers inaudible.

The terms of the dare were to 'shag in front of Snape's office.' There were no specifics as to how this was to be carried out, a fact which Padma had picked up on immediately. It was she who had suggested borrowing Harry's Invisibility Cloak (a garment whose existence was apparently the worst-kept secret at Hogwarts). After all, she reasoned, it would be much safer to shag in front of Snape's office if Snape couldn't see the shaggers.

Gotta love those clever Ravenclaws.

Parvati, bolder than her twin, had already slipped off her skirt. Even in the dim light of the dungeons, further filtered by fabric, she made a pretty picture with her shapely legs bared to the hips. A hint of lace knickers was visible where her blouse split at the sides.

Padma started to take off her tie, but Ron caught her hand and whispered in her ear, "Leave it on. Sexier that way, you know?" The twins giggled again, which was a little worrisome considering they were so near Snape's lair. But Padma left her tie on. Ron was relieved. Strategist that he was, he knew this would end very badly if he forgot which twin was which.

Not that he wasn't fairly certain he could tell them apart...Padma was the more cautious of the two, and tended to blush and hide behind him, while Parvati had initiated the hands-in-back-pockets thing and made short work of his shirt. Impressive... her unbuttoning the whole thing so quickly (single-handed, no less). After sharing a series of increasingly deep kisses, Ron concluded hazily that he rather preferred Padma...smart, like Hermione, but less bossy. *But, a dare's a dare*, he thought cheerfully as he contemplated Parvati's gold lace demi-bra.

By the time they got to Snape's door, their clothing amounted to the Cloak, his boxers, the girls' knickers, and a school robe with three wands bundled into it. The moment of truth, so to speak, was there. Fuelled by a burst of alcoholic and hormonal bravado, Ron removed the red boxers that Hermione had found so cliché and stood proudly for their inspection (in more ways than one.) They were so close together under the cloak that the ladies had to tip their heads slightly to take in the whole picture.

Parvati broke the (apparently) impressed silence first. "You owe me five Galleons, Padma. It's not just a rumour that Weasley men are hung like Hippogriffs."

Padma was looking and blushing flatteringly until she met Ron's eyes and took in his cocky grin. She averted her gaze, coyly glancing behind him. "His bum's not bad either," she said, and both girls evidently took that as the signal to giggle...then pounce.

Ron forgot to worry about the giggling. Particularly not once Padma (who still showed traces of shyness) sidled around behind him. A wisp of something silky brushed past his legs, and a glance at the floor revealed the blue bra's matching knickers. She danced her delicate fingers around his ribcage and up to play with his nipples, and he wasn't sure whether it was that or the fact that he could feel her pert tits pressing against his back that made him moan into Parvati's mouth. He never heard the office door creak ominously.

And he forgot about everything... including the cold and damp of the dungeons, the weird smell in this particular corridor (which the exciting muskiness of slightly perfumed girls confined under a cloak couldn't quite efface), and even bloody damned Snape, who was about and ranting, when Parvati left off snogging him and slid down to her knees at his feet, looking up slyly from under her eyelashes. She fished her wand out of the rolled-up cloak and Transfigured the discarded knickers into a nice blue pillow to protect her knees from the stone.

"If this doesn't count as shagging, you can make up for it, sister," she whispered in the general direction of Padma, just before delicately fastening her lips around one very impressive cock (if Ron, Padma, and Parvati did say so themselves).

Ron's last more or less coherent thought was, *As long as they don't figure out why I really asked Padma to leave her tie on, this is going to be BRILLIANT.*

---

With a triumphant, inarticulate cry, Severus managed to snag the corner of the cloak, ripping it off...

Not Potter!?

He looked at the tableau before him. Under the coffee-coloured flesh *Latte*, he thought inanely, he could just manage to see Ron Weasley and his mind slipped sideways. He heaved himself up to his full height, gathering his dignity around him. "Mr. Weasley..."

*It's so unfair*, a voice wailed, and he shuddered when he realised it was his.

A rather different voice (also his, but with the presence of mind to remain inside his skull where it belonged), reminded him, *Two of those students are female, Severus... Either put the cloak back on them or stop looking.*

He staggered up the stairs, shouting, "Inappropriate Attire! You are *not* supposed to have a girl as clothing! Theft of a magic item, to wit, one cloak of Invisibility! Giggling in the corridor! Rubbish in the Hall! Detention for life, you bastard!" As he stumbled up the stairs, he slipped and slid over the clothes strewn over *his* steps. "And clean up this mess," was his final rejoinder to the oblivious trio.

The more restrained voice, whom Snape had begun to think of fondly as 'not as drunk Severus', reminded him he had duties to attend to *You need to get started on your rounds, if students are getting so bold as to...frolic...in the corridor outside your office.*

"Right you are," he answered aloud.

Snape knew he couldn't be terribly drunk. After all, it bothered him slightly that he was talking to himself. Though what bothered him most at the moment was that all his fine threats hadn't managed to so much as budge the grin from young Mr. Weasley's face.

---

Hermione's shell of togetherness instantly crumbled on the other side of the tapestry. Struggling with the twins had been a little too much fun, and she was thoroughly flustered. *It's just that they're attractive, and you're a perfectly healthy female*, her voice of reason insisted, though it was rising slightly with something like hysteria. *You didn't drink nearly enough of their de-inhibitor, or whatever you want to call it, to do anything rash.*

She was so distracted, she ran out into the corridor instead of into the Great Hall...and right into Ginny.

"Sorry..." she began, but Ginny cut her off with a musical laugh.

"Hermione! Now that I think of it, you're exactly the person I wanted to see!" Ginny threw her arms around Hermione's neck as if they hadn't seen each other in months.

Hermione extricated herself from the sticky embrace as tactfully as possible. "Ginny, we need to empty the punchbowl! Fred and George spiked it with an experimental potion!"

Ginny smiled indulgently at her. "Hermione, you really need to relax. How about a bath?"

"You don't understand! Relaxing is the problem...it lowers inhibitions. Who knows what sort of trouble..."

"Oh, is that all? That one's harmless. It just helps people be less shy." She patted Hermione on the back reassuringly, managing to leave a substantial amount of chocolate in her friend's hair. "You look a little messy. Let me wash your hair before you go back to the party, hmm?"

Hermione wanted to protest, but Ginny was her friend... a bit like a little sister, really, with all the bonding they'd done over the past year, trying to keep Harry in one piece... A nice hair-washing would be relaxing about now.

*There's something I'm supposed to do*, Hermione thought. But the reason she was upset wasn't terribly clear in her mind anymore, especially when the younger girl took her by the hand, offering her a winning smile.

"I guess I want to freshen up for the party, right?" she asked, still feeling vaguely uneasy. Ginny's smile brightened, and she nodded. With that, Hermione surrendered her worry and let Ginny lead her to the Prefects' Bath.

---

Kingsley finally arrived in London with the evacuees and non-combatants from Hogwarts and Hogsmeade, escorting them to a spare safe hall in the wizarding area of London. He figured he ought to owl Tonks to inform her they'd arrived and ask how things were going up her way. Their intelligence regarding You-Know-Who's plan to attack suggested it would happen soon.

He looked around, for another of the Aurors who was helping escort the evacuees. He saw Dawlish just inside the hall and approached him.

"Dawlish, I'm going to go send an owl up to Tonks, telling her we got here and ask how things are on her end. You'll be okay for a few minutes, won't you?"

"Sure, no worries," he replied.

Kingsley nodded at him and turned to leave. Edging past the evacuees who were crowding into the hall through the narrow doorway, he headed for the owl post office near Diagon Alley.

---

"Hello, Sybill! What are you doing here?"

"The spirits told me to come here. Momentous revelations would await me here, they said," she replied in the dazed manner she tended to affect when she spoke of her communion with spirits. The others looked at each other and rolled their eyes.

*Balderdash*, the other professors thought, collectively. Then they thought of another matter entirely, which could put a damper on their celebrations.

"Well, Vector and Sinistra are still there to hold the fort, along with Snape and our Head Girl and Boy, right?" Hooch inquired nonchalantly and with an interested look at Sybill's bangles, which were clanging against the tabletop.

"Actually, I sent those two ahead to check up on things here even before the celebration started. They were supposed to be back a long while ago," McGonagall said with a frown.

"If they're here, where are they?"

"Missing anyone?" Rosmerta asked, arriving with the next round of drinks.

"Yes, we are. Professors Vector and Sinistra."

"Oh, you needn't worry about them. They're upstairs," Rosmerta replied with an indulgent smile, putting the empty glasses on her tray.

"Upstairs?"

"Yes. When they saw everything was all right, they took a room for the night," Rosmerta said.

Silence.

"Well, who would've thought? Certainly seems to be en vogue at the moment," Sprout commented, with a glance at Hooch and Poppy cuddled together at one end of the table.

"So who's at the castle right now, supervising that party?" Minerva asked, slightly concerned. But only slightly, because the Firewhisky had kicked in at last.

Silence reigned once again.

"Well, Snape, Hermione and Ernie. They're very responsible though. You know that."

A pause, then, "You're right, Filius. They'll be able to manage without us for a little while, and we won't be here long after all. Just one more drink and we'll head back."

The others looked at each other and grinned. She'd said that to begin the last two rounds.

Party time.

---

Ernie remained at his post in the Great Hall, though he wasn't certain why. He'd declined the Hat's offer to find him a match, since he already had a Ravenclaw in mind. *Hmm... speaking of Ravenclaws, Justin's Muggle-born... I wonder if he knows the lyrics to that song called 'Mandy'?*

He took a sip of his punch and gasped. 'Punch' definitely described its impact at this point. It seemed a forgone conclusion the stuff was spiked. But then, Ernie knew next to nothing about alcohol. Who did?

"Zabini! Hey, Zabini! C'mere!"

Blaise sauntered over. Normally, he couldn't care less about responding to a Hufflepuff, Head Boy or not... but really, who had anything to prove anymore? It was all fun and games from here on out! "What is it?"

"You know a thing or two about alcohol. Tell me, exactly how much in the way of spirits is in this punch? And should we still be drinking this stuff?"

Blaise leaned over the bowl to take the dipper, only to stagger back slightly from the fumes. Gingerly, he dipped a cup in and took a sip. His eyes widened. He picked up another cup, dipped it, and handed it to Ernie, who mirrored Blaise in raising the cup in a toast.

After they downed their doses, Blaise pronounced shakily, yet solemnly, "Offhand... I'd say there's enough booze in here to get a herd of centaurs totally shitfaced." And he helped himself again.

Ernie's head was swimming. It wasn't clear what was going on, but it seemed to be all right. "Oh. Well. Nothing to get excited about, then." And he wobbled off to find Mandy.

---

"Move it, Malfoy. I have a hot date with an even hotter witch in the Prefect's bath, and I'm already late." Harry brushed past and kept walking. If Malfoy wanted to apologize for any other random past misdeeds, it could wait until tomorrow.

Much to Harry's surprise and annoyance, this resulted in a sudden face full of irate blondness.

"Oh, no, you don't, Potter! You've been ignoring me for EIGHT YEARS...you aren't going to do so one minute more!"

"What the hell are you on about?" Harry was rather gobsmacked to note that the other man's eyes were red rimmed from crying and his lower lip was wobbling.

"You fucked up EVERYTHING by not being sorted into Slytherin! You're the most powerful wizard on earth, and you were supposed to be in Slytherin with your gorgeous green eyes and those luscious waves of magical energy that just roll off you, and you were supposed to be impressed with me that day in Madam Malkin's, and we would have sewn up all the Quidditch matches and gotten all the really hot people to bed us and cheated our way to the most NEWTs in history! But instead you fucking well REJECTED me and got sorted into stupid, fucking, red-doesn't-flatter-those-gorgeous-eyes-of-yours GRYFFINDOR! You aren't going to ignore me anymore, do you understand? YOU WILL PAY ATTENTION TO ME!"

Harry was feeling pretty mellow... and randy... and open minded. But it still came as a bit of a shock when Malfoy shoved him against the nearest wall and started snogging him, wobbly lip notwithstanding. Rather well, actually...that couldn't be easy with such a wobbly lip.

"Was that an audition or something?" Harry gasped once they came up for air. This was apparently the wrong thing to say. Draco's pout was threatening to spill over from his lips and take over his entire body. *Interesting how having someone put their tongue in your mouth suddenly makes you think about them by their first name*, Harry thought.

"I wish you'd take me seriously. We were meant to be near each other... physically... emotionally... alphabetically..."

Harry wanted to laugh at that, but he'd prefer not to be subjected to any snivelling. It seemed very possible at the moment. What was it with crying people kissing him?

"I guess that means Ron wins the bet. He always said you were as bent as a tin sickle." Harry saw why, now that he had a decent pair of glasses. Sweet Merlin...anyone as pretty as Draco had better be either female or queer. It was sort of wasted, otherwise.

"Oh, that's *nice*. For years I've been carrying a torch for you, playing the nice straight little pureblood scion just so I could keep my arse intact...*for you*...and you were betting against me being gay? Was the thought that I might fancy you too repugnant? I swear, if you reject me again, it won't be pretty!"

"Quite the drama queen, aren't you?" Harry softened the quip with a slight smile, though, and played with a strand of Draco's hair. Quite nice... silky, even. Ginny had wanted an audience for their games in the bath, and possibly someone to join their fun. As far as 'someone' went, they could do worse. Malfoy almost acted like a human being since becoming aligned with the Light and practically destitute.

And even a hard-core butch lesbian would have to admit Draco was one fine piece of arse.

Obviously Draco knew this as well as anyone who had eyes to see, because he pulled himself together and did a very seductive thing with his bottom lip and his teeth. Harry's fingers in Draco's hair probably encouraged it, but suddenly, that was just fine. It was even acceptable when Draco leaned the full length of his body against Harry's, subtly rubbing against his chocolate-stained thigh. "So... do you go my way, after all?" he asked in a sultry purr.

Harry seriously considered messing with Draco's mind, but ultimately opted for honesty. He'd never been a very good liar. "I can't promise you anything, lovely... especially since I've already made certain promises to Ginny. But come to the Prefects' Bath with me and we'll run it by her. If she says you're in...you can play. With *us*."

"I don't fancy girls." Draco pouted some more. It was rather cute, actually.



"Not even a little?" Harry was sure he'd felt a reaction from Draco's body against his when he'd mentioned Ginny...and it hadn't been disgust. "You couldn't make an exception for a curvy little redhead who looks really good in... bubbles?"

Yep. Definitely a twitch...maybe more than one. "Maybe a little." The pout was still there, but it was considerably sexier.

Harry laughed. "Ginevrrra," he purred, and Draco shivered tellingly.

Draco pulled away a little. He was bravely trying to hold on to his petulance, but it was drowning in signs of excitement. "Okay, you win... as usual. Are you going to take me to that bath, or not?"

"You walk ahead. I want to have a good look at this 'virgin arse' you're so proud of."

Before complying with that request, Draco gave him the coyest sideways smile Harry had ever seen from anyone, male or female, in his entire life. It was quite possibly the best example of such on the planet. And he wasn't sure if it was just something he's missed, what with the nature of school robes, or if it was something Malfoy was doing deliberately, but the man didn't walk. He...he *sashayed*.

This was going to be one interesting bath.

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Severus staggered into the Great Hall and beheld... chaos. Some students had wrested control of the Charmed instruments from their supervising ghosts and were making a hideous racket for the handful of dancers clustered against the stage.

*I know we came back with more students than that...where the hell are the rest of them* Still, like a mule on its towpath, Snape moved by sheer force of habit towards his domain...the punchbowl. He resolved to poison whomever was in charge of chaperoning this event, in light of the evidence of a food fight he was forced to sidestep on the way to his goal.

Beside the punchbowl, was an enormous terrine of chocolate mousse that appeared to be...moving... and singing.

*Even for Hogwarts, singing mousse is a strange new wrinkle.*

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

All mimsy were the borogoves,

And the mome raths outgrabe.'

He carefully negotiated the banana splits, the chicken drumsticks, the salmon mousse, and peered into the chocolate. His hand snaked into the bowl and drew out something familiar. The Hat peered blearily at him and burst into song... and very un-poetic song, at that...

"Knickers and Neckties and boobies and buttocks

Know-it all beauty and red-headed floozy

Two sets of Twins tied up in knots

These are a few of my favourite scenes..."

"Oh, hi, Sevvie, old pal. Ya'know I think I did the world a great disservice when I sorted you into Slytherin. Loyal to a fault, would do anything for a friend... and you did consider Albus a friend, didn't you? Courageous to almost blind stupidity. Sounds more and more like a Gryffindor to me... Oh well (hic) it all turned out in the end."

"You're... you're drunk?" Severus dug the hat out of the remains of a bowl of chocolate mousse. The chocolate mousse was liberally spread over the hall, as well as every other piece of food, as far as he could see.

He was distracted by tittering and moaning under the table. He stumbled to his knees and saw a couple of Ravenclaw girls liberally coating one of his Slytherins with the mousse and licking it off. The Ravenclaws glanced at him, but the Slytherin was too intent on her pleasure to notice. *For Merlin's sake, Severus, stop looking... where they're licking*, ordered his (mostly) not-drunk persona, noting that he was gazing owlishly at the students.

"My office, first thing tomorrow, ladies...you must be in proper uniform at all times," he said. The two Ravenclaws just giggled and nodded their heads as Severus got up from the tableau.

"Now isn't that nice," the Hat commented. "It's all over now and the Houses don't have to fight anymore (hic). I'm just helping the love along, Sevvie." If a hat could look smug, this one was definitely had Lucius' expression down pat.

Touching the Hat seemed to be as hazardous as donning it, at least in terms of the integrity of Snape's mental defences. The Hat wobbled drunkenly right into his memories.

*Are you sure it's the Hat that's wobbling, Snape?*

"I've decided I don't like you after all," he announced to 'not-so-drunk-Severus'.

"Now let's see, oh yessss (hic). How 'bout that Gryffindor girl?" the hat said, casually pulling up an image of Hermione in one of her Muggle outfits. She had dropped into Hogwarts for extra-curricular work over the summer, still in her Muggle clothes. It had been a stiflingly hot day, and she showed far more flesh than any witch should show. He was riveted on the expanse of flesh that went from her midriff to well down her waist and was forced to cover it with an acerbic comment...something to the effect of...

"Oh, let's have the whole thing, Sevvie," the Hat said, with disgusting cheerfulness.

"What a shame you won't be in my classes next year, Miss Granger."

Her look of confusion was priceless. "What... why do you say that, Professor?"

"Since you obviously cannot afford enough material to cover yourself, by inference, you cannot afford the fees to attend Hogwarts," he said, folding his arms over his chest in a long-practiced stance of disapproval.

She had coloured at that, but managed to maintain her dignity...as much as she could in what he deemed next to no clothing...and primly stalked off to find a robe. He hated to admit it, but she showed a certain admirable restraint in neither crying nor talking back.

"That's not all that you found admirable," the Hat said, sagely noting how Severus' eyes had strayed to the gently bobbing curve of her backside as she left.

Snape dropped the Hat in disgust and found somewhere else for his eyes to stray...namely, to a pile of clothes at the entrance of the hall. As he stalked towards them, (well,

even he had to admit his gait was not steady enough to constitute a 'stalk' at this point), the Hat called out, "Hey, don't forget this." Severus tiptoed carefully back to the Hat...to stagger would have been undignified, after all...and noticed that the ancient piece of headgear seemed to have acquired a more modern adornment around its brim, all but obscured in mousse. He grabbed the chocolate-smeared material, which resolved itself into a bra, whose brilliant redness shone through the chocolate. "She'll be wanting it back, eventually," the Hat said with a snigger.

Snape ignored the hat, shouting general promises of 'detention for life' in the direction of the clumsy oafs pretending to dance on the other side of the Hall, and set off to cite Miss Granger for improper disposition of her undergarments.

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Hooch and Sprout entering the Three Broomsticks courtesy of SS Lupin.

Hermione tying up the twins courtesy of Broomclosetravenclaw.

Pince leaving and the Professors starting their own party in Hogsmeade courtesy of shalimar1981.

Shacklebolt attempting to contact Tonks courtesy of lux\_astraea.

The Snape scenes courtesy of JustDesmond.

The anxiety of the Weasley twins, Pansy moving on, punch-drunk Ernie and Blaise, Ron/Patil Twins romp, Ginny/Hermione and Draco/Harry all courtesy of dracontia.

The first nonsense poem of the Hat courtesy of Lewis Carroll's "The Jabberwocky".

## 4: Um... Is It Just Me, or Does This Look Wrong?

*Chapter 5 of 11*

The castle is all but empty of professors, most of whom (ironically) are looking for a full house. Except for certain souls who are looking for an empty room. And there are those at the castle who don't mind the lack of privacy in the least. Everyone into the pool!

Disclaimer: These characters and the setting aren't ours. We just toy with them until they beg us to make them ours.

Chapter 4: Um... Is It Just Me, or Does This Look Wrong?

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Leaving Mrs. Norris behind, Argus Filch strolled out of Hogwarts with a noticeable spring in his step that approached, but fell just short of, skipping. Nothing would get in the way of his celebration... neither Voldemort (he'd been vanquished) nor Mrs. Norris. (Filch had made it perfectly clear to her that *his* needs would be met from now on, too.) Nothing would stop Argus Filch from indulging himself in that which had been denied him for too long. He could already taste the Firewhisky. He smiled in anticipation.

He was a very happy man at that moment. Sure, it was wonderful that Voldemort had been put down so quickly, but Filch had a more personal reason to want to celebrate. He'd sensed a difference in himself, a feeling of raw power, a tingling from deep within. He could feel it from his fingertips to his toes. Filch now had magic. He knew it and wanted to celebrate it.

The walk to the Three Broomsticks was not far, but for the first time in his life, Filch considered the possibility of Apparating once he'd left the Hogwarts grounds. A moment later, he dismissed the idea. He would apply for lessons like everyone else and learn it properly. Rules were rules and Filch could follow them when it suited him. He decided it wasn't worth the risk of splinching, possibly nullifying the recently awakened magic within him. The very thought made him shudder.

Soon enough, he reached the Three Broomsticks, walked in and sat down with a stiff drink. He downed it easily and followed it with a second and then a third before finally saying, "Just leave the bottle."

He sat back and looked around. He'd seen it all before, but now he saw it as a wizard. He was fully part of this world now, and he grinned openly for the first time since Umbridge had given him free reign during her brief tenure at Hogwarts.

"Don't you look like the cat that got the canary, Argus?"

Filch was a little too relaxed to be startled that Irma Pince had evidently noticed him the moment she'd walked into the Three Broomsticks. She removed her cloak, laid it down and sat at his table before he had time to answer.

*That settles it. This is my lucky night!*

---

Ginny decided that a relaxed Hermione was excellent company and congratulated herself (and Fred and George) on a job well done in getting her to that point.

They had cheerfully discussed plans for the future on the way to the bath (both of them concluding solemnly that Hermione ought to be Minister of Magic one day), gossiped about mutual acquaintances (their debate as to whether or not Cho Chang had really been smart enough to merit Sorting into Ravenclaw degenerated into a flurry of catty remarks), and resolved between them, with much giggling, that the castle was an exhibitionist's dream...there was something sentient enough to watch you in almost every room and corridor.

The bathroom's resident mermaid portrait yawned and looked away as the girls undressed.

"As if you're anything special," Hermione said to the haughty portrait.

"I'll bet these won't fit in your seashells," Ginny added...airily tossing aside her blouse to show the fantasy mermaid what she meant.

Hermione looked ready to chastise her friend, until she took in the mermaid's shocked expression and burst out laughing. "That's not all she can't compare with us," Hermione said, audaciously bending over as she pulled off her knickers. The mermaid squeaked in indignation at the semi-intentional mooning and disappeared into her painted sea with a splash.

Ginny snickered. "Oh, that was brilliant!" She padded over to the taps and made a few selections, unleashing torrents of fragrant water and bubbles. The two girls splashed in merrily.

"Come here...I promised I'd wash your hair, remember?" Ginny said, splashing the water above the step next to her invitingly.

"Okay," Hermione said, still apparently a little shy despite her taunting of the portrait. She half-swam over, slumping a little to keep key bits below the bubbles. She reached over the edge of the bath to pounce on her wand and wordlessly Summoned a bottle of some scarlet liquid. "It's rather hopeless without my own shampoo," she explained, handing the bottle over to Ginny.

Hesitantly at first, Ginny worked the suds into her friend's mass of curls. After a bit, her touch grew more assured, and Hermione relaxed back against her, and back into the conversation. They both blushed slightly at the idea of being naked...and touching...but they were both girls. Where was the harm?

---

The professors decided to change scene when even more villagers came into the Three Broomsticks to celebrate and things began to get rowdy. Relocating into a private parlour near the back of the house afforded them quiet and discretion lacking in the common room.

"What say you all to a game of poker?" Tonks asked, with a winning grin and rubbing her hands together in anticipation.

Remus only barely managed to suppress a groan.

"Oh? I've never played," Flitwick piped up excitedly, and Remus felt the first twinges of panic rouse within him.

"Oh, let's! It's been ages since we had a proper game amongst the staff!" Hooch threw in. It was clear that she was dying to play as well. Now Remus was getting worried.

"A good game of poker is exactly what we need right now," Sprout added.

"It might even help us keep track of our alcohol levels," Poppy commented in her Matron-voice.

"The spirits are amenable to this course of action. Luck will favour us tonight," Sybill supplied with a hiccup.

A full-fledged panic it was now. He knew how these things always ended up.

"Well, count me out. I'm not that good a player, you know, and don't have much to lose anyway," Remus said as casually as possible so as not to raise suspicion.

"Nonsense," Minerva said brusquely, conjuring a deck of cards. "I remember all those rumours about that poker ring the Marauders managed in Gryffindor Tower on weekends. Boys playing against girls. No proof was ever produced of course, but it was said that once someone was down to their last Knuts, pieces of clothing were acceptable stakes," the Headmistress said with a shrewd look at him.

Now he could no longer keep that groan in or the blush from his face as every head whipped around to stare at him incredulously.

*Thank you very much, Minerva,* Remus thought a bit sourly.

