

That Language He Has Never Spoken

by madqueenmab

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thought. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

1

Chapter 1 of 6

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thought. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

. . . of course it's no surprise that Potter can't be counted on to catch every thought; the only sure bet is the boy will be too rash or too thick and never the right trait when it's needed. But if the prat can't manage to take them all, then thank the full Pantheon and the Founders too that this memory is the one he'll miss out on: Miss Granger on her knees in the Potions classroom, attending him. Her tongue wraps slick around his cock, and her lips work like cilia pursing against him as he pumps in and out. She takes him deep. She looks up at him with eyes as round and brown-gold as old Knuts. She moans and the sound vibrates against his shaft. Her tongue passes over the head and presses, and she is sweet and slick and skilled and. . .

. . . and he wakes in his quarters, hard and on the verge. There's no shame in a dream like that, he's read enough Psychology (it behooves a Legilimens to learn everything he can about the mind) to forgive himself the images, to lie back and enjoy without guilt what small thrills his brain weaves. Nothing personal, the body wants and the mind assigns. Severus grasps himself and begins to stroke. He's had student dreams before, though never Miss Granger. She'll do though, she'll do very well. He slows the pace of his hand, and with a sharp intake of breath, thinks of the dream warmth of her mouth, and of her hair come all undone. He closes his eyes and rearranges her. Not on her knees, never that, not with the war he's fighting and the side that thinks kneeling the proper place for those of her blood. He puts her astride him, riding, grinding, her skin summer brown and her breasts swaying every time he thrusts. She's naked now, Hogwarts uniform forgotten (despite rumors, that's not his thing, and Severus expects he knows what the psychologists would make of his dream-students wearing not today's uniform, but the boxy-cut version from his own school years). Miss Granger glows with sweat. They're somewhere outside, sunny, warm. She pants and she smiles and she writhes tight around him, and his hand speeds up, stroke, stroke, stroke, and her lips are swollen because of course he's been kissing them, and even if he slowed his stroking, this won't last much longer because his hand's at her clit, and she arches back and her breasts thrust forward and she. . .

At Grimmauld Place he never thought they'd win this war; at The Burrow he thinks, maybe, maybe. Last year at the Black home, they were new-sorted first years at the edge of the forest, good and unknowing and earnest and edging towards long shadows. The cur Black bore the brunt of it, but number twelve was a hard place for all of them. The house was always cold, for one thing. Tempers lent the only mote of heat. Yes, The Burrow is better. A sunny, domestic place for sunny, domestic people, though he swears by Salazar's forked tongue that he will never, ever stay for a plate of stew or round of Snap. He comes quietly and leaves quietly; the students have never noticed him once. It's evening and out over the gardens the Weasley sycophant wheedles Potter for a chance on the Firebolt. Potter laughs and--

Potter? Potter? Confound the thrice-cursed little bratling. This one's important. This memory. He's got to see. Take it . . . take it . . . take it. But Potter stands, gap-mouthed and glass-eyed as a drowned kneazle. Please, Potter. You were there for this, twilight at The Burrow. You saw it happen. Take it, help, take it, you need this, I need it, please please--

"Please, sir. Can I speak with you?" Miss Granger is there beside him, barefoot. He didn't hear her approach. He hasn't once thought of her since the dream, but the dream crashes back and he thinks of her now. Tendrils escape where she's tried to tie them back and her t-shirt's so soft and faded he can't read the words on it. He tries. It gives him the excuse to look. Dreaming of such things again would not be at all objectionable. Until she smiles. He has never despised a student's expression more. Too big and too meek simultaneously, the whole broad curve of it begging like-me-like-me-oh-please-like-me. Miss Granger wants to talk to him. Miss Granger has been thinking about the Dark Lord's snake.

"And I've been pondering Dolores Umbridge's calico kittens. What of it?"

"It was awful, what it did to Mr. Weasley. If the Order hadn't got to him . . . and even then it was touch and go at St. Mungo's. You-Know-Who's not stupid. He'll use it again."

"In all probability, yes."

"That's why I've been reading up on Muggle herpetology."

"Herpetology, Miss Granger."

"It's the scientific study of..."

"I know what it is. That was a correction, not a question. Herpetology, not 'Muggle' herpetology. Knowledge is knowledge, whether the recipient has magic or not. Art is art. Science is science. Technology is technology; music is music; and literature is literature. Magical and non-magical aren't all that different. The essence of human accomplishment is the same for us all." He's parroting Lily, not for Miss Granger's sake, but because it's safe to parrot Lily at The Burrow. He believes them too, those Lily words. Now and with a whole heart. He'd like nothing better than to *Avada* the man he was before. "The way we bandy about the prefix 'Muggle,' that's what this war's comes down to. It's more insidious than other terms, but also more pervasive and as such does ten times the harm."

