

The Truth

by ladyofthemasque

Severus is hit by a spell, and The Truth is revealed. Vigorously. (I blame the *Potter Place Winter Challenge #22* plot-bunny for the bite-marks on my keyboard.)

The Truth

Chapter 1 of 1

Severus is hit by a spell, and The Truth is revealed. Vigorously. (I blame the *Potter Place Winter Challenge #22* plot-bunny for the bite-marks on my keyboard.)

Author's Note: This is clearly and undeniably Over The Top...and I make no apologies for it. It is a response to *Potter Place's Winter Prompt Challenge, 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?*

Enjoy!

~Lotm

"You don't love her, Ron! You *never* loved her!" Harry accused his best friend.

"I did, too--I *do* love her!" Ron jerked a thumb at his chest, his face flushing red enough to hide half of its freckles.

"Not in the way she *deserves* to be loved!" the Boy Who Lived Twice argued, jabbing his finger at the youngest male Weasley.

God damn Ronald Weasley.

Annoyed, unable to concentrate on his book Severus rose out of his favourite worn armchair in the corner of the teacher's lounge, snapping shut the volume in his hands. As much as the tumultuous end of the war had caused upheavals in all their lives, being pardoned of all charges for his extremely deep-cover role in helping end the war with Voldemort had led Severus back here, to Hogwarts. The one place of reasonable peace and tranquility--exploding cauldrons and House rivalries aside--that he had known for the vast majority of his adult life. Stalking toward the pair, he favoured both of them with a glare.

"If you two imbeciles will not *moderate* your tones, half this bloody school will know the intimate details of your jealous little spat! I will *remind* you that you are *professors*, and thus should act *professionally*!"

The pair ignored him, annoying him further. Ronald, Quidditch Coach, jerked his thumb at his chest, then poked his finger at his longtime friend. "*I think you're just jealous because she's finally come to her senses in choosing *me* over *you*!*"

"It's not her senses I'm worried about!" Harry, Professor of Defence against the Dark Arts, retorted. "It's her *heart*--I don't think *you* really love her! She deserves someone who does!"

"And *I* think *you* don't love my sister nearly so much as you *think* you do, if you're still jealous over my dating Cho!"

Harry purpled with fury, and yanked his wand out of his sleeve. "You take that back! I love Ginny *completely*!"

"Stop this at once!" Grabbing for Harry's wand, Severus yanked it out of his fingers...just as Ron whipped out his own.

"--*Amantametsi*!"

The spell struck Severus on his sleeve, soaking into the elbow that lay between its caster and the intended target. Both men flinched; Harry shrank back in belated fear, and Severus whirled on his so-called colleague in anger. "What have you done?!"

Ron, wincing as well, gingerly pointed his wand at the ceiling. "I...er..."

"*What*," Severus enunciated, glaring up into the slightly taller man's face, "did you *do* to me?"

"It...it's a Romanian spell. Charlie told me about it."

Black eyes bored mercilessly into blue. "Go on."

"It...forces the person struck by it to..." Ronald swallowed, turning so pale that freckles Severus hadn't ever noticed before stood out on his face like an explosion of troll-pox, "...to declare their feelings to their true love...whoever that is, the moment they, erm, see them. And, to, erm, act upon them...to a degree corresponding to their depth of...of feeling, regardless of who may be around."

"Oh, fuck," Harry groaned.

"Language, Potter!" Severus snapped.

"--What's wrong, Harry, upset that you nearly ended up spilling your guts about Cho?" Ron accused, ignoring the Potions Master between them in favour of returning to their previous argument.

Severus, catching the implications finally as well, paled. Then reddened with fury. "No, you imbecile. He's concerned about how this spell will affect *me*...given how I am *married*. I do not take *kindly* to being made a fool in public. And now, no thanks to *you*, you cerebral pustule," he hissed at the redheaded Quidditch Coach, "I am now in danger of doing just that. Pray I do not run across the object of my deepest affections out in the halls of this school whilst I take this matter straight to the Headmistress! In the Manual of Staff Conduct, above and beyond the rule about *not* hexing the students is the rule about *not* hexing your fellow teachers! Though I am now wishing I *had* hexed you back then!"

