

Kindness Has Its Own Rewards

by Good_Witch

Page 394 Challenge Response! Hermione is embarrassed at her 5 Year class reunion, and Snape is the unlikely person to comfort her. In an unexpected show of kindness, everything changes between them. A Porn-Without-(MUCH)Plot...

5 year reunion

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: This is my response to the Page 394 Challenge, yonked from Ladyofthemasque, who credits gasking it from doomsark, who says he got it from notsosaintly, and after that, I gave up tracking it... LOL

The rules are as follows:

1. Take the nearest five thick books. If you don't have five thick books near you, go to the bookshelf. If you're too lazy to do that, use fewer than five.
 - 1a. None of the Harry Potter books are allowed, however. Anyone doing that will have a week's detention with Snape, and it won't be that sort of detention. It will involve scrubbing cauldrons and pickling pig foetuses.
2. Turn to page 394.
3. Take the second sentence on that page of each book.
4. Arrange the sentences to form as coherent a story as possible.

Thanks go out to Ladyofthemasque for a very quick turnaround on a beta, and to Laela for inspiring me even more by rising to the challenge herself!

The five sentences and the books they were taken from are listed after the story. Enjoy!

"Kindness Has Its Own Rewards"

"Will you marry me, Hermione?" Ron had dropped to one knee to propose to her, irrelevant of the fact that they were surrounded by scads of people at the Hogwarts class reunion.

Hermione went white, completely gobsmacked. He hadn't acted as if he still had feelings for her in ages, and now, in front of everyone, he had the gall to blindside her with a marriage proposal!

Her mouth opened, but no sound came out. Blinking rapidly, she noticed that the crowd had gone silent, waiting with interest to hear her response. The longer the silence reigned, the redder Ron's ears became, and the more uncomfortable he looked. Hermione glanced around desperately, looking for something...anything...to rescue her from this hellish spectacle.

Harry stood to one side, Ginny at his hip, watching them with an indulgent, tender expression behind his glasses. Ginny beamed at Hermione hopefully, wanting her for a sister-in-law. Over at the staff table, she saw Minerva and Albus gazing at them, curious and benign, expecting her to say yes, obviously. Then, as she looked away, pained, she saw Snape glaring at them, disdain plainly written on his face. But, as she latched onto his pale visage in her frantic need for distraction, she thought she saw something else, a tinge of wistfulness and regret, perhaps.

Staring at his black eyes, she saw him finally look at her, locking gazes. A flash of answering pain flared in his eyes as she mutely begged him...or anyone, really...to save her from this awkward predicament. A slight cough tore her attention away from the man who had been her teacher five years before.

Looking back down at Ron, she saw the humiliated rage boiling up in his blue eyes. He had coughed, still waiting for her answer. Hermione cleared her throat, hot tears prickling at her eyelids in her deep embarrassment.

Closing her eyes to avoid seeing Ron's hurt, she shook her head, the tears wetting her lashes. In a choked voice, she ground out, "I'm sorry, Ron. I can't marry you. I don't mean to hurt you. I wish you hadn't done this..." She opened her eyes to see him glaring at her, his eyes narrowed hatefully. The crowd started shuffling, awkwardly trying to start up small talk, to take the spotlight off the horridly uncomfortable pair. Harry and Ginny gasped in surprise, but at least Harry had the presence of mind to steer his girlfriend away from them before she let loose her share of the famous Weasley temper.

Ron stood slowly, his jaw clenching and throbbing. Breathing harshly through his nose, obviously trying to maintain his composure, he stepped closer to Hermione, making her cringe away from his towering, angry form.

"How could you do this to me in front of everyone? I thought you cared about me. I guess I was wrong. Forget it. Forget everything. Don't ever come crawling back to me after this. Goodbye, Hermione." He stalked off, shoulders tight, to Apparate away from the festivities.

Hermione stood, frozen for a moment, trembling in the wake of her shock. Humiliation flooded her, and she wanted to get away from the prying eyes of her entire Hogwarts class and their guests, as well as all of her old professors. Looking around furtively, she saw disappointment and pity in both Albus' and Minerva's faces. Chewing her lip, she yanked her gaze away from the pity shining in their eyes and was met once again with the penetrating black gaze of her former Potions Professor. It was at that moment that she received a second shock, nearly as earth-shattering as the first. Snape was regarding her with a look that held a bizarre mixture of things...satisfaction, hope, triumph, and sympathy. It was the softness in his gaze, the compassion she had never before seen in his face that caused her to freeze once again, this time, staring at him.

After a moment that seemed eternal, she recovered from her shocks and managed to convince her body to move. As quickly as she could, she retreated to the castle, away from the cheerful banquet set up out in the bright summer sunshine on Hogwarts' lawns. Once inside the cool stone building, she sagged against the wall in the shadows, crumpling to the floor, finally giving vent to her tears.

