

Like the Muggles Do

by *fyiagcg*

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The Order Games

Chapter 1 of 12

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~~ I don't own the Harry Potter universe, and I doubt anybody would pay me for my writing even if I did have the right to demand money, money that belongs to J.K. Rowling, not me

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Like the Muggles Do

"I'll have you know, I received nothing short of perfect marks on all of my Muggle studies lessons when I was in school," he informed her defensively and then added, with a snarl, "despite my distaste for the people we were learning about." The fact that he was accustomed to making people defend themselves, not the other way around, did not elude him and his words came out crisply and aggressively, despite his comfortable tone.

"Oh, Severus. Getting good grades *however many years* ago in a *class* taught by a *wizard* is *not* conducive to understanding the everyday life of an ordinary Muggle."

Hermione had to stifle a giggle at his look of sheer horror at her inference that he might not know everything. How hard could it be, to live like a Muggle? And it wasn't like it would take a long time before those other, inferior teams gave up. Team Snarky-Smartly would easily triumph over the other contenders. Not only was he highly capable himself, he was partnered with the only Muggle-born Order member that participated in these ridiculous contests. It was ludicrous to think that his success was not guaranteed. He could live like a Muggle. He'd be able to do it better than the average Muggle, too. He was sure of it.

Hermione had not only been his partner in these foolish but enjoyable games since they had started, she had also developed a mutual friendship with the decidedly difficult man that she had worked beside for two years. She knew exactly what he thought, and didn't bother trying to hide the rolling of her eyes at his misplaced confidence. Why keep trying to explain it to him? He was as confident as a Slytherin and as stubborn as a Gryffindor.

She pulled out the very short list of directions and rules as Severus took out the key to their new flat. After five minutes of struggling and the decision that the keys or the door or both were defective, he handed the obnoxiously noisy things to his partner who had the deadbolts unlocked and the door opened in mere moments. Hermione sighed as he swept past her into their temporary home. 'This is going to be a really *long* experience,' she thought to herself. Then, following her new roommate inside, she amended, 'or a really short one.' Frighteningly, she was beginning to think it would somehow be both.

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The Order of the Phoenix was decidedly bored. The war that they had all expected never really happened; the battle between Harry Potter and Voldemort had been highly

anti-climactic. The Dark Lord had left behind his loyal followers and tried to attack Harry on his own. The crazed wizard was over-confident and under-prepared, and the boy-who-lived triumphed again, having only worked marginally harder this time than he had the first. With Severus Snape's knowledge of the majority of the Death Eaters' hiding places and meeting locations, over half of the dangerous men and women had been captured and detained before the Wizarding world even knew it had achieved its freedom. After that the Order of the Phoenix had a brief period of searching and chasing and hexing and attacking, but there had been a very limited amount of casualties on both sides and all in all everybody was quite satisfied with the outcome.

But they couldn't help the fact that they were bored. Happy and relieved, but bored.

All of that training and planning and stress had adequately prepared them for the short period of unrest that followed Voldemort's demise, which ended with the last Death Eater captured and sent to Azkaban. From Voldemort's fall until Valentine's Day (how ironic), they were kept busy with attacks and counter-attacks. But they couldn't help but feel cheated. Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger were at a loss. Their entire lives, all through school and afterwards, had been spent in constant vigilance and preparation. The war that had haunted seven years of education ended in an alley two blocks from the Leaky Cauldron, and their hard work and impressively honed skills meant almost nothing.

So when Albus Dumbledore had called a meeting of the heroes of the Wizarding world, the famed Order of the Phoenix, half a year after the final not-quite-a-battle, interest was piqued. And when he had explained his plan, his game, to the group of powerful and jaded wizards and witches, there had been a general agreement that this could be fun. Even Severus Snape grudgingly admitted that he longed to challenge his long-time rivals once more.

The plan was simple: the Order would split into groups of two and compete every six months in a game of skill, power, intelligence, cunning, and perseverance. And they would do their best to kick each other's butts.

When Dumbledore had started pairing people, the promising idea was almost lost: Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy; Ron and his mother Molly; Fred and George; Ginny and Nymphadora Tonks; Minerva McGonagall and Mad Eye Moody; Remus Lupin and Luna Lovegood; Neville Longbottom and Arthur Weasley; and last but not least, Hermione Granger and Severus Snape.

Needless to say, only Fred and George had been completely satisfied with their arrangement. Everybody else could think of some argument that they were not partnered with the best choice. But Albus had insisted that the choices were not only logically determined but magically chosen, and one by one each pair agreed to give it a shot. The Order members would convene twice a year, once during summer and once shortly after the New Year. Then they would listen in stunned silence as Albus gave them their objectives and rules before sending them off to compete.

After two and a half years of these games, all of the pairs had developed a working arrangement and became closer and able to work together more every time. Ron and his mother didn't bicker nearly as much as they had during the first set of games, when the exact replica of a Muggle picnic had awaited everybody. Challenges of walking back and forth with eggs on spoons, shaving balloons, three-legged-races and more had all been given a Wizarding twist and the mother and son pair came in last place. They were unable to agree on anything and any time Ron tried to make a suggestion Molly would silence him with her 'I'm your mother and I said so' glare, leaving Ron to pout like an insolent first year.

During the next challenge, McGonagall and Moody had entered into a fight so public that two blocks of Muggle London had to be Obliviated by the time it was all over. The sparks had flown, literally, as the two argued over a road map and its correlation to the map all of the teams had been given by Albus. Apparently the tower housing Big Ben and a very prominent tree a bit further south were nearly impossible to distinguish, magical eye or not.

When Albus had sent them all into the New York Subway System and given them a week to visit a list of stops, Fred and George had been thrilled. Being lost in a different country wasn't the only setback. Albus had made one half of each team blind and the other half deaf. While the other pairs tried to communicate through a series of grunts, pokes, gestures, and yelling, the identical boys had the time of their lives. The twins had been seeing hearing speaking and thinking for each other for long enough to make it to every station Albus had directed them to and then some, with time to explore.

Harry and Draco had surprised everyone; coming out of each game with nary a scratch (inflicted by each other that is). The pair had grudgingly, but quickly, accepted Dumbledore's decision and agreed to try working together. As Draco had promised Harry on their first day at Hogwarts, the two were a perfect balance of talent, drive, and loyalty and worked together almost as seamlessly as the Weasley twins. Their combined power was a force to be reckoned with and their minds seemed to work alike, making them a very satisfying duo. For the next Order Games, shortly after the students had left Hogwarts for Christmas break, Albus created a large maze and obstacle course taking up most of the Hogwarts grounds. Harry had already experienced one Wizarding maze and was at an advantage over the others. He and Draco were also very skillful at defensive and offensive techniques, needed against many of the obstacles. And once put onto brooms, the light and dark pair had shone brighter than any other team. Only Severus and Hermione came close to the two, a mix of intelligence and powerful spells solving the problems and getting past any complications. Everyone else had done quite well, they thought. There were only a few broken bones and only one truly severe burn, and the Order members felt quite satisfied with a few scars and stories as opposed to other possible outcomes of their near-death experiences.

The alphabet scavenger hunt had taken Neville and Arthur over three weeks to complete, while everybody else finished in under a week and a half. Neville was adequate at figuring out the riddles that led them to each required item (in alphabetical order, of course). But Arthur had been far too distracted to help at all when they collected Muggle objects, which made up about half of the list. Rather than going straight on to the next clue, Arthur managed to pull Neville into a thorough examination of each article. When Albus told them that they were allowed to keep all of their treasures when it was all over, Mr. Weasley was more thrilled than the winners, Ginny and Tonks.

Remus and Luna had cried that the most recent game had been unfair. Nobody had expected the whole excursion to take as long as it did, and the coming full moon brought Lupin back from Hong Kong before they had reached all of their destinations, disqualifying the two. Each pair had been given a list of cities, Muggle and Wizarding alike, that they had to visit, all across the globe. They were only allowed to Apparate within a country, could only use a Portkey once, and had to use all of the Muggle traveling systems. Airplanes, trains, rental cars, cruise ships and a hot air balloon were just a few of the required modes of transportation. It had been quite a trip for everybody, and the length of the game was an unexpected necessity.

Severus and Hermione had not come in less than third place in all of their trials, but had also never won. Although no disagreements were ever witnessed by outside parties, there had been a fair amount of shouting and cursing in private. But they worked well together and neither could deny that. Every plan they made was well researched, well thought out, planned to perfection, and executed with the precision and determination expected from the exacting potions professor and bossy know-it-all. When, shortly after the treasure-map game, Hermione replaced Irma Pince as the Hogwarts librarian, the two developed a subtle but promising friendship. Severus had easily noted her discomfort at joining the staff halfway through the school year, and when she sought him out and tried to engage him in conversation, he bit back more than half of the insults he had the opportunity to use and discovered that she was quite pleasant and her company was agreeable. They had, after all, done quite well in their first two Order Games, and neither could name a single person who matched them better in their intellectual achievements. It was one evening during dinner a few weeks after she joined the staff while he pointed out to her the students to look out for, the ones to look after, and the ones that actually held some promise, that she summoned her courage and insisted that he stop referring to her as Miss Granger. He had obliged and allowed her to use his given name as well, and a level of comfort was introduced. The two managed to work and spend time together with spectacular results.

Her knowledge of potions and his love of books had bode well for the pair, and they never ceased to have something to discuss. The whole of Hogwarts was shocked to discover that the Bastard of the Dungeons could smile - genuinely rather than his usual nasty-spirited smirk - and even award house points to non-Slytherins every now and again. Not many people had been privy to his laughter, but those who were found themselves in agreement that Hermione was the best thing to ever happen to the ill-tempered man. Albus himself had been surprised to see just how well the two suited each other, and nobody could understand or deny the facts: the two were happiest and worked best when together. Severus became slightly more sociable with other people, the ones he didn't consider to be idiots, as her amicable nature influenced him. She cultivated a wicked sense of sarcasm that she knew would not have suited her school days. Hermione found herself emotionally and intellectually engaged for the first time in her life; her best friends had never been the type to encourage her pursuit of knowledge or engage her in intelligent conversation. And Severus had never bothered looking for someone to engage in intelligent conversation and discovered that it was a pleasure when his discussion partner was the know-it-all, stubborn, brilliant witch. As one learned to encourage students in their progress, the other learned to thoroughly discourage students in any questionable activities. They were rubbing off on each other as new friends often do.

When Albus had dubbed them Team Snarky-Smartly they had bit back similarly scathing reactions and humored the old man. The other pairs had all been given equally

ridiculous names but Dumbledore insisted and refused to talk about the games at all without people using the proper team names. Hermione and Severus had, shortly after regaining their lost senses in New York, decided to change their team name, arguing with the headmaster that Team Snarky-Smartie could and should be changed to Team Sugar-Has-Rotted-Albus'-Brain. But they had only received a chuckle and lemon drop for their efforts and didn't bother trying to reason with the old man again. Both of them thought the name fitting; clearly sugar *had* rotted Albus' brain if he really thought his nickname for the two (which he proceeded to use all of the time and not just during Order Games) to be anything but cruel and unusual.

Their last excursion as a team, the around-the-world adventure, had changed everything and nothing. With only four cities left, the two found themselves stationed in Paris for an evening. They made plans to set off the next day to travel through Berlin and make it into Transylvania in three days time, and the two then settled into what had become a familiar routine, food and conversation being the necessities. They had a delicious dinner at a small French bistro that Severus had insisted on, walked by the Seine in a deep discussion about the properties of various dragons blood and ground saphioporos petal combinations, and found themselves feeling distinctly like Muggle cinema characters as they stood before the Eiffel tower, studying each other rather than the architecture. A truly fabulous snogging session had followed shortly after and might have gone further had they not been interrupted by several flashes of light. It would seem that they weren't the only ones to think their situation surreal; a group of American tourists, possibly thinking they were part of the attraction, had stopped to take pictures of the entwined couple. The two had gone to their separate beds that night pondering the possibilities but had been too busy with their travels to discuss anything for the next few days. By the time the two had a chance to sit and talk again after their first day back to work at Hogwarts, they had unfortunately both decided to leave the subject alone. Their friendship returned to the companionship they had already achieved. It wasn't discussed again, much like the proverbial seven-foot purple hippogriff. Their friendship and working relationship didn't seem to suffer from it, and eventually their discomfort waned. Paris was a lovely city, a romantic city. Who couldn't help acting as they did after the evening they spent together? Without speaking about it, the two agreed to leave the reasoning behind it at that, and not dwell on it. But if they *did* have to remember it, they both recalled that evening in Paris particularly affectionately.

Shortly after the school year had ended, Albus called another meeting to begin their next game.

Everybody had scoffed at what the headmaster insisted was their hardest challenge to date: to live like Muggles. No loss of senses, no travel destinations, no direct competition with the other groups. They just couldn't use magic. Be they cooking a meal or calling a cab or starting a fire, there was no wand use allowed (or wandless magic, the headmaster amended, while giving Team Snarky-Smartie a knowing look). No spells, no charms, no potions. Nothing magically oriented. They were to live like Real-Life-Muggles. Whichever team outlasted the rest before resorting to magic was the winner.

Expenses, like always, would not be a problem. The goblins managing Gringotts had supported Albus' games in a very generous and unexpected agreement. The war or lack thereof and its effect on their business and their welfare had indebted the miserly creatures to Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix. They were the only beings other than the players that had intimate knowledge of these games, and they were happy or at least willing to fund the games from beginning to end. None of the Order members could be sure of their motives, as the goblins weren't known to share their personal business, but Albus would not deny that the sponsors of the Order Games were always quite interested in all results. Team Sugar-Has-Rotted-Albus'-Brain was quite certain that there was an intricate pool of sorts on the outcome of each game; their sponsors were betting on who would win.

Living expenses, food expenses, anything they could wish for, was taken care of. They could spend however much money they liked (within reason) and needn't worry about their job security or other various responsibilities. The headmaster had his connections and a good deal of influence and nobody was about to argue with the most powerful wizards and witches in the Wizarding world. There was nothing to stop them from disappearing and living without magic for as long as they could possibly stand.

So the Order of the Phoenix split up into pairs once again to do something they'd never imagined to attempt; live like Muggles.

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Authors Notes Well, I simply can't be blamed for the introduction of this story. I was highly encouraged by the last thing I wrote and am still on a bit of a confidence high.

This is, in theory, a multi-chapter story. Something I never dreamed of attempting. Then again, if everybody hates it, I probably won't bother attempting to finish.

I made up the second ingredient they discussed in Paris. It doesn't affect the story at all and won't be explained later. I just made it up.

I don't have a beta, but I suppose I should get one. I can't bring myself to do it, though. It feels like having a beta is something ::real:: authors do, and we all know how much I don't feel like a ::real:: author.

I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer and need serious prodding to grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback. Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

The Grand Tour

Chapter 2 of 12

Hermione and Severus explore their new apartment. And that's about it.

~~ I don't own the Harry Potter universe, and I doubt anybody would pay me for my writing even if I did have the right to demand money, money that belongs to J.K. Rowling, not me.

A/N at bottom, requesting you to bear with me and rambling a bit. All reviews (assuming I get any) are answered on the reviews page.

Oh, and for anyone wondering, you don't exactly 'pronounce' my penname. It's not a word, the letters stand for something. And no, I'm not telling here what they stand for.

So I'm just F-y-i-a-g-c-g.

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 2

The Grand Tour

Hermione and Severus looked around the apartment. Hermione considered her surroundings and tried to take everything in without voicing any opinions she had aloud, yet. She had learned the hard way just how long her companion needed silence when confronted with a new situation, partly because he was a foul-tempered git. But also partly because though it didn't seem like it he was quite deep in his own inspection of this unfamiliar place himself.

The main difference between the two and their investigation techniques was that Hermione moved close to objects, reading titles, lifting trinkets, and running the pads of her fingers across surfaces, intent on thoroughly examining them, entranced and intrigued. Severus, on the other hand, kept his distance and carefully and slowly swept his eyes over every detail with a hint of disdain in his demeanor.

Both saw things that the other did not, they knew. Different details and peculiarities caught their attention, and the pair looked forward to pointing out as well as being exposed to the myriad of effects they hadn't noticed.

Neither was in a rush to step away from the expansive bookshelf covering one wall, despite the unexplored hallway leading off of this main room. Severus was seriously considering picking a tome and settling in, uninterested in the rest of the flat. Hermione noticed the hallway but once her eyes swept over the books available, she stood dumbstruck. Both stared at the wall of bookshelves, imagining that living like a Muggle couldn't be too bad, now that they had subsequent reading material.

Finally their curious natures managed to win over their bibliophilic tendencies and Severus led Hermione through the doorway and into a long hallway with five doors, two to each side and one directly ahead. Hermione chose the first door to her left, leaving Severus to explore the room across the hall on his own.

Displeased with herself for her automatic urge to cast Lumos in the dark room, Hermione felt along the wall to the side of the doorway and flipped the switch she found. A light in the ceiling came on and she was able to take in her surroundings. The room was a bedroom, not small but not extravagant. A comfortable looking bed sat against the wall to her left. It was not like the four-poster beds almost overwhelmingly large with unnecessarily intricate carvings that she had become accustomed to in her days at Hogwarts.

But thankfully it wasn't like her own at home a twin bed with brass head- and footboards and an awful handmade quilt, a horrible bed that reminded her of her awkward childhood and her horror that she was twenty years old and living with her parents again. This bed was a good size and looked to be quite comfortable. It had simple wooden head- and footboards and took up a good portion of the wall with a nightstand on either side.

Hermione moved closer to the bed and nightstands to really examine them and found that while not expensive or ornate, the furnishings were above satisfaction. The bed was made of dark wood she wasn't sure what kind a deep brown color and smooth feel, and it matched the nightstands as well as the other furniture in the room a large dresser, small desk with an uncomfortable-looking straight back chair, and bookcase. The coloring and contour of the wood quite suited the feeling of the room as did the colors used.

The bed had a comforter that was striped with a deep navy blue and dark forest green. A slightly lighter version of this pattern was on the walls, making the colors easier to distinguish from afar but not creating a specifically 'light' atmosphere. She pulled back the comforter a bit and found black cotton sheets, as she had slightly suspected. She considered that this would probably not be her room, unless the two bedrooms were identical... which she doubted.

There was a lamp on each nightstand, identical except for the color of the shades. They were solid rather than striped, one side was a green that fit in the middle of the spectrum used for the bed and walls, and the other was blue, also not as dark as the navy on the comforter but not quite as light as the shade surrounding her. Both nightstands were about the right size to fit, along with the lamp, two or three nighttime-reading books, or a pitcher of water and glass. The dresser looked accommodating enough for the amount of Muggle clothes she would need, with a large but plain mirror above it.

The desk was completely unsuitable for any kind of proper research or even comfortable writing environment. It looked like the right size to sit at to write a letter a short one, maybe a postcard but not to spend any substantial time at. She thought this odd. Surely Albus knew the two members of his staff well enough to know that a lack of magic did not mean a lack of knowledge.

The bookcase was also somewhat disappointing. It was only three shelves high and less than half the size of the dresser. Again she internally questioned Albus' reasoning, but remembered the remarkable bookshelves in their living area apparently she and Severus were expected to share.

The room had no windows, so when she flicked off the ceiling light it was once again shrouded in darkness *Like a cave* she thought, *perfect for a Vampire*.

Sniggering to herself, her investigation complete, Hermione stepped back into the hallway. Across from her she could see Severus in the other bedroom, and she stepped inside with slight expectations as to the color scheme of this one. Her hypothesis had been correct; house loyalty was still to be taken into account, even if only in interior design.

The bed that her partner and friend stood next to was striped in the same pattern as the room she had just left, but next to a deep blue was a dark maroon. She noticed, however, that neither color was as dark as those in the other room. The blue on this bed was closer to the shade on the walls across the hall. The two lamps were a blood red and a dark blue, once again a few shades lighter than she had already seen.

And the coloring on these walls was bright, cheery. The walls of this room definitely projected a brighter atmosphere than the others had. The light did not seem to absorb and disappear into these walls; instead, it illuminated the bedroom and brightened the wood. It was the same wood, she observed, although it looked different amongst these colors, and there was an identical dresser, inadequate desk, and pathetic bookcase.

The curtains on the window had been drawn, letting in the sun and reinforcing the 'bright' feeling. She said nothing but found herself stuck between exasperated and horrified by the choice of lighting. Severus had crossed the room in the relative dark to open the window shades not because he preferred sunlight. He hadn't known any other way to turn on a light. He hadn't automatically used magic, but he was still far from a Muggle.

Poor Dear, she thought and then thought how ridiculous it was to be calling Snape a poor dear and switched to something more fitting *insufferable Bastard*, she thought, *not quite used to the light switches*.

Indeed, the man had very little knowledge of anything related to electricity, but she knew that trying to teach him without his asking would be an exercise in futility. He would watch her to learn to do things, and in time he would ask questions. He had been exposed to electricity in various other games, and would understand it quickly, but it would take some time before he learned to naturally swipe his hand against the wall rather than wave his wand across the room.

"I think this should be your room, Severus." She grinned cheekily, speaking in the bright tone that the room inspired. "It's... it's *you*."

The only response she received was one raised eyebrow and his graceful exit, murmuring what sounded suspiciously like *over my dead body*. "Which was funny until he continued with *or yours*."

She followed him back into the room she had looked at first and was actually able to hear his small sigh of relief, satisfaction, or maybe just comfort. He matched the room, fit in perfectly. He would definitely prefer this room.

She considered insisting on this bedroom being hers, just for the fun of his predictable indignation. She loved to tease him as much as she enjoyed disagreeing and debating with him in earnest, but oftentimes the results of teasing were unpleasant for all involved, while debates however heated usually offered a chance to learn something new, at least. So rather than start a battle, she smiled and returned to the living room.

She came back down the hallway dragging a medium-sized suitcase and pulled it into the brighter room. Severus mimicked her action and brought his suitcase the same size as hers and also black, but covered with little silver snakes rather than gold lions into his room and laid it next to the dresser, before finding his way back into the hall. Both were much happier with their room choices than their first impressions had led them to expect.

She had known for the past 11 years that the Potions Master had a cruel disposition, but Severus had been surprised to find Hermione's temper able to show through so strongly. The boys had not bothered to warn him of Hermione's nature; she was always right, always in charge, and getting into a row with her was dangerous and scary. He had learned soon enough, after the first time he had called her a "silly girl" while they were supposed to be working alongside each other as equals; he now used the phrase "silly woman."

When Hermione had charged into his office to collect an overdue book on rare plants of Ethiopia, he had been quite amused at her temper. But when she had challenged his knowledge, citing an obscure article about sephipporous stems that conflicted directly with his developing thesis, his temper had matched hers. He had seen men and women alike cower at his scowl, his angry voice, his intelligence. But Hermione, the slip of a girl he had intimidated and mocked for seven years, matched his every move.

Albus had heard them from the Great Hall and come down before anything dangerous had happened. But although no hexes were thrown (this time), vicious academic premises had flown between the two in an ever increasing volume. And they had liked it.

When temperaments rose between the two, coworkers and friends alike would leave the room, uncomfortable with the atmosphere. Not many people could sit between a yelling Severus Snape and a shouting Hermione Granger, both intense and passionate and not the least bit approachable. Their intellect, emotions, and power had conquered anyone that had stood in either's way, Hermione having developed a list of defeated opponents to rival Severus' multitude of cowering and emotionally-scarred challengers.

Both Hermione and Severus were pleased with the discovery of a proper dueling partner verbal, magical, and intellectual duels that they entered into regularly that they could view as an equal. The two had learned much from each other during their debates and discussions, and the road to knowledge was worth the scorched walls and the destruction of a few priceless knick-knacks.

But they knew the difference between these arguments and a bit of teasing. And Hermione knew that teasing only got him riled up to a degree and the little bit of amusement she found in the beginning was often not worth it. He had still not managed to perfect 'teasing' her, but he had his own ways. He had cut her down many times in the past two years, only mildly less viciously than when she had been a student. It would be interesting to see how the two would fare in a fight as Muggles, unable to pull out their wands when other arguments had failed.

Would fists come into it? she wondered. I must have learned something from Dad and his self-defense lessons. He hasn't got a chance.

She was not above resorting to Muggle bullying techniques to settle a disagreement. But she knew that, cruel as he was, Severus would never retaliate physically. Well, probably not, anyway. He had been willing to match her magically... She vowed to check the bookshelves for tips on hand-to-hand combat, just in case.

Either way, it was not worth the trouble of even a verbal sparring. She was much happier with the room she had just left, with its cheerier walls and lovely view, than she would have been in that dark, perfect-for-brooding dwelling that her ex-professor was returning to the hallway from. Pretending to care about room assignments solely for the purpose of irritating him would take up too much energy. Energy that could be used to explore the rest of the flat.

Hermione opened the door next to his room. Inside, she saw a toilet, small hand-washing sink with a small mirror on the wall above it, and a small tower that would only properly fit little soaps and the spray-stuff for odors, the ones that come in the small handy size.

Her heart sank a bit at the decidedly *small* room, she wasn't the type to spend hours doing her makeup but she doubted very much that this little loo would accommodate anyone wishing to change or wash up. Severus glanced in with a look of disinterest, but she was *sure* she saw a bit more disdain for this *small* room than he had displayed for the others.

Her spirits lifted when, across the hall, she and Severus stepped into a large, accommodating bathroom. It had a large bathtub with a shower, a toilet, a large sink with a fitting mirror above it and plenty of counter space around it for toiletries, a much larger tower which would nicely fit towels, extra toilet paper, and the girly stuff that she would put there just to irk her companion and a mirror next to the door that was large enough for Severus to be able to see himself completely when standing before it.

She checked the edges of the mirror quickly, hoping she was being discreet. Satisfied that there were no words there one had to be wary with the Headmaster as their decorator, after all she exited the bathroom feeling much more confident in her ability to bathe and groom herself comfortably.

She looked at the door to her right the only one down this hallway leading to a room that hadn't yet been explored and instead turned left to return to the living room. Severus was not far behind her, the confusion that she had expected to see not evident.

"I agree," he firmly told her, not giving her the chance to say anything for him to agree or disagree with. "We should save an exploration of the office area for another time. I doubt that I will want to tear myself out of there, if Albus did what I expect, which he often does. Irritating, predictable, conniving old man..." He let his statement end in a grumble of sorts, possibly injecting a few words that she, however much she agreed, would scold him for using about his mentor and friend.

As his gaze shifted to the other two rooms attached to the one they stood in, Hermione found herself unable to bear the thought of exploring them just yet. Her attention returned to the room they stood in. She had looked at it before but now, having seen the bedrooms, it seemed a little more fitting.

Their living room was lovely; large with enough windows to keep her comfortable without disrupting the dark man beside her. It seemed to be an attempt to satisfy both tastes, by not using either's specific colors. It was done in shades of blue, the wallpaper striped like in the bedrooms, but with the six different shades of blue Hermione had noticed, rather than one blue and another color.