Slapping his book against Ronald's chest, shoving him backward with the force of the blow, Severus thrust Harry's wand back into the startled wizard's hands, and left the lounge, robes snapping with the speed of his angry stride.

A comment behind him made him spin on his heel, catching the staff room door before it could fully close.

"What does *he* have to worry about? He doesn't love anyone," Ron muttered. "The spell won't work on him!"

Before Severus could speak, Harry answered for him. "...You *are* a cerebral pustule, Ron. Even if he isn't secretly in love with someone else, picture the reaction of his *wife*, if he doesn't truly love *her*. What will she do--to not only him as the victim, but *you* as the spell-caster--if he declares his love to someone*else*?"

"Cor, that's *scary*," Ron whispered, eyes opening so wide, their whites could be seen all the way around. The redoubtable Mrs. Snape had been known, when suitably provoked, to react very unpleasantly in the face of bad news. Mr. Snape was just a terror, twenty-four/seven. Mrs. Snape, when riled, was an unholy terror. No one wanted to provoke her into what was called--and not the least bit in jest by anyone--her 'harridan mode'.

All three men shuddered. Shutting the door quietly, Severus turned and hurried toward the Headmistress' Office. To be on the safe side, he would go nowhere near the library, the domain of his thin, tall, occasionally temperamental mate. If he did go near her, and if she was indeed his true love--to contemplate anyone else in that position was too frightening--then she would be very upset with him for 'acting upon his true feelings' the moment he saw her.

The woman would not only consider it an affront to her perfectly run library--with the students terrified into respectful quiet as they carefully handled her precious collection of tomes--but an affront to her delicate sensibilities as well. She had some rather strict notions on when and where displays of affection should take place. As did he, truth be told. Public displays of affection were an oxymoron; the most he would ever allow his students to see him do around his wife was the sight of him holding her chair at mealtimes, and allowing her to tuck her arm in his as they walked around the school grounds. Anything more would risk inviting the student body to comment on his private life, and he was *not* going to allow that.

His glare and his speed cleared the corridors of students, forcing them to either retreat into classrooms, scatter into side-halls, or flatten themselves against the walls. Not since the days of You-Know-Who had they seen him so foreboding in appearance. Stopping in front of the stone gargoyle, he muttered the password, making sure no students were near enough to hear. Not because the password was a deep secret, but because Minerva McGonagall had decided to base all of her passwords on phrases in well-known children's stories.

"And he huffed and he puffed and he blew the house down."

It was undignified, but the gargoyle obligingly moved aside. Stepping onto the spiraling staircase, Severus rode it impatiently to the top. Crossing to the door, he didn't bother to knock. Too many years of being colleagues, Order members, and friends--plus the added fluctuations of House rivalries--had worn down such formalities between Minerva and him. He could hear voices inside, anyway, and figured she was consulting with the portraits of past Headmasters and Headmistresses, as she was wont to do.

"Minerva, I *must* insist that you discipline Ronald W..." He trailed off, the door standing open, his startled body drifting to a halt just a few feet inside the office. Minerva wasn't in there. Someone else was.

"...Oh!" The woman standing in front of Minerva's desk gave him a startled look, her hands fluttering for a moment before clasping in front of her. "Erm...hello, Severus! Minerva just went off to go looking for you. She must have missed you in the halls."

Oh, no...not here, not her, not now! No, Merlin...no!

"Hermione..."

Her given name escaped him on a sigh. When she was but a student, he had considered it an obnoxious mouthful, rivaling only his own archaic moniker. But now...it was a polyphonic, heavenly choir in his ears. Oh, yes, that damned Romanian spell of the freckled brat's was now taking him over, sense and sensibility alike. All he could do was cringe internally, and wait to see just how badly he would be affected.

He wanted to demand what she was doing here, but Severus found he couldn't speak. Not those words, at least. His feet started functioning again, sending him slowly towards his new quarry. Feeling the weight of curiosity from the wizarding portraits crowding the walls, Severus approached her cautiously. The only things he could do were to bit his lip to keep himself from spewing foolishness verbally, and to minimize his steps, to give him time to find a way out of this damnable situation.

Eyeing him askance--not that he could blame her, for his current demeanor was probably very much at odds with his normal mien--she cleared her throat. "I'm, erm, up here because Minerva has...well, she's offered me a job."