A few minutes later, she was startled by a familiar voice coming from the adjacent shadows.

"Miss Granger." There was a pregnant pause. Hermione vainly sniffled, trying to compose herself. "May I offer you my handkerchief?" His voice was low and resonant, and she was taken aback by the compassionate solicitude. Looking up, surprised, she was met with the sight of a square of white linen edged in green, embroidered with SS at one corner. Bewildered, she took the proffered handkerchief and immediately applied it to her streaming eyes and nose.

In a shaky voice, she murmured, "Thank you."

There was another long pause, broken only by the sounds of Hermione sniffing and blowing her nose, gulping in air to regain her composure. Her eyes still puffy and red-rimmed, she looked at the soggy handkerchief and grimaced. "I can't very well give this back to you like this..."

She was startled by what sounded suspiciously like an amused snort before that same black velvet voice muttered, *Scourgify*, and the handkerchief was restored to its original pristine condition. She wasn't sure how many more shocks to the system she could take when Snape suddenly dropped down beside her, hunkering down in the half-light, his elbows resting on his knees as he squatted near her, eyeing her with a faint smile. Snape was smiling? Hermione's eyes widened in disbelief, and her mouth dropped open as she saw the rare sight of Severus Snape actually smiling, and not in a sarcastic, evil way. Her obvious incredulity made him smile even more. Tilting his chin at the handkerchief, he purred, "You may keep it. I have others."

Hermione desperately marshalled her senses and faintly stammered, "T-thank you, Prof..."

Snape smoothly interrupted her, stating, "Dispense with the formalities, please. You haven't been my student for five years. You may call me Severus... Hermione."

She shivered at the tone with which he had spoken her given name. Reeling, she tried to do as she was bid. "A-all right. Thank you, Se-severus." Cursing herself for stammering like an idiot, she frowned and hid her face in his handkerchief again. After another awkward pause, she glanced back at him. He was studying her, that unusual smile still on his lips. At her look, he struggled to wipe it from his face, studiously conforming his expression to one of polite concern.

"Will you be all right?" His voice was soft and low, and Hermione blinked again in disbelief at how sympathetic he was being. Was this the same Professor Snape?

No, a voice in her head quipped, *It's not Professor Snape, it's Severus.*

Gathering her scattered wits, she tossed her head in impatience and petulance and said, "I can't believe him! I've likely just lost one of my best friends, and it's not even my fault!" She sighed deeply, pushing away the incredulous thought that she was confiding in *Snape*, just grateful for a compassionate sounding board.

His voice thick with grim finality, Snape drawled, "Marriage is not for you. At least, not with your erstwhile cohort, who would likely pursue the ultimate Weasley predilection for populating the earth with volatile redheads, whether you liked it or not."

Hermione snorted in agreement with his astute assessment. Almost wailing in her frustration, she continued, "I thought we were past all that! I mean, for years now, his mother has been trying to get us together, and he has gone back and forth with his feelings for me. We even tried dating, but it was just too weird for me. He's like a brother, just like Harry. I couldn't get involved with him like that."

Snape eased back onto his heels, turning so he rested against the wall, his body barely an inch away from touching hers. Sliding down the stones until he, too, was seated on the floor next to Hermione, he leant his head back and sighed, "Ah, the ubiquitous Weasley family, always believing that they know what is best for everyone else. Once they've hit upon something that they want, it's like trying to pry a bone from a dog's teeth to get them to give it up." Hermione coughed, covering up her sputter of astonished laughter at his earthy imagery. "Forget that their targets may not agree. That just doesn't occur to them, as they blithely angle to get everyone to acquiesce to their plans." Hermione sighed and nodded, leaning her head back against the wall, mirroring Snape. There was another silence, but this time, it wasn't awkward so much as it was pensive. Eventually, Snape continued, "If they want something different from what you want, you do not need to give equal weight to their preferences because everyone knows that their preferences are... mysterious." His tone was sardonic as he drawled the last word. Hermione couldn't stop herself and burst out laughing.

"Mysterious? How diplomatic of you..." She was still grinning at his obvious sarcasm as she rolled her head to the side to look at him. He did the same, and she found herself enveloped in a deep black gaze that swam with things she had never seen before in her old Professor's eyes. Her breath caught in her throat and her pulse quickened in uncertainty. Her grin faded into a wide-eyed stare of bewilderment.

Held captive by his gaze, Hermione didn't know what to say or do. She was completely unprepared for the unsettling sequence of events that had transpired that day. After a long moment, Snape whispered gently, "Would you like to leave without having to face that mob again?" Hermione nodded mutely. Snape's lips quirked in that faint smile again and he inclined his head at her in acknowledgement.