She looks up at him. She's nearly a head shorter than he remembered; in the dream he's sure she was Lily's height. She's not much like Lily, but Lily would have liked her. The only time he's really laughed since the Dark Lord's return was overhearing the girl tell Black's painted mother that *Toujours Pur* was the slogan for the brand of orange juice she drank in France on holiday. There's a funny expression to her face. A better smile, smaller and less desperate. He wants to touch it with his thumb. He'd like to touch the soft rest of her. He is thinking about her mouth, and he watches that mouth move and hears her say she thinks it might be a good idea for the Order to develop an antidote to Nagini's fangs.

"Miss Granger. Surely if you are one eightieth as bright as my illustrious colleagues claim, it would occur to you that I am already at work on such a project." On top of his courses and his House and his summons and Wormtail sniffing about and his Vow to Narcissa and Draco's taciturn plotting and his own unspeakable pledge to Albus and the fresh hell that will break loose once he honors it.

"I presumed as much, sir. And you've probably already thought of this but..." She blushes. He's close enough to feel the warmth she radiates, and he remembers the plum tree in Mrs. Evans' garden. Once he and Lily (and Petunia too, this was before the school owls came) made themselves ill eating its fruit out of season, green, hard plums that puckered the mouth. But when the plums ripened Lily picked one and she put it in his hand. You can feel the whole summer in it, she said, the whole summer beneath its skin. This girl glows the same way, like a good plum, like she's swallowed a full season of sunlight.

"But what, Miss Granger?"

"I suspect you've been rather busy. With, um, projects." For a feverish instant he thinks she knows about the dream. About the new rush of waking thoughts. About the stirring he feels even in this moment and what he's going to imagine about her in his quarters tonight. It has been a long time. She touches his arm and he's half a breath from pulling her down with him to the grass, pressing himself against her and then into her with the day's last light on his back. She lifts her hand away, and he realizes she's touched his *left* arm and what that means she's saying without saying aloud. A year or so ago, she'd have been fool enough to give voice to it. When she was a child, she never stopped talking. When she was a child. Well, so few children are children now. These days, even the first years, even the ones in his own House, look haunted.

"I cannot speak of it."

"I know. That's why I did this research. Mug...non-magical avenues of thought, just in case you've been too busy, sir. I wouldn't presume . . . that is, you may well have already thought of this, but I've been thinking about Mr. Weasley. He's survived the bite; his system knows how to resist it. So maybe if you used his blood as the base for a sort of modified Blood Replenishing Potion. A draught that replaces contaminated blood with cured?"

He looks at her, just looks. She is lit from within and part of it's pride. She knows it's a good idea. A breakthrough; her breakthrough. And for all his fine words it never once occurred to him to look through non-magical texts. He should have thought of it. Lily would have thought of it. "Hermione, I could..." kiss you, he almost says, and he almost believes she can hear it; that smaller smile appears and already he thinks of it as *his* smile, his. . .

AN: Threesome will be dream sequence-y, so don't get too excited. . .

Thanks to all who reviewed and all who ("Imperio!" says madqueenmab) are going to review!

The characters aren't mine. The concept is not mine. If you think any of this is mine, you belong in St. Mungo's, which is also not mine.

2

Chapter 2 of 6

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thought. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

This chapter: Three patrol nights in a row, he catches her out after hours, down on the Quidditch pitch. She practices, always practices. *Salvio Hexia, Protego Totalum*. She has no idea he's watching until the night she masters *Homenum revelio*. When he takes no points and offers no reprimand, she winks. Lily is the only other person who has ever winked at him.

She takes no notes her first day in his class, just blinks at his "many varied, ever-changing and eternal." Hermione has no need to write it; Hermione knows. And he can't help watching, cataloguing the ways that knowing has changed her. No harm in watching. It's wholly on the up and up. She's of age and he's her teacher. He would never seriously consider touching her, besides which the Headmaster would hex his bits to Snitches. She Confunds McLaggen and he's delighted; the girl who was blindly wedded to the rules is gone (that sow Umbridge is to thank for that, he supposes, and the Ministry too). The young woman he watches—the unaffected way she slings her arms around the miscreants, the brave, determined set of her jaw whenever she opens the *Prophet*—that woman knows that we're at war and that in war the rules matter very little. Horace complains about dwindling stores, Polyjuice filched right from the cauldron, disappearing Dittany, other key (and costly) healing ingredients gone missing. Horace says some troublemaker (Peeves, probably) has been wreaking havoc with his wards, and while Severus would like nothing more than to tell the pompous old fool it was a student, a sixth year no less, who cut through his protections, he doesn't mention the Gryffindor prefect he saw tending a first year's bloodied elbow. He certainly doesn't mention that his first thought seeing her steady hands on the child's hurt wasn't that ward breaking would come in useful when she fights or that a knack for healing might just help her keep Potter's hide intact long enough for him to end this. No. His first thought was that he would gladly cut himself to have those hands upon him.

