

Something Afoot

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Sometimes it's the quiet ones you have to watch.

One

Chapter 1 of 5

Sometimes it's the quiet ones you have to watch.

A/N: A small piece inspired by a conversation with Snapekat at the possibility of Snape having a mild foot fetish. We resolved to each have a go at writing a chapter about it with a deliberately unidentified OFC. Go and have a look at hers(Stumbling Into Ecstasy)!

Be nice; it's my first time!

The room waited: silent, patient, still.

The dull, almost metallic winter light barely had the strength to force its way through the slightly warped glass pane of the window. Or perhaps it just wasn't trying hard enough. The day had been bitterly cold in the way that English winter days were prone to being...the wind cutting cruelly through clothing, whipping the persistent rain around in frustrating whirls of splattering wetness that defied any protection against it; frosts that barely melted to an icy dew before the creeping evening froze the droplets once more into tiny, white pearls; a frigid air that stole the breath away in gasps of pale cloud.

A slight vibration ran through the room. It could have come from somewhere below the building where the Circle line ran or from a heavy-goods truck passing by. But the room knew that neither of these things were the cause, taking a slow breath in and scenting the approach through the worn and pitted panels, cobwebbed cornices and the threadbare pelt of carpet.

An angry voice floated through the cracks between the door and its frame a few seconds before the handle turned.

"...don't understand why you think that isn't important, and I really don't believe that we should be wasting time like this!"

The woman limped into the room, her face set resolutely in an expression of extreme annoyance that was a perfect match for the crabby tone of her voice. The flush of red in her cheeks had as much to do with her mood as with the cold outside. She took a cursory glance around the room and grunted.

"Cheery," she concluded sarcastically and hobbled over to the chair by the cold fireplace. Beads of water trickled off her chestnut overcoat and pattered onto the carpet, igniting a pale bloom of the fibres' former glory as the moisture soaked through the layers of dust trodden into them over the years.

Her companion drifted in after her and closed the door behind him, his face as pale as his clothes were dark, a lock of damp hair plastered to the side of his face that succeeded in accentuating the angularity of jaw and cheekbone. He seemed untouched by the woman's rancour, a line between his brows that could have indicated distraction. Or perhaps it was connected to no emotion in particular. Perhaps it was always there.

The room wondered how long they would stay. That they had not removed their coats boded ill, and the room's past experience led it to the conclusion that their presence would be only temporary. A ripple of disappointment rang along the joists. It had been some time since anyone had stayed long enough for the room to live anything more

than a washed-out existence. How long had it been? Days had come and gone, but as to how many... The room didn't know.

The woman sat down heavily in the old chair, causing a cloud of dust to erupt up and into her face. She waved her hand to push the dandruff of disuse away from her nostrils and swung her leg up and over the arm of the chair.

"Bleugh! Couldn't you have picked somewhere a bit less fusty?" she muttered under her breath and scowled at the darkened hollow of the fireplace where the logs sat like lumps of stone.

The man either didn't hear her comment or chose not to answer. He went and stood in front of the window, his back to her, and gazed outside.

The room wasn't certain...it was early days yet, of course...but he seemed anxious about something. If they stayed long enough, it was possible that that the room could discover why. The transient comings and goings of people meant that there was a small window of opportunity for any kind of empathy with those that paused between the walls, and the room had learned to absorb as much of what little there was as quickly as possible.

Right now, the spiky waves of discontent radiating from the glowering woman were like a flow of pain from a fresh wound: bitter and stark. She shifted so that she could balance the heel of her boot on the very end of the chair arm and glanced at the man's back.

"You haven't spoken all day," she stated, narrowing her eyes, her hands fussing around her raised ankle absently.

The man said nothing, but the room thought that his anxiety increased. Just a fraction. Sometimes when people stood by the window, the room could feel them more clearly, as if the barrier between object and being were thinner there, more permeable to the currents of emotion.

"I've left you at least five openings for sniping, and you haven't bitten once."

His head tilted slightly to one side, the sodden ends of his hair trailing across the dampened fabric of his coat, feigning interest in some detail that lay outside. The room realised that he was waiting for something. The plaster swelled in anticipation, and a gust of icy air exhaled from the fireplace, making the woman shudder.

"Are you in a snit about something?" she accused, her eyes still shuttered to slits. "You usually are, but you've never shied away from vocalising it."

His shoulders shrugged incrementally.

The woman pressed her lips together briefly. "It's making me nervous."

The room realised that she had been reluctant to admit that. Interesting.

And it seemed he thought so, too, turning his head so that his profile was silhouetted sharply against the colourless sky through the window, his eyes set so that he could see her peripherally, like a hawk on a branch that saw all that sought to hide from its gaze.

The room reached towards him gently, like a hand questing in the dark, and felt the pulsing thud in his chest. The floorboards quivered at the connection, thirsty and needy. The air inside warmed, the room's unseen fingers drawing out the heat from inside him eagerly. His heartbeat faltered slightly and then righted itself once more, the momentary uncertainty that came before a final decision.

With an audible sigh, he turned from the window and walked towards her, his thumb brushing the lock of hair that had been stuck to the side of his face back into and amongst the other midnight strands. Hooking his foot around the leg of a rickety wooden chair that sat beside the equally decrepit table, he swept it across the floor smoothly and sat down in front of her. One long-fingered hand reached part way towards her, palm facing the yellowed ceiling, allowing the room to see the faint crescent marks his fingernails had pressed into the lined flesh. He fixed his gaze on some point on the floor between them.

The woman stared at him in mild surprise, her pale green eyes widened, the colour of shallow waters under blue skies and spring leaves. The room thought them her best feature and wondered why he would not look at them. Into them.

Neither of them moved, though it seemed the crease between his brows deepened. Just as the woman's mouth opened, his middle finger curled and straightened repeatedly in a summoning gesture.

"Your foot," he stated quietly. "Give it to me."

At first, the room thought the last words were unnecessary, but he'd spoken them carefully and emphatically, as if the clarification held some particular significance buried in the grain of his voice. The mantelpiece flexed in response to the timbre...dark like polished wood, smooth as a bird's feather, deep as a forgotten hollow under a towering mountain. It flowed and spread through the room, into the spaces that had opened over the years as the structures had fallen slightly from each other in fatigue and disappointment and the ennui that had become all that the room could remember with any certainty, binding them together once more in an almost visceral convulsion.

The woman's breathing quickened. "My boots are dirty," she replied faintly.

He did look at her then, the combination of the gentle curve of his upper lip and the squint of one eye making it clear what he thought of her statement.

She huffed and glanced quickly to one side, the colour in her cheeks deepening, but she lifted her foot off the arm of the chair and down into his outstretched hand. Clasp his fingers around the heel, he drew her foot slowly toward him until it rested on his knee. His hand travelled up the back of her calf, pulling the cuff of her trousers up to expose the top of her boot.

Although her eyes were still turned away from him, she noticed the hesitation before he pulled the laces from their knot.

"Don't worry, my feet don't smell!" she bristled, closing off the brightness of her own anxiety in that shrewd narrowing that fanned out the lines at the corners of her eyes more noticeably. The room wondered, if she had seen the small smile on his face that her comment elicited, whether she would have had any idea what was coming.

The laces slithered through the eyelets, allowing the leather to relax away from her ankle. Her face tightened as her pain increased, the thrum of blood moving through her leg making the room flex inwards, pulled inexorably to that multi-channelled river that carried the myriad of things that sustained her in its circular, crimson journey.

The empty boot hit the floor, making her jump. Her nostrils flared wide as her sock slipped down her calf, the red and black stripes alternating as they emerged from behind the faded, rusty colour of her trousers like a banded serpent's markings.

He noticed her shivering before the room did, his head tilted just so to ask the question without speaking, the fingers of one hand wrapped around her bare ankle and the palm of the other cradling her calf, eyes half-closed so they appeared almost totally black.

"It's cold," she explained quickly, flicking a glance at him. *"I'm cold."*

Again, the small smile that was the only outward sign of the growing satisfaction in him at her tremulous agitation.

"Take off your coat."

"No!" She folded her arms tightly, trapping her hands under her armpits, holding the cold, damp fabric around her body defiantly.

The room sighed in an echo of the flush of triumph that rose in his body at her faint gasp as his fingers slipped smoothly over and around her ankle, trailing down and into her instep. She tried to draw her foot back, but he tightened his grip on her calf, his eyes widening and hardening in warning. She halted her retreat abruptly, frozen in that

penetrating stare, her own eyes blinking uncertainly.

He waited until the muscles under his hands relaxed before letting go.

"Give me your other foot."

Her eyebrows floated up. "Why? I only turned one ankle, not both." Her brows lowered back down, shadowing her eyes. "That is, *you* turned my ankle!" she corrected quickly, her shoulders tightening in frustration.

"Is that so?" The room twisted in the radiated challenge as if it were a gentle eddy that caught the unwary in a firm but dangerous caress. "Give it to me."

The second boot hit the floor, making her jump even more noticeably this time, her shivering increasing until the water-tipped points of her hair vibrated.