In one fluid movement, he stood and extended a hand to her. Hermione stared dumbly up at him and distractedly placed her hand in his to allow him to pull her to her feet. He lifted her with the ease born of subtle strength, managing to settle her a mere few inches from him. Hermione had never been that close to Snape before, and she felt

the heat and power radiating from his tall, thin frame. It took a moment for her to realize that he had not released her hand yet, as he stood within her personal space and gazed down into her wide eyes, as if reading her very soul. When she finally noticed that her hand was still gripped by his long, slender fingers, warm and smooth against hers, she felt a flush travelling up her neck to suffuse her cheeks in self-consciousness. Without realizing she did so, she chewed her bottom lip, unsure of how to react.

Snape watched her capture her lip between her teeth and stopped breathing for a moment. A jolt shot through him, making him want to lean down and soothe that lip with his kiss. Forcing himself to breathe again, he swallowed and slowly backed away from her, tilting his head to the side, murmuring, "Come, I can show you a way out of the castle to exit the grounds without having to pass the others." He turned away and began leading her, her hand still clasped in his. He moved quickly and quietly, like a cat, and Hermione was fascinated by his lithe movements. Her hand burned where he held it, and she struggled to keep up with him as he led her down the dungeon stairs and down a dim passageway. Coming to a worn door, he waved his wand and muttered something, opening it. Glancing reassuringly back at Hermione, he pulled her behind him into the dark corridor. As the door closed at their backs, they were plunged into utter darkness.

Hermione gasped involuntarily. Almost immediately, she felt a strong arm snake around her shoulders. She felt his breath stir her hair as he said, "Don't be frightened. This is the way I left the castle whenever I was summoned. It's completely safe, I assure you." There was a slight pause before he said, his voice barely above a whisper, and with a suspicious longing, "Do you trust me, Hermione?"

She stood stock still, trying to reason out her response. Did she trust him? Surely she must. Her brain worked frantically as she tried to absorb the new person she had observed in the past twenty minutes. Again, she shivered, flustered by his touch, shaken by the wistful tone of his voice, and staggered by the new way he had been looking at her. Her voice quavered as she answered, "Y-yes, I trust you... Severus." She had no idea why she had suddenly tacked his name on the end of that statement. She was grateful for the darkness to hide her embarrassment.

Snape gave her a quick squeeze and smoothly took her hand again, urging her forward in the pitch black. Hermione focused on walking, hoping not to stumble. Part of her brain growled about using their wands for light, and why didn't she just suggest it or do it already, but a deeper part of her being ignored that voice of reason and went along with the situation, oddly wanting to prove to Snape that she did trust him.

After several minutes of nothing but the sounds of their breathing and the slight echo of their footsteps, Snape slowed, whispering, "We're here." They stopped, and Hermione's eyes strained in the darkness to see him...anything. She heard what sounded like the creak of an old metal handle as Snape tried to open the door. After a few attempts, she heard a stifled curse, followed by a heavy sigh.

Hesitantly, she asked, "What's wrong?" Her nerves were on edge, primed to react in the unknown darkness. She could almost hear Snape's frustration boiling.

In a chagrined tone, he said, "Well, I haven't used this passageway in five years, since the last time I was summoned. The door...it's stuck. I've tried pulling it open, and it hasn't budged."

Hermione's logic reasserted itself. "Well, why don't we both try?"

There was a beat of silence. Then, "Very well. Here. Grab this, and we'll pull on the count of three. Agreed?" Snape placed her hand on a heavy metal ring that was attached to the door. She gripped it with both hands, and ignored the queer flutter in her stomach when he placed himself behind her, his arms on either side of her and his larger hands covering hers.

She planted her feet and took a deep breath. "Agreed." Snape counted, and on three, they both lunged backward, yanking at the stuck door. It gave way with surprising suddenness, after an instant of resistance. Unprepared, they both lost their balance and fell to the ground, blinded by the bright sunlight that was streaming in through the now open door.

Hermione shaded her eyes with her hand, slowly realizing that she was sprawled atop Snape's supine form. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she turned to him, apprehensive. Nervous, she gave a forced giggle...one that had a rather hysterical tinge...and said, "How well we pull together, don't we?" She grimaced ruefully at Snape, who was lying on his back on the ground, looking at her where she was lying on him.

Snape hoped she wouldn't be able to feel the fierce pounding of his heart at the sensation of her body against his, or the growing heat of his arousal trapped between them. Pinning her with an intense gaze, he purred, "Begg the question of what else we might do well together..." He felt a surge of hope as he watched her pupils dilate, even as her expression changed to one of sheepish consternation.

