

Substances

by septentrion

Hermione wants to open the first professional wizarding lawyer practice, Severus wants to test his improved version of Polyjuice, and the wizarding world tries to contain the increasing use of Muggle drugs by young wizards. That should make for interesting happenings. This was written for Whimbley for the Summer 2007 SSHG_exchange.

The Drugs And The Potion

Chapter 1 of 3

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Many, many thanks to Dacian Goddess for her help and advice.

I don't make money out of this, only fun.

MUGGLE DRUG USE INCREASES IN WIZARDING YOUTH

Another victim of heroin abuse was found yesterday between two rubbish bins in Knockturn Alley. The Minister declared that all signs regarding Muggle drug use were alarming.

"Our young people have been most traumatized by the events of the last war against You-Know-Who. Most of them have witnessed horrors for which they weren't prepared during the Hogwarts battle two years ago. St Mungo's healers are currently being trained to help victims of trauma cope, and hopefully, we'll be rid of this scourge soon."

Hermione Granger had just had enough time to read that titbit of information in the *Daily Prophet* before she had to dash out of her dingy flat. She didn't want to be late at work: it would mean an immediate dismissal for her, and she couldn't afford to lose the money. She couldn't Apparate either because she was working in a Muggle pharmacy situated in a totally Muggle environment, so while she was taken to her destination by the bus, she dreamt of what her life would be when she would have enough money to open her own lawyer practice, the first professional wizarding lawyer practice.

"That should do it."

With satisfaction, Severus Snape added lead, instead of mercury, to the potion bubbling in the cauldron hung in the fireplace of his kitchen. He had introduced changes in the original recipe for Polyjuice, both to the ingredients themselves and to their proportion in the potion. Now, he just had to wait for a month, and he would be able to test what he believed to be a twenty-four hour Polyjuice. So content he felt that he decided he would leave his home in Spinner's End for a few hours and treat himself to a nice meal in town. Such an unusual state of mind was the only logical explanation for why he hadn't heard the old man currently sitting in his old armchair come into his house,

more precisely in his sitting room. He was slightly startled at the sight of the intruder, and so he nearly bumped into the doorframe.

"Headmaster! What is it that cannot wait until September?"

Albus Dumbledore, clad in a purple cloak and an emerald robe...quite a contrast with Severus' black attire and his dark sitting room...rose and smiled congenially at his Potions master.

"Good morning, Severus. Nothing too serious, I assure you. I'm sorry to intrude on your privacy, but you wouldn't answer your door, and I really needed to ask you if you have reconsidered your position about your role during the prevention campaign."

"You very well know my answer will remain 'no'."

"Ah, pity. I will have to look for someone else to fill in the position." Dumbledore's face showed the most endearing expression of annoyance Severus had ever seen. Why would he deprive himself of such simple pleasures in life?

"You do that and leave me to my own devices." There. His tone was final. And he hadn't offered the other man to take back his seat in the hopes of seeing his backside...no, not like that...very soon. Ah, but there was something to be said about old men and their resilience; for Albus Dumbledore showed no sign of intending to leave any time soon.

"Speaking of devices, how is that project of yours going?" he asked in a pleasant tone. "I recall you saying to Horace that you were on the verge of a breakthrough before the holidays."

Stiffly, Severus answered, "I think I'll be able to test it at the beginning of September."

"I hope you'll be able to market it afterward, Severus. Your hard work should be recognised and rewarded." Severus couldn't decipher if the Headmaster's statement was a threat or not. "I promised Sybil I would see her just after lunch; it's time for me to leave. Good bye, Severus."

"Good bye, Headmaster."

Severus wondered what all that had been about, but decided not to bother himself with it. If Dumbledore had a plan in the making, he'd know soon enough, which would probably be too soon. At any rate, he wouldn't let him spoil his self-granted meal at the local pub.

A brown owl hovered in front of Hermione just as she reached the pharmacy door. She snatched the parchment attached to the owl's leg, put it in her pocket and quickly got into the building.

"Granger! This is not the time to dawdle! A delivery is waiting to be shelved. Get to work."

Her boss had hardly finished his customary bellowing greeting to her, and she was already opening the first cardboard box. But as soon as he had his back turned, she pulled her letter out and read it.

Miss Granger,

I was hoping I could meet you at your flat tonight after your work. I will be on your landing at eight.

I hope to find you as well as Harry told me you were.

Until then,

Albus Dumbledore.

The Headmaster was going to visit her tonight? What could that mean? Was a new Dark Lord rising already? Or did he want to propose her a teaching position? Whatever he would tell her, she hoped it would bring a welcome change in her current life.

Hermione had met Dumbledore...but how did he know her schedule anyway?...as planned. She welcomed him inside her flat, like the polite woman she always was, invited him to share a drink and a few cocktail snacks in her small, overcrowded-with-books living room, and listened to him describe the goings-on at Hogwarts. However, he must have sensed her tiredness because before long, he came to the point.

"Miss Granger, I have a favour to ask of you."

"Oh, what would that be?" she answered enthusiastically. She was going to get a bit of excitement in her life!

"You have probably read about the drug problem among young people since the war ended?"

She nodded.

"I have decided that a prevention campaign at the school wouldn't be amiss. It has not come to the public's knowledge that five students have suffered from drug overdoses last year. Madam Pomfrey was able to take care of them efficiently, but I felt, and most of the teachers as well, that something ought to be done." Hermione was listening to him attentively. He went on, "A part of this prevention campaign will be an event at the very beginning of the school year on September 5th. I would like for all the students to have a lecture on the effects of Muggle drugs that day. None of the teachers have the necessary qualifications for this, but Minerva suggested to me that you could do it. You're a Muggle-born who still has roots in the Muggle world, and you have the proper age and experience to understand what our students are going through."

