

Phlebotonium

by lizzyann

It was the best of massages; it was the worst of massages.... Think back to the day when a seventh-year Head Girl could develop an overwhelming need to fornicate with her greasy-yet-attractive Potions master, and call it a retro-cliche smut-fest.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Notes: Heartfelt thanks to my editor, notplainjane, restrainer of dots and dashes extraordinaire, who nursed me through a painfully long creation process. So long that PWP also stands for "Prince, what Prince?"

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It was a nasty, nasty dream, but when Hermione woke up, she almost wished she could crawl back into it. She was lying in bed, curled in a tight ball of pain that screamed through every muscle of her body. The lights were dim, but even the soft glow stabbed like needles behind her eyes.

She couldn't move, could barely think, but somehow, she had to get out of bed, find somebody, and get them to take her to the infirmary. After she got them to Oblivate her into next week. *Harry would do that for me, wouldn't he? Or Ron? After all, I'm the ethical one, aren't I? They shouldn't have a problem with a minor moral detour for the greater...* a stab of pain in her shoulder derailed the thought. She had a more immediate problem. For the very first time, Hermione Granger deeply regretted the single room to which the Head Girl was entitled. If she were still sharing, she'd be halfway to the hospital wing by now. But no, she had always reveled in her solitude, her big, comfortable bed, her carved wood bedstead, her green velvet bed curtains...

Wait.

Green velvet?

This was not her room. And it certainly wasn't the hospital wing. She had a bad feeling that she already knew which rooms at Hogwarts would come with green curtains.

Hermione twisted her head to get a better look around, but then yelped when her muscles seized up again. She sensed rather than saw a vague, dark shape move towards her from the corner of the room. She groaned and shut her eyes. She heard the soft swish of robes that came to rest by the side of the bed, then nothing. The silence stretched into a pounding void that Hermione couldn't hear because she was too busy chanting in her mind, *Dream. Get back to the dream. It was a lovely dream. There were some Death Eaters, and they were hexing me into the ground, and then someone came and... No, don't think about that! Think about the hexes, and then the lovely oblivion. Do NOT think about a smug, supercilious Potions professor, who just loves to humiliate people, standing exactly two feet away.*

"Miss Granger."

Hermione gave up all hope of a self-induced faint and opened her eyes. "Professor Snape." She couldn't see his face from where she lay, just a column of black starting where she imagined his knees to be and ending, if she slewed her eyes hard to the right...*Ow, OW...*at his shoulders. But she could see his hands. Broad palms and long, thin fingers; short, blunt nails and callused knuckles; stained and scarred and not at all delicate, but...Hermione had always thought...quite the most extraordinarily capable hands she had ever seen. Capable hands that were now clasped together, clenching and unclenching in arrhythmic jerks... Dear God... Professor Snape was *nervous*? Oh, heavens, she must be dying.

"Miss Granger, I assume that, as nobody troubled to Oblivate you, you are capable of recalling recent events." His voice dripped irony. Perhaps she wasn't dying after all.

Flashes were coming back to her. Curses flying thick in the air, screams, whimpers...Had that been *her*?...and then a great black bat swooping down, wiry arms swathed in yards of black fabric enveloping her, then a muttered word, very nearly a caress...*Stupefy*...and then blessed, blessed nothingness.

"There were... Death Eaters... attacked me... way back from Hogsmeade," Hermione ground out haltingly, discovering new, excruciating cramps in her jaw muscles. "Hit me... and were talking..." Her voice rose in panic as her memory supplied the frightening, humiliating comments they had made while she lay on the ground, clothes torn and barely conscious.

"Miss Granger," he said sharply, "you will not start obsessing now about the depraved predilections of a bunch of half-wit men. You may, if you care to, develop a charming neurosis about it at your leisure. *Later*. Now, I need you to pay attention. If it is any comfort to you, the men in question have absolutely no memory of the event."

It was comforting, actually. And good to know that *he* didn't have ethical issues with a little beneficent Obliviation. But why would he bother to soothe her? How dangerously hurt was she? Snape's voice cut across her thoughts.

"You were hit with a hex which..."

"Cruciatus?" Hermione interrupted in her best eager-to-please, schoolroom voice.

"Crucio is a curse, not a hex"...*you silly girl* echoed unspoken..."nor are its effects this long-lasting without reapplication, and *if* you were still experiencing it, you would not be capable of carrying on this delightful conversation." Ah. Sarcasm *and* contempt. She was likely to make a complete recovery. "As I was saying, a hex that is extremely resistant to countermeasures. It acts on the muscles of the body, causing the greatest discomfort at the slightest movement."

"Discomfort!" Hermione's voice soared into the soprano range. But a really satisfying rant was cut off when the hex reasserted itself, and her words died off in a whimpering wail.

"Miss Granger, you *will* control yourself, and you *will* remain still. The hex is cumulative. The more you move, the worse the effects grow." Hermione listened very hard for some smug satisfaction in the words, but couldn't find any. Oh, dear. "Since this precludes you from asking any questions"...Ah, there it was, his smirk an almost palpable aura..."I shall attempt to continue without unnecessary interruptions."

"The Phlebotonum hex can be counteracted." *Oh, good*, thought Hermione. "There is a potion, an extremely complex and delicate potion, that is an effective treatment." *Naturally*, she muttered in mental counterpoint. "The headmaster has *requested*," he spat out the word, suddenly sounding neither smug nor satisfied, and her nerves went on high alert, "that I provide you with the antidote." A long pause. Very long. Hermione opened her mouth cautiously.

"Thank you, sir," she murmured. "I'm greatly obliged..."

"Be *quiet*, Miss Granger. You may wish to hear how this antidote is applied before expressing your gratitude." Hermione stayed quiet. "Perhaps you begin to have some idea, *clever* girl that you are. You do not ingest this potion. It is topical." A brief, crazed image ran through Hermione's mind of headlines in the *Daily Prophet*: Potions master verbally tortures brilliant NEWTs candidate, withholds life-saving decoction. "Topical, Miss Granger. It must be applied directly to the skin over the affected areas. *All* the affected areas. And before you start bleating for Madam Pomfrey, it only works when applied by the hands. That. Created. It." The fury in Snape's voice was just this side of terrifying. Hermione, however, was only barely aware it. Two seconds after his words sank in, she began a mental litany. *Ohgodohgodohgod hecan't ohgod Iwon't ohgodohgod mustbeanotherway ohgod itcouldwearoff ohgod Potionsmasterhands ohgod touchingme OH GOD.*

"Sir?" she quavered.