Hermione gingerly removed herself from his person, wondering at the odd tingle that was chasing around in her stomach. Standing and brushing herself off, she peered through her lashes at him as he gracefully got to his feet and copied her actions. Turning away from him, she looked out onto the expanse of grounds, wondering how many other secret passageways there were in the castle. She inhaled sharply as she felt a firm hand at the small of her back, and a presence hovering at her shoulder. A shudder rippled down her spine at his voice when he said, "There's a gate at the edge of the grounds. I'll show you." She nodded and stepped forward at the subtle press of his hand on her back. She was surprised that he didn't remove it as they trekked to the gate. Highly conscious of the warmth of that hand, she barely noticed when they reached the gate, so distracting was his simple touch.

Snape matched Hermione's pace and remained just at her shoulder as they walked, casting glances at her, and inhaling the scent of her hair as it bounced. He was fighting an inner battle, afraid that he would humiliate himself if he dared pursue his fancy. His old, bemused fascination with Hermione had suddenly morphed into something more when he thought he was about to witness her engagement to the Weasley boy. In that moment, he had suddenly realized that his carefully detached interest in the brilliantly clever witch wasn't so detached after all. He had noticed how elegantly she had grown up, settling into her adult self with a grace and aplomb that pleased him. After her class had left Hogwarts, and the War had ended, he had still seen her occasionally at Order meetings, where he tried to convince himself that he was content to admire her from afar. But his feelings had crashed down upon him when he thought he was about to see her claimed forever by someone else. Then, when she had refused Ron, Snape had felt almost faint with relief and hope.

If there was one thing he had learned in his travesty of a life, it was to not pass up opportunities when they presented themselves. Especially for good things...things that could very well be those upon which his future hinged. He had to strike while he had the chance. So far, she hadn't snubbed him. Perhaps he was on the right track after all.

At the gate, they stopped, and Snape stepped around her, his hand sliding around from her lower back to rest on her hip. Hermione's eyes were wide again as she blinked disconcertedly up at him. He smiled faintly. "Here. You can Apparate just outside the gate." His brow furrowed as he leant forward in concern. "Are you all right? I'm afraid you may not be in any shape to Apparate." He gently reached up and smoothed her hair away from her face, letting his fingertips graze along her cheek as his hand fell.

Hermione closed her eyes and gave a trembling sigh, feeling the tingling trail of where his fingers had touched her face. Inhaling deeply, she opened her eyes again, only to see his glinting with concern and caring. Marvelling at the change in the man before her, she mentally shook herself. Faintly, she whispered, "I'm okay. I can Apparate."

Her eyebrows rose at the flash of disappointment she saw in his eyes. Snape looked down quickly, smiling politely as he looked back up. "Very well then. If you're sure..." He courteously opened the gate and gestured chivalrously for her to step beyond it. Hermione moved like one in a daze.

Closing the gate, Snape leant forward, resting his elbows on it, eyeing Hermione hungrily. She felt the answering jolt in her stomach, but was afraid to act on it, so befuddled was she by the traumatic events of the day. Vainly casting about for her manners, she felt herself flushing again as she stammered, "I-I appreciate your help. You've been so kind. That was really a nightmare back there..."

Snape's black eyes deepened as he murmured, "Certainly." He licked his lips unconsciously before adding, "I *can* be kind now. Now that the War is over, and I don't have to keep up a façade. In fact, I can be more than kind..." He trailed off, his voice heavy with meaning. Hermione swallowed against a suddenly dry throat.

Nervously twisting his handkerchief in her hands, she blurted, "Oh, I'm sure," then flushed again as she realized how that sounded.

A slow, mischievous smile spread across Snape's face. In a devastating purr, he said, "Are you? Well, how about that..."

Hermione's eyelids fluttered. Her body felt odd. Her head was swimming, and somehow, it all had to do with the almost feral grin gracing Snape's lips. Feeling completely at sea, she knew she had to get out of there.

Clearing her throat, she said, "Um, well, I should go. Thank you again. It was... good to see you again, Professor." She was taken aback by the stern look Snape levelled at her.

Drumming his fingers against the gate, he drawled, "Tut tut. I am no longer your professor. Didn't we already have this conversation... Hermione?" He raised one eyebrow at her in reprimand.

She looked down, chastened, and rasped, "Yes. Sorry. It was good to see you again, Severus." She forced the name out, cringing at the vehement sound of it.

Snape's grin returned, and he purred silkily, "Much better. I agree. It was good to see you, and it would be even better to see you again. May I contact you, Hermione? I have some interesting plans for the summer, gathering rare ingredients, and it would be much more... rewarding to share them with someone who can appreciate them." He ended on an upward note of entreaty, tilting his head to one side ingratiatingly.