By mid-term, Hermione's marks are slipping—not that it matters. Most students, most Ravenclaws even, would still waltz with a Blast-Ended Skrewt for her grades—and when Minerva comments, he doesn't even rib her. Because he's watching, always. Her breasts graze the library table when she leans over her books, advanced tomes that have nothing to do with the schoolwork she's neglecting: books on memory charms, on illusion and disguise, on long forgotten wizarding battles. A map of Australia, for some reason once, and one of Canada, and one of the States. She arrives early to class one day and extracts her textbook, quill, and the two-foot essay he's assigned from a coin purse that fits easily in her palm.

"Some kind of Engorgement Charm?"

"Close, sir. Undetectable Extension." She shrugs. "You never know what may come in useful."

"Throw everything at him but the kitchen sink?" That's not a wizarding expression. It's one of Lily's; he's slipping up. Hermione would never tell, but still. He's got to be more careful.

"If I thought it would work, Professor, I would throw the sink too."

Potter is in the hallway, and it wouldn't do for the boy to hear him laugh. Not with anyone, and especially not with his best friend. Severus leans in towards Hermione and whispers, so that the boy--

He's got to get this one, he won't know otherwise. Potter, don't let the memory go to smoke. Take it, boy, you'll need it; Hermione has to know that--

Severus leans in towards Hermione and whispers so that the boy won't hear. "Hermione, do you recall the potion we discussed?"

She nods.

"It is progressing." And there again is that smile, his smile, not the classroom one, and the air between them shimmers. He is warm, if only for an instant.

Three patrol nights in a row, he catches her out after hours, down on the Quidditch pitch. She practices, always practices *Salvio Hexia*, *Protego Totalum*. She has no idea he's watching until the night she masters *Homenum revelio*. When he takes no points and offers no reprimand, she winks. Lily is the only other person who has ever winked at him.

In his dreams now Hermione is with Lily; their mouths meet, pink on pink. Their tongues meet, shy but welcoming. Lily is taller; the younger witch must rise on the balls of her feet to keep the kiss going. She does and Lily leans down into it. Hands find breasts, Hermione's hands over Lily's, guiding, showing her what she likes. The women have the same skin tone. The women are the same temperature, except where there's skin on skin and they grind, a tangle of limbs. He can see heat build where they press together. Even dreaming, he remembers Lily saying it's possible to make fire just by rubbing sticks together, and Severus never believed, but believes now. Only the women aren't kindling, they are too supple for that, Dryads, green in the center, soft with sun and alive with sap. They breathe words into each other's ear; it's a language he has never heard before.

The dream changes. Lily is still with Hermione and he is watching, but he himself is somehow also Lily. Hermione parts her legs and he is/Lily is far away, way down at Hermione's ankles, but they begin to kiss their way up. When they reach her apex, they lick and she moans. He is Lily and his Lily hands hold Hermione's hips still as she bucks against him. He tongues in. She is wet everywhere and warm. His Lily mouth sucks at her clit, and he works a finger in, and then another. He is Lily but the fingers are his own, and Hermione tightens around them and he presses deeper. Hermione thrashes beneath him and moans, and his tongue flicks and swirls, and she comes, calling out to him in that language of hers that he has never heard before. She calls out again, tenderly, and he knows now it is the name for when he is him-and-Lily, and that word is the warmest sound there is. He begs Hermione to say it once more, and she does, drawing his mouth up to her waiting nipple. Again and again she says it, stroking his red hair. He sucks, desperate, at Hermione's breast, as if she could succor him and Lily, as if she could bring them back to life...

Thanks to all who reviewed and all who ("*Imperio!*" says madqueenmab) are going to review!

The characters aren't mine. The concept is not mine. If you think any of this is mine, you belong in St. Mungo's, which is also not mine.

3

Chapter 3 of 6

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thought. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

Winter in the castle has him cold to the marrow, and it's a shame mere physical comedy doesn't warm him; there's plenty of that in these hallowed halls. To wit, Ronald Weasley, bounding from a vacant classroom, a fierce flock of yellow birds in pursuit. Potter flaps and gibbers at them, his catching skills quite clearly limited to Quidditch. And while it would be sweet indeed to take points...make it ten per bird...for unauthorized familiars, Hermione is at the far end of the corridor, running as if from the Dark Lord himself. Severus follows her--

and Potter should have followed, Hermione's his friend. He should have slipped on that blasted cloak and pursued. Because if he had, the boy would know, and he has to see, he must. But he stands there gaping, letting silver thought turn to silver nothing. Pay attention, Potter. Confound it, boy. Another time, another place, Severus would have sworn he'd rather die than have the Chosen One see what follows, but he's dying now; he feels the poison's chill and Potter doesn't see yet, and if he doesn't see soon, there'll be no helping it and--

Severus follows her round a corner, down a staircase, and another, down the long hallway on the sixth floor, through a door.

"Hermione?"

"Go away. This is the girl's room."

He enters the washroom. She's bent over the sink, splashing her face. "I said, leave me alone," she snaps.

"Yes, you did, but professors are under no obligations to prefects."