Somehow, he confined his curiosity to an upward quirk of one eyebrow.

Her hands twisted together in front of her stomach, fingers lightly stained in a couple places with ink. She had such graceful hands, so deft, so talented...he felt an unhealthy urge to compose poetry praising the beauty of those hands. She cleared her throat, making him aware of how sensuous the huskiness of her alto voice could be.

"Neither of us wanted to hurt your feelings, but...well, the Board of Governors for the school have decided that, with your particular past--exonerated or not--allowing you to take Filius' place as the new Deputy Headmaster just wouldn't be...well...very politic. Actually, they were pushing for Harry to fill the job, but Minerva put her foot down," Hermione added quickly. "Even *he* would agree, he just doesn't have the temperament of an administrator, which is what this job needs. Maybe, in a few decades. But, um...we were going to find you and tell you, before letting anyone else know."

He closed the last few feet between them, struggling against the compulsion rising within his body. It demanded that he take her in his arms, that he deafen her with praise, drown her in kisses...sweep Minerva's desk clear for a most direct and unmistakable demonstration of the hidden depth of his feelings for this too-intelligent, too-beautiful witch.

Right under the painted gazes of his employer's advisors.

Damn that Weasley brat, for this!

"...You're not mad at us, are you?" she asked him, wincing a little in anticipation.

Severus closed the final foot of distance between them. His robes brushed against hers. Lifting his hands to her face, he cupped her cheeks in his palms, making her give first him, and then the portraits around them, a confused, worried look.

"Erm...Severus?"

"I love you."

She blinked at him, taken aback by the apparent non-sequitur, and he repeated himself.

"I love you, Hermione...*I love you*, so *much*," he quietly groaned, closing his eyes for a moment. Unfortunately, the hex wouldn't allow him to deprive himself of the sight of her for more than a single heartbeat. Closing the slight gap between their faces before she could do more than gape at him in her shock, he claimed her mouth. Claimed it, worshipped it, possessed it, and devoured it, swallowing down her muffled exclamations.

The intensity of his declaration was matched by the intensity of his action, but it wasn't enough. He had to *tell* her, and to *show* her just how much he truly loved her. Even if the portraits were watching them. Temporarily abandoning her lips, turned swollen by the press and nip of his own, he shifted his hands from her face to her shoulders, then to her waist, kissing his way to her ear so that he could hiss his feelings into it.

"The mere sight of you in public is enough to break my heart, for I find I long to hold you, to touch you and caress you and worship you, and yet I dare not. I crave your touch, I yearn for your arms to enfold me, for my own to pull you to me," a tug of his hands, now on her hips, bumped their groins together, "just to mould all those soft curves to my *hardness*..."

"Oh!" Clearly startled by the sharp tug, and the lump it revealed, Hermione clutched at his shoulders for balance.

He ground himself into her lasciviously, whispering in between tonguing the curve of her ear. "Every little gasp and moan you make drives me insane with the need to hear *more*."

"Severus, this isn't...appropriate..."

Her voice cracked when he suckled on her earlobe, but he didn't stop; she was too tasty, too divine a treat. But her comment had to be addressed. Growling into her ear, he wrapped himself around her, swooping her over one arm dramatically, forcing her to loop her arms around his neck for balance.

"What isn't appropriate? This? Us? Here and now? I want to *be* inappropriate with you! I want to be your beloved, your swain, your *lover* in every sense of the word!" Outwardly, Severus nipped at her throat with his mouth, making her squirm at the ticklish touch. Inwardly, he winced as words utterly unlike his normal self spewed forth, no thanks to Ronald's damnable hex.

"Severus, let me up!" Hermione demanded, increasingly red-faced as she darted her brown eyes around the room, taking in the agog, oil-based stares of the former administrators hung around them. "--Is this some sort of joke?"

"My love for you--my *passion* for you--is no joke! I would make you my mistress if I could, I want to be with you so *inappropriately*," Severus found himself growling, pulling her loins up into his own. His back was beginning to feel the strain of holding the pose, especially since she struggled harder to right herself at his words. But he couldn't stop himself from kissing her jaw, chin, draped over his arm like that Muggle witch, Scarlett, to his Rhett. "I would shower you with affection, and then beg you to marry me in secret, and tryst with you most illicitly, dragging you into every shadowy nook available in this place, until the rafters rang with your screams of pleasure!"