With his head tilted forward, his long hair hid most of his face from her, but the room could see his eyes travel along and over the lines of her feet slowly, his hands drawing her ankles closer to each other, making the slight puffiness from her injury more apparent. The room could now see many things that had been hidden.

Soft words hissed from his mouth, birthing a fire where for years there had been none. The room was almost certain it was done to distract her from noticing where he placed her uninjured foot: between his thighs that were parted just enough to allow it to rest there, the wool fabric of his trousers touching its edges ever so slightly.

She yelped in surprise at the flames under the mantel, her head turned towards the light that seeped into the greys and tans of the room, lifting them to warmer shades that hinted at how the room had once been before slipping into disuse, a slow death that made the infrequent rally of recovery to be that much sweeter.

Fingers slid over her skin languidly, tightening briefly over the pulse points, the corners of his mouth turning up at the rapid fluttering that beat against his fingertips.

Her hands, now freed from their prison under her arms, clutched tightly at those of the chair, her eyes wide and round, locked on the only part of him that moved, that felt every square inch of skin laid bare between his palms.

Confusion, uncertainty, self-consciousness...the room could taste them all in her, but the cause was not as much the motion of his hands as the sensations they caused in her. She was fighting against them. And losing.

His long thumbs stroked along the sole of her foot, gradually building the pressure, making her toes curl in her final, valiant attempt to hold off that soft, liquid release that seeped into her, through her.

She watched in terrified fascination as one hand cupped her foot and raised it up and off his knee, oh so slowly, the ends of his hair slipping past her swollen ankle, her instep tickled by the warmth of his exhaled breath.

The room clenched in anticipation.

His mouth opened. The pause seemed to extend forever, both cruel and exhilarating. He knew to wait just that little bit longer, so finely tuned to her mood that it was almost torturous the way he held her at the very edge, on a knife's unforgiving blade. Her nostrils flared erratically with her breathing, nails digging into the fabric of the chair.

The cool tip of his nose brushed a line across her sole once. The second time, the trailing touch of his lower lip deepened that invisible line. The third time, he washed the line away with his tongue, making her toes flare and spread in shock.

"Whuh... what are you *doing*?" she asked, voice strangled, her face as scarlet as it could possibly go.

He tipped his head back up to look at her through half-lidded eyes, her foot still held a hair's breadth from his open mouth, breath sighing in and out silently against her skin.

The room knew. The room now knew it all. How long he had waited to do this to her and watch her unravel. How long he had thought of how to convince her to let his will be greater than hers, just for one moment. How many times he had dreamt of this exquisite point in time, freed from being unable to touch her for fear she might recoil from him in disgust. Or worse, derision.

The room felt. The room now felt it all. How much she had struggled against that insidious desire to watch him when she thought he was unaware of it. How she tried to deflect the confusion at the pull of his eyes whenever he looked at her. How she desperately wanted to experience what it was like to have him consume her in any way he saw fit, and not die of shame at the perverse thrill it ignited in her.

The room decided. It would not let them go until they reached the precipice of that elusive synchronicity of smothered, internalised hunger, until they fell willingly from the summit of lubricity down and into the depths of lustful completion. It bowed, focussed and reflected, channelling everything that swirled within them into an irresistible wave of demanding need that crashed repeatedly against them, wearing down their resolve until there was nothing left but truth.

Refusing to let her eyes slip away from his, he slid his tongue with agonising slowness from her instep, up and across her sole, working his way patiently up to her little toe, the skin of this most dextrous muscle hotter than fire, smoother than silk, stronger than desperation. He moved his head past her foot, leaving his tongue to trail up after before retreating back into his mouth. The expression on her face made him bare his teeth in the addictive thrall of utter control.

Eyes never leaving hers, he lowered his head until her toe vanished into the velvet embrace of his mouth, his grip on her raised calf loosening so that he could pull her other foot flush up against him, using his palm to trap her up against the strength of his urge to leave her in no doubt of what he had every intention of giving her. She broke.

"Oh... my... *god*!"

And those three words were his undoing. The control and restraint he'd been so proud of, that he'd gloated at her through, shattered so completely it left nothing but insubstantial dust. His hand clamped her foot up so tight against him that the buttons of his trousers dug into her skin. His mouth left her toe and latched onto her instep with the appetite of a starving man who had been given a ripe peach to eat, answering her involuntary moan with one of his own as his hips moved to grind himself against that blessedly willing appendage with a fierce, increasing determination.

Her back arched as his tongue wound itself around and between her toes, as he bit each pad of flesh firmly and possessively before sucking them so hard the blood rose to the surface, threatening to bruise her flesh with a sweet agony.

The sounds of their fevered breathing were threaded through with the rhythmic creaking of the chair he sat on as he crushed his length up and down her foot, his head falling back in sensory overload, her name curling out from his mouth in ragged, drawn out syllables uttered in time to the sweeping, upward thrusts of his hips, his fingers digging with near painful intensity into her flesh, the hem of his overcoat swaying across the thin carpet in a mirrored motion of the undulating curtain of his hair.

Freed from his possessive, trapping eyes, she watched her toes rub helplessly along his hardness that, although hidden from her view behind that ridiculously encapsulating attire he insisted on wearing, was no less intoxicating for being so. She saw the pulsing beat in his exposed throat that was echoed inside the thick desire under her foot, heard the increasing cadence of approaching orgasm wrapped in that voice that had plagued her, tortured her, liquefied her with a studied and deliberate domination. Even in his lascivious abandon his power over her was so complete that she willingly drowned in it.

The chiselled prow of his nose reared up and over as he lifted his head, impaling her with the intensity in his eyes one final time, sinking his teeth into the underside of the foot cradled in his upraised hand so hard that he broke the skin, a thin trickle of blood leaking down to her heel, the first drop falling to the floor just as he came with a wrenching force that threatened to splinter the bones trapped between his palm and his groin, sucking feverishly and greedily at that crimson rivulet, shuddering with the

impact of that glorious finality, pulling her with him, both keening incoherently as she followed him over the edge.

He doubled over as he fell apart, his teeth still buried in her, unwilling to let her go as she convulsed repeatedly, squeezing her between his thighs and drawing his nails along her arch.

The room crowed and dissolved in their delight, alive once again after so very long, after so many cold and bitter days that had shrouded it in loneliness and desolation, shimmering in the aftermath that neither of them wanted to end.

But he lifted his mouth from her, licking that faint sheen of red away from his lip before sliding the bone of her ankle down and along his philtrum, his laboured breathing gradually lessening.

"How's your ankle?"

"Ah, er, still a bit sore, I'm afraid," she panted with eyes screwed shut tightly, her head resting on the back of the chair, cheeks flushed.

"Well, then," he surmised with a smile on his face, stroking the trembling foot between his thighs delicately. "I guess I need to give you something stronger, don't I?"

And so the room waited: silent, patient, still.

AN: I finally did a piece of art for this story. I hope I'm allowed to put this link here so if you're so inclined:

<http://protowilson.deviantart.com/art/Lick-92930818>

Two: Fall

Chapter 2 of 5

Because the idea refused to die.

A/N: My thanks to both fhestia and snakekat for being so encouraging and helping to weed out the errors. This one's not as footsie as the last chapter, but don't worry, new-born foot fetishists, it'll return!

Soft. So soft. Not what he had expected at all.

Skin so smooth it felt almost liquid, like warm cream. Something inside him coiled and entwined as he noticed the carefully trimmed nails at the ends of her toes, pale pink crowned with a line of perfect white, a rose bitten by frost.

His fingertips continued to track curled patterns over the foot still clasped between his thighs, still trapped up against him, held as securely by his teasing caress as if locked in the grip of a dragon's jaws.

The tiny tremors that shuddered along her legs hadn't faded, and her pulse raced in its startled rhythm, pushing her warmth to her very edges and into him.

He supposed it had something to do with what had just happened, with what he had just done to her. With her. The sound of his own breathing mingled with hers as he nuzzled her other foot, still cradled in his right hand, the tip of his tongue flicking out occasionally to wash away the deepening scarlet trail that wound its way down her instep towards her heel...her blood seeking escape. He'd only been careless enough to allow two or three drops to fall to the carpet where they bloomed like tiny flowers, brightening the flattened fibres with a pale aura.

She tasted of steel. Of steel and strength and the colour of the clear sky at dawn. But if he held his mouth still, lapping her flesh with a swirl of his tongue, he could taste the brightness of what lay underneath: so sweet, like a wash of honey. He nearly bit her again in his hunger, pining to consume everything she hid inside. Reluctantly releasing her from the suckling grip of his mouth, he blew lightly on the tiny puncture marks his teeth had left behind, making her toes curl slightly and her breath hitch.

She still hadn't opened her eyes, her hands still desperately gripping the arms of the chair. He'd never seen her like this, so anxious and uncertain, frozen.

She could have kicked him in the face, he realised. Worse, she could have driven her heel straight into his groin and left him groaning on the floor in agony. She was capable of such things, never one to suffer anything she didn't like; quick to anger, slow to appease.