She stands upright. "Professor!" The collar of her shirt is wet. She blushes. The color fills in the skin between tear tracks. "I'm sorry. I guess I'm always off crying in washrooms." She flashes that wretched like-me-like-me-oh-please-like-me smile.

"Are you unwell?"

"No. Not as easy as that."

"These are hard times." Such a wishy platitude. Fornicating Founders, he sounds like Albus.

"It's not the times, it's...gah!" She kicks, furious, at the wall. Again and again. "It never ends, never. There's always another book or another spell or person or a brand new looming disaster to factor in. Eighteen going on eighty and I'm never going to have any chance for a...a life." She kicks the wall once more, then winces. "And now I've hurt my goddamn toe." She sighs and leans against the wall. It doesn't give way or hurl her across the room, as some crankier spots in the castle might after being so thoroughly abused. "To top it off, I've made a resounding fool of myself in front of you. How many points is it going to be?"

"No points. These are hard times. If you have to explode, explode."

There it is, the true smile. "I never imagined I'd hear my Potions master advocating explosions."

"It's Defense now."

"Explosions there are no good either. I like it when you smile," she says. He hadn't realized he was.

"I suppose I have reason. There is good news," he says. "I was coming to tell you."

"To the girls' bathroom?"

"I intended to wait until after class, but this is where I found you."

"What news?"

"I've completed the Weasley-based potion. The Headmaster thinks, and I agree, that we shouldn't advertise its existence. It's far better for us at this point to be underestimated. But the breakthrough was yours; I thought it right you be told."

"Thank you. It really works?"

"If administered quickly, before the throat seizes up. Quite extraordinary, really. I know I mean to carry it with me at all times. The others will too, once I finish this next batch... The brewing makes Wolfsbane look like Pepper-up. But after the war... This is important work. It could lead to a whole new sub-field. And I want you to know that, when this is published, you'll have contributing credit. I'll have to change the potion's name first; I can't abide the idea of linking my own with 'the Weasley-based potion.' I think Snakecure..."

She flits towards him. Her lips are on his, the barest flutter.

"...Serum is a bit obvious, but will do if..."

Her lips again. Twice as warm as when he dreamed. Hermione is small, so small. She has to rise on tiptoe to reach him.

"Hermione. If you wish to thank me, thank me." She takes her tea with honey. He can taste it on her lips. "But this conduct is inappropriate."

"I'm not thanking you," she says, "I'm believing you." She is still on tiptoes. He inhales what she exhales. All the air in the world belongs to them.

"What nonsense is this?"

"I trust you. When you say there will be *an* after I believe there will be."

He waits. She waits.

"Say it again," he says.

"I trust you."

"No. The rest of it."

"There's going to be *an* after."

He darts down to fully claim her lips, her tongue. A few fast steps and she's back against the wall, mewling with pleasure. She leans into him and her hands are inside his shirt, and he had no idea how cool his skin was, how chilled, before Hermione was here and touching him. His hands work fast to free her from her blouse. Nothing has ever been as fragile as the line of her neck. He can see her pulse in it and he bites there. She laughs, a rich, slow, merry sound out of pace with their frantic undressing. Her hand undoes his trousers; his peels away her knickers. She grinds against his palm and they melt together down the wall. He gathers her into his lap, facing him, and his mouth is on her lips, her forehead, her cheeks where he can still taste salt. She wriggles against him and moans that it's hard, so hard, and he pulls her to him because he will never have enough of her skin. They kiss once more and her hands are in his hair, down his chest, on his cock, and she bites small bites on his shoulder. Her breasts are just right for his hands, and she shivers and throws back her head when he strokes and squeezes and tongues the flesh. Only when she picks up her discarded wand and passes it over her abdomen to cast a husky-voiced charm against conception is he fully sure this is no dream.

He asks, "Do you want this?"

And she says, "I do."

He moans when she says it.

And she says it again. "I do. I do."

She is ready for him and he thrusts in and Hermione keeps saying it, "I do, I do, I do." This is no dream. She is here and he's inside her and it's slick and he belongs; he's

supposed to be here. It's clear from how he fits, right and full and hard; it's natural as the stone inside a plum. Her voice in his ear, how she wants this, "I do, I do, I do, I do." He thrusts up; she gasps and gyrates. He pulls her close to him, head to his heart.

Severus knows he's been a cold man all his life. Bitter and envious and even cruel. He will be that man again, he knows, maybe even the instant they're done here. But right now, warm and wild and moving inside her, it's not strange at all that he cherishes her all the more for knowing she's lived her whole life cherished, brilliant daughter, beloved friend. He can feel the beating of his own heart, there, beneath the skin. It dictates the rhythm of his thrusting, faster and faster. Sometime in all of this, her "I do, I do, I do," has become "I am, I am, I am." The sound of it drives him harder, faster, pounding until she comes, gasping and writhing between an *I* and an *am*. He thinks: *she is, she is* and no incantation has ever had so much power. He spills into her, grateful, for the first time in years, for the simple fact of existence.