This was not as exciting as going after another Dark Lord, but the offer was tempting all the same. That would mean one day at Hogwarts, far from her irritating boss and picky customers. A thought occurred to her then. "Headmaster, what day of the week is September 5th?"

"A Friday, Miss Granger."

Her face fell. "I'm afraid I have to decline. It's a working day, and I can't skive off. My boss has been hoping for a reason to sack me since June."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow at her statement. "Did you hex a customer who manhandled the merchandise?"

Hermione blushed and averted her eyes at the reminder of the reason why she'd been fired from Flourish and Blotts a few months before. She nevertheless couldn't hold her tongue in check and spilled the truth about her situation.

"No, nothing like that. It's just that ... he does things the wrong way. When I arrived at the pharmacy, I tried to give him some hints to increase his sales, make the pharmacy more agreeable to the customers. He told me that he's been in business since before I was born and to mind my own business instead of his. He didn't dare fire me right away back then because he hired me as a favour to my parents, but he's been looking for a pretext to do it ever since."

"Pardon my curiosity, Miss Granger, but why didn't you search for a job in the wizarding world?"

"Er, that is to say, I, erm, might have displayed my ability to jinx a customer a bit too much. No one would hire me after that," she said sheepishly.

Dumbledore smiled as if she had nothing to be embarrassed about. "I think I have a solution for your predicament. You will be able to come to Hogwarts and not lose your job. No, young lady," he said when she gave indication that she would speak, "don't ask."

Hermione saw no reason to refuse the Headmaster's proposal, so great was her faith in his abilities to achieve his goals without any harm done to anyone.

When he left, Dumbledore blessed the long, white beards that helped cunning Headmasters hide predatory smiles.

What does he want this time?" Headmaster, what a surprise. I didn't expect you to visit me twice in two days. *'At least, he had the decency to knock at the door today. He must have feared for his beard.*

Severus stepped aside and let Dumbledore in.

"Severus," the old man said while sitting down, "I have found someone for the prevention campaign; I wanted to let you know."

Severus raised an eyebrow while sitting in his faded sofa. "Couldn't an owl have delivered your message just as efficiently?"

Dumbledore chuckled. "No, Severus, it couldn't. You see, I've found a volunteer for the job, but she has conditions. You could help her make sure she would be able to come to Hogwarts. It would be beneficial for the both of you."

"What would these conditions be? How would this be beneficial to me?" It felt like a trap, but a very tempting one.

"She can't leave her current job for a single day, or she will lose it. I thought you could test your extended Polyjuice by taking her place at her job while she does what you refuse to do. I am offering you a full day to test your potion in real conditions."

The Headmaster certainly knew which buttons to push. To test his potion in the field for a full day? Severus tapped his lips with his index finger, a sure sign that he was considering the offer.

"Would I be able to hold her job?"

"Assuredly. After all, she works with remedies."

That was promising, though Severus couldn't recall if he had ever seen a woman working in the Apothecary.

"I accept."

"Good. I'll owl Miss Granger with the news."

Intriguing. "Granger? Is she working at Slug & Jiggers?"

"Not at all. She's currently employed in a Muggle pharmacy."

Severus saw red. "What? You expect me to work in a Muggle pharmacy?" he exclaimed.

"I don't see why that would be a problem, Severus. I'm sure you'll manage." Dumbledore's eyes were twinkling with benevolence and ... trust.

Severus tried not to sound like whining. "But I don't know anything about Muggle remedies!"

"For all I know, she's simply stacking and selling them. Besides, you've given your word. You. Have. Accepted."

Severus resisted the temptation to pinch the bridge of his nose in annoyance. Instead, he looked at the Headmaster right in the eyes. "All right, I will do it, for the potion only."

Dumbledore beamed. "I'm sure that you will success. I will write Miss Granger about the arrangement and will let the both of you work out the details."

They cut the pleasantries short after that, and Dumbledore left for Hogwarts.

Miss Granger,

I will meet with you Sunday afternoon about the Muggle drug prevention campaign at Hogwarts. I will be at your flat at 3 p.m.

Severus Snape.

Short and utilitarian. Hermione snorted to herself. *I'm sure he regrets every inch of parchment he's used to write to me. I wonder why I have to meet Snape for the campaign. I suppose I'll see on Sunday.*

"Do come in, Professor. You're as punctual as the speaking clock."

Severus didn't like being compared to a disembodied voice; it was demeaning to his best feature. "Must I deduce from your statement that you would rather that I tell the time than read the directory?" he purred while stepping into her flat.

Hermione's eyes widened. She knew the soft, silky tones of his voice, of course, but she'd never heard before the particular quality he'd just put into it. She nearly answered, "Whatever." Instead, she said, "Would you like some tea? I was going to help myself to some."

"Yes, please." He took a seat in the only available place on her sofa, between piles of *Wizarding Code...* from volume one to volume eleven. He let her serve tea and biscuits before he tackled the matter at hand.

"I am to understand that you are going to take my place at Hogwarts on September 5th?"

She frowned. "Take your place? I'm just going to give a lecture about Muggle drugs."

"That's what I meant. I was supposed to be the one giving the lecture, but I don't know much about Muggle drugs, nor do I have the time to research them. That's why the

Headmaster asked you to do it. I am here to work out with you the details of my one-day replacement."

Her frown deepened. "Why would you want to do that? I just need a room and seats for the audience. There's nothing special in giving a lecture."

"Those are not the kind of details we must speak of, Miss Granger," he snapped. "We must determine how you won't lose your job. In fact, Dumbledore has suggested a solution to your situation, but your whole cooperation is needed."

She sighed. "I suppose that, if Dumbledore has suggested it, we'd best implement it."

"Don't you want to know what it is about before agreeing?"

"I promised Professor Dumbledore to be at Hogwarts on September 5th, and he promised me he would find a way to prevent me from losing my job. And I trust him."

He smirked. "Do you trust *me*?"

"Of course," she huffed. What kind of a question was *that*?

