

A Good Day

by a_bees_buzz

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Thanks go out to my wonderful betas, the_rainbow_jen and sshg316.

Part 1 Bewildered

Severus Snape woke up in a warm, comfortable bed in the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix holding a raging hard-on. Most of his attention was firmly focused on the matter in hand, but one little corner of his brain began cataloguing the improbabilities of the situation.

He woke up. Meaning, presumably, that he was alive. This turn of events was not one that he had ever considered. Albus had urged him to, many times, until Severus had

finally silenced the old man's absurd optimism with two words and a bit of foolish wand waving.

He was in a warm, comfortable bed. Not in a ditch or under a pile of mangled bodies. In fact, now that it occurred to him, he directed his unoccupied hand to search for injuries. Both arms appeared to be undamaged, no obvious wounds or major contusions to the torso, the hair was dirty and matted, but missing the telltale stickiness of congealed blood. Two spasm-like kicks assured him that both legs were still functional. And the tadger was in fine shape. *Very fine shape indeed, he thought, as he let his fingers drift delicately along its length.* The tadger had not been in such good shape in years, not since the night that Potter had emerged from the bowels of Hogwarts castle with the Philosopher's Stone in his pocket and the news that the rumours were true: the Dark Lord was actively attempting a comeback.

He stroked himself slowly, just teasing the blessedly engorged flesh, drawing out the experience as long as possible. If the last sexual moment of his life was going to be a wank, he would do his utmost to make it a good one. Not that he was in any way disappointed to be wanking. After the whole Quirrell episode, the tadger had gone shy, needing a great deal of effort to manage even a half-hearted performance, but from the moment he had first been Summoned to grovel before the scaly one, three years later, it had gone out on strike, refusing to so much as acknowledge his efforts to cajole, persuade, negotiate or otherwise force it to attention.

What had made it worse was the sure knowledge that his compatriots had no such issues. On one side, the members of the Order of the Phoenix behaved much as they had in the previous war, though some of the faces were new and others had become more wrinkled. They paired up at the first stirrings of danger and took every opportunity to fornicate while the fornication was good. Eating and drinking were restrained by the vicissitudes of budgets and the need to be ever vigilant, so they made merry in the only way they could. Those who neglected their Silencing Charms were only slightly less irritating than the couples who didn't manage to make it to their rooms.

On the other side, the enthusiasm of the Death Eaters for raiding was only exceeded by their enthusiasm for post-raid copulation. Anyone who harboured the illusion that any Death Eaters were either reluctant or compelled need only have observed their behaviour in the aftermath of a raid. The glitter of sexual desire flared from behind their masks and most bounced in place with eagerness as they stood in the circle in the moment before they were released. No one stayed to natter, rushing off to their spouses or whores. "You're welcome to come with us," offered one of the group that celebrated at The House of Mirthful Maids. "Thank you, but I have my own arrangements."

It was worse when torture was involved. Severus tried his best to get away before those unwilling to take those extra seconds to Disapparate began writhing on the ground in groups of two, three, or more. Fortunately, they tended to be in too much of a rush to do more than shift clothing out of the way, sparing Severus their nudity. The worst were the times a lusty Death Eater would make a grab for him, forcing him to fend off the unwanted attention. Voldemort found those moments particularly amusing. The Death Eaters were divided between those who believed that Severus kept a Muggle slave hidden in a secret dungeon deep below Hogwarts Castle and those who were certain that he had discovered the trick to fornicating with house-elves. The truth was that he spent the hours after their meetings on the floor of the loo, his body spasming in the throes of regurgitation rather than passion.

He began to apply more pressure, slowly building the moment as he let go of his consideration of the improbabilities. Instead, he let his thoughts drift back to the images from his dream, the ones that had left him in his current, happy condition. Hermione Granger, of all people. Not, perish the thought, as she had been as his student, but as he'd seen her the day before: deadly and confident, exchanging hexes with a fierce concentration that was broken only in that one moment when he had suddenly noticed her, the moment he would never be able to forget. She had turned to him and smiled. It had lasted a second, perhaps two. Certainly no more. One of those smiles. The uncomplicated ones that spoke of nothing but pure joy. He had seen such smiles before on the faces of children who played and the parents they embraced, on Seekers with Snitches and courting wizards and witches. He had even seen it on her face once before, when she'd danced with the Bulgarian to open the Yule Ball the year of the Tri-Wizard Championship. He wouldn't have noticed, but Minerva's incessant gushing had forced him to divert his attention away from the gaggle of deviants attempting to spike the punch.

He could not recall such a look ever having been directed at himself. He idly wondered whether she had been struck with an Imbecilus hex or merely received some sort of head injury.

As effective as his meandering thoughts were at distraction, there was only so long that a man could hold off his first orgasm in years. A few sharp tugs pulled him over the edge and he watched with no little degree of satisfaction as his seed spurted quite a respectable distance, one overly enthusiastic globule managing to reach his forehead. He gave the tadger an affectionate pat before tucking it away. As thoroughly pleasant as that interlude had been, there were more pressing matters calling for his attention in the area of his bladder, preferably before he had to face whatever fate the victorious forces had in mind for him.

