

Unkissed

by chivalric

2008 Winner for best PWP at the New Library

Harry and Ron play a prank on Snape, but have no idea what actions and reactions it might cause, and who will get entangled in the magic.
This is a sequel to "Valentine Mischief."

Laced Tea

Chapter 1 of 9

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A/N: Dreamy_Dragon: Thank you very, very much not only for beta-reading, but for the comments and most useful suggestions! CharmedForce: hugs to you as well won't let you out of my claws again.

This is set in an Alternative Universe about a year after Voldemort's death. In this version, Harry, Ron and Hermione didn't find out in their sixth year who the Half-Blood Prince is. Dumbledore is alive and Headmaster of Hogwarts.

Although Hermione is of age, she is still a student; if you are offended by teacher-student relationships, please do not continue reading.

This is the sequel to [Valentine Mischief](#). The banner was made by my friend shellsnapelover - thanks, shell, it's beautiful!

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1: Laced Tea

"Told you it'd work, mate he's fidgeting like a five-year-old," Ron whispered into Harry's ear.

The seventh year Slytherin and Gryffindor students were in the dungeons for Potions lessons with Professor Snape, who had decided to take up his old job again after the war had ended the previous summer. As usual, he was wearing his immaculate, forbidding black robes. Quite unusually though, he was nervously shifting in his chair, forwards and backwards like indeed a five-year-old. He did it discreetly; only two students had observed it yet and couldn't take their eyes off the sight.

Harry sniggered behind his hand, and Ron couldn't suppress a huge grin on his freckled face. It seemed as if they had found a way to annoy the Potions master yet again, only three months after their Valentine's mischief, and both boys looked positively delighted about that fact.

It was their last year at Hogwarts, and Voldemort was finally dead, his ashes thrown to the wind. There had been celebrations, there had been feasts, there had been hugs and tears. It had been wonderful, that time right after the war.

The last thing Ron and Harry would have expected was to get summoned back to school to repeat their final year and to sit their final exams to earn their N.E.W.T.s.

Somehow, they had hoped to be free of lessons and homework, and certainly they had been massively relieved to be finally rid of Snape and his Potions classes.

Then Dumbledore had sent a charming letter, letting the students know that the year before Voldemort's downfall had been nullified, and that they would have to come back to school if they were interested in a future career in the wizarding world.

Hermione, naturally, had been delighted. Ron and Harry had been horrified, but then had accepted their fate. They needed their N.E.W.T.s if they wanted to become Aurors, and so they had packed their trunks after the summer break and had headed back to Hogwarts.

"At least Remus will be teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts again," Ron had cheered.

Harry had been looking forward to taking Potions classes with Slughorn again. With the Prince's book in his bag, nothing could go wrong there.

The final shock had come the first day at school when the Headmaster had twinkled at them over his half-moon glasses and told them that Professor Slughorn had retired once more and that Professor Snape, after severe consideration, would allow the students who had already studied Potions under Professor Slughorn in their sixth year into his classes, even if they didn't reach an O in their O.W.L.s. Ron and Harry were left speechless with fury at the unfairness of the world, and that had resulted in a considerable effort to play as many pranks on Snape as possible.

Now they were here again in the dungeons, looking at the dark wizard and disliking him as much as ever. It seemed that Harry and Ron were only able to survive the Potions classes since they had found out that playing tricks on Snape massively brightened their day.

Snape moved on his chair, his traditionally pale face nearly grey today. He was not feeling well, that much was obvious.

Harry, grinning at his friend, concentrated hard he was just adding the necessary counter-stirs to his potion. "Guess it's working, finally," he murmured back. "Twenty-seven, twenty-eight..."

"What's wrong with him?" Hermione's voice came from behind, and the two boys looked at her somewhat guiltily.

"And, Harry, if you don't add that powdered Mandrake soon, you can dump your potion. Didn't you read the instructions?"

Harry chuckled and so did Ron. Both added their Mandrake powder before they cast another glance at the Potions master, who sat in his chair behind his huge desk and was clearly feeling highly uncomfortable. Snape was even paler than usual. His long, black hair, nowadays always clean and most of the time tied into a ponytail, was hanging in lank strands into his slightly sweaty face quite like the old days, really. He shifted his position every other second as if he couldn't sit still, like a child eager to get up to get a favourite toy or desperately needing to use the toilet. Snape's hands, if they weren't forced down to the surface of the desk in front of him, rubbed either along his legs or his upper arms. If left unobserved for a single moment, they just clenched and unclenched over and over again. Nervousness was radiating from Snape in waves, and he was distracted enough by whatever bothered him that he had neither taken house points nor given detention to anyone.

Highly unusual. Highly suspicious. Hermione watched her teacher closely and couldn't help the feeling that he was not only quite uncomfortable but close to panicking.

Harry and Ron grinned even wider and were careful enough not to let the nasty bat of the dungeons see their smirks.

Suddenly, Snape jumped up and started pacing the room like a wild panther in too small a cage. His eyes were fierce, his lips drawn back, revealing his teeth in a dangerous snarl, and when Draco happened to stand in his way, Snape just grabbed the Slytherin's collar and pushed him ruthlessly towards the next wall.

"Ouch!" Draco screamed, sounding more surprised than hurt, but Snape didn't pay him any attention whatsoever. Instead, his head snapped up, and he stared at his students in utter bewilderment.

"Dismissed," he growled, his voice low and dangerous.

"Get out!" he shouted a second later when none of his students made any attempt to leave the classroom. They were too stunned to act.

Hermione raised a hesitant hand. "But, Professor, class started only ten minutes..."

"OUT!" Snape screamed, but then, seemingly ignorant of the thunderstruck faces in front of him, he just swirled on his heels, left the classroom with billowing robes, and slammed the door shut behind him hard enough that Neville's cauldron tipped over and smashed to the floor.

"Wow," said Harry, quite impressed. "Didn't know someone could slam the door that hard maybe he didn't sleep well, what d'you reckon, mate?"

"Cool," Ron breathed. "A free afternoon, just as planned let's go to the Quidditch pitch; I could do with some training." He snatched up his books and vanished the potion he had just started with a quick flick of his wand.

"But..." Hermione said, confused. No one listened to her, though. Minutes later, the classroom was empty save for the Head Girl, who sat still on her chair, wondering.

"What was that all about?" she said quietly, her curiosity piqued. Then she packed her bag and left, lost in thought. What was wrong with Professor Snape and what had the boys done now?

Whatever was wrong with the Potions master was serious enough that he didn't join his colleagues for dinner. His seat at the staff table was empty, and Dumbledore made jolly conversation with Professor Lupin. *Nothing important then*, Hermione thought, strangely relieved. Otherwise Dumbledore would have made an announcement if Snape was in the infirmary or wouldn't be able to get back to teaching tomorrow.

Still pondering this puzzle, she took another apple and bit into it with a crunch when Ron nudged her in the ribs. "At least you could say thanks for the free afternoon we got you," he said, munching on a biscuit.

Harry nodded his agreement. "I think that was the first time Snape didn't finish tormenting us maybe he spent the time on the loo, given the look on his face when he rushed out of the classroom." He peeked at Ron, and the two of them suddenly broke into laughter, spraying food all over the table.

Hermione slammed the apple down on her plate and broke it in two. Instantly, the two halves of the plate vanished and so did the rest of her dinner.

"What have you done?" she hissed. "There is mischief written in big red letters all over your faces, and I want to know exactly what you have done to Professor Snape!"

Harry patted her shoulder in a condescending manner. "Why do you think it was us?" he asked innocently, but still grinning. "Maybe... maybe he has messed with one of his nasty potions?"

Ron pressed his hand to his mouth and giggled. "Or maybe it was a stray hex?"

Hermione had enough. After their trick on Valentine's Day, when they had flooded Snape with roses up to his ears, she had been massively annoyed with them, but hadn't thought they would try to pull Snape's leg again so soon. Of course, they didn't know that Hermione had given the Potions master a single, wild rose that night three months back to let him know that she at least liked him. And had they known, they would have been shocked to the core.

Hermione made a quick decision she needed to know what was going on. When the other students had finished their meal and were leaving the Great Hall, she grabbed one arm of each of her silliest friends and dragged them along until she had found an empty classroom. She not only closed the door, she warded it as well. Then she

turned and faced Harry and Ron.

"Tell me. All of it. And if you think of leaving anything out, be aware of the fact that I can read you like open books. So what have you done and how?"

Now Ron and Harry were shifting uncomfortably.

"Erm," said Harry.

"Umm," said Ron.

It was never a good idea to withhold information from Hermione, as they both knew only too well. And when Hermione didn't stop looking at them *with that* stare, her lips pursed, her foot tapping impatiently, Harry finally took a battered book out of his bag and gingerly placed it in front of her.

Hermione gasped in disbelief and snatched up the book.

"That book! The Prince's book you still have it?" Swiftly, she grabbed Harry's collar and shook him angrily.

"Harry! You... you idiot! How could you... you have no idea who has written these instructions! It could have been a Death Eater, for all we know! Tell me you didn't try one of the spells in there. You... do you ever think before you act? WHAT DID YOU DO?"

Ron, watching Hermione's outburst with a shocked expression, took the book and opened it. "Here, look," he said, tapping on the page with his fingertip.

Hermione frowned; then she let go of Harry and came over to have a look at the page in question instead. Harry followed her a moment later.

"That potion here, see, that one with the handwritten instructions?" Harry said and pointed to the top of the last page. "It's a sickening potion. The ingredients are harmless, we checked. It was easy to brew; it took us less than an hour, and here, see what the Prince has written next to it? 'For distraction'. And Snape you saw him in class. He was just nervous, the way he jumped up and down in his chair. I mean, how bad can it be then, Hermione, eh? He's throwing up, that's all, and we had the afternoon off." Running his hand through his hair uncomfortably, he handed the book over.

She took it and read the recipe in question. Occasionally, she nodded, once she frowned, but she didn't start shouting again. Just when the boys were sighing with relief, they heard Hermione catch her breath and saw her bending down lower as if having a closer look would reveal a deeper secret.

"How and when did you put that into Professor Snape's food?" she asked quietly. "Because this is what you did, yes? You added the potion to his food?"

Both Harry and Ron knew that with Hermione, 'quiet' was similar to 'dangerous'.

Harry ruffled his hair. "We laced his tea this morning," he finally confessed. "We went down to the kitchens. Ron distracted Dobby, who always prepares Snape's tea. You know, that special blend he drinks? I poured in the phial. Wouldn't have worked if Dobby didn't like me so much." He stood shoulder to shoulder with Ron, staring down at Hermione, who was still clutching the Prince's book tightly.

"Right," she snapped after another moment, got up, and stuffed the book in her bag. "A sickening potion. Harmless ingredients. So, what are the Ashwinder Eggs doing in there?"

Harry shrugged his shoulder. "We haven't got a clue what they are. But it is a harmless ingredient. We checked!"

Ron grabbed her wrist. "You won't tell anyone, will you?" he asked anxiously.

Harry had another problem. "Hermione, can I have the book back?" he demanded angrily.

Hermione shot him such a nasty look that he flinched.

"You have no idea what you have done, have you, Harry?" she growled. "The book has increased your marks in Potions; that's the only reason you want it back. And now you have found that potion, considered it harmless, and applied it to someone else's tea without thinking of the consequences. If you had bothered to listen only once to Professor Snape's lessons, you would know that the mixture is very important, and that harmless ingredients when brought together can cause very complex and dangerous reactions." Turning on her heel, she stalked out of the classroom, slamming the door shut behind her.

"Eh?" Ron said, confused. "Dangerous? Complex? It's just a potion that made him use the loo a bit more often so what the hell is she talking about?"

"Don't ask me," Harry grumbled. "Obviously, she thinks that she knows everything since she's working those extra hours with Snape."

Floo Network

Chapter 2 of 9

Hermione knocks on Snape's door, but he doesn't open it. So she seeks out the Headmaster in order to get through to her Potions professor.

Many, many hugs and kisses go to notsosaintly. She knows why.

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2: Floo Network

Pale-faced and worried, Hermione ran downstairs to the dungeons where Professor Snape's private rooms were located at the end of a dark and spooky corridor. She held her bag with the Prince's book tightly in her arms she would need to show the potion's recipe to the Potions master so he could take the right antidote as quickly as possible. Being violently sick wasn't a pleasure.

And maybe this wasn't a sickening potion at all.

Maybe. But maybe not. Most likely not. She had studied the brewing instructions carefully; although it had looked like a potion that would cause severe stomach cramps, she just didn't believe it was.

Because there was that one ingredient that didn't fit. Ashwinder Eggs weren't used in harmless throw-up potions. If at all, they were used... in another sort of potion. But of course, the boys didn't know that and didn't get suspicious. They would have needed to read a book or two that didn't contain Quidditch tactics to know about the eggs. They thought they had made Snape just sick. Hermione believed he wasn't.

Maybe those special projects I'm working on will pay out now, she thought grimly whilst her feet carried her closer to the dungeons. *Maybe it was a good idea after all to accept Snape's offer.*

She thought back to the day shortly after the beginning of term when Snape, for reasons only known to himself, had talked her into working with him on a private project. "Nothing too advanced," he had said, sounding bored. "Just something I could need some help with. And you are at least slightly brighter than the rest of those imbeciles."

Truly believing that he was mocking her, she had declined at first only to remember that the Potions master never joked. He certainly had raised a disapproving eyebrow at her refusal. "If you think you can't find the time," he had sneered and turned his back on her, and that had been what was necessary for her to make up her mind. She couldn't miss an opportunity like this, and she had accepted in order to improve her knowledge. And she had learned a lot.

Only recently, she had found that she quite unexpectedly enjoyed his company as much as the knowledge he provided. And she had become aware of the fact that he had begun to make an effort of not being overly unfriendly towards her. Sometimes he even made her grin with his snarky remarks.

Sometime after Christmas, she had had to admit to herself that she liked him. Which was the reason why she had given him a Valentine's rose and why she now hurried along to... well, to find out what was really wrong with him.

Was it or was it not a harmless potion?

The recipe's ingredients flashed through her mind. "His symptoms just don't tie in with a sickening potion," she muttered under her breath and turned another corner. "His restlessness, his foul temper, that he was so nervous... and if he had felt merely sick he would have simply gone to the infirmary, which he didn't. I checked that."

She could leave it as it was, of course. The alternative to seeking out Snape would be to turn round and go back to the common room, pretending she wasn't suspicious. It would mean allowing an innocent victim to suffer from her two best friends' attempt of poisoning.

Damn Prince, damn book, damn boys, pushing me into such an impossible situation, Hermione thought viciously, and nearly knocked over Neville, who was on his way to Gryffindor tower. *If I'm right and don't at least try to tell him what I know, I won't be able to face myself in a mirror ever again. And if he lets me in, I'm as good as expelled he will never allow me to stay at Hogwarts with me knowing what exactly prevented him from finishing classes today.*

Bugger.

There she was, finally, right in front of Snape's door. Panting, she raised a fist and banged at it without allowing herself to have second thoughts she simply had to make sure that the professor was all right.

She hammered on the wood repeatedly, and after a few moments she started shouting Snape's name.

Useless. He didn't open, and that led to only one conclusion: Hermione was right concerning the potion. He would open to no one, under whatever circumstances, even if she stood here all night long.

"Damn," Hermione swore under her breath, then called, "Professor! Listen, open up, I might know what's wrong with you!" But she had to admit that if she would have been suffering from the potion's presumed effects she wouldn't open the door either, especially not if she were a teacher and knew that on the other side of said door was a screaming student. A female, screaming student.

Gasping and sweating, Hermione considered her other options.

There were none. If Snape didn't open the door voluntarily, she had no hope whatsoever to break his wards. But maybe...

Hermione hesitated; then a determined grin crossed her face. There was another option. She just needed to ask Dumbledore politely, and then she needed to explain to him why she and only she...

Well, let's go, girl, she thought and headed upstairs again towards the Headmaster's office. Luckily, Harry had just found out Dumbledore's new password, so at least seeing the Headmaster and asking him if she could use his Floo wouldn't be a problem.

A few minutes later, Hermione gently knocked at the Headmaster's door and heard his friendly, mild voice call her in.

"Good evening, Miss Granger," he greeted her, sitting in his armchair and sipping his good-night-cocoa from a huge cup. Although it was only seven o'clock, his eyes were a bit sleepy. But then, she wouldn't disturb him for long.

"Professor Dumbledore," she started, suddenly unsure how to begin and how to explain. "I... that is Professor Snape... what I mean is... it is..."

"You might like to sit down, Miss Granger," Dumbledore said and gestured at a chair. "Would you like a cup of hot chocolate? Tea?"

"No! No tea! I mean, thank you very much, but I don't have time, really," Hermione blurted out. "I need to use your Floo, please!" Ouf she had said it, it was out.

Dumbledore looked slightly confused. "My Floo? What's wrong with the Floo in the common room?"

Hermione sighed, then sat down. Taking a deep breath, she said, "I need your Floo because I need to see Professor Snape, and he won't open his door. It is very, very important that I see him tonight. Now, actually. That's why I need your Floo only yours is connected to his; only from here I can enter his rooms." Expectantly, she looked at the Headmaster only to see him frown.

"Is something wrong with Severus?" Dumbledore asked, clear concern in his voice. "I will check on him myself, just wait here..."

"NO!" Hermione screamed.

Dumbledore stared at her, bewildered. "Maybe something is wrong with you, Miss Granger?" he suggested gently. "I will contact Madame Pomfrey. A night in the infirmary..."

If she was right, it would be highly embarrassing for the Potions master if his employer saw the state he was in. Hermione jumped up. "Professor Dumbledore! Nothing is wrong with me; a lot might be wrong with Professor Snape. Nothing dangerous, though, just a bit... delicate. I can't tell you why I have to see him, but it must be me and not you or anyone else. Please, can't you trust me for a change, the same way you usually trust Harry?" She was pleading, and she heard the begging tone in her voice, but silently, she was swearing. Dumbledore was wasting her time, and she was pretty certain that Snape would be grateful for every second she arrived earlier. She couldn't even imagine how unpleasant it must be to suffer from... what she thought he was suffering from.

The Headmaster still didn't give in. "Tell me what is wrong with Severus. You should know that I will always help him whatever his problem is."

Hermione considered her options. "Someone played a nasty trick on him," she said hesitantly. "I don't think he is in danger, otherwise I would tell you. I guess it's a potion that makes him severely sick, and I happen to know that he wouldn't want to see you or anyone else, but I think I know how to... how to reverse the effects, I guess, and so... please, Professor, let me use your Floo!"

Dumbledore stroked his beard thoughtfully and peeked at her over his half-moon glasses. "I really need to know exactly which potion we are talking about," he said sternly, and Hermione exploded.

"You DON'T want to know that, believe me! You definitely do NOT want to know what potion it was trust me, you really, really don't!"

Maybe Dumbledore had seen something in her face or in her huge eyes or maybe it was her words suddenly his eyes widened, and he closed his mouth with a small plop. After a stunned moment of silence, he said, "Ah," in a dubious sort of way and stepped away from his fireplace. "Floo powder is on the mantelpiece," he offered and watched as the young woman took a bit of the dusty substance and threw it into the flames, saying, "Professor Snape's quarters," loud and clear. A moment later, she and her big bag were gone.

"Hmmm," said Dumbledore and settled down to finish his cocoa.

Hermione had never before entered someone's rooms without permission. She had travelled to and from The Burrow, she had travelled to the houses of friends, and she had once travelled inside Hogwarts.

To enter the Potions master's private rooms without him opening the door and asking her inside would have caused her nightmares had she ever considered doing so before tonight. Once, in her second year, she had stolen from his private stores in order to brew Polyjuice Potion she still woke up sometimes, usually in the small hours of the morning, and felt his long, cold fingers on her neck, crushing her to pieces, because in her dreams he always caught her.

She expected nothing less than getting stunned instantly when she stepped out of Snape's fireplace. She figured that he would be sitting in front of it, waiting for her after all, this was the only way into his rooms, and wouldn't he have worked out that she would be determined enough to get in after she had banged on his door for ten minutes?

Apparently not. He was nowhere to be seen. The room was empty.

Absentmindedly, Hermione warded the fireplace against further usage of the Floo and had a quick look round. Maybe he was hiding in one of the corners, searching for a book, maybe he sat on his desk, marking essays...

The sight of the fully blossomed rose that stood in a crystal vase on the desk, half hidden by a big volume, took her breath away. It was of a deep, rich orange streaked with yellow, the leaves dark green, the stalk bent and thorny. The vase sparkled in the candlelight; the rose itself seemed to glow in the darkish room.

The flower was certainly as beautiful as it had been the day Hermione had cut it from her father's rose bush as a Valentine for her Potions professor, but despite the joy he had shown at the sight of it, she would have never expected Snape to keep it, to preserve it with a spell even, to treasure it enough for keeping it at the place where he must spend his days when he wasn't teaching. It was a secret, totally unexpected sign of affection, and it touched Hermione deep enough to make her blush.

Belatedly, distracted by the rose, she became aware of the fact that the room was still empty. *Oh gods*, Hermione thought, *what if I was wrong and he is having a quiet evening out? That would mean I broke into a teacher's...*

A small sound from the door at the back of the living room caused her to turn her head around quickly. Wide-eyed, she stared at the door, saw that it opened, and realised that Snape must have been in the bathroom or the bedroom. Her mind raced; for a moment she didn't know what to do, but luckily, her body took over and decided that it was time to become afraid. Therefore, her hand dug into her bag, rummaged around for a second and found the book. Eyes fixed on the opening door, Hermione pulled it out, held it in her sweaty hands like a shield, hoping dearly her teacher wouldn't rip her to pieces for standing uninvited in his living room.

The door opened fully and Snape stepped out, yet unaware that he had a visitor. His head was lowered, his hair dripping wet, as was his naked chest. He wore wide, soft, dark grey trousers and nothing else.

Merlin! Hermione panicked. *I got everything completely wrong! He just had a shower and... and he'll kill me!*

Then Snape raised his head, and his sharp intake of breath made clear that he was not only surprised but truly not happy to see her. He was shaking slightly; his skin was the same faint blue colour as his lips. Water was dripping from his hair and skin to the ground, soaking the hem of his trousers and leaving small pools on the carpet.

Hermione saw that his hands were clenched into tight fists; she saw his pallid face and his haunted eyes; her gaze involuntarily dropped lower, below his waistline, and she knew with absolute certainty that she had been right. Not a sickening potion. Not at all.

"Out!" Snape breathed, his voice barely audible. "Get out, immediately, or I myself will... I... Don't hold me responsible for anything I do to you if you don't leave right now!"

Hermione held up the book. "I know what your problem is; I know which potion caused it," she whispered.

Snape took a staggering step towards her. "What?" he croaked, staring at the book in her hand. "Where... where did you get *that* from?"

As quickly as possible, Hermione opened the book at the last page and placed it on the huge workbench that dominated one side of the room. "This potion here it was put in your tea today, this morning. I... I found out only recently, and I realised that the combination of the ingredients might... The Ashwinder Eggs... might cause..." She swallowed hard. "It's an aphrodisiac, isn't it? A strong one?"

Snape made it to the table, but barely, using one hand to steady himself. He picked up the book, and Hermione couldn't help but notice that his hands were still trembling. His naked feet were restless as well, which caused her to frown the Potions master was well known for being a master of self-control. That he couldn't hinder his own body from shaking and shifting and shivering and shuffling was a scary sight indeed.

He took the book and stared at the page she had opened. Then he flipped through it until he had found the handwritten note saying that this book was the property of the Half-Blood Prince. Blinking several times, he faced the girl standing so boldly in his living room. "This book where did you find it?" he asked, his voice flat. "This book is mine; this potion is mine. Where. Did. You. Get. It. From!"

Hermione turned pale and her breath quickened. His book? His potion? "You are the Prince?" she asked in disbelief. "But Professor Slughorn gave Harry that book nearly three years ago! Remember, Harry hadn't expected to take Potions with only an E in his O.W.L.s... you were insisting on an O! Then you took up Defence Against the Dark Arts instead, Professor Slughorn taught Potions, and that's why Harry didn't have a book back then. He worked with this textbook during our sixth year, although I told him it might be dangerous. He... Harry's potion skills have reached unthinkable heights since he has followed the instructions in this book!"

"Guess why," Snape sneered, then groaned and moved away from the table, turning his back to her. His shoulder muscles stood out as if he were lifting a heavy weight. Then he laughed, a dry, deep laugh, horrible in its humourless way.

"What an irony," he rasped. "My book, my potion, my own work... will quite possibly drive me mad before the sun is up again. Brilliant the Dark Lord would have laughed his head off if he weren't too bloody dead and could hear about my... misfortune." Then he hissed with pain and reached out once more, putting one hand on the table.

Hermione saw that his nails were blue as well.

"How long have you been in the shower?" she asked, and as he was taken off-guard by the question, he answered her.

"Since late afternoon. Didn't help, though." Another step to get away from her; she saw his back muscles stiffen again.

"Go," he said once more.

Hermione simply accepted the somewhat incredulous fact that her Potions professor had once been a boy and had once owned this book. That he had scribbled in it, that he had left it behind, and that Harry, coincidentally, had stumbled over it. Snape was the Prince no surprise since the corrections to the various recipes were so brilliantly done.

Only this potion seemed to be a really dreadful thing. "Certainly, as this is your potion, you would know the antidote for it?" she asked hesitantly.

"Never bothered to make one," he snapped, his head bent low. "Can't make one now, either too complicated, and I can't think clearly anyway."

"Oh," she said. She hadn't considered this possibility. But then...

"Then... then surely you could... yourself...?" This was a solution Hermione didn't really want to spell out.

"Self-induced release is not an option." Snape's voice became more forced with every minute. "I will manage. Get. OUT!"

Hermione took a hesitant step towards her teacher. She had planned to come here, tell him what she knew so he could help himself only to find out that things weren't as simple as she had thought.

"Listen, sir, there must be something I can do," she offered, not sure what this something might be. "I mean, how long can one phial of this potion last..."

He spun round, sheer terror in his face. His eyes were wide with shock, and he staggered back, nearly tripping over the chair.

"What?" he managed, clearly in pain, clearly not himself, clearly hoping that he had misheard. "A... a whole phial? Someone was cruel enough to... to put a whole... one *whole* phial in my tea?"

"I... yes." What else could she have told him but the truth, although it shook her to the bones to see her professor so terrified by this information.

Snape's legs just gave way. He fell against the wall and slowly sunk to the floor, unaware of the fact that his back was becoming bruised by the rough stones of the dungeon walls. Both arms flew round his midst as he grabbed hold of himself; pulling his legs up, he lowered his head to his knees.