Until the reality of that existence reasserts itself; cold tile beneath his arse and a crick in his neck. He's just had...and thoroughly...a student on the floor of the washroom, where anybody might have caught them. Caught him. Going at it like a full moon on Mayday. Such blood thrumming madness; there's a reason one letter only separates Eros from Eris. Hermione's lips are chapped; it's winter. He'd forgotten for a moment. He'd like to kiss her once more; he'd like to wring sighs from those lips, moans, his name, hell, even a how-dare-you-Professor-what-on-earth-do-you-think-you're-doing? Anything, so long as it's loud enough to draw someone, anyone, to this room. A wandering second year. Minerva. Potter. Argus or his horrid cat. This is Myrtle's bathroom; where the hell is that spying specter? If he's caught there'll be no sidestepping the Governors' wrath, no denying the flagrant disregard of the school charter, not to mention basic morality. The Headmaster will have no choice. Severus will be canned for a letch. Drummed out of the castle. Azkaban or exile; it doesn't matter so long as he's too far from the grounds to honor his mentor's suicidal request.

Hermione's expression is wild, desperate; it may well mirror his own. She kisses him. It's gentle. From the look in her eyes, he expected something fiercer. "Don't worry," she whispers.

He cannot speak of it. "I won't," he says.

"I'll never tell, Professor. I swear." More kisses. Lips, throat, eyelids. Her tongue beneath his tongue, like the coin it costs to cross the Styx.

"Hermione." Where his lips first met her neck, the skin is starting to purple. His fingers will stay warm now, even in the chill of the dungeons, just remembering the weight of her breasts.

"I wouldn't want to tell, anyhow. I want to keep this for myself."

For myself, she says, not *to*. It makes a difference, and his mouth is on hers once more and maybe someone will come, maybe someone will hear...

AN: Eros and Eris are the Greek God of Love and Lust and Goddess of Chaos and Discord, respectively. The River Styx, in Greek Mythology, is the boundary between living earth and the realm of the dead. Proper burial required a coin be placed beneath the tongue (or over the eyes) so that the deceased could pay for passage across the water.

Thanks to all who reviewed and all who ("*Imperio!*" says madqueenmab) are going to review!

The characters aren't mine. The concept is not mine. If you think any of this is mine, you belong in St. Mungo's, which is also not mine.

4

Chapter 4 of 6

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thought. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

Lily smelled of spring, Hermione of the fall. Both of them with notes of honey, but not the same honey, honey from different blooms. Buckwheat honey, that's Hermione. Lily is too long gone for him to remember anymore. His nose is large, and his nose is clever, but never clever enough. Lily used to say if this war gets all too much for us, we'll run away and buy a vineyard; keen smell's a plus in that business. He knows very little about wine, only that the more vines struggle against drought and ill light the better fruit they yield. He thinks about their vineyard, how the three of them would bottle the very finest. Red not white, because white must be served chilled and Severus has had enough of cold. He thinks of honey-women at harvest time, grapes beneath their feet. Lily. Hermione. They hitch up their skirts, but the hems catch in the juice. It stains the fabric the color of plums.

He of all people should know how to quiet his mind.

He catches Hermione out after hours the night of Ronald Weasley's narrow miss. She's alone. If Potter--

Potter, Potter, please. It's a small blue bottle. The Snakecure Serum. Left front pocket, nearest the heart. Listen for once; listen to me. It's a small blue bottle, a small--

She's alone. If Potter were with her she'd be safe under his cloak and he wouldn't have seen her at all.

"Miss Granger," he asks. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm scared," she says, which he realizes later is not exactly an answer.

"Mr. Weasley will recover."

"I'm scared all the time these days."

He doesn't tell her he's scared too. He's her teacher; he can't burden her like that. Can't burden any of them. He's her teacher; he ought not back her against the wall, part her knees with his own, draw a hand slowly up her thigh. No one else is in the corridor, but they're two doors away from Weasley's sickbed. Poppy will be hovering. Poppy with her shrewd ears. "Please," says Hermione, her voice little more than breath, and he cups her. He pulls the crotch of her knickers aside. She nods, and so he takes her again, right there, braced against the cold stones. He thrusts harder this time, but Hermione's much quieter, only a kittenish little keening. Where she's tight, she gets twitchy-tighter, once, twice, three times. She rocks against him, frenzied, but still she makes no sound.

"Let it out," he says. "Let it out."

She's crying quietly.

"Don't stop," she says when she sees he's noticed the tears. It's a whisper. "Hard now. Harder." That's a whisper too.

He pounds and pounds. Harder like she asked, hard as he can ever remember going. He feels her come once more, and they both look down, rapt, to watch the in and out of their bodies meeting. The castle sleeps. It's appalling that no one catches them; even the portraits snore. He expected better of the school's guardians. Their world is at war. They really ought to be more alert.

