

Dances with Witches

by Pearle

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

To Tango or Not To Tango, That Is The Question

Chapter 1 of 49

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Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

## 1. To Tango or Not To Tango, That Is The Question

Samantha walked into the break room with a card in her hand. "Hermione, you are not going to believe what is waiting for you out there! He looks like something from a gothic horror novel. He handed me this card. Your name appeared on it." Samantha held up the card for the other girls to see before handing it to Hermione.

Hermione Granger put down the cup of tea she was holding and reached for the card. Her name was printed in script on the front of what seemed to be a plain white business card. As Hermione touched the card, it started to glow and grow in size. Writing now covered what appeared to be a legal size piece of parchment.

"Whoa! That is so cool." Katherine's eyes were wide as she watched the card magically change.

Margaret and Samantha had cracked the door to the break room and were peeking out at the man impatiently waiting for Hermione. "Look at that scowl. He looks like he ate a lemon whole."

"Hmmm. Dressed all in black? Tall, sort of big nose?" Hermione asked absentmindedly as she read the letter.

"Yeah. You know who he is?"

Hermione sighed. "Yes. He was my potions professor at Hogwarts. That, ladies, is Severus Snape." While Severus's efforts during the war and final battle were well publicized, pictures of the man were not. He detested publicity of any kind. Very few photographers were brave enough to try for his picture during the Ministry ceremony awarding the Order of Merlin medals when it was made public knowledge what he did to the photographer that took his picture after the final battle. Though to Snape's credit, he did warn the man before hexing him. Snape never did understand what all the fuss was about, the boils healed completely in only three months.

Margaret's eyes were wide. "Severus Snape the war hero? You've got to be kidding."

"The wizard that brought You-Know-Who down with Harry Potter?" Katherine walked to the door to get a peek at Snape.

"What's he doing here?" asked Samantha, as she moved to let Katherine have a look at the man.

"Oh my god," said Katherine. "Actually, he's kind of sexy in a dark, bad boy way."

Katherine turned to find the other girls looking oddly at her. "What?"

"It would seem he's here because he lost a bet with Albus. At least that's the gist of this letter. I have been hired to teach him to, I don't believe it." Hermione had been reading through the parchment as she spoke.

"Teach him what?" asked Margaret.

Hermione groaned. "Teach him to dance the Tango. I am so going to hex Dumbledore when I see him." Hermione was working for the summer at The Lighter Than Air wizarding dancing school. She had taken various classes as a child and had continued to dance summers when she was home visiting her parents during breaks. Dancing was excellent exercise and helped to keep her fit. Hermione had graduated two years ago from Hogwarts and was now part of an experimental program at Cambridge. Most of her classes were in a new wizarding section of the school, but the program called for a few Muggle classes as well. Hermione carried a double major of potions and charms. She had set her sights on becoming a Potions Mistress. She worked summers to earn pocket money.

"I'd better get out there before he decides to destroy the building. He has never been known for his patience." Hermione sighed as she went out to face Snape.

Samantha called after her, "Good luck. I'm just glad it's not me."

Severus turned as he heard the door open. He hoped it was not the same little chit that took the card from him. His scowl deepened as he saw who was walking towards him. He shook his head and backed up a step, his hands coming up in front of him as if to ward off some form of evil. "Miss Granger. Please tell me you are a hallucination caused by too many curses and not actually here."

Hermione's voice sounded weary as she said, "Hello, Professor."

Severus covered his face with his hand. "The rest of the golden trio isn't going to jump out of that room, are they? What are you doing here? What am I doing here for that matter?" Severus looked around the room. "Where are we? Merlin help me, this looks like some kind of dance hall."

Hermione looked curiously at the man. "You don't know what you're doing here?"

"No," answered Snape bitterly, "I was standing talking to Albus in his office, when he handed me that card I gave the girl. It was obviously some sort of port key."

Hermione's voice was gentle as she said, "Would you like a cup of tea and I'll explain it to you?"

Severus drew himself to his full height while pulling his robes protectively around him. He glared at the young woman in front of him as he arrogantly said, "I would like you to tell me what this is about so that I may leave this ridiculous place immediately. Something is stopping me from Apparating or I would have left already." His indignation was palpable in his response.

Hermione held up the parchment in her hand. "Do you remember losing a magical bet with the Headmaster?"

Severus's shoulders slumped. His hands came up to cover his face as Hermione's words sunk in. "I don't believe it. I am going to kill Albus when I get back."

"Care to tell me what the bet was about?" Hermione was enjoying his obvious discomfort. He had put her and her friends through enough bad times at Hogwarts to make this seem all the sweeter.

Severus was angry as he said to Hermione, "Two bloody times in twenty years the old witch was right. How the hell was I supposed to know she could do it again?"

"Professor?"

"Trelawney."

"You and Albus had a bet over a prediction Trelawney made and she was right? What would you have won if she was wrong?" Hermione was trying not to laugh at the corner he had backed himself into and she was failing miserably at doing so as she started to chuckle.

Snape glared at the girl. "Think, Miss Granger. Use that brain of yours that is so famed for operating at such a remarkable level and think."

A light bulb went off in Hermione's head. "You bet him for the Defense Against the Dark Arts position didn't you?" The look on Snape's face confirmed her guess. "Didn't you know what the consequences would be?"

Snape waved his hand. "I vaguely heard Albus mention something about dancing. Who would have thought she could ever be right again? Both her predictions were about the Dark Lord. He's dead! What were the odds, a million to one?"

"Professor, this parchment is a copy of the bet and the consequences. It specifies you have to take ten weeks of dance lessons with me and dance at the Halloween dance at Hogwarts."

Snape roared as he grabbed the parchment from her hand, "I will not bloody dance at the Halloween dance nor do I intend to endure your presence for the next ten weeks. Seven years at Hogwarts was long enough."

"I quite agree, I return to Cambridge in four weeks." Hermione's smile was self-serving. Let him chew on that. She took the parchment back as she looked over the requirements again. "However you are required to fulfill the terms of the bet. The conditions are quite specific. Ten weeks of lessons, one lesson a week and dancing the Tango in full costume at the Halloween dance."

"What do you mean full costume? Let me see that." Snape growled at Hermione as he grabbed the parchment out of her hands again.

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "It could be worse. He could have specified the welcoming feast. Just say you are in costume for the dance and nobody will be the wiser."

Snape arched one eyebrow questioningly. "What exactly is full 16th century costume, Miss Granger?"

She held her hand out for the parchment again and pointed to a particular paragraph. "It says right here, oh dear lord. Uhm, how do you look in tights Professor?"

"Tights?"

"Yes, it says you are required to dress in a 16th century costume complete with..." Hermione started to laugh.

"WHAT?" Snape looked again. "The man's gone dodgy. And how exactly would I retain any authority dressed in that clothing?"

She snorted as she tried to stop laughing. "I understand sir. But it says tights complete with a codpiece and said codpiece must have the image of a snake on it. Maybe you can think of it as joining in the spirit of Halloween?" She held up her hands to ward off the look he was giving her. "I didn't write this, the Headmaster did. At least he didn't say it had to be a Rhinestone snake and have pink ribbons to hold the piece on."

Snape's glare was murderous. "I do not think it appropriate to adorn my genitalia, Miss Granger."

"Well it's not like you have to tattoo a snake to your....." The words died in her throat as she looked at her former professor's groin. Was she really going to discuss Snape's member with him?

His voice was icy as it cut through her musings. "Miss Granger."

"Hmmm?" Get a grip girl. Actually she did wonder what he would look like in said codpiece and tights. The summer between her sixth and seventh year she had accidentally caught a glimpse of him at 12 Grimmauld Place just before he got in the shower. He had been ready to take his underwear off as she walked into the bathroom. Who knew that a man who would wear such voluminous robes would wear body-hugging briefs underneath? She had had a few erotic dreams about the body those briefs had been hugging. Hermione blushed as she thought of him wearing practically nothing.

Severus rolled his eyes at her apparent discomfort. His tone was harsh as he said, "Miss Granger."

"Oh. Sorry, Professor. This is a magical bet, sir. You have no choice but to comply. I believe you are bound by the terms correct?"

Severus covered his eyes and shook his head. She was right of course. If he did not agree to set up a schedule for the lessons, he would not be able to leave. Or worse. He did not want to know what the consequences would be for defaulting on a magical bet with Albus. He eyed her appraisingly, his voice dropping to a purr, "You could say no, you know. Then I could leave and Albus would be forced to let it drop."

"Unfortunately, Professor, it seems the Headmaster hired my services through a formal contract with my boss. I'm just as stuck as you are," Hermione sighed. "When do you want to start your lessons, sir?"

Severus looked questioningly at the young witch. "You mentioned you are leaving for Cambridge in four weeks did you not?"

"Yes, but Albus must have set this up. Last night my boss asked if I would be willing to instruct someone after I left as a favor to him. He said he owed an old friend a debt and would pay me a bonus if I would agree. I'm at University. The bonus will come in handy so of course I agreed. Albus must have been that friend." She indicated the parchment he was holding. "It says right there in item three. I have been hired by formal contract. It appears the Headmaster covered all the angles, sir."

"Why you, Miss Granger?" He was sure he would have hexed one of the other twits by now, most of them just stood and giggled annoyingly.

"Because I happen to be one of the few instructors that teaches the Argentine Tango here in London," she answered with a grin.

"Argentine Tango?"

"Yes. The Argentine Tango is a cultural dance that has its own style, pauses, musicality, body language, and movement. The Argentine Tango requires a man and woman to embrace as they move around the dance in unison. It's the only style of Tango I teach."

Snape cheeks tinged a light pink. "Embrace?"

"Yes, Professor, embrace." Hermione stepped forward and took his right hand. "Your right hand goes around my back and rest lightly on my left shoulder blade." Snape stiffly moved his hand to the location she described.

"Lower this elbow a bit, sir, and bring it in closer to our bodies. My arm needs to rest gently on the upper part of your arm." Severus lowered his elbow and Hermione rested her left arm on his right bicep as she placed her left hand on his shoulder.

Severus swallowed harshly. "Next?"

"Next extend your left arm out and bend it up at a ninety degree angle." He did as she instructed. She brought her right hand up to his and rested the palm of her right hand against the palm of his left hand. "You're a bit tall. Bring your hand down a little. There, that's right. Close your fingers around my hand more. You need to hold me against you. As the man, it's up to you to create the space I occupy and move in. And loosen up, your very stiff. When we begin dancing, we dance almost cheek to cheek. It helps to keep our movements flowing as one."

Hermione looked up into Snape's black eyes as she realized she was encompassed firmly in his embrace. His hands were large and supple. She could feel the warmth of his hand as it lay against her back. She could feel the strength in his arms as he held her, the sheer power of the man in her arms. The scent of spices assaulted her nose. His expression was unreadable. His eyes seemed to glow as he watched her. Hermione took a step backward out of his embrace. "So, when do you want to schedule your lessons?"

TBC

A/N: My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. The Argentine Tango is considered the main dance in Buenos Aires. I took the steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

### **Cod-piece challenge**

This challenge is brought to you by Adora, because influenza1918 asked for it during WIKTT chat on August 7. Some parts of this challenge have come from the minds of Madeline, caeruleussum and one\_demonicangel

Storyline: Snape can't dance, but he has to learn. Why he has to learn how to dance is your decision. Hermione has to be the dancing instructor.

Somewhere, somehow, a cod-piece has to show up. Extra points if it has a Rhinestone snake on it and pink ribbons.

Crookshanks has to feature.

### **Mandatory quotes:**

"It's not a cod-piece Miss Granger."

"I do not think it appropriate to adorn my genitalia"

"Professor, do I want to know what that is, pressing against my leg?"

"Step on my toes one more time, Professor, and I'll... (finish your own sentence)

### **Mandatory situations:**

Snape and Hermione dancing the tango together

Some public display of Severus's dancing

Severus can't be a quick learner (would be too easy)

Hermione has to be of age, and because this is WIKTT, they must develop a relationship throughout the story.

Optional sentences (you may also use a part of this, or make these longer):

"A waltz doesn't have 4 beats"

"My, my, Severus, how you've grown"

"Don't worry, I won't drop you..... Oops! I guess I was wrong"

"What are you, joined at the hip?"

"That was just a dance move, nothing more"

"I have to dance on heels?!"

"Over your dead body"

"If you manage that, I'll dance with the first Hippogriff I see"

"Steel-toed boots... Hmmm..... might come in handy"

"Stiletto's, roses... you're feeling very prickly today, aren't you?"

"I only have that during that time of the month" with the reply: "It must be that time of the month all year round then."

"I will not do that 'Dirty Dancing lift' with you. I'm ticklish."

"I can teach you how to bewitch the mind and ensnare the senses"

## **The First Lesson - Vertical Movements**

*Chapter 2 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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2. The First Lesson - Vertical Movements

Before leaving, Severus set up a schedule of dance lessons. His first lesson would take place on Thursday evening, three days from now. He felt the restriction on his power to apparate ease as he confirmed the date with the Granger chit.

His robes billowed out behind him as he walked up the path to Hogwarts from the apparation point outside the main gates. He wouldn't have to worry about keeping the dance lesson with Granger Thursday. He would be in Azkaban before tonight was over. He planned to kill Albus when he found him.

He hadn't recognized Granger when she first walked into the room. She had done something with her hair and her figure had filled out considerably, though she could have looked like that when she was at Hogwarts and he wouldn't have noticed. Her most obvious attributes when she had been his student had been Potter and Weasley. The Golden trio had been inseparable their last year.

He wondered if she saw either one of them now that they had graduated. Maybe she was dating one of them? Couldn't be Potter. His name was in the news regularly. Even what the idiot ate for breakfast would become fodder for some columnist. If she were dating him it would have been in the papers. Weasley? Definitely not up to her intellectual level.

He had read about the new experimental program Cambridge had set up. Only the cream of the crop was accepted. Granger's N.E.W.T.'s had tied his own. They would have been thrilled to have her in their program. Adding in the fact that she was also one of the Order members that had helped to bring down the Dark Lord and she would have been accepted anywhere.

What did it matter who she was seeing the voice in his head asked him? She was supposed to teach him to dance and that was that. Where the bloody hell was Albus? Severus threw open the doors to the castle startling Professors McGonagall and Sprout who had been on their way out.

"Severus? Are you all right?" Minerva was concerned as she looked at the angry wizard in front of her.

"Where the bloody hell is Albus?" His anger at the man was ready to boil over.

"Calm down. He had to leave the castle on business. He will be back on Friday. What is the problem?" Minerva was looking at him oddly.

"Friday?" Just his bloody luck, his first dance lesson was on Thursday. He stormed down the hall, his robes billowing out behind him.

"Severus, where are you going?" Minerva called after him.

"Oblivion."

The two witches looked at each other as Minerva asked, "Where did he say? Olivia? Who is Olivia?"

Sprout shrugged her shoulders as they watched Snape flow down the hall. It was the middle of August and the castle was empty except for a few of the staff.

Severus Snape sat in front of his fireplace studying a glass of Old Ogden's. The dungeons were chilly even in August. He turned the glass from side to side watching the whiskey reflect the flames. Oblivion was not to far off considering the level left in the bottle. Granger. Hermione Granger. While the chit had obvious intelligence he never realize she had grown into a very curvaceous witch, not that it was any of his business.

He sighed deeply as he thought about his dance lesson. Holding her tonight had affected him more than he wanted to admit. How the hell was he supposed to get through two hours Thursday night? A snake tattooed on his member she had said?

He had to laugh and wonder if she even knew that part of the male anatomy was sometimes referred to as a snake? He wondered if she suffered from ophidiophobia? He had a python he'd be willing to show her sometime. The only known way to overcome a fear of snakes was constant and repeated exposure to them. He'd be willing to help the witch if there was a problem. After all, he was the head of Slytherin. He knocked back the remainder of his drink.

"Accio bottle," a fresh bottle of Ogden's flew into his open hand. It was going to be a long night he thought as he shifted in his chair.

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Severus apparated in front of the Lighter Than Air dance studio several minutes earlier then his actual lesson time. He was curious to see what else might be going on in there. He was not disappointed as he heard Hermione's voice when he opened the door.

"I will not do that 'Dirty Dancing lift' with you. I'm ticklish and this is a waltz!" She was slapping the hand of a young man away from her hip. "One more touch, Mister Wells, and you will not sit for a week. Are we clear?" A wizard of about thirty appeared to be dancing with Miss Granger. The man had the good grace to look contrite for the rebuke.

A bell sounded off to the side. "I believe that ends this weeks lesson. I have a new student starting tonight, so your lesson next week will be with Katherine at your regular time." Hermione was all business as she marked the date and time on a card she handed to the man.

The wizard gave Hermione what he hoped to be a sexy look as he said in a low voice, "What if you're the only witch who can teach me anything?"

Before Hermione could answer, Snape walked towards the man. His scowl was firmly in place and his robes did their usual menacing billow. His voice held an edge that said 'cross me and we will see how many parts they can find when I am through with you'. He glared at the man as he said, "I believe Miss Granger informed you your lesson is finished. Is there a problem?"

Hermione was amused to see the man turning pale as he faced the Potions Master. His expression went from annoyed to fearful. He took the card Hermione held in her hand and headed for the door. "No. No. Everything's fine. Thanks."

Hermione waved and called cheerfully, "Thanks, goodnight." She turned to Severus with a grin. "Thank you for your help but I was fine. Shall we get started?"

"If you really want to be appreciative, we could skip the lesson." Snape's black eyes glittered while he watched the young woman.

"Professor!"

He pinched the bridge of his nose as a headache threatened to appear. "Skip the lesson, Miss Granger. I go home and you go home. Separately." Dear Gods, what did she think he meant? He was her ex-professor for Merlin's sake.

Hermione blushed. "A contract is a contract. Sorry, Professor."

"Fine," Severus stood waiting for instructions, "Well?"

Hermione eyed him up and down. "You're not going to be able to dance freely in all those layers. You'll have to take off your cloak."

Severus glared at the witch. "This is exactly what I had on the other night. It was not a problem then."

Samantha and Katherine had come out of the break room to see what the fuss was about. "Everything okay out here, Hermione?" Samantha asked.

"Fine, Sam. Thanks. Professor?" Hermione arched one brow as she indicated his cloak. The girls giggled as they went back through the doorway.

"Twits," Severus mumbled under his breath.

"Sir?"

"Fine. I will take the bloody cloak off." He was pulling at the clasp to his cloak as he glared at her. A coat stand magically appeared to the side of Hermione. With an annoyed look Snape hung his cloak on the stand. His tone was snide as he asked, "Happy, Miss Granger?"

"I'll be ecstatic as soon as you remove the robes too. Honestly how many layers are you wearing? It's August for god's sake. Why haven't you passed out from the heat?" She thought he was aptly named as the Head of Slytherin. She imagined a snake shedding its layers.

Severus unclasped and unbuttoned his robes in a manner befitting a full ceremonial ritual. He hung the garment up as he said, "I am a wizard. Have you never heard of a cooling charm? Now may we begin before I am forced to take this lesson in my bare skin?"

"The coat, Professor." He was wearing his usual frock coat under the robes and the cloak. Honestly, thought Hermione, how much amour did he need?

He arched one brow as he asked, "You want me completely starkers?"

Hermione patiently said, "Professor, I can see your white shirt under the coat. I promise not to ask you to remove that or your trousers. Although.." Hermione held up her hand and a pink leotard and tutu flew into her palm. "Would you be more comfortable in this?" she asked with a smirk.

An inner voice that was running in her head said, 'Starkers might be nice.' Hermione watched him as he unbuttoned what appeared to be an infinite number of buttons on his frock coat. His body formed a classic 'V' shape, broad shoulders tapering to a narrow waist. She watched him from the back as he reached to hang up the coat. 'Nice bum,' her inner voice commented. She shook her head. 'I really need to get out more,' she thought.

Severus was back to full glare as he took off his coat. He had made it down to the final layer, his white dress shirt and black linen trousers. "If you are satisfied, Miss Granger, may we please begin so that I may leave before midnight?"

"If you will come dressed appropriately next time, we won't have to do this again." Her tone was brisk as she discarded the tutu and moved to stand in front of him.

He stood still, silently looking at her. All though she wore heels, he was still several centimeters taller than she. She was wearing a simple black leotard with a dance skirt over it. Her clothing was simple but still managed to show her figure to its best advantage. Her body curved in all the right places. The skirt twirled with her movements.

"All right, Professor. Let's begin. Your right hand around my back and resting on my left shoulder blade please."

Severus slid his hand across her back and rested it on her shoulder blade. He felt a slight shudder pass through her. His eyebrow shot up as he noticed a light flush of color to her face. "Problems, Miss Granger?"

"No, sir. Bring your elbow in and bring your other hand up please." God yes there were problems! Her dreams of him had returned after he left the other day. The scent of the man combined with the sensual slide across her back was not helping. He looked incredibly sexy in a shirt and trousers. 'Get a grip!' she told herself.

They had assumed the position she had shown him the other night. He wasn't listening to her instruction as he thought something was missing. His right hand moved in a circle around her shoulder blade. He looked down and took in her cleavage. 'Why didn't he feel a foundation garment?' he wondered.

"Professor," Hermione's voice cut through his thoughts, "While I have always enjoyed a good back rub, I do not remember requesting one from you. What is the problem?"

It was now Severus's turn to go red in the face. The best defense is an offense. "Are we going to get on with this lesson or not? I do hope your teaching methods are more organized than this."

Hermione snorted as she looked at his face. He looked like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar. She'd have to remember to wear something more revealing next week if only to taunt him. "Fine. There are three basic steps used in the Tango. The Side step, the Forward step and the Back step. The direction is relative to the orientation of the upper body. The woman always walks in a straight line either forward or back. The man always moves so that the woman remains in front of him. You 'mark' or direct my movement by the shift of your body. There are two ways to mark a movement. For example, pulling back your right shoulder creates an open space between us. This indicates a turn to the right. I would pivot on the opposite leg to follow through."

Severus did as he was told and felt her move in his arms. She pulled him with her in an awkward turn as she pivoted on her back leg creating a full 90-degree turn to the right.

"The other method to mark a movement would be for your arm to press against my back on the right side while your right hand pressed firmly on my back indicating I should not continue in that direction. Again my movement will shift to the movement of my back leg to complete the turn."

Severus followed her instruction and the pair turned, a little less awkwardly than last time.

"We will work on turns later. I want you to understand the basics of movement first. It is an important part of the Tango for the man to mark each change of direction. A shift in either your hand or the movement of your arm will communicate to me that I need to change direction."

Severus listened intently to her instruction. She had used something with a berry scent that was tickling his sensitive nose. Her voice was smooth and seemed to flow over and through him as she spoke. "So if I were to do this, you would move to my left?" he asked as he matched his actions to his words. He pulled gently on her right hand where their palms were joined while shifting his right along her back. This time the turn was smoother. Hermione's moves were fluid while Severus had always moved with a natural grace.

"Very good, Professor. But in the Tango your left hand would hold firm, telling me not to move up or back. I would then move as your other hand instructed. I'll make a dancer out of you yet." She was smiling up at him as she spoke. They returned to their original position.

"We begin with the Salida, or the beginning sequence of dance steps. Tonight we will work on walking forward and backward with a stop at open stance and closed stance and a counter clockwise turn. I'm going to take a half step back from you. This distance will cause our bodies to lean into each other. This too helps us to move as one. The Tango requires a mark from the man, a motion from the lady and a subsequent motion from the man. Ready?"

Severus nodded his head as Hermione took a half step back and moved her cheek next to his.

Her breasts were now pressed against a broad firm male chest as he held her in his arms. They started in the traditional position facing one another with their feet together. Hermione continued to talk him through the steps as they moved forward and back. They walked through a turn and sped up the movements a little the second time through. They moved with a surprisingly natural rhythm together, considering they were not exactly fast friends to begin with.

The buzzer startled the two of them as they moved through the dance steps again. Hermione laughed as she said, "Well, it appears we've reached the end of our first lesson. You move very well, Professor. All those years of carrying cauldrons back and forth I assume?"

Severus was surprised to find he had enjoyed himself. He was actually sorry the lesson was over. He enjoyed the feel of the young witch in his arms and the sensual sway of their bodies in time to the music. "I would assume. Thank you for the lesson, Miss Granger. It was most interesting. It would be interesting to see the dance performed by professionals. Those that are attuned to each others movements." The dance had a seductive feel to it. Your partner moved against you as the music pounded. 'I am in such trouble,' he thought as he buttoned his frock coat.

"You know what they say don't you, Professor? If done properly, the Tango is the vertical expression of a horizontal desire." Hermione was grinning as she pulled her wand out.

Severus heard various sounds in the background as she pointed her wand at the doorway to the break room and then again at the windows. "You are closing for the evening, Miss Granger?" He donned and closed his robes as he spoke. The coat rack disappeared with a pop as he removed his cloak from the stand.

"Hmm? Oh, yes. Katherine and Sam left just after your lesson started. We just need to leave through the front door and I can lock and ward the studio from outside. She indicated the door as she said, "After you, Sir. You know if you're really interested, Professor, we're putting on a performance for the University in two weeks, just before school starts. You're welcome to come and watch the performance if you like."

They had exited through the front door. Hermione had turned to ward and lock it. Severus arched a brow as he asked, "Do you dance in the performance, Miss Granger?"

"Yes. I dance with my boss Ted. He's my partner for the Tango and a Rumba. I can give you the information next week if you're interested. Well good night, Sir. See you next week." And with a pop, Hermione Apparated out.

"Good night, Miss Granger." He said to the empty air. No longer angry about taking lessons, he would be here next week. He suspected she would be making an appearance in his dreams during the week as his body recalled the feel of her moving against him.

He Apparated back to Hogwarts with thoughts of a horizontal expression of a human desire running through his mind concerning a certain witch.

TBC

A/N: Ophidiophobia is the fear of snakes from the Greek ophidon meaning small snake. The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. The comment about horizontal desire is credited to a journalist, Angela Rippon. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one. Next up, another dance lesson for our friends! Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Lesson Two ? Do Cats Tango?

Chapter 3 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

3. Lesson Two Do Cats Tango?

It was Monday evening before Severus emerged from his dungeons again. He normally spent most of the summer lost in pure research and experimentation in his private lab. The house elves were used to him flooding the kitchen for meals at odd hours. They had been forbidden years ago from entering his private laboratory or personal quarters. He had experiments and potions that should not be touched by anyone. It was also conceivable that one of the elves could have caused him a problem during the years he spied on Voldemort.

Severus had always been a solitary man. He normally preferred his own company to the company of others. Inane small talk and mindless chatter annoyed him. Albus required Snape to attend dinner during the school year. He worried Severus would turn into a recluse if he ever left Hogwarts. Dinner Monday night found Severus sitting between Remus and the Headmaster. A full moon would appear in a week and Remus had found he was low on Wolfsbane.

Albus eyes twinkled as he said to the Potions Master, "So, Severus, I understand your first lesson went well?"

Severus glared at the Headmaster. He considered Albus to be his friend and mentor, but the man enjoyed tormenting him for some unknown reason, as evidenced by the conditions of the lost bet. Albus always claimed he wasn't trying to annoy Severus. He merely had his best interests at heart. How the bloody hell could dancing with Granger and learning the Tango be in his best interests he'd like to know? He supposed his traitorous body could answer that one. 'Down boy,' he thought with a chuckle. His dreams had been of a certain witch lately. The dreams had them dancing together again, this time without clothes on!

Snape answered sarcastically, "Fine. Just wonderful. This week we will work with castanets."

"I believe castanets are used in Flamenco dancing not The Tango. Have you decided to take more than one type of dance lesson from Miss Granger?" asked Albus as he laughed at the murderous glare Severus was directing at him.

"What lessons are you taking from Hermione, Severus?" Remus asked curiously.

Severus addressed the Headmaster, ignoring Remus, "I am so pleased you are enjoying my discomfort, Headmaster. I do so enjoy amusing you." He stood abruptly and left through the back door in a flurry of cloth.

"What was that all about?" asked Remus.

Albus was still laughing as he answered, "Severus lost a bet to me and the consequences were most dire." Albus's eyes shone in the candlelight.

"The consequences?"

"Yes," he said with a smile. "He is being forced to take dance lessons from Miss Granger. I firmly believe he needs to leave his dungeons and interact with other human beings once every five or ten years, whether he wants to or not."

"What type of lessons?"

Remus would later swear that the Headmaster's eyes shone like fairy dust for a moment before he smiled and said, "The Argentine Tango."

Remus choked on the pumpkin juice he was swallowing. "You have got to be kidding!"

Albus's grin was bright. "Should be interesting. Don't you think?"

Remus could only nod his head in agreement.

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Hermione was sitting in the break room with Katherine and Samantha. "So how is tall, dark, and gothic doing?" asked Sam with a grin.

Hermione gave Sam a look before answering, "Professor Snape? Not bad. He moves very well, course we only worked on up and back in a straight line with me pivoting to show him how to keep your partner moving in a straight line at turns." Hermione shrugged. She had agonized over having to teach him anything in the days preceding the lesson. She still had knots in her stomach wondering how tonight would go.

"What is with him?" asked Katherine.

"He's a bit, I don't know eccentric?" Hermione laughed at the description. She really couldn't pin down what he was. "The man is brilliant, top in his field. I think he needs to work on his people skills."

The girls laughed. They looked at each other when they heard the outer door open. Both Hermione and Katherine were teaching tonight. Katherine sang out, "Show time!"

"You take the front and I'll take the back studio. Wells' lesson is only an hour. Professor Snape is scheduled for a two-hour lesson, that way you won't have to disturb us when you finish. Just lock the doors when you leave. I won't be able to hear anyone come in if I'm in the back studio."

"You can have all the privacy you want," snickered Samantha with a wiggle of her eyebrows.

"So do you have a thing for him?" asked Katherine.

"Oh grow up you two." Hermione rolled her eyes at the two as she and Katherine walked to the front. They reminded her of Harry and Ron whenever they talked about the opposite sex. A thing for Snape? The man obviously had a nice body and his intelligence had always intrigued her. Even though the dreams she had of him had been erotic, they were just dreams, a product of an overactive mind. Hers. She was sure he was not a pleasant person in real life. The dreams were the result of not being involved with anyone for longer than she cared to think about. Snape? She'd stick to looking and not touching thank you.

Snape and Wells were waiting at the front desk glaring at each other. Hermione thought they looked ready to break out their wands and challenge each other to a duel. She wondered if Wells knew Snape was a dueling master. They would be picking up pieces of Wells for weeks if it ever came to a duel.

"Good evening, Professor. Please follow me. We're going to use the back studio tonight."

Snape shot the wizard a last look as he followed Hermione down a short hallway. She was dressed much the same as she had been last week, except this week her clothes looked as if they were painted on by magic. The skirt swayed with her hip movement as Severus watched her walk. Thoughts of his dreams this past week did not help as he watched her arse sway in front of him.

Hermione walked through an open doorway halfway down the hallway. "Here we are." She turned to look at Snape. He was reaching up to unclasp what appeared to be his teaching robes.

As Severus opened the clasp, a coat rack appeared. He silently eyed the witch daring her to say something about his attire. Hermione remained silent while he hung his robes and frock coat on the rack. He was dressed once again in a white dress shirt and black linen trousers.

'At least he didn't wear a cloak this week, that must count for something,' she thought with a laugh. She moved to the middle of the room. "Ready, sir?"

Severus stood silently waiting for Hermione to instruct him. "Last week we worked on the basic walk up and back with an open and closed stance. This week I'd like to work more on structure and form. To move gracefully when dancing the Tango, keep the image of a cat in your mind. Keep your weight on the balls of your feet, not your heels as you do when you normally walk. Shifting your weight will create a more cat like movement. You need to keep this movement as we dance the steps. It helps with the



graceful flow of the Tango. When you move backward, stay on the balls of your feet and straighten your leg a little more than you ordinarily would. You should reach back a little farther than you might feel is natural. This will stop you from bumping your partners knee when you dance and help with the flow of movement."

Severus snorted. "A cat. Would you like me to get down on all fours?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Professor. Try walking on tiptoe for a moment."

Severus stood looking at her. She couldn't be serious?

"Walk on your tiptoes," she repeated with a nod of her head.

Severus looked skeptical. "You're serious?"

Hermione gave an exasperated sigh. "Yes, watch. It's an exercise in movement. You know if I questioned everything you said in class, I never would have learned anything." She moved forward and back, and side-to-side on only the balls of her feet. The moves were more of a glide then steps. "You start practicing on tiptoes to strengthen and stabilize the muscles of your toes, feet, and ankles. You don't dance on tiptoe. That would be too tiring. Professor?"

Severus walked forward a few steps, bouncing on his toes. He could feel the muscles in his calves tighten as he moved. He felt unbelievably idiotic and thought he probably looked ridiculous.

"Good. Now move backward and remember to exaggerate straightening your leg." He moved four steps backward. "Fine. Try again, completely across the room, up and back."

Severus glared at the young woman, but did as instructed. He could feel an ache in his legs and feet.

"Good. Now remember to walk on the balls of your feet as we try the next set of steps. In Spanish, the verb Caminar means 'to walk'. The single movement of one foot forward and then bringing the other foot next to it is called a 'paseo'. A Caminata is a series of 'paseos' or steps. Lets try four paseos together, first with a slow beat and then with a faster Latin rhythm. Try to let your feet move with the beat. Ready?"

Severus moved forward to place his hand on her back and waited for her to position herself against his arm and chest. The shift of his weight from a flat stance to the balls of his feet brought his chest more firmly against Hermione's breasts. He looked down and thought the "V" in front was deeper than the top she had on last week. The material felt like silk under his hand.

"Five points from Slytherin for not paying attention, Professor." Hermione was grinning at his obvious distraction.

Severus glared at the witch. A hint of color appeared on his cheeks. 'Blood hell,' he thought, 'the little chit is enjoying this.' He leaned forward, his breath warm on her ear. His voice was silky as he said, "I do not believe you have the right to deduct house points, Miss Granger. 10 points from your precious Gryffindor for impertinence and inappropriate attire for an instructor."

Hermione grinned as she ignored his comment. "Are you ready, Professor?" The music had a slow beat as they moved together forward and back. "Good, now we're going to speed the tempo up. Watch your step and remember to stay on the balls of your feet."

Severus found it was harder to keep the same movement with the faster rhythm. "Count the beats in your head while you move. The movement should be more fluid. Watch." Hermione stepped back out of his arms. He felt the loss of contact more intimately than he should have. She stepped forward while counting each step. Each step was held for the count of one as she said, "Watch my feet. One, two, three, four."

"Like a waltz?" Severus scowled at her and his legs ached. There must be some sort of charm to make this easier and ease his muscles. Eight more lessons like this? He'd never make it.

"This is a Tango, not a waltz. Not only that, a waltz doesn't have four beats. It has three. A waltz is ONE, two, three, ONE, two, three. Not one, two, three, four. Shall we try again?"

Severus was sulking. "Last week was much easier."

"Last week was the first lesson. You start at the beginning. You wouldn't teach a first year how to brew a Draught of Peace would you?"

"A Draught of Peace is taught fifth year, Miss Granger. Or has your ability to retain even the simplest of information moved beyond your capabilities?" A tired and annoyed Snape tended to be snappish.

"That's my point. We start with what is easy and work towards what is more difficult. Shall we?" Still not happy, he moved forward and assumed the beginning position. They moved up and back until Hermione was satisfied with the movement.

"Now let's try the same steps but this time the music speeds up to an eight count measure. Watch." She demonstrated the counting and movement but moved much faster this time.