His voice was muffled when he spoke. "Five drops at the most. Five! I knew something was wrong; I knew it was bad, but that..." Terrified, he shuddered and then stared without comprehension at Hermione. "That is madness. A phial. A whole... phial! I cannot stand that. Never. Not on my own. Impossible." His arms tightened round his legs, drew them closer to his chest. Again he groaned, painful and deep.

Hermione was nothing less than scared to death. Madness because of sexual arousal? Was that possible? She had merely thought that the result of the potion might be unpleasant, maybe even very unpleasant, but... real pain?

But then, what did she know of the male body? Nothing, apart from some theories and details from a few well-drawn pictures. And he was in pain, no way of denying that.

The man as this was not her professor anymore, but a man she had never seen in her life before was clearly too far gone for reasoning. He slowly rocked himself, trying to keep control and was losing it nevertheless.

The few things he had told her, though, pointed to a clear path of action. In her mind, Hermione ticked off the points:

1. He was suffering from the effects of a potion.
2. He had taken far too much of said potion.
3. The potion was an aphrodisiac, and there was no antidote.
4. He was aroused well, very much aroused, obviously, and it was bad enough to cause pain.
5. He couldn't find release by either cold water or his own hand.
6. If he didn't find release, the potion would drive him crazy.
7. He had said that he couldn't stand that on his own, which implied that someone else could be of help.
8. She was here.

Conclusion: She would have to take matters in her own hands.

At that last thought a nervous giggle erupted from Hermione's throat. Maybe the wording had been a bit unfortunate... no. The wording was perfect, she realised. *Oh dear*, Hermione thought, shot one last glance at the rose and approached Snape, who was still staring into nothing, eyes wide open, his head against the wall.

His pupils were huge. If his eyes hadn't been black, Hermione was certain that one of his colleagues would have seen that something was wrong long before he had fled to his rooms. He was so very clearly drugged; she couldn't hold him responsible for either his words or anything he had done or said or might do or say soon.

Well, maybe it was up to her to do something. Slowly, she stepped closer and went down, kneeling only a few inches next to him. Hoping a touch might calm him, she reached out and gently put her hand on his skin, expecting it him to be cool considering his earlier ice-cold shower. But she was wrong. "Gods, you are burning," she exclaimed, which earned her a faint but bitter laugh.

"That's the whole intention of this potion," Snape bit out through gritted teeth. "Makes you hot unfortunately, it's meant to be taken only when you have a greedy girlfriend who is complaining about your performance. Or lack thereof, to be precise." But despite his harsh words he leaned against her, searching for body contact, searching for help, unable to hinder himself.

Hermione looked down at him, feeling the heat of his skin through her clothes and wondered if she could do what was necessary. If she was really able and willing to help him. As it was help he needed, and soon.

But she liked him. She liked him a lot. Certainly she liked him enough to help him?

Tentatively, she slipped her arm round his trembling shoulders, wondering if he would push her away.

Instead, he not only allowed her to pull him close, but leaned into her touch, welcomed her hand, hungered for it most obviously. His breath came fast and laboured; his eyelids dropped closed. Hermione realised with a pang that he didn't even know anymore what he was doing getting close to her, urging her on, allowing her to take the

lead.

So she just pulled him to her chest and placed his head on her shoulder, stroking his wet hair out of his face and brushing his cheek whilst doing so.

Instantly, he relaxed; his legs went down, stretching out before him. Both his fists moved between his legs as if trying to beat down his erection.

Carefully, Hermione placed her other hand on his chest, feeling his galloping heartbeat. Free to watch him as his lids were shut, her eyes wandered over his body. *He's so pale*, she thought in wonder. So pale and so lean, and he was trembling so very badly, and all of this was such a completely surreal situation, and he was so very un-Snape-ish in his weakness and vulnerability that all of a sudden, out of nowhere, a tiny butterfly started to beat its wings in Hermione's stomach.

It felt good.

Her hand wandered across his chest, not knowing what to do or what not, and she found that she enjoyed the texture of his skin and the feeling of his long, still wet hair brushing against her throat and chin.

But he was now literally shaking with need, and so he encouraged her hand to dance lower, exploring his pale flesh, and she expected him to jump up and away from her any second.

He didn't jump; he definitely didn't get away from her. Instead, he slipped another inch closer, his weight pinning her to the wall. His hips moved, shifted slightly, and he bit his lip as if to hinder a moan from escaping them.

Is he really that desperate? she wondered when she felt his head pushing harder against her shoulder whilst his body became rigid. With need? With pain? Or both, perhaps?

Lower her hand went. Her eyes were drawn to his mouth, nothing but a thin line in his ashen face; with her fingertips she circled his belly button. His lips parted, just a little bit, and quavered.

Now he moaned, deep and longingly. His fists opened, his hands moved as if on strings. Unceremoniously, he started to unbutton the fly of his trousers.

Hermione could only stare, mouth ajar, at his actions, watched as one button after the other opened, revealing that he didn't wear anything underneath.

He was so obviously desperate for release she was certain that he didn't know where he was anymore, who was with him or what he was actually doing. He acted like his potion-driven body demanded, and Hermione, having made her decision, just gulped once and let her right hand wander deeper whilst her left grabbed his shoulder hard for reassurance. Her eyes, though, flew back from his hands to his face.

But her fingertips... they first touched the waistband of his trousers, halted, then went on, tracing each opened button of his fly. She felt his hands clamped hard onto the fabric of his trousers, nearly ripping them apart as if he was trying to keep control over them so they wouldn't do anything inappropriate. Like grabbing *her* hand, forcing it on, forcing it elsewhere.

Tracing across his hand, she could feel his knuckles standing out, but she still didn't dare to look at what she was doing or where her innocent hand was heading to. Her gaze was set on his face, roaming over his clenched jaw, his eyes, which were squeezed shut in a mixture of pain and desire, the pulse hammering in his throat. She could even see his heartbeat, she...

Her fingers danced another little bit lower, and suddenly, unexpectedly *Am I there already?* they touched moist velvet. *Good gods!* she thought. *That's... that's his cock!*

He groaned again, but it was she who nearly jumped at the contact. Bracing herself, she told her scared fingers to wrap round his erection before she could think this through again, and her fingers obeyed and his hips bucked, once, twice. Then both his hands suddenly clutched hers.

Merlin, he's hard! And she was thunderstruck at the fact that mere flesh could feel like that at all strong, hot, powerful and frightening all at once. But... but... no. Or... Yes? Yes. Definitely yes. It felt good, this part of his body, although it was a strange feeling to have this alien male attribute forced against her sweaty palm by its master's strong fingers wrapped around hers.

She was wondering what to do now that his hands began to move, taking hers along in an entrancing rhythm. Obviously, with her hand underneath his, he considered it now not only possible to find the release he was craving for but mandatory to finally start the process to get there as well.

And then it became utterly impossible not to look, not to watch what she was doing she was giving Professor Snape a hand-job, and it didn't matter that he was dictating how it should be done. Her eyes fastened on his groin, and with a surprised smile she looked at her own hand, for a change not holding a book but being wrapped round the very erect penis of her Potions professor. She felt the steel covered in velvet, saw his foreskin revealing his glans every time their hands moved up and down, slowly, carefully.

Not good enough; not *fast* enough. His fingers squeezed her hand harder round his cock, and his fist sped up her movements. He threw his head back against her shoulder, pushed his whole body against hers; she felt the wall behind her, painfully pressing into her back.

Still he didn't slow down, and his grip became even harder. His face was a mask made of sweat and pain.

Hermione, taken off-guard by all of this, could do nothing but watch in horror; she was even very close to snatching her hand away.

That's too hard I will hurt him; he will hurt himself! The thought sprang into her mind as he held her hand in an iron grip, forcing her to wank him mercilessly, brutally, but before she could slow him down or free her hand, he came. His back arched, thrusting his cock once more into her hand, his whole body shook convulsively, and then he spilled over their entwined hands and his lower abdomen. His breathing was so fast as if he had just won a marathon, and Hermione knew that her fingers would be blue and bruised in the morning, so hard was his fist wrapped around hers.

Bed Time

Chapter 3 of 9

Snape is still under the influence of the lust potion; Hermione is still willing to help.

3: Bed time

Minutes after his orgasm, Snape still hadn't released her hand. And his penis hadn't softened either, although Hermione was certain that this was supposed to happen after a man had had his fun.

On the other hand this wasn't fun for him, certainly not. His breath had calmed down just a bit; his face still wasn't relaxing at all, his muscles were still hard as stone, his jaw still shut tightly.

Silently, Hermione cast a cleansing charm. Carefully, she tried to get her hand back. Hesitantly, she whispered, "Professor?"

Snape's eyes snapped open, focused, found her face, and widened in shocked comprehension. He looked down, saw his fingers and hers on his...

"Damn!" he cried and snatched his hands away. A deep red flushed his cheeks, and he jumped to his feet, both hands now pulling up his trousers, closing them in a highly embarrassed manner. He took a step, stumbled, and landed on one knee. "Damn, damn, damn. FUCK," he hissed, and Hermione couldn't suppress a relieved smile. How comforting to see the scary, fearful Potions master down on his knees, especially as she was so very confused about what had just happened.

"Get. Out!" he growled, and then he startled her by adding, "Please!"

Getting up herself, she hesitated for a moment. She should go, she really should. She should go and seek out Madam Pomfrey or tell the Headmaster. She should let others take over.

But she couldn't. Although she had believed that she only needed to tell him what was wrong with him and be done with it, she couldn't bring herself to leave. She didn't want to leave. Not yet.

Hadn't he said that he would be insane before sunrise without help? Didn't that imply this wasn't over yet, but would go on for a while? And anyway how would the matron or even Professor Dumbledore be of any help if all Snape needed was literally a helping hand?

Silently, Hermione stepped behind Snape and put her hand on his shoulder, fully aware of the fact that with this she was committing herself to stay in his rooms as long as necessary.

I will kill the boys, she thought furiously as she felt the Potions master tremble under her touch. At the same time, she was taken aback by the fact that Snape tried to get away from her, but leaned against her at the same moment. *Hot*, she thought at the touch of his skin. As if he were in a fever. Well, he was, of course. And it was in her powers to help him through the night.

She went down and knelt beside him once more.

He didn't shrug her hand away; instead, he placed his own over hers. Softer, more gentle than before. Hesitantly.

"You need to go," he murmured, but she didn't miss the pleading undertone in his voice. "You have no idea how much danger you are in. I cannot control myself. You can't be here. Go!"

"The way I see it, you have three choices," Hermione said, ignoring his words. "First: you throw me out and according to your own words go mad. Second: you allow me to stay, but fight against me. Third: you not only allow me to stay but... but accept that I know what I am doing and that I want to help you." Carefully, her hand whispered over his burning skin. "You said you can't handle this alone did you lie?"

"No." His face was covered by his hair. "I was given a massive overdose; the result is... dreadful, to say the least."

"So you will allow me to stay?"

He didn't answer, but he neither got up nor did he order her to leave again.

Hermione swallowed. "Will you fight against me? I ought to know if you fight me, if you make this an embarrassment for the both of us, I will need something to drink, a lot actually as I can't stand the thought that I have to force you into something you don't want, however much you might need it. And I don't want to get drunk. I get all whiny when I've had too much alcohol. So will you fight me?"

"I... how... why would you want to stay here?" Slowly Snape worked himself up to his feet, never letting go of the girl's hand. He turned and looked her up and down, arching his eyebrows. His confusion was very obvious. "This is not your call," he said quietly, but couldn't take his eyes off her gently moving chest.

"Well, I guess I could go and drag Ron or Harry down here," she said dryly, and Snape involuntarily took a step away from her. Well, she had to admit the thought was disgusting to her as well she didn't want anyone else down here and certainly not the boys.

Hermione smiled wearily and continued, "And as you clearly can't go to the Headmaster, to Madam Pomfrey, to anyone, really, I don't see who else could be of any useful assistance to you."

Snape's jaw just dropped, and Hermione's smile widened. He obviously hadn't expected her to handle this situation so matter-of-factly.

After a moment of silence, during which she was very aware of his eyes upon her body and face, he asked, "So, Potter and Weasley are behind this?"

Hermione nodded and observed that his skin was of an angry red where her robes had touched him earlier. It seemed that the potion caused skin to react badly to fabric. "Yes, my two absolutely daft best friends have put that potion into your tea," she stated. "But to give them some credit they thought they had brewed a sickening potion."

"That, of course, changes things entirely," Snape snapped bitterly.

Gently, she reached out and wrapped her slender fingers round his wrist. Under the circumstances, touching him seemed the most natural thing to do. "I found out and came here to help you. I didn't know that it would literally mean a helping hand, but as I have done it once already, I see no reason why I shouldn't do it again until this is over. But I need to know if my help is... welcome."

He flinched at her words, clearly at a loss how he should handle this situation. His Adam's apple moved twice in an attempt to reply. "Welcome or not, I cannot accept your help," he finally pointed out and again tried to move away.

She hindered him by not letting go of his wrist. "I want to help," she insisted. "You need help."

A moment later he came closer again, and his fingertips, as if possessing a will of their own, started tracing one of her delicate eyebrows. "You don't know what that means. You are my student, you..."

The sensation of being touched by him was surprisingly nice, and the longing look in his face made her heart leap. No one had ever looked at her as if she were the answer to all his prayers; not Viktor, not Ron, not Harry. No one apart from her Potions master.

Who is under the influence of a lust potion, she sternly reminded herself and nearly managed to chase the little butterfly out of her stomach.

She placed her hand on his naked chest. "Even a student has the right to a private life. I chose to be here after school, after classes. So I'd say, don't look at me as your student but as a... a... well." Deep breath. "A woman who wants to be with you." With those words she shrugged off her robes and revealed plain jeans and a grey sweatshirt, discarding school and books and learning and the words 'teacher' and 'student' to a puddle of garments on the floor.

Snape closed his eyes for a moment, and Hermione could feel him leaning into her touch. And suddenly, a few more butterflies joined the first one that was still happily beating its wings in her belly.

"How old are you, Miss Granger?" Snape asked hoarsely, piercing her with his charcoal black eyes. She could feel his heartbeat under her hand, beating strong and fast.

"I was nineteen three weeks ago. Of age. Free to make my own decisions. And please, for tonight call me Hermione." She reached out her hand earnestly as if she wanted to seal a contract, but she smiled.

After a long moment, he took her hand in his as if it were a lifeline, thus accepting her offer. His voice was nothing but a hoarse whisper when he said, "I'm very sorry for everything I will ask you to do tonight. But without you... I'm doomed."

Her heart stopped beating for a second as fear tried to claim her, but she didn't allow it after all, things couldn't get worse than they already were. And frankly, giving him a hand-job hadn't been that bad. She had never touched a man before, hadn't even kissed Ron properly so far; she had considered the whole business being a lot worse.

Hermione pushed her hair out of her face and then opened the door that led to his bedroom. She took his hand in hers and pulled him on, and he followed, allowed her to take the lead and firmly closed the door behind them.

His bedroom was as dimly lit as his living room, but naturally, Snape would have found the way to his bed even in complete darkness. He forced himself to let go of the girl's hand and collapsed onto the mattress, rolled into a ball and turned his back on her.

This situation is simply a catastrophe, he thought, feeling half-mad with the potion thundering through his veins. *I should end this, now, before I do something unforgivable. I must push that stupid girl out of my rooms....* But instead, he became immensely aware of the fabric of his trousers, which caused his overly sensitive skin to burn like fire.

A few movements, a kick of his legs, and he was rid of them. The cool texture of the soft linen sheets was still uncomfortable, but better than the rough wool of his trousers. Each movement felt awful; nevertheless, Snape pushed the duvet to the ground and pulled just the sheet up to his waist. He nearly screamed when he did where the potion, correctly taken, simply encouraged nakedness, the overdose caused sheer pain when the skin came in contact with anything else but another human being.

Still, there was no need to scare the girl more than absolutely necessary by forcing her to look at his nude frame just now.

The mattress dipped under her weight when she climbed into the bed. After a moment of silence, her whispered words ended a rather awkward moment.

"Shall I... would you like me to touch you?" Hermione asked hesitantly, stunned by her own bravery.

Before she had got into the bed, she had taken one look at him, had observed him getting rid of his trousers, and had taken off her jeans and her shirt as well. Now she was naked, save for her knickers and her undershirt she rarely wore a bra as he obviously wouldn't have been able to stand the touch of her clothes. She could still see where her sleeve earlier had left scratches on his skin.

And strangely enough, she didn't feel as bad as she had expected the last time she had as much as tried to think about sleeping with Ron had been a lot weirder. Not that she was planning to sleep with Snape, of course.

Sitting cross-legged next to him, she looked at his back and waited for his answer she didn't know the rules of this game or healing process or however one would call this yet. Maybe he had agreed not to fight her, but Hermione knew that this wasn't easy for him. He was a proud man, solitary, and very strict when it came to private matters. *This is hell for him*, she thought, *and not only because the potion affects him in such a highly personal way, but because he is forced to depend on my a student's help.*

She had to confess that, at the moment, she was slightly scared to be in bed with Snape. Maybe she had day-dreamed about it, but right now she needed reassurance, needed to know if he really wanted this, and if she really was able to do it. Maybe she would be revolted; maybe she couldn't bring herself to do what was necessary.

"I would like to just touch you, to put my hands on your skin, if you don't mind," she murmured.

His whispered answer came after another long moment. "Your touch is balm for me. I feel like I am in purgatory; only the touch of someone else's hand can bring relief. Your hand."

Right then. She reached out and lightly ran her flat hands across his back, causing him to relax instantly. And she was not revolted.

Maybe a bit of talking would make things a little less complicated.

"So this potion why did you brew it? Who did you hate so much that you came up with such terrible stuff?" Up to his neck, over his shoulders, down to his waist and up again, her hands moved in slow motion. His skin was soft, and his back surprisingly muscular for a man who seemed to spend most of the day in a chair.

Touching him was not only not revolting it felt good. Hermione's eyes wandered to the sheet that covered his body from hips to toes. How strange to know that she had already touched a part of what was covered by the sheet.

Snape gave a bitter laugh. A moment later, he moved a little closer. "It was a birthday present for Lucius Malfoy. I was so fed up with his moaning that sex with Narcissa lacked a certain sensation, and when she complained one evening that Lucius wasn't... lasting very long, I made this potion. I was sixteen I considered it romantic, back then. I should have known better." Relaxing further under her touch, he uncured and rolled over to lie flat on his belly, embracing the pillow so he wouldn't turn and embrace her.

Without thinking, Hermione pushed down the sheet so she could see him uncovered she heard his sudden intake of breath, caused by her shameless action. But he should have known that she always was curious, even under these unusual circumstances. He shouldn't be surprised that she wanted to learn as much as possible about... well, him. After all, it didn't surprise her that much anymore that in less than an hour her world had turned upside down. She was in bed with Snape and didn't think it odd.

Shoulders, arms, back. A pause. Then, briskly, she allowed her hands to lightly brush over his bum in order to reach his legs and felt him tense.

Ah, she thought. *He likes that.*

Calves, ankles, thighs, and back to the bum. There she rested her hands for a moment before she went on, up to his shoulders again. *Nice arse*, she admired silently, not believing that she was actually thinking this.

"And he didn't complain afterwards?" she asked.

"Obviously, if taken in the correct form and dose, it doesn't cause pain but immense pleasure," he murmured, his body humming with desire under her touch and his cock twitching with greed for more attention. "I applied it to Lucius's and Narcissa's tea on a Saturday morning; four drops each. Tasteless, scentless they never knew what hit them until they landed in bed together. I believe two weeks later he proposed to her." His hands grabbed the pillow tighter, his hips began to move, slowly. He couldn't help it.

Hermione chuckled and moved into a more comfortable position, pulling her legs underneath her. Seeing his movement Snape's slow, shagging movement the butterflies in her belly doubled their attempt to get her attention. Suddenly, unexpectedly, she became aware that there was not only a longing in her abdomen, but that she was wet. There was a pulling between her legs, a pulling she had denied earlier, but that by now had strengthened, had even become demanding.

It was impossible to ignore the needs of her body. She looked down at Snape and became aware of her hands on him, felt the muscles in his arse move with the movements of his hips.

I usually don't get wet that easily, not even when I'm alone in my bed with certain books she thought in surprise. *How can it be that I simply touch him and want more?*

"You must understand... the potion... it is awful when overdosed..." Snape groaned, stopping in mid sentence.

Hermione gulped. It was clear what was wrong. He needed her. Now. She saw him thrusting against the mattress and flushed, clenching the muscles in her vagina to get control of the throbbing down there. *What's wrong with me?* she wondered once more, and with a swift gesture pressed both her palms on his buttocks and stilled his movement.

In a moment, she would take his cock into her hands again, bring him off once more. Knowing that, she had to close her eyes for a moment was that really desire that washed through her? Then she took a deep breath and asked, "How long does it take until the effect wears off?"

Merlin, how nice his arse felt. The heat he radiated was delicious.

She saw his hands strangling the pillow and became aware that she was not only simply touching him, but caressing and teasing him. Her hands were kneading his arse, arousing him even more. And he most obviously liked it.

"Twenty-four hours, from the first intake," he rasped. "For me, that means... until shortly after sunrise. I will try to control it, but at the moment... I can't... please!" The last word came strained and urgent in need of release again, in need of her touch. He turned round so she could do once more what he needed her to do, only to go grey with shock at her sight. "You... you are half naked, you stupid girl! Gods, there is no way... You have no idea, you..."

She interrupted him, forcing her eyes to stay focussed on his face. Her hands had moved to his hip bones with her weight, she held him down. "My clothes were hurting you. I couldn't cause you more pain than you were already suffering. So I just took off my jeans and my shirt. I am not naked!" But she was pale herself she had interpreted the look in his face very correctly and knew that he certainly was thinking about something else than just having her hand on his cock again.

Butterflies, more butterflies and wetness. Involuntarily, her eyes were drawn to his midst, to his cock, to the erection that jumped out at her. Immediately, panic hit her *That this thing fits inside me is impossible!*

But those battering butterfly wings that were now beating between her legs how lovely they felt. Hadn't she come here to help? Hadn't she silently, secretly hoped for something different to happen, something special, something well worth remembering? Hadn't she thought about him, sometimes during classes and mainly whilst working next to him at their projects? Hadn't that been the very reason for giving him a rose on Valentine's Day?

Would she back off now, scared, frightened, although he had warned her, had tried to make her leave?

She drew a deep breath and placed her hand on him once more. Her stomach tightened when her fingers wrapped around his length again.

His eyes were glued to her hand on his cock, then they snapped back to her breasts, covered only by a flannel undershirt. Both his hands lay flat next to his hips; then she pulled back his foreskin, and he gasped and bucked, losing control under her unpractised, but nevertheless delicious manoeuvre.

Hermione expected him to thrust into her fist and wasn't entirely sure if she wanted this or something else. For a brief moment, she visualised herself slipping on top of him... Then he grabbed her and threw her onto her back, was over her frighteningly fast, ripped with one fast, strong hand her knickers away as if they were made out of cobwebs, and was, with one hard thrust, inside her before she could say as much as 'wait'.

It happened quickly, and it happened brutally. All right, she was wet; all right, touching him had aroused her as well. She had, only half earnestly, toyed with the idea of sleeping with him.

But this it hurt!

"Professor!" she cried out, feeling his cock sliding in and out of her painfully, repeatedly, like a steel pipe, with his weight pinning her down. Desperately, she dug her nails into his shoulders, shocked to the bones that this could have happened from one second to the next.

Shouldn't have taken my jeans off, it screamed inside her head, and she was hitting her fists now into his shoulders in order to push him off.

Useless, of course. He was stronger, heavier, taller than she. He was driven by desire, by the potion she didn't stand a chance against him.

Suddenly, just as tears welled up in her eyes, he stopped. He was still inside her, but he had stopped moving. She could feel his hot breath on her skin, at her neck, she could feel the damp strands of his hair on her shoulders, and she could feel him tremble with the force to hold back, with the pain to keep still. And when he continued to be just inside her without thrusting in, she opened her eyes.

He stared at her. Shifting his weight only a little bit, he took it off her, leaned on one elbow now and brushed her hair out of her face. His fingers traced the lines the pain had painted round her mouth, touched the corner of her eye and caught a tear.

"I'm hurting you," he whispered, his voice full of sorrow, and she nearly whimpered with relief as surely he would pull back now, would let her go, would...

Slowly he started to move again, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Please, don't," she whispered, scared and pleading, but he didn't stop moving.

Slowly, very slowly he slid out of her. His hand found her breast under the shirt and cupped it easily as his hands were big and her breast small. Gently he massaged it, and this at least felt good, felt wonderful. Not really knowing what she was doing, she used her hands to pull up her shirt, to reveal her breasts so she could feel his naked hand on them.

When he ran his thumb over her nipple she whimpered again, but this time to let him know that he should do that again.

He slid inside her again, in slow motion, as if he weren't mad with the need to come. She expected pain again, and it was there, but this time it was fainter, less persistent.

Out again. His hand on her breast, rolling her nipple into erection; his lips on her throat.

Inside again, deeper this time. He filled her, and she felt her legs spread, although she hadn't ordered them to do so *Oy! she thought furiously. I don't want that, I... oh! Oh, yes!*

His breath came in laboured gasps, and she realised how much it cost him not to just continue what he was doing in his desperate need for relief. His moans near her ear unexpectedly heated her own desire again he wanted her, he needed her, and how could he desire her when she had tried to push him off, when she had screamed, when she had cried? How could he resist just fucking her until he came, no matter how much he might hurt her? Why did he make the effort to give her pleasure as well?

Because that was exactly what he was doing, giving her pleasure with his oh-so-slow movements, with his cock that didn't seem to be too big for her anymore but was the perfect size, was fitting perfectly, was...

Gods! she thought, suddenly not fighting against but moving with him, *Gods, please, don't stop!*

Hermione didn't know what to think anymore. This was overwhelming, him on top of her and inside her. Her legs wrapped round his waist as if they belonged there, and her hands didn't push him off anymore but pulled him closer.

He moved faster now, and in addition to his moans she heard someone else emit small gasps, belatedly realising that it was her.

"Don't stop," she begged, and with her words he came. She could feel it as he spilled deep inside her, shuddered, and lay still.

Hot tears ran down her cheeks, sobs built up in her chest and demanded to get out. It was her body that was shaking now, and his hands that were caressing her. Holding her tight, he just stroked her hair, her shoulders, her back gently, carefully, over and over again.

Between her sobs, she wondered why she didn't run from him. Why she instead enjoyed his touch and the heat his body provided.