After, she thanks him, of all the preposterous things. Why has no one come running? The castle's always so quiet by night. The tiniest sounds carry. When she leaves him, he can still hear her footsteps halfway down the hall...

AN: Sorry so short! The next one will be longer.

Thanks to all who reviewed and all who (*Imperio!* says madqueenmab) are going to review!

I still own nothing.

5

Chapter 5 of 6

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thought. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

Trouble is, he's a Slytherin and it's not Slytherin nature to get caught. But she's alone with a stack of books, and he knows the Library's his best chance. Empty, yes, she's the only one who'd come here on a Saturday, but there's always Pince, and besides, this is the Restricted Section. There are books here that scream if you breathe wrong, wail at the touch of an un-gloved hand, burst into flame if you mispronounce their titles. Someone will come. And, failing that, he can make her mad. Make her run crying to Minerva; he knows her reputation as a temper and a tell-tale. He approaches silently. She doesn't look up from *Magick Moste Evile*. It's not the first time she's read it, he knows, it's the ninth at the very least. His first act as Defense master was to charm the darker texts to alert him if a student so much as touched their spines. Hermione seems to be making a list. From the looks of it she's writing down every title referenced by the tome in front of her. As if that's the kind of thing that will help Potter--

Help, Potter. Not the blue bottle, too late for that now. But listen to me, see me. See this, the two of us. Too late for blue bottles. But it's not too late to tell her, so please, Potter, help, Potter, look, please, look here. Before you go to Him and death and to your mother, look at us. You have to see. I need you to tell her, need your help, Potter. Harry. Help--

As if that's the kind of thing that will help Potter with this war, Potter who is pudging up for the slaughter. He was almost willing to do as Albus asked, dispatch him then and there, hearing that. Lily's son. And how it will hurt this girl when the boy dies. This girl who he has to hurt now, hurt to save Albus, save himself, save her too. Expulsion is nothing, shame is nothing, not if it means she'll be sent off miles away and safe from all of this.

"Anyone who tells you, Miss Granger, that it's worthwhile to fight fire with fire is either a fool or a pyromaniac. Tell me, what are you looking for in that particular book?"

"I would prefer not to discuss it, Professor."

"We all have our preferences. I, for instance, would much prefer you naked at the moment."

Her eyes snap to him. The other times it simply happened, no discussion before or after. Simpering goody-girl. Surely crassness will embarrass her. Surely there will be tears. With luck she'll run to Minerva to confess and not the Headmaster. The more people who hear, the better, though either way he'll be out on his arse by sundown. She stands. Her eyes dart towards the door. She crosses to it. Perfect, she's going to leave him. He ignores the sudden twinge. It has to happen this way.

But no, she closes the door firmly and turns to him. There it is again. The last thing he expected. His smile.

Clearly he knows her not at all. The amount of trouble she gets into. Something about it draws her; he should have seen it sooner. All her prissing around can't hide it. Their little army was her idea, he knows, and the Polyjuice too. Astounding how she has the whole staff fooled. Hermione, the reasonable tagalong, trying and failing to keep those foolish boys in line.

A quick flick of her wand and she is naked before him.

Extraordinary. Exquisite.

He knows her not at all.

They won't be safe unless she's wounded and wild.

Without a word he frees his prick. It's hard as anything. She stares at him, at it; it feels harder still under her eyes. His blood thrums. He needs her almost as much as he needs to hurt her. "Tits to the table, Miss Granger. I am going to fuck you full of splinters."

She complies without hesitation, eager legs parted to make things easier for him.

The girl must be mad.

He's lived a spy for years. Survived. It's a simple question of playing a role. Of thinking a thing to say and saying it. "Nimue fucked her teacher too," he says. "Whored herself to Merlin for a bit of knowledge. Do you want it like that, then? Do you think you're ready for what I could teach you?"

She moans a little and wriggles towards him. And they say Slytherins are perverse. It's horrible how he wants her. He hasn't yet touched her today, and he doesn't, not until he plunges into her, no warning. He expected some resistance, but she's wet for him, slick as she's ever been. Astounding. "You like it this way?" The incredulous words come before he can stop them.

"It's a little different," she says, breathless but calm, reassuring, like they were having an ordinary conversation, "but it's quite nice, actually." She pushes back against him

and clenches as if to prove it.

He groans and trusts. So be it. "I'm going to make you come, Hermione, and when you do I want you loud. A wizard likes to know he's appreciated."

The heat of this girl...there's nothing like it. She quivers around him, divine. She rocks back against him and he drives into her roughly. He'd like nothing better than to fuck her to pieces, and he tells her so. In no time at all he has her howling. No one appears to stop them. The table beneath her creaks. Her breasts slap against its surface and she grunts and no pair of sounds has ever been so pleasing. He pistons in, out, in, out, and when, with a throaty cry, she comes tight on his cock once more, he realizes: this is far from the first crime he's committed on school grounds. Since his mark burned black again, nothing, no ward or ghost or painting or colleague, has ever stood in his way. Albus knows his spy must edge right up against the darkness. Albus knows a spy with no way to slip around the rules is no good to the Order. The Headmaster must have the castle itself charmed to cloak his every wrongdoing.