"Good because I'm going to take your place that day."

She gaped, which served to show her pink tongue behind her small...small?...teeth. "How? They'll never believe ... You don't look like me," she spluttered. The tea in her cup threatened to spill onto her lap.

His smirk widened to such proportions that it could nearly be called smiling. "What if I looked like you?"

She caught on immediately. "Polyjuice? That could work." Her face became suspicious. "What advantages would the situation hold for you?"

"I shall use the opportunity to test an extended version of Polyjuice, actually a twenty-four hour Polyjuice that I've been creating for the last two years." He was exuding pride quite palpably...much like other individuals exuded sweat and/or cheap perfume.

Her eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. "Really? But I thought you weren't teaching Potions anymore?"

"I don't, but I'm still interested in working in this field."

And it is very profitable, she thought. "This plan seems all right to me. I'd just like for you to specify that I've taken a part in your experiment with this potion. I want to be a lawyer, and this kind of advertising would no doubt be helpful, especially as you're going to use my body."

Ah, yes, working with an ex-Death Eater on a questionable project will certainly help a lawyer in finding customers. "Miss Granger, I think we have an agreement. To quell any anxiety you might feel about me using your body, I promise you that I will not use it for anything else that the experiment." *Not that I would mind having a bit of fun, but I really need her trust and full cooperation.*

She was glad she didn't have to extract the promise from him; it meant he would hold it. She smiled warmly at him, and he found her gesture most agreeable.

They met three other times in August so that Severus would have all the information he needed to impersonate Hermione Granger at work. She borrowed Harry's Invisibility Cloak for him so that he could follow her one day and see what he would be supposed to do on September 5th. He was itching to hex Hermione's boss and thought that he would need to take a Calming Draught when he would be...although the Muggle would be none the wiser...on the receiving end of his rudeness. Severus acquired a new appreciation of Hermione's resistance to insults that day.

As for Hermione, she did an extensive research on drugs. What she found horrified her. She decided that she would present her findings to the students as if she was pleading a case in court, in the hope to get them away from those abominations like heroin, cocaine, or meth. Besides, that would be good training for her future career.

At last, September 5th was upon them.

Severus was ready. He had taken the extended Polyjuice at ten p.m. the previous day to give him some time to get accustomed to a female body. Hermione hadn't been shy to discuss things with him, and now the time had come to put them into action. Putting on a bra had been awkward...the contraption was far easier to take off...but he nearly made a fatal mistake when he used the loo. He remembered just in time that his dangling bits were "concealed" for the time being. At least, she had had the courtesy of snipping some hair from her mane at a time when she didn't have her period. He tried to comb said hair, quickly renounced, and set off for a last meeting with Hermione...they'd been on a first name basis since the last time they've met...at her flat. He had no doubt that the few Slytherins who had seen him/her leave their Head of House quarters would remain silent. He walked outside of the school's gates and Apparated on her landing.

Hermione recognised Severus' way of knocking and opened her door. "Severus! What have you done to my hair?"

"Nothing!" he snarled. "I can't do anything to it. That's the problem."

She pouted. "Come. We still have time; I'll braid my...your curls for you."

He made to take his customary seat in her living room.

"No," she interjected. "Take this chair. It will be easier to do it there than with you sitting on the sofa."

He looked at the rickety chair as if he suspected it to collapse at any moment, but sat down on it nonetheless. When they were done, he appreciated not to have his face tickled by misbehaving hair anymore. He looked at her properly for the first time since his arrival and noticed her professional-looking witches' robes, her own braided hair, her light make-up and her air of readiness. He idly thought that she had the potential of being a great lawyer.

"Well, I think it's time for me to go. Professor Dumbledore expects me to arrive in half an hour, and I wouldn't want to be late. You still have an hour before you have to leave. Make yourself at home." And as simply as that, she was gone. She was far too trusting.

Severus used the time he had left to check his emergency vials of extended and regular Polyjuice, of Calming Draught, his wand, and to review everything he knew about Hermione's job.

An Eventful Day

Chapter 2 of 3

An eventful day, which ends with an interesting night.

Disclaimer: see first chapter.

Thanks to Dacian Goddess for betaing this story.

Hermione was breathless when she reached Dumbledore, who was waiting for her in the Entrance Hall. He greeted her with warmth, and his eyes held his famous and comforting twinkling.

"Good morning, Miss Granger. It's such a pleasure to see you again within these walls."

She was still panting when she answered him. "Thank you, Professor. I'm so glad to be able to come back here, if only for a day."

"Miss Granger! I can't express how delighted I am to see you!" Hermione turned around only to find herself hugged by Professor McGonagall. The few students who were loitering in the Hall were looking at them and quietly whispering among themselves.

"Not more delighted than I am, Professor." She glimpsed the hourglasses beyond her tartan-clad ex-Head of House's shoulder. Gryffindor was leading, and the thought cheered her.

She followed her elders in the Great Hall where her lecture would take place. She glanced fondly at the enchanted ceiling, which showed the clear blue sky littered with sparse, white clouds. She noticed the House tables were turned so that the students would be able to look at her without straining their necks.

"You will give your lecture five times, Miss Granger," McGonagall explained to her. "The first group will comprise the first- and second-years. None of them have seen the battle, so they are less susceptible to be seduced by the artificial paradises. However, we fear that they might follow the older students' habits. The next group will be the third- and fourth-years. After lunch, you will have the fifth-, sixth- and seventh-years. We thought it would be best if you talked to the upper years separately. They're older students, and some of them have already tried those drugs. We felt that they would need more time."

Hermione nodded her understanding. She climbed on the dais, laid her parchments on the table in front of her, made sure she had all the pictures she intended to show...gruesome, horrible moving pictures, which reminded her of the ones Professor Snape had displayed in his Defence classroom...in order to keep the young from even thinking of the drugs' reputation as fun. She finished her preparations under the benevolent eyes of Dumbledore and McGonagall.