Her shivering subsided after a long while and her tears dried. He hadn't said a word to soothe her, and she was grateful for it. He didn't know why she was crying and therefore only could have said the wrong things.

"Did you mean that when you said it's an awful potion?" she whispered into the silence of his arm she lay cradled in.

Snape pulled her a bit closer, his hand still gently stroking her hair. Hermione nearly felt his urge to apologise but what would have been the use of that? She was absolutely certain that he would take her again, willingly or not, and that she was trapped here with him. And as if he had heard her thoughts, he didn't say a word to excuse his actions. He did explain about the potion, though.

"There are two aspects to this potion," he began hesitantly, then continued more firmly, merely reporting dry facts. "One is to enable the man to have an erection whenever his partner desires him; in case a woman takes the potion, she will be wet whenever her partner wants to penetrate her.

"But you took an overdose," Hermione whispered and slid her hand over his hip.

She heard his breath hitch at her touch. Then, he sighed deeply and told her the rest. "Because of the overdose, it will take more than your hand to bring me to climax. A lot more. The second aspect of the potion is to add sensation to the act itself thus the sensitivity of the skin. In other words, making love in only one position or one way gets boring when under the influence of the potion, and release becomes impossible. A certain variety will become desirable, even necessary, which was exactly what Lucius was craving for." Closing his eyes for a moment, he whispered, "But as the most urgent need has been stilled, I will try... I promise I will try not to take you against your will again."

She turned with a quick move and stared at him, wide-eyed.

"You mean... different positions? Different... ways?" She didn't blush. She became pale instead she had detected the hesitation in his words when he had made his promise and was quite certain that he wouldn't be able to keep it. If she tried to go now, she had the feeling that he wouldn't let her. He had already taken her in his potion-induced desire. He had hurt her, had made her cry. In the end he hadn't even managed to make her come.

But then, he possibly had also a very wrong idea of why she had cried.

"You should not be here," he said quietly, confirming her guess.

Hermione saw the self-hate in his face and realised that he had misunderstood her. His clear words hadn't shocked her. In fact, she had always found clear words the easiest way to deal with unusual situations.

"I don't want to be anywhere else," she said firmly, taken by surprise that this was actually the truth. She wanted to be exactly where she was in this man's bed.

Still, it wasn't easy to continue. The words she needed to say were hard to find. "When you... when you... took me... First, it hurt; then it hurt less; then it started to feel... it felt good. Then you stopped. You stopped too soon."

Finally blushing, she bit her lips. "I know you couldn't help yourself, and I know that me being in your bed nearly naked... drove you. It was clear that you didn't want that to happen. And it is obvious that you hate me being here, that you despise being in need of my assistance."

"Don't," he croaked, shocked at her self-accusation. "Don't say that. None of this is your fault, so don't blame yourself for what I did." He wiped the drying tears away from her still wet cheeks. In his eyes she could see the sorrow he felt about his actions. And she could already see the irresistible need to take her again even against her will.

It didn't matter. What he didn't know yet was that she wanted him as much as he wanted her.

She closed her eyes, found his hand and pulled it up to her breast. Stunned, he watched her as she edged another little bit closer so his hand could rest there comfortably. His fingers acted on their own and began to circle her nipple.

With an unsteady voice, embarrassed to the bones, she murmured, "You don't understand when it had stopped hurting, I enjoyed it. I didn't expect it, but it happened nevertheless, and can you... do you think... next time you could... make me... come? Because I nearly did come and... and... it hurt! Not to reach the peak, not to come. You started something and didn't finish it and that... feeling inside me is big and frightening, and crying was the only way to master it. But next time... I'm sure I will break if you don't make me come."

She was talking about a next time so easily, it took his breath away. Never before had he thought about her or any other student in those ways; and never before had he been in such a delicate, awful situation. He didn't care much about women; he didn't care much about sex. Or so he had thought. So he had told himself as every lonely man did in order to be able to find some peace.

And now this girl was here in his bed, and touching her was heaven. Feeling her was paradise. Her fingertips that were now tracing his lips left coolness in their wake, stilling the flames that licked at him.

Snape felt his heart hammering in his chest, felt his blood rushing through his veins and believed for the first time in many hours that maybe he would survive this night without ending up screaming and driven to insanity with unfulfilled desire. The woman in his arms was adorable, wonderful, incredible and she wanted him. She had said so. She was here with him, and she was willing to do a lot more than just use her hands for his benefit.

He should have made her leave, but couldn't.

He would have to take her again, but clearly couldn't do that, either. If he wanted to ever face himself in a mirror again, he couldn't.

He gently touched her cheek. "Whatever you wish," he said.

She took a deep, shuddering breath and freed herself from his embrace, rolling swiftly on her back. Then she closed her eyes and blushed even deeper. "You don't happen to have a salve to put on those bruises you caused?"

Powerless

Chapter 4 of 9

It's getting late, and the potion takes its toll on Snape. Hermione, though, begins to enjoy being in her Potions master's bed.

A/N: My beta pointed out to me that the scene at the beginning of this chapter is somehow similar to a scene in "Care of Magical Creatures" by mia madwyn. I have not read that fic (and therefore didn't nick the scene) but consider it fair to warn you. Please judge for yourself.

@Mia: Now then please let me know *how* similar it is...

□

4: Powerless

Snape knelt next to the naked girl in his bed and carefully avoided touching her with more than his fingertips. His desire had subsided for the moment. The pain had been eased by two very much needed orgasms, and he was able to concentrate enough to do what the girl had asked him to do: apply the salve that would quickly heal the bruises and small chaps his ruthless thrusting had caused. Of course, he was aware of the fact that touching her would arouse him quickly again, but then, this would happen anyway, so he might as well make this easier for her by doing what was necessary.

He had summoned the pot with the salve and had placed himself beside her, looking down at her. She was lying on her back, her legs slightly parted, her eyes shut. She seemed relaxed, and he imagined that she would anticipate his touch. He, certainly, was longing to touch her and was deeply worried that, before the night had ended, he would have her momentary trust in him shattered to pieces by simply being unable to keep control over his need.

She had refused to apply the salve herself. "By the look in your face, I assume that touching me will ease your symptoms," she had stated briskly and had refused to move as much as a finger.

Damn her. Why did she always have to be right? Touching her calmed down his heartbeat, eased his panic that she might leave, and gave him a deeply content feeling about the whole situation.

On the other hand, it made him want her.

Hell, didn't she know what she was doing to him? The sight of her her soft skin, her curly hair, her long, slender legs, her narrow hips, her small, perfect breasts, her light brown pubic hair, the ribs he could see under her slowly moving chest flushed him with lust, and his hands trembled when he dipped his fingers into the salve. His cock was already hardening again; it would soon be screaming for her, but at the moment he managed to ignore it.

Hesitantly, he touched her thigh and began to rub in the salve. Her skin felt cool under his hands.

She sighed with relief when the first bruises vanished under his massage. Her fingers that had clutched the sheets somewhat nervously for the past few minutes went still, and a small smile appeared on her lips. "Feels good," she murmured. "Go on, please."

Even more careful now after this confirmation, he worked his way up, treated each bruise and each scratch with delicate care. They vanished, leaving soft, tender flesh in the wake of his treatment.

Her legs spread just a notch wider. Her nostrils flared when his hand slid higher, and his fingers touched her slightly swollen outer lips. Swallowing hard, he took them between thumb and index finger, squeezing lightly, massaging slightly, and thus applying the salve.

She made a small sound of desire and opened herself for him, revealing her glittering wetness.

Rational thought left him rapidly. Gone was his intention to only allow *her* to touch *him* whenever it was necessary. Gone was the promise that he wouldn't fuck her again. Gone was the memory that not too long ago he had caused her pain. The only thing left was the need to continue.

His right hand parted her, and she moaned. His left wrapped itself round his cock, and he groaned.

Very carefully, he slipped his middle finger inside her, his thumb brushing lightly over her clit. She was lying still, but her hands were kneading the sheets into crumpled heaps. Her mouth was parted, her tongue licked her lips, her nipples were hard. "Mmmmmh," she murmured.

She was very wet, and he slipped his finger deeper inside her. His left hand was moving up and down his shaft, only causing frustration as it was useless, but he couldn't help doing it anyway he was too hard to not at least try to seek release.

A second finger found its way into her tight channel she hissed with pain, and there was even a bit of blood on his fingers, but her hips nevertheless bucked lightly against his hand.

He froze. She was hot and wanted more, and he could think of nothing else but sheathing himself as fast and deep as possible inside her. But she was hurting as well, and he should just apply that damn salve.

And then he didn't think anymore of the things he should do and couldn't do and mustn't do and had to do. Instead, he pulled back his fingers a bit and spread her a little wider at the same time. His other hand found the pot with the salve, dug in, and just a second later he had smeared it over his cock all along his shaft. The tingling sensation the potion ingredients left on his length was highly uncomfortable, but what the hell he couldn't think of himself all the time.

Her eyes were open when he looked at her again. "What are you doing?" she whispered, and he would have sworn he heard lust in her voice.

She moved her gaze down to his cock, then to the pot with salve; then she smiled and reached out a hand. "Brilliant idea."

She found his shoulder and pulled him down on top of her, and he didn't resist. Of course he didn't resist. He was nothing but desire and pain; she was all he wanted and needed.

With the last shred of will he had left, he prevented himself from burying his cock inside her with a quick, hard thrust. Instead, he lingered at her hot entrance, feeling his cock on his own fingertips that were still parting her. His chest hurt as he held his breath, trying with all his might to slow down.

Her hand slipped down his back. One of her legs moved around his hip, her heel dug in his arse and urged him on, and just like that he lost control again. Thanks to her wetness and the salve, he slid inside her smoothly, ignoring her gasp of renewed pain and reassured himself that now the salve would work on even the most hidden parts of her fragile young body.

He started to move in and out of her. Her painful gasping subsided. Instead, her hips started to match his rhythm. He pulled back just a little bit, then pushed again, slightly harder.

"More!"

And again. He had shut his eyes by now, was guided by his cock, and before his inner eye he saw flashlights dancing in the blackness. Where his skin touched hers, where her body enwrapped his, there was pleasure. Where he touched the sheets, or where his skin was just exposed to the air, he felt either a searing pain or a fiery, hellish heat.

He moved faster now, and she moved with him. Both her legs were entwined behind his back, his elbows carried his weight so he wouldn't crush her, and she moaned loudly whenever he thrust harder, more urgent, more demanding.

Her mouth opened. "De-eper!" she gasped, and he did as she wished, fucked her harder and deeper, completely bereft of the power to rein himself in. He just needed to come again, inside her, as deep inside her as possible. He could, thankfully, blissfully, feel his orgasm building up a little bit longer, a little bit more, a few more thrusts...

...what about her?

Snape's eyes flew open, and he believed for a moment that the required strength not to let his lids drop close again would surely tear his brain apart. The dim light of the candles stabbed his pupils, but it had the needed effect: he was able to catch his breath for a few brief seconds to take a look at the girl underneath him.

She was close, so close to her own orgasm, but if he wasn't careful, she would miss it again. Her breath came in harsh, short sobs; her fingers were digging holes in his skin as she met with his against his thrusting hips. He stared at her in disbelief, then remembered with an abandoned section of his usually well-working brain that she had liked his hand on her breast.

Not stopping what he was doing with his cock, he still managed to lower his head to her throat, nudged her chin up and bit her slightly whilst his hand found her breast and his fingers deliberately pinched her erect nipple.

She gasped and came, riding out her orgasm, and it sent him over the edge as well. For the third time since she had entered his rooms through the Floo, he came, and the pain eased once more, the desire temporarily sated, the maddening lust stilled for the moment.

"I will kill them. I will skin them alive, chop them to pieces, crush and grind them into non-existence. They won't see another sunset. When I'm finished with them, nothing will be left but dust. Ashes. A few splinters of broken bones, maybe."

"How about disembowelling them first?" Hermione asked and let her hands wander across Snape's chest. She sat behind him in order to prevent his back from touching the pillow. His head rested against her shoulder; her arms were wrapped around his body. Her legs were spread to make room for him. One of her knees was propped up, and his long fingers languidly traced meaningless patterns on her ankle and calf. Lightly she caressed him, ran her hands through his hair, followed his jaw line, found her way back to his chest. For him, it felt like icy water on the bushfire of his tormented skin.

"Excellent idea," he agreed, leaning into her touch. "In the Middle Ages the Inquisition came up with some interesting methods to convert or punish heretics. I guess I could adopt a few for Potter and Weasley."

His eyes were closed as he deeply inhaled her musky scent. He was relaxed, even his heartbeat had slowed down a bit, a simple pleasure, but much welcomed after the galloping of the past few hours. Sometimes, he had truly feared his heart would break his chest.

It was way past midnight now. The aphrodisiac hadn't lost its power yet, and his need had demanded release many times by now. Despite the current break he was exhausted, worn out, and as his physical strength dwindled, the pain became worse with every breath he took.

Often, she had simply brought him off; nearly as often she had slept with him, had taken him inside her with a desire that matched his own. He still couldn't believe it.

She had come with him, had screamed his name, had whimpered and moaned under his touch, had given herself over more than willingly whenever he had demanded release. And she seemed to enjoy it every moment of it. She really and truly seemed to like being here in his bedroom, in his bed touching him, caressing him. Fucking him.

Impossible.

As he lay cradled in her arms, he could feel her slow and steady heartbeat, hear her breathing and feel the curls of her hair on his neck. He thought how much he hated those damn boys who had driven her into his bed under those damnable circumstances. Because if this hadn't happened, he would still be able to imagine her coming to him of her own free will and not driven by her stupid Gryffindor urge to help even those who didn't deserve help.

Sighing deeply, he ran his hand up to her thigh and wondered if he had ever enjoyed a woman's company as much as he enjoyed hers. He wondered how they would get along after the next morning when the potion had left his system and she had left his bed. And he wondered how he'd manage to get through the rest of the night. He was almost too tired to even talk, and she was in no condition to endure any more sexual attention from him. She was sore; even the salve couldn't solve that problem anymore. There was no way he could enter her again without causing her enough pain to scream out in agony.

"The iron maid," she suggested, interrupting his thoughts, and traced her fingertips across his hollow cheeks and his clenched jaws. "Or the Spanish boot. A bit of whipping would teach them a lesson on not to dose anyone's tea with a potion they don't know, and I am certain we could persuade the Thestrals to tear them apart. Come to think of it how about a dragon? They would make nice dragon food, don't you think?"

"Hmmm," he agreed, one hand on her leg. He was starving, but getting up was not a possibility, and he wouldn't be able to keep any food down right now anyway. "Aragog's children would be glad to have them for dinner as well, I suppose."

Talking about the revenge he would take on Potter and Weasley was a surprisingly joyful conversational subject. But he was so very tired, and every inch of his body was aching. *How long until sunrise?* he thought, and forced some air into his lungs.

Hermione laughed and brought both hands down to his abdomen. In the past hours, she had learned a lot about the man she was with, a man who might resemble the Potions master, but whom she had known in absolutely no way whatsoever before tonight. True, he was still black-haired, black-eyed and pale, but even his physical form seemed to be different the Snape she knew was always towering over her, was always dressed in that forbidding black, and certainly was not a man she could cause to chuckle about a cheeky remark.

This man, the man in her arms, was vulnerable and entirely in her hands. To see him naked, to see the slim frame, the long, slender bones, to have him accept, even enjoy her embrace, made him extremely human all of a sudden. That he was so very dependant on her kept the butterflies flying in her stomach. No, this was certainly not her Potions master.

She had made him come more often than she had pleased herself in the darkness of her room; she had slept with him more often than she had as much *thought* about sleeping with anyone before. And he had made her come, repeatedly, something she hadn't expected at all when she had first touched him. That an orgasm could be so big, so overwhelming, had been news to her. That she could enjoy losing herself in someone else's embrace had been nothing less than a shock as she had believed herself to be someone who would never ever willingly lose control.

She moved slightly and perceived that Severus *when have I started to call him Severus?* had dozed off. With a smile, she very carefully allowed his body to slip to the mattress and got up to stretch her muscles. She eased her shoulders and her lower back, turned her head to the left and right and stretched out her arms. Every part of her body was aching and would ache worse in the morning, definitely after what she had done tonight.

Thoughtfully, she looked down at him. This was wearing him out badly, she could see that. Although asleep, he looked haunted, and his skin was red and sore where, at one time or another, it had touched the sheets or the pillow during their love-making. His back and legs looked worse as if he had been whipped. Even her touch could not bring relief there.

His cock, never less than half hard, was already stirring again, and with a sudden rush of cool determination, Hermione decided that she would indeed find a way to get back at Ron and Harry for what they had done to him.

Following a sudden urge, she bent down and brushed a strand of hair out of his face. She almost brushed his lips with hers.

Instead, she took a step back. She was thirsty, and so she went looking for something to drink. On the desk that stood in the bedroom, she spotted a jug and a glass, and she poured herself some water, which she drank in deep draughts.

She felt so... different. Not like she had felt yesterday, not like she had felt a few hours ago when she had stepped out of the flames right into a possible nightmare. But it hadn't turned out to be a nightmare. Instead, it had become the strangest, most exciting night in her life. She certainly felt substantially older; she felt as if she could face anything from now on.

She didn't feel bad, though, as she had expected after she had first cried out her lust into his neck, after she had first allowed him, begged him to make her come. Surprisingly enough, she didn't want to leave, either. The thought of his cock once more moving inside her made her wet instantly and left her cringing as well, as she was sore beyond belief.

He would need her for another few times, she guessed and rolled the cool glass over her forehead. For nearly an hour now, he had stayed calm, and she guessed that he would need her maybe four or five times more before sunrise would end the potion's cruel grip. *I wonder how we will get on, after this night,* she thought, put the glass down, and went back to bed. Oddly enough, it felt strange to be away from him even just these few steps.

The sheet had slipped onto the floor, and out of habit she bent and picked it up.

An iron grip enclosed her wrist, and she winced in surprise. "Ow!" she exclaimed and shot up, leaving the cover where it was. "What... ow! Let go!"

Snake's hand was clasped around her wrist and nearly broke it. He was awake but dreadfully pale, and his chest, which had moved so silently in his slumber just minutes ago, was now heaving unevenly.

"Don't... leave me!"

The look in his eyes... Hermione's heartbeat skipped a beat when she saw this look. Infinite blackness was mixed with deepest panic, panic about the fact that she hadn't been beside him when he had woken up, she realised. Quickly, she sat beside him, ignoring the pain in her wrist, and placed her free hand on his arm, brushed his lips with her fingertips, then bent lower and gently breathed on his skin. His fingers opened and released her hand, but found their way up to her neck where he entwined them in her hair.

"I'm here," Hermione murmured soothingly. "I just had something to drink. Please, it is all right, I'm here." Pulling both legs up on the bed, she took his arm and placed it round her waist; then she slowly began to move her hands across his shoulders and arms. She could feel his muscles tremble, she could see his heart beat in his chest, and she saw the despair in his eyes.

"This is affecting you emotionally as well as physically," she said softly, tracing her fingertips along his collarbone. "I will not leave you. I will stay as long as you need me. I promise." Her palm cupped his cheek; his eyes fluttered close and he exhaled a long, shaky breath.

"I... should have told you that there's an emotional component as well," he murmured after a while. "It's not only because I need you. It's... I need to feel you near me, close to me. I need to touch you. The thought of you not being here with me... is unbearable. I am sorry."

Goodness, won't those butterflies stop flying sometime tonight? she thought with a smile.

When he had calmed down a bit, he took her wrist between his strong fingers. "I apologise," he said simply. "More bruises I wonder why you don't just slaughter me."

Across his chest her hands brushed, over his ribs, down his arms and up to his neck, then down to his belly and over his hipbones. In the past hours she had learned that her touch needed to be firm and light as well to still the feeling of flames licking all over him. "Those bruises aren't permanent," she dismissed his concern. "And it is very obvious that you can't be without me at the moment. There is no need to apologise. I only wish you wouldn't suffer so badly from the potion."

Then she took his hand into hers and examined it closely to avoid the thunderstruck expression in his eyes. Did he still not understand that she liked being here with him? Hadn't she screamed out often enough by now in his embrace, hadn't she made it clear enough that she wasn't here because she had to, but because she simply wanted him?

Hmmmm. Obviously not, or he wouldn't be so surprised.

She pulled his hand closer and turned it slightly into the light of the candles, adoring the long, strong fingers and admiring the delicate structure of this extremely skilled human tool. She touched every finger, explored the swell of each knuckle and the shape of his nails, teased the small hairs and probed the soft webs between the bones, felt the joints and followed the tiny scars and scratches that preparing potion ingredients had left upon this hand. Touching his hand and caressing it aroused her, she found, and she looked up at him, searching for his face.

There was a sparkle in his eyes and desire and something else. There was a longing that hadn't been there earlier on a longing for more than a mere fuck, she imagined and shivered at the thought. Indeed, how would they get on after this night?

But the night wasn't over yet. He had reacted to her touch, was hard once more, and she was wet for him. Gently, she placed his hand on her thigh so his fingertips could just reach the point between her legs where she wanted to be touched. Even more gently, she wrapped her hand round his length, picking up the slow rhythm he liked best in the beginning.

He sighed, half with relief, half with lust. His hand moved on until one of his fingers slipped into her wetness.

She flinched. It hurt more than she would have thought, and she couldn't suppress a groan.

Instantly, he removed his hand. He stared into her tired eyes, at her creased eyebrows, at the way she was biting her lips. Pulling back his hand, he turned away from her and dug his head into the pillow. His body language screamed with frustration, disgust and desperation.

"This is too much for you. You can't..." he started, but she interrupted him by grabbing his shoulder and forcing him to face her.

"But I want you. You felt it I want you, and I don't care if it hurts a bit. The soreness will be forgotten once you are inside me, and full intercourse will buy you at least two hours of peace."

He sat up and ignored the agony in his tortured back, scrubbing against his pillow that felt as if it was made of barbed wire. "I won't do it." He searched for her hand and, when he found it, pulled it down and wrapped her fingers round his hardness again. He was quite sore himself. The contact with her soft palm was still painful enough to make him wince, although he hungered for another climax. Not letting go of her, he forced her into a faster rhythm in order to finish this as quickly as possible.

She shook her head, snatched his wrist, and stopped him. Still, after so many hours in his bed, he didn't understand that she needed him nearly as much as he needed her. Her whole body was craving him, each inch wished to be touched, every cell of her wanted him inside her and not just in her hand.

"I want you," she demanded and leaning down, brought her mouth close to his ear. "And you want me, too." To ease his immediate pain she continued to move her hand up and down his cock but slowly, gently, not nearly as hard and fast as he needed it to come.

Her mouth was touching his ear now, and she whispered the first words of a spell. An idea had intrigued her, and she wanted to try it, aware of the fact that indeed her vagina was aching too much to harbour his length again. *But his fingers*, she figured whilst whispering, *will be more than enough*. His fingers would be circling, teasing, squeezing her clit whilst his cock would be spilling elsewhere.

She finished the spell only a moment later, feeling his length becoming slick instantly. Simultaneously, his body became rigid he obviously knew the spell, understood what she wanted him to do, and refused.

But at the same moment he tried to move away from her, she felt his cock getting very hard in her hand, felt his pulse shooting up, felt his speeding heartbeat responding to her offer. Maybe his brain said he couldn't do it, but his body said in clear terms that he wanted it. Wanted it badly.

She pulled him over so he was lying on his side and turned round as well, placing her bum right into his lap. Her own heart was hammering a fast staccato in her chest, and her desire had, somehow, doubled. The throbbing between her legs had spread to her back entrance, and lust was now pulsating everywhere between her legs like crazy. To say the spell, to articulate her wishes so clearly, made her slightly dizzy when had she become so shameless?

Ah, yes. In the past few hours that she had spent with her Potions master.

Snape's arm slipped round her waist and pulled her closer. His other hand found its way between their bodies and down to his cock. Hermione could feel it at her back and the lubrication the spell had caused; it was covering his length as well as her waiting bum as he demandingly rubbed his cock against her buttocks. She could feel him stroking himself, heard herself moaning with desire, then felt his tip touching the tender skin between her buttocks.

"Good gods, Severus, please do it," she breathed and offered her bum by pressing it harder against his cock.

Then there were his long, burning fingers, and he used one to find her anus, circling it, teasing it. His hand, slick from the lubricant, became curious, and as carefully as possible he slipped one finger a tiny little bit inside her. That muscle it was tight, and it clenched round his fingers, and Hermione's breath hitched.

"Yes!" she whispered and didn't dare to move in fear of doing something wrong. This was new and different, dirty and wonderful.

Gently, silently, slowly, he pushed his cock into that second, secret entrance that passage she hadn't thought about until recently. She felt the tip of his cock lingering, she felt his fingers searching, then she felt him slipping inside her tight arse.

Admittedly, she had expected pain. But there was none, simply because her spell had worked perfectly and because he was so very patient by entering her and so very slow and most careful not to hurt her. He barely moved, just pressed his hips against her and thus was gliding easily deeper insider her bum.

It felt marvellous. Utterly wrong, somehow completely forbidden, strangely perfect. "Gods... Merlin!" she moaned when he finally began to move, spreading that small hole and the tight muscle with his hard and needy cock. And now she had him where she wanted him, she wanted him to thrust deeper, and a bit harder, and maybe just a nudge faster. He filled her in a way she hadn't believed possible, and she wanted more. Now.

His free hand found her clit, found her wetness, and whilst he fucked her from behind, his clever fingers circled her clit lightly, driving her crazy.

She felt like fainting, or like dying, like flying and crying, and she wished this night would never end.

Her first orgasm washed over her long before he was ready, quickly followed by a second one. Still he didn't stop. She heard herself whimpering his name, observed from a distance that she just moaned, "Yes, Yes, YES!" over and over again. Then she lost contact with reality for a brief, endless moment and came again, this time feeling him orgasm as well deep inside her, moaning and grunting and with his face buried in her hair.

Feeling safe in his arms, feeling him still inside her, she was completely entranced, enjoying the sensation of floating like a feather somewhere outside her own body. And thus, she entirely missed the lightest of kisses he placed on her exposed neck.

A/N: The scene where Hermione caresses Snape's hand was inspired by Laurie King's book "Oh, Jerusalem", featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes. There it is Holmes, caressing Russell's hand. I simply couldn't resist adapting it.

Sunrise

Chapter 5 of 9

The night in the Potions master's rooms comes to an end.