Sitting up, he was surprised to find his wand lying on the bedside table. He hesitated before picking it up, considering the likelihood that it had been tampered with, but decided to take the risk. Anyone who had wished him harm could have achieved their ends while he was unconscious; the only other reason anyone would want to sabotage his wand would be to track him, which would be pointless until such time as he actually left Order Headquarters. No, whoever had put him in that bed and left him his wand wanted him alive. In fact, they had taken extraordinary measures to keep him alive.

After eighteen long months at Voldemort's side, incapable of any action that might help to tip the war in their favour, he had found himself in precisely the situation that he and Albus had plotted towards: standing next to Voldemort and waiting for Potter to make his move. He spotted the boy moving towards them, flanked not only by his two most trusted friends, as they had all expected, but two solid ranks of fighters. Severus' orders were to team with Bellatrix to distract the boy by taking out one of the friends; Rodolphus and Lucius stood on Voldemort's other side, charged with the same mission. With two experienced fighters focused exclusively on each of his closest companions, Potter's attention would be divided, ensuring that the Dark Lord got in the first strike.

Instead, Severus took out Bellatrix while she was taking aim at the Granger girl. One curse among many, one more fallen fighter. No one seemed to notice. Severus stepped back and fired again, this time across Voldemort's back. He took out Lucius as the arrogant pure-blood attempted to block a curse directed at Rodolphus. Without Lucius' cover, the last Lestrangle went down as well, leaving Voldemort momentarily both exposed and distracted as he became aware of the presence of a traitor in his inner circle.

"Now, Potter!" Severus shouted as he stood awaiting the fatal blow that would finally end his miserable existence.

He remembered the thrill he'd felt as the scarred one leapt at the opportunity, dealing Voldemort a crushing, if not immediately fatal blow. His one great fear had been that the boy would be too startled to act and all his efforts would have been for naught. And then, his amazement as he had been granted those precious extra moments, left standing to watch as the badly injured Dark Lord was finally destroyed. And still, Severus stood. He was vaguely aware that a voice had shouted, "That's him!" just before Potter made his move. A hand grabbed the back of his robes and pulled him to the ground. "You'll live longer if you keep your head down, mate."

As it slowly occurred to Severus that he might have more than a second or two of life remaining, he took note of the action around him. A wave of unmasked fighters had surged past him, setting their battle line just before him and fighting off the final, desperate charges of the now leaderless Death Eaters. He picked out at least two Weasleys, the werewolf, Potter and the Metamorphagus. Hooch was blocking for Shackbolt while Finnegan did the same for the Clearwater girl. Right next to Potter, he caught sight of the bushy-haired know-it-all just as she paused and turned towards him. And smiled. The battlefield shrank to two individuals in a maelstrom of hexes and curses. Without any conscious volition, Severus found himself by her side, for once in his life permitted to wield a wand for a cause he actually believed in.

No question. The Order of the Phoenix had deliberately moved their line to encompass him, protecting him from any remaining Voldemort loyalist who might have observed his treachery and sought a final act of vengeance. What was even stranger was that they had not killed him themselves. It was not until he had been fighting in their ranks for some minutes that it occurred to him to remove his mask. How had they known who he was? And what were they saving him for?

He must have been hit as that was all he could remember before waking up, still in the clothing he had worn under his Death Eater robe. Which meant that someone had retrieved his unconscious body and placed it in a bed. At the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. (He chose to believe that he had opened his trousers to release the tadger himself, while emerging from sleep. The alternative was... not to be considered.) Yes, effort had been made get him where he was. The question was, why?

Severus wiped the semen from his clothing as well as he could and then moved quietly down the hall to the nearest loo; there was no point in attracting attention with either spell or sound. As he finished taking care of his most immediate concern, there was a knock on the door. At least he would not piss himself when he faced their judgment. A good night's sleep, a final wank, and the chance to maintain a shred of dignity. Far more than he had ever hoped for. Squaring his shoulders he opened the door, ready to meet his fate.

"Thought you might want these."

The youngest male Weasley pressed something soft and bulky into his belly.

"Plenty of hot water, take your time," Ron said.

Severus glanced down at the stack of objects he had reflexively grasped. Clothing, a towel black, he noted with amusement and a sack of toiletries. Apparently he was to be granted both time and the materials necessary to make himself presentable. Shedding the clothes he had worn to battle, Severus further contemplated the situation.

He still had his wand. There was no apparent guard, though the house itself could be warded to prevent him escaping. Someone had thought to allow him to clean himself and provided fresh clothing. Vaguely familiar clothing. Turning off the water, he stepped out of the shower to check. His own clothing, though he had not seen those particular items in a year and a half. Clothing he had left behind in his rooms at Hogwarts. It occurred to him that he had never seen black towels at number twelve Grimmauld Place back in the days when he had been welcome there. Had someone charmed the towel for him? Was it meant as a kindness or humour at his expense?