Severus stepped forward into position. They moved awkwardly to the faster beat. Hermione had them work on the movements until they flowed a little easier.

"We have about fifteen minutes left. I just want to show you one more step tonight. It's a two-step called El Retrocesa and it starts out backwards. Your right foot moves back, hold it for two counts and then slide your left foot even with your right and move it a step to the left, then bring your right foot next to your left for one count. From there we go back into a walk again, forward and back. Lets move through it slowly a few times to get the feel of the movement. It might help if you start off center of my legs. You'll have less of a chance of bumping my knee that way. Remember, on the balls of your feet. Ready?"

He was back to wanting to kill Albus again. Walking had been easy last week. Now counting and a new step, he didn't want to know how to do the bloody Tango anyway.

The buzzer sounded signaling the end of their class. "Good. The eight count tempo and that last step will require some practice to get it right, but tonight went well." Hermione was grinning mischievously. "For homework, I want you to practice walking on your tiptoes for at least ten to fifteen minutes a night. You need to build up the correct muscles in your legs. Stand as if you were holding me, yours arms in the proper positions, then rise up on your toes and repeat the steps we did tonight. Try doing it at least three times through, up and back, with a slow beat and three times through with a fast beat."

"Homework." The word dripped sarcasm. Exactly who did she think she was? He arched his eyebrow as he looked at her.

"Yes. Homework. This is a class. I am the instructor and you are the student. I give you homework to prepare for the next lesson," Hermione spoke patiently to him as if he were a three-year-old child. "Unless you'd rather I tell the Headmaster you refused to cooperate? I'm sure the consequences still apply for not completing all ten lessons. The choice is yours, Sir."

Hermione waited patiently as Severus's black eyes glowed with anger. It galled him to know she was right, and what was worse, there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

His voice was pure honey as he asked, "And do I receive a grade at the end of my lessons, Miss Granger?"

She smiled brightly. "Oh yes, and a certificate, suitable for framing." She was baiting him and appeared to be enjoying it as well.

Severus grabbed his frock coat from the rack and put it on. The stand popped out of existence as he lifted his teaching robes and swung them around his shoulders before securing the clasp. Hermione turned back to the studio as they passed through the doorway. She pointed her wand at the room and the lights went out.

They had reached the front desk when Hermione saw the poster in the window advertising the performance at the University. "I don't know if you're still interested, but the poster has information about next weeks performance at Cambridge." Hermione continued to look up. Sounds of closing doors and slamming could be heard from the other rooms.

Severus looked at the announcement. The poster was printed on both sides so the information could be read from inside and outside. Brightly color swirls dotted the face of the board. Large bold letters proclaimed, 'Dancing Exposition! One night only.' The Argentine Tango was listed first along with the Fox trot, the Rumba, the Waltz, and several other dances. The date was listed as a week from Saturday. A line at the bottom said, 'New lessons and classes starting in the fall. Join Now! Special Introductory Fees, Ask any Associate. Owner: Thaddeus Pritchard.' That explained a thing or two. It also brought up a few new questions.

"Ready, Professor?" Hermione had walked up beside him while he was reading the poster.

He waved his hand to indicate the sign. "It says you will be performing at the Cambridge Enchanted Union?"

"Yes, this is a wizarding dance school. The Cambridge Enchanted Union is part of the new wizarding university set up at Cambridge." Hermione followed Severus out the front door. She turned to look and ward it as she asked, "Are you planning on attending?"

"I am not sure I will have the time." Severus stood to the side and waited for her to finish. He would Apparate after she left.

Hermione nodded. "Good night, Professor. See you next Thursday." She was gone with a pop.

Severus looked at the sign again. Thaddeus Pritchard. Pritchard had been three years behind him when he was a student at Hogwarts. He had passed some information along to Dumbledore a few years ago about two prominent Death Eaters before the Dark Lord's downfall. Granger had said her boss owed an old friend a debt. Albus should have been in Pritchard's debt, not the other way around.

Questions swirled in the Potion Master's mind as he Apparated back to the castle.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Next up, another dance lesson and an exposition at the University. Severus hasn't even begun to fret over the costume he is going to be required to wear. Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Lesson Three - A Dance of a Different Kind

*Chapter 4 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

### Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

4. Lesson Three - A Dance of a Different Kind

Thursday rolled around faster than Hermione would have thought possible. She had just moved back into her University flat the day before and would be starting her third and final year at Cambridge next week. The program was at an accelerated level. It encompassed intensive class work for three years and then a one-year hands-on internship. She was carrying a double major of potions and charms. Her advisor said she could complete the charms course by correspondence while satisfying her internship. Once a month she would be required to return to Cambridge for testing on her Charms skills. She had always excelled at Charms and did not think meeting these requirements would pose any difficulties for her. The young witch was busier than she would have liked tonight. She had a final dance lesson with an elderly wizard who wanted to surprise his witch with his dancing ability on their 90th anniversary. Professor Snape's third dance lesson was also tonight. To top it off, the dance exposition was Saturday and she started classes on Monday. She sighed heavily wishing she knew a charm to make the day thirty-six hours long.

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The final notes of "Summer Wind" sung by Frank Sinatra faded in the background. Being Muggle, Hermione had been surprised when she found out Sinatra was a wizard. But the more she thought about it, she realized his blue eyes twinkled just like Albus's did.

Hermione smiled at the elderly wizard. "Mister Willit, I think your wife will be thrilled with your new found dance ability and congratulations on ninety years of marriage. That is an amazing accomplishment."

"Thank you my dear. You've been very sweet to such an old codger like me." The elderly man smiled back at Hermione.

Hermione was reminded of Albus. Mr. Willit had a beard that would have rivaled the Headmaster's. He told her he was 130 years young. She thought he was quite fit for his age. "Nonsense, I've enjoyed our lessons. Take care and tell your wife congratulations too." She walked back to the front counter to record their lesson in her book.

Severus had arrived early and watched the last few minutes of the previous dance lesson. Even though Hermione's attire was more demure this week, he thought the outfit still showed her figure to its best advantage. He thought she would probably look good in a sack as well. Where did that come from? He wondered. He stood quietly watching her, waiting for her to turn around. She was humming a wordless tune as she continued to write in the ledger, her hips swaying hypnotically to the tune she hummed.

"Miss Granger." His voice cut through the silence in the studio.

"Professor Snape," she said brightly, turning around to face the Potions Master. "I'm sorry, I didn't see you come in. Ready for your lesson, Sir?"

"May we get on with it, Miss Granger?" Severus really did not want to move. He had been enjoying the view from behind and would have gladly stood there awhile longer but the first rule of Slytherin was to keep the upper hand.

"Of course. Why don't we use the back studio again?" Hermione pointed her wand at the front door, locking and warding it and then repeated the movements aiming her wand at the break room door.

Severus's eyebrow shot up in surprise. "Why are you locking up the studio now?"

Hermione led the way to the back studio, explaining as they walked, "The other girls have left. Actually they finished Tuesday with the last of their students. Most of the instructors are part time for the summer. There will be a few instructors who will return in two weeks now that their children are gone for the school year. Which brings up another issue."

Severus looked questioningly at the witch. "An issue?"

"Yes, issue. I start classes on Monday. Do you think it would be a problem if starting next Thursday we meet at my flat for your lessons? Ted is closing the studio for a week's holiday after Saturday's exposition and I have a study group that meets on Thursday's at my place. We usually finish around 6:45pm so there should not be any conflict. Professor?" Hermione was waving her hand in front of his face.

"Stop that silly hand waving immediately." Severus had stopped listening after her suggestion of meeting at her flat. "How large is this flat that you can hold dance lessons?"

"Professor, we live in a magical world. The room can be changed or enlarged as needed, for any event. University flats have always reminded me of an offshoot of the room of requirement. I can give you the location before we leave tonight." Hermione was watching his eyes.

"Very well, if only so that I may complete these ridiculous lessons."

"Thank you. That will be one less thing I have to worry about. Professor, your robes?"

Severus had been standing listening to her instead of removing his robes and frock coat. The coat stand appeared as he opened the clasp on his robes. "Does your employer often close his establishment to take a holiday?"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders, watching her ex-professor unbutton a seemingly endless row of buttons. "I don't know. This is the first summer I've ever worked for him. I think the studio has only been open a year or so anyway."

Severus hung his frock coat on the rack. "I realize we still have time, but when were you planning on obtaining our costumes? I assume you will need funds if you are renting the dreadful garments. You will need to advise me of the amount."

Hermione's eyes were wide with surprise. "Our costumes? What do you mean, our costumes? Why would I need a costume?"

Severus's eyes snapped with anger. "You do not jolly well expect me to dance the bloody Tango with Albus, do you? You are the one teaching it to me." Who exactly did the little chit think he was going to dance with? It's not as if he wanted to do the bloody dance anyway. Bet or no bet, this was turning into more than he bargained for.

"And you expect me to dance the Tango with you at the Halloween dance at Hogwarts?" The nerve of the old bat.

Sarcasm was his specialty. "No, Miss Granger, I expect you to dance the Tango with me at the Queen's Jubilee. Of course at Hogwarts, where else would we dance?"

"Professor Snape, I was tricked into agreeing to teach you the Tango, nowhere in the contract does it say I have to be your partner for the dance."

"Then how the hell am I supposed to dance the bloody dance and resolve the bet? Who would you suggest I ask, Hooch, McGonagall, or Sprout?" His eye blazed with fire as he regarded the witch standing in front of him.

She should have shrunk in fear under his angry glare, instead she broke out in uncontrollable laughter. When she was able to contain herself again she said, "I'm sorry, Sir. It was just the thought of you Tangoing with any one of those witches. The image was almost as funny as it was disturbing." She was still chuckling as she wiped tears from her eyes. "I guess I really hadn't thought about who you might partner with."

"Very well. I shall overlook your lapse in reason this time. Pity I can no longer take house points from you. I do not believe disturbing adequately describes the image of me dancing with anyone let alone dancing a Tango with McGonagall." Severus had faced the Dark Lord and lived to tell the tale, but the thought of McGonagall and the tango... he shook his head, a dozen Cruciatus Curses would have been kinder. "I do not expect you to absorb the cost of your costume. You have reminded me numerous times that you are a poor University student."

"How very kind of you." Hermione was known to be just as sarcastic as the Professor from time to time.

Severus's smirk was evident as he said, "Yes, I thought so."

Hermione gave him an appraising look. Severus shifted uncomfortably. He knew that look. That look said I have something you want. What are you prepared to do for me? "What is it, Miss Granger?"

"What is what, Professor?" Her voice was sweet and innocent and did not fool Severus for a minute.

"I have been on the receiving end of that look too many times not to recognize it. What do you want in payment for agreeing to be my partner? What is your pound of

flesh?" He never would have stayed alive the last twenty years if he didn't know how to read people.

"What makes you think I want something?"

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione looked at him. "All right. There is a symposium on the evolution of potions the end of November in Italy. I want to go." She stood quietly waiting for his response.

"And how does this concern me?" She could not be asking what he thought she was asking. Could she?

"Students are not allowed. Only instructors and Potions Masters are invited by special invitation. You could take me as your assistant."

"What makes you think I am going or that I would wish to remain in your presence any longer than absolutely necessary?"

"Professor, I know you are speaking on Dark Potions." Her look was smug as the words left her mouth. Hermione had read about the symposium in *Ars Alchemica*. She didn't think she would have a chance in hell in attending. Sometimes opportunity came in the strangest form. "I promise you I will remove my offending presence as soon as we arrive at the conference. I just want the chance to listen to the presentations and view the Potions Masters. I'm going to have to petition one of them soon for my internship. I would like to observe them in their natural habitat first, so to speak."

Truth be told, despite his acerbic personality, she would have liked to petition Snape for the internship. He was the leading Potions Master in the United Kingdom and possibly all Europe. He was infinitely more knowledgeable than most on all aspects of potions and potion making. Hermione knew through her work with the Order that he had been spying for the last twenty years. An assistant would have been out of the question in the past. She didn't think he would change his practice now that Voldemort was gone.

"Merlin forbid. You were not planning on petitioning me. Were you?" He liked his privacy just fine. An assistant would only interfere with his life. Knowing Albus and Minerva, he would be forced to take on Granger regardless of how he felt. He was sure Albus would trick him into it somehow.

"No, sir. I know you have never taken an assistant. You would not have been at liberty to come and go if you had an assistant before Voldemort's defeat. I cannot imagine you would change your practice now."

And what was so wrong with him that she would not even consider asking him? Her seven years at school, his general personality and moodiness, his past. He chuckled as more reasons presented themselves. Severus eyed the young witch. "You know a Slytherin would trade the dance for the internship not just the symposium?"

Hermione glared at Snape. "I'm sure they would, Sir, however I do not intend to spend my internship angry, annoyed, and insulted. It is getting late, Professor, we need to start your lesson. What is your decision?"

Just like that? Where was the fun in being so straightforward? "Touché, Miss Granger. I see no need to take on an assistant regardless of the existence or nonexistence of the Dark Lord. I will allow you to accompany me to the symposium provided we do not have to see one another after our arrival. Does that meet with your approval?"

Hermione smiled. "I will disappear the minute we check in. You won't even know I'm there."

Severus looked skeptical. What was he getting himself into? "I highly doubt that, Miss Granger."

"In the meantime, I will look into costumes and let you know what I find. May we get on with the lesson now? I believe we have wasted enough time already. We'll never get through the whole lesson as it is."

Severus moved forward to take Hermione in his arms. The scent of her perfume tickled his nostrils. A mix of spices he couldn't quite place. He wondered if she brewed her own scent. His mind was distracted. Why did he agree to let her attend the symposium with him?

"Professor." Hermione's voice was a little louder this time, "Professor."

Severus brought his attention back to the present with a jolt. He shot Hermione his best glare.

"Thank you for joining me. All right let's review what we learned last time."

Severus shifted his weight forward onto the balls of his feet. He had felt like an idiot, but he had actually practiced in his chambers all week. His legs had ached after last week's lesson. He would practice during class, when he would stop at a student's desk. He would shift to the balls of his feet as he looked into the cauldrons. He didn't think the students noticed the change in his stance but it helped to build the muscles in his feet and ankles. He thought he would probably make a complete ass of himself at the Halloween dance. He could then kill Albus with a clear conscience. But somewhere in the back of his mind he held out hope, if he danced with Granger and danced with any skill at all, he might not come off as a complete jackass. Twisted logic maybe, but it seemed to be all that was getting him through these lessons.

Hermione felt him shift forward as her breasts pressed into his chest. His white shirt was silk this week. Was he playing her game? She felt the play of muscles under the smooth fabric. The image of him in just his briefs rose unbidden in her mind. A gentle shudder ran through the witch as she tried to clear the thought away.

They moved through the opening dance steps and the slide. Hermione was impressed. It was obvious he had practiced. They moved through the slower beat fine. He was still having trouble following the rhythm when they moved to the faster tempo.

"All right, we'll try the faster tempo again in a minute, I want to show you the next step we are going to work on, it's called a sacada. A sacada is a body displacement across the path of your partner to provoke a change of direction. What that means is this, displacement is placing a part of your body in the path of mine to move me in another direction. In this case, the displacement will be your foot stopping my movement, a mark with your leg that will cause a change of direction." Severus was at a total loss to understand a word she said. Hermione smiled. "It's easier to understand as we walk through the steps."

"Face me in position. We walk three steps forward on a slow walk. Now, if your leg touches me it is a signal to stop my movement, you will arc around me and remember to count the beat. The stopping point is when my right side is lined up with the middle of your chest. Our shoulders should be at a 45-degree angle to each other. Facing opposite directions, my right foot moves forward. You slide your right leg through my legs. You should have your weight equally displaced between both your legs. When you shift your weight to the right, this will throw my weight to my front leg. The shift will turn me around."

Severus raised an eyebrow, "I slide my leg through your legs?"

Hermione looked at him. Were all men little boys underneath it all? "That's just a dance move, nothing more. Shall we?"

They moved through the walk and the first arc with ease. Hermione's right foot slid forward. Severus moved to slide his right leg through her legs and kicked her left foot.

"Oww!" The two moved apart.

"Miss Granger. Are you all right?"

Hermione rubbed her foot. "It's all right, Professor. That sometimes happens with this move. Let's try again. Ready?"

They moved through the walk and the first arc again, this time Severus moved too quickly and accidentally kicked her right foot as it moved forward. In his haste to back up he stepped on the toes of her left foot.

"Professor!" Hermione was moving from foot to foot, not sure which one hurt more. This was a difficult step in the dance but she felt it captured the essence of the Tango. It was one of the reasons she taught it. She had been stepped on before teaching this step, but not like this. Severus had conjured a chair for her to sit in.

"Miss Granger, I must apologize." Severus was at a loss for words. "I am normally much lighter on my feet."

"Maybe you could try being lighter on my feet? Step on my toes one more time, Professor, and I'll hex off all the protruding bits on your body. You will not have to worry about wearing a codpiece when I am through with you." Hermione was still rubbing her left foot. It had taken the brunt of two attacks by the Professor. Her words might have stung if not for the smile in her voice as well as the one on her face despite the ache in her feet.

Severus chuckled at her words. "Perhaps I can transfigure a pair of steel toed boots for your safety? I will still need a partner for the Halloween dance," he said with a smirk.

"Steel-toed boots... Hmm... might come in handy, especially if we are to continue. Shall we try one more time, carefully?" Hermione stood and waved the chair to the side of the room. "We only have a few minutes left. I'm not too sure my feet could stand anymore tonight anyway."

They slowly and carefully worked on the new step. They were on the second try when the buzzer sounded. "You're going to have to work on that step this week. It will take practice if you're going to get it right. If you really want me to be your partner, I will have to be able to stand."

Severus had always appreciated a dry wit. Her humor must have been lost in the shuffle every time one of the idiotic duo had opened their mouth, he thought. He was still concerned, he was taller and heavier than she. "Miss Granger, are you really all right?"

"Afraid you will have to dance with Professor McGonagall instead?"

Severus grinned. "Hardly, that was never an option. I believe Albus would be forced to substitute. I would rather not get that close to his beard thank you. You will have to do." Severus had donned his frock coat and was closing the endless row of buttons.

Hermione watched fascinated at the sheer volume of little black buttons that seemed to be on the coat. "Have you decided to come to the dance exposition this Saturday?"

He was closing the clasp on his robes as they walked to the front door. "I suppose I will have to attend just to be sure you can still stand."

Hermione smiled. "You can also see how that step is performed without crippling me for life. Remember we will meet at my flat this Thursday for your next lesson."

Severus nodded his head as she gave him the locations of her flat and the Cambridge Enchanted Union. She let them out the front door, then locked and warded it. "Great, I will see you this Saturday then. Goodnight, Professor."

"Saturday. Goodnight, Miss Granger."

Hermione disappeared with a pop.

Severus stood for several long minutes looking at the empty space she had occupied. Why did he ever agree to let her attend the conference with him? What was he getting himself into? She had invaded his dreams on an irregular basis for the last three weeks. The smell of the young witch combined with the times he held her lithe body while they danced seemed to fill his nights with a few erotic dreams of his own. He would hex Albus for forcing this on him. While he enjoyed her obvious intelligence, he was an old man who had no right to think anything of his ex-student. He shook his head. He was a fool. Time to return to the castle. He would have another chance to make a fool out of himself Saturday night when he attended the dance exposition. Why had he ever agreed to go?

Why indeed.

With a crack, he was gone.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Next up, another dance lesson and the exposition at the University. Hermione and her flat. Crooks and the Professor. I know I have said "Hermione popped out" and Severus creates a loud crack when describing the two apparating. Before questions arise, my view is this, a short distance, a pop. Severus is traveling a longer distance, thus a crack. Frank Sinatra and Summer Wind in particular happen to be one of my favorite Muggle singers/songs. Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Enchantment

Chapter 5 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

### 5. Enchantment

Severus studied his image in the mirror. He was wearing a black cable knit jumper with his black twill trousers. A tweed coat, transfigured from his teaching robes, lay across the bed. Black of course. He had dealt with these academic types before. They liked to dress the same as the young witches and wizards they were teaching. He regarded his reflection. He thought he looked like any of the instructors at the University. Tonight he wanted to blend in, remain inconspicuous. Why had he told her he would attend the dance exposition? 'And don't forget the symposium,' a small voice in his head chimed in. He sighed, not wanting to address either issue right now.

Severus left his quarters through a side entrance to the castle. The night air felt cool on his skin. He thought about tonight's performance and wondered how the dancers would be dressed. His thoughts turned to his own costume as well as Miss Granger's. The parchment clearly stated he had to wear tights with a codpiece. He had taken stock of himself earlier after his shower. His back and chest were a road map of scars but his body was firm and in good shape. His stomach was relatively flat and muscular and his legs were long and lean. Even a look at his arse showed firm buttocks. He would never admit it to anyone, but he thought he would probably look good in tights. Severus wondered if the codpiece came in sizes. He chuckled as he thought he should tell Miss Granger to order an extra large for him. He wondered what her costume would look like. What did 16th century woman wear?

He had caught her blushing a few times in the last few weeks. He did not believe her to be an innocent. It was near impossible to make it through Hogwarts without at least one or two sexual interludes. He'd had a few encounters himself during his student years. Another 5th year Slytherin had been just as eager to rid herself of her virginity as he had been. As far as experiences went, it had been adequate. His jaw clenched as he wondered who Hermione's first had been, or her second for that matter. It was in a decidedly blacker mood he reached the apparation point outside the main gates of Hogwarts. A loud crack wrenched the air as he apparated to the Cambridge Enchanted Union.

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Hermione paced nervously behind the makeshift curtain. She couldn't seem to settle down. She had spent seven years as the Professor's student. He had never offered her a word of praise or encouragement. She knew she was intelligent but she would have liked if once, just once he had said, "Good work, Miss Granger." Even when she had answered all the extra credit correctly on an exam his comments were intended to wound her, "It is a pity there are no more extra points you can try for, Miss Granger."

"Are you trying to wear a hole in the floor boards?" Sam asked with a good-natured smile.

Hermione's head snapped up. She smiled sheepishly at the girls. "Sorry. I guess my mind was elsewhere."

"On tall, dark, and gothic perhaps?" Katherine had a huge grin on her face.

Seven years in his presence had taught Hermione something. The glare she gave Katherine would have rivaled the Potions Master's at his best. "I told you there is nothing going on. He's just a former professor of mine."

A tall young man with blond hair was standing behind Sam listening to the girls. "Your boyfriend's coming tonight, Hermione?" She turned to glare at the young man too.

Katherine and Samantha looked at each other. "Right, Hermione. Whatever you say."

Hermione ignored them as she scanned the backstage area. "Did you see where Ted went? He was here a minute ago and now he's gone."

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The Cambridge Enchanted Union was built in the shape of an 'L'. The first floor of the shortened end of the building was often annexed to present special programs for the students. It was here the make shift stage had been set up for the dance expo.

Severus stood to the side, hidden in the shadows. A large group of students were sitting in chairs that had been set up in front of the stage. The students talked among themselves waiting for the show to start. He looked over the crowd and the other people standing on the sides. He assumed the small knot of men wearing robes and engaged in an animated discussion were professors in the magical section of Cambridge. The students all appeared to be in Muggle clothing. The majority seemed to be wearing jeans. Severus shook his head. He preferred a more formal style of dress. He approved of the uniforms the students wore at Hogwarts. It allowed the students to start out on an even level and put the emphasis on the instruction.

Severus was satisfied he had dressed appropriately and would blend in with the others waiting for the performance to begin. He had no desire to be noticed tonight. He would watch the damn performance just so he could see how the Tango should be danced and then get the hell out of there. He was annoyed with himself for even coming tonight. He told the voice in his head to bugger off when it suggested he had come for another reason.

The lights dimmed as a man Severus recognized as an older version of the Thaddeus Pritchard he had known in school step out between the curtains. Pritchard was about the same height as Severus but with a broader build. The noise of the crowd died down as the man greeted the spectators. "Good evening, my name is Thaddeus Pritchard and I would like to thank you all for coming tonight. I run a small dance studio in town called 'Lighter Than Air'. Tonight we would like you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a demonstration of the dances our studio offers. New lessons and classes will be starting soon. We have a special introductory offer tonight for anyone requesting information about the lessons. If you are interested there will be table at the side where you can leave your name and we will be glad to send you an owl with information regarding the studio. Tonight we will be performing a variety of dances for you. The Meringue, the Samba, the Fox trot are just a few of the many you will see. And as a special treat, my partner and I will dance the Argentine Tango. So sit back, tap your toes, feel the music, and enjoy the performance."

The lights dimmed. The silhouette of two people standing motionless could be seen against the back curtain. The man and woman on stage were in profile to the audience. They appeared to be frozen in time. The man held the woman in his arms, ready to dance. The woman appeared to be looking down. As the lights brightened, an overhead announcement proclaimed, "Ladies and Gentlemen, The Samba."

A sharp note sounded into the silence. The woman's head snapped up. A second and third note sounded as the two looked into each other's eyes. A strong Latin beat started to play in earnest as the couple moved into the dance. Severus's breath caught in his throat as he watched the woman move. Hermione Granger was dancing with Pritchard on stage. Their moves were exact as he spun her around turn after turn. A smooth rocking of her hips and the suggestive movement of their lower torsos punctuated the forward and backward steps. Hermione was wearing a black dress with silver trim that hugged her ample curves. The front had a deep V. The left side of the dress ended at the middle of her calf while the right side was slit to her hip and angled. Severus was just as willing to look at her legs as the next man, but it was the back that held his attention. The back or rather lack of it. The dress was completely backless to just above the cleft of her buttocks. Severus decided the dress had to be magicked on. The material defied the laws of gravity as it followed the curve of her shoulders and moved down her sides. The fabric stayed against her skin through every movement, every spin. Her hair was a wild cascade of curls down her back that moved back and forth as she turned. Severus was mesmerized with the vision on stage.

The dance continued through its sensual moves. Hermione shifted around Ted's body. The music increased in tempo and the dancers steps mimicked the beat. The two

appeared to ignore their surroundings as they concentrated on each other, moving in step with one another. Severus watched Pritthead's hand glide along Hermione's hip as they stepped out to do a forward and backward walk together. He pulled Hermione in and spun her around again. The spin ended with her landing hard against his body. Severus felt an unfamiliar wrench in his gut. His mood turned angry again without reason.

Pritthead had stopped moving. He spun Hermione out and back one last time. Pritthead's arm around Hermione's lower back seemed to anchor her in place. Hermione arched her back, threw her head back and kicked her foot back as the music reached its downbeat. She held this stance for the last few notes of the song. Severus could see the rapid rise and fall of her chest as she tried to catch her breath after the last series of steps. Pritthead and Hermione stood side by side as the music ended and bowed to thunderous applause from the crowd. They turned and slipped back through the curtain. As if coming out of a daze, Severus suddenly noticed the crowd around the stage and chairs had grown considerably. The sound of the music had attracted the people walking through the student union and the crowd had doubled in size.

Severus ignored the comments and wolf whistles as the lights dimmed yet again. The couple had reappeared on stage and was silhouetted against the back curtain. The lights brightened in time to the start of the music. A voice overhead announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Fox trot." Severus had leaned forward in anticipation of seeing Hermione dancing again. He was disappointed to see the blond chit from the studio dancing with a young man. He watched the couple dance with an air of indifference. They were good, but not as good as Hermione and Pritthead had been, their dancing spoke of a higher level of expertise. The two had moved together with a natural grace.

The blood pounded in his ears as he thought of Hermione dancing the Argentine Tango with Pritthead. She had said the Tango was the vertical expression of a horizontal desire. Well, the Samba didn't seem too far off that description either he thought sourly. He had no reason to care what Granger did or with who. All he wanted was to see the Tango danced properly so he would not make a complete fool out of himself when it came time for him to dance at the damn Halloween dance. He would hex Albus to tomorrow and back next chance he got. He groaned inwardly as he thought of dancing with Hermione at the dance and wondered once again what her costume would look like, especially in light of what she had worn tonight. He was sure his dreams tonight would incorporate this new image of the young woman. He had felt a stirring in his groin as she moved on stage as it was. It annoyed and appalled him to even think about a former student in any manner other than professionally. This was the Gryffindor know-it-all, one third of the golden trio, and a pain in his arse for seven years. While he had always admired her mind that was as far as his interest went. The voice in his head spoke up again, 'But she is not your student anymore and she certainly did not look like this back then.'

In all her seven years, from first year potions to advance potion theory, he had never been able to get the better of her. He had tried. He would ask her questions on obscure facts and the little chit would still answer correctly. He could have really advanced her knowledge if she had been in Slytherin. She could have been his protégé. But it was not until the end of her seventh year that the defeat of the Dark Lord occurred. The end of Voldemort caused Severus to take a long hard look at himself. He had spent more than twenty years playing out the deception of who he was. But who was he really? Did he believe the views he had spouted for so long? The fact was he did not know what to think anymore. His anxiety in the future, a future he had helped to bring about increased. He was suffering from shell-shocked, though he would not have recognized the term even if someone had told him about it. It had been a summer of self-discovery after the defeat of Voldemort before he could realign his thoughts and join this new future.

His past students would be surprised if they witnessed any of his classes today. He still favored Slytherin, he was Head of their House, but he was fairer to the other houses now. The first Gryffindor student he had awarded five points to for the correct brewing of the Draught of the Living Death had actually passed out. His personality remained the same. He was a loner, an intellectual who preferred books and potions to people. He was uncomfortable in social situations but his outlook had improved with the thought of a future without the Dark Lord. Even his sarcastic comments held a little less sting and a bit more humor in dealing with his colleagues. Various witches had sought him out after the final battle and the publishing of that ill-fated photo. He still did not understand what the uproar about the photographer he had hexed had been about. The man recovered in less than three months. More witches had tried to contact him after the ceremony awarding him an Order of Merlin, first class. He had received owls declaring how desirable he was and how sexy they thought his mysterious manner was. Severus chuckled to himself. He was sure ten minutes in his presence and they would not find his person so desirable. He had kept his liaisons private in the past and would continue to do so in the future. These other witches were glory seekers and he wanted no part of them. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of applause. He looked up to see the young couple bow and leave the stage.

The other witch Severus had seen at the studio took the stage with a young man her age. The opening strains of classical music could be heard as the overhead announcement declared, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Waltz." The young couple moved with an exaggerated sway as they danced around the stage. He was impatient for Hermione to come out and dance so he could leave this dreadful place. His dungeons would be a welcome respite. The song seemed to drag on as the young couple danced on stage. The dance finally ended to the enthusiastic applause of the assembled.

Hermione and the blond young man from the second dance, the Fox trot, took the stage. Again the overhead announcement proclaimed, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Rumba." The two faced each other, not touching, as the beat seemed to match the pounding in his ears. They moved slowly, sensuously around each other. Hips undulating, they joined hands and seemed to slide across each other's bodies. The young man spun Hermione out slowly, and as if calling her to him, brought her back again. Severus released a breath he had not realized he was holding. He thought most of the Latin dances were similar except for the beat and some of the movements. While the Samba was definitely sexy, the Rumba has a more sensual feel to it. Hermione and the young man were exaggerating their movements. The man pulled her in, she arched over backwards, her foot pointed and reached for the sky. Several intricate moves had the audience oohing and aahing as the couple danced. They joined in a final embrace. Hermione's leg stretched out behind her and the young man pulled her into a tight circle while turning Hermione around before pulling her firmly to him at the end of the dance. Once again the applause was over whelming.

Three more dances followed with the two witches from the studio and the two young wizards performing them. The Merengue, the Cha-cha, and a Salsa were all danced with a style and flair all their own as the dancers strutted their stuff. Severus was impatient for the Tango he knew would be coming. After seeing Hermione and Pritthead dance the Samba, he could not imagine what they would look like doing the Tango. He wanted to see the dance and leave without having to face Granger.

The lights dimmed and the overhead voice announced, "Ladies and gentleman, as promised a special treat, the Argentine Tango." The lights brightened, spotlighting the pair on stage. A strong beat sounded as the two started to move. Severus recognized the stance and the opening steps from the lessons he'd had with Hermione but he lost track as they moved into more complicated steps and movements. They moved up and back with a cat-like grace. The movements were more clipped, not fluid as they moved across the floor. The steps were exact and performed in a rapid movement and then just as suddenly they shifted into a slow sensual turn. The shift from side to side and back was more suggestive than he would have first thought. The movement she tried to show him when he had just about crippled her foot came across as a very sexy step when done properly. There was a passionate feel to the dance as Pritthead turned Hermione around. They appeared to be embracing, dancing cheek-to-cheek. Hermione's arm moved across Pritthead's shoulder drawing him closer to her. She hooked her leg around his as they turned. They moved quickly through several steps, turning rapidly and then just as suddenly stopped and moved slowly against each other. Lovers came to mind. They gazed into each other's eyes, ignoring the world around them. Pritthead walked slowly around Hermione as she pivoted on her back leg. His arm shifted lower on her back drawing her upper body sharply against him. Their hips appeared to grind against each other before moving into a series of backward steps.

Severus did not allow the voice in his head to comment on Hermione dancing with Pritthead. Watching the pair seemed to provoke a reaction he was not prepared for. They reached the final stance and struck a dramatic pose. The pair was rewarded with enthusiastic applause as they bowed.

Pritthead stepped forward and the crowd quieted. "I would like to thank you all for your generous applause. We hope you enjoyed our presentation. Dancing is a wonderful form of exercise. We have a wide variety of classes ranging from the beginning student up to the most advanced. Please stop by the table and check out our fall offering. I would also like to thank my dance partner, Hermione Granger." Hermione bowed, a ripple of questions shot through the audience as they recognized her name from the final battle and as a friend of the boy-who-lived to save the wizarding world at large. "I would also like to thank Katherine Acart, Samantha Parke, Justin Rickfield, and Adam Facet." The two young men had joined Hermione and Pritthead on the stage. The young women were standing at a table off to the side. "Katherine and Samantha are at the side table if you have any questions. Thank you all for coming tonight."

Severus was about to make a hasty exit when Hermione spotted him from the stage. "Professor Snape. Professor." Her voice was loud and carried across the crowd. Heads turned as she called his name. Severus turned to acknowledge Hermione. He saw Pritthead's face change as he recognized Snape.

To the side, people were lining up to request information. A few turned to look in their direction. Severus approached the stage as Hermione and Pritthead descended the make shift stairs. The two young wizards were shrinking and disassembling the stage and its surroundings. A short dark-haired woman reached Pritthead's side about the same time Severus did. Something about the woman seemed familiar. Pritthead hugged the woman. She wound her arm behind his back and smiled up at him.

Hermione's eyes sparkled. "Professor, did you get to see the whole show? What did you think? How did you like the Tango?"

Before Severus ever got the chance to answer her questions, Prittchard asked, "Snape? Severus Snape?"

The woman's eyes seemed to light up. "You're one of the instructors from Hogwarts, aren't you?"

Severus nodded at the couple in front of him, wishing he could be anywhere else on Earth.

"I'm sorry, I just assumed you all knew each other." Hermione stepped forward. "Ted and Vanessa Prittchard, this is Professor Severus Snape. The Professor is the Potions Master at Hogwarts," she said by way of explanation to Vanessa.

A smile lit Vanessa's face. "Then you know the Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore?"

Severus could not help but smirk as he answered, "Yes, the Headmaster and I are well acquainted."

Prittchard's eyes danced with amusement. He held out his hand to Severus, "I think we all owe you a thank you if not more." Severus was still not used to people coming up to him and thanking him for his part in the final battle. He still did not like Potter, but he felt some sympathy for the boy considering all the years he had endured the unwanted attention he had received. He found it hard to swallow himself. "How are you enjoying the lessons?" asked Prittchard with a smile.