Thankfully, most were too stunned to comment. Until...

"Remus, you old dog! How come you never told *me* anything about that?"

He suppressed another groan. *Because I always lost, Nymphadora...*

"Well, those rumours are greatly exaggerated. Really nothing inappropriate..."

"Ah, ah, Remus! What about Mister Linley?" McGonagall asked, sending a knowing look his way.

*Damn.*

"Well, that was..." He stopped himself and sat back down, slightly disgruntled and avoiding everyone's gazes. "Whose deal is it?" Even if the change of topic was totally obvious, he would *not* answer any questions on *that* one.

"Mine," Hooch said with quite the interested gleam in the eye. McGonagall gave over the cards, and Hooch dealt them out, five cards a player, while the others took out their money bags to settle their contents on the table in front of them.

"So, how does one play poker?" Flitwick piped up again, and most players smirked. The thought *Easy game*, ran through everyone's head.

---

Draco decided it would be a sensible precaution to ensure that Harry didn't loose track of him on the way to the Prefects' bath. So, he started to leave a trail.

His jumper went first, since he was quite warm by this point, anyway. What to take off next? Decisions, decisions...

He finally settled for slipping off his shoes. It wasn't very alluring, but they had to go if the trousers were going to. And he had every intention of getting to that point. A quick glance over his shoulder...

"Oh, *God*," Draco whimpered. He didn't care that he was whimpering. It was totally justified.

Apparently, Harry had decided to follow his lead and had unbuttoned his chocolate-stained shirt... all the way down... and it was untucked, and wide open, and son of a goddamned *bitch*, but Harry had filled out really, really well in the four years since the challenge in the lake at the Triwizard Tournament! And his tie was still mostly TIED and hanging down to the top of Harry's trousers. Where his thumbs were hooked into the tops of his pockets, so that his hands just sort of rested on his hips...

"Not bad, then?" Harry asked, with his head sort of tilted to one side, looking a little curious, a little cautious, but mostly, gloriously, unselfconsciously HIMSELF, just the way he'd looked in Madam Malkin's eight years ago, except several million times hotter.

Draco wanted to shriek, "Are you KIDDING? Not bad? NOT BAD?" But he couldn't do that, because his knees had become water and he was shaking and the air in his lungs was sort of holding him up right now; so if he said anything, he'd keel right over, he just knew it. He settled for nodding and whimpering again.

Now Harry did look a little self-conscious, and it was SO bloody endearing, how he ducked his head and tried to smooth that glorious mess of hair. "Hermione thought I should work out a bit...you know, for endurance and everything. Got sort of rough, that whole year we were searching for the Horcruxes."

Draco nodded and squeaked, decidedly dazed as he turned to continue their trek. The cold air on his legs didn't cool the rest of him in the least. His only coherent thought was something along the lines of *Thankyouthankyouthankyou, Granger. I will neverneverneverneverNEVER call you a nasty name again.* He could hear tantalizing whispers of fabric dropping behind him, but didn't dare look.

Finally, oh, precious door to the bath! Draco stammered the password, quivering with anticipation. He turned to make sure Harry had caught up, and they sort of ran into

each other, stumbling a little and laughing. Swept up in excitement, Draco grabbed Harry by one hand and that insanely sexy loosened tie, and pulled him through the open door, still giggling.

---

Ginny turned at the sound of the door opening, expecting Harry. She did not expect Draco. She certainly did not expect Draco with no trousers, and if she had, she would not have expected her first thought to be, 'Damn, he has nice legs.' And in the remarkable event she had foreseen any of that, she never in a million years would have expected to see Draco, sans trousers, giggling, and pulling Harry into the room by one hand and his tie. There wasn't much else to grab at the moment, since tie, boxers, glasses, and the arm-strap dueling holster Ginny had gotten him for his birthday, were all Harry still had on his body.

"Eeep!" Hermione squealed, disappearing up to her nose in bubbles.

Draco stopped in mid-unbuttoning. "I didn't realize we'd have so much... company."

Harry unstrapped his wand from his arm, shrugging. "I told you, Ginny and I come as a set...oh! Hello, Hermione," he said a little awkwardly. Seeing Ginny's slightly sheepish grin, he recovered and managed a little smile of his own. "Enjoying yourselves?"

Hermione sort of squeaked and blushed, her eyes bulging a bit like Luna's as they bounced back and forth between Harry and Draco. Ginny didn't blame her. Those two were well worth looking at, and she felt warmth spread out from her face at the idea of looking at them... maybe actually doing... something.

"Hermione's going to wash my hair," Ginny said, inspiration striking her. "Why don't you two have your fun, and we'll sort of meet in the middle or something, after?" She settled back against Hermione (who had cautiously risen until her shoulders were almost out of the water).

"Right," Harry finally said. It came out a little strangled; Ginny wasn't sure if it was because her breasts had gently floated above bubble-level (at least, she was pretty sure they had, judging by the slight chill) or because Hermione had just leaned over and kissed the corner of her mouth. Maybe it was a little of both.

---

"I suppose we can have a little fun for ourselves now we don't have to baby-sit Draco for a while. What's to eat?" Vince moved over to the nearest refreshment table, his friend at his heels.

"Ugh, seafood. Anything else?" Greg shuddered as he looked at the barely touched plates of shrimp, winkles, roll mops and gravalax laid out on the table. He'd had a bad time after eating a bucketful of oysters once and only ate fish if it was battered and surrounded by chips. Vince poked around between the dishes and held up a limp lettuce leaf that had been used as a garnish. Greg sighed. "Why do they insist on serving this stuff? I mean, who eats it?"

"Apart from the Squid, you mean?" Vince joked, prodding a finger at the pickled herring. A grin spread across his face, and he looked up to find a similar one on Greg's face. He grabbed the seafood while Greg descended on a small group of sixth-year boys who were discussing the use of Arithmancy to determine the best chat-up lines, nearby.

"Come on, you lot. Fancy a trip down to the Lake?"

It had needed surprisingly little persuasion to convince four of the boys to join them in 'taking a little snack to the dear old Squid', although one of them, Randolph Carter, looked as if he wasn't quite in the same reality as the rest of them as he stumbled across the lawn, lead on by a classmate.

Reaching the shores of the Lake, they all peered out into the darkness (except for Carter, who lay on his back contemplating the stars with a dreamy look on his face). After a minute, one of the sixth year boys called out "Here, Squidy-widdy!"

Greg cuffed him on the shoulder. "You don't call it over like that, you plonker." Stepping forward, he flung a handful of shrimp into the water, then lifted his wand to produce a swirling cloud of coloured lights in the air above him that coalesced into a pulsing arrow pointing down at them. "Squid communicate through patterns of colour and light," he explained, "so this should get his attention."

Moments later, the increased lapping of the waves at their feet indicated the approach of the large aquatic creature. A sinuous limb wavered before them, and Vince stepped forward and passed it a few small shrimp. The tentacle swiftly retracted, presumably to the mouth hidden below the water. Finding the offering acceptable, both tentacles and arms came begging towards the line of boys, and more seafood was dispensed. Greg watched warily as one appendage gently explored him as it looked for more treats, and on impulse he held a couple of shrimp in his teeth. The tentacle gently probed upwards, found the prize and carefully extracted it.

Vince stood for a moment with a grin of admiration on his face before he too offered a titbit in a similar fashion. The large arrowhead-shaped muscle gently but slimily trailed across his cheek before it wrapped itself around the fish and shot back. Seeing that neither of the larger boys had come to any harm, the others started jostling and daring each other to copy them.

Brought round by the commotion, Randolph Carter looked across from where he had been gazing beyond the stars just in time to see the Squid's sinuous limbs writhing around the boys. His eyes bulged, and he screamed. Shocked by this, his classmates jumped back, throwing the bowl of seafood in the air and letting the contents fall across the prone boy.

The Squid lost no time, its appendages flashing across so as not to lose one of the fallen treats. Picking Carter up by one leg, it gently shook him and patted him down until it was satisfied there wasn't a wrinkle left. It was gentle and precise in its search, but Carter seemed almost insensate with fear, yelling out gibberish as he hung there. "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn!" As soon as he felt the Squid release him, he went hurtling back across the lawns to the castle, his friends following close behind.

Vince turned to Greg. "What was that all about?" Greg shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps he doesn't like seafood, either," and with that the two Slytherins headed back to the castle.

Back the Entrance Hall, they reached the stairs that lead down into the Dungeons. "Y'know, we never did get anything to eat," mused Greg. "Fancy a raid on the kitchens?" It took only a moment's consideration for Vince to throw a comradely arm around his friend's shoulders, and they set off downstairs together.

---

Unbeknownst to Filch, Irma'd had her eye on him for some time. Tonight, however, was different. Tonight, there was a reason to celebrate. She decided to throw caution to the wind. "Mind if I join you?"

"Don't mind at all, Irma. I like a woman who can be forward."

Pince raised her eyebrows and feigned surprise. "Are you saying I'm being forward, Argus?"

Filch reached across the table and patted her hand. "I'm saying I wouldn't mind at all if you were."

Pince blushed appropriately, but was inwardly pleased. This was all going quite well. "I never knew you were so charming." Her eyes never left Filch's face.

"You have no idea." Filch grinned so wide, it was nearly a leer. His eyes dropped to her décolletage for a few seconds before he raised his glass to his lips. He reclaimed her gaze and drank. He set the glass down on the table and licked his lips. "Delicious," he commented softly. Her blush grew deeper at the ambiguity of his statement. Had he meant the whisky or her?

"What'll it be, Irma? Firewhisky good for you or would you rather something else?"

"Firewhisky would be lovely, thank you."

He poured her a glass, refilled his own and then raised his glass in a toast. "The night is young... to new possibilities!" Pince matched him glass for glass in quick gulps, refilling and emptying several others. Finally, the temptation became too much for Filch. He leaned over and placed a hand on her waist and his lips on hers. He sat back, raised another glass and commented, "I've always wanted to do that."

Pince, caught unawares, but finding she hadn't really minded his advance, was at a loss for words. A quick glance around the room assured her no one cared what they did. Her head was spinning, though she was unsure whether the alcohol or Filch's kiss was the cause. She decided then and there to let the little devil win tonight's argument. It had been far too long. "If I asked you to do that again, would you?"

"Tit for tat?" Filch smiled at her.

She laughed out loud at his choice of words. She knew him to be a very well-read man and she'd always admired his stance with unruly students. She had harboured a secret interest in the scruffy Squib and had believed she'd caught him staring at her more than once over the years. He was certainly staring at her now, mainly at her chest. "You know, I've always thought my legs were my strong point."

"Really?" His eyes stayed fixated on the same spot.

"I used to dance in my youth."

"Uh-huh."

"Have you ever danced, Argus?"

"Oh, it's been a long while, but I bet I still got the moves." His eyes remained glued to a spot several inches below her chin.

Pince giggled at the thought of Filch dancing. "Do you remember Saturday nights at the Hog's Head, oh it must be about... more years than I care to admit?"

"I remember a lass who used to get up and dance on the tabletop." He laughed.

"That was me," Pince blithely admitted with a coquettish grin.

---

"Okay. I'm going all-in."

"Dora, you can only go all-in if you have something left to bet, which you don't."

"Hm, you have a point."

It must have been the alcohol. That was the only possibility. He never would've said what he was about to had he been sober or at least not as drunk as he was by then already. Curiously enough, Nymphadora and he suggested it at the same time. Perhaps that was the definitive sign they belonged together. It seemed they were both as mad as a hatter after all.

"Well, you've still got your clothes."

"Hey, I've still got my clothes to bet!" they said in unison, he clapping a hand over his mouth immediately and she with a triumphant grin. It was too late, however; the others had heard.

"I knew the rumours were true!" Minerva cackled, hitting her thigh over and over again as she laughed.

"A splendid idea," Hooch said with a grin from behind a pile of Galleons.

Those with similar monetary problems as Tonks and Remus were enthusiastic about this suggestion, and those who had large stacks of Galleons in front of them were equally eager thinking what fun it would be to see the other members of staff in their underwear.

So any protests by Remus (no matter that he had actually been the one to come up with that idea) were ignored. It didn't occur to him to stop playing either, however. Everyone was playing except Sybill, who had fairly catapulted herself out of her chair at the mention of strip poker and mumbled something no one quite understood and had left swiftly. So he wouldn't fold.

And that's how things began to go downhill at a truly alarming rate.

---

"Never." Filch finally looked up at her and smiled in newfound appreciation for the usually staid librarian. He recalled how bitterly he'd wished he'd had a wand so he could lift her skirt up higher. As it happened, other men had the same idea and caused the little lady to show more skin than she'd probably intended. He always got an eyeful, but all the same... He wondered why he'd never recognised her in all these years, but then again, he'd rarely looked at her face back in those days.

"Oh, yes, I was a bit of a hell raiser in my day."

"What stopped you?" Filch began to wonder whether he could coax her to go back and relive a fond memory from their apparently shared youth. They continued to down drinks as they talked and reminisced.

Pince was now leaning a little against him, a position that afforded him an even better view of her chest than before. "I don't know. You get a little older, a little wiser..."

"You're never too old for a good time, Irma." His arm wrapped around her shoulders, fingertips stroking the soft bare skin. "You could dance again for me tonight! Right here! Right on this table!" He rapped the table with his free hand.

Pince sighed. "And what would you do for me, Argus?"

"Take you to a quiet spot and show you what all I've got in my bag of magic tricks." He smiled what he hoped was a fetching grin. Her initial laughter did not put him off. Far from it, it served only to embolden him. "Think about it, Irma. Didn't Dumbledore always say that music was strong magic?" He loved hearing that word now. He nodded at her, encouraging her to agree with him. "Dance can be the same!"

"What would you know of magic?" Her eyes flickered with building excitement. She was weakening and he knew it.

"I know what that kind of magic does to a man, don't you worry none!" He motioned with his eyes to the table. "One dance, Irma, for old time's sake!"

She hesitated for a moment, casting a nervous glance around the room. Then, an impish grin overtook her. In a flash, she hoisted her dress and used the chair as a stepping stone up onto the table. She smiled down at him, and then began to dance. Her moves were slow and awkward at first, but she began to pick up more speed. She moved her hips more vigorously, lifting her dress herself to avoid tripping over it. She raised it ever higher in response to the look of growing appreciation from Argus. Other patrons began to take notice and cheer her on. Her gaze remained fixed on Argus. She leaned over him, shaking her shoulders to give him a good show, when she lost her balance and tumbled on top of him. Both ended in a crumpled heap on the floor, laughing uproariously.

Pince attempted to stand, but was stopped by Filch's strong grip around her waist. He pulled her closer. Their eyes met. Pince lowered her head towards his, their lips finally finding each other. The first kiss was brief, almost hesitant, but was followed by others of increasing duration.

"Hey, get a room!" A strange voice rang out of the crowd.

Filch whispered, "I know just the place we can go."

"Is it far? We could get a room here, it's just upstairs!"

"This place is better! It will be far more private. Just you, me and my little bag of magic tricks!" He stood and offered her his hand.

Pince giggled from the effects of the whisky and Filch's kiss, not to mention the promise of what she knew was coming. She allowed him to pull her to a standing position. She steadied herself against him as they headed to the door. "How can you do magic, Argus? You don't even have a wand!"

With his free hand, Argus patted the wand he'd pocketed from the fallen Death Eater. "Ooh, I think you'll be more than impressed with my wand, Irma!" Together, they stumbled their way to the Shrieking Shack and walked inside.

Filch grasped the wand, feeling its energy, raised it and spoke, "Lumos!" The wand tip lit, casting long shadows around the dark room. Filch stared at the wand, then looked at Pince.

Pince was open-mouthed. "You, you have a wand? And you can do magic?" She was breathless with excitement.

Filch set the glowing wand down and approached Pince. He wrapped his arms around her and whispered huskily, "And that's not all I can do..." He led her to a dark corner. Her giggles were soon silenced by his kiss... a kiss she eagerly returned.

---

Severus continued his patrol, doggedly ignoring the lascivious images the Hat had conjured for him. As he passed a door, he heard a thumping and faint cries. He tried to push open the offending door. Once... twice... then realised his mistake and pulled. A pile of people crashed to the floor, and he saw Fred and George Weasley trussed up like a roast. "Runs in the family, I see," he said to them, bleary eyes trying to focus. "Typical decadent pureblood antics," he noted as he sauntered away, his voice drifting down the corridor. "Detention forever, you malcontents." Fred and George just stared at his diminishing figure.

"He didn't untie us, Fred."

"That he didn't, George."

"Praise Merlin that he didn't check our pockets."

"You're right there, brother mine. Though it might have been worth cutting him in on our patents to get out of this."

"He probably would have hexed us for the next decade, Fred."

"Yeah... no sense of fun at all."

---

*To bet clothes!* Sybill Trelawney thought indignantly. *Everyone knows layers of clothing shelter the physical shell and the soul encased within against unfortunate influences, not to mention the weather. But otherwise clothes are superfluous, really,* Trelawney thought, striding determinedly away from the pub.

"Underwear! Pah!" she muttered under her breath.

So much for trying to commune with spirits there. Now she would need to find someplace else.

She was determined to prove once and for all she could really do it. That she was no fraud like they all thought she was.

Certainly the alcohol in her bloodstream helped with that decision.

*Maybe... Yes, that place will be ideal!* she thought with a slight spring in her step, leading her to stumble a bit.

Sybill Trelawney made her drunken way along the rough path to the Shrieking Shack.

*With all those angry spirits rumoured to be there, surely I can channel at least one of them!*

---

Having waited on tenterhooks for a response from Tonks, Kingsley jumped up eagerly when he saw an owl descending towards the hall the evacuees were cooped up in. Releasing the note from the owl, which flew off quickly, he opened it, hoping for the best.

What he got was an illegible, scrawled mess.

He spent the next quarter of an hour trying to decipher the note and what he got didn't look good. Still, perhaps she was simply in a hurry? Or had his message been intercepted and this was a trick? It wouldn't do to mobilize a team of Aurors and descend on the school, only to find that the evacuees had been ambushed while they were gone.

*One more owl to confirm, then,* he thought, determined not to act precipitously.

---

A cackle of maniacal laughter echoed down the previously quiet corridor. Peeves felt quite pleased at the outcome of this most recent project, especially if said current project could cause the Headmistress to fling a few of her fitsies.

*Yes, this should be just the thing to get that old biddy's knickers in a knot.*

McGonagall wasn't usually such a focus of the poltergeist's ire, but she'd truly crossed Peeves a just a few hours ago. He'd simply been quietly minding his own business, placing some of the suits of armour into lewd and lascivious positions with each other, when he'd heard the definite sounds of merrymaking and mayhem starting to take place in the Great Hall. Knowing it was his duty to contribute to mayhem wherever and whenever it might occur in the castle, Peeves immediately made for the ruckus in the Great Hall. Like rats running to the Piper's flute, Peeves couldn't have resisted if he'd wanted to.

Seeing the red-headed twin menaces heading in the same direction only excited him more. Whenever those two were involved, pandemonium would be a safer bet than Trelawney wanting another sherry. There were very few beings, such as the Bloody Baron, that Peeves ever felt inclined to give his respect, but he felt absolutely no reservations about doffing his tatty hat to those two. Anarchy seemed to swirl about them, and if they were in Hogwarts again, then the party Peeves could hear brewing was sure to be quite entertaining.

He'd been so distracted by the thoughts of an evening's joyous bedlam that he'd not noticed the Headmistress exiting the stairwell from the dungeons into the main

Entrance Hall. One moment he'd been doing cartwheels in the air, soaking up the ambient energy released by the over-excited teenagers, the next he'd been hit in the chest with a Vanquishing curse. He couldn't believe it...McGonagall actually hexed him! And the worst part of it wasn't just that he'd been flung to the farthest reaches of the castle, but that there'd been a timer on the curse, ensuring it'd be several hours before Peeves could hope to join in the raucous celebrations.

*Dumbledore would never have treated me like that! Speaking of whom...*

There was that bloody statue of good ol' Albus, commissioned by the Ministry in Scrimgeour's determination to show his 'sympathy' over the death of Dumbledore. Upon its delivery to Hogwarts, McGonagall immediately hid it away in this lonely corridor, where she believed Dumbledore's spirit could still have some peace. Peeves, however, knew better.

*The man never enjoyed peace when he was alive, why should he wish it now that he's dead? And marble-white would never have suited such a dynamic wizard!*

Hence, Peeves spent his exile in a munificent effort to cheer the statue up...and if it annoyed that tartan-clad banshee, then all the better.

Peeves gave into another cackle of sheer joy as he gazed upon his handiwork. "My masterpiece!"

Peeves expected that most people would quite like his latest contribution to the Hogwarts décor. Certainly the former headmaster would have to be pleased; Dumbledore always had liked discordant colours. What better hue for Dumbledore's beard than vivid purple? And surely his robe had never looked so fine as it did now, blazing a brilliant red that would even make a Weasley jealous. Brilliant pink hair provided a crowning glory. Now, if only he could arrange to be here watching when McGonagall first laid eyes on his work of art...

---

"Damn!" Trelawney cursed as she stumbled over a halfway upturned floorboard in the Shrieking Shack.

*How inconsiderate of the spirits not to warn me. Hmph,* she thought indignantly, trying to straighten one of her myriad shawls, which was stuck on a bent nail. She pulled at it sharply, ignoring the ominous sound of fabric tearing and went to look for a good spot to sit down and commune with the spirits of the dead.

Stumbling about (since her blood-alcohol was still fairly high), she finally found a good place in a corner on the first floor landing. She plumped down unceremoniously and leaned against the wall, settling down to wait.

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The courtship of Filch and Pince courtesy of leniarianna.

The squid dare courtesy of DawnEB.

Shacklebolt's continuing travails courtesy of lux\_astraea.

Snape leaving the Weasley twins to stew courtesy of Just\_Desmond.

Teachers playing poker and Trelawney's trek to the Shrieking Shack courtesy of shalimar1981.

The striptease and any good, clean fun in the Prefects' Bath courtesy of dracontia.

The Peeves scene courtesy of Wolfmoonshadow.

## 5: When You Have To Say, 'Now, That's Just WRONG'

*Chapter 6 of 11*

Let's put it this way: short of detonating the infamous Nude Bomb, it would be difficult to end up with more undressed/partly dressed people in this chapter.

Disclaimer: We don't own these characters and are not responsible for their actions. We couldn't afford to be responsible for them if we were, so don't sue us for liquid-splashed monitors or keyboards, either.

Chapter 5: When You Have To Say, 'Now, That's Just WRONG'

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Iain Hendeson, a seventh-year Ravenclaw, leaned forward to emphasise his rhetoric. "Look, it's simple enough. I'll write the names of several members of staff on slips of parchment. We all pair up, draw a slip, break into that person's room, locate an item of 'intimate apparel'... knickers to you, Jason," Hendeson responded to the growing frown on his fellow Ravenclaw's face while the others sniggered at the *double entendre*, "and bring them back here. We then string the underwear up like bunting over the Head Table."

A Slytherin, Alena Lundy, leaned forward with a predatory look on her face. "Forfeits?"

Hendeson looked thoughtful for a moment. "Failure to bring back an item will result in the losers having to stand on the table and sing *I'm a Little Teapot* while wearing one of the retrieved items...and nothing else. Any other questions?"

When none were forthcoming, Hendeson pulled out a piece of parchment from a pocket and, casting *Diffindo*, cut it into strips. After a scuffle to find a quill, he quickly scribbled down the names of several members of staff and popped them into a small bag. As soon as everyone had paired up, five hands reached in to withdraw a slip and call out their target.

"Professor Sprout."

"Sinistra."

"Hey, Filch isn't a teacher!"

Hendeson flashed a wicked grin before defending his choice. "No, but he is *staff*."

"Trelawney."

Alena peered at the slip and held it up to her partner. "Who's this?"

Her partner peered at the name before replying. "The Muggle Studies teacher."

"Oh, okay."

Hendeson upended the bag over his hand to retrieve the last slip. "Which leaves me and Susie with... Madam Pince. Okay, off we go." The teams headed out of the hall, intent on their mission.

It had been Hendeson and his partner who had returned first, with a liberty bodice they had liberated from the librarian. Shortly after, they were joined by Alena and her Ravenclaw partner, who looked as smug as Alena looked ruffled and swollen-lipped. She forestalled the comment that was blatantly on the tip of Susie's tongue by proudly displaying a pair of Y fronts with the words 'Mug. Stud.' printed prominently on the waistband.

While the four of them were laughing at the obviously unintentional innuendo, Kevin Entwhistle and his partner, Stevie Cornfoot, came swooping through the Great Hall. Billowing between them like a double windsock was the most enormous pair of bright yellow flannel drawers anyone present had ever seen, property of Professor Sprout. It was obvious the stout Hufflepuff took no chances with the chill winds that blew around outside the greenhouses of Hogwarts.

The fourth and fifth teams slipped in almost unnoticed during the ruckus the two Ravenclaw boys had caused with their circuit of the hall, but the others made room for them to sit down. One pair revealed Sinistra's short, sheer night-dress with a flourish, to the appreciative sounds of the rest. Kevin looked sympathetically at the other two girls, who sat with a slightly stunned look on their faces. "You had Filch, didn't you? I wouldn't have had the nerve, myself. What were they, all manky and holey?"

The first girl seemed to come out of her trance at the question. "Actually, no, they weren't." She gestured to her friend, who pulled out a pair of perfectly pressed silk boxers in baby blue. "They were all like that. Silk. Dozens of pairs in various colours, all ironed and neatly folded." All eyes were drawn to the garment, each student lost in contemplation of the startling image they conveyed. Who would have thought it of the ghastly caretaker?

It was some time later before the final team staggered into the hall. They fell onto the bench where the others were discussing the best spells to fix the stolen underwear over the High Table, a smell of incense clinging to them and their faces ashen. "At last!" Hendeson said. "We were beginning to think Trelawney had caught you or something. So, Jason, Tim, what did you get?" The other teams all brandished their prizes as they waited expectantly.

Instead of producing the required garment, Jason shuddered and shook his head. "We didn't get anything." His partner shook his head to emphasise the statement.

