

Verus Votum

by Moreteadk

Severus is hit by a stray spell that makes him behave... rather oddly! Especially towards Hermione.

Response to prompt number 22 of the Winter 2007 prompt challenge at the Potter_Place Yahoo group. The prompt in its entirety is included below the story.
Not HBP-compliant

Part 1

Chapter 1 of 2

Severus is hit by a stray spell that makes him behave... rather oddly! Especially towards Hermione.
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"You're pathetic, Tommy," a dark-haired boy said to his friend as they walked through the corridors leading to the Hufflepuff common room, "if you think that spell will work. And even if it does, Alice might not want to go out with you anyway."

"Look, I told you, Victor. It's easy," Tommy said, showing his friend the large book he was carrying. "It's all right here in the book. All you have to do is flick your wand like so and say this incantation, and she'll confess her heart's deepest desire. Which will of course be to go out with me."

Victor rolled his eyes. "You'll just get her angry with you. It's your fault if she starts screeching."

"Screeching?!" Tommy repeated indignantly. "Alice does not screech. She has the voice of an angel."

"A screeching angel, perhaps," Victor muttered, but Tommy had stopped listening.

He was reading about the spell again. It didn't look very complicated, but he was uncertain about the pronunciation of the incantation.

"Perhaps I'd better practice casting it first," he decided and pulled out his wand. *Verus Votum!*"

Victor looked at him uncertainly.

"I'm not sure it's a good idea to do that out here where everybody could come by..."

Tommy didn't listen and tried again. Just as he released the incantation, Professor Snape came around the corner in front of them, and the spell hit him right on, before he had any chance to react. Tommy and Victor froze in wide-eyed terror, and the book fell to the floor from Tommy's suddenly lifeless fingers. Snape froze for just a moment,

awaiting ill effects to take hold of him. Nothing happened. His eyes narrowed.

"Ten points from Hufflepuff, Mr Durrant, for casting spells in the corridors and fifteen points for trying to hex a teacher," he started.

"It's not a hex," Tommy tried to protest, but a glare from Snape silenced him immediately.

"Ten more points from Hufflepuff, Mr Durrant, for talking back to a teacher, and five points for careless handling of an ancient and irreplaceable library book," Snape said and picked up the book. "I'll take this back to the library. Ten points from Hufflepuff, Mr Whyte, for failing to stop your friend from foolish behaviour."

Victor glared at Tommy as Professor Snape stalked away with the library book.

"There goes sixty points, because you couldn't wait long enough to get back to the dorm before you started practising that stupid spell," he said sourly.

"Well, at least we didn't get detention," Tommy said weakly. "Why do you suppose the spell didn't work?"

Severus was still angry when he reached the library, and stalked towards the librarian. He had every intention of complaining to about the overall dunderheadedness of the entire student body and the lethal danger involved in letting them near wands and spellbooks in the first place. It wouldn't be the first time he had unloaded on her. Shortly after Hermione Granger had replaced Madam Pince as the school librarian Severus had caught her hissing to herself about the students, their sticky finger prints and general lack of respect for the books. While it couldn't be said she and Severus had become close friends, they had both found it nice to have someone to vent at now and then. Someone who understood that the students really weren't the bunch of angel children that some of the other teachers appeared to believe. If you asked Severus or Hermione, the castle was filled to the brim with little terrorists.

"Miss Granger," he said curtly as he approached.

When she turned around, he took her hand and kissed it. Hermione looked at him with something akin to shock on her face, but Severus didn't pay it any mind.

"Of all the flowers of the world, you are by far the prettiest," he said, delivering this smooth line with a smile, that made her eyes widen even further and drew his attention to them.

"I could drown in those eyes," he said, caressing her cheek. Then he leaned forward as if to kiss her, only to suddenly draw back again clearing his throat just before touching her lips.

"I do apologize, Miss Granger, that was terribly forward and inappropriate of me," he said.

Hermione blinked a few times. She didn't look any less shocked, but there was also something on her features that could easily be mistaken for a light twinge of disappointment. However, even if it was, it wouldn't have been proper of him to be kissing a lady in such a public place as the library, or even for him to make such remarks about her beautiful eyes. After all, he didn't even know for certain if she would even appreciate such comments. For all he knew, she might already belong to another man.

"I actually came to give you this book," he said, handing it to her. "I confiscated it from Tommy Durrant earlier. Some children really have no idea how to treat school material properly, throwing it around like that. I suggest you keep an eye on what you allow him to check out."

"Thank you," Hermione managed, and took the book.

Severus smiled, bowed slightly and kissed her hand again before leaving the library. It wasn't until he closed the door behind him that he realised what had just happened. The next time he saw Tommy Durrant he would find a reason to deduct so many points from Hufflepuff, the House would be in the negative for the rest of Mr Durrant's school time.

Severus was in a foul mood all the rest of the day. He glared at the food on his plate, viciously stabbing at it with his cutlery. He was aware that Albus, on his right, was beginning to get curious as to what could be causing this worse than usual mood, and that Pomona, on his left, kept glancing at him with increasing worry. Somehow he just couldn't bring himself to care about either of them. What had happened between Hermione and himself in the library was none of their concern and those two were precisely the *last* people he wanted to hear about it. Apart, of course, from his students. Or Sinistra, who was a terrible gossip. Actually it was bad enough that Hermione knew, and she had been involved. Would she say anything to anybody? He didn't think so, but he decided it would probably be prudent to have a chat with her about the virtues of absolute and complete silence regardless. Perhaps make her take an Unbreakable Vow.