What a terrible thing it is to be trusted.

Hermione will be hoarse this afternoon from the way she's screaming beneath him, but on the shelves the books stay still as stones. He expects he could bugger her at breakfast in the Great Hall and somehow get away with it. No one will see him, no one will stop him, no one will save him. Only the girl beneath him can do that now. There are many magics that can force the truth to light, but not one that can permanently suppress it. Not when a strong mind's determined to speak it clear. Severus has got to hurt her enough to make her tell. But he's been watching her. It will take a lot. She's nearly outgrown running to the authorities. She's the kind to keep a secret close. All too late he remembers the way she marked that Edgewood tattler. Still, Severus knows he has a gift, a curse, a weapon: ever since that day with Lily at the lake he has an instinct for knowing the cruelest thing a person could possibly say.

You, girl, are no Nimue.

Nimue came to her teacher intact.

You're nothing but a convenience.

You like this world, don't you? So much you'd do anything to belong, open those legs wide for anyone who asks.

Desperate little thing like you I'd barely call a witch.

More like a hole that needs filling.

He knows to cast an Unforgivable you have to mean it. Speaking something unforgivable though, that can be all too easy. Since the lake he hasn't let it be. Oh, he insults people, but the stinging words are calculated. Nothing ever just slips out.

You, girl, are no Nimue.

You don't belong here; you know it. That's why you're so quick to spread yourself for those who do.

Squirm for me. Feel my prick inside. You like it deep like this, rough like this, hard enough to split you in half. This is the most real magic you will ever get. Common chit like you won't ever belong here, but I'll let you pretend if you come for me now, and come hard.

Even in the first war he never felt as powerful as this. Her hips are going to bruise from his grip. Good. Evidence for when she runs...limps!...sniffing to someone kinder. Astounding she's still tight, wet, and willing, given the unrelenting way he's driving. So young, so lovely, so absurdly full of trust. Severus has to speak. He knows the terrible words that will save them both. Hermione will hate him, but she'll stop his mad pact with Albus. All he has to do is say it: you, girl, are no Nimue.

When the Dementors come for him they won't find much left worth kissing. To cast an Unforgivable you have to mean it. To speak one, it's best to mean it too. It's easy enough. Just think of your target at her most loathsome. Miss Granger's broad and begging smile.

You, girl, are no Nimue.

That smile in his classroom. That smile in the front row.

Nimue came to her teacher intact.

Like-me-like-me-oh-please-like-me.

He knows her not at all. He knows her all too well.

Eros and Eris, he feels so right inside her. Eris and Eros, he's *in loco parentis*. In a better world he'd never have been either.

He fucks like mad. He fucks like he could fuck whatever drew her to him in the first place right out of her.

You, girl, are no Nimue.

He hears his own voice, a rasping, broken thing. "Put me in a tree. Please, put me in a tree."

Which is what Nimue did, having learned all there was to learn of Merlin. Everyone knows the story. Young girl like that, his student. The bastard deserved it.

"Put me in a tree." He deserves it too, like Merlin, cursed with centuries of toxic, troubled sleep.

"Put me in a tree." It's the only way left to keep him from the darkness he must do.

He's begging now. "Put me in a tree."

He gentles his pace. "Put me in a tree."

He's weeping. "Put me in a tree."

He kisses the words into her shoulder blades. "Put me in a tree."

Her spine could be a tree trunk. He traces it and begs again. The tree he's thinking of is Mrs. Evans' plum tree, stark in winter. Hermione, tight around him, is all the warmth that remains in the world. He's close now, and getting closer. Any minute now, any second. The plum tree starts to bud, then flower...

Thanks to all who reviewed and all who ("*Imperio!*" says madqueenmab) are going to review!

I still own nothing.

6

Chapter 6 of 6

Snape lies dying on the Shrieking Shack floor, hemorrhaging silver thoughts. Here are a few key memories that Potter failed to collect.

The time comes all too soon. Filius lies Stupified on his office floor. At least he can keep Hermione from fighting, keep her safe, if only for a little while.

"Tend to him," he says. He doesn't think to wonder what she's doing outside his office at midnight with the Lovegood girl. It doesn't do to question such an unexpected gift. "Be careful. Be safe."

"Are you going...?"

"To the fight."

She nods, much calmer than she seemed before. This too is a gift. The last moment anyone will find comfort in his presence.

The Lovegood girl kneels beside Filius. "We should lift his feet, Hermione. Everyone knows it's bad luck to wake up in your own footprints."

"Yes, let's do," Hermione says. "That's a non-magical cure too. We call it treating for shock."