"What, couldn't you get past her wards, or was she still up there?" Alena asked. So far, no one had questioned their good luck at not running into any of the teachers.

Jason shrugged. "Neither. We got in easily enough, and there was no one home, so we had the chance for a really good look around. We looked high and low, in drawers, in the bathroom, laundry basket, under the bed. You name it, we looked there, but we drew a total blank." The others were finally beginning to realise the horror of the situation.

"You mean, nothing? No knickers, no bras?" Susie asked. The two boys shook their heads, and she pressed on. "There must have been something...a nightie, woollen vest, leather corset, *something*?" The boys just looked her morosely.

Stevie had been sitting with a growing look of horror spreading across his face. "D'ya mean to tell us she swans around the place with no kecks on?" His question brought on a round of gagging sounds and gestures from the others as it finally sank in. A bottle was swiftly passed around in the hopes it could wash away that image.

When good humour had been restored, Hendeson stood up and gathered their attention. "Much as it grieves me to say it," he said, the smirk on his face belying his words, "the fact is that you two failed the dare, so you'll have to pay the price!" The protests of the boys were drowned out by the rest of the teenagers, and they were jostled out of their seats and into the nearest loos in order to comply.

A few minutes later, the revellers in the Great Hall were entertained by the sight and sound of a pair of blushing young men being led up onto the High Table, one in each leg of Sprout's commodious drawers to preserve what little dignity they could muster, where they sang '*I'm A Little Teapot*', complete with actions, under some highly unusual bunting.

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The biggest revelation of the night came when Hooch's clothes were all bet on one hand...and subsequently lost.

It had seemed a good idea at the time, one green hand holding up an almost drained glass of Firewhisky (best stick to recognizable drinks, Hooch thought), while the other held up what Hooch had thought was a winning hand. The main goal was to get Poppy naked...the woman had lost nothing but her shoes during the entire game, and was surprised when Hooch was the one to stand up in front of the other professors and strip.

*It's okay. Poppy is fine with it, and the others will be, too.*

After the pants (the final article of clothing left) were removed, the gasps around the poker table had ceased somewhat. A hint or two had been afforded by the previous clothes removed, but somehow, one more comment had to be added to the sight of Rolanda Hooch's penis, green as spring leaves.

"Holy fuck, it's bigger than mine," Remus muttered, loud enough for Hooch to hear.

Hooch calmly took his/her seat...ironically, without clothes, appropriate gender pronouns were confusing (especially with the amount of alcohol already consumed).

"Any questions can be answered when I'm sober," Hooch slurred solemnly.

The others nodded, shocked but pleasantly drunk enough to continue the game.

---

*Oh, bugger it all! Why did humans have to be so fickle, anyway?*

The evening *had* looked promising to Mrs. Norris until her pet, Argus, somehow got it into his near-petrified brain that he was due a bout of celebration at Hogsmeade with those other miscreants of a faculty. So he had powers now, so what? So did everybody. So he found good use for them during the battle, hadn't they all? And now he wanted to go drinking with the rest of the blighted staff? *Her* staff? Hmmpf! Bloody bad staff as far as she was concerned!

She'd teach Argus to walk out on her! Wait until he came home to find just how far she'd got, with a good dead rat as a bribe for that sorry excuse of an almost Kneazle, (whose pet had probably abandoned him, too).

*Bad Staff!*

Humans were just too damn ignorant to train anymore. Not that Crookshanks likely had that problem. *His* pet was just too oblivious and self-willed to be properly trainable. He could probably use more than a sympathetic nuzzle about now. Hmmm, damn fine furry bits on that one, if she did say so, and some of the stories she'd heard about half-Kneazles... well, the best of both worlds apparently, or so she could hope. If old Argus was going to be like this, then maybe it was time for something a little more



upscale than just a belly-rub! She flounced off the bed with a most un-ladylike, not to mention most un-felinelike, grunt and padded off toward the party herself.

At the very least she could make somebody else miserable. That always helped.

---

After a while it became clear that, most haunted building in Britain or not, Trelawney's spot was not good, not good at all. If the wall you are leaning against disintegrates after a while, that is not a good sign. She went to search for another place in the shack.

By now a breeze had picked up outside, causing the ramshackle building to sway dangerously in the wind and to creak and groan as it moved. But Sybill (being Sybill) was getting more excited by the minute by the moody atmosphere, taking it as a sign the restless dead would soon put in an appearance.

She wandered farther up into the house until she reached a room that seemed almost habitable, in a way. It was a bit less shabby than the rest of the house and contained a tattered sofa of an indistinguishable colour.

Thinking it a good place as any for her purpose, she entered the room, floating about in anticipation of a supernatural encounter. She was abruptly jolted out of her reverie when the door to the room slammed shut behind her. But she wasn't afraid, no, not Sybill Trelawney.

She was practically bouncing with excitement...as well as one could bounce while as drunk as she was...feeling her meeting with the spirits was near. She swayed over to the sofa, thinking it was a good place as any to await the spirits haunting the old house. As soon as she collapsed on it, sinking deeply into the half-decayed cushions, an enormous dust cloud rose into the air, fairly choking her. She started coughing and wheezing, waving about frantically in an effort to dispel the dust so she could breathe again. Her attempts to clear the air were so enthusiastic that she managed to roll off the sofa and land on her arse, raising further evidence of nonexistent housekeeping.

"Ow!" she exclaimed, coughing and wheezing some more. Maybe this hadn't been such a good idea...

As the dust cloud finally dissipated (without her help), she sat there dazed, her mind a total blank for a while. This was not an uncomfortable state for Sybill, so she went with it.

Then suddenly, an unnatural wail echoed through the house, startling her into thinking once more. This had to be it!

Her gaze darting frantically about the room, she noticed that the dust clouds hadn't really settled at all, but were rather involved in a sort of dance across the floor, settling in strange patterns before being whirled up again.

She rocked back and forth in excitement, trying to decipher what the shapes on the floor could mean. It was hard to see them in the faint moonlight falling in from one of the windows.

Then one of the shapes seemed to stay as it was, while the others surrounding it were destroyed and reformed with a certain constancy. This was an undeniable sign of spirit involvement! She squinted to make out the one shape that didn't change. It had to be important! Making it out, she gasped. It was the Grim!

"No, no, not the Gri...Oh, yes! It's a cat! An omen for, uh, for... OH, yes! For wealth!"

Though she was of course relieved that the cup had passed her, she was nevertheless confused now. Would she become wealthy?

She leaned even closer to that shape, with her nose almost touching the film of dust and laughed. It wasn't a cat either, but a face!

She shivered, looking around her uneasily now. It was a face that seemed to stare back at her.

If this was the spirits' doing, maybe she should try to speak with them?

"Are you a spirit, wanting to guide me?" Sybill asked hesitantly.

Nothing happened.

"Hmph."

*Maybe I should try to speak louder?*

A cross between a squeal and a moan echoed through the house making an unearthly sound.

"All right," she muttered, taking the sound as an affirmation to her question and repeated her earlier question.

"Yesssss." The hiss reverberated through the house in a way that caused shivers to run down her spine. But she wouldn't give up now she had got a response!

"Are you a spirit from the near past?"

"Yes! Oh, yes!"

*My, the spirits are... passionate.*

"Are you trying to tell me something?"

"Yeee-eesss."

"Am I... Will I ever not be considered a fraud by my peers?" Sybill asked, not really knowing why. She didn't really want to know the answer to that, to be honest.

"YES!"

Her heart dancing with joy, she couldn't help asking the next question as well. "Will Argus ever respond to my advances?"

"**No!**" The shout echoed through the ruin of a house, startling Sybill with its vehemence.

"Oh, well," she mumbled, slightly disappointed. But there were still other fish in the sea.

Feeling quite optimistic despite this setback, she asked some more questions about her personal future to which the answers were much more favourable, not to mention enthusiastic. They even seemed to build in fervour until the voices practically screamed a stream of "Yes!"

The next question she asked, however, was only greeted with silence. Repeating it received no reaction either.

*Hmm, maybe I need to wait for a while?* Sybill thought, unwilling to abandon the excellent connection she had with the Beyond just yet. So she asked her question every few minutes, staring intently at the shape of a face in the dust, and she wasn't disappointed. About a quarter of an hour later the spirits were again in the mood to answer her questions it seemed.

So it continued throughout the night with Sybill staring at that face in the dust and asking questions that would define her future and the spirits answering, interrupted by

sometimes short and sometimes longer pauses.

---

That wasn't all. Remus' undershirt ("Werewolves do it better") as well as his boxer shorts with little pink werewolves on them raised quite a few eyebrows and a round of raucous laughter.

"They were a birthday gift from Nru... Nyr... Dora," he stated, too drunk to be really embarrassed and laughed the loudest of all with his arm around a half-naked Tonks, who was grinning like mad.

It was, curiously, not Tonks' underwear or lack thereof that shocked everyone the most...it simply wasn't that much of a surprise.

But after her initial good luck, Minerva was forced to take off her robes. Her choice of underwear was very surprising and raised quite a few cat-calls and whistles...and not only from the men. She sat there unabashed in her dragonscale pattern teddy. Certainly no one had expected *that*.

Soon after, an owl swept into the room through an open window, settling on the table directly in front of Tonks. She had quite some trouble in getting the message off the irritated bird's foot and then in trying to read it.

"Oh, it's from Kingsley again. Though why he needs to know if we've eaten yet, I don't know! Oh, no wait! If we defeated You-Know-Who or something like it. Though why is he asking me that again for the fifth time? Or was it third? What the heck, I'd better use another bird in any case." With that, Tonks proceeded to stagger to her feet and pull Remus' undershirt on to cover herself minimally. After a long, drawn-out kiss with Remus, she wandered off in search of another owl.

---

"Right now, I want to feel you up against me," Harry said, punctuating the comment with a sleepy, bedroom stare over his glasses. It was almost sultry, but the honesty in it made it softer, and Draco started to melt in earnest. "Turn around."

"Okay," Draco quavered. Those insistent lips on his neck and firm hands roaming all over his body helped him decide.

Being able to snuggle against Harry's gorgeously defined chest and rub his toes and ankles against Harry's in an elaborate game of footsie under the water gave Draco the advantage of allowing him to watch the Weaslette eye them hungrily, though not necessarily jealously, over Granger's shoulder.

*Why is this a turn-on? Do I have an exhibitionist streak? Residual straightness from all that time in the closet? And is it such a bad thing that she and Harry come as a set?*

This was definitely a *very* good washing. Dizzily good. So good, he didn't hear the first few times Harry asked, "Clean yet, my lovely?" even though Harry traced every word directly onto Draco's ear with soft, flushed lips. All the whimpering Draco was doing might have drowned it out, though.

"Not...not yet," Draco gasped, his head lolling back on Harry's shoulder. Draco was ready to leave himself truly vulnerable with some sweet, foolish confession or another...when the door swung open.

"Wha...Whatsh th'me...mea...What the fuck?"

*Snape?*

*DRUNK Snape?*

"Bloody hell," Harry muttered, in a very different voice than the lovely throaty one he'd been using, "just because I forgave him, doesn't mean he has to hover over my personal life like a human rain cloud."

Draco refused to accept that his favourite professor (who would be losing that status very soon if he didn't stop glaring at Harry and he as if they were outdated Potions ingredients) had just walked in on what was by far the most delightful moment of his life to date. And was drunk.

"Oh, help," Draco panted, "find...someone...else...to bother." He clutched at the side of the pool, groping for his wand and gathering the concentration to Transfigure Harry's tie into a suitable 'distraction'. "Go make yourself useful...ohhh!...somewhere over there...yes, yes...take this...mmm...if you're too pissed to...get it up!"

Snape's eyes failed to track where Draco had gestured. He squinted at the two boys, shuddered, and picked up the transfigured object, eyeing it with extreme puzzlement.

"Draco... do you have any idea where P-Potter's BEEN? You'd better be taking pre-prec... have we discussed safe sex?"

This was one of the most terrifying things Draco had ever heard from Snape, and that was really saying something. Harry had become rather adept at dealing with trauma over his lifetime, so his ears mercifully filtered most of it out.

Just then, a sound from the other side of the room interrupted Snape's train of thought. A truly indecent sound. *Amoaning* sound. Three male heads whipped around in time to see the cause of that sound, to whit, Ginny licking a path from Hermione's throat to her earlobe.

Snape went slack jawed for exactly one minute before wandering in that direction, dazed, the forgotten vibrator hanging from his hands.

"Remind me to thank your girlfriend later," Draco said, relaxing back against Harry.

"You'll get the chance to thank her sooner," Harry said, as Ginny all but swam across the tub towards them.

---

Crookshanks curled up comfortably and unobtrusively beneath a suit of armour in the corner of the Great Hall, watching with wry amusement as the mayhem progressively advanced toward ever-increasing entropy. Out on the dance floor, apparently moving to their own internal music...which must have ranged from waltz to rock to Tibetan throat singing...the swaying, gyrating, and in some cases practically orgasming couples, seemed to be vying for the title of most inappropriate full-body contact while fully clothed.

With all the distractions around the room, Crookshanks may have been the only one to notice when Mrs Norris came strutting into the Hall with a self-satisfied air, a small grey fur-clad object clenched in her jaw. She was rather obvious in her scanning of the room, but didn't seem to find what she was looking for. With a visible huff, she weaved her way through the maze of shuffling feet, settled herself in under the punch-bowl table and dropped the rat.

*Merlin's mange!*

If there was one feline in the castle he really didn't want to deal with, it was Mrs Norris. But... that was one mighty fine looking rat she'd pranced in with. He watched as Mrs Norris left the rat under the table and began to prowl the far periphery of the Great Hall.

*Hmmm.*

Crookshanks snuck out and slunk under the punch table as only a half-Kneazle of his talents could. She'd dropped the thing right in big puddle of spilled punch, but still it was a mighty good-looking hors d'oeuvre. He gave the thing a tentative lick and felt a strange tingle on his tongue.

*Not bad. Odd, but...* He had another lick and couldn't help himself from taking one more. By the time Mrs Norris got back to the table, her lust-offering had been completely

forgotten, and he was eagerly lapping directly from the puddle of punch. She eyed him with what Crookshanks could only assume passed for coquettishness among non-Kneazles, and joined him in licking up the fiery, yet somehow satisfying, elixir.

Crookshanks wasn't sure exactly when he became so aware of Mrs Norris, and that not only was she really a female feline, if rather far from a fine specimen of the form, but was also vividly and inexplicably... *in heat*. Far out of the normal season, but the sudden strong waft of pheromones left no doubt. His own hormones responded as only the hybrid glands of a half-Kneazle could, and he suddenly found himself thinking that she didn't really look *quite* so thin and scruffy. In fact, her light grey shading almost shimmered in the lighting of the Great Hall. When she gave him a haughty look and padded out the door with that particular sway to her tail, what could any hot-blooded Kneazle possibly do but follow, albeit attempting not to appear quite as eager as he truly felt?

After one last slurp of punch, of course.

---

Hermione was rudely ripped from her lust-induced haze and confronted with her Potions professor ogling her appreciatively. It was strangely exhilarating to have the complete attention of Severus Snape fixed on her. Belatedly she realised that she was completely naked and that Snape...her teacher...was staring at her. Blushing like mad, she quickly plumped down in the tub, so she was covered from neck to toe with water and bubbles. She edged back to the side of the tub and leaned against it.

"You needn't have done that on my account," he said, sounding slightly disappointed.

"I'm sure you were enjoying yourself, but it was getting a little cold," she replied a bit tartly.

They only looked at each other, neither quite knowing what to say or do.

Then out of the blue the solution came to her. It was simple really, but very daring at the same time. The consequences should he not want her in return were too ghastly to even think about, so she didn't. That fact alone should have alarmed her, but she couldn't for the life of her remember why.

Keeping her gaze fixed to his, she slowly sat up and began to rise out of the water like Venus from the ocean.

"Don't." The word left his mouth so strangled that she hesitated, water still...though barely...covering her breasts.

"Why not?"

"You know very well," he managed to get out, his voice sounding hoarse. Her breasts were only barely covered with bubbles by now.

She was about to say something, but noticed just then that he held something in his hands.

*Is that... can't be... what I think it is?*

---

It took all of two minutes from the moment Ginny's skin was hit with cold air to the moment she noticed Snape.

Noticing Snape approach while she was utterly undressed and aroused was ample reason to break away from Hermione and slip fully into the water. Noticing Snape approach with a peculiar look on his face and a dildo in hand was ample reason to Apparate immediately to an unlisted country. Since that was impossible from within the walls of Hogwarts, she settled for paddling quickly across the pool to the only other persons in the room with the good sense to look as horrified as she felt.

"Harry, I can't finish with them standing there *ogling each other*, right in front of us!"

"So, don't look at them," Harry said, the last word swallowed in Ginny's warm mouth. Ah, that was more like it. As nice as kissing Hermione had been, Ginny preferred masculine kisses.

"Easy for you to say, you've got that pretty little bit of ginger to snog," Draco whined. Ginny rather liked the whine, much to her surprise... it was more needy than petulant, breathy against her hair. She decided it deserved a reward.

Ginny was dimly aware that Harry was watching with some interest as she kissed Draco. Completely understandable; it was an interesting kiss from her perspective; male tasting (come to think of it, unsurprisingly Harry-tasting), yet with a hint of softness. She had Draco's interest as well, if the noises he was making were any indication.

"Ech. Now *I* can see them. There's no winning," Harry said with a sort of moaning sound that had nothing to do with pleasure.

Ginny broke off the kiss abruptly, leaving Draco's lips working blindly at the empty air. "Oh, yes, there is," she said evilly, and pushed Draco's face firmly into her cleavage as she reclaimed Harry's mouth.

Judging from the enthusiasm of their muffled groans, Ginny felt it was safe to say her plan met with the boys' approval. And none of them had to look at Snape.

---

From Snape's perspective, Miss Granger was staring hard at his groin area, which had him quite flustered indeed. Why did she have to stare at him ~~there~~? He was flushing all over at the thought of her doing much more than just looking.

Hermione furrowed her brows in concentration. He was just about to tell her to stop for heaven's sake, when she asked, "What is that?"

For a moment he had no idea what she meant...probably because very little blood was making its way to his brain. Then he actually looked where she was looking and wanted to sink into the floor, a feeling he could happily have gone the rest of his life without experiencing again.

He tried to think of a way to get rid of the dratted object (if she had to ask, she hadn't recognized it...right?). He whirled around before his alcohol-dazed mind helpfully suggested a banishing charm, when he suddenly felt her warm and slim body press fully against his back. He should've been concerned that she would soak his clothing and move away from her grasp, but he couldn't bring himself to care. The thought of her naked, wet body pressed intimately against him along with the feeling of her breasts crushed against his spine, raised thoughts of an entirely different nature.

"Relax. It can't be that bad, can it?" Hermione asked, her arms snaking around his middle in a tantalising way. He just barely stopped himself from complying. This wasn't right. Albus...no, Minerva...hell, Herm...no, *Miss Granger* would dismember him personally in the morning if he would succumb to her wiles now.

*This is so unfair*, he thought, trying to distract himself from what he wanted to do right now; which included, but was not exclusive to, tearing off his clothes and joining her in that bath. He wasn't even dirty. Well, he was, but a bath wouldn't help.

He gripped the infernal device tightly as her small hands started to trail up his chest to his shoulders, hugging him from behind for a moment before her hands moved downwards again, stroking idly over his chest. When they reached his hands, skin touching skin for the first time, a pleasant shudder ran through him, distracting him from the problem at hand and so belatedly moved his hands away to get the device out of her reach. She held onto his hands, one stroking his fingers while the other moved over his hand to examine what he held by touch alone.

The sight of one of her hands stroking the firm latex over and over again, no longer inquisitive but leisurely caressing - in a pointed way - was what finally made him groan aloud.

Why didn't she stop? This was pure torture and he was only a man after all. Imagining what such a real touch on himself would feel like made him whimper. Whimper, for heaven's sake!

He let go of the vibrator with one of his hands and roughly grasped one of hers, stopping her from continuing her infernal teasing.

"Stop it!" he hissed, his voice hardly recognisable to himself.

"Why?"

"Surely you can't be that naive and inexperienced? Touching this... *this thing* like this is more temptation than *anyone* could stand. Stop it now or face the consequences!"

"Hmm." She sounded very thoughtful as she held that damned device firmly, stroking it some more beneath the grasp of his hand. It was getting very warm all of a sudden.

"What?" He did not like how desperate his voice sounded.

"Well, I was just wondering how you might compare," she said simply but with a husky undertone, tightening her arms around his ribs infinitesimally.

He could take it no longer. Snape pried her hands away from him and from the vibrator, pushed them away from him so he could turn around and grabbing her arms, crushed her back against him. Along the way he had tossed away the vibrator, because if he had any say in it, *if* they got down and dirty, a vibrator was the last thing they would need.

"You little tease!" he muttered heatedly. Then he took a good, long look at her and shoved her away from him, averting his eyes as he did so.

"Are you just going to stand there and do nothing?" she asked quite a bit puzzled.

"I *should* lighten Gryffindor's hour-glass by a considerable amount of rubies for this... spectacle. I also should be long gone on my rounds."

"But that's not what you want to do."

Instead of answering, he directed his wand at himself and cast a charm, which served its purpose in clearing his head for a short amount of time, while still leaving the alcohol (and potion) in his bloodstream. Only a Sobering Potion would make him completely sober and that was somewhere in the cabinet in his bathroom, so he had to make do with this.

"Would you mind doing that for me as well? Perhaps you'd believe me if my head was clear."

He complied before realising he ought to wonder what she was talking about.

"Believe what?"

"That I know perfectly well what I'm doing," she said, taking a step closer to him.

"This is insane. We shouldn't," he said and yet stepped even closer to her, reaching out a hand as if meaning to touch her, but stopping himself at the last moment. Before he could withdraw his hand however, she took hold of it and laid it against her cheek. After a moment's hesitation it cupped her cheek and his thumb moved to caress the edge of her bottom lip.

"I agree," she said quietly, breathing uneven and took another step closer to him so that her breasts brushed against his frock coat.

He knew on a certain level that all this had to be very wrong simply because it felt so good, but when he consulted his conscience, it had nothing to say.

So with another look into her eyes to make sure she was really willing and not about to back away, he leaned down to kiss her. She didn't avert her face, even leaned in closer to him. The first touch of their lips sent a jolt through both their bodies.

Everywhere they touched they became warm and tingly and soon a simple chaste kiss was no longer enough. Mouths opened and merged, hands explored, arms tightened and the only thought that remained was *More*.

Catcalls from the other side of the room had them break apart reluctantly, more than just a little annoyed. Snape looked at the trio draped all over each other in a corner of the Prefect's bathroom, but averted his eyes quickly again.

*That is more than I ever wanted to see of Potter! Or Draco. And... well, the Weasley girl... no, don't go there, Severus...*

He directed his eyes instead back down at Hermione; an infinitely more appealing sight. "I don't know about you, but I'd rather continue this in a more private place, like say, my rooms?"

"That is a very good idea."

"Oh. Good then," he said, making to scoop her up in his arms. He was slightly confused when she scurried away from him.

"What are you doing?! I'm not going out there with no clothes on!" she protested, blushing.

He could've said that whoever was out there would probably be too distracted by other things than the way she was or wasn't dressed, but sweeping his eyes over the length of her, he found himself unwilling to share the view even with the most distracted bystander. "Well, then put something on," Snape said, bent over and picked up various parts of clothing and tossed them to her.

The length of time it took for Hermione to find a blouse that fit to her liking dispelled what modest patience Snape possessed. Rather than await the outcome of the skirt selection process, he simply grabbed one of the towels lying around and wrapped it around her waist, and proceeded to toss Hermione over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. She squealed loudly in apparent protest, but soon dissolved into agreeable-sounding giggles.

"Hold on! Where do you think you're going?" Harry asked with more than just a touch of alarm, when Snape was making for the door with Hermione over his shoulder.

"I'm taking this lovely, intelligent young lady somewhere she won't be pawed over by degenerates like you," Snape replied with a smirk at the indignation forming on the trio's faces and slightly adjusted his burden.

"Degenerates?" Ginny said, sounding annoyed.

"Does she know you're rescuing her?" Harry asked dubiously.

"Beautiful? He's even more pissed than I thought," Draco muttered to himself and snuggled back against Harry and Ginny to enjoy the afterglow.

"*She's* just fine, thank you," Hermione joined in this bizarre conversation, sounding slightly miffed.

"If that was all, we have somewhere we'd rather be." Snape rolled his eyes at the display and made for the door again.

"Wait! Hermione, you can't be serious! You'd never go with him if you were sober!" Harry exclaimed, trying to ignore how Snape was glowering at him.

"On the contrary, Harry, I would," Hermione stepped in...figuratively of course...before bloodshed could commence.

"You would?" all four persons present exclaimed in disbelief...including Snape.

She sighed impatiently. "I thought I made that clear already, Sna...Severus. I know perfectly well what I'm doing. Sure, he isn't conventionally attractive, but neither am I. But his intelligence, loyalty, honour and his sarcastic wit more than make up in attractiveness what he lacks in looks," Hermione explained matter-of-factly, to the consternation of her friends. Snape himself was quite flustered, although he didn't show it. "In fact I have wondered more than once in the past year what it would be like to be with him...and not only sexually. Satisfied now, Harry?"

"Disgusted, actually," Harry replied, looking a bit green around the gills.

"Go now, or he'll be sick," Ginny said to Snape and Hermione, who only 'hmped' in indignation. Normally he wouldn't have let that slide, but if it meant they could finally head down to his quarters...

Snape sighed in relief and finally made his way to the door, this time without interruptions. She was starting to get a bit heavy.

The solemn mood was broken when someone yelled after them, "Don't forget the vibrator!"

The door slammed emphatically in reply.

---

*She should have answered that damned owl by now.*

Something needed to be done, and he looked about the room, trying to think of what. He saw Mundungus hanging about in the corner: *Imm... he thought, I can persuade him to 'investigate', surely. With threat of prosecution, if necessary.*

Kingsley quickly approached Dung. "Fletcher, I need a favour."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, I've finally received word from Tonks in Hogsmeade, but I can't decipher the letter she's sent. Her handwriting isn't normally this atrocious. I need you to go check it out."