As he was contemplating how to get her to agree to an Unbreakable Vow, and thinking up arguments for how such a vow would be in her own best interest as well as his, Hermione approached the head table. Severus felt an odd compulsion to look up and before this could alarm him, he had already looked. He didn't notice the way she glanced briefly and warily at him, as she went to her own seat.

Rising hastily from his chair, he strode to the other end of the staff table and pulled her chair out for her, bowing slightly as he did so. Hermione gave him an odd look, but she didn't say anything. A tiny, rosy blush crept on to her cheeks as Severus gallantly helped her get seated next to Filius and Sinistra.

It wasn't until he was back in his own seat that he realised the entire teaching staff and student body was staring at him. He looked sourly at the wide-eyed Pomona.

"What are you gaping at? It's a very unflattering look on you," he snarled.

Pomona didn't answer, but she did turn back to her own plate with an offended little huff.

"Severus," Albus drawled from his other side. He sounded far too amused for his own good. Severus didn't have to look at him to know that he was twinkling. In fact he could feel said twinkle boring into his back. "You sly old dog! I had no idea you were interested in Miss Granger."

"I am not interes-," he hissed, then abruptly stopped himself as his recent actions finally sunk in. He desperately wanted to swear loudly and vehemently, but all he could manage was a long-suffering groan. With the entire student body watching, could the situation possibly get any more humiliating? Severus finished his meal in impenetrable silence, carefully ignoring everybody around him.

Severus stalked angrily through the hallways towards the staff room, finding excuses to take points from every student he met on his way. On the relatively short route from his dungeon quarters to the staff room he had already managed to take 30 points from Gryffindor, 25 from Ravenclaw and 40 from Hufflepuff. A student from Slytherin had received a stern warning. And he was still only halfway there. He would much rather have spent the rest of the evening comfortably ensconced in his quarters, but unfortunately being in a bad mood was not a valid excuse to get out of the monthly staff meeting. If only Hermione wouldn't be there, it wouldn't be half as bad.

Speaking of Hermione, the curly-haired librarian was calling his name behind him, running to catch up. Once again something else seemed to overrule his common sense and seize control of his body, and it compelled him to stop and wait for her.

"Goodness, you walk quickly," Hermione gasped, as she reached him.

Severus kissed her hand, and frowned at her erratic breathing.

"Miss Granger, are you unwell?" he asked her.

"What? No, I'm just not in shape. Just a bit winded," she said. "Listen, I want to ask you something."

"My dear Miss Granger, you can ask me anything you want. I promise I shall be as honest as I possibly can," he said, offering her his arm.

"Severus, what is going on with you? Why are you acting so strangely?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand what you mean. Could you clarify in which way my behaviour is strange or abnormal?"

Hermione looked confused and disbelieving.

"Well, for one thing you keep calling me 'my dear Miss Granger'. I've never been all that dear to you, so I'd definitely classify that as abnormal. Then there's the fact that you've kissed my hand several times, you offer me your arm, you pull my chair out for me at the dinner table, you bow to me. Oh, and you nearly kissed me," Hermione said.

Severus raised an eyebrow, still not believing that he was doing anything at all out of the ordinary. He could feel a small subconscious thought niggling at the farthest back corner of his mind, telling him that she was speaking the truth and that it was a highly abnormal behaviour, but whatever it was that had taken control of all the rest of his brain squashed it back into obscurity and made him change the subject instead.

"Are you certain you're not unwell?" he asked, covering her hand at his elbow with his other hand. "I could escort you to the infirmary and have Madam Pomfrey take a look at your breathing problem. Or I could carry you; that would probably be better. Best not exert yourself if you aren't healthy."

"No thank you," Hermione said with a small sigh. "I assure you, I'm quite well, thank you. Honestly."

Severus just nodded, even if he wasn't entirely convinced that she wasn't just playing it down to avoid causing worry, and they walked the rest of the way to the staff room in silence.

Hermione honestly didn't know what to think of this. Certainly, it was nice to be given some thoughtful attention, but the strangeness of the fact that it was Severus Snape pouring her tea, fetching her napkins and serving her biscuits quite overshadowed the pleasant experience. Why on earth would Snape go around offering her blankets for her legs in case she got cold, or be so concerned with a little shortness of breath after running, that he would constantly ask her if she felt any better, and if she was certain she didn't need to see Madam Pomfrey? And in the face of all that, how could he even bring himself to say that there was nothing wrong with him? That he wasn't acting oddly? He *bowed* to her when he served her tea, for Merlin's sake!

During the meeting she couldn't stop looking at him, almost as if she was daring him to say there was nothing wrong with him, but he didn't seem to even notice her odd looks. Neither did he notice the rest of the staff staring at him. Pomona and Sinistra was whispering to each other behind him, and on the other side of the room, it looked as though Filius, Vector and Hooch were taking bets on something, while glancing at Severus and herself. Hermione could only imagine who they were betting about, and she made a mental note to put a stop to it at first given opportunity. It was obvious that something had happened to Severus, most likely very much against his will, and the way he was currently carrying on he was setting him up for ridicule. He couldn't help what he was doing, not even when in the presence of students, and they were bound to jump at him like vultures if given half the chance. She imagined it would take him quite a long time to straighten out his reputation after this and regain the respect, or in his case abject fear, of the students. The last thing he needed was to have his colleagues mock him too. He wasn't the sort of person who would find it even remotely amusing, and she couldn't see there was any reason to humiliate him further than whatever spell had hit him was already doing. He would hate it if he knew it, but she couldn't help feeling sorry for him.