"Yes, Miss Granger?" he exhaled on a sigh. "I suppose it was far too much to hope that you would simply remain silent and take your medicine."

Hermione pulled herself together. Was she a Gryffindor, or was she not? "Could you... perhaps... Stupefy me and... do it... while I'm unconscious?"

Apparently, she was not.

"No," he said dryly, "I cannot. I will require responses from you as to whether the Potion is taking effect, where it requires longer application, and which areas need deeper penetration." Something that had once been Hermione's stomach dropped straight out of her body, and a few inches further down, a set of muscles she WAS NOT THINKING ABOUT clenched. Hard. She groaned as the hex pains responded and, out of the corner of her eye, caught Snape look at her sharply.

"You see, Miss Granger?" said Snape silkily. "If you were unconscious, those sorts of reactions would be denied me."

Bastard. Utter, utter bastard. He was *enjoying* this, the son of a bitch, reveling in her humiliation and the little prods he could use to ratchet it up just that one notch more. And that was just with his voice. *God knows what he'll do when he actually gets his hands on me. And he will!* Hermione realized suddenly. *This is the only option. If it weren't, I wouldn't be here, and Professor Snape certainly wouldn't be here. He would be snarling through the halls of Hogwarts, moving heaven and earth to find an alternative. Because this really, really can't be any easier for him than it is for me...*

"Miss Granger," he said sharply. "Much as I enjoy the unaccustomed silence, a little attention to the proceedings would be appreciated." He had squatted down beside the bed and for the first time was looking her squarely in the eye.

Hermione drew a shallow, careful breath and returned his gaze. "Yes, Professor. I'm ready."

Something seemed to move behind his eyes, and an odd expression flitted across his face. "You... accept this." As close to a question as Snape seemed willing to get.

"You wouldn't be here if there were any other choice." A fourth cousin to a smile twitched the corners of Snape's mouth. "So, yes. I trust you to help me." The second the words were out, Hermione could have bitten off her tongue. It couldn't have hurt any worse than the spasms that hit when she tensed involuntarily. His eyebrow soared right on cue.

"So you *trust* me, do you? Trust the fearsome head of Slytherin? The *Death Eater* of Slytherin?" he spat out. Then his voice dropped to a hiss. "What a brave little Gryffindor you are."

How does he do that? How does he make that sound like an insult and a caress at the same time? Hermione wondered. But there had been something else, something in his eyes, just for a second, something almost... vulnerable. And the memory of that something made her look back at him, daring him to contradict her, and say, "Yes, sir. I trust you."

His eyes widened for a moment, then narrowed. "I see," he said softly. "Very well." Snape rose in a swirl of robes, muttering something that sounded suspiciously like *illegally little girl*.

"The application of this Potion requires that I touch you rather... intimately. I will warn you before I... do... anything." He didn't, she noticed, say he would ask her permission. "You," he growled with resurgent Snapishness, "will tell me whether it is working. I trust this is one direction you will not find it impossible to follow."

"No, sir."

"Good. We will begin on your back." A charmed sheet slithered its way over her body, and then, a few murmured words later, Hermione found herself very naked under green cotton. She squawked and tensed, then groaned and cursed when hex cramps ripped through her.

"Oh *hell*! I thought you were going to warn me!"

"Language, Miss Granger. I assumed such a clever girl would realize that this is the inevitable first step in the proceedings."

"Since I'm clearly *not* such a clever girl, perhaps you could stop *calling* me one," Hermione muttered caustically, but very quietly. His own fault if he chose to hear things normal humans couldn't. She twitched experimentally, then groaned. "I don't think I can..."

"Don't try to move." Snape knelt beside her again, holding a large, dark-colored jar. He dipped his fingers in it and rubbed the stuff...more a cream than a liquid...over his hands. It had a curious smell, musty like old books and chintz armchairs, richly sweet, almost overly so, like lilies or orchids, and... quiet. It smelled quiet and soft. Quiet like the faint odor of furniture polish in an unused room and soft like washed flannel.

Snape murmured the levitation charm, and Hermione wondered dimly about wandless magic as she felt herself become very light under the sheet. "I am going to turn you onto your stomach."

Even with the buildup, and the warning, Hermione wasn't ready when Snape's hands slid *under* the sheet and began touching her. She stifled a squeak of shock when his palm pressed against her knee, then inhaled sharply, expecting the counterpoint of pain and... it wasn't there.

Well, it was there; her thigh was cramping horribly. Underneath his hand, however, the muscles just above her knee were tingling in the most wonderful absence of agony.

"*Oh*," she sighed. "That feels *marvelous*."

"Thank you," he said dryly, but with a smile lurking somewhere in the depths. His other hand slid behind her calf, and very gently, very carefully, he straightened her leg. He did the same to the other, and then with little movements, careful nudges at her shoulders and waist, he turned her gently from her side to her front and laid her back down. A whispered *Finite Incantatem* and Hermione felt herself sink into the mattress again. *What does it say about the greasy git of Hogwarts that he has 400-count cotton sheets and pure down pillows?* she wondered idly. She heard him start to murmur a spell, then stop.

"This will be easier if I move the sheet." Said surprisingly bluntly.

"Okay," said Hermione after a pause. *Would he...*

Snape eased the sheet down with his hands, carefully settling it just below the curve of her waist. Hermione felt the dip in the bed as he sat beside her. Her head was turned towards him, and she could just see his face through her hair if she slewed her eyes to the left. His expression was unreadable, but so intent that it made her nervous. All that time spent trying to get his attention in class, and only now did she realize that actually having it made her feel flushed and something akin to queasy. She dropped her eyes, grateful for the mass of hair mostly hiding her face, and focused on his hands again. A prominent tracery of veins on the back disappeared into the sleeves of his robe. There was a line of red around one nail where he'd torn the cuticle, and it made them look oddly vulnerable. The queasy feeling intensified. *His knee*, Hermione thought desperately. *His knee is an excellent thing to concentrate on. Or maybe I'll just shut my eyes altogether...*

There was a long pause, seconds stretching out excruciatingly.