"I'm ready to begin," she said to the Headmaster and his Deputy. Dumbledore waved his hand. The doors opened, and the first- and second-years entered. They seemed a bit curious and nervous, bumping into each other and giggling behind their hands. They sat down on the benches and watched her expectantly.

Hermione straightened her spine and began her lecture.

Severus arrived at the pharmacy without a hitch and on time.

"Granger, stop staring and get to work!"

Severus didn't even have time to close the door when the pharmacy manager barked his order at him. Not answering, courtesy of the Calming Draught, he found the daily delivery in the back of the shop and set about to shelve it. He didn't work as fast as Hermione because he had to be careful to move like her, to perfectly imitate her gestures and facial expressions. What's most, the difference in height was making it more difficult than it should have been.

"What got into you today, Granger? You act like a sleepwalker."

He pasted a pained expression on his face.

"Sorry, sir. I was sick yesterday, and I didn't sleep much."

The manager didn't show any concern. Instead, he showed his disliking of the woman by asking her not to vomit all over the place. Perhaps Severus should have taken two doses of Calming Draught. He'd seen Hermione at work; he knew she was efficient. In fact, he wondered if the manager's attitude wasn't the translation of his fear of being outsmarted by a young woman barely out of school.

When he finished stacking the medicines, he went to help the customers. He met there the same kind of daft people he would have met in the Apothecary, the only difference being these Muggles would never dream asking for Acromantula venom, bubotuber pus, or horned slugs. Instead, they asked for paracetamol, vitamins and various suppositories.

In his estimation, Severus was managing well. He hardly made any mistakes, and a bit of training on Hermione's computer had given him confidence in using the cash register. He might have mixed up the categories a bit, like registering the phloroglucinol with the herbs, but nothing too obvious.

He had been at a bit of a loss when a customer suffering from a severe facial tic had asked for, "You know, baby? The big ones with the banana taste." Which medicine tasted of banana? Or did the man want banana perfumed herbal tea? "No, baby. I want," the man checked that nobody was behind him and winked at him meaningfully, "condoms. The biggest size." He finished his sentence in a whisper, leaning toward Severus-as-Hermione over the counter and winking so much that his blue eye looked like a forgery of Dumbledore's twinkle. What's more, being the recipient of a saucy wink from some one he didn't know from Adam provoked a corresponding twitching of Severus' hand in direction of his wand.

The jerk was saved at the last minute by John, one of Hermione's colleagues. "Freddy, Hermione has already told you she wasn't interested. Besides, you're disturbing the other customers. Either you pay for what you came here for, or you go away." Nobody wanted to face John's displeasure: the man was a boxing champion outside of work. Freddy left as quickly as he could without giving the impression of running.

Severus was glad, very glad, when the time came to go back to Hogwarts. His limbs ached from moving and stacking and shelving so many boxes. Thank the gods, he was accustomed to standing for hours, as was his temporary body. In fact, he'd been so taken with the happenings of the day that he'd forgotten about the experiment. The logical conclusion was that the potion had worked perfectly.

Hermione collapsed on a chair as soon as the last student left the Great Hall. She would never have thought that explaining the same thing five times in the same day could be that exhausting. Merlin! What had Dumbledore been thinking? At least, the students had seemed interested enough. She had strived to hammer in their psyche that Muggle drugs were destructive. Wizards often had a hard time comprehending that not all Muggle things were inoffensive. Well, Hogwarts students certainly shouldn't have any more illusions on the matter after seeing those horrible pictures of drug addicts' internal organs. She smirked when she remembered how some of the older ones who had fought against the Death Eaters two years ago, had blanched at the sight of an emaciated drug-addict whose arms and thighs had been blue, purple, yellow with

bruises.

She was folding her parchments and pictures when Dumbledore and McGonagall entered the Hall.

"I trust everything went well?" the Headmaster asked, curiosity seeping from his voice.

"I think it went well indeed. I don't know if it'll be sufficient to keep all of them away from drugs, but I hope I've reached through to some of them. You told me there had been five overdoses last year. I'm afraid a number of students are already on this path among the fifth- and seventh-years. I've noticed a very thin boy who looked particularly drawn. He did nothing else other than feverishly scratch his arms. Some others were incredibly restless as well."

"I'm afraid I've noticed them too, as have all Head of Houses."

"I've given them the names of the Healers at St Mungo's who are trained in the follow-up care of drug addicts. Oh, and I nearly forgot; I've got a few leaflets from St Mungo's for the teachers and Madam Pomfrey as well."

"Miss Granger, I knew you'd be perfect for the job." McGonagall's voice was full of pride.

The two professors invited her to remain for dinner. She took the opportunity to catch up with the school gossip and noticed one of the teachers was missing. She surmised he'd rather appear in public in his own skin.

After dinner, she made a beeline for the dungeons. Severus had told her where to find his quarters, and she was dying to know how his day had been...that is, if the potion had worked and if he'd managed not to get her sacked. He showed her in as soon as she'd knocked at the door, careful to stay behind the door. It wouldn't do if someone saw two Hermione Grangers in the Defence teacher's private rooms.

The two of them stood and gazed at each other for several minutes. If one went past the Snape-like posture and frowning, no one would doubt being in the company of Miss Hermione Granger. She had been too stressed that morning to notice, but now, it unnerved her.

"How did it go?" she asked when the silence became unbearable.

"It went well. The potion hasn't given any signs of wearing off so far. If my calculations are correct, it should wear off in about two hours."

Only then did he invite her to take a seat in one of the burgundy velvet armchairs near the fireplace. "I have felt no sickness or nausea, though I did lie to your boss to explain your unusual slowness. He's under the impression that you'd been sick last night."

"So, I still have a job," she teased.

He smirked. "I believe so. I was even rescued by a knight in white coat when one of the customers tried to make a pass at me."