There was a large rug in the middle, atop which sat a couch and coffee table. The couch looked adequate for three people, comfortably. It was done in just two shades of blue, the body part of it was the color on Severus' lamp and the cushions were the color on Hermione's lamp,

The coffee table was low and wide, with various 'coffee table books' resting on it. Scanning the titles, Hermione found their displayed books to be as Muggle as possible; football and television guides being the two on top. Severus would be livid. The table itself, though, was the same beautiful wood used on the beds and dressers, and it sat on a blue carpet that seemed to have all of the 6 blues in it, in no discernable pattern.

There was a large TV with a VCR and DVD player along with a stereo system next to it. She looked forward to exposing Severus to the joys of Muggle movies and music. There was a small collection of movies and CDs and she could see a few titles. Damn the headmaster, he knew them both too well.

Near the wall behind them the glorious wall that was almost entirely bookshelves sat two chairs, similar looking but tailored to their intended occupants. They were both blue, though one was considerably darker than the other. The lighter was Hermione's ideal reading chair: soft, big, comforting. The darker one had a higher back, and not nearly as much padding as the other, and an ottoman in front of it.

There was a small table between the two chairs as well, but this one had no books on it. The bookcases were about half full, giving them enough reading material to keep satisfied for now but with substantial room for more, which she would enjoy going to the bookstore for. There were Muggle classics, cookbooks, dime-store romance novels, encyclopedias, recent bestsellers, graduate-level textbooks, and a whole shelf of books that definitely weren't in English. There were no Wizarding books, though. They were Muggles, after all.

Across the living room were the dining room and kitchen. She had warned him on the way here that cooking was not like brewing a potion, and he seemed to believe that more than any of the other warnings. The fact that it seemed similar to his mastered field but that would be hard to accomplish clearly discomfited the man; he was used to doing things perfectly and did not like being shown to be ignorant or uninformed about anything.

He was looking into the room with its shiny appliances, tiled floors, and various weaponry in a way that reminded her of Neville, looking into the Potions classroom. Dread, horror, nervousness, uncertainty. This was a side of Severus Snape not many saw. And it was freaking her out a bit.

"The little dining room seems nice," she began, uncomfortable with the silence. "That table will properly fit the two of us. With a lot of food, our own reading material, and

anything else we can think to throw on it."

"The kitchen," she continued, eyeing the man next to her carefully and feeling confident that she knew him well enough to be saying the right thing, "seems lovely, and I can't wait to see what Muggle tools Albus has given us to learn on." She went on, aware that she wasn't just doing this for him- she hated to cook too. "But," she saw him physically un-tense a bit at this, "I think we should go out today. I can show you around town a bit, we can do some grocery shopping and fill in the gaps in our wardrobe, and maybe have dinner at a dirty greasy Muggle pub."

He shuddered a bit at each suggestion she made, but was definitely in favor of that plan over conquering the kitchen. "Or..." he began, searching his brain for activities that would be preferable even as he put on his cloak.

"No, Severus. These are things we need to do. We'll get hungry at some point while we're here and there are no house elves to whip us up a five course meal. And look at us, putting on our cloaks to walk around Muggle London! You haven't nearly the right clothes to last much longer than a week without resorting to robes. Unless you are eager to learn laundry...?" she let the question dangle while he took in the implications, a resigned look on his face.

"We don't really *need* to eat somewhere cheap, loud, and full of drunken Muggles. But I want to, because I know you don't."

He scowled at her, helping her with her own cloak without really thinking about it, and vowing to stop letting her order him around. As soon as he overcame the foolish, unnecessary sense of nervousness he was suddenly feeling. Which would be any minute now, he was sure.

He grabbed the keys off the small table next to the door where she had dropped them. Uncomfortable with the foreign objects, he handed them to Hermione and closed the door behind them, seemingly surprised when she put the keys back into their locks. Once she had the deadbolts clicked into place she dropped the keys into her purse. They both took a deep breath, and began to walk down the sidewalk, ordinary Muggles on an ordinary Muggle excursion.

Author's Notes: *I had a lot planned for this chapter. And now I have it planned for the next chapter. Funny how things work out.*

*My constant need to ramble and describe has been outed in this chapter. The first chapter was mostly back-story, but this one has no excuse. I just needed to describe their new surroundings thoroughly. I figure it's easier to both create and read about a situation if you can see it clearly. That and I couldn't stop typing. I do promise, the next chapter will be more than paragraph after paragraph of interior decorating. They're going shopping! They're spending the entire chapter in each other's presence, talking and stuff. I just, need to write it... It promises to be more fun than a barrel full of monkeys. Well, sleeping monkeys at least. Sleeping monkeys aren't incredibly fun are they, because I can amend that to dead ones if I'm unable to live up to being **more fun than a barrel of sleeping monkeys!***

Also, I don't think my Snape is as Snapey as he should be here. But keep in mind that despite his confident demeanor, he is still in a new situation. And he wants to win. And, um... I'll do my best to give him some more... personality... in the next chapter.

I still don't have a beta. It still freaks me out a little to think of it. I suppose I prefer reading this over a dozen times and then posting it. And then reading over it again, and going into my account to edit it. And then reading it again... ad nauseum. Maybe that's why I don't like my writing. I'm sick of it by the time anybody else reads it. So my lack of a beta and eventual surrender are the reasons behind any errors, or gaping plot holes. Or just general crappiness. The admins here at SH have advised me to find one and I suppose it would be most wise to do as they ask. I went over this chapter (for the fifteenth time, at least) after their response, but should probably try to side-step that little necessity by handing in something worth posting next time. I suppose that if you're reading this, they accepted my corrections (meaning I was able to guess correctly what needed to change). But I am knackered and really don't think I could edit this (or read it at all) one more time, even if my life depended on it. A few people offered to beta for me in response to the last chapter. If anybody is still interested, e-mail me at fyiagcg@yahoo.com. I'll love you forever. Or, at least, I'll like you for a little while.

Anyway, I did want to state that the entire story will not be full of my remarkable way of describing things that don't exist until people are sick of them. Hopefully. Please please please stick with me?! and Review! I need it. If you're still not sure if you want to read this story or not, tell me why.

Like I've said, if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

A Long Black Coat

Chapter 3 of 12

Severus discovers commission and mannequins; Hermione's imagination conjures panthers, Birkenstocks, and Mohawks; and revelations are made about some interesting emotional reactions and long-standing questions.

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*I don't own the Harry Potter universe, and I doubt anybody would pay me for my writing even if I did have the right to demand money, money that belongs to J.K. Rowling, not me.*

*A/Ns at bottom (not quite as verbose as last time), all reviews answered on the reviews page (oh keep reviewing, it makes me happy!!)*

*This chapter somehow inspired by six hours spent on a greyhound bus.*

*As always, I blame Alicia entirely. Even more so this time, because she let me hang out in her home and write this stuff, and use her computer to type it up, and she gave me something to drink when I reached 100 reviews on Ashwinder and started hyperventilating.*

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**Like the Muggles Do**

**Chapter 3**

**A Long Black Coat**

"Hermione."

"Yes, Severus?"

"You must do something about that man. He keeps touching me."

"Severus, he's a sales clerk. He's simply getting your measurements so that your clothing will fit properly."

"I do not like it, all the same."

"You'll live."

"He, however, might not. You know how I react when people dare to touch me. Especially if those people are blithering idiots, raving on about fall fashion and movie stars *while* they touch me. I do not care what looks 'fabulous' or what Hugh Grant is wearing. That inane chatter that he kept up, blathering on about... who the hell Hugh Grant anyway? Don't bother answering that, I really don't care. If that stupid, annoying child touches me again, if he speaks to me again, if he comes near me again, I cannot be held responsible for my actions."

With a resigned sigh, Hermione left Severus to browse the coat section alone so that she could intercept the salesman before he reached her irritable partner. It was amazing how pushy and annoying people could be when working on commission. The idiot salesman (she had heard his constant talking, he really was an idiot) was aware, because Severus had told him, that they had a good deal of money to spend. Severus of course had never dealt with a pushy sales clerk and did not expect the sod to try to predict, however incorrectly, their every need or want. Hermione berated herself for not anticipating the possibility of Severus answering the question 'can I help you?', especially not with the truth.

"Do you think you could just... estimate what size he is? From over here?"

"Well for such esteemed customers such as yourselves, we want the look and fit of every article of clothing to be perfect. I wouldn't dream of asking you or your gentleman friend to compromise on the quality of your purchases."

*Kiss ass*, Hermione thought, vowing to introduce Severus to thrift stores sooner than later. As horrible as this boy was, though, the clothes in this shop were first-rate, and she did feel that if they had the funds, they could and should insist on the best. She considered just telling the boy to bugger off, but decided that shopping would be easier with someone to scurry off to find the right size of everything they liked. It was a luxury few could afford, and Hermione had not been raised to take available luxuries for granted.

"Well, you see... My friend, he doesn't like being touched."

"I don't quite understand." The simpering fool did, at least, look like he was trying to pay attention to what they wanted, rather than what they could afford.

"He's a very... private man. He doesn't like physical contact. When people touch him, he becomes uncomfortable and tends to... how do I put this... lash out."

Hermione could not deny that when Severus lashed out it was quite a show, but she felt that the Muggle before her would not survive Severus Snape's wrath. Something as simple as his dislike of being touched had weakened much greater men and women; even Aurors chose carefully how to pick their fights with the dangerously short-tempered Wizard.

Tonks had tried to give the sour man a hug at the first meeting for the Order Games. Her hair did not return for several months. And when it did it would change only to green and silver. When she patted him on the back and chuckled "no hard feelings, mate" at the next meeting, he had added a black snake design to twine around her scalp. It hissed at anybody that Severus didn't particularly like (which was most everyone) and Tonks was so frustrated by the end of the game, she swore to never touch him again. Whenever there were no Muggles around, the damned thing had slithered and hissed and tried, despite its status as hair, to bite Tonks' forehead. When there were Muggles around, they openly stared at her, more so than usual. Snape eventually took off the charm that animated the snake, but when he heard her mumble something about a 'spiteful bastard' he simply renewed the other two charms before returning to Hogwarts.

Hermione had thought it rather dashing, though she was a red and gold girl herself. And she was astonished that when they all met at the end, before Severus had lifted his spell, the snake had not hissed at her as it had at the beginning. She had been rather impressed with Severus' reinforcement spells when, before Albus shipped them all to the New York subway six months later, Tonks admitted that she had finally been able to remove the serpent design only a few days prior, though she had been able to change the colors from Slytherin pride to those of her own choosing for a few months.

Of course Hermione could not tell the salesman in front of her the possible hazards of touching her 'gentleman friend' the young man was a Muggle, after all. She and Severus were Muggles. So as the salesman continued to stare at her blankly, while she imagined him with a Slytherin-themed Mohawk, she continued her explanation as best she could, trying to hold on to some semblance of honesty.

"He used to have a dangerous occupation; he couldn't trust anyone. So he developed strong natural personal defenses." She tried to find the right words to explain her companion. "And besides which, he's..."

"Sensitive?"

"A sadistic bastard."

"Oh."

Hermione did not miss the snort that came from somewhere around the trench coats. Apparently, someone thought that the idea of Severus Snape being sensitive was rather absurd. She agreed.

Her glance flicked towards the noise and locked with a pair of dark, impatient eyes. The salesclerk not only didn't notice that her attention had been drawn elsewhere, but he was also still trying to convince her that he wanted only the best for them. Apparently, only he could offer them "the perfect fit, the most modern and popular styles, and only the highest quality fabrics."

The eyes she was watching were animated, trying to convey some message. The look said "get rid of him or I will. Annoying dunderheaded boy..."

Or at least that's what she was thinking.

She looked back at the man before her and interrupted his inane chatter, exasperated with how much he didn't get what she was trying to say, no matter how nicely she tried to put it. "I am through being polite. You don't seem to take a hint, so I'll be blunt. We do not need an ignorant little cretin buzzing around us and boring us with... well, whatever you've been saying. I tuned you out some time ago. We can do just fine without your assistance. I think that I will go find the men's section without your escort and personally pick out several items on which we will spend an unimaginable amount of money. Thank you." She gave him one last superior and disdainful look, and walked away, with a curt "Good day," and, just loud enough that she was sure he could hear her, "you useless idiot."

When Hermione rounded the corner, quite proud of herself for leaving the mosquito-like little nuisance in the stupor that she had, she refused to think about just where she had learned such behavior. Snape emerged from the coat section with a long black trench coat hanging over one arm. The dazed salesclerk started a bit at Snape's sudden appearance, but actually had the nerve to launch into some sort of apologetic plea to salvage his commission. He had apparently decided that the 'bitch' he had just encountered was clearly the unstable half of the duo, and he was sure Severus would be much more reasonable. His expression reflected that he was sure he could convince the man now scowling at him of his dubious usefulness.

Severus' voice came out icy cold as he interrupted the impertinent young fool. "The lady has informed you that we no longer require your services. And she has done so in a far more polite manner than I am likely to." He drew himself to his full height, towering over the boy and silencing any further protestation with his harsh, black stare.

"Without her around to keep me calm and collected, I am likely to show you what I really think of your efforts and your opinions. Do not bother me with your sniveling inanities. You will not like seeing me in a bad mood."

The salesclerk exited the dangerous man's presence as quickly as a first-year Hufflepuff.

"You scarred him for life!" she scolded him, with a hint of amusement. She had felt that she had done a highly satisfactory job of dismissing the rude, annoying little shit. She was not pleased that Severus had chosen to continue the imbecile's torture after her suitably haughty and insulting exit.

"It's what I do."

Hermione opened her mouth to argue with him, but promptly swallowed her words when she considered the man walking beside her.

"Fair enough."

He was right, that's what he did. She could no sooner confront him than she could a panther. Asking Severus Snape to not insult and intimidate someone was akin to asking a panther to cease its hunt, and never again pounce, attack, and kill its unsuspecting prey. Shredding the defenseless creature's hide with razor-sharp claws, and tearing flesh with long, fierce teeth...

She'd rather take her chances with the panther than Severus.

One wrong step with either would result in the salvation of the original intended victim only because the focus of the attack would be transferred to her. Little chance existed for all of the possible targets to escape unscathed. A panther's dinner, she thought, was a much better option than being the sole target of the Potions master's viciousness.

Besides, the little sod deserved it. "He was a blithering idiot anyway," she continued. "And I did try to warn him about you."

"That you did," he said with a smirk. "Don't do it again. I like them surprised."

She laughed as she slowed her pace, still alert as she navigated the department store in search of menswear. Severus' attention was drawn to his recent acquisition, hanging over his arm as they walked.

"I picked a coat."

Hermione practically screeched to a stop, not noticing in her excitement that they had reached their intended destination. She beamed at him and eagerly took the long black trench coat for inspection.

Severus studied his surroundings and noticed that standing on a platform next to them were several men. Well they obviously weren't real men. They didn't look like anybody had even tried to make them realistic... *lazy, inartistic Muggles*. They were ghostly white, with limbs stiff in unnatural poses. They were given faces, of a sort, but all three were the same. And there were no real details, just the basic outline of eyes, ears, nose, mouth. Their hair, or at least the idea of hair, had been simply carved into their heads. To make them even more dreadful, these men they must have been made of stone, though he couldn't tell for sure without studying them up close were dressed atrociously.

One held a long metal stick and wore plaid pants which made him think of Minerva, a vest-like sweater over a short sleeved shirt, and a flimsy looking hat with what looked like a baby Kneazle on top. The poor bastard in the middle had been contorted into a ghastly parody of someone running. He had on pants and a jacket made of the same, indistinguishable fabric that could only have been developed by Muggles. There appeared to be buttons running down the side of the pants, as though one could pull them apart to reveal a separate front and back. On the man's feet were ugly white shoes; trainers they were called, though he had never seen any so pristinely white and detailed with all sorts of useless-looking additions. Severus looked at the third man and nearly gagged at the thought of any man dressed in the ridiculous costume. The shorts he wore bordered on obscene, topped with a brightly colored shirt. There were fuzzy bands around his head and wrists and he held a racket, though Severus had never seen a metal like it. It was clearly not steel or any other strong metal, it was shiny and looked to be easily bendable. The strings crisscrossing the strange racket also did not look like those he had seen in the Wizarding World. Everything looked man-made, nothing he held appeared to be natural. In his other hand was a fuzzy, bright green ball; much larger than a Snitch but not nearly the size of a Bludger. The third man also wore trainers, with white socks that went higher up the man's calves than the shorts went down his thighs.

Severus couldn't comprehend why someone would take the time to carve these sparsely-detailed statues, not even giving them color for their hair, and then dress them up in these ridiculous, appalling clothes. He hoped Hermione didn't expect him to look like one of them when they left. He would rather dress as Longbottom's boggart, in a dress and large ugly vulture hat.

Hermione had taken his coat from him and was examining it, and then holding it up to his body, and then her own. She murmured a distracted "They're mannequins, Severus" before continuing her investigation by putting her hands in every pocket she could find. Approving of his choice, she gave him an unimpeded smile.

"Brilliant. It's perfect. You chose a good coat."

Severus narrowed his eyes at the smiling woman. "I am not a child, and I will not tolerate such condescending remarks about my ability to choose clothing."

"I'm sorry, Severus," she sighed, a look of relief not completely hidden by her newly contrite expression. "I was just worried that this shopping thing would be difficult."

==

"Why do you have to be so difficult?" the exhausted witch cried. "We're going nowhere, Severus!"

Indeed, the pair had been, essentially, arguing for almost an hour now. Piles of discarded clothing lay like corpses around their feet, and the two were facing each other, looking murderous. On a chair, off to the side, sat her purse and shoes (which had become exponentially less comfortable as her irritation grew), their cloaks, and on top of all of it, a long black trench coat.

She gazed longingly at the coat, which had been so easy to find and agree on. Anger flooded her brain again and she looked back at the man across the clothing battlefield from her.

He stood perfectly straight, arms folded tightly across his chest, feet almost shoulder-width apart. He was glaring at her, all sense of amusement gone from his demeanor. His thin lips formed a sneer as he looked down at her over that prominent nose of his with an irate stare, eyebrows coming together to complete his angry expression. His lank hair fell in front of his face and grazed his cheekbones, but he did nothing to fix it. He didn't move. It didn't even look like he was breathing.

She studied him, recognizing the stance from seven years of being on the receiving end. But as she looked at him now, she did not see the intimidatingly fierce Potions master, Great Bat of the Dungeons, that she had seen him as during her childhood.

She was looking at him as a grown woman, now. She saw him in a brand new light. She finally identified exactly what this new view was. Her stomach flipped and her mind reeled, but this new opinion did not budge. She would never have predicted that she would feel this way about her former Professor, let alone tell him. But he needed to know how she felt, how he was making her feel.

"Severus Snape, you are acting like a defiant, stubborn, spoilt little boy!"

He was dumbstruck. She could hardly believe herself, as her mouth continued to speak to him with a familiarity for which she was sure he would somehow punish her later. Her anger overpowered her fear and respect of the man, and she berated him further.



"I am not asking that you don't wear pastels or take up golfing. All that I ask is that you deviate from neck-to-toes covering black. I insist that you stop acting like a child and compromise with me. Otherwise, I will lose this game for us right now by hexing you into a pink and purple party dress with Gryffindor red and gold tights and matching hair ribbon."

He was gobsmacked. Gobsmacked and dumbstruck.... She had scolded him to the point of speechlessness.

His defiant stance melted away as he strode toward her, calm yet dangerous. Speech was only returning to him in parts, and rather than complete sentences he was growling fragments of an incoherent phrase, raging at her.

It had all come out as a sort of non-understandable sentence, with only tiny pauses between words to demonstrate the changing of thought. "Disrespectful... superior... war hero... headmaster... Golden Trio... insolence... detention... librarian... stealing... clothing... black... on *fire*... grown man... lost your mind?"

He had reached her now and stood silent again, mere inches from her. For her part, Hermione was giving him her best basilisk-stare, with her hands defiantly set on her hips, her face flushed with anger rather than fear.

"Miss Granger," he began, his voice deafening in her ears, barely above a whisper. He leaned closer until his face was right next to hers. "You will remember-

Her hands silenced him as they came up to cup his face, suddenly. Her entire disposition changed from the expression Draco Malfoy was accustomed to, to a look only Ron and Harry had seen before.

"I've got it!" she exclaimed, tapping her hands on his cheeks in a playful, excited mini-slap. There was a triumphant gleam in her eye and she was smiling. And then she stepped back from him, turned on her heel, and walked away, without another word.

The sharp left that she took, two aisles down, and her determined stride assured Severus that she would return. Besides, she had left her purse and shoes.

He retraced the steps he had taken moments before, this time not in anger, but not pleased. He kicked a pile of black garments lying, unwanted, on the floor, and considered her final argument from the battle they'd been fighting right before she had, quite clearly, lost her mind...

"Severus, you have to wear some kind of color."

"I will only wear black."

"You can't wear just black."

"Well, there *is* usually a bit of white as well."

"You can not dress the way you **usually** do."

"I don't see why not."

"It's not acceptable!"

"It has always suited me just fine."

"*At Hogwarts!*"

"Yes, at Hogwarts. Since before you spent that first day, hand waving in the air and that eager-to-prove-yourself look on your face. For as long as I've worked there, which is longer than you have been alive. I have always worn a white linen shirt, black wool trousers, a black vest, and a black wool coat. When I really want to *cut loose*, I will remove the jacket. Maybe roll the sleeves up, which is more likely now, at least, than before your lucky bastard of a best friend defeated the Dark Lord for good, practically by accident. Now I only have a foolish tattoo, rather than the sign of death destruction and enslavement to a madman. On top of all of this I don robes, which I have conceded to avoid for the sake of this ridiculous Muggle farce.

That is how I dress. I have dressed this way for over twenty years. Conservatively, and in black. I am an old man, Hermione, and set in my ways. My clothing has always satisfied all of my needs and purposes."

"And what are those purposes, *old man*?" Her fury had doubled during his rant, and she always worked up a rage when he went on about being old. That's why he called himself an old man, her response was predictable and enjoyable. It had incensed her further, and she did not wait for him to answer. "Frightening small children? Intimidating teenagers? You don't have to dress that way here, now, Severus. You can try something new."

His voice dropped to an angry growl, he crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes at her.

"I do not wish to try something new."

She had really lost her temper (and all sense of reasoning) then. He was sure the entire store had heard her screech as she implored, "Why do you have to be so difficult?"

==

It hadn't been long before Hermione returned, a confident expression on her face.

"It's practically what you wear already!" her excited sales-pitch began. "They're just like your white linen shirts. Long sleeved, with the collar and the buttons. They're in cotton, though. So you'll look like you belong in this decade." He arched an eyebrow at her, allowing her to continue as he took one crisply folded shirt from the pile in her arms and studied it. She took a deep breath.

"I grabbed a couple black ones and a couple white ones, and a few colored ones. Before you protest, please look at them. The colors aren't that bad. This plum will look dashing on you. The blues are all very dark. And manly. Menacing, even. And the dark green ones are perfect for a Slytherin. None of them are shiny or silky or showy, so you won't look like Lockhart. There are also some gray ones. They aren't technically a 'color,' so that should make you happy. But they're not your usual simplistic black and white, so I'll stop nagging at you. They're all good shirts, Severus. But they won't leave you looking..." she was gauging his reactions, trying to satisfy his demands. And doing a much better job of it than that idiot sales clerk had done. "...like you're trying too hard," she finished, her practiced speech concluded. She drew in a long breath really that had been a lot to say on the minimal amount of oxygen she had provided herself.

She studied his face and opened her mouth to launch a second attack.

"Fine," he said, not wishing to hear her try to convince him further. "These will do." She smiled again, the first genuine one since he had shown her the long black coat. "All that I ask is that we leave this God-forsaken place and return to a world of people. No matter that the clothes are probably better company than the various Muggles you no doubt plan to inflict on me."

"Brilliant. Let's pay for these, then we can go." She was somewhat shocked that he had agreed so fast. He wouldn't ever tell her, but he was quite pleased with her selections. He felt a strange bit of pride that she had thought of something he truly approved of.

Her face fell, and his headache returned full force, preparing for what she was about to say, which was bound to be bad news.

"We still need trousers."

==

Severus pulled the money from his Muggle wallet, not sure if they were spending a lot or a little, glad to be leaving. The rest of their shopping had gone rather smoothly. She had insisted that he wear pants *not* made of wool, and begged him to pick something suitable.

He had chosen several pairs of black trousers and a few of a very dark gray, satisfied with Hermione's beam of appreciation at his, however fractional, deviation from all black. She had not argued with him over any of his choices and everything had gone much more efficiently.

She had picked out a pair of black boots that resembled his own, laughing when he told her 'none of those ridiculous lace-up trainers' he had seen. "Oh!" she had exclaimed. "I would pay money to see that!" Her fit of giggles only escalated as she looked around the shoe department, at all of the possibilities. She was doubled over, tears forming, gasping something about 'Birkenstocks' when a salesperson came over to see if they were ok

Hermione had straightened, and at Severus' disapproving glare reverted to a somber expression. She calmly told the young woman that they were ready to check out.

Hermione had only grabbed one thing for herself a pea coat that she said couldn't wait. She had insisted that Severus put on his new trench coat and asked the cashier to put their cloaks into one of the large bags full of their new purchases.

Walking out of the department store, Hermione informed him that they were returning 'home' to relieve themselves of their packages before coming back for more 'fun.'

"Tomorrow, I'll leave you at the flat while I come into town to buy a few articles of clothing for myself. I doubt that you want to accompany me on another exciting shopping trip."

He had been relieved at that. Doing *that* again, in a woman's section, rated just above Double Potions with Slytherin and Gryffindor her year.

"I'm sure you can shop for yourself, you seem to be competent at it." She studied his face, trying to discern if his comment had been an insult or a complement. "I had wondered why you had only bought the one item." He looked her up and down, appraising her appearance "You look quite nice in your new coat."

That, she was sure, was a compliment. After all that, the bastard had just told her she looked nice! She looked around them, the entrance to the store was crowded but there was no one properly witnessing the historic event. She saw his lips twitch and just about fainted. Was he going to smile? A smile and a compliment together? That could be considered nice. And even throughout their growing friendship, Severus Snape had never been nice.

He smirked at her oh thank Merlin! He enjoyed having thrown her off balance; it was a very Slytherin trick to compliment her just to see her squirm. That was the Severus she knew.

With that smirk, he turned from her and began walking down the pavement, his long black coat... not really doing anything special.

==

All traces of reaction to the compliment and almost-smile followed by the inevitable superior look and rather rude abandonment disappeared, replaced by simple, uncontained glee.

"Ha!" she barked, startling a Muggle man walking past her. "I knew it!"