Severus eyed the man before reluctantly shaking his hand. "The lessons have been...interesting. I am not sure what debt of gratitude you owe the Headmaster, but if you truly want to thank me, tell Albus you have to cancel the remainder of the classes."

Prittchard laughed at the comment. Hermione turned to Severus. "Thanks a lot, Professor. I risk life and limb, literally, to teach you and you want to quit?"

Severus could not tell if her indignation was real or feigned. He felt a headache coming on. "It is not your teaching, Miss Granger. It is the entire bet!" Severus' black eyes bore into Hermione's. She had better not spell out the details or he would hex her where she stood.

The other dancers had gathered around. Severus noticed the stage and chairs were gone and the crowd had started to dissipate. Vanessa's eyes twinkled. She smiled at him, saying, "Professor, we are heading out to Pizza Magic for a bit to eat. Why don't you join us?"

He did not want to 'join' them. He wanted to get as far away from them as possible. And why did the woman remind him of Albus? Still, he was curious, "Pizza Magic?"

Hermione laughed, "Yes, it's a wizarding pizza place modeled after the Muggle pizza places near most colleges. It opened just after the new extension to Cambridge opened. Come with us, Professor."

"I do not really have time, I must be returning to..." Severus did not get the chance to finish his sentence. Vanessa grabbed his arm with all the strength of a giant and the tenacity of devil's snare. Who in the bloody hell did this woman think she was?

"Don't be ridiculous. Of course you have time. It's just around the corner. Ted, come on everyone." She was still holding his arm. The others were following behind. "So, do you enjoy teaching at Hogwarts?"

Severus looked back at Hermione. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders. It took all of Severus's restraint not to hex the woman. Who the hell was she? Molly Weasley could take a few lessons from this one, he thought. Severus tried to untangle his arm. "Mrs. Prittchard..."

Vanessa's voice could be heard as they walked, "Please, call me Vanessa. You don't mind if I call you Severus do you?"

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - . Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

There is a real Pizza Magic located in the U.K. Information can be found at this site: . I don't know the exact location, so I'm not sure if it is the restaurant located next to the new wizarding section of Cambridge or not.

Questions: Who is Vanessa and why do her eyes twinkle? Will Severus Go to Pizza Magic? Does he even like pizza? If so, what kind? Still to come, another dance lesson, a discussion of costumes, Crookshanks, and Hermione's flat. Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## A Good Time Was Had By All? Or The Thin and Thick of It

*Chapter 6 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

**Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected**



Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

6. A Good Time Was Had By All? Or The Thin and Thick of It

Severus tried to untangle his arm. "Mrs. Pritchard..."

Vanessa's voice could be heard as they walked, "Please, call me Vanessa. You don't mind if I call you Severus do you?"

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Severus had finally managed to slip from Vanessa's hold. They were standing outside the student union. He patted and rearranged his clothing. His scowl was fierce as he turned to the detestable witch. "Madam, I do not have time for such flippancy. And you may not call me..." The words died in his throat.

Vanessa was smiling up at him, her eyes held a bright twinkle. In her hand was a white card with his name on it. "Ted," she called out, "why don't you get us a table for eight? We will be there in a minute."

Severus sighed heavily. His head ached. "Who are you? What exactly do you want from me?"

Vanessa's laugh was melodious as she said, "I believe this is for you."

Severus eyed the card in her hand. With quiet resignation he accepted the offending piece of parchment. Hermione was still standing on the side, watching the two. She watched as the card transformed itself. It was the same type of card as the one he had given Samantha at the studio.

The card glowed and grew in size. Writing now covered a legal size piece of parchment. Severus looked at the parchment in his hands. He heard a clicking sound as a paragraph in the middle of the page glowed a bright pink. "Ah, Severus, my boy. You have obviously violated one of the rules of the bet or you would not have received this parchment." Albus Dumbledore's voice was coming from the glowing paragraph. Amusement was evident in the Headmaster's voice as he continued, "Paragraph 5, section 7, subsection Z394 clearly states you are not to negotiate for cancellation of classes, either by force, intimidation, or request once they have begun."

Severus held the parchment closer to his face. "Where in the bloody hell does it say that?"

A chuckle could be heard from the parchment. "It is in the fine print. In any event you are now subject to a detention. Since Miss Granger is acting as your instructor, she may determine your detention. Or you could always return to the castle and have dinner with Remus, Harry and myself and we can discuss it. They are here visiting Miss Weasley, it seems she is not on duty in the Hospital wing tonight."

Severus's voice was deadly, "Where are you Albus? When I am through with you, there will not be enough left of you to identify."

Albus or the parchment ignored the threat. "Do try to have some fun my boy and bring me back the leftovers. Miss Granger, Vanessa, my best wishes to you both." The paragraph went dark, a few seconds later the parchment turned to dust in the Professor's hands.

Vanessa looked at Hermione, a twinkle still evident in her eyes. "Do you suppose it would be punishment enough to force him to accompany us?"

Hermione ignored the glare the Potions Master was giving her as she spoke to Vanessa. "I'm starving. Shall we go?" The two women had turned and started to walk away. Hermione's voice drifted back to him. "What type of pizza do you like, Professor?"

He would never enter into another bet again. Why didn't someone just kill him now? He followed the witches in front of him. His mind occupied with methods of revenge.

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The interior resembled any other wizarding pub in England. Drinks floated through the air and pizzas appeared on large round platters in much the same manner as the food appeared at Hogwarts. Hermione looked around for their table.

Vanessa touched her arm. "There they are, in the corner." Two tables had been moved together. The very end of the table and the seats on either side were still vacant. Severus continued to sulk as he took the seat at the end of the table. Hermione was at his right and Vanessa at his left. Ted was seated on the other side of Vanessa and one of the young wizards was on the other side of Hermione.

Severus looked around at the other tables. "Miss Granger, why are those people not using utensils?"

Hermione looked to where Severus was staring and started to laugh. "Haven't you ever had pizza before? You don't use a fork, you pick it up with your hands."

Severus was astonished, "You are joking aren't you?"

"No. Usually you eat thin crust with your hands and thick crust with a knife and fork."

Severus looked at her questioningly. "Thin crust? Thick crust?"

"I don't assume you have a favorite pizza then? Vanessa, how about one of each, a plain cheese and a sausage pizza?" Hermione was looking at a menu. "And garlic bread."

"Sounds good. Severus, wine, butterbeer, or pumpkin juice?" Vanessa was smiling at him again.

Severus glared at the witch. Unfortunately it did not appear to have any affect. "Wine." He decided not to waste his breath correcting her about his name. He did not think it would do any good anyway. Who the hell was she and how did she get that card?

A waitress appeared at the side of the table. "Okay, everyone ready to order?"

Vanessa took charge, "We would like a small cheese pizza, a medium sausage, and a medium garbage pizza." Severus arched one brow in question. Garbage?

"Thin or thick?"

"All of them thin crust and a bottle of your house burgundy, what would you like to drink?" She had turned to the dancers at the other end of the table.

They gave the waitress their drink orders. "Add two orders of garlic bread please." Vanessa gave Hermione a wink. The waitress waved her wand over the table. The drinks magically appeared as she walked away.

A bottle and four glasses appeared in front of Ted. He poured wine for Severus, Vanessa, Hermione, and himself. The others had opted for butterbeer. Vanessa watched Severus watching Hermione. Albus had asked if she would give him a first hand account of tonight. Justin was sitting next to Hermione. Whatever he said had caused her to burst out laughing. Severus glowered at the two.

Ted raised his glass. "I want to thank you all for a wonderful performance tonight. I cannot tell you how pleased I am with the responses we received." They clinked glasses all around, except Severus.

"Professor? It is bad luck not to complete the circle." She held her glass out to his. His scowl deepened. She shrugged her shoulders and went back to talking to the others.

Severus turned an appraising eye on Vanessa. "Are you going to tell me who you are and where you obtained that card?" He peered closer into the witch's eyes. "You're not really Albus on some sort of polyjuice are you?"

Vanessa laughed. "Perish the thought. How well do you know Albus? How long have you been teaching at Hogwarts? He does seem to take a special interest in you."

What was she getting at? Severus groaned. "I would prefer it if he would turn his attentions elsewhere. I have been teaching class after class of incompetent students for the last twenty years. But that still does not answer my questions, who you are and where did that card come from? What do you mean he seems to take a special interest in me?"

Vanessa seemed to make up her mind. She looked around the table. The others were engaged in various conversations. Severus felt a surge of magic as Vanessa cast a zone charm over the two of them. What could she have to tell him that required secrecy? "Would it help you if I told you my maiden was Morgane? Vanessa Morgane?"

Severus sat back hard in his chair, completely gobsmacked. His eyes were wide. He looked around and decided she must have cast do not notice as well. He was transported back to early October of 1980.

Severus told Dumbledore about two planned attacks by Death Eaters he had heard about at the last revel he had attended. One was going to take place during the upcoming Hogsmeade weekend. Dumbledore did not announce the cancellation of the weekend, he just kept the students in the castle. Aurors and Order members were positioned in strategic place in Hogsmeade to trap the anticipated Death Eaters.

All went according to plan when the Death Eaters apparated in until two Muggle born witches wandered out of the Three Broomsticks and into the line of fire. One of the witches was killed instantly and the other was gravely injured. Albus blamed himself for the young witch's injuries. He apparated to St. Mungo's while the Aurors captured the remaining Death Eaters. The young woman was hovering near death. Albus donated three drops of his own blood to a rare life saving potion for the witch. The young woman's name was Vanessa Morgane.

It had taken several months for her to recover completely. Albus visited her regularly during her recovery. Sometime later, Albus had lamented about the death of the other young witch. Severus pointed out that Albus had protected the children and saved Morgane. Albus had given him an odd look and in a quiet voice told him even one death was one too many. He may have not understood it then, but he understood it now. Two weeks after the attack on Hogsmeade, Lily and James Potter were killed setting off a chain of events that would last for the next seventeen years.

Severus looked at Vanessa. She had been sitting quietly observing him. She smiled and her eyes twinkled. Did she receive an added gift from the esteemed Headmaster when she received his blood? Severus swallowed harshly, "What did Albus pass on to you? Are you omniscient too?"

Vanessa laughed, "No, not like Albus. I do seem to have a positive affect on those I meet and sometimes I can anticipate what is going to happen. Ted says it is more women's intuition than anything. I do not believe he passed any real powers on to me but I do owe him my life."

Severus was still not convinced. "But your eyes twinkle?"

"Yes, that did seem to be a side effect from the potion but really nothing else that I could tell." Vanessa's smile was gentle. "He sent me the card earlier this evening with instruction to hand it to you when we left the student union. I really did not know what would happen."

Severus continued to scowl but his voice had lost its sarcastic edge, "And what did he tell you about me?"

Vanessa was amused. She and Albus still visited once or twice a year. They had a long talk when he last visited concerning Severus and their bet. Albus had said Severus was a very private man. Difficult to know but that he had a good heart. He thought of Severus as a son.

Albus worried that he was lonely and still had not forgiven himself for past transgressions. They had hit upon dancing the tango as a consequence of the bet. He thought Severus should learn to loosen up and enjoy life. "He didn't say too much. Only that he was sure you would not be pleased with the consequences he chose, of learning the Tango. That, and he thinks very highly of you."

Severus sat back. He felt a surge of magic as she lifted the charms.

Her words seemed to have a calming effect on him. It could also have been the three glasses of wine. The waitress appeared at the side of their table with three large platters. She placed them on the table. Three pizzas magically appeared. Ted signaled for another bottle of wine as he poured the remainder of the second bottle into Severus's glass.

His brow arched in question, "What is that one? I believed you called it...garbage?"

Hermione laughed. "Garbage means everything on it, Professor, sausage, onions, green peppers, ham, mushrooms, black olives, pepperoni, anchovy, prawns, cockles, mussels, sliced tomatoes, and pineapple. Try this."

Severus visibly cringed at the thought of the garbage pizza. He accepted a plate from Hermione with a slice of cheese, a slice of sausage, and a piece of garlic bread.

"Actually, Albus would like you to bring back any leftover garbage pizza. It's one of his favorites." Vanessa was helping herself to more wine.

"Do you mean to tell me they do not make a lemon drop pizza?" He eyed the slices on his plate, reluctant to pick them up with his hands.

Hermione and Vanessa looked at one another and burst out laughing. Hermione snorted as she said, "Maybe they could add Canary Creams and chocolate frogs. Or licorice wands and jelly slugs. They could call it a Headmaster special."

"It would most likely send you into sugar shock." Vanessa could not help but chuckle at the thought of such a pizza. "What do you think, Severus?"

"The wine is very good."

"I think Vanessa meant the pizza, Professor."

Severus looked at Hermione, a slight smirk on his lips. "I know." He took another sip of wine, "The pizza is tolerable." He would admit nothing. He had actually enjoyed the meal but he was still annoyed at the coercion used against him.

The bill came and Ted settled it. A wave of the waitress's wand and the remaining pizza was packed to go. Severus tried to give Ted money but he refused saying it was his way of thanking the dancers for the show.

Vanessa handed Severus a small greasy box, "Would you take this to Albus?"

Severus looked at the box with obvious disdain. He took his wand out and waved it over the leftovers. The box immediately became wrapped and sealed in plastic before being shrunk into a small square no larger than a postage stamp. Satisfied the grease would not leak out of the package, Severus dropped the tiny box into his pocket.

The small group headed out the door. Hermione turned to Severus, "Our next lesson is Thursday, Professor. You have the directions to my flat?"

Severus glared at the young woman, "Yes, Miss Granger, I believe I am capable of recalling simple instructions."

"Miss Granger? Try Hermione." Severus turned to glare at Vanessa.

They were standing outside the restaurant. Severus stood awkwardly to the side. Ted and Vanessa were hugging Hermione and the others while saying their goodbyes. Vanessa grinned as she turned to Severus and put her hand out, "It was nice to meet you, Professor." The smile and teasing tone did not go unnoticed.

Severus took the woman's hand and bowed low. His voice was silky smooth as he said, "It was interesting, Vanessa." Severus would swear the twinkle in her eyes got momentarily brighter.

Ted and Severus nodded to each other. With a crack, Vanessa and Ted apparated out. Samantha turned to Hermione. "Are you coming?"

Hermione nodded. "Start walking, I'll join you in a minute."

Severus looked questioningly at Hermione. "They live in the student housing across from my flat. Good night, Professor. See you Thursday."

Severus leaned towards Hermione. For one impossible moment she thought he was going to kiss her but he moved to whisper in her ear. The scent of spices invaded her senses. His breath was hot and tickled the sensitive flesh of her ear. His voice was seductive, sending a tingle through her body as he whispered, "Goodnight, Hermione."

Severus straightened up. The air around them seemed to crackle. Their eyes locked. Severus nodded, a slight smile played at his mouth and with a crack he was gone.

Hermione heard her friends calling her from farther up the street. She stood rooted to the spot, staring at the space the Potions Master had just occupied.

Hermione shook her head. "I am in such trouble."

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

I know Paragraph 5, section 7, subsection Z394 states Severus is not to negotiate for cancellation of classes, either by force, intimidation, or request once they have begun or he will be subjected to a 'detention.' Before anyone points out he tried to get Hermione to cancel lessons in Chapter 2, may I remind you the subsection states once lessons have begun. They had not yet started his lessons. Severus was there for his first lesson in that chapter.

According to the Harry Potter Lexicon, Hermione and company will end their seventh year in June of 1999. In the story Hermione is starting her third and final year at Cambridge, August 2001 ending in June 2002. The lexicon states Snape started teaching in 1981, thus he has been teaching 20 years.

Vanessa cast a Zone charm, think cone of silence but invisible.

Still to come, another dance lesson and Hermione's flat. Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Lesson Four ? Invitation to the Dance

Chapter 7 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

Chapter 7 : Lesson Four Invitation to the Dance

Sunday night found Severus sitting in front of his fire reading. A glass of brandy sat on the side reflecting the firelight in the amber liquid. A knock sounded at his door. Without looking up Severus called out, "Go away. I do not wish to be disturbed."

A second knock echoed through his chambers. Severus looked towards the archway housing his door as he drew his wand from an inner pocket of his open vest. He aimed his wand at the door, casting a silencing charm over the ornately carved wood. He returned his attention to the book held loosely in left hand. Severus sighed deeply as he felt his wards being taken down. A slight breeze swept into the room as the door opened on its hinges. Severus sipped his drink, ignoring the presence that entered his quarters.

"Good evening, my boy. I did not get a chance to thank you for the delicious snack you brought back for me last night." Albus Dumbledore, the most powerful wizard in all the wizarding world stood in front of him smiling. "You don't mind if I rest my weary bones, do you?" Without waiting for confirmation, Albus sunk into the chair across from Severus.

"Yes, I do mind. Go away, old man, before I am forced to hex you. It is bad enough I must put up with being in the same castle as you. I believe these are my private chambers. GO." Severus continued to look at the book in his hand and not the wizard in front of him.

"Tsk, tsk. Perhaps if you were to change your diet it would help to improve your mood? Tell me, do you feel less irritable after you eat?" Albus had conjured a full silver tea service and was helping himself to a cuppa.

Exasperated, Severus threw the book down on the end table and glared at the Headmaster. "What is it you want now, Albus?"

"I don't want anything. I merely wanted to thank you for your thoughtfulness in bringing me back the pizza last night." The twinkle in Albus's eye matched the twinkle in Vanessa's eyes the night before. On his return from the dance exposition Severus had summoned a house elf and instructed it to give the Headmaster the package he was holding. He had assumed that would be the last of dealing with the pizza.

"You know very well Mrs. Pritchard sent you that pizza. It was not my idea. What did you have to gain by not telling me who would be there last night? And what in the bloody hell do you mean altering the terms of the consequences?" Severus had worked himself up into a justifiable anger by this time.

"Calm down, Severus. I thought meeting Vanessa on your own would be a better idea. How was the dancing? Did you enjoy the pizza?" Albus calmly sipped his tea.

Severus shook his head wearily. "Go away, Albus. I have one week of quiet before I am forced to teach the art of potion making to cretins without so much as two brain cells to rub together."

"I have always liked your first year speech, Severus. I can teach you how to bewitch the mind and ensnare the senses. Very nice use of imagery. I would imagine it captures the students' attention. You still haven't told me how last evening went."

Vanessa had flooded Albus earlier that afternoon with details of the previous evening, including her speculation as to Severus's reactions to a certain young witch. Albus was sure the Potions Master would stay true to form and refuse to talk about last night.

He felt Severus needed to join those around him and not lock himself away from the world, to dwell alone in his dungeons. Some days it infuriated Albus to know that Severus would not allow himself to be absolved of his past. That he would steadfastly refuse to acknowledge he could actually enjoy living now that the Dark Lord had finally been vanquished. Severus was a young man in terms of the wizarding world.

Regardless of his past reputation, which Severus was always so quick to bring up, the man had spent the last twenty years fighting to save the very world he refused to live in. Albus was determined to make Severus forgive himself if it was the last thing he ever did. And a determined Albus Dumbledore was a formidable force.

Black eyes bore into the ancient wizard. Severus took a deep breath and leaned forward. His tone was snide. An overly large grin was plastered on his face as he said in a falsetto voice, "The pizza was marvelous. Vanessa was just fascinating. And I do so love dancing." Severus's sneer and voice returned too normal. Looking at Albus he asked, "Now will you leave me alone?"

Albus laughed as Severus slumped back in his chair. "Are you channeling Gilderoy Lockhart now? Maybe I should go get Sybill and you two can read tea leaves together?"

"You are starting to get on my nerves, old man. What do you want?" Severus glared at the Headmaster.

Albus's voice took on an unusually serious tone, "Despite what you say, you spend far too much time alone down here, Severus. It is time you allow yourself to live a little. The war is truly over. Forgive yourself and join the living. Get out. Meet people."

The Potion Master's voice was bitter, "And do what, Albus? Destroying the Dark Lord cannot possibly make up for my deception, for the lives I have taken. It is a very shadowy line between light and dark. One I seem to have crossed far too many times. Too many were lost in the name of both sides. Too many to count that I had a hand in." He sat back and took a deep breath, eyeing the Headmaster. "For some unknown reason you have always had an unshakeable faith in me. Minerva and I have decided your poor judgment is probably due to an over abundance of sugar. I am fine right where I am, thank you."

Severus picked his book up again. He looked at Albus over the top of the pages, a smirk on his face. "There is something you can do for me if you really care as much as you say you do."

Albus laughed out loud. "Sorry, Severus. A bet is a bet. I would hate to deny you Miss Granger's company. Or deny Hermione yours."

Severus's face darkened. "How can you be so sure that was my request?"

Albus overlooked his comment. "I will leave you to your book. Think about what I said. And do try to enjoy your life a little." Albus smiled at him as he rose from his seat.

"I plan to do just that, Headmaster, just as soon as you leave." Severus had returned to his book, totally ignoring Albus.

"Severus."

The Potions Master looked up. Albus was staring intently at him. "Albus?"

"I worry about you, Severus. I am no longer a young man but I do remember being young once myself. Voldemort is finally gone. Stop being a martyr. You do know to the wizarding world you are a hero. Start acting the part and stop feeling sorry for yourself."

"I am fine, Albus." This was not a new discussion. Severus knew Albus cared. He was one of the few people he called friend but he was not in the mood for yet another discussion on ways to change his life. "Goodnight, Headmaster."

Albus studied the man in front of him. With a slight nod he said, "Tell Miss Granger I send my best."

The bright twinkle in his eye should have been a clue to Severus that the Headmaster had something in mind. As Albus walked to the archway, he called over his shoulder, "Give her a hug hello for me." And with that comment he was gone.

Severus looked at the doorway, shaking his head. The more things change, the more they stay the same. He returned to his book.

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Thursday night Severus Apparated according to the directions Hermione had given him. He found himself standing in the small vestibule of an old building. Through a doorway on his right he noticed a set of stairs. Obviously the flats had been warded against apparating. She had said she lived in 2West. Severus trudged up the stairs. He stopped on the landing and looked at the door to his left. A worn and nicked silver plate inscribed with 2W was affixed to the door. Voices could be heard from within. She had mentioned a study group that met at her flat. He tentatively knocked on the door. He would have to see if she was hooked into the floo network or maybe setting up a portkey for the next lesson.

Severus stood uncomfortably in the hallway waiting for Hermione to answer the door. The door opened as two young women walked out of the flat and into Severus. He glared at them as they mumbled sorry. One witch tripped in her haste to get away from him.

Two young men, another female, and Hermione were still sitting on the floor gathered around a low coffee table covered with papers. They were in the process of packing away their belongings. Severus stood inside the doorway, unsure of what to do and getting more annoyed by the minute. It did not matter that he was almost fifteen minutes early for his lesson. What mattered was that he felt rather foolish standing there waiting for the Granger chit as if he were an errant student. And an annoyed Severus tended to be a snappish, acrimonious Severus.

Hermione looked up and smiled brightly. "Professor Snape, you're early sir. Perhaps you could answer a question for us?"

Severus tone was cutting, "I do not believe it is my function in life to act as your personal reference library, Miss Granger." Snappish and obnoxious, Severus was about to learn what Ron and Harry already knew, an annoyed and angry Hermione was not someone you wanted to cross. Harry had once said he would gladly face Voldemort all over again than face Hermione when she was angry. Severus was about to find out how true that statement might be.

Hermione stood up, glaring at the man. The others were moving as fast as they could to get out of the way. They had been students at Hogwarts and lived in fear of the Potions Master. They did not even think to ask what he was doing there. The air around Hermione seemed to crackle. With her hands on her hips and a scowl on her face, Hermione faced Severus. "Would it really kill you to be human for once in your life? No, you always have to snap at a person. Whatever is your problem? I ask a simple question and you in your infinite wisdom decide it would be better to belittle me than answer a question. I think you might even have known the answer considering this a study group for my advanced potions class. Then again, maybe you wouldn't know the answer."

Severus was speechless, rooted to the spot.

Crookshanks had walked into the room. The half Kneazle stopped a few meters away from Severus and nonchalantly started to clean his front paw. He padded over to where Severus stood and started to rub his already squashed face against his legs. A trail of orange cat hair appeared on the black twill of Severus's pant leg.

"Bye, Hermione"

"See you tomorrow."

"Bye." The students beat a hasty retreat, stepping as far away from Snape as they could.

Severus looked down at the cat. The cat ignored Severus' glare and continued to shed hair on the black cloth winding his way around the man's legs. "What in the bloody hell is that thing? I suggest you remove it before I use it in a potion."

Hermione quickly grabbed her cat. "Don't you dare harm my cat or Hogwarts will find itself short one Potions Master when classes start next week!" Oh my gods. What was she thinking? Had she really just threatened one of the most powerful wizards in existence, not to mention telling him off for not answering a question for her? Crooks shifted in her arms and jumped lightly to the floor, ignoring the two humans staring at each other.

Severus looked at the young witch. He had heard she had quite a temper but had never been on the receiving end of it before. There was that time she slapped Malfoy. That alone took more courage than most grown men possessed considering Lucius was his father and well known for acting on his son's behalf. Despite himself, Severus was impressed. No one ever argued with him except Albus.

The two stood eyeing each other waiting for the other one to make the first move. Finally Severus asked, "What was the question?"

"What?"

"Has your hearing gone bad too? What was the question your group wanted to ask me?" The half smile on his face took some of the sting out of his words.

"Oh. That question." That was it? She thought he would have hexed her by now. Of course she was no longer a student and he still needed her to teach him the rest of the Tango.

Severus had crossed over to the sofa and sat down, all the while watching the thoughts openly playing across Hermione's face. "My, my. Such Slytherin thoughts for a Gryffindor, Miss Granger," he said smugly.

"Oh come off it with the House prejudices, Professor." He was impossible but she grinned at him nonetheless. "We had a question about the properties and ingredients of the Wolfsbane Potion. You are one of the few Potion Masters in Europe that can brew it properly." Regardless of what she felt, she would give the man his due. He was gifted and stood heads above the rest in his chosen profession. He excelled in several others as well.

"The question?"

"Yes. Well," Hermione moved to sit on the floor in front of the table and started to leaf through papers as she talked. Her anger was forgotten as she started to expound on her theory. "I know two drops per liter of aconite is used to make the potion but what if you substituted belladonna instead at an earlier stage in the brewing process? It could be strained and treated to alter its poisonous effect in much the same manner as the aconite is. Belladonna combines much more readily with hellebore in its raw state. The hellebore could have more of a calming affect on the subject."

Severus stared at her. He had always known she was brilliant even if he did not personally acknowledge that fact to her face but this surpassed even that estimation. The idea was so simple as to be overlooked, yet full of endless possibilities. "They are teaching the Wolfsbane Potion in your class?"

Hermione blushed. "We touched on it. The idea of changing the aconite and adding hellebore is my idea. Muggle medicine teaches students how to alter drugs based on the properties of the ingredients to reach a specific end result. The same theory could be applied to potions. It would result in a wider range of potions to treat more specific problems." Hermione sat back on her heels and looked at Severus.

"I do not believe that approach to the potion has ever been taken before. What would you estimate the result of such an alteration would be if you substituted corkbulb root for the hellebore?" Severus watched Hermione's eyes dance and listened as she spoke with a passion for her subject.

They debated the properties of ingredients for the Wolfsbane potion for the next hour. Sometime during that hour Severus had taken his black coat off and thrown it over the arm of the sofa. He had absentmindedly rolled the cuffs up on the charcoal grey dress shirt he was wearing as he analyzed her theories. During the last hour a tea service had appeared on the coffee table. Severus topped off his cup as he listened to Hermione.

"But the sliced caterpillars used in the calming draught are not as strong. I highly doubt they would have the same effect on a transforming werewolf." Hermione giggled as she reached for her tea.

Severus arched an eyebrow in question. "Yes?"

"Well, I was just thinking how calming chocolate can be in large doses. Why not add chocolate and see what happens?"

"I do not think I want to be present when you test that particular theory."

A Muggle cuckoo clock on the wall startled the two as it chimed the hour. "Oh my gods, it's eight o'clock. We should have started your lesson an hour ago. I'm sorry, Professor. I got carried away with my theory. It's not every day I get to discuss Potions with someone as knowledgeable as you. I'll just change quickly and we can get started." Hermione was flustered as she waved her wand. The tea service rose in the air and headed for the kitchen. Another wave and her papers shifted back and forth, organizing themselves before landing neatly in her binder.

Severus looked at the witch. He was loath to admit it, but he had enjoyed the lively discussion. He rarely got the chance to debate anyone as interested or educated on the subject of Potions. The past hour had flown by without either of them noticing it. He thought Hermione could probably qualify as a Potions Master today with the knowledge she possessed. She was certainly more knowledgeable than a few of the Masters he'd had the misfortune to come across. "Miss Granger, stop and take a breath. We can start the dance lesson in a minute. Do you have an early class tomorrow? We can skip a week if that would be easier. We still have time before Halloween to finish the lessons."

Hermione flashed him a warm smile. She chuckled as she said, "I'm fine, Professor. My classes are not that early tomorrow. Thank you for listening to me. I'll change quickly."

Severus nodded as he watched her disappear into the other room. She had been wearing a pair of denim shorts and a print blouse. He had noticed her attire when he entered the flat. The outfit, down to her bare feet, did little to hide her figure. He had become so embroiled in the debate that he had forgotten until now how good she had looked. Maybe Albus was right. Maybe he did need to get out more. She's an ex-student ran through his mind again. It seemed to be his mantra every time he thought of her lately. Severus shook his head to clear his thoughts. He stood up and moved around the room to stretch his legs.

A basket in the corner, next to an over stuffed chair caught his eye. Papers covered the top of the basket. A small black triangle of fabric was sticking out from under the papers. Severus pulled the fabric out from under as Hermione walked back into the room wearing a black leotard, a dance skirt, and heels. He held the scrape of fabric gingerly between his fingers as he examined it. "Have you decided to make our costumes? This is not a codpiece, Miss Granger. The design was supposed to be a snake, not a rose. And I dare say it is much too small." Severus smirked at her obvious discomfort.

Hermione blushed a deep shade of red. She grabbed the swatch from his hand and shoved it into the basket. A quick flick of her wrist and the basket was on its way to her bedroom. "No, Professor. That is not a codpiece. I will have some suggestions for our costumes next week. Shall we start the dance lesson?"

Severus did not move. "Is that an eye patch for another costume? Why the rose?"

Hermione covered her eyes with her hand. "That is not a part of any costume. Can we get on with the dance lesson?"

"If it is not a part of a costume, what is it?" He stood with his arms crossed, looking questioningly at her.

"Professor, can we dance? What does it matter what it is?" Hermione stepped forward. Her perfume wafted up and tickled Severus's sensitive nose.

His voice was low, seductive, "Miss Granger, the object in question seems to have a decided effect upon you. It appears to be nothing more than two triangle of fabric with a bit of string between them. I dare say a dark spell could not have upset you more. I would like to know what it is that seems to be disturbing you so."

Hermione decided he was enjoying her discomfort way too much. "That piece of fabric, Professor, is a thong if you must know." Could she be any more mortified?

Severus looked puzzled. "A thong? What is its purpose?"

Hermione looked at him. He couldn't be serious could he? "You don't know what a thong is?"

"If I knew, do you think I would have asked you?" He was back to being annoyed.

Hermione laughed. "It's underwear, Professor. Sort of abbreviated knickers." It seemed it was his turn to blush tonight. She laughed harder as a pink tint colored his cheeks.

"I do not have all night. Can we start the lesson now please?" Severus was mortified. Knickers? Her knickers? She wore that scrap of fabric? Images of Hermione in nothing but "The Thong" as his mind had now catalogued it tried to over take his thoughts. When had she become Hermione to him? Well, the image of her in just those knickers ruled out calling her Miss Granger. He pushed the image away. There would be time to think of that later. The last thing he needed was for his traitorous body to respond to that image while he held Hermione in his arms and inhaled her scent. Perhaps he could hex the offending bits, bully his body into behaving. He wasn't going to be using them anytime in the near future anyway as far as he could see.

"Professor?" Hermione was standing in front of him. The song they had danced to before was softly playing. "Let's start with a review. Remember to dance on the balls of your feet."

Severus stepped forward and took Hermione into his arms. She's an ex-student, she's an ex-student and the Gryffindor know-it-all ran through his mind. He was losing the battle with his thoughts. He moved forward onto the balls of his feet and felt her body shift against his. Severus groaned silently to himself. He could feel her breasts pressed against his chest. The image of Hermione in The Thong rose in his mind. Not keeping his mind on his dancing, Severus tangled his legs with Hermione's, bringing them both crashing to the floor.

"Hermione!"

"Professor, are you all right?" Did he just call her by her first name? She had landed almost on top of him. They were eye to eye, just a few centimeters apart. Hermione quickly scramble back onto the floor and stood up. Crookshanks had wandered over to see what the commotion was about. He scooted away as Severus got to his feet.

Severus was dusting off his clothes, stalling for time. Merlin, did he call her Hermione? "Yes. I am fine, Miss Granger? Are you damaged in any way?"

Hermione smiled. "No. I do not believe I am damaged, Professor. Shall we try again? Let's try everything but the sacada. You need to keep your mind on the dance, sir." Hermione ignored his glare. A wave of her hand and the music started again. Severus had stepped on her both her feet and kicked her trying to do the sacada last time.

Severus concentrated this time and they moved through the steps with few errors. He was just starting to relax when the tempo changed.

"Let's try the faster beat. Shall we?" He had been practicing and even though the beat was faster he fared better than the last time he had tried to dance at the upbeat tempo. There were still some problems, but they were progressing. "Do you remember seeing the Tango preformed during the expo? Did you notice how the sacada was danced?"

"I was able to follow the first few steps and then the dance changed. Is that a more advanced form of the Tango?"

"The Tango does not have a set formula. It should mold to the music and change with each song, with each new partner. The steps I am teaching you are the building blocks of the dance. They can be put together in an endless number of ways. To truly dance the Tango you should never memorize patterns or steps. Everything must be improvised, like life you take it one step at a time, one beat at a time. I think for our purposes we will continue to use the same song and follow a set list of steps." She smiled mischievously at him. "I am correct in assuming you are not planning to continue your dance lessons once the required lessons are over?"

Severus chuckled darkly. "Didn't Pritchard tell you? The discount he was offering was too great to turn down. I have signed up for thirty-six months of lessons, all with

you."

Hermione threw her head back and laughed. "That will happen about the time the Chudley Cannons recruit me as their new seeker."

Severus looked at her. "Not an option?"

"I don't fly, Professor."

"The infallible, Miss Granger, does not fly?" Severus vaguely remembered something about her inability to fly well when she was a student. "All witches fly."

"Yes, and we all have warts on our noses and are uglier than sin. Lovely stereotype, Professor. What are you doing?"

Severus was examining her nose. "Looking for warts."

"Thanks a lot. Can we get back to dancing? Let's try the sacada, step by step. Slowly." It took four tries before he got the timing right and was no longer in danger of stepping on her foot. It was another four tries before he could match the beat of the slower music. They worked on integrating the move with the steps Severus already knew.

"It's almost 10 o'clock, so before we end I want to show you one more step. It will add a bit of flair to the dance."

Severus groaned. He still had not mastered the steps he knew now. She was obviously making him pay for his seven years as her professor.

Hermione chuckled. "It's not that bad. Watch. This is called El Circulo or the circle. It is a simple pattern made up of the two-step we have been working on. The only difference is you always pivot to your left at the end of each step so that you circle back to the beginning of the pattern. Circles can help you move if you are hemmed in on a dance floor. They also add a different feel to the dance."