There are so many things he could say. He lays a hand over his heart, over the pocket containing a small blue bottle--

small blue bottle, Potter, too late...too small blue late Potter bottle...Potter blue...Potter bottle...too blue late, small Potter--

He lays a hand over his heart, over the pocket containing a small blue bottle that—who knows?—might someday save his sorry life. But he doesn't draw her attention to it. He can't. In a handful of moments, what's to be done will be done. Even if they find his notes or the half-brewed batch in his lab, the Order won't trust him or his bottles. But maybe she has it in her to trust herself, the hard bright gem that was her idea. He'd best not remind her then that he, the betrayer, puts faith in it. She's entirely too by the book with Potions, but the Weasley twins, mad though they are, are an enormously promising pair of brewers. They might find a way to duplicate the formula, improve on it, give a dose to every fighter in the form of a Snakcure Snackcake. He keeps silent. For the sake of the Order. Quiet always, for the sake of the Light.

There are so many things he could say and no time at all. The Lovegood girl will witness everything, which is an unwanted complication. The Ravenclaw wrangles Filius' boots off and begins to hum an unfamiliar tune. "Brindlespecs are drawn to merriment, and they're the best things ever for a speedy recovery," she explains. "If we can attract a few, Professor Flitwick will have an easier time when he wakes." The melody is absurdly cheerful.

He'd have strength enough for what's coming if he was close enough to smell Hermione, all autumn leaves and buckwheat honey. He'll have to find the strength regardless. "Miss Granger," he says. It may be futile, but he hopes she'll have sense enough to loathe him and not herself. "I believe you are destined to do great things for our world." He should have said these things to Lily too. Every day when she still spoke to him. "You must always believe it is your right to do them."

He's revealed too much. No matter that soon no one will believe him capable of saying such things. He draws his wand for an *Obliviate*. Her expression stops him. That last fleeting gift of a smile. His. He carries it with him step by step by step up the tower...

...and he's lying on cold stones; they smell cold even, cold in the air and dust in the air and probably residual were-dander. Severus is afraid. He's always afraid in this nightmare excuse of a hovel. Since his fifth year, he's known this is where he would die. He *is* dying. He smells blood—his own. It's too much to hope for that the Dark Lord's—that Riddle's—been cut. He's bloodless, Riddle. Venom in his veins, sharp and cold and clear as white wine. Thank the good Goddesses it was only the Snake and not the Wolf come to claim him in the end. The gnashing Wolf, his yellow eyes shot through with veins, his breath fevered with old meat and new blood, and Severus will be meat soon enough, sinew and bone for the Wolf who paces gray and matted and waiting—No! He won't die thinking of this. Not when the Wolf is Lupin after all and bound to be out there still in the melee, may he tear the voice from Bellatrix's throat. May he rend Lucius from stomach to—No! These aren't the thoughts that will bear him through the Veil. Not when (impossible, but there it is) he scents out honey in the air. Buckwheat honey, dark, sweet and with it the tang of smoke and of fallen leaves. And then green eyes. Green? *Look at me*. He's dying, not mad. The mind's still keen. He knows full well that's not the scent that goes with those eyes. He blinks. Still they're green. And then he realizes. It's magnificent; despite it all they've found a way to come for him. Both together, those brilliant witches. Lily is Hermione is Lily is Hermione; this is magic after all. There's a word for her, for Lily-and-Hermione, a word for her in that language he has never spoken. They've come to him together to teach him their name. He will learn it and he will leave and he knows their name and knows that they are merciful: they can't stop his going, it's too late for that, even if (and, clever girl, she might just) she finds the bottle. They are good, too good to let him leave from here. Not the floor of the Shrieking Shack, somewhere better...

...the Forest of Dean. His doe is at the ice lake, watching over the others. No harm will come to them. No matter that Potter only ever thinks two minutes after it's too late, or that Weasley could draw every ear in the forest with his galumphing about. No harm will come to them. She is watching. And Severus stands shirtless in a snow-hushed meadow, the land bare and white and empty if he looks with his eyes. But his eyes are closed. He presses against the wards that she has cast. She's cast them well. They crackle against his skin. He feels for her mind—not to possess it, he has never, he would never—just to know that she is asleep and she is warm. If he had time, he could dismantle the protections; it's easier to do, after all, when one has made love to the caster. But this is war and Severus knows he has little time left, and what time he has will be spent in fighting. He leans forward, her magic lashes then shrouds him. He is glad in his heart he has never seen her cast a Patronus. He doesn't know its form and doesn't know what his knowing would do to the doe. He doesn't know if Lily would understand about Hermione, if she would care even, if she would forgive him at least this sin against her. All he knows is this: as long as he thinks of the scent of honey, there is light enough within him to call forth a Patronus, despite what role he played in darkening the world so that young as they are, radiant as they are, both women have had terrible cause to cast one.

The End

AN: Sigh. I promise my next fic will be a bit cheerier. Thanks for sticking with this and double thanks to all who reviewed and all who ("*Imperio!*" says madqueenmab) are going to review!

I still own nothing.