Severus stopped walking and allowed her to catch up with him, undoubtedly viewing it as a gracious favor rather than common courtesy. He looked at her with a bored and exasperated expression, but also an invitation to continue.

She caught up with him and he resumed walking. She checked behind them just to be sure. Triumphant and confident in her discovery, she grinned at him smugly and, lowering her voice, bragged "I knew you charmed your robes to billow the way they do!"

He looked at her with a mix of shock, confusion, and innocence.

All of which she could see right through he had been a spy, you'd think that he'd at least try to make his farce believable. Amidst all of his feigned indignation, she saw the glimmer in his dark eyes. A spark of amusement danced in his gaze, and she knew that she was right but he would never admit it.

That didn't mean she wouldn't tease him about it in the future. But she smiled and continued walking in the direction of their flat, triumph in her step, content to have one long-standing question in her life answered.

She could only imagine what new questions and answers this man would pose in the future.

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**Author's Notes** *ah, that's much better.*

*I promised that this chapter would return to something actually resembling a plot, and it did, I think. Personally, I quite liked this chapter. I didn't expect to spend so much time shopping, but my pen just refused to be cooperative.*

*I'm not sure if it lives up to being **more fun than a barrel of sleeping monkeys** but the effort was made and that's half the battle.*

*Love and Thanks to my two beta volunteers; Michele and Keladry. Michele procrastinated in the real world enough to beta this several times in 24 hours. Anything left that sounds awkward, she probably told me to change it and I refused. Keladry pointed out all of the things that I had probably already refused to change, that really needed something different, and got me to fix them. Even after I informed her that I was impatient and had already posted without her help. Just the offers of beta-work, their faith in my writing, helped this chapter come to pass.*

*A general thank you to everyone who reviews, good or bad. It really is incredible how much each review has an effect.*

*I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.*

*Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.*

# One Down

## Chapter 4 of 12

Dinner at a pub, the cab ride home and an incident with the Police, a rude awakening, and post: which team has dropped out of the game?

*I don't own the Harry Potter universe, and I doubt anybody would pay me for my writing even if I did have the right to demand money, money that belongs to J.K. Rowling, not me.*

*A/Ns at bottom.*

*Love and thanks to QueenP, who beta'd this throughout its creation, and Keladry, who beta'd this after its completion. Anything that's not good, they probably told me to change it and I refused.*

*Also some thanks to the Ash. Admin. who rejected my first draft and included corrections for pretty much every paragraph that had dialogue in it (which I suck at, apparently) and gave me a few suggestions that can only be described as appreciated.*

~~~~~

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 4

One Down

~~~~~

Hermione smiled at him, which could not possibly be a good sign. She turned back to the man next to her and mumbled something else to him. The man nodded and walked away, and Hermione returned to their table.

Severus wanted very much to know exactly what she had discussed with the young man behind the bar. But when the man came to their table, carrying two large glasses that he promptly set in front of the dining pair, Severus knew just what she had done. She had ordered for them both. He thought of arguing with her over his right to choose his own food, but decided that this way, if he hated the food he could blame it on her, and not any poor judgment on his part. She picked up her glass and motioned for him to do the same.

"This, Severus, is a pint."

"A pint?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"Beer."

He put his drink back onto the table with ardent disdain. When he spoke, he said the words as though they were an assault on his tastes by just saying them. "I will not drink butterbeer. It is a sickly treat for children happily visiting Hogsmeade. I did not like it as a third year, I definitely will not enjoy it now."

"Not butterbeer, Severus. Beer. It's an alcoholic drink."

"I have, unfortunately, seen its effects on house-elves. I can state for a fact that any alcoholic substance in it could not be considered..."

"Just try it, Severus. It's nothing like butterbeer. It's just beer. I... I can't describe it to you. Just take a sip."

Severus lifted the glass to his thin lips and, watching her over the rim with those dark piercing eyes, took a drink. The focus that he had established on her quickly left him, as his entire mind-set was switched from loathing of the know-it-all in front of him to figuring out what he had just swallowed.

It was Hermione's laugh that brought him back from his internal analysis of the amber liquid. "I told you it was nothing like butterbeer. And if you drink a lot of it, you can get quite intoxicated and do some stupid things. Most Muggle men do. So do you like it?"

"I-" he stopped his answer as he realized he wasn't sure.

His first instinct had been to tell her that he hated it and to insult her preference of beverages, but the taste lingered in his mouth and he found himself wanting another sip. He raised it to his mouth again, this time taking a larger drink. If he said he hated it, he would have to stop drinking it. And he still wasn't quite sure if he wanted to drink more of it or not. Adding to that the fact that he was still planning an assault to retaliate after her scolding of him in the department store, he decided to store his more barbed retaliations and agree to imbibe this questionable 'beer' of hers.

"I have not yet formed an opinion. But I do not openly hate it."

Her grin of satisfaction made him instantly regret conceding even that point.

==

"So what is it, exactly, that you ordered for us?" He took another sip of his beer, and before she had a chance to answer he continued, *Without consulting me.*"

She swallowed the bite in her mouth before attempting to respond. She looked chastised enough, though, so he shifted his glare from the woman sitting across from him to the plate from which she was eating.

"It appears to me that our first course is fried circles soaking in grease."

"Well, yeah. Pretty much. These," she waved toward the plate set in the middle of their table and picked up another hoop, "are onion rings."

Severus gave her a doubtful look. "I know, Hermione, what an onion looks like. And those are not onions."

He looked at the plate between them. It had several crispy looking bands piled on top of each other. In the middle of the large pile was an empty place that Hermione had burrowed herself, and then she had squirted a strange blood red substance into it. He sniffed at the plate and felt his stomach growl. They looked and smelled suspect

but...at the same time, the scent coming from the platter before him made him quite hungry.

Hermione smiled at him as she picked up another ring. "Honestly, Severus. Try them." She took a bite, leaving a semi-circle which she then showed him. "See? That's an onion in there. It's just battered and then fried. It tastes good." As if to prove her point, she dipped the rest of her onion ring into the red sauce on the plate. "And this is Muggle ketchup. Tomatoes and sugar, basically."

She popped the remainder into her mouth and smiled a closed-lipped smile at him, gesturing at the plate. He winced, slightly, as he picked up the greasy, prickly food, and took a bite.

*Damn her*, it was palatable, almost good.

"We have not eaten all day. And dealing with dunderheads and clothing is enough to make anyone hungry. Even for," he sneered and gestured to the food on the table, "this."

==

"So, next time we have pub food-"

"We will not be dining at any other establishments like this one."

"Oh, right. Of course, no more pubs." She paused for a moment, as if to pretend she believed what she had said. "So. Next time we have pub food I want you to try nachos. Pork scratchings are delicious, if you're brave enough to try them. And I think you might enjoy a tuna melt."

She paused again and his paranoid mind assured him that she was only pretending she was finished speaking in an attempt to lure him into a false sense of security. Her next words confirmed his suspicions.

"And a BLT. Oh, you have to try one of those. You see, what they do-"

"I simply cannot digest properly with you talking so much. I must demand that you be quiet this instant."

"Wow. That was... almost polite." With his glare, she bit back her next teasing remark and turned her attention to the little amount of remaining food. She picked absently at the dish before her.

She popped a lone chip into her mouth and looked at the man across from her. He appeared to be studying the plates. She wasn't sure exactly how much they had drunk, but she was quite sure that for every one pint that she drank, the man had downed two. And she was feeling a tad light-headed herself.

She had ordered two of her favorite pub dishes, ones that weren't common at Hogwarts. Fish and chips was such a staple in the Muggle world that she couldn't understand how she'd never come across any wizarding versions, nor had she seen anyone eating chili con carne.

She had expected that Severus and she would each eat half of both dishes, the greasy balancing the spicy, but she had ended up eating mostly the fish and chips. Severus had, with much less trepidation than the onion rings had brought on, agreed to try the food the waiter had brought them. After a few comments about cleaning charms and presentation, Severus had taken to the spicy dish and quite enjoyed it.

Hermione assumed that he was contemplating his chili and his sample of fish and chips as she gave their server the credit card Albus had included in their provisions. The usually glaring eyes had become slightly glassy, and he had not made a truly cutting remark for several minutes, now. He did look up when the waiter brought back her card and asked her to sign a slip of paper. His questioning look did not go unnoticed and as soon as the man could not overhear her, she tried to explain the card to the slightly inebriated wizard.

"They just swipe it through a machine, and later a company will ask us to give them money along with a little extra in interest and..." she trailed off. He was looking at her blankly and she had lost track of where she was trying to go anyway. "It's like *magic*."

He looked doubtful but did not argue with her. *Definitely sloshed* she thought, having rarely experienced a calmly accepting Severus Snape.

==

When Hermione stood and pulled her coat from the back of her chair, he rose and helped her into it before putting on his own long black trench coat. They walked out the door and Hermione realized that between a very full stomach, a bit of beer, a long time away from the city, and a brand new address... she had no idea how to get home. She threw her left arm into the air and called out, "Taxi!"

"Don't those cost money?" Severus asked her, looking highly displeased.

"We can afford it."

"Nonsense. Whether we can afford it or not is not the issue. I see no point in wasting money when my feet and legs are in perfect working condition."

"Oh yeah, smart guy? What *direction* is our flat in?" She had brought her hands to her hips and was tapping one foot on the pavement. She had raised an eyebrow and slightly pursed her lips, waiting for his answer.

He looked around them once... twice... three times before turning back to her with a look of anger. Alas, he would not concede defeat so easily.

"I admit that I am not quite sure where we live in relation to this questionable establishment. But shouldn't you know? You are the Muggle expert, are you not? You know everything, surely you aren't *lost*."

Every word dripped with sarcasm and she found herself a little hurt. She had never liked it when he called her a know-it-all and she could see the insult forming on his lips. She chose, probably unwisely, to launch a counter-attack before he even got a chance; if he was going to call her a bossy know-it-all, she would act the bossy know-it-all.

"If it weren't for me you would have been reduced to a dribbling wizard idiot by now. It's only been one day of this game and already I have proven to be essential. You, however, are in no position to argue. You could not live like a Muggle without me."

"I'm afraid you think far too highly of yourself, you foolish gir- woman."

"Oh, look at you! Pissed on Muggle beer. I have ordered your food, helped you find acceptable clothes, toured you around the city.... Without me," she sneered, "you'd still be standing outside the front door trying to work the dead-bolts."

"Correction: You have spent the day scolding me as if I were a child and not a grown, competent man. You have bossed me around as if I were those two idiot friends of yours rather than your superior. You have picked out clothing and food for me despite the fact that I can manage myself just fine, have for several years now. You have been completely intolerable, and a bossy know-it-all. I will not tolerate your behavior a moment longer."

She glared at him, refusing to even consider changing her actions or attitudes in the least.

He caught her intention, or lack thereof, and gave a small insincere sigh, continuing, "Then I believe that now is the time that I tell you how childish and stubborn you are

being. It seems slightly redundant, I'm quite sure I've told you just what I think of your methods before. I will not repeat myself and explain to you why your actions today, and right now, are strictly inappropriate. You have always claimed to be an intelligent witch. I'm sure that you will be able to come to your own conclusions. I'm sure that you can find your way home on your own as well, I know I can."

He spun on his heel and started walking in the direction opposite her. She had to admit, when he just got going, the turn changing to a stride, his long black coat had swirled around him quite nicely. It did not billow as he walked away, but for a Muggle, the effect was quite impressive. Perhaps not all of his intimidation tactics were false. The man truly was a great bully. But he was good at what he did. For a moment she had agreed with him completely and felt very bad about all of her actions.

Sense came to her quickly and she realized that his tactic had worked and stifled a groan. *The great terrorizing bastard*, she suppressed a grin, *He's good*.

She would let him win this round, if not just because she was slightly drunk and standing alone in the middle of London. It would be best to allow him this victory, to keep the game even and assuage his stubborn ego. She ran after him and grabbed his elbow as she reached him.

"Severus, I'm sorry. You're right. My actions today were inexcusable and the accusations I made just now were terrible. I, like you, just want to win this game. I know that I can't do it without you. Forgive my thoughtlessness."

He regarded her with a skeptical look, but finally gave her a slight nod of his head. She knew that was as close to a "you are forgiven" as she would get. He began walking again, this time at a pace slightly slower than before. She could just barely keep up with him at this speed with her shorter legs, but it was better than when he was in full Bat-mode, which usually meant she had to keep at a steady jogging pace to stay at his heels.

She stopped him again. "But I'm pretty sure the flat isn't this way." She saw his indignation return, about to respond haughtily at her implication, once again, that he was lost. "Look, here comes a cab. Can we please just catch it? I really don't know where we are and I'm somewhat frightened of walking around Muggle London at night. Besides, I am tired and don't think I could stand walking much now."

His look of superiority at her obvious weakness as compared to his infallible persona was exactly the response she had been going for. Slytherin or not, he was still Severus Snape, Potions master of Hogwarts, and he still loved hearing that he was better than other people.

"Very well," he conceded.

But she could see the small relaxation in his tense shoulders when he opened the door for her, glad that he would not have to admit to being lost or being wrong, nor walk about in the cold.

==

"Oh, turn it up. I love this song."

Severus looked at her like she had just sprouted another head, but the cabdriver didn't even bat an eye as he leaned forward to twist the knob. She had recognized the song right away; really those opening bars were unmistakable. A smile crossed her lips as she internally debated telling the dark man next to her about her little wish. She experienced a slight head rush, from the combination of beer in her system and a sharp turn the taxi had just taken, and she took a moment to listen to Sting's voice before turning back to her companion with her confession.

"I always wished, when I was younger... well, even now I guess... I always wished that someone would think this about me. It always seemed like such a nice sentiment, I've always wanted to be the kind of woman that could inspire that."

"Well, you are."

"Huh?"

"Everything you do..." his eyes locked onto those watching him from the rear-view mirror. Their driver was doing nothing to hide the fact that he was listening to their conversation. His next words were spoken to the nosy man.

"Could you turn it up a bit more... more... just a tad more?" he was shouting to be heard by the eavesdropper in the front of the car, and only then did he nod slightly, indicating that the volume had reached his desired level. He leaned in closer to Hermione and said, just loudly enough for only her to hear, "Everything you do *is* magic, woman. You are a witch. And a very powerful one at that."

"Yes but not everything I do."

"Yes, every little thing. Even in these silly games where we pretend to be Muggles, there is still a strong magic coursing through you. Everything you do and everything you are is magic, which is something many purebloods cannot even claim."

She stared at him, surprised, for a moment, letting his words hit her fully. She chose to take the easiest route she could think of in response to what he had just said to her.

"Why, Severus, if I didn't know better, I'd think you had just complimented me."

"I am not incapable of praise, Hermione. I am simply discriminative about whom I praise. And before you say anything, you know I have not unduly praised any son-of-a-death-eater in a long time, my compliments are much more sparse now that I have the freedom to choose the recipients. I will only praise someone or something when I think it worthy."

"And you think I'm worthy? I'm flattered."

"Don't be. If I have never praised you before, it means I have never thought your actions, ideas, or powers to be worthy of the honor." He smirked at her, knowing that it raised her ire when she thought of her many years in his class, aching for the tiniest bit of acknowledgement. "Besides, I really didn't like you much when you were a student."

"Really, Severus. That means a lot to me." He graced her with a small smile and she allowed herself to grin shyly back at him until she realized the true reason for the smirk on his face. "It means a lot to me that you think me a worthy witch, not that you didn't like me in school."

His smile faltered a bit, as he contemplated allowing what was originally a mocking smile to turn into a sincere one.

The song ended and Severus called to the cabdriver to turn the radio back down, bringing Hermione back to the original topic.

"Anyway, I want the whole song to be about me. Did you not listen to the rest? The next line was 'Everything she do just turns me on.'"

"Oh. Well you definitely do not inspire such sentiments from me."

"Yes, I know."

"Lots of things that you do most definitely do not turn me on."

"I'm aware, Severus."

"When you eat rice pudding, your mouth makes a slurping noise that turns my stomach."

"Well, I'm-"

"And the odd look on your face after you cast Lumos certainly does not turn me on."

"Yes, Severus I-"

"There are many things about you that do not turn me on."

She tried to interject again, but he simply kept speaking as though she hadn't said a word, a trick he had learned from the headmaster.

"Do not forget that I have seen you in the morning, with your hair knotty and your teeth unbrushed... surely not a turn-on. The week you spent terribly sick last fall, with your nose all runny and you coughing and sneezing all over the place, needless to say I was not turned on. And any time you're within five meters of Potter and Weasley... well, the three of you have kept my libido in check for years."

She was giving him a strong look now, still opening her mouth to try to interrupt him. But he went on.

"Your bit with the house-elves was definitely not attractive. And I don't think I need to mention the weeks you spent as half-cat. I am surely not turned on when I see you attempting to maneuver a broom. And I will never be turned on by the sight of you retching into a toilet like a drunken teenager."

"Are you *quite* finished yet, Severus?"

"Well, I could go on," she gave him an exasperated and angry glower before he continued, "but I think that I have properly established that 'everything you do' does not 'turn me on.'"

"Yes, you have made your point quite clearly." She looked from his face, out the window, and then leaned forward to speak to the cabbie. "That's our flat just two blocks down there, with the strange looking plants in front of it." She turned back to Severus, and the second he had her attention again he began speaking.

"Oh, I mustn't forget. Calling me a spoilt child, in public, loudly, laughing hysterically in the middle of a shoe section without explaining why, eating those *onion loop* things... most everything you did today can be easily classified as not turning me on."

"Oi, professor." The cabdriver barked, as he pulled to a stop in front of their new flat. "Don' yeh think yer bein' a bit 'arsh on the lady? She don' seem tha' bad. 'Ave a bit o' class."

Before Severus could tell, or maybe show, the man where he could put his 'class', the cabdriver had turned his attention to Hermione.

"I'm sure yeh do sometin' to turn 'em on. You keep yer chin up, miss, don' let 'im bring ya down."

Hermione's small smile of appreciation appeared to be response enough for the man, and he accepted the bills she gave him with a "Thank yeh."

As he pulled away from the pavement, he called out the window, "Good luck to yeh wit tha' one, mate."

The thought did not cross either Hermione or Severus' mind that the cabdriver had not specified who he was speaking to.

==

"Wake up."

Hermione gave up her fight and released her hold on slumber. She had just been reaching a particularly nice part of her dream. As she bitterly climbed back into consciousness, she could already feel the lovely visions fading away from memory. She slowly opened her eyes, not yet ready to focus on her surroundings. There was sunlight hitting her face, and she was only able to make out a few blurry images. With a contented sigh she let her eyelids droop back to closed; she was still in her dream world.

"Granger. Wake up!"

Hermione sat straight up and her eyes snapped open, quickly adjusting to the light and the shock of wakefulness. Severus Snape stood over her bed, scowling at her, likely preparing to try to wake her again.

She reflexively yelped and pulled the covers up to her chin. He looked a bit startled by her reaction and she had to wait for an awareness of both her surroundings and her situation before she relaxed. She let the covers drop back down, revealing a highly un-revealing set of pajamas a tank top and a pair of light flannel pants. It had been an impulse to pull the covers up, as though her clothing needed to be hidden from Severus' eyes.

She looked at Severus, who had lost the somewhat hesitant expression in response to her reaction and now looked extremely annoyed. The way he eyed her was such that she felt that she had somehow imposed on him, rather than being the one to be awoken from a peaceful sleep and a dream about... *well damn*, she had already lost the details, and could now only remember that it had been pleasant. This man had just plunged her back into reality and he was standing there glaring at *her* as if she had done something wrong?

"What are you doing in here?"

That had meant to be cutting and mature, but had come out more like a petulant child arguing with an older brother. She took a breath and tried to proceed in a suitable manner. "Severus, do you have a reason for waking me?"

There, that had sounded much better. She felt herself waking up more as she waited for his answer. She swung her legs over the side of her bed and gave him her best *'you'd better have a good reason for waking me up, you great bastard'* look.

She should have known that her half-hearted quasi-awake glare would have no effect on the man that had once faced a trapped and enraged Lucius Malfoy.

"It is time to wake up, Granger. Make yourself presentable and get into the living room." With that he exited her room. She had the chance to take in his attire as he walked away; loose, black (of course) cotton pajama pants and a plain black t-shirt. She had rarely seen him dressed in something without long sleeves, and she marveled at the informal short-sleeved shirt. From just below one sleeve she could see a long scar snaking out and wrapping almost completely around his left arm, just above the elbow. She ached to ask him where it had come from. He did, after all, know what and where her nastiest scar was, as he was partly responsible for how she had survived to have said scar.

She groaned a bit as she hefted herself out of bed, still unhappy about being awake in the first place, and padded across the room on a mission to find her toothbrush.

==

Teeth brushed, clothes changed, and mood slightly brightened, Hermione walked into the living room expecting to find Severus in a similar state. Well, with his teeth brushed and clothes changed at least, she did not expect a better mood than she had already witnessed.

He sat, still in his pajamas, in the dark chair by the bookcases. He was quietly scribbling in a notebook of some sort, but looked up as she entered. His disposition had not brightened, it actually seemed to have gotten even worse.

"It is morning. I am awake. There is no food and no coffee."

"Well, because we took so much time shopping for clothing yesterday, we didn't have a chance to go grocery shopping. Would you like to go out somewhere?"

"Most assuredly not, Granger."

She felt frustration bubble towards her surface. She did not like having to deal with people without food or coffee in her system, but being in such a state while dealing with Severus Snape promised to be quite testing.

"Well then what would you like? For me to wave my magic wand and get you a meal? Or would you like me to pop down to the corner café and pick you up some breakfast and coffee?"

"*Waving your magic wand* would do nothing but send us back to Hogwarts, where my meals are cooked and ready for me when I wake. You may, however, go get us something."

"I was being facetious. I am not going to go get you breakfast. What next? Will you expect me to be up with the sun every morning to cook you a gourmet meal? I suspect that is what you expect of women, we should be in the kitchen or cleaning the house or otherwise at your beck and call..."

"Do not be foolish, Granger. That is what house elves are for."

"I am NOT."

"Just go get it," he snapped, stopping her mid-tirade. "I am not a sociable man, nor am I a morning person. I am, however, a creature of habit. I do not... function... well without a cup of coffee."

She thought back to the two years that she had been sitting next to this man every morning at the Head Table. He was always in the Great Hall before her, holding a steaming mug of coffee. She had only once or twice seen him on the way to breakfast. She tried to remember those times and all that came to mind were serious losses of house points from any student in his way. She studied the man sitting in front of her; he looked dangerous.

"Fine. I will go get us breakfast. This time. But you will..." she didn't yet know how she wanted to finish her demand and she stopped speaking so she could devote her attention to figuring out how she would make him pay for her morning of discomfort.

"What? What will I do?" he questioned in such a way that she knew he would not take any demand graciously and his tone and demeanor dared her to challenge him. The thought crossed her mind that if she said the wrong thing, he might simply decide against morning coffee and instead break her neck and drink her blood.

"I don't know. I am too tired and too hungry to think on it. And I need coffee to function as well, especially if I'll be trying to get along with you."

"Then go."

"You are such a-" the door slammed behind her before he was able to hear the rest of her pronouncement.

==

Hermione leaned her head back and took in a deep breath. She had been back home for fifteen minutes now and neither had said much more than a few words. He sat across the comfortable table from her, serenely drinking his coffee.

He had not reacted well at the first sip of his Muggle beverage. He had calmed considerably, though, when she took the cup from his hand and handed him the other drink she had carried in. She took her coffee black, with two sugars, he did not. The second cup that he drank from contained coffee with a bit of cream and no sugar, and since then he had been drinking it silently and contentedly.

She finished the last of her doughnut as a knock sounded at the door. Knowing that Severus would not be a very welcoming host until his cup was drained, she rose to answer it.

==

"And who saw fit to disturb us at this hour?"

"It was the post."

"Not possible. Owls cannot knock."

==

Hermione opened the large Muggle envelope and pulled out a sheet of white paper. On it was a typed note with a handwritten post-script.

*Harry, Draco, Ron, Molly, Remus, Luna, Fred, George, Neville, Arthur, Severus, Hermione, Tonks, and Ginny --*

*Congratulations on getting through your first day and night as Muggles. Everyone is doing a marvelous job.*

*Team Cat's Eye has dropped out of our current game. Apparently, Alastor did not take favorably to his Muggle glass eye and resulting 'blind spot'. Minerva is doing fine now; the hex he sent at her when she 'snuck up' on him was a mild one. I recommend, however, that no one attempt to stun her again any time soon; she's been touchy about those for years anyway.*

*I've done some research for each team, which is enclosed. This Internet thing is great fun, once you're used to it. There is nothing it doesn't know!*

*Good luck, everyone.*

*Albus Dumbledore*

*Headmaster, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry*

*Co-Founder, Order of the Phoenix*

*Order of Merlin ...*

*Blah blah blah.*

Hermione chuckled a bit at the Headmaster's careless attitude towards his many accomplishments and read the post-script.

SS&HG --

*A package came for you from Gringotts. Not every team received mail from the goblins, and I do believe yours is the largest. They seem quite interested in the outcome of this game.*

*Enjoy your office area. Learn something new. You two don't work enough.*

-- AD

Hermione handed the sheet of paper to Severus and reached back into the envelope. She pulled out another, slightly smaller manila envelope and a few sheets of paper.

"This must be the research he did for us." She noted to Severus as he finished reading Albus' letter. She handed him the group of papers and he studied them while she opened the other package. The first pages were a list of restaurants, shops, and some other locations in their vicinity, along with a brief description of each. The next two papers were maps; one of the surrounding area, and another just like it but covered with little stars with numbers in them. The page after that was another list, shorter than the first, that was numbered down the side with the names of, he assumed, the coordinates marked on the second map.

Hermione handed him another letter, which had likely come from the second package. She dug through the second envelope while he read the note, this time handwritten on parchment.

*Team Snarky-Smarty:*

*Good luck with your most recent mission. We are sure you will emerge the victors.*

*Go have a nice Muggle dinner, on us.*

*We are behind you all the way.*

*With regards,*

*The Gringotts Marketing Department,*

*Assistant Managers in Charge of Withdrawals,*

*& the*

*American, Japanese, and Kenyan Foreign Exchange Offices.*

~

"I was almost sure the Curse-Breaking Department had been betting on us."

"No, it's only sensible that they'd be behind Molly and Ron. They definitely have faith in the Weasley genes. How could they not with Bill being one of their best?" There was a short pause while Hermione counted the bills she had pulled from the second envelope, and then Severus spoke again.

"I am a bit surprised that the Japanese office is behind us."

"Yes, I thought they favored Tonks and Ginny." She counted the money in her hands again. "They've sent us fifty pounds."

"Is that a lot?"

"It's about ten Galleons. We can definitely have a nice Muggle dinner on that."

He arched an eyebrow at her use of the word 'nice'.

"Meaning somewhere that's not a pub."