Severus looked skeptical. "We both pivot left?"

"No, you pivot left and I follow pivoting to my right. Let's try." The circle went smoother than he thought it would. He kept wanting to move in a straight line, performing the step as he had originally learned it but Hermione kept correcting him until he started to pivot each time. He figured he would forget to go straight the next time they tried the whole dance again and would have to learn the step all over again. "I think that will do it for the night, Professor."

Severus moved to the sofa to retrieve his coat.

"I'm sorry about the delay tonight. I promise next week we will get right to your lesson." They were standing at the door.

"Actually, Miss Granger, your theory on the Wolfsbane Potion may bear looking into. Have any of your professors expressed any interest?" He wanted to try some of her theories himself. He had an idea one of the combinations of ingredients she mentioned might work with a little alteration.

Hermione's face lit up. "Really, Professor? I don't think any of my professors actually brew the Wolfsbane Potion on as regular a basis as you do. None of them are interested in listening to me about any alterations. They are Masters and I am a student."

Severus regarded the woman in front of him. He thought she might be right. They would view her as intelligent but that would be as far as it went. She was Muggle-born, female, and a student. Most likely three strikes against her to their way of thinking. They would find it hard to believe she could ever come up with such a revolutionary concept. While he might be arrogant in his own right, he could appreciate her intelligence for what it was. Severus had never complimented her to her face, but he and Albus had often discussed her intelligence. She was an extremely powerful witch. Couple that with a brilliant mind and you have a most impressive combination in such an unassuming witch. "I believe you may be right about some of the ingredients and their combinations. I think you may have to alter the process for the combinations to work correctly. Perhaps we can continue our discussion next week after the dance lesson?"

"That would be great. Thank you, Professor." Hermione was excited beyond belief. In her enthusiasm, she leaned forward and hugged Severus.

He stood still not knowing what to do, at a total loss as to how he should react. He raised one arm tentatively just as Hermione jumped back. She was horrified when she realized what she had done. "Um. Sorry, sir. I.."

Severus looked pained. He nodded curtly before leaving. "Goodnight, Miss Granger."

Hermione fell back against the closed door after he left. She broke out in a fit of giggles. "What a night," she thought. "It's a shame I no longer keep a diary. First I have to explain my thong to him. Then we fall all over each other and now I hug him. Merlin help me. I don't think I want to know what will happen next!"

Severus stood outside the building looking up at the second floor. He chuckled as he remembered Albus's parting words about hugging Hermione. A crack broke the silence as he Apparated home to Hogwarts.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

The HP Lexicon lists aconite as one of the ingredients in the Wolfsbane Potion. Aconite, also called monkshood and wolfsbane, is an extremely poisonous plant. The name monkshood comes from the shape of the flowers. Essence of Belladonna is part of a student's standard potion-making kit, also poisonous. Hellebore is the only known ingredient definitely used to make the Draught of Peace (OP12), despite its poisonous properties. The ingredients are listed, with their properties, in the Lexicon. I have taken 'artistic' liberties in describing their alterations and the process of making the Wolfsbane Potion. If Professor Snape had bothered to answer any of my owls I might have been able to supply you with the correct facts.

Severus's comment about the 'eye patch' stems from a similar comment my husband made. My husband pulled my teenage daughter's thong out of the laundry basket and asked who's it was. When I told him it was our daughter's he asked, in all seriousness, "Why does she need an eye patch?" When I was able to pick myself up off the floor and stop laughing I informed him it was underwear. He paled before saying, "You've got to be kidding."

"Never memorize patterns or steps. Everything must be improvised, like life you take it one step at a time, one beat at a time." I would like to thank one of my reviewers, Angeline, for the quote and the information on dancing the Tango.

Still to come, another dance lesson, more discussions, and some costume ideas. Enjoy and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Change Is In The Air

Chapter 8 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

### 8. Change Is In The Air

Friday found Severus a bit distracted. His mind had been occupied with the possibilities of adapting the Wolfsbane Potion ever since leaving Hermione's flat the night before. There had been a few hours during the night when his sleeping mind had dwelled on other matters. Those matters had included a belly dancing Hermione, but that was not a topic his waking mind intended to address today, if ever. If he was correct, with a slight alteration they might be able to deter or weaken some effects of the werewolf's change depending on the combination of ingredients they altered. He wondered how many other potions could be improved if they were to apply the same principles to the potion's ingredients.

Remus Lupin arrived late Friday afternoon to pick up a new dose of the Wolfsbane Potion. Severus had been sitting in his office since his last class trying to assemble a list of ingredients and their properties to discuss with Hermione when he saw her next. He looked up at the werewolf with a clinical eye.

"What?" Remus considered Severus a friend of sorts, but really the man could be a git at times.

"Has Miss Granger ever questioned you about your...condition?" He had wondered where she had gathered her initial information. Lupin was a friend of the Golden Trio and the most likely source for her to question.

"My condition?" he asked with a weary laugh. "Severus, most people prefer to see right through me rather than acknowledge I exist. Being a werewolf is like one of those secrets you sweep under the carpet. Everyone knows it's there but they assume it will go away eventually if you ignore it. Without the Wolfsbane Potion to stay the change, I would hate to think what the Ministry would do to me. What does Hermione have to do with anything?"

Severus rubbed a hand across his eyes. "Lupin, I understand you wish to protect Miss Granger from the bat of the dungeon, but you have not answered my question. Has Miss Granger ever questioned you about being a werewolf? I believe the choice is yes or no."

Grey eyes tinged with yellow flecks stared into unreadable black orbs. Remus sighed heavily, "Yes, Severus. She has questioned me. So have Ron and Harry, though I will have to say Hermione's questions were of a more clinical nature than theirs were." Remus was unable to meet Severus eye's as he thought of a few of the questions the boys had thought to ask. "What is this about?"

"I believe Miss Granger may have discovered a way to alter the Wolfsbane Potion. It will require additional research and experimentation before we know for sure."

"Alter it? In what way?" Remus was having difficulty trying to contain his emotions. He had been bitten as a young lad by another werewolf and spent most of his life shunned when others found out about his affliction. It was only the Wolfsbane Potion that allowed him to live as a human being without fear of infecting someone else. Severus was one of only three Potion Masters in Europe that could brew the difficult potion properly. He knew it was selfish, but he shuddered to think what would have happened to him if Severus had succumbed to the Dark Lord.

Severus smirked at the man. "Lupin, we are still in the research and experimentation stage, but I believe she may have found a way to lessen the effects of your transformation. Unfortunately it may take a few months before we will be ready for any type of trials. Am I to assume from your reaction that you are interested in taking on the role of guinea pig?"

"Yes. Of course, I am interested, but isn't Hermione going to Cambridge? I don't recall Harry mentioning her doing research."

Severus handed him two sealed bottles of the potion. "Miss Granger happened to mention her findings to me last night. I was planning to ask her to stay at the castle during the Christmas holidays so that we may work on revising the potion. I believe we will be ready to start the trials at Christmas if we continue to work on the research and formulas until then. Perhaps she could be persuaded to come to the castle on an occasional Saturday once we are further along in our research."

Remus had an amused smile on his face. "She mentioned it to you last night, huh?"

Severus glared at the man. "Don't be a prat, Lupin. I was forced to endure another of those damnable Tango lessons the Headmaster has saddled me with. The only bright spot was finding out about the alteration she has discovered. She mentioned it to one of her professors at Cambridge but those idiots are unable to see her intelligence as anything but threatening. They refused to listen to her theories. I doubt any of those so-called Masters has anywhere near the talent Miss Granger has at brewing potions."

"Is that all that is going on?" It was unheard of for Severus to compliment a student. Especially someone he claimed had been a thorn in his side during her entire attendance at Hogwarts. He had spent seven years berating her as a know-it-all. Remus's nostrils flared. Werewolves had increased senses, even in human form. Severus was giving off a strange sent, one he had never smelled on the man before. It took him a moment to realize what it was. Lust. Or more accurately, an increase in testosterone and pheromones that pretty much amounted to the same thing. Arousal or lust. "How is Hermione?" he asked cautiously.



Severus's scowl deepened as he regarded the werewolf. "I do not believe I have time to play these juvenile games with you. Miss Granger was alive and breathing when I left her flat last evening." His words were dripping with sarcasm and meant to convey the impression of annoyance.

His mind however, was unable to stop the image his brain had created of a barely dressed Hermione wearing nothing but The Thong from entering his thoughts. He shifted his stance as his trousers started to feel a bit snug. For some reason, his sleep-addled brain had decided Hermione would look best belly dancing while wearing The Thong. That was now the image that kept popping uninvited into his mind since waking up this morning. He preferred to think it was her intelligence that was acting as a powerful aphrodisiac instead of just his baser instincts.

*'Right,' the voice in his head said, 'that brain, in that body, wearing The Thong, and maybe...reciting the twelve uses of dragons blood as she belly dances around your bedchamber?'*

Did Hermione even know how to belly dance? He shook his head. All right, that wasn't even the point. He was nothing but a lecherous old man. She is an ex-student, and the Gryffindor know-it-all ran through his mind once again. He really needed to keep a tighter hold on his emotions.

Remus smiled knowingly at him. "So nothing is going on?"

Severus glared and actually rolled his eyes at the man. "How juvenile are you? Are you asking me if I fancy the girl as if this were some childish crush? She is twenty years younger than I am. She has her whole life in front of her. I am merely interested in how we can change the potion."

"Do you fancy her? I believe the choices are yes or no." Remus chuckled. Severus could complain all he wanted, but his body was giving him away.

"Are you Albus using polyjuice? If you start twinkling I swear I will hex you to tomorrow and back." Severus was looking into Remus's eyes.

"What would be wrong if you did care for her? Maybe she cares for you too? I know you have an image to uphold as the bat of the dungeon but I also know you have a heart somewhere underneath all those robes. And contrary to popular opinion, you have been known to be nice on occasion and help people. Why do you make the Wolfsbane Potion for me?"

"Why indeed? That is exactly the same question I keep asking myself every month. It may be too late to take the potion this month, I suspect you are already suffering from lunar madness."

It was Remus's turn to try and analyze the man in front of him. "What would be so wrong?"

Severus was angry as he moved behind his desk and started to shuffle papers around. "What would be wrong? Oh yes, a witch young enough to be my daughter, who I made life a living hell for seven years is going to be interested in me. Do you think it will be my good looks or my charming personality that will entice her? Perhaps it will be my sterling past?"

Remus smiled broadly, "A hot shower and some shampoo might not hurt." He gave up all pretense of amusement as he faced Severus's scowl. "I believe she will be interested in your intelligence and your personality. Hermione is a lot like you. You two are more alike than you think, even if you do fail to see the similarities. What has age got to do with it? From what I hear the young men her age bore her silly and fail to appreciate her. They don't want to discuss academic theory. All they want to talk about, if I heard her last rant correctly, is Quidditch and other witches."

Severus's eyes glittered in the half-light. "Who told you this?"

"Hermione told me last week when Harry and I had lunch with her. I believe she said she was through with dating. How did she say it? The only difference between the young wizards she meets now and the little boys she used to baby-sit for is the size of their toys?" The two men looked at each other. Remus shrugged his shoulders. "I believe it is a muggle expression. She and Harry were beside themselves with laughter. All I am saying is do not rule yourself out. No matter what you say, it is obvious you are interested in her beyond the potion. You are allowed to be happy you know?"

Severus sighed, "Have you been talking to Albus? Why can't you leave me alone? Is this a Gryffindor trait? I am too old for a liaison of any kind. It was bad enough when I had those witches chasing me last year after the Ministry ceremony honoring the second anniversary of the Dark Lord's defeat, now I have you and Albus pestering me too."

"I seem to recall you did see one or two of those witches, didn't you?" It was all anyone had talked about for weeks. Severus, dating. He had taken out a few of the witches that had expressed an interest in him. "Though I don't think it was for more than one or two dates if I remember correctly."

Severus snorted. "They all seemed to think I wanted to change and that they were the witch to help me turn over a new leaf. Do I look unhappy to you? I have no desire to change my clothing or my living conditions. One silly twit dissolved into tears when she dropped in here one day unexpected."

"Here, at Hogwarts? What happened?"

Severus's smile was fiendish. "I had just finished with fifth year potions and was not in the best of moods. Albus was kind enough to escort the twit to my office before he was called away. The blasted woman had shown up unannounced. Why she thought I would be thrilled to listen to her chatter on about new robe styles or some other foolishness I cannot imagine. I was just about to educate her on why she should not have come, when she started to cry and shake uncontrollably. She seemed to have lost the ability to speak coherently."

"What did you do to her?" Remus had to admit Severus had a talent for story telling if he was in the mood. Even his sarcasm has a wry edge to it if you listened close enough.

Severus looked innocent, as innocent as he was capable of looking. "I did not do anything to her. It seems she had finally noticed the bottles of ingredients behind me. One of the ingredients was apparently looking back at her, when it blinked she went into hysterics. Eventually I made out what she was saying. I assured her the bottle was tightly capped and nothing could escape. For some reason this seemed to upset the chit even more. I finally had to floo Albus and Poppy for help. I believe she was released from the hospital wing after just a few hours. I never heard from her again."

Remus was over come with laughter. "A date with you and the poor witch ends up in the hospital wing. Maybe I should warn Hermione. Then again she may just be an even match for you. I'm sure she would never run off in hysterics. She probably would have wanted to know the characteristics of the ingredient in question."

"Most likely she already knows the characteristic of the ingredient and what potions it would be useful in." Severus sank back into his office chair. He thought of Hermione again. He had no desire to set himself up for failure and ridicule. He had enough to last him a lifetime, thank you. But what if Lupin was right? He had enjoyed debating the Wolfsbane Potion with her last night. She was truly brilliant. He had rarely had occasion to have a conversation of that level with anyone other than another Potions Master. Hermione was only a third year student and knew as much if not more than most experienced Masters. She had seemed more than happy to talk to him about the challenge of adapting the potion. Was it the chance to work on the potion or was there something more between them? There had been a few times over the last few weeks he'd had the feeling she was thinking about him. He had dismissed the idea as ridiculous, but maybe there was something there. She had been extremely pleased when he had said he would like to continue their discussion this week. It was one of the reasons he even entertained the thought that there could possibly be something more between them.

Remus's voice broke into his thoughts. "Are you going to sit there and moon or are you planning to eat dinner tonight?"

Severus looked at the clock above his desk. It was time for dinner. Drawing himself up, he made a show of arranging his robes before answering. With a smirk he said to Remus, "I do not moon. You are a sodding git. You do know that don't you?"

Remus grinned back. "Indeed. After you." And the two headed to the Great Hall for dinner.

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"How do you ever expect to pass charms if you do not practice? Honestly, sometimes I think you are worse than Ron and Harry when it comes to studying." Hermione was sitting in the lounge of the Cambridge Student Union with Edmund, Susan, and Kathy. They were supposed to be working on their independent charms project.

Edmund was pleased. "You're comparing me to the great Harry Potter? Well then, I must be doing something right." Susan giggled at the expression on Edmund's face while Hermione just rolled her eyes.

The girls had been a little overwhelmed last year when Hermione had asked if they wanted to study with her. She was the best friend of Harry Potter, the boy who lived and the wizard that had brought down the Dark Lord. Her face, as well as Ron's, Dumbledore's, and Snape's had been plastered everywhere after the final battle. She and her friends had received further recognition that summer when they were awarded Order of Merlin medals, First Class by the Ministry of Magic. Severus had received a medal too but his little stunt with the first photographer after the Final Battle ensured no more notoriety in the form of photographs. His name was well known. But no photos, combined with his past reputation, and his recent heroics all added an air of mystery to the man.

"Hermione, what was Snape doing at your flat last night?" Edmund was watching Hermione as she looked between the open book in her lap, her notes to the right, and another book on her left.

"What was Snape doing what?" Hermione liked Edmund. He had been a student at Hogwarts, a Ravenclaw. They had even gone out on a few dates their seventh year but she found he made a better friend than boyfriend. His kiss goodnight was the same as Ron's. More like saying goodnight to your brother. She wanted sparks, fireworks, not nice and friendly.

"Earth to, Hermione, hello? Why was Snape at your flat?" Edmund was waving his hand in front of her face.

Hermione looked up. "Don't you remember? I told you a few weeks ago. He was taking those dance lessons at the studio. Well, he isn't finished with them and I promised Ted I would continue lessons with the Professor for the next few weeks." She and Edmund had stayed in touch and owled each other over the summer. Hermione had told him about teaching dance at the studio. She shrugged her shoulders. "It's really no big deal."

Edmund shook his head. "Our study group for Advanced Potions meets at your flat. We almost killed ourselves getting out of there when he showed up last night. How much longer are these lessons going to last? When we talked last week you never mentioned you were still instructing him."

Susan's eyes were as wide as saucers. "You don't mean Professor Snape from Hogwarts do you? That man terrorized us for seven years and you say it's no big deal? Why would he be taking dance lessons? How can you stand to be near him?"

"Professor Snape lost a bet with the Headmaster. He has to take dance lessons as one of the consequences." Susan and Kathy started to giggle at the thought of Snape taking dance lessons. Hermione's glare cut the girl's giggles short. "Come off it, Susan. Professor Snape is a man not a monster. We learned a lot in his class. I would imagine you would be a bit irritable too if you spent twenty years as a spy, not sure if someone was going to kill you every time you walked out your door. He helped Harry defeat Voldemort and received an Order of Merlin First Class for Circe's sake. Doesn't that count for anything?" Hermione was looking at Edmund as if he were a specimen under a microscope. He was starting to get on her nerves. This was exactly the reason she did not like boys her age. "And why exactly should it matter to you whether I am instructing him or not?"

"The man scares me. You want to instruct him? Fine. You can dance with him all you want. You can fancy him for all I care, but I would rather not run into him again if you don't mind. Seven years was enough. Hero or no hero."

"I do not fancy him but I do respect him and so should you. I have no choice. I agreed to finish his Tango lessons." She was not going to mention the research for the Wolfsbane Potion that she was dying to get started on. That was none of their business. Last night had been amazing. Professor Snape had treated her as an equal. He listened to her theories and then added comments of his own. Dancing with him was not such a chore either when she really thought about it. In her opinion, Thursday night could not come soon enough. She looked at Edmund sitting stiffly with his arms crossed. His mouth was set in a thin line. "Fine. Why don't we meet a half hour earlier? If we start earlier you will be long gone before he arrives." Hermione shook her head. How childish could he get?

"Fine. I'll tell the others." Edmund was relieved. He had absolutely no desire to see Snape again. He had always thought Hermione was a little odd. How in Merlin's name could she be teaching Snape to dance? Then again she had faced He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, so maybe she could stand to be near the old bat.

Hermione was glaring at all three of them. "Can we get back to Charms now or do you have other problems you wish to discuss?"

Edmund shook his head. Maybe it was Hermione and not Snape he should be afraid of.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Remus Lupin's eye color is never mentioned in the books. In my mind they are a pale gray with yellow flecks. Traditional werewolf lore says the eyes turn yellow when they transform. JKR has not included this information in any of the books.

This is from the HP Lexicon: Wolfsbane Potion While this potion can't cure lycanthropy, it does prevent the extremely dangerous dementia which accompanies the transformation from human into werewolf. A fairly recent invention, very difficult to make. Snape makes it for Lupin. The statement, "Severus was one of only three Potion Masters in Europe that could brew the difficult potion properly" is artistic license on my part.

This is the actual quote. I altered it to fit the story. The only difference between men and boys is the cost of their toys. ~Author Unknown

Does Hermione know how to belly dance? Will Severus ask her? Still to come, another dance lesson and some costume ideas. Enjoy. Review and let me know what you think. As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Lesson 5 - Prelude To The Main Event

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

**Summary:** Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they; belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

Severus looked down his nose at the witch, 'Arrogant little chit,' he thought. "I believe you will need to grow a few more centimeters if we are to be on even ground." He

was pleased to see a smile break out on her face at his comment.

"Is that a hint you would like to see me in higher heels, sir?" Was she really flirting with him? Merlin help her, what was she getting herself into? "In any event, I am no longer afraid of you. There is really nothing you can do to me."

"Don't be so sure of that." Severus's voice was pitched low and velvety.

Hermione smiled as a tingle shot up her spine. "Shall we start your lesson, Professor?"

Severus nodded and took her in his arms as the music started. He was immensely pleased she was not afraid of him. On the contrary, she seemed to enjoy bantering with him. One step at a time. He really was a patient man. He had endured Voldemort for more than twenty years, waiting until the time was right to destroy the Dark Lord.

Take it slow Lupin had said. Maybe the man had something there.

"All right, Professor, let's practice what we have already learned." A wave of her hand and the music started. Hermione shifted her stance and leaned into the Potions Master as Severus moved towards her. The blood pounded in his ears.

Their movements flowed with a different grace this time, both keenly aware of each other's movements. They moved through the practiced steps, forward and back three times and then a circle to move them in a new direction, a side step and then the El Retrocesa, a two-step that moved them backwards. The beat of the music remained slow and Severus was just barely able to move through the steps.

"This is where the sacada would come in. Let's try it slowly." Severus nodded and concentrated on not kicking her leg or stepping on her foot. It was a bit awkward, but they managed to move through the steps without permanent damage to her person. "Not bad, sir. I would like to show you a new step before we practice with the faster tempo tonight. It's called an Ocho. Ocho is Spanish for eight. The steps resemble a figure eight. An Ocho can be forward or backward. The woman performs the Ocho around the man. You just have to guide me around you. A Double Ocho requires us to both move in the same direction using the same steps in mirror form. Your steps will be to your left, while my steps are taking place on your right. Let's try the simple Ocho first. "

Severus was trying to pay attention to what Hermione was showing him. He was getting lost in the smell and feel of the woman in his arms. The silk felt exquisite to his touch as it shifted across Hermione's back. He could feel the heat of her body through the silky fabric. He had managed to quiet the voice in his mind that was wont to make lewd comments but a new 'voice' seemed to have taken over.

'Just how interested was she in getting to know him? Could they be friends? Could they be more than friends?' He thought the questions seemed to be coming from some corner of his mind that held his adolescent hopes and dreams. A time before he ever took the Dark Mark that changed his life forever.

Not to be outdone, the Slytherin in him decided to throw in his two knuts worth. 'Maybe she just wants a reference for potions from you? Why would you want anything to do with a Gryffindor anyway, even if the idea of her in her scant knickers might be interesting? Why set yourself up for ridicule? When are you going to accept the fact that you are destined to be alone?' The last thought had rolled around his head for as many years as he could remember.

He had always enjoyed his solitude. A wife and family had never held much interest for him. He knew what others thought of him and did nothing to discourage that image. The image helped to hide his role as a spy for the last twenty years, never allowing anyone to get close to him. Feminine entanglements had been far and few between. He thought he had accepted his fate, now he was not so sure. He would hex Albus the next time he saw him for putting him in this position.

From the first time he held her more than six weeks ago, she had invaded his thoughts. He had flinched the first time she touched him. He was not used to such close contact with another human being. Now the feel of his arms around her as they danced would come back to him at off moments and created a longing he was not used to.

Hermione invaded his dreams almost every night since their first lesson. Some of his dreams were highly erotic in content while others were of a more mundane nature. He felt a profound sense of loss when he awoke to an empty bed every morning. It was sweet torture to be here holding her week after week. He had always admired her mind and quick wit.

These past few weeks had given him a greater insight into who she was and he found himself wanting her even more. He felt a childish jealousy that she was here at University with others her own age. He knew it was uncalled for, he meant nothing to her. Even if Lupin had said she had no interest in boys her age he was still twenty years older than she. He wished circumstances were different. Damn Lupin, it was his fault he was even entertaining thoughts about Hermione.

"Professor? Are you all right?" Hermione's concerned eyes met his. "I seem to have lost you there for a minute. Do you want to sit down?"

Severus chuckled. "I am fine, Miss Granger. Shall we proceed?"

Hermione grinned. "Wool-gathering, Professor? I don't think I have ever seen you distracted before."

"Rest assured it is not an everyday occurrence. Perhaps being forced to learn a dance I have no desire to learn may have something to do with it?" Severus's eyes gleamed in amusement.

"Pretty much like those dunderheads you teach that do not want to learn potions, Professor?" Hermione's smirk was evident as she went for the jugular.

Severus's eyes widened and his voice was hard as he answered, "Are you comparing me to the students I teach? And calling me a dunderhead in the process?" My god, the little witch had nerve, he thought.

"If the cauldron fits, sir." Had she gone too far? Until the last comment he had seemed amused.

Severus leaned into Hermione. A wisp of his hair brushed her cheek. His voice dropped an octave as he whispered in her ear, "I am magically bound to complete our lessons, Hermione. But there will come a time when that will no longer be a fact. I have a very long memory. You will have to pay in some form or another for what you have put me through." He watched the witch as he straightened up. Her eyes were dilated and he could see a pulse at the base of her neck. Maybe Lupin was right. "Shall we continue, Miss Granger?"

Hermione felt herself blush. Dear god, what he could do to her with just his voice and a few comments. Her mouth had gone dry at the images his words had brought forth. She licked her lips. "Okay, Professor. Let's, umm, let's try again." Her breathing was slightly irregular as he took her in his arms and they moved through the dance steps again.

"All right, Professor, let's try the Ocho at this point in the dance. Just stand and guide me around you." As Hermione moved through the steps she added a few toe taps to make the movement a bit flashier. "Okay, now the Double Ocho, slowly."

They spent the next hour practicing the new step before repeating the dance again at both the slow and faster tempos. Hermione looked up as the cuckoo clock sounded the hour. It was nine o'clock. They had been working for just over two hours. "For homework," she stopped to see if he was going to protest as he did the last time she mentioned homework.

Severus schooled his features to remain neutral. He would be damned if he was going to give her the upper hand. His eyes glittered dangerously as he watched her. "Yes?"

Hermione smiled, "For homework, I need you to continue practicing the steps we have been working on. Also, I want two feet on the history of the Tango by our next lesson. Please stay within the required length."

It seemed to take a moment before her last comment registered. An essay? An essay! "You little...witch. Of all the cheek. After all the essays I have been forced to endure during your seven years at Hogwarts that went ten times beyond the required length. If you think for one minute I am going to write..."

Hermione burst out laughing. "All right, fine, no essay. You know, if I had complained every time you gave us an assignment, I would still be in the dungeons cleaning cauldrons. Without magic."

"And it would serve you right," he said with a smirk.

"I know it is getting late. Did you still want to talk about the Wolfsbane Potion?" Hermione was on edge waiting for his answer. She had felt exhilarated talking with him last week and had spent most of this week replaying their conversation in her head. She was sure his interest had been a fluke and he would sweep out of her flat and be done with her.

Severus walked to the front door and reached for his cloak. Hermione's stomach dropped. She felt an overwhelming sense of disappointment. "What did you expect?" she thought angrily. "You were an annoyance for seven years. Why should that change now?" She sighed deeply, "So, I will see you next Thursday then?"

Severus turned from the door, a thick sheaf of parchment in his right hand. "Next Thursday? If you are tired, Miss Granger, we can continue the discussion next week. I have made some notes on the properties of the ingredients that could be altered but it can wait if you are not feeling up to it."

"No, I am not tired at all, Professor. When you went for your cloak I had assumed you were leaving. Wait. I will get my papers." Her eyes sparkled with excitement as she disappeared into the other room.

Severus had moved to the sofa and was reorganizing his information. He was deep in thought when Hermione reappeared.

She lowered her book bag to the coffee table before taking a seat at the end of the sofa. "Would you like some tea, Professor?"

"Yes, thank you. I have talked to Lupin about your theory. He has consented to be a guinea pig when we are ready for the testing stage. It seems having a werewolf around will finally come in handy," he said with a half chuckle as he returned to the papers he was sorting. "If all goes well, I would think we should be ready by the Christmas holiday to run a few trials. I have not spoken to Albus, but the castle has guest accommodations. I am sure there will be no problem securing rooms for you. No doubt Minerva will have my hide if I offer any of the rooms in the dungeon near the Potion's lab, even if they would prove to be the most convenient." Severus looked up from his papers at the young woman sitting quietly next to him. "Miss Granger?"

"When you said you wanted to continue our discussion, I thought that meant, you wanted to continue our discussion. You are talking about moving forward with actual research, not just an academic exercise." A small silver tea service floated out of the kitchen and landed gently on the coffee table in front of them.

"Miss Granger, I believe your theory has practical applications on a variety of potions. The Wolfsbane Potion will be the first step in proving that theory. Eventually, I expect to publish our findings in *Ars Alchemica*. What I propose is this, you will receive sole credit for the original theory but I believe we could agree on joint credit for the research and trials as well as the final outcome and eventual application." Severus turned back to the papers on the table. "Perhaps you will be free on a few Saturday's between now and then? We could do some further reach in my private lab. I will set the wards to recognize you in the event I am not present when you arrive at the castle."

Hermione continued to sit quietly on the sofa, her mind whirling with the implications of his words. She was thunderstruck with the knowledge that Professor Severus Snape, Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and probably the leading Potions Master in the United Kingdom, wanted to collaborate with her.

"Miss Granger, am I to assume from your silence that you agree to this idea?" Why wasn't she saying anything he wondered? "Perhaps if I narrow the choices for you? Yes or No, pick one," he said with a smirk.

Hermione's smile was brilliant, "Yes, of course. Professor, did I hear you correctly? Did you just propose?"

Severus sighed, "Merely a figure of speech, Miss Granger."

Hermione put out her hand, "I believe we have a deal, Sir."

Severus laughed as he looked at the young woman next to him. Shaking her hand he said, "Indeed, Miss Granger."

"Professor, could I ask a favor of you?"

One brow rose in question, "And that would be?"

Hermione blushed. "Calling me Miss Granger makes me feel like I am back in seventh year potions. If this is to be an equal venture, then I would like you to call me Hermione."

"I see." His black eyes bored into hers as he asked, "And I suppose, Hermione, you expect to call me by my given name as well?"

"That would seem to follow, would not it?"

"Well?"

Hermione looked puzzled. "Well, what?"

"I am waiting. I wish to hear you call me by my given name." Severus sat back and crossed his arms. A slight grin was evident as he waited for her to say something. She still thought of him as her instructor. He was waiting to see if she could get past that.

Hermione poured a cup of tea. "Would you like lemon with your tea, Severus?"

He laughed openly as he took the cup from her. "No, black is fine. Are you ready to start or is there another problem we should address first?" He indicated the ingredient lists he had prepared. "I thought we could examine the properties of the traditional ingredients first."

And with that statement they were off and running.

It was eleven o'clock before they realized how late it was. Hermione had kicked off her heels and was sitting on the floor against the sofa with her feet tucked under her. Papers and books were strewn across the sofa, coffee table, and floor. Sometime in the last two hours they had discarded the tea set in favor of a bottle of red wine. Hermione had forgotten she had in the back of her refrigerator. A half empty box of biscuits was lying on its side under some papers on the sofa.

Hermione set her empty glass down on the coffee table. "What if we were to infuse the hellebore with ginkgo biloba extract using a heat infusion formula to bind the two ingredients together? One of its main properties of ginkgo biloba extract is to strengthen mental acuity." She was writing notes on a pad at her side. "We need to chart the combinations that will be the most effective."

Severus watched Hermione as she wrote notations on the pad in front of her. She was truly remarkable, her mind moved with lightening speed from one concept to the next with full clarity. He was looking forward to working with her. "Have you considered the various properties and effects a change in cauldron material will make?"

"Mmm. Gold, silver, base metal, glass, and wouldn't the stirring implement affect the potion if used it at the proper stage of the incantation?"

"Yes, I suppose we will have to try several scenarios before actually creating the potion. Would you be available to come to Hogwarts on Saturday? We can start testing

the cauldrons in my lab." Severus hoped he sounded nonchalant. He felt anything but calm right now.

"No. I can't this weekend. Unfortunately I already have plans with Edmund for Saturday and Sunday." Hermione was still writing notes on the pad in front of her or she would have noticed a change come over the Potions Master. "I can come out next weekend if that would be all right?"

"I believe that will be adequate. I shall see you promptly at seven o'clock on Thursday." Severus rose stiffly and moved to the door. He was a fool, an old fool. Of course she would have plans. She was young. Why wouldn't she be interested in some young wizard, this Edmund? Why in Circe's name would he ever think she would be interested in him? He needed to leave before he said anything foolish.

Hermione looked up. Severus's voice had sounded odd to her. It had sounded cold. He had been open and friendly all evening. What happened? Suddenly he had slipped back into full Potions Master persona. He was reaching for his cloak when her hand on his arm stilled his movement. "Severus, are you all right?"

"I am fine, Miss Granger. I will see you on Thursday. Now if there is nothing more, I need to return to Hogwarts." Severus was still facing the door, not looking at her.

"We're back to Miss Granger, now? I thought you agreed to call me Hermione? What just happened here?" What was his problem?

Severus wheeled around abruptly, dislodging her hand from his arm as he faced her. "Fine, Hermione. I will see you next week. Is that better?"

She took an involuntary step backward. The ice in his voice baffled her. "No, it is not better. Will you please tell me what you are so angry about?"

"I understand you have a busy schedule but I do not recall you mentioning locating a costume for either one of us to wear. Perhaps sometime between now and next week you can find time to complete that task. I will see you on Thursday. Enjoy your weekend, Miss Granger." He needed to leave. He could see the hurt in her eyes. She had done nothing wrong. It was his fault for creating a scenario that did not exit. 'No fool like an old fool,' he thought. His voice was softer as he said, "I will see you next week, Hermione."

"I cannot imagine you would be upset because I did not find us some skimpy little costumes to wear. Severus, I am sorry I cannot come on Saturday. I have an Advanced Charms project, with Edmund, to finish for Monday's class. He is worse than Ron when it comes to getting work done. If I push him hard enough, we might be able to finish early on Sunday. Maybe I could come for a few hours?" She did not want him to leave in the mood he was in. Things seemed to be going so well. She really thought they were becoming friends.

"You are working on a project this weekend?" He knew he sounded foolish. The words sounded foolish to his own ears. Did she say skimpy little costume?

"Yes, an Advanced Charms project with Edmund. He was here last week. You might remember him, he almost tripped in his hurry to get out the door."

They were standing next to her front door, his cloak forgotten on the rack. Severus's black eyes locked with Hermione's. He thought he saw flecks of gold in the warm brown of her eyes. "You would not object to coming out to Hogwarts? What if Edmund objects to hurrying through your project so that you can leave?"

"Edmund would be thrilled to have me do the project. I would hex him if I thought Julie wouldn't get mad. Honestly, some days he is a bigger child than Harry and Ron put together. I don't know how she stands him."

"Julie?"

"Edmund's girlfriend. Wait. You didn't think Edmund and I...?" She was not sure what had happened, but he seemed to have relaxed a little.

'Leave while you still can,' the voice in his head was screaming at him. It was advice he thought he would do well to follow. Instead he smiled and asked, "And that is not the case, Hermione?"

Her smile was bright. "No, that is not the case. I am not...um...seeing anyone." Oh god, maybe the floor could open up and swallow her whole before she said something even stupider

"And why would that be?" His voice had taken on a husky quality.

Was she really going to talk about her love life, or rather lack of it, with him? "I don't know. Boys my age annoy me. All they ever want to talk about is Quidditch. It would be nice to have an intelligent conversation for a change."

Her breath hitched in her throat as he moved a step closer to her.

"Say a conversation about potions perhaps?"

His words were said with a sexy drawl. Hermione thought she would just melt onto the floor and get it over with. She wasn't sure her legs were going to continue holding her up much longer. She was pinned to the spot by his gaze. "Potions would definitely be interesting." Was he flirting with her?