But she hadn't kicked him. She'd sat there and let him worship her feet with his body, open-mouthed and wide-eyed, letting him tear away the façade and show her how he felt. How he wanted. How he lusted.

Lowering his arm so he could gaze at her foot in his hand, his eyes travelled over the faint scars set evenly between the bones, the flesh even paler than her normal colouring, lines of terrible memory and painful experience. He frowned as he noticed a fine, hairline slash of white different from the others. His left hand withdrew from the foot between his thighs and traced a finger along the line gently.

She stirred, and her eyes opened a fraction, watching him in his careful study of this faded memory. He lifted his head to look at her in silent query.

She pressed her lips together before answering. "My sister."

He blinked.

"She stabbed me in the foot when I was eight."

His brows drew down. "Why?"

She shrugged. "Because I held her down and spat in her ear."

There was a pause, a blend of surprise and disbelief, before he laughed, making her stiffen in indignation and pull both feet away from him, but he couldn't help himself. So like her.

She glared at him over the tops of her knees, her legs drawn in tight to her body, closing herself off from him. He regretted his laughter now and feared this would be where she would push him away in frustration and hurt. Like a cat, huddled into itself, shamed. This wasn't what he wanted to have happen.

She had been right. He had been to blame for her twisted ankle. It hadn't been deliberate, but nevertheless, she'd tripped over his foot as he had shifted towards her, the two of them moving simultaneously, each surprising the other. One moment she had been still at his side, and then she had stumbled over his foot, dropping to the floor in a graceless heap, swearing at him like a fishwife. Now, he couldn't even remember why he had moved at that moment. It had seemed as if his body had decided on some course of action without telling his brain.

Naturally, she blamed him. Naturally, it had nothing to do with the rather curious lack of reflex on her part. This woman who could move faster than a mongoose had fallen flat on her face right at his feet like a clumsy teenager. He'd been too surprised to even help her up; not that she would have accepted such assistance.

She'd been off-balance since the previous evening. Ever since he'd caught her staring at him so intently that she hadn't noticed he'd seen her looking at him, glass raised to her slightly open mouth, eyes glittering from behind the strands of her hair, thinking that perhaps it shielded her from his detection.

He knew she'd been staring at him. It didn't take the glass paused before her mouth for at least half a minute to give her away. It had been like a gentle pressure in his mind, like a butterfly's wing turning through the spring air. He'd felt it before, but had never been able to catch her looking directly at him when it happened. Her eyes were always sliding away when he glanced, affixing on some other point in the surrounds, her face neutral. But lately, he'd been almost able to catch her watching him with those shrewd, challenging windows into her thoughts.

He'd expected her eyes to flit away when he flicked a glance at her, but they didn't. His eyebrows had risen slightly in astonishment until he realised why she hadn't known he was looking back at her...she was staring at his nose so intensely she hadn't seen his eyes move.

So he'd waited for her to notice, remaining as still as possible. Seconds passed, measured out by his heartbeat that gave a curious kick at the end of each pulse, pushing his blood in a tingling flow, a flow that began to pool steadily and insistently in his groin in reaction to her attentions.

He'd been forced to clear his throat in the end. Her eyes raised to meet his and then darted away in shock, her hand bringing her glass that final inch to her mouth so clumsily that the liquid inside sloshed down her front. Their table companions had laughed, one making a joke about it that they all took as the reason for her rapidly reddening cheeks. But he knew it was because he'd finally caught her, and it turned him on so emphatically, so completely that he was certain it was written all over his face for everyone to see.

Except her. She kept her eyes fastened on the table in front of her, cheeks still burning until she muttered some incoherent excuse and left the room, stumbling slightly at the doorway in her haste.

He'd had to wait until the others had left before he could even think about moving from where he was, keeping the evidence of his arousal hidden through sheer willpower against its siren call, the way it wrapped itself lovingly around his spine and how it made him pant.

He had only just been able to make it to the room in which he slept before falling to his knees, gasping, one hand pressed hard to his erection in both acknowledgement and rejection, bending forward until his hair brushed the floor, supporting himself with his other hand as he rocked back and forth, whispering a denial under his breath while admitting his need with long-practised touch and motion until he fractured in a series of draining surges as her name hissed through his clenched teeth.

It was there, on the floor, that he realised he couldn't go on this way any longer. It was there, with his forehead resting on the carpet, that he knew he had to do something, to take a risk, even if it ended in rejection. It was there, swallowed in the brutal ache of need, that he knew he had to do it soon.

Nothing had shown on her face the following morning. He'd looked for any sign, any crack that would let him know if he had a chance, but she was too wily, too careful to slip a second time. So, he had begun to doubt himself. Perhaps she had just been staring at his nose because it was so large. She wouldn't have been the first and certainly not the last. Perhaps she was just another in a long line of those who mocked him for the incongruity of his features; just another to treat him like an ugly oddity to be reviled.

And so he'd said nothing. And berated himself for his arrogant assumption.

She'd noticed his silence and prodded at him like a child poking a stick into a spider's hiding place, trying to draw him out of his black sullenness. He'd ignored it even as the core of him whined like a stupid dog in its attempt to make him beg for her. It had driven him to near-madness to do so, but he'd stood firm, condemning himself to the sting of it as his rightful punishment.

But when he'd heard the anxiety in her voice at his continued silence, something collapsed, and his blood flowed again. He threw caution to the floor and accepted that whatever she did, whatever she said he would endure, even if it hurt, even if it shamed him, even if it made him shrivel and die inside.

And so, if he was going to go down willingly, he had nothing to lose that he hadn't already surrendered. His hand had paused as it had reached for the laces of the boot that rested on his knee, a secret and forbidden thought surfacing from the depths of his most lewd fantasies, lip curling in both scorn at himself and lust for the final realisation of something he'd played over and over in his mind in the darkness until he convulsed at its apex, again and again.

And she'd let him do it. She'd let him grind against her like an animal in rut, laving her foot with the kind of abandon he'd only dared to attempt in his mind, until he'd heard her moan in pleasure and he'd lost control and dragged her with him into that most primal release, the name he had never spoken to her face falling repeatedly from his mouth in hopeless gratitude and searing delight.

She'd let him do it. And like a greedy and wilful child, he wanted her to let him do it again.

Slowly, he slipped off the rickety chair and sank to his knees before her. Her eyes glinted with reflected firelight, her arms tightening around her shins, drawing back ever so slightly. His fingers wrapped around her forearms, pulling them firmly apart and away from her legs. She fought him, just enough to let him know that it was only with her permission he could do so, but her arms still moved to where he placed them on the chair beside her. Her body still shook; still so uncertain, making him want her in a furious swell that went from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head.

He edged her legs apart gently until there was enough room for him to shift forward and between them, his thighs stopped by the chair, preventing him from moulding his body against hers. He leant forward, his nose sliding gently along the side of hers, hair falling to brush against her face, one hand sneaking behind her head to help guide her back, his other hand placed on the cushion seat to help him balance. Dragging his bottom lip over the bridge of her nose, he proceeded to caress the other side, his breath light against her cheek, trailing down to her mouth where he teased her with his closeness, a hair's breadth from tasting her, from drinking her. He felt her shift toward him and quickly wrapped his fingers in her hair to turn her head slightly, exposing the side of her neck, opening it to him. The thick flat of his tongue pressed against her, tracking over her carotid as it thudded underneath the wetness, making her whimper.

He whispered to her, the fingers in her hair stroking her, calming her as he told her how much he wanted her, his mouth against her ear, using his voice to coax her back to that delicious peak. His soft, velvet tirade paused only long enough for him to bite her earlobe, claiming it as his as she shuddered, her breathing becoming faster and deeper.

His hand dropped from the back of her head, sliding down her spine to hook her behind and pull her into him, against him. That same hand sneaking up her front to unbutton her coat, pushing it aside so he could feel the thud of her heart more clearly, so he could manoeuvre her until they aligned; hunger, need and appetite pressed so tight, his hips taking that same slow rhythm as before to let her know that he wasn't finished with her, wasn't even close to satiation.

He whispered to her, his body moving gently, purposefully, his hardness sliding against the liquid he had spilled earlier in his feverish wantonness, the friction both delicious and painful. She breathed words of her own, words that sounded like both entreaty and demand, spurring him on.

Her legs slipped around him, binding him to her, her hands grabbing fistfuls of his overcoat, still damp from the morning's rain, the scent of him strengthened by its

moisture, his hair brushing over her mouth as they swayed in their embrace, her eyes squeezed shut as she let him fill her with his voice and drive her crazy with his lazy thrusts.

He whispered to her, desperate to tell her everything as slowly as he could, as completely as he could, winding a vocal halter around her...to control her, to bewitch her, to master her once more. He gasped as her legs crushed him into her, groaning as she matched him in that sweeping motion he had set the pace of, inhaling that quivering sweetness that rose from her flesh.