"I think it's quite obvious why slaughter is out of the question here," Hermione said, slightly sleepy and cradled in Snape's arms. Sunrise was perhaps an hour away; their last encounter had given him rest not only for two, but for over three hours. Her back was pressed against his chest; her upper arm was placed on his hip. His breath, a bit uneven, touched her neck and made her smile. He had dozed for about half an hour; now that he was awake again she wanted to hear his voice and feel his attention.

In the long aftermath of her orgasm, in the quiet hours of very early morning, she had forgotten that for him this was a necessity, not something he wanted to do or would have ever considered doing under normal circumstances. She was tired, but in heaven as well. He was beyond exhaustion and as close to hell as possible for a man still alive.

The brutal facts hit her when he didn't respond to her words and instead stiffened under her touch, gasping with pain. She had traced the long muscles in his thigh at the back of his leg; then, she became aware of the fact that he started shivering all over. "What's wrong?" she asked anxiously. Carefully, she turned over to face him.

His eyes were shut, his face deathly pale. "Cold," he murmured. "I'm so damn cold, but if I cover myself I will start screaming."

Hermione sat up, carefully making sure that her hands didn't leave his body at any time. She took in the beads of sweat that stood on his forehead, the muscles that were working in his jaws. Dread was painted on his face at the thought of the next rush of desire that would definitely claim him again before the sun was up.

"I cannot go through this again," he whispered through chattering teeth. "I'm too tired, and it hurts too much. I can't even stand your touch anymore. *It hurts*. Every bloody single little bit of me hurts."

Fear washed over Hermione and took away the sleepiness. Only a moment ago, she had felt completely happy, had felt wonderful, had thought that for a change the night had turned out a lot better than expected; now she felt nothing but guilt at her selfishness. She had enjoyed this so much, every moment of it, and had hoped that for the main part of the night Severus had enjoyed it as well.

But now it had turned into torture again despite her effort to see him through the night unharmed. The dose he had been given wasn't quite killing him, but came close. She could see that he was craving her touch as much as he feared it – a truly demonic mixture.

"Maybe it won't be necessary," she said, reassurance in her voice. "Maybe it's over, maybe you can rest now – sunrise is near. In less than an hour this here will be over."

"Not yet," he rasped and clutched his arms round his shaking body. "You can feel it. I'm freezing, but my skin is still burning. Not... not over yet." He was hunching his shoulders. Hermione heard him grinding his teeth, trying to keep in the pained gasps that wanted to emerge.

Good gods, Hermione thought. *How shall I help him if I can't even touch him?* Desperately, she looked round, sitting as close as possible to the naked, trembling man in the bed. One of her hands rested on his hip, the other was just touching his fingertips so he could feel her being near him. Most parts of his skin looked as if she had scratched him with razor sharp nails for the last hours instead of simply caressing him. Here and there – on shoulder blades, buttocks, legs – blood drops turned up and seeped into the white sheets.

Her gaze fell on something that stood forgotten on the bedside table; the pot with the salve he had used to treat her bruises. For some reason, neither had thought of using it to ease his symptoms, but then, the touch of her hand had been enough for that. Pity that now she couldn't use it as massaging it into his skin with strong hands would send him to hell with pain.

A tiny idea sparkled in Hermione's mind. Slowly, she reached out and took the pot, scrubbing out a small handful of the creamy substance. Collecting it in the middle of her palm, she then concentrated and cast a silent spell, freezing the salve into a small ball of ice.

Snape stirred, searching for her. His eyes were still closed.

"Just a moment," Hermione murmured and put the pot back on the bedside table. If this worked, if she could ease his pain again, she might even be able to find a position and a way they hadn't tried out yet that would guarantee him a satisfying, and hopefully last, orgasm for the night.

But that was for later; first, she placed the frozen salve on his shoulder and ran it lightly and relatively fast down across his back to his hip bone.

The small wounds healed in the wake of her movement. They weren't too deep, mere cracks in the skin, and she didn't need to use force. Snape's hot skin melted the ice; the salve could seep in and ease the pain.

Snape, who had sucked in his breath sharply at the first contact of the ice cube, exhaled with relief and relaxed slightly. "What's... that?" he gasped, and Hermione saw that he had dug his hands into the pillow. She could only assume that he was close to jumping out of bed, fleeing the coldness the iced salve left, and trying with all his might to withstand his instincts. "Cold!" he managed. "But... good. What... what are you doing?"

She smiled. "I had an idea. It's a trick – I froze the salve. I'm sorry that it's so cold, but it heals the worst areas. Can you feel it?" All over his back she moved the ice cube, from his neck along his spine down to his bum and up again until nothing was left – neither salve nor open wounds. *No wonder I healed that fast when he had used it to heal me*, she mused. *This stuff is powerful!*

He couldn't stop shivering. But he murmured, "Go on," and relaxed a bit more.

Instantly, Hermione froze the next handful of salve. This time she took care of his legs, letting the small ball of ice wander over his shins, his calves, and his thighs before she turned him onto his belly and concentrated on his bum and his back. She felt his steady heartbeat under her palms, and she was most grateful that her idea seemed to work, although the coldness of the ice-salve made him shiver even more. Compared to the result, it was a small price to pay. And he didn't complain, despite his chattering teeth. He still looked like he had been attacked with a knife, but at least he seemed to be able to breathe more easily.

In the process of scrubbing the salve out, freezing it, and working it into his skin, her fingers became slick with the melted substance. Tentatively, she rubbed her fingertips together before she began to gently massage his neck. She barely needed to touch him to ease his pain, and with each breath he took, he relaxed more.

For about fifteen minutes she worked on him in silence, applying the salve and reassuring him of her presence with her light touch. He had turned onto his back by then and was lying spread-eagled on his bed, his head slightly tipped to one side. The pulse in his throat was beating a slow rhythm.

But of course this moment of peace wasn't to last. Hermione was just slipping the rest of the frozen salve down his chest when his cock began to stir. Her hands halted, resting on his lower abdomen, and she felt his muscles harden instantly – he had been close to enjoying this, but his cock got rock-hard in such a short time it sent a bolt of pain through his body from head to toes.

Hermione looked at his face, his eyes not only closed but squeezed shut with pain, and knew what she would do.

Very gently, she wrapped her creamy fingers round his length and began to stroke him, knowing only too well it wouldn't work. She had done that too often in the past hours – as much as he had liked it, the potion still demanded variety. Giving him another hand-job wasn't an option anymore, but luckily she knew that and was certain she would find a way to send him over the edge once more, only once more.

Hermione caressed him lazily. "Don't move," she told him. "I will do what is necessary. Just... enjoy it."

Without hesitation, she settled her fingers at the base of his shaft. What she was about to do she had wanted to try hours before. He had hindered her, clearly too embarrassed to allow her to do it. Yet she had seen how much he had wanted her to do it – therefore, she now slid down to his waist, adjusted her position so that she was comfortable, bent down and swiftly closed her lips round the tip of his cock.

As he was in no condition to move anymore, not even his arms and hands, he was not able anymore to hinder her. But his hips bucked once, and he gave a low, raw gasp.

Hermione's right hand moved up his length again and pulled back his foreskin, revealing the silken texture of the head. Tentatively, she allowed her tongue to caress him, to circle around that round, strange part of his cock, to follow the thin slit at the top. Hard it felt, that head, and soft as well, and it was not at all like the other skin on his body or even on his penis. She flicked her tongue. Then she carefully sucked, just to find out if he liked it.

His moans became louder.

Her hand slipped lower and rhythmically began squeezing his testicles. Simultaneously her lips, always covering her teeth, applied a certain pressure whilst her tongue danced on him.

"Goodness," he murmured. "Good... grief!"

Hermione smiled at this confirmation that he indeed liked what she was doing and was surprised at the same time how easy this was and how good it felt. For some reason, from the things the girls in her dormitory had told her, she had expected a blow job to be somewhat disgusting, something that needed a certain effort to overcome a bit of revulsion. She couldn't see why the girls had said that she was intrigued by the feeling and the power she had over him simply by satisfying him with her mouth, her lips, and her tongue.

But then in the past hours in his bed she had felt his tongue inside her, had allowed him to taste her. Back then, she had been entirely in his hands and she had loved it. Maybe that had changed her view on certain things? He had nothing less but demanded to taste her, to feel her, to explore her in every possible way. His hands had been everywhere, his cock, his mouth, even his breath, and once she had had the incredulous, impossible feeling of his mind melting with hers.

Hermione considered it only fair to have him at her mercy now, to have him come in her mouth.

She didn't move much, didn't get closer although she wanted to, as she knew he wouldn't be able to endure it. But her tongue and her lips and her caressing fingers were enough to make him groan loudly. His hands searched and found her head and buried themselves in her long locks, holding her lightly, but determinedly, down at the level of his groin. Hermione found this strangely arousing, being pinned into a position so delicate and intimate, and out of nowhere came the thought, *I bet I can make him scream when he comes.*

How dirty a thought; how intriguing an idea. How shocking that she, Hermione Granger, would come up with such plans.

In the past hours since her first orgasm she had been loud, had repeatedly screamed with lust and desire. She had hungered for him, and she had made it very clear that she wanted him as much as he needed her. Discovering the simple fact that she not only enjoyed having sex but especially loved *his* touch and *his* full attention had come as a shock at first, but she had accepted it more or less immediately because well, because sleeping with him had been and still was so very, very good.

On the other hand, he had held back his emotions. He had moaned and groaned, had never allowed to lose himself in her embrace and had bitten back every audible sign of his orgasms. She had seen that it had required a lot of self-control, especially under the influence of the potion, and she had disliked it. She not only wanted, but needed to see him lose control; she wanted him to be as much at a loss for words after his climax as she had been after hers. She needed to be certain that this night was as special for him as it was for her, and her instincts told her that if she allowed him to keep control, he would be nothing but her Potions master again in the morning. And that was unacceptable for her.

Then make him scream, her mind whispered.

Her fingers, still slick from the salve, sneaked on silently and nearly unnoticed while her tongue and her lips were teasing his cock. They went between his legs and lightly stroked the area underneath his testicles and continued onwards to touch the inside of his buttocks.

Obviously, that was enjoyable as his groans became deeper and because he parted his legs, spreading them to grant her better access. A moment later, he bent one knee and slightly moved his hips so that her hand could caress his buttocks.

Her right thumb was massaging the sensitive bridge between scrotum and bum. She could feel him shiver and prayed it was not from cold or fatigue. She hoped he shivered with anticipation that he knew what she was up to and wanted her to go on.

Her lips curved when she took his length deeper in her mouth and flicked her tongue faster. There was a bit of liquid on the tip of his cock, not her saliva, but the first sign of his orgasm. It tasted a little salty.

His hips rocked gently, thus allowing his cock to slide in and out of the dark cave of her mouth. The muscles in his arse moved under her hand, and when he moaned again, using his bent leg to push upwards into her mouth, she momentarily tightened her grip on his bum.

"Yes!" he whispered, and it was her now who trembled. This time he wouldn't be able to stay silent.

Another flick with her tongue, another stroke with her fingertips. She felt his grip on her head tighten only so slightly, urging her on. And so she slipped one deft, creamy finger deep into his anus.

"Gods!" he roared, and she let a second finger immediately follow the first one. The strong muscle in his arse clenched round her fingers, and then he bucked violently against her hand.

She pulled her hand back, then pushed again, pulling and pushing in an endless rhythm, each time driving her fingers deeper inside him.

His hoarse scream was music in her ears. She sucked him with her mouth and fucked him with her strong, slender fingers, vaguely hearing him begging for more, and therefore, delighted, she gave him more.

Many long moments later he came, spilled his bittersweet semen into her mouth, and was loud enough in the release of his lust to wake up every single student at Hogwarts, had his rooms not been warded by silencing spells.

Hermione's eyes were closed, and a delighted smile curved her full lips whilst she rested beside him, the fingers of one hand entwined in his. As light as the butterfly wings that still danced in her stomach, she traced his eyebrows with her fingertips, found the corner of his eye, then whispered down across his cheek and past his mouth to his throat where his pulse reluctantly was getting back to a slower rhythm.

His eyes were open, although she could see in his face how immensely tired he was. More than tired. Exhausted. Done. Finished.

But he didn't look haunted anymore.

"What have you done to me, girl?" he murmured softly.

Her smile deepened, and she opened her eyes, looking back at him. Slowly, a hint of red crept into her cheeks.

"I thought... I wondered if you would like it," she said and blushed a bit deeper. Half expecting a scowl, she was nothing less than thunderstruck when he flashed her the first smile she had seen on his lips during the entire night. It was not only very unexpected, but surprisingly charming as well, changing the hard features of his face completely. For a brief moment she saw that he was not at all the sarcastic, sardonic, unfair, cruel, demanding teacher he impersonated under normal circumstances,

wasn't even the man anymore who had desired and taken her. She suddenly saw the boy within the man, a boy who just had experienced a miracle first hand.

The butterflies in Hermione's stomach vanished; instead, they got replaced by a strange, wonderful pain, flooding her body and claiming her heart. It was powerful enough to take her breath away.

She didn't see Professor Snape, her Potions master. She saw a stranger in the bed lying next to her, a stranger who was too weak to move, too tired to talk, too exhausted to touch her. A stranger with a smile that made her wish she could stay.

Stroking this stranger's cheek with her fingertips, she wanted nothing more than to stay with him.

His breathing became deeper, his eyes dropped closed. "Hermione. Wish I could tell you..." he murmured. And in the next moment he was asleep.

Hermione's eyes widened. "What? What do you wish you could tell me?" she pressed in a low voice, but nevertheless urgent. She wanted to shake him, wake him. She sat up and hoped he would feel the movement, would pull her down again.

His chest was moving in a slow, regular, deep rhythm, and she knew her hopes were in vain. He wouldn't answer her, he wouldn't wake, he wouldn't tell her to stay. He was gone from the world for the next few hours, and nothing she could do would change that fact.

She nearly cried. She so very badly needed to know what he had wanted to say. The thought that she had to go nearly strangled her.

But a few minutes ago the sun had come up. Their time together was over.

Her Day, His Evening

Chapter 6 of 9

Snape and Hermione are having a talk.

Hugs to my two wonderful betas, Dreamy_Dragon and CharmedForce.

Special thanks to notsosaintly. She still knows why.

□

6: Her Day, His Evening

Hermione felt strange when she got up and stretched she expected his hand to reach out to her, pulling her back to bed, and was somehow disappointed when he didn't.

"It's over," she said firmly, but not too loud so she wouldn't wake him up.

Then she looked at him and smiled. Lying on his back with his arms spread wide over the sheets and his mouth slightly ajar, he was snoring softly. Dryly, she stated, "Well, you sleep like a dead man. I guess even shouting in your ear wouldn't disturb your slumber. Sweet dreams, Professor Snape!"

As she had no business anymore in her Potions master's rooms, she assumed that it was time to leave. Somewhat reluctantly, Hermione took the blanket she hadn't managed to pick up earlier and pulled it over Snape's sleeping body, seeing him shivering with cold even in his deep sleep. She hoped that his skin wouldn't react so bitterly, so very aggressive anymore to the soft fabric now that the potion had left his system. "You will need a really good healing charm if you want to be able to so much as get up later," she told him and heard with surprise the fondness in her voice.

Then she shook her head. Frowning, she wondered why she was talking to Professor Snape as if he could hear her or as if he would be interested in her opinion even if he were awake.

"Each of his reactions was potion induced," she sternly told herself. "When he wakes up, he will be nothing but the terror of the dungeons again, and I'm his most hated student. He possibly will expel me for what I've done and for knowing too much."

Briskly, she stepped away from the bed and went to the fireplace. It was cold and empty as warmth would have meant torture during the night. But now a fire was due. She piled a few logs and lit them. She was satisfied only when she felt the flames sending heat into the room he would need the warmth to sleep comfortably. And only when she turned to him and saw his features soften in the light of the fire was she willing to leave Snape's bedroom.

In the living room she lit a fire as well and then looked for her abandoned clothes before she remembered that she had taken them off in the bedroom. So she went back, took another look to check if he was still asleep, picked up her jeans and jumper, and tiptoed out even slower than before.

Outside, she was just about to get dressed when a thought hit her. She dropped her clothes on the nearest chair. "I reek of sex," she stated to no one in particular. "It's impossible to leave, smelling like this and looking like... like having spent the night in Professor Snape's bed."

A view down her front confirmed her worries: there were various bruises on her hips and her waist, on her thighs, even on her knees. His hands were strong; his desire had been stronger, and his fingers had left visible marks on her body. Of course no one would see her naked in the near future, but there were bruises on her forearms, her wrists, her neck and her throat as well. She needed to check those more thoroughly in order to be able to hide them. She needed a mirror.

And she needed a shower.

Hmmm. She could combine both needs by using his bathroom. And it would give her the opportunity to stay a bit longer. Although she was pretty sure that this night had meant nothing but pain and embarrassment for him, it had meant a lot to her, and she hadn't yet a clue how to deal with it or her feelings or the longing to go back to the bedroom, taking another look at the man sleeping there.

Damn. It wouldn't be easy to go on as if nothing had happened. To see him in class again, to endure his sneers and his nasty comments, to hand in her homework, seeing his hands holding the quill instead of caressing her breast...

"Stop thinking about him!" she scolded herself, went into his bathroom and refused to admit that she was glad about the delay in leaving her professor's rooms.

His mirror revealed that his hands had been everywhere on her as well as his lips and his mouth. *And his cock*, she thought, having a hard time suppressing a lascivious grin that wanted to spread on her lips. He had taken what he wanted, and she had enjoyed it – no point in denying it. But still, she needed to do something about his marks on her skin.

A scarf would be a good idea; so would be very long sleeves until she had found the recipe for the salve to vanish the bruises. And she would have to remember to get undressed in the dark so the other girls in her dormitory wouldn't see the proof that the Head Girl had been very naughty indeed.

"Shower," she reminded herself and put her clothes on a small chair. His bathroom was small – bathtub, shower, sink – and only very few personal items were visible. Toothbrush and toothpaste, of course, a hair brush, and shaving items. A deep purple dressing gown was hanging behind the door. And the towels were of the darkest black: soft, huge and fluffy things, perfect to warm up a body after a nice, long shower. Actually, the towels as well as the dressing gown were big enough to even cover two people. If two people were to take a shower together, that was.

Oh, gods, Hermione thought and stepped into the cabin. *Getting over this might be harder than I considered at first.*

She turned the water on and sighed contently when the hard, warm beam hit her head, soaked her hair and relaxed her shoulders. For some minutes she just stood and let the water massage her, the soft patter washing her thoughts away as well. Then she searched and found the soap.

Sandalwood. The fragrance was very nice, and the thought that she was in her teacher's shower whilst the teacher in question was sleeping naked in his bedroom just a few steps away made her shiver.

"Stop it. Don't think about him," she murmured and took the soap. Creamy foam bubbled in her hands.

Resolutely, she turned off the water and started to wash herself. She had the strong feeling that – if she wanted to quench certain romantic feelings before they fully blossomed – she would need to wash off the night's events, would need to erase his fragrance on her skin, would need to cleanse herself of his semen that was sticking on her legs and which she could still taste on her tongue.

"The last thing I need is to fall in love with him," she whispered into the water. "*I can't* fall in love with him – this was just one night, born out of need and pain, and if I allow my emotions to run wild, there won't even be the chance of friendship between us!"

A tiny voice tried to get noticed, but was ignored. It wanted to say 'It might be too late', but of course that was ridiculous. She was not in love with Snape. Professor Snape. Severus.

Unfortunately, she realised only a moment later that the touch of his soap on her naked skin, combined with the pictures of its owner's nude body, didn't help much to forget what had happened.

She was wet, and it wasn't because of the water she had turned on again.

His hands on her head. The velvet texture of his cock. The power she had had over him. She remembered him trembling under her hands and trembled herself at the memory of it.

"Now that's ridiculous," she said aloud to the tiles. "I've had enough sex for a lifetime!"

So what were her slippery fingers doing between her legs? The area between her legs was in no condition to welcome fingers, slippery or not!

Her fingers, though, didn't listen to her, and actually it seemed as if she weren't as sore as she had thought. Her other hand had decided that gently rolling the nipple of her left breast was a good idea.

How cool the tiles were, how warm the water, how wet her entrance and how longing for release she was. Before her inner eye she saw *his* black eyes staring into hers whilst thrusting inside her. And her fingers urged on and her legs parted only a bit, and it didn't really take long to send herself off, moaning and groaning, thinking of Professor Severus Snape.

Oh, hell.

It took her a few moments to catch her breath again afterwards. "Damn," she stated and washed her hair with his shampoo. "Not only did I just pleasure myself in Professor Snape's shower, using his soap, but I did so and came whilst thinking of *him*!" Severely annoyed with herself now, she stepped out of the cabin and started drying herself with rough and careless hands.

And what the bloody hell was her nose doing now, searching for his scent in his towel? "Stop it!" she nearly shouted, tossing the towel into the next corner and running out of Snape's bathroom towards her clothes, towards safety, towards normality. Surely, when she was dressed this would be over, once and for all! Hopefully, when not naked anymore, her usually well-working brain would stop insisting that she should think about Snape, Snape, and Snape again!

She dressed hastily, but found that she was indeed quite sore and the fabric of her knickers not soft enough to go well with the tender places it touched. The sight of the chair behind the desk with its hard wooden seat caused her physical pain when she imagined sitting on it. *Guess I should give up chairs and benches for a little while*, she thought with a grin.

Right then, time to leave. *Just a quick check if everything is all right with him.* But she was somewhat taken by surprise when she found herself standing *again* in front of his bed.

He had turned in his sleep. She couldn't see his face anymore, but only part of his shoulder and his dark hair, reaching halfway down his back. She seriously considered getting undressed and slipping into bed with him, snuggling up closely, bathing in the heat of his body.

She had reached out her hand already, touching the blanket, when she realised that it was a really bad idea, this thing she was about to do. "Out! Get out – that's the last thing he wants, you getting sentimental over something that meant nothing to him!"

This time she got as far as the front door when she considered that she might have to come back here in order to make sure he was... well. Fine. Still asleep. Not relapsing. Whatever. She quite possibly would need to come back. And she decided that she couldn't leave through the front door anyway – how absolutely impossible if one of the students saw her leaving Snape's quarters at half past six in the morning!

Back via Floo then. Back to the headmaster who needed to know if his Potions master was still alive anyway. Back to face the man who would at least be slightly suspicious, seeing her at that time of day and knowing where and with whom she had spent the night.

Twisting her damp hair into a bun at the back of her head, Hermione considered that problem for a moment or two. Well, she would simply lie to him. She would tell him that Professor Snape had been too sick to be left alone, and that he was now asleep. Partly true, anyway.

Before she left, she altered Snape's wards, which was always easy from inside the warded room. Now she would be able to come in through the front door. When no one was around to watch her. "You are lingering," she hissed at herself and resolutely stepped to the blazing fire, found some Floo powder, and surprisingly enough, managed to leave Snape's rooms without further delay. It had only taken her a bit more than an hour.

Dumbledore sat in the same armchair as the previous evening when Hermione arrived back at his rooms.

"Good morning, Miss Granger," he said in his friendly voice, but looked at the young woman sternly over his half-moon glasses. "Please take a seat. I would like to hear about Professor Snape's condition." He gestured to the big chair that stood in front of the fireplace.

"No thank you. I prefer to stand if you don't mind," Hermione answered shortly. She wanted to get out of here as quickly as possible. But she took a step towards the headmaster. "Professor Snape is asleep. I doubt he will wake up any time soon. He won't be able to teach either today or tomorrow."

"Is that so?" Dumbledore said more mildly. "You know, I was seriously concerned about your words yesterday evening and decided that I should check on Severus myself. Imagine my surprise when I found that you had warded his fireplace. I truly wondered why you did this. Maybe you would care to enlighten me?"

Hermione looked straight into his eyes. Usually, she would have quivered with uneasiness, knowing about the immense power of the headmaster beneath his friendly exterior. But after last night, she found that he wasn't that scary anymore. "Professor Snape asked me to do so," she lied blatantly. "He was grateful that I had information about the potion that made him sick and didn't want to be disturbed. With my help he brewed an antidote. I decided to stay and make sure that... that everything was all right."

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "It was of your own free will that you stayed in Professor Snape's rooms? He didn't... force you? Or prevented you from leaving?"

He knows, Hermione thought, feeling surprisingly unimpressed by it. "Yes," she said coolly. "I stayed because I wanted to stay. Professor Snape even ordered me to leave. I declined his wish he was in no condition to be left alone. And as I am old enough to make my own decisions, I think you have no right to question my actions. Headmaster."

Dumbledore got up and turned his back to her. "You are an extraordinary and most loyal witch," he murmured. "I must admit, I did not expect you to care for Professor Snape."

He thinks I'm lying. It was obvious to Hermione his words and the way he spoke them betrayed him. Wondering vaguely if he would use Legilimens on her to find out the truth, she stared at her headmaster's back and really didn't know if she would dare to draw her wand if he attempted to do so.

He didn't. Apparently studying his books, it took him many minutes to remember that she was still standing behind him. Finally, he said, "I sincerely hope Severus will recover from the potion he was given. You may go, Miss Granger."

She sighed deeply. "May I please be excused from classes, at least in the morning?" she asked as relief made her knees weak. There wouldn't be a confrontation. Stifling a yawn, she explained, "I'm sorry, but I would surely fall asleep."

"Certainly," Dumbledore answered, still not looking at her. "I will inform Minerva and Rubeus."

Hermione was out of his rooms before he could think of some more questions to ask.

There were students everywhere as breakfast was about to begin when Hermione passed by, heading for Gryffindor Tower. Inevitably, she bumped into Harry and Ron.

"Mione!" Ron called, his mouth occupied with an early toast. "Where have you been? We were looking for you!"

"Didn't you sleep well?" Harry asked and eyed her tired face suspiciously. "Don't tell us you worried all night over Snape!"

Hermione stared at her two best friends and couldn't match their questions to the events of last night. Those two realities simply didn't fit. She opened her mouth to tell them that she felt unwell when Ron said, "We've been doing some research. We've found out something about the potion we slipped the greasy bat."

Hermione nearly dropped her bag in surprise. "Research? You? What's wrong with you, are you ill?"

"Oy!" Harry said and grinned. He took her arm and pulled her into a quiet corner. "After you scolded us we went to the library and checked up on that one ingredient, you know, the Ashwinder Eggs? We found out that... you know... that..." He chuckled too heavily to finish his sentence.

Ron took over for him. "Sometimes rarely they're used in aphrodisiacs, Hermione! Bet you didn't know that! We didn't brew a sickening potion, but made Snape... erm... horny!" His face turned crimson, and he couldn't suppress his laughter. Clearly, he considered the image of Snape craving for a woman as too ridiculous not to laugh one's head off.