"More interesting than Quidditch?"

"Infinitely more interesting than Quidditch."

Severus laughed at her comment. "Tell me what you want, Hermione." He was lazily stroking her arm from the shoulder to the elbow and back again with the barest of touches.

Hermione found it hard to breath. "I want...I want you."

"Are you sure?"

Her eyes drifted close as she smelled the unique scent that was Severus. "Mmmm. Yes. I'm sure." His touch was mesmerizing.

"Tell me to leave, Hermione. I am an old fool. Too old for you. You need a young wizard, not a man who has lived his life in the shadows. Tell me to leave and I will return next week as your work partner, nothing more. Tell me to leave before we both do something we will regret."

She was staring up at him. Hunger shone in her eyes as she reached for him.

They were only a few centimeters apart. He gently cupped the side of her face, looking deeply into her eyes as his thumb traced sensual patterns against her skin. "I'm not an easy man, you know," he whispered, closing the distance between them just a little bit more. 'She must have washed her hair in vanilla,' he thought, as the scent drifted up to him.

"What makes you think I'm any easier?" she asked. She could feel the vibration of his laugh at her comment. The movement caused her stomach to flip as want for him raced through her body. His warm breath and the gleam in his eyes were sending tingles through to her very core, not to mention the hand sensually massaging her bum, pulling her tightly against his arousal. She was playing with the silky hairs at the nape of his neck as she ran her other hand over his back, slowly caressing his shoulders. Just enjoying the feel of the man in her arms. They had held each before when they had danced. Every move had been a prelude to this, this dance of wanting, of needing, of feeling.

"Last chance, Hermione." His eyes were dark with lust as he watched her. His body was responding to the closeness of the witch in his arms. Her scent, the softness of her skin, the press of her breasts, and the hard nub of her nipples against his chest were overwhelming his senses. He found it hard to believe she wanted him as much as

he wanted her. But her eyes reflected his lust, his desire. Her hips rocked against his hardened member in a dance as old as time.

Her eyes fluttered closed as she rose up on her tiptoes to meet his lips. He lowered his head to hers, embracing her passionately. The sparks flew, fanning the fire between them.

Their kiss held the promise of unrestrained passion as it moved them into uncharted waters. Severus had meant to take it slow. This was not to be a one-night stand but the heat of the moment seemed to be devouring them. He wanted more than just sex from her, however his straining member was vehemently protesting that thought. The voice in his mind spoke up, 'You may not be some hormonal teenage, but just feel the heat coming from this witch. Just think how good she will feel wrapped around you. Just lift her up and go for it I say. Do you think she is wearing The Thong?' A small portion of his mind wondered how he could go about exorcising the voice in his head. The rest of his mind and all of his body was focused on Hermione. Slow or not, a bit of snogging could not hurt.

Severus's tongue pressed against her lips, seeking entrance. His tongue found its way into the hot, wet cavern of her mouth. Their tongues danced against one another, learning the feel of each other, tasting one another. His hands played over the gentle curves of her body, enjoying the sound of her moans as they kissed. His hand drifted to the side of her body as he slowly brushed his fingers against the side of her breast, drawing a groan from the aroused witch, a groan that seemed to travel straight to his groin. His hand continued its path down her side to caress her hip before drawing her forcefully back into his embrace.

Electric shocks were coursing through Hermione's blood. She could feel the pounding of Severus's heart as he crushed her to his chest. Her head swam with the intensity of her feelings, with the undeniable feeling of pleasure as her body responded to his touch.

The need for oxygen reluctantly ended the kiss for both of them. Severus's breath was ragged as his arms tightened around her. His voice was rough and husky, "I think I had better go. I am not sure I will be able to stop if I do not leave now."

Hermione found she could not read the emotion in his eyes. Her hands continued to caress his back and buttocks. Her voice was a whisper, "What if I don't want you to stop? Or maybe you don't want..." She ached to feel him, to have him buried within her. Why was he stopping? Maybe he didn't really want her, but that couldn't be true. She could feel his body's response to her. The hardness of his member, pressed against her stomach.

Severus looked at the witch in his arms. Truly amazed at the depth of feeling he had for her and even more amazed that she wanted him. "Even if we did make love tonight, you have class in the morning and I have to be back at Hogwarts tonight for hall duty. Hermione, I want more than one night with you, not just a quick release. Make no mistake, you are what I want and we will be together. But we need to face each other as equals, not as student and teacher. We need to get to know one another better. I do not want this to be something you will regret because we acted too quickly. After all, you have spent far more time hating me than wanting me." He played with the mass of hair running down her back, hypnotizing her with the movement.

"I've never hated you, scared of you yes, but I didn't hate you, Severus." Her eyes shown with warmth as she regarded him.

"Never?"

"Never." Hermione smiled mischievously, "Equals, not as student and teacher. Or more like predator and prey?"

Severus chuckled darkly. Predator and prey had come to mind, though he could not have said which one of them was which. Severus leaned closer to Hermione. He gently bit the outer shell of her ear, sending shock waves through her body. He could feel the slight tremor in her arms as he held her. "And when we do make love, there will be no question as to how much I want you."

He pulled back and looked intently into her eyes, eyes glazed heavily with lust. The voice in his head was screaming at him, 'You could have her now, what in the bloody hell is wrong with you?' But he wanted their joining to be about more than just lust. He was afraid to put a name to what he really wanted from her. Truth be told, he was overwhelmed with the feelings that had surfaced within him tonight. He needed time to clear his head. The feel of her body against his seemed to erase all thought, all reason from his brain.

He had kept a tight rein on his emotions for more than twenty years, never allowing anyone to get close to him, always worried about the possibility of betrayal. One night was not enough to release that hold. He had not allowed himself the luxury of feelings or emotions in so long that he was not sure he was still capable of acting on those feeling. This was foreign territory to him. Seduction he could do. He was not ready for anything more. Except his mind thought his heart might have other ideas.

Severus lowered his mouth and kissed her possessively, forcefully. The kiss left her breathless as he moved to the side of her neck and bit the sensitive flesh there, marking her. His voice was low and smooth as he whispered in her ear, "Good night, Hermione. Until Sunday." He reached up and grabbed his cloak off the hook.

Hermione was breathless as she answered him, "Good night, Severus."

A gentle brush of his lips across hers and he was gone.

Hermione leaned against the closed door much as she had the week before, wrapping her arms around herself. Her breathing was ragged and her face was flushed. Her body was alive with feeling and ached from wanting him. She would have gladly jumped him if he had given her half a chance. 'Oh my god,' she thought. 'All that from a few kisses?' Dear god, she could not wait until they actually made love!

TBC

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A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Perluceo (pelluceo) lucere (luxi) is Latin for to shine through or to be transparent.

Ginkgo biloba extract is a natural herb known for enhancing memory, mental acuity, and focus. More information on natural herbs can be found at this web site : Forms of Herbs [http://holisticonline.com/Herbal-Med/herb\\_forms.htm](http://holisticonline.com/Herbal-Med/herb_forms.htm)

Next up, Sunday at Hogwarts, a talk with Ginny, and some interesting combinations in the Potion's Lab. Enjoy. Review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Interlude

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

## Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 10 Interlude

The morning sunlight streamed through her bedroom window giving new life to the dust bunnies hiding in the corners of the room. Hermione felt a warm body next to her shift as she stretched languidly in the bed. Her hand dropped to pet the soft orange fur of her familiar. His tail flicked back and forth in a lazy arc as she scratched behind his ears. She'd had the most delicious dream and was loathe to leave the warm haven of her bed and face the day ahead.

'Professor Snape. Severus. Oh, my god!' she thought. His kisses, the touch of his hands, and that voice, even his words, had awakened intense feelings deep within her. While she may not have had the dating repertoire of Lavender Brown, she'd had enough experience to know this was beyond anything she had ever felt before. Her own desire for the man had created a physical need for him. She had always been the sensible one and here she was, practically throwing herself at him.

A warm bath and some rather personal attention to herself had temporarily resolved that problem last night, but her mind had continued to replay their kisses and his words, over and over before she finally fell asleep. It was no surprise her dreams had been about him.

Hermione had always thought of him as Professor Snape. It sent a tingle down her spine to shift her idea of him from Professor Snape to Severus, but then he had certainly helped to change that image last night. While she had always thought of Severus as brilliant, she had rarely considered him as a man.

'There had been that time between sixth and seventh year. When you saw him just before he got in the shower at 12 Grimmauld Place,' she reminded herself. She'd had a few erotic dreams about him then, but it had been more of a physical thing. She had put it down to the product of an overactive mind and her own lack of personal involvement with anyone at the time.

The man had an amazing body from what she had seen back then. While he might appear tall and wiry, Severus was lean and muscular in all the right places. She had noticed a few other attributes last night that she was not even going to think about right now.

Even at 12 Grimmauld Place, Severus had maintained an aloof persona. She knew the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall, Albus and Minerva she mentally corrected herself. She had joined the Order of the Phoenix along with Harry and Ron in her last year at Hogwarts. They had insisted on having the 'Golden Trio' call them by their given names when they were at order headquarters. The practice just continued on a more permanent basis after graduation. Albus and Minerva seemed to be in the general vicinity of what one would call a friend or, as close to being a friend as the term might apply to Severus. She supposed he had been on his guard for so long, that it would have been near impossible to let anyone in.

In the past two years she had noticed a gradual change in the man. She had seen him at the anniversary celebrations and a few times when she had visited Ginny at Hogwarts. Ginny had graduated last year and decided to pursue a career as a mediwitch. Madame Pomfrey had been all too happy to take on an assistant. Hermione would visit from time to time, or meet Ginny on a Saturday in Hogsmeade. She had only seen Severus a handful of times in the last two years.

If Remus was to be believed, he and Severus seemed to have an amicable 'relationship' at present. While never friendly and relaxed, his comments were no longer barbed with malice and he appeared to be, well, healthier for lack of a better word. More rested, calmer, though that wasn't exactly it. She had assumed the change in his demeanor stemmed more from two almost concurrent events, their graduation and the end of Voldemort.

As far she was concerned, Sunday could not come fast enough. Unfortunately, before Sunday came, she would have to face today and tomorrow. Edmund and Charms. With a reluctant sigh, she dragged her body out of bed and headed off to take a shower and face the day. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Crookshanks burrow into the warm covers she had so reluctantly vacated.

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Hermione stood grinning foolishly as she looked at herself in the mirror. There, on the side of her neck, bloomed a lovely purple love bite. Maybe the rumors were true? The man just might be half vampire from the look of that mark. It was just high enough to escape her collar covering it. She giggled as thought she should leave it and see what Edmund's reaction might be. He might put two and two together and come up with the right answer. Then again Susan would faint if she figured out it was Severus that gave it to her. Not wanting to answer any questions just yet, she cast a small glamour over the area. There would be time enough for that group to find out she was seeing Severus. Last night was still too new. She wanted to keep him to herself for just a little while longer.

She would send Ginny an owl when she returned from class and let her know she would be at Hogwarts on Sunday. She debated telling her about Severus. Well, what could she say?

"Hi Ginny.

Cambridge is going well. Severus came for his dance lesson and we ended up snogging. Can that man kiss, among other things. I will be at Hogwarts on Sunday. See you then.

Love, Hermione."

No, not an option. Potions class would have been a whole lot better if she had known what an amazing kisser he was. She laughed as she shook her head. She would tell

"I know when I am not wanted."

"No, you do not. That is the problem."

Remus chuckled as he rose from the chair. "Glad to see you took my advice. I will see you later."

"I cannot wait, Lupin." Severus nodded and returned to the stack of essays he was grading. He looked up as he heard the door close. He was glad that he took the werewolf's advice too.

Hermione. Severus thought Sunday could not come fast enough.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Next up, Sunday at Hogwarts, a talk with Ginny, Remus, an argument, the Potion's Lab, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Sunday at Hogwarts: Act One ? A New Duet

Chapter 11 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

#### 11. Sunday at Hogwarts: Act One A New Duet

Severus was in a rare mood as he stalked the hallways from the Great Hall to the Slytherin common room. He had managed to take a combined total of fifty points in the last half hour from all four houses. Some offenses had been minor, twenty-five points from a second year Gryffindor for coughing and disturbing the afternoon quiet. Others had been a bit more serious, two points from four seventh year Slytherins, a full one-half point each, for setting fire to three tapestries while practicing hexes in the hallway. All four houses had been affected. The students scrambled out of the way in the wake of Severus's obvious bad mood.

Hermione was already an hour late. 'Not an hour late,' he told himself, the voice in his head taunting him. 'She is not coming. Why are you surprised she failed to show up? Would you show up if you were meeting you?' He sighed, all right, face it. Hermione had decided not to come. She must have reconsidered her actions Thursday night and come to her senses. It really should not have come as a surprise to him.

Hermione seemed to have taken up residence in his mind over the last few days. She was all he could think about. He found it hard to believe she had expressed any interest in him. He did not believe fate would allow him even this small pleasure.

His dreams of the last three nights had been filled with Hermione. Hermione working in the lab with him; he and Hermione talking; Hermione in various stages of undress; Hermione dancing in The Thong. Hermione in as many compromising positions as his wretched mind could come up with. Wanting someone did not make it reality.

'You could have had her the other night and been done with her,' the voice in his head reminded him. But he had wanted more from her than just a quick release. He had hoped for some type of relationship with the young woman. Obviously that was not going to happen now. Best just to forget her. He had essays to grade, potions to make, and a case of Old Ogden's waiting for him. He sighed heavily as he turned into the hallway leading to his office.

Hermione's face lit up when she saw the Potions Master in the hallway. "Severus" she called out. "Hello. I am so sorry I am late, but Edmund was just impossible. Reminds me a little of Neville when I was in school."

Severus barely acknowledged her presence, his expression cold.

Hermione noticed his standoffish manner. "Is something wrong?"

Ignoring her question, Severus turned in the direction of his office, expecting her to follow. His robes billowed out behind him. He tone was curt, and tinged with a bit of

annoyance, "Do you realize you are more than an hour late, Miss Granger? I had assumed you were not coming." He knew he was acting childish, but could not seem to stop himself. Right or wrong, he had decided to reject her before she could reject him. He chided himself for being a fool. It did not matter any more that she was here. He should have never allowed it to get this far in the first place. Why the hell did he ever listen to Lupin?

Hermione followed him. He was obviously mad because she was late. She tried again. "I know I should have sent an owl but I was in a hurry to get here. I'm sorry." They were standing in the hall outside his office. Severus's attitude and tone were confusing Hermione. He had told her he wanted her. She could not have imagined his feelings for her. What exactly was going on?

"If you will follow me?" Severus walked into his office and held the door open for the confused witch. He locked and warded the door before turning to Hermione.

"Severus, what is the problem?" Hermione was at the end of her rope. Either he explained what was wrong, right now, or she was leaving.

The hurt and anger in Hermione's voice finally caught Severus's attention. He could see the anger flashing in her eyes but chose to disregard it. He had convinced himself she had changed her mind. It did not matter that he was being unreasonable. "You are late and I would rather not have my association with you announced in that manner."

"What manner? All I said was hello?" What the hell was wrong with him?

"You called me Severus."

"What did you expect me to call you?"

"There were students in the hall. I would have assumed you would address me as Professor Snape."

"We're back to, Professor Snape? Maybe coming here was a mistake." Hermione rose from the chair she was sitting in, anger surging through her.

"Perhaps I was not thinking clearly," Severus said quickly, opposing feeling for the witch warring in his brain. Want and need were fighting with rejection and hurt, causing him to doubt himself.

Hermione's anger was coming to the forefront. "No. You were not thinking at all. The last two days seemed to drag by for me. I can't tell you how much I was looking forward to seeing you. If you have a problem being seen with me, I suggest you tell me now. In fact, maybe it would be a good idea if I just leave right now and we can forget the whole thing." Hermione grabbed the doorknob and tried to open the door. "Professor Snape, will you please unlock this door?"

Severus ran his hands through his hair and sighed. "Hermione, I am sorry. I am not used to being in this type of relationship. You were late. I thought you had changed your mind and decided not to come."

"You're sorry? That's it? I'm a little late and you decide to cut me down to size. And what relationship are you talking about? We haven't even started on a relationship yet. Please unlock the door, Professor Snape."

"Hermione, be reasonable."

"Be reasonable? I am the one acting unreasonable? It is Miss Granger remember? I suggest you unlock this door now." She'd had enough of him. "Why did I ever think there could be something between us?"

Severus moved behind his desk and sunk wearily into his chair. 'Well,' he asked himself, 'are you happy now? You knew this would happen.' He had hoped for a relationship with this woman. When had hope ever gotten him anywhere? What difference if he did care for her? He tried to ignore the voice in his head and said to Hermione, "Perhaps you are right. Though I am not in the habit, I will apologize for any inconveniences I may have caused you, Miss Granger." He waved his wand at the door, unlocking it and removing the wards.

Something in his tone made her turn around.

"You are free to leave. I regret we must continue our lessons, but we are both magically bound to finish the contract. In light of the circumstances, perhaps I can persuade Albus to change the consequences to another alternative." Severus felt a headache coming on. He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, wondering if he had any headache potion left. Perhaps he could find something lethal and put himself out of his misery. He was startled when he felt Hermione's hands gently massaging his shoulders. His ear had been so occupied listening for the slam of his office door that he never heard her move behind his chair.

"Hermione, what are you doing?" Why was she still here? Understanding and outmaneuvering the Dark Lord had been a piece of cake compared to dealing with this witch. Severus did not want to argue with her, but he seemed to lose control of his emotions when she was around. He was melting under her touch. He could not remember the last time a woman had touched him with such tenderness.

"Bad headache?" Something in his voice had affected her. She could hear the loneliness, the despair. She knew he rarely, if ever, opened up to anyone. Yet he had risked reaching out to her. She suspected it was the same distrust of people that caused him to shut down so quickly. He would reject her before she could reject him.

"Yes. I was just wondering if I had any lethal potions in the lab that could rind me of my headache and perhaps put me out of my misery at the same time. Would you care to help me look?" He raised a brow at her in question.

Hermione continued her massage. "Mmm, your muscles are tense. Relax. No. I am not going to help you look for a lethal potion. I think we need to discuss some ground rules so there will be no further confusion."

She was staying? Severus swiveled in his chair. He grabbed Hermione's hips and pulled her into his lap. "Are you saying you are willing to give...this, another chance?" He had wrapped his arms around her. One hand gently caressed the side of her face and tangled in her hair. The other held her close to him, afraid to let go of her. His voice was soft and seductive, "Hermione."

Hermione slid her arms around his neck. His eyes bore into her, searching. They seemed to peer into her very soul. Severus's lips grazed the side of her neck, sending a tingle straight to her very core. He nipped her earlobe before capturing her lips in a searing kiss. Hermione opened her mouth to his probing tongue. The kiss was heated, passionate. His tongue plundered her mouth, mimicking the action his already aroused member wanted to engage in. Hermione shifted in his lap. She could feel her effect on him, hard against her bum.

"Hermione," he whispered again as they broke apart, a trace of a smile on his lips. "May I assume you are staying?" He stroked the side of her body, alternating between a gentle caress and a firm touch, moving in ever widening circles along her side. She was wearing a silk shirt with black Muggle jeans. His hand slipped under the edge of her shirt, caressing her soft skin and moved slowly along her side, stroking the heated flesh from her waist to her breast. He slowly raked his fingers along the sensitive under side of her breast. A moan escaped her lips.

She shifted again, trying to bring his hand where she needed his touch most. Her nipples were hard pebbles as he ran his thumb across the lace surface of her bra, teasing the hard peak underneath. "Hermione, God, do you have any idea what you do to me?" he said softly. He gently licked and nipped the outer shell of her ear. Her name was smoke and fire. His words sent lust coursing through her blood. She shifted against him, his aroused member pressing into her bottom. She wanted nothing more than to feel him deep within her. He was taking her to a level of passion she had never felt before.

Her hands played across the muscles of his chest and shoulders. She had managed to open the clasp on his robes and the first few buttons of his frock coat. 'What was it with him and buttons?' she wondered. Maybe she could explain Velcro to him. It would make undressing him a hell of a lot easier. She opened the top four buttons of his white linen shirt and slipped her hand under the crisp fabric. His skin was pale, almost translucent, with a dusting of fine black hair. She stroked his exposed skin, tracing

the line of a scar. She could feel him tremble under her touch. "So what type are you used to?" she asked softly.

Severus had been kissing and nipping along the length of her neck. His tongue brushed the top of her décolletage. He raised his heated gaze to her eyes. "Pardon me?" What the hell was she talking about?

'You stopped! What in bloody hell are you stopping for? You were at her breasts! What is wrong with you? Get back down there.' The voice in his head seemed to have returned with a vengeance as it yelled at him.

She kept shifting in his lap, causing his already aroused member to harden further. He was ready to sweep everything off his desk and take her right there. He could feel small tremors run through her body as she shook with need. He felt her pulse pound as he kissed the side of her neck. She was as aroused as he was. Her obvious desire only seemed to arouse him even further. He thought he did not have enough blood left to power his brain since he could not seem to follow whatever it was she was asking him.

Hermione's breathing was ragged. "You said you were not used to being in this type of relationship. What type are you used to?"

She wanted to talk about a relationship, now? He sighed. Fine. They would talk. He could be as human as the next person. "I normally do not engage in relationships per say." Severus laughed. He could not believe she wanted to talk. Damn know-it-all. It was probably a good idea. He was rapidly losing control and did not think he would be able to stop if they keep on. He was a step away from magicking their clothes off before impaling her with his very stiff member. While he thought she might not object, he rather hoped they would take their time and explore each other's bodies first. And maybe find some place a little more comfortable than his office chair.

Hermione marveled at the feel of the vibration from his laugh. "Have I ever told you I like your laugh?"

"No, I do not believe you have ever mentioned that particular fact before." His arms had encircled her body again. He gently played with her hair.

"So what do you engage in?" She giggled as he wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "Okay, maybe I should rephrase that?"

His eyes softened as he looked into the eyes of the witch in his arms. "Hermione, I have spent the last twenty years with only two goals in mind. One was to gather information to bring down the Dark Lord. The other was to try and not get killed in the process. There was a time I would have welcomed death, but I owed it to Albus to try and be useful. He gave me a second chance when I was not deserving of that chance. I owe him my life. It is a debt I will never be able to repay. There is still a large part of the Wizarding World that does not think highly of me. I have a black past I cannot change. There are things in my past I am not proud of. If you are with me, people will judge you too. It does not matter that I won an Order of Merlin. People remember only what they want to remember. You may want to rethink us."

Hermione wiped a tear from her eye as she hugged Severus. Her heart ached for this tortured man. He deserved so much more than the scorn of the Wizarding World for giving up the last twenty years of his life. Her voice was thick with emotion, "Oh, Severus." Her arms tightened around him.

The act of hugging was more intimate than their kisses had been. He clutched her to him, a lifeline to a drowning man. It would take a long time for his soul to heal. But maybe, with her help, he could hope again. It was a few minutes before he could speak. "I would think you might not want to be seen with me. Not the other way around. You mentioned ground rules?"

She laughed softly. "Yes, ground rules. As in, using your given name in public. Understanding I am not trying to hurt you or run away from you. Acknowledging my existence, even if someone else is present. I am not asking you to shag me in the middle of the Great Hall. I understand public displays are not in your nature. They are not in mine either. But if we are to be an 'us', we need to be together. I will not hide our relationship."

"Where *would* you like me to shag you?" Dear god she was amazing.

"We will have to figure that out. Won't we?" Hermione's hand was caressing the side of his face. Severus's eyes closed for a moment as he leaned into her touch.

"What about your friends? What will you tell them? I am sure they will not approve. Potter and Weasley will believe I have slipped you a potion. Or at the very least, they will believe you have lost your mind." He had never liked the idiotic duo. He supposed he would have to learn to tolerate them if he was to have any type of future with Hermione. Potter was working for the Ministry, being groomed to one day assume the position of Minister of Magic. While not friends, they had come to an unspoken understanding. After their joint effort in destroying the Dark Lord, he and Potter had developed a quiet respect for one another. He thought Potter would think twice before opening his mouth. He was equally sure Weasley would charge forward like a wounded Erumpent.

"Severus, when have I ever worried about what other people think? If either Harry or Ron, or anyone else for that matter, has anything to say, they will answer to me. I think they will see reason. I have been known to be very creative when I hex someone."

Severus nodded. "Perhaps we should start working on your theory?" He knew he could stir the embers and bring them right back to the level of passion they had been at. It was barely contained below the surface. It would not take much, but he thought it would be wiser to stop. He turned his head towards her hand as she caressed his face and started nibbling and softly licking her palm, his words contradicting his actions. His voice was low, silky, "We need to stop. There is still research to do and you have to return to Cambridge tonight."

Hermione sighed. "Right. Okay." She moved off his lap and straightened her clothes. Her eyes were glazed and her cheeks were flushed. Severus thought she looked lovely.

He heard the disappointment in her voice and pulled her back into his embrace. "Hermione, you have no idea what you do to me. I was more than willing to clear the desk a moment ago and just take you right here. But I do not think it would be wise. We were going to take it slow. Remember? While I do not care what anyone else has to say about us, I believe this afternoon should be an indication of just how important it is that we get to know one another better, if only to avoid any misunderstandings in the future." His voice was soft, "believe me, there is nothing more I desire then for you and me to be together."

Hermione's smile was bright as she kissed the man in front of her. "I believe you. The desk, huh? I may just take you up on that some time."

Severus shifted uncomfortably in his seat, the little chit. His smirk was evident as he said, "Shall we try to tame a werewolf? Are you ready to work, partner?" An arched doorway appeared on the back wall of his office. "I have reset my wards to recognize you. We will use my private lab. The equipment and research books are of a higher quality then the classroom."

They walked through the heavy oak door and entered Severus's private quarters.

TBC

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From the HP Lexicon and Magical Beasts: Erumpent -This huge African magical beast resembles a rhinoceros. Its horn, which can pierce almost anything, contains a fluid, which explodes, destroying what it has hit. Because male Erumpents frequently blow each other up during mating season, the species is somewhat endangered.

Next up, Sunday at Hogwarts Part Two. Severus's private quarters, the Potion's Lab, a talk with Ginny, Remus, dinner at Hogwarts, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

# Sunday at Hogwarts: Act Two ? And the Band Played On

Chapter 12 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

## Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

12. Sunday at Hogwarts: Act Two And the Band Played On

"My private lab is through the sitting room. I put a few books on the side that I thought we could use as a starting point in evaluating the properties of the cauldrons as they relate to altering the ingredients... Hermione?" Severus realized he had lost Hermione's attention. One look at the witch and he was not sure he ever had it in the first place. Her reaction to his sitting room should have been a foregone conclusion knowing that she spent the majority of her seven years at Hogwarts in the library.

Hermione was standing in the doorway, entranced with her surroundings. Severus's sitting room was in fact not a sitting room, but a formal library. The room was two stories high and lined floor to ceiling with books. The walls were randomly broken up in spots with a few charmed windows. Several doors were set into various doorways along the walls leading off to other rooms. At the far end of the room, an oriental rug dominated the hearth in front of a large fireplace. Two overstuffed black leather chairs and a green, silver, and black patterned sofa completed the setting. The room spoke of personal comfort and knowledge.

Hermione was attempting to take in her surroundings. This was the room of her dreams. She could imagine long winter afternoons, curled up in one of the armchairs, reading by firelight. She briefly wondered what the other rooms looked like.

"Hermione?" Severus chuckled as he called her again, "Hermione. Is there a problem?"

"Severus, this room is wonderful! If I had known you had a library like this, I might have made a play for you years ago." Hermione had walked to the side and was running her hand reverently over the spines of the books.

Severus put a hand on his heart. "You wound me deeply, Miss Granger. I would have thought you were interested in me for my good looks and charm, not my material possessions."

Hermione's eye sparkled. "Looks fade and personalities change, but books...well, you can never have too many books. I never would have wasted my time in the restricted section if I had known you had a library like this!"

"You are welcome to borrow any of the titles you like. Though I must caution you, some of the books can be rather temperamental at times. My private lab is through this doorway." He guided her past a massive desk overflowing with books and papers as he indicated a heavy oak door set back in the shadows.

Hermione was as overwhelmed with the lab as she had been with the library. "No wonder you stay at Hogwarts," she said in awe. "This is truly amazing."

Severus looked at her curiously. "Why I stay?"

"Well, yes. You don't appear to like teaching all that much. It is a known fact you do not like the students. The war is over so you are free to go wherever you want. With your skill as a Potions Master, I am sure you could find work anywhere in the world. Just wondering, but, why do you stay here?"

Why indeed? "I suppose, because this is my home. I have a Manor House that was left to me when my father died. I am not particularly fond of the Manor. Hogwarts has been my home for twenty years. Contrary to popular belief, I do not hate teaching as much as people seem to think I do. I actually find the upper level classes to be quite satisfying now that I am no longer forced to endure your friends, or Mr. Longbottom. It is the result of dealing with a few select students that has earned me the reputation you speak of."

Hermione looked at him. "A few?"

"All right, all of the classes below OWL levels and a few hundred ex-students over the last twenty years. The lower level class consists mostly of dunderheads that are there because they have no choice. Potions is a required course. The students taking upper level classes normally have an ability and interest in the subject. And they are willing to learn. Then there is the rare student that is unusually bright. They are always a challenge." Severus was pulling down cauldrons of various metal compositions and placing them on the workbench as he spoke.

"Did you find me a challenge?"

Severus snorted. "You were a challenge in more ways than one." He opened a black leather bound journal sitting on the side of the table and pointed to a page written in his familiar script. "I have taken the liberty to start a work journal for us so that we can record our progress as we go. This is a simple base combining the essential ingredient of the Wolfsbane Potion. Brewing the potion in each of the base metal cauldrons will give us some indication of the changes in properties that will occur using each of the metals. This should give us a foundation to choose which ingredients we might want to experiment with." Severus was enthralled with the intensity of Hermione's focus. Her concentration was centered directly on him as he explained the process.

"That sounds like a good place to start." Hermione pulled a small parcel out of her pocket and placed it on the workbench. A wave of her wand and the package turned into her ever-present book bag. She was reading over the steps for the base potion as she reached into the bag for her quill and ink.

"I was wondering where that was." Severus said with a smile.

Hermione was intent on the instructions in front of her. "These are standard ingredients. Do you want me to get them from the classroom or do you have a separate store room in here?"

"Hermione."

The sound of his voice caused Hermione to look up at him. Severus's gaze was intense as he watched her. Taking a deep breath he said, "Would you have dinner with me one night this week?"

"Dinner, as in a date?" He was asking her out on a real date? Her heart jumped to her throat.

"Yes, as in a date. In as much as I have enjoyed dancing with you and rendering you virtually crippled. And I am looking forward to working with you on the Wolfsbane, we are more or less required to be together in these instances. I would like to take you out somewhere because we want to be together, not because we have to be. Somewhere we can be alone."

"I would love to have dinner with you, Severus." Hermione moved into his arms. "We are alone now."

As if on cue, a loud knock was heard on the far side of the room. "Severus, Miss Granger? Are you in here?" The Headmaster's voice could be heard through the door.

Severus closed his eyes. His arms tightened around Hermione as he called out, "Go away, Albus."

Looking slightly guilty, Severus and Hermione jumped apart as they heard the door opening and a smiling Albus Dumbledore walked into the lab. "Good afternoon, Severus. Hermione, it is good to see you again. You are looking well. Lemon drop?" His greeting was warm. He genuinely liked the young witch.

Hermione laughed. "Hello, Albus. It is good to see you too. Though I don't think I would have been happy with you if we had met a few weeks ago."

"Ahh, Severus and the dance lessons." He said nodding his head. Albus's eyes seemed to twinkle brighter, "And now my dear, have you changed your mind?"

Much to Severus's chagrin, Hermione glanced over her shoulder to give him a look before turning back to Albus. She broke out in a warm smile as she said, "And now I think I will reserve judgment until I see what develops."

Albus's laugh was merry. "Divination? We can have Sibyll read your tea leaves and see what she has to say about your future, if you like?"

Severus barely contained a groan. "If you two are finished, perhaps we can get on with our work? I believe Hermione needs to return to Cambridge sometime this century, unless you or Minerva are in possession of another time turner she might use?"

"Yes, of course. Hermione, you will stay for dinner tonight won't you? I am told we have Bread and Butter Pudding for dessert."

"I would love to stay, thank you." Hermione smiled at Albus. It had taken time for her to merge the image of the kindly old grandfather type that he had been during her school days with the powerful wizard he had proved to be during the final battle. Hermione had always known he was a great wizard, but that day, during the battle, Albus Dumbledore had radiated pure power. He had called upon the Heavens above and the very ground they stood upon to do his bidding.

"Wonderful, then I will leave you to attend to your work. Oh, Severus, Poppy has asked if you could brew another batch of the Deplucking Draught. It seems she has run low and still has two students in the Hospital wing sprouting feathers."

"Fine, I will start a new batch now." Severus pulled down a steel cauldron from above the bench and placed it to the side. He glanced at the Headmaster. "Is there something more, Albus?"

Albus nodded. "No. I believe there are a few matters that require my attention alone. I will see you both at dinner."

Hermione turned to Severus as the outer door closed. "Is he always like that?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I believe he thinks he is helping me with his meddling. This door leads to my private storeroom. Why don't you get started on the base potion and I will set up the Deplucking Draught."

Hermione looked amused. "Deplucking Draught?"

With a long-suffering sigh he said, "Yes, it seems my class is not the only class to have students who fail to pay attention. Minerva was teaching the students in her second year transfiguration class how to transfigure a teacup into a down pillow. One of the student's wands was cracked. The charm bounced off the teacup and hit six students. Instead of turning into down pillows, they grew feathers. Minerva was not able to reverse the charm, thus the Deplucking Draught. The feathers usually fall out within twenty-four hours after taking the draught with no ill after effects. Some of the feathers have been particularly persistent and have required more than the standard dose of the draught."

They had retrieved the necessary ingredients from the storeroom and were setting up across the table from each other. "Go ahead and start preparing the ingredients for the base while I start the Deplucking Draught for Poppy. It will have to simmer for an hour and thirty-five minutes once I have added the necessary ingredients."

Hermione had always enjoyed watching Severus work. He moved with an easy agility and grace. His movements were precise as he laid out the ingredients. After filling the cauldron with water, Severus removed his frock coat and hung it on a hook by the door. He rolled his sleeves part way up his forearm to avoid staining the cuffs.

"Do you really think using all three metal cauldrons at different stages of the process will..." Hermione's words died in her throat. She had just finished recording the various metal cauldrons and their properties in the black leather journal.

Severus had reached for a glass stir as Hermione looked up. He heard her intake of breath and saw her wide-eyed look. A quick glance at his left forearm was all the confirmation he needed. His Dark Mark. He had been so preoccupied with their argument earlier he had forgotten to cast a glamour over the Mark. Unbelievable what this witch did to his mind and his sanity, he thought.

The Mark had faded to a silvery gray color, but it was still visible on his forearm, a constant reminder of his past transgressions. He could only imagine her horror at seeing it. Her parents had fallen victim to a surprise Death Eater attack he had been powerless to stop, during the Christmas holidays her seventh year. He pulled his cuffs down before looking up at her.

Hermione had tears in her eyes. His shoulders slumped. They may have made it over the first hurdle but he was sure this would prove to be too much. His voice was filled with pain as he said quietly, "If you want to leave, Hermione, I will understand. I am truly sorry." He sighed as he started to gather the unused ingredients.