Hermione felt a surge of excitement. *That does sound interesting... And he's so much nicer now. I could probably even enjoy myself, actually having someone who wouldn't get bored if I wanted to talk about the ingredients...* She refused to even think about the implications contained in his pronunciation of "rewarding." Suddenly feeling shy, she cast her eyes down and chewed her lip. Snape gripped the gate.

"That sounds fascinating. Yes, do contact me. I have the summer off from graduate school, so I would be available." She glanced up at him. "I look forward to hearing from you... Severus."

Snape bowed to her and smiled. "You shall. You have my word on that. Good day, Hermione. Do be careful Apparating. It would be a tragedy for the wizarding world if you splinched."

Hermione smirked. "I'll be careful. Good day to you, too." Rippling her fingers at him in a wave, she walked a few paces away and Apparated.

Snape heaved a huge sigh and sagged against the gate, closing his eyes. After a long moment, he straightened and briskly returned to the castle, a pleased smile hovering on his lips.

*** *****

Several days later, Hermione was sitting in her flat, tears leaking from under her lids as she sat disconsolately at her kitchen table. The nightmare that had begun at the class reunion had continued. Ron wouldn't speak to her, and the rest of the Weasley family was just as cold and unforgiving. Even Ginny was harsh, regardless of Harry's pleas that she try to understand. Hermione felt ostracized, and the stress was wearing on her.

She welcomed the distraction of the owl as it back winged onto the table. She gestured for the owl to wait in case she wanted to reply right away. Opening the parchment, she felt a little thrill run through her when she recognized his familiar spidery scrawl, only this time, the ink was black instead of red, and the words were pleasant instead of acidic.

Hermione,

I am planning a trip to the mountains. It is a full moon this weekend, and some of the ingredients must be gathered then. Usually, I go out early in the day and set up a camp, working at night and simply staying there so I can continue the next morning without delay. If this is acceptable to you, I would welcome your company. Please respond and let me know whether or not you will accompany me. I can make the arrangements and owl you the details. Like I said before, I am looking forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely,

Severus

p.s. I do hope you are doing well. I have only heard idle gossip about your fate after the reunion. Try not to let them get to you. You did the right thing. If you would like to vent, I would be a willing target on the trip. After dealing with Voldemort all those years, I think I can take it. Please, Hermione, let me be kind to you...or more...again.

Hermione felt a warmth spreading through her. This was the first friendly "voice" she had encountered since the reunion. She smiled wanly in gratitude as she found a quill and parchment to respond.

Severus,

Your offer comes at just the psychological moment, as I really don't think I can stand to stay around here much longer without resorting to doing something desperate. I would like to join you, so please forward me the details.

Your postscript was more comforting than you can imagine. I haven't spoken to Ron since the reunion, and the rest of the Weasleys seem to think I am now evil incarnate. I do miss Ron. His friendship was of value to me: to lose it tried me severely. This has been the longest five days of my life. A pleasant distraction would be just the thing to help me regain some balance.

Of course, I sha'n't regard this as purely a pleasure excursion, as I fully intend to help you with your work. You will allow me that boon, won't you? It would be... kind on your part.

I'm looking forward to meeting with you again.

Cordially,

Hermione

p.s. Is there anything in particular I should wear to go to these mountains of yours?

She sealed her letter and gave it to the owl, thanking it for waiting. It fluttered its wings and hooted at her before taking off again. Left alone with her thoughts, she pondered the changed manner in which Snape was treating her. For the first time since she had graduated, he had treated her not only as an adult, but as a friend. Remembering the way his touch inflamed her skin, she coloured, even in the privacy of her own home. Firmly veering away from such unlikely thoughts, she strode to her bookshelves, scanning them for a potions ingredients book to browse. Thankfully, the proposed expedition had already served its purpose of distracting her from her depressing situation, and she found herself absorbed in looking up those ingredients that had to be harvested under a full moon and cross referencing them with those that could be found in the mountains.

Later that evening, she was startled by another owl scabbling at her window. Rushing to open it, she apologized to the indignant bird and retrieved the missive, once again feeling a disconcerting thrill course through her at the sight of Snape's writing.

Hermione,

I am indeed pleased that you want to accompany me and, even more so, that you find the idea appealing. Meet me in Diagon Alley by Flourish and Blotts...you do remember where that is, don't you?...Saturday morning at 9:00. We will Apparate from there. You can expect to be back safely Sunday evening. As for what to wear... Dress appropriately for hiking, both under the midday summer sun and through the cooler night. I shall provide the necessary camping accoutrement.

It pains me to know how callously you have been treated by the Weasleys. One can hope that, over time, they will see the error of their ways and will once again welcome you into their ranks...without having to marry into them, of course. After all, it would be a grievous shock to the wizarding world for anything to happen to their beloved Golden Trio.