"Really," Hermione said quietly. "How funny. See you later, boys."

Clearly confused, Harry and Ron stared after her. "Now what's wrong with her this time?" Harry said, and Ron shook his head. "Dunno, mate, dunno. Maybe she doesn't know what an aphrodisiac is?"

Up to her dormitory, drawing the curtains of her bed close, getting undressed, hitting the pillow, and then sleep that was Hermione's plan, but it didn't work out. She found her bed, she did get undressed, she even lay down and pulled the duvet over her tired body, but sleep wouldn't come. Her friends' words rang in her ears together with their laughter, which was one part of the problem. She knew they wouldn't keep it a secret for long that they that someone had laced Snape's tea with a lust potion. It would be most humiliating for the professor if they started babbling about it.

Not if. When. They certainly would talk. And it could very well cost Snape his job if somehow the rumour would spread that not only had he been given an aphrodisiac, but that he hadn't been alone the night he suffered from the consequences. Harry and Ron only needed to put two and two together, and they would guess in no time that she had been with Snape during the night in question. Obviously, they both would attack Snape immediately, assuming the worst and not bothering to ask her first.

And Dumbledore already knew that Snape hadn't been sick, she was certain of it. If there were rumours, he couldn't afford to support his Potions master as of course everyone would assume he had forced her, had raped her.

Additionally, there was the problem that whenever she closed her eyes, *he* looked at her with that damn cute, surprised smile on his lips and with those black eyes that could sparkle so mischievously. Squeezing her tired eyes shut didn't work, hiding under the duvet didn't work, tossing and turning didn't work, and after half an hour trying to get some sleep, Hermione gave up and got dressed again. Slowly and carefully and choosing especially soft underwear.

Obviously, she went to the library to find a nice book and to do some homework. Strangely enough, the thought of attending classes didn't cross her mind at all.

Hermione had a favourite desk in the library, and this was where she headed, settled down and enjoyed the silence that enwrapped her. Sunbeams had found their way in, and dusty little stars danced in the light. It was warm, it was peaceful, she felt safe and sort of at home. She had to write an essay for Professor McGonagall, and her Arithmancy homework was due tomorrow. She only needed to decide what to do first.

Wonder if I can find a healing spell, she thought and went to search for the book she needed. As she knew every volume personally, it didn't take her long to locate one that dealt with injuries of the skin, caused either by hexes, curses, illnesses or potions. Finding the right spell and copying it only cost her another few minutes. Dealing with her fury that she couldn't get Snape out of her head cost her half an hour.

Then she came to terms with herself. As the day had started oddly enough *With a shower down in the dungeons and other interesting things* she would just go with the flow even if it meant that she would end up in his quarters again. She was a very thorough witch, she had to give that to herself; therefore, she couldn't leave business unfinished. He needed the healing spell. He would need something to eat, later. She even couldn't be certain that her professor was all right, so she would make sure that he was.

And she hadn't dealt with Ron and Harry yet, either *Disembowel them*, shot through her mind and, *Find a dragon*.

Then Hermione's eyes fell on her bag that lay forgotten on the floor next to her favourite table and an even better idea, better than anything Snape had come up with concerning the boys whilst lying in her arms, jumped at her out of nowhere.

A wide grin full of malice crossed Hermione's usually so friendly face. She snatched up her bag, stuffed the piece of parchment with the spell in and headed for the dungeons the one place where certainly no student would be found today as Dumbledore had surely announced during breakfast that Professor Snape had been taken ill and wouldn't return to work before Monday.

When Snape woke up, he felt as if a large, unfriendly wardrobe was sitting on his head, hopping up and down playfully and crushing his skull to pieces. *Ouch*, he thought wearily and with tremendous effort managed to open half an eye to peek at the clock: ten to eight.

Must be Tuesday, he thought with a brain that wasn't really up to thinking yet. But he had figured out that, as his clock hadn't woken him at half past five as usual, it surely was the one day of the week where he didn't have to get up before sunrise.

He felt lousy. Actually, he felt as if he was dead. *Hangover*, he guessed. *Big, bad hangover. Big, nasty, monstrous, awful hang...* "Why do I have a hangover?" Snape muttered and forced his other eye open. "I don't drink. I hate firewhisky. I don't go out on Mondays. Or any other days. I don't drink alone. Therefore, I don't have hangovers."

Fighting with the duvet, he won after strangling it and then beating it down to the ground. Groaning, he sat up and rested his aching head in his hands. "Ouch," he murmured and nearly allowed his tired body to slump back to the mattress and drop off to sleep again. Only the fact that he was starving kept him awake.

He opened his eyes a bit wider and stared at his bare legs.

Naked legs, naked chest, naked everything; he wasn't dressed at all.

Bugger. Had he missed something?

"I never sleep naked!" Good Merlin, and his voice sounded as if he had been tortured rough and hoarse, unfamiliar and faint. "Crucio?" he wondered as that would certainly explain why he felt like a three-day old corpse. It didn't explain, though, why he was in his own bed naked. Each time the Dark Lord had been friendly enough to bless him with his attention, he had always made it up to the infirmary afterwards, not collapsing before he had reached Poppy's caring wings. And he had always been dressed, before, in, and after the infirmary bed.

So no Cruciatus Curse had caused his headache and the loss of his clothes. Hmmm. Strange.

And besides hadn't there already been one Tuesday in this week? The Tuesday two days ago when he had given detention to an entire class for general inappropriate behaviour?

But, but... if today wasn't Tuesday, but Thursday, and if it was indeed nearly eight o'clock now... then this meant that he was late for classes! He, Severus Snape, who ripped everyone into pieces who dared to arrive as much as a second late, not to talk about half an hour!

"What's going on here?" Snape hissed, swung or rather wobbled his legs out of bed and heaved himself into a standing position.

Bad idea. Very, very bad idea. Actually, getting up was definitely not only a bad idea, but a lousy one. In front of his eyes colourful stars were dancing, his head was close to exploding, his legs didn't feel much stronger than wet spaghetti, and he generally wished he hadn't woken up at all.

But there were too many mysteries to unravel. So Hogwarts' Potions master fought hard to keep standing and won.

He swayed slightly. Warmth brushed his naked skin. Puzzled, he turned and stared into the flames. Had he lit the fire? And if yes, why he didn't remember doing so or putting new logs on? "Strange," he muttered and went to search for his clothes.

Just when he couldn't find his robes and was about to become really suspicious, his eyes fell upon a pot that stood on his bedside table. "You don't belong there," he sternly told the pot and picked it up to check its contents, in vain, though, as the pot was empty. Only the slight whiff of chamomile gave it away. A healing salve? What was *that* doing on his bedside table?

All of a sudden and still staring at the pot, Snape became highly aware of certain areas of his body.

First, he blushed all the way from his head down to his toes. Then he dropped the pot as memories came rushing back, reminding him which specific healing salve had been in that specific pot, and what exactly he had done with it.

The next moment he nearly fainted when he remembered *what else* had been done with the salve. He wanted to swear, but couldn't get his mouth to open as his inner eye chose this moment to present him with the memory of who had used the salve to do things he hadn't even dared to dream about.

Snape fled into the shower and hoped that the hot water would wash away those memories, those dreadful, catastrophic, highly erotic memories. The pictures of the girl underneath him and on top of him and beside him and him taking her and her giving him a blow-job whilst... whilst...

"Fuck. Oh goodness grief, damn fucking fuck. Shit! Fuck!"

Snape turned the water on and tried to drown himself.

Leaning his head against the cool tiles, the Potions master fought the memories of last night. His inner clock had caught up as well: it wasn't eight in the morning, it was eight in the evening, and he had slept all day in the aftermath of a countless amount of orgasms, reached only with the help of one of his students. A student he had forced to give him a hand job as soon as she had entered his rooms. A student he had raped. A girl who had come willingly into his bed and had done things to him he hadn't imagined possible. A young woman who had refused to leave, and who had found immensely satisfying ways to ease his potion induced desire.

"You perverted bastard," Snape groaned into the water that pattered on his head.

As soon as he had suspected that he had been slipped a potion, he should have gone to Poppy. When he had found it impossible to continue teaching, he should have asked for help. But he had been too stubborn and far too embarrassed, had thought he could deal with it even when it had been quite obvious that the potion in question wasn't a potion that could be found in a schoolbook. Or in Advanced Potion books. Or in any book at all he had searched in.

Defeated, Snape sunk to his knees and hung his head, his wet hair touching the tub, shampoo dripping from his eyelashes and the black strands. What he had done to this child was unforgivable, no matter the circumstances, no matter the madness that had rushed through his veins at the time. He now remembered his fear clearly not to be able to look into a mirror ever again if he kept her in his rooms. Now he had to deal with the fact that it was a lot worse than that he wasn't even able to face himself without

a mirror.

Slowly, he managed to get up again, rinsed out his hair, and washed himself mechanically. The hot water vanished his headache, but he stepped out of the shower like a beaten man and fished for the towel, which wasn't where it always was, but lay instead in the corner of his bathroom. One step and he had picked it up, wondering how it had come to be there, went to dry his face and smelled her scent in the fluffy fabric.

The fact that she had taken a shower here hit him like a hammer. Wide-eyed, he stared at the towel, then at the cabin, then pressed his face into her scent once more, her scent in the towel, mingled with his. The thought that she had dried herself with this very towel made him dizzy, made his head spin, made his heart jump. She hadn't stormed out of his rooms as soon as he had fallen asleep. She had taken the time to shower.

Maybe... maybe she didn't hate him too much.

"Sentimental fool," Snape said tiredly when realisation dawned. He knew his own heart only too well. He was used to being nothing but hated, feared, disliked and despised, being called the nasty bat and greasy git. Over the years, he had built a wall around his heart so no one could come near him and had forgotten that each wall has a weak point, and that his weak point was a smile, given willingly. He had forgotten that something as small as a smile could break that wall, simply because no one ever smiled at him. He had ignored the fact that such a smile, if cast at the right moment, could get directly through him the very moment his stupid heart was unguarded and vulnerable.

And she had smiled at him, last night, at the perfect moment. And as he had been extremely vulnerable, his silly heart had opened to her.

"A pervert, an idiot, a bastard and a fool you are, Severus. Well, that's nothing new." Dropping the towel, Snape embraced the self-disgust that washed over him like an old friend and went to get dressed.

Soft grey trousers, a very soft flannel shirt, thick woollen socks, and on top his dressing gown he was cold to the bones, still very tired and hungry on top of it, and all he wanted to do was to sit down and forget what had happened. Unfortunately, this wouldn't be possible as he would have to summon a house-elf to get him some food. There was no way he would leave his rooms any time soon. But the house-elf would tell Albus that he was awake. Albus would storm into his rooms instantly to fire him for getting intimate with a student as, surely, she would have told the headmaster every detail of his crime. Actually, Snape wondered why he wasn't already here in his rooms, fuming Albus could Floo in at any time. Headmaster's privilege.

If the fireplace wasn't warded, that was. And his fireplace was warded, Snape realised only now.

Hermione had made sure that Albus couldn't disturb his sleep? Quickly, Snape checked the wards at his front door and found them altered so that not only he could get in, but someone else as well. Someone female.

Hermione had altered his wards so she could come back without using the headmaster's Floo? Why the hell would she do that?

Confused, Snape dropped into his favourite armchair near the fireplace. Flames danced happily, shedding heat. *She's been here, not too long ago*, he realised. And at the same moment as his back touched the back of his armchair, he figured out something else: that he shouldn't be able to sit down so easily, to lean back without wincing with pain. When he had fallen asleep, his skin had been burning red, even after she had applied the salve. Under normal circumstances without magical support it would have taken days for him to heal, but apparently he seemed to be... fine.

Holding up his hands, Snape inspected them and found them looking pale as usual. Then he pushed back the sleeve on his left arm. Looking closely, he traced a muscle from wrist to elbow, expecting the searing pain he remembered from last night. But there wasn't any.

Experimentally, he flexed his shoulders, leaned into the pillow on his back. Fine. It felt a bit unpleasant, but all in all fine. Come to think of it, if he weren't fine, the towel would have had him screaming with pain given the harshness with which he had rubbed himself dry.

Impossible. Only a specific spell would have sped up the healing of his skin, and only Poppy would have known that spell... But then, the girl was a bookworm. A know-it-all. Someone who knew the library by heart.

Snape's hands grabbed the armrests as something very close to hope stabbed his already severely upset heart. Hope that maybe she not only didn't hate him, but cared for him.

It took him several minutes to persuade his stupid heart to calm down again. When it was beating regularly, his eyes fell on the small table next to his armchair, and his jaw dropped.

Oh, yes, and his heartbeat raced on at galloping speed.

On the table was a pot of tea, covered with a warming spell, a plate with sandwiches, and a letter. The tea was not his usual blend, which had been immensely thoughtful of her as he would have vomited at the sheer smell of it. The sandwiches were massively welcome as he was ravenous, and he devoured them all but one in just a few bites. The letter told him that she had indeed cast a healing spell, that she hoped he had slept well and felt better, that she had made the sandwiches herself so no house-elves were involved, and that she would pop in to speak with him in about another hour. And the headmaster thought it had been a sickening spell he had suffered from. Signed: Hermione. Just her given name as if they were... close.

Snape sat for another few minutes and drank his tea. Then he summoned a house-elf something he had been afraid of only moments ago, but which had now become mandatory after he'd read the letter and told him to get the headmaster down to the dungeons as the Potions master needed to talk to him.

"Severus," Dumbledore greeted him, "you look absolutely terrible. That must have been one nasty sickening potion, my dear boy."

"Good evening to you as well, Albus," Snape replied sourly and gestured at the chair opposite his. "Take a seat. I need to talk to you, but first I want to know what Miss Granger has told you about last night's events." His voice was cool and controlled, betraying none of his emotions; if there were any emotions he possessed at all, that was.

Dumbledore looked at him for a long moment. What he saw troubled him: his Potions master was grey with fatigue, although he had slept all day. He seemed exhausted, and in his eyes there was a haunted look Dumbledore had never seen before, not even when Severus had been tortured by Voldemort.

"Miss Granger told me that you had been slipped a sickening potion," he said, carefully studying Snape's face. "She said she found out coincidentally which exact potion it was, insisted on seeing you, refused to show me the book in which she had found the potion, and reappeared in my rooms around seven this morning. I must admit, I was... suspicious, to say the least."

Snape didn't say a word. But he wasn't surprised that she had lied.

"She said you told her to ward the fireplace?" Dumbledore asked.

"I did," answered the Potions master and met his headmaster's inquiring eyes squarely. He wouldn't tell Albus that the girl had been lying it was unnecessary.

"She said you had been too sick to be left alone. She said she stayed because she wanted to stay. And she swore you didn't do anything... inappropriate whilst she was

here."

"Of course I didn't," snapped Snape.

Snape expected Albus any moment now to accuse him of lying.

"You won't tell me the truth, Severus, will you?" Dumbledore stated gently.

Black eyes stared into blue ones. Snape just shook his head. He knew that Albus wasn't believing a thing either the girl or he had been saying. Still, telling the truth was not an option it would only compromise the girl and force Albus to take measures no one wanted him to take, not even Albus himself. Snape hoped that Dumbledore would be able to rein in his curiosity and leave things be.

"I need a favour, Albus," Snape said, when silence had stretched a bit too long, and went on without waiting for a reply. "I can't teach the girl any longer. I need you to arrange for her to take Potions lessons and eventually her final exams either in Beauxbatons or Durmstrang. From next week on."

Dumbledore took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose, his eyes closing at Snape's words. "As she worked closely with you, what explanation would there be for an action like that?" he asked wearily. "Everyone would guess that she either did something terrible to you to earn such punishment, or suspect that a highly personal problem occurred between the two of you. I suppose you don't want either rumour to spread."

Snape sighed deeply, most thankful that his friend didn't press him to reveal the truth, although he probably suspected it. "I've thought about that," he said. "Beauxbatons' Potion mistress owes me a favour; if I ask her, she will lure the girl into one of her highly advanced projects. She usually only allows her best students to participate, but the girl is most brilliant. That Beauxbatons would want her is therefore more than likely. It wouldn't be seen as punishment, but as a reward for one of the best students Hogwarts has ever seen. No negative rumours would spread, and it could ease the girl's way into a possible career. And the project she's been working on with me isn't that special Beauxbatons is the better choice for her. You just need to pull some strings, break it to her parents, and make it clear to her friends that this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for her she can't refuse to take."

"Why are you doing this, Severus?" Dumbledore asked quietly. "Do you fear you...?"

"Look at the table, Albus," Snape interrupted.

Dumbledore took in the tray on which one sandwich was left, the pot of tea, the piece of parchment, and raised an eyebrow. "Did she...?"

"Yes."

"So she cares for you, then," said Dumbledore after a moment of silence. "I see. You want to protect her. Well, if you insist..." Then he got up and placed a light hand on his friend's shoulder. "I will do what is necessary, Severus. But I doubt it is the right choice."

"It is the only choice," Snape said and closed his eyes whilst Dumbledore left, listened to the beats of his aching heart, and waited for the knock on his door.

It came not too long after Albus had gone back to his office, and for a moment Snape considered ignoring it when he remembered that she was able to let herself in he hadn't bothered to readjust his wards so far. "Come in," he called and shook his head at the faintness of his voice. He should sound stern, strong, maybe a little furious. But he didn't. At the moment, he didn't sound scary at all.

She opened the door slowly, obviously a bit taken aback that he was actually up and about. Well, up and sitting in a chair that was, but definitely awake.

"Good evening," she said after she had closed the door behind her. "I thought... I just wanted to make sure that you are all right."

"All right' isn't the expression I would have used," he said, too tired to snap. "Please sit down. I... need to talk to you." She put her bag next to the chair, then sat down, pulling her feet underneath her, making herself comfortable. Observing her was a temptation too big to resist. And he had to make certain that he was right. That it was impossible to teach her any longer. For her own good.

She smiled at him, and his heart bled with the need to touch her. "The healing spell worked by the looks of it." Her voice was slightly smug, and why not? She had mastered a very complicated bit of magic. "Your skin isn't too red, and you are obviously not in pain anymore. Well, not much."

Snape closed his eyes for a moment. It was worse than he had feared she not only checked on him but insisted on talking about the previous night as well. He should interrupt her, should tell her to shut up, to never mention it again. But for some peculiar reason he couldn't bring himself to do that. Instead he said, "I am feeling much better, thanks to your effort. I am grateful I would have found it impossible to search for the spell myself, and for obvious reasons I wouldn't have asked Poppy, either." Then he watched her smile deepen and silently called himself a fool.

With bright eyes she looked at him and scanned him from head to toes. "You look very tired, sir, if I may say so. I hope you don't mind that I told Professor Dumbledore you wouldn't take up teaching again before the weekend."

A small smile curved his lips. "I doubt I would have made much sense even tomorrow. But on Monday, I should be all right. Again, thank you for your thoughtfulness."

"Good," she said happily. "I'm looking forward to it the day is odd without Potions lessons."

Damn, Snape thought. *Tell her, now!* But he couldn't get the words out.

Instead, he wondered why she was so relaxed in his company. "Albus has just left," he told her, taking in her surprise as well as the way she looked and breathed and played with a strand of her crazy hair. "He told me what you had told him. I am surprised you lied to him. I would have expected you to... explain to him what has happened."

Now she blushed, but only a bit. "None of his business what happened here," she murmured. "I didn't want him to think wrongly of you as he most likely would have despite the circumstances."

Oh Merlin, he thought, *why did this have to happen? I might have been able to gain her friendship, if nothing else!* What I wanted to talk..."

"There is something I need to give back to you," she interrupted him and rummaged in her bag until she had found the book. Carefully, she brushed a few crumbs off its cover and handed it to him. "I think this is safest in your hands," she said, her lips twitching. "Ron and Harry won't miss it, I made sure of that."

"Potter and Weasley won't have use for any magical books anymore," Snape stated coolly. "I will have them expelled. I would rather take a more personal revenge, but I guess disembowelling them is not an option."

She laughed out loud. "You don't need to expel them, and I think it wouldn't be in your best interest anyway they would come up with quite unpleasant rumours. Therefore, I have taken measures to silence them. They will never, ever cross the line again at least not with you they will never say a word about the potion they slipped you, and they will behave most respectfully towards you from now on. I guarantee that."

At a loss for what her words meant, he just nodded to her to go on.

She beamed at him. "I met them after breakfast. They had found out what the Ashwinder Eggs were for."

Snape's expression became fearsome. "They will not keep their mouths shut," he hissed, well knowing that the laughter would never die if they let slip that juicy piece of information. And if anyone ever suspected the girl to be involved, Dumbledore would have no other choice but to fire him.

She raised a hand, interrupting him again. "At lunchtime, I apologised for my rude behaviour yesterday. I had scolded them for slipping you an unknown potion by giving them a bottle of butterbeer each," she continued lightly.

Silence. Finally, Snape was forced to ask, "And what exactly has that to do with the two imbeciles keeping a secret?"

Comfortably, she leaned back in her chair. "I gave them a piece of parchment as well. With your best regards. After they had emptied the bottles," she added, waiting for him to make a conclusion.

Unfortunately, he didn't have an idea what the connection was between butterbeer and parchment. He raised an eyebrow. "Pray tell me what was on the parchment," he said, surprised by the fact that playing hide and seek with her was most entertaining.

"A spell," Hermione answered. Her lips twitched again. "A lubrication spell. I thought it could come in handy sometime... during the day. Or the night. I guessed they'd be too distracted to think of it. But they will certainly will need a little help."

Her words for a tiny moment didn't make sense at all. Then his eyebrows shot up when he got her meaning. Staring at her, he thought for a moment that he had misunderstood, but then she grinned in the most malicious way he had ever seen on her face.

"How many drops?" he whispered, not really trusting his voice.

"Three. After all, they are still teenagers, and I wanted to teach them a lesson, not kill them."

He suppressed a smile. "They will be drawn to each other like magnets."

She nodded. "I know. I guess when they are out of the Room of Requirement by tomorrow, they will have lost all interest in lacing anyone's tea with a potion ever again. Actually, they will quite possibly have lost all urge to play pranks at all. They will not talk about which potion they have slipped you. They won't even play Quidditch for a few days, I suppose."

Snape brought his hand up to his mouth, trying to hide the wide grin that had claimed his lips, then just grinned helplessly. That was a lot better than anything he would have thought of, he had to admit that. A moment later his shoulders were shaking, and finally a deep rumble emerged as he laughed out loud. The thought of the two dunderheads drawn to each other by the potion he had made two decades ago was a wonderful thought indeed after the pains of last night and the prospect of having to tell the girl about Beauxbatons sometime soon. "They aren't gay, I assume?" he managed to get out, and she gave his amusement more food by answering, "Not usually."

It took him a few minutes to regain control, and even then chuckles emerged whenever he looked at the extremely smug looking girl. "You are wicked," he finally managed, wiping tears out of his eyes, and was delighted to hear her laugh again.

"I believe in justice," she replied. "I figured that Harry and Ron, having found out what potion they had slipped you, would have never kept their mouths shut. I needed to take care of that problem and decided to give them a dose of their own medicine. An eye for an eye, as Muggles say." Then she got up and poured a cup of tea. She handed it to him as if it were the most normal thing in the world as if they were friends, sharing an evening.

"So when I tried to get some sleep this morning and couldn't, I went to the library instead, found the healing spell, had that special idea and then came down to the dungeons to brew the potion." She took the last sandwich and ate it. "By tomorrow they will know exactly what this potion does, and they will never ever dare to talk about it. It's only fair, don't you think?"

Snape gently shook his head and regretted immensely what he would have to do soon push her away. "They will never as much as look in my direction again," he said, not really troubled by this prospect.

"They will be far too embarrassed," Hermione agreed and wiped her hands clean on her trousers. "There was only one concern there aren't any side-effects, are there? And I am not asking that just because they are my friends, but because of you as well."

Snape snorted. "Do you think I would have given Lucius and Narcissa something potentially dangerous? There is only one side effect, and it is of no consequence to the two dunderheads."

Curious as always, she asked, "Which side-effect would that be?"

Shrugging uncomfortably, Snape said, "The potion doesn't go well with virginal blood. But Narcissa wasn't a virgin, and the boys for obvious reasons won't be bothered by this problem. As I have pointed out, it is of no concern whatsoever."

Hermione studied her hands for a little while. "What do you mean, it doesn't go well? Is it... dangerous or something like that?"

Goodness, the girl never passes up an opportunity to be nosy, Snape thought with amusement. "Virginal blood has strong magical properties. Combined with the potion, it will bind the person who has taken the potion to his or her partner."

"Meaning?" she asked, obviously unable to form full sentences anymore. Snape watched her closely she had gone pale and quiet. His heart stopped to beat for a very long second.

"You are a virgin," he stated, much more calmly than he felt.

"Past tense," she replied with a whisper. "I was a virgin. Before you... before last night. That's why it hurt so much the first time." She now blushed, a deep red that started at her ears and went down her throat and even coloured her wrists. "So... what are the consequences for me?"

Snape got up quickly, although fast movement was still unpleasant. He turned his back to her. "There are none," he said, his voice hard. "It only has consequences for me until I have come up with a potion that will reverse the effect."

The effect that pushing her away so she can have a life will break me to pieces, he thought, slightly surprised that he didn't whip round to embrace her. To kiss her.

She got up as well now and stood only inches behind him. "What consequences?" she pressed.

He thought of not answering her, but then, she would continue asking, and he needed her to go before he couldn't control himself any longer and simply dragged her to bed, devouring her like a panther would devour his prey. "It means that I am bound to you that I will be unable to be intimate with anyone else as long as I haven't found a way to break the magic."

Silence answered him, and he turned round. He wasn't surprised to see various emotions rushing over her face: Guilt, shame, pity, even fear. He couldn't stand to see it. He so much wanted to touch her and knew it was impossible. She was too young and too innocent, she was visibly shaking and he knew she wanted him to take her back to bed. She absolutely needed to be protected from her own emotions. "It serves me right," he mused and heard the bitterness in his voice. "For what I have done to you it seems to be quite... appropriate."

A hurt look crept into her big brown eyes. Good. That would make things easier for her. She would forget this soon. She would benefit from Beauxbattons. Surely.

"Professor, I... "

"You will go now. And you will not attend my class anymore or work with me on my projects. Talk to the headmaster. He will explain the conditions to you under which you will be allowed to stay at Hogwarts." Walking past her, he opened the door. She followed, a deeply confused, even scared expression on her face, and silently stepped out into the dark corridor. She was walking like a puppet on strings.