Finishing his shower, Severus continued to assess the evidence as he shaved and dressed. He could only come up with one hypothesis that fit the facts: they were trying to lull him into a false sense of security. Even that hypothesis was hopelessly flawed. There were simply too many people in the Order who knew him too well to imagine that he could be lulled. Clearly he needed more information. He decided to test his boundaries by attempting to leave the house. Front door, back courtyard, numerous windows and fireplaces he made a quick mental survey of the options, deciding to start with the window in the room he had slept in. Returning to 'his' room would not raise as much suspicion as attempting to reach any of the other potential exits.

He never made it that far. No sooner had he stepped cautiously into the hallway than he was spotted.

Part 2 Bothered

"He's out!"

With just a quick glance to either side, Severus realised he was surrounded. The Metamorphagus stood at one end of the hallway and the werewolf at the other. "I was just going back..." He tried to head into his room, but Lupin cut him off.

"Not so fast. We've been waiting to speak with you."

Heads appeared in doorways and bodies clambered up and down the stairs to congregate on either side of him, though no one came within reaching distance. Their faces were... curious, perhaps a bit wary. No wands were pointed at him, not yet, anyway. They were waiting for something. Then he heard a single set of footsteps slowly, hesitantly even, descending the staircase towards him.

Her. The widow.

Suddenly, it all made sense. He had been saved for her judgment. Fair enough. She deserved no less.

"Severus? Is that you?" Bodies shifted with alacrity as she trailed a hand along the wall, moving forward with sightless eyes directed upwards. Reaching him, she felt along his arm and touched his face. "Is that really you?"

"Yes, Minerva. It's me." He waited for the curse.

"Oh, thank goodness!" She threw herself on him, her hands clutching at his clothing as her grey, disheveled head rested against his chest. "I've been so worried, dear boy. So worried." His shirtfront was becoming damp with what he could only imagine must be tears. It seemed the old biddy had lost more than her eyesight to be weeping in the arms of her husband's murderer.

He looked up to see Granger beaming at him again while Tonks appeared to be tearing up. Some sort of gender-specific enchantment, then. He wondered if it was a potion or a spell.

Then the noise started. It took him a moment to identify the nature of the disturbance; he had not heard applause in quite some time.

"You'll be wantin' summat ter eat, I'll wager," Hagrid boomed. "Can't be starvin' a hero, now, can we!"

"Hero?" Severus vaguely recognised that he was not living up to his usual standards for invective. It must be shock.

"Well, course ye are. Take a real hero ter do what you done," the half-giant said, taking Severus by the arm and pushing through the crowd.

"I don't understand."

"It was Hermione who figured it out," Fred (or possibly George) said. "She explained how you and Dumbledore planned to have you in position to throw the battle," said George (or possibly Fred). "It was brilliant, that." "You really shafted old Riddle." "He was totally flummoxed." "Didn't know if he was coming or going."

Severus froze, tearing his arm away from Hagrid's grip in the process. "You all knew?" He turned his patented angry-professor glare on Hermione. "I suppose it would have been too much to expect you to keep your little deductions to yourself. After all, it was only my life that was at stake if any one of you had been captured, but out of respect for Albus' sacrifice..."

"That's enough, Severus!" Minerva's patented deputy-Headmistress' invective cut through his rant before he managed to build up to a full-scale tantrum. "Hermione waited until the night before last to share her thoughts. You were as safe as she could make you."

"Even if I'd been caught, I had no proof," said Hermione. "I doubt Voldemort would have believed me; I was never entirely sure whether I believed it myself, not until you made your move on the battlefield."

"None of us were," Arthur said. "Hermione's theory was plausible, but not really convincing, not on its own. It was just enough so that we were prepared, in case she was right, you see? And of course she was."

Taking a deep breath, Severus allowed himself to be propelled on towards the kitchen. So, the little know-it-all had not only seen through their deception, she had been clever enough to hold on to that insight until the proper moment. That explained why Potter had been able to take advantage of his diversion so effectively and why no one had tried to kill him yet. Not that it would matter in the long run. The Order of the Phoenix might have been forced to recognise his true loyalties, but they could not protect him from the Ministry. He would still be arrested on sight, given a show-trial, and condemned. His presence in this house, then, was a reprieve, a moment of grace given the condemned man before his inglorious end.

Perhaps they could be prevailed upon to grant him the luxury of offing himself before the public circus. No. Too many woolly-headed Gryffindor idealists. He would have to arrange for some time on his own. Enough to write a final farewell that would be pleasant, knowing he had left a record. Once the full story came out, when he was revealed as a hero to one and all, his last letter would be made public and expose everyone who had doubted or slighted him over the years. A chance to reach out from beyond the Veil and take down his enemies. Severus smiled.

Everyone followed him into the kitchen, filing in and taking seats until all the available chairs were filled and more had to be brought in and still there were some left standing in the doorway. Molly busied herself filling a plate and Seamus brought him a steaming mug of coffee.

"Extra strong, black with two sugars. That's right, in't?"