"Severus, that is *not* funny! You're *already* married, for heaven's sake--or had you forgotten that singular fact?" Hermione demanded tartly. "And I will *not* be treated as any man's hallway whore, least of all yours!"

Righting her quickly, Severus found himself dropping to his knees, clutching at her thighs.

"Then let me worship you as my goddess!" he found himself crying...and silently pledged to skin one Ronald Bilius Weasley alive, one square inch at a time, for he heard one of the painted former Headmistresses *giggle* at his fervent declaration. Pressing his cheek into the flat plane of her abdomen, he clung to her tightly. "Let me honor you above all others, let me cater to your every whim! Let me be your devoted slave! My Hermione, my Goddess, my Love! Let me sing out the heavenly gift of your name--*Hermione / My one only / Truest Love / Goddess above!*

Oh, shite, I must really love her, if I'm being forced to spew this level of sheer, inane drivel! Kill me! Someone--anyone--kill me now!

Her jaw had dropped with that last bit. Blinking, looking a bit owlsh, she stared at him. "...You can actually *sing*?"

Bounding to his feet, ignoring the creak of forty-six-year-old knees, Severus pulled her against him once more. "My voice is the croaking of frogs dying in a winter storm, compared to the most angelic croon of your least little sigh...and I *want* to make you sigh. I *will* make you sigh, and scream, and cry! You *will* love me just as much as I love you, when I am through!"

"Severus--!" The attack of his lips cut off whatever else she might have said. His lips, his hands, his arms, even his legs entwined with hers. Until he freed his hand long enough to fish out and slash his wand wordlessly through the air. Papers and inkwells--thankfully still corked--*floofed* and tumbled free of the Headmistress' desk. Clothing *popped* and fluttered to the persian rugs scattered on the floor. Exclamations from the paintings made her stiffen in mortification...but given how his hands were groping and caressing her every pleasure-point with incredible, deft accuracy--guided without any fumbblings from the sheer strength of his feelings and the hex still controlling him--it didn't take that long for the new Deputy Headmistress to melt into the arms of the Potions Master.

When he laid her on the desk, laving her hands and arms with fervent affection, when he parted her thighs to kiss the softest skin on the inner sides of each of them, she was not only unresistingly pliant, she was actively participating. Mainly by the urgent grasping of his locks--still somewhat greasy from the ever-present moisture of his cauldron-laden classroom, though he had taken greater pains with his appearance once the war had ended than he ever had before it--and the way she all but broke his nose, attempting to mash his face into her dripping depths. Not that he minded; she was fragrant and slick and undeniably willing to be tasted.

In fact, Hermione moaned deliciously, deliriously, and embarrassingly loud as she approached her climax. Severus desperately wanted to stop, to shield both of their naked bodies from the portraits--he prayed to God and Merlin their occupants had already taken themselves Elsewhere urgently, preferably from right after that giggle he had heard--but he could not stop. Not even to look up and see if any were still there. Not when all the signs of her now enthusiastic welcome of his lovemaking only egged his hex-bound mission onward.

It didn't help--and God and Merlin help *him*, if she ever found this out--that he was feeling more than a little turned on by the *thought* of someone watching them. The imp of the perverse lurking within him--and not the one associated with this damnable hex--was excited by the unabashed sounds of her lusty welcome for his touch, by the feminine growls of impatience that accompanied her struggle to sit up on the edge of the desk, by the insistent way she wrapped her calves around his buttocks and her fingers around his prick, dragging him to her.

Not that he resisted, and not that he really wanted to resist. In fact, Severus realized the only way to *control* this hex, it seemed, was to throw himself willingly, eagerly, and wholly into expressing his love for the former Know-It-All of Hogwarts. That allowed him enough control to tease her with the tip of his glans, rubbing his shaft this way and that way and every which way but the way she wanted most, moistening it in the folds of her femininity. Until she growled and grabbed him again, kicking her heels against his backside to warn him he had better drive himself the rest of the way home, Or Else.