She fought against his coat, pulling at it to try and force it from his body, to make him shed at least one layer, to relinquish one stratum of armour. The strength of her in her passion was both frightening and exhilarating, threatening to rip the fabric in twain. He shrugged his shoulders and twisted out of the coat, his arms going back around her, two bands of iron to hold her as still as she would allow whilst he moved more insistently in his struggle to ride the wildness in her.

He whispered to her, words that promised, words that begged, words that plunged into her, dirty and sweet, bonding her to him and him to her, words slippery with lust and dark with possession, talking her through her ascent, guiding her in that climb to the summit, lifting her up to where the air would make her head spin and pound.

Her hands on his back, digging her fingers viciously into him. Her legs clamped around his hips to let him struggle futilely to find a way inside her, failing to achieve more than to feel the heat of her against him. Had she allowed it, he would have shredded the fabric between them in his frenzy to be lost within her, but she was too strong for him.

So he whispered to her in adoration, urging her on, pleading with her, promising her anything she wanted if only she would break again in his hands, promising her he would catch her and never let her go. Her body tightened in fear at the fall.

So he whispered her name.

And she fell.

Gently. So gently. Not what he had expected at all.

Three: Proof

Chapter 3 of 5

Some things require study and practice.

A/N: Cos I'm sick and can't stop. My thanks once again to fhestia and Snapekat.

She'd heard it all. And wondered if it were true.

Bat of the dungeons, they called him in their scorn. The greasy git, they dubbed him, laughing behind his back. Ex-Death Eater. Turncoat. Traitor. The snake in the dark that you'd never see 'til he struck.

The Hufflepuffs were afraid of him. They *all* were, but the Hufflepuffs especially so. Unforgiving, biased, unjust, they labelled him, muttering at his favouritism and prejudice that messed with their concrete definitions of fairness.

The Gryffindors hated him. Intolerant, nasty, humourless, they denounced him as, convinced he existed purely to ruin their lives; self-centric in the way Gryffindors were.

The Slytherins admired him. Champion of their cause, punisher of fools and defender of their rightful place above all others. They stood behind him in all things and smirked at those stupid enough to challenge.

But the Ravenclaws had not yet passed final sentence. Mean, they said, but strong. Bad-tempered but brilliant. Intimidating and exacting in standards. They could appreciate that, judging from all angles in the way Ravenclaws were prone to. She'd heard as many words of praise from their mouths as those of condemnation, and God knew there were plenty of the latter.

Ravenclaws left themselves open to possibilities, speculative and considering, always asking questions, demanding information that they tested, catalogued and applied. The Potions master was no different a subject matter than any other to them, but sometimes their analytical conversations wandered into unexpected areas.

She'd been in the library, sifting through the shelves in the section on politics in magical society to source material for some painfully dreary essay that Professor Binns had shackled them with when she'd overheard a small group of Ravenclaw sixth-year girls whispering at a study table behind the bookshelf she was perusing. At first, she had not known what they were discussing, merely using the sounds of their hushed voices to keep her from falling asleep on her feet. Dear lord, even the *titles* of the books were enough to bore her unconscious!

The realisation of the subject matter they were debating about came to her gradually, one eyebrow finally lifting in scepticism as she stifled a snort of amusement that was echoed by a majority of the girls at the table.

"I'm telling you, you're not looking at the facts," said the presenter of the theory that they were betraying their cynicism of. "They all lead to the same conclusion I've reached."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Natasha! You're just skewing the facts to fit your rather perverted hypothesis!"

Supporting murmurs followed.

"I think it more likely that you're unwilling to re-examine the evidence for fear you'll have to let go of your simplified and comfortable little categorisation, Amy," was Natasha's rather supercilious retort. "Just look at what he wears."

"The same black straightjacket he's worn ever since we've been here!"

"That's *precisely* the attitude I'm talking about, Amy! You're too quick to dismiss the theory at the surface level. A man who wears clothes that cover that much must have something to hide under it."

"Yeah, a pair of grey underpants!"

The girls sniggered in agreement at Amy's interjection, but Natasha refused to be dissuaded.

"You'd allow the rumour of old evidence to influence your analysis? Listen to what I'm saying."

From behind the bookshelf, their eavesdropper leant forward slightly, eyes no longer focused on the open book in her hand.

"Clothes with that many buttons take time to both put on and take off: patience and control. The cut and style of attire is close-fitting and restrictive whilst the teaching robes are longer and more voluminous than those of the other staff: carefully-considered flair. Movements precise and certain with hands as skilled and graceful in using a knife as they are elegant at rest: knowledge and experience in when and how to move."

"And she's off again," said one of the girls under her breath, making her companions giggle in agreement.

"Are you honestly telling me you have never wondered what those hands *cando*?" Natasha asked incredulously. "Fingers that long could reach all sorts of exciting places. Steady, delicate, rhythmic."

The faint gasps around the table evinced the shock such a scandalous thought elicited.

"Don't tell me you haven't wondered what it'd be like to have that dark voice whispering into your ear, talking dirty, making you so weak at the knees that the only thing that held you up would be the brush of his lips on your bare neck."

"What lips?" Amy muttered derisively.

"And the size of his nose..."

"Ah, Tash, you know that's just an old witches' tale! They've proved that a man's nose has nothing to do with the size of his..."

"That's not what I'm talking about, Amy. Haven't you ever had a guy go down on you?"

There was a shocked silence.

"Well, yes, but I didn't think it was all that amazing," was the reluctant reply.

"A *guy*, Amy, not a boy," Natasha clarified. "An experienced guy knows how to drive a girl crazy with his nose as well as his mouth and tongue."

Their eavesdropper's eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

"And he has a very long tongue."

Someone squeaked. "How do you know *that*?"

Natasha laughed quietly. "I saw him lick his knife at dinner once. Very, very slowly. It was one of the most erotic things I'd ever seen."

"Gross!" squawked a couple of the girls, making the others hush them lest Madam Pince descend upon them in ire for breaking the hallowed silence of her domain.

"You've all felt what it's like to have his eyes on you, so black, so penetrating that you're sure he knows what you're thinking."

"Tash, if he knew what you were thinking, he'd have a fit and then hex you into next year!"

"I don't know, Belinda," Natasha replied. "I think our Potions master has a few secrets that'd make your toes curl."

"Speculation!" the other girls pointed out, almost as one.

"Speculation is what makes it fun," Natasha giggled. "I've often wondered what he'd be like in bed."

More scandalised gasps. Their eavesdropper blinked rapidly, echoing their gasps with one of her own.

"What a nauseating thought!" said Amy quietly, though with not nearly the level of repulsion that had been in her voice previously.

Seconds of silence passed, broken only by the sound of a page being slowly turned.

"Have you ever seen two snakes fighting? I reckon it'd be like that."

"Belinda!"

"Ah, stop being such a prig, Amy!"

"Do you think he'd hold his partner down?"

"Or tie her up?"

"He'd have to, otherwise she'd run a mile."

"Shut up, Amy!" they all hissed.

Another pause. Another page turned.

"He looks like the type to be into bondage."

"Ooh, leather! That's hot!"

"Dominant or submissive?"

"Dominant!" they all pronounced emphatically and sniggered.

"Dominant all the way." There was no mistaking the taint of Natasha's grin in her voice.

Someone shifted in their chair.

"Do you think he'd talk while he was *doing* it?"

"Hearing him talk *is* like doing it!"

"Can you imagine him saying the word 'fuck'?"

More muffled giggling.

"Do you reckon he'd snarl when he came?"

"Amy!"

"I reckon he'd bite."

"You've been reading those vampire novels again, haven't you, Tracey!"

"He looks starved for it. I reckon he'd come hard."

"Hissing."

"*Cursing!*"

The girls snorted, and one of them drummed her feet on the floor in delight.

"But his hair is so *greasy*," Amy pointed out, making the others sigh and tut in annoyance.

"I bet it's to stop you from pulling it while he's growling you out," Natasha guessed.

"It wouldn't stop *me*! Toby loves it when I pull his hair! He says it makes him hard."

"A stiff breeze would make Toby Federson hard!" someone muttered.

"I can't imagine Snape letting a woman pull his hair. I think he'd pull *her* hair, though."

"While he was doing her."

"From behind!"

"On the floor!"

"Of the classroom!"

More feet drummed on the carpet in excitement, laughter muffled in hands and in crooks of elbows.

Their eavesdropper shook her head in disbelief.

There was a heavy sigh.

"I still can't see it," said Amy.

"I can!" said all the other girls simultaneously before bursting out into gales of laughter that reverberated back and forth between the walls of the library, drawing the vulture out of her eyrie to scold and drive them out for such shocking and disrespectful behaviour.

Missed by Madam Pince in her purging sweep, their eavesdropper closed the book in her hand, slotted it back into its place on the shelf and found her own way out. The girls' unashamed speculations weren't what she found surprising; it was how closely they had matched her own musings that unsettled her and, if truth be told, made her hackles rise slightly in jealousy.

She lived her life in second place, *herrightful* place: second in all things. Except danger. That was what she was trained for. The shield always on guard to take the brunt. Her needs did not enter into it. Her wants were unimportant.