When Snape finally touched her, it was not, as she expected, on her back or arms, but on her neck. His hands slid and twisted, he muttered a charm, and Hermione discovered that her comforting curtain of hair was gone. She must have made a noise because he responded sharply, "You hardly expected me to work with that bramble concealing everything."

Hermione gritted her teeth and choked back her first response. "No, sir," she ground out *And when this is over, I'm going to apologize to Harry and Ron for every single time I've twitted them for saying rude things about Prof...about Snape. Then I'll have them repeat them all to me. In alphabetical order. Because he really is a horrid, nasty, cruel...*

Snape's fingers brushed against her temples.

...rude, heartless, unkind...

The pressure from his fingertips strengthened, slacked off, and then became a bit harder, as if he were carefully calibrating the force needed to produce the result he wanted.

...crabby, cold, misanthro-ooh-ohhh...

And Snape laid his palms, somewhat awkwardly, along her jaw.

His hands were warm. The potion didn't feel like much of anything, not even greasy, but his hands were warm. He rubbed her temples for a moment, then slid one hand to her forehead, closing her eyes. His fingertips settled at the inner corners of her eyes, then lightly slid over her eyelids, his knuckle pressed against her brow bone. Then his fingers slid into her hair, loosening the web of tension on her scalp. Hermione made an involuntary noise. Snape stopped.

"Miss Granger?"

"Oh... it's fine... I mean, it's working fine," she babbled. A non-committal grunt and Snape's hands moved again. Hermione concentrated on not making any more noises. The resolution lasted until Snape got to her shoulders. His fingers pinched gently at her trapezius muscle, then he pressed his palms over the points of her shoulders. She whimpered. Snape froze.

"I am relying on you to *tell* me if this is hurting you," he said with asperity. Hermione bit back the sharp retort that wanted to come out. There was something layered beneath Snape's intonation, something almost like fear.

"I'm sorry," she murmured. "It's working very well. *I will* tell you if it isn't."

The silence was uncompromising, but Snape began moving again, down her arms. He was using his palms now, coasting rather cautiously over her skin. But when he got to her wrists, he took one of her hands in both of his, clever fingertips finding and kneading the knot that writing with a quill always gave her. Hermione sighed, quite softly, she thought, but Snape stiffened again, and the silence was sharp and forbidding.

"Sorry, Professor," she said meekly. "It's still fine." The noise Snape made sounded suspiciously like a sigh itself...a rather long-suffering one...but he moved on to her other hand without comment. Then he started back up her arms.

Hermione's practical experience with sex was limited, but she had absorbed a substantial amount of written material on the subject. She vividly recalled taking detailed notes on *That Unmagical Moment: What Muggles Can Teach Us About Sex* (Flitwick, Turpin, et al. London: 1986, pp. 67-8). "The inner surface of the upper arm," she had carefully recorded, "is one of the lesser-known erogenous zones, but its potential for promoting erotic sensations is equal to that of the inner thigh."

It's natural, she told herself firmly. *It's not as if you can help it. It's an involuntary physiological response. You know that. It doesn't mean anything. And Snape knows that. He must be expecting...*

At that point, Snape's fingers stopped prodding at her elbows and curled around her biceps. His thumb drew a line from the inside of her elbow up to her armpit. Hermione... gurgled. Snape's hands tightened.

"Miss Granger, this grows monotonous. Do you intend to imitate a hamster throughout the entire process? If you persist..."

"I'm *sorry*," said Hermione defensively, and angry frustration made her continue, "I mean, it's not as if I can*help* it. You can't imagine that I would*want* to... make... noises... here..." Hermione trailed off. Snape's hands were still on her, tap tap tapping impatiently on the points of her shoulders.

"Quite." His throat clicked dryly.

"I didn't mean... I mean... it's not precisely *you* I mind... Well, it is, sort of... but...*Oh*, this whole situation is so absurd!"

"If it eases your obsessive little mind, you need not imagine that I think your reactions are to anything other than the potion."

"It doesn't ease my mind if you shout at me every moment I... er... react. You must know I can't*help* it."

"Perhaps," said Snape cautiously.

Hermione tried to turn her head to look at him and yelped. Rather muffled by the pillow, she said earnestly, "You do know, don't you? Oh!" She finished more quietly. "This happened to you once, didn't it?"

Snape's hands tightened on her shoulders, and the silence stretched out.

"I will agree not to comment on any... reactions you may have."

"It's not just commentary. I'd still know you're*thinking*."

"I assure you that you do*not* know what I am thinking." There was a trace of panic in Snape's voice.

"Your hands." Snape's fingers were still digging into her shoulders. "I can feel how much you want to yell at me."

"I see." Another long pause. "Very well. I will endeavor to display no irritation with your prudish, puerile, post-adolescent..."

"Thank you, Professor," Hermione murmured demurely.

"I haven't *finished*. And you, in return, will resist that charming urge you have to ask impertinently probing questions." Snape's thumbs jabbed pointedly into her shoulders.

"Yes, Professor."

"And you will further refrain from *thinking* them."

"I can't control... I can't see how you would even know."

"Believe me, I would know," Snape said darkly.

"I'll try."

"Try very hard, Miss Granger." Snape flattened his hands over her back and pressed his fingers unerringly into the muscles of her shoulder. A flood of shivers swarmed down Hermione's arms and over her scalp. She moaned. "Because I consider myself bound by this agreement *only so long as* you uphold your end. So do try not to think too much."

Hermione gritted her teeth. "Yes, Professor." She couldn't really believe she'd just bargained with a professor, with *Snape* of all people. *This Potion must be affecting my mind. Or maybe it's the hex... Ooooh...*

Snape was moving down her back quite gently with clever fingers that seemed to know the shape of her spine, pressing harder on either side, but very softly tracing over the bones. He was down to the dip of her waist; lower... lower... then a long slow slide back up to her shoulders. Hermione swallowed hard.

There was a pause. She felt Snape shift, and his hands were gone. Hermione felt sharply bereft: not pain, exactly, but a loneliness that squeezed hot tears behind her eyes. Dimly, she heard the squish of him scooping up more of the potion. Another shift, and cool, slick fingers were back on her shoulders. The hot tightness in her eyes and throat eased. Hermione had a passing feeling that there was something rather odd about that, but it slid away as his hands began moving again.