"But Professor..."

He glared at her. "Do not ever call me that again," he hissed, and categorically closed the door in her face right at the moment when the first tears began running down her cheeks.

Three Years Later

Chapter 7 of 9

A rainy night at Spinner's End and an unexpected visitor lead to minor misunderstandings.

□

7: Three Years Later

It was a warm night in August. A thunderstorm was coming down heavily, soaking the dry earth with cool rain and casting faint, white flashes of lightning through the dark sky. The thunder rumbled, and the windows of the small house at Spinner's End were rattling with every bang. Of course there was no danger that they would break, but Snape liked the powers of nature and had refused to ward his house too strongly. Each curtain was drawn back; the window in the kitchen stood open a crack. He could smell the rich, wet earth from his garden, a fragrance just strong enough to stand a chance against the garlic he was chopping.

Half past eight in the evening and there was a knock on his door, a strong, demanding knock that told the Potions master his visitor didn't like to be kept outside in the rain. Placing knife and garlic on the wooden plate he was working on, he took a cooking spoon instead and stirred the sauce that was peacefully simmering on the hearth.

Knocking again. Well, Remus usually was a patient man, but Snape had to admit that it was more hail now than rain, so he went to open his door.

"Lupin," he said and brought the spoon up to his mouth, licking off a drop that threatened to drip onto the floor. "You are early. That's certainly..." He stopped in mid-sentence and stared at the visitor on his doorstep.

It wasn't Lupin. It wasn't a werewolf. It wasn't even a man.

"Good evening," said Hermione Granger, brushing her wet hair out of her face.

Snape continued to stare. Then he wiped his lips clean with the back of his hand, became aware of the wooden cooking spoon in his hand and seemed somewhat surprised that he had taken it to the door.

"I was in the neighbourhood," Hermione continued and wrapped her arms round her shivering body. "I thought I'd drop in and say hello. But if this is a bad time..."

Snape suddenly realised that he was inside, in the warmth of his house, and that she was still standing outside in the storm. "Get in," he snapped, "before the rain floods the hall."

She followed him into the kitchen, leaving wet tracks on the light planks of his floor. Wordlessly, he gestured to a chair, then went to the fireplace. A short conversation through the fire told the werewolf that the dinner appointment had to be cancelled, and no, everything was fine, and yes, Snape would get back to him soon. Later. No, not today. No, nothing bad had happened. "Good night!" Snape said, his voice impatient, and finally got up to face his visitor.

Hermione. In his house. After three years in which he had managed not to think of her too often. After she had left school and the country as well. After such a long time, and right at the moment when he had begun to believe he could stand the thought of her not being part of his life not ever.

Her hair was longer and, due to the rain, not as curly as he remembered it. Her eyes seemed darker, but that could be because of the flickering candles and the flashes dancing outside. She seemed pale, and she was unusually quiet. She certainly followed hesitantly when he walked past her back into the kitchen.

Those big, brown eyes he could feel them piercing his back, and Snape's heart made some painful flips in his chest. Gritting his teeth, Snape thought *Unbelievable, how extremely one night of passion can complicate things.*

Time to stir the sauce. Maybe it wasn't necessary, but at least his hands were occupied.

One night of forced passion, he corrected himself silently. *Never forget that.*

Before that night, she had been a student. Intelligent, eager, helpful. Friendly. Someone whose company he enjoyed.

After that night, she had turned into someone he dreamed about. Someone he longed for and knew he couldn't have. Someone he had tried to rip out of his heart; obviously to no avail, as his heart reminded him right now how much he had missed her.

He didn't have a clue why she was here and what she wanted, but he sincerely hoped it wasn't to accuse him of what he had done to her three years ago. The memory of that night was dear to him. He didn't want her to shred it to pieces, rightful or not.

Snape turned from his sauce to the still silent woman and looked her up and down. He frowned. She looked older. She looked thin, cold, and unhappy. She was wet, and her whole body was shaking.

"Merlin, girl, have you forgotten that you are a witch?" Snape growled, waved his wand and had her clothes dry in an instant. With a second flick, he cast the rain out of her hair, and it suddenly wasn't plastered to her skull anymore, but stood round her face like a halo, fluffy and soft like the little dandelion parachutes he used to blow into the

wind as a small boy.

I'm staring, he realised and angrily turned round to have a look at his pots and pans. Over his shoulder, he said, "As you have messed up my plans for the evening so thoroughly, I consider it only fair that you will join me for dinner. Sit down and pour yourself some wine."

Do you really have to be that rude? he asked himself. Unfortunately the answer was obvious. Yes, of course it was necessary. That she probably expected him to act like that was one reason. The other one was even simpler: Where she was involved, he was vulnerable, and whichever reason she had to be here, in his house, he wouldn't show her how happy he was to see her. Maybe she had cared for him, back then, before he had thrown her out of his rooms. Certainly she didn't care for him anymore. And he had no desire to get hurt; therefore, he would continue to be cool, controlled, and occasionally rude. She would leave after dinner. He would continue dreaming about her. Problem solved.

He mixed the dressing for the salad and watched her out of the corner of his eye as she shrugged out of her coat and put it on one of the chairs around the large table. As she continued to shiver, he went to close the window. Thunder and rain were still loud outside, and the wind had been blowing its chilly breath into his kitchen.

Silently, she took a seat, poured herself some wine and emptied the glass in one go. She was watching his every movement from beneath her crazy hair. It made him nervous, but he refused to let her see it. After all, he was used to many pairs of eyes watching him whenever he was in class one single pair of eyes shouldn't bother him at all.

Sternly, he placed dinner on the table about fifteen minutes after she had knocked; in all that time she hadn't said a word. Twice, she had filled up her glass. She didn't move to put anything on her plate, and so he did it for her instead and didn't stop glaring at her before she had taken a bite.

She ate the first bit of food slowly; soon she shovelled in her dinner accompanied by more wine. Two helpings, salad, and dessert she must have been starving.

"You are too thin," Snape stated after she had scraped her plate clean with a bit of the bread he had baked earlier on, but he was strangely pleased that she had liked what he had served her. "What's wrong is the banking business going that bad?"

Her head snapped up, and she lowered the glass she had just taken to her lips. He saw that there were dark rings under her eyes as if she hadn't slept in a while, and she was paler than she should be at that time of the year. And yes, she didn't weigh enough, not even for the relatively small woman that she was and although she had light, fragile bones.

"Why do you know I'm working for Gringotts?" she asked quietly.

Her voice had changed. It was darker and sounded as if she didn't speak much, which seemed like a ridiculous observation in itself, her being the babble-mouth that had driven him crazy now and then, always talking, always asking questions.

Well, she just *had* asked him a question. "I'm following your career. Although I would have thought you might take up potions, I wasn't really surprised that you chose Arithmancy instead, working as a consultant for Gringotts' Italian branch. I expected you to be good enough in your job, though, to buy yourself regular meals. Or new clothes." He nodded at her faded blouse with the worn sleeves.

"I don't care about clothes," she answered and took a big sip of the wine.

"And not about food, either?"

She sighed. "I was in Venice last week. Holiday." She said it as if the implication of her words should be obvious to him. When he didn't reply, she continued, "I met someone whilst I was there. A young Italian guy. Not as tall as you, but with black hair and dark eyes. As always. His eyes were only a bit lighter than yours like dark bitter chocolate. We went out for dinner, we went for walks. He told me how beautiful I am and how much he loves me." Her voice faltered.

Icy fingers trailed along Snape's spine, and a large, burning stone appeared in his stomach. He didn't want to hear what she was telling him. Before he could hinder himself he asked, "What happened?"

Her eyes were flat when she looked at him. Still brown, of course, still big, but there was no joy in them. "I fucked him, of course," she snapped. "It was awful. I hated it. I pretended to have fun. I made all the right noises at the right time, and afterwards he lay on his back and smoked a cigarette and there was this look in his face..." Disgusted, she shuddered, but not from the cold this time. "He looked so self-satisfied, and all I wanted was to go, and then he said he'd make me scream out again in another few minutes. As if he could. As if he did the first time." She drained her glass. Snape took the bottle and refilled it without asking.

"You don't get it, do you." Staring out of the window and into the rain, she added something he couldn't understand.

Carefully, he leaned back in his chair. This here was way beyond his experience. He didn't really know what to do with this young woman who was so deeply unhappy and had come here to tell him things she should tell a friend, but not him of all people alive not him at all. Of course he didn't have a clue what to say.

"Why did you push me away from you?" she asked, louder this time, and hung her head as if fearing his answer. "I hated Beauxbatons. I hated the Potions mistress, and she hated me. I missed the project I had worked on with you. I missed your classes. I missed *you*."

A flash. Thunder followed. It gave Snape time to think of an answer and to keep his voice as cold as he wanted it to sound when he answered. "I had to make a choice, and my choice was to send you away out of my reach."

Harshly, as if she hadn't heard him, she continued, "She was so sweet and friendly and false, and I couldn't cope with it. You were nasty and cruel, sometimes you were bitter and hard, but never unjust. At least not in my last year. And you were honest and direct with your praise as well as with your wrath."

"Hermione," Snape said, and she smashed the glass, threw it at him. She missed him only by inches. Her eyes were blazing with something close to hate.

"How dare you," she hissed.

"What..."

"How dare you address me with my given name after what you have done to me!"

He had known it would come down to that from the moment he had seen her standing on his doorstep, and he had dreaded it. Getting up, he began to put the dishes away, well aware that her eyes were following him.

"Answer me! That's why I am here tonight, to get some answers from you.*Professor!*"

Snape flinched at that title. Not because he wasn't used to it every student and even some of his colleagues called him that. But from her lips, it burned a hole in his soul. Out of her mouth it was an insult, and she knew it.

Obviously, he couldn't flee her accusing eyes any longer. He had managed it for three years. Now she had him cornered. Putting the dishes in the sink, he turned to her.

"I apologise," he began, expecting more hateful accusations any moment. "Not for sending you to Beauxbatons, of course. That was necessary. But for that night. And for everything I forced you to do during that night. I should have apologised three years ago, but found that I couldn't even be in your company for too long. I feared you might touch me, I... I might have..." He stopped himself just in time. He couldn't let her know that he had been close to dragging her back to bed that evening when she had

poured tea for him. Instead, he calmly said, "You had come close to me too close. So I arranged for you to go to Beauxbatons, and I threw you out of my rooms. I did that in your own best interest."

Her eyes narrowed. "Ah, honest words, it seems. And you really thought you acted in my best interest? Nice you haven't asked for my opinion on the matter! I would have told you that I didn't want to go to Beauxbatons! I didn't want to leave your Potions lessons or the projects we were working on! I wanted to stay at Hogwarts! With you!"

"I know," he said quietly. "You... liked me more than you should have. I couldn't allow that. I was your teacher, and I had forced you into my bed. What you thought you felt was nothing but a reaction to what had happened that night."

"The night you fucked me," she said coldly.

She could as well have hit him. But the pain only lasted a second before he managed to get it under control.

"Exactly," he hissed. "The night I fucked you. Against your will, if you may recall that. I was driven by a potion your friends had laced my tea with. I would have never touched you otherwise, and you know that. But you... you began to care for me, afterwards. The healing spell, the tea, the sandwiches. Your letter. When I realised that you were about to make the biggest mistake of your life falling in love with me I told Albus as much as I could without compromising you. I couldn't allow you to harbour those feelings. They weren't real. They were born out of your loyalty and your Gryffindor bravery and..." He took a deep breath. "And out of sexual pleasure. So I sent you away."

She had paled at his words and needed several attempts to say, "You... you knew I cared for you and still... you still did that to me?"

"Of course," he answered and nearly choked at the words as he knew they gave the wrong impression. To her it must sound as if her caring had been unwelcome, her emotions unwanted. And that wasn't the case. After twenty years in solitude, after two decades mourning Lily, he had fallen in love with her that night, just like that, easily and without wanting to. Had fallen in love with her tenderness, her bravery, her smile with her, his student. Impossible, unacceptable, of course. And certainly nothing he would ever tell her.

Nodding her head in understanding, she picked up her coat from the chair and pulled it on. Raising her chin, she headed towards the door, and he followed her in order to lower the wards. Her hand on the doorknob, she said, "Thanks for telling me that you couldn't stand my company, that you even dreaded to touch me, that is. It will be easier for me to forget you now that I know how disgusted you were by my sheer presence. At least I won't punish myself anymore with stupid hopes." One step and she was out in the storm. The wind slammed the door shut, and she was gone.

Snape stared at the wood in disbelief. What had she said? How had she... what?

Two steps and he nearly ripped the door off its hinges. He feared he would find nothing but wind and rain and darkness, but no, there she was, once more dripping wet, only this time with her back towards him. Her shoulders were shaking, and even through the thunder he could hear that she was crying.

He stepped out into the rain and closed the door behind him. Inside it would be warm and dry and bright; outside, where they could barely see each other's faces, it might be possible to talk without saying all the wrong things.

"Hermione," he whispered and placed his hands on her shoulders. He felt her muscles tense, felt her trying to pull away from him. She didn't try neither too hard nor too severely.

"I couldn't allow you to harbour feelings for me," he repeated, breathing into her hair and remembering how it had felt on his naked skin. "You were so young and so innocent. You still are. You have your whole life ahead of you, your career, your future. I did not despise your company on the contrary. I wanted you there, in my rooms. Seeing you laugh, seeing you sitting opposite of me as if you belonged there was unbelievably wonderful. But if I had allowed you to stay in my class, to continue working with me, if I hadn't sent you away, I would have allowed you to throw all that away for someone who... for someone with the wrong reputation, for someone twenty years your senior, for someone who is still feared in our world. To risk it all for me? I could not let that happen."

With a quick twist, she freed her shoulders from his grip. "You loathed me being there, in your bedroom, in your bed. You hated needing my help!"

With force he turned her round, but she refused to look up at him.

"I had *raped* you, Hermione! And you thought, for some reason I will never understand, that you liked me nevertheless, that you should look after me. I saw it in your eyes. I read it in your letter. You wanted more! You thought you wanted me! But I couldn't let that happen. I couldn't let you..."

"... fall in love with you?" she finished bitterly. "Don't be ridiculous as if one night in your bed could have been the trigger for that. It seems you still don't get the point, Professor. I already had fallen in love with you before I came to you that night weeks before, before Valentine's Day. That's why I gave you that rose. It happened whilst we worked together in your lab and you for once didn't growl all the time but decided to use patience and friendliness to teach me. When you were more human than ever before. When you showed me that you had some humour after all, and when you allowed me to see that you can get tired and bored. When I saw you smile now and then." She came a step closer, her eyes blazing with rage. "So each of your actions came too late. They only hurt. What you did to me *after* I had left your bed hurt. Badly. I asked you, even begged you to sleep with me. I did not consider it rape, not for one moment. In case you didn't know that, Professor."

Most people would have sworn an oath that Snape, terrifying bat of Hogwarts' dungeons, didn't own a heart. So how could it hurt so much? "Please don't call me that," he whispered, the title she had used to address him still ringing in his ears.

She snorted and impatiently wiped her rain-heavy strands from her worn face. Her usually amber eyes had become dark with anger and sadness. "What shall I not call you? Professor? Oh, yes, I remember, you forbade me to address you like that. Well, maybe you are right. After all, I'm not your student anymore. So what shall I call you then? Mr Snape? Actually, I wondered how I should address you ever since you closed the door in my face. Luckily, I only saw you from the distance after that I might have slipped and called you by your given name. Like I did in your bed." Her every word was dripping with sarcasm. They were sharp and each one cut him deeply.

He let go of her shoulders and just stood before her. "I can't stand you calling me 'Professor'," he found himself confessing. "Not after that night. Not after you called me..."

"Severus," she said softly and slapped him hard across the face. "You are one damn bastard *Professor*. I've been in love with you, you ignorant, cruel idiot! I still am! And you had no right to make decisions for me! You had no *right* to send me away, to steal my love, and you certainly have *nducking right* now to tell me it wasn't even real! You lousy, worthless, stupid, arrogant, egoistic... *man!*"

Stunned at her outburst, he staggered back a step and tried to find something sensible to reply. He failed.

"Now then, *Professor*, can you take it off me this love I feel for you?" she shouted and pushed him back another step. She was stronger than she looked, and he nearly slipped on the wet grass.

"Can you take those emotions you caused off me? Can you stop me feeling like I have to burst when I am not near you? No? I thought not! You are in my dreams and in every one of my thoughts when I'm awake, and it destroys me. I'm unable to have a relationship with anyone. I always think of you. You, you, and you again. Your eyes, your hands, your burning skin and your voice and your damn cock. Isn't that great? I feel as if I'm bound to you, I..."

Suddenly, she swayed. Suddenly, she seemed to have an idea, and her mouth sagged open.

"Hermione?" Snape asked, alarmed at her sudden change. "What is it?"

"Tell me it's the potion," she whispered and grabbed the front of his rain-soaked shirt, whirled him round and pushed him further out into the rain and towards the trees. She shook him like an adult might shake an unruly child. Her chest was heaving, and her frizzy hair was not frizzy anymore, was soaked again like her clothes, her shoes, like

him.

She brought her face close to his. "Tell me I am affected by this awful aphrodisiac. Tell me you... somehow... you sweated it out through your pores that night! And then it got into my system and in combination with the blood... That must be it! Please tell me this is just potion-induced! That I am in fact just bound to you! Tell me this is potion-induced and that you can take it off me! Please!"

Silence dropped down with the rain. Each drop washed away her hope as he just sadly shook his head.

"What you feel your emotions, your... love is not because of the potion," Snape said. "It's absolutely impossible that it affected you without you actually having taken it. I wish it were different. I wish I could help you. I didn't mean to cause you harm. I only hoped I could protect you. I never, ever wanted you to suffer like you do. That is the reason why I sent you away. It was the right thing to do. The only thing I could do to protect you and to give you a chance for a life."

With one wet sleeve, she wiped her face only to find the rain too heavy to succeed. "Great," she murmured wearily. "That will make going on like this a lot easier, knowing that there really is no chance to get over it. Tried it the last three years. Didn't work."

Out of an impulse, and because it was so reassuringly dark, Snape reached out and cupped her cheek, wet with rain and tears. "Why did you come here tonight?" he asked. "Why tonight why not a year ago, two years ago, why not right after you had finished school?"

She shrugged away from him once more, which caused a cold shiver to run down his spine. He hadn't known how successfully he had made himself forget how much she meant to him.

"Why the hell would I?" she snapped. "You didn't want me. You closed the door in my face, and I decided you weren't worth the effort to come creeping back to you, begging for attention."

He had to clench his jaws at those words. She certainly had learned how to hurt in the past years.

"I hoped I would grow out of loving you," she continued, her voice hard. "I thought what I felt for you would vanish after a little while. Unfortunately, I was wrong. Whoever I slept with, it always had to be someone dark-eyed and dark-haired. In most cases, this someone was older than me. But last week in Venice, when I turned that bloke into a toad only because he tried to kiss me, I realised I had to come here and at least try to get you out of my head and my ridiculously stupid heart."

It had taken him most of the three years to repair the broken walls around him. Her words tore them down in a moment as if they were made of paper instead of stone. For a moment, he considered his options and decided that he had nothing to lose anymore. Therefore, he asked, "You slept with him. So why hex him for a kiss?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I don't allow anyone to kiss me. You didn't kiss me that night. Whoever has tried it since had to find out that I am not a girl that likes to be kissed."

Dear Merlin, he thought in despair. *Is there anything I didn't mess up?*

"I didn't kiss you because it was the only thing I could spare you," he whispered. "I had taken your virginity, I had forced you into a situation no one should ever have to be forced into, and I wanted you to be able to kiss the one you wanted to kiss without being reminded of that night. Of me."

She pondered that for a while as she stood in the rain and stared into the dark garden without moving. She was a only few feet away from him, but to Snape it seemed as if she couldn't be farther away if she had still been in Venice.

Then she turned and approached him, anger and aggression clearly written in her face. Her hands gripped the collar of his black shirt. "I so much wanted to kiss you that night, but didn't dare," she stated and ripped off the first button. "You were so vulnerable that night, so very dependent on me, so absolutely different from your usual self, and I didn't want to do something so very intimate. Stupid, isn't it? I shagged you in every possible way and considered a kiss too intimate to share."

Cold wind bit into his skin, but her fingers were hot. He shivered and didn't hinder her from getting whatever she was after.

"You are the only man I ever wanted to kiss, and you are the only one who didn't bother to do so," she hissed. The second button went flying into the ankle-deep grass, and Snape stared at her, dumbstruck. Her hands were strong a plain shirt was no challenge for her. The third and fourth button, one last rip and he stood there with a bare chest. She placed a burning hand on his hammering heart. "Tell me did you want to kiss me back then?" she demanded to know. "Did you *want* me in your bed? Or did you just use me because of that potion, because you didn't have another choice?"

Should he lie? Should he crush her with a few words, her and the love she felt for him for whatever insane reason? It would be so easy. If he lied to her, she would be gone forever, and his life would go on uneventfully. Hadn't he longed for that all those years whilst he was a spy for Dumbledore, an uneventful, peaceful life? But if he lied to her, he would bury himself alive. And he would hurt her yet again. Last time, he had believed it to be in her best interest; if he told her anything else but the truth, now he would be the monster most people still claimed him to be.

"Yes," he answered, barely audible over the pouring rain. "I wanted to kiss you. I was lost the moment I saw you standing on my hearth rug. The potion was running through my system, and I couldn't think clearly. But I would have attempted murder on anyone else. I wouldn't have touched anyone but you. That it was you, you of all women... you cannot imagine how much it meant to me that it was you who came to my bed voluntarily."

She dug her nails into his pale, cold, wet skin. "Then why didn't you tell me?" she bit out. "Why did you let me believe you didn't want me? Why hurt me so much?"

Her nails were leaving marks on him, but he didn't care. "I didn't know you loved me." How hard those words were to vocalise. Had he known the truth back then, he might have been right enough to act differently. But he hadn't. Hadn't even considered the possibility. "I thought your feelings were the result of that one night and could be quenched before they turned into something strong. Something like this. I just wanted you to be happy with someone of your own choice, not someone who had been forced upon you."

Surprisingly gentle, she clasped her hands behind his neck. She laughed without humour. "Do you really think I would have come to your rooms without having feelings for you in the first place? If it had been Hagrid dosed with an aphrodisiac or Professor Flitwick, I simply would have told Professor Dumbledore. But it was you, and I wished... I hoped..." Her voice faltered. He could feel the clammy fabric of her blouse on his naked skin and her breath on his chest. Pulling herself up and thus standing on tiptoes, her tongue sneaked out of her mouth and licked off some rain that ran down his neck. "Bastard. I hate you," she whispered in his ear and used her hip to push him back a step. He staggered and tripped over a root hidden in the grass. Grabbing her round the waist he protected them both from tumbling to the ground.

She fastened her grip. The sensation of her hand on him was arousing and disturbing at the same time as she was so clearly in a murderous mood. Her hands came down, left his neck and searched and found the rim of his trousers, went lower, grabbed his arse. At the same moment, she hooked one of her feet behind his, pulled and pushed simultaneously. It was an easy, but still very effective way to make someone fall, and Snape naturally lost his balance and landed hard on his back. A soft "Ouf" emerged from his lungs, then Hermione landed on top of him. Her thigh pushed between his legs, and he hissed with pain when she squeezed his balls.

Her mouth brushed his lips when she said, "I thought I would come here to tell you that that you are a bastard, and that you don't mean anything to me and never did, and I wanted to hurt you and shout at you. And I did. I did tell you. And I did shout. But it's not enough."

Carelessly, she nudged his chin up and bit his throat. Her fingers trailed up his face and buried themselves in his hair.

Snape just lay there, getting soaked even more by the wet grass and the pouring rain, and wondered how this evening could have gone so dreadfully wrong. He couldn't see her expression as it was too dark it would be close to midnight, he guessed but he could smell the wine on her breath, and suddenly he could hear the slight slur in her voice. She might not be really drunk, but she wasn't entirely sober, either.

"Please, stop that, Hermione," he begged, when she began to trail kisses along his collarbone, and placed his hands on her waist. "You had too much wine... Let's go

inside..."

"It's not enough," she repeated, ignorant to his words. "Hereby, I decide that I want more." With a sudden movement, she brought one arm across his throat, thus pinning him down effectively. "I think I came here to take what's mine. Let's see if you can make me scream again. Let's see if you can repeat what no one else has managed so far to make me come. And then I will leave you behind like you have left me behind. I hope it will hurt every bit as much as it hurt me."

"Herm..."

"Don't you dare call me that, Professor!" she shouted through the thunder and brought her mouth close to his as if she wanted to kiss him. Instead, she pecked her lips to his cheek, and the mockery in this made him cringe. She wanted revenge, that much was obvious. He wasn't sure if he could stand it.

But then, hadn't he earned whatever punishment she considered fair?

Snape began to shiver, lying half naked on the cold ground. Lightning flashed still through the sky, but the rain had subsided slightly. It was now a constant patter on his exposed face, and he found it hard to keep his eyes open.

She placed her long-fingered hand loosely round his throat. Moving her hips, she straddled him, grinding her bum into his lap, and made herself comfortable. Involuntarily, he got hard. He hadn't had a woman in quite a while, and her attention, although unwanted, made him remember certain needs. "You want me to leave?" she asked, obviously well aware of his arousal.

"No." What else he could say? He didn't want her like that, but he wanted her to leave even less.

In the darkness, she brushed his lips with her fingertips. "Good. Because you are mine, and I am going to take you. I don't care if there's someone else." She ripped her blouse open to cast it away, then got up briefly and was out of her jeans in no time. Naked she stood in the rain, a wild, fierce creature with fire in her eyes and desire in her voice. "I want you. Now. Here. I've waited long enough. You are mine, and I will take what belongs to me."

She was on him a second later and ripped his trousers open, and he didn't dare to hinder her. When the soaked fabric didn't relent to her will, she moved her hands and vanished it. Like the storm itself she flung herself at him; her mouth, her lips didn't kiss, but bit and licked his now equally naked body. Snape could do nothing but give in to her, as the only other possibility would have been to push her away with all his strength. He didn't want to do that. He *couldn't* do it. He had pushed her away once, quite successfully, and it had nearly broken him. He wouldn't be that stupid again.