Dung looked a little shifty-eyed. Not that this was unusual for him. "Erm... all right," he said, "I suppose it could be me."

*Well, that was surprisingly easy,* thought Kingsley, *not that I'm going to say anything.*

"Thanks...just go see what's going on and report back, yeah? Don't get into trouble."

"Sure thing." Dung set off, looking as if he'd escaped something. Kingsley resolved to check the man's robes for contraband when he returned. Come to think of it, the elderly Ancient Runes professor they had escorted from the school appeared to be short a brooch...

---

"I still think it's disgusting that Hermione wanted to go with Snape, but at least it got him out of the room. Hated to think of him getting off on watching us," Harry said, sticking out his tongue at the idea. "We need privacy. Why don't you two let me go and see what the Room of Requirement can come up with?"

Draco bit at his lip for a few moments, recalling his own history with that particular room, of which he wasn't exactly proud. "Sure. All right," he said, still sounding a little uncertain.

Harry seemed to remember it too, in a sudden burst of awkwardness that sent him all but flying from the water. "Okay, I'll get it ready." He didn't attempt to dry himself properly or charm his remaining clothes clean. He merely grabbed his wand and hurried out, dripping and wrapped in a towel, giving a loud squawk as his feet hit the cold floor of the corridor.

Ginny stared after Harry until the door closed, then turned back to Draco. "I think Ron was wrong," she said, playing with his earlobe in a most satisfactory manner. "You're definitely bi."

It was rather pointless to argue, especially since Draco couldn't hide the evidence in favour of her assertion. Besides, her idea had the charm of not forcing him to admit he'd been wrong about his orientation all these years. He'd just overlooked part of it. "As of tonight... I think I'll agree with you." He made an involuntary noise of protest when she pulled away.

"I don't know about you, but I want to catch up with him as quickly as possible." She pulled herself from the water with a rush of bubbles, spelling herself dry. She didn't bother to sort through her stained clothes, instead grabbing the first clean garment she came across...which happened to be Draco's shirt.

"In case you haven't noticed, that's..." Draco trailed off, failing miserably in his attempt to dissuade her from stealing his shirt. He really had some excuse, being introduced for the first time to the universal paradox of men's shirts looking much better on women.

"Doesn't quite contain my abilities, does it?" she asked with a giggle.

*Sure as hell doesn't,* Draco thought, considering it rather a good thing. He could find something else to wear. Or transfigure something. "I'll see you there," he said, trying to sift through the scattered bits of fabric without taking his eyes off her.

Ginny blew him a kiss and scampered out of the room, her hair wrapped in a towel against the chill and the rest of her covered, however inadequately, in the shirt.

Draco decided if a towel was good enough for Harry, it would do for him as well. Besides, he didn't have time to bother with clothes...he needed to find a mirror and put his hair to rights before letting Harry and Ginny mess it up again.

*Oh, God...I want them to mess up my hair. Is this love?*

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Authors' Notes:

The Hooch reveal courtesy of SS Lupin.

Teachers playing poker and HG/SS departure courtesy of shalimar1981.

Trelawney's strange interlude courtesy of shalimar1981, from material brainstormed in chat with lux\_astraea, dracontia, leniarianna, et. al.

Underwear dare courtesy of DawnEB.

Crookshanks/Mrs. Norris courtesy of Wolfmoonshadow.

The continuing travails of Auror Shacklebolt and his proxies courtesy of lux\_astraea.

The slash and the proto-threesome stuff courtesy of dracontia.

Would you believe that dracontia cribbed the Nude Bomb reference in the summary from 'Get Smart'? (Sorry about that, Chief.)

## Chapter 6: When It Feels So Right No One Remembers It's Wrongne Would Recognize Wrong if it Bit Them in the Arse

*Chapter 7 of 11*

Exceedingly randy teenagers. Exceedingly accommodating Room of Requirement. Exceedingly drunk professors.  
Exceedingly naughty and/or funny stuff ahead.

Disclaimer: We solemnly swear we don't make any money. (We figured it went without saying that we're up to no good.)

Chapter 6: When It Feels So Right No One Remembers It's Wrong

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Fred and George were used to being the life of the party...as far as they were concerned, the party didn't start until they had arrived with lewd smiles and bottles of the alcoholic beverage of their choosing.

So they couldn't help but mourn the fact that they were tied up, sans girls, in the trophy room while the greatest party Hogwarts had ever seen was roaring floors below them.

"Can't you reach your wand?" Fred asked, struggling in his own bonds.

George shook his head as best as he could. "No... can you manage a wandless Accio?"

"Do I look like Harry Potter to you?"

"No, you're far more handsome."

Fred would have punched his brother in the arm had his hands been free.

"What are we going to do now?"

While George pondered their options, struck by inspiration, Fred said, "If you could pick one person to be in this room, who would it be?"

"There would have to be two...one for me and one for you."

"Not even thinking about getting freed, are you?"

"No... too bloody horny for that."

A pause... then, muttered in simultaneous bursts of exasperation, "Thanks a lot, Hermione."

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"Come on, Pansy, don't sulk. Let's go back and join the party," Millicent coaxed her friend.

Pansy still sat sulking on her bed, but finally raised her eyes to look at Millicent.

"Forget it, Millicent. They're all the same...too poor, too ugly, or taken."

"Since when has the last one stopped us? Here," said Millicent, handing her a flask, "drink up; it will make you feel better."*Or at least get you in a better mood,* she thought.

As Pansy gave in and took the flask, Millicent pulled her up and towards the door. Pansy reluctantly followed as she took a long, large drink from the flask.

About halfway back to the great hall, Millicent changed directions.

"Where are we going?" demanded Pansy.

"I have an idea," said Millicent as she turned into another corridor.

Pansy stopped. "What?"

"Just come on."

"I refuse to take another step until you tell me what you are up to."

"Fine. Party Pooper," said Millicent. "We're going to the trophy room."

"Why?"

"To pick out a date for you...guaranteed to be a winner."

"What?" Pansy said for the second time in the span of two minutes.

"Forget money for one second."

Pansy gave her a flat look.

"*Pretend* it's not that important for one second. I'll blindfold you and spin you. The first recent trophy you touch will be your date for the rest of the evening, and if you're lucky, for the rest of the night."

At Millicent's last comment, Pansy blushed. Although she and Draco had been together, it was only once (that counted, anyway) and not that great. As she thought back on it, it seemed he just liked her on his arm, not in his bed. *Stupid, vain ponce*. She took another swig from Millie's flask, spluttering a little. *No wonder she dumped out the mead and replaced it with punch. This stuff is more potent...well, than anyone I've ever dated. Stupid Blaise and his Quidditch Pool.*

They arrived at the door to the trophy room, Pansy still hesitant, but Millicent leaving little room for hesitation. Millicent took off her ample bra and transfigured it into a blindfold, tied it around Pansy's eyes, spun her, and shoved her into the room. Pansy stumbled forward, her hands feeling in front of her until she felt... something warm... not metal... that... chuckled at her... She gasped and pulled her hands back.

"It can't be that bad," Millicent said from the door of the darkened room. "Who did you get?"

Pansy lifted her blindfold and stuttered, "A...a Weasley."

"At least they're purebloods... Oh, crap...is it Percy? Tell me it isn't Percy."

"Um, no, it's one of the twins."

"One of them? Can't you read the name? I suppose it really doesn't matter with them, anyway." Millicent entered the room. Shock quickly gave way to leering speculation on her face. "Oh, you *literally* meant one of the twins."

---

Luna walked a little ahead of Neville in the dark, her face tilted towards the night sky. They crossed the grounds towards greenhouse three, giggling and joking about random things as they went.

"Neville?" she asked, turning to face him more seriously in the midst of their banter.

"Yeah, Luna?" For some reason he felt like he could do almost anything. It was as if his nerves had disappeared.

"Do you think that Harry likes Draco?"

Neville thought that he was used to Luna's apparent randomness, but that floored him. *Where did that come from?* "Uh, I'm not sure what you mean, Luna. I mean... they've never really gotten along, have they?" He meant it to be a rhetorical question, but the look on Luna's face nudged his voice upwards into an actual interrogative at the end of it

"It seems like that, doesn't it?" With that cryptic comment, she shrugged and changed the subject again. "Let's get to the greenhouse; it's nice in there. Herbology is one of my favourite subjects, you know...."

Greenhouse three was locked; Luna drew her wand to deal with it, but Neville intervened.

"Please, let me," he said, feeling a surge of chivalry that, to his happy amazement, wasn't quashed by even a hint of self-consciousness. *Well, you did avenge your parents after all*, an inner voice reminded him staunchly. *You've every right to expect that you can talk to a girl without stammering, and...to get the bloody door to open...*

**BANG!**

"That was... forceful." Had anyone else addressed Neville like that, he would have assumed they were trying to be tactful about his latest gaffe. Luna's lack of affinity for tact convinced him it was a compliment, and he impulsively took her arm, intending to swing her gracefully over the low threshold.

Evidently, not all the occupants of the greenhouse were as admiring of his door opening technique.

"Waank! Honk! Honk! Annkk! Honkkk!" The blaring cacophony of the offended honking daffodils startled him so badly he accidentally knocked Luna into the flower bed, setting the rest of the blooms off in every possible pitch, timbre, and volume imaginable.

Neville stared aghast at Luna sprawled amidst the potting soil and overturned daffodils, dirt and plant smears streaked across her uniform. He reached down to help her, but his grace had apparently been left behind on the dance floor. As he pulled her to her feet, he overbalanced himself and both fell backwards across the path. Neville caromed into a patch of mumbling *Mimbulus mimbletonia*, Luna sprawled indelicately across atop him. The disturbed *Mimbletonia* immediately sprayed them down with a foul-smelling sulphurous liquid that stuck to their clothing. He could feel the stubby spines digging uncomfortably into his arse. They scrambled to their feet with Neville brushing ineffectually at her befouled blouse and muttering abject apologies.

"Honk!" the daffodils cried, and "&\*\$&\$&\*\*\*#@," the *Mimbletonia* mumbled, seeming to agree with them.

"Oh bugger!" Neville swore, red-faced with embarrassment. "Now they'll be at it all night! Luna, I'm so sorry..."

"It's okay...before your *Mimbletonia* got to know me, I learned a really good spell to get rid of Stinksap." She spelled them both clean, then took his hand and led him to one of the low potting tables that were used during lessons.

Taking seats next to one another, they sat in silence (except for the complaining plants) for a moment before starting to speak at the same time.

"Luna, I"

"Neville, did you"

They both stopped, smiling at one another. "You first," Neville said.

"Well, I was just going to ask what plant that was," she said, pointing.

"A Palmquist...it's a new one. Professor Sprout just had it delivered from America. She says it's apparently a top plant over there right now."

"What does it do?"

"Well, it's a bit snappish actually, and when old enough, its roots allow it to walk in a funny way. It has a habit of walking back and forth in front of anything that moves,

almost like stalking its prey. Not much else to tell really." Neville shrugged and turned to look at Luna. She was lovely in the moonlight streaming in from the glass ceiling of the greenhouse, and he found himself edging closer to her. The Daffodils had finally stopped complaining, and the Mimbletonias subsided into slightly disgruntled snores.

"Sort of a plant version of a cat, I suppose, stalking its prey. Or a lawyer in court; that would work, too." Luna said with a laugh.

"Luna," Neville began, "can I... can I ask you why we came here?"

"Well, to get away from the noise, but also so we could kiss. I think that would be nice, don't you?"

Yes! This was even better than Neville had hoped. He really liked Luna; she might be a bit dreamy, but she was also straightforward. He leaned across, feeling bold, and kissed her on the cheek.

She turned to him, eyes wide. "That was nice, but I think I'd like it better here," she said, leaning over and kissing him on the mouth. Slowly he relaxed into the kiss, although he still didn't quite know what to do with his hands. Well, he knew where he *wanted* to put them, but didn't know if she would approve.

As if she knew what he was thinking, she pulled back from the kiss and grasped his hand lightly, putting it on her waist. "You can touch me; I won't bite," she whispered.

He smiled, grasping her waist more firmly. He pulled her closer and kissed her again, more intensely than before.

After a few minutes, and far too soon for Neville's liking, she pulled back, giggling. "I liked that, did you?" She was a little breathless and Neville found he was too.

"Yes," he said, smiling. "Very much."

"I feel a little like my brain has a Wrackspurt in it; you know, it's all fuzzy. But that's a good thing."

He smiled. Luna's random comments made some people laugh, but he thought they were sort of sweet. Feeling a little braver, he pulled her to him for another kiss.

The Honking Daffodils, silent until they noted the increasingly heated snog, let out a chorus of wolf-whistles.

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Although his thinking was a little clearer, Severus was still feeling the effect of the alcohol coursing through his blood as he stumbled along under the weight of the young woman across his shoulder. After her muffled complaint as he bumped her head on the banister a second time, he put her back on her feet. Grabbing her hand, he pulled her along in his wake. They quickly navigated the steps down to his chambers, and Severus sighed in relief as he saw...and heard...a distinct absence of Weasley and the Patil twins.

He pulled up short outside his rooms. With the fading effect of the wit clearing charm and the cool air of the dungeons working on him, he had a moment of uncertainty. "Miss Granger... last chance. I know what I want... If it's not what you want, if you have any concerns over what you or your friends will think afterwards, leave now so I can keep on drinking, drink myself into oblivion and..."

"As I told those de-debauchees upstairs, it's none of their business. As for me..." she said before pulling herself up and kissing him firmly. He hardly noticed that her towel slipped from her hips, but his hands encountered nothing but bare flesh as he held her tightly. *She only stammered once; her reasoning couldn't be totally impaired if she was using three syllable vocabulary*, he reasoned to himself as he pushed open the door.

Hermione was obviously intrigued by the contents of the shelves, but her eyes fixed on Severus as he stood looking at her guardedly. "Nice collection, but the books can wait; I have someone ahem something else I'd much rather be doing at the moment." Severus had put an encouraging arm around her and led her to the bedroom, thinking about how quickly his luck seemed to have changed. "Miss Granger..."

"Call me Hermione, or we'll never be able to do this."

"And call me Severus. Seriously, Miss... Hermione, I don't know what you have in mind..."

"Oh, good!" she interrupted. Hermione had spotted the ensuite and dragged Severus towards it. She started to unbutton his cuffs and shirt, running her fingers through his hair, eliciting a moan from Severus. "Too many fucking buttons," he heard her whimper in frustration as the last buttons defied her ministrations. Mustering a little cohesive thought, he flicked his fingers, and they popped one by one. She pulled off the cloak and the shirt and then peeled off his treads.

"Why are we here?" Severus asked, suddenly realising where they were. He was beginning to wonder if Hermione had some kind of bathroom fetish...not that he was complaining if she had.

"Wouldn't you like to try some of the fun I was having in the bath when you found me?" she asked over her shoulder as she leaned over his tub to turn on the water, exposing her naked backside to him as she did so.

*'Never thought I'd want to be afun guy,'* was all he could think as both the returning effects of the alcohol and the view robbed him of all higher thought process.

---

Pansy froze when Millicent spelled the candles in the trophy room to light. It was bad enough that she had agreed to go to the room in the first place, but groping a Weasley twin whilst blindfolded?

"If you're going to keep your hand there"

"You might as well help my brother out and move it up a bit."

Pansy quickly took her hand away from the inner thigh of the twin she had grabbed. "I would never"

"What my friend meant to say was..." Millicent stepped next to Pansy and in front of the other twin, "that she would never take advantage of you this way. Right, Pansy?" Millicent threw Pansy a sharp look.

"Er... right," Pansy agreed. *What is this girl getting at? Is she really going to try to...* Pansy's eyes widened without her permission. *Seduce them?*

"You would have to... agree to it first." Millicent raised a hand to Weasley's shirt and began to rub against his chest.

"Millicent!" Pansy hissed. Couldn't the girl ask if *she* agreed to it first?

"Yes, Pansy, dear?" Millicent was already undoing the front of the twin's trousers.

"Can't we at least figure out their names first?"

"Fred," the one with his trousers around his ankles said.

"George," the other affirmed.

"That settles it then." Millicent lowered her head and kissed Fred with no intention of rising for air.



Pansy just watched the couple in shock as Millicent extended her hands to stroke the ropes that tied Fred's wrists and yank them toward her.

Fred made a keening noise, and Millicent pulled away to sneer at him.

"Like pain, I see."

Fred's eyes had a glint in them that Pansy could see from where he stood. "And you like your men tied up."

Millicent stepped forward again, placing her palm flat against Fred's abdomen. "I'll make it worth your while."

"How so?"

Millicent's hand went lower. "Sex is sex for me," she said, fingering the waistband of Fred's boxers. "But tied up?"

She kneeled and gripped the backs of his thighs. "It's mind-blowing."

Fred snapped his hips forward. "Yes."

Pansy stared open-mouthed as Millicent proceeded to pull down Fred's boxers and make good on her promise.

"He'll have the worst rope burns after that."

Pansy faced George, who seemed unaffected while watching his twin brother getting sucked a few feet away. Then she saw the erection in his trousers and thought differently.

"I thought you didn't like Weasleys," he said, meeting her eyes once she tore them away from the impressively sized bulge.

"I never said that," Pansy said. They were a respectable Pureblood family; if it weren't for their dismal Gringotts accounts...

"So then, you wouldn't mind..." George pointed downward with his chin.

Pansy wrinkled her nose. "Of all the cheek!..."

George blushed, even as a wide grin spread across his face. "No... I mean, could you untie me?"

Pansy blushed and resisted fidgeting. "How can I trust you not to take advantage of me once you're freed?*Would that be such a dreadful fate,* part of her mind asked plaintively, *especially since you haven't been so much as kissed since Draco last decided to listlessly go through the motions... sometime last term?*

"I may look just like my brother, but..."

Fred took the opportunity to let out a string of curses as Millicent's hand wandered behind him.

"Not that I wouldn't mind, of course."

George's smile remained, and Pansy thought of how easy it would be to unbutton his shirt and reveal the same expanse of freckled skin Fred was displaying. Maybe getting out of here...now...would be a good idea.

"Er... Millicent?"

"In... a... minute," she said during gasps for air. Millicent pulled away from Fred, and rucked up his shirt.

"George... what a lovely chest you have."

"Fred," he moaned.

"Didn't know you liked your brother that way." Millicent smirked, planted a kiss at his tip, and stood.

"How's progress coming along?" Fred called out to his brother.

"How's the cold air treating you?" George retorted.

"Pansy, why aren't you joining the fun? Poor Fred over there is still dressed."

"George," the twin corrected.

"Six of one, half dozen of the other," Millicent said dismissively. "But you, love, need to loosen up."

"Love? Since when are you"

"Shh." Millicent sauntered over to Pansy and placed a finger to her lips, using her other hand to cup Pansy's chin and lift it. When Pansy nervously met her eyes, she saw that Millicent's eyes were determined. "Play along, or else," Millicent said in a subtle murmur and less-than-subtle body language.

"These men are young and gorgeous," Millicent murmured into Pansy's ear, her lips brushing against the lobe. Pansy shivered and closed her eyes.

She felt hands holding her breasts gently as only another girl could, kneading them until her nipples hardened. She felt those hands unbuttoning her shirt, stroking her skin and unhooking her bra.

"No..."

"No clothes? Not a problem." Millicent bestowed a kiss upon Pansy's neck and continued stripping her until she had nothing but her knickers on.

"But..." Pansy opened her eyes when the cold air hit her back and she should not be here and why did it all feel so good?

Millicent stood and kissed Pansy's lips slowly, pulling away to whisper one last thing in Pansy's ear.

"They're loaded. Rich. Successful. Set for life."

Pansy groaned, kissed Millicent back, and broke away to wrap her arms around George.

---

Pomona left the poker game early enough so that she wasn't stumbling out of the pub it was more like an ambling walk that was a little closer to the floor than she would've liked.

Waving goodbye to Poppy and Rolanda at the door of the Three Broomsticks, Pomona leaned back against the pub's wall, taking in deep breaths of air. It still smelled of fireworks and liquor, but it was cool and helped reacquaint herself with her senses.

But... maybe getting a little intoxicated wasn't such a bad idea after all. In the haze created by those lovely fruity drinks...she *must* get the recipe from Ros... good Merlin, what was her name, anyway?...she was able to strip out of her robes and cambric shirt without much trepidation, and now she could see Aberforth without tripping over her feet. Much.

As if she had Summoned him, Aberforth emerged from the crowds and stepped up to her.

"Aberforth."

He didn't say anything, opting instead to place his palms flat against the wall on either side of her head, the beginning of his beard inches away from her lips.

"I've been waiting too long for talking, Pomona," he said gruffly, tipping her head back for a kiss.

"Oh," she gasped when they parted.

He tilted his head, his blue eyes looking unsure for the first time. "Still worried about propriety?"

Feeling her cheeks heat and her breath quicken, she ran a finger against his lips. "Fuck propriety."

Aberforth laughed and helped her through the crowds and to his flat, an arm around her ample waist. "We shall," he said.

---

Apparating into Hogsmeade behind the Hog's Head in a small, rarely used alleyway, Dung looked about cautiously. *No sign of anything so far*, he thought. *What made me say 'yes' to this crazy idea?*

He slowly walked around to the main street, checking and double-checking as he went. After all, it was his arse on the line.

Eventually arriving on the main street, he heard noises, but they sure weren't noises of people in battle, or even of fleeing. They sounded almost... jubilant.

*Well, maybe there's people in 'Ol Hog's; I'll go have a quick look see*, he thought to himself. Doesn't sound like terror from here.

Dung entered the Hog's Head to find out more. As soon as he did, he found himself accosted by more than one highly inebriated person giving him drinks and telling him the 'great news'. Distracted by the free flowing alcohol and cheery atmosphere, he forgot why he'd even come to Hogsmeade in first place.

---

Draco cast a stout Warming Charm on his way to the Room of Requirement. To someone who'd just spent nearly half an hour adjusting his hair to perfection and cleaning and applying glamours to body parts most people didn't even THINK about on a daily basis, much less worry about the appearance of, gooseflesh prevention was vital. He opened the door slowly, wondering if he'd get an eyeful of Harry and Ginny...

...reading?

"Are you sure, Harry? The book recommends a different position for beginners."

"I want him to see both of us, love. With enough pillows and lu..."

The candles flickered in the draft from the door, bringing their attention to Draco's entrance. He would have liked to flatter himself that they'd spent the entire time reading and waiting for his arrival, but the scratches all over Harry's back and the bite marks (especially one right at the juncture of Ginny's neck and shoulder) said otherwise.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"Hi."

*Well, that was scintillating.*

Draco surveyed the room. "What's in the Samovar?"

"Is that what you call that thing? It's full of hot chocolate," Harry said.

Ginny giggled. "It's no ordinary chocolate, if I guess correctly. And it's spiked."

"Ooh... Is it that really pure stuff they call cocoa de amour?" Draco headed for the table, but Harry was up and had strong arms around him in an instant.

"Later. We're not here for the drinks," Harry said, his voice muffled as his lips traced the words on the back of Draco's neck.

"I'm here for the scenery," Ginny said with a grin, her eyes dancing appreciatively over both men. "Though the view would be better if you'd drop the towel."

Harry nibbled the back of Draco's neck. Suddenly, he sucked a bit of tender flesh into his mouth firmly and worried it with his teeth. Draco yipped.

"You're going to leave marks!"

"That's the idea." Harry spoke right into the hollow behind Draco's ear, a smirk in his voice. He set about making a neat, whimper-inducing row of scarlet love-bites.

Ginny caught on and took over decorating the front of Draco's neck. "What's wrong, Draco? Don't like your 'Gryffindor necklace'?" She giggled her question into the hollow of his throat.

"You're *marking* me?"

"We're... sharing you," Harry said, voice soft and soothing.

Then everything was a blur of passionate kisses, through a sort of sparkly black haze (possibly related to his eyes rolling back quite emphatically), Draco was aware of Ginny collapsing on him in a pile of warm softness. Then Harry wrapped his arms around both of them; someone was trembling, or maybe it was all three of them. All Draco knew for certain was he wanted to keep doing this.

And if that meant they wanted him to wear a collar... well, he was sure he could convince them to select something that would complement his eyes.

---

Vince was singing under his breath, a cheerful baritone accompanied by Greg whistling.

"Something parboiled, something in oil, something delectable, some real food, tonight!"

It probably should have offended Greg that Draco didn't have more appreciation for their musical abilities. Draco may have come up with most of the lyrics for 'Weasley is Our King,' but it all would have been just a lot of mediocre poetry without Greg and Vince's composing skills.

"Something delicious..."

It was a catchy little number, but Greg didn't think they should get their hopes up too high for this kitchen excursion. The house-elves' usual enthusiastic shower of sweets just wouldn't satisfy tonight, and it would take them longer than Greg cared to wait to actually cook something. *Oh, well*, he thought as he waited for Vince to deal with the pear. *At least there'll be san...*

"Do you smell that?"

Normally, Greg didn't care for having his thoughts interrupted. Granted, they weren't necessarily the most profound thoughts, but he rather liked them. He'd forgive Vince this time, though, since the kitchen fragrance was ample interruption on its own.

"If by 'that' you mean a sort of rich, meaty smell I'd tear down a door to get to..."

"So, you do smell it."

"Cordelia, it's burning!"

"Sod it, Vi!"

*No way that's a house-elf.*

Greg and Vince found themselves gawping at a rosy-cheeked girl, the sleeves of her Hufflepuff jumper rolled up and her face smudged with flour. She blushed and all but hid behind the heavenly-smelling pan of glazed vegetables she'd just rescued from the oven.

"Oi! You two! Don't just stand there like a couple of dogs outside the butcher shop! If you want a taste, fetch some dishes!" Another girl, so petite she'd hardly been visible beside her shy companion, shook a spoon at them, her bossiness at odds with her Hufflepuff tie.