She burst out laughing. "Of all the days, Freddy chose to visit the pharmacy today! I guess John was the one who came to your help?"

So, what had happened today was a regular occurrence. "Indeed."

"John has been trying to convince me to get out with him for months; and for months, I've been turning him down."

"A pity. I've accepted an invitation for dinner tomorrow evening on your behalf," he said, deadpan.

She blanched, then turned red. "You didn't? Oh no, you didn't? Tell me it's a joke." She sounded desperate.

He smiled maliciously. "I thought you'd be grateful."

Less than a second later, he was staring cross-eyed at the tip of a wand that would have poked at his nose, had he been sporting his own face at the moment. Damn, he hadn't known that the girl was so sensitive to the subject. He back-pedalled as gracefully as he could without his voice. "Right, right, it's a joke. I am aware that he isn't your type."

She put her wand back in her sleeve and casually asked, "Do you have any idea of what my type would be?"

The conversation was treading dangerous, slippery grounds. Last time he'd heard this question, he'd been the one to utter it. He'd been trying to chat up some woman in hope of a one-time shag...which he had got; and he had nothing against repeating the experience. He'd carefully scanned Hermione's body the evening before. Oh, he'd not breached his promise; he hadn't touched more than what was necessary for hygiene purposes, but he'd looked, and he'd liked what he'd seen: firm breast, rosy nipples, enough roundness to her stomach to make her look like a woman, rounded hips and buttocks. He hadn't exactly ignored the other parts to her body, of course, but these were the ones he had more thoroughly observed. No, he wasn't adverse at all to a shag with Hermione Granger, but he'd rather do it while in his masculine form. Finally, he answered, "I certainly don't know you enough to thoroughly answer your question, Hermione, but I would think that intelligent conversation and human warmth would be in your criteria."

However unsettling it was for her to speak to her likeliness, Hermione laughed heartily. "You're speaking like the horoscope: not very specific and broad enough to be true for most of the people who listen to it."

Against his better judgment, Severus' lips twitched and sketched a smile on his...presently Hermione's...features. "I should have known that you would see through it."

She smiled warmly at him, and he felt liquid soaking his knickers. He glanced at the clock: still one hour and a half to go before the dampness would be replaced by rigidity. But he didn't know the meaning of mortification until he squirmed. He realised his body was seeking to create friction on his clitoris; he blushed.

"Are you unwell?" Hermione asked with concern, leaning forward slightly. "Is it a side-effect of the potion?"

Severus took in her kind face, highlighted by the fire of the torches on the stone walls and in the hearth, the golden hues of her hair, and her breast which he could peek at through the gap of her décolleté. He now felt as if he'd wet himself...it was worse than being restrained in one's trousers. "In a way, it is," he managed to say steadily enough.

He felt warm, very warm. He wanted nothing more than to touch his hardening nipples and to plunge a hand down his knickers. He tried not to squirm anymore, but couldn't help squeezing the muscles of his lower belly.

"Severus? You don't look well. I'll fetch Madam Pomfrey. It seems that the reversing process isn't without consequences."

He caught her wrist before she could stand completely.

"Don't. It will pass, I am sure."

He was touching her, and it was distracting. "Now, while we share a cup of tea, you can tell me more about your project to become a lawyer, Hermione."

Hermione launched into an extensive explanation of her plans of becoming the first professional lawyer of the wizarding world. "You see, when someone has to face the Wizengamot, they can have someone with them to help, but they're not professional. Too often, people are tried and sentenced without a proper defence, especially if they don't have any influential friends who can vouch for them."

It reminded Severus of his own trial decades ago, when Dumbledore's protection had been the only thing that had guarded him from a stint in Azkaban. "I think this idea of yours is a very sensible one."

She beamed at the unexpected compliment. "Thank you, Severus. It means a lot to me."

Suddenly, he felt his body shifting. He put his cup down on the coffee table. "I'd better go into my bedroom and take your clothes off before they are torn. I'll be back momentarily."

She watched him retreat through a heavy-looking, wooden door. Five minutes later, he was back, clad in black robe. That reminded her that she was still wearing her own dark blue robe over her Muggle clothing. He handed her a bag. "Your clothes."

She stood. "Thanks. Well, erm, you look well, and it's getting late, and ..."

"I know for a fact that you don't work tomorrow. If you don't mind, I'd like to carry on our conversation."*And possibly get laid.*

She cast him an uncertain glance, but nonetheless sat down. "Sure." Was it her imagination or was Severus' armchair closer to her own than before? "Do you plan on marketing your potion?"

It was his turn to lose himself in a thorough account of his research. "You'll understand better if I show you." He strode to another door, one that led to his laboratory she supposed, and returned with a heavy book. "I have compiled my research in it," he said. He stood in front of her, a pensive air on his face, as if he was considering something. "Would you mind if I Transfigured the armchairs into one sofa? It will be easier to read my notes together that way."

She nodded, but didn't miss his air of satisfaction. What was he up to? Was it necessary for him to sit that near to her to skim through his notes? Oh, oh ... she realised what he was doing: he was seducing her. Oooooooh, when he had felt faint a little while ago, he'd been feeling desire. She now recognised the signs. What to do with this knowledge? She peered at him sideways through her lashes to assess him. She'd got past his disagreeable face during her meetings with him. His body showed no sign of excessive weight, though she suspected him to have a bit of fat on his belly, like any man his age. Severus wasn't known for being a great practitioner of sports after all.

He was interested and interesting. And she could do with a shag after a day-long with noisy teenagers. She edged closer to him so that their thighs were inevitably in contact. He caught on the manoeuvre at once: his hand crept onto her knee. It lay still while he turned a page none of them was really reading, before it bunched the fabric of Hermione's robe in its grip. She closed the book and put it on the coffee table in front of them.