Severus stared at the young wizard suspiciously. "How do you happen to know that?"

"S on the list." Seamus pointed to the yellowed parchment stuck to the wall beside the coffee-pot where Molly had recorded the preferences of all the Order members. It made it easier for her to carry out her own work, knowing that everyone would be properly cared for even in her absences.

"Some of the children wanted to strike you off, but there's enough of us left from last time. We learnt our lesson. We weren't going to give up on you without knowing all the facts," Arthur explained.

"Not saying it was easy, mind you," Moody added. "Couldn't say any of us believed, except Hermione, of course."

"No. But we weren't certain either." Arthur said. "You wouldn't want to strike a man off the coffee list if you weren't certain."

"Of course we weren't, dear." Molly laid a heaping plate of toast, eggs, bacon, sausages, mushrooms and tomatoes before Severus. From the envious glances and lean frames of those around him, Severus realised that his meal was quite a bit more luxurious than their usual rations. No one seemed to begrudge the condemned man a hearty last meal. Before he could take a bite, though, Molly wrapped her plump arms around his shoulders.

"We all remembered how long you'd been working with us and all the sacrifices you'd made. It broke my heart to think you might have left us. I just had to think there was some other explanation and, of course, there was and it's all been sorted now. I can't tell you how relieved I am to know we hadn't lost you, Severus dear. I couldn't have enjoyed the victory properly if we had."

Severus shifted uncomfortable in her overly-sentimental embrace. He was grateful that his position, seated at a crowded table, restricted her to draping herself over his shoulders and pressing her damp cheek to his. It was a bit of shock to realise that the dampness came from tears; Molly Weasley was crying over him.

"Hope," Minerva declared. "As long as we had hope, your name stayed on that list."

His suspicions were confirmed: definitely some sort of gender specific enchantment. He carefully lifted his cup and inhaled the rich, faintly bitter aroma with an outward show of appreciation. It would not do to offend the obviously deranged females. With every eye in the room upon him, he took a sip and turned his gaze upon the nervous-looking Mr. Finnegan. "Perfect," he declared. "Five points to Gryffindor."

Seamus made a great show of swooning, careful to land across Harry and Ginny's laps. "Tell me Gran, Harry. Tell her I lived to see a miracle 'n died a happy man."

It was with great restraint that Severus managed to not roll his eyes or fire off a sharp remark.

"Can you tell us what it was like, sir?"

"Neville! Let the man eat his breakfast. Besides, he may not want to talk about it." Hermione's response was both quick and sharp.

"I only asked. He's not eating, anyway."

In fact, Severus found it difficult to eat in front of such an attentive audience, despite having missed dinner the night before. "The coffee will suffice," he said, pushing the plate to one side. There was a quick flurry of hands as the plate was rapidly emptied. "However, I feel no pressing need to bore you with the tedious details of my work." Perhaps, if he was fortunate, they would allow him an hour or two of quiet rest before he had to face the ordeal of imprisonment.

"You're joking, yeah?" Ron asked. "Without your reports, we've been fighting blind. Hadn't a clue what was happening on the other side. We've been going mental wondering what they were up to."

"How were the Death Eaters organised?" "Who was in charge of planning operations?" "How many cells operated at a time?" "What properties were built into the masks?" "What was the strategic objective in the attack on Edinburgh?"

Questions came from every corner.

Severus slowly surveyed the room. A new theory occurred to him. He had something they wanted: information. The miserable existence he had been forced to endure the past eighteen months fascinated them and gave him a measure of utility in their eyes. Even Minerva's face revealed a noticeable measure of curiosity, forcing its way through the heavy curtain of beatific adoration. He managed not to snort at the batty old girl before her expression reminded him of that other victim of the mysterious ailment, the other woman who had displayed inexplicable, mindless joy in his presence.

She was there, just a few seats away from him. Once he found her, though, he noticed something strange. She alone, of everyone in the room, did not appear to care to hear his tawdry tale. There was no eagerness shining from those serious, focussed eyes.

"Miss Granger. What tale do you wish to hear?"

She lifted her chin an inch before answering. "Nothing that you do not want to tell. You have done enough; I won't ask for more."

It occurred to Severus that he had been offered the bargain of Scheherazade. As long as he told his story, he would remain free, but at the price of his privacy. It was not a welcome bargain for an intensely private man, but she had given him a great gift. If not for her intervention, all his efforts might have been for naught. If not for her insight, he would have died never knowing the outcome of the battle. If not for her efforts, he would not be there to speak. "The bossy little know-it-all has grown into a gracious lady," he said, dipping his head towards her. "For you, I will give a full accounting of the events of the past years."

Even as Severus was speaking, Dean summoned writing materials. "What?" he asked those who turned to glare at him. "We've got all the rest of our mission reports in the files. His ought to be there too."

After years of reporting to Albus, Severus had no trouble organizing his thoughts to present the unimaginably horrific as a clear, dispassionate narrative. He told the story of the war from the time of Voldemort's resurrection to the final battle, including everything from the petty personal squabbles to the grand delusions of the Dark Lord himself. His own roles, both the traitorous and the heroic, were woven in without either apology or boast. If he happened to include particularly damning information about those who had wronged him in the past, who would dare complain?