Hermione walked around the worktable. Her voice broke as she spoke, "Do you really think that little of me, Severus?" She reached for his arm, pulling the fabric back. Her fingers were cool against his skin as she traced the gray lines. "I am the one that should apologize for my reaction. I think it was just the shock of seeing it on your arm. Can you forgive me?"

Severus had closed his eyes when she reached for his arm, not wanting to see the rejection in her eyes. "Hermione, you have nothing to apologize for. I know what I am. I told you before, my past keeps coming back to haunt me. This is just one more instance. Perhaps you would be better off with a younger wizard who will not cause you pain."

Hermione ignored his words. "Severus, look at me. We can't do this at every turn. You have to stop thinking I am going to run out on you every five minutes. You said take it slow and get to know one another. I agree. But please, have a little faith in me. Maybe I can exorcise one of your demons for you."

Severus stood transfixed, as Hermione lowered her mouth to his arm. She softly kissed the Mark before allowing her tongue to trace the lines along his forearm. A groan escaped his lips. "Hermione, Oh dear God."

Hermione moved forward and stepped into his embrace. She kissed him softly, gently. Her kisses were meant to heal his soul, not arouse him. He crushed her to him with an anguished sob. They stood that way for several minutes.

"You are remarkable. What did I ever do to deserve you?" He kissed her tenderly before releasing his hold on the young woman.

Hermione grinned mischievously at him. "I'm sure it will come to you." Her expression turned serious, "It is just a Mark, Severus. It means nothing anymore. You have nothing to hide. And if you say spoken like a true Gryffindor, I will hex you into tomorrow."

He kissed her gently before she returned to her side of the workbench. He watched her for a moment, amazed at the woman she had become. They worked for the next half hour talking about the various ingredients as Severus set up the Deplucking Draught and Hermione worked on the base of the test potion.

"This needs to simmer an hour to be complete. I will clean up here and then help you test the base." Severus regarded the young woman in front of him. 'Young being the operative word,' he thought. "Does my age bother you?"

Hermione continued to measure the ginger root as she answered without looking up. "No, not at all. Does mine bother you?"

Severus sighed. "Yes. As a matter of fact it does. I am just thankful you scored so high on your NEWTs or there maybe some questions as to the validity of your grades as my student."

Hermione put the measuring rod down and looked at Severus. "Is it my age that bothers you or the fact, that people will talk? Anyone who was at Hogwarts when I was a student will know the truth. You could not stand me back then."

"Yes, we do seem to be getting along so much better now." All though the comment was meant to be sarcastic, Severus's slight grin and the chuckle that accompanied the remark shifted the meaning from hurtful to playfully teasing.

Hermione thought he had a wonderfully dry sense of humor when it was not used for cutting remarks. "I would say so. From what I could tell sitting in your lap a little while ago, you seemed quite happy to see me."

Severus smiled. "Mmmm. Perhaps. How long has the cauldron bubbled?" He indicated the first stage of the test they were working on.

"I believe it has another two minutes before I add the root." She consulted the notes in front of her. Severus nodded his head and reached for a thick green book at the edge of the worktable. Hermione was not about to let the age issue die. "How old are you, exactly?"

Severus arched a brow in question. "You do not know how old I am?"

"If I knew how old you are, would I have asked you?" Really, the man could be exasperating at times.

A gleam came into his black eyes. "I will be sixty-eight my next birthday."

"Really. Well then we are fine. I will be sixty-two on my next birthday." Hermione smiled, she knew he was teasing her. "I seem to recall you and Remus are the same age. That would make you about.... forty, forty-one."

Severus shook his head. "Fine. I will be forty-one in November."

"Well, then you are only nineteen years older than I am. What's the problem?"

"And this does not bother you? Shouldn't you be interested in someone closer in age?" 'Are you an idiot? Are you trying to drive her away?' The voice in head screamed at him. He told the voice to bugger off. This was something he thought they should talk about now. Right now, rather than after they walk into the Great Hall together for dinner.

Hermione looked at him, with a smirk she said, "You won't get rid of me that easily. No, I do not think you are too old for me. My mother said I was born being fifty so you have a few years to go to catch up to me. And besides, what boy my age has his own potions lab and library?"

Severus snorted. "I should have known you were not interested in me for my good looks alone." He came around the bench to check the potion. His voice softened, "I just want to make sure you have considered all the consequences and options of being seen with me."

"Severus, Albus is eighty-five years older than Minerva and it does not seem to bother them. Stop thinking so much." Hermione checked her notes and then added the grated root to the bubbling potion.

"Would you like to discuss the up coming match for the Chudley Cannons instead? Quidditch is a secret passion of mine," he said with a smirk, knowing Hermione's intense dislike of all things Quidditch.

Hermione looked at him in horror until she noticed the corners of his mouths were slightly turned up. She shook the stirring rod at him as she said, "Ground Rule number five, we will not discuss Quidditch or there will be consequences."

Severus engulfed the young woman in a quick hug. "I cannot seem to recall rules one through four. Care to refresh my memory?"

"Severus."

"Fine. We need to record the properties of the base and then let it simmer for another ten minutes before rechecking the properties again."

They spent the next hour comparing the base potion's properties against the resulting potions in the other four cauldrons and started compiling a list of ingredients for future experimentation. Severus racked the clean cauldron over the bench as Hermione recorded the outcome of the base potion.

He noticed Hermione was absent-mindedly rubbing her shoulder as she checked the reference book. "No, it says right here that hellebore only reacts to gold, not pewter. Mmm. Oh God, that feels good." Severus had moved behind the young woman, massaging the kink from her shoulder. His long supple fingers worked the muscles from the top of her shoulder down. Moving his fingers in circles that slowly radiated outward from her shoulder blade down.

Hermione seemed to puddle in her seat. She crossed her arms on the table in front of her and leaned forward to rest her head on her arms and give him better access to her back. Severus shifted her hair to the side, off her back and shoulders. She mumbled contentedly, "I always thought you had great hands. You didn't happen to use Legilimency on me did you?"

"And why would I use Legilimency on you?" He was working the muscles down her spine. Alternating a firm circular motion with the press of his fingertips along the spinal column. He raked his finger out towards the edge of her body, just touching the sides of her breasts before moving his fingers back to her spine, and then sliding his hands down to massage the top of her buttocks.

A contented sigh, almost sounding like the purr of a cat escaped from the relaxed witch. Her voice was a mumble, "Because I have a weakness for back rubs. You are in the wrong profession, Severus. You should be giving massages instead of teaching potions. You have amazing hands." She was a boneless mass as he continued to massage her back.

Severus leaned over and planted a line of kisses along the side of her neck, alternately kissing and nipping the sensitive skin. Hermione's body went from puddle to alert in zero to nothing flat. A moan escaped her lips as he moved the back of her shirt collar aside before biting and licking the heated skin on the back of her neck.

His own body had responded to the small whimpers and moans of pleasure from the aroused witch. He hoped his trousers hid his obvious erection. There was no question he found her desirable. The problem was, this was not just about sex release.

There had been one-night stands and mindless sexual encounters with the wives of the other Death Eaters in the past. For the first time in his life he wanted more, and in turn was willing to risk opening himself up to Hermione. He had spent the last few nights alternately reveling over the young woman and worrying about letting her get close to him.

Sometimes he agreed with the voice in his head that said just take her and be done with it. It would be easier and less agonizing that way. At other times he thought he could actually imagine a future that included the two of them. He was sure, once she really got to know him, she would end whatever was going on between them. He had never maintained a prolonged relationship with anyone, but he knew sex complicated things. It brought forth emotions he was not ready to deal with.

He was not a nice man. He knew that. He was by turns mean, bitter, and disillusioned with his life. He took small pleasures in reading a book, working alone in his lab, and his research, all solitary pursuits. Could he let someone else in? Hermione reacted to him like no one else he had ever known. She slipped under his defense and answered a need he never knew he possessed. It had only been a few days. They both needed more time to see how things progressed between them. Intimacy would come later, regardless of his body's response to the witch. In the mean time he would enjoy teasing and touching her.

His voice was husky as he said, "As much as I enjoy the feel of your body under my hands, I must finish this stage of the Deplucking Draught in the next fifteen minutes or the Draught will be useless." Severus kissed the side of her neck before returning to the bubbling cauldron on the other side of the bench.

Hermione's breath was ragged and her face flushed as she looked up. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Severus laughed at the obvious double meaning of the question before answering. "While I am sure there are an infinite number of possible answers to that question, each more enjoyable than the next, my immediate need is to complete the Draught. How do you feel about straining the solution while I retrieve the potion bottles from the store room?"

"I think I can manage that. Why don't you use those for the Draught?" Hermione pointed to a row of empty bottles on a shelf next to the desk.

"The bottles I use for Poppy have been charmed with a special stasis charm to keep the contents fresh."

They worked together for the next half hour, bottling the Deplucking Draught and cleaning the lab. Severus rechecked the journal entries before putting the black book in the top drawer of his desk. He took his frock coat from the hook by the door and snagged a set of teaching robes hanging next to it. The clock over his desk indicated dinner was about to be served in the Great hall.

Hermione had been preoccupied with packing and shrinking her book bag and failed to notice the Potions Master had returned in full form. Severus was once again wearing his frock coat and a full set of teaching robes when he rejoined Hermione at the workbench.

"I could keep you here as my prisoner and no one would be the wiser." Severus loosely encircled Hermione with his arms. 'Slow, remember?' Mimicked the voice in his head. He could not seem to stop touching her.

"What a shame I said Hi to Remus on the way in. Not to mention I owed Ginny on Friday that I would be here today." Her eyes had drifted closed as she laid her head against his shoulder. Her arms loosely circled his waist. She could have stayed in his arms forever.

"Then I suppose it would be prudent for us to attend dinner in the Great Hall. I still have essays to grade, and you need to return to Cambridge in a short while." He would have been content to never move again. She felt wonderful with her head resting against him. He rested his chin on the top of her head. 'Strawberries,' he thought as he smelled her hair.

"Tell me," he asked with a small chuckle, "do you wash your hair with whatever ingredient or fruit is closest at hand?"

Hermione looked up at him, one brow raised in question. "You don't like the way my hair smells?"

"On the contrary, I do. But the other night I smelled lemon and before that, vanilla. Tonight, strawberries. I just wondered how you decide."

"I just use whatever is in season. Though watermelon does not work well, too many seeds in my hair."

Severus laughed as he led Hermione out the far door and into the outside hallway.

Hermione noticed a subtle change in Severus as they walked through the hallways. His body seemed to shift as he walked. They continued to discuss Hermione's classes as they moved towards the Great Hall but Severus's back was straighter, his step measured, and his ever present scowl, the look she remembered most from her school days, lay firmly across his features. He had slipped back into his evil Potions Master persona as easily as one pulls on a favorite coat. She smiled up at him.

"Is there something you find humorous in my appearance, Miss Granger?" His eyes were warm, as he looked at her, amusement evident in his black gaze.

"I was wondering if I would see the bat of the dungeon tonight, Professor."

Severus leaned into the young woman, his voice low, "Careful, Hermione, or I maybe forced to take you back to my quarters and have my way with you."

Heat flooded Hermione's body at the images his words had conjured up. "Promises, promises," she said with a laugh.

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"Good evening, Severus. Hermione. I am glad you could join us. I trust my Potions Master is treating you well?" Albus welcomed Hermione and Severus as they entered the Great Hall from the back door.

Severus guided her to the empty seat between Lupin and himself. Those sitting at the Head table greeted Hermione warmly. There were a few new faces but most had been her instructors when she was at Hogwarts. She waved to Ginny at the other end of the table, ignoring her look of surprise.

Severus scowled as he watched Lupin simpering around Hermione. Her laugh drifted back to him and seemed to set his nerves on edge. Severus knew they were friends

and that jealousy was a childish emotion. Still, it did sit well with the uneasy thoughts going through his mind. He wondered how mad Albus would be if he hit Lupin with stupefy. Would Albus even notice if the werewolf failed to move? Could he get away with it without Hermione noticing, or getting mad? Could they find another werewolf to test their potion on? He was calculating the angle of refraction when Minerva's voice cut through his thoughts.

"Hermione, it is wonderful to see you again. Albus tells me you are working with Severus on researching a new potion. I hope he is not giving you any trouble." Minerva had been aware of the bet between Albus and the Potions Master but not the resulting attraction between Severus and Hermione. She thought it odd the way Severus kept looking at the young woman. She would have a talk with Albus later, and straighten things out.

"I believe I am capable of controlling myself, Minerva," Severus answered sarcastically as he poured himself a glass of juice.

"Unfortunately," mumbled Hermione into her drink.

Remus's heightened hearing caught Hermione's comment. He sprayed juice as he tried to laugh and swallow at the same time. Hermione laughed at his reaction. Remus ignored Severus glare as he said, "Well, Severus, it is nice to see Hermione's presence has had a positive effect on you."

"Remus." Hermione glared at him.

"What," he said laughing. "I'm joking."

Hermione could feel the tension in Severus as she turned towards him. She lightly rested one hand on his arm, a movement that did not go unnoticed by those around them, and said, "I will be right back, Severus. I need to speak with Ginny a moment."

Severus allowed himself to be placated and nodded his head. He ignored the werewolf in favor of glaring at the students who looked up at the Head table.

Hermione walked around to the far end of the table. Ginny was sitting between Madame Pomfrey and a blond haired young woman Hermione did not know.

Ginny broke out in a huge grin at the sight of her friend's flushed face. "Nice of you to come to Hogwarts to visit me."

"All right, maybe I should have said something but it is just a little hard to put into words."

Ginny indicated the young woman next to her. "Hermione, this is Jessica Brownynn. Jessie is the new library aide. Jessie this is my sometimes friend, Hermione Granger."

"Ginny!"

"Well you could have said something. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you two walk in together."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yeah, I know. Sorry about that. I'll stop by after dinner for a few minutes before I say goodbye to Severus. I still have to get back to Cambridge tonight."

"Severus?"

"Ginny." Hermione scolded her. "I'll talk to you later."

Hermione returned to her seat between Remus and Severus. She spent the remainder of the meal answering questions about Cambridge with Albus and Minerva. And talking with Remus and Severus, though Severus remained fairly quiet.

Hermione finished her dessert and turned to the Potions Master. "Severus, I promised Ginny I would stop by for a few minutes before I left."

Severus sighed. "It is just as well. I have essays to grade."

He looked surprised when she said, "Great. I will meet you in your office in a half hour." She squeezed his arm before saying her goodbyes to those around her and took off to find Ginny's room.

Scowling, Severus held up his hand as he rose from his seat. "I do not want to hear about it. Not one word!"

Remus looked at Severus with amusement. "Who, me?"

He left through the back door in a flurry of black cloth.

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"I wasn't sure what to say." Hermione was sitting on the sofa in Ginny's sitting room. "Really, this just started Thursday night when he kissed me."

"He kissed you, before or after the dance lesson? I take it you like him?" Ginny was happy for Hermione. Though the Potions Master was as far away from her type as you can get, she thought he and Hermione were a lot alike. "So, details. What was it like? What were you doing here today?"

Hermione laughed. "The kiss was, amazing. Can that man kiss. Actually, he is amazing. When it is just the two of us, he is a different person. I would never call him soft or the cuddly type but he is, I don't know, easier. He has a great sense of humor." Her cheeks flushed thinking back to this afternoon. No, soft would hardly be a word used to describe Severus.

"Hermione Jane Granger, you are blushing," shrieked Ginny. "So do you discuss potions theory between kisses?"

"I just, I don't know. Yeah, I do like him. Okay? We sort of became friends over the last few weeks while I was teaching him the Tango. Things just, changed." Hermione shrugged her shoulders, not sure if she could explain it better than that.

"Hey. It's okay. He may not be my type, but I think you two seem to fit together. Actually, I don't think Snape is all that bad. He never noticed me in school but he has been nice to me since I started working in the Hospital wing. If you're happy, I'm happy. What are you going to tell the boys?"

That was the question, wasn't it? What was she going to tell Ron and Harry? They knew about the dancing lessons. They'd had a good laugh over it. "Well, I think I will wait a bit before saying anything. Severus and I just started seeing each other. I will be back on Sunday anyway to work in the lab with him. I have a theory on how to alter the Wolfsbane Potion to keep the mind in a more conscious state during the transformation. Severus believes it could be a major breakthrough in improving the potion. If this works, we maybe apply it to other potions. He and I are working on the theory. Hopefully, we will have some answers and be ready to test it around Christmas."

"Test it? On Remus, did he agree?" Considering how brilliant she thought her friend was, Ginny was pretty sure Snape was one of the few people that could appreciate her for her mind alone.

"You have any other friends who happen to be werewolves too that I don't know about?"

"No. Just wondering. Look don't worry about Harry or my brother, they will come around. Eventually. And if not, you can hex them!" she said with a smile.

"Thanks. I want to say goodbye to Severus before I leave. I will see you next week." She hugged Ginny goodbye, happy to have her friend's support.

"If you want someone to help you when you give Remus the potion let me know. Having a mediwitch around might not be a bad idea if something goes wrong."

"Thanks, Gin. I'll let you know." Hermione took off for the dungeons with a silly grin on her face.

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Severus had been sitting at his desk for the last half hour attempting to grade fourth year potion essays on the use of armadillo bile as it was used in the Wit-Sharpening Potion. Hermione had said she would stop back and say goodbye before she left. He had no reason to doubt her. His mind kept drifting back to this afternoon, when she saw his Dark Mark. Her reaction left no question in his heart, even if his head would not listen. She belonged to him. He would do whatever it took to make this relationship work. He had a strong possessive streak and did not want to share her with anyone.

'That would probably be the fastest way to drive her away,' he mused. Tell her he did not want her to see her friends. He did not mind Ginerva. She had proved to be quietly capable in his dealings with her. It was the idiotic duo he was thinking about. Severus heard a knock at his office door. "Enter," he called out.

"I'm here to serve detention, Sir," Hermione said with a smile.

"I see. Come here, Miss Granger." He indicated his side of the desk. He thought they were in for some very erotic role-playing when they finally did get down to it. Severus looked at the young woman in front of him. He pulled her into his lap. Hermione came willingly, her arms sliding around his neck. Severus nuzzled the crook of her neck as he said, "How is it possible you have changed everything in the span of less than one week?"

"Just lucky I guess." His hot breath and the movement of his hands on her body were sending heat straight to her core. She shivered under his touch. "Will you walk me out? I still have some studying to do tonight."

His eyes dark with lust, Severus captured her lips in a possessive kiss. "Will you go out with me this week?"

Hermione's breathing was ragged as she answered him. "Unfortunately, I have study groups on Monday and Friday this week and a project scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday. Maybe we can have a quick dinner Wednesday or what if I order pizza after our dance lesson Thursday and we can plan something next weekend?"

"Hermione, I understand, school must come first. Pizza on Thursday will be fine. I know you are not one for Quidditch," he said with a smirk, "but Gryffindor is playing Slytherin on Saturday. Why don't you watch the game with me from the faculty box and we can have dinner at the Three Broomsticks after?"

"And toast the winning team?"

Severus raised one brow, "Depends on the winning team, doesn't it?"

Hermione laughed. "Spoken like a true Slytherin. That sounds great. Walk me to the gate." Hermione pulled Severus out of his chair. They left the castle by a side door adjacent to his quarters.

Severus stood outside the gates at the Apparition point with Hermione. "Are you sure you do not want me to see you home?"

"I Apparate directly to the front door of my building. I will be fine."

Severus pulled Hermione into a tight hug. "I will see you on Thursday. Take care of yourself until then." He did not want to let her go. He knew things seemed to be happening quickly, but he could not deny his feelings for her.

Hermione smiled. "I will. You too. Goodbye, Severus." She gave him a quick kiss and stepped back.

Severus nodded at the young witch.

With a crack, she was gone.

Severus stood for several minutes looking at the empty space she had just occupied. "Hermione," he said softly. With a sigh, he turned and started back towards the castle.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

A Note in a Note: You may notice I use the Harry Potter Lexicon as a source of reference for dates and information. In an interview, JK Rowling said she refers to the Lexicon when she needs to look something up. I figure this is as close to cannon as looking something up in the books. And a lot faster too.

Hermione's comment about books is in the same vein as two of my favorite quotes by Edward Gorey, "So many books, so little time." And, "There is no such thing... as too many books."

Severus exact birth date is not listed in the books. The lexicon lists his birth year as 1960. I had Severus take a few on line quizzes that said he was a Scorpio, October 24th to November 22nd. Since Scorpio is more heavily in November, I am giving him a birth date of November 1960.

Here is what the web site: http://wawa.essortment.com/zodiacsignsmea_rmvs.htm for the information.

Scorpio : You are shrouded in mystery, which you love, but you have a lot of trouble expressing your feelings. You are very loyal and possessive, and you become jealous very easily. You have a great deal of courage and are very clear on what you want and how to get it. You are protective and will seek revenge on those who do wrong to you. You are also very clever and expect your lover to be attuned to your needs and wants. Your best romantic matches are Capricorn, Pisces, and Leo. Unfortunately, Hermione is Virgo, September 19th, 1980.

According to the Harry Potter Lexicon, Hermione and company will end their seventh year in June of 1999. In the story Hermione is starting her third and final year at Cambridge, August 2001 ending in June 2002. Hermione's age is 22 on Sept. 19th. (2001-1980, plus one additional year in age for the time turner)

HP Lexicon: Minerva McGonagall born 1925. Albus Dumbledore born 1840.

Harry Potter Bread and Butter Pudding Recipe: <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art7253.asp>

Bread and butter pudding is one of the most traditional English desserts there are. This would be a treat Harry Potter would enjoy often at Hogwart's.

Ingredients: 1/3 cup raisins, 5 slices bread, 1/4 cup butter, 2 eggs, 2/3 cup sugar, 2 cups milk, and 1/2 tsp vanilla

Grease a pudding dish and layer the raisins on the bottom. The bread into 3 slices each. Melt the butter and dip the bread into the butter, then layer it on the bottom of the dish. Mix together eggs, sugar, milk and vanilla and pour on top. Put the dish into a larger pan of water. Bake at 375F about 45 minutes, until knife comes out clean.

When do we find out what the costumes look like? Where is The Thong and why hasn't it surfaced lately? Will Hermione ever model it for Severus? Remember the symposium? Do they? So many questions.

Next up, another dance lesson, pizza, and maybe a question or two answered. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always

thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Lesson Six: Concerto For Two

Chapter 13 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

#### 13. Lesson Six: Concerto For Two

"Albus." Minerva McGonagall stood framed in the doorway of the Headmaster's office, her mouth set in a thin line. "You left the Great Hall before I could speak with you."

Albus looked up from his desk. "Did I, Minerva? Was there something you wished to ask me?" Fawkes hooted quietly from his perch at the side of the desk. Albus reached back into a small orange box behind him to pull out a treat for the aged phoenix. He was within days of a burning day and looked rather shabby.

Minerva strode forward into the room. "Would you like to tell me what is going on?"

"Going on, Minerva?" The Headmaster's eyes twinkled.

"Are you going to repeat everything I say? I saw the way Severus was looking at Miss Granger yesterday. What have you done now?" She had known him too long to fall for that innocent routine.

"I have done nothing. Miss Granger is here to work with Severus on a potion. I imagine we shall be seeing quite a lot of her over the next few months. It will be interesting to see the efforts of her dance instruction with Severus at Halloween as well. Lemon Sherbet?" Albus offered the angry witch a wrapped candy from the crystal bowl on his desk.

"Albus Dumbledore, do you mean to sit there and tell me you had no hand in whatever is going on between those two?" Minerva's eyes narrowed in disbelief.

"Is something going on?" Albus was shifting papers on his desk, doing his best to be noncommittal.

"Albus, you know I care about Severus, but Hermione is just a child. How can you subject her to Severus? He spent seven years sneering at the poor girl. I did not approve of the consequences of that ridiculous bet between the two of you, but you are going too far this time." Minerva's back was straight, unbending, as she sat in one of the plush chairs in front of the desk.

A full silver tea service appeared on the desktop, complete with the Headmaster's favorite chocolate biscuits. Albus proceeded to pour a cup for Minerva. "Calm down, Minerva. I have done nothing to either Severus or Miss Granger. They are, in fact, working on an alteration for the Wolfsbane Potion, something to help the recipient retain greater control of his mind during the last phase of a full moon. May I remind you that Miss Granger is the only witch to ever tie Severus's NEWTs, and that they were the highest in the history of Hogwarts, as were Severus's scores? Hermione is a full-grown witch who knows her own mind. If I were to worry about anyone getting hurt, I would think I should be worried about Severus, not Hermione. That boy has no experience with relationships or woman."

Minerva snorted into her tea. "That boy, as you so generously refer to Severus, is a forty year old man. Hermione may have more experience with relationships than Severus, but he has not exactly locked himself in the dungeons for the last twenty years. You know his past as well as I do. And do I have to remind you, he is Head of Slytherin?"

"Surely you are not prescribing to House prejudices, Minerva? I know very well what Severus was and what he has done. I also know he had proved himself to be a loyal and trusted member of the Order many times over. I doubt his past will bother Miss Granger in the least. The two are in a working relationship. Whatever develops will be their decision, not mine, I can assure you. Need I remind you that he was pivotal in defeating Tom Riddle?"

"No, of course not. But I saw the way he was looking at her." Minerva studied the Headmaster's face.

Albus smiled. "I hope you are correct. Only time, and Severus will tell."

With an uneasy feeling, Minerva left the Headmaster's Office. She felt it might be prudent to visit Severus and discuss Hermione further.

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"So how did your plans go on Sunday? Did you enjoy yourself?" Edmund's sarcasm sounded like a childish whine. It lacked the bite necessary to make it effective.

"Fine, thank you for asking. May we get on with our studying, if that is all right with you?" Hermione's voice was sickeningly sweet. A sure sign she was annoyed.

"Do you want to meet Saturday and we can study for Monday's test?" Kathy looked up at the group. Edmund and Susan nodded their assent. When Hermione neglected to answer, Kathy cleared her throat. "Erm, Hermione, Saturday?"

"Saturday." Hermione parroted, she was listing ingredients she wanted to check before Severus's arrival on Thursday and not following the conversation at the table.

"So, is that a yes?"

"What?"

Kathy rolled her eyes. "Studying for Monday's test this Saturday? Is that a yes? What time is good for you?"

"Saturday? I can't study this Saturday, but you guys go ahead without me." Hermione was shaking her head as she paged through her notes, unaware of the group's collective stare. "Okay, we are through with Bewitched Sleep. Professor Recanto said the next charm we will be working on is Binding Magic. I cannot believe we are going to study Advanced Charms alphabetically. You would think a sixty-five year old wizard would have a little more creativity than that. I would think it would be just these two charms on Monday's exam unless Recanto introduces a new Charm on Friday."

Edmund exchanged looks with Kathy and Susan. "You are busy again this weekend?"

Hermione ran her finger down the page of her weekly calendar, shaking her head. "Yep. It says right here, 'Adv. Charm Study Group, Mon. 4:00'. What I don't see 'Is explain to Edmund what your plans are for the next weekend'. This group meets Mondays at four, not Monday, Saturday, some Sundays and any time someone mentions it."

"You just seem to be busy a lot lately."

Hermione attempted to rein in her temper. Her tone carried all the subtlety of speaking with a three year old. Each word was enunciated slowly and to its fullest, driving home her meaning. "Edmund. You are getting on my nerves. Yes, I have plans. I am working on a new project on the weekends. It does not concern you."

Susan turned to the other two. "Why don't the three of us meet here at ten Saturday morning and we can study then?"

The look in Hermione's eyes left no doubt she would be more than happy to show them her expertise at casting the Binding Charm on any one of them if they wanted to continue questioning her.

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An ominous crack of thunder could be heard outside the castle as an autumn storm battered the stone walls of the ancient building. Severus's tread was heavier than usual, his flowing black robes snapped out behind him as he proceeded to the Great Hall for dinner. If anything, his mood appeared to match the storm raging outside.

Minerva had been giving him odd looks all day. And if possible, Albus's damn eyes seemed to twinkle brighter at lunch. Minerva's shrill voice called to him as he emerged from the dungeon stairway. "Severus, I would like a word with you please."

Severus stopped and waited for the witch to reach him. His tone was snide, "Yes, Minerva?"

Minerva considered Severus to be more than just a colleague, it was with genuine affection she thought of him as a friend. That affection made what she was about to say all the more difficult. "What is going on between you, and Miss Granger?"

With a malevolent smile, he answered the witch. "Worried about one of your little cubs?"

"Severus."

"I have had a trying day, Minerva, and have no desire for idle chit chat. Exactly what is it you are asking me?"

Today's classes had left him in a hostile mood. Two first year Ravenclaws had not been paying attention to his instructions while making the Boil Cure Potion. One of the two cretins added twenty-two nettles instead of two. While Severus thought the resulting cauldron explosion was spectacular and worthy of Longbottom at his best, he prided himself on seeing to the safety of the students in his classroom.

He had been able to cast a shielding charm on the cauldron just as the explosion occurred, limiting the damage to a large hole in the floor that lead through to the unused dungeon below it. After a stern lecture on the limited ability of mediwitches and healers in reattaching limbs and the importance of paying attention, the two were assigned detention with Filch for a week and a loss of house points. He thought the irony of losing of twenty-two house points each was probably lost on the pair.

"I saw the way you were watching Hermione yesterday. I will not have you toying with her."

"Toying with her? Are you asking me what my intentions are?"

Albus's voice interrupted the interchange between the two. "Good evening, Severus. Minerva, there you are. Would you come with me please? I need your help. One of the students, a first year Hufflepuff I believe, was attempting to transfigure the drinking glasses at his table into hedgehogs. There are now six glasses, with legs, running around the table. Perhaps you would be so kind as to correct the mistake?" Dumbledore continued to sweep Minerva along towards the Great Hall as he spoke, not giving the angry witch time to object.

Severus chuckled as he watched Albus maneuver Minerva into the Great Hall. He resisted the urge to wave goodbye as they disappeared through the large wood doors. It was nice to see someone other than himself on the receiving end of the Headmaster's attentions.

The heavy oak door hit the back wall with a loud thud. The sound went unnoticed by the inhabitants of the Head Table, long used to Severus's dramatic entrances at mealtime. Severus ignored Remus's greeting as he took his usual seat between the werewolf and the Headmaster.

"Good evening, Severus. I heard you had quite a firework display in your classroom today. Trying to tunnel your way out of the castle?" Remus asked, taking great pleasure in annoying his friend.

"Actually, I thought you might enjoy new quarters, Lupin. You may view them at your earliest convenience." Severus flicked his wrist and a basket of rolls floated down the table.

Remus raised a brow in question. "Gryffindor is playing Slytherin Saturday, care to make a bet on the outcome of this week's Quidditch match?"

"While I have no desire to engage in any magical bet with you, I already know the outcome of this week's match. My Slytherin's will win." Severus reached for the decanter to refill his juice.

"If you are so sure of them winning, what harm could betting on the match be? You already know who will win. We can ask Sibyll her view of the game's outcome, if you

like, and bet on that," he said with a smirk.

It was bad enough he had to fulfill his obligations to the Headmaster. He would not become indebted to Lupin too. And he would bloody well never underestimate Sibyll again. What if the blasted witch managed to make another correct prediction? "Sorry, Lupin, you will have to peddle your precious Gryffindors elsewhere. Be assured, they will not win." Severus's look was smug. "I take it you have not seen our new seeker this year?"

"Now, Severus, both teams have an equal chance of winning." Albus was smiling benevolently at the two. "And may I say you do not seem particularly worse off from the unexpected benefits of the bet you lost."

"Albus." Severus tone held a note of warning as both Remus and Albus laughed at the implication. He knew Albus was referring to Hermione.

As if reading his mind, Remus asked, "Are you seeing Hermione this weekend?"

"I was not aware I was in need of a social secretary. Are you applying for the position?"

"I might be interested. How much does it pay?"

Severus shook his head. "Do you ever plan on growing up?"

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Severus stood before the mirror examining his image. He had no illusions as to his looks. The lines in his face were softer now, and his face had filled out a bit, but he would never be called a handsome man. Comments had been made about how much healthier he looked over the last year. Sleep, without fear of being called to the side of a Megalomaniac, had a lot to do with this healthier image. Sleep was nature's basic repair potion. Not being called at all hours of the day and night to his possible death made a marked difference in his general health.

After the notoriety of the final battle, a bevy of beautiful witches had run after him, glory seekers and the like. He chuckled to himself as he recalled their comments regarding his looks and attire. Did they really think him so stupid as to believe they thought of him as aristocratic and misunderstood by the populace, that any one of them could "help" him to achieve his rightful place in the community?

One sorely misguided witch had even suggested he run for Minister of Magic. He brushed a piece of imaginary lint from the leg of his immaculate trousers. He was an academic who valued his solitude, who also happened to be an ex-Death Eater, an ex-double spy, and the bat of the dungeon as Hermione had so 'sweetly' called him, Minister of Magic indeed.

Hermione. If ever there was an enigma, it was Hermione. It had only been a few days since he last saw her, but he missed the witch's presence. She seemed to have taken up permanent residence in a corner of his mind. His dreams of the last few nights had centered on a series of very erotic images of Hermione in an odd assortment of barely-there costumes. Nightly the witch performed a private show for him in his mind.

The last four mornings had found Severus hard and lusting for her, only to wake and find his bed empty. The dreams curled around his mind like wisps of smoke that floated back to him at odd times during the day. She was driving him to distraction. Common sense told him to at least wait until the Halloween Feast before making a move on her. If things did not work out, he would not have to be tortured with her presence afterward.

The thought of ravishing her had led him to darker, more disturbing thoughts. Severus had long ago come to terms with his past; it was Hermione's he was having a hard time dealing with. He had idly speculated before becoming involved with her as to the amount of sexual experience she'd had. It would have been foolhardy to think she was still virginal.

When he had first started the damn lessons it had been a way to occupy his mind while waiting for the last lesson to end and his lesson to start. Now that he seemed to have a vested interest in the young witch, it did not amuse him to think there had been other men in Hermione's life before him.

He was well aware he was measuring her against an unfair double standard, but he was helpless to stop the overwhelming feeling of jealousy at these nameless, faceless lovers he imaged she'd had. He shuddered at the thought that one of the faceless few could be Potter or Weasley. He was a possessive man, and he was determined to make Hermione his.

'Ah, but you are forgetting the symposium. You will be alone, just the two of you, in a hotel room. Think of the possibilities.' It was the same voice that kept bringing up that damn black Thong with the rhinestone snake on it. His trousers grew tight with the thought of Hermione and The Thong.

The symposium had crept back into his mind as well. While he was pleased Hermione would be attending with him, her purpose for attending unsettled him even more. She wanted to see the various Potions Masters in their natural habitat, her exact words. The thought that she would spend the next year apprenticed to someone else disturbed him. Someone else would have her undivided attention. Another would enjoy her wit and intelligence.

He would hope she would still want to see him, but their time would be limited due to the nature of her apprenticeship. The thought that he would be willing to take her on as his own apprentice seemed contrary to his solitary nature. His reputation as a Potions Master was unshakable, but how would it look for Hermione if she were to apprentice with him and be in some type of relationship.

He knew he could keep their private relationship separate from their professional association while maintaining an impartial attitude about her work. It would be the resulting gossip and whispered innuendo that might prove too much for her.

"How old are you?" he asked as he scowled at the image in the mirror. He had resisted the urge to contact her Monday night as if he were an adolescent schoolboy with a crush. The problem was, he did feel like a schoolboy, unsure of what lie ahead of him. He found it hard to believe he was nervous at the thought of seeing her tonight.