Due to these highly unusual circumstances, Hermione didn't hear much of what was being said, and given the incessant whispering still going on between Pomona and Sinistra, she didn't really think the others had either. When the meeting was finally over, Severus once again politely offered her his arm and escorted her back to her quarters, where she quickly thanked him and went inside. She waited, leaned against the closed door until she couldn't hear his footsteps moving away anymore. Then she cautiously and silently opened the door a crack to see if he was gone. She saw him just as he was turning around the corner, gesturing angrily to himself.

Hermione was worried. She had no idea what Severus was up to, or rather, what whoever had done this to him was up to, and she didn't like that. If it was something done to Severus with malicious intent, then it was making her a target almost as much as him. Secondly, she didn't like that she had rather enjoyed being treated like a lady for once. Cared for and spoiled. It wasn't something she felt a modern woman ought to like. Hermione was far from a frail flower and she despised that others might think that just because she had a tendency to catch colds easily it meant that she was made of crystal glass.

The discovery that she couldn't help but like the advances was even more disturbing considering the quarter they came from. Outside of respect for a teacher and colleague and worry for the safety of a helpful spy in a very dangerous situation, she had never thought much of the man. She had certainly never considered him in any sort of romantic setting except to admit to herself that he possessed a nicely sensual voice and a charismatic way of using it to his advantage. She didn't even know he was capable of chivalry, so perhaps some of the sour and bitter disposition he normally presented to the world was just a facade.

Shaking her head, Hermione picked up the elderly Crookshanks from his basket near the fireplace and went to bed. The huge cat burrowed under her duvet and curled up against her hip, quickly falling asleep, but sleep didn't come easily to Hermione. She lay awake for several hours, contemplating this odd situation with Severus Snape and his sudden bout of chivalry.

When Severus woke up the next morning, his first thought was a heartfelt hope that the unfortunate spell had worn off during the night. Most of this kind of spells that he knew of only lasted some 12 to 24 hours, so he didn't feel his hopes were ungrounded. He couldn't be sure that it was really gone until he saw Hermione, however, and as he had no intentions of making another spectacle of himself at the breakfast table in the Great Hall he decided to test it out by checking the library and have breakfast in his quarters if she wasn't there. It was a well known fact that Hermione frequently used the early mornings to shelve books, so there ought to be a good chance of getting the test over with in private.

It occurred to him that during the night the way the spell affected him seemed to have changed. The day before he was never aware that he was doing anything at all out of the ordinary until he was no longer in Hermione's company, and even then the strange behaviour seemed to fade from his conscious mind after a short while. This morning he was consciously aware of his behaviour towards her and he hadn't even seen her yet. Severus decided that it had to be a good sign of the spell really having worn off and released its hold on him, thus freeing his mind to know these things. At least, he hoped it was a good omen, he thought with a frown while idly transfiguring a few of his quills into flowers before leaving his quarters.

Hermione liked shelving books in the early mornings when the library was quiet and deserted. She tended to do it manually rather than by magic, because she enjoyed the chance to just wander around between the bookcases soaking up the atmosphere of the library and all that knowledge sitting on the shelves just waiting to be imparted to inquisitive minds, and Hermione loved just handling the books, idly leafing through one or two of them before putting them back on the shelf if they looked interesting.

There was of course also the opportunity to check that no students were taking advantage of the quiet library for a bit of snogging time, but that didn't happen often at these hours. It was more of an afternoon and evening occurrence. She remembered how people had often hidden between the stacks for some semi-privacy, and it had annoyed her even then, as it was highly disturbing to her study time.

When she returned to her desk, she found Severus standing there, viciously glaring at a handful of flowers as if he had only just discovered that he was carrying them and

trying to will them out of existence. It looked as though his odd, chivalrous mood hadn't quite worn off yet, and once again Hermione wondered what sort of spell he could have been hit by. It was so unlike him, and frankly it was beginning to worry her more than she had expected it would. What if he had been permanently jinxed and he would have to go around for the rest of his life handing out flowers that apparently had come to him from out of nowhere? It was a hard fate, Hermione mused.

She couldn't imagine that this would be the way he would normally court a woman. Not that she had ever thought he would be courting her in the first place, but it did rather look like courting was what he was doing even if he didn't look to be too happy about it. On the other hand, she couldn't imagine him really courting *any* woman, so for all she knew this might be the only way he knew how, in which case it wouldn't matter whether or not he liked it. If he was serious about his courtship, he would just have to suck it up and do it.

This was all too confusing for her, mostly because she found it rather nice to have someone paying so much attention to her, and there was no doubt in her mind as to who the flowers were for. Being a somewhat plain girl of a slightly chubby figure, she wasn't used to being the centre of someone's romantic attentions, and deep down she desperately wanted to savour it while she could. Even if it was just an illusion created by some sort of stray love spell. However, the more she thought about it, the more confused she got, and the more confused she got the less energy she felt she had to deal with an overly romantic Severus Snape. Overly romantic *and* angry Severus Snape just made it worse, and for a long moment she seriously considered tiptoeing off and hiding in the stacks until he was gone.

Before she could make the decision to do so, he looked up and she saw his demeanour change completely with that first look of her. He smiled and kissed her hand, bowing slightly as he did so.

"My dear Miss Granger," he said as he handed her the small bouquet. "How are you this morning? Are you feeling better?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow.

"I'm fine, thank you. I wasn't aware that I had been ill..." she said, feeling rather puzzled.

Severus looked quite consternated and frowned at her.

"But you were having trouble breathing just yesterday. Have you forgotten that already?"

"I had been running!"

He ignored her outburst and offered her his elbow instead.

"May I escort you to breakfast, Miss Granger?"