Complying with a groan, Severus sank to the hilt. He bucked a little, undone by her soft, tight, spasming heat, then grabbed her ankles, forcing her fully onto her back, sprawling her wantonly across his employer's desk. The first edge of both their desire--for the damned hex ensured that he made sure she enjoyed it, freeing one hand from her ankles so that he could flutter his thumb over her clitoris--didn't take that long to sate. Thankfully, as not more than two minutes into it, the spasms of her climax triggered his. Now he could surely stop, rest, apologize, explain about the...

Nope.

Unfortunately for him, though his limbs longed to turn themselves into rubber jelly from the delicious draining of sexual repletion, the hex still had a hold of him. By the family jewels, it seemed, for he remained hard enough to stay within her while lowering her legs to his waist and dropping his head to her breasts. Laving them with attention--he had missed them earlier, and the hex wanted him to apologize sweetly for the oversight and make up for it thoroughly--Severus rocked gently into her passion-sensitized flesh.

With his lips occupied by the thorough worshipping of her nipples and his tongue laving the valley between, he wasn't free to tell the unsuspecting, ambushed witch *why* he was doing all of this. She did try to speak, but her half-hearted protests were more disjointed mumbles than actual, coherent phrases. Not that he gave her much opportunity to speak, since after her breasts were thoroughly dampened with his spell-enforced affections, he stood upright again, grabbed one flailing foot, and devoured her toes.

She went wild, squirming and hollering and carrying on as if he were murdering her, however pleasantly. After that, things went downhill. The hex within him, hearing how thoroughly she was enjoying his ministrations, took full control.

Severus hadn't known it was possible to suckle, thrust, and compose lyrical sonnets on the perfection of her curves simultaneously. Singing them was over the top. Beyond the pale. Worthy of gutting, skinning, and taxidermically mounting one Ronald Bilius Weasley--preferably whilst still alive--as a monument to Wand-Wielded Utter Stupidity. Indeed, the Headmistress' office rang with his deep baritone in ways that would have made his shower stall livid with envy...had he been the type to admit to singing at all, never mind whilst bathing, and only when he knew no one would be around to hear him.

By the time it was all over, three hours had passed, Double Potions with the fourth-year Ravenclaws and Slytherins had been utterly missed, and more than just the scrolls and papers from Minerva's desk had been scattered all over. The carnage included an entire section of books that had been bumped off the shelves on the curving stairwell behind the Headmistress' desk, plus a rack of scattered scrolls and two overturned chairs, thanks to their wild antics. Severus had three pulled muscles in his back, another one in his groin, his hair was more snarled and tangled than hers--which said too much about how often she had grabbed it--and his nose felt broken from the repeated blows of her bucking pelvic bone.

His jaw felt dislocated, and his face--his face smelled great, but his whole face hurt. God and Merlin, his fingers hurt. His arms hurt. His shoulders and hips and knees all hurt. And his loins...his poor loins felt like they had been roughed up like a salisbury steak from too much friction, his penis had withered to the size of a disreputable radish--compared to its normal cucumberish state--and if his testicles weren't shriveled into little prunes from dehydration, it wasn't for lack of trying.

But the hex had finally worn off. Mostly because his ambushed lover had keened her way into unconsciousness, her face twisted into a rictus of a blissful grin. Sprawled on the persian carpet in front of the main hearth in Minerva's office, papers and cushions and whatever else flung all around them from the way he had chased the new Deputy Headmistress around the chamber, Severus surveyed the damage on Hermione's body.

He could not attest to pulled muscles, though her lower limbs were sprawled in a way that said they weren't ready to get close to each other just yet. Her intimate flesh had gone well past pink to a deeply flushed, chafed rose, no doubt part of the reason behind the parting of her thighs to the point of penpalmanship. There weren't many bruises, thankfully...but there were an awful lot of love-bite marks. Most of which spelled out from right thigh to left shoulder, *Severus Loves Hermione*...and on her left thigh had been suckled the word, *Mine!*, punctuation and all.

It was beyond anything and everything that could possibly have happened under normal circumstances. Beyond anything that would have happened under even extraordinary circumstances. No, when Severus got his strength back--and his own thighs decided to eschew penpalmanship in favor of a close enough re-acquaintance to walk--he would visit his solicitor, draw up a power of attorney for his wife, and go kill the youngest male Weasley in the most gruesome manner possible. Lifetime imprisonment in Azkaban *might* be a bit much, but really, he could cheerfully spend six or seven years there in payment for his troubles. He was certain that, given the choice of contemplating the outcome of the freckled pustule's magical attack, the Wizengamot would be slightly more lenient with him.