But her fantasies were hers alone. She was entitled to them, but she held them close and caressed them when no one was looking, twisting her mind closed lest any trace of her thoughts become apparent to others and betray her selfishness and indulgence, consuming the eroticism of her sordid desires like the smooth delicacies they were, full and bittersweet, making her sigh and shudder as the flavour of them gripped her body and made her dissolve in the heat of lustful imagery.

About him.

With her.

Doing the things she wanted him to do with her. *To her*.

The blood would rush to her face at the thought of it, but she could never stop herself. It was a compulsion she relished, as exhilarated by its intensity as she was fearful of it, an intensity that increased steadily until it began to make her careless around him.

But she couldn't stop it, didn't *want* to stop it. It felt too exquisite to do anything but allow it to run through her. To make her stomach drop when she heard his voice, so silken and fluid, as masterful in arousal as it was in scorn and derision. To run her eyes over his body and wonder what it looked like uncovered, moving over her, the faintest sheen of sweat making the contours of his muscles catch the light as they rippled in rhythmic effort. To watch his hands as they gestured in graceful and unflinching exactitude, and shudder at the thought of them on her body, stroking her skin, bracing her hips, fingers dipping inside her to pull her taste to him. To marvel at the clean, arcing silhouette of his nose and imagine the enjoyment of having it sliding against her, teasingly insistent, a counterpoint to the writhing twist of his tongue as he left no part of her unsavoured. To inhale the scent of him, a melange of all the things he touched and mastered to do his bidding, eliciting a thirst in all her senses that made her curl in on herself in an effort to quench it. To wonder if she could stand the dark destructiveness of his eyes locked on hers as he pushed firmly inside her with both mind and body, leaving her no refuge from the spiralling rapture such overwhelming penetration would ignite.

Twisted and hateful, they called him in their ignorance. The black-clad wraith who went out of his way to punish and hurt, they described him as. Arrogant. Untrustworthy. Coward. The Dementor born a human to fool the unwary into carelessness.

The same man whose face was buried in her neck, whose hands had eased back her coat, trailed down over her ribs and ghosted up over her breasts and twisted themselves in her hair, whose voice had pinned her and melted her and sunk inside her in imploration and insistence, whose body had sinuated against her until she peaked in red-faced amazement under his ministrations, whose unexpected actions had let her feel what it was like to be first instead of second.

He had done nothing to satisfy her appetite, manipulating her against him in such a way that it made her want him more desperately than ever, more selfishly than ever.

First. She liked first. It made her bold enough to touch him, her hands finding the front of his coat, the ends of her fingers tracking upwards along the buttons to his throat, working the fastenings until they relaxed apart one at a time, down over his chest, down to where their bodies were pressed together. Her palms glided over his shirt,

tracing the outline of his muscles as her legs tightened greedily around his hips, making him draw in his breath against her neck in a long, sucking gasp, making him shudder as she whispered his name for the first time, making the pulse inside the evidence of his lust thud against her even harder.

Slowly, deliberately, she gathered the material of his shirt in her hands and tore it straight down the centre, its buttons unable to withstand the force she put on them, seams wrenched apart in ragged wounds.

His teeth latched onto her throat as she ran her hands over his flesh, his body quivering at the contact, so unfamiliar, so delicious. His own hands left her hair and slid over her, fingers pressing firmly against her as if testing her ripeness. His skin, hot and slightly damp from his exertions, thrilled her. His body, lean and slender, promised her endurance and strength. The moans that stayed trapped behind his teeth, which thrummed against the skin of her neck, assured her of his willingness.

She wondered how he'd react if she pinned him down and fucked him six ways from Sunday. Would he submit, letting her take whatever she wanted? Would he fight her for dominance? Would it shock him or would it please him? Would it give him what he wanted or would it make him pursue even more, matching her gluttony and challenging her to best him?

She pushed him back with the flat of one hand, his heart under her palm, his teeth dragging at the skin of her neck in his reluctance to release it. Her knee pressed against him to make him sway back far enough for her to place one foot on his sternum, forcing him to edge backwards on his knees and away from her until her leg was straight.

Eyes wide, nostrils flared, bottom lip glistening faintly with moisture in the firelight, the front of his body finally revealed to her from under black and white, his raven hair brushing his collarbones as he moved...a picture to tempt her, to lure her into frenzy, to snare her in a web of delicious craving.

They stared at each other, poised in a moment of time that stretched and flexed and collapsed in on itself.

"Show me," she told him.

He blinked at her, uncertain of her meaning.

Her foot trailed down his stomach, over the waistband of his trousers and along the length of him, making him hiss and clench his hands into fists, his eyes never leaving hers. Searching. Asking.

She opened her mind. And told him.

His eyes went even wider in shock, showing more white than she had ever seen, mouth falling open to show the slightly elongated incisors that made his sneer so distinctive. His astonishment lasted only a few seconds, his eagerness to comply filling the vacuum in a swell.

Fingers wrapping around her foot, he held it still against him until she passed the control from her to him. Head bowed forward, his face hidden from her, he gazed at her foot hungrily, fingertips stroking softly, giving her the chance to study him, half-unbound and on his knees, silhouetted against the darkening afternoon through the window behind him.

She'd seen the scars at his throat. They were not new to her but no less powerful for that. Three lines across his torso, pale and precise, two crossing each other over his heart as if someone had deliberately marked it so, flexing as his chest expanded and contracted in increasing cadence. The first flush of dark hair guiding her eyes down his abdomen made her tingle at what it promised, down to where his hands cradled her foot, down to where his hips rocked gently.

He tugged at the cuffs of her trousers, his eyes lifting to her face, speaking silently to her through the warming air of the room, through the locks of his hair that she wanted clenched tightly and possessively between her fingers. She fumbled at her waist and wriggled so he could pull her trousers down to slide along her legs, reluctantly opening a gap between them to allow him to discard the clothing atop his overcoat. Scooping up her other foot, he placed it next to its partner, bracketing the engorged flesh still trapped behind his own clothing. His hands clasped eagerly over her feet, drawing them towards each other and squeezing himself rhythmically, pulling up an ardent groan from within her that he answered with a curling twist to his mouth, eyes glittering at her as she gazed fixedly at where her feet sat. Stroking him. Hardening him. The feel of his flesh behind the fabric was incredible. Hot. Powerful.

Her own hands travelled up the insides of her thighs, their movement ensnaring his eyes and causing him to bare his teeth in the same burgeoning lust she attended to with careful, obvious motion.

One hand took on the work of two as he stilled himself to loosen that final barrier between them, one button at a time, revealing the intensity of his appetite with agonising graduality, torturing her, making her writhe as he uncovered himself, inch by inch. Thick, wrapped with snaking veins that helped to darken him, flaring wider underneath the head in a pledge to her pleasure, in a vow to slide inside her and lock himself there, moving in delectable friction, deep and slow.

He lifted her feet up to his mouth and ran his tongue along first one instep and then the other before trapping himself tightly between her arches, hips moving once more in a sinuous movement that started from his sternum and ran down his body in a muscular wave.

She sighed at the sensation of him sliding between her feet, at the sight of that firm column of flesh as it stroked back and forth, at the sound of his breathing as it hitched in his throat, at the way his eyes never left the site of such glorious frottage of sensitive skin, at the clear drop of fluid she desperately wanted to wash away with her tongue as it trailed down the underside of him, at the brush of hair on the soles of her feet and the caress of his loosened clothing along her ankles.

He pushed her feet together even tighter, making the velvet skin ripple in his efforts, increasing his pace and plunging deeper in this perverted version of copulation that allowed them both to see how he used himself to help satisfy the both of them, the cords of his muscles standing out under pale skin dewed with sweat.

Faster. Harder. Rougher.

She saw his head fall back as the waves pulsed along him, pushing against her insteps, his long fingers interlacing tightly over the end of himself, his whole body shaking and her name falling again from his mouth as a milky trickle escaped and ran over the knuckles of his hands. Hips twisting and grinding erratically, his movements lessening until he drew in a deep, shuddering breath and his body clenched over her feet, holding himself there for over a minute, panting helplessly as the shocks of his orgasm wracked his frame.

Words ancient and well-known to him sighed in an exhalation, purging the slipperiness from his hands, allowing him to unlace his fingers and use his mouth to soothe her bruised flesh in apology and appreciation.

Bastard, they called him. Vicious and bitter, they labelled him. Ugly and gaunt, pale as bone and cold as ice, they described him as. A man with no heart, no remorse and no empathy, as soulless as the grave. A man born only to be hated and despised.

She'd heard it all. And knew now what was true.

Four: The Liar, The Punisher & The Thief

Chapter 4 of 5

The strings pulled into a knot may actually make a pattern if one steps back.

Surely they had not known that this would happen?

Circumstance is a strange thing. Inside circumstance lie all the possibilities in the world, and it takes the smallest thing to turn possibility into actuality.

Old as it was, the room knew this. It was a creature of subtlety, such subtlety that many would consider it inanimate.

Built as it was, the room was forced to act in indirect and delicate ways. Those who paused between its walls never noticed its influence on them.