He was hard for her and he couldn't deny that he wanted her. Still, he didn't really enjoy what she was doing. This was nothing but a dirty, meaningless fuck. She was greedy in her lust and didn't give a damn about him. Her mouth was everywhere apart from his; her hands didn't leave the smallest spot untouched. She smelled him, tasted him, rasped her rough tongue over his chest, his belly, his cock. When she slipped on top of him, she just took his length inside her. She rode him mercilessly, seeking her orgasm, and if he had thought she would be finished with him quickly, he had been mistaken. She used him for her own pleasure, forced his hands where she wanted them, raked her nails across his back and shouted her lust and her desire and her sorrow at him through the thunder that was still rolling in the sky above them.

He could do nothing but try to satisfy her in her fury whilst she used his body as she might have used a sexual toy.

Her eyes were squeezed shut when she came, her face hard, rain mixing with tears. She seemed to hate him even more, now that she had what she wanted.

She never spoke his name.

She didn't kiss him, either. And he was glad about it.

It didn't take her too long before she was sated definitely not long enough for him to climax. It was still raining when she stopped as suddenly as she had begun. Silently, she sat on top of him, his still hard cock inside her, and she stared at him as if she had just woken up from a bad dream. He could feel the raindrops running down his sides. He could feel the small wounds her nails had cast.

He could feel the tears, falling from her cheeks to his chest. They were small, hot little reminders that she was still as unhappy as she had been when she had first entered his house.

"What have I done?" she murmured, clasping her hand over her mouth in terror. "What on earth have I done?" She flung herself off his body. Slipping on the muddy ground, she crawled away on all fours through the slippery grass. Only when she reached the oak and nearly bumped into the ancient tree did she stop and press her hands at the bark, never looking back at him.

Thunder growled above, reminding him that they were in the middle of a storm.

Staring at her back, Snape tried to understand what just had happened, and found he couldn't. He could only accept it. Doubting very much that she would ever as much as look in his direction again, his head fell back to the ground, and he stared up to the starless, cloud-filled sky with wide eyes. The raindrops that covered his face could have been tears as well.

Then, with a sudden, unpleasant vengeance he became aware of his hardness and remembered her embarrassed whisper when she had told him three years ago how it had hurt to be so close to a climax and then being left unsatisfied. His own still hard cock now told him how she had felt back then and that she had been right. It hurt.

Sighing with relief or with despair? With longing? he wrapped a practised hand round his length. A few tugs were all he needed to spill into his fist. But he was not satisfied. Not at all.

In the silence that followed a thunderclap, he heard her sobs, silent and suppressed. She sounded like he felt lonely, miserable, lost. It broke his heart to be the cause of those emotions, and he made a decision.

He was on his feet and beside her in no time, knelt next to her and enwrapped her in his arms. Although she went rigid at his touch, although she tried to get away from him, he didn't let go of her. He just held her close.

She began to tremble, to shake, and then her arms flew around him. Her tears were as hot against his chest as the rain was cold against his back.

He realised only after several moments that she was murmuring words as well. After another few moments he understood that she was apologising.

"I'm so sorry, please, forgive me, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that, I beg you don't hate me, I'm sorry, I'm..."

"Enough," he said and lifted her up. She was light as a child, and she clung to him as if she feared she would drown otherwise. The feeling was mutual had anyone ordered him to let go of her, he wouldn't have been able to.

Another sob against his neck. "Don't throw me out!"

He smiled against her cheek. "Even if I wanted to I couldn't throw you out of my house as we are outside already." He pressed her tighter against him and crossed the lawn in long strides. "I'm taking you inside. You are not going anywhere tonight. I won't allow you to leave you will stay, and tomorrow, we will talk." With a swift kick of his naked foot, he opened the door, stepped in and shoved it closed with his shoulder, warding it with a silent spell. Then he carried her through the hall and upstairs. Her arms were wrapped tightly around his neck.

"Don't throw me out," she whispered again.

He found his bedroom in the darkness, avoided contact with the furniture, and finally placed her in the middle of his bed.

There she sat, her arms wrapped around her legs, her head lowered to her knees. Of course she was still naked their clothes were somewhere outside in his garden and she was wet from the rain. Grass and earth stuck to her skin, water dripped from her hair onto his sheets. She looked like a drowned kitten in the small light of the one candle that lit the room.

Standing in front of his bed, he looked down at this unbelievable woman. That she was here in his house was nothing short of a miracle. That she was in his bed seemed simply not possible. But there were her soft sobs of despair, her cold skin, the sound of her chattering teeth.

Time to end this.

A murmured spell and she was dry and more or less clean. A second spell did the same for him. Her head snapped up when she felt the tingling of magic, and she stared at him, wide eyed and beyond embarrassment. "What are you going to do with me?" she asked, her voice not completely steady.

His lips quirked into a smile when he sat beside her and brushed her wild hair out of her face. "Nothing," he answered. "But I would be grateful if you could move a bit."

Her eyes grew bigger, and her gaze shot from him to the bed she was sitting in, then took in the rest of the room: desk, fireplace, wardrobe, door, and another door, presumably to the bathroom. Books everywhere and parchment piled on the desk. A shirt hung over the only chair in the room. She must have assumed this to be the guest room, so clear was her surprise that she was in his room instead. "But..." she stammered, "I can't... you surely don't want to..."

"You are tired. I am tired. We need to sleep, and therefore we will go to bed. Now. Here. Unless you want me to sleep on the couch in the living room?"

She closed her eyes. After a long moment, she said, "I never wanted you anywhere else but next to me," and moved to the outer corner of the bed.

He took that as an agreement that he could sleep in his own bed and blew out the candle.

When the bed dipped under his weight, he felt her stiffen. When the covers moved, she nudged another inch away from the heat of his body.

Then his arms reached out, found her in the darkness and pulled her close. She struggled, but he ignored it and pulled her to him until she rested with her back to his chest. Protectively, he slipped one arm under her head, the other over her waist.

He felt her heart beating like the wings of a caged bird. Her breathing came too fast, and he could feel her whole body tremble from toes to shoulders. "You will sleep now," he said firmly. "And just for your information: my bedroom has even stronger wards than my private rooms at Hogwarts, and it is impossible for you to alter them even from the inside. I learned that much from our last encounter. So don't even try to sneak away. Understood?"

"Yes." Barely audible, but she moved her hips to a more comfortable position. Her shivers subsided under his sure embrace.

"Yes, what?" he growled right into her ear.

For a moment, she didn't seem to know what he meant. Then she relaxed in his arms. One hand searched and found his in the darkness. "Yes, Severus," she whispered, closed her eyes and was asleep.

Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Chapter 8 of 9

Another 'morning after.' The only question is, will it end as catastrophically as the last one?

□

8: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

The sun shone right into Hermione's eyes when she woke up. For one blissful, peaceful moment she didn't have a clue where she was and what had happened. She thought she was in her hotel room in Venice; she could almost hear the Vaporettos crossing the Canal Grande, could hear the seagulls. In her half sleep-half dream state, she knew that she would be in the library very soon again; that beautiful library where it was quiet and safe. No sightseeing, no people, and no men, most of all. Just books. Silent, harmless, friendly books, without hands and eyes, without a voice, and they never tried to invite her for a coffee.

Hermione smiled in her sleep, thinking of the Venice library.

Then, she stirred and felt an arm under her head. It wasn't her arm her arms were both in front of her. Ripping her eyes open, she stared disbelievingly at the stranger's arm and froze.

"No," she whispered in horror. "No, no, no! I never fall asleep with one of them. Never! I always leave, I don't... I... one night, and then I go!" She wanted to scream with frustration, but reined herself in just in time as she needed to prevent the man behind her whoever he was from waking up.

She had to leave. Now. She had to be gone before the guy woke up and wanted to talk and have another go and maybe even try and kiss her. She couldn't cope with that; she didn't allow kisses, and they never understood that.

Inadvertently, her gaze fell on the hand that belonged to the arm her head was lying on.

Her eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

Impossible!

Light as a feather, she touched a finger, a knuckle, the inside of the wrist. She knew this hand better than her own. One night, she had studied that hand from every possible angle, had caressed it, had kissed each fingertip, had aroused the man who this hand belonged to by simply stroking along the palm. This was Severus's hand strong, long-fingered, potion-stained and if this was his hand, it was his arm, which would possibly be attached to his body, and therefore conclusion he was lying behind her, and she was pressing her bottom into his lap.

"I'm snuggled up to... to Severus," Hermione managed to vocalise, still very quietly. "And I'm naked. And... he is naked as well!"

Oh, Gods. Oh, Merlin. What have I done? she thought, half in panic and not daring to say that aloud.

Unfortunately, that was the moment when, like an avalanche, the events of last night engulfed her, and her panic deepened. Obviously, she had to get out of here. Immediately. Not only because she had just appeared on his doorstep after three years of silence, or because she had eaten in his kitchen without even looking at him. Not because she had shouted at him, had insulted him, had slapped him. Most of all she had to leave because she had as good as raped him, and although he deserved to suffer from her wrath, he certainly didn't deserve to be used like a whore in a dark corner of Knockturn Alley.

Especially not because she had told him at some point last night that she loved him. "If you love someone, you don't treat that someone like shit." A whisper in the sunlit room, not more. "I of all people should now that. How could I... how on earth could I have been so daft and so cruel?"

Well, if she was honest with herself, she knew why. She had changed in the past years, and not every change had been a good one.

Why did I come here after all these years? she mused, pressing her nose to the inside of his elbow, inhaling his faint, sleep-warm scent she remembered so well. "Because I bloody love him! Damn!"

He smelled of earth and rain, naturally, but underneath was the unique scent of his skin, impossible to describe and equally impossible to forget. She loved this fragrance, and she nearly choked at the big lump in her throat. There was no way she would ever smell him again, given what she had done last night.

And why, for Merlin's sake, did she feel so light despite the disgust she felt welling up inside her? Light and free and not at all hateful anymore. She felt as if the storm had washed away the past years, the anger, the loathing, and the bitterness. Had left only her younger, innocent self.

Ridiculous. Last time, he had messed it up. This time, she had. Great.

Carefully, Hermione turned round to put some distance between their bodies. His arm hung sleepily over her waist, but she managed to slip away without waking him. She wriggled and moved her shoulders, slowly shoving her bottom farther away. She lifted her head off his arm and had just managed to sit up when her gaze fell on his face, open and unguarded in his sleep.

A sudden rush of emotions overwhelmed her.

He was lying on his side, one arm now stretched out over the sheets, the other under his head. The duvet had slipped down to his waist and revealed his shoulders and chest. He was breathing slowly and deeply. His long, raven-black hair was cast across the pillow; a few strands were covering his face.

On his shoulder and across his chest she could see the marks her nails had left last night

Longing. Sweet, overwhelming, unbearable longing mixed with stabbing guilt, relief, and sadness. The rush of emotions strangled her and threatened to make her cry. Again. Hadn't she cried enough last night?

Joy crept along, and happiness. She hadn't felt most of those emotions in years, had buried them somewhere deep in her heart. That she was bursting with them right now gave her hope that she wasn't emotionally broken for good. And they scared her immensely as well. She had to go, she had to leave before he woke, just like last time.

Still, she so much wanted to kiss him. She so very much needed him to take her into his arms. "Should have thought about that last night, girl," she murmured. "Had you kissed him instead of straddling him, there might be a chance."

With one finger, she pushed the long, black strands out of his face, carefully avoiding touching him. There was a smile on his lips. A happy, delighted smile, and she could do nothing but smile as well. She had missed him so much; she had tried to find him, a little bit of him in each man she had bedded in the last three years and had failed. She had searched for someone who could make her smile like he could, whose lips curved like his. Instead, she had found nothing but meaningless sex.

Her sole reason for visiting him had been to end her obsession with him and to tell him a few things. Attacking him had not been on her agenda, knocking him to the ground, ripping his clothes into pieces and taking him as if he were a callboy. Certainly he would throw her out as soon as he was awake. How could he not?

But... hadn't she thought so last night already, and hadn't he taken her into his bed instead?

Hermione wrapped her arms around her body and stared down at the sleeping man. There was a leaf in his hair and some grass. On the floor were dirty footprints, and on his pale skin she could see the bites she had left. She had even grabbed him hard enough to bruise him, and still he had held her close all night.

She had to go.

"If I had stayed three years ago, things might have ended differently," she whispered to herself. "If I go now, I will never find out if he..." Her voice faded.

Last night he had told her that he had only wanted to protect her. He had made a decision for both of them a wrong decision, no doubt of that but not out of cruelty, or because he didn't care for her. He had shut the door in her face because he had believed it was in her best interest.

She had called him a bastard for that decision.

Damn.

She had woken in his arms. She hadn't slept that well once in the last three years. And he had said that his bedroom was warded. He had warned her not to leave.

"Not warned. Begged. He carried me up here last night, into his room, into his bed. He has cradled me all night like I cradled him back then."

People said she was intelligent. If that was true, she needed to act accordingly. She needed to admit to herself that he quite obviously didn't want her to go.

More confused than ever and with hope bubbling inside her like boiling water, Hermione swallowed hard and forced herself to turn her eyes away from the man who had haunted her dreams for years. She took in the white painted walls instead, the light wooden planks on the floor, the low, sloped ceiling under the roof, the small window through which the sun shone.

And on the windowsill, in a crystal vase, she saw a rose, glowing in the sunlight in colours of bright orange and yellow. Her eyes widened when she recognised the flower, and she knew with absolute certainty that she couldn't leave now. She needed to talk to him properly. They needed to talk. Finally.

A happy grin crossed her face. The rose had once been the reason for her to stay. It could very well trigger the same decision again.

It was her rose on the windowsill, the one she had given him on Valentine's Day when she had been in her last year at Hogwarts. The one that had stood on his desk in the dungeons the night the boys had laced his tea. The rose she had picked from her father's greenhouse as a gift for her professor. That he had kept it, had preserved it, had caused a butterfly to beat its wings in her belly back then, and that she saw it in his bedroom now told her everything she needed to know.

From out of nowhere, the butterflies had found her once more, gracefully flying maddening circles inside her head, her heart, her whole body, and she had to bite her lips to not cry out loud. She had thought she would never feel like that again, so light and wonderful and happy.

But there still was the problem of the kiss he hadn't given her and she hadn't given him.

Well. Yet.

Taking a deep breath, she decided to wait until he woke up. And until he did, she could watch him sleep.

He stirred, and she hoped he would wake up soon. He looked surprisingly young in his sleep, and she remembered how she had lingered in his rooms after their night together had ended. She nearly had slipped into bed with him, and she smiled at the memory because, well, now she finally had slept with him in one bed, in his arms.

"Idiot," she breathed. "I am an idiot for not having done that the first time I had the opportunity. He might have been angry, but certainly it wouldn't have been that easy for him to throw me out. Not with me naked in his arms."

He moaned, and Hermione frowned. The smile was gone from his lips, apparently wiped off by something unpleasant he saw in his dreams. From one moment to the next he got restless and pressed his head deeper into the pillow. His breath sped up; then he reached out with his arm. His long fingers stretched as if trying to catch something. Or someone.

Another moan emerged from his lips. "No," he whispered, pleaded in his sleep. "Don't!"

Hermione had to take the blanket, had to wrap it round her shoulders whilst she watched him dreaming it scared her to see him like that, and it made her feel cold and lonely. It might have started as a pleasant dream, but it had turned into something nasty. Her own dreams were unpleasant, to say the least, and she was always glad when they were over she should wake him. Hesitantly, she reached out to touch his shoulders when his searching hand fell back to the sheets, his shoulders dropped in resignation, and he let out a long, beaten sigh.

Gods, how much I hate that dream, Severus Snape thought, not fully asleep anymore, but not yet awake either. He hated it, no matter how often he dreamed it. It was ridiculous, really, to become so distraught by such a small, unimportant thing as a dream; a dream he hadn't had for quite a while now, but that was nevertheless destroying him, slowly but surely.

He dreamed of her. Always of her, of the girl, of Hermione. And it wasn't even a proper dream, but merely a small scene, a picture his stupid mind repeatedly painted shortly before he woke up. It didn't last longer than a few moments. Still, it was worse than all the dreams he occasionally had about the Dark Lord and his time as a Death Eater.

This dream always started off nice; she was lying in his arms, safely snuggled up to him, her warm, soft body pressed tightly against his bony frame. He could feel her crazy hair tickling his cheek. He heard her slow, even breathing. He smelled the mingled fragrances of their night of passion. It always made him smile, dreaming of her.

But then, he would try to pull her closer, and she would turn into dust and smoke. A chill claimed his heart, making it stop beating when he realised that she was nothing but a dream once more, that she wasn't real, that she would vanish again right in front of his eyes.

That was the moment when the dream turned into a nightmare.

Always, always he would reach out for her, trying to stop her from leaving him. He would beg, plead even. He would try to reach for her hand. Useless. Always useless. He would wake up, involuntarily, and would open his burning eyes once more to a bed he had shared with no one.

There, he could feel the sheets under his shivering body. Sunlight warmed his face. He was nearly awake now, and he sighed, deep and forlorn. He hated this dream. It showed him in most brilliant pictures what he had lost. Or to be precise, what he had never had to begin with.

Fighting the feeling of loss and loneliness, Snape opened his eyes to the day.

For a moment, as it happened sometimes, he couldn't see more than a blur, which was partly caused by the sunbeams that needled him. Then he shifted, turned his head, and wiped his hand over his face as if to rub off the last memories of the dream. Stretching out his shoulders, trying to relax the muscles that had tightened whilst he had tried to hold back nothing but empty hopes, he grabbed the duvet in order to cover himself better. He was shivering. *Happens when you sleep naked*, he thought and froze only a second later.

He never slept naked. Sleeping naked reminded him of a certain night, a certain evening when he had last woken up naked *That* day had turned into a disaster. No need to remember it.

Well, time to get up and face the rest of the summer break. He had the vague feeling that he hadn't done the washing up last night after Remus had left.

Remus. Hmmm, Remus hadn't been in his house last night, actually. He had cancelled the dinner appointment with the werewolf because someone else had appeared at his door...

"Good morning."

Snape, although he was so nicely thwarted in his attempt to remember last night's events, literally shot up in bed, didn't manage to free his legs which were entangled in the duvet, fought for a moment, lost the fight and landed, bottom first, on the floor.

"What the..." he began; then finally his eyes decided to fully wake up as well, and he stared, thunderstruck, at the witch who sat in his bed as naked as he, only with part of the duvet around her shoulders.

Hermione looked down on him, her expression a mixture of amusement, shame, longing, and guilt. Then her lips curved into a smile. Obviously, the sight of him sitting on the floor, hair tousled from sleep and mouth hanging open, was a silly sight indeed.

"You are not really here!" he accused her, impatiently wiping black strands out of his face.

She blushed slightly. "I'm sorry, but I am. You carried me to bed last night. You... well, you actually forbade me to leave. So I stayed."

For once in his life, Snape didn't even try to hold back the smile that spread on his lips. Sitting naked on the cool floor of his bedroom after he had fallen out of his own bed, *after* he had had quite a nasty little dream, he could do nothing but grin widely at the girl, the woman, the witch who looked down at him. He couldn't believe that she was really here, and then he remembered that he really had a visitor last night.

Her.

"You've called me a bastard," he stated and finally managed to get up. Still naked, he stood in front of the bed, glaring at her.

She raised her chin. "I have because you are."

"Hmmm." Snape nodded. "You have a point there," he agreed and sat down next to her.

They had eaten together. Then she had shouted. Then they had been in his garden, in the rain, during the storm.

Where she had taken him, just like that, with her eyes closed and her jaws set, with determination and no tenderness at all, with something close to brutality.

He remembered her tears and her apologies. He had carried her to his bed, had cradled her in his arms. Naturally, he had dreamed of her as he had feared she would be gone in the morning. But she wasn't. She sat on his bed, and maybe he would manage not to mess this up for a change.

He half turned to her. "A bastard. Yes, I'm afraid I can't deny it," he said. "But just in case it doesn't bother you too much do you think you could have breakfast with me and... talk?"

Hesitantly, Hermione pulled her legs up and wrapped her arms round her shins. Thoughtfully, she looked at him. Even more hesitantly, she reached out to touch his lips, tracing them, and under the light touch the corner of his mouth curved again. "There it is," she murmured. "This smile I've been looking for this smile all over the bloody planet, and all the time it was here. You should have told me that I couldn't find this smile anywhere else but in your bed!"

The smile in question deepened. "Where else?" he asked. "You are the only one who can make me smile like that." With a swift gesture, he discarded the blankets and sheets and pillows to the floor, wiped them off his bed until nothing was left but the naked girl he had missed so much in the past years, ever since he had thrown her out of his rooms. Cupping Hermione's cheek and leaning in to kiss her was the most natural thing to do.

A moment before their lips touched, he stopped himself. "Do you really want this?" he whispered, his breath warming her skin. "This kiss? Me?"

She just wrapped her arms around him and pulled him as close as possible. Their lips touched, briefly. "More than anything," she whispered back and again brushed his lips with hers. Then her grip tightened, and his arms found their way around her slender waist.

Gently, tentatively, he deepened the kiss, parting her lips with his tongue, and she welcomed him, returning his kiss with a hunger he actually had expected as he felt the same hunger claiming him. Her hands tightened behind his neck, and his hand moved to her wild hair, burying his fingers in the crazy mass, holding her close.

One kiss, just a simple little kiss, and not only last night was forgotten, but the past three years as well. Her anger melted for good, her sorrow, the wall around her heart vanished under the kiss. The loneliness they both had suffered from was gone whilst their tongues danced together, whilst they shared their breath. One kiss, the tender touch of skin to skin, and they both knew that this was a beginning, not an end.

She pulled him back onto the mattress, and he followed, still kissing, still breathing with her.

Not breaking the kiss, he slipped on top of her, his hard cock brushing her hip, her thigh, searching for her entrance that would be as wet and waiting as he hoped, as he was sure, as he knew.

She grabbed him tighter, pulled him closer, one hand behind his neck, the other clutched on his bum. With a fierce move of her hips, she managed to get some space between them for a brief moment so she could open her legs, then her hand searched and found his cock, guiding it where she wanted it.

He took her with one gentle push as soon as he felt her heat and her wetness. Waiting was not an option; the word 'foreplay' had not only fled his mind, but apparently hers as well, as all he wanted was to be inside her, to feel her, to move with her, to come with her.

With her legs wrapped around his waist, he slowly began to move. After endless moments, he finally broke the kiss and looked into her eyes. "There is something I wanted to tell you," he breathed and moved his hips, slipping in and out of her for her and his pleasure.

"What would that be?" she murmured, her eyes not leaving his face, her back arching to meet his tender thrusts.

"I wanted to tell you back then. I wanted to tell you..."

"Yes?"

"... that you have touched my heart and my soul..."

"I have?"

"Of course! And I wanted you to stay with me." Carefully, he increased the speed and felt her whole body arching up against his. The moans came out of both their mouths, and it wasn't really that easy to speak, to form a sentence that made sense. But he had to tell her. "I wished..." he rasped and brought one hand under her bum to press her closer to his groin, "you would have been there when I woke up. I... have... enjoyed that night more than I... than I... Gods, Hermione, do I really have to tell you right now that I love you?"

"Now' is the perfect moment, Severus," Hermione said and reached up to claim his mouth. She kissed him deeply, stole the words from his lips. Then she tightened her grip on his bum, and he understood that she desired a change of position. With a swift move, he rolled onto his back and pulled her with him so that she now was on top of him.

Her hands landed on his chest, and his hands stroked her hips and her thighs. Slowly, maddeningly slow, she rotated her pelvis, driving his length deeper inside her, making him close his eyes and whimper with desire.

Her moans were not soft, but loud now, and her fingers moved tenderly up to his shoulders. He first whispered her name, then bit it out through gritted teeth, then shouted it out when he came, deep inside her, feeling her orgasm wash over him at the same moment he spilled his seed in her dark heat. Simultaneously and with a long wail, she hissed syllables in his ear, still shuddering from the climax she had brought on for both of them, then captured his face in her palms. She stared at him with wide, amber eyes as they both felt his cock going soft, but not yet slipping out of her. "Severus," she said. "Severus," and kissed him again.

It took them a while before they had caught their breath again. The sun was still shining into his bedroom, but it was way past morning when he finally propped his head up on his elbow and looked down at Hermione. Gently, he began to brush her hair out of her face, then traced her lips, her cheeks, the thin bone that shaped the bridge of her nose. After a while, his fingertips wandered down to her throat, rested for a moment at the pulse, and finally went down to her bellybutton where he started to draw circles. "Good morning," he said, and laughed once more when her stomach answered with a low, loud rumble.

"Bit late for breakfast," she said, shy in a way as she had no idea how to deal with the situation. Tentatively, she placed her hand on his chest. She had just fucked... no. Wrong word, wrong word entirely. During the past three years she had fucked, last night she had fucked right now, they had made love, and she was still breathless from the difference it made to come with him instead of leaving him behind, unsatisfied. Or to be left unsatisfied herself.

His heartbeat under her palm pulled her back from her thoughts, and when he put his warm hand on her stomach, she felt her heart flip. "Breakfast for the lady," he growled, bent down and kissed her cheek. "Or lunch. Or dinner. Whatever you wish for but first I will have a shower and get dressed, if you allow."

She smiled and nestled her shoulders comfortably into the pillows. "Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We have a lot to talk about. Without wanting to scare you but I won't leave this house again before my holiday is over, which is in two weeks. And I want a guarantee that I can come back whenever I want. You will not send me away from you ever again, I promise you that! I'd rather turn you into a toad for good and place you in a glass on my desk."

"I feel properly threatened," he answered dryly. "And if you try to leave without telling me when you will be back, I will chain you to the bed."

"Deal," Hermione said. "Now that we have an understanding, go and take a shower. You may even get dressed," she teased, "but only if I can stay in bed and watch. I always wanted to watch you getting dressed."

She was rewarded with the rare sight of a blushing Potions master. Quickly, he got up and closed the door to the bathroom firmly behind him, hearing her chuckle until the

splash of the shower drowned every sound.

It didn't take him long to get clean the charm he had used last night had taken care of that but he liked the way the heat of the water relaxed his muscles and lingered under the hard beam. When he found a leaf in the drain, he knew that the charm hadn't worked perfectly. *So what?* he thought, rinsing out his hair.

Whistling a tuneless little melody, he finally stepped out and dried himself and slipped on some underpants. He was pretty certain that, if he went back into the bedroom naked, they wouldn't have time to think about nourishment for a little while. Smirking, he thought, *On the other hand, that wouldn't be such a bad idea.*

Goodness, he felt good. Marvellous, in fact not because she was here with him, in his house and in his bed, but because he knew she would be here the next day as well, and the day after that, and next week, and next month. They had already wasted three years. *He* had wasted three years, and she had suffered during that time. Time to be together instead of separated.

He opened the door to his bedroom.