Hermione couldn't help feeling slightly amused at his predicament. She knew it was completely involuntary and that he couldn't help himself, and she knew that it was terribly rude and insensitive of her, but that didn't make it any less amusing. As long as she didn't tell anybody or openly laugh at him, she supposed it wasn't really all that bad.

Severus was livid. Clearly the spell was as strong as ever. In fact he suspected it was getting worse, and the fact that he had just given Hermione five of his best quills transfigured into flowers had just confirmed it. The worst wasn't the humiliation it caused for himself. The worst part, the part that made him want to strangle little Tommy Durrant with his bare hands, was that she seemed to appreciate his advances *and* that it pleased him that she did. It raised questions that he would rather not consider about a woman young enough to be his daughter. Not to mention the fact that she was Potter's friend.

He had to tell her that this was all just caused by a stray spell that he had been an innocent victim of, and that he would very much like for it to stop, only he didn't know how. Carefully he phrased this statement in his head, ruthlessly weeding out all the sugary sweet words that tried to tangle up in his thoughts, until he felt he was ready to try it out. He cleared his throat in preparation.

"Hermione, I was wondering if you would care to have dinner with me this evening?"

Damn and blast! That wasn't what he had been trying to say at all. In fact it was just about the opposite of what he had been trying to say. Oh, please say no, he thought.

"I'd love to," Hermione replied, smiling at him.

Severus was afraid of what sort of nonsense he might let out, so he refrained from saying anything else to her for the rest of the way. Part of him, the scary part that liked her positive response to this stupid spell, was elated that she had accepted. All the rest of him was uncertain about the way she had smiled when accepting the invitation. She had looked all too happy that he had asked her. He couldn't help himself now, but he wasn't really interested in a romantic relationship with anyone, and if this spell didn't wear off soon, she would think he was. When he was finally released from the spell, he would either be stuck in a relationship that he didn't want or he would have to admit to her that he had merely been leading her on and wasn't interested in her at all.

Neither possibility held much appeal to him. The latter not only because it would undoubtedly upset her, but also because he knew she wasn't above corporeal punishment if sufficiently provoked. Severus vividly remembered the state Umbridge had been in after Hermione had purposely led her right into the middle of a group of aggressive centaurs. Or the panicked and desperate Weasley tearing through the corridors trying to escape a flock of viciously pecking canaries. Just because he might succeed in getting her to like him, it didn't mean that he was any safer than if she didn't like him at all.

He had to come up with some way of telling her what was going on before this nonsense went too far. Perhaps he could do so over dinner. There was no need to upset her in public or to admit the humiliation of not being able to get rid of this jinx on his own, he decided as they arrived at the Great Hall and he helped her take her seat.

Severus had barely left her before Filius leaned over.

"Hermione, what is going on with you and Severus?" he whispered curiously.

"I haven't got a clue," Hermione answered. "For some reason he's turned all chivalrous."

Hermione thought for a moment. It wasn't entirely true as she was fairly certain that Severus had been set up for a prank. "Has he been this way to others or is it just me?"

"I haven't heard of him courting anybody else," Flitwick said.

"I suspect he might have been jinxed somehow. I just don't understand why it hasn't worn off yet. Or why it's only directed at me," Hermione said, frowning slightly. Filius nodded in agreement.

"I'll ask him when we have dinner together tonight," she decided.

When Filius' eyes widened, Hermione realised that she shouldn't have mentioned the dinner date at all. Before she could say anything, Filius had elbowed Vector, who was sitting on his other side, muttering something about her owing him five Galleons.

Severus breathed a sigh of relief when he could finally return to his quarters after the last class of the day. The spell was getting worse. Yesterday it had seemingly only affected him when he was in Hermione's company, but now it was causing her to invade his thoughts constantly. It was putting him in a disgustingly good mood, and at one point he had even caught himself humming. Luckily, no students had been around to hear it.

Every time he thought of Hermione he found himself wanting to do something sappy. He had decided to start marking some of the essays piled up on his desk while the students worked on their potions, and before he had realised what was going on, he had already drawn several red hearts with arrows through them on a spare piece of parchment instead of marking the pile of essays on his desk. Shocked, Severus noticed that he had even written their initials inside most of them. Frantically he leafed through the essays to make sure he hadn't drawn hearts on any of them.

Under these circumstances he had decided that it was far too dangerous to be marking essays, and had taken to wandering around the classroom instead. He took a small comfort in taking ten points from Tommy Durrant because his potion was the wrong shade of purple. To be honest the exact shade of purple was irrelevant as long as it was purple, but Durrant didn't know that.

Now that he was back in his quarters, Severus took the piece of parchment out of his pocket. He had no idea how it had ended up there, as he could have sworn he had thrown it into the fireplace. Distracted by thoughts of how to get out of that blasted dinner date, he went to throw it into the flames now, but instead folded it neatly and placed it on the mantelpiece next to a bouquet of flowers.

Part 2

Chapter 2 of 2

Severus is hit by a stray spell that makes him behave... rather oddly! Especially towards Hermione.
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When somebody knocked on his door, Severus was surprised to discover that it was 7 o'clock precisely. He was even more shocked to discover that while he had been plotting how to get out of that dinner date he had passed the time with showering and washing his hair, shaving and putting on cologne, dressing in his finest robes, setting a table with a white table cloth and a flower arrangement that he suspected he had transfigured from something or other, and lit several candles. He even had the bouquet from the mantelpiece in his hand already as he went to open the door, knowing that once he did he would be lost.

"Hermione, do come inside," he said and handed her the bouquet. "These are for you."

Severus was fairly certain he had just given her another handful of his best quills. If he was going to keep giving them away at this speed, he would have to go to Hogsmeade next weekend and purchase some new ones.