The telling took all of the morning and continued through lunch and well into the afternoon. Owls came and went. Food was prepared, eaten and cleared away. Tired hands passed the lengthening scroll as quills were worn to nubs and replaced. Severus continued to speak, his mellifluous voice never faltering, his narrative never losing its thread, and all who were not called away on other business continued to listen, enthralled by the richness of his tale.

Of all the listeners, there was only one who never interrupted with either question or exclamation, who simply sat quietly, nodding occasionally as a correlation was drawn or a supposition confirmed. When the tale was told, he turned to her. "How did you find your story, Miss Granger?"

She snorted, breaking the nearly reverent mood with which his tale had been received. "Hardly mine. I'm just pleased that it ended well."

All yours, Miss Granger, he thought. *I would have carried it to the grave if not for you.*

"If we're finished here, it's high time we made an appearance at Hogwarts," Minerva announced. "The press and the Ministry people have been waiting quite some time for us."

Arthur threw a grin to Severus. "Scrimgeour is practically spitting nails. Can't believe that we've kept him waiting this long. It's completely stuffed up his plans to take credit for the victory, you know."

"It is always a pleasure to assist in 'stuffing up' the Minister's plans," Severus replied.

Arthur's grin grew wider as he slung an arm across Severus' shoulders. "Can't tell you how good it is to have you back. You've really been missed, you know."

Severus managed a tight, bitter smile. One day of freedom. One day of being welcomed into the community of heroes. One day of knowing that his sacrifices had not been in vain before the inevitable return to an existence of monotonous despair, broken only by the occasional moment of blinding terror or excruciating pain. "The Minister can hardly be expecting me. Perhaps I could retire to my room. It has been a tiring day." *Perhaps I could be allowed a moment of privacy to take my life while I have the chance.*

"Nonsense! Wouldn't hear of it! We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you. Isn't that right, Harry?"

"What's that, Arthur?"

"Severus here was thinking of missing the ceremony. We can't have that, can we?"

"Of course not, Professor," Harry said, evenly. "Your presence is essential."

Severus glowered. He had always suspected that Potter would be the undoing of him. One Potter or another.

...

The Ministry had arranged for the press conference to be held on the very steps of Hogwarts. Any latecomers would have to walk up the road from the front gate, giving the minister plenty of time to take his position, front and centre, where they would have to climb the stairs up to him one at a time. Unless, of course, one of your party had been the deputy headmistress and still had access to the Floo connection in the headmaster's office. Which Minerva, of course, did.

Without warning, the doors of the castle swung wide open and the members of the Order of the Phoenix stepped out into the daylight in a massed, triple rank. Harry, Ron and Hermione were in the front row, flanked by the most senior members of the original Order. Severus was in the middle of the second row, directly behind Harry. Cameras flashed and reporters shouted questions, most of which were directed at Harry.

Severus watched in amusement as Scrimgeour hurried forwards, attempting to take a place by Harry's side. The front row of fighters was positioned at the edge of the top stair, forcing him to step down and cross below their ranks. Reaching the centre of the line, he tried to push Hermione aside to make space for himself, but she held her ground and Harry held onto her arm, forcing him to either take a place below them or be kept out of the proceedings. By the time he realised that he had been outmanoeuvred, there had been plenty of time for the photographers to catch him in the undignified act of trying, and failing, to push around a petite nineteen-year-old witch.

Choosing to accept the situation, Scrimgeour turned towards the press and began making a speech. Just as he finished his welcome to the members of the fourth estate, Percy Weasley ran up and whispered into the Minister's ear. As the officious redhead gestured his way, Severus realised that the moment had finally arrived. The Minister of Magic was standing not more than three feet in front of where he himself towered over Potter and Miss Granger, ensuring that his own face would appear prominently in any photographs of the event. Cursing himself for not making more of an effort to stay at the back or off to the side (though, in truth, he had been jostled into position before he had a clear idea of what was happening), he watched as officers of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement edged towards them.

"Is there a problem, Minister?" Harry asked, his voice pitched to carry.

"Nothing you need worry about, my boy. An insignificant matter." Even Severus found the Minister's tone inappropriately condescending.

Severus felt a disturbance as the MLE officers circled around behind him. A faint ripple of movement, a tensing of muscles and then a sudden surge as the entire Order of the Phoenix shifted into battle stances.

"How dare you try to take one of us?" Harry's challenge to the minister was unmistakable. "Do you believe that you have the authority to pick and choose who deserves to be recognised for their efforts in this war? A war that you and your ministry contributed nothing to?"

"You and your minions stayed safe behind your desks, leaving us to shed our blood and risk our lives for your protection. Is there anyone here who would blame us for the tactics we were forced to use? Would you arrest me for the Killing Curse that took down Tom Riddle? Every one of us here did what we had to do. You cannot judge any one of us without judging us all.