Regarding you assisting me with my work on this expedition: You are quite likely the only person I would trust to do so. As for being kind to you... Nothing could please me more than to be kind to you, Hermione.

I shall see you Saturday morning.

Sincerely,

Severus

Grinning at the compliment, Hermione blushed, preening at his recognition of her skills...something that she had been striving for all through her school career. She hastily penned a response.

Severus,

I'll meet you at 9:00 Saturday morning. And you can wipe that sarcastic smirk off your face...of course I remember where Flourish and Blotts is. Honestly!

Thank you for your sympathy. It really helps. As for shocks to the wizarding world...maybe I should let it get around that Severus Snape can actually be nice... That would certainly send the world into an uproar, wouldn't it?

I'm eagerly anticipating assisting you. I've always admired your expertise, and I've had a niggling little yen for learning more from you than we were allowed in school.

I must say that I'm rather taken aback by how kind you have been. But I will also admit that it's quite refreshing, and I am curious to see how much nicer the dreaded Potions Master of Hogwarts can get.

Affectionately,

Hermione

She excitedly thrust her note at the owl, sending it on its way. Smiling in anticipation, she quickly scrambled to her room to sort her belongings for the weekend. *This has turned out to be quite interesting...*

Saturday morning, Hermione Apparated to Flourish and Blott's at two minutes before nine. Barely a beat after she arrived near the building, Snape appeared near her. Her mouth dropped open in surprise at his clothing. She had never seen him in anything other than his stark black teaching robes. He was wearing sturdy black leather hiking boots, under well-worn black jeans. She blinked again, noticing that he wore a simple black t-shirt under a faded blue denim jacket. A stout canvas backpack was slung over his shoulder. But what affected her the most was the candid pleasure in his eyes, and the warm smile that spread his lips as he turned and saw her.

Crossing to her, he gazed down into her wide eyes and purred, "Good morning, Hermione. Ready to go?"

She managed a weak nod. Inclining his head in acknowledgment, he stepped closer to her, wrapping his arms around her waist. She stiffened at the tingling sensation that wormed through her. His velvet voice floated down to her ear.

"Relax. I've Apparated with others countless times. You're safe with me." One corner of his mouth quirked up in amusement and Hermione blinked up at him.

"Oh, of course... Um, whenever you're ready..."

He flashed her another smile and murmured, "Now." They Apparated to a clearing. Slowly, Snape released Hermione, letting his hands slide along her as he backed away. She gazed about them, delighting in the beauty of the mountainside.

Clasping her hands, her eyes shining, she exclaimed, "Oh! How lovely!" She beamed at Snape, and was startled to see him watching her with an intense, consuming look. Her breath caught in her throat as his lids lowered and he regarded her through his lashes.

His voice a deep, throaty drawl, he replied, "Indeed. Quite lovely."

Hermione blushed, knowing deep inside that he was not referring to the scenery. After a long moment of devouring her with his eyes, Snape turned and led the way along the path. He cast a smouldering glance over his shoulder and said, "Come. I'll set up the camp when we reach our destination." Then, he set off at a decent pace, Hermione scrambling to catch up.

The sun made its inexorable way across the sky, as they worked companionably. Hermione felt as if she had taken some sort of drug, she was getting so giddy. It was the effects of a beautiful day, stimulating conversation, and a change from her stressful home life. As the afternoon progressed, the temperature rose, and Snape took off his jacket, revealing his pale arms with their flat, wiry muscles. Hermione found herself staring at the Dark Mark on his forearm, fascinated by the casually bad-boy image of the tattooed iconoclast before her. She felt herself growing warm as well, and shed her oxford, leaving her clad only in a spaghetti strap tank top and jeans.

Snape sucked in a breath at the tight shirt hugging her curves. He swallowed several times, fighting the urge to accost her.

After that point, as they worked, they somehow managed to find ways to brush up against one another, their sweat-slicked skin meeting. As the sun set, they retired to the camp to rest, waiting for the full moon to rise before they attempted the rest of the harvesting.

Snape watched the varying colours of the sunset playing across Hermione's face, wanting her more and more. Hermione felt the silence change between them. Glancing up, she saw naked desire in his deep black eyes. An answering throb in her centre took her by surprise. She locked eyes with him, unable to break away from his penetrating gaze. Unconsciously, she chewed her lip in anxiety.

Snape licked his lips in an involuntary response to her teeth worrying her lower lip. His voice low and sincere, he offered, "I'm glad you came with me."

Hermione ducked her head and flushed. "So am I. Thank you for offering. This was just what I needed." She sensed movement and snapped her head back up, to see that Snape had closed the distance between them, sitting next to her in the dusk as he had done in the shadows of Hogwarts.