He pounced. One moment she was leaning over the coffee table, the next moment she was lying on her back on the sofa, Severus was on her, frantically kissing her mouth and the area around. He slipped a thigh between her legs, allowing himself to grind his pelvis on her thigh. The drawback with robes was that they were a hindrance in such situations, so they were soon hitched up around their waist; unfortunately, the skirt Hermione wore beneath her robe was still in the way.

"I believe we'd better go to bed," Severus whispered huskily in her ear. "I want you out of these cumbersome layers."

He stood up and took her hand to lead her to his bedroom. Her lust-filled mind registered the presence of a four-poster bed, covered with a plush, dark green coverlet. The next thing she knew, Severus was pushing her naked form on it. She revelled in the softness of the thick velvet on her back and in the heat of Severus' body on her. He resumed their position from the sofa: his leg between hers, each rubbing the centre of their pleasure on the other. They kissed more leisurely, tasting the other's tongue, mapping the other's mouth, feeling the sharpness of the other's teeth.

She took his face between her palms and held his head slightly apart from hers. "Severus?"

"Yes?" He tried to kiss her again. If she had regrets ... well, it was too late for regrets.

"I'd like you to touch my breast."

He pushed himself on the side, moulding his body into hers as much as possible, and put his left hand on her left breast. Her moan travelled along his neurons from his ears right to his groin. His blood was taken in the movement, and his brain shut down completely. His mouth travelled along the curves of her neck, shoulders, collarbone, grazing and in some places marking her soft skin, until it reached her nipples. He caressed each of them with his hand, lips and tongue.

Her hands were alternatively gripping his hair to keep his head where it was, or massaging the nape of his neck or his shoulders. Her legs were restless in spite of his weight partly on her, her pelvis was undulating without her knowing it, her juices were forming a wet trail on his thigh, coating the dark hair that covered it, and she wanted something more to happen between her legs. She caught the hand that was attending her right breast and tried to bring it to her clitoris. Instinctively, Severus moved his leg away and cupped her sex. She ground herself against his fingers and started a chant of onomatopoeias. In-between "oh" and "ah" and "yes", Severus understood "now" and slid between her legs. She bent her knees, and, cradled by her body, he entered her.

Both thought, though their hazy brains hardly registered it, *This is heaven!* Severus tried to keep a level rhythm, not too fast, not too slow, but Hermione's legs wrapping themselves at the small of his back shattered any minimal resolve at holding a measure of control he might have imagined. He started pounding heartily into her, his torso braced on his arms, his eyes set on Hermione's upward-turned face. He felt his cock being stroked by the walls of her cunt, her muscles clenching in harmony with his movements, letting him feel the approach of her orgasm.

She was moaning with each of his thrusts. With her fingernails, she was drawing random patterns on the skin of his back. Suddenly, she tensed, and she threw her head back so much, that he feared she would snap her neck. He didn't stop though, nor did he even relent. He was letting go completely, taken by the need to ejaculate inside the beautiful and passionate woman under him. He felt it; he felt his come being expelled from his balls, running along his urethra and gushing out in its hot, wet, and welcoming receptacle.

Afterward, he didn't collapse on her, but rather lay down at her side, stroking and caressing her still form. They were both panting slightly.

She turned her head towards him and smiled. "Thank you, Severus. I needed an outlet after a day like this. I've never thought that speaking in front a teenage audience could be so stressing."

He chuckled. "Welcome in my world, my dear."

"Well, now I'm exhausted. May I sleep here?"

He considered her. She did look exhausted, and his bed was big enough for two...or more. Perhaps it would help convince her to have an encore of their performance? *really need to get laid more if I'm thinking of bedding her again not ten minutes after our coupling.*

"That's no problem for me. I have everything you could need in my quarters. Just be discreet when you leave tomorrow morning. Some students have already seen you leave my quarters this morning...don't forget that I had taken the extended Polyjuice...and it wouldn't do for it to happen twice in a row. I don't want to be the object of gossips." Especially when the gossip columnist was Albus Dumbledore.

Decisions

Chapter 3 of 3

The outcome of Severus's experiment.

Disclaimer: see first chapter.

Many thanks to Dacian Goddess for her invaluable help.

Hermione felt fully rested when she woke up the next morning. She stretched languidly, relishing in the feeling of the soft cotton sheets on her skin, and nudged Severus as a consequence.

"Hmm," emerged from the lump that was Severus' form under the covers.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you. Did you sleep well?"

"What is your opinion on the matter?" He opened his eyes and gazed at her, still sleepy.

She smiled softly at him. "You've slept well. Hungry?"

"I need the loo first," he grumbled. He stood up and strode in all his glorious nudity to the bathroom. He came back, already clothed in his customary black robes.

Wide-eyed, she told him, "I know I'm not supposed to linger here, but you could have waited a bit before getting dressed!"

He sighed. "Hermione, I'm not casting you out of my bed or my quarters, but I only have nightshirts and robes, and it's too chilly here to wander with just a nightshirt on. Besides, I will soon have to attend breakfast in the Great Hall." He smirked. "Believe me, I'd rather attend any need you might have."

"All right." She sat down and started to collect her own clothes. "I'll get dressed and go back home." She had a smirk of her own. "When will you next be available to attend my needs?" she asked coquettishly. She was downright irresistible like that, batting her eyelashes in a parody of a pin-up girl with only her underwear on.

He went up to her. "I think I can manage an evening a week out of the castle and entertain you here every Friday and Saturday evenings. Your choice, my dear."

"Saturday, Saturday evening is fine. I'd like to go out with you and then to take you to my home. I promise I'll have a warm bathrobe for you to wear in the morning."

"We have a deal." He pinned her against him and kissed her for a long time. "Get dressed so that I can walk you to the gates."

"Don't you fear we'd be seen?"

"I've thought about it, and I've come to the conclusion that I don't care. In fact, I expect everyone to be shocked that such an unpleasant man like me can get a girlfriend." He looked smug about it, though there were denigration and self-teasing in his voice.