"If you need a show trial to serve your political purposes, then try yourself for criminal incompetence. Try the entire bureau of Magical Law Enforcement for dereliction of duty and cowardice in the face of the enemy. But lay one finger on any member of this Order and you will have every one of us to answer to. Am I making myself clear? Or should I use smaller words?"

In shock, Severus watched as Scrimgeour recoiled, waving away the MLE officers as he stumbled through an attempt at an explanation. "A misunderstanding, dear boy. I assure you, we at the Ministry of Magic have nothing but respect and gratitude for each and every one of our valiant heroes."

The rest of the press conference passed in a blur for Severus as his mind spun and whirled, trying to make sense of the latest turn of events. He had been used. That much was clear. His presence had forced the minister into an embarrassing confrontation that would dominate the front pages of every newspaper, and every one of the men and women who stood with him at that moment had been in on it. So, yet another way in which he was still useful to them, but there could only be so many. Soon, they would all go their own ways and leave him to face the wrath of the ministry and the general public on his own.

That line of reasoning kept him satisfied until they re-entered the castle for their return to Order Headquarters.

"Well done, Harry!" "And you said you weren't a public speaker." Fred and George were slapping Potter on the back.

"I flubbed a couple of the lines. Sorry about that, Hermione."

"No, Harry. You did really well. Much better than my script."

Severus sneered. "So this was all just a show. How... expected."

"Course it was," Ron said with a grin. "You didn't think we were going to let those idiots from the Ministry get you, did you? We planned it all out last night while you were sleeping off the hex."

"It was Minerva's idea, really," Harry explained. "She was the one who made us all realise that this is the one day that we can ask for anything we want and they'd have to give it to us. We had a long talk about all the things we could ask for, but everyone agreed that the most important thing was to head off any war crime trials. Especially yours."

"We couldn't let the Ministry have you, dear boy. Not after everything you've been through," Minerva added.

"We take care of our own," Kingsley said, clapping a hand on Severus' shoulder.

There was a hand on his thigh and another around his waist and then he lost contact with the ground. He was lifted up and tossed around.

"Three cheers for Severus Snape! Hip, hip..."

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, Hip..."

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip..."

"HURRAH, HURRAH, HURRAH!"

Like all schoolboys, Severus had daydreamt about this sort of adulation. After Quidditch matches, watching enviously as mere athletes were lauded for the ability to fly a broom or catch a ball, he had wished for his own talents and achievements to someday receive similar recognition. In practice, it was rather disturbing to be jostled about with no control over his body, forced to trust to the goodwill and attentiveness of others to protect him from a hard and unpleasant fall on the flagstones of the entry hall. Rather than feeling elated, by the time they set him down he was disorientated and queasy.

Nevertheless, there was a certain satisfaction to be derived from the fulfillment of a childhood dream. At that moment, Severus tired of waiting for the other shoe to drop and determined, instead, that he was hallucinating. It was a sufficiently pleasant hallucination that he decided to treat it as a holiday rather than attempting to wake himself. The brutal realities of his existence would return soon enough, no need to hurry them along.

Part 3 - Bewitched

All through dinner, Severus smiled and nodded pleasantly at everyone who spoke with him, his worries finally dissipated. He was being treated with respect and admiration, even affection. His crimes had been forgiven even by those he had injured most deeply. And there, across the table, an intelligent, attractive young woman was favouring him with her most wondrous smiles. It all made perfect sense. The entire day was nothing more than the deepest longings of his subconscious, brought to the forefront of his mind by some sort of hideous brain injury. He vaguely wondered whether his body was suffering from an excessively high fever, severe spell damage, or merely a concussion. For the moment, he didn't particularly care.

The meal stretched out as toasts were drunk and boasts were made; it was bedtime before the company finally broke up. Severus made his way to his room (*His room!* What a peculiar notion, having his own room in this house. He marveled at the unexpected longings of his own subconscious mind) with a somewhat heavy heart. It had been as nearly perfect as any day he could recall. Surely, going to sleep would mark the end of this glorious fantasy he had concocted. He wished that there were some way to prolong the experience, but events continued to sweep him along in their wake. For a man who had survived by maintaining control over every situation, his passive acceptance of the inexorable flow of his hallucination served as further proof of its unreality.

For the first time in his life, Severus Snape was content. It may have only been one day and it may not have been real, but experiencing, just once, the life he had always wanted made it all worthwhile. Whether he woke to a resumption of his previous miserable existence or never woke at all, it was enough. One perfect day in which all his fantasies were fulfilled. Well, nearly all of them. Enough.

Then someone knocked on his door.

It was a hesitant knock, so soft that he was not quite sure that it was real.

He opened the door wearing only his pyjama pants. She was wearing a dressing gown and, from the way it clung to her, not much else.

Her.

All his fantasies. More than enough.

"Miss Granger," he said, as he let her into the room.

She looked nervous. "I just wondered... I mean... I thought, perhaps..."

He waited.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come here. I don't know what I was thinking."