==

"Well, I am off to do a bit of shopping for myself. Don't look at me that way, I don't enjoy it any more than you did, but it has to be done. You will be okay without me?"

"I am sure I will manage. I will take a shower and look over our bookcases."

"Do you need me to show you how to work the shower? It's different than in the magical world. You have to--"

"I have used a Muggle shower before. I do not need you to teach me how to read, either. When you return we will look at the office that Albus seems so proud of."

"Are you sure you can resist exploring it without me?"

"The bookshelves will keep me satisfied for the time being. As I am not a Gryffindor, I have *patience*."

"Since when?"

Before he could answer the rhetorical question she was out the door.

==

~~~~~

Author's Notes *whew.*

The song in the cab is The Police, "Every little thing she does is magic." I was listening to it in the car when that bit of this chapter came into existence.

Anything in this chapter that is based on fact or canon has, hopefully, been properly researched and can be attributed to other, reliable sources. The Harry Potter Lexicon helped me greatly with the alcoholic beverages issue (I had one. I don't now), and also helped me get a picture of how the Wizarding World eats. An (unnecessarily long) internet search involving words like "London, Pubs, Menu" helped me compile a theoretical menu for the pub our heroes are dining in in this chapter. Being neither a Brit nor one to eat at bars often, that was a bit of a tough bit for me. Dear Keladry also contacted a friend from Britain to confirm my choices and together they convinced me to not give Sev a chili-cheeseburger, instead recommending chili con carne. Also, I have (once again thanks to the lexicon) researched the mathematics of money issues, and

come to a proper Wizarding-British-American money exchange rate. (1 galleon = 5 pounds = 7.33 dollars... and that's just one equation). Last but not least, the thick-british-accent thing of the cabdriver was all a shot in the dark, based on what I could remember from other fics, books like *Trainspotting*, and what I could make out in certain movies. Anyone who is more knowledgeable about such things is welcome to correct me. If anybody would like to take a final look at chapters for me, before posting, to brit-pick a bit, contact me.

A general thank you to everyone who reviews, good or bad. It really is incredible how much each review has an effect.

I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.

So, **what'd you think?**

Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

Literature

Chapter 5 of 12

Read it. You just might enjoy it.

I do not own, nor do I claim to own, any part of the Harry Potter Universe or anything else cooked up in the mind of J. K. Rowling. And the bits that I did come up with, well I can only hope they fit in seamlessly.

Thanks and love to my lovely betas. QueenP and Keladry. Anything that's not good, they probably told me to change it and I refused.

A/N's at bottom.

~~~~~

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 5

Literature

~~~~~

Severus emerged from his bedroom, fresh and clean. From his hair, streams of water dripped down his back, causing the black cotton shirt he wore to stick to his skin.

He knew how to use a towel, of course. He had, all of his life, used a towel to dry himself off after bathing or swimming. He knew of very few wizards who did not. His hair, however, he had always used a drying spell on. He was wary of using the large green bath towel on his head, electing instead to just let it dry naturally.

Across his face, from ear to ear and covering his mouth, tucked beneath his least-favorite protruding member, was a sheet of toilet paper. It stuck to his cheeks, chin, and upper lip, held in place by little red dots.

He slowly peeled it off, glad that the wounds he had inflicted were merely superficial. Why Muggle men chose, on a daily basis, to inflict such pain on themselves was beyond him. Severus was once again struck by the thought that it was good to be a wizard the hair removing spell and the shaving spell were highly preferable to dragging a strange object with a sharp edge back and forth across one's sensitive skin.

Before he was able to complete his praise of all magical kind, the face of Albus Dumbledore occurred to him. He promptly lost any sense of peaceful thoughts and once again imagined creative ways to hex the old wizard, un-traceably, once this ruse as a Muggle was complete. He swept his eyes across the room to clear the image from his mind. It did no good, however. His mentor smiled beatifically at him, as if conjured by Severus' mental image. Upon a bookshelf, a little lower than his eye level, sat a framed photograph of the sugar-rottedly twinklesome old codger.

His shock at seeing the picture, an exact replica of the image that had graced his mind a few moments before, faded as events from the night before pushed their way to the forefront of Severus' memory.

He remembered it quite clearly now that he thought about it. He had stood right where he was now. He remembered leaning forward, hands braced on the shelf upon which sat the framed photo, nose centimeters from the edge, staring at the picture. He had remained in that position for twenty minutes, at least. He also remembered swearing at said photo quietly, telling it to "*Move, dammit!*"

Hermione had chuckled at him, the little chit, and tried to alter his attention to something else. It had been a book, that he remembered. Something about tearing a bodice...

His eyes alighted on the small table between the reading chairs. There... a paperback book, about the size of his hand, left dog-eared on Hermione's side. On the front a couple embraced each other tightly, lips almost meeting, while a breeze apparently tried to sweep them away. The male figure was a large man, far more muscular than Severus (much less any man he knew), but with a strikingly familiar face and hair. His hair was long black and shiny, and it framed a face with thin lips, black eyes, and a monstrosity large nose.

The woman, too, aroused recognition in his mind. Her facial features and long curly brown hair were remarkably reminiscent of Hermione. The unnatural body of the woman, extreme curves with disproportionately massive breasts, however, did not remind him of his book loving partner. The book-cover woman instead stirred a disgusted sense of animosity that he had not felt since walking into a bedroom at the Burrow to find Tonks sandwiched between Fred and George Weasley, all three of them quite unclothed.

The wind-swept clothes and effect on the couple's hair, partnered with the unnaturally rippling physical features, added to faces that looked so much like Hermione and himself, sparked in him equal parts annoyance and amusement. It was so bad it was almost humorous.

He picked up the book and sat in his high-backed chair, resting his feet on the matching ottoman. He let out a snort at the title, *Releasing the Blossoms of Love*, and

opened it, planning to give it a brief glance before moving on to the rest of the shelves and less ridiculous books.

==

Severus slapped the book shut with a resounding *thwack* that filled the second's silence between the two loud ringing noises that echoed through the otherwise empty flat. As the room silenced again, Severus discreetly tucked the paperback between the cushions of his chair and looked around. The noise, a *brrrring ... brrrring* that was unerringly distracting, returned and Severus scowled, trying to determine its source. There was another silence before the ringing came back, causing Severus to rise from his chair, rather forcefully, and spin around until his eyes lit upon the ringing device set near the television set.

He moved to take a step nearer to the object, and in a highly ungracious manner reminiscent of those hulking beasts Crabbe and Goyle, knocked over a stack of books. The novels were each a thick block of paper the size of his hand, give or take, with a disturbing cover picture and increasingly ridiculous titles with words like unclasping and revealing in an obnoxiously elaborate script.

Kicking the pile of novels aside, he strode toward the damned ringing thing, confident that if he were closer to it he might understand it better.

He didn't.

He squinted at it trying his best to stir up some forgotten memory of this familiarly foreign machine.

He recognized it now. This blasted contraption was a telephone, He had observed Hermione using it on a few occasions during past games. He had watched, with growing interest, as she pressed the buttons with their glowing numbers and brought the object to the side of her face. But when she caught him studying her, she had tried to explain the machination, and his attention on the captivating appliance was quickly lost.

Watching the device blaringly emit that unsettling parody of a bell's ring, he wished he had not scoffed at her and her *Muggle toys*' and surreptitiously ignored all further telephone interactions.

After two more pairs of rings, just as Severus began reaching his hand toward the telephone, a box next to the machine took over. No less than three red lights came on, one blinking and one remaining on. There was a third alighting synchronized with an ear-piercingly high-pitched sound that echoed in Severus' ears even after the beep had ended and something in the machine clicked and whirred as it came to life.

Severus could only stand, dumbstruck, as Albus Dumbledore's voice enthusiastically sounded from the contraption.

"Hello! Team Snarky-Smartie is unavailable to take your telephone call right now. But after this recording has played, you can leave your own 'message' for them to hear later. You may begin talking after the beep."

There was a slight scuffling sound and Severus heard a gruff voice, muffled, saying,

"Really, Headmaster. I don't think I ought to-"

Albus' voice, not as loud as before but still full of sickeningly sweet mirth that made Severus' teeth hurt, responded, *"Come now, Argus. Don't be a spoil-sport."*

There was another small scuffling noise after which Severus heard a clearing of the throat followed by the caretaker's voice, in a long flat tone, *"Beeeeeeeeeeeeep"*

Severus' lips twitched in amusement as the recording clicked off. Another red light then began blinking. With a click, the sound from the machine took on a busier, thicker quality. He could hear, faintly, women's voices and masculine grumbles, some sort of *buzzing* sound, and a door slamming.

But in the forefront, quickly drawing his focus away from the background noise, was a hearty chuckle he had grown to enjoy. The laughter ended with a few drawn breaths and a light *"Oh Dear."* and Severus could do nothing but stare as Hermione's voice now emanated from the little box.

==

"Severus? It's Hermione. Well, I certainly hope you know who it is. Who else would be calling you, really...? That's what I've done, I've called you. I used the telephone. See, phones link through... oh, sod it all. I wish you'd have let me explain them the last time I caught you watching me on the phone."

Anyway. I'm still in the city. I know, I've been here a while, but something... came up.

Shopping was moving along fine and then they sprung on me. Somehow they were able to sense me, or something. Of course they claim they had no idea I was even in London, much less at that particular store, but I wouldn't be surprised if Albus went to their house, personally, and gave them the exact time and coordinates.

Well, of course my mum wouldn't just let me go with a 'Hallo. Nice to see you. Have a nice day. Kisses!', though in all honesty, I think Persy would have been fine with it.

I've told you about Persephone, right? My little sister, she's only got a year to start getting ready for university. Loves shopping, beautiful, smarter than she pretends to be, very popular with the boys, tons of friends, big fan of make-up... I love her, of course, but I really don't like her half the time.

You would hate her.

You would hate both of them.

Right now I hate both of them.

Well my mum swept me up shopping with them for several hours, and with Mum's constant talking and questioning and Persephone's useless, meaningless gossip, plus the fact that I was shopping for clothing with my mother, I completely lost all track of time.

Then she insisted on taking me out to lunch.

We've just finished eating and I was about to make excuses about getting back for you as I realized just how long I've left you alone.

I hope you're okay, I really hadn't meant to abandon you like this...

Anyway, my mum says that you're a grown man and you can take care of yourself for a few hours. I tried to explain that she's wrong, but she would have none of it. So she's got somewhere around fifteen hundred more shops to drag me to. She barely let me make the one phone call.

Goodness, it sounds like I'm in prison.

She wants to meet you, by the way. All three of them do. They want to have us for dinner.

Not in the way that they rip us apart and tear at our flesh. In the way where my mum cooks something and we all feel very awkward and my father asks if your intentions

are pure. Don't know if I wouldn't prefer being torn apart by wild beasts.

Hah. My predicament isn't so funny now, is it?

Anyway... I'll be home at some point. I hope you aren't starving or lying on the bathroom floor with a broken leg or something equally inconvenient.

Er... Bye."

==

Severus cast slightly dazed eyes around the room, finding a clock on the other side of the television. It was 3:30. He had glanced at the clock while dressing after his shower he noticed absently that his hair was dry now and his shirt only stuck to his back minimally at which point it had read well before noon.

Severus was baffled as to what had made him lose track of time so easily.

His eyes alighted on the pile of books in disarray next to his chair. It had been a neat stack earlier, but in his haste to respond to the noise that he now knew was from the telephone, he had somehow knocked the knee-high tower over.

He didn't remember consciously doing so, but judging by the scattered placement of the books, he must have kicked some under his chair. He decided to clean them up immediately, and not have to be startled on their account again. He had not known what had caused the ringing sound and was relieved now that he had not been caught reading any of them.

He scowled then, a very nice sneer that made him think of taking points from Potter. Really, it was too bad there was no one around, this was a right good angry face being wasted on a bunch of books.

He didn't even have the consolation of sending the couple on the cover of the book he now held remaining locked in their passionate embrace running away or, at least, cringing. That was one benefit of magical photos and paintings frightening Ravenclaws was one thing, but it took a special *talent* to intimidate two-dimensional figures.

He scowled even more.

Really. He was trying to put these books away as if afraid. Severus Snape was not some teenage boy being caught by his mother with his father's Playwizard. He was a grown man. And if he was in a rush to put the trashy romance novels that had captivated him for hours back on their shelves, it was *not* out of shame or fear of Hermione's disapproval.

He simply hated clutter.

==

Severus placed the last book in its place on the shelf alongside the others. He straightened, leaving the books about level with his knees, and looked at the bookcase before him. His eyes scanned the spines, taking note of many titles he would be interested in reading at some point. He would have to inspect them later. He remembered Hermione blathering on to a member of the Weasley clan about one author whose work he saw on the shelves. He remembered that the man was American, and she had spoken of several stories. An automobile not unlike the one that had met the Whomping Willow in her second year, something about large, bat-like rat creatures, and the importance of balancing obligations with leisure time activities. There was almost an entire shelf of novels by this King Stephen fellow, but Severus continued on, reading the spines of the many other books.

He moved over to examine another shelf, beginning to think that nothing would jump out at him. He shuddered, thinking of the tome that had taken that phrase literally, having actually leapt from a shelf in the Restricted Section and clamped itself onto his leg. The book, holding tight to the muscle of his lower leg, didn't hurt him; luckily this edition didn't have sharp teeth. It had, however, kept a very firm hold with its jaw-like pages in its un-emancipating determination. It had refused to liberate him for almost a week. This of course had been quite a problem, as the situation forced him to walk around the halls of Hogwarts for a week with a very heavy, leather-bound book latched onto his shin. When he had finally pried it off of his person, which involved a good amount of physical strength combined with the right amount of scowling and threats, he immediately returned it to the library, awing Hermione as she gawked at him and the book's cover. Apparently, most copies of that particular manuscript, Inspirations of Eccentric Authors, and Other Oddities or Interesting Ideas Often Apparent in Exceptionally Original and Undoubtedly Acclaimed Icons' Enticingly Idiosyncratic Imaginations, usually did not release their victims quite so easily. She had once done a report on the insistent books, and had discovered multiple instances in which the blasted thing had not released its hold for over two years.

Perhaps living in the Muggle world had its advantages -- inanimate objects remained just that: inanimate.

That, however, did not help at all at this juncture, as the shelves and shelves of books loomed before him, mocking his inability to make a selection.

His mind began conjuring the memory of the series of reference guides that actually did mock people, hurling insults at their readers and those browsing. Before he could remember their titles, a book near the top of the bookcase caught his attention.

Albus had to have left this just for him. Hermione would not be able to reach it, even standing on her tiptoes, bracing herself against a shelf, and extending one arm as far reaching as she could, stretching one side where her shirt would ride up to reveal just a little bit of skin, with her head tilted to one side, that determined expression on her face.

No, this book was placed for him.

Severus reached up and pulled it from the shelf. He studied the cover before opening it and flipping the pages. He scanned the contents and made up his mind. He knew what he would do while waiting for Hermione to return. He pulled down all of the other books on the subject, of which there were many, and turned from the selves with a smile on his face that was almost more frightening than any scowl.

==

Author's Notes

(which are) A bit verbose, but when am I not?!

*Well, kids. It would appear that the word of the day is **Onomatopoeia**. Look for it in the next bit, too! Runner up, for this part at least, would have to be **vowels**. **Aneurism** is, of course, what will happen if I don't continue writing as soon as possible. **Impatience** is what I and I hope everyone else has felt towards having a new chapter of this damned story. **Metaphor** would be me creating a book that appears to be related somehow to the infamous **rabid plot bunny**.*

*Night Shift, Dracula, and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy can probably be held accountable for anything that sounds good. I've already put up my disclaimer, but I'll say again, it in fact all belongs to JKR, so I shouldn't even take credit for the little things. And anything else, that we're going to contribute to only me, blame the **rabid plot bunny** and the muse that's been poking me with a cattle prod since I came within five miles of my own computer. And there are several reviewers who can be held accountable (at least in part) for Severus shaving, reading trashy romance novels, and... well, you'll see.*

It is entirely possible that this chapter, without the second part which I'm thinking will be posted separately, goes absolutely nowhere and contributes nothing to the story.

Which is probably why I had such fun writing it.

QP told me I was allowed to blame her for the amount of time that it took this to get up. But really I can only attribute about a week to her. I've moved from California to Kentucky (driving across the country), helped open a restaurant, and then 3 weeks later moved from Kentucky to California. At which point I returned to my 'niece', recently turned three and slightly less recently diagnosed, officially, with autism and even more recently started pre-school. My world plans to become even more busy as, now that I'm home (I'd been in Kentucky for 3 months prior to the move, and my be-lov-ed LtMD was born there, as well as If at first and Preparing) I need to get a job and start going to school (Je n'aime pas le francais. Alors, ce n'est pas la verite, j'adore parler et comprendre francais. Je n'aime pas etudier) and spend every moment possible with the most beautiful little girl in the world.

This is actually only the first half of what I had prepared for 'Chapter 5' but I decided to focus just on this part. Plus I couldn't think of a decent title for both parts together.

As always, reviews are appreciated and loved and keep me going.

I swear, I'm in the process of typing up Chapter 6 untitled as so far. Reviews might encourage me to get on the ball and actually try to churn this motherfucker out. (Don't you hate it when authors say things like that?) Kel said this was an evil cliffie, but I disagree. Probably because I know what's going to happen.

Special double thank you to kel, who had to tell me to beat it because I'm not patient enough for her RL. Kel, you've done a lovely job! You kept this chapter from being (too) redundant, and helped with a bit of Brit-picking. Everyone send love to Keladry (whose story, She Was Beautiful to Him, is killer). Queen P, prepare yourself for chapter six. Hopefully coming soon. A general thank you to everyone who reviews, good or bad. It really is incredible how much each review has an effect.

I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.

So, **what'd you think?**

Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

Culinary Arts

Chapter 6 of 12

Things get messy.

~~~~~  
I do not own, nor do I claim to own, any part of the Harry Potter Universe or anything else cooked up in the mind of J. K. Rowling. And the bits that I did come up with, well I can only hope they fit in seamlessly.

Thanks and love to my lovely beta, QueenP. Anything that's not good, she probably told me to change it and I refused.

**A/N's at bottom.**

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Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 6

Culinary Arts
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The first thing Hermione had noticed was the smell.

In quick succession, she had also become aware of the multi-colored mess covering the walls and the counter of the bar area that separated the kitchen from the living room, at least a dozen books half of them laid open on the dining room table, and another colorful mess of puddles, smears, and handprints covering the books, table, and chairs.

Next, her eyes took in the kitchen, which was in such a state that she almost walked out the front door to verify that she was in the correct flat. She grudgingly admitted to herself that there was no doubt about whether or not she was in the right place, but at the moment the thought of breaking and entering was much more enticing than facing the frightful mess before her.

Only after taking in the disaster area that had been her flat that morning, and experiencing a queasy feeling from the odor assaulting her sense of smell, did she see him.

He was surrounded by a light cloud of white, with even more mess covering his clothes than had been on the table and bar area. His hair had clumps of something sticky in it, and was slightly greyer than usual, the white powder in the air settling onto the lanky strands, condensing on the sticky-looking substance. When he turned around, she saw that his shirt and trousers were as covered in mess in the front as in the back. And he had a somewhat endearing streak crossing his cheek and ending on the bridge of his large nose, something a pink-ish tint that he apparently wasn't aware of.

She stared at him with a mix of shock, amusement, and horror, setting her packages on the floor. Her eyes did not change focus as she put her purse on a shelf with a *thud* and took off her coat, putting it where the coat rack was supposed to be and not really noticing it fall to the floor in a heap next to her purse.

==

He interrupted her quiet ranting about the mess with a dismissive wave of his hand.

"It is inconsequential," he said, uninterested in the Armageddon around him, while Hermione slowed her advance toward him. "You, of all people, should know the inevitability of the occasional mess. While brewing potions, it is to be expected. Certainly, certain sensitive potions need their surroundings to be immaculate. And when trying to teach a group of thick, ignorant children, it is best to over-emphasize the importance of order and neatness. But one cannot properly work without causing a bit of disarray. *Especially* when one is experimenting. After all, you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs."

"*What are you talking about?*" she screamed. "You don't even know how to make an omelette. The analogy of eggs is completely inappropriate! Whatever you've done to destroy this kitchen has nothing to do with coooooo!"

Comprehension dawned on her before she finished the word.

"Oh no. Tell me you're not cooking." Her brain spun a bit, a mix of the odor, the atmosphere in the room around her, and horror making her sit down.

She instantly regretted that decision as she discovered that the chair she had chosen was not immune from Severus' devastatingly gooey influence.

==

"Severus. Let me put this as simply as possible..." she began, with a tone of voice that suggested she was talking to either a rowdy child or a man with a bomb strapped to his chest standing in the middle of a bank, "how do you plan to clean this all up?"

"Really, Miss Granger, even the densest of second years knows that spell."

She did not respond to his pomposity, choosing to study him instead while waiting for the realization that was sure to come any moment now. She watched his face closely, knowing that under usual circumstances, even her several years of friendship and partnership with the former spy would not help her much when trying to read his reactions. His usual mask of indifference had slipped since they set foot in their new Muggle flat. Somehow being a 'Muggle' allowed him to let his guard down.

In rapid succession, she saw his face go from condescending superiority, to realization, to hesitation, which quickly changed to confidence, finally fixing her with a smirk similar to that of condescending superiority.

"Muggles make messes and clean them up everyday. Surely it is not much of a challenge. Seeing as how the spell is as simple as it is, surely the Muggles have discovered something to try to equal it."

She rolled her eyes and stood, landing her hand in a sticky puddle as she pushed herself up from the table. She joined Severus in the kitchen, deftly sidestepping something dark brown on the floor as she walked past him. She crouched down at the sink, carefully opening the cabinet door beneath it.

She found a bottle of dish soap and a sponge. Desperately pushing them aside and all but climbing into the cabinet herself, she called out loudly enough for Severus to hear her and her unmistakably annoyed tone, "What do you do when you give a detention?" She did not wait for an answer. "You make them clean cauldrons *without magic*." As she backed out of the empty cupboard below the sink, she continued, "And why do you make them clean things *without magic*? Why do you view cleaning cauldrons *without magic* to be an appropriate punishment?" Once again she paused, pulling herself to her feet but still not letting Severus answer. "Because it's a pain in the arse. And you enjoy being a pain in the arse." She took a few deep breaths and looked around the room. "So, what about this do you think is going to be *simple*?" She gestured around her at the devastated rooms, spying a thin door just inside the dining area, next to the archway separating the two disastrous rooms.

Walking with determination to her last hope, she barely paused to take a breath. "Imagine yourself having to clean a cauldron *without magic*. A cauldron the size of this *room*!" She threw open the thin door to find a cleaning supplies cabinet, just like she'd hoped. "Do you know what that would be like?" Unfortunately the closet was empty, save for a fuzzy yellow feather duster and a pile of rags that looked like Muggle t-shirts, shredded. "I'll tell you what it's like, you pain in the arse. It's going to be a... a pain in the arse!" She slammed the closet door shut. "Well I can assure you, buster, I'll not be doing it all by myself. Oh no." She looked around the room, desperately searching for another cupboard or cabinet or closet that might hold her salvation; there was nothing. "You'll be putting in an equal amount of elbow grease. Understand me?"

She turned to him then, glaring daggers. When he remained silent, her *I'm not a mother!* resolve broke. "Do you understand? Well? Answer me when I ask you a question!"

Severus had not finished saying "I-" before Hermione cut him off again.

"Don't you *dare* say a word, Severus Snape. I don't want to hear it."

Severus stared at her blankly, unsure whether to apologize, yell back, just stand there, or flee. Luckily (depending on how one defines luck), Hermione didn't keep quiet or still long enough for him to be forced into a decision.

She hastily picked up her coat from the rumpled heap on the ground, righting the purse next to it and refilling it with its spilled contents.

"I am going to Tesco's, and when I get back you will clean, perhaps with my assistance, every bit of this apartment that you have touched."

She was standing in the doorway, the setting sun streaming into the room and framing her with the silhouette of an Amazonian Warrior Princess.

"Don't. You. Move."

About five minutes after the door slammed shut, Severus Snape slumped to the floor, leaning against a cabinet. He meekly called out at her, "What *is* elbow grease?"

==

Hermione's hair must have grown two sizes.

When she had left her mum and sister and returned home, her hair was perfectly moussed, spritzed, and styled. Her companions that afternoon had appointments at a local salon, and Hermione couldn't muster the courage or the excuses to deny her mum when she insisted that Hermione accompany them. Her mother had challenged the two stylists without clients, saying that she wasn't sure if either of them could 'do something with this mess,' and the two had jumped at the task to prove their worth on Hermione's seemingly un-manageable hair. Muggle hairstylists were a frivolity that Hermione had never felt the need to indulge, but she had not been disappointed when the bush atop her head had been transformed into concise corkscrew curls, left slightly crispy by the mass of hair products added to it. Hermione had walked up the front steps to her apartment, primping herself in an unnatural bit of confidence, feeling beautiful and wondering what, if anything, Severus would have to say about her highly stylized mane. She was sure she'd be satisfied with his reaction as long as he didn't say anything along the lines of 'Blimey, Hermione. You're a girl!'

When she stormed from the flat less than ten minutes later, bitterly making her way to the store while dusk set onto London, her tight perfect curls had begun to frizz.

The next Severus saw her, she resembled a lion; a poof of curly hair thickly surrounding her features. Her eyes flashed from behind the many strands that had fallen in front of her face, and she scowled at him in a manner that would have been much more threatening if had she not looked like she'd been electrocuted. She was sweating just a bit and nearing the point of breathlessness. Parts of the back of her hair were still settling, no longer affected by the wind of her trip. She said nothing, with great difficulty, while she set down three canvas bags in front of the door to the closet she had been unable to find supplies in earlier. She choked back the admonition Severus so rightly deserved for moving from his place standing in the middle of the kitchen to a position leaning against what *had been* the only clean cabinet. The cabinet door now showed the sticky imprint of a man's shoulder blades and a head-shaped stain lightly dusted with white powder.

Severus was sure she would have cast an Unforgivable right then and there, Order Games be damned, had she not been followed by a young gentleman. A spotty boy, probably around the age of a sixth year, was following Hermione with his eyes set fixedly on her bum. He carried over his right shoulder three mops and two brooms, looking for all the world like a soldier carrying a rifle during formation. In his left hand, the Muggle teenager carried two buckets, one inside the other, filled with various sponges and brushes.

Only after the boy had unceremoniously dropped his cargo onto the floor next to the wall separating the kitchen and the dining room did he take his attention off of the thoroughly braced-off witch's rear end. His eyes grew wide and his mouth hung open. The kid appeared to be teetering between horrified and impressed, taking in the carnage around him. Rather than leaving right away the little sod stood and gawked around him, questions forming on his face.