"If you'd like, I'll write a plea to defend your case against the world."

His lips tightened to prevent a smile, but he couldn't hide his appreciation of her words to show in his eyes.

"Thank you, Hermione. It will not be necessary, but I'll keep the offer in mind."

She smiled at him...again. He couldn't get enough of it.

In September, Hermione and Severus managed to see each other two to three times a week. Severus' propensity to give detentions drastically decreased during that time. Between long conversations with Hermione, sex with Hermione, and the paperwork required to have the extended Polyjuice patented, he really didn't have the time any more to punish mischievous students.

As for Hermione's lawyer office project, things were going nicely. She'd found a place, studied enough, and had enough savings to start working without earning money yet.

By November, she'd quit her job at the pharmacy and was falling madly in love with Severus Snape.

What? What do they mean?

Severus was staring with incredulity at the parchment he'd received from the Ministry.

Mister Snape,

After thorough testing, it appears that the extended Polyjuice, which recipe you have submitted to the Ministry for Magic, is successful in morphing an individual into another for twenty-four hours. We therefore congratulate you for your success.

However, due to ethical considerations, we regret that it cannot be allowed to be marketed. If this recipe were made public, criminals could use it to commit their mischief and put the blame on honest witches and wizards.

Yours faithfully,

Percy Weasley

Executive Clerk of the Ludicrous Patent Office

In the same letter, they were congratulating him and telling him he had done all this work for naught! Unthinkable. He would appeal the decision in front of the High Committee for Marketing Magical Products. But first, he needed some cheering up. He stood up from his chair at the High Table and approached Dumbledore.

"Headmaster, I have to leave the castle this morning, possibly until this evening. Could you please cancel my classes?"

Dumbledore frowned, concern etched in his old face.

"Are you unwell, Severus?"

"I have received bad news from the Ministry. I cannot wait to take action," Severus said impatiently.

"You can go, Severus. You are indeed in no condition to teach today. I would fear for an accident to happen. Don't worry for your classes."

Severus nodded. "Thank you, Headmaster." He then turned on his heels and briskly walked away.

"Say hello to Hermione for me," Dumbledore shouted at Severus' back.

Less than a half hour later, he was in front of Hermione's flat door. Her smile soon melted in a frown when she saw his tense posture.

"Severus, what is it?" she asked softly, stepping aside to let him in.

"This." He shoved the Ministry parchment into her hands and sat down on "his" sofa with petulance.

She beamed, then frowned at the content of the missive.

"Bullshit!" she exclaimed.

In spite of his current difficulty with the Ministry, Severus couldn't help but be shocked at the very rude word Hermione had just uttered. "What?" he said.

"That's all bullshit. They want to keep the recipe a secret so that the Ministry will be able to use it on unsuspecting wizards. I won't let them get away with this!"

"What do you mean by 'I'? You're not concerned by this 'bullshit', as you put it."

She put her hands on her hips. "Severus, we are in a relationship, aren't we?"

"Of course," he scoffed.

"So, if something happens to you, it is a concern to me. I'm going to help you." She smiled cunningly. "Would you mind being my first customer?"

He narrowed his eyes. "What would your fee be?"

"Nothing monetary," she said in a sultry tone. When she saw his expression darken, she hastened to add, "Of course, this is a special Severus Snape fee."

He pondered the question a bit. On one hand, he knew her enough not to doubt her abilities; what's more, thanks to their relationship, she would have a personal interest in his victory against the Ministry. On the other hand, wasn't it against her profession's ethics to represent one's lover? After a few minutes, he opted for "employing" her as his lawyer. He realised when he started to talk that she was anxiously waiting for his answer.

"You will represent me. I intend to appeal the decision in front of the High Committee for Marketing Magical Products. You could help me build my case and be my go-between between the Ministry and myself, especially as I can't leave my job every day."

His confidence and trust in her filled her with warmth, and she grinned. "Thank you, Severus. You can't fathom what it means to me." She knew right there and then that she had definitely fallen for him.

The date for the appeal was fixed on November 29th. Hermione worked hard to prepare Severus' appeal. It reminded her of the time she had spent in her third year to gather information for Buckbeak's defence. She hoped that the nowadays Ministry officials were less susceptible to favouritism than they had been at the time.

Severus fetched her at eight that morning and Apparated them both to the Leaky Cauldron, whence they could Floo to the Ministry Atrium. From there, they headed to the seventh level; the High Committee would meet them in one of the meeting rooms of the Ludicrous Patent Office.

They were the last to arrive. They took their seats in leather chairs on the nearer side of an oval table, in front of three other persons who introduced themselves as Percy Weasley, Executive Clerk of the Ludicrous Patent Office, Mafalda Hopkirk, from the Improper Use of Magic Office, and Benjamin Croaker, from the Department of Mysteries. No one was smiling, and the atmosphere was tense. Percy waited for Hermione to set all her notes on the table in front of her before he cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to hear Severus Snape's objection to the Ministry's decision to ban him from marketing a twenty-four hour Polyjuice potion. The Ministry's decision was based on ethical considerations as follows: if the recipe of such a potion were made public, it would be only too easy for criminals to impersonate people usually trusted, such as Aurors or family members, and to take advantage of the weakest members of our community. Past uses of an hour-only Polyjuice have already led to disaster. The danger is too great for our community. However, you've decided to appeal the decision, as is your right. We're listening to you, Mister Snape."

"Mrs Hopkirk, Gentlemen, my lawyer, Miss Granger, will represent me." He turned his head toward her. "Hermione, if you will?"

"Of course, Severus." She watched the members of the High Committee straight in the eyes. "Mrs Hopkirk, Gentlemen, I believe banning Mister Snape from marketing the twenty-four hour Polyjuice is unfair, and I will prove it to you. The Ministry's fear that the wrong people would use this potion is perfectly understandable, but it's not proved that making it illegal would prevent criminals from using it. After all, the news of such a discovery has probably reached all the Ministry's employees, who might have spoken of it at home."