The lads were spared having to locate the tableware. "Young masters mustn't trouble themselves; Nipsy brings the dishes, just like the ingredients young mistresses asks for, yes! Nipsy still doesn't understand why elf cooking isn't good enough for young mistresses..."

"Your cooking is fine," the petite one said. "We just love to cook and haven't been able to in ever so long."

"You were very helpful, getting the utensils and ingredients," the shy one added, her voice reassuring. Nipsy bounced away, beaming.

"That's the best looking Coq au Vin I've ever smelled," Greg said, staring at the dish being levitated to the table.

"Don't you mean the best you've ever seen?" Vince asked, nudging him.

"Yeah. Both."

"Thanks, luv," the petite Hufflepuff said, a self-satisfied smile tugging at her lips.

"Aren't you two usually with Malfoy?" the other asked, still blushing a little.

Vince was used to fielding questions when Draco wasn't around and stepped in automatically. "Yeah, I guess that's pretty much how we're known around here. I'm Vincent Crabbe; this is Gregory Goyle. For Merlin's sake, call us Vince and Greg unless you want to sound like our mothers."

"Cordelia Slade and Amethyst Grayson, but she's shy so everyone calls her Violet," Cordelia said, indicating her taller companion in a gesture reminiscent of the one Vince had used to introduce Greg. Greg wondered if the shorter of any pair of people was usually the more talkative.

"Well, it *is* my middle name," Violet mumbled. "Would you like to join us for a proper dinner?" she asked, looking at Vince with earnest brown eyes.

Cordelia's curls bounced prettily as she looked from Vince to Violet in surprise. "That's more than she usually says to anyone but me all day," she said, elbowing Greg in the ribs to drive the point home. "Blimey, I think she fancies your mate!"

Vince must have thought so as well, for he was already pulling out a chair for Violet. Cordelia summoned Nipsy to order bread and butterbeer, then stood next to an empty chair with an expectant look in her keen blue eyes. Greg hastened to follow Vince's example, then rounded the table to take his own seat.

The lads opened the ladies' butterbeers for them, and Greg surprised himself by proposing a toast. "To the cooks," he said, and Cordelia clinked her bottle against his with gusto. That was about it for conversation as the eating began in earnest, but even through his haze of gustatory enthusiasm, Greg noticed that a lot was being said with glances and little smiles between bites.

*Heaven. This is absolute heaven.*

"Vince?"

"Yeah, Greg?"

He chewed and swallowed, but never took his eyes off Cordelia. "I think I'm in love."

---

Picking a winner with Millicent and Pansy courtesy of broomclosetravenclaw.

The happy foursome (and we ain't talking bridge) was taken the rest of the way by SS Lupin with material developed by broomclosetravenclaw, et. al.; the Pomona and Aberforth prelude to gettin' it on is entirely SSL's responsibility, though.

Neville and Luna in the greenhouse courtesy of lux\_astraea and wolfmoonshadow, from ideas brainstormed in chat.

Shacklebolt's recurring headaches courtesy of lux\_astraea.

Granger/Snape courtesy of Just\_Desmond and DawnEB.

Harry/Ginny/Draco and true love in the kitchens courtesy of dracontia.

Assorted remarks within the kitchen scene courtesy of Hubby\_of\_Drac.

If there's something vaguely familiar about the structure of Crabbe and Goyle's song, thank Steven Sondheim...who wrote the music and lyrics for 'Comedy Tonight', the

featured song in 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum'.

## 7: When It's Safe To Assume No One Would Recognize Wrong if it Bit Them in the Arse

Chapter 8 of 11

If we told you what was going to happen in this chapter, you still wouldn't believe us.

Disclaimer: We don't own it, and contrary to all appearances, we intend no disrespect by borrowing it.

Chapter 7: When It's Safe To Assume No One Would Recognize Wrong if it Bit Them in the Arse

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Back in the greenhouse, Neville and Luna were laid out on the potting table, snogging the living daylight out of each other. Neville had no trouble finding his Gryffindor courage (or adolescent randiness) and his hands were wandering over Luna's breasts, albeit on top of her jumper. His hair was a mess and hers was no better, their clothes rumpled and their shoes discarded. The Daffodils launched into a smooth jazz chorus...if it had been a phonograph album, the track could have been titled, 'Music to Shag By.'

Luna suddenly sat upright with a gasp.

"What's wrong? Did I do something wrong?" Neville asked, sitting up beside her.

"No, I just saw a Nargle! It's in my hair." She reached up to touch her hair. "Can you see it? It's really small and a bit like an insect." She was talking fast, not at all like her usual dreamy pace. "Please find it! They're quite dangerous sometimes...especially when they attack as a group."

At the word 'attack' Neville shook the haze of lust clouding his brain and started looking with more deliberation. He moved so he could see better and pulled aside her hair. "Hang on... I think I can get it...." Whatever it was, it was moving fast, and looked a little like a small insect of some sort.

"Aah! I can feel it," she said with a squeak. "Hurry, Neville!"

"Got it!" Neville clamped his hands carefully around the insect-like creature.

"Oh, thank you, Neville!" She turned and hugged him, his clasped hands between them. "If it'd had the chance to call its little friends, we could have been in trouble."

He looked into her beautiful grey eyes bulging adoringly up at him, and it occurred to him that he could look forward to being very appreciated indeed!

"Luna, I'll just, erm, dispose of this, shall I?" Neville said hesitatingly, gesturing to the sealed furnace in the corner of the room, which was always lit.

"We can't kill it...we need it as evidence! I'll get a jar. A Nargle... how unusual. They usually infest Mistletoe, in groups." She wandered off to the cupboard to find a container.

Neville sighed. *Well, that was the mood ruined. It was going so well, too,* he thought to himself. The Nargle in his clasped hands wriggled, tickling him a little. "Well Bob," he said, "thanks for ruining my chances."

"What chances?" Luna asked.

"Oh, um, nothing," he mumbled, embarrassed.

She took the Nargle from him, sealing it into the jar and spelling a couple of tiny holes in the lid. "Bob... I like that name," she said.

Putting it down on a side bench, she returned to her seat next to him. Neville sighed. *Well, there was the hope of a 'reward' for rescuing services rendered gone.*

"Neville?"

"Yes, Luna?" Neville turned to her, a slightly wistful smile on his face.

She grinned cheekily, "This." With that, she kissed him.

*Maybe I was wrong,* Neville's sensible side thought. The rest of his brain was happily shouting, *Yippee!*

They kissed, things heating up quickly and soon they were soon lying back on the table, Neville's hands firmly *under* her top this time around. He pulled her over so she lay on top of him, and she sat up, straddling him.

"It is warm in here or is it just me?" he asked, a bit too breathlessly for it to sound like the joke he meant it to be.

"Well, it is a greenhouse, Neville," she said in a serious tone. Then she laughed at how his face dropped and leant down to kiss him once more, before sitting up again.

"Luna?"

She smiled and raised her arms, taking her jumper off. Neville smiled back. *I love this girl.* She leaned in, their faces now mere centimetres apart. "Well? Your turn."

Neville lay still for a moment before rolling them over, Luna giggling as he did.

"Oh, Neville, the stars are so beautiful tonight," Luna said, looking up at the night sky.

Neville looked at them briefly, and then removed his jumper. "Yeah."

"But that's not why we're here," she said with a wry grin. "Kiss me again, Neville."

---

Blaise took the time to sip his second cup of the punch. It really was powerful stuff, and there was a strange undertone to it he couldn't quite put his finger on. By the time he'd got halfway down the cup he had decided it was probably something like fruit juice corrupting the brew.

Looking around for somewhere a bit calmer to sit and watch the celebrations--a good Slytherin didn't miss a chance to gather something that might be used to influence someone at a later date--he found himself draped against a wall on the far side of the High Table. Nearby, a relatively quiet group were discussing Quidditch good-humouredly. Blaise eavesdropped idly whilst taking a few mental notes of the antics unfolding before him.

"Hey, Zabini!" Blaise was instantly alert, despite the numbing effect of the punch. He realised that most of the group had turned to look at him and one of them, a Slytherin named Harper, was waving him over. Easing himself up, Blaise strolled across in a suitably nonchalant fashion to indicate that he saw no reason to comply with the request, but would indulge Harper *this* time. It had the added benefit of allowing his forward progress to remain upright and free of unsightly weaving. "We need to settle a friendly dispute, and you're just the man to do it. Which Chaser scored most goals in their first season, Vaisey there," he indicated the young man just in front of Blaise before nodding towards another to his left, "or Zac Smith?"

Zabini smiled as he snagged an empty chair. He had been keeping a book on the Hogwarts Quidditch games ever since his second year, and had an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the matches and players since then. He thought for a moment. The scoring power of the Chasers to win a game was the often overlooked. Seekers were the Glory Boys, swooping in to grab the Snitch and end the game, but the 150 points would be for naught if the opposing teams Chasers had racked up enough goals in the meantime. It paid Blaise to keep their statistics in mind.

"Vaisey's first season saw him put away a total of 103 goals in the inter-house games; Smith had 107 in his." Blaise pronounced after a moments thought. There was a round of good-natured backslapping and joshing, and someone handed Blaise the bottle of mead that was doing the rounds. He found himself being drawn into the general conversation, which was based around Quidditch and flying. He took note that most of the group was players from all four houses. They had all taken part in the aerial manoeuvres that had proved so effective in the recent battle, the attacks and harrying from above doing much to help distract the opposing Death Eaters and their allies.

As was inevitable, the talk of game moves moved onto some of the daredevil tricks and near misses during the Final Battle. There was a lull in the conversation, until Bradley, a Ravenclaw Beater, piped up. "I saw the damndest thing on the way back to the castle. You know how we were flying ahead of everyone for a while? Well, as I was about to turn back, the weirdest looking beast stepped out of the trees! It was black and bony, with what looked like wings folded up on its back. I thought for a moment it was something that Voldishorts and his lot had conjured up against us, but before I could do anything it turned and disappeared."

Blaise nodded knowingly. "Thestrals."

"No, it's the truth!" Bradley blurted defensively.

Blaise gave a rare laugh. "No, you prat, I meant the beast was a Thestral." The smile slowly dropped from the Slytherin's face. "Don't you remember the Care of Magical Creatures class back in fifth year? Winged horses, usually invisible. Hogwarts has a huge herd of them...they pull the carriages to and from Hogsmeade Station. You can only see them once you've seen death." A silence fell on the whole group. Blaise sat in a kind of reverie for a few moments before he took a deep swig of the bottle he found by his chair and leaned forward. "They tend to keep to the Forest and the far side of the grounds as they are shy of people, but there's a small group that lingers close by Hagrid's hut that are a bit more 'friendly'."

"I suppose that means we could all see them now," said Vicky Frobisher. The others all nodded sadly. Vicky, having failed to get on the Gryffindor team the previous year, still played a good game, and had more than played her part in the fighting. Blaise noticed she also seemed to have her eye on the Hufflepuff, Smith. She spoke again.

"No, I mean *we* could all see them *now*, go out and look for them!"

Before he knew it, Blaise was showing the ragtag bunch of them down the path to where he knew there would be Thestrals.

---

If someone had approached Harry yesterday and intimated that Malfoy was a screamer, he wouldn't have batted an eye. Had that person suggested Malfoy might swing both ways, Harry would've shrugged. However, had said hypothetical gossip stated, 'Draco Malfoy is an insatiable cuddler,' Harry would've made an emergency Floo-call to St. Mungo's on their behalf.

What a difference a day makes.

"Want to stay with you. Both of you." Draco's voice was tiny and vulnerable, breathy in the aftermath of pleasure. "I don't like to be alone."

All three lipped sleepily at each other's faces, nuzzling noses, brushing lips across eyelids, sighing across each other's skin. "You're not alone," Harry reassured him, thinking how nice it was that Ginny's breasts were quite generous enough that they could nuzzle side by side without running out of pillow goodness. Ginny seemed to think so as well, humming her approval as she played with their hair.

This couldn't possibly get better. Ginny had tossed off all that 'scarlet woman' baggage and was more than living up to the passionate potential of her hair and figure. Snakey, ferrety Malfoy had changed into Draco, who was sort of fragile and pretty and...hmm, ferrets are warm and fuzzy... *And*, the happily smug thought arose, I'm apparently quite enough to satisfy both of them. Though it's rough on the knees.

"Want you to," Ginny murmured, turning to Draco and kissing him as if he were the only kissable human being on earth. "Stay with us."

When she was done, Harry claimed his lips, kissing the remaining breath from Draco's lungs. "Yes... promise we'll take care of you, pet."

Draco made a sort of purring sound. "I like the sound of that. Will you walk me? Feed me? Rub my tummy?"

Harry snorted; Ginny giggled. "Anytime, so long as you wear your collar," she said, stroking the tender row of love bites. "Mmm... my turn in between."

"Ooh... Page 113, right?" Harry made a clumsy search for the lubricant as they rearranged themselves accordingly. Then they all went a bit boneless, rather forgetting what they'd intended to do.

"Pansy always ran off to take a shower, after," Draco murmured sulkily, evidently back to his abandonment issues. "She'd take her clothes and not come back."

"Doesn't sound as if the bed would've been any warmer with her," Ginny said, and Draco rewarded that tart analysis with small laugh and an appreciative nuzzle.

"If I fancy a shower, you can come along. Right now, I want to... rest my eyes," Harry said, swallowing a yawn.

Ginny relaxed back into the softness of the bed, sighing. Everything was warm and cozy, as she spooned against Draco and snuggled up to Harry. Somehow their arms and legs sorted themselves into a comfortable tangle. "Okay... we have all night..."

"Mmm-hmm," Harry agreed, snuggling up to her and stretching his arm out to embrace both of them. 'Shagged out' didn't begin to express his condition; he'd more than doubled his lifetime tally of sex acts in this one night. "Have all the time we need." Without thinking about it, he wandlessly pulled the covers over all three of them. Something about 'love' was whispered, somewhere in there. More than once, by more than one person.

"Sleep'sgood," Draco slurred. His arm grew heavy against Ginny's side; his hand on Harry's arm went limp.

Harry yawned widely. "Sorry," he said to no one who could hear. He was the last to drift off, his right fingers twining in rich, red tresses and his left ones caressing silky blond locks until sleep stilled them.

---

They stood in a loose huddle at the edge of the sloping lawns, just on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Blaise called out on the evening breeze, not the odd, shrieking cry that Hagrid used to call them, but a soft whistle. Almost immediately he could make out the dark shapes moving like shadows through the thinning trees, but it was a couple more minutes before anyone else did.

"There! Just there, by the twisted ash. Do you see it?" Summersby called in low but excited tones. The others all moved forward, watching as the gaunt but strangely graceful creatures stepped nervously into the open. They raised their dragon-like heads, scenting the air and pawing at the ground skittishly. Cadwallader, a Hufflepuff Beater, turned to Blaise. "What's up with them? Are they normally so jumpy?"

Blaise shook his head. "It's the blood. Even this far away, they can smell it, are drawn to it, but they can sense the Dark magic too." He pulled a tiny penknife from his pocket and started to prod around at the heel of his thumb, finding a spot that would yield a little blood. As a small amount welled up he held his arm forward, and one of the Thestrals moved towards him, holding its head low. As it lipped the blood like any other horse would take a sugar cube, Blaise reached forward and scratched the surprisingly warm, soft skin between its ears. "Tenebrus. It's good to see you again," he murmured, too quietly for the others to hear.

As the dark creature nuzzled familiarly against Zabini in the manner of all equines, the others found their courage and stepped towards the rest of the small herd. Blaise saw that some had pulled out knives or pins and were trying to prick their fingers to encourage the winged horses closer. He considered leaving them to learn their own lessons, as he had, but he felt generous in the aftermath of the Final Battle and with the nightmarish yet gentle beast leaning against him. "Don't prick your fingers, they bite! Try the heel of your thumb, or the flesh at the base of your fingers."

The nods of understanding were replaced with wincing as efforts were made to produce a little blood, but soon the witches and wizards were moving amongst the gently milling horses, scratching, patting and stroking and being nuzzled and bumped in return.

A sudden commotion drew everyone's attention as two young stallions began bickering. A space cleared around the pair as they each sought to establish their place in the pecking order. The teens watched in wonder as the horses suddenly rose into the air, kicking, biting and buffeting each other with their wings in a display of aerobatics before they subsided as if nothing had happened, the outcome unintelligible to the humans.

Vicky Frobisher looked at Zac Smith and said in an awed voice, "Wow, they look so thin, but they're really powerful. I wonder how it would feel to fly on one?"

Zac nodded. "Yeah," he said thoughtfully, "I was thinking about what it would be like to play Quidditch with Thestrals." Vicky, Harper and Bradley nodded in agreement with the idea as they shared a bottle, until Vaisey spoke up.

"Yeah, but how'dya get 'em on a broomstick?"

---

Mrs Norris' provocative strut was occupying all of Crookshanks' attention. Feeling all his senses tingle with the pleasant promise of an impending mating, Crookshanks could only follow her, his bottle-brush tail cocked at a most jaunty angle.

Mrs Norris suddenly stopped her progress through the castle and turned around to face him. Pulled out of his lascivious reverie by the abruptness of her actions, Crookshanks performed a quick nose lick to cover his confusion, then tried to nonchalantly adopt that pose which only an utterly confident, self-absorbed Tom could manage. Of course, he was The Male, divine to any female in radius of his lusty odour. Of course he was. Really.

Self-doubt is the bane of any Tom's success, so Crookshanks fixated on that sense of confidence as he launched into a loving serenade lauding the somewhat dubious assets of his soon to be lady-love. His off-kilter cacophony of yowls, growls, and something that might almost be mistaken for a sound that had absolutely nothing to do with purring, generated an auditory field of such high-decibel lust that it sent the all the inhabitants of the nearby portraits fleeing for any available picture frame in the farthest reaches of the castle.

Throughout his serenade to her, uh, charms, Mrs Norris simply lounged back on her haunches and gave him *that look* through half lowered eyes. As his raucous ode came to a conclusion, she curled herself about, rump in the air, waving her tail like a high stream angler who's found religion in the casting of his fly.

---

Between incredibly heated, passionate snogging, Hermione contemplated whether it was more courteous or more chauvinistic of a man to ask the 'are you or aren't you?' question before sex. To his credit, the professor... Severus... hadn't asked with whom... *Perhaps it's best to stick with inarticulate noises for the rest of this. An ill-timed, 'Oooh, Professor!' might kill the mood.*

Her tipsy musings were interrupted when the uniform shirt fabric covering her breasts was replaced by slightly damp skin. Hermione had expected that he'd be good with his hands; they were pretty incredible-looking hands, after all. His strength was a pleasant surprise, as he picked her up and they continued the kiss with her legs around his waist. He'd obviously drunk enough to spoil his sense of direction, though. They wobbled through the room, missing the bed, and he only managed to get them properly aligned and push in just as she hit the bookshelf.

"Ow!"

He almost dropped her, looking incredibly rattled. "I thought you said you weren't a virgin!"

Hermione had a lot of practice giving males in her life the 'are you stupid?' look. It had become reflexive, and she employed it to good effect on her...well, with their current state of interconnectedness...lover.

However, she restrained her withering comments to, "You slammed me into the shelf and there's a book poking me in the back!"

He reached behind her, tossed the offending book to the floor, and picked up where they left off. It was a testimony to how much he wanted this that he was willing to just throw a book. It was a testimony to how much she wanted it that she didn't 'Accio' her wand and hex him into a turnip for throwing a book. Instead, she lost herself in the sensation of Severus' hot mouth, the peculiarly kinky press of leather spines against her spine, and the sudden stiffening...

The next thing she knew, she was being slowly lowered to the floor and treated to the sight of a panting, flustered, and deliciously embarrassed Severus Snape. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I assure you, I can make it up to you in a very short while."

Hermione wasn't exactly disappointed. Granted, it was all over a good bit more quickly than she would have liked. But it was still pretty good for a half-pissed older man shagging against a bookshelf. She was about to say something reassuring when she noticed the book on the floor. A book which, evidently, was not a book.

She gave him what she hoped was a sultry, slightly challenging look and disentangled herself. Practically feeling his gaze burn into her backside, she bent to survey the contents of the false volume. Hermione wasn't exactly familiar with sex toys. But even to her untrained eye, these seemed quite a nice little collection.

One item in particular caught her eye, the silver metal and green velvet looking both sinister and beautiful. She brought them to Severus, who couldn't seem to decide whether to look at the contents of her hands or the contours of her body.

"So... Care to teach me how to use these during round two?"

---

Filius Flitwick woke as he always did after a night of drinking: with a bottle in his arms and a yelp. The bottle was self-explanatory; the yelp he still hadn't figured out after over a hundred years.

He sat up gingerly. That he even managed to do so was a sign he hadn't drunk quite as much as usual. Few knew how well he could hold his liquor. They all assumed that because he was so small in size that he was automatically a lightweight when it came to alcohol.

He tsked as loudly as he dared and surveyed the scene around him.

Well. That had certainly been an exciting evening by the looks of it. Even without remembering what had happened...which he did...an almost naked Lupin esconced in another tight embrace with the Headmistress, who seemed to be wearing nothing but a Dragon-scale negligee would clarify for even the densest that they'd had one hell of a party. He wondered if Aurora and Septima were still in their room. That had been a bit of a revelation...he could have sworn they'd each shown interest in men at some point. Perhaps they played both sides of the pitch?

*A very interesting evening indeed*, Filius thought, curiously not because of finding his colleagues in varying stages of undress, but rather because he had found that what he had assumed was a pillow he had been resting his head on was actually a sack full of Galleons, Sickles and Knuts. A very full bag.

He had done it again! He resisted the urge to cheer, and instead jumped from the bench he had been sleeping on and picked up his cloak...the sole piece of clothing he had apparently lost last night. He smirked. *Lightweights*.

Then he slipped out the door of the private parlour leaving his drunk and much poorer colleagues as they were.

---

In the wee hours of the morning, when all was finally still and quiet on Hogwarts' grounds, a lone figure was marching determinedly away from the Shrieking Shack and toward Hogwarts castle.

She wanted to squeal and dance with joy, but restricted herself to a smug smile and a spring in her step.

*I did it! The spirits really spoke to me! Ha! That will teach all the others to call me a fraud! I am that no more!* Sybill Trelawney thought on her way back to Hogwarts.

By the time she got to the gates, she'd tossed all thoughts of decorum in the lake and was literally skipping with joy.

---

Irma Pince walked out of the Shrieking Shack, prim expression firmly in place. She patted her purse to ensure that her little souvenir of the evening was likewise secure.

*I really must have a night on the town more often. I wonder, should I return these to Argus later, with an invitation... or just keep them as a memento of the evening?*

If there was a trace of smugness around her eyes and an enthusiastic briskness to her gait, well, no one on the streets of Hogsmeade at this hour was sufficiently awake or alert to notice. Two people gazing sleepily out of a second story window of the Three Broomsticks were a bit more observant. But even they failed to discern that the scrap of violet silk waving jauntily from the back of her purse belonged to a pair of boxer shorts.

---

Sinistra's eyes bugged out as she happened to glance at the Shrieking Shack once more. "Septima, luv, I wish I'd bet against you when you said it couldn't get any stranger."

"Why?"

"Sibyll and Irma weren't the only ones in the Shrieking Shack."

"You don't say."

"You'll never guess who just staggered out, looking half shagged to death."

"Well, don't keep me in suspense, Aurora, dear."

"Argus."

"No!"

"I kid you not."

"You mean...all three? Together?"

"Did you have to say it?"

"Blimey. None of my calculations even hinted at that."

"The stars didn't give any indication of it, either. I suspect they were looking away."

Vector snorted, looking up at her makeshift chalkboards she'd been filling all night. Calculations covered three walls of the room they'd let from Rosmerta, and it was time to start recording them on parchment. Sinistra found it absolutely stultifying, but Septima seemed to thrive on it.

Sinistra yawned and gave her Celestial Globe a spin, idly noting that it stopped on Leo for the third time since they'd begun their research project earlier that night. She felt vaguely guilty for having abandoned the castle when Minerva no doubt had her hands full getting the students settled down, especially now that she was nominally Head of Slytherin. But she and Septima never had the time to work on their research together during the school year, and this had seemed like a tailor-made opportunity to do so in peace. Analysing the outcome of the war was as good a project as any.

The Arithmancer's voice broke through her musings. "So, what do the stars have to say about last night in history?"

"The stars, I believe, have gone flat barmy." She allowed Septima's laughter to subside before she elaborated. "It wasn't too unexpected that Mars fizzled a bit; after all, it's been burning like a mad Whizzbang for over two years, and the war did end. What surprised me was how active Venus was. Full all night, and in the most amazing conjunction I've ever seen, right in Leo. There was some odd activity below Orion's belt as well...something to do with death and athletics."

"Hmm, that's interesting. It parallels my calculations, actually. My first equation of the night reduced all the chaotic number sequences that have accompanied the Mars issue into some semblance of balance...which lasted approximately 20 seconds before both the Eye of Loki and the Axe of Set popped up on either side of the equation."

Aurora tried hard to keep her eyes from glazing over.

"But they got tied up in an inverse pretty quickly, and nearly everything after that worked out to some function of fortune or sex magic. This is all going to be fascinating when we compile it. I suppose we should do that back at the castle, though. I think we're officially AWOL right now."

Aurora sighed and shrank her globe for easy carrying. It was true, of course. She spent a few minutes longer staring out the window, unsurprised to feel an angular chin

come to rest on her shoulder. *Septima definitely has her father's chin*, she thought.

All she said aloud was, "Knut for your thoughts."

"Are you ashamed to admit we're related because my dad was a Muggle?"

Aurora couldn't have been more shocked if her half-sister had punched her in the gut. "No! I'm not ashamed we're sisters! You know Mum's reasoning behind hiding our family connections. And besides... I think the Slytherin in me likes having secrets."

Septima seemed to relax a little. "Yeah."

"But the war is over...for good, this time. Her reasons don't matter anymore. I have every intention of telling anyone who'll listen that you're my little sister, just as soon as we get back to the castle today."

"Half sister, at least. And who are you calling 'little'?" she asked, grinning down at Aurora.

"Well, half a sister is better than none."

Septima punched Aurora in the arm. "You realize what that means, don't you?"