Snape pressed and stroked deep touches into her muscles and almost-caresses on her shoulder blades and ribs. Then he dug in rather hard just above her right scapula, and Hermione flinched and squeaked. There was a pause.

"Miss Granger?"

"That's... uh... not a knot. I mean, it is a knot, but it's not a hex knot." Hermione suppressed a manic desire to titter. "It's just an ordinary knot."

"I see," he said. "And do you often have these ordinary knots?" In a normal universe, the line would have been dripping with sarcastic innuendo, but his voice was curiously blank, almost thoughtful. His hand rested on her back, his thumb tracing idly around the edges of the Evil Knot of Death.

"I, well, I guess... sometimes. The worst was my third year." She paused, hoping he would work it out. No good could come of reminding Snape of the Time Turner Incident. "I was pretty much a mass of knots then. Professor McGonagall showed me a charm to use, but it didn't seem to help much."

"The Disangeo Charm," Snape said dryly, "is seldom effective when performed on oneself. Particularly in such an awkward location." A silence. "And how long have you had this knot?" Very softly now.

"Um... I think... since I started seriously revising for NEWTs, I guess. So, November?"

Another long silence, but just when Hermione was expecting him to say something cutting about the Gryffindor know-it-all or simply move on to more magically induced

agonies, Snape murmured a few words and pressed, quite hard, with his thumb. Hermione yelled in surprise, then felt a tingle, a delicious little shiver that started where his thumb was kneading and steadily expanded as he laid his other nine fingers on her, pressing, stroking, finding knots so old she'd almost forgotten them and new ones she didn't even know about yet. Hermione moaned. It felt so good, so very good; the tight mass of tension that always made her feel brittle and sharp was uncoiling, leaving her feeling heavy in the best way and curiously light at the same time.

"Oh...*ohhh*," Hermione sighed reverently. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Snape cleared his throat. "Miss Granger, I hope we are clear that our agreement assumes that you will not recount, speculate about, or otherwise regurgitate these events to your sniveling little... ah, to your friends. Or anyone else."

"Oh. Well. Yes, we are. Clear, I mean. Although I thought that was just for the duration. I mean, I'm not asking you to keep treating me, er, kindly afterwards."

"No. You are not. Which is very wise of you. Because remember, Miss Granger, I know ways to make those knots come back." And Snape dug his fingers into her side just below her ribs.

"Ow! That *hurt*!"

"Did it? Is this better?" He just brushed his fingertips over her side. Hermione twitched, then yelled in pain. He did it again.

"Oh, please don't! Stop!"

"Don't stop?" She could almost hear the eyebrow.

Hermione wasn't usually ticklish. But sometimes, in certain situations, a scattering of spots across her lower back became unbearably sensitive. That those situations were generally sexual Hermione put down to the fact that most of the times that someone else is touching your lower back, the circumstances are sexual. And Ron had always stopped when she yelled at him. But Snape was still stroking lightly, inexorably, making her want to writhe, but the thought of the hex pains lurking just over the edge of perception kept her still, just barely trembling. The effort of not moving and the tingling in her back were fast becoming too much. Then, with a sensation like a full-body shiver, the feeling stopped being unpleasant and transformed into a quivering reaction that spread down her legs and up to her neck in a hot flush. Hermione moaned.

Snape's fingers slowed, stroking more firmly.

"Why, Miss Granger, one might almost think you like this."

Oh, God, thought Hermione. *He's teasing me*. She quivered again, and the fine hairs on her skin prickled under his fingers. It felt *good*. She was on edge, almost twitching, and it felt so... so *erotic*. Then his hands slid down a few more centimeters, and his forefinger was resting right in the triangle of dimples at the apex of her bottom. And his palms...

In her head, Hermione shrieked.

Oh, God and Merlin, Professor Snape has his hands on my arse. And he's... Oh... What is he doing?

Snape's hands slid over her bottom, fingers trailing down the cleft between, thumbs finding and pressing into the creases underneath. Hermione wheezed.

And then it was over. Somehow, the sheet was strategically replaced, and Snape's hands were resting chastely on her ankles.

"Are you all right?" She could hear the trepidation in his voice.

"Fine," Hermione gurgled. She swallowed. "I'm absolutely fine. I mean, the potion is...entirely effective."*Too effective*, she thought desperately. *Physiological reactions are all very well, but I can't be supposed to feel like this. This needy. This wanting.*

Snape began on her feet. Hermione didn't know much about pressure points, but Snape seemed to find more than your average acupuncturist. Hermione felt it in her scalp, down her spine, and deep in her solar plexus. Then he scratched a fingernail down her sole, and her foot curled.

"Better?"

"Wha...? Oh. Yes. Right. Better. Definitely."

Snape grunted noncommittally. His hands cradled her ankles. *Nice hands*, Hermione thought vaguely, hands sliding up over her calves, prickling over the stubble where she hadn't bothered shaving because she hadn't known she would want the Potions master's hands sliding smoothly over her shins.

Wouldn't, she told herself sharply. *Wouldn't want. And don't. Want.*

Except.

Except the slow stroke of his hands upwards focused all her attention on the area he was moving towards. The blissfully languorous feeling his hands left on her skin seemed to intensify the ache, reminded her body that he was moving inexorably closer to a place she really, really wanted him to...*Ack/Don't want. Don't want him anywhere near*, she told herself frantically. *It's simply necessary. There is nowanting here.*

Except parts of her body would not get with the River-in-Egypt program, and between her legs, Hermione was very, very wet.

Snape laid his palms on her lower thighs and pressed upwards. Back down. Then up again, his thumbs sliding up her inner thighs, higher... higher... until he was touching the wetness there. Hermione froze, tensed, and gave a strangled sound of pain and humiliation.

Snape's hands weren't moving.

"Miss Granger..."

"I'm *sorry*," she choked out. "I don't know how..."

"Miss Granger! *Stop* apolog..." Snape took a deep breath. "Please, don't. Don't apologize. We both understand what this is."

Snape's hands hadn't moved.