"Mmm..."

He stiffened, then winced as the tension causes his pulled muscles to ache. The new Deputy Headmistress was finally stirring back to life. She stretched slowly, then twisted onto her side, draping her arm around his ribs. Cuddling with him.

That was unexpected. Severus would have sworn that she would hit him with whatever dregs of strength remained in her slender form, but no, she willingly cuddled hi-
-thwap! There it was; the expected, punitive whap of her hand into his chest. It made his body protest, reminding him that, long-lived wizard or not, he was on the verge of middle-age.

"*That*," she yawned, "was for attacking me like a sex-crazed fiend."

Severus could live with that; he deserved it and he knew it. But then she *cuddled* him again, hum-sighing into his throat. The weight of her chin on his shoulder let him

know that those muscles were feeling a bit strained, too, not just the ones in his back.

"...And this," she murmured, shifting enough to kiss the edge of his jaw, "is for making me enjoy it so much."

Deny it as he ought, Severus knew the heat in his cheeks was partially from a pleased blush, and not just an embarrassed, somewhat furious one. Clearing his throat, he forced out a confession. "This...ah...*episode* was spell-triggered."

It was her turn to stiffen. "Spell-triggered?"

"Your two colleagues were arguing in the staffroom." Drawing in a deep breath, or as deep as he could manage with his strained back muscles protesting, he continued. "When I stepped in to end it, the soon to be late Quidditch Idiot cast a, er, Romanian love-spell upon me."

"A Romanian *love-spell*?" she repeated, her voice rising with dubious skepticism. "*Ronald* cast a love-spell on *you*?"

"Not on me!" Severus corrected quickly, wincing. "He was aiming it at the other idiot."

He heard her draw in a sharp breath, no doubt to castigate him, but paused a long moment before letting it out slowly. "Alright... Normally I would argue your opinion of their intelligence...but that was stupid of them. Very stupid."

"Extremely," he agreed, closing his eyes. From the looks of things--now that he had the time and energy to spare--most of the portraits had been abandoned at some point, but not all of them. He would never live this moment down. Ever.

"The question is, *what* sort of love-spell was it? What could possibly have made you attack me like a total madman?" Hermione asked him. "I mean, you were *singing*! I don't think I've ever heard you sing before, and I've known you for over a decade, now!"

Severus wasn't about to confess that he usually cast an Imperturbable Charm on the bathroom to prevent sound from escaping when he was in the mood to, well, do what he wasn't going to admit to ever doing.

"...Well? What kind of a spell was it?" his flushed, ambushed lover demanded. "I think, as the target and secondary victim in this mess, I should know exactly what in the universe caused this...this..."

Her hand lifted from his chest, making a vague circling motion to encompass the disaster-zone of their surroundings.

"Apparently, the spell was designed to cause the victim to confess the depth of their passion to their true love upon seeing them...and to act out the depth of their love."

"Oh."

Glancing down at her face, Severus could see how wide and startled her eyes were. She stayed silent for several moments, then inhaled, exhaled, and clarified the moment.

"So, all of...*this*," again, her hand circled directionlessly, "was the, erm, acting out the depth of your...your love for me?"

Unable to deny it, Severus sighed quietly, closing his eyes once again. "Yes. I love you this much...if not more. You did pass out before the compulsion was through with humiliating me."

He felt her shift, and the press of her lips against his cheek. Glancing warily at her, he found her beaming at him. Then she lifted her arm and whapped him with the back of her hand. This time the force of her blow stung for several seconds, making him grunt. A glare accompanied her words. "Don't you *ever* do this to me in a room full of portraits, ever again!"

"I *thought* you were in the Library, and I was going to *avoid* you until we were both safely in our quarters!--And *bugger* the Board of Governors," he added, belated frustration rising within him. "I wanted to be the Deputy Headmaster! You may have some talent for administration, but so do I--and a lot more seniority. Sod them all!"

"Sod them all, indeed," Hermione agreed, kissing his shoulder. "When I am the Headmistress, you'll be *my* Deputy, regardless of their feelings on the matter."