"Am I about to be treated to another one of your formulas?"

"No. It means you got your sense of humour from *your* father."

---

Having been up all night tending to the evacuees and such, Kingsley was seriously worried. No news from Tonks or Dung, and he still wasn't one hundred percent sure about what Tonks' letter had said. Stopping his pacing, he approached Auror Dawlish, who was just waking up from a nap.

"I'm going up," he said. "Something's off about this. You're in charge here, okay?"

Still sleepy, Dawlish nodded his agreement, looking around the room. Most people were still sleeping, if a little uneasily. "Sure, take care, sir," he said, getting up.

Kingsley grabbed his cloak. "I'll send word when I can. You know what to do if I don't?"

"Yeah. No problem, I hope it goes well."

Kingsley checked the room one more time and then left, Apparating to the path leading to Hogwarts.

---

Remus shifted in his sleep, rolling over onto his side *Merlin it's cold. Where's the blanket gone?* he thought. *Am I on the floor?*

"Mmm, Tonks, gimme some covers back," he mumbled, reaching out blindly for her. She had a habit of stealing the covers during the night, not that he usually complained.

His hand encountered bare skin, her thigh Remus assumed, and he moved it moved up and down, still searching for the blanket. Under his hand, Tonks moved a little, as if trying to escape his grasp.

"Hmmm, playing *that* game are you, huh?" He smiled softly, his eyes still closed. His hand moved further up her body, reaching her waist *since when did she sleep in a silky camisole? She usually goes nude...*

Slowly his brain started to register that she never did wear anything, or at most a pair of knickers, and that could only mean one of two things...

"EXCUSE ME!?" came a voice that was certainly *not* Tonks'. Remus shot upright, wincing as his head pounded and voiced its complaint about the sudden movement.

Turning more slowly now, he opened his eyes to see whom exactly he was laying next to... oh dear, Nimue. Minerva.

"Um," Remus started, then, realising he was only in his boxers (a pair from Tonks, with a funny werewolf pattern on them), he stopped and grabbed the nearest piece of material to cover himself with. It was someone's skirt.

*What on earth went on last night?* thought Remus and Minerva at the same time.

"Well... I... Remus? Oh dear Merlin, what's going on?" Minerva sat up, clutching a cloak over herself as best she could. "Dear Merlin, my head."

It was quiet for a moment or two. Remus and Minerva both looking around the room, trying to remember what had happened. Only fuzzy glimpses of memories appeared and no details about how they'd ended up here *together* came forth.

"Oh, we're in the Three Broomsticks," Remus said, as he realised that he recognised the room.

"Hmm," was all Minerva said in response.

Well, this was awkward.

"Erm," Remus said quietly, his head pounding. "We didn't... I mean... I don't think we...." He trailed off as he saw Minerva glaring daggers at him.

"Certainly not, Mr. Lupin," she snapped.

It seemed a Minerva with a hangover and fuzzy memory of the night before was a very grumpy Minerva, Remus realised.

"Do you remember how we, ah, ended up like..." he trailed off as she glared again. *She's as bad as Severus is at the breakfast table in the morning*, he thought. *Well, anytime really, with him.*

"No."

"Well, I'll just... erm, try to find my clothes." He stood, holding the skirt as best as he could to cover himself.

Remus looked about the room again; he could see his trousers over on the floor in the corner. Well, that was a start. He walked over, his feet cold on the floor and collected them. Putting them on as best he could, he turned back to Minerva, who was still sat on the floor.

"I'm sorry about that before, Minerva," Remus apologised. "I thought you were Tonks."

"So I gathered," she replied, still a little thin lipped.



"Well, sorry."

"Let's *never* mention it again, if you don't mind."

He agreed wholeheartedly and nodded his acceptance even though it did hurt his head.

Slowly, he and Minerva found their clothes, which were scattered all over the room. Remus passed her hers turning his back as she dressed. But not before he caught a glimpse of her camisole. *Pink dragon scale pattern?* he thought, bemused.

"Well," Minerva spoke, "shall we see about getting sorted and going back to Hogwarts sometime this year?"

"Sounds like a plan."

Together they put the room to rights as best they could in their rather hung-over state, and gathered the clothes that had been left by the others together for the trip back to Hogwarts.

As soon as they were finished tidying and such, they began making their way up to the castle, things between them were still a little... uncomfortable.

---

Walking at a steady pace, Kingsley made his way towards the gate to enter Hogwarts grounds. Keeping an eye out for anything unusual...Death Eaters could still be about, after all...he stopped as he heard the sound of twigs snapping somewhere in the bushes he had just walked past.

Turning quickly, wand at the ready, he approached the bush. "Who's there?" he asked.

No reply was forthcoming.

Just as the sound had stopped, and Kingsley was beginning to think he had imagined it out of sheer exhaustion, something - no someone - rolled out of the bushes.

"Urgh..." the someone groaned. Kingsley slowly approached, lowering his wand as he recognised Filch, the caretaker of Hogwarts. What was he doing *here*?

"I think... I think I'm gonna be sick," Filch moaned, rolling onto his front and moving so he was on his hands and knees. Kingsley took a step back. He did not want his nice new dragonhide boots covered in *that*, thank you very much.

"Bloody You-Know-Who's defeat will be the death of me," Filch moaned, looking decidedly green.

*What was that?* Kingsley thought. *He's dead? Or is Filch so drunk he's making things up?*

Just as Kingsley was considering whether to leave him there or help him back to Hogwarts, he noticed a wand sticking out of Filch's back pocket. Why did he have one of those? The man was a Squib as far Kingsley knew. *I'd better take it from him for his own good* he thought, leaning down to grab it.

Filch didn't say anything, just burped. Kingsley backed off again quickly, thinking of his new boots. He looked at the wand a little more closely and did a double take.

*It can't be.*

"Where did you get this?" Kingsley asked, holding the wand so Filch could see what he was talking about. What the bloody hell a Squib was doing with You-Know-Who's wand was beyond Shackbolt. His first wild thought was that it was some sort of Weasley twins item, but the feel of strong magic around the item was unmistakable.

"Hey, that's mine, finders keepers and all that," Filch said, attempting to get up.

"Fraid not, Filch...and I do need to know where you got it," Kingsley repeated in his best 'I'm-an-Auror-and-can-arrest-your-arse' voice.

"Found it over there, didn't I," he answered, waving vaguely off in the direction of Hogsmeade.

"Right, because You-Know-Who would leave his wand lying around for anyone to find," Kingsley said sceptically.

"Well, what's he care, now that he's dead? Potter offered him yesterday sometime. Found the wand on my way to get a drink." Filch sat down again, settling himself under the bush he'd appeared out of.

Kingsley wanted to believe Filch...he just didn't think he could. He needed to speak to someone else, verify that it was true. Tonks maybe. She should be about somewhere. Maybe at the castle, if there were prisoners or wounded?

"Have you seen Auror Tonks?" he asked Filch, but the man had fallen asleep. Kingsley sighed and began walking again, his mind on the fact that You-Know-Who could really be dead.

*Well, he thought, this wand is pretty good evidence of the fact he is*

---

Thestral Quidditch (all portions) courtesy of DawnEB.

Threesome stuff and the real lowdown on what's between Vector and Sinistra courtesy of dracontia.

Neville/Luna getting down to business courtesy of lux\_astraea, with additions by wolfmoonshadow.

HG/SS courtesy of lux\_astraea, SS Lupin, and dracontia in chat.

Crookshanks finally getting the go-ahead from Mrs. Norris courtesy of wolfmoonshadow.

Trelawney celebrating and Flitwick getting away with it all courtesy of shalimar1981.

Kingsley's decisive moment, his encounter with Filch, and the Lupin/Minerva morning after courtesy of lux\_astraea.

## 8: When It's All Gone Pear-Shaped

Chapter 9 of 11

Been keeping up with us so far? Good. You can tell the characters what they did last night, then.

Disclaimer: We SO do not have permission to use these characters and abuse their setting. We don't make any money from their use and abuse either, which means that we'll likely be cleaning the castle for quite some time to atone for it. After all, suing us would yield pocket lint, some butterbeer caps, and a handful of Mardi Gras beads. (Hic! Egads, that was fun.)

Chapter 8: When It's All Gone Pear-Shaped

---

*Where's the bloody Hangover Relief Potion?*

Poppy frantically searched through her substantial medicine cabinet, filled with bottles of various colours and sizes. She rarely used one of the potions on herself, but she had received many an "emergency Floo call" in the middle of the night asking for some restorative or other. As if she didn't have other concerns besides the medical maladies of students and teachers.

She was definitely having an emergency this morning, however, her head pounding and her mouth salivating, and not in the way it had last night when they had managed to get into her rooms.

Retching into the toilet...Wurly Worms could stay the hell out of her toilet, thank you very much...Poppy could hear soft footsteps approach her and felt warm hands rub her back soothingly.

"Morning sickness? So soon?"

Poppy never had known a man to make a pregnancy joke after sex. But Hooch wasn't like other men, of course.

She raised her head and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "Not funny."

"I recall a pretty nurse by the name of Pomfrey who once lectured the staff to take their Hangover Potions *before* bed, at the meeting following our Christmas feast." Helping Poppy up, Hooch kissed her forehead with verdant lips.

She could smell ginger and mint in his breath. "You've had some already... but when?"

Hooch handed her the bottle she had been looking for. "Woke up in the middle of the night. Now, drink up."

Poppy was a little rankled by Hooch giving *her* the healing advice, but took her potion. It made her eyes water and stomach turn in too many directions, but she didn't feel as nauseous as before.

"Better?"

Poppy nodded slowly. "But your skin."

Some pink showed through the green on Hooch's cheeks. "It'll fade... but I'm surprised you're not troubled by my other condition."

"I want your eyes. Your arse. You."

Rolanda smiled. "At least we cleared that up now that you're sober."

As they trekked back to the bedroom, Rolanda uttered one last statement before all talking ceased.

"How did you get a toilet here? I haven't seen proper indoor plumbing in years!"

---

Neville slowly rolled over onto his back, sunlight shining into his eyes. Rubbing a hand over his face, he tried to shake off the lingering tiredness.

*What happened at that party?* he wondered, his mind strangely fuzzy.

At this, Neville's eyes snapped open and he took in his surroundings properly for the first time.

He was surrounded by the familiar vegetation of Greenhouse Three. He was as naked as the day he was born. And he wasn't alone. To his left lay Luna Lovegood, sound asleep.

A very *naked* Luna, his mind helpfully supplied, making him blush.

*That must have been some party,* he thought, completely dazed. He closed his eyes (after all, he was a gentleman) and tried to remember it.

Before his mind could supply any answers, Luna awoke. She turned over and looked at Neville sleepily. "Morning, Neville."

"Er... Hi Luna," Neville replied nervously.

She sat up and took in her surroundings, a quiet, "Oh," escaping her lips. Neville sat up too, careful to cover certain sections of his anatomy.

"Do you remember anything, Luna?" Neville ventured.

She turned to him, taking in his nudity with a smile and answered, "Sort of."

"Um... could you help me out, then? It's fuzzy for me at the moment. I remember the party and drinking the punch. I think there was something in it... I'm not sure."

"I remember coming here," Luna began, "and then you and I..." She trailed off, looking at him intently.

Neville looked about the room. Taking into account all he could see (not to mention the whole nudity business) he realised what she was getting at. A few flashes of what had happened flitted through his mind.

She smiled at his expression and looked about the greenhouse again. "Oh! Look at the mess we made!" She laughed.

Somehow, their clothes were all over one end of the greenhouse, in a wide circle around where they had been lying.

"Well, I didn't realise we were quite so, ah, energetic," Neville said, looking to Luna. As he caught her eye, both blushed a little and smiled in memory of what exactly they *had* been energetic in doing the previous night.

Neville stood, offering a hand to Luna to help her up. Turning around the room to hide his mild embarrassment that they were both naked, he realised he couldn't see some of his things. "Hmm, hope we find it all," he said, thinking about how embarrassing it would be for someone else to find... things.

"Yes, I'm missing a cucumber earring for one thing," Luna said, touching her ear.

A rustle of vegetation had them both turning round and they saw that the *Mimulus mimbletonia* was trying its hardest to direct them to something.

Luna walked over, keeping a distance from the plant just in case. She was naked and it sprayed Stinksap sometimes when provoked; she didn't care to discover first hand if it considered human nudity provocative. Much to her surprise, it merely flicked something shiny in her direction, which she recognized as her errant earring. Picking it up, she put it in and turned to the plant. "Thanks."

"Well," Neville said, "we ought to get dressed and back up to the castle, I suppose."

"Hmm, yes," Luna replied, wandering to pick her skirt from the plant it lay on.

They dressed quickly with some of the more sentient plants lending a helping... leaf... and pointing to clothes they couldn't spot. Soon they stood at the door, looking back on the room, Luna with the jar containing Bob the Nargle in one hand.

"Um," Neville began. He wasn't sure what to say really, his courage seemed to have run off again. He wanted to tell her he liked her, loved her even, but didn't know how.

Luna smiled and grasped his hand with her free one. "Come on, let's go get cleaned up and eat. We've got today, and all the days after that, ahead of us to sit and wonder. After all, everything's different now."

Neville looked at her; she really surprised him sometimes. "Yes, it is," he replied and kissed her lightly.

She smiled and pulled him out of the greenhouse and towards the castle.

---

Blaise was a bookie, not a gambler. He hadn't been about to take his life in his hands by actually *playing* Quidditch on Thestral-back, choosing instead to serve as referee from the steady platform provided by Tenebrus. Not only could he watch the action up close without being in it, he could also nudge the close calls in favour of whomever he chose. Though it was a forgone conclusion that once everyone sobered up, they would refuse to honour any bets based on his officiating.

This all would have been very well had the game not been a total disaster. The details were a little hazy, even from his excellent vantage point; but some of the stallions had evidently deemed the throwing of the Quaffle to be an act of aggression, and hovering seemed to bring out the worst in a previously amiable filly being ridden by one of the Keepers. The upshot of it was that Thestrals were not what you'd call good sports.

"Maybe they prefer Quodpot," Vaisey groaned from where he had fallen, alerting Blaise to the fact that he'd made this last observation aloud.

This was a miscalculation on Blaise's part. He blamed the punch. Unfortunately, it appeared that some very large Quidditch players blamed *him*. Now looked like a good time to make a strategic withdrawal.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Sloper had clearly mastered the 'voice that reaches into your gut and somehow stops your legs.' It was a talent that seemed endemic to the inhabitants of Gryffindor tower, and even Longbottom had managed a reasonable facsimile of it during the battle. Blaise knew there were reasons Slytherins didn't normally get along with Gryffindors, and he suspected The Voice had a lot to do with it.

There were no friendly faces in the crowd that was advancing on him. Even Frobisher was favouring him with an evil glare from where she sat tending a nasty wound on Smith's leg. Blaise opened his mouth to say something smooth and placating... and the next thing he knew, he was looking up at the inky silhouettes of the irate Thestrals as they flew away.

*The ground never seems this hard when you're walking on it.*

He had always thought that reports of seeing stars after being hit in the head was poetic exaggeration. But there definitely weren't that many stars visible in the faint glow of dawn. Despite one eye rapidly swelling shut, he managed to flinch at the angry expression on his attacker's bloodied face.

Yes, Cadwallader was a Beater. But who the hell would have guessed a Hufflepuff would hit *a person* that hard?

"Get up, Mr. 'I know all about Thestrals.' You're going to help us move the most wounded to the infirmary. And it's going to be your job to wake up Madam Pomfrey," Bradley said menacingly.

This seemed very reasonable to Blaise. At the very least, it was a lot more appealing than having his black eye accessorized with a broken nose. He meekly acquiesced to arranging makeshift stretchers for Vaisey and Smith, and led the sad little party to the infirmary.

Almost as soon as they entered the castle, strains of an animated conversation floated down the corridor.

"Neville saved me from the Nargle!"

"Well, it wasn't that hard to catch."

"And he named it Bob. Isn't that a nice name?"

*Oh, God. Just what I needed to go with my throbbing head...Looney Lovegood, in concert with Longbottom* Blaise thought tiredly. *And judging by the volume, they're getting closer. We're getting closer to them. Whatever.*

"That's all very well, Luna, but could you help me with these gauntlets?"

The Quidditch casualties encountered a remarkable sight upon rounding the bend: Luna Lovegood rhapsodizing over a curious bug in a jar, while Mandy Brocklehurst, Neville Longbottom, and a partially dressed Parvati Patil attempted to extricate Ernie MacMillan from several pieces of armour. The players in that odd little tableau froze in place, staring at the wounded and being stared at in turn.

"Game of Blind Man's Bluff. Looking for Mandy. Found a suit of armour wearing a dress," MacMillan said tersely, with the air of a man who'd told this story more times than he cared to (and with a hangover, no less).

"Quidditch on Thestral-back," Frobisher responded, equally succinctly.

They continued on their way, stepping over a few unconscious bodies. Cadwallader stopped to check for pulses before they left the passed-out where they lay. *Now he remembers he's a Hufflepuff*, Blaise thought sourly. The way to the infirmary seemed to have gotten longer during the night.

Tiredly, Blaise pulled on the bell rope next to the door of the nurse's quarters, though he felt certain the moans coming from the ward behind him would be enough to wake anyone. He waited quite a while before pulling it again, and finally decided to try knocking. As usually happens in such cases, the door chose that exact moment to open, and he almost fell face-first against a very irate witch.

"I'll be with you in a minute, young man. Cool your broom-twigs!" She slammed the door shut again.

Blaise wandered back into the treatment area and sat on an empty bed, blinking stupidly. He could have sworn he'd just seen Madam Pomfrey in nothing but a dressing gown. Not only that, but over the nurse's shoulder, he'd glimpsed a very green, very shirtless, and apparently male M...um, Hooch.

Obviously, Cadwallader had hit him even harder than he'd thought.

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Hermione woke to a crash and flurry of muffled curses ending in a pained whimper. It took her a few moments of confused reflection to ascertain that she was not, in fact, the source of either outburst, and that the person swearing sounded awfully familiar. This was rapidly followed by the realization that she was unable to move her hands and arms, capped off by the abrupt appearance of a very naked Severus Snape.

Snape turned her way, blinked at her naked figure, looked down and took note of his own lack of clothing, and promptly dropped to the ground with a muffled squeak.

Hermione was too mortified, annoyed, and just plain cold to bother with niceities. "Quit hiding and get your handcuffs off me!"

"I'm not hiding! I'm... looking for my wand. And stop yelling." The last sounded suspiciously like a whine. She noticed that he was (very impractically) only looking for it where he could be fully covered by the footboard.

"I see it," she said in the most helpful tone she could muster. "It's over there, near the bookcase, on the floor. Now, please unlock me!"

He tried to look at her without looking at her, then scanned the floor for his wand before looking/not looking at her again. It would have been funny if she weren't naked, suffering from an exceedingly sore upper body, and in need of the loo. Finally he spotted it and tried to crawl blearily forward.

"Oh, good grief! Do a wandless 'Accio' and spare your precious modesty! Though I don't see why I should care, since you haven't done a thing to spare mine, or why you should care, since..." she thought for a moment, then proceeded with slightly muzzy confidence "...I saw it all last night!"

"I think that should be a huge point loss for trying to kill a professor with your voice," he mumbled as the wand wobbled uncertainly through the air to his hand.

Standing awkwardly with his back to her, in an attempt to keep his private bits... private... she watched as Snape put his right arm over his left shoulder and pointed the wand in her direction.

*He's not going to.... yes, he really is...*

Hermione gawped internally (she would never do so literally if she could help it) at the sheer inanity of the act. Before she managed to object, he sent an 'Alohomora' in her direction. It may have worked on the handcuffs, had he not got her left thigh instead.

"Merlin, help me. Professor, just toss me a sheet already," she said wearily.

She had the distinct impression he would have read her the riot act if his head weren't threatening to explode. However, he did manage to toss the sheet clumsily over her, with a minimum of turning (and, to his credit, a minimum of looking). With a glare that dared her to comment, he draped the blanket around his waist and over one arm, evoking comical comparisons to a hung over Roman emperor.

'Alohomora!'

Nothing.

"Try 'Aperio.'"

"Yes, thank you, I'm quite aware of that one," he snapped. It proved just as ineffective as Alohomora.

"Don't you know how to open your own handcuffs?"

He blinked. "These are mine?"

"I know I don't own any green velvet covered handcuffs!"

He studied the cuffs, trying to find some clue to their operation. "Oh, God... these are so... so cliché!" he moaned.

"Well, I didn't ask for them."

He stopped, evidently lost in thought. It appeared to be painful. He blinked again, a look of recall coming across his face. "Actually... come to think of it... you did."

She opened her mouth to object, but just as quickly shut it again. Eyes wide, she thought, *Oh, God... I did.*

There was a moment of silence. Then Hermione made one more suggestion. "Bombarda?"

She rethought the suggestion as she took in his unsteady aim. "Wait!"

CRASH!

Too late.

Splinters of wood exploded around her. Hermione shrieked; Snape moaned. On some distracted level, she realized this was a repeat of last night's soundtrack, only with very different causation.

"I'm levitating the canopy, get your wand and deal with the other cuff," he ordered crankily. She decided against arguing. After a few frustrating moments, she gave up on trying to break the cuff itself and lasered a neat slot in the remaining bedpost. Leaving Snape to deal with the sagging remains of his bed, she marched to the loo, with as much dignity as possible under the circumstances, clutching the sheet around her.

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In an office quite close to where the handcuff drama was playing out, Padma was waking up with a bit of a pain in her head, a heavy arm around her waist, and no more clothing on her body than her Ravenclaw tie. She gulped, wincing at the taste in her mouth. A masculine snore sounded almost in her ear, scaring her fully alert.

*What have I done? Parvati's the wild one. It's not like me to wake up with strange men!*

Padma tried to reign in her rising hysteria with a little logic. After all, it technically couldn't be a stranger, since she knew everyone in the castle. She could reason out who it was while she waited for her memory to reassert itself. She opened her eyes, wincing a little. The spiked punch had taken its toll, though she didn't quite have a full-on hangover. First observation: a flat wooden surface, about three inches from her nose. A desk, then. And walls full of shelves... shelves full of nasty things in jars...

*Oh, no. Oh, Krishna, Vishnu, and Shiva, please, please, PLEASE, tell me I didn't sleep with Professor Snape!*

For several minutes, Padma fought the urge to cry. Finally, she drew upon some echo of courage within herself and looked down at the arm around her waist.

It was young. Long fingered. And, oh, glorious morning, freckled. She almost cried, this time with relief.

"Ron!" she cried out happily, rolling in his grasp and kissing his slightly open, slightly drooling mouth.

He woke with a start. When she pulled away, she realised that his eyes had probably been open and bulging almost comically throughout the kiss.

"P-p-padma?" he stuttered. So far, so good. He not only knew which twin she was (maybe the tie had helped, but she decided to be optimistic about it), but he seemed pleasantly shocked rather than upset. "Oh, right... the dare."

Right. The dare. It was coming back to her, including why the dare had come about. Parvati had most unorthodox ideas about matchmaking when she was drunk.

"Um..." He seemed to pick just that moment to become aware of their mutual nudity. The blush was sort of cute, she decided, especially since they were both wearing it. "I had a really nice time," he said, handing her bra over as if it were a bouquet and they had spent a night out doing something more respectable than shagging on the desk in Snape's office.

"So did I," she admitted, shrugging her way into the garment. He streaked his way to the door and quickly returned with her skirt and his boxers. He was even gentleman enough to automatically hand her the one remaining robe they found on the stairs out of the dungeon. For some reason, the rest of their clothes had disappeared.

"I'll, ah, just walk you back to your tower," he said, still blushing a bit. Padma was now officially pleased with Parvati's matchmaking abilities. He could have just as well left her to her own devices and made a run for his own dormitory, in hopes of minimizing the number of people who saw him in his underwear. Suddenly, he stopped short.

"Oh, bollocks!"

"What's wrong?"

"We left Harry's cloak in the dungeon!"

Padma couldn't help herself. She didn't know if it was the tousled red hair, the bemused expression, or the awkward courtesy, but she had to kiss him. Right there in the corridor outside the Great Hall. With her just wearing a school robe over her bra and skirt, and him in his ridiculously adorable phone-booth-red boxers.

---

While Miss Granger did whatever it was she needed to do, Snape got dressed. He would have preferred to wash first, were it not for the fact that there was a young woman of the student persuasion in his bathroom and he had some hazy yet damning memories of what happened the last time he was in said room with her. His head was still pounding, but it would probably be more convenient to wait until AFTER Minerva castrated him for sleeping with a student. That way, he could deal with all the pain at once.

*Why did Miss Granger have to save me? Just so I could enjoy the poetic justice of being killed by my employer and soon-to-be-former friend?*

He surveyed the damage to his bed as he attempted to dress in some semblance of proper clothing.

*Oh, well. At least I finally got to use the handcuffs.*

As if on queue, the inappropriately-consorted-with-student in question stepped out of his ensuite, wrapped in a towel and an air of mildly injured dignity.

"I'll be going now," she said. He thanked anything remotely holy that she did not raise her voice.

*I can hear the charges now. Drunk while on duty...*

She continued in the same low, stiffly reasonable tone, "Perhaps it would be best if we'd forget this happened..."

*Restraining a student to the bed and shagging the life out of her...no one will ever believe the handcuffs were HER idea...*

"...and resume a strictly professional teacher/student relationship."

*Handling a student's underwear... bugger, still doing that, actually...*

She finally located her blouse and shook it out, apparently calculating how to slip it on without removing the towel. He removed the red bra from his pocket (resolutely refusing to acknowledge that he'd been unthinkingly fondling it) and 'Scourgified' it. It seemed a more gentlemanly thing to do than to hand it back covered in chocolate. He cleared his throat to get her attention.

"You will probably want this first, Miss Granger."

Blinking, she looked at the bra, then back to him. "Do you make a habit of collecting people's under-things, professor?"

It was his turn to blink. "It's not... yours?" He looked from the garment in question to her towel-clad chest. "Ah... my mistake. It's a bit large."