Hermione had shoved him back out the front door before he completed the second syllable of 'happened', shoving his tip into his hand while trying to close the door in his face.

"Oi, Miss!" the boy called, catching her attention before the door was completely shut. "This is real pretty, Miss. But t'aint worth nothin'. I got bills to pay--"

Hermione offered a murmured apology as she traded the kid a 5-pound note for the gold coin, then promptly shut the door before the boy could say thank you. She turned her attention back to Severus, the annoyance gone from her countenance. She had on her face a look that could only be described as cruelly gleeful, reminiscent of the special expression that Severus reserved only for giving out detentions to innocent Gryffindors. She rubbed her hands together and advanced on him, ready to teach him his lesson about mussing up *her* kitchen.

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Hermione's sponge landed with a satisfying *splash* in the bucket of lukewarm soapy water. When Severus' wooden-backed brush followed it, splashing a bit of water over the side, Hermione sighed contentedly, in time with the moan coming from the sink. She looked around, finally satisfied; the flat was clean again. Except for that little puddle of dirty water newly formed next to the bucket.

Hermione stood up, arching her back and rolling her head from side to side, trying to oust the crick. Severus pushed himself up from under the sink, another moan emanating from his throat, but this time not of satisfaction. Hermione could hear the ominous cracking noise of his joints straightening. The life of a Potions Master apparently didn't involve a lot of crouching or scrubbing.

Hermione led the way out of the kitchen, Severus staggering behind her a few paces back. They both wandered in the general direction of the hallway. Passing the TV, Hermione turned her head, with only minimal muscle resistance, to see the digital clock proclaiming it to be 2 am. Her bed was calling her. Her entire body was functioning, currently, only because of the prospect of lying down. Even the protesting of her skin, which was begging for a shower, could not deter her from her beeline towards her room.

Passing through the archway into the hall, she took a sharp turn to her right and was able to see her goal, fluffy pillows and all. She turned in the doorway, placing her right hand a little higher than her head as she held onto the door. Being mad at the dolt was no reason to not say goodnight, and she waited for Severus to enter the hallway as well so that she could wish him pleasant dreams. She let herself lean against the door, putting a bit more weight onto her right side, letting her hip land against the door, shortly followed by her head, curls dripping with sweat and who-knows-what else. Her hands were raw and sensitive, and she could feel the rough edge of the wooden door on her palm. She shifted a bit, worried that if he took much longer she would lose her balance or her grip on the door and topple to the ground.

She never did get the chance to say goodnight to him.

Severus turned the corner into the hallway and walked straight into his closed door. There was a loud *thud* as his forehead made contact with the wooden obstacle. His hand automatically came up to his pained face, cupping his large nose, as he staggered backwards. His toppling was stopped by her doorjamb, and he leaned against it, still holding his face. He was close to her, close enough for her to hear him swear in the guise of an exhalation. He smelled of masculine sweat, sandalwood, and... lemon. Yes, the potions master was definitely lemon scented.

She wasn't positive that she had managed to keep the small bit of mirth out of her voice when she asked if he was alright. After he nodded, barely, she couldn't refuse her natural tendencies and had to ask what had just happened.

"The doors to my chambers at Hogwarts are charmed to open for me."

While pity and hilarity warred within Hermione, her instincts kicked in and she raised her hand, moving to give his arm a comforting pat. Centimeters away, she stayed her hand. Her palm was close enough to the exposed skin of his right forearm that the hairs there stood up, as if reaching out for the contact her bare hand promised. She could feel sparks prickling against her skin, so unusually close to his. Her hand froze where it was, despite the heat radiating off of both of them.

As her hand hovered above his arm, she internally panicked. Why had she stopped? Was she afraid of how he might react to her unassuming gesture? Did she suddenly remember the salesclerk from the day before, and Tonks, and all the other people who had been foolhardy enough to think themselves on an okay-to-touch basis with the fearsome Slytherin? Perhaps it was the faint scar staining the pure, pale skin of his forearm, no longer a burden but remaining as a reminder to him and everyone who looked at it of a time passed and a person he no longer was, no longer wanted to be. Was she still afraid of the faded tattoo, or just the man standing next to her?

Whatever the cause of her hesitation, it was too late to either overcome it or to act on it. She had consciously kept herself from touching him, and he was aware of it.

The look he turned to her was ambiguous but unsettling. Angry, annoyed, embarrassed? It could have been a look of disgust at the thought of her touching him. It could have been a glare of warning that if Potter and Weasley ever mentioned this, she would regret it. It might have been apologizing, aware of how hard she had worked to clean up *his* mess. Or of gratitude, knowing that she must be as exhausted as he was. Or perhaps he had been hurt -- hurt that she had stopped her hand, hurt that she was hesitant to physically touch him.

His door slammed behind him, and she slowly extricated herself from her door and quietly pushed it closed, now contemplating what emotion her friend and partner had just conveyed. What was he feeling? Did it have something to do with her refusal to touch him? Had he actually wanted her physical contact? Did it bother him that she had acted in such a seemingly rejecting way? Did he...?

He probably had a concussion.

~~~~~

#### **Author's Notes**

*See, I told you that it wasn't that interesting a cliffie!*

*This definitely took less time than the last chapter did to get up. I hope it holds you over because I'm only just now working on draft one of chapter 7 (in which, so far, someone gets naked...)*

*Thanks again to QueenP who asked the folks over at Potter\_Place about British supermarket-type places. They gave a few ideas, but Tesco's was mentioned twice so we went with that.*

*I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.*

So, *what'd you think?*

*Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.*

## Seasons Change

Chapter 7 of 12

A bath rejuvenates the body and brain. The morning meal strengthens confidence and courage. Post affects the soul and the spirit.

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 7

Seasons Change

~~~~~

I do not own, nor do I claim to own, any part of the Harry Potter Universe or anything else cooked up in the mind of J. K. Rowling. And the bits that I did come up with, well I can only hope they fit in seamlessly and offend nobody.

Thanks and love to my lovely beta, QueenP. Anything that's not good, she probably told me to change it and I refused.

A/N's at bottom.

~~~~~

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 7

Seasons Change

~~~~~

Hermione sighed as she lowered herself into the tub. Every muscle in her body began to relax as it was submerged in the hot, clear water, and she could feel the sweat and grime and oven cleaner melt off her skin. She took a deep breath of warm, humid air, and then dunked her head under the water. Her hair lifted itself from the greasy mess that it had been and began floating around her head, spanning in all directions. She shook her head a bit, feeling the strands swish back and forth around and in front of her face. The bathtub was large enough that she could lay flat in it and deep enough that the water would completely cover than her body.

When she needed oxygen again, she broke the surface of her bath slowly, pushing upward until the water was leveled below her collarbone. Her wet hair clung to every bit of skin it could reach, covering her neck and shoulders. She impatiently brushed it away from her face so she could breathe properly and open her eyes. The room was steamy and the air was warm, but her exposed flesh longed to resubmerge in the bathwater that engulfed her and made her skin tingle with its heat.

She lay back again, tilting her head back so that the only part of her above water was her face, from chin to eyebrows. She brought her left hand up and gripped the edge of the white bathtub to keep herself steady, as her breathing caused an almost undetectable tide in the still water. Her right foot also came up to keep her body's natural buoyancy from taking over and forcing her to the surface. She tilted her foot until the inside arch rested against the shining silver water faucet, droplets of water dripping from her calf back into the bathwater.

The rest of her muscles relaxed, her body finally submerged in the hot, cleansing water after the grueling night she had gone through. Contented and perfectly comfortable, Hermione's mind drifted from the natural urge to situate herself, moving on to naturally do what she did best think. The outstanding mind that she used to research, debate, and learn turned to contemplate the same thing she had the night before. Questions about Severus and her mother had repeated themselves as she tossed and turned for hours.

As she had lain in bed, longing to bathe but too eager to let her body rest, her mind had refused all attempts at a calming night's sleep and trepidation about the day's activities had firmly taken hold. Her mum had frustrated the hell out of her, asking constant questions about potential 'gentlemen suitors' and bragging about Persephone's long-time boyfriend. Her teenaged sister was showing signs of becoming the kind of woman that never wanted for anyone's adoration and company. Hermione was only in her early twenties and already her mother worried she'd become a spinster.

Harry and Ron had once been Hermione's salvation, but once Maia Granger realized that neither was likely to be a future son-in-law, their existence had become a burden rather than a blessing. The fact that Hermione's best friends had always been boys did not reassure the pestering woman; rather she managed to become quite concerned. Hermione couldn't begin to remember all of the times her mum has fussed over her eldest daughter's hair, nails, makeup or clothing, in an attempt to make her 'not look like one of the boys.'

Hermione forced her muscles to move, bringing her free hand to her head, rustling the long strands that were surrounding her face and pointing in all directions. Despite the amount of time and effort required to tame her frizzy bush of a mane, Hermione had been pleased with the outcome of her long, grueling beauty session the day before. Her mother had beamed, saying that Hermione could be a 'complete knock-out' if only she would 'make a little effort' with her appearance instead of 'hiding behind that wild hair.'

Hermione's parents had always been proud of their eldest daughter for all her achievements. In her life she had never lacked praise or encouragement from both her mother and her father. Her mum simply argued that all of Hermione's positives could be augmented with a change of attitude about professedly more shallow concerns, specifically her looks.

She thought of Severus, who had told her that many of her actions did not turn him on. For the first time since his proclamation, she wondered if that meant that some of her actions *did* turn him on. Such thoughts made her want to dunk herself completely underwater again and scream until she was hoarse. Did she want to turn Severus on? Could she? She knew that he hadn't had a chance to notice her well-coiffed appearance the night before. Perhaps if she had gone to pat his arm while her hair was still perfect, she wouldn't have stopped herself. Perhaps he even would have welcomed her touch. If she was still herself, but beautiful, would anyone want her then?

But how could a plain girl with big teeth and bushy hair ever become classically beautiful? She would never look like Persephone, who made men fall for her in an instant. Persy was born beautiful, Hermione had been born plain. The beauty her sister possessed always left Hermione envious. Even at Hogwarts, her schoolmates wouldn't have held a candle to Persy. Yet those girls had never wanted for suitors. Perhaps if she spent as much time as her sister or her old roommates did on their makeup and hair, or if she dressed in shorter skirts or low-cut tops...

Hermione didn't want to spend hours on her appearance. She had always scoffed at those girls, fretting over their looks and what everyone else thought of them. She had never been more worried about her exterior than her brain and her soul. While other girls obsessed over their appearances, Hermione would much rather spend her time reading, or working on a project, or discussing something with Severus.

Severus, who she knew respected her mind and her thirst for knowledge. Severus, who deigned to converse with her when he felt that the majority of the human race was not worth it. Severus had always chosen his friends with certain standards, ones that she met. The man was a right bastard and most people never made an effort to befriend him. Even of those that had made such an effort, most were discouraged by his ire and disrespect. She considered it an honor that a man of his intellect and countenance would actively engage in friendship with her.

But what of romance?

She thought of the night in Paris, of his lips against her own while they embraced in front of the Eiffel Tower. He had held her close, one hand at the small of her back and the other roaming over her shoulder blades and down her arms. His body had been warm as it pressed against hers, and his lips were soft and inquisitive. He had tasted of the wine they'd had with dinner and the ice cream bought from a street vendor. The passion that he had elicited left her feeling, for once in her life, truly desirable.

None of the few men she had kissed or been intimate with had made her feel so wanted. His hands flat against her back, the pressure of his lips and his mouth exploring her own... she had never felt anything like that before. It felt so clichéd that there had been something special about Severus that night, that he had stirred emotions within her. Emotions of which she had never considered herself capable. Their surroundings could have had an exaggerated effect on their emotions and their actions. They *had* been in the most romantic city in the world; the Eiffel Tower and the Seine had surely inspired much more than one remarkable snogging session throughout all of the city's existence. They had both been drinking excellent wine that night as well, after having traveled for several long days. Could these things have effected her friend and partner to the point of doing something not just unexpected but also undesired?

Had the Potions Master acted solely on impulse, the sporadic moment born of opportunity and circumstance rather than sincere wanting? Might he have been unpredictable and affectionate not because he wanted to, but because of influences outside his control? Did Severus Snape act on impulse with her, doing something that he didn't truly want to do, going against his natural tendencies? Was that the sort of thing that one could expect from the man?

She rolled her eyes at the questions she was asking about **Severus Snape**.

Did he act in brash and romantic ways with little thought?

Not bloody likely.

The knowledge that the passionate embrace they had shared had not likely been an accident did nothing to quell her anxiety. It simply brought her back to her original, and most troublesome, conundrum -- what did Severus Snape feel for her?

That question led back to thoughts of the night before, and what he was feeling when he looked at her after she stopped herself from touching him. She alternately congratulated and berated herself for the decision to stay her hand so close to coming in contact with him. Her questions of herself, and her reasoning behind refusing the physical contact, were only overshadowed by his reaction. His face had conveyed an emotion, a break in his carefully crafted façade of uncaring. When she closed her eyes, she could remember exactly how his expression had looked. He was either disgusted by her almost-contact, or hurt by her hesitation.

Thinking of his eyes, the way they shone as he looked at her, she could feel a pain in her heart. The way he had regarded her, she didn't know if it was rejecting or rejected. It was upsetting but even worse it was confusing. She had grown comfortable enough with the man that she could often read his signals and brace herself for expected reactions, but, in this case, she was utterly lost. It was unfortunate that in the dark man's eyes, disdain and passion seemed so indistinguishable from one another.

Her mind continued to question and answer until she could feel her fingers starting to wrinkle. How long she lay in the bath like that she couldn't be sure, but when she moved to a sitting position, she could see that the water around her was no longer crystal clear. Her hair must have deposited at least a half-dozen styling products in the water, and the effects of her kitchen clean-up the night before had also helped turned her bathwater a foggy grey. Hermione wanted nothing more than to never leave her still warm, still comforting bath, but it couldn't possibly still be suitable for bathing.

She pulled the plug from the drain and dropped it over the side of the bathtub, knowing that the chain attaching it to the faucet would keep it from being lost. She turned the water back on, this time having much less trouble finding the desired temperature using the two "H" and "C" labeled knobs. A quick adjustment of another knob and the water sprayed down onto her from the high showerhead, which was tall enough for Severus to not have to stoop. She hauled herself to her feet, wondering where she could find soap, hoping that at least one issue would wash down the drain with the bathwater.

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"Wastebasket."

"Right. And what do we use it for?"

"Waste."

She rolled her eyes and let a sigh escape. She couldn't exactly call his answer wrong.

"And what is this?"

"I know what a sink is, Hermione. I also understand anti-bacterial soap, dish towels, spatulas, and that temperature business."

"Fine, fine. Go ahead and start. But I'm watching you closely," she pushed herself onto the counter separating the kitchen and living room, "and if I *seene drop* hit the floor or counter, we're going out for breakfast."

Severus began adding ingredients into a bowl, mixing them thoroughly before pouring the batter into the pan and sliding it into the pristine oven. Hermione watched as he added butter to the pans on the stove. The links went into one shallow pan, and she listened hungrily as they sizzled and popped. Severus pulled out a knife and began to dice onions, tomatoes, mushrooms, and several other vegetables. After the second pile had been formed, Hermione had to choke back laughter. She contemplated how to explain to Severus that the cubes did not all need to be the same exact size. She left it alone as he seemed to be comfortable and happy with his methods. Plus, he was being neat. He mixed the eggs, cheese, vegetables, and other pinches and dabbles of things and set them in the second pan on the stove. Hermione was impressed as she watched him flip and fold with ease.

The scents Severus was creating made her mouth water and stomach growl in hunger. It was much better, she decided, than the odor the day before, which made her eyes water and her stomach *scream* in horror.

When he pulled the fresh muffins from the oven, using his ever-so-helpful baking mitts, she hopped down from the counter. She knew exactly where to find all of the necessary tableware, as she had washed and organized the majority of it the night before. She silently collected silverware and dishes and set the table.

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All of the pans and utensils were soaking in hot, soapy water in the sink, Hermione noted. The counters were spotless, all of the ingredients had been put away, and there were only a couple splashes and smears on Severus' now discarded apron.

That the apron had been black was the only positive thing about it. It had, in white, across the chest, "Kiss the Cook" with a little baker's hat cocked to the side on top of the C. There was a distinct frilliness to the two front pockets, and Severus had been reluctant to let her tie it behind him in a bow. Hermione had had to storm into his bedroom and bring out his shirt from the day before. The now probably ruined shirt had made her point and he donned the apron with a quietly simmering discomfort. He drew the line, however, at wearing it while dining.

She sat across the table from Severus, eating her omelette. Her fresh blueberry muffin was sliced down the middle, the butter melting its way through. Her sausages were greasy and slightly burnt, the way she liked them. And her freshly squeezed orange juice had just the right amount of pulp.

The only thing Severus hadn't prepared was the coffee. She had been happy to run down to the corner café while Severus took his own shower, earlier that morning. Neither had yet used the coffee maker and the thought of attempting to do so without its sweet caffeine coursing through their systems already was a deeply disturbing idea.

She smiled as she bit into a sausage, happily watching Severus take a long, satisfying sip of his coffee.

She finished her meal and groaned, almost too full and contented to move. After a few digesting breaths she stood up and took her plate into the kitchen. Severus stopped her before she began cleaning up after herself, standing between her and the sink. Despite her attempts, he refused all her offers to do the dishes. He pointed her out of the kitchen and towards the bookcase, knowing that she would not be able to resist the lure of the mainly unexplored bookshelves.

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Hermione took a last, satisfying sip of coffee. Her muscles had stopped aching once she had gotten that first bit of caffeine into her system, but, shortly thereafter, she had eaten just a bit too much, leaving her with that highly satisfied, almost queasy feeling. The water had stopped running a few minutes prior and she knew that Severus had washed his last dish of the morning. She stood up, relishing in the painless movement. She walked into the kitchen and threw her empty coffee cup away.

Severus stood at the sink, drying glasses with a tea towel. He looked dashing domestic with his apron on and yellow rubber gloves covering half his forearms, his sleeves rolled up to just below his elbows. He turned as she began walking toward him.

His eyes widened slightly in surprise, but otherwise he didn't react as she brought her arms around his neck. She stood on her tiptoes, bringing her face level with his. Before he could question why she was invading his personal space, she leaned further forward, pressing her mouth onto his.

She ended the kiss as quickly as she had initiated it, stepping backwards until she was at a respectable distance from him. Severus was too shocked to move, and she was glad for it. She wasn't sure whether he'd push her away with disgust or pull her to him with passion, and she didn't particularly want to find out.

Of its own volition, her hand reached out to trace the words on his chest. She smiled at the bewildered man and then changed her focus to the movements of her hand, until he looked down to watch her fingers glide over the letters K-I-S-S. He looked back to her face and his eyes locked with hers.

"Thank you for breakfast. It was delicious."

The doorbell rang as she finished the word 'delicious,' and she quickly retreated. She left the room and did not look back, as she proceeded to the front door to answer it.

As she chatted politely with the postman, she didn't hear the sound of glass shattering on the tile of the kitchen floor.

==

Severus gracefully flopped into his high-backed chair. When Hermione bade the postman goodbye, she shut the door and crossed the room to sit in her chair, beside his. She held up a rectangular white Muggle envelope with their names and address on it. Severus nodded to her in an okay to open it.

Hermione slipped her finger into the top corner, sliding it across the envelope, the triangular flap springing up from the body as the glue was separated. Hermione removed a sheet of white paper and unfolded it. She smiled at the letter, entirely typed save the signature of Albus Dumbledore at the bottom.

"It's from Albus."

Severus did not know the Muggle teenager word *dur*. But had he been familiar with it, the look he shot her would have been meant to convey that particular sentiment exactly. She glowered back at him, knowing that her pronouncement had been rather obvious but still insulted by his implied snark.

She did not continue telling him about the letter, nor did she refocus her attention on it. She rustled the papers in her lap a bit, her eyes darting from the text before her to the man beside her to a mid-distant spot that wasn't really anywhere in particular. After a few moments of mutually expectant silence, Severus sighed and lifted his hand in a small wave.

"Well, go ahead and read it, Hermione. You were always so anxious to hear the sound of your own voice during my classes. I can see no reason that you should feel hesitant to read aloud to me *now*."

A defensive look crossed her face and he knew that he had struck a particularly sensitive nerve. Her mouth opened to form a response to his accusations and supercilious demand. She began to turn slightly pink, and he knew what she would tell him; that he never knew her intentions as a student and had treated her unfairly; that she was now a grown woman and his partner and deserved to be spoken to with at least a modicum of respect. Despite the fact that she would be insulting and upset, he looked forward to the verbal retaliation she would provide. He was feeling more confident this morning than he had since the game started. He had been scolded, ordered around, and manipulated throughout the game, and he knew he had deserved it all. Cooking a delicious breakfast, however, had raised his confidence level and given him the needed *oomph* to reassume his usual role of Snarky Bastard.

She was about to form a very indignant retaliation, but a word on the piece of paper caught her eye and she stopped in the middle of declaring him a 'Bastard'. Her eyes burnt into the page as she re-read the sentence with said word in it a few times, with both disbelief and amusement apparent. She continued reading the letter to herself until a clearing of the throat to her right reminded her that Severus had ordered her to read it aloud.

She cleared her throat a bit and began.

==

"Hermione, Severus, Arthur, Neville, George, Fred, Luna, Remus, Molly, Ron, Draco, & Harry

Yes I know I did not need to say all of the names. But you wanted me to read it verbatim, did you not?

Congratulations on another successful day of living as Muggles.

We are down to six teams now. Team ChameLion -

Really, Albus and his sweets... I can't imagine the amount of sugar he must have consumed to come up with all of those ridiculous team names. Anyway. *Team ChameLion has dropped out of the game. Ginevra and Nymphadora discovered a game called football while in the city. There was a 'match' on the 'telly' in a Muggle 'pub' that they stopped by in. As avid sports fans, Tonks and Ginny became quite interested in the game.*

The good news is that the Arsenal, the team they were rooting for, won the 'plate' or the 'fork' or something along those lines.

He means the Cup. Football is played for a Cup, I'm almost positive. Um, Ahem,

The bad news is that Tonks celebrated said victory by changing her hair to the team colors, red and white.

This qualifies, whether done consciously or not, as the use of magic. Muggles apparently have something called 'dye' which they use for such purposes.

That leaves you, the twelve remaining players.

Best of luck to you all.

Everyone is doing a splendid job!

It's signed Albus Dumbledore, Game Master.

...

That man is so odd."

She put the paper down on her lap and slowly shook her head, a faint smile crossing her lips and belying her attempt to convey annoyance. She had mastered both the urge to laugh hysterically and the urge to scream in frustration before she raised her eyes to regard the man sitting in the chair next to her.

==

When her gaze rested on him he realized that she was waiting for his input. Quiet contemplation came easily to both of them, but she had come to enjoy receiving his opinion on matters. He also had learned that sharing his thoughts did not always lead to confusion or contempt, and he now generally offered his assessment with much less prodding than she had been forced to use during the establishment of their rapport.

"Quite."

He knew that his one-word agreement would not be enough to satisfy her, but was trying to put his thoughts in order so as to not sound like a complete dunderhead when he gave her his view on the letter and its implications. As expected, the exasperating witch kept her eyes locked firmly on him. Severus was rather certain that she had willed her eyes to keep from even blinking as she waited for him to break from his silent reverie and grudgingly speak his thoughts aloud.

"It has been two days since the Headmaster exiled us for his most recent punishment, ahem, I mean his most recent **competition**, for us all."

"Yes..." she supplied, hoping to encourage him to continue his disclosure. He knew that she must be truly interested in where he was headed as she made no comment on his *accidental* verbal slip and display of pessimism and spite.

"Only two days have passed, and already two teams have been disqualified." She nodded at the known information, eyes shining with interest as she tried to determine the conclusion he had reached. "I knew that it would be easy to outlast the other teams. I had not expected, however, that the other teams would fall this quickly." His smugness was conveyed clearly, a stirring of disappointment possibly warring with his relief in the more traitorous parts of his mind.

"Well they had severe obstacles to overcome. By an accident of birth, members of those teams could not fulfill this mission satisfactorily."

"Because they were born to wizarding families? Need I remind you that I am a pureblood myself, and do not appreciate the implication that said parentage makes me inferior to anyone? Or that I take offense to the suggestion that I am less qualified or worthy than people that I consider my equals? Nor do I agree with the allegation that I am unable to conquer the necessary obstacles to emerge from this game victorious."

She sputtered in righteous indignation at his accusation that she was a bigot. He smiled, knowing that she couldn't really see his expression through her blinding rage, and twisted the knife.

"Really, Hermione. I expected better of you. I'm very disappointed to learn that you, of all people, would judge or worse *degrade* someone based solely on their blood-status."

He was sure she was about to choke on her own tongue. Words were leaving her mouth incoherently, as she simultaneously tried to defend herself and explain things calmly. She was offended and not thinking clearly. When her eyes focused on his face, she caught sight of his firmly-established hint of a smirk. He was either unwilling or unable to sustain the guise of antipathy in the face of her predictable reaction.

The flush that had begun at her neck and concurrently traveled up to her face and down to her chest faded in a moment. She turned pale for a split-second and examined his face for reassurance. Apparently finding it, she smiled.

"Did you just *tease* me, Severus?"

"I suppose I did."

"I've known you to insult me, and to ignore me, but you've never quite mastered your teasing technique."

"I appear to be improving."

"Yes. That was definitely teasing. How'd it feel?"

"Satisfying, yet lacking in the malicious glee I'm usually able to achieve with true nastiness and sincere dislike."

"And that is a good feeling, or a bad feeling?"

"I prefer not to answer that question, as I've never been one to show a preference." He paused and she snorted, preparing to bring up house rivalries and teachers' pets. He spoke again before she was able to make a statement, continuing as though she had interrupted him after the word preference, as opposed to him halting his statement to raise her ire, "A preference for one insulting method over another, of course."

"You are so..."

"You needn't praise my candor. I believe you were going to explain to me our advantage over teams ChameLion and Cat's Eye? If I'm not mistaken, you were going to outline the reasons they were destined to lose this competition by accident of personal nature, rather than coming to the natural conclusion that I I mean **We** - are simply superior in self-restraint, knowledge, skill, and other resources necessary to play this game to the end."

She groaned at his words, but inwardly grinned at what appeared to be Severus Snape in a playful mood.

"It's what we don't have that will help us. I'm not a Metamorphmagus, and you're neither paranoid to the point of partial insanity nor are you missing an eye. And neither of us is prone to automatically hexing unknown innocents for the evil of being not in our immediate line of sight."

"Indeed. Just the same, however, you ought to avoid sneaking up on me or, essentially, progressing on me in any way that could be misconstrued as aggressive. And this 'football' monstrosity is definitely a wretched Muggle obsession that we should avoid at all costs."