"I should retire, and become an apothecary in Pago Pago," he snorted. "After *this* little debacle, we probably *will* have to relocate, just to escape the gossip that will undoubtedly ensue!"

A familiar, unwelcome voice--that of the portrait of Phineas Nigellus--interjected a comment. "Not really."

Hermione squeaked and grabbed the nearest bit of fabric, Severus' discarded teaching robe. She yanked it over herself, quickly flipping a bit of sleeve over her husband's groin, too. "Phineas! Were you watching the *entire time*?"

"Of course! I *am* still a man, for all that I'm nothing more than an enchanted series of oil daubs," he snorted, shifting into a couple of the empty frames across the room from the two. "As I was saying, your reputations aren't irreparable. We *are* geased to not discuss whatever is said or done in this particular office with the rest of the castle without the current Head's clearly expressed permission, after all." Clutching the edges of his professorial robes, the sour-faced former Slytherin gave them an arch look.

"Now, if you had sought to play Stern Professor and Naughty Student in either of your offices, or in the Potions classroom or the Library, *then* it would be all over the castle, and the two of you would have to flee to Pago Pago, indeed."

"But as you managed to reenact the Battle of the Sex Fiends entirely within these hallowed walls...you need only come up with a convincing excuse as to why you missed several hours of work. I highly recommend the use of Bavarian hazelnut chocolates, too." At their puzzled looks, Nigellus smirked. "She'd never admit this, but our current Headmistress has a weakness for hazelnut chocolates. A bribe might not be amiss, in smoothing over this decadent little debacle. Oh, and she also adores stuffed green bell peppers...but I wouldn't linger if you give her one. Particularly not when you're downwind of the woman around an hour afterward."

"Duly noted. Now, bugger off!" Severus asserted. "All of you. I'll not have my wife ogled any further by a bunch of prurient portraits."

"As you wish..." Strolling leisurely across several frames, he finally vanished from the one by the door. Then popped his head back inside. "Though you should probably get dressed, as former Headmistress Isolde demanded that I let the others know as soon as you were finished. She's been keeping Minerva out of the chamber. Even if she does know what happened here--the portrait of Thomas Baggery in the teacher's lounge told the Headmistress that you were hit with a love-spell--Minerva will not be very happy to find her office in such a dreadful state, if you leave it this way. You'll have about five minutes at most to put everything to rights, if you hurry. Since you are now through, and I've already told Minerva you were through."

Groaning--glaring at the smirking painting--the pair on the floor stretched to search their long-abandoned clothes for their wand. As soon as Severus had clothed them with a reversal of the Disrobing Charm, he started putting the room back together. Hermione stared at her wand, a strange look furrowing her brow.

"Severus..."

"Yes? And could you help me by righting those books, Madam Librarian?" he added tartly, flicking his wand to tidy several scrolls.

"Do you think, if we asked him nicely, Ron would consent to teaching us that spell, so we could use it upon each other in the future?"

His wand lowered, allowing the chair he was righting to topple back onto its side again. "Are you *mad*, woman?"

"Oh, not for everyday use, of course," she disparaged quickly. A wistful look crossed her face. "But...every once in a rare while--say on our birthdays or anniversary--it might be nice to, erm, shower each other with absolute love, passion, and affection...wouldn't you say?"

Severus, about to snark that he would never, ever, allow himself to be humiliated like this, ever again, paused to think about how ~~he~~ she might show her deep love and affection for *him*. His body hurt too much to contemplate it immediately. But in a few more weeks, it would be the middle of February, and with it, an overblown excuse for a dreaded, overly commercialized, tritely advertised holiday. Undoubtedly, she would want him to profess his undying love in Shakespearean verse again at that time. Could he do it? Could he tolerate making an arse out of himself--a sore and bowlegged arse--just for his wife?

Clearly he would, if he loved her this much.

"...I suppose...under carefully controlled circumstances..." he allowed, wincing at the thought of another three-hour performance like this last one. She flung out her arms and wrapped them around him with a tight little squeal of joy. *Yes, those muscles are definitely pulled. It will take all of my cunning to come up with some suitable, non-salacious excuse that Poppy--the rotund little gossip-monger--will believe...*

"Oh, how I adore you! As soon as Valentine's Day comes, I will show *you* how deeply I love you!" Planting a big kiss on his mouth--she missed dead center in her sudden enthusiasm and his startled jerk, so it sort of landed near the corner of his thin lips--Hermione slashed her wand through the air, righting the fallen books scattered down the right-hand stairwell.