Alone as it was, the room sought to touch whomever it could, emerging from its grey hibernation with an eagerness to connect, to breathe again, to show its colours trapped for so long under dust and abandonment.

The window flexed, shifting against the contracting chill of the approaching evening and the expanding, slightly damp warmth inside. Damp from clothing beaded with rain that slowly rose in vapour at the fire's enticement. Damp from fevered exhalations sweet with lust. Damp from skin flushed with friction and slick with desire.

A pale, white condensation formed at the edges of the glass, making the room tremble in distracted irritation at the encroaching hindrance of its view of the two figures inside. There were other ways to observe, but the room liked best to use the window where perception was clearer and deeper. The room was nothing if not a voyeur.

Soft. Gentle. Silken. Smooth. The room could see the way his mouth worked on her feet, the lightest touch of his tongue sliding over her skin with a studied care that always guided him back to where his teeth had pierced her. He kept her blood flowing by suckling on her instep, drinking red in a steady rhythm.

Slumped as she was in the chair, did she know what was going through his mind? The room wasn't sure. People seemed to evince an incredible lack of empathy with each other which the room never understood. In its opinion, people proved incredibly dense at reading each other. Perhaps it was deliberate, but the room couldn't see what the advantage of that could possibly be.

There was something between them, like a silvern thread that smelled like the full moon late in the year. What passed between them through this thread? The room didn't know.

His mouth pulled away from her skin, his hair brushing along her ankles gently. He sat her uninjured foot down on the seat of the chair and cradled the swollen one.

"It seems my actions have done little to improve this," he noted dryly, running the tips of his long fingers over the puffy joint. He pressed his thumbs into her flesh. "Does this hurt?"

She shrugged slightly, her eyes wandering over the front of his body, his torso framed by his loosened clothing. "It's not that bad."

He looked up at her, his hands becoming still. "Considering how much you cussed and limped, you gave every impression that the injury was significant."

The room shivered at the edge in his voice.

"Are we to have another discussion on the unwise tendency you have to obscure your physical condition from me?"

She looked straight into those black eyes without a shred of anxiety. "I don't recall any discussion on that subject."

His eyes widened in warning at her statement.

"I *do* recall you shouting *at* me about it," she continued with a half-smile. "If memory serves, it was quite a spectacular tantrum."

No, she *didn't* know what was going through his mind, otherwise she wouldn't be pushing him in such a fashion while sunk so calmly in the chair.

His face didn't change expression. "I see." He plucked one of her socks off the floor and slid it onto the foot in his hand, his thumbs hooking into the fabric to guide the striped covering over the curvy swell of her calf, his palms running over the lines of her leg, up past her knee to half-way up her thigh.

She frowned. "What are you doing?"

"It needs to be bound to minimise the swelling," he told her distantly, resting her leg on the arm of the chair.

Her frown deepened as he found her other sock and slipped it on and up past her right knee. "Why...?"

"Symmetry," he replied, interrupting her question and wedged her foot into the right-angle between the seat cushion and the arm and picked the other foot up once more. His hand delved into the pocket of his coat and drew out his wand, the tip of it running down from her toes to her heel. The fabric tightened, constricting in concentric waves, embracing her ankle snugly.

She didn't see the flick of his wrist that he hid behind her foot, but she did feel what it did. Her eyes narrowed to slits and her hands bunched into white-knuckled fists.

"You sneaky bastard!"

He gave her a wide smile that would make a shark hesitate. "I know how many teeth you have hidden, tigress. I'm not about to let you sharpen them on me."

She pulled against the interwoven bonds of her clothing with the covering of the armchair, the fabrics knitted tightly together where they touched each other, her arms bound to those of the chair, her back glued to its front: trapped.

"And you need to be very still for what I'm going to do to you."

The cool wood glided up the inside of her thigh, making both her and the room shudder at its touch on her warm skin, quiver at the steel hidden in his voice under dark red

velvet and tighten at the midnight control in his eyes.

The wand reached where her thigh joined her body, the material gathered in a ripple of creases due to the position of her legs: open, bent, allowing him to trail this extension of his hand across in a sinuous line.

"I don't like being lied to," he told her, head tilted to one side, enjoying the frustration locked in her expression. "Yet you persist in it." His wand traced a rune of physical pleasure onto her. "I think it's time I broke that habit in you."

"With *that*?" she asked derisively, rolling her eyes at what he held lightly in his hand. "Good luck, Professor!"

The tip of the wand travelled up her torso to rest under her chin.

"I'm perfectly capable of getting what I want without it," was the assured response. He pushed her head back slightly by pressing the wand harder under her chin, exposing her throat to him.

Despite his confident statement, the room was glad she was bound to the chair. The dangerous glint in her eye foreshadowed an outburst of aggressiveness that would have most backing away rather swiftly.

"Punishment can be enforced in a number of ways. I prefer to be creative."

"I'm not your student," she growled at him through gritted teeth.

"You are if I'm about to teach you something." Another slight pressure under her chin tipped her head to the left.

They were *flirting* with each other! The room thought this odd considering what had already occurred, but it was unmistakable. Their words said one thing while their bodies spoke differently, helping them manoeuvre around each other in a twisted, almost convoluted pathway of verbal foreplay.

Keeping her head still, he leant forward, bracing himself with his free hand by placing it right between her thighs, so close to her body that his forearm pressed firmly against her. Air hissed through her teeth and the muscles in her legs flexed.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you that lying was *bad*?" he whispered in her ear, his lips brushing against her earlobe. The wand left the underside of her chin to drop back into where it had come from. His fingers slid along her jaw-line, around and back behind her head where they clasped thick locks of her hair resolutely.

"You lie all the time," she pointed out huskily, the angle of her head making it difficult for her to speak. "That makes you a hypocrite."

He laughed softly against her neck, shifting his body closer. "Such a shame you can't do anything about it."

She opened her mouth but no words came out, only a groan as he latched onto her with his mouth, his hand relinquishing her hair, palm pressing flat against her as it trailed down and over one breast ever so slowly. His fingers moulded around the softness, long thumb brushing back and forth to coax the peak into a firmness that he trapped gently against the side of his palm.

"Ah... er..."

"Is there a problem?" His words were muffled from his reluctance to stop tenderising her neck with teeth and tongue.

"If there was, would you care?" she gasped, eyes screwed shut.

"Not in the slightest," he breathed against her and sunk his teeth in just short of breaking her skin. Her body arched up to push into his hand and against the solidness of his forearm as much as she could, the bonded material pulling her back from a more complete and satisfying contact.

His hand released her and slithered down to the hem of her cotton top, drawing it up and over her chest. The revelation was alluring enough to separate him from her neck and make him bury his face between the two generous swells, tongue dipping down to taste the saltiness of her skin. His hand quested under the left sleeve of her coat to draw out the slender blade she had hidden there. Firelight flickered down the sharp edge as he slid it carefully under the thick fabric that secured her chest. He only had to pull the hand-length knife towards him gently to slice the material cleanly.

The weapon clattered dully to the threadbare carpet as he pulled the covering aside to bare her chest fully to his mouth and hands. His tongue left moist, glistening trails that he smoothed away with his fingers, spreading the evidence of his appetite for her flesh until her breasts were slick with it, making it harder for him to clasp her.

Fingertips teased lightly where his tongue didn't, the contact between her and him liquid and hot. The insistent pull of his mouth, the graze of his teeth and the wash of his tongue sensitised her in increasing waves, the rich, dark pink flesh stroked and caught firmly, making her shudder and pull more desperately at her restraints.

The room could understand her frustration, tethered as she was, helpless under him, fighting against her body's reaction to what he was doing, holding out against that inevitable submission he was determinedly drawing out from her. It could also understand *his* frustration, persistent as he was, poised over her slumped form, his efforts increasing in strength and rate to force her to beg for more. Both so stubborn, each unwilling to relinquish control, neither wanting to show how the other stirred the murky depths of arousal in them into a turbulent vortex.

So the room decided that neither of them should have the control, that both should submit. Its walls flexed and sheared as it reached inside them both to steal away their resolve and resistance, commandeering their self-control for itself, leaving them stripped of restraint. The effect was instantaneous.

Her back arched sharply as he sucked with an almost vicious intensity, his fingers digging into her skin greedily.

"Oh, my God!" she gasped out, her hands gripping the arms of the chair frantically.

"He won't help you," he growled at her, his voice reverberating along her ribs and into her spine.

The knife up her right sleeve found its way into his hand to slice away the rest of her underwear before being thrown more forcibly aside than its twin, skittering across the floor to collide with the doorframe.

His hands clutched her hips and lifted her body upwards to pause an inch below his open mouth, allowing him to inhale the citric sweetness, to see the paleness of her skin barely hidden under the light dusting of hair, to feel the intense heat rising from her to caress against his face...

... before he plunged his tongue along her in one liquid swipe from tailbone to pubis.

... before grinding his nose into the centre-point of her building ecstasy as he drank the fresh slipperiness from her.