"Right. I agree. Though at the rate everyone's going, this game will be over in a week."

It would be eleven days before Severus and Hermione were visited again by the postman, carrying another note from the Game Master.

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Author's Notes

This is my first chapter written entirely (written, typed, edited, posted...) in California. I worry that my change in scenery affected my writing. Does it? If it did, is it a positive or a negative change?

A note on 'Maia Granger'... Although the name Hermione is most known in conjunction with Shakespeare (as far as I've been informed), I've chosen a slightly different theme with the names of her family. I see Hermione as being derived from Hermes, who was, amongst other things, the messenger of the gods and the god of literature. Hermes was born of Zeus and Maia (a nymph). Persephone, of course, would be Hermes' sister (Zeus and Demeter being her parents, as well as siblings) and the unwilling Queen of the Underworld. Her beauty attracted Hades and he stole her down to the underworld, tricking her into being forced to stay there 1/3rd of the year. When Demeter refused to let anything grow from the earth when her daughter was below, the seasons began. That name came to me out of a desire to correlate her with Percy Weasley. After that the rest of this Greek stuff just started and now there's nothing I can do. To learn more about Greek Mythology, visit pantheon.org

I have no idea how I was inspired with the working title of 'Seasons Change'... I think it somehow came from the story of Demeter and Persephone and I thought it fit.

A note on the word omelette: Word spellcheck doesn't accept it. My beta corrected it to omelet, but my spellcheck doesn't recognize that word either. So I referred to chapter 6, in which I spelt it omelette.

Another note on Maia Granger: She is not a bad person. She is not a bad mother. Hermione loves her mother and is exceptionally lucky to have both her mom and dad as loving, attentive, encouraging parents. I wanted that to show through. Hermione's mom is not meant to be cruel or demeaning. She just wants her daughter to be happy. The relationship I have established here is based on my own with my mother. So if I can say that my mom isn't a bad mother for encouraging me to lose weight or brush my hair, I'm pretty sure Hermione would say the same thing.

The amount of feedback I got on chapter 6 was directly linked to how quickly/hard I worked on chapter 7. Keep that in mind when you see that little 'would you like to submit a review?' button.

Another special extra thank you to QueenP, who not only pimped chapter 6 but was willing to give me feedback and other supportive gestures when I sent her every draft of each part of Chapter 7 with 'well, does it suck?!' at the end. QueenP is... well, she's more than just a queen, she's a goddess. A general thank you to everyone who reviews, good or bad. It really is incredible how much each review has an effect.

I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.

Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

Chemistry

Chapter 8 of 12

Eleven days have passed since team Snarky-Smartly last heard from the GameMaster. A comfortable routine has been established, with new discoveries every day.

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 8

Chemistry

A/N's at bottom.

This is not HBP compliant. I wrote that I am NOT HBP COMPLIANT in my info and don't plan on writing it again, but as my first chapter up since book 6, I figured it wouldn't hurt to put it again.

Other than the fact that I refuse to accept her modified universe, this is all still owned by JKR. I make no profit and intend no disrespect.

Love and Thanks to the insurmountable queenp, without whom the admins would surely laugh at me.

*This chapter is rated **W** for my attempt at the description of lewd acts.*

Severus heard a gasp from across the room and stilled his hand. His pen hovered above the equation for kinetic energy. Physics was proving to be a bit more challenging than chemistry had been. Severus had spent almost a week experimenting and exploring the organic and inorganic aspects of that subject. With a vigor he had only seen once since his own experience as a student at Hogwarts, he had indulged his love of learning with a passion. He studied the Muggle periodic table of elements and devoured the many University textbooks available on the bookshelves dedicated to the equations and experiments.

The bookshelves in their large office had been Hermione's favorite aspect of the large room. They lined the wall that was set a few meters back from the door, spanning as far wide as their bedrooms likely went. Unlike the bookshelves in their living room, before which he sat with Hermione every night, these bookshelves were full and did not contain novels, biographies, magazines, or other reading material. These shelves held solely textbooks, most of which Hermione explained were for University students. Hermione had pointed out to him the various subjects. A large portion of the books was dedicated to Muggle sciences; Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, and others. There were also many levels of mathematics ranging from algebra to trigonometry to calculus. History textbooks focused on London in the late 1800s to the present or American history and their revolution and civil war, as well as books about the first and second World Wars.

Hermione had taken Muggle University courses during her Summer holidays away from Hogwarts. She held a basic understanding of each subject and tried to give Severus a general idea of the different areas. It hadn't taken much for Severus to content himself with learning Chemistry.

Severus had found interest opposite the many books. Along the back wall, which had no doors or windows, was a series of cabinets, drawers, and shelves-- all part of a storage space as tall as the ceiling. This area was divided into three equally long and tall pieces. The two outside sections stood out from the wall a few metres, large enough that Severus or Hermione could sit comfortably inside any of the cabinets. The middle section came out only half as far from the back wall.

This middle section was simply rows and rows of shelves. The distance between the shelves would change to accommodate the size of whatever was put on them. They had been full when Severus first saw them. Upon further inspection, he had been thrilled to find bottles, cans, jars, vials, bags, and boxes littered throughout the shelves, holding and filled with all sorts of interesting fluids, powders, gasses, and objects. He had been reminded of the shelving that he kept up at Hogwarts. He liked to have a few creatures floating in jars for his students to look at while waiting for his attention. Amongst the many unknown entities on these shelves, however, there did not appear to be anything resembling a pickled body part. He had been anxious, after simply looking at these shelves, to find out how to use and understand everything that he saw there.

The first section had many drawers as its bottom half, differently sized in depth. Some of these drawers held cutting knives or stacks of paper, the deeper drawers held large bowls and other equipment. Above the drawers in this first section, cabinet doors opened to reveal spacious cupboards filled with various tools and toys.

The third section was comprised of four cabinets. It was split into three equally wide cupboards, but the middle cabinet had then also been split in half, to make two equally tall cabinets.

Severus had marveled at the obviously expensive Chemistry set contained within the cabinets. In just a week he had made a small dent in the multitude of objects and tools to explore and play with, as he learned how the elements interacted with each other.

It had been a pleasant surprise when he had found a cabinet in the first section filled with clocks, telephones, light bulbs, radios, and a small T.V. And found in a drawer beneath it the tools required to take them apart and put them back together. Hermione had, from within the bookshelves, quickly found several tomes for him dealing with how each device worked in general and instructions on how to understand the inner functioning gears and wires, as well as step-by-step directions to assemble or disassemble each device. Severus immediately scoffed at the assembling directions, but thanked her for the other reading material which he wouldn't 'need' in order to understand these machines, but might provide further information.

Although having no personal vendetta against the patron of the Weasley clan, Severus was loathe to admit that he felt, while working with these machines and seeing how they worked, a bit of the giddy rush that Arthur Weasley must always feel about his Muggle artifact discoveries. He even surpassed the excitement of Arthur Weasley flying his new car when, after two days of tinkering, he had managed to put together a working telephone.

He would never admit how much it pleased him when Hermione had applauded him and his success. She had insisted on taking him out to dinner that night, where she ordered champagne and toasted team Snarky-Smartly for having made it to their second Wednesday, passing ten days as Muggles. Over several courses, she told him of her insatiable curiosity when she was twelve and insisted on taking apart all of her parents possessions to see how they worked. It had taken her over a week to properly understand the mechanics of the telephone. It had taken her another week after that to reconstruct a working telephone. That he had figured out the telephone in a few days, she said, was pretty amazing. He reveled in her praise but covered it up by teasing a bit about his superior advancement. Hermione was gracious enough to smile and accept his gloating, never pointing out that he was thirty years older than she had been, and she had had to experiment on the one phone her parents had allowed her to study and deconstruct, while Albus had provided Severus with several.

He had been studying physics at his desk for two days now, since finishing his work on the telephone. For the several days that he had spent experimenting with his Chemistry kit and all of the materials, he had determined that his desk was not been a suitable place for such exploration. Nor had it been a suitable place to study and deconstruct complicated machinery. Because of this, he had not spent much time at his desk as of yet.

There were 4 worktables in the middle of the room. They ranged in width and length but were all the same height required to make experimenting comfortable, with two stools tucked underneath each. Even with the stools pulled out, there was ample space between the tables, a testament to the size of the room. He and Hermione had, at times, both worked at the tables and only once or twice had they bumped into each other.

Each had their own desk at opposite ends of the room. They were large and rectangular, with one of the shorter sides flat to the wall, leaving the desk to protrude into the room. The desks had been identical except that the one on the left wall faced the cabinets, and the desk on the right faced the bookshelves. Other than that, they had the same things on them and had been arranged identically. After almost two weeks, however, the desks looked almost nothing alike, as their owners had rearranged and added supplies as they saw fit. To the left side of each desk there were drawers going to the ground. On the surface there was a nice lamp, a pencil sharpener, stapler, some tape, scissors, and a multitude of pens and pencils. There were also little cups full of rubber bands, stamps, thumbtacks, and paper clips. On the wall right above the desk was a corkboard. Apparently he could put things on this board and make them stay by using... well, he knew he had to use either thumbtacks or rubber bands but he couldn't remember which.

On the right side of each desk was a computer, a large whirring device with a multitude of wires protruding from the back, disappearing through a hole in the desktop. There were many devices connected to the large, noisy block and the 'monitor'. There had been several books on computers available on the bookshelves, but many of them Severus took offense to. He expressed disdain that the Muggles should be making people feel like a 'dummy' or an 'idiot' for simply wanting to understand the computer more. He imagined that the books must be full of small words, written in a condescending tone. Hermione had held only a basic knowledge of the contraption, which made learning about yet another "new" device of which he was ignorant and the exploring of it a bit easier to bear. Together, they had been able to identify the keyboard, printers, and speakers with ease, and then started trying to teach each other what they could.

Once they had the mechanics down, they thought themselves rather clever. They had mastered pointing and clicking, dragging and dropping, cutting and pasting, saving and printing, files, folders, the desktop, and a general idea of what almost all of the buttons on the keyboard did.

It was in the application of these new skills that Severus and Hermione couldn't learn from the manuals.

Hermione had cared much more than Severus did about actually *using* the damned thing, as opposed to understanding it but leaving it alone. She had been intent on 'surfing the web' and fiddling around on the machine, until she felt herself a 'competent computer user.'

Severus had taken to Chemistry while Hermione studied Psychology 'in-line.' Hermione was more open than he to new and different ways of gaining knowledge. She had been happily goggling any subject she could think of, and occasionally stopped Severus, telling him to come over and look at a picture or reading aloud her findings.

Severus considered himself a purist. Hermione used the word 'snob' concerning the acquisition of new information; he much preferred the weight of a tome in his hand, the musty smell of an old book, the sound made when he turned a page, or the old, cracked leather on an ancient volume.

Besides, his one foray into the world-wide-web had resulted in 5 and a half hours lost to a 'hearts' tournament. He no longer remembered how he had found himself on the gaming site, or how he had found himself already signed in and waiting to play. He had done well, though, third place out of thousands of players. He was almost proud of himself. His father's voice told him repeatedly that third place was no place for a Snape, but his father had never played internet hearts with that many players spread around the world. Severus had played many games in those five hours of staring at the screen before him, losing only one. Every victory was bittersweet, though, as he watched snarkysmartysevy rise on the scoreboard. All in all, he was proud of his third place but boasting about it would only lead to people seeing what player held the title of third place, and he did not want anyone encouraged to call him Sevy.

He had sworn off 'online gaming' after that, preferring to have books and that strangely lined paper, which was bound by some kind of swirly wire and had three holes down its left side.

It was above one of these 'notebooks' that Severus' hand hovered, the ballpoint pen poised to jot down that $KE = 1/2 \times m \times v^2$. When the silence after Hermione's gasp faded into giggles, he set the pen down, looking at the clock to affirm that it was time to retire for dinner anyway.

==

She watched the man jerk wildly. He was naked, showing off his well-muscled body, his skin glistening with sweat. He held his very large penis in his hand, while his left played with the skin at the back of his balls. The dark patch of hair around his shaft led to an enticing line that ended (or did it begin?) at the belly button of his flat, toned stomach. His pinkish-brown nipples stood out against a very light dusting of hair. The muscles in his neck strained and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he gasped. His hair had fallen in front of his face until he threw his head back, silently gasping his orgasm.

She had watched him slowly undress for her. His eyes had not changed focus once during the stripping, and she felt her irises connected with his. When he had removed his cotton boxer-briefs, a smirk came over his face. His proud, hardened cock sprang free of its confines and bobbed at her.

When the first drops of pre-cum glistened on the tip of his turgid member, he had spread it around his shaft before bringing his hand up to lick the warm, salty, opalescent fluid from his fingers. His tongue laved at it, suggesting that it was rather tasty.

He had started slowly, stroking the sign of his arousal gently, while moving his balls around softly with his fingers.

The confident man had sped up his strokes until he found the perfect tempo.

His hips had started moving, in rhythm, with his hand. As his enjoyment continued and the intensity increased, his hips jerked without control. He came, the hot cum dripping down his hand and thighs.

He continued stroking, riding his orgasm past its peak, until the hard, jutting cock began to return to flaccidity. Once completely satisfied that he had coaxed every last bit of pleasure from his ministrations, he turned his face back in her direction, satisfaction and a remainder of desire flashing in his eyes.

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"What is the meaning of this, Granger?" boomed the Potions Master. Hermione jumped a bit at the unexpected sound of his voice.

"I have no idea. It just popped up." She began to giggle again. "No pun intended."

"But what is it?" asked the perplexed man now standing behind her. She barely controlled her giggles as the gorgeous, spent man on her screen disappeared to reveal a fully dressed man in a suit. It was a completely sexless sight, if not for the distinctive bulge in his trousers. The man was jerkily patting his groin and pointing at her, while next to his image, she was told to **Order Now!** in flashing letters.

"Um, I think I've just been witness to internet porn," she said, shrugging her shoulders at the phenomenon that she had only been warned of before. She moved the rat to click on the little **X** in the top right corner of her screen, closing the window.

As soon as the aroused man disappeared from the screen, a new box sprang to life. Nothing within it was moving or flashing, but there were several pictures. In the middle, one button said **Order Now!** while another said **See More**. Pictures surrounded the buttons and bits of text, each with a description below. She looked at the images and descriptors, reading each of them aloud.

"Girl on Girl, Chicks with Dicks, Bondage, Shaved, Girl on Girl on Girl, Hot Chix and Horses, Hungry for You, Hot Chix and Animals, Hot for You, Sucking It, All Tied Up, Watch Me Strip, Watch us Fuck, Teh Hott Sexxors, Tit Play, Anal Play..." These are disgusting."

If Ron were standing behind her, he would undoubtedly be trying to shove her out of her chair, one hand fumbling with his pants while the other attempted to "see more" or "order now."

Severus merely sneered, his face twisted into disgust and loathing. His pants were gracefully bulge-free. He leaned forward.

His arms encircled Hermione as he leaned over her, one hand resting on the edge of her desk, the other covering the hand with the rodent. He glided her hand so the pointer was positioned exactly where he wanted. His breath was hot on her neck, and she allowed him to guide her hand. He used his forefinger to apply a gentle but insistent pressure on hers, clicking on his desired targets.

He repeated the process a few more times, hand over hers, coaxing her to click where he wanted. His hair brushed against her ear, and she refrained from twitching under the tickling sensation, her body remained still except for her hand, which followed where he took her.

When the screen finally clicked to black, he removed his hand and returned to his usual impeccable posture. Her neck felt cold at the sudden loss of his presence and her hand fell limply to her lap, as though it would no longer take from her, instead only functioning with Severus' hand guiding it. The mouse sat idly on its pad on the desk, as though nothing special had occurred.

He turned and calmly left the office. After a moment, she stood and followed him through the door.

His long black coat was on by the time she exited her room with a pair of shoes added to her stockinged feet. Severus helped her into her coat before opening the door.

He proudly re-locked the dead bolts with the jangling keys and turned to her.

"I would prefer to neither speak of, think about, nor find myself looking at anything like that ever again."

"Amen to that," Hermione replied with a sigh, stepping down onto the pavement.

They made it a block towards downtown, a route they both knew now with very little trouble, when he broke the silence again.

"A man what?"

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Hermione had reached the eighteenth century in the history of Christianity occasionally promising Severus that Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam could be explained later when they stopped walking. Severus had been rather interested in her lecture on Muggle religions, but was not completely dismayed that she had paused in her 'summarization.'

He followed her gaze up to the bright white board with its black lettering.

"We should see a movie. Can we see a film, Severus? Please? I'll let you pick the restaurant, even though it's my turn."

Severus would have readily agreed when she first suggested going to the Muggle cinema, as it was something they hadn't done, but he was wanting to experience. But if he could avoid going to another of Hermione's choices for dining, he had no qualms about taking advantage of the situation. He pretended to internally debate the pros and cons while she watched him with a hopeful expression. Their outing tonight would be highly satisfactory; usually Hermione chose an unsuitable location or other variable he did not approve of, but tonight he would be entirely un-opposing of their itinerary. He had always enjoyed having an advantage.

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Hermione held her breath as she watched him debate her request. Were she dealing with her father, she'd squeeze his hand and draw out her 'please.' If she were dealing with the boys, she wouldn't have asked, she'd have taken her 'know-it-all' stance and told them that they were *going to a movie*. If she had been trying to convince Albus, she'd point out the concession stand.

Severus, however, was more difficult, but no more or less predictable. He had nothing against the Muggle cinema and would eventually agree, but the question was, how many decisions would she have to relinquish to get her way? He didn't yet know about the general genres found in cinema, or what kind he would like (drama) and what kind he wouldn't (romantic comedy). He also didn't know if he preferred buttered popcorn or extra salt. She wouldn't mention to him now, of course, that she would be choosing anything after his agreement to attend. She would let him believe that the only decisions there were to make were up to him.

He relinquished his hesitation and agreed. She smiled.

"Good. So, first we go to dinner," he looked about to interrupt when she continued talking, "at the restaurant of your choice." He looked satisfied with her summarization. "And then we'll come back here to see a film."

She stepped to the side a bit and gestured for him to take over the navigation in order to direct them to his choice of restaurant. He took a thoughtful moment to decide, then looked about. Once he had a general idea of where they were, getting somewhere would be much easier.

Apparently, his mental map included these cross-streets. He gave a curt nod and turned, heading to their left.

She quickly followed him.

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"I resent their depiction of wizards. We do not all look like Albus Dumbledore..."

"Yes, there was a conspicuous lack of witches as well. In fact, I don't recall any really strong woman portrayed at all..."

He continued as though she hadn't interrupted. "And elves *do not* look like that."

"I'm sure S.P.E.W. would have been much more popular if they did."

"And what in Merlin's name is a *Hobbit*?"

Hermione sighed. "You finished 1984 last night, right?"

"Yes, why?"

"I think I know what you should read next. It's by a man called J.R.R. Tolkien..."

Severus did not mention again their movie-going experience, except right before beginning *The Two Towers*, when he confidently told Hermione, "The book was much better than the movie."

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Team TiT for TaT has, regretfully, dropped out of our game. The Twins in Trouble for Trickery and Tomfoolery could not help but live up to their reputation, or their team name.

Fred and George Weasley wish you all the best of luck in this game. They also express the deepest regret to the dozen or so Muggles affected. But they couldn't stop sniggering when they released that apology, so I'm not quite sure of their sincerity.

Congratulations to everyone, tomorrow will be two full weeks living as Muggles.

Good Luck.

Albus Dumbledore

Gamemaster

Co-Founder, Order of the Phoenix

Order of Merlin, first and third class

Headmaster... blahblahblah

==

"Really," said Severus, sneering at the letter in his hand. "I was surprised they lasted that long."

Hermione chuckled. "I wonder what they-" she paused, as her imagination began conjuring possible scenarios. "No. I don't even want to know what they did to those poor Muggles."

Severus shook his head, moving to put the letter with the other missives from the sadistic old wizard.

The doorbell rang and Hermione and Severus looked questioningly at each other. As Severus was already standing, he walked to the door and opened it.

The postman looked alarmed, retreating a step backwards. Severus scowled at the man. After a moment, the bewildered fellow stood a bit straighter and held out an envelope, briskly stating, "You must be Mister Snape. Here you go." And with that the young uniformed gentleman turned on his heel and fled.

Severus closed the door, growling, "It's Professor, you simpering dunderhead..."

Hermione looked at her friend and then at the letter he held, raising her eyebrows questioningly. He handed her the letter and left the room, moving in the direction of the loo.

She opened it and was not entirely surprised to see a short typed message with the signature of Albus Dumbledore.

Please be aware that on Sunday there will be a maintenance wizard coming by your apartment to renew certain wards and charms. Your absence is appreciated. The crew should only take about 10 minutes, but scheduling does not permit an exact time for their arrival. Therefore, please be away from the residence from 8 am to 9:30 pm.

We regret any trouble this may cause.

Well, not really. You two need to get out more. Sunshine is good for you.

Best,

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Author's Notes ::

*I am completely blaming my lovely, beautiful beta queenp for the delay. True, I slugged off for a couple of months. But as she is lovely and beautiful, I'm sure she will allow me to point the finger of blame at the long period of time it took her to get back to me. I thank her immensely for everything, including the wait (don't know why I'm thanking her for the wait, but I feel I should)... The instant I found her beta'd version in my inbox, I moved to Word and edited and then posted. So really, I was **trying** to be fast.*

Elsewhat... I agreed to the end-of-August challenged issued by Kel. I did not follow through. Obviously.

I wrote this chapter long before fall semester started up. I am hoping that the fact that I'm taking physics is not directly related to me writing about it.

Was originally using 'theater', which was corrected by the all-knowing queen to 'theatre'. But I was reading a magazine ("Hotdog") today and it kept referring to 'cinema's. As its writers are British and neither my beta nor myself is British, I decided to trust them.

I have the suckiest school schedule ever (by my own doing). The positive of that is that I've been writing non-stop. The next chapter is all written, just waiting to be typed. Reviews encourage me to type more.

I like long ass author's notes.

(reverts to cut-and-paste)

I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.

Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

Bogus Magic

Chapter 9 of 12

Sometimes you find magic in the strangest of situations

Like the Muggles Do

Chapter 9

Bogus Magic

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**A/N's**, just as verbose as usual, at the end.

*Other than the fact that I refuse to accept her modified post-HBP universe, this is all still owned by JKR. I make no profit and intend no disrespect. I do not own, nor do I claim to own, any part of the Harry Potter Universe or anything else cooked up in the mind of J. K. Rowling. And the bits that I did come up with, well I can only hope they fit in seamlessly and offend nobody.*

*Love and thanks, as always, to my (once lost, now found) beta queenp. Anything that's not good, she probably told me to change it and I refused.*

**B/N** So I forgot to tell fyiagcg that I was back after hurricane Rita...sue me...you won't get anything, I'm a teacher in a public school in Texas...:)

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Severus turned the page, aware that he had been 'reading' the page before since Hermione picked up the telephone. She had been having what seemed to be a pleasant conversation with her mother. Hermione's voice had grown agitated, though, since her mother must have made some kind of request or suggestion. Her *'No thanks, Mum's* had turned much harsher in nature as the book he held became more and more inconsequential.

He heard his name. Had he not already been listening, he would have started now.

"Well, no, Mum. I suppose there's nothing in the rules that states we have to always be together." Hermione sighed.

"Still, I don't think it's very fair."

"Well, no. But just because I'm not forced to."

"No, Mum. There is nothing going on between Severus and me."

"Yes, Mum, I know he has no claim to me."

She was silent for a while. Her face, from what he could tell from quick glances at her, became more and more horror stricken as her mother apparently argued her point.

"Mother, we are not talking about this."

"No, I will not tell you the last time I was 'Good and Shagged.'"

"Because that is not the sort of thing I want to talk about with my mother."

"I don't care if Persy tells you every time she's been 'Fabulously Snogged.' If you haven't noticed, Persephone and I are very different people."

"Dear Merlin, Mother. Please do not finish any sentence involving Daddy and a raincoat."

"No, Mother, I am not a-"

"No, Mother," Hermione growled, "I am not a lesbian."

"Just because I do not wish to go on a date with your patient's cousin's son's best mate does not mean that I am doomed to spend my life a spinster."

"Mum, I'm a witch. I don't think it would be wise to date a Muggle," she said softly, apparently changing her defense strategy.

"Yes, there are Hogwarts students with only one magical parent."

"I don't think marrying and having children with a Muggle would be in my best interest."

"No, I have nothing against Muggles."

"Yes, Mum. I know you and dad are Muggles."

"And I love you. But you could never understand."

"Yes, he does."

"No, he doesn't understand what its like to be Muggle-born. But that's as unfair as saying he doesn't understand what it's like to be a woman, but at least we have."

"No, Mum. I told you there is nothing going on."

"No, not like Ron and Harry. It's different."

"Well, we-" Hermione paused, and somehow Severus knew her mother was waiting in silence and not interrupting her. He stood up and made his way across the room. Hermione hadn't even noticed him moving until he was almost upon her. He caught her eyes as she attempted to speak again.

"Severus and I, we..."

He was close enough now to hear the silence on the other side, finally broken by Hermione's mother, asking shrilly, "You what?"

Severus held eye contact as he reached to her and pulled the phone to his own ear. Hermione's knuckles had turned white and her fist did not readily release the receiver, leaving her fingers resting between his own larger hand and his temple.

"Mrs. Granger."

"Who is this?" Hermione's mother asked, somewhat frantically.

"Professor Severus Snape."

"Oh, hello, er- Professor." Her voice had relaxed significantly with his introduction, likely no longer worried that a strange man had broken into Hermione's flat to rape and kill her eldest daughter... after using the phone.

"Please, call me Severus," he drawled in his smoothest tone. "I feel truly horrible, Mrs. Granger."

"Maia," she corrected him, a clear invitation to explain, in detail, why he felt horrible.

"Hermione told me almost two weeks ago about your invitation to dinner."

"Yes," Hermione's mum confirmed. "We thought it would be nice to have you both over. We have heard so much about you, after all."

Severus quirked an eyebrow at his partner, who had removed her hand from the receiver but still stood close enough to hear both ends of the conversation. If he didn't know her as well as he did, he might have failed to notice the faint blush that arose in her cheeks.

"Well, I know it's not giving you much notice, but tomorrow, Hermione and I have just discovered, we will be forced out of our flat all day. Would you like to dine with us tomorrow night? I do not wish to be a trouble to you; perhaps we could take you out to dine at your choice of restaurant."

"Oh, don't be silly, Severus," Maia Granger chastised him, in the condescending tone Hermione had complained of many times before. "We would be happy to have you here. Shall I expect you at 7 o'clock?"



"Sounds perfect," Severus said as charmingly as he could muster. He must get off the phone as soon as possible, before his head exploded from the effort of containing his usual sarcasm, derision, and malice.

"Is there anything in particular you would like to eat, Severus?"