She turned and reached for the doorknob, but his hand was braced against the wood above her, holding it closed. "At the risk of committing a very serious faux pas, can I presume that you came here in the hopes of sharing my bed?" Not that there was any question. This was, after all, his own personal hallucination of a perfect day and there could be no better ending to that day than a passionate shag with the woman who had captured his imagination since the moment of his awakening that morning. Her hesitancy was nothing more than his idealization of her admiration for himself, with perhaps a lingering trace of innocence. He had no interest in virgins, but neither did he like his women too jaded.

"It was a stupid idea. I don't know why I thought you might be interested." She kept her head down, still facing the door.

"Are you aware that this entire day has been nothing more than a figment of my imagination? Hmm? No, I suppose you wouldn't be. Nevertheless, illusion or no, I am... most definitely interested." He leant against her, pressing his pelvis into her backside. It was a bold gesture of the kind that he would never have dared in real life. In his fantasy world, he could be the aggressive, determined lover he had always wanted to be.

Her hand dropped from the doorknob. "It seems real enough to me."

"If this were real, I would be forced to point out the inappropriateness of a liaison between a young woman barely out of school and a former teacher twenty years her senior," he murmured into her ear. "And I would be forced to refrain from doing this," he said as his hands slid upwards over the curves of her belly to cradle her breasts.

"In that case, I won't try to convince you otherwise," she replied, her head dropping back onto his shoulder, tempting him with her long, graceful neck. "Out of curiosity, what would you consider to be proof of my reality?"

Perfect indeed. He was suave and seductive, and she was teasing and pliable. "That would require you to deviate from my fantasies, a prospect I find entirely implausible at the moment. Your willing presence in my bedroom is sufficient to prove my case."

Grinning, she pulled away from him and walked over to the bed. "In other words, to prove I'm real I would have to disappoint you?"

"Precisely. Is that your plan?"

"That depends. What would your fantasy of me be wearing under this dressing gown?"

"Nothing at all." He tugged gently at her belt, undoing the knot and letting the garment fall open. "You see? Just as I imagined." He pushed it off of her shoulders and stepped back, frowning slightly.

"Is there a problem?"

"A minor matter. Nothing you need be concerned about."

"Excuse me? You have a 'minor' problem with my standing naked in front of you?"

He managed not to smirk at her indignant expression. "It's just... that you are somewhat more lovely than I had imagined. It is a minor difference after all, I had anticipated an extremely high degree of loveliness but you have managed to surpass my expectations."

"I see. Does that make things more difficult?"

Severus pretended to ponder the matter before rendering his judgment. He was terribly pleased with his newfound skill at flirtation. Hermione's responses, from surprise to indignation to coquettishness, had been flawless. He chose to ignore the fact that it was his own subconscious that had provided those responses. "I believe that I will be able to adjust to this circumstance," he declared, pulling her onto the bed. "However, the subject does demand a rather more thorough investigation." A very thorough investigation. For once in his life, he would have the sort of sexual encounter he had always wished for.

Despite his boasts in the classroom, Severus had never enchanted anyone's senses. His sexual experiences had been limited to partners who had achieved such a high degree of either loneliness or sexual frustration that they would settle for what they could get, willing to allow him access to their bodies only in return for their own orgasms. His first regular partner had insisted that they only meet in the dark. Another had required a minimum of half a bottle of firewhisky before she let him touch her. Then there was the memorable, formative experience when he lost his virginity to a bitch who demanded that he "get on with it, I don't have all night." He had learnt to be efficient in bringing his partners off, providing them the only coin he was willing to spend in return for his own release. In his fantasies, though, it was all so very different. He was an attentive, tender lover who took his time, reveling in the sensual responses of a willing, appreciative partner.

His investigation of Hermione's loveliness was carried out with fingers and lips and tongue, beginning at her mouth and moving slowly across her body, tasting and touching each part, from the backs of her ears and the calluses on her writing fingers to the ticklish spots on the arches of her feet and the hollow places below her hipbones before finally settling between her thighs. He breathed in deeply, immersing himself in the musky scent of her arousal, delving into her most private places, tonguing her to the verge of orgasm and then, when she was writhing and moaning beneath him, plunging into the sweet, hot, slick, pulsing pleasure only found in the body of an aroused and eager partner. His morning wank had taken off enough of an edge to allow him to savour the build-up, but Voldemort himself, resurrected and casting a Killing Curse, could not have stopped him once he entered her body. The perfect quim in the perfect woman at the end of the perfect day. He was vaguely aware of her climax as his own overwhelmed him, leaving him drenched in sweat and gasping for breath.

Knock, knock.

Severus wondered, as he struggled back into his pyjama bottoms, what else his subconscious could possibly have in store for him. A slightly embarrassed-looking Ronald Weasley would not have been his first guess.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything. That is to say, erm, actually I do hope I'm interrupting. Not that I want to interrupt, of course. It's just..."

"Perhaps you could come to the point, Mr. Weasley?"

"I was just wondering if Hermione was with you. Which would be fine, great, really, for both of you, just she's gone missing and there are still Death Eaters out there, so Mum was a bit worried..."