"I understand, at any rate." Snape sounded determined and grasping for his usual authoritative tone, but kindly, as if to soothe her. "I understand what you are feeling, and believe me, Miss Granger, I will hold to our bargain. I will not judge you, and if it comforts you, I doubt there is anything you could do, any... reaction you could have that would surprise me."

Snape's hands still hadn't moved.

Oh, really, Professor? What if I come all over your fingers? Because if you move them just one millimeter closer, that's what's going to happen.

"Professor," said Hermione in a strained voice, "you need to...." Hermione couldn't say it. She couldn't tell Professor Snape that *he needed* to do something, particularly if that something is induce an orgasm in his student... not if she wanted to remain unexpelled, anyway.

"I need to turn you over." His hands moved then.

A silent scream of frustration welled up in Hermione's throat.

Strong arms slid under her shoulders and waist, eased her over...

"Please, don't try to help me. I assure you that your whimpers of pain aren't adding anything to the ambiance."

...arranged her hair so it wasn't pulling, and grasped the sheet resting at her waist. Snape raised a sardonic eyebrow.

"Do you want me to raise your veil?" He was looking, very carefully, only at her face.

Hermione suddenly realized Snape was still fully dressed: coat, robes, and all. She lifted her chin. And then regretted it.

"There isn't much point. But... I would really appreciate it if you would... take your robes off."

"I beg your pardon."

Hermione raised her own eyebrow. *Surprised, Professor?* "It would just be easier if you weren't... It's a bit forbidding, you know."

"The effect is intentional."

"I just can't with you looking... like that, and me like..."

"I thought that some semblance of my usual role would be more comfortable."

"It's not."

"I see." Snape was about to say something else, then stopped, stood up, and began unbuttoning. He didn't take his eyes off her while he was doing it. Hermione swallowed and stared at his fingers. He shrugged off the robes and his coat. White shirt, black trousers. No surprises.

"Better?"

"Er, thank you."

Snape took out his cufflinks and began rolling up his sleeves. The hair on his arms was very dark against his pale skin.

He settled himself beside her again, and it was just the same, Hermione told herself, except now she was face up and naked to the waist and didn't have anywhere to look except at him, or the bed curtains, but maybe that would be rude. Hermione focused on the top button of his shirt. It was closed just at his breastbone, and a tuft of dark hair showed in the vee above.

Snape put his hand on her chest.

"It's cotton. The buttons are wood. It is an entirely unremarkable shirt, but I am fond of it. Now shut your eyes."

Very gently, Snape traced his fingertips over her eyelids, the bridge of her nose, and her cheekbones. He cradled her cheeks in his palms and slid his thumbs down the sides of her nose, which almost made Hermione sneeze, then traced over her lips, and his thumb pressed just inside her mouth.

"Suck. Don't swallow," he said, voice carefully neutral.

Hermione's eyes popped open. They met his for a split second...they were black, almost all pupil...before his slid away to the side.

His thumb was still in her mouth, on her tongue, and Hermione sucked. She pressed her tongue against the rough pad of his thumb, tightened her lips and felt the tingling bliss of the potion work its magic on the ache in her cheeks. She flexed her jaw a bit.

"Please don't bite me."

"Uhmrmph," Hermione sputtered, but Snape didn't remove his thumb.

"Hermione Granger, unable to speak. I could quickly become accustomed to this." The obligatory satirical eyebrow. Snape cupped her chin with his other hand. His fingers pressed into the points where her jawbones met under her ears. "But all good things, I suppose. Is that better?" He still had his thumb in her mouth.

Hermione glared at him and, acting on a half-formed inspiration, bit lightly on his thumb while rubbing her tongue over the pad.

Snape took his hand away very quickly.

"Just what do you think you're playing at, Miss Granger?"

Hermione wasn't sure, not at all, but she wasn't about to tell him that. The feel of his finger in her mouth had sent a ribbon of electricity straight down her chest. Her heart was pounding hard, her skin, soothed by the Potion, was itching for something, and she just wanted him to *touch her again*. But she absolutely was *not* going to tell him *that*. "That feels much better, Professor," she said carefully.

"Good." Snape's voice sounded strained, and Hermione felt a curious rush of power, coupled with another flush of arousal.

It lasted only until he touched her again. The pressure of his hands on her throat and chest was clinical, almost brisk, and his eyes were fixed on a point to the left of her shoulder. The pain from the hex faded dully, but frustration coiled inside her, and when he scratched her collarbone with his nail, she said sharply, "I think you'd better look at what you're doing. Sir."

Snape put his hands on her shoulders. Silence stretched out. Hermione risked a slewed look at him. He was still staring a hole in the sheet. His face was impassive, but he was breathing heavily. His hands tightened until they were almost rough on her.

"I am *trying* to decide the *easiest* way to get this over with."

Hermione didn't hear the uncertainty underlying his words, only the venom dripping off them. She cringed away from him, humiliation warring with anger. Anger won.

"You can choose what you do, but I want you to stop acting as if this were some ordinary classroom accident you can fix with your usual mix of coldness and contempt.

That can't be all you feel." Hermione faltered. Maybe that was what he felt.

"I am striving to maintain some *distance*, Miss Granger," he said, voice tight. "*Your* reactions may be hex-induced, but we both have to live with what *we* do."

"I can't live with thinking you hate this, that you're pulling away in disgust." Hermione almost spat out the last word, looking straight at him now.

Snape flinched and dropped his eyes. Hermione waited for the roar of fury, but it didn't come. Instead, she felt his thumbs making small, soft circles over her shoulders

"If you really think I hate this, you're not as clever as I've given you credit for," he said quietly.

Hermione swallowed. "I think..." she began in a tiny voice, then gathered her scattered determination and went on more firmly. "I want you not just not to hate it. I want you to... like it." She gulped. "I want to like it."

He looked at her sharply, and Hermione felt a passing concern for Legilimency. But she met his eyes without flinching, and whether because of what he read in her face or in her mind, he drew a quick breath, and then slowly his body relaxed, his demeanor became softer than Hermione had ever seen it.

"So you're willing to live with these memories, are you? *Ofwillingly* giving yourself, losing yourself?" His voice dropped to a murmur. "And of your greasy git of a professor *willingly* taking you?"