She stopped to assess the effects of her words. She noticed with satisfaction that the Committee members looked uncomfortable. She pushed her advantage. "Besides, it's a well known fact that the Aurors are taught a spell, created last year, which exposes impostors. The risk isn't as big as the Ministry makes it."

She decided a theatrical pause would further her cause. She let her eyes fall on each Committee member silently. When she was through with the motion, they were all fidgeting uncomfortably. Then she resumed her speech. "A medical use has been found for the potion, too. If people would store parts of their bodies such as their hair or nails...under a stasis charm, of course...while they are healthy, those body parts could be used in the twenty-four hour Polyjuice to put them back in said healthy condition if they fall gravely ill. It would grant Healers the time to treat the disease, or to brew the needed potion."

The High Committee felt uneasy, she could see. They hadn't expected this argument, one of the kind that couldn't be ignored, especially if the wizard of the street would hear of it. And there was no doubt that he would hear of it.

Now that Hermione was sure that her case was all wrapped up, she decided to put forward their last argument, which would provide the Ministry with some sense of security and control, and therefore win them over.

"Severus Snape also accepts that the recipe of the potion not be made public. He accepts that the potion be sold under restriction, without the recipe or the ingredients made public, but he feels that simply prohibiting it would deprive the community of something useful. I have nothing else to say."

Mafalda Hopkirk, Benjamin Croaker and Percy Weasley exchanged glances before Percy Weasley spoke, "Thank you, Miss Granger. You and Mister Snape can wait in the corridor while the High Committee for Marketing Magical Products deliberates and makes a decision."

Hermione and Severus rose in silence and walked into the corridor. Severus began to pace at once while Hermione leaned against the wall opposite the meeting room door. They waited, not saying a word, for fifteen minutes. It was a very starchy Percy Weasley who opened the door and invited them back in. When everyone had returned to their seats, he spoke.

"Mister Snape, the High Committee for Marketing Magical Products has carefully examined the arguments that you submitted to us in relation with your application to market a twenty-four hour Polyjuice. The following decision has been made: you may patent the recipe of the potion in question, but with restrictions." Hermione fought to keep her face straight at hearing those words, and Severus' face relaxed minutely. "The recipe is to remain strictly confidential and only accessible to the employees of the Ludicrous Patent Office and of a Ministry-authorised laboratory which will brew it. Its distribution will be restricted to St Mungo's, Healers, the Aurors, and individuals with special authorisation from the Ministry."

That was a victory. Severus felt elation invade his mind. If he were a lesser man, he would have grabbed Hermione and spun her around the place. Instead, he grabbed her hand under the table and squeezed it. His reputation of someone of importance in the Potions makers' community was now certain; realisation brutally dawned upon him that he'd in reality worked more for acknowledgment and recognition than for money.

As for Hermione, she didn't mind showing her relief and joy about the High Committee decision. She managed to restrain herself from hugging him publicly, but her grin and sparkling eyes brought the sun in the underground building. Or at least, that was what Severus thought. *Damn, I'm becoming sentimental.*

They nearly missed the end of Percy's speech. "This decision has yet to be upheld and signed by the Minister for Magic. The final answer will be sent to you by owl. The meeting is over."

That certainly dampened the couple's enthusiasm, though in Severus' case, the change wasn't very apparent. This explained their shock when Benjamin Croaker amiably spoke to them. "Don't worry too much. The Minister will follow our decision. He always does."

With those words, the members of the High Committee filed out of the room, passing by Hermione and Severus without another glance at them, leaving them awkwardly standing in the Ministry room. After a short while, Hermione's stunned face was disturbed by a twitch of her lips. Little by little, like water threading its way through the mud until it reaches the surface and bursts in the open air, her smile grew into a grin, to finally erupt in a full throat laugh. "We've been played," she hiccuped, clutching her belly. "This Committee always intended to allow you to patent your potion. It's Scrimgeour, the Minister, who didn't want it to be patented. But his staff disagreed and used these proceedings to thwart him.

"Don't you see that, Severus? Their arguments were feeble, and they gave in after a ten-minute deliberation only."

Severus' mind did a double take; they'd been played? But it'd been to their advantage! He'd never heard of a situation in which a person had been played to their advantage. There had to be a catch! However, his mind was too frantic to come with an answer, and Hermione's noisy glee didn't help, either. Actually, Hermione's glee appeared to be contagious, or maybe it was how his mind decided to cope with the revelation, but he started to laugh with Hermione. They were soon obliged to support each other for the next ten minutes until their laugh subsided, and they could think rationally again. Later, they would bless the fact that no one had used the corridor while they were so incapable of maintaining their dignity.

They felt good after their outburst; they had needed the outlet after the weeks of tension, and it was as good as sex for relieving tension meant.

"I guess now we only need to wait for the letter," Severus finally said.

His posture was relaxed, and this was a bit disconcerting. Not that Hermione wasn't used to seeing Severus that relaxed; but when that happened, he was naked in bed after a healthy bout of sex, not in full Snape regalia in the middle of a Ministry corridor. She smiled naughtily at him. "Why don't we go home? We have the rest of the day to ourselves."

He smirked, took her arm and led her to her flat, where they made sure they would get even more relaxed.

Severus was mildly surprised when, a few days later, he received permission from the Ministry to patent the twenty-four hour Polyjuice. He hadn't been entirely sure that his request wouldn't be rejected after all. However, he didn't feel as elated as he should have been by his success. He briefly wondered why, until his eyes travelled through the open door that led to his bedroom and fell on the young woman still asleep in his bed; the rumpled sheets, lifted in a regular rhythm by her breathing, were baring her delectable throat. Hermione was the only real reward for his efforts, he reflected, and there was no way that he would let her go.