Her rapidly reddening face (quickly outshining the undergarment in his hand) was his first clue that he had just said A Very Stupid Thing. So stupid, it deserved capital letters and a place in a hall of shame of some sort. Even being painfully hungover was no excuse for that level of idiocy. He had spent so many years among the dunderheads that they were finally rubbing off on him.

"Yes, you'll just have to return it to the large-chested hussy you were shagging BEFORE you kidnapped me from the bath." Her voice was remarkably even. It also sounded remarkably like Minerva's before she hexed the living crap out of someone, though it lacked the heavy brogue.

She buttoned her blouse and settled the towel around her waist, Transfiguring it into a reasonable facsimile of a school skirt.

"I did NOT shag anyone else last night," he said. It was a shame the post-drunken tremor in his voice undermined the certainty of that statement.

"Oh, really? What are you doing with it, then? If you're contemplating cross-dressing, you should stay with something a little more realistic for your build." Hermione strode out of his bedroom, and the slam of the door to his chambers reached his ears, competing with the spinning thoughts and pressure-pain within his skull.

Snape swiftly found the potion that would ease his headache, swallowed it down, and left to find her. To hell with bearing pain gracefully.

She didn't run from him, but neither did she look at him as he fell into step beside her. "I was NOT with anyone else last night! The bra was wrapped around the Sorting Hat..."

"Right. Did a suit of armour provide you with the matching knickers? "

He ignored the fact that this was something very much like what he would have said under similar circumstance, and ploughed on. "More to the point, I know I didn't sleep with anyone else because, even stinking drunk, I am NOT going to sleep with a dunderhead...and despite your choice in friends, you have never fit in that category. In fact, your intellect... foremost among other things... is thoroughly appealing. I regret if that offends you, but I prefer that you be offended by the truth than by the absurd idea that you were just the object of some drunken frolic." *Besides, I would have remembered becoming closely acquainted with a pair of knockers capable of filling that bra, hangover or no.*

Just then, Snape *did* remember seeing a female figure which could have filled out the brassier in question, and the circumstances under which he saw her. He promptly resolved to Evanescio said garment as soon as he returned to his quarters. Along with the rug it had landed upon. He might get rid of the coat in which he'd pocketed it as well. And then, he'd prostrate himself before Filius and beg to have the associated images removed from his memory.

"I'm not offended."

"Sorry?"

She slowed down, though didn't quite go so far as to stop and look him in the face. "Last night the Weasley twins got out of the infirmary and spiked the punch at the party."

Snape forgot for a moment that he was a professor, in the presence of a student, desperately trying to rebuild his trashed professionalism, and said a very bad word.

"I don't care for the language, sir, but I can't argue with the sentiment. It's actually not as bad as it sounds. They used a potion that relaxes people. Slightly loosens inhibitions. Mixed with alcohol, it may have had a stronger effect than originally intended, but I was hardly pissed beyond belief. And you did not...kidnap...me from the bath."

He let the implication sink in for a moment. "In that case..." Snape trailed off, considering whether to make the offer. "We continue as before, not speaking of last night. And, if you are willing, we could... after you graduate... meet somewhere. For dinner," he hastened to clarify.

She was silent just long enough to make him believe he was in profound trouble.

"I accept. A date only...no promise of anything else."

"Of course."

The gravity of the moment was shattered by an unearthly yowl. Snape drew his wand to defend his witch.*no, his student, still a student for another two months..from...*

"Crookshanks!" Hermione screamed. An orange missile streaked down the corridor in the direction of the Great Hall, followed by an irate Mrs. Norris. Filch's erstwhile companion was apparently spouting the feline equivalent of hair-raising profanity, judging by the state of both animals' fur.

Hermione took off after them. Snape followed, reasoning that they were heading in the direction the Great Hall and that it was as good a place as any to start assessing the damage. He almost ran into her when she stopped for a moment and waved her wand at chest level before continuing at a fast clip.

*That is the most innovative use of a Levitation Charm I've ever seen*

---

Continuing his journey towards the gates, Kingsley tried to restrain the wild sense of hope that it was indeed true.

Yet again, a little up the path, Kingsley heard the snapping of branches.*Strange*, he thought, looking around, *there aren't any bushes just here. Where's that coming from?*

A loud crash followed...the snapping of a large branch off the tree Kingsley stood near. Following the branch on its rapid descent to the ground was Tonks.

"Blimmin heck," she said. "Landed right on me arse."

She stood up, rubbing her rump and looking mighty annoyed. It wasn't until she turned around that she saw Kingsley, who was gawping at her, dumbstruck. Not surprising really, she was only wearing knickers and a t-shirt that *definitely* wasn't hers.

"Wotcher, Kingelsy... I mean Kingersy... no, that's not right either, is it?" She was still a little drunk and wobbled a bit as she spoke.

"Not quite, no. Erm, what were you doing on the tree?" he couldn't help but ask.

"Sleepin'," she replied. "Bit chilly, isn't it?"

Kingsley didn't quite know what to say to that.

"Oh yeah, did y'hear? Old-Thingy-Bob's dead, Harry did it yesterday. Great, right? None of them Death Munchers on the loose either, we reckon."

"That's great, Tonks," Kingsley said cautiously. He wasn't sure whether that could count as an official report, seeing as she was drunk, but it'd have to do for now. "Now give me a minute and I'll transfigure you something to wear..."

*Right*, he thought, trying to recall the wand movement for the only clothing spell he could remember.*It's a bloody good job Transfiguration isn't of much importance in the Auror exams. I'd never have gotten in otherwise.*

"Oh hey, Kengsliy, guess what!" Tonks babbled excitedly. "I got me a tattoo last night, let me just find it for yer..."

Kingsley thought harder, trying and remember the wand movement as Tonks half turned and pulled her knickers away to reveal her bum cheek.

"Nope, not there..."

"Tonks, you can, ah, show me another time OK," he protested.

She then continued to do the same on the other side, so Kingsley, being a gentleman, closed his eyes, still trying to remember that wand movement.

"...Nope, not that, either. Oh, I got a bruise from the tree... ouch... Oh! Oh!" Tonks yelled. "Kignesly, I found it. Look!"

He'd remembered the wand movement, so he looked, casting as he opened his eyes. As he did, he read what exactly the tattoo in question said... and as a result, missed the third 'swish' in the movement. *Moody?!?* Kingsley thought. *Oh dear, Nimue...*

'POOF!'

Instead of a jumper-covered Tonks, in her place now stood a small sheep.

"Ooops," Kingsley said. "Er... hang on, I'll try to undo it,"

A few unsuccessful incantations later and Tonks was still a sheep. "You just wait here. I'll be back with someone to sort you out. OK?"

By way of reply, he received a 'Baa' and the sight of a wooly tail bobbing as Tonks the sheep bounded off toward the castle.

*Oh well*, he thought, somewhat helplessly, *at least she's on Hogwarts grounds*. With an embarrassed glance at his colleague's retreating cute wooly tail, Kingsley braced himself to break the news to the world.

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Blaise's fall from grace, and Ron and Padma coming to an understanding courtesy of dracontia.

Rolanda (Roland?) and Poppy's morning-after sickness courtesy of SS Lupin.

Kingsley's continuing confusion and Neville and Luna's muddled wakeup courtesy of lux\_astraea.

SS/HG reconstructing the evidence courtesy of SS Lupin, dracontia, and lux\_astraea in chat, with highly appreciative acknowledgements to the original, far more elaborate encounter by shalimar 1981 (some version of which possibly coming soon to an archive near you...)

## 9: When Whatever Has Hit the Fan Is Dealt With

*Chapter 10 of 11*

Let's just put it this way: all that 'night before' had to end up somewhere.

Disclaimer: This frisky little farce is based on concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who might very well freak out if she saw what we were doing with them. No one involved in this bold multinational venture makes any money off it, and at this point, we will consider ourselves lucky to escape a virtual stoning by the fandom at large. Unless they're all just so happy to read something *intentionally* funny that we're forgiven.

Chapter 9: When Whatever Has Hit the Fan Is Dealt With

The 'pop' heralding Shackbolt's Apparition into the Ministry Atrium seemed amplified because it was so deserted. Which, considering the ungodly hour, wasn't that much of a surprise.

He knew *someone* needed to inform the Ministry, and seeing as it was his fault the Auror on duty was now an ewe...though he'd have to have a serious chat with her later as to why she was pissed out of her skull on duty...he supposed he ought to be the one to do it.

He made his way past the Floo fireplaces, all closed off for the moment, and past the security stand where Eric usually sat. Letting himself in...after all, he was an Auror...he stood near the lifts in the small hall and pondered.

"Right, if I were an overeager, overcompensating employee that felt the overriding urge to be at work at this time in the morning, who, and where would I be?" he mused aloud.

"You'll be wanting the Weasley boy," a voice muttered in the silence.

"...Hello? Who's there?"

A loud sigh came from the corner and he moved to inspect its origin.

"Over here," the voice spoke, louder than before. It was a painting.*Figures really, no one else is about right now.*

"I said, you'll be wanting the young Weasley boy. He's the only one ever here at this hour. Well, him and his silly little assistant."

"Oh, cheers. Thanks for that," Kingsley replied and got into a lift.

Once on the right level and having ascertained the right corridor, he set off at a brisk pace. As he neared the door to the outer office of Percy Weasley, he saw it was open.

Being an Auror, it was a talent to be able to sneak up on people, and Kingsley wasn't one to waste a chance trying to do it...all in the name of practice, of course.

"Why... yes, Minister... thank you, Minister. It's an honour." Kingsley could hear Percy Weasley, muttering to himself in his office.

"Oh no, Minister, of course I appreciate the thought, but honestly this promotion is all I ever dreamed of. You don't need to give me that, too... Well if you insist... Thank you ever so much, Minister."

By now Kingsley was standing in front of Percy Weasley's desk, waiting to see when the man realised he was being watched. He was also trying~~not~~ to laugh at the little scenario it seemed the man had running in his head.

"Yes, Minister, I..." Percy's eyes opened for a brief second, closing before his brain realised he was not alone. "Arghhh! Holy mother of pearl! You scared me," he yelled,

jumping out of his seat.

*Oh, how I love doing that to people* Kingsley thought to himself. *I'm good.* Kingsley suppressed the urge to grin, simply looking as if he hadn't meant to do that at all and uttered a small, "I'm sorry about that."

It seemed to work, as Percy quickly composed himself and coughed as if to hide his embarrassment. "Well, good morning, Mr....?" Percy began.

"Oh, hello, I'm Auror Shacklebolt," Kingsley replied.

"Sorry, Mr. Weasley," came a voice from right behind Kingsley.

"Hells bells!" Kingsley exclaimed. She'd snuck up *on him!* He blamed it on tiredness... Yes, that was it, sheer exhaustion. She walked around him, bit of a grin on her face and addressed Mr. Weasley.

"I only just got back. Here's your juice and fruit. Anything else you need?"

"No, no, that's fine, thank you," he replied. She left, closing the door behind her.

"How can I help you, Auror Shacklebolt?" Percy Weasley asked from his chair behind a desk almost as wide as the office itself.

"I have news about You-Know-Who, and as you're currently the highest ranking person in the Ministry at the moment I came to you," Kingsley said.

"Yes?"

"Well, it appears that he's dead." Kingsley said. No other way about it, really.

"Do you have any proof," Percy began, pouring out some juice into his glass. "I mean, I can hardly take your word alone, can I?"

"Of course not, I have here You-Know-Who's wand," Kingsley said, taking it out of his robes. "I confiscated it from a Squib up at Hogwarts. He is one of the people who confirmed the death."

Percy looked at the wand sceptically. "And how, exactly, can you be sure that this *is his* wand?"

Kingsley had been prepared for this part. "All Aurors have to know what certain wands look like. This one has been on top of that list for a long time now."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's so that people can be identified. Polyjuice and glamours can change your appearance, but people still tend to use the same wand."

"Oh, well, I suppose that makes sense," Percy replied. "Well, I ought to start sorting things out. Ministry official business, you know." He stood and began ushering Kingsley out of his office, not a mean feat for someone possessing marginally less height and substantially less physical presence than the Auror. "I'm sure you've heard about my organisational abilities, yes? We need to get the Minister informed, of course. That's the most important thing. Then we need to sort out press arrangements and photos. Oh, yes, the photos. Miss Chang! Miss Chang, come here," he practically shouted, making Kingsley wince. He was still unsure whether half of what had just been said was actually aimed at him.

"Yes, Mr. Weasley?" Her voice sounded a little strained.

"Right," he began, when she appeared in the doorway, "I need you to do a few things for me."

She looked at him, then back to the pastries and coffee on her desk longingly. Food was off the list of priorities, obviously. "What do you need, Mr. Weasley?"

"I need you to get in touch with Peter, sorry, Mr. Parker," he replied. "Tell him it's urgent and an opportunity not to be missed. Yes, I believe he will be the best photographer to use; he's very discreet. Send an owl straight away and ask him to meet me at Hogwarts' gates in about an hour...sooner, if he can."

Percy turned back to Kingsley, who could just see the ideas running through the man's mind. *Oh, dear Merlin... what have I done?*

"Well, Auror Shacklebolt, I do believe I have an important missive to write to Minister Scrimgeour, so if you'll please excuse me," he said, ushering Kingsley the rest of the way out of his office.

"Well, actually I..." Kingsley began.

"No, no, you've done your part. Go have fun, celebrate and all that. I'll sort it all out," Percy interrupted. "After all, you did come all the way here, and you must be tired."

The door shut in Kingsley's face. *How did he manage to get me out of his office?* he wondered. Turning to address Weasley's assistant, Miss Chang, he found her absent, having run off to do as she was bid.

He was just wondering if he should stay and then go up to Hogwarts with Percy and Miss Chang...who knew whether all of the Death Eaters ~~had~~ been dealt with after all (it wouldn't do to have even an annoying bureaucrat injured, or worse), when...

"Chang, Chang... MISS CHANG!" Percy's voice came from the other side of the office door.

"She's not here," Kingsley yelled back.

The door opened and a now red-faced Weasley came out, looking about. "Where has that silly girl gone to now?"

"Well, you did just tell her to send a note to the photographer."

"Oh, yes, I suppose I did." He sighed. "Are you still here for a reason?"

"Yes, actually. I've decided to escort you and your assistant to Hogwarts, seeing as we're heading in the same direction. For safety reasons of course; don't want to risk anything what with Death Eaters possibly still about."

Percy looked at him for a moment. "Yes, yes, I suppose that would be best. Just try not to get in the way, yes?"

Shaking his head in amusement, he followed Percy into his office. He was shocked that Percy's first thoughts had been of publicity, of all things.

"Right, now I've written the letter to the Minister, explaining what's happened and my idea for heading up to Hogwarts for a photo shoot and press conference of sorts. That needs sending off. Oh, I'll just add that I've sent for a photographer so he doesn't need another. That way the news for You-Know-Who's death can be announced at the right time and make the photo shoot seem more 'spontaneous' and all that..."

Whether Percy was addressing him or talking to himself, Kingsley wasn't quite sure, but it was amusing to try and decipher what he was saying at top speed and without



pausing for breath. Come to think of it, he reminded him a little of Molly when she was in 'arranging' mode.

"...It's a shame the Floo network isn't running right now, it would make things so much easier. Oh, I do wish she would hurry up. The girl is always off in another world." He went to his desk and began sealing the missive addressed to the Minister.

"Mr. Weasley, the letter you've written to the Minister...it is under a Privacy charm, isn't it? We wouldn't want it to be intercepted by the wrong people, after all."

"Good idea, I'll do that now. No that wouldn't do at all,*Occulo*, there we go."

Miss Chang then returned, slightly out of breath. "Mr. Weasley, the letter is on its way. Was there anything else you wanted me to do?"

"Yes, could you get my things ready to go to Hogwarts please, the usual: parchment, self-inking quill and so forth. You'll need to get both of our cloaks also." He replied without looking up from what he was doing. She sighed lightly; taking one last glance at her breakfast, she disappeared again.

"Right, we'll get this sent off then arrange press coverage and leave for Hogwarts. Oh, I must say this will be brilliant for my career. I never imagined I'd be the one able to arrange this." He picked up the letter and then took off at a brisk pace towards the corridor. Kingsley just shook his head and followed on once more.

Having sent the letter off to the Minister on the 'best owl available,' Percy, followed by his assistant and Kingsley, headed to the Atrium on level eight.

"Right, now everyone got everything?" Percy asked. "Cloaks, my bag, and wand, yes, all in order. Well, to Hogwarts gate it is then."

Three short 'pops' could be heard in the empty Atrium as they Apparated away.

---

If there was anything left in his stomach, Harry didn't need to know about it. If there were any traces of last night on his skin after all the scrubbing he did in the shower (no baths...he blanched at brief flashes of memory), he didn't need to know about those, either. What he did need were his glasses, which were obligingly transported to the edge of the blink from wherever they'd been tossed the night before, and the soft, thick towel that appeared on the wall in response to his need to dry off. Good old Room of Requirement.

But there were some things he had to know, and the room wasn't supplying them. Neither was his brain, which felt a bit like a tossed salad at the moment. And there was nothing reassuring about the images it kept tossing at him.

He knocked desperately on the door Ginny had disappeared behind. "Ginny, come out of there! I'm not going to yell through the door!"

When no reply was forthcoming, he yelled.

"Damn it! Ginny, what happened last night?"

She peeked out, flinching at the sight of his wild expression. Her hair was plastered damply to her head, and the oversized terrycloth robe made her look tiny and forlorn. "Don't you know?"

"I keep seeing flashes. Bits and pieces, nothing beginning-to-end. It's all jumbled."

"Me, too. I remember the bath, and...Oh, God! Hermione!" Ginny went so pale, Harry was afraid she might faint. "What have I done?"

It couldn't be... but this triggered another cascade of memories, assuring Harry that it was. It also reminded him of someone else who had been present during everything that had happened last night. He channelled his confused frustration into pounding on the other door.

"Get out of there, Malfoy!" When no response was forthcoming, Harry Summoned his wand and blasted the door off its hinges. Mercilessly, he shut off the taps and wrenched a shivering, wet, sniffling Draco from behind the shower curtain, roughly shoving a towel at him as he forced him from the room. Draco pulled away and hid in the meagre sanctuary of the rumpled bedclothes, stifling his tears in a pillow.

"What did we drink?" Harry was still shouting, half angry, half frantic.

Ginny shivered violently despite the robe. "I'm th-thinking... H-Hermione s-said that F-fred and G-george p-put a potion of theirs in the p-punch. It's a-a variation on a C-calming Draught...relaxes p-people who are shy." She took a deep breath, sinking to a seat at the foot of the bed so she could speak without shivering so badly. "I remember them working on it, now that I think of it. None of the ingredients are aphrodisiacs. It must have been a lot... more relaxing... than they thought."

Harry stared down at the blankets. Muffled sniffing still provided the soundtrack for the scene. "So, everything we did last night...was something we would have been willing to do anyway, if we weren't worried about it?"

"That's how it's supposed to work."

"Does this mean that we need..." He couldn't articulate the thought, mainly because he wasn't sure which direction it was going. "I...honestly, I haven't seen myself as a sex maniac before." He sank to a seat not far from Ginny on the blanket, more bewildered than anything else. Harry was tragically accustomed to everything in his life going utterly pear-shaped in a matter of seconds, so he was getting good at moving past shock, bargaining, and denial into acceptance.

"I don't know! I still love you. But last night was really good." She reached for him and he allowed her to. Ginny still looked vulnerable with her hair slicked against her head. He charmed it dry, and things felt a bit more normal.

"And you're...you're okay with it?" Harry really wasn't ready to examine the fact that the only thing worrying him about last night was Ginny's feelings.

"Actually... yeah." Her voice got a little odd, and she glanced at the quivering outline under the covers.

Harry pulled her close, studying her eyes intently. They glanced over to Draco at the same moment before their eyes met again. Both Harry and Ginny shivered with shock and pleasure as they were assailed with flashbacks from last night. With none of the expectations, prejudices, fears, or inhibitions of half a lifetime in the way, it had just felt incredible...maybe even right.

"I still love you, too. Maybe... there's room for one more," he whispered. They crept to the head of the bed. Awkwardly, through the blankets, they patted and caressed their erstwhile partner, trying to comfort him.

---

Something seemed amiss about Hogwarts as they entered the gates, though Percy couldn't put his finger on it immediately. At first, he thought it was excessive stillness. But that didn't seem quite right, as there was this...

"What is that sound?"

Percy frowned briefly at his assistant for interrupting his train of thought. "That was precisely what I was about to ask Auror Shacklebolt," he said, deciding to affect a condescendingly approving tone as if he'd just been waiting for her to do her duty as an assistant and articulate the source of his discomfort.

They stopped and listened. By holding exceedingly still, he could perceive a sort of low-level polyphonic moan, lurking at the edge of human hearing.

Shacklebolt cast several spells before allowing them to proceed. "Whatever it is, it doesn't appear to be Dark in origin," he assured them.

"Perhaps it's coming from the hospital wing," Percy said, a speculative gleam coming into his eye. "The sounds of the wounded being tended to by Hogwarts' own Angel of Mercy, Madam Pomfrey."

Miss Chang quickly forestalled any incredulous interjections from Shacklebolt by whispering, "Preparing for the reporters."

"Quite," Percy said. "Mustn't be without a proper quote on these occasions."

"Of course," Shacklebolt said. Percy idly wondered why the words came out so strangled. "Perhaps the Minister will want to use that one."

Percy brightened. "Do you really think..."

He stopped in mid-sentence as they encountered the half-open door to the entrance hall. An empty robe lay on the steps, ominously half inside, half outside. "Did the battle reach the school itself?" Cho asked in a hushed voice.

Shacklebolt drew his wand and cautiously led the way into the hall. Percy permitted Miss Chang to nearly huddle close to him in her apparent nervousness. It wouldn't do for an engaged man to actually properly huddle with his female assistant, even in a completely platonic manner, but the poor girl did seem a bit twitchy.

Their forward progress was halted by a familiar voice speaking in a very ragged, unfamiliar tone of voice. "Keep your hair on, Mr. Zabini, I'm sure we can get them all sorted. But they'll have to settle for rest, fluids, and Pain Relief Potions, as we just don't stock that much for hangovers."

Percy pushed past Kingsley, ignoring the Auror's shout. With Chang and Shacklebolt hard on his heels, he pushed open the doors of the Great Hall...

...to a come upon a scene of utter anarchy.

Percy stood blinking for several vital moments, an act over which he would remonstrate himself sternly later. Time was of the essence in damage control scenarios, after all. He would be especially hard on himself with regards to the mostly irrelevant first words he blurted out, to wit:

"What is this sheep doing here?"

"BAA!"

Madam Pomfrey's impromptu assistant, his dark face slightly grayish above his dishevelled Slytherin tie, answered tiredly. "We're not exactly sure. In fact, we haven't figured out if it's a sheep, or... someone."

"WHAT?"

The sheep gave a frightened bleat and galloped off down the length of the Great Hall.

Neither the bleat nor the yell went over well with the fellow Percy decided must be Zabini. "Please don't yell! There was, um, some drinking, some dares, and no one can remember if..."

It took approximately one second for Percy to decide to sweep it all under the rug so it didn't reflect badly on HIM.

"Oh, no. No. Oh, NO YOU DON'T! This is going to be a DIGNIFIED and SOLEMN affair!" Percy's face grew redder and redder as he 'Evanesco'-ed food messes and Summoned robes to cover underclothed people. "THE MINISTER OF MAGIC IS GOING TO BE HERE IN HALF AN HOUR...SO YOU ALL BLOODY WELL NEED TO TAKE SOME POTIONS AND GET OVER IT!"

Some of the injured began groaning, capturing his attention. "You eight! You were injured in the battle, right?"

"Thestral Quidditch," one he recognized as Vaisey grunted from somewhere under a bandage.

"No one mentions Thestrals or Quidditch! Got that?" He buttonholed Madame Pomfrey, still very much the worse for wear despite having managed to keep down the contents of a vial of Hangover Relief Potion. "Patch them up as best you can, so they can at least sit up for the photo. Damn it, Ron, PUT ON A ROBE!" This last he directed frantically at his youngest brother, who had just stumbled into the room wearing nothing but boxers and a confused yet pleased expression.

"I NEED HOUSE-ELVES, FRONT AND CENTER!"

In a volley of 'pops' so simultaneous they mimicked the detonation of a significant explosive device, the entire house-elf population of Hogwarts appeared in the Great Hall.

"You lot! Fetch school robes for anyone not properly dressed! I want a dozen of you to search the corridors for anyone passed out or roaming about being unruly and bring them here. And the rest of you, clean up this mess!"

There were so many things present in the Hall that shouldn't have been there that Percy overlooked something that should have been there, but wasn't. Or rather, *someone*. Shacklebolt was a bit more alert.

"Where's Potter?"

Percy whirled on a harried and confused-looking Shacklebolt. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WHERE'S POTTER?"

"Does Harry Potter need finding?" A house-elf, in clothes so multicoloured that they appeared to have been vomited by the Hogwarts Achievement of Arms popped up in front of Percy. The creature's huge ears were quivering with excitement.

"Yes, he bloody well needs finding! We need a bloody damned Saviour of the Wizarding World in the foreground of the photograph, or the Minister is going to..."

"Dobby is finding him right away!"

One more 'pop' of house-elf Disapparation was added to the din.

Percy clenched his fist around his wand and set his jaw. "Miss Chang," he said stiffly, "follow that sheep."

---

The warmth of soothing hands gradually penetrated the cold ball of misery (and the residue of being hungover) surrounding Draco. Four hands, distributing their caresses over his back, arms, and through his hair. Flashbacks to more intimate caresses shocked his system. Someone charmed his hair dry, so it was no longer dripping coldly down his neck. Soft words threaded their way into his ears, counterbalancing the bittersweet musk of sex that permeated the bedding.

"Don't cry, pet."

"Shh, baby. We'll work something out. We'll make it better."