"Oh," he responded, "if your cooking is half as good as Hermione boasts, I'm sure I will thoroughly enjoy any dish you choose to make."

They exchanged goodbyes, and Maia Granger hung up without even asking to speak with her daughter again.

Hermione gawked at him, mouth slightly open and eyes wide.

"We will be dining at your parents' residence tomorrow at seven p.m.," he told her, handing back the receiver to be hung up. She stared at the phone in her hand for a few moments before setting it down and finding her voice.

"If you were that charming to everyone, people would-"

"I do not want for people to like me or talk to me more. I am quite satisfied with the loathing and fear I currently inspire."

She smiled. "Actually, I was going to say that people would drop dead from the shock."

"Ah, yes," he said, inadvertently reminding her of the headmaster. "But then there would be nobody left for me to intimidate."

==

Severus practically threw himself onto Hermione, almost knocking her to the ground. He flung his arms around her shoulders and spun her until his back was to the crowd of people.

She stood in his rough embrace, stunned beyond comprehension. What in the world had gotten into him?

And then she heard the man in the center of the crowd shout again.

"And I say the magic word once more... Abracadabra!"

Severus tightened his grip for a second and then released her completely, as he shoved his hands into every pocket he could find in his coat and trousers.

She realized he was looking for his wand and spun around to face him, catching his wrists in her smaller hands.

"He's a Muggle, Severus. Just a simple Muggle magician."

"He what?" Severus asked, no longer frantically defending their lives but still looking confused and suspicious.

"Look," Hermione said, pointing, as part of the crowd parted, leaving the shouting man in plain sight. "Does he look like a murderous wizard?"

Severus had to admit that no, the man did not. He wore a tuxedo, covered by a shiny black cape lined with red fabric. He placed a black top hat on his head with one white-gloved hand, while the other held a black stick that looked *almost* like a wand, if one were to squint their eyes and cock their head to the left, just so.

"What is *that*?" he asked with a repulsion usually reserved for first year Gryffindors and Crookshanks' fur balls.

==

They had crept closer as Hermione explained that the man posed no threat, and was not, in fact, a Lucius-Malfoy-wannabe with a speech impediment. Being jostled by the crowd separated them temporarily, but when Hermione found herself back at the side of the foul, sneering man, she hooked her hand into the crook of his elbow. He did not protest, but Hermione kept her grip loose so as not to offend, just in case.

The Muggle magician pulled a white-furred bunny from his top hat, to the 'ooh's and 'aah's of the crowd. Severus snorted. In a not-so-conspiratorial tone, he verbally lashed the man's trick, pointing out where the rabbit had clearly come from.

Over and over again Severus revealed the truth behind every trick the Muggle in the tuxedo performed.

The crowd began dispersing, especially in the area closely surrounding the masquerading witch and wizard. Hermione began trying to convince Severus to move on, pulling on his elbow and then his wrist with no success. The magician, not hearing Severus' remarks, noticed only that he was losing his audience. He began attempting flashier tricks to regain the attention of the people walking away, going on their intended ways. The harder the man tried to impress, though, the more malice Severus released in his commentary.

It might as well have been Harry Potter trying to wow the thinning crowd, with the venom Severus produced to lambaste and degrade him.

Even when Hermione firmly gripped his hand and tried to walk away, Severus' focus did not leave the poor man. Eventually Hermione was standing two arm lengths away from her surly partner, pulling with all her might, the line from her shoulder to his tautly straight, if a bit diagonal due to the height difference between the two.

No matter her attempts to pull him from the Muggle magician, Severus stood firm and did not falter in pointing out the trickery behind every attempt at 'magic'.

The Muggle magician asked for a volunteer from the now significantly smaller audience. Hermione could feel Severus preparing to step forward. Hoping to spare the hopeless Muggle from a direct verbal attack from that man at her side, Hermione, with her free hand, swung her purse at him with all her might. The bag hit Severus hard in the chest, causing him to retract his undesirable attentions from the gaudily dressed man. Momentarily focused on her, the disdain visibly receded from his face. She took advantage of his disorientation to hiss at him.

"Severus, can we please go? I'm starving. If we stay any longer, we'll ruin our appetites, and my mother doesn't take well to any seeming rejection of her cooking. We'll be forced to have third helpings until we feel so full we become sick to our stomachs. Please, let's go."

Once his attention was taken off the defenseless Muggle, Severus' insistence on staying where he stood faded. He allowed her to pull him from the crowd. After a moment spent unsure of what way they had been going before, Hermione turned left and they continued walking.

It was a long walk to their destination, but the weather was pleasant and the streets uncrowded. The fresh air tickled her cheeks as they strolled to the small diner. She told Severus of how her parents had brought Persy and her to the comfortable restaurant every Saturday when she was growing up.

They began talking about beloved yet unofficial traditions. Severus even managed to think of a few fond memories of his youth. He did not speak of his family much in general, unlike Hermione, who often found herself recounting loving childhood moments. Severus never said as much, but she suspected he enjoyed hearing about her relatives. Whether he was fascinated by her Muggle upbringing, or wistful of the love she had been raised with, a vague look often came into Severus' eyes when she spoke of life amongst the Grangers.

There was always the possibility that he had simply perfected the art of 'act like you're interested.' Harry and Ron had gradually improved in their attempts at the male-staple expression over the years of their friendship with Hermione, but she still felt the change in attention paid each other when talking about Quidditch as compared to her long,

loving explanations of the newest eighteenth century charms book that she suspected Albus had 'come across' on purpose, for her.

As a man, she would not find the presence of such a trait in Severus to be a big surprise. As the man she knew him to be, she would not find an insistence for perfection on just such a talent to be a surprise at all.

But something told her Severus was not 'faking' such an interest in this case. A small, traitorous part of her thought that maybe it wasn't the Muggle vs wizarding world difference, nor the presence of deep familial love she felt towards her parents and sister. It was possible that he was simply interested in what she had to say, because it was *her* telling him about *her* childhood, whether good or bad.

She spoke of her familial traditions then took the logical step to telling him of the simple traditions she shared with Ron and Harry.

He still couldn't listen to her talk about the two troublemaking boys without an occasional biting, sarcastic comment about their characters. However, talk of Hogwarts encouraged a sense of understanding in the Potions master, and he was soon telling her of the staff's annual get-together a week before the students were scheduled to arrive every fall.

Apparently, Minerva had drunk Sybill Trelawney under the table before the start of Hermione's sixth year, after an argument about the 'ambiance' of the Divination teacher's tower room. Hermione found it to be equal parts hilarious and horrifying, hearing about her professors in such a way. She had found that she longed to have stories of more staff parties in the future to share with the man beside her.

It wasn't until they tried to walk through the narrow doorway to enter the small diner that Hermione realized her hand was still linked with his.

==

Hermione had just finished the last of her coffee when the doorbell rang. Her father, sitting next to her on the couch, rose to answer it, still speaking to his daughters. But Maia Granger laid her hand lightly on her husband's arm and stood. She excused herself to Severus, with whom she had just finished sharing the recipe for the pudding they had enjoyed after their delicious dinner. Lugh Granger did not protest, and continued telling Hermione and Persephone about his internet advertising campaign. He resumed his sentence as though there'd been no interruption.

Hermione caught Severus' eyes and gave a small smile, really just a slight quirk of the side of her mouth. She didn't expect a toothy grin back from the Potions master, but the subtle twitch of his upper lip was enough. The almost unnoticeable change in expression was the reassurance that Hermione needed that he was not having a dinner-at-Grimmauld-Place-when-Sirius-still-lived-there miserable time.

She suspected he wouldn't be averse to leaving soon, but she might have just been projecting. The comfort and relative solitude of their own flat pulled at her, and she doubted Severus would protest.

Her mother returned to the sitting room, but Hermione had not heard the door shut. Mrs. Granger looked a tad bit confused, but, since the first time an owl tapped on their kitchen window, the Grangers had become much more resigned to not understanding aspects of Hermione's life.

"There is a taxi waiting outside for you two. He wouldn't explain how or why he knew you were ready to go, but I suspect neither of you would mind returning home. You've surely had a long day."

Hermione and Severus exchanged matching *'I didn't call'* looks, but both rose to their feet. Persy, Lugh, and Maia Granger took turns hugging Hermione goodbye at the front door. Her father shook Severus' hand amicably, while Persy waved a goodbye to the greasy man she had heard horror stories of as a child.

Hermione was unsurprised, but gratified all the same. Both had taken to Severus rather sociably, though wary. They had heard pleasant things about him for the past three years, but the ten years of nastiness Hermione had reported prior to that was not easily forgotten.

Her mother, however, gave Severus a hug as fierce as the one she had given her eldest daughter. Hermione couldn't see, so she couldn't be sure, but she rather suspected that her mum had even planted a kiss on his thin, bony cheek.

She ushered them out the door before either Hermione or Severus could react.

==

Hermione and Severus sat in silence in the back of the cab as it weaved its way through London. It was after nine, and most of the other cars on the street were taxicabs as well. The path their cabdriver chose to take, at least, had very little traffic.

The cab smelled of peanut butter and green apples, and as they went over bumps in the road and around corners, Hermione felt the familiar pull of sleep. She felt her head drooping and struggled to keep her heavy eyelids from closing. Once or twice she caught herself right at the precipice of slumber and jumped awake, startling Severus and herself. The cabdriver, on the other hand, never shot back anything but a cheeky, twinkling grin.

Again, she felt sleep tug at her, and finally leaned, ever so slightly, to her side, until her head came to rest on a solid object. It was round, and had a softness covering a very hard, steel-like structuring. The warmth radiating from it made her forget the shivers she had felt walking from her parents' house to the cab. Something slightly above it tickled her forehead, and something near the crease of her eyes let out a soft, reluctant sigh. As she closed her eyes and let herself become comfortable, she found herself almost burrowing into the object, which stayed very still except for a steady rise and fall of the area near her chin. She hummed contentedly and felt herself falling...

"Oi," someone barked out, startling Hermione from the edge of slumber. She jerked her head up and straightened, not noticing that she almost broke Severus' already long, crooked nose. She settled in a state of exhausted alertness, and focused her eyes on those of the cabdriver, in the rear-view mirror. "Yer stop's jus' up 'ere, folks." He looked straight at her and she felt her brain tingle, as though she'd had too much to drink with dinner. "Yeh look tired, Miss. I suggest yeh get 'er in safe an' in bed, Mate," the cabbie said, nodding at her while speaking to Severus. "Else she'll not make it past yer chair."

"Oh, no," Hermione interjected, feeling slightly insulted at the implication that she was a fragile little girl to be carried to bed. "I'm fine, really. I'm not at all that ti-" she did not finish her sentence, as the word 'tired' collapsed into a wide-mouthed yawn. She scrunched her nose and shook her head a bit to clear it, but by then the man she was defending herself to had already turned back to the road.

Severus eyed her askance while reaching for his billfold. As he counted out the eerily familiar driver's fare, Hermione collected herself and her things, the desire to sleep weighing heavily on her shoulders.

She barely registered the white van pulling away from the pavement as they came to a stop in front of the steps to the front door.

As the van passed on her side of the cab, she saw a glimpse of a long white beard and hair under a pointed, purple cap and saw the hem of a similarly bright purple robe hanging out the bottom of the passenger side door. She smiled and read the sign painted in a sparkling gold on the side of the van.

### **"Wizards' Housekeeping and Security"**

She suspected the slogan "*We clean and protect like magic!*" wasn't quite the false advertising most would suspect.

==

Hermione felt a familiar prickle as she stepped through the doorway. Her eyes swept the apartment, finding nothing different from that morning, and rested on the digital

clock. The time was 9:31.

She mumbled something to Severus along the lines of, "That driver was good," as he pulled her coat off her and hung it up, setting her bag on the table beneath it.

He just smiled and placed his hand on the small of her back, guiding her toward her room. He took particular care as they passed his reading chair.

"Should I check," he began, "to see if you've been hexed? You seem out of sorts."

"No, I'm fine." She shook her head, an understanding occurring to her. "That cabdriver just had Dumbledore's power of suggestion." She scowled as she opened the door to her bedroom. "Bastard."

Severus considered asking whether she meant the cabdriver or the Headmaster. Seeing as how it was a word often used to describe his personality, however, he chose to keep his silence, on the off chance that he had somehow done something to offend her.

Nor did he question her when she turned from the doorway and mimicked her mother's actions, giving him a quick but strong hug and a peck on his sallow cheek. "You were wonderful today, Severus. Bloody fantastic."

She released him and turned to her bed, toeing off her shoes and not shutting the door behind her. When she reached her dresser and turned back to him, tugging at the zipper of her trousers already, he hesitated for a moment.

He diverted his eyes and gave a small, formal bow. "Goodnight, Hermione," he told her softly, before softly shutting the door and retreating across the hall.

Before he was completely in his room, he heard a muffled "G'night, Sev'russ..." followed by the thump of a tired young witch collapsing into a deep, peaceful sleep.

### **Author's Notes**

*The 'raincoat' comment is directly thanks to Betz. See, reviews count!!*

*The second scene in this chapter was one of the main inspirations behind the creation of this story. I hope everyone else thinks it's as funny as I did.*

*To get Mr. Granger's name I scanned pantheon.org again. I chose to avoid more of the Greek mythology and chose instead the Celtic area. The second name that I saw that I liked was Lugh. 'Lugh is the Celtic lord of every skill', it told me, and I thought that could be rather fitting for Hermione's father. What really got me was when they were saying the other gods from other cultures that were similar to Lugh. The discovery that he mirrored the Roman god Mercury made him a sure bet.*

*Peanut Butter and Green Apples ~ that's actually my world right now. Had to put it in there.*

*Sorry it took so long.*

*Love and thanks (AGAIN) to the amazing queenp, whose e-mail almost caused me to wet my pants, I was so excited to hear from her again.*

*I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.*

*Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.*

## **The Ride**

*Chapter 10 of 12*

*Life is a trip, enjoy the ride.*

**A/N's at the end.**

*This is where the newly changed Mature rating comes in, for my attempt at graphic sexuality.*