...before his tongue twisted and writhed inside her and out as he revelled at the sound of her incoherent pleading, fighting to keep her still.

... before he scooped up that mix of his hunger and her desire with three fingers, dipping into that cache of membranous delight to slide a fraction of it over him, one arm wrapped around and under her behind to hold her up as he stroked himself eagerly with the intimate scent of her.

Their bodies swayed and pushed in the darkness of the room, the wetness of skin and lust shining in the firelight, breathing heavy and laced with fervid encouragement.

His mouth dragged her towards the edge mercilessly, held her right at the tipping point deliberately, his tongue rippling against her as he brought himself to fullness a third time.

Her whole body clenched, her teeth gritted together as she strained against her bindings, the muscles in her legs bunching in her effort to wrap them around his neck to crush him tighter against her, into her. She called out to her deity once more, desperate for release. It would take just one more press of his tongue, just one more gluttonous suck of his mouth, just one more brush of his hair along the inside of her thighs, just one more deep, throaty word of encouragement to fragment her.

That was when he dropped her, mouth no longer against her, leaning back and away from her shocked expression.

His tongue slipped out to lick the taste of her off his lower lip, curling up and around to the corner of his mouth, chest rising and falling rapidly behind the torn remnants of his shirt.

"Punishment, not reward," he breathed at her. "Did you forget?"

She bared her teeth and swore at him as her orgasm slipped away from her in the cruel torture he had meant to put her through all along, holding her by the scruff of the neck to force her to look right in the face of ecstasy and then push her into the dirt of unfulfilment.

The room laughed, ceiling and floor bowing in toward each other, pressing the air closer. It laughed not for what he'd done, but at what he deliberately pushed her towards with such finely-tuned skill, smiling lazily at her as she railed at him. It would take the smallest thing to turn possibility into actuality, and he knew exactly what that thing was.

His hand lifted to the crossed scars on his chest, fingertips gliding over his skin, down his torso, over his lean abdomen, through the dark, curled hair and along the underside of that heavy, defiantly-shameless arousal at her frustration. Even under the sway of almost priapic engorgement, he was ruthless enough to mock her further, slender fingers wrapping around himself, flesh encased in flesh that stroked back and forth with an insulting graduality to force her toward that one last possibility he'd left her in his deft handling of both her and circumstance.

But the room wondered if he realised that she had known full well what he was doing, the manipulated outfoxing the manipulator, biding her time through such sweet agony in order to show him that he was not the only one capable of getting what he wanted.

Or perhaps he *had* known of her cognizance, rubbing his mastery over her right in her face to infuriate her into what he so desperately wanted.

The room saw now how each had plied the other, twisted circumstance, recognised possibility and chosen the actuality they wanted, hoping for acceptance, wishing for indulgence, begging for consummation.

The room had been the only one in the dark.

They had both known all along what would happen.

Five: Push

Chapter 5 of 5

There's nothing wrong with pushing your luck to get what you want.

AN: Thanks as always to fhestia for being my beta for this, and snakekat for being such an encouraging cheerleader.

Always a challenge. From the first moment he'd met her to this very instance.

Of course, he never shied away from a challenge. More often than not it was a weak swat that he had no trouble deflecting in his customary cool disdain. It had been years since any challenge had been sufficiently strong to make him flex his muscles, with most of those willing to try having given up long ago at ever really making an impression in that impenetrable façade.

She'd pissed him off from day one. At first, he'd thought it a deliberate attempt on her part to aggravate him, but he'd seen her do the same with others, though with not quite the same depth of effort. The certainty of her assertiveness had many hesitating, unsure in the face of her outright and rather blunt honesty.

He remembered feeling surprised when she'd given him a verbal slap, and then angry that he'd not been fast enough to think of a suitable retort. Lack of practice had made him rusty and dulled the edge of his invective, leaving him open to her jabs. He hadn't liked that. He hadn't liked it at all. And he'd liked her even less.

That didn't faze her in the slightest. She didn't play the popularity game that others did. If they didn't like what she had to say, then so be it, and she was fairly undiscerning whom she blessed with the brunt of her forthrightness.

Naturally, it amused him no end when someone copped a face-full of her attitude. He lost his sense of humour when he got a dose of it, especially if someone else witnessed it.

So he sharpened the blade of his repartee on the whetstone of her insolence until he won almost as many vocal battles as he lost. She hadn't liked that. She hadn't liked it at all. And that had piqued his interest.

He'd thought she had as much grace as a punch to the face. The lack of finesse and subtlety in her conversation fooled him into thinking she wasn't as sly as he was. Yet she knew things about him before he'd even realised them in himself, harbouring an unfair advantage that unbalanced the playing field in her favour. She seemed to find it amusing that she could get one step ahead of him. In fact, she revelled in it, waiting for him to catch up just so she could jump ahead of him once more. Their exchanges had left many wincing and backing away from the carnage lest they get hit by the shrapnel.

But her methods were more varied than he had first realised, as dextrous as she was overpowering, switching between her weapons with a honed skill that left him in grudging admiration. She was a terrifying adversary if the situation dictated it. He couldn't imagine that many would have had the guts to stand against her, and he wondered if that disappointed her. He knew what that was like.

So, he deliberately pushed her until she snapped, letting the acid roll over him as he smirked at her, the scent of his victory in the air the second her face shifted into steely

outrage at his gall. He liked that. He liked it a lot. And he kept doing it.

Admittedly, it did sometimes backfire, leaving him smarting internally as she bared her teeth at him in that smile that was both insulting and enervating. But the successes were too addicting to stop him from trying. He learned new ways to push her that didn't involve words. Sometimes the simplicity of a blank look would be enough to have her huffing in annoyance. Sometimes, when he stood close enough, he could feel the static of her agitation run through him, making his muscles tense in anticipation. The risk was worth the reward if the cut could go both ways. He grew to love the sting of it.

His attraction to her had snuck up on him long before he'd been conscious of it. It had taken someone else pointing out his unusual behaviour around her to make him realise that it was too late. She'd found the chink in his defences that he thought he'd closed over long ago. He hadn't like that. He hadn't liked it at all. But he fell anyway.

He tried to hide it, and wonder of wonders, she seemed not to notice. He didn't know whether or not to be disappointed at that. Not long after, he'd learned that she harboured strange notions about her physical appeal to such an extent that the idea that she should seem attractive to a member of the opposite sex caused an excessive amount of hilarity in her. The lack of guile and willingness to prey on a man's gullibility both mystified and intrigued him.

He found himself wishing she would touch him, and it caused a flush of embarrassment in him. He eschewed physical contact with others, preferring to stand beyond the normal radius of personal space in denial of his physical need to connect with another person. Connection meant being open to hurt, and quite frankly he'd had more than his fair share of that. He still wished she would touch him.

She'd granted that wish, though not quite in the manner he had hoped for. She'd driven her fist into his midriff in a stark demonstration of the ineffectiveness of his supposed control over her. He'd been lucky to escape with not much more than wounded pride. He'd spent the remainder of the evening seething in his bolt hole, resenting her success over him like a thwarted child. His dreams that night had been disgusting. He'd liked that. He'd liked that a lot. And he wondered if she'd let him try those things out on her.

Circumstance arose that allowed him to see her as more than a knife-wielding, sarcastic virago that did little more than agitate him or give him a hard-on, usually at the same time. He'd seen her near-drown in the depths of bone-deep despair, buckle under a bitterly cruel burden placed upon her by others, and stumble in exhaustion towards a death he'd pulled her back from. She'd felt rather strongly that it meant that she owed him something. A part of him did crow in possessiveness at that, and it shamed him even as it appealed to him that he could make her do what he wanted and she would not refuse him. Most of him, however, recoiled from such a disgraceful possibility. He wanted her to come to him willingly, not under the duress of obligation, and the chances of that were so close to zero that he should have given up even thinking of it. But of course, he hadn't. He cursed himself for a fool even as he indulged himself in the fantasy of it.

Then she had saved his life. It had taken all his willpower not to offer what little he had of himself to her until the strength of his anger had taken over. The resulting argument had been gargantuan in proportion. She'd seemed to find it bizarre that he would berate her "for doing her job", as she had so calmly described it. He'd shouted at her that her actions had been foolish and ill-considered, but what had really enraged him was the likelihood that now she would consider her obligation to him fulfilled, and that it would have been through his own carelessness that it was so. He'd turned his fury on her when it should have been directed at himself. Afterwards, he had been too ashamed to retract his vituperation and sulked in black resentment. She feigned not to notice. For days he could barely look her in the eye for fear she'd see his gratitude at that. Not as graceless as he had thought.

He pushed her, and she pushed back, the balance tipping back and forth until they reached an impasse that neither of them seemed to know what to do with. Almost imperceptibly, the push turned into a pull. She did it by staring at him when she thought he didn't realise it. He did it by willingly standing closer to her than he ever did another human being. They both pretended nothing was going on, but in all seriousness, who were they trying to fool? He'd thought that she was testing him, but he wasn't certain, and he was too reluctant to take the risk that perhaps he was mistaken. Some things he was never willing to gamble, no matter how convincing the evidence. Was it a cruel trick to make him think she was interested just so that she could rebuff him and cut him so deep that it would drive him away? His experience said yes. His heart said no. His head still didn't know.