He tilted his head and gazed at her appraisingly. "What was it you needed, exactly?"

Flustered, Hermione struggled to come up with a good answer. "Well... I... Um... I needed someone to treat me like a human being, and not like dirt. I needed someone to be..."

Snape cut her off. "To be kind to you?" Hermione stared at him and nodded. A breeze whipped through their camp and she shivered, goose flesh pimply her bare arms and shoulders. Instantly, Snape edged closer, draping one arm around her shoulders, pulling her against him for warmth. "Are you cold, Hermione?" His tone was rich and resonant with solicitude. Hermione tried to answer, but found she had no voice. Snape leant closer to her, purring, "I can be more than kind. Would you like me to show you just how nice the dreaded Potions Master can be?" His breath was hot against her ear, and she shuddered again. "I know just the way to warm you..."

Hermione's eyes fluttered closed as she felt his arm tighten around her, and his tongue flicked out to trace the shell of her ear. A sigh escaped her lips. Snape reached up and caressed her hair, brushing her curls away from her face. Lightly gripping her chin, he turned her face to him, enveloping her in a dark gaze of crackling desire. They stared at each other for an agonizingly long moment before Snape took a deep breath and whispered, "Hermione?" A wealth of meaning filled that single utterance.

Hermione felt her lids drooping over her glazed eyes, and she breathed, "Severus..." At that moment, all the tension left her body, and she melted against him. Snape snatched the opportunity and covered her lips with his in a fervent kiss. A soft moan vibrated against his lips as Hermione responded in kind. Her hands slid around him, and he consumed her with feverish kisses. Gently, he twisted and lowered Hermione to the ground, atop the blanket they had placed for ground cover.

When she felt the hard ground against her back, Hermione's eyes flew open in surprise. Snape immediately pulled back, attentive to the wary stiffening of her pliant body. Searching her expression for permission to continue, he groaned as her hesitant fingers rose to trace his face. Catching her fingertips in his mouth, he kissed them, sucking them in and laving them with his tongue. Hermione arched her back, sighing at the erotic sensation. As she locked eyes with him again, she saw him waiting for her answer.

Spinning on erotic euphoria, she smiled faintly and pulled him down to her, kissing him fiercely. Even so, she was not prepared for the volatile eruption from Snape, who growled as he gathered her in his arms, gripping her tightly as his mouth travelled over her. Hot, insistent kisses covered her skin from her forehead, to her ears, to her jaw, to her throat, to her collarbone, to her shoulders, to her cleavage, and finally to her nipples, stiffly poking at the stretchy fabric of her tank top.

She groaned in appreciation of the glorious sensations evoked by Snape's tongue. His hands roamed her body, stroking her and grasping. She realized that she was fisting his t-shirt in her hands, undulating beneath his clever ministrations. A mewling whimper wrenched from her throat as Snape languidly pushed her top up her belly, following his deft hands with that talented tongue. Hermione arched up into his hands as they uncovered her breasts, cupping them and caressing her soft skin. His questing tongue sped from one taut nipple to the other, suckling them and moaning against the sensitive buds. Urgently, he pushed the top higher, and Hermione reached up to tear the offending garment from her, tossing it to one side.

She could feel the heat from his body against hers. The night cooled even more, and the breeze picked up. As they panted together, she felt his hard length rocking against her leg. The thought of his cock, hard and ready for her, made her wet. She squirmed rhythmically under him, until a sharp breeze whipped over them, making her gasp at the cold air, shivering.

Snape backed away, coming to his senses. Realizing that she was cold, he ripped his t-shirt off and draped it across her. Her eyes closed at the heat suffusing the fabric, and she felt a pulsing in her centre at the utterly masculine scent of his sweat and lust wafting to her nose. Purring in appreciation, she opened her eyes and felt a burning wave of desire crash over her at the sight. Snape hovered over her, his face shadowed by his hair hanging down, his ghostly pale skin almost glowing in the moonlight, his lean torso bare to her scrutiny.

Dazed with lust, she reached between them and fumbled with her jeans, fighting to get the button open, to yank the zipper down. Snape groaned above her. Impatiently, she pushed at the jeans, shoving them down, finally edging them past her arse. Suddenly, she was crushed by Snape swooping down on her, ravaging her with a plundering kiss. His hand smoothed across her belly, sliding his fingers under the edge of her knickers. She arched her hips up, encouraging him. Savagely, he tore her knickers down, abruptly pulling away from her to peel her jeans from her legs, distractedly bunching her knickers with them. Once free from the confining denim, Hermione could feel how wet she was, as the breeze blew over her soaked pussy lips, chilling her heated flesh.