Under other circumstances, Hermione might have quarreled with all the "giving" and "taking," but just then her mouth was too dry. She simply nodded, staring at him.

"You are dangerously brave, Hermione. Indomitable Gryffindor." It sounded like an endearment. And the way his voice caressed the syllables of her name made her head spin.

She stared at him. When he took his hands off her shoulders, she quivered and made a tiny, desperate noise.

"Relax, Hermione. And," his mouth twisted, "try not to call me Professor for the next little while." He traced a fingertip down her cheek.

Hermione nodded slowly. Relaxing was harder. Snape's eyes were still on hers, and the content of that look made it hard to breathe.

"You can close your eyes if you like. I've heard Gryffindors prefer rushing in blind." The asperity in his tone, muted but still vivid, made Hermione keep her eyes on his. He blinked slowly, then his gaze shifted down. She stopped trying to relax and started trying not to hyperventilate.

Snape laid his fingers on her chest and drew them slowly down, stopping just at the swell of her breasts. He slid his hands around the outside curves, nudging her arms away and cupping the splayed weight in his palms. It felt intimate and shockingly good. He pressed inward a bit and Hermione drew a choked breath. Then slowly, using just his fingertip, he traced circles around her breasts, spiraling lazily inward and back out, but never touching the tips. After one abortive pass, she made a little noise of dismay.

"Impatient, Hermione?" That damned eyebrow again. She realized her arms had slid up until her hands were touching over her head. As if she was offering herself to him.

"Please." It sounded a good deal more pleading than she would have liked.

"Let it happen." His eyes flicked to her face. "You will tell me if anything still hurts?"

"Yes. Just... please."

"All right," he soothed. He cupped a breast in his hand and pressed up, and then he ran a finger along the crease underneath it. Hermione's nerves went unexpectedly crazy. She writhed as he did the same thing to her other breast. Then he took his hands away. She drew a breath to complain and choked on it when his fingers brushed fleetingly over her nipples. She heard the soft squish of more potion being scooped out, then wet, wet fingers circled her nipples. The skin there tightened, and crinkled, and *ached*. Snape plucked gently at one nipple. Hermione moaned and spasmed, almost knocking him off balance.

"Do be careful," Snape chided. "Or I might have to stop this." He caught her other nipple between his knuckles and squeezed, watching her narrowly.

Hermione's nerves went haywire. She bucked again, but this time Snape was ready. He pressed a hand into her abdomen and looked more than a little smug.

"So, Hermione Granger likes a bit of pain with her pleasure, does she? Oh, the spells I'd like to..." Then Snape shook his head quickly, blinked, and smirked down at her. "But you'll have to figure those out on your own. For now..." He scratched a fingernail carefully around her aureole then pinched the nipple. With another finger, he took a dab of potion and swirled it gently over the tip. The contrast of hard pressure and wet, feathery touches made Hermione cry out.

Snape's eyes flew to hers. "Miss Granger?" He relaxed the pressure fractionally.

"Oh, God, don't stop. Please... more... you have to... please."

"So, there is a way to reduce Hermione Granger to gibbering. Pity I can only..." Snape caught his breath, and his hands stilled on her chest. "A great pity," he finished softly.

Hermione heard the regret in his voice, but vaguely, buried under the electric feelings overloading her senses. Snape returned to his task with fervor, and she wriggled and whimpered as he drew slow, meandering lines of Potion on her upper arms, then sharply pinched the soft skin there and stroked until the mark faded. He traced mysterious figures over her chest and stomach, and they seemed to take on a life of their own, tingling on her skin and stirring the nerves underneath.

At one point, Snape half-bent his head to her breast, and Hermione caught her breath. But he stopped himself, hands resting on the sheet on either side of her chest, eyes shut and breathing heavily.

Hermione stared at the top of his bent head, desperately wanting... something...*more*. He looked up and met her eyes. His gaze was shuttered, focused on something behind her eyes or beyond her.

After a long moment, his eyes came back to her, and there was a gleam in them.

He shifted to her side and reached out to rest a hand on her knee. His fingers curled in the sheet and began to pull. The sheet whispered over her body, down her legs and then off, and all the while Snape held her eyes.

"Do your legs still hurt?" he asked abruptly.

Hermione shook her head slowly. The parts of her body that were still hexed were sending a riot of conflicting messages to her brain, but the prevailing one was want.

"Then open for me."

Hermione flushed, suddenly embarrassed and feeling ridiculous.

"Spread your legs, Hermione."

She inched her legs apart. Snape's mouth twitched, and he moved and settled himself smoothly between her shins.

Hermione stared at him as his eyes roamed over her body, not cautiously now, but with an all-encompassing look of possession. It suddenly hit her that Snape wasn't just shockingly good at eliciting reactions she didn't know she could have; he was also deeply, stomach-quakingly sexual. And the way he was looking at her, with a combination of speculative calculation and barely veiled hunger, held enough of an erotic charge to curl her toes.

He curved his hands over her knees and slid his palms up to the tops of her thighs. Down again, the outside of her legs, pausing to brush his fingers over and over against the back of her knees. It made her twitch, made her legs bend a little, and he was waiting for that. He caught her knees and pressed them back against the sheet, pressed her open.

Another stab of insecurity, and Hermione began to curl away. Snape caught her hips and held her still.

"No, don't do that. I want to look at you. You're very beautiful like this, Hermione. And it is a heady thing to be the first person to see it." Hermione looked at him sharply, and Snape grinned slightly maliciously.

"That look of uncertain expectancy... If Weasley ever had you in this position, I can't imagine he'd know what to do.

"What do you want *me* to do, Hermione?"

Hermione learned something about the potential entwining of sex and anger then, as a stab of antagonism twisted into a coil of arousal inside her. "I need you to make me come. Professor," she said through gritted teeth.

"I could do that, easily," he said silkily. "You're almost there already, aren't you?" He drew a finger up her thigh. Hermione twitched. "You can barely feel the hex anymore, I suspect. All it would take is a quick touch or two, quickly over..."

"No!" Hermione burst out.

"No?" Deft fingertips traced lines and patterns up and down her inner thighs, close, closer, but never quite.

"It's... it's too big... the feeling... inside me... to just..." Hermione trailed off. She flushed hot, and frustrated tears squeezed out of the corners of her eyes. She turned her head into the pillow. Desperate she might be, but there was no way she could tell Snape she could not imagine this ending like most of her forays into masturbation: successful, but not exactly earth-shattering.