"I have some purchases to make in Hogsmeade next Saturday," he told her. "Would you care to have tea with me there?"

Not again! It seemed like it was completely impossible for him to say anything at all to her without asking her out.

"Yes, that would be nice," Hermione answered, and Severus heaved a mental long-suffering sigh. Apparently he just couldn't win.

"I must apologise for not having come to pick you up at your own quarters, though," he continued. "It wasn't considerate to let you walk through the corridors on your own at this time of night. Anything might have--"

"Severus, please," Hermione interrupted. "This is Hogwarts, remember? The corridors can hardly be compared to the seedy streets and back alleys of some ghetto. You shouldn't worry about it. In fact, please don't."

Severus frowned, unconvinced. He rather thought his current predicament to be fairly good evidence to the fact that not even the corridors of Hogwarts were entirely safe against unexpected and unpleasant incidents. Hermione ignored him, however, and sniffed her flowers. Shock, dread and panic rose in him when she fished a folded piece of parchment out from between the flower stems as if it had been a card. He knew that parchment all too well and could have sworn he had thrown it into the fire. He was even fairly certain that he had watched it burn.

He went to snatch it away from her, but she had already opened it, blushing at the sight of all the little hearts with their initials in them. Forget about holding her chair for her in the Great Hall during meals. Forget about serving her tea and biscuits at the staff meeting. Forget about giving her all his quills in the shape of flowers, kissing her hand and bowing to her. This moment was by far the most mortifying moment in this whole escapade. The only good thing about it was that now she would undoubtedly leave and if he was lucky she would also refuse to have tea with him in Hogsmeade. Surprisingly the possibility stung at his heart.

"Well," she managed after a moment and cleared her throat, trying to avoid looking at him. "I see."

She didn't look like she was going to flee, he noticed with equal parts of disappointment and relief. If the sight of that stupid parchment couldn't even scare her away, then what would it take? The part of him that had felt mostly relief was practically bubbling with glee by now over the fact that she hadn't objected violently to such a juvenile display of emotion. The only thing he could do about the situation now, though, was to just ignore it. He took her hand and led her to the table, wondering to himself what he might have asked the elves to serve.

Hermione also looked a bit uncertain, when he uncovered the meal. She was probably wondering whether or not he had ordered something to top that note in terms of sappiness. Severus' relief was great when he saw that nothing was flowery or pink or even remotely heart shaped. In fact the meal looked like it might be the exact same thing as what was being served in the Great Hall with the exception that Severus and Hermione's meals came with a bottle of wine instead of the selection of milk, water or pumpkin juice served to the students.

At least until the dessert appeared on the table:

a chocolate cake decorated with dozens of little hearts and red marzipan roses.

That did not look like a dessert served to the students. He stared at it in horror and managed a weak smile, cursing mentally at himself for having believed even for just a moment that he had been let off the hook.

"Oh dear, that's some cake!" Hermione giggled. "Well, it's only Valentine's Day once a year, I guess," she continued cutting herself a piece of cake.

Severus still couldn't quite make himself believe that cakes like that were actually being served in the Great Hall, Valentine's Day or not, but if Hermione thought so, he wasn't going to protest. Better than having her think that he had ordered that cake specifically for her. He had actually quite forgotten which day it was, and the thought occurred to him that having invited her to dinner this night of all nights had been an especially sneaky bit of trickery on the spell's part and that it had only dug this hole he was mired in so much deeper.

"Would you care for a cup of tea?" he asked her as they finished their dessert.

"Yes please."

Severus suggested they moved to the sofa and as soon as they sat a pot of steaming tea and two cups appeared on the coffee table directly from the kitchens. When he had poured a cup for them each, he leaned back and fished a small, thin book out of his vest pocket.

"Drink your tea, my dear Hermione," he said, "and I shall read some of this for you."

He opened the book and started reading, managing to get through four sonnets before he realised what he was doing. It was poetry! Severus had never been particularly interested in poetry, and he would swear he didn't own a book of sonnets. It wasn't exactly something the school's library would have on the shelves either, so that had to mean that he must have bought it. For money. Real bloody money wasted on a bloody book of bloody romance sonnets because of that bloody spell! It was just unbearable. No matter how he had procured the book, however, Hermione appeared to appreciate it, and she nudged his arm to make him continue reading.

If it hadn't been for the spell he would have given her the book and told her to read for herself, but he was compelled to continue until she started showing signs of being tired and he could escort her back to her quarters.

As nice as it had been to begin with, Hermione was getting fed up. There were flowers everywhere. Every day she found at least one small bouquet on her desk in the library and a handwritten card containing one of the sonnets Severus had been reading to her outside her quarters or pushed underneath the door. Several times she had even come to the meals in the Great Hall to find roses on her plate. It seemed she couldn't go anywhere at all these days without an escort, and he was constantly asking to make sure that she was in good health as if he expected her to drop dead at any moment. All that bowing and kissing her hand was so not like him, it was beginning to creep her out.

She almost wished he would stop insisting on fetching things for her and holding her chair whenever she moved to sit or otherwise offer his assistance with even the tiniest of tasks. She definitely wished he would stop consistently calling her 'my dear Hermione' and just say 'Miss Granger' or 'Hermione'.

The culmination of the week was the invitation for tea in Hogsmead. Even with that mysterious curse hanging over his head, she had expected him to take her to the Three Broomsticks. The last place she had expected him to take her was Madam Puddifoot's. She had never been there before, and she didn't like it one bit. Everything was too pink, too cuddly and too obviously designed to set a romantic mood that it very nearly made her feel physically ill. As if that wasn't bad enough, her reaction to all the pinkness made him ask about her general health all over again and contritely offer to follow her back to the castle. Her attempts to excuse herself by saying that she needed to run a couple of errands didn't work either. It just prompted him to escort her as she bought the things she needed while insisting on paying for everything and carrying her parcels. Hermione soon discovered that everything was a lot easier if she just let him have his way. In her head she kept a careful tally of his expenses, knowing that he would probably expect her to pay him back once this strange ordeal was over with.