*Other than the fact that I refuse to accept her modified post-HBP universe, this is all still owned by JKR. I make no profit and intend no disrespect. I do not own, nor do I claim to own, any part of the Harry Potter Universe or anything else cooked up in the mind of J. K. Rowling. And the bits that I did come up with, well I can only hope they fit in seamlessly and offend nobody.*

~~~~~

Hermione looked at her bedside clock.

It was 3:30 and she had been lying awake for almost an hour. Her mind would not calm and her body was beginning to get restless. She threw off the covers and swung her legs over the side of her bed. She looked down at herself, considering whether or not she should put on a dressing gown. She wore a pair of black cotton knickers and a light pink camisole. The air was neither overbearingly warm nor cool, and she still felt slightly lethargic. She decided against the dressing gown.

She set her bare feet on the floor, enjoying the softness of her rug against the sensitive soles of her feet.

She walked out of her bedroom and into the bathroom, yawning and scratching the bare skin of her belly underneath her top.

She threw water on her face and used the loo, letting her mind drift to the dream that she had awoken from. She could remember the tingle that was going through her limbs when her eyes opened.

Lying in her bed, she could still feel Severus' hands on her body, in her hair. They had been in the taxi on their ride home from her parents' house, but in her dream she wasn't sleepy.

She had been thinking seriously about her bed, but not for resting purposes.

The dream began with the cab taking a sharp turn, sliding a seatbelt-less Hermione into Severus' side. She looked up to apologize to him just as he leaned down to see if she was ok. Their lips met and lingered on each other. Her eyes widened and then she let them drift closed. The second her eyes were shut, she was no longer touching Severus.

Indeed, she opened them to find herself looking out the window of a cab. Severus sat lengths away looking out his own window.

She shut her eyes for a moment and sighed, trying to get her bearings. As she reopened them she felt the cab take a sharp turn, sending Severus sliding from his window, his body colliding with hers and pressing her against her door.

She looked up to ask if he was all right and he looked down to apologize. Their lips met and she felt shivers rattle her spine. She felt her eyes drifting shut as she brought her hand up to cup his cheek.

She could feel his sharply defined cheekbone beneath her slightly unsteady hand. His soft lips opened slightly and she felt his tongue nudging her own lips apart.

Their mouths locked together, soft and wet and warm, as he brought one long fingered hand up to the side of her face, the other hand snaking around her waist. Her other arm came up to wrap around his neck and she sighed, reluctantly separating her lips from his, only for their mutual need of oxygen.

The moment their lips no longer touched, she felt a slight jolting feeling, and then the sensations of his arms around her, his skin beneath her fingers, and his warm breath were all gone.

Her eyes opened to find herself leaning against the door to the taxi, seeing Severus across the seat looking out his own window.

He slowly turned his head to look at her. He opened his mouth and practically growled her name, just as she almost hissed his.

In an almost synchronized movement, they both sprang at each other, meeting in the middle of the cab's back seat. Their lips met in a searing kiss. Her hands threaded into his hair, nails scraping his scalp in a way that made him groan low in his throat, as his hands roamed her back, pulling her body flush against his own.

Their tongues tangled and hands explored. She was reluctant to lose any sort of contact with him. She felt his hand inch lower until it rested at the hem of her blouse. And then it was beneath her shirt, his cold hand running up her bare back. His other soon moved to join the first. But the second she felt the palm touching her warm skin, she felt almost a shock through her body and a sudden feeling of loss.

She opened her eyes to find herself across the cab from her friend and partner.

Their eyes met and she groaned. His gaze alone lit a fire near her lower belly.

Their bodies moved towards each other slowly, their lips being the last things to meet.

As their lips molded together, her body moved of its own accord, one leg swinging over his legs until she straddled him. She was in his lap, her breasts pressed against his warm chest.

She groaned again when his lips left hers, but she sighed in appreciation as they moved to her neck. She let her head roll back as he suckled at the sensitive skin beneath her ear. His hands were in her trousers, pulling her knicker-covered arse towards him.

She felt the graze of his teeth at the nape of her neck just as she realized what the hard, pulsating bulge pressing into her inner thigh was.

Her eyes flew open to discover that she was once again sitting across the seat from the man who was definitely the cause of the moisture now collecting in her knickers.

Her body stung with arousal and she let out a scream, closing her eyes to stop her frustrated tears.

Her eyes flew open, then. She was still screaming, her eyes unfocused but looking into those of the man before her. Her body tensed in orgasm as she felt his bare skin against hers, his hands cupping her breasts as his hips bucked up to meet hers. He pushed further into her than she had ever felt a man go. She wasn't sure if they were still in the cab or not, and she really didn't care. The only thing that mattered was that his naked body was jerking and pulsing under her own. His skin was as hot as hers, and she could feel their mingled sweat drip down between and beneath her breasts. She screamed again as her walls tensed around him. She saw starbursts and shut her eyes to the bright light, discovering more flashes of light behind her eyelids.

She had opened her eyes to find herself lying in her bed, alone, with a burning, tingling feeling of loss throughout her entire body.

==

She left the bathroom, her dream already slipping from her memory. Her mind grasped at the fading images as she walked past her bedroom, not even noticing that the door across from hers was open, the room beyond empty.

The feelings and sensations she had woken with were becoming more and more distant. She tried to remember basic things, what had happened, where she had been, who she'd been with... but her still sleepy brain kept pushing them just beyond her mind's reach.

She raised her arms above her head as she walked through the living room. She stretched and yawned like a cat in the sun. Her eyes closed with the satisfaction of her muscles stretching and her bones shifting, before she could register the light from the lamp by the bookshelves or the open book lying face down on the high backed reading chair.

She did notice the refrigerator light shining when she lazily opened her eyes mid-stretch. The white light was silhouetting Severus Snape, wearing only a pair of boxers, drinking from a bottle of milk.

==

Severus Snape drank milk from the bottle. Hermione had reprimanded him several times in their weeks together, telling him it was uncouth and unsanitary. He had stopped doing it in front of her. She no longer complained. And if she noticed that the milk supply would decrease without a dirty glass appearing in the sink, she didn't say anything.

In the wizarding world, Severus merely told someone or something that he wanted a glass of milk, and one would appear. Usually with biscuits, although he rarely asked for them. When he was finished, the glass would go away. For all he knew the house-elves never did dishes, simply threw away his empty milk glass and conjured another upon request.

He was not concerned with the affairs of house-elves.

The affairs of Muggles, the necessity to find and pour and wash and put away, had never concerned him either.

Oh Merlin, he thought, *I certainly hope Albus' next game doesn't involve us acting as house-elves*

He did at least put the bottle back into the refrigerator. He was a masquerading wizard, not an animal, after all.

He was actually rather keen on the Muggle refrigerator. It was as efficient as a cooling or freezing charm, kept his kitty-bags of restaurant leftovers fresh, and the soft hum it regularly generated was oddly comforting to his restless mind.

Severus was especially interested in the little light bulb inside the refrigerator. It was perplexing. He wondered, was the light always on or did it turn off when the door closed? He had posed this question to Hermione, after several attempts to open and shut the refrigerator swiftly enough to catch the light bulb unawares. Hermione had smiled patronizingly and said something about a tree in the forest and a clapping hand.

He hadn't understood her, but dared not ask again. Her cryptic answer had reminded him too much of Albus.

==

When he looked toward the dining room and saw her watching him in the dim light, he was glad he had resisted the urge to test the little bulb again. She was staring at him, a little too sleepily to be considered wide-eyed. Her hair was everywhere and her cheeks were flushed.

He took in the rest of her; bare feet, a pair of knickers and a tiny scrap of a top. It was then that he became aware of his own state of undress; he stood wearing only his boxers, the hair on his legs and few hairs on his chest sticking straight out in reaction to the cold refrigerator.

He stilled his hand as his arms flew up automatically to cover himself. After all, there was no reason to react like a fifth-year caught changing after Quidditch. Besides, what was there to cover? The only truly offensive bits were firmly encased in his boxer shorts. It had been a long time, however, since anyone but Poppy Pomfrey had seen him so exposed. And he mostly didn't count her, as he had learned that even with magic, she could not do a proper medical examination, much less heal his wounds, through five layers of cotton and black wool, and was thus entitled and forced to see him without clothing.

He turned his instinctive urge to cover himself into a nonchalant yet suave brushing of his shoulder at a very believable non-existent piece of lint. He cleared his throat and her still clearly sleepy eyes snapped to his.

He shifted away from the refrigerator door and tried to gauge her comfort.

"Good evening, Hermione," he said, in his most I'm-not-uneasy tone.

"Hello, Severus," she replied, sounding completely at ease. "Had trouble sleeping?"

He had, though he no longer remembered the dream that had woken him an hour earlier. "I enjoy reading at night," he told her, gesturing across the living room to the open book on his chair.

"Hm," she half-sighed, reaching up and scratching her stomach. "Me too. I was just going to get a glass of juice and see about finishing my book." She seemed to notice then that her hand, underneath her tank top, scratching beneath her breast, had caused the already revealing shirt to expose the area between her knickers and belly button.

She hastily tugged the shirt down, almost revealing her breast in the process, and shifted awkwardly.

"I apologize," he began. "I must be making you terribly uncomfortable in my state of undress. I'll go cover myself."

"Severus," she replied, forgetting her uneasiness in her frustration with him. "We are both adults, here. I am not your student and you are no longer my professor. There is no reason to react immaturely." She paused in her reprimand. "Unless you're uncomfortable?"

She looked slightly hopeful and he almost gave in to the urge to shout *Yes, I am!* and run. But he was an adult and would not admit such a juvenile discomfort. "No," he said, though to his ears it didn't sound entirely confident. "I'm just fine."

"Okay, then."

"Okay."

They stood looking at each other in silence until she cleared her throat. "Er, I was still hoping to have a glass of juice."

"Yes, of course, go ahead," he mumbled, trying to pass through the wide archway from the kitchen without rubbing anything of his against anything of hers.

"Oh, by the way," she said as he made his way to his chair. "You've got a bit of a milk mustache..." he looked at her quizzically, "er... some milk still on your upper lip."

He reached up and rubbed at the spot she was indicating with her small fingers, pulling his hand away to see a white smear on the back of it.

She got her juice and settled in her chair, next to him, opening her novel to the page she'd left off.

==

Severus awoke feeling the early-morning sun on his face. He looked at his friend and partner curled up asleep in her oversized chair. Her book lay in her lap, closed but with two of her fingers wedged in her place. Her head rested on the soft back of her chair, her mouth slightly open. The fabric was darker where her lips met it and he realized after a moment that she was drooling.

He looked at the rest of her, noticing her relatively un-clothed state, and then recalled his own.

He was out of his chair and across the room before he remembered how they had come to be asleep in their chairs half naked.

His door shut a bit louder than he had hoped, but he was safely barricaded in before Hermione's head rose and she looked around sleepily.

Her hand came up to wipe her slightly moist chin as she stumbled into her room, shutting the door and folding happily into bed.

~~

"What'ya say we go out for breakfast?" Hermione asked, not entirely sure why she felt mildly uncomfortable.

"Lunch." Severus had been quiet and unresponsive. This was not very unusual, however, and Hermione thought little of it.

She looked at her watch; it was quarter 'til one.

"Breakfast. Lunch. Same difference," she said. Apparently already expecting a yes, she was putting her coat on near the front door. "We'll drink coffee and read the paper. It'll be fun." He raised an eyebrow at her. "...Ish. C'mon. Get up, let's go."

She opened the door and waited while he stood and put on his long black coat, grumbling something that sounded suspiciously like *bossy*.

==

"I miss the boys."

"Why?"

Hermione sighed, wishing she hadn't said anything.

"Never mind," she said, taking another sip of her coffee.

They sat quietly for a moment before Severus folded his paper before him and looked her in the eye.

"Really," he said, sincerely, "I just don't understand. Explain it to me."

"Why I miss them?"

"Yes, that. And why you like them so much. Why they remain your best friends. You're not an awkward teenager anymore. Potter no longer relies on your intelligence and Weasley's loyalty to keep him alive. You're a grown woman now. You have little in common with those two."

"We share more than you think," she snapped.

He raised an eyebrow and Hermione could see a rather incredulous look, followed by a quizzical gaze. She caught his misunderstanding before the ridiculous question formed on his thin lips.

"They're my friends, my best friends. Whether my mother wants something else or not, I've never been truly romantically involved with either."

"The staff had a pool going in your sixth year as to when you and Mr. Weasley would be romantically inseparable."

"Well, you must have all been very disappointed when Ron and I went separate ways after a physically awkward week of attempting to date."

"No. Well, everyone else was. I won the pool. I said that you would come to your senses in less than a fortnight."

"Is that so? What did you win?"

Severus smirked, remembering the eighth day after two thirds of the golden trio had been spotted holding hands awkwardly. The head table had been abuzz when Harry Potter sat between his two friends at lunch.

"Fifteen Galleons, six months off from Hogsmeade chaperoning, first pick of scheduling the next year, and a bag of lemon drops."

Hermione smiled. "Well, I'm glad someone gained something from that ridiculous relationship."

Severus nodded, fondly remembering his free Saturdays spent brewing his own potions instead of watching students frolic to and from Honeydukes.

"So what is it, then?" he asked without malice. "What has held you three so close for over ten years? What have those two done to deserve such devotion from you?"

Hermione thought for a moment. "I don't know," she finally admitted. "They love me. Unconditionally. Other than my family, they're the only ones who ever have. They're my best friends. I can't imagine my life without those two idiots. We've been through so much together, good and bad. Death, disease, love, pain, new life, war, peace, hatred, just growing up... I can't explain it. I just know that I'm happier when I'm with those two dunderheads than when I'm not."

When she looked at him again, she got the distinct feeling that she'd said something wrong.

She had no idea what it was, so she ignored the sensation and continued.

"Like when I'm with my parents and Persy. They drive me crazy, but they're my family. Harry and Ron are a sort of family too. So is Hogwarts. There's a certain 'at home' feeling I get. It's a different comfort and happiness than any other. Those two... I don't feel like I do with them during the rest of my time. And when I'm at home with my family, there's a part of me that's perfectly content. Or during staff meetings. Or in my library. Or at Order meetings."

He looked thoughtful. She considered letting a bit of silence pass, but her mouth overrode her mind and she let out a small chuckle. He looked at her, slightly startled.

"It's silly. You don't understand what I love and miss about them. But when I'm with them, if I start trying to tell them about something interesting I talked about with you, or something funny you've said, they get on my case that same way. They don't understand why I willingly spend time with you, what I see in you. I think it actually bothers them a bit when I'm spending time with them and... *'just want to talk about the greasy git'*!" She smiled at him. "Perhaps you three aren't as different as you claim to be."

He was silent after that, and eventually they both went back to reading the paper and sipping their coffee.

==

"All of these people around... I think they're giving me hives."

"You're so overdramatic."

"Am not. Look." He pulled up the sleeve of his left arm. It was a pinkish color, as opposed to his usual paleness.

"You've been scratching at it for twenty minutes. Of course it's red and sensitive."

"No, all of these people made it like that. I've been scratching merely to relieve the discomfort."

Hermione groaned and rolled her eyes.

"I've never seen you like this at Hogwarts."

"So?"

"So... You're surrounded by people then. Children, no less. I've never seen you scratch once."

He looked at her, as though not understanding why that meant he must be faking now.

"How is it, then, that all of *these*-" she waved her arm to indicate the other diners, "people give you hives, but Wizarding groups don't?"

"Anti-Hives spell."

"There is no such thing."

"Sure there is. It's a flick-flick-swish followed by two semi-circles, while saying..." he paused again, and Hermione knew he was making something up, *no-hives-ium from dunderhead-itus-group-os.*"

She looked at him with a latent disbelief she had only dreamed of showing him when she was his student.

He knew what the look meant, but nodded, as though her silence meant acceptance, and went back to his paper.

==

The waitress came over to drop their check. They'd sat there awhile after eating lunch, drinking their coffee and reading their papers. It had gotten a bit busy, but in general she had kept their coffees filled and never asked them to just leave already.

Hermione smiled at the girl. She was a few years younger maybe Persy's age. She was probably working for pocket money over the summer holiday. She had been sweet and Hermione planned to give her a generous tip. The girl grinned back at Hermione, then turned to thank Severus for his patronage.

He scowled at her, as he had for most of their meal, and offered a slight head-nod of acknowledgement.

The waitress turned back to Hermione, her smile slightly dimmed, as Hermione counted the bills to pay her.

Severus had gone back to reading his paper, studiously ignoring both women. As Hermione paid the girl, she gestured for her to lean closer.

"That means he likes you. If he didn't, he wouldn't have nodded, and you might have heard him growl."

"Really?" the girl asked, slightly disbelievingly, daring another glance to the erect newspaper across the table.

"Quite. Plus, he's not scratching." The girl's uneasiness changed to confusion. Hermione didn't plan on explaining his hives, so she continued. "Anyway, I just meant to say that it's not you, he's just an arse." The paper cleared its throat, reminding Hermione that it was not a silence barrier. "The look he gave you was approval. You've done a lovely job taking care of us."

The girl's smile brightened, sincerely, and she glanced at him again. "If that's approval, I'd hate to be on his bad side."

Hermione let out a light chuckle. "You have no idea," she said, almost fondly.

"How long have you two been together?"

Hermione's brow furrowed for a moment and the waitress saw it. "It's just that I can't imagine how much work it would be to get affection."

Hermione's face flushed a bit, through no fault of her own, and the girl sighed. "I wish I had someone like that. Are you two married?" The girl's eyes strayed from Hermione's face to her left hand, and Hermione instinctively folded her hands together.

"Oh, no. We're not."

"Ah. Just waiting for him to pop the question, eh? D'ya think he's the romantic type? Well, I suppose you know... I'm sorry, you probably think I'm being terribly nosy and rude. I just... I see a lot of couples in here who I know just won't last. The ones that grope each other, the ones who try to keep up conversation the whole time. It's nice to see you two, so comfortable and in love."

"We're not - !" Hermione paused a moment, hoping her voice wouldn't squeak again. "We're not together like... that. We're just, erm..." *Two wizards playing a game, who got stuck with each other for partners and then saddled with the team name snarky-smarty...* "Friends. And co-workers." Hermione felt like she was lying, she had no idea why. "Just friends," she repeated, more firmly.

"Ah," replied the young waitress, putting the bill in her apron pocket and patting Hermione lightly on the shoulder. "One of those," she said knowingly. "Good luck then, girl."

As she walked away, Hermione was tempted to argue with her, to explain that there just wasn't... Severus folded his paper and took a final sip of coffee, moving to stand.

"Shall we?" he asked, neither an angry nor an amused look on his face.

Hermione rose. At the door she allowed him to help her with her coat. As he held the door open for her, she glanced one last time at their waitress.

Hermione wasn't sure, but she could have sworn the girl winked at her.

==

When they arrived home, they found a letter waiting for them. Hermione controlled her curiosity enough to let Severus read it first, but quickly snatched it from his hand when he finished reading. His eyes were no longer fixed on the page, and that was good enough to Hermione as him holding it out and announcing, 'I'm done.'

Dear Arthur, Draco, Harry, Hermione, Molly, Neville, Ron, and Severus;

Team Loony-Moony was disqualified yesterday evening. Miss Lovegood was sure she had sighted an everating seclactic trinidadoo, a very rare find indeed. She immediately conjured a camera, small cage, and summoned a group of honeybees (as you know, honeybees are the elusive trinidadoo's favorite snack.) Such a catch of the creature many believe to be fictional would have been "worth losing the game," said Luna. Alas, to add insult to injury (Remus will be out of the medi-ward soon; Madam Pomfrey assures us that although there is no magical remedy for bee stings, he should heal quickly and there will be no lasting damage), the creature turned out to be a Chinese Crested.

The re-warding of everyone's flats went well. A slight tingling as you crossed the threshold is to be expected. This is an inadvertent reaction to outside party's magic, and is not considered to be any magic on your part.

Luna has told me of the fascinating Muggle publication of a daily horoscope. Mine was spot-on. I recommend that if you have not yet been enlightened to the Muggle 'Astrology,' you should give it a glance.

Happy Muggle-ing!

As Always,

Albus Dumbledore.

==

"Well, I suppose I'm happy for them."

"Hermione, there have been many times when your sometimes disjointed logic has eluded me. But I cannot see how one could be happy for our game's most recent losers."

"The full moon is nearing." When Severus looked no more enlightened, she explained, "Last game, they weren't able to finish, because of Remus' changing. It's good for

them that they got to play out this entire game."

"But they still lost."

"Yes," Hermione replied, as though talking to a child. "But they earned it."

"So you feel," he replied, as though talking to a mad person, "that they are fortunate to have lost, because losing because of Miss Lovegood's slightly off-kilter imagination is better than losing because the game was not set expecting a condition that Lupin has no control over?" Hermione nodded. "That is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. No one would prefer to have losing be their fault over bad timing! And the only thing you should be happy for is that their disqualification has left us with one less opponent."

"Well, I'm sorry. But I just don't think like that," Hermione replied. Upon considering his words, her eyes narrowed. "And that's horrible to be glad they've failed. They are our friends and we should be rooting for them-"

Severus snorted. "Perhaps they are your friends, but the werewolf and that girl are not my friends. Even if they were, there's only one team that I'm rooting for. Us."

"Well," she sighed, walking to her room, "if you can't show sportsman-like conduct, there's no point in even arguing this with you."

Her door shut, he headed toward the kitchen, smirking in what might have been considered a disconcerting way.

"Spose not."

He was almost sure, when he opened the refrigerator, that he saw the light blink on, from an unlit state.

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She smiled, having enjoyed the argument despite herself. Arguing with Severus Snape was fun, she thought, as she toed off her shoes.

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Author's Notes

I am not, intrinsically, a sexual person. I have, however, had sex. Any ridiculousness on behalf of the cab scene dream is just my own inexperience.

I made up the 'esverating seclactic trinidoo'. Don't tell Luna, she might be upset if she finds out it doesn't really exist.

For a picture of the Chinese Crested, go here: <http://www.nextdaypets.com/directory/breeds/1100073/>

I personally think Chinese Cresteds are ugly as sin. I apologize if anyone owns/loves a Chinese Crested, no offense meant.

*Thanks to all the folks at Potter_Place who told me Brits **do not** drink milk, don't often ask for doggie-bags from restaurants, and do call the refrigerators 'fridge' or 'fridgidaire'. I appreciate all the help. Unfortunately, none of this advice worked for my story. So I ignored it. Please, anyone hoping to enlighten me in a Brit-picking manner, don't bring these 3 things up. (Edit after a few reviews) Well, there you go, I've had several reviews defending the mild-drinking and the doggie bags. Just goes to show, you can always be right, as long as you ask the right people.*

As far as thanking a beta, poor dear queenp has been very busy lately so really I just ought to thank the mods over at OWL.

I know this took forever. I'm taking a pretty serious courseload at college and have been too busy to get this all typed up (the worst part is that it's been in my notebook for quite a while now).

I respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. I won't insist again that I am not a writer. Instead I grudgingly admit that as long as I'm writing, I'm a writer. But I will ask for feedback.

Because if I'm going to admit to being an author, I'll damn well insist that I've no idea what I'm doing, and admit that I'm scared as hell.

Dissectional Interlude

Chapter 11 of 12

Hermione muses while Severus contemplates Biology.

A/N's at the end.

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Hermione toed off her shoes under the desk and curled her now only-sock-constricted toes. Loud cracks echoed through the silent office as the knuckles of her little piggies cracked and popped. It was a testament to how engrossed in his project Severus must be that he did not immediately straighten and bark at her. He often told her – as often as she committed the crime – how much the sound bothered him. As she continued her ritual by rolling her feet around on the joints, eliciting more cracking from her ankles, she cringed in anticipation of the ear bending to come.



She looked back at Severus, but he didn't display a single twitch of annoyance or disgust.

Hermione felt herself so shocked by Severus' uncharacteristic lack of venom that she almost rose to go to his side and investigate what he hunched over, rapt attention focused on.

But, of course, she already knew what he was doing, and found it not just disgusting but despicable.

Having enjoyed Chemistry, as it was so similar to his own craft of potions, for almost a week, being challenged and yet enraptured by physics – and how muggles sought to explain things that most wizards had either never pondered or just attributed to some sort of ancient magic (which was not always true) for another week, Severus had moved onto the study of biology a week before. He was currently dissecting a frog.

Severus was still, forceps in one hand, holding back what Hermione assumed was a part of the deceased frog's skin, the scalpel in the other hand, poised to make an incision. He was so focused on his dissection that Harry and Ron could have bust through the office door, battling to the death with Death Eaters led by Lucius Malfoy – back from the dead – and an apparently not-so-vanquished Lord Voldemort himself and Severus would not have raised a single inquisitive eyebrow.

Hermione thought herself fortunate that she did not have some urgent matter to discuss with her friend and teammate *that instant*, nor did she have to the compulsion of so many girls her age to constantly be the object of attention of every man in a room, for she had the notion that to distract Severus from his apparently riveting dissection would require a hand to be placed in a very unfortunate location between the opened frog and the scalpel. The deep gauge that would result, though easily fixed by magic, would involve a trip to the Muggle emergency room that she was neither ready nor willing to endure. She shuddered at the thought of the hard plastic chairs and unsympathetic hospital workers, then shuddered again as she thought once more about what Severus was doing.

Severus, convinced that the best results would come from the freshest specimens possible, had procured two live frogs, one male and one female, from a local pet store. Hermione had quickly become attached to the two would-be pets and named them – Sevvie and Hermie – despite Severus' stern admonitions. She now understood why, as her heart broke for poor little Sevvie as he watched his mate be butchered in the name of 'science.' Hermione knew it was little Hermie on the table primarily because Severus had called her over to look at the caviar-looking ovaries after he sliced open the poor frog. However, she was sure that if she got closer she could identify the bodies by certain distinguishing brown marks each had around their eyes and across their backs.

She was therefore certain that it was poor little Sevvie occasionally "ribbit"-ing in dismay as Hermie met and became thoroughly acquainted with the blade of dissection.

Hermione was so moved by the plight of Hermie and Sevvie – as well as their dissection-doomed amphibian brethren – that she half considered campaigning on behalf of the unfortunate creatures' rights. The Benevolent Association of Rights for Frogs, perhaps.

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A few moments, or perhaps minutes, later, Hermione was startled to find Severus leaning over her desk. She half-consciously noted that the sleeves of his dark-blue shirt were still rolled up to the elbows, though his surgical latex gloves had been removed, and his hair was still pulled back in one of her elastics, though a few long black straggly pieces hung around his face, almost dashingly. He was staring at her, so it was not strange that, while she was still processing his presence and preparing a question, he was quicker than her and able to speak first.

"You have been mumbling for a while," he said, sounding only mildly irritated. "Spelling out words. B...a...r...f..., ..s...p...e...w..., are you ill? Or in a rude spelling bee, perhaps?"

She was about to answer, though she wasn't sure how, when the phone began to ring. She was halfway to standing, and just taking a breath to say "I'll answer it" when the doorbell, too, began to sound.

Fully risen and headed toward the half-open door between the hallway and their office, without shoes, Hermione turned to see Severus – no longer hunched over her desk to look her eye to eye, now standing fully erect – watching her.

"I'll get the door," she told him, back in her bossy know-it-all element and aware that he had a much better phone persona than if he were face-to-face with someone. "You answer the phone."

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Author's Notes

See?! Told you guys this wasn't abandoned. I know this is short, but I had a need to write something for this story and post it sooner, rather than later, and decided to just create a little interlude before starting on the next, long chapter.

The toe- and ankle-cracking is something that I do, often, and its inclusion here can be attributed to an accident I had that resulted in a sprained ankle, hair-line fracture of the fibula, and some torn ligaments. I haven't cracked my left toes or ankle in over a month, and its driving me somewhat mad.

Details of the frog dissection were researched online at Netfrog (the interactive frog dissection page), as well as dim recollections from... oh, I don't know... eighth grade?

A thanks to all those who have reviewed begging for an update in the past year or so. Also to all those over at WIKTT and Potter_Place who gave me ideas for what to next inflict on our Heroes, at least one of which will appear in the next chapter.

Please leave a review. The muse, lost for so long, is still only tentative and needs excessive feeding to get her back on her feet. I try to respond to every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. All reviews are appreciated and adored. Flames are ignored... after I cry.

Wanted, Unwanted

Chapter 12 of 12

Who was at the door? Who was on the phone? What does Severus really think? And do dreams ever truly come true?

Summary Who was at the door? Who was on the phone? What does Severus really think? And do dreams ever truly come true?

Disclaimer

A/N's at the end, as per usual

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Hermione closed the door and leaned against it, rubbing her temples. She had a migraine now.

"I never should have answered the door," she mumbled. Once that thought was out of her mouth, another entered the forefront of her mind; "Where is Severus?" was a question she'd been asking herself for the second ten minutes she had stood in the doorway. For the third and final ten minutes that she had been standing there, the question had been replaced by a statement: "I'm going to kill Severus."

He had probably gotten off the phone after about thirty seconds and gone back to the office and his dissection. At this moment, the bastard was most likely studying the entrails of poor Hermie, like many children's fairy tale versions of witches.

She took a moment to mentally curse the Muggle Mass Media's gross misrepresentation of witches and wizards (It was libelous and slanderous she wished she could sue.) She quickly returned her anger to that nasty, greasy, surly, sorry excuse for a man hiding in the back room.

Her migraine hadn't abated, but she was now harnessing the intensity and redirecting it to wrath. She stormed towards the back of the flat, a white rage boiling inside of her, the sides of her vision turning black whether that was the fury or the headache's work she wasn't sure nor did she care and entered the study, cursing and telling Severus that she was going to plunge that scalpel into his chest, where his heart *should be*, if he had one.

But Severus wasn't there.

She thought for a moment that perhaps he had heard her threats and curses and dove for cover. But the man that had battled Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy, and even herself on many occasions, was unlikely to be scared into hiding by a wandless witch on the warpath.

Had he gone into his bedroom to lay down for a nap?

But Severus never napped during the day. He said... well, Hermione wasn't about to go down that road of thinking. She wasn't quite ready to replace her anger with a kinder sentiment resembling any kind of affection for him, nor did she want to admit to herself that she remembered something he had said, in passing, almost two months ago.

So if he wasn't sleeping, where was he? Maybe he was cooking.

She humored that idea for a moment, in part because she loved almost everything he made for her she might forgive him if it was especially delicious and in part because the knife drawer in the kitchen would provide ample weaponry for her threats; with a butcher knife, she could carve him open and search his ribcage for what was left of his shriveled up old heart.

But he wouldn't be cooking. It was Thursday, which meant date night a term that even under Crucio, Imperio, and Veritaserum she would never admit to using. She had done her best, for the past month, to convince herself that despite the fact that they were a man and a woman, going out to dinner, the theater, the movies, or whatever else they felt like doing, at night, together, they were not dating. They were friends, coworkers, partners... not lovers. He went out with her every Thursday because it was a nice substitute to staying in, not because of any silly romantic notion. They had a good time, eating, drinking, and entertaining themselves, but he had never suggested it was anything more than that. Despite what *she* might like to believe their Thursday nights were, they were not date nights.

So if he wasn't dissecting in the office, sleeping in his bedroom, or cooking in the kitchen... what could he possibly be doing?

He couldn't possibly be having a long conversation on the telephone. They had only received a handful of calls that hadn't been wrong numbers since moving in, and those had been from her mother and telemarketers.

A thought struck her, and her confusion which had replaced her rage, for the most part turned quickly to panic. For a half an hour, he had been on the phone with either her mother (the horror of which was almost too much to bear) or with a telemarketer (with which he had no experience).

She left the office at a mad dash, but the doorbell rang before she reached the end of the hallway.

==

Hermione stood, flanked by bedroom doors to either side, racked by indecision should she go check on Severus or answer the door? Although she was worried about his well being a thirty minute phone conversation could leave even someone as good natured and laid back as Neville Longbottom ready to pull out their wand and cast Crucio on either themselves or the other speaker she couldn't convince herself that Severus was in much trouble. And what would she have done, barreling into the living room? Tear the phone from his hand and slam down the receiver? She didn't think Severus would take kindly to that.

The doorbell rang again.

Despite the protests that might arise if she pestered Severus about his she checked her watch 34 minute phone conversation, she didn't particularly want to answer the door.

What if it was those Jehovah's Witnesses again? She didn't think she could handle another half-hour long conversation about religion. Severus would have slammed the door in their faces, but Hermione knew she could never do that. After all, though she had absorbed bits of Severus' personality, she still wasn't a total bastard. And besides, she had been raised to have tolerance for other people's beliefs and religions, whether they conflicted with her own or not. She had nothing against people that felt so strongly in their beliefs that they wanted to share them, in fact she applauded it. However, the three people two men and one woman that she had spoken to for half an hour were just a little too pushy for her taste. She now realized that no matter how good your cause or how much passion you put behind it, some people simply didn't want to hear about it and at a certain point you had to accept that and let them close the door. If she believed in karma, she would guess that the thirty minutes she had spent standing in the doorframe were payback for trying to force others both fellow humans and house-elves alike to join and support S.P.E.W. against their will. Perhaps a good sentiment and kind intentions weren't enough.

She wanted to consider the implications of this new thought-process, but Severus was possibly dead of a brain aneurism after over 30 minutes of conversation with a long-winded caller, and whoever was at the door was now knocking, loudly.

"Hermione, will you answer the damned door? I'm on the telephone here!"

Well, apparently Severus was still alive and well, and snarky, so her worry of him having gone into a coma from too much conversation with her mother was apparently unfounded.

She broke her self-imposed paralysis and moved quickly toward the front door.

==

Harry, Ron, Hermione, Draco, Severus, and Molly

Congratulations to our three remaining teams! Keep a watchful eye out tomorrow for a special letter to reward you for making it to the top three!

As you may or may not have noticed, Team FernMugGully is no longer in the competition.

While on a walk through a busy Muggle park, Neville noticed some Muggle gardeners about to pull from the soil several full-grown Mandrakes. Neville quickly stunned the men and Arthur immediately contacted some Aurors, who removed the Mandrakes and cast Obliviate on the surrounding Muggles.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that their actions saved countless Muggle lives, this use of magic disqualifies Team FernMugGully from our game.

At my request, the Deputy Minister in charge of Wizard-Muggle relations will wait until the game ends to hold the ceremony, so you six can also attend and congratulate Neville and Arthur on their heroism.

Don't forget, check the mail tomorrow!

-Albus Dumbledore, GameMaster

==

"You know, I knew an orphan once. Two, actually," Severus was saying as Hermione walked into the living room and sat on the sofa next to him. "I didn't much like either of them. One was a total maniac. And that isn't hyperbole; he was completely insane and rather evil. Although, I must admit, he could be rather charming and quite persuasive when he wanted to be." Severus thought for a moment, and glanced at Hermione with a look that she knew conveyed about a dozen messages or more, not the least of which being 'Where have you been?'

She was still trying to decipher all of them, while also making an effort to keep a mental tally of how many there were he might have reached a new record when she heard the disembodied voice through the telephone begin, "As I was saying, sir..."

The dozen or so messages that Severus had apparently been attempting to convey to her through magic-less Legilimency were replaced by a smile that she had seen before, one that told her 'this is going to be painful for him, fun for me, and entertaining for you.'

"Mind you, I hated the other orphan as well," Severus continued, talking over the other man in a manner very similar to the Headmaster. "He wasn't evil. In fact, he was widely lauded as the Hero of the Light. The Boy Who Lived, the Golden Boy, the leader of the Golden Trio. He was actually orphaned by Vol-ahem, by the other orphan I knew. About twenty years later, he killed the evil orphan. I had to teach the little bastard. Saved his life a couple times, too. I never did get so much as a thank you, the little brat. Never could convince him I wasn't working for the evil orphan either. I could understand his not trusting me completely after the first time who knows, maybe it had been an accident to save the little ingrate's life. Maybe even the second time, and even then it's not likely. But you'd think that the little shit could've caught on after the third or fourth time I kept him from dying an extremely painful death. Then again, he never was all that bright. Got by on a little bit of talent and a lot of luck, whereas better students, ones with huge amounts of both talent and intelligence, and a great work ethic..." He paused and looked at Hermione, and she knew she must look extremely eager to hear what he had to say next. "Actually, I've only come across one student like that, in my entire career, and she... well, I suppose I never treated her too well as a student, but surely she knows now how much I respect her, admire her, enjoy her company..." he trailed off, leaning towards Hermione with a distinctly gentle look on his face, the kind that made her think he was no longer babbling just to punish the man on the other end of the telephone wire.

Severus was, in fact, leaning closer and closer to her, his face less than a foot from her own now. A thought struck her "He's going to kiss me!" and not only did the realization not disgust her, it thrilled her. He was six inches away, now closer, she closed her eyes... and then the damned voice, belonging to some stupid telephone-using git, jumped in and broke the spell.

"Yes, sir, I'm sure she does. But, as I was saying, your donation would go through our organization to several orphanages throughout the UK. And I know you expressed interest in learning more about the tax deduction, and I can assure you"

Hermione broke from her trance, yanked the telephone from Severus, and said testily into the receiver, "We're not interested. Don't call here again." She hung up the phone and turned to Severus, who looked like he was coming out of a daze, and starting to lean back, away from her.

Well, she wasn't a Gryffindor for nothing. Time to be brave and, if need be, a bit bossy.

She grabbed his face in both hands and kissed him.

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Author's Notes

*Wow, has it been a crazy year. I've spent a lot of time with my six year old niece, who is finally starting to talk more. I've raised my gpa from a 2.6 to a 3.2, gotten my AA, and graduated from the community college I've been going to for **6 years**. I've moved and started at a University to get my BA in Communication with a Minor in Literature and Writing Studies, and got a damn good set of grades in my first semester. I've fallen in and out of complete infatuation with a very confusing guy. I've made friends after about 6 months of feeling completely alone. And I think I've finally conquered the dreaded writer's block.*

I hope everybody enjoyed this chapter and will continue to stick with this story.

Just for the record, I have nothing bad whatsoever to say about telemarketers or Jehovah's Witnesses, and I hope my comments in this chapter have not offended anybody.

*Special thanks to everyone who responded to my post about a year and a half ago begging for ideas on what to throw at our heroes and advice on what to do about the writer's block. I appreciated everyone's ideas, but a special shout-out to Planescapebard, who was one of the first to respond and suggested both door-to-door preachers and aggressive telemarketers. And a big thanks to my buddy Jeff (who will never read this, but whatever) who, in response to my questions about what kind of telemarketer, thought up a bunch of ideas, including a charity donation, and when pushed a little harder for what kind of charity, pointed out that "I'm" the author, not him. And to Noel, (who also won't ever read this) for being full of understanding when I snapped at her that I'd have to call her back, I was writing. She tried to explain her methods for writer's block to me when I practically screamed that after six months, I finally had some **goddamn ideas and the words to express them** and I'd call her back when I was either out of ideas or out of ink.*

Also thanks to QueenP, beta extraordinaire, who after almost 2 years was willing to jump right back into the LtMD pool with me and, once I got the right email account, was speedy, efficient, and just the right amount of brutal.

*Last but not least (not by a long shot) **thanks to everyone who has reviewed to say they love/like/tolerate/whatever this story, and those that have begged me to continue it. All of those reviews have kept me caring about working on it, even when I didn't have two sentences to rub together.***

BTW, I've already got ideas for the next 3 chapters, so keep those reviews coming and I'll try to keep the Order Games hilarity coming.

I read and enjoy every review I get. I also make a loud squeaking noise of excitement every time I see a new one. All reviews are appreciated and adored. Flames are ignored... after I cry