The uncertainty made him ratty and unfocussed. He couldn't concentrate when she was nearby and he couldn't ignore her absence. His dreams forced him into greater physical indulgence than he had ever enjoyed as a hormone-riddled teenager, leaving him somewhat mortified that he had regressed in such alarming magnitude. It came as a rather sad realisation to him that he was one step short of resenting her. Of hating her. He didn't want that. He already hated too many people. And liked too few.

And so, in a rather stunning surrender on his part, he decided to stop the charade, consequence be damned. A part of him had actually breathed a sigh of relief at it, too tired to care that it might go so painfully awry.

And so, that was why he was here, on his knees, the taste of her still sweetening the inside of his mouth, the pull changing back to a push in his attempt to cajole her into a more active participation.

The feel of her against him had been intoxicating. He'd touched her before but never like this, not with his body. He'd whispered to her before but not like this, not with his lust. He'd indulged in such lewd acts with her before, but not like this, not in reality.

The sensation of her hands on his body had been exhilarating, and that had been before she'd even touched bare skin. To have her pull him towards her instead of shoving him away turned him into jelly. To have her legs wrapped tight around his hips was a honeyed snare he wanted to entrap him once more. To have her whisper his name for the first time, not in scorn or mockery or anger, just for him alone, nearly caused him to drop what pathetic excuse for control he already had.

The sound of him losing this fight was that of fabric been torn. The strange thing was that it was also the sound of his victory.

Her right hand clenched into a fist and she ripped the sleeve of her coat off the arm of the chair with a heave of her shoulder. He saw her hand disappear into her coat just before he turned away, stumbling on the hem of his own coat where it was trapped under his knee. His outstretched hands broke his fall.

The floor vibrated as her feet landed either side of him, a fistful of his hair in her grasp and a line of cold steel pressed against his throat as she pulled his head back.

"A bit slow, Professor," she whispered in his ear, her lips grazing his skin and making him shudder. "Either you're getting old, or you want to get caught." She pulled harder on his hair to get him off his hands and knees, dragging him back until he sat with his back against her leg. Her knife held him still as she let go of his hair so that the strands slipped forward to frame his face.

The fingers of her free hand glided over his shoulder and snuck between the torn pieces of his shirt. He gritted his teeth to muffle the groan her touch pulled out of him as it slid over his skin, trying to remain as still as possible lest the blade at his throat bite in. Her hand travelled lower, down over his sternum, along the ripples of his muscles, dipping briefly into his navel before the tips of her fingers splayed so she could slide them either side of the hardness he'd mocked her with barely moments before. His own fingers dug harshly into the thread-bare carpet, and he drew his feet in closer to his body to bend his legs, to brace himself so he could push slowly but firmly against her open palm.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you that it's polite to share?" she asked him softly, dragging her fingers through the curled hair under them, making him squirm and gasp. "Let's just see how much you have to go around, shall we?"

The edge of the blade at his throat changed to the flat that she used to make him lie back, the fingers of her hand at his groin grasping the darkness tightly, making the breath hiss through his teeth. He looked straight into those pale eyes for a brief second before the knife pushed his head back to leave him staring at the aged ceiling of the room with its cobwebs and cracks that appeared and disappeared in the flickering firelight and shadows.

The steel left his throat. His clothing was pushed aside to bare his body. Her breath sighed against his chest, making him arch his back to try and force contact with her lips. At his failure to do so, his hands sought her out. The steel returned to his throat.

"Lay still, Professor," she told him in a voice that brooked no argument. "I wouldn't want you to get hurt, now."

He bit his lower lip and returned his arms to his sides, his breathing increasing in rate in a mixture of fear and excitement. This had been precisely what he was after, and the last thing he wanted to do was ruin it.

Lest he try and disobey her, the steel stayed at his throat while the hand at his groin proceeded to run smoothly over his skin, over the prominence of his ribs, along the gentle curve of his collarbones, teasing in the hollow of his hip and cresting the swell of hard muscle above it. The need to snatch this questing hand up and bind it around his lust and under his own hands drove him insane, his chest rising and falling erratically while the blood drained the sense from his head and fuelled the lascivious desperation between his legs.

She was crueller than he thought she'd be. He liked that. He liked that a lot. And hissed out his pleasure repeatedly.

His shoulders pushed back against the floor, his bent legs allowing him to make the tiniest of rhythmic motions with his hips as the ends of her hair brushed against his skin, as her breath warmed the skin below his navel, as her mouth tasted his flesh with a velutinous eagerness.

He screwed his eyes shut as her tongue played across him, and her teeth scraped lightly at the cords of his muscles that were tight with his effort to restrain himself from moving any more than that plaintive rocking of his hips.

Her knife left his throat so that she could double the contact, caressing him with a tortuous delicacy as her mouth found places of such sensitivity that it threatened to overload his brain. She treated him to the same liquid enthusiasm that he had shown in his exploration of every square inch of her breasts, her hands kneading his chest like a hungry kitten. A kitten that bit. A kitten that drew its claws possessively down his stomach in reddening trails.

Her hands closed around his length firmly for a few seconds and then cradled it so she could suck at the base of it, dredging up her name from his lips as she mimicked a deep drinking to slake the thirst she had for him.

The mouth she abused him with, the mouth she challenged him with, the mouth she smiled with in her triumph over him moved slowly up that thickened flesh with precise and thorough attention, her tongue spreading and flattening under the head to slide up and down the smoothness she found there in time with the rhythm of his own subtle motions.

He had to see it. He had to watch her do this to him, this intensely erotic consumption of him, her lips closing around him as she stroked him with such utter skill, mouth and hands rubbing along him, feeling every vein, every ridge, every piece of taut, heated skin that he wanted her to own, that he wanted her to take.

A solid pressure under his chin stopped his head from moving.

"Ah, ah, Professor!" she muttered against him, the vibrations sinking into him and making him shiver. "You don't get to watch what I do."

His groan turned into a yelp as her mouth took in half of him in one swoop and pulled the engorged flesh hungrily, her tongue a silken bed for the underside of him, one hand closed around the base of him to hold him still and firmly as she sucked on him with a twisting motion, her other hand buried under the opening of his trousers to cup him carefully, pressing the palmful up against what her other hand held in a delectable counterpoint to the penetration she was orchestrating.

Her bent leg across his chest told him that it was her foot lodged under his chin that kept his head tilted back and against the floor. The foot he'd once seen come close to killing someone who'd threatened her. The foot he'd healed from brutal injuries she'd withstood during months of incarceration. The foot he'd had the most perverse fantasies about. The foot he'd fucked. Twice.

Words fell from his mouth, incomprehensible, pleading, affirming as she gradually took in more of him in that repeated suckling, burying him inside her until her lips brushed the hair clenched in her fingers. He let his thighs fall open to allow her to stroke with firm, moistened fingertips that smooth flesh lower down that sent jolts of pleasure straight into his spine.

As he sank again and again into that delicious embrace, the strength of her throat squeezing him in vicious pleasure, he defied her by grabbing the foot under his jaw and bringing it to his mouth so he could lap her with his tongue with furious intensity, biting her skin voraciously, engulfing each toe in turn into his own fluid grasp.

Too late he realised what she was doing, so lost in his own efforts at satiation that he missed the point of no return.

He pulled his mouth from her foot. "Ah... no... that's... too much!"

She batted his hands away from her head and pinned his hips to the floor, her foot going back under his jaw.

He gritted his teeth. She was going to take him over the edge without his assent. Deliberately. Maliciously. Resoundingly. Too soon! He strained against her hands braced on his hips, grinding his pelvis into the floor as she ate him up, as she plunged her mouth up and down faster and harder, pushing him right up until the end.

Right up until the orgasm ripped through him and tore his spine out.

Right up until the pulsing surges hit the back of her throat.

Right up until he cursed her in a snarl as he drained into her.

His just punishment for denying her what she had forced on him, breaking under her ruthlessness that was as sadistic as it was sensual.

"Why?" he asked her in a ragged voice even as his body continued to convulse in the aftermath.

Her mouth freed him in a firm, slow pull, her foot no longer braced under his jaw.

"Because you deserved it."

He gasped lungfuls of air in and out painfully for a few moments.

"You shouldn't have."

Her hands played over his sweat-soaked body hungrily. "Why?"

"I'm not eighteen," he reminded her. "I don't have the same... stamina for repetition."

She threw back her head and laughed. "Repetition isn't what interests me, Professor. I expect you to last longer than an eighteen year-old ever could, and you were too close to the edge to hold out as long as I need you to."

She pressed her lips to the crossed scars on his chest in a gesture that was strangely simple and sweet after such lewd treatment that they had just bestowed upon him.

"And we still have so far to go."

Looking into her eyes, he didn't know whether to be overjoyed or terrified.

Always a challenge. From the first moment he'd met her to this very instance. And beyond.