Snape scooted back, gently but firmly pushing her knees apart. Hermione's breath hitched as she realized what was coming. Snape settled himself between her thighs and tenderly traced his fingertips along her swollen sex. A strangled cry burst from her lips. He leant forward, inhaling the tangy scent of her arousal mixed with the metallic odour of her sweat. Groaning in appreciation, he dipped his face closer and exhaled onto her slick folds. Hermione sighed at the warmth of his hot breath bathing her. Then, right on the tail of that, he backed up, letting the breeze blow across her again. She bucked at the novel sensations of one extreme to the other, from hot to cold. He was using the very air of the mountaintop as a means to bring her pleasure, and at some inner level, she marvelled. After teasing her until she growled in frustration, he chuckled, deep in his throat, the sound inciting another flare of lust in Hermione.

He reached forward and dragged his tongue from her sopping hole up to her swollen clit. Hermione shrieked into the wind, shuddering in delight. Snape revelled in her excitement, feeling his own straining against his jeans. After a few moments of lapping at her clit, flicking it with a steady rhythmic pressure, he was startled from his lust fogged task by Hermione's voice, barely recognizable in its ragged tones, rasping, "Please... Oh gods, please... Severus... I need you..."

Snape's eyes rolled back in his head as he fought the urge to come right then. Frantically tearing at his jeans, he managed to get them off, his straining cock bursting forth, glistening and red. Hermione glanced down with burning eyes and moaned. Her hands gripped convulsively as she reached for him, urging him back to her.

Snape slid back up her body, his throbbing cock barely touching her entrance as he paused over her, gazing down into her face in awe, marvelling at her expressions of ecstasy. She opened her eyes and focused on his. Engulfed by the raging desire in his gaze, she simply whispered, "Now..." Snape closed in and pinned her with a demanding kiss as he thrust into her, filling her in one stroke. His bellow and her shriek were muffled by each other's lips. Snape probed her mouth with his tongue as he filled her cunt.

Hermione shuddered around him, sending shocks up his hard length to end in his balls. For what seemed like eternity, they ground against each other, exploring and experimenting. Finally, the pleasure became too much, and, as Snape thrust deep and rocked his hips so that he rubbed against her clit, Hermione came, crying out in her ecstasy, chanting his name. The feel of her cunt spasming around him, rippling along his buried cock, sent him over the edge, and he pulled out, pounding into her as he came, his muscles tightening, contorting his face into a rictus of divine agony. As he came down from his peak, he held Hermione close, covering her with his body, shielding her from the breeze that chilled the sweat on their skin, warming her with his heat.

There was a long silence, broken only by their slowly calming breaths. Eventually, Snape pulled up, gazing tenderly, but warily, at Hermione. She stared back up at him, incredulous that she had just had such an amazing experience with her former professor. Her lips trembled as she smiled at him.

He simply gazed at her, eloquent appeal in his dark eyes. Hermione gently drew his face to hers for a soft kiss. As she released him, she whispered, "You can be so much more than kind... I'm certain of it in a way I had never thought to be, but I'm very glad I know first hand... just how nice the dreaded Potions Master can be."

Snape felt relief flood through him, and he smiled at her. She grinned back. He kissed her again, gently, tenderly. He caressed her cheek as he pulled back, hesitantly murmuring, "Hermione..."

She laid a finger on his lips, crooning, "Shhh." He blinked at her, bewildered. She chewed her lip and shyly looked at him from under hooded lids. "Severus... Do you think you can be kind to me again?" Eager hope shone in her eyes and her lips glistened wetly in the moonlight.

Snape felt his chest tighten in incredulity, just as his cock began to perk back up. His stunned, delighted expression changed to one of wicked intent, his lip curling into a feral grin. His voice was deep and dark as he drawled, "My dear Hermione, you have it in writing: Nothing could please me more than to be kind to you." And with that, he began in earnest to prove again how kind he could be.

Unfortunately, no ingredients were gathered that night, but Snape and Hermione reckoned they had found something more magical on that mountainside that night. And

yet, no one quite believed her when Hermione averred that Severus Snape was really a nice person after all...

Author's Note again:

These are the five sentences I had to use:

"He was using the very air of the mountaintop as a means to bring her Pleasure, and at some inner level, she marveled." *The Plains of Passage* by Jean Auel

"Marriage is not for you." *A Clash of Kings* by George R. R. Martin

"How well we pull together, don't we?" *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

"His friendship was of value to me: to lose it tried me severely." *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte

"If they want something different from what you want, you do not need to give equal weight to their preferences because everyone knows that their preferences are mysterious." *Philosophy, the Power of Ideas, 5th edition* by Brooke Noel Moore and Kenneth Bruder