Short of casting a few dozen glamours on himself, this was as good he was going to look he decided. With a sigh, he gathered his cloak from the wall hook and headed for the Apparation site and Hermione.

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Smoothing the line of her skirt over her hips, Hermione took a last look at herself in the mirror. Her grandmother would have said she was as nervous as a long-tail cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

Hermione rushed to her front door when she heard his knock, only to stop abruptly and take a deep breath. It was with a practiced air she opened the door and invited Severus in. The tension was palpable between the two as Severus hung his cloak on a hook by the door.

"Good evening. Your study group seems to have left early again." The comment was not necessary, but Severus's was feeling anxious, unsure of what her reaction might be if he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her senseless. 'Go for it!' yelled the voice in his head, sounding remarkably like Lupin. Instead, he did nothing.

"Hi. Yes, they did. I thought we could have a dance lesson before I order the pizza. If that is all right with you?" Hermione herself was a nervous wreck. This had seemed so much easier last week, she thought, maybe he changed his mind.

Severus nodded his head, no longer sure what to do. The two moved towards each other at the same time, Severus bumping his chin on the top of Hermione's head. It was enough to break the tension. Hermione laughed uncontrollably at the scowl on Severus's face as she rubbed the top of her head. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"I believe I will survive. This merely confirms my suspicion, you are rather hardheaded at times." Severus reached out and drew Hermione into his arms before placing a

gentle kiss on her lips.

"I'm glad you're here. I missed you," she said. Hermione thought she could get lost in the endless depth of his eyes. His arms tightened around her. She grinned and asked, "Ready for your lesson?"

As the music started, Severus moved into their practiced stance. He had worked on the steps, after a month and a half of lessons he could follow the slower melody fairly well. But this dance was to be different. The Tango is meant to be an expression of want, lust, and desire between a man and a woman. And this time, the two would dance it, as it was meant to be.

Hermione could almost feel his need, as Severus gathered her in his arms. She was pressed against the broad expanse of his chest and could feel his heart pound. His hand splayed possessively against the small of her back. As they started to move with the beat, his movements took on a more sensual quality. The sway of their bodies and the constant contact sent fire straight to his groin.

The feel of his leg sliding forward between her thighs as he executed the Sacada sent electric shocks through Hermione. She felt own desire ratchet up a notch as she shifted, her breasts rubbing across his chest before she turned in his arms. She watched his eyes become fathomless as his arousal increased.

Dancing a circle around him, she allowed her arse to slide across his as she completed the circuit. He crushed her to him as he moved her through a slow sequence of two steps, his hand drifting down to caress the top of her buttocks. They moved into a fast series of Ochos before performing a slower stroll. Their breathing was ragged as the dance came to its conclusion.

Hermione's face was flush, her gaze locked with Severus's. His hand came up to gently cup the side of her face, his thumb tracing the line of her cheekbone. Severus leaned forward and placed a kiss on her lips. "Well, Professor," he asked with amusement, desire flickering in his eyes, "how am I doing?"

Hermione laughed, "Your dancing has definitely improved. I have a new step to show you, it is called la Salida with a cross to the right. After that we can try another run through. You seem to be comfortable with the slower rhythm, so I think we should just continue to work at that."

Severus listened as Hermione showed him the new step at the beginning of the dance. It was a type of side step, similar to what they had been working on, but with this step, they moved side-by-side, hip-to-hip and then moved into a pivot.

They worked through the new step and the dance for the next hour and a half. While Severus's technique had improved, this closeness, the constant shift of their bodies against each other sent his arousal spiraling out of control. Each dance raised the bar on his lust until it was impossible to hold back. Their eyes locked as the music ended. The two seemed frozen in time as they gazed at each other. The moment exploded as Severus watched Hermione lick her lips. His groin tightened at the sight of her tongue caressing her bottom lip as he thought of what her mouth and tongue would feel like on his heated flesh.

Severus pulled Hermione into his lap as he sank back onto the sofa. His mouth took possession of hers as his tongue thrust over and over into her mouth. Her whimpers aroused him to a fever pitch. She moaned louder as he kneaded her breast through the soft material of her dress.

Their labored breathing and the small whimpers and groans from the aroused witch were the only sounds in the heated room. Hermione's hands trembled as she attempted to open his shirt.

"Hermione, tell me what you want," Severus's voice was husky with passion. "Let yourself go."

With a whimper, Hermione pulled herself forward and straddled Severus's lap, unable to express her hunger in words alone. She was wearing a leotard under the dance skirt. He could feel her heat through the thin material, his erection separated from its desire by just a few scraps of fabric. She rocked her hips back and forth creating friction against his already straining member, drawing a quiet growl from the aroused wizard.

His hands roamed her body as the intensity of their kisses increased. Hermione threw her head back and moaned as he nipped the skin at the sensitive juncture of her neck and shoulder before moving to nuzzle her cleavage, planting feather soft kisses in the hollow between her breasts.

She hung on to his shoulders, her nails digging into his skin through the silk of his shirt. His hands on her arse pulled her tight against his aching member. The sensation of his hands and mouth proved too much for her. As the blood pounded in her ears, Hermione gave in to her release.

Severus felt her shudder as she arched her back and rolled her hips forward a few more times. 'Sweet Merlin, did you feel that?' the voice inside his head asked in an awed whisper as he watched Hermione ride out her climax.

"Severus," she groaned as she leaned against him. Her movements had stroked his own aroused member to a fevered pitch. The desire to rip her clothes off; the need to bury his hard shaft in her oh so willing body, the want of feeling her walls clamp tight on his engorged member as she called his name pushed Severus to the edge.

But he had not survived twenty years as a spy by allowing his emotions to dictate the moment. With a massive effort, Severus pulled back on his own needs. There would come a time in the not too distant future, when he would allow himself to unleash his hunger, until then he was content to hold her quietly while she came back to herself. It was enough for now, to know that he had brought her pleasure. Knowing she would give willingly of herself, he would take what he wanted, what she would give him, when the time came.

Hermione blushed at the thought of what had just happened. She was not naive by any means, but she had never been so turned on by a man's touch. "Severus, I..."

"Shhh." Her words were lost as Severus kissed her. "You, were amazing," he said as they came up from air.

She turned to kiss him again when her stomach growled loudly. Hermione turned bright red. She had just come with the barest of touches from this dark wizard and now her body was embarrassing her with its need for food.

"Mmm. Perhaps dinner is in order?" he said with a smirk.

"But you..."

His thumb caressing her bottom lip stayed the words before they left her mouth. "I take great pleasure in seeing your desire fulfilled. There will be time for us, but not tonight. Now, give me a kiss and order this pizza you mentioned. After which we can compare notes on the Wolfsbane Potion." The voice in his head reached a fevered pitch. 'You bloody idiot! What the hell are you doing? You're stopping now? Has your brain gone soft from one too many Crucios?'

Severus wanted her to need him, to want him. She had become a drug he could not do without; he wanted her to feel the same about him. Sometime in the last few weeks, Hermione had become his own private addiction. He wanted to take his time and explore her body, learn what pleased her; he wanted to spend the night making love to her until she was past rational thought; he wanted to wake up next to her in the morning and relax in bed together before taking her again. He wanted more than her desire, he wanted her mind, and her heart and soul as well. He was worried her feelings for him would change when the novelty of their relationship wore off.

"Are you always this demanding?" she asked with a grin. Hermione had moved to sit next to him on the sofa. A large stack of brightly colored papers sailed through the air and landed in her hand.

"Demanding? I allow you to see the softer side of my personality and you call me demanding?"

"Fine," she agreed, "you're not demanding. My mistake." Hermione was leafing through a sheaf of take-out menus looking for the pizza parlor's menu.

Severus looked at the menus as she discarded them. Most of the fast food restaurants in the area were represented in the stack she was looking through. "I would assume

by the sheer number of establishments represented, that you rarely cook for yourself. Is this all you ever eat?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm usually too busy studying to worry about shopping and cooking."

"A proper diet is essential in keeping your body healthy and your mind sharp."

Hermione looked at him. "This, coming from a man who does not cook his own meals. You would starve if the house-elves at Hogwarts ever abandoned the kitchen. I'm Muggle-born. Remember? I know how to cook, I just choose not to."

"Which is probably most fortunate for the rest of us. I do, however, know how to cook. Cooking is similar to potion-making. I have no need to prepare my own meals when I am required by Albus to be present in the Great Hall during mealtime. The pizza?" He indicated the menu she was holding, curious as to how they would deliver the meal since Hermione was not hooked into the Floo Network. He had enjoyed the pizza the last time he had sampled it at Pizza Magic, though the idea of eating without utensils still appalled him.

Hermione laid the red sheet of paper on the table in front of her. She tapped a small square at the bottom of the page with the tip of her wand. The square glowed for a moment and then expanded to encompass the entire menu. "How about a thin crust sausage pizza and an order of garlic bread?" Next to each menu item was a glowing square similar to the one that activated the menu. A large 'X' appeared in each of the squares as she made her selections. Hermione noticed Severus watching her. "Okay, that should only take a few minutes."

Severus was puzzled. "We are not going to the restaurant to retrieve the order?"

"No. The food sort of, Apparates here. The menu has a tracking charm on it. It's like the meals in the Great Hall, just a longer distance from the restaurant to my flat than from the kitchens to the tables."

"How do we settle the bill?" This process was entirely new to Severus. It was evidently a cross between Muggle restaurant service and the wizarding world. One of the boxes she had tapped had said something about payment received.

"Oh. Did you notice the last box I tapped?"

"The gold square?"

"Yeah. Activating that square, as you called it, gave Pizza Magic authorization to charge the bill to my Gringotts account. Kind of like a Muggle charge card."

"Hermione, I do not expect you to pay for our meal. How do we go about charging it to my account instead?" Severus sat up straighter. He would not allow her to pay. "As far as I know, I am still gainfully employed, unless Albus has had the good sense to sack me since I left earlier this evening. I will not allow you to pay."

Hermione sighed, there were times Severus seemed to be steeped in the Victorian era. She had suspected he would not let her pay for the bill. She wondered how he felt about women working. "Fine. Tap your wand on the green square and then the gold one."

Severus did as he was told, surprised she agreed without an argument. Both squares glowed before going dark. Another square appeared with the words, "Transaction reversed. Payment to be made in the name of Severus S. Snape. Gringotts Account #xxxxxxx1669. Transaction completed."

Hermione grinned. "Severus S. Snape? Were your parents into alliteration? What does the 'S' stand for?"

Severus gave her a mock glare. "Slytherin."

"Really?"

"No. It stands for Salazar." A pop startled the two as their order popped into existence.

"Did you bring the journal with you?" Hermione rose to get her book bag and the necessary cutlery while Severus retrieved his notes and the journal from his cloak.

They sat for the next hour and a half, eating pizza and reviewing the various outcomes resulting from using the different metal cauldrons on the ingredients they tested. It was another hour before they came up with a new set of parameters to be tested.

"I can't believe how much trial and error there is in the testing stage." Hermione was exasperated.

"It is the only true method for optimizing the potion. But it is getting late. I need to get back and you need rest." A wave of his wand and the parchment they had been working on rolled itself up before shrinking in size. The journal and other papers followed suit, leaving a small neat parcel for Severus to slip into his pocket. "Albus has arranged a room for you near the Gryffindor common room if you want to stay over Saturday night. We can work on the potion Sunday if you like."

"I thought there were closer rooms near the lab. What happened?"

A scowl crossed Severus's features. "Minerva." His tone conveyed his annoyance of the witch.

Hermione laughed. "Minerva?"

"Yes. The old busybody actually asked me what my intentions were."

Hermione's eyes gleamed. "What are your intentions?"

"What would you like them to be?" he asked her with a raised brow and an evil smirk.

"I suppose we will have to figure that out. What time is the match?"

"I believe the match starts at two and then I have made reservations for dinner in Hogsmeade."

"Why don't I meet you in your office about 1:30? I have a meeting with my Professor in the morning and then I will be free for the rest of the weekend."

Severus was just about to agree when he noticed Hermione looking at him funny. "Yes?"

"Would you care to make a little wager on the outcome of the match?" she asked.

First Lupin and now Hermione. Did everyone think he was a sure thing since losing to Albus? "What did you have in mind?"

"If Gryffindor wins, you agree to call Remus by his given name for a month."

"And when Slytherin wins?"

"You mean if Slytherin wins. It would be your choice."

"Ah. Therein lies the difference between us, I meant when, not if, and I choose your consequence?" Severus smiled. Suddenly a chorus of voice sounded in his head. 'The Thong. Have her model The Thong. No, no. Have her belly dance for you. No. Make it something kinky.'

Hermione watch Severus as his pupils dilated; a thrill ran through her at her own guess of what he would request.

But a funny thing happened when Severus started to think about what he really wanted from her. He could not for the life of him come up with one consequence. He wanted her heart, but he knew that would take time. For the first time in his life he was happy with his life as it was.

Teaching the lower level classes was a chore, but he found the advanced level classes to be rewarding. Hogwarts was a comfortable home for him and he considered most of the staff to be friends of a sort. He actually liked annoying Lupin and trading barbs with the man. It no longer mattered to him if he taught Defense Against the Dark Arts. He now had time to pursue his own research. And of late, he found the thought of being with Hermione more than he could ever have hoped for. For the first time in his life, he did not want for anything.

Severus enfolded her in his arms. His voice was rich, silky, as he said, "So many things to chose from. I do not know where to start. I suppose we can start simple and move on to more involved consequences in the future. In the unlikely event Gryffindor wins, I will call Lupin by his given name for a month. When Slytherin wins, you will be required to give me a back rub. As I recall, you did not properly finish the last one."

"A back rub?"

Severus nodded and held out his hand. "Deal?"

Hermione shook his hand and said, "Deal. You know, I would give you a back rub whether Slytherin wins or loses."

"I know. No matter what, win or lose, I win." He tightened his embrace as he kissed her goodbye. "I will see you Saturday."

"Saturday. Good night, Severus."

And with a swirl of his cloak, he was gone.

Hermione walked back to the sofa and sat down. 'Dear God, what had come over her tonight?' She had never really thought of herself as a sexual being, not after listening to the girls in her dorm trading experiences about the boys they had been with. But there was something about Severus she found unbelievably erotic. He seduced her mind, as well as her body. She had never before experienced anything close to what she had felt with him tonight. The thought of making love to him set her nerves tingling. She thought a hot bath and her imagination would be the only relief she would get tonight. It would be a long time before she was able to fall asleep, only to dream of him.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Concerto - A composition written for a solo instrument. The soloist plays the melody while the orchestra plays the accompaniment.

From the HP Lexicon: Bewitched Sleep - no incantation given. Puts the target person into a deep sleep; subjects are in a state almost like suspended animation and do not breathe for the duration of the spell. Dumbledore placed Cho, Ron, Hermione, and Gabrielle Delacour into this kind of sleep while they were "held hostage" by the Merpeople in the lake (GF27).

From the HP Lexicon: Binding/Fastening Magic - no incantation given. Spells which fasten chains or ropes to restrain someone or something. The chair in the Court of Magical Law magically restrained the accused using ropes (GF30, OP8). Snape fired "thin, snakelike cords" from his wand to bind Remus Lupin in the Shrieking Shack (PA19).

Recanto Latin meaning to recall, recant; to charm away.

Megalomaniac- A psychopathological condition characterized by delusional fantasies of wealth, power, or omnipotence.

My sincere thanks to all that sent their prayers and thoughts my way. I can't tell you how much it meant to me. I enjoy being on my couch at home as opposed to lying in a hospital bed. I still have two weeks left of treatment but I still hope to have the next chapter up by the end of next week. Having said all that.....

Next up, A Quidditch match, Gryffindor vs Slytherin, Who will win? Dinner Saturday night and a sleepover at Hogwarts. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Septet at Hogwarts or Everyone Has An Opinion

*Chapter 14 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

**Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected**

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.



Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 14. Septet at Hogwarts or Everyone Has An Opinion

The morning sunlight through the enchanted window cast a warm glow on the figure sleeping in the bed. Severus stretched as his internal clock woke him. He had a rare few minutes to lie in before he was forced to rise, shower, dress, and face the day. He watched a few random dust motes dance in the sunbeam as it hit his coverlet.

The window was an enchantment of the largest window in the Astronomy Tower. His quarters were located under the lake, so it was an enchanted window or a window that looked out on the merpeople and the giant squid, making him feel as if he lived in an aquarium. He would take the sunlight, thank you.

His mind turned to Hermione, as it was wont to do at any given moment. She would be coming to Hogwarts tomorrow for the game and a quiet dinner after. He'd made reservations at a new restaurant that had opened in Hogsmeade over the summer. Witchcraft was one of the more upscale establishments in the little town, especially when compared to the Hog's Head. But then, he thought with a snort, even a broom closet could win out over that place and Witchcraft, as far as he knew, did not allow goats to run through the restaurant. The establishment was understated but elegant, and would be the perfect backdrop for their dinner date.

Severus's stomach rolled over as he thought of their date. Minerva had been on his back all week about his 'interest' in Hermione. He was, apparently, the main topic of conversation among the gaggle of witches inhabiting the castle. Their conversation came to a dead halt every time he entered the staff room.

Hooch and Sprout had the good grace to blush and look away when he glared at them. But Poppy looked like the cat that swallowed the canary and Minerva's mouth seemed to be set in a perpetual thin line, lips tightly compressed in disapproval. Everyone seemed to have an interest in his life lately. Even Albus and Remus would smile and attempt to pat him on the back in a show of camaraderie. It was enough to tempt him back to his Death Eater days. Well, not really, but it was getting on his nerves. It took all of his considerable control not to hex the old hags every time he heard a snicker coming from one of them.

What surprised him the most, was Ginevra Weasley. Minerva had taken on the role of substitute mother after Hermione's parents were killed. It had been Wednesday night, on one of his nightly patrols of Hogwarts, he had overheard Minerva questioning Ginny.

He stepped quietly into a darkened alcove when he heard his name and listened, unseen, to Minerva's cross-examination of the young woman. Minerva repeatedly asked Ginny questions about Hermione and her interest, if any, in him. It was with amazement he heard Ginny chastise the Deputy Headmistress.

Ginny had taken Minerva to task for interfering in her friend's life and insinuating that something was wrong. According to Hermione, Ginny told Minerva, she was happy. And no, Professor Snape did not appear to have any ulterior motives. They had started a working relationship and it had turned into something more. What more, she was not sure. Hermione found the Professor to be interesting and enjoyed his company. And Ginny, for one, was happy her friend was happy. Severus's fragile ego felt a lift at the young witch's words.

Her next comment threw him for an even larger loop. Ginny proceeded to 'defend' him to Minerva. Listing his years of spying, his work for the Order, the final battle, even his Order of Merlin, first class. He could hear the annoyance in Minerva's voice as she told Ginny that she did indeed respect Severus and considered him her friend. It was Ginny's parting words that shocked him the most.

"If he is truly your friend," Ginny said, "then I would think you would be happy for both of them. I hope their relationship does lead to something. No one should be alone. Professor Snape has spent his life trying to protect all of us without asking for anything in return. It's about time he had a little happiness. Now, if you will excuse me, it is time for my shift in the hospital wing." And with that, she turned on her heel and left, leaving Minerva shocked and speechless in her wake.

Severus turned and made his way back to his quarters. He poured himself a healthy dose of whiskey and tried to process what he had just heard. Foremost, was that Hermione was happy and interested in him. He had thought she might consider him a novelty and the newness would wear off after a while, now he was not so sure. Maybe something, whatever something was, would come of their new relationship. He sat back in his chair and watched the fire, lost in thought. His smirk was evil as he thought of a slip of a girl bringing Minerva to task.

He had always thought Ginny the most level head of that whole family. He had felt compassion for the young woman after her torment at the hands of the Dark Lord her first year at Hogwarts. Someone of less metal would be in a padded room in St. Mungo's by now. He knew she'd had nightmares for several months after. He himself had brewed the Dreamless Potion she took that summer, tapering the strength of the potion, at Molly's request, over the six months following the incident. All in all, she seemed to have moved passed the ordeal.

Ginevra had been seeing Potter for about six months now. The bloody boy who lived just to continue annoying him was around almost as much as when he was a student. He did not exactly hate Potter. The boy had been respectful, but distant, when they had brainstormed the final battle plans. Potter didn't seem to have to do anything specific to annoy him, breathing alone was enough. Severus sighed. He would have to appear more tolerant of Potter if he was to see Hermione on any regular basis. They were still fast friends, along with the annoying Mister Weasley.

'Do you think Potter has seen, The Thong?' asked the annoying voice in his head. He told the voice to bugged off but not before he wondered why he had such an obsession with it. 'Because it's black instead of Gryffindor red, you idiot. Wonder who she was thinking of when she bought it?' Who, indeed?

It was with considerable effort he dragged himself out of bed and headed for the shower. He groaned as he thought of double Potions with Gryffindor and Slytherin after breakfast. Some days were just trouble waiting to happen.

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"Repeat after me, Ree-mus. The emphasis is on the first syllable." Hermione smiled sweetly, paying no attention to the intense scowl from the man next to her.

"Ignoring the fact that the match has yet to start, I do not believe there is anything wrong with my diction. Do not count your Billywigs before they sting, Miss Granger." His tone was smooth and held an underlying note of amusement.

"I just thought you would like to get some practice before you lose."

Severus eyed the young witch for a moment before leaning closer and saying, "Would not the same hold true for you, Hermione?"

Hermione blushed. His tone implied something more than a casual comment. And after Thursday night, his close proximity and silky tone made her stomach flip.

Ginny noticed Hermione sitting with Severus as she and Harry started down the stairs of the faculty stands. She had yet to tell Harry of their friend's association with the Potions Master. The bench in front of Hermione was half empty. It was to these seats Ginny directed Harry.

Harry's focus had been on Ginny when they entered the stands. It was not until they were seated that he heard Hermione's voice behind him. "Hermione! I didn't know you were going to be at Hogwarts today. Why didn't you owl me?" Harry had the shock of his life when he turned to greet his friend. Hermione and Severus were sitting fairly close together. The two, lost in conversation, ignored the world around them.

"Hi, Harry. Hey, Ginny. I didn't see you come in." Hermione smiled warmly at her friends.

"What are you doing here?" Harry's confusion was turning to anger as he regarded the Potions Master.

Severus glared at him before remembering his promise to be more tolerant of Potter when Hermione was around. His scowl disappeared, only to be replaced with a look of indifference.

Ginny's smile was genuine as she greeted Hermione and the Potions Master. A slight nod of Hermione's head indicated she was indeed with Severus.

"Watching the match. I'm staying over tonight. I'll catch up with you later." Hermione had turned back to Severus and picked up the threads of their previous conversation. Harry felt her dismissal as keenly as if she had slapped him.

"See you later," Ginny agreed, before quietly telling Harry to turn around and let it be. They would talk later. But in Harry's opinion, Ginny seemed to be enjoying his discomfort a bit too much.

Remus arrived just as the match started. The stands were almost fully occupied. He took the last seat next to Hermione. After greeting those around him, he settled in to watch the match, not knowing he was the possible consequence of a bet.

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It was difficult to say which occupant of the faculty booth was the most shocked and for what reason. The match was tied 50 to 50. Everyone was on the edge of their seats, as the seekers for both teams streaked through the sky after the elusive snitch. The Gryffindor seeker proved to be just a little faster, giving Gryffindor the win.

As a cheer went up from the Gryffindor box and several of the staff, Hermione threw her arms around Severus and hugged him. Severus's arms went around the witch almost as a reflex, returning the hug. He had actually had a hard time concentrating on the game with Hermione next to him. Sometime during the game, she had moved to sit against him. His body twitched in response to the feel of her leg touching him from the hip to the knee.

Severus hastily pulled back as he realized the very public location they were currently occupying. His actions only seemed to confirm Minerva's suspicions that something was amiss. Albus and Minerva had been sitting two rows back, giving Minerva the perfect opportunity to watch the couple throughout the match. Albus's cheery manner seemed to further her irritation as he refused to show any concern for the situation. Hooch and Sprout were sitting on the far side of the stands. The three witches exchanged knowing glances before turning their attention to the match.

Hermione turned to her left and briefly hugged Remus before turning back to Severus with a wicked grin. "Aren't you going to congratulate Remus on Gryffindor's win, Severus?"

To say he was annoyed would have been a gross understatement. He could feel the magical bet trying to loosen his tongue so he could congratulate the damn werewolf. "It is not as if he is directly responsible for Gryffindor's win, Hermione. He did not catch the blasted snitch himself."

Hermione smiled. "Nonetheless."

With an overly dramatic sigh, Severus said, "Very well. Congratulations on your house win," the name was unwillingly forced from his lips, "Remus." He turned his glare on Hermione, but found he had long since lost the power to intimidate the young woman.

Remus raised a brow in question at the obvious use of his given name. "Thank you, Severus. It was a close match." Emotions had been running high between the two all throughout the match. He was acutely aware of the attraction the two seemed to have for one another.

Harry turned around in his seat when he heard Severus address Remus by name. "Hermione, can I speak to you for a minute?" Dinner would be starting in the Great Hall soon, but he needed to talk to Hermione first.

"Actually, Harry," Hermione glanced briefly at Severus before continuing, "I can't talk now. I need to change for dinner. Severus made dinner reservations for us at that new restaurant in Hogsmeade. I have just enough time to change before we leave."

If he lived to be two hundred, Severus didn't think he could be more pleased as he watched Harry's mouth open and close several times in surprise, without uttering a sound. Earlier, he had thought to hex Potter as the twit kept glancing back at him in thinly veiled displeasure. He did not, however, wish to face Hermione or Ginevra's wrath. Bringing down the Dark Lord was a walk in the park compared to what two angry witches could do to him.

"I have heard Witchcraft has very good food. Have a great time." Ginny turned to Harry with a smirk on her face. "Close your mouth, Harry, you look like a fish."

Severus offered Hermione his arm. "May I escort you back to the castle? Ginevra, Remus, Potter." The last name was said with utter disdain as he escorted Hermione to the stairs. All in all, he thought, it was shaping up to be a good day.

The quiet in the stands was broken by Hermione's laugh. She called her goodbyes to Harry and the others over her shoulder as she left with Severus. Remus broke out into a quiet chuckle as he observed the look on Harry's face.

"They're going out to dinner? And why were they so cozy? What else is going on? What aren't you telling me, Gin?" Harry was beside himself.

"What is there to tell you? Hermione is seeing the Professor. She's your friend, Harry, and if you know what is good for you, you will be happy for her." Ginny fixed him with a quiet stare, daring him to argue with her. "I'm starving. Let's head for the Great Hall. Why is it you've never taken me to Witchcraft? I think you and I need to talk, Harry." Ginny grabbed Harry's arm and dragged him to the stairs.

Harry's voice could be heard as they climbed the stairs, "What is going on, Gin?"

"How would I know? Though I do seem to remember Hermione saying he kissed well."

Harry paled at the thought of his friend with Snape. "You have got to be kidding? Hermione snogging...SNAPE?" Harry stopped abruptly and clutched his stomach, his voice turning into a whine, "I think I'm going to be sick. Snape?"

"Well, then it's a good thing you're dating a mediwitch, isn't it? Some Aum-nauseo potion will fix you right up."

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"It's almost ten. They should have been back by now."

"She's a big girl. I wouldn't worry. You can talk to her in the morning, Harry." Ginny had lost track of how many times in the last few hours Harry had commented on Hermione.

"She hasn't returned to her room yet. The charm I placed on the door is still intact. Where is she?" Harry had placed a notify charm on Hermione's door after dinner. A ringing bell would sound to the spell caster when the door was opened, thus notifying the spell caster when someone was coming or going. It was especially popular with parents of teenagers, discouraging them from sneaking out when placed over the house, encompassing both the doors and windows.

"Maybe she isn't planning on returning to her room tonight." Ginny suggested.

Harry looked at Ginny in disbelief. He visibly shuddered as he said in a quiet voice, "You mean, Hermione and Snape? They... No. I can't believe... That's not funny, Gin."

"I'm not joking, Harry. I suggest you wrap your mind around the idea that the two are together. Really, I think they go well together."

"You know what he's like. He was horrible to us all through school! I can't believe she has any interest in the greasy git." Harry knew he went too far by the look on Ginny's face.

Ginny's eyes took on a steely quality, her tone stern. "You listen to me, Harry Potter. Hermione is our friend. And how dare you speak of the Professor like that? Do I have to remind you of the final battle? If you don't care if Hermione ever speaks to you again, then go right ahead and charge forward without thinking about her feelings. But if you ever hope to have her talk to you again, I suggest you back off. For your information, Hermione is going to ask the Professor to the party at the Burrow next week."

Harry sat in shocked silence. Hermione was asking Snape to the Burrow? Hermione's birthday was Friday and Arthur's was Saturday. Every year, Molly threw a combined birthday party for their family and friends. The party had become even more important to Hermione after her parents' deaths. And now, she was including Snape. "You think he means that much to her?"

Ginny shrugged her shoulders. "She told me she likes him. Think about it, Harry. They're a lot alike. Now, I haven't seen you in a week, do you really want to sit here and talk all night?"

Harry made a promise to himself to talk to Hermione in the morning. Just a friendly talk to let her know he was there for her if she needed him. He gave up any attempt at further rational thought as Ginny proceeded to show him just how much she had missed him.

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Dinner had gone well. Witchcraft was as elegant as it was understated. Ginny had been right; the food was excellent. Severus had chosen a dry red wine that seemed to complement the meal as well as relax the two of them. They exchanged stories of their day; hers at the university, his teaching yet another class of dunderheads. As the dinner progressed, their talk turned to their interests in music and books. The outside world slipped away, as they discussed and debated various authors, playwrights, and performers.

"May I suggest the house specialty for dessert?" The waiter had appeared silently at Severus's elbow.

"Hermione?"

"Everything was delicious, but I don't think I could eat another bite." Hermione was inordinately pleased the evening had gone so well. Her initial nervousness had faded sometime during the main course leaving her relaxed enough to enjoy the company of the man she was with.

"What is the house specialty?"

"A special confectionery created by the chef exclusively for Witchcraft. It is titled, Death by Chocolate." The waiter's tone left no room for decision. It was a once in a lifetime treat, not to be missed.

Severus remembered from her school days, chocolate was one of Hermione's favorites. "I believe the lady and I will share a dessert."

"Very good, sir." With a bow he was gone.

"Severus."

"I seem to recall you liking chocolate."

Hermione smiled. "I love chocolate, but I could do without the calories. I don't get as much exercise during the school year as when I teach dance during the summers."

Severus's voice dropped, sending a shiver down her spine. "Don't be ridiculous. The current fad of stick-thin witches is absurd. I prefer a woman with a shapely figure rather than the way some of these young girls walk around today."

Hermione blushed at the implied compliment. "It's hard to think of you as a man who actually looks at women."

Severus laughed quietly. "At the end of the day, that is all I am, Hermione. A man. I have warned you before about being seen with me. I fear now it is too late." He gestured to the other patrons in the restaurant. Several people had turned to look at them as they walked in. It was not every day one got to see two heroes from the final battle up close. It was a rare event to see the feared Potions Master of Hogwarts in the company of...well, anyone really. It was likely there would be a mention of their dinner in the Daily Prophet tomorrow. "I imagine we will be the general topic of discussion tomorrow morning. I also have no doubt that Mister Potter is laying in wait for you right now, imaging the worst."

Hermione's laugh was warm. "He knows better than that. Besides, Ginny would hex him to next week and back if he tried anything. She approves of you, you know."

Severus's black gaze was piercing. "And what do you think?"

Hermione never got the chance to answer. The waiter appeared just as suddenly as before. With a flourish, he placed the dessert on the table. The sinfully rich dessert seemed to float above the translucent dish it was resting on. Death by Chocolate was a piece of rich, flourless, chocolate fudge cake covered in a dark chocolate ganache. The top of the cake was feathered with white chocolate to resemble a spider's web. Shards of rich dark chocolate, around the edges, finished the cake.

Severus chuckled darkly as he watched Hermione's eyes widen. "Go ahead. Take the first bite." A moment later it was Severus who was breathless as he watched Hermione eat the slice of cake. "Did you see that?" asked the voice in his head in an awed whisper. 'Circe, it looks like she's making love to the fork.' Severus shifted in his seat as he watched the wanton performance in front of him.

Hermione had taken a small bite of cake. The fork slipped slowly from her lips as her eyes fluttered close. Her tongue darted out to catch a single crumb, slowly caressing her lower lip in the process. A small moan came from the witch as she savored the flavor.

Severus felt his resolve slip as his body responded to the most erotic image he had ever seen. His voice was husky as he asked, "May I assume you are enjoying the dessert?"

Hermione's eyes opened slowly. She had noticed a subtle change in his voice. While she had always thought his rich baritone to be sexy, this husky drawl set her nerves to tingling. "Let's go back to the castle, Severus."

The bill was settled and the two left the restaurant. Severus pulled Hermione into an alcove as he bent to kiss her. The taste of Hermione and chocolate assaulted his senses. His arousal heightened by the feel of the woman in his arms. The kiss was raw and passionate. Hermione could feel his erection pressing against her, as her body molded to his.

Severus drew his cloak around them, his voice a growl, "Hold on to me. I'm going to Apparate us to the front gate." It took all of his considerable will to concentrate on the process of Apparating and not think of the sexy woman clinging to his side.

Hold on? She has no intentions of ever letting this amazing man go. She knew him to be hard and difficult at times. He definitely had a stubborn streak running through him a mile wide. But, she had never felt the connection with anyone that she felt with Severus. His intelligence intrigued and challenged her. His wit, biting and dry, was amusing. The last two years, since the final battle, had softened his anger. She was not some starry-eyed teenager with illusions of castles in the sky and happily ever

after. She was just as hardheaded and stubborn as he was. But the fire he started in her blood was like nothing she had ever felt before.

As a teen, she worried that she was not like other girls. She was the perpetual bookworm. Her interest in boys seemed to be on a casual level. Viktor had escorted her to the Yule Ball and then turned into a long-distance pen pal. Ron had a crush on her their sixth year at Hogwarts, but they quickly decided they were better as friends than as boyfriend and girlfriend.

She had lost her virginity to a neighbor the summer between her sixth and seventh year. Sex was something she had been curious about, especially after hearing the other girls talk about their experiences. The encounter left her wanting and unsettled. She had dated a bit at University. A few more sexual episodes had left her wondering about the validity of the stories she had heard.

It was not until Severus had kissed her that first night that she understood what all the talk was about. She had laughed at the phrase, 'wet with desire.' But, for the first time ever, it applied to her. Her desire for this dark wizard scared her as much as it enthralled her.

With a crack, they disappeared from the doorway and reappeared at the front gates of Hogwarts. Severus's arms tightened around her as he kissed her with unbridled passion, his tongue thrusting heavily into her mouth. His hands on her buttocks pulled her tightly against his body. She could feel his erection, hard and heavy through the layers of clothing, her leg twined around his as she moved against him.

She moaned his name into his mouth as his hand caressed her arse, his member growing harder. He was willing to take her against the gate in a minute if they didn't stop. He had an idea she probably wouldn't object if he did.

"Hermione, my quarters," he said, as they separated. They quickly made their way to a side entrance of the castle that lead to Severus's quarters. Once inside, he turned to lock and ward the door. He added a silencing charm for good measure. All thought of restraint went out the window as he felt Hermione's arms around his waist.

"Do you know what you do to me? How lovely you are?" He was kissing his way down the side of her neck, his hands tangled in her hair. Her breathing was ragged as he gently bit the side of her neck before soothing the heated skin with his tongue.