With the corner of his mouth rendered lopsided by her affectionate display, Severus allowed it to quirk upwards. Uncertainly, but upwards. Some days, it didn't pay to question his headstrong young wife. Especially if it meant she was going to show actual, honest affection for him.

The truth of the matter was, Severus Snape deeply loved Hermione Snape, formerly Granger. And he was not adverse in the least to demonstrating it to her, and upon her, whenever and wherever appropriate.

But not in front of everyone else, never ever again.

Gathering up their clothes, Severus herded his wife toward the hearth. A fistful of Floo Powder, the destination of their private quarters, and the pair of them stumbled out into their living room. It didn't take long to shamble into the bathroom--their limbs weren't quite up to cooperating--but a fistful of healing draughts, a double-dose of Pepper-Up Potion, and half a jar of anti-chafing cremes restored the two of them to functional order.

When he finished capping the jar and setting it back on its shelf in the mirrored cabinet, Severus found his wife wringing her hands. Arching a brow, he asked, "What is wrong?"

"Could you...you know...cast that spell on me now?"

Severus scowled at her. "Are you *insane*?"

"No, no, just...worried. I want to make *sure* I love you truly and deeply," Hermione corrected. Then chewed on her lower lip in that worried way of hers. Severus hated when she did that; it always made him feel as if he had to move heaven and earth to cure whatever ailed her normally happy self.

"Can we at least wait until the weekend?" he bargained.

"I suppose," she sighed, shrugging.

Nibble.

Oh, bugger it. His heart knew that she loved him completely, but his mind still had that same inimical *why me* floating around in it that had plagued him all throughout their courtship. Fetching two more bottles of restoratives, he uncorked both, handed her one, clinked the vials together, and knocked his back. Waiting until she had drained hers, he set them aside, picked up his wand from where he had set it on the counter, and aimed it at her.

"Amantametsi!"

The spell splashed over her body, sinking rapidly into her skin. For a long moment she just stood there, eyes reflexively winced shut. Then she opened them, and looked at him no differently than she had ever looked at him before he had enspelled her. Severus waited...and waited...and carefully contemplated killing Ronald Bilius Weasley most gruesomely. He was certain Molly would forgive him; the Weasley matriarch had been one of their staunchest supporters when it had been revealed that Severus was dating Hermio--

Hermione almost broke his wand, flinging herself at him, peppering his face with kisses, and singing his name and his praises in a gasping, trembling voice that told him she had been trying to contain herself, testing the strength of the spell. Stunned and relieved, Severus fell to the floor under her rapacious, demonstrative weight, too caught off-guard--and frankly, too ecstatic--to really feel the pain of his bruises just yet. A corner of his mind--the kind that securely warded the walls, ceiling and floor of this chamber whenever he was In The Mood--noted that she had an absolutely lovely singing voice, and that they just might be harmonically compatible, should he ever dare to expose that deeply buried side of himself.

After that, it was a matter of saying bugger to their professional duties: The school library would have to remain closed, the afternoon's last Potions class of Advanced Seventh Years would just have to make up for their sudden free hour with an unexpected quiz the next day, and the evening meal would have to be skipped entirely in favour of a late night raid on the kitchen.

A very late night raid. When their thighs were on speaking terms once again. His last conscious thought was, *Rather than skinning the prat, I think I shall instead let him know--subtly of course--that his botched attack has led to his best friend coming on to me like a niffler tossed into a Gringotts vault...because the truth is, I love her AND she loves me back, praise Merlin and his undershorts.*

God bless Ronald Weasley...even if he is a cerebral pustule.

But it really was his last coherent thought for a long while, for the Hogwarts Librarian had instinctively discovered this certain, sinful, blissful thing she was doing with her teeth, her tongue, her sexy little growls, and the vulnerable curve of his earlobe...

...And the plot-bunny thumped its tail vigorously, quite happy with the mangled mess it made of my poor plastic keyboard... ~Lotm