Severus slammed the door to his quarters behind him. That stupid spell was getting on his last nerve. It was taking over his entire life and forcing him to behave like a complete idiot towards the only female being in the entire castle who was relatively attractive and not either a student or as old as sin. He could tell during their entire outing that she was beginning to tire of his attentions, but the more he tried to stop himself the worse it got. They had only ended up in Madam Puddifoot's because he had been attempting to come up with just one slightly snarky thing to say to instead of all that sappy rubbish he was constantly spouting these days.

There was no escaping the spell. If he gave in to it and allowed it to lead him around by the nose, it just got worse. If he tried to fight it and resist it, it turned completely catastrophic. More times than he could count he had tried to write down what the root of his problem was, namely the mysterious spell, ask for her help in getting rid of it and request that she otherwise held her tongue and never breathed a word of it to a living soul again. He had done his very best to write down exactly the words that were in his head, and he had re-read each letter at least twice before pushing it under her door, but he still had a strong suspicion that Hermione had received nothing but sappy poetry and the like.

Well, tomorrow was Sunday, and he was determined to try to leave her alone at least for that one day. He had no classes and no other duties and could just avoid leaving his quarters at all for the rest of the day and all of the next. Perhaps if the spell wasn't 'fed' with her constant presence it would wear off and go away. There was only one flaw in this otherwise brilliant plan and that was the problem of how he was to stop himself from leaving the moment the spell took over. If he thought too much about Hermione, he had learned the hard way that there was simply no telling what the spell might make him do.

Severus pulled a bottle of firewhiskey out of the cupboard and looked at it. No more than a third was missing. It should be more than enough to get him drunk enough to pass out. If he was too drunk to move all night, Hermione would be safe, and he would be too hung over to bother her in the morning. Then all he would have to do was fight the urge to brew a hangover remedy.

It wasn't the best of plans ever hatched, he would admit that readily, but if it worked he didn't care.

Hermione woke with a start when something tapped loudly at her window. Thinking it might be an emergency owl or something similar, she hurried out of bed and opened the window. No owls were in sight, but from the park below her tiny balcony, she heard a voice unmistakably belonging to Severus Snape, although it was somewhat slurred at the moment. Frowning, she went out on the balcony and leaned slightly out over the railing, trying to hear what he was saying.

"Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in Ethiop's ear--"

There was more but it was drowned in rustling sounds. This could just not be happening, Hermione thought. He was going entirely too far by this, and she had a disturbing thought that at any time he might start singing.

"Lumos!"

That had been a mistake. Sure, she could see Severus struggling with a ladder now, but the light of her wand seemed to encourage him further.

"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the East and Hermione is the sun!"

There was a moment's pause while he dropped the ladder and picked it up again, aiming it at her balcony railing.

"Uh... Her eyes in heaven would through the airy region stream so bright that birds would sing and..."

He missed the balcony railing and let go of the ladder to pick up something he had dropped on the ground. The ladder slowly started tilting to the side.

"Severus, what are you doing?" she called down to him.

"Oh, speak again, bright angel! For thou art as glorious to this night, being o'er my head as a winged messenger of... uh..."

Hermione pursed her lips as he tried to remember the words. If he thought she was going to respond with a 'wherefore art thou Severus', he was going to get sorely disappointed, she thought irritably. He had managed to get the ladder in place now and was climbing it slowly, careful not to drop a large bouquet of roses. Considering the bunch of quills she had found in a vase that morning, it didn't take a genius to guess where he might have managed to get hold of the roses. If this didn't stop soon, he probably wouldn't have a single quill left. In his present, odd predicament, he probably wouldn't accept his own quills back if she tried giving them to him, but perhaps she could smuggle them into his pockets or something like that.

As if that wasn't bad enough, he started singing when he was halfway up the ladder. Loudly, and not very well. Hermione didn't recognise the song, but she had a sneaky suspicion that he was making half of it up as he went. A couple of times he stopped to wave the bouquet imploringly and dramatically about in emphasis of his song before continuing on up.

"This has got to stop," Hermione said, grabbing hold of his arm and helping him over the railing.

He was still singing when she pushed him inside and shut the door. Hopefully, nobody had seen or heard anything. Since her quarters faced the park behind the castle, she thought there was a fairly good chance he had gone undetected.

Severus finally stopped singing in order to shove the bouquet into her arms and falling to his knees in front of her, kissing her hand tenderly. He absolutely reeked of firewhiskey and the front of his shirt was stained, providing her with the information that he had spilled some of it down his front. Distracted by this, Hermione didn't manage to tug her hand away in time to avoid a ring being placed on her finger.

"Hermione, I have loved you from the first moment I saw you! I humbly kneel before you imploring you to give me your hand in marriage," Severus gushed at her. "I've already owed your father for permission to take you as my wife."

The bouquet fell from her suddenly lifeless fingers, and she pulled her hand away from him as if burned.

"The first time you saw me, I was a child!" she reminded him, "and please tell me you didn't owl my parents."

"But I did. As soon as he approves my--"

"Stop. Please. Just stop right there," Hermione snapped and stepped away. "You *did not* just propose to me and you certainly *did not* owl my parents. Have you lost your mind completely?"

"But Hermione--," he started, reaching for her again.