"Please reassure your mother that your friend is perfectly safe." He closed the door.

"Does it bother you?" Hermione asked, sitting up in bed.

"What?"

"By morning the entire house will know we spent the night together. You've always been such a private person, I thought it might bother you."

Not only did he get to have an extraordinarily desirable bedmate, but everyone he knew would be aware of the fact. Severus Snape, the lonely, bitter hermit was gone, replaced by Severus Snape, daring spy and romantic hero. While it would be pleasant to gloat, he didn't want to break the mood. "No. It doesn't bother me in the slightest. After all, they are no more real than you are."

She smiled indulgently. "Of course they aren't. How silly of me to have forgotten. Tell me, in this little fantasy of yours, what happens tomorrow? What kind of future do you wish for?"

"That is a somewhat complicated matter," he replied, sitting next to her. "The rules of this fantasy world seem to restrict me to actions of which my true self is capable. I could not Disapparate from the hallway this morning, for example, no matter how greatly I desired to. My true self is somewhat limited in his choices."

"I don't see why. You are a skilled Potions master, an experienced professional and a war hero. There must be loads of things you could do, it's just a matter of choosing."

"I may be exonerated in the eyes of the Order, which just might be enough to keep me out of Azkaban, but even in my wildest fantasies, I cannot imagine a world in which the general public will either allow me to teach their children or purchase potions I have made. The only other skills I have exercised in recent years are groveling, bootlicking and arse-kissing. None of which will be terribly useful to me."

"Oh, I don't know," Hermione teased. "Groveling and bootlicking don't sound like much fun, but I definitely think the arse-kissing has potential."

"Do you?" he asked. "As I recall, you spent our entire previous encounter on your back. It seems I have been woefully derelict in my attentions to your posterior."

It took very little direction to get a thoroughly cooperative Hermione into position laying on her stomach, from where he proceeded to give her backside the same thorough investigative treatment he had previously granted to her front. He was between her legs, caressing the tender inside of one smooth thigh and allowing his fingertips to barely graze her outer lips at the top of each stroke, when she declared, "I can't take any more of this," and twisted around, throwing him on his back and mounting him in a single, perfectly coordinate move. "You are driving me mad," she growled.

Severus lay back to enjoy the view of the naked woman riding him, her arched back thrusting her bobbing breasts forward, her splayed thighs and belly rippling with her gyrations, providing him an occasional glimpse of the base of his cock sliding in and out of her moist, glistening slit, her movements becoming faster and more urgent as she lost herself in the moment. He grabbed her hips as she climaxed, pulling her down hard onto him and shooting his own release deep inside her.

"I concede," he gasped. "This is real."

"You found *that* disappointing?" she asked, incredulously.

"On the contrary. You have greatly exceeded any scenario I could possibly have imagined."

Hermione smiled. "I quite enjoyed it, myself." She slid off of him, curling up with her head pillowed on his shoulder.

"There may be repercussions. I had not truly considered the matter of your reputation before this."

"I don't mind. No one here will be judging anyone for anything that goes on tonight."

"What if it was not just tonight?" *What? How did those words come out of his mouth?* Severus Snape had only managed to live to the age of forty by exercising caution at all

times. He did not make unguarded suggestions. This was no hallucination, damn it, it was real and he'd better start acting like it before he found himself booted out of the improbably pleasant circumstances he had fallen into.

"Is that something you want?"

She hadn't laughed in his face or recoiled in horror. The situation might still be salvageable.

"I hardly know who I am at the moment, much less what I want. For the first time in far too many years I have no idea what I'll be doing on the morrow or for the foreseeable future. The one thing that I do know, the one thing that has been clear to me throughout this incomprehensible day, is that you have turned into a fascinating and admirable woman. Yes, I would very much like the opportunity to get to know you better, but I will have no regrets if you choose to take another path." That was as well said as he was likely to manage. It seemed that he still retained a fragment of the bravado that his earlier disbelief had leant him.

"I won't pretend that I'm madly in love with you, how could I be? Until today, we hadn't spoken in a year and a half and we were hardly friends before that. But I have thought about you a great deal and I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for the choices you've made. I came to your room because I feel drawn to you. Nothing that has happened tonight has changed that."

He silently thanked Merlin that the girl was not delusional. Not that it would have posed an insurmountable barrier to continuing their dalliance, but he much preferred the company of the sane. "Does this mean that you grant me permission to court you?"

"Under one condition."

"Which is?"

"That we continue to have sex. I may not be sure of my feelings for you, but I am very sure that I absolutely love the way you fuck me."

"That is an acceptable condition."

...

Severus Snape woke up in a warm, comfortable bed in the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix with a raging hard-on. His head was resting on a rather odd sort of pillow that he eventually recognised as a woman's ribcage and his hand cradled the soft curve of her lower belly.

"Are you awake, Severus?"

Most of his attention was soon firmly focused on suckling a tightly furled nipple, but one little corner of his brain wondered what new surprises the day had in store for him.