A soft touch to her cheek brought her back to him.

"Just feel, Hermione. Shut your eyes and just feel." His voice was as smooth as ever, but the caress of his fingers felt like an apology.

She opened her mouth to say something, but Snape was moving again. He stroked her legs, then took his hands away from her, and Hermione nearly screamed until they pressed low on her stomach. And there, yes, that was good too, her muscles uncramping under his palms, the jagged hex agony there quieted, but deeper inside something coiled tight and pulsed hard.

His hands slid down, separated, and curved over her hipbones. He paused, and Hermione felt the slow surge of her hips into his palms. She was rocking up, into his hands.

When she felt fingers ghosting over her, she twitched and nearly yelped. Then Snape drew a long finger down the crease of one leg, up the other side. He tugged lightly at her pubic hair, then parted it and spread her lips apart. There was a fleeting touch right on her clit, and Hermione moaned.

"Yes, that's it, isn't it?" Then the touches began, around and around, meticulously tracing her cunt, but avoiding her clit. His finger slid down and circled her entrance, and then very carefully he pressed the tip inside her. Hermione stifled the noise in her throat.

"No, don't do that. I want to hear you," Snape murmured, and his finger thrust a bit further inside her. Hermione gasped. The finger stilled.

"Am I hurting you?"

"No. God! You have to... do that... have to touch... please."

Snape's other hand found her clit again, finally, and this time he left it there. Two fingers, pressed lightly against her, barely moving, and another pulsing just inside her. Hermione felt all the tension gathering inward, all the agony on her skin from the past several hours coiling and tightening right *there*, underneath his fingertips. It was overwhelming, but it wasn't enough. The gentle touches were winding her up, making her half-frantic with the need for release, but they weren't taking her there. Then Snape started talking.

"Can you feel that?" he murmured rhetorically. "Can you feel me inside you?" He slid in a bit further. "You are so very wet, Hermione, and just aching for it, aren't you? Balanced right on the edge, but you can't... quite... push yourself over." The movement of his fingers increased infinitesimally.

Hermione moaned, and her hands moved convulsively down.

"Keep your hands to yourself," he said absently. "Ah, there, you like that. Just a little more... Your cunt is flushed very red, Hermione."

When Snape said *cunt*, something in Hermione's brain short-circuited and shot down her spine, and as he murmured the syllables of her name, she began to come in wracking hiccups of spasms that twisted her insides into knots. The waves of orgasm were half-pain, half-pleasure, a convulsive release that went on past the point of comfort, and all the while Snape's fingers moved smoothly, inexorably over and inside her. She was breathing in gasping sobs, and the waves were *still* coming. It was starting to tip over to the side of pain when he stopped.

Hermione lay panting, quivering, her nose running. *I must look a fright*, she thought vaguely. *And I'm shaking, I'm so tired*. But the trembling didn't ease. *Oh, God, I can't... How can this not be out of my system?*

"Prof...Severus?" she stuttered. "I don't think... I don't know... It isn't over. But I don't think I can stand more... of that." She opened her eyes to find Snape watching her narrowly.

"No," he said softly, "it isn't over. But that was for the pain. This... isn't. And I promise you will stand it very well, Hermione."

Snape moved then, and she felt shoulders against the backs of her legs, hair brushing her inner thighs, and. *Oh, GOD...hot breath against her center.*

Hermione choked and tensed. Strong fingers gripped her hips.

"No," he breathed against her. "*Trust me*." And he pressed his open mouth to her. He ran the fingers of one hand up and down, over her bottom and the back of her thighs. Then he used his tongue. It felt indescribable, as if he was licking away all the painful tension left inside her, leaving just warmth, wet, wonderful warmth. Delicious shivers were running over her skin now, prickling lightly on her scalp and the back of her legs and more sharply inside her. A tiny surge of pleasure shivered through her, and she moaned.

As if in response, Snape shifted again, and Hermione felt gentle pressure against her opening, then one long, deft finger slid inside her. Hermione gasped and tightened.

"Yes, that's it," he muttered raggedly. "Come for me." And, oh, God, that voice, not so silky now, but heard and felt against her cunt. The surge washed over her again.

The finger inside her wasn't moving much, but it pulsed hard in her, his knuckles pressed up tight against her entrance. Hardly realizing she was doing it, Hermione began moving with him, hips surging against his mouth and fingers.

A muffled laugh, and then: "Tell me, Hermione. Tell me what you feel."

He wants me to talk? Hermione thought frantically. "I...I...Oh, God... pressure. You...your finger...harder. Please, so close," she babbled. "Just... so close. Just... a little... more..."

Then an errant finger slid over her bottom and pressed gently against her arsehole. Hermione shrieked.

"Yes, yes," Snape almost groaned, and she could feel his shoulders pressing rhythmically against her, knew in the scrap of rational thought left in her that he must be thrusting against the mattress. Then he moved his mouth against her harder and *sucked*. And Hermione's rational thought fragmented.

She realized later she must have screamed, her throat was so scratchy, but at the moment all she thought of was the pleasure, the soaring bliss. She moaned and shook and convulsed against his clever fingers, his mouth. He was sucking on her clit and moving his fingers in time with the waves of orgasm that welled up effortlessly inside her.

Their strength didn't seem to fade, but Hermione felt her mind drifting away. But she'd never been more aware of her body, and even as she slipped away, she felt Snape surge hard against her, fingers and mouth grasping at her, and heard a stifled moan that set off a muted twinge inside her. Then he relaxed into the cradle of her legs, and Hermione fell into darkness to the surreal feeling of him sucking at her as softly as a kitten.

Hermione awoke with the sense that not much time had passed, but she was clothed in a set of pajamas...black...and the room was empty. She thought she heard a shower running somewhere nearby. Hermione swallowed against an unexpected lump in her throat.

Of course he's distancing himself, she thought viciously. *He can hardly do anything else. And he's expecting you not to act like a sniveling schoolgirl.* Hermione sniffed and forced back tears. *He's treated you like an adult... mostly... and he expects you not to turn this into something it isn't. He was just... doing what was necessary... a bit more than necessary, maybe, but still nothing to get emotional over. So I won't. I'm not.* Another sniff. And underneath the layers of exhaustion, she felt a tingling sense of incompleteness and the emotions associated with loss.