Hermione stepped back and watched as he toppled over when he couldn't reach her. Moments later she heard snoring. Sighing she took the ring off, leaving it on the corner of her desk, and levitated him onto the sofa, covering him with a blanket. On second thoughts she added a Silencing Charm for the snoring.

It was getting more and more odd. Whatever it was that he had been hit with, it should have worn off by now, and instead it had just been getting worse. Hermione wasn't entirely certain where getting this drunk fitted in the theme of chivalrous behaviour that had been predominant all week. At least the worst of it seemed to happen when they were alone, but it still had to be a huge humiliation for him.

"What on earth has happened to you, Severus?" she whispered, brushing his hair away from his face.

Severus groaned as he slowly and painfully regained consciousness. There was a foul taste in his mouth and his head was pounding. The sofa he found himself lying on was too short for his tall frame, and his muscles ached from the uncomfortable position he had slept in. With great effort he managed to pry one eye open and then the other, and realised to his surprise that he was not in his own quarters.

Realisation came slowly. Obviously the plan of rendering himself physically incapable of leaving his quarters hadn't worked. Suddenly his head filled with vivid memories of himself climbing a ladder to her balcony. Serenading her. He must have passed out afterwards. How incredibly embarrassing.

As he pushed himself up to a sitting position, he spotted the ring lying on the corner of her desk and felt his face turning white. It was a gold ring with a heart shaped diamond in it, and he realised that he must have proposed to her the night before. Drunk off his arse and in the middle of the night. If she had been annoyed with him before, she definitely wouldn't want to have anything to do with him now.

His heart sank. He knew that he was supposed to be irritated that he had succumbed to the spell again, but shockingly he found himself rather more upset that he had ruined things this way. Unlike the other day where it hadn't really been a problem, where he hadn't thought this ordeal could cause any actual harm other than to his dignity, he now found that he much preferred to have her like and appreciate his advances. He hadn't realised until now that would rather like to keep her.

It was too late for that now, though. His behaviour last night had more than likely taken care of that, and this overly romancing way was obviously not the way to get her back. Normally he wouldn't even try it and expected it to work, but on the other hand he didn't really know how else to approach a woman. Since joining Voldemort Severus had never sought a relationship with a woman before, and he had no idea of what a modern woman would like. Definitely not this, he thought, disgusted at the memory of the night before.

It was probably better to just not think about it any more. People would just see the whole thing as a vicious prank played on Hermione and himself, but no real harm had been done to them. Unless of course you counted that fact that Severus now wished he could have truly won her heart. Nobody but he knew about that part however, so it shouldn't add too much further harm to his dignity.

Severus was brought out of his contemplations when Hermione entered with a breakfast tray. He eyed the vial easily recognisable as a hangover potion with something akin to pure greed. Apparently not even this spell could compete with his hangover for very long, and although he apologised profusely for his behaviour and for having been drunk in the presence of a lady, it was a half-hearted effort.

"Don't worry about it, Severus," Hermione said and placed the tray on the coffee table in front of him. "Just eat your breakfast. Then you'll feel better."

While Severus ate, Hermione sat down in a chair next to the sofa with a book she had picked up on the library before he woke up. It was the same book that he had brought to her the first time he had gushed romantically at her, and she had a suspicion that it might be connected to whatever it was that had happened to him. If Filius or any of the other teachers didn't recognise it, it had to be rather obscure. Whoever cast it must have found it in a book, and quite possibly this one. The title 'Romance Then And Now: Spells, Potions And Divination Techniques' certainly fitted the bill.

Hermione decided that it must have been a spell. Divination techniques didn't interfere with people's behaviour, and she couldn't imagine that Severus would have ingested a potion without knowing exactly what it was. Even if it had been hidden in his food, he would most likely have noticed that something was off. Skipping through to the section on spells, Hermione started reading.

After a good while, she looked up to notice that Severus had finished his breakfast and was now sitting on the sofa with his hands folded in his lap, politely waiting for her to finish. As soon as he realised that she was aware of him again, he stood, bowed and once again apologised for his behaviour and drunkenness, and with a kiss of her hand he quickly left.

On the corner of her desk, Hermione saw the ring lying where she had left it. She hadn't expected him to take it with him, but she assumed that he would want it back. The gold looked old and worn and she thought it was probably heirloom. At least she had managed to sneak a good deal of his quills back into his pockets.

It took a little while for Hermione to summon up the courage to go see Severus. She knew exactly what sort of behaviour he was likely to exhibit, and she even considered just sending him an owl in order to avoid the excessive apologies, bowing and hand kissing. Finally she pulled herself together, and with the book of love spells under her arm, she went to his quarters.

"Hermione, do come inside," he said, when he opened the door. He bowed and kissed her hand.

"Hello, Severus," she started, "I have something I ne--"

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Yes, please. Severus, I have someth--"

"Biscuit?"

"No thank you. Look, I've fou--"

"I must apologise for my behaviour the other night. It was completely inappropriate and unforgivable."

"Severus!" Hermione snapped, "Could you listen to me for a moment?"

"I apologise, I will of course listen to anything you have to say to me," he said contritely.

Hermione paused for a moment, glancing suspiciously at him. She didn't entirely trust him to not interrupt her again if he suddenly came up with more to apologise for. It wasn't until he raised an eyebrow, silently questioning her silence, that she deemed it safe to continue.

"This has got to stop, Severus. I know you keep telling me otherwise, but you are behaving extremely oddly and people are definitely noticing. It's a good thing for you that most of the student body is so afraid of you, they all think you're going to snap at any given second. The staff, however, is quite another matter. I think Filius has even been taking bets on whether or not I'm going to fall for it."