When he felt the soft touch of lips on his ear...not kissing, but whispering, which was still remarkable and wonderful...he dared to lift his hot, tear-stained face from the

pillow. Harry slipped a handkerchief into his hand, and Ginny Summoned a damp cloth to wipe away the tears. It almost made his sniffing worse; up until this moment, he'd thought that only Vince and Greg were able to handle his emotional morning-after-a-bender state.

"I didn't know about the punch... That wasn't supposed to... I mean, I just... wanted..."

Ginny closed her hand around his. "It's okay. I guess we all did."

Draco took a deep breath, trying to speak around the painful knot in his throat. "I couldn't even admit it to myself... I had to become really, really good at Occlumency... My father will kill me when he finds out..." he trailed off in a fearful whimper. Ginny leaned in closer, not relinquishing her hold on Draco's hand.

Harry wrapped one arm around each of them. "He's never getting out of Azkaban. And if he did, he would never get past me."

"Ooh, he's going all heroic." Much to Draco's chagrin, it came out simpering rather than sarcastic. He couldn't help himself. He'd been wanting to snuggle into Harry's protective embrace for longer than he was willing to admit, and was dead tired of pretending otherwise. After a brief, half-hearted effort, he also gave up resenting Ginny's cuddly, warm, presence, which actually enhanced the experience.

Especially when she glanced slyly between Harry and Draco and giggled. "It's a wonder I can walk this morning."

Draco shifted carefully. The potions provided by the Room of Requirement hadn't been able to completely erase his discomfort. "Mmm, I know the feeling."

Draco and Ginny exchanged a sort of 'we have a secret, don't we?' look, each suddenly feeling much more sanguine about the other's presence in the same bed as Harry. The Harry everyone was familiar with showed up just then, blushing brilliantly.

With a glance from under his eyelashes that was a cute, shy echo of last night's seductive looks, Draco studied Harry's glowing cheeks. "I love it when he blushes like that." He followed it up with a stifled giggle.

Harry tried to squirm away, but they held him fast. "I know," Ginny sighed, snuggling closer. "He's adorable."

Harry mumbled something unintelligible that might have been a permutation of 'Give over, you two' and squeezed his eyes shut in lieu of actually being able to hide his face.

"I think this will work out nicely. He's so absolutely edible that we'll have to take it in shifts to beat the obsessed fans away from him," Ginny whispered into Draco's ear. Absolute perfection. She not only felt nice, Draco liked the way she thought.

Really, there was only room for two obsessed fans in Harry's life.

He whispered back, "That sounds like a plan."

---

Ginny decided to pull Harry back into negotiations before he died of unnecessary modesty. "You know, being close like this is so nice. Could we try to do something... maybe like we did this morning, before we freaked out?"

"That's one thing I remember clearly," Harry asserted, nudging her in between them.

"I'm definitely not up for anything more involved yet," Draco said impishly, cuddling against her back.

Harry looked into her eyes as if pondering very seriously what to do, before bestowing a decisive kiss. They were both shaking by the time he pulled away and let her sink to her back. Draco was waiting for her, and only hesitated slightly before kissing her just as deliciously, if a little less forcefully. She could add breathless to trembling by the time they were through, and she looked expectantly between both men. It was all the encouragement they needed to enter into a kiss of their own, and God on a Cleansweep, it was so hot she almost forgot to *breathe*.

But it wasn't until they found the courage to actually kiss each other all three at once...a gentle brushing of three sets of lips that somehow met in the middle...that they actually dared hope it might be all right, after all.

As she drifted on a cloud of threesome-y bliss, the inconvenient part of Ginny's mind which had been silenced by the potion asserted itself. It sounded suspiciously like her mum.

*What about marrying Harry?*

*What about it? We still have time to think about it. And if we do, nothing says Draco couldn't visit... on a more or less permanent basis...*

*Ginevra Molly Weasley! Are you seriously considering living in sin with two men?*

*Um... it's more like mutually agreed upon adultery with two men. Something like that.*

She drowned out the resulting mental shriek with a pleasant meditation on Page 113.

*POP!*

Ginny had a feeling that if Dobby's eyes could get any bigger, they would.

"I hope this is important," Harry mumbled, sounding vaguely grumpy. Draco gave a petulant whine, and Ginny fully concurred with both of them. Just when they were getting comfy again...

"Dobby is terribly sorry to be interrupting, but Ministry people are asking for Harry Potter, and..."

Someone's stomach grumbled. Dobby paused, giving a discreet cough. "Is Harry Potter wanting breakfast for...for three...before going to the Great Hall?"

Harry sighed. "Maybe you could bring us a little something once we go downstairs. It sounds like the Aurors need confirmation that it's over, and better to give it to them sooner rather than later. Just clothes, for the moment."

The room summoned the requisite garments and Dobby handed them out. "These are for Harry Potter... these are Mizzweezy's... these are Mr. Malfoy's..."

"What? No, 'Draco Malfoy is a very bad boy'?" Ginny teased, buttoning herself up just enough for decency. Harry rolled his eyes and headed for the door, barefoot and with his shirt and tie hanging from his shoulders. Draco shot her a dirty look and made his own half-dressed exit.

Dobby aimed a crafty glance at Draco's neck; for the barest fraction of a second, the normally earnest house-elf looked a trifle Kreacher-like. "Dobby is still suspecting Draco Malfoy is a bad boy, but he is Harry Potter's bad boy now, so Dobby leaves it."

Ginny couldn't stop giggling all the way down the stairs. In no way did Harry and Draco discourage her from doing so by taking it in turns to grab and try to quiet her. Particularly when they opted to do so by covering her mouth with theirs.

---

Minerva was made of stern stuff. She had outdistanced Remus in her efforts to reach the castle...he'd waved her on, both too embarrassed to accept any help from her and too tired to keep up.

Yes, she may have awakened in bed with one of her employees, hungover, wearing nothing but that teddy (damnit, a witch needed to feel sexy if she was going to project efficient authority day in and day out), but that wasn't going to stop her from marching back into her school in proper Headmistress fashion. With only a few borrowed garments to cover said teddy.

She could march just as effectively though an obscure back entrance.

---

"What was in that punchbowl?" The Poltergeist addressed his question to the crumpled wad of fabric at his side. He vaguely recalled attempting a cannonball into the large bowl, but after that...

Slowly, the Sorting Hat uncurled itself from the armpit it'd been nestled in, then tilted its tip upward, as if to return Peeves' stare.

Peeves blinked a few times, then attempted a simple sentence. "What happened to all the fun?"

"What fun? One moment the Creevey boy grabs me, everyone demands to know who they belong with, then I'm forgotten again. Where's the fun in that?"

"I'm sorry." Peeves felt shocked at the realization that he truly meant it. He'd never apologised or felt sympathy toward anyone in his entire existence, yet tonight he suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of compassion for the flimsy hat still sitting in his lap. The only explanation could be the punch and whatever potions resided within it, but for the moment Peeves found that he really didn't care about the whats or the whys.

"For close to a thousand years I've done my duty, judged the unjudgable, labelled the young and the innocent. My warnings all go unheeded. All that anyone cares is that my annual song is new and witty and that I don't place too many of the Slytherins' children in Gryffindor, or the reverse. No one ever thanks me."

"It's been almost a thousand years for me as well; keeping things interesting, not letting the students or staff forget that magic is unpredictable. They'd grow soft without some challenges, they would. I can't think of anyone who appreciates my work though, except perhaps the Weasley twins. No, poor Peevesy, always shunned, just like Godric's poor hat off sits forgot."

As he spoke Peeves started to stroke the Sorting Hat around the brim, surprised at how soft the old, patched leather felt under his fingers. The hat seemed to respond to his attention, cuddling deeper against his chest and humming faintly. Peeves thought it felt somewhat like a kitten, purring and snuggling into a body's warmth, though it had been centuries since he'd last held a kitten.

"Do you think, perchance, that the castle could function for a few hours, or even days, without our efforts and vigilance? As none seem to truly care for us, would we even be missed?" The Sorting Hat sighed, then resumed its humming, apparently enjoying the gentle play of Peeves' fingers over its brim and tip.

"No respect, the lot of them. Makes Old Peevesy cranky, it does."

Nimble fingers tenderly caressed the inside of the frayed brim as the hat's tip slowly swayed against Peeves' stubbled chin. Soon the contented humming of both intermingled with the creaks and groans from the ancient castle, as two of its most misunderstood residents slipped into a much deserved rest, under the benevolent gaze of the purple bearded marble Dumbledore.

---

If Minerva hadn't been indisposed, she would have yelled. Something. The sight of that obnoxious statue of Albus (newly redecorated in colours that would have been truly eye-hurting, even to perfectly sober eyes) was yell-worthy. The two crumpled figures at the base of it, at least, in that combination, were equally disturbing. And their conversation, conducted in an apparent failure to notice her presence, was even more so.

*Albus would have liked the colours*, she thought dazedly as she wandered towards her quarters.

"If this is what happens when I nip out for a quick one, I'll never touch so much as a dram again," she muttered, once a safe distance from the unlikely duo.

*If this is what happens when you leave Severus and your Head Boy and Girl in charge, you may as well ask the Weasley twins to mind the school while you're out*, a snide internal voice replied. It sounded suspiciously like the voice with which she'd addressed Peeves when he was having trouble with a chandelier during the Reign of Umbridge.

Peeves. Sorting Hat. Right. No time for a quick trip to her rooms for fresh clothes. Who knew what state the rest of the school was in, considering those two. She Transfigured her borrowed cloak into a reasonable approximation of her usual garb and set off to find out what had become of the students' party. With the proper amount of determination, she could likewise Transfigure her grimace of pain into a suitably stern expression of reprimand.

---

It was then that Percy caught sight of his baby sister... and Harry... and...

*Holy crap.*

"Ginny! What the BLOODY HELL are you doing with those two?"

Ginny glared tiredly at her irate sibling. "Percy, sod off. We just got Draco put back together again. We don't need you upsetting him again." The threesome settled onto a bench...Malfoy sitting in a noticeably cautious fashion.

"We? WE? Wasn't it bad enough, you being Harry's girlfriend? The publicity alone is heinous. But Malfoy? You can't be serious! You know damn well not everyone accepts 'spying' as an adequate excuse for..." He cut off, noticing that the aforementioned Malfoy's face had crumpled unflatteringly, and he was now clutching at Harry and looking miserable. Both Harry and Ginny looked daggers at Percy as they tried to comfort the sniffling Slytherin, cuddling him like some sort of shared teddy bear.

"I've spent the last eight goddamned years living up to everybody's stupid expectations, and that's OVER now. So anyone who has a problem with whatever...or whoever...I want to do to be happy at this point can just fuck themselves," Harry snarled.

"They'll have to do it themselves, because you're spoken for," Draco said quite nastily, sounding utterly like himself except for the residual sniff. Ginny seemed to find this funny, and Harry's cheeks went pink, though his expression remained defiant.

"Oh, to hell with it! I don't have time to argue. Harry, just stop Draco from snivelling into your shoulder, or else put him in the infirmary and tell everyone he got injured...doing... something vaguely heroic, okay?" With that, Percy stalked off in search of his beleaguered assistant, who was still (to his knowledge) chasing the sheep.

Only to make several wrong turns and find...

"Fred... George?!"

"Percy, you wanker, untie us!"

"YOU TWO! I should have KNOWN!"

"Give us a break, Percy! We've been like this most of the night!"

"Fucking Snape was too blitzed to untie us..."

"And Bulstrode and Parkinson tied us back up after that bathroom break!"

"Yeah, we can hardly feel our hands anymore."

Percy grew very still. His eyes slowly shifted from startled to determined. And with a flick of his wand, he relocated them to the nearest broom closet. As he walked away, they could hear his voice, clear and very cool.

"There WILL be order here."

---

Remus finally arrived back at the castle, glad enough to let Minerva walk ahead. He dropped the clothes from the Three Broomsticks in a spare classroom, deciding that they could be sorted out later.

As he left the room, he heard a shout. Looking down the corridor he saw a girl (he thought he recognised her vaguely as someone he'd once taught) chasing a sheep.

*What in the devil's name?* He watched as they approached. The young woman, who he finally recalled being named Cho Chang, looked like she was about to pass out from exhaustion.

As the sheep, now far ahead of Cho, approached Remus, it slowed then came to a stop, after half falling over its own legs to do so.

He looked down at it. The sheep looked back at him. Then, it turned a bright bubblegum pink.

*Ah, I was wondering where she'd got to,* he thought.

"Hello, 'Dora," he said aloud.

"Baa," the sheep-Tonks said.

"Well, let's sort you out, shall we?" he said, drawing his wand.

As he did, Cho finally caught up with them, and sheep-Tonks backed away a little.

"Sorry..." she breathed in and out heavily. "Professor, I... was told to... chase it..." She stopped, trying to catch her breath properly.

"That's OK, I know who it is. I'll sort it out." Remus smiled at Cho and opened the door he'd just closed moments before. "After you, Nymphadora," he said gesturing with his arm.

Sheep-Tonks looked at both of them, then walked into the classroom, her fluffy tail bouncing as she went.

"Erm, sir, who is it?" Cho asked.

"A friend, Miss Chang, no need to worry." He closed the door, turning to look at Tonks. "Well, I'm sure you've got quite the story to tell," he laughed. Readying his wand, he cast the reversal charm for what he assumed had occurred...

'POOF!'

Tonks returned to her normal self, sat on her bum, legs askew, looking up at Remus with a goofy grin on her face.

Leaning down to help her up, Remus asked, "Do I even want to know what happened? And why you're wearing next to nothing?"

"Baa." She paused, and coughed once, a blush staining her cheeks. "Probably not. I'll tell you later." She hugged him, tight. "Urgh, I feel like crap. Got any hangover potion handy?"

"Ha! I wish. Join the club," he said, hugging her back. "It's hangover central here this morning."

"Oh, that's my skirt!" Tonks said, releasing Remus, looking towards the pile of clothes he'd brought in before. "And my top too."

She quickly got dressed, and together they headed towards the Great Hall to assess the damage wreaked by the unsupervised students overnight.

---

"Still don't see why we had to leave the girls," Goyle complained as they made their way through the chaos in the Great Hall.

"Don't be a pillock...we need to make sure Draco didn't get himself hexed into the middle of next week trying to snog Potter," Crabbe admonished. Truth be told, he was beginning to feel more than a little guilty for having left their boss to his own devices all night, particularly in an emotional and drunken state. "If nothing else, we'll see them in Hogsmeade next weekend, yeah?"

Greg muttered something in reply, words which were cut off with a sound something between a cough and 'Eeep!' It was clearly audible in a room suddenly gone quiet, except for the sound of house-elves charming away messes. It was understandable, really, seeing as how Potter had just made his entrance...half dressed and wrapped in a very affectionate bundle of Draco and the Weaslette.

Vince and Greg stared. From the corner of his eye, Vince noted that Granger and a nearly-apoplectic girl for whom his brain helpfully supplied the name 'Chang,' stared.

"I think that's perverted," the girls gasped.

"I thought you were gay," the boys blurted.

"I'm NOT perverted, I'm... energetic," the Weasley girl said defiantly.

"I'm not gay, I'm bi," Draco said primly.

"I'm... sort of confused at the moment, but I can live with it," Harry said, looking back and forth between Ginny and Draco and smiling a little dizzily.

Vince noticed as the Chang girl's gaze drifted to Potter's half-buttoned shirt. Draco and Ginny...*I expect we're through calling her the Weaslette*, Vince thought...apparently noticed as well, because they suddenly wrapped themselves around Potter and glared icily at the girl through narrowed eyes.

"Back off, you cow," Draco hissed.

"Show's over." Ginny hastily fastened Harry's buttons. Chang turned splotchy and cleared out. Vince thought she really did look a trifle cow-like. Must have put on a few

pounds since school.

"I expect our job is done," Greg sighed, gesturing vaguely at Ginny and Harry. As usual, Vince caught on at once. They exchanged a look that said, clear as day, 'We'll turn over the complete instructions for the care and handling of Draco later.'

---

Percy was on the warpath, tearing through the school like a spin-doctor version of Molly, making everyone look marginally presentable (or at least, not quite so shagged senseless). He knew from clothing straightening, bruise clearing, and hair tidying charms...he wasn't Molly's son for nothing, and one didn't work under Cornelius Fudge's dissolute administration without gaining some experience in removing evidence of hangovers. Almost anyone who managed to acquire a significant other before their sixth year at Hogwarts knew how to cover up hickeys.

"At the very least, hide those in your sleeves, Hermione! THERE WILL BE NO GREEN VELVET HANDCUFFS IN THIS PHOTO!" He wondered if it would be possible to tame her hair with some sort of Charm. It was either that or she'd have to kneel so as not to obscure whomever was obliged to stand behind her. "Doesn't anyone know the spell to open these bloody things? Or at least, a way to Banish them?"

Snape mumbled something incoherently in the background.

Percy whirled about. "What did you say, Snape?"

Snape cleared his throat, still not looking at anyone. "'Kinky schoolgirl' is the password."

"Oh, NOW you remember?" Hermione was absolutely seething.

Percy had another worry. Actually, it was three of his previous worries who were, for lack of a better term, at it again. "I don't suppose you three could do that WITHOUT snogging?"

Harry, Ginny and Draco ignored him completely, in favour of continuing to dust little kisses all over each other's faces as they straightened their ties and collars and whatnot. Though Draco could be heard to mutter, 'bitch,' in a quiet but decidedly catty voice as soon as Percy's back was turned.

Which didn't stop Percy from hearing him. "Starch your wrists before the photographer gets here, Malfoy," he shot back over his shoulder and set about triaging the hangover victims so that the worst of them could be shuffled to the back of the photo.

They were fairly close to being in some sort of order when Pansy Parkinson suddenly stopped fidgeting and began marching determinedly out of the room.

Millicent grabbed at her arm, stopping her progress. "We're going to be part of history here, Pansy! Where do you think you're going?" she hissed.

"To hell with history...I'm going to look for George," Pansy said, setting her jaw. It had the unfortunate effect of making her look more pug-like than ever.

Whatever argument Bulstrode may have intended was cut off by a shrill, Creevey-ish cry from the Entrance Hall.

"Crap on a stick...The Minister is at the gates!"

From the consternation in the room, he may as well have been announcing Voldemort.

---

Shacklebolt's close encounter of the bureaucratic kind and Remus' close encounter of the livestock...erm, Tonks...kind, courtesy of lux\_astraea. (And she takes full responsibility for naming the photographer as well.)

The momentous Harry/Ginny/Draco accord, some connective tissue (ie., Pansy's dismissive attitude toward history and Vince and Greg's last hurrah) courtesy of dracontia.

Drunk/Hungover Peeves and Sorting Hat commiserating with each other courtesy of Wolfmoonshadow.

All the rest ingeniously devised by the Mad Chatters, et. al. You do realize that we're evil, don't you? Funny, but evil.

## Epilogue: When It's All Picture-Perfect

*Chapter 11 of 11*

Summary: Canon? We don't need no stinkin' canon!

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Victory Photo

By Mad\_Chatters\_Tea\_Party

Disclaimer: This frisky little farce is based on concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who is in no danger of being mistaken for us, nor vice versa. For one thing, our epilogues are funny... on purpose.

Epilogue: When It's All Picture-Perfect

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*The Daily Prophet,*

*April 21, 1999*

**VICTORY!**

Ann Deshcreet, staff reporter

Rejoice, wizards and witches! We don't know the precise hour, or the exact circumstances, but a team of Aurors, a throng of reliable witnesses, and no less a personage

than the Minister of Magic himself have confirmed it: As of last night, Harry Potter fulfilled his destiny and completely defeated 'the wizard formerly known as Tom Riddle.'

We can also thank young Mr. Potter for this new term for the menace we preferred not to name, which he coined in his sole statement to the Ministry and the press: "The wizard formerly known as Tom Riddle is dead. The Ministry can put his remains wherever they like. I've done my job and would appreciate it if they would kindly sod off."

Although this reporter regrets their brevity, it is hard to blame Mr. Potter and the young heroes of the Final Battle for their reluctance to speak at length, not after the hellish experiences the previous night, the likes of which would bring most worldly, experienced adults to their knees. Nor do we blame their professors for their own reticence to elaborate on the experience. Under the circumstances, this reporter deems it a show of laudable decorum that all of them simply stated that 'Everyone did their duty,' with voices variously terse or trembling with emotion, faces pale but resolute.

Why, you may ask, has the text of this history-making story been relegated to page two?

Look at the photo gracing the cover of this edition, good readers. The sparse quotes and meager information available at this time can do little to enhance the image that completely fills the front of this publication. If ever a picture was worth a thousand words, it's this one.

There are several images from the conference, all showing a throng of moony-eyed young war veterans and their haggard teachers, the damage to their bodies...and spirits...downplayed. Yet in years to come, wizards and witches all over the world will show their children the photo featured on the front page.

Look closely, and you will find all the details in their faces, the range of expressions captured for posterity. Not unexpectedly, Miss Hermione Granger and Mr. Ronald Weasley, stand on either side of Mr. Potter. Lesser people might have taken for granted their right to stand by the conqueror's side, considering all these three have reportedly accomplished together over the years. But Miss Granger stands with her hands almost hidden in the sleeves of her robes, her eyes demurely downcast, the very picture of becoming modesty, and Mr. Weasley alternates between directing a self-effacing smile at the camera and over his shoulder at one Miss Patil, a lovely Ravenclaw student. Mr. Weasley's little sister Ginevra likewise has a place of honour in the front of the photo, hand-in-hand with Mr. Potter and occasionally letting her head rest tiredly, confidingly, on his shoulder.

They are far from the only obvious young sweethearts in the photo. It will suffice to point out one particularly exemplary pair, that of Mr. Neville Longbottom and Miss Luna Lovegood. With their clasped hands, shy glances at each other, and rosy cheeks, they are the epitome of chaste young love. A budding naturalist, Miss Lovegood also holds high a jar containing a very valuable specimen, possibly a Dark Creature captured during the course of the battle. (See 'Yes, Virginia, There Are Nargles,' page 8.)

More surprising is that Draco Malfoy, once considered a fugitive from justice but since fully exonerated by virtue of his risky endeavours as a spy for the forces of Light, likewise holds a place of honour near Mr. Potter. The looks exchanged between Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy, and Miss Weasley are somewhat difficult to interpret, given that their eyes are red-rimmed, likely from high emotion and the haze of spellfire; but it seems that war has forged what was allegedly once a fierce Quidditch rivalry into a bond of allegiance and esteem.

Indeed, traditional prejudices and rivalries cannot be found anywhere among this cadre of survivors with people from all houses supporting those who suffered unusual hexes...some resulting in simple wounds, others leaving their victims with more peculiar difficulties, including the breastplate of a suit of armor affixed to Mr. Macmillan, the slime coating Mr. Carter, and a decidedly unnatural shade of green afflicting one Madam Hooch, flying instructor. The wounded seem to include a disproportionate number of Quidditch players. One might go so far as to say that the final battle for the safety of the Wizarding world was won on the Quidditch pitch of Hogwarts. (See: 'Colours United...Complete Rosters of All Four Hogwarts Quidditch Teams,' page 2, Sports Section.)

One cannot broach the topic of Slytherins and redemption without mentioning the most reviled yet possibly the most heroic Slytherin of them all, the spy Severus Snape. With only the most rudimentary knowledge of the deeds he was forced to perform in the course of his duties, one could speculate ad infinitum on what a tortured conscience he must live with. It is little wonder that he seems to be trying to sidle out of the frame, hoping to remain unnoticed. It is a testimony to the degree to which he has been forgiven these necessary evils when you see Ministry official Percy Weasley personally escort Mr. Snape back into the frame, the grimly determined look on his young face seeming to say, 'You, too, deserve credit here.' It should be noted that it was Mr. Weasley's idea to take this photo, arguing that the faces of the victors present a far more eloquent account of the battle than words spoken while on the brink of exhaustion. (see Editorial Debate, page 5...'Percy Weasley: Is This the Sort of Dignity That Should Characterise a Proper Minister of Magic?')

Other redeemed Slytherins making a good showing in the photo include Messers. Crabbe and Goyle, beaming at the viewer beside Misses Grayson and Slade of Hufflepuff in a charming image of what reconciliation and unity can look like.

Lest anyone suspect that all this camaraderie is somehow staged, the utter candidness of the photo is proven by a flurry of motion in one corner. If the attentive reader looks closely, it is possible to spot Mr. Fred and George Weasley, successful entrepreneurs with a reputation for mischief, being pulled into the frame at the last moment by one Miss Parkinson of Slytherin House. Rumour has it that she retrieved them from the infirmary just so that they would not miss being part of this historic photograph.

It is all refreshing evidence that, despite their impressive accomplishments, these warriors remain normal, wholesome teenagers and fine examples for the generation to come.

Quotes seem superfluous. One need only peruse this image of collective valour, with Harry Potter at the forefront. It can all be summarised by the expression on his face: humble, thoroughly exhausted, yet oddly satisfied. It is completely understandable...after all, hadn't he had the hardest night of anyone? And of all those present, had he not most richly earned the right to reap the pleasures of victory?

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Minerva put down the paper and regarded Albus' portrait. She was sure there was a chuckle hiding in the snores, somewhere.

"Go ahead and pretend to sleep while you still can. Once *thereal* story gets out--and the way Mr. Potter is carrying on with *both* of the objects of his affections, that will probably be some time in the next fifteen minutes--your garish little statue will no longer be the loudest thing in this castle."

Dumbledore's lips twitched beneath his painted beard.

Minerva sighed and surreptitiously reached under the edge of her collar to adjust her silver teddy with the blue feather trim. She just couldn't quite bring herself to put the pink dragon-scale one back into the rotation yet.

FIN

Editor's notes:

Developed from a chatroom session with Aturia, dracontia, and shalimar1981, with contributions from JustDesmond.

The hapless reporter who wrote what amounts to a superfluous description of a photograph has not one clue that her story is but a long and ironic exercise in innuendo.

Dracontia apologizes profusely for letting real life get in the way of finishing the revision of the epilogue, for constantly annoying the snot out of the decent people who contributed to this story, but most of all, for being a pompous twit who will no doubt be visited by the angry ghost of the Duke of Wellington for utterly corrupting the 'Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton' quote.