Hermione heard a door, and Snape appeared from the bathroom, wearing pajamas like her own. At the sight of him, her skin prickled, and somewhere a bit below her stomach her insides twisted. She suppressed...imperfectly...a groan that came out of nowhere and turned into a desperate squeak. Snape looked at her sharply, almost nervously. He covered it with a forbidding expression.

"Miss Granger, you should not try to move around for the next ten hours. I intended to spend the night on"...a wave of his wand and a camp bed swirled into being..."that, but if your outraged feelings prefer it, I will sleep on the couch in the sitting room."

Hermione made an unintended little gurgle of hurt, squelched it furiously, and turned her head away, blinking hard.

Oh, but that cut, didn't it, Miss Granger? jeered a very Snapish voice in her head. *But what else did you expect? That he would be considerate? Kind?*

A lump rose in her throat. It swelled and, before she could think better of it, bubbled out her mouth in tear-filled words.

"How can you stand there like that, as if nothing happened? You can tell yourself it was just the hex that made me... made you... d-d-do those things," Hermione stuttered, but plunged on heedlessly, "but it wasn't. How can you say these horrible things, as if it didn't mean anything?"

"Miss Granger..."

"Oh," she wailed, "Now, you'll tell me what a desperate, pathetic girl I am and storm out and put this whole nightmarish *incident* behind you!"

Snape opened his mouth, clearly furious, then stopped. He shut his mouth, took a deep breath, opened it again, hesitated, then said cautiously, "Miss Granger, how do you feel?"

"How do I feel?" Tears of fury and frustration in her eyes, clogging her throat. "How do you think I feel? I feel as if I've been electrocuted, pummeled, seared into heaven. I can't control my emotions, and if you don't touch me right now, I think I'm going to shatter." She stopped short. "Oh. *Oh*. It isn't over yet, is it?"

"It appears not... precisely. The hex is gone. But the treatment carries certain, er, side effects..."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" Hermione sniffled.

"Because they don't always manifest, you stupid...Miss Granger," he snapped, "and what would have been the point? We had no choice."

We?

"This side effect," said Hermione slowly, reaching for a calm she didn't feel and making her way cautiously past words that would trigger his temper, "it's not just me that's feeling it, is it?"

"... No."

Hermione digested the magnitude of that admission slowly. "And how long..."

"Typically, as long as you are recuperating." He cleared his throat and continued in a voice wiped of affect, and as careful as hers. "If we do nothing, the effect will fade in a day or two. And you will still be able to leave here in the morning."

"And if we... don't... do nothing?"

"A few hours."

"And what wouldn't we... exactly... not do?" Hermione flushed and swallowed hard against a lump of longing and fear and uncertainty.

"Touch. Skin to skin," Snape said expressionlessly.

"Just touch?"

"Just touch, Miss Granger," he said, asperity creeping back into his voice. "Whatever may have happened... whatever *bid*, this past hour, if not precisely, entirely necessary, arose from the necessity of saving your life. This is... this would be... merely palliative."

And Hermione understood. Such a dry word. Palliative:*for the temporary relief of pain*. And Snape would never, ever ask for the relief of his own pain, temporary or otherwise, any more than he would throw himself heedlessly into relieving another's.

"Professor," she said formally, "would you please get into bed?"

Snape exhaled slowly. For a moment she thought she'd wildly misinterpreted things, but then he sat down on the edge of the bed, took off his slippers, and slid under the covers.

For a long moment, they lay there stiffly while Hermione wondered what the hell to do now and tried to figure out how to frame the question. But Snape, apparently more comfortable now he was over the dangerous border, spoke first.

"Miss Granger, if you would turn over...OW...No, away from me... yes... I will...*Stop squirming*...I will do the rest."

Sheets rustled behind her, but Snape still hadn't touched her, and Hermione felt sharply, fiercely alone.

"Would you," she stumbled, "could you call me Hermione? Please? Just for a little while longer? It would... feel... palliative."

Snape didn't say anything. There was a long moment of silence, then he rolled close behind her. Unerring fingers found the hem of her loose top and pulled it gently up her back. He stopped at her shoulders, and then Hermione, still almost entirely clothed, felt his chest press against her.

He must have unbuttoned his shirt, she thought dizzily, but she didn't think much more than that because her body was moaning*right, right, so right*, and now all she wanted to do, for this moment that might be her entire life for all the eternally planning Hermione cared, was wrap herself in him and sink into oblivion. Crisp hair scratched at her shoulder blades and lower back, and one arm, sleeve pushed up past his elbow, crept around her waist and splayed over her bare stomach. Hermione shivered in delicious contentment and curled further into him. Snape's arm tightened reflexively around her, and she was struck with a vivid sense memory of the final seconds of her climax, the moment before she'd fallen asleep... Snape's attentions suddenly fierce, hands clenching, crying out...

In orgasm, she concluded, belatedly. *Not that that means anything*, she told herself quickly. *Men are aroused more easily than women. Why, Wizards Are From Ganymede, Witches Are From Callisto (Frobisher, Hogsmeade: 1974) devotes an entire chapter to the...*

Snape cleared his throat.

"I would remind you that our agreement is still in effect."

"Oh. Yes."

"I can almost *hear* you thinking," he said pointedly.

"What? Oh, sorry."

Then Snape did something utterly shocking. His arm gathered her closer, and his free hand stroked her hair away from her face until his mouth rested behind her ear.

"You are forgiven. And... thank you."

It didn't mean anything, really, Hermione thought. He would surely be gone tomorrow morning and just as unpleasant as ever after. But right now, in this moment that she wanted to last for eternity, it meant a great deal.

Hermione found his hand resting against the pillow and laced her fingers with his.

"It wasn't just the hex, Severus."

His grip tightened a moment, then relaxed.

"Go to sleep, Hermione."

And, her smile curving against Snape's hand, Hermione did.

END

Note: Phlebotomum, according to internet lore, is the place-holding term used by Joss Whedon and Co., of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for an as-yet-unnamed spell, thingie, or magical whatsit designed to move the plot along in a desired direction.