"What?" Severus exclaimed and shot up from his seat. "Placing bets on a lady? That scoundrel! Worry not, Hermione, I shall defend your honour!"

Hermione started and ran to throw herself in front of the door before Severus could leave. His face had gone almost completely white with anger, and he already had his wand in his hand.

"There will be no duelling! Sit down, Severus!" she snapped, holding her position in front of the door, as he tried to get past her. "Sit down, or I'll never speak to you again!"

It was a stupid sort of threat and had it not been for the spell it probably wouldn't even have worked. Now, though, it made him take a step back, then another and then sit down on the sofa looking rather ashamed of himself.

"I think I've figured out what's wrong with you," she said and sat down next to him, putting the large book of love spells in her lap. "It's all in here. It's a spell that forces you to um..." Hermione paused, blushing slightly, "to openly admit the woman your heart desires."

Severus looked startled for a moment, then he smiled at her.

"My dear Hermione, no spell is responsible for how I feel about you," he said.

"Maybe not," Hermione conceded, "but would you have told me so?"

Severus sighed and reached for the teapot to refill their cups.

"I am only an old man, worn and embittered by hardships and poor choices made in my youth. I'm hardly what you might call a catch. It is a true wonder to me that you would even consider spending even a small modicum of time in my company," he said, sounding slightly forlorn and avoiding looking at her.

Hermione couldn't help but smile. It wasn't exactly a clear answer, but it was enough. She was now certain that he had indeed been hit by the spell she had found in the book. Whoever had cast it had either gone a great deal out of his way to play the prank, or Severus had been hit entirely by accident. The latter was probably the most likely to have happened, considering that it had just been Valentine's Day a few days ago. Someone had probably wanted to find out if his or her feelings were returned. Hermione could only wonder if they had read the bit about the spell not taking effect until the person it was cast on saw the person their hearts desired most. Or if they had read the bit about the spell not wearing off for up to six months unless the person afflicted received a sincere declaration of returned affections or an equally sincere kiss. Definitely a spell to be used with caution.

Hermione tapped her finger against the page in the book and looked sternly at Severus.

"I am not going to wait six months for you to go back to normal, Severus, and I don't think I can make any sincere declarations of undying love. At least not any that could fool this spell. Looks like you're going to have to kiss me," she said.

Severus looked immediately contrite. It was beginning to become a familiar expression on him.

"My dear Hermione, if I had known that my advances were not--"

"I didn't say that," she interrupted. No more apologising. Please! "I just meant that it's too soon for that. Let's just get that spell neutralised, and then we can see what happens between us."

Severus nodded. There was a lot of hemming and hawing and more than a few clearings of his throat, but that was about as far as he got. Realising that she would have to take charge, Hermione leaned in and kissed him on the lips. He did his best to keep the kiss chaste, but Hermione couldn't imagine that the spell would be satisfied with that and pressed on, refusing to let him draw away by keeping a firm grip on a fistful of the front of his shirt. A few moments after she had managed to sneak her tongue into his mouth, she felt him grabbing her bottom with both hands. If that didn't mean he was cured, he likely never would be. She pressed herself a little harder against his body, telling herself that it was just to make sure that he really was freed from the spell.

Kissing Severus was surprisingly nice, Hermione found, especially now that he was kissing her back and one of his hands had stolen up under her shirt. She was vaguely aware that it probably shouldn't be allowed to go any further and that her goal had been reached when he was released from the spell, but she still couldn't quite bring herself to pull away just yet. It wasn't until she had managed to get the first two top buttons of his shirt undone that Severus broke the kiss and pushed her away.

"It's too soon for that, Hermione," he said, quickly buttoning his shirt again.

For a very short moment Hermione feared that he hadn't been released from that spell at all, but the lack of profuse apologising proved otherwise. Severus looked at her with a slight frown.

"No, I have not reverted back into spell-induced chivalry," he said with a slight sneer. "As much as I'd like to see that wilderness you call hair spread out on my pillow, this is hardly the right time." He paused, then continued in a less condescending tone, "I wouldn't object if you would agree to have dinner with me tomorrow evening."

"I'll be there on one condition," she said, making him raise an eyebrow in question. "That you try to moderate your romantic tendencies."

"I promise you I will," he said. "You have my permission to hex me severely if I don't. I'll expect you at seven o'clock."

Hermione smiled and nodded her agreement. Then she picked up the book of love spells and went to the door. Just before she left she turned around and took the ring out of her pocket, giving it back to him with a smirk.

"You forgot this in my quarters by the way. Don't worry, Severus. I've sent my parents an owl stating that you weren't in your right mind when you owled them to ask for my hand in marriage," she said, finding a childish pleasure in watching him pale slightly. Obviously he had forgotten about that. "I can't believe you threatened to duel Flitwick for my honour, though."

Giggling, she closed the door before he could retort and walked back to the library. All in all she couldn't say she was entirely displeased with this outcome of this ordeal. Somehow he had managed to endear himself considerably to her, even though she knew that he hadn't been acting like himself at all, and she couldn't help looking forward to having dinner with him again, this time under much more normal circumstances. Still, this book was definitely going to be put in the Restricted Section from now on.

Fin

A/N: Severus quotes Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. I don't own that either.

Prompt 22 - Snape is hit with a stray curse intended to make the

victim openly express his love for his heart's true desire. The

intended victim and other corresponding details are up to the author.

When nothing immediately happens, both Snape and the spell's caster

breathe a sigh of relief. But what happens when Snape later

encounters his secret heart's desire and suddenly turns into a

gushing, lovesick, romantic. How will the object of his affections

react? How will Snape react when the spell finally wears off?