She was still lying in his bed, watching his every step when he approached his wardrobe. It made him oddly nervous, but then, she had warned him that she wanted to watch him getting dressed. More quickly than usual he chose his favourite shirt and pulled it on, only to get distracted by the shocked gasp that came from the bed. Alarmed, he spun round.

Hermione sat up, the duvet pulled up to her chin. Her eyes became big, and she stared at him as if he were a ghost. "But, but..." she stammered and pointed at him.

Speechless for a moment, he tried to figure out what was going on. He followed her gaze: it was fixed on his chest. Ah. That.

A small smile curved his lips. Very slowly and deliberately, he said, "It is *ashirt*. Its function is to cover my torso. It is made of linen, and it will keep me warm in addition. Any questions?"

Faintly, she answered, "It's not black!"

"No. It's grey. Light grey, actually. Didn't you know that there are colours beside black?" Turning, he rummaged in his wardrobe, found one pair of trousers and pulled them on, deliberately extending that simple task.

She pressed her hand to her heart and pretended to hyperventilate. "Jeans!" she gasped. "Blue jeans, stone-washed. You wear blue jeans; you are not the man I thought you were! Tell me something only you and I know, otherwise I must assume you are someone else, and that means I will have to hex you!"

Carefully, he buttoned the fly, well aware of her eyes that followed every move of his hands. Then he came to the bed silently on his bare feet. He pondered what to tell her. "Not that easy," he mused. "As we don't have that many shared memories. But then... ah, yes. I'm certainly one of the few who know about that. Tell me, Hermione, how are Potter and Weasley nowadays? Do they talk to each other at all after their... encounter in the Room of Requirement?"

Laughing with delight, she reached out and took his hand, pulling him next to her. "They do," she answered, wiping a tear of joy out of the corner of her eye. "But they didn't talk to me for nearly half a year, so it was not too bad that I was travelling between England and France most of the time. In the end, they decided that our friendship was more important than your potion, and we sorted things out."

"I'm glad to hear that," Snape said and was somewhat surprised that he really was. He knew that the three of them were very close, and he knew how hard it was to lose a friend.

Hermione gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Actually, they meet every now and then in a quiet hotel in the countryside and spend an afternoon and a night together." Her voice sounded slightly bored. Snape's head, though, shot round, and his eyes nearly fell out of their sockets.

"They...?"

"... decided that the potion had only shown them the obvious that they really, really like each other." Hermione finished the sentence. "They are both married, of course, but Ginny and Lavender don't mind them sharing a moment every now and then."

"Goodness," Snape murmured. "Certainly something I didn't expect."

"Well, I never expected to see you wearing Muggle clothes," she teased, entranced by the sight of Severus in jeans and a shirt. For many years she had actually believed he even slept in his robes. And now she had to realise that there was a side of him she hadn't thought about his private side, his appearance, his likes and dislikes when he was not at Hogwarts.

With one fingertip, she traced the seam on his sleeve. "You look good in a shirt that's not black," she stated.

"Well," he said, quite amused at her still surprised expression, "did you honestly think I would bother with robes outside school? As you know, they are damn uncomfortable." He sat on the bed and adored the shimmer on her still naked skin.

"Of course I assumed you wouldn't wear robes at home. But I thought your private clothes would be black. Last night they were, and you certainly didn't wear jeans," she grumbled and placed her hand on his leg. "You wore black as you are supposed to."

How hot her hand was through the fabric of his trousers. If he wasn't careful, he wouldn't be wearing his clothes for much longer. "Last night I was expecting Remus. He possibly would die of a heart attack if he ever saw me in these clothes."

She grinned and ran her fingers through the ink black strands that covered, as usual, half his face. "I know exactly how he would feel," she agreed. "He would feel as stupid as I'm feeling right now, for assuming your wardrobe contained nothing but black garments."

Then something else crossed her mind. "Erm... Severus," she said. "I know I said I don't care if there's someone else, but... but if there is..."

A small smile curved his lips. "There isn't."

Her smile was nothing but pure relief. "But why not?" she pressed. "Surely there are women who are interested in you. I know you were bound to me, but..."

"Present tense," he cast in, his smile getting bigger. "I *am* bound to you. Still. Since I never bothered to make a potion to reverse the effect. What for? I didn't want anyone else."

After a while he began to laugh as she stared at him without saying a word. That was certainly something she hadn't expected. "Had I known that it is that easy to make you speechless, I would have tried it years ago." Finally deciding that it was time for something to eat, Snape got up and headed for the door.

Her hand shot out and grabbed his wrist. "Just wait a second," she said, and pulled him back onto the bed again. Intently, she looked at him as if she was trying to think of something that had momentarily slipped her mind.

Hermione leaned forward and blew on the spot between his shoulder and his neck. Then, she deeply breathed in, trying to catch the scent of his skin once more. It had changed, was laced with the smell of soap and aftershave, but still uniquely him. "I love your fragrance," she murmured. "Come to think of it in my last year, you never

smelled of potions as you used to in the years before. You always smelled... nice. And then you had your teeth straightened as well I never really thought about it, but now, with those clothes, it is striking how much you have changed. How... why? Why have you been horrible for so long?"

With his pale hands he cupped her face. Carefully, he turned her head, staring intently into her eyes. "I heard you were the brightest witch of your age," he mused. "But obviously, it was a rumour. What a shame."

"Right," she snapped, but her eyes sparkled playfully because of this little riddle and because she feared she would burst with happiness at any moment. "Are you telling me that your appearance at school was nothing but an act?"

"I'm mildly impressed," he grumbled. "Maybe you are relatively bright. Now, tell me, why would I make myself as unlikeable as possible? What would I gain from being scary, terrifying, and ugly? From being the greasy git?"

"I can't imagine why you did it," she confessed. "All I know is that you changed after Voldemort had been turned into dust."

Snape stepped over to the side table and picked up a leather thron. Pulling back his hair into a ponytail, he tied it at the nape of his neck and opened the door, now getting really hungry himself.

"Whose eyes would linger longer than necessary on someone who had a more than slightly disgusting look and smelled of acid most of the time?" he asked over his shoulder. "People avoided me my colleagues, my fellow Death Eaters, my students. Especially my students. Children are far too curious, as you should know yourself. You were the most curious of them all. When the Dark Lord was alive, I made sure that no one wanted to stay anywhere near me; not even him. Most importantly not him. I made sure he and everyone else saw a man who didn't care about personal hygiene, who looked as if he didn't own a toothbrush or a bottle of shampoo, who might even have been infectious in some sort of way. Small effort, huge result I could do what I had to do unobserved. I could move unseen. The Dark Lord himself fell for it he treasured me but didn't like me near him. I was a little safer, my secrets were a little safer. It wasn't easy, believe me. But now it is over and I can brush my teeth whenever I want to. And you better take a shower yourself. There's grass between your breasts." With that he cast her a mischievous smile and went for the kitchen.

Whistling again, he went downstairs, pondering what he could make for breakfast. Or lunch, really. Hmmm. Maybe sausages... or eggs... He was lost in thought and nearly missed the last step as he caught sight of the two men sitting leisurely in his kitchen. Each had pointed a wand at him, and it was lucky Snape was busy catching his balance or otherwise, out of sheer instinct, he would have tried to draw his own wand. And then he would have been stupefied, if not worse. In the last moment before he fell down his own staircase, he managed to get a hold on the wall, steadied himself and approached the two men with two long strides.

"You better stop there, or I will cast a full Body-Bind on you," Remus said pleasantly. There was no humour in his eyes, though. "What do you think, Albus Polyjuice or Imperius?"

Albus Dumbledore, still Hogwarts' Headmaster, looked sternly at the tall, slender man in front of him. With his summer-sky-blue eyes he took in the bare feet, the jeans, the light grey shirt, and the smile. Naturally, this man wasn't Snape his Potions master hadn't smiled in years. Dumbledore quickly flicked his wand and murmured, "*Finite Incantatem.*"

Nothing happened. Dumbledore frowned.

Snape crossed his arms over his chest and beat down the urge to shout a hex. With knitted eyebrows, he stared at the men. "Pray tell me what you are doing in my kitchen," he growled. "And in my house."

Dumbledore sighed. "Not the Imperius curse then, as otherwise my counter spell would have freed him. So it must be Polyjuice." Fiercely, he pointed his wand once more at the barefooted man. "Who are you, and where is Severus Snape?" he asked, his voice only mild at the surface, but dangerously angry underneath.

"Albus, you imbecile, what the hell are you talking about?" snapped Snape, becoming impatient. "This is *my* house, *my* kitchen, *my* chairs you placed your idiotic bums on. And I am hungry, I have to do the washing up, and I will throw you out of *my* house now!" With that, he took a step only to find the two wands now drilled right into his chest.

Remus was most aggressive now. "I had an appointment with Severus last night, but he cancelled in what was literally the last minute he would never do that, but even if, he would explain it first thing in the morning. He never gets up later than seven. Now it is past noon. Severus always cleans up his kitchen right after meals in all the years I have come here for dinner, it's always happened like that. And he never, ever would wear Muggle clothes. So: Who. Are. You?"

Snape let out an exasperated sigh. When Hermione had accused him of being someone else, it had been because she just hadn't expected this side of him, and it had been amusing. But this here was ridiculous. "Would you like a cup of hot chocolate, Remus, to calm down your nerves a bit?" he asked acidly. "Topped with cream and a hint of chilli?" One cold night last winter he had prepared this speciality for the werewolf, and Snape doubted that anyone else knew it.

He turned to the Headmaster. "And you, Albus everyone knows that you are fond of sweets, but how many people know that I provide you with a certain potion that allows your stomach to actually cope with them?"

The two men were silent for a moment, pondering who else knew about their silly little secrets. Snape took the opportunity to get to the sink and started to tidy up his kitchen. "I had a visitor last night. We talked, we ate, and I wasn't in the mood to tidy up." *What an understatement*, he thought. "I slept in this morning even I am allowed to do that."

"Your clothes," Remus objected.

Snape slammed his hand into the water. It splashed over the counter. "I grew up wearing Muggle clothes, wolf, since my father was a Muggle. You know that. Don't be so bloody shocked to see me actually wearing something more comfortable than those sodding robes!" All right, he was furious. His eyes were tiny little pools of pure hell, and neither Remus nor Albus seemed to have the slightest wish to discuss the subject of his clothing any longer.

Snape took his wand out, but only to send the clean plates back to where they belonged. They clattered nervously, obviously fearing to be broken at any moment. Instinctively, werewolf and headmaster ducked their heads.

Albus lowered his wand first. Remus followed his example. Both men stared at the Potions master as if he had grown two heads all of a sudden.

"It's most certainly him," Remus said.

"I do agree," added Dumbledore. "Only Severus can make you feel like a first year who has just blown up his classroom." He chuckled. "My dear boy, I must apologise, but if you take the time to see things from our point of view, you will understand that your behaviour and your appearance is unusual enough to make us suspicious. We were just worried and decided to make sure you're all right. Sorry for breaking your wards."

Snape just said nothing, but it was obvious that he wanted to and just reined himself in with a generous amount of willpower. Finally, after several minutes, he murmured a few spells under his breath and slammed down two mugs of tea in front of the two intruders only a moment later. "I wonder why you didn't simply storm into my bedroom to drag me to Azkaban for the life-threatening crime of not wearing black clothing," he snapped. "Or for sleeping in. And Merlin, for not doing the damn washing up in time!"

"Ah, we tried that getting upstairs but the wards on your upper floor are even stronger than the ones on your front door. It took us long enough to get in at all, and so we decided to wait until you came down," Remus said idly, taking a sip of his tea.

Snape paled at the thought. Albus and Remus storming into his bedroom whilst he was making love to Hermione was certainly a most unwelcome picture. Involuntarily, he

looked up the stairs. Surely, she was finished having a shower by now?

Albus had followed his look and was just about to ask a question when they heard footsteps above. Footsteps, a door that was opened, and a woman humming not a hundred percent in tune.

Remus cringed. "Surely you didn't give in to her, Severus?" he said, slight horror in his voice. "Please, tell me she didn't catch you in her nasty web!"

Snape stared at his friend, then at the staircase. "What..." he began, but Albus interrupted him.

"Rita Skeeter she is still after him?" he asked the werewolf, clear disgust in his voice. Then he shot arrows with his blue eyes at Snape. "My dear, dear boy, I truly hope you haven't let this woman into your house no matter what her tricks might have been."

Snape shuddered at the very words. Skeeter they thought that he had sunk *that* low? Gods, they really didn't know him at all. "I would never..." he began, but luckily Hermione chose that moment to dance downstairs.

"Severus, I really can't wear my blouse again, it's torn to pieces. I took one of your shirts. I hope you..." She stopped dead in her tracks and stared at the men in the kitchen. "...don't mind," she finished with a grin. Looking over to Snape she continued, "Really, you should have told me you were expecting guests. I would have stayed out of sight."

"I didn't expect them. They broke the wards and were, until a minute ago, ready to hex me," he replied. "You can take what you want out of my wardrobe or any other place in my house. And if you hadn't come down voluntarily, I would have dragged you in here. They thought they honestly thought I allowed Rita Skeeter to get anywhere near me! You, Hermione, certainly will not hide in the bedroom." Glaring at her, his lips curved into a smile when he saw her stunned expression.

"Certainly not Rita Skeeter," Dumbledore commented. "What a pleasant surprise to see you, Miss Granger."

"Ron said you were in Rome," Lupin said, slightly confused.

Hermione laughed. "Ron really can't remember anything that isn't written on his palm. I was in Venice. I came back last night and paid Severus a visit. And I'm starving is there any chance of breakfast?"

Dumbledore got up and placed one finger under her chin. What he saw in her brown eyes seemed to confirm a suspicion. "You are not unhappy anymore," he stated. "May I hope that we will see you more often from now on?"

She looked at him. A little surprised, she became aware of the fact that she was not angry at him anymore for sending her to Beauxbatons. Back then, she had hoped he would interfere, would forbid Severus to send her away. Today, it didn't matter anymore. "No, I'm not. Being unhappy for too long is a dreadful thing. I couldn't stand it any longer. And I certainly will pay Severus a visit every now and then when he's at Hogwarts."

"Wonderful." Dumbledore nodded. "This here it began with a potion? A potion that made you... not exactly sick, Severus?"

"Before that," Hermione replied calmly. "Around Valentine's Day."

"So the rose Severus keeps on his desk is yours? I thought so," Dumbledore practically beamed with joy, having unravelled another little bit of this strange tale. "Dear, I wish you had told me, Severus."

"I couldn't, and you know that, Albus." Snape gave him his most fearful look only to see his employer twinkle over his half-moon glasses. "What I never understood, though, is why you haven't fired me."

Dumbledore patted his arm and sat down again. "What for, Severus? For being ill? Miss Granger had told me in no uncertain terms not to interfere in her business. She was of age, obviously very fond of you, and determined to help. You were most devastated at the prospect of not being able to teach her again after that night. Had I forced either of you to tell me the truth, I would have lost you, my dear boy. I was not willing to risk that." Idly, he picked up his mug and took a generous sip of his tea.

Snape was speechless. Dumbledore admitting that he was actually fond of him was nothing less than terrifying. "Sentimental old fool," he snapped, but Dumbledore only laughed, delighted to see his friend happy, possibly for the first time ever.

"How about some toast? Remus asked. "And maybe someone could fill me in on the gossip?"

"Breakfast for four, if you please, my dear boy," Dumbledore ordered. "And then you will tell me when you decided to discard your traditional black."

"None of your business, old man," said Snape and began to make a huge amount of scrambled eggs whilst Hermione set up the table.

Epilogue

Chapter 9 of 9

A student knocks on the Potions masters room only to find that he's not alone.

A/N: Initially, I had no intention to write an epilogue, but found, instead of working, I thought about a way to end this story properly. This is which I came up with. Now there's only the sequel left to write...

Many thanks to CharmedForce, shellsnapelover, and notsosaintly for betaing!

□

Epilogue

The knock on the Potions master's door was faint, if not to say hesitant it was so very clearly a frightened student knocking that Snape didn't even bother to pick up his wand.

"Come in," he bellowed, being in a relatively bad mood as his jacket refused to be found when he was already in a hurry. "Come now, or do I have to drag you in here by

your worthless neck?"

Yes, 'bad mood' was probably a mild description of his state of mind. Not only was his jacket gone, but his shoes refused to be found as well, and if he didn't hurry up he would miss the overture plus a considerable part of the opera.

"Sir?" a small voice piped, and Snape, half-dressed and furious, nearly hexed the boy out of his living room for his impertinence.

"What?" he snapped. "What do you want? And what are you doing in my private quarters? I don't allow students in here! Detention, Leonard, and ten points from Hufflepuff!"

The boy paled visibly. He was about fifteen years old, slightly podgy, with a mild and friendly face and huge feet. He trembled, shuffled, and shifted. He couldn't stand still and avoided his teacher's eyes with effort. Eventually, when it seemed clear that Snape wouldn't cast a Cruciatus Curse at him, he mumbled, "You already gave me detention, sir. That's why I am here. Could you please tell me... where Mr Filch awaits me?" Ducking his head, he looked as though he expected several bombs to emerge from thin air.

Snape, kneeling on the floor, whipped round and knocked his head on the sofa. He stared at the boy, piercing him through and through with his charcoal black eyes. "Detention?" he asked, then cast a quick glance towards his bedroom door. "Of course. You are the boy with the ridiculous amount of siblings and cousins. I expected you; you are late."

"Erm..." Sam Leonard managed. "Erm... yes, sir, sorry, sir. I have four older sisters. One younger brother. Three baby sisters triplets, a year old. Twenty-five cousins, give or take a few, all between three months and twelve years old. Um, Mr Filch, sir? Detention? Please?"

Snape had found one shoe and put it on. Luckily, the second one was hiding close by. A moment later, the great bat of the dungeons looked more like himself again as he didn't walk around in socks any longer. "Jacket... money... wand," he murmured under his breath and then remembered the boy once more. "So, you have some experience with babies, have you?" he snapped, causing Leonard to stagger back a few steps.

Nodding eagerly, Sam folded his hands behind his back, apparently to stop them from shaking. "Endless experience, sir. My mum works at St. Mungo's, my dad at the Ministry. I feed my baby sisters, change their nappies, sing lullabies, bathe them..."

"Perfect. Come with me, Leonard." Snape turned and pushed open a door Sam had tried to ignore so far the bedroom door. What lay behind it was something the boy really, really didn't want to think about. Quite possibly, Snape's bedroom was the most horrible thing to experience; there might be... chains... and cauldrons... and no bed but a rack instead... dark and smelly... in short, a room to cause nightmares.

"Today, boy! I don't have all night!"

Slowly, Sam followed his professor into the bedroom and was stunned into speechlessness; it was not horrible! Actually, it was even quite... nice. Cosy. Dimly lit by half a dozen candles; a faint fragrance of orange flowers. And no rack, but a big bed stood in the middle of the room. Not a common four-poster; the bed looked handmade and old, the wood darkened by the years, and it suited the feared Potions master as it was not fancy, not fragile, but strong and beautiful in a unique way. A quilt was thrown across it, its colours bright and friendly. A rose stood on the bedside table, and bookshelves were covering the stone walls. Sam found he liked the room.

Huh. How horrible, to like a teacher's bedroom!

Only one thing was strange. In the left corner, right next to the bed, a big basket hung off the ceiling. Made of willow branches, it swung gently in a non-existent breeze. And this basket was where Snape was heading. Silently, the Potions master stepped closer and stilled its movement; not abruptly, but in a tender way. He peeked in; his expression was covered by his long hair.

Then he reached out and touched whatever was in the basket. *What's in there?* Sam thought and curiously came a bit closer as well. *Kittens? Snakes? It's definitely alive, or he wouldn't be so careful not to wake it.*

Impatiently, Snape snapped his fingers, ordering the boy to step next to him. Clumsily, Sam obeyed and would have fallen if his professor hadn't steadied him with a swift grip round his arm. Before Sam could take a look into the basket, Snape hissed right into his ear, "If you wake her, I will kill you with my bare hands! It took me over an hour to sing her to sleep, so you better be quiet!"

That was the moment Sam nearly fainted the moment when he finally saw that not snakes or kittens were sleeping in the cradle, but a tiny little baby girl. Peacefully, she had one of her chubby fists buried into the fur of a big teddy bear, the other one had found Professor Snape's little finger and held it close.

Sam's jaw sagged open. Staring at the child, he observed her rosy cheeks, her Slytherin green-and-silver pyjamas, and the raven black hair. The teddy bear was nearly as big as she was and had a red-and-gold ribbon round its neck. The baby couldn't be older than a few months; she was extremely cute, and why on earth did Snape look so positively at a loss for words? He just devoured the little girl with his eyes, and Sam was certain that if he had said something then, his professor wouldn't have heard him.

The moment was gone quickly. Snape freed his finger gently from the child's sleepy grip and instead locked his hand on Sam's shoulder. He pushed the boy out of the bedroom again, back into the living room, closing the door behind him without making a sound. "Do you think you can look after her for a few hours?" he asked coldly; he could have been asking about a particularly nasty potion recipe as well.

"Erm..." said Sam. "I..." he continued. "How...?" he finally managed and heavily sat down on the sofa. Rubbing his face with both hands seemed a good idea; maybe he could get rid of the confusion he felt.

Snape took a single step closer. Too close. Sam felt the little hairs on his neck stand up as his Potions professor intruded on his personal space, towering above him like the gallows towered above the condemned.

"Ask," Snape growled. "Ask your questions. Then answer mine can you look after her? You have that one chance; I can always assign you for cleaning out the Owlery as well."

Sam hated owls. He made a quick decision. "I have no questions, sir," he hurried to say. "I can baby-sit. *#ke* to baby-sit! Honestly. And I won't wake her. I won't even go back into your bedroom! I will sit here and do nothing but... but..."

"Your homework, Leonard," Snape finished for him. "Your last essay was a shame. Do it again. And inform me immediately if she wakes up." With that he put more distance between him and his student again. From his pocket he produced a Galleon and handed it to the boy. "Tap it with your wand and say the message you want me to receive. The coin is charmed; I will get your message instantly."

"Yes, sir," Sam said. What else? He wanted to get out of here alive. Baby-sitting for Snape no one would believe it! "Does she... What is her name?"

"Sasha," a new voice said, and Sam jumped up from the sofa when he saw the woman standing in the door that led to the bathroom. "And no, Severus has not kidnapped her. Nor is he a vampire, keeping her for a midnight snack. In case you have wondered, she is his daughter. And mine, of course."

"Hermione!" Snape scowled. "You just ruined my reputation!"

The young woman Hermione smiled a malicious smile, stood in front of Snape, and rearranged his tie. "Your reputation is nasty enough without students thinking you eat up little babies, love. And tomorrow you can assign detention to anyone who crosses your way, proving you haven't gone mellow only because you have a child."

Sam looked from him to her and back and couldn't believe what happened here. Snape had a child? And... this woman... was she... did she just call him 'love'?

"Oh, and Sam," Hermione said. "You will get paid for baby-sitting for us. Just in case Severus didn't make that clear to you."

Sam shook his head. "Detention," he objected weakly. "I blew up a cauldron today. I can't get paid!" Panic laced his words when he said that. Whoever this woman was, she must be mad to assume she could make Snape do what he didn't want to do.

Apparently, she was mad enough to kiss the great bat of the dungeons. "You scared the life out of the boy," she said, disappointment ringing in her voice. "I won't have that! No one is looking after my daughter who doesn't get paid properly, is that understood?"

Sam expected Snape to hex her for her impertinent words. Instead his lips twitched. "Absolutely," he replied. "But if he messes this up I will turn him into a toad. Agreed?"

"Turning people into toads is my speciality," Hermione smiled and took Snape's hand in hers. "We have to go. Tonks and Remus are waiting, and I don't want to be late. I haven't seen them in a while, you know that. Sam, have a nice evening. We will return around midnight or if you call us back earlier. Sasha doesn't usually wake up after she's fallen asleep. Tell the house-elves to bring you some snacks, if you like. And if this works out fine, think about the possibility of baby-sitting for us again. Sometimes Severus has a hard time looking after Sasha when I am at work."

Sam opened his mouth to say something. Then, he closed it again when he saw Snape walking arm-in-arm out of the door with her. Since when did Snape touch people? Since when did Snape smile? Come to think of it since when did Snape have a woman, and a child, and a life?

Shaking his head in disbelief, Sam picked up a toy wand from the floor. Now he saw that there were several toys all over the place children's books, a doll, some blocks, and a fluffy rabbit. Snape's daughter Sasha quite obviously was allowed to mess up the Potions master's room thoroughly.

Actually, Sam liked the idea of baby-sitting for them again. He just witnessed first-hand how Hermione had kept the Potions master in check with a smile and a kiss. He had seen the great bat of the dungeons speechless at the sight of his sleeping daughter. His position would be unique, as there were no other students with his experience in baby-sitting. It was unlikely that he'd ever get expelled for blowing up cauldrons. A perfect arrangement for each side.

"Hell, I would give up my Chocolate Frog Card Collection to know how *that* relationship started," Sam murmured and went back into the bedroom, checking on the baby. "Perhaps someone hexed him. Or gave him a potion so he'd act human for a change. Hehehe, maybe a love potion. Man, that would be a story to tell: Snape ruled by lust!"

But, of course, the thought was ridiculous. Who would be mad and stupid enough to dose Snape with a potion? "I bet not even Harry Potter would have come up with such an unthinkable prank," he said with a grin. "They possibly met whilst shopping or something equally boring. As always. There's just no romance left in the world." Sam gave a final sigh and tried to figure out what he wanted to eat.

Author's Note (the last one for this story, promise!)

Endless thanks once more to my wonderful betas, Dreamy_Dragon and CharmedForce. Dreamy has found all the changes in POV I managed to put in the chapters and has nagged me until I had them fixed. Her comments on characters and storyline were invaluable as well as most needed. She and CharmedForce gave feedback in abundance and thus, they helped me tremendously to make this story better than it was before it landed in their caring hands. They did the cheerleading, told me to hurry up, scolded me about wrongly used gerunds and strangely shaped sentences. My dears, I simply love you!

Special thanks to shell who made the banner for me. Sorry, but I had to put it on every page :-)

In addition, I wish I could hug notsosaintly in person. Thoroughly. She did the final check at the Poetess. And found some more mistakes. Huh. I swear I am chased by commas and gerunds each night...

To all my readers

Thanks for staying with me so long, thanks a lot to each one who has left a review or will leave one. To get read is the sole reason why I write, and reviews are proof that I get read. Hugs to all of you. In case you are interested, there's a sequel: "Journey's End" ([Click here to read](#)).