"Severus." Hermione seemed to have lost the power of speech as his hand moved to caress her breast, his thumb flicking her nipple through the soft velvet of her gown. She was running her hand along his back and down the side of his body. One hand moved to the front, to undo the clasp of his cloak. It fell to the floor with a soft thud as she started on the buttons of his coat.

Severus buried his nose in her hair, inhaling the soft floral scent of her shampoo. Roses, he thought. He swallowed harshly, "Hermione, are you...? Have you ever...?"

"Hmmm?" Her eyes appeared almost as black as his. Her pupils were dilated, her eyes glazed with lust.

Severus's head snapped up as he heard Albus calling him through the Floo Network. "Go away, Albus, before I am forced to cast *an* *inforgivable* on you." He would cheerfully hex the Headmaster if it meant he could be alone with Hermione.

"Severus, Hermione, I am truly sorry to interrupt you. If it were not of the utmost importance, I would not have bothered you."

"I am warning you, Albus, go away," he snarled.

Albus's voice was quiet. "Severus, Mister Ackart was brought to the hospital wing a short time ago. He attempted to take his own life. He added belladonna to a Draught of the Living Death before he drank it. Poppy managed to save him but he will not speak to anyone. You are Head of his house." The words hung in the silence of the room.

Severus drew a shaky breath. He had watched the boy on and off throughout the last year. The lad was quiet and withdrawn, not making friends easily. He identified with the child more than he cared to think about. He looked at Hermione. "Hermione, I have to..."

Her smile filled his heart. "Go, Severus. He needs you. I will be here when you return."

"I am sorry. I will hurry back as quickly as I can." He cast a cleaning charm on his clothes and was in the process of closing the endless rows of buttons Hermione had just managed to open.

Her smile was warm. "It will give me time to look at your library. Go. Take all the time you need."

He nodded and kissed her quickly, marveling over her compassion. "I'm coming, Albus," he called out. Severus grabbed a pinch of Floo Powder and stepped into the fireplace. In a clear voice he called out, "The Hospital," and disappeared.

Hermione sighed as she watched him go. After selecting a book on exotic ingredients, she curled up in one of the overstuffed chairs by the fire to wait for him. She shucked her shoes off and tucked her feet under, burrowing deep into the cushions.

It was here Severus found her almost three hours later. In addition to trying to gently gather information from Ackart, he was forced to calm his roommate, too. Kinnard had stumbled on his friend minutes after he had taken the draught. He acted quickly, sounding an alarm and sending others for help while he stayed with Ackart. Severus had a difficult time trying to convince the young man he was not responsible for his friend's actions. He had finally calmed the boy down and reassured Ackart that things would be better. He was still not sure where the boy had obtained the draught. Severus stayed until Poppy gave both students a strong dreamless potion. Albus had said he would contact both sets of parents and apprise them of the situation. They would talk further in the morning, knowing the lad was safe in Poppy's care for the night.

Severus was beyond weary when he finally returned to his quarters. He was surprised and delighted to find Hermione asleep in the chair, having assumed she had returned to her room some time ago as the hour grew late. He stood watching her for a moment as she slept. Hermione shifted, mumbling in her sleep. His voice was quiet, "Shhh. Sleep." With a tired sigh, he gently covered her with a blanket and kissed the top of her head before he dropped down on the sofa. He summoned a soft throw from the other room. It was with thoughts of Hermione he drifted off to sleep.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Septet- A set of seven musicians who perform a composition written for seven parts.

Hogwarts septet is as follows- Severus, Hermione, Ginny, Harry, Albus, Minerva, and Remus.

Aumnauseo from Latin meaning, A-um-not, and nauseo - to cause disgust or nauseate.

Belladonna - essence of this poisonous plant is part of a student's standard potion-making kit.

Draught of the Living Death - Causes someone to fall into a deep sleep.

Quidditch 10 points a goal, 150 points for catching the snitch

From the HP Lexicon: Billywig - A magical insect, native to Australia. It is about a half-inch long and vivid blue in color. A Billywig's sting causes giddiness and levitation. For this reason, the Billywig's sting is highly sought after by Australian wizards. Dried Billywig stingers are useful as a potion ingredient.

Death by Chocolate. There are various recipes with this name. The cake described is from here: Jenny's Gourmet bakery at www.jennysbakery.com.au/cakes2.htm.

Ganache- A rich icing made of chocolate and cream heated and stirred together, used also as a filling, as for cakes or pastry.

Still to come, What happens when Harry finds Hermione? Sunday at Hogwarts, The Burrows, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

I would like to thank Nakhash for graciously offering to be my beta. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Regards, Pearle

Which Witch is Which?

Chapter 15 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 15. Which Witch is Which?

He woke to the feeling of a soft warm body curled around him. The floral scent of her shampoo drifted to his nostrils as the young woman next to him shifted in her sleep. The sheet covering them moved with the witch, exposing a quickly hardening nipple in the cool morning air. With a heavy sigh, he tried to carefully extract his limbs and not disturb the sleeping figure.

"Mmm. Morning. Where are you going?" Her voice was still groggy with sleep.

"Go back to sleep. I'll be back in a minute."

"Where are you going, Harry?" Ginny sat up, allowing the sheet to fall to her waist.

The sight of her naked body was having the desired effect on Harry, weakening his resolve. He had planned on finding Hermione, and asking her what was going on. "She never returned to her room last night, Gin. The charm is still intact. It's six o'clock in the morning. Where could she be?"

Intuitively, Ginny knew who the 'she' was that Harry was referring to - Hermione. "Do you really want to know? Come back to bed, Harry. "

"You don't honestly think she's with him, do you Gin?" Harry shuddered as he thought of the two together. It was no secret he and the Professor did not get along. The man had tormented him throughout his time at Hogwarts. Harry had learned to control his temper and work with the Potions Master. Neither one was happy about working with the other one, but without their combined efforts, Voldemort would have never been defeated. They had learned to tolerate each other out of necessity. Now it looked as if he would be forced to continue enduring the man's presence out of loyalty to his friend. "What could she possibly see in him? You know, it would have been a whole lot easier if she and Ron had just clicked our last year."

Ginny gave a very unladylike snort. "Harry, Hermione and Ron went out on what, three dates? I'm surprised it lasted that long without them killing each other. I love Ron, but he can be such a prat sometimes. My brother is much happier playing the field. I swear he has a different witch with him every time I see him."

Harry smiled as he thought of his other best friend. Ron was working as a trainer with the Chudley Cannons. They saw each other every few weeks when Ron came into London with the team. There seemed to be a never-ending stream of women running after him. And Ron, it seemed, had no desire to run that fast. Each conquest only lasted about a month. Harry couldn't keep track of their names. Some didn't last long enough for Ron to bring them around. "I saw him last week. He stopped by the Ministry on his way to lunch with, I don't know, I think her name was Babbette." Harry shook his head and laughed.

"What ever happened to Tiffany? I thought my brother liked her. She made it out to the Burrow twice that I know of. I wonder if he'll bring Babbette Saturday? Knowing Ron, it will probably be someone new by that time. Hermione tied the Professor's NEWT's, Harry. They scored the highest in the history of Hogwarts. According to Remus, they sit at the Head table debating properties of this potion and specifics of that one. He is probably one of the few people she can talk to about her studies. Besides," she said with a grin, "Hermione told me he snogged well."

Harry shook his head. Hermione and Snape snogging? God, he was going to be sick. What else were they doing? Have they...no. He didn't want to know. The image of them kissing was bad enough. Remus had told him of Hermione's idea to alter the Wolfsbane Potion. He had some vague idea she was consulting Snape on it. It made

perfect sense for her to talk to Snape about her idea for the Wolfsbane. After all, it was Snape who made the potion for Remus. Harry just didn't realize what else had transpired between them. "I really don't want to know what they're doing, Gin. Snape?" Harry shook his head again. "Do you think they will be able to help Remus?"

"If anyone can come up with something to help him, it would be those two. They really are well-suited for each other. Hermione is happy, Harry. No matter what you think of Professor Snape, she is your friend. Just be happy for her." Ginny studied Harry for a minute. His boyish smile never failed to warm her heart. Effortlessly, she slid from the covers. Standing next to the bed, she stretched her arms over her head, well aware of the image she was projecting. "I don't know about you, but I need a shower before breakfast and my shift."

Harry grinned as he watched her sashay nude into the bathroom. Waiting another half hour or so to find Hermione couldn't hurt, he reasoned. It was still early. It was like Gin said, she was a big girl and she was most likely fine. He decided a shower, among other things, seemed like a good idea.

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Severus shifted on the sofa, one long leg resting half off the cushion. The sound of knocking coming from his door was amplified in the quiet of the morning. Hermione mumbled something unintelligible but did not wake. He decided he would hex whoever was at the door first, and ask questions later. His sleep had not been restful and his first thoughts, on waking this morning, had been of Ackart. He needed to get back to the hospital wing and speak with Poppy. The last thing Severus needed to see when he opened his door was a very agitated Harry Potter.

"Where is Hermione? What did you do to her? She never came back last night." Harry strode forward into the entranceway of the room.

"Oh, do come in, Potter. How nice of you to visit." Severus's scowl deepened. "To what do I owe this great honor?"

His sarcasm had no effect on the young man. "Where is Hermione?"

Severus crossed his arms over his chest. "What makes you think she is here?"

"Come off it, Snape. She had dinner with you last night and never came back to her room. What did you do to her? I know you must have slipped her some type of potion. Why else would she want to see you?"

His tone was snide. "I do not believe she is dressed yet. We had a rather... late night. Would you like to come in and wait while I fetch her?"

Harry was about to lay into the man on what he thought of the situation, when a voice cut him off.

"That is enough out of both of you. No one slipped me anything, Harry. I'm here because I want to be. I happen to enjoy Severus's company. He didn't give me a potion or cast any spell on me."

Harry looked properly chastised. Severus smiled to himself. 'Today might not turn out to be too bad after all,' he thought.

"And you can stop looking so smug." Severus lost his smirk as the angry witch turned her glare on him. Hermione had heard enough to be equally annoyed with both of them. "Is it too much to ask you two to get along for five minutes? You don't have to go off in a dark corner and snog each other silly. Just be civil to one another, for God's sake. What the hell is wrong with you two, anyway?" Hands on her hips, Hermione was starting to work into full lecture mode.

Harry was shocked to hear her talk to Snape in that tone. He was even more astonished to see Snape looking mildly contrite.

Severus's voice was still husky with sleep, "Hermione, I was..."

Harry was speaking at the same time, "Hermione, I was just concerned..."

She raised a hand to stop further comments from the two of them. "Stop. If I don't get a cup of coffee in the next few minutes, whatever you two have to say will not matter. They will be taking me off to Azkaban for killing both of you. Go. Sit down." She looked at Harry before turning to Severus. "Why don't you Floo the kitchen and get us some coffee and muffins? I don't want to hear one wrong word out of either of you. I think the two of you are old enough to get along for five minutes. I will be right back."

Severus glared at her back as she went off to use the loo. He sent an order to the kitchen for coffee and muffins before sinking wearily into an armchair next to the fireplace.

Harry looked at the dour man before him. "Are you really going to let her talk to you like that?"

Severus sighed. He could feel a headache coming on. What made him think today wasn't going to be too bad? "Apparently, I am."

Harry looked at him in mock shock, "We don't have to snog in the corner until she gets back, do we?"

Severus couldn't stop himself from laughing. "Most decidedly not! You, Potter, are not my type."

Harry took a long look at the man in front of him. Severus's shirt was wrinkled. It was obvious he had slept in his clothing. He looked like he needed a shower and a shave. It was just as obvious Snape was making an effort to be civil to him because Hermione had asked him to. Would wonders never cease? "And Hermione is your type? You really care for her, don't you?"

"Not that it is any business of yours, but, yes. I do. What? Surprised that the greasy git could have feelings for someone? Don't look so shocked. I know what the students call me, Potter." Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. He needed a headache potion. He just didn't have the energy to retrieve it at the moment. The Potions Master fixed Harry with one of his patent glares. "Hermione has not ingested any errant lust potions I happen to have lying around. Regardless of what you think of me, I would not stoop to that level."

Harry shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "That's not it." Okay, he mentally corrected himself. That was part of it. "You hated us when we were in school. What changed?"

"Hermione." He had only said her name. But the more he thought of it, the more he was convinced it was Hermione that had changed him, changed everything. Her intelligence, her passion for life, her obvious disregard for his temperament. "I have no illusions about myself. I know what I am. I am at just as much of a loss as you are to explain why Hermione has decided to ignore all the evidence to the contrary and agree to see me. And I didn't hate you, Potter." All right, maybe he had hated Potter, still did. But for her sake, Merlin help him, he was going to try and at least tolerate him.

Harry looked skeptical. "You didn't hate me? You sure had a funny way of showing it, Snape."

Hermione stood in the doorway watching the two for a moment. She cared deeply for both of them in very different ways. Harry was the brother she never had. And after losing her parents, they became family to each other. It helped to know that she was not alone in life if she had Harry to turn to. And Severus - Severus was more than she had ever hoped for. Someone to share her passion for books and learning; he thrived on knowledge. She blushed as she thought about last night. If Severus had not had to leave, they would probably still be in bed. Last night, Albus had called Severus to the hospital wing. What was the students' name? Ackart?

"It's nice to see you two playing together so well." Hermione moved to take the chair across from Severus. "What happened with Mister Ackart? Is he all right?"

Severus passed a hand across his eyes. "He will live. His roommate found him in time. The lad was just as shaken up as Ackart."

Harry silently watched the byplay between the two. He had been with Ginny this morning when Madam Pomfrey had explained the circumstances surrounding the presence of the two young men occupying the hospital wing this morning.

Hermione's voice was soft, "Why did he do it?"

"He did it, as you so simply put it, because he failed a test. He was afraid to face his father's wrath for what he considered a major personality flaw." Severus sighed. "I have watched him for some time now. He was always so quiet, so alone. I am not sure if he had any real friends."

Hermione put a hand on his arm. "You can't blame yourself, Severus. You couldn't know what he was going to do."

Severus rose abruptly. He started to pace the floor, agitated. "How could I not know? I am bloody Head of his house, for God's sake. I knew something was not right. I just did not think he would go this far." His laugh was bitter. "He's a lot like I was at that age. Possessed. Driven."

"Yes, but you never tried to take your own life." Hermione could tell Severus was more upset than he was showing.

"No," he raged, "I did something much more cowardly. I took the Dark Mark instead."

Harry realized they had forgotten he was there. He was embarrassed to have witnessed such an intimate display of emotion between the two. Catching them snogging would almost have been less embarrassing, he thought. One thing was for sure; Hermione really did seem to care for the git. Harry cleared his throat.

Severus turned from his place at the side of his desk. Lack of sleep and worry over the boy, not to mention Hermione's presence, had addled his brain. Potter. He forgot he was in the room. "Potter." He hurled the name with all the fury he possessed, as if the force of his voice alone could turn the name into the malediction he normally thought it to be.

Hermione turned to face Harry. "Harry, I'm fine. Thank you for your concern. But really, I'm fine. Why don't you go to breakfast? I'll catch up with you later." Hermione was watching Severus out of the corner of her eye. His whole being radiated anger. Never mind that breakfast was over, she needed to get Harry out of the room so she could talk to Severus.

Harry looked stricken. "I, uh, know what happened last night. I was with Ginny this morning when Madam Pomfrey spoke with her."

Hermione took hold of Harry's arm. She was gently, but firmly, pulling him towards the door. "Then you understand. I need to talk with Severus before he returns to the hospital wing. I'll see you later."

Before he knew what was happening, Harry was unceremoniously pushed out the door. And said door was closed firmly behind him, leaving him standing alone in the corridor. A soft whoosh could be heard as the doorway disappeared and a tapestry, depicting, what else, a snake, appeared. Harry shook his head. Hermione and Snape. His best friend and the man he hated most. Somewhere, he was sure, the Fates were having a laugh at his expense, though Ginny would have been quick to point out the world did not revolve around Harry Potter. Even if it did feel that way some times. Ginny. His step quickened as he headed for the hospital wing and Ginny.

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Hermione noticed the change in Severus the minute she stepped back into the room. He must have cast a cleaning charm on his clothing and hair. And a depilatory charm she decided. He looked freshly shaved. He was wearing his frock coat again, fully buttoned against the outside world. The Potions Master persona was firmly in place, blocking everyone out, including her.

Severus gestured to the silver tray currently residing on the table between the fireside chairs. "I have poured you a cup of coffee. Help yourself to a muffin. I am afraid I cannot join you, I need to return to the hospital wing."

"Severus." Her voice was soft. She could see the anguish in his eyes. "Please don't shut me out. Talk to me. Tell me what you're feeling. Let me help."

Something in the pleading tone of her voice touched a chord deep within him. He was used to dealing with life alone, with no one to rely on but himself. Having someone else care about him, someone other than Albus, was new to him. He needed to keep her at arms length so he could clear his mind and analyze the events of the last twenty-four hours. It had occurred to him too, had he not been called to the hospital wing last night, he would most likely be in bed with Hermione right now, engaging in yet another round of carnal delights, if last night had been any indication. His voice was rough with emotion. "Hermione. I'm sorry. I am just not used to having someone else...here."

"You prat," yelled the voice in his head. "For someone so eloquent, you sure screwed that up. Why are you pushing her away? You have someone else waiting in the wings?" He imagined a presence shouting at him from another room. He willed the door to the room to slam shut. Locks and chains appeared across the door. At least he would have a temporary respite from the noise in his head, he thought.

Hermione put her arms around his waist, laying her head on his chest. "I don't scare that easily, Severus. It's okay to be upset. Underneath all this black, I'm sure there is a human being trying to get out."

A sound somewhere between a snort and a chuckle escaped his lips. Severus's arms automatically encircled the young woman. "I suppose you would rather see me in lavender or powder blue?" An arched brow punctuated the question.

Hermione laughed. "I don't think I would recognize you in anything but black. It does seem to suit you."

His arms tightened around the witch. "Hermione, I really do need to return to the hospital wing. Albus will need to see to the boy's parents this morning. I should be present when they arrive."

Hermione nodded. "You go and do what you have to. I need to find Ginny and Harry, anyway. I'm sure they're going to want to have a word with me. I also have a few ideas I need to research before we begin experimenting again. Why don't I meet you in the lab later? I can get started and you can join me whenever you can."

"Hermione..."

"Severus, don't. You have responsibilities. I understand. Really. Just go and do what you have to. I'll see you later."

Severus kissed her hungrily, passionately, saying with a kiss what he could not seem to put into words. His arms tightened around her, pulling her against his chest. He had a fierce desire to lock her away from the outside world. He did not want to share her with anyone. He knew how foolish the idea was. She had friends who cared for her. It did not matter what he thought of Potter or Weasley. He knew they would fight to the death for her, just as she would for them. Potter had been willing to hex him this morning thinking he had somehow harmed Hermione.

Severus wanted her for his own. He saw it as a weakness within himself that he was powerless to stop. She owned him. He knew that now, even if she did not. Sometime in the last few weeks he had given her his heart without thought to the consequences of that action. He was not exactly sure when it had happened. The thought of a future with her materialized after the lab incident involving his Dark Mark. He knew last night, when he could not control his need for her, he was hers for the taking. She had become as necessary to him as the air he breathed. And he was bound and determined to make her his own.

He wanted to be the only man in her life, the only one to arouse her to passion. She never had the chance to answer his question last night. He suspected she was not a virgin. He would hex whoever had touched her before him if he ever found out who it was. He would not embarrass her and demand to know the details but he did not think he could rest until he knew. Severus realized he was holding her to an unfair double standard. He would never have been able to withstand the same scrutiny he was willing to put her through. It was a feeling, for once in his life, that seemed to be beyond his formidable control.

His past was not something he was proud of. He could never hold a candle to her. He had performed deeds, in the name of the light as well as the dark, that should never see the light of day. They were scars on his soul that he lived with daily. His penance for the wrongs he had brought forth in the name of the Dark Lord before Albus had

helped him turn to the light. He had lived in the shadows for too many years. Too many years to have those shadows fall on Hermione.

Did he even have the right to subject Hermione to his moods, his temper? She was strong willed herself. And the brief glimpse he'd had of her anger made him think she could probably take him on. He chuckled to himself. He had no hold on her. He no longer intimidated her. She could yell and swear with the best of them from what he had seen. And she appeared to have latent Slytherin tendencies, if her handling of Potter this morning was any indication.

She had claimed to care for him, but how much did she really care? Would she be scared off if she knew the true extent of his feelings? Would her friends convince her to leave him and find someone else more...suitable?

The need for air ended their entanglement. Severus gazed deeply into her eyes. Finally, satisfied with what he saw there, he bent his head and gently kissed her. Without a word, he left for the hospital wing and the duties required of him as Head of Slytherin.

Hermione wrapped her arms around herself, goose bumps appearing on her upper arms. His kiss had been overwhelming. He had gone beyond passion, though he had managed to arouse her in the process. There had been a feeling of desperation, of need. She knew he desired her, but this was something more. He was a brilliant man. A powerful wizard. And by turns, he could be difficult and stubborn. Passionate and erotic. He was a true contradiction. For every plus there was a minus. She was in for the ride of her life if she was going to try and figure him out. She was sure her friends would not understand, well, Ginny seemed to, but Harry and Ron were another story. Ron. She forgot to mention the Burrow and next week to Severus.

'Well, standing here will not get you anywhere,' she thought. First stop, the library before finding her friends. Harry had mentioned Madam Pomfrey. That probably meant Ginny was on duty in the hospital wing. Best to give it some time before she ventured there. She would check the lab before leaving and make sure Severus had not changed the wards since last week. They had been set to recognize her but he could have changed them since then. She did not want to leave if she couldn't get back in.

Hermione walked through the doorway connecting Severus's private quarters with his lab. The wards he had erected last week had not been changed or she would never have been able to enter the room. That meant she was free to come as go as she pleased and the wards would still recognize her. Hermione hummed to herself as she set out for the library and unrestricted access to the Restricted Section. Having Severus as a boyfriend did have its advantages. She burst out laughing. Boyfriend. He would kill her if she called him that. The word made her think of Muggle sock hops and proms. Of pimply faced teenagers snogging in the back of cars. Hardly images to describe Severus. She would have to figure out a way to refer to him as her boyfriend. 'If only to see his reaction,' she thought, a wicked grin gracing her lips. Her step was lighter as she climbed the dungeon stairway and headed for the library.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

For all those questioning when our favorite duo will get together, I guarantee the story will earn its rating on Ashwinder, Aff, and Whispers at Chapter 18 - Hermione's Birthday. FFn will be edited for a strong R since they do not allow for a higher rating. There is still more story to follow, the symposium, Christmas, and beyond. While it will not be all roses for our favorite couple, it should prove to be an interesting ride.

Here is a teaser from Chapter 18 that will give you an idea of what is to come:

Chapter 18 Hermione's Birthday

(Rating NC17- for sexual activity- Please skip if this is not your cup of tea.)

Severus moved slowly down the length of her body, stopping randomly to lick and nip her heated flesh. His tongue dipped into her navel, before dancing around to tease the sensitive skin at her hip. Her muscles clenched as he nipped the supple skin, then soothed it with his tongue. The musky smell of her sex filled his nostrils as he buried his nose in the soft damp curls covering her mound.

Hermione's breathing was ragged. She could barely speak as he nuzzled her sex, his breath hot on her skin. "Severus, you don't..." He looked up to see her watching him. The desire in his black eyes held her captive, silencing her objection.

His voice husky, "I don't have to do this? Hasn't anyone ever pleased you before? Trust me, this is as much for my enjoyment as it is for yours."

You get the idea.

Thank you to Nakhash, my beta. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Still to come, Sunday continues at Hogwarts, Harry and Hermione talk, Severus and Hermione have a heart to heart, plans for Hermione's Birthday, The Burrows, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Coda at Hogwarts or Are We There Yet?

*Chapter 16 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

**Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected**



Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

## Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 16. Coda at Hogwarts or Are We There Yet?

"I thought I'd find you here. Are you buried there or do you have a few minutes before the gr..." Her heated glare cut short the childish nickname he was about to utter. Ginny's words came back to him in force. Hermione was happy. He, for one, was not about to rock the boat, even if he did not like the focus of her affections at the moment.

Hermione had lost track of time. Having unrestricted access to the Restricted Section of Hogwarts' library was a dream come true for her. Three hours had passed since she sat down to look up just a few facts before trying to find her friends. Hermione's sigh spoke volumes. "Do I have a few minutes before what, Harry?"

"Uh, before you, uh, before the great research you're doing takes you away. I just wanted to talk to you a minute." Nice save, he thought. Maybe she won't notice the slip.

"My great research, eh? With my brilliant lab partner?" Hermione laughed. She had never been able to stay mad at Harry. "All right. What? What is it?"

Harry smiled at his friend. It almost felt like they were back in seventh year, all they needed was for Ron to come bustling around the corner to complete the picture.

"I thought I heard voices back here." Madam Pince moved into view.

Madam Pince, Irma, had been called away on a family emergency. It had been two weeks before she had been able to resolve matters at home and return to the castle. Poppy and Minerva had been more than happy to bend her ear last night and fill her in on the goings on with the students and staff in her absence. Especially, the 'goings on' regarding a mysterious Potions Master and former student, no less. And here was Hermione Granger sitting with Potter. Interesting.

Not for the first time did she wonder if something was going on with those two. She knew Potter was seeing the Weasley girl, but you just never knew about some men. And these two seemed to be uncomfortable about something, as far as she could tell. Just wait until Minerva heard about this. "Do you need any assistance?"

"We're fine. Thank you, Madam Pince. I was just doing some research for a project I am working on." Hermione smiled at the woman. She had endured long hours being glared at by the librarian during her time as a student.

The library had been her real home during her seven years here. Hermione had found peace and solace among the stacks of books. Knowledge and the ability to expand her mind, as well as her talents, had proved to be just as much a friend to her as Harry and Ron had been. Books, unlike people, had never let her down.

"Please, dear, call me Irma. You are no longer a student here. Is there...something, I can help you with?"

What exactly did she see in Snape, Irma wondered? She'd had a few errant thoughts about him herself. There had been rumors of his sexual prowess from several of the bints that had chased after him in the months following the final battle. While they may have sated his baser appetites, not one seemed to have more than two brain cells to rub together. It was no wonder he soon tired of them.

Asking the girl if the rumors about Snape's ability, or questions about the size and proportion of his endowment, was not exactly considered the height of good taste, Irma decided. Madam Pince's eyes seemed to glow with an odd light as she appraised the two.

"Thank you, but, we're fine... Irma."

'Okay, that was uncomfortable. I really do not want to know what that is about,' thought Hermione. The woman annoyed her just as much now as when she was a student here.

"If you need me, I will be in the main library." The librarian turned and left the Restricted Section. Her mind whirled as she etched the details into her brain, phrasing and rephrasing her thoughts and the comments of the last few minutes. She couldn't wait to find Minerva.

Harry shifted in his seat as he watched the librarian leave. "Was she always that weird?"

"Yeah, she was. You probably spent all of ten minutes in the library during your whole time here or you might have noticed."

"I spent more than ten minutes. 'Course, whatever time I spent here was because you dragged Ron and me here to study." Harry grinned affectionately at her. "So, you want to tell me what is going on between you and Snape? You pushed me out the door this morning, 'Mione!"

"I did, didn't I?" Hermione smiled. "What's happening between you and Ginny?"

"You probably know more about what's going on between Gin and me, than I do. You seem to be her favorite topic of conversation lately."

Hermione raised one finely arched brow. "Jealous?"

"If you weren't like a sister to me..." Harry laughed. "Though, I suspect Snape would have my head if I did try anything. Then again, there probably won't be anything left of me for Snape to attack when Ginny gets through with me."

Harry shrugged. "So, you want to talk about it? About, you two?"

Hermione sighed. "There's not a lot to tell. I told you before about Severus losing that magical bet to Albus. And the consequence was me, teaching Severus to dance the Tango. I don't know, sometime in the last few weeks, something seemed to change between us. We started talking about my theory of altering the Wolfsbane Potion one night, before his dance lesson, and sort of lost track of time. I really didn't think he would be interested, but he was. I know you don't like Severus, Harry, but he is the leading Potions Master in the United Kingdom. Do you have any idea what it means to have him interested in my theory? We plan on publishing our findings after the final trials. Severus thinks we may be able to extend the process to other potions and possibly improve the results of those potions."

Harry watched Hermione's eyes sparkle as she spoke of her work with Snape. He was lost as she explained some of the processes they were exploring. He was sure Snape would not feign an interest in her theory just to win her over. Hermione was brilliant in her own right. It actually made sense that the two of them seemed to get along. There were very few people on the face of the planet that could understand his friend once she worked herself up to explaining her theories.

'Maybe Ginny was right,' he thought. Snape could possibly be one of the few people Hermione could talk to and not only understand her, but also not grow bored with her explanations of things. He seemed to enjoy research as much as she did. But snogging Snape? Harry shuddered inwardly at the thought. Well, she seemed happy enough. "So, you really think you two can help Remus? By the way, why was Snape calling Remus by his first name yesterday?"

"At the match?" Her smile was wicked. "He lost a bet to me. If Gryffindor won, he would have to call Remus by his given name for a month."

"What if Slytherin had won? No. Don't tell me. I don't think I want to know. Hermione, you two are comfortable working together, great. I know there is something more than that going on. Are you really happy?" Harry watched her eyes, trying to read the emotions behind her words.

"Yeah, Harry. I am really happy. I know you two don't get along."

Harry snorted at the comment. That was a gross understatement on her part.

"Okay," she amended, "it goes beyond not getting along. You hate each other. I got that. But Harry, he's, I don't know, different when we were together. His sarcasm is not, mean. It's actually funny sometimes. We talk for hours. He has some very interesting theories on quite a few subjects other than potions. I've always respected him. You know that. I finally got a chance to see behind the robes. I am happy. Really. Can't you try to get along with Severus, for me?"

Harry agreed half-heartedly. "Yeah, I can try. He was actually human this morning. I can't believe you talk to him like that."

"What?"

Harry shifted uneasily in his seat. "Well, Ginny said you told her..." He couldn't say it. He really did not want to know. All right, he was curious, the same way you can't look away from a really bad accident. Morbid curiosity. Snape, as anything but the over-grown bat of the dungeon, would take some getting used to. Snape being intimate with his best friend was an image that could melt his brain.

Hermione grinned at his discomfort. She was not about to let him off the hook so easily, not after the little scene he staged this morning, even if he had thought he was acting in her best interest. "You mean, Severus and I engaging in..."

"Enough! Okay. You win. I'll talk nice to him. I won't hex him when he stands too close to you. But, please, I don't want to hear the details of your love life." God, what was she going to tell him? He had heard a few rumors himself about Snape, he had no desire to know if they were true or not. That was her business, not his. If she was happy, he would be happy for her. End of discussion.

"I was only going to explain how our research would help Remus. I have no intention of sharing my love life with you. That is not open to discussion." 'If she didn't get Severus alone soon, there wouldn't be a love life to discuss!' Hermione thought.

Her birthday was coming up the end of this week. She knew exactly what she wanted. And her gift would come nicely wrapped in black silk, if she had anything to say about it. Maybe, she could magic up some costume samples for him to try on. A few adjustments to the codpiece and she might just have a very Happy Birthday after all.

Harry grinned boyishly at his friend. "Care to join me in the Great Hall for lunch?"

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It was early afternoon when Hermione left Harry and Ginny in the Great Hall and headed for the dungeons. Lunch had been a pleasant affair, reacquainting her with some old friends and meeting some new people. She had left promising to owl Ginny sometime this week. She would see them next Saturday at the Burrow, in any event.

Before leaving, Hermione had taken Ginny to the side and asked her what had transpired this morning in the hospital wing. Ginny had heard Albus talking to Severus before she had left the hospital. Ackart was being transferred to St. Mungo's for treatment. His roommate, Kinnard, would receive counseling at the school. The Headmaster and Professor Snape had left the wing to make the arrangement with St. Mungo's and the student's parents, Ginny had told her. Ackart still refused to tell them where he had obtained the potion.

When asked how she thought Severus was, Ginny was hesitant to offer an opinion. "He's always polite to me, Hermione. He just seemed a bit...distracted, if I was going to say anything was different at all. He did look tired, though." Hermione had thanked her and left to find Severus.

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Hermione drew a deep breath before entering the lab; ready to deal with whatever mood Severus was in. The room was empty. Looking around, she realized he had not worked today. Everything was in its place. The benches were spotless. She walked through the doorway to his private quarters. The sight of Severus, in his shirtsleeves, slumped in a chair, contemplating a glass of amber liquid, met her eyes. She suspected it might not have been his first drink of the day.

Severus had felt the wards shift when Hermione had entered the lab. He felt her presence when she entered his quarters. His mind was weary, stripped bare with the events of the previous night and this morning.

Hermione sat across from him, watching his face. "Severus, are you all right?"

He ran a hand through his hair before dropping it tiredly by his side. "I'm fine. Did you finish whatever you needed to?"

Hermione moved forward in her chair, her knees touching the side of Severus's leg. His hand moved forward to trace a meaningless pattern in the fabric of her pants. His other hand tightened on the heavy glass as he took a long pull from the amber liquid.

'Firewhisky,' she thought, as the smell of the whiskey drifted to her. "Severus, talk to me. What happened?"

"I'm fine, Hermione. Did you find Potter? Ginevra? She was in the hospital wing this morning." He drained the remainder of the glass in a single swallow.

"I didn't ask how you were, I asked what happened. I know you don't care about Harry, especially since you can't take house points from him. What happened?" Hermione's tone was harsh. He needed to snap out of this malaise, now. She was not going to sit back and let him shut her out. Obviously, he was not aware of who he was dealing with.

Hermione moved behind him and started to rub his shoulders. She felt his body tense before easing back into her hands. She remained quiet, gently massaging his shoulders and the back of his neck, trying to remove the tension she felt radiating from his body. She could not have said how much time had passed, when he suddenly started to talk to her. Hermione remained quiet, allowing him to talk at his own pace.

"I should have known he would try something like this. I watched him all last year. He seemed so...alone. I should have realized the level of his desperation. Did I tell you I knew his father? The bastard was a supporter of Voldemort's. He had enough pull in the Ministry to keep himself out of Azkaban since he never sported the Dark Mark. Ackart told me in confidence one night; his father had expected him to take the Dark Mark after his graduation. The boy was grateful to me for the Dark Lord's defeat. Can you imagine? He actually thanked me." Severus yanked the cuff of his shirtsleeve back, exposing the silver scar on his forearm. "There are days I wish I had the courage to cut my arm off, and this bastard wanted his son to wear the brand of a madman."

Hermione understood this went deeper than the young man's attempted suicide, though Severus's maudlin thoughts seemed to revolve around the boy and his father. She moved to his side, her hand covered the scar of his Dark Mark. "Severus, I know you regret ever joining Voldemort. But without your help, the light would never have won. Harry may have fulfilled the prophecy, but without your information, we would not have been prepared for the final battle. Don't you understand? We could not have won without you! More lives would have been lost. Voldemort would have won. I know you don't think of yourself as a hero, but you are. To a lot of people, you are a hero."

His tone was bitter, "And to quite a few, I am still a Death Eater who saw a chance to save his own skin."

"That's not true. I don't care about the people that question your loyalty. I have a few questions about them, myself. You know what side you stand on. The people that

matter know where your loyalty lies." Hermione's voice was quiet. "I have always respected you, Severus. It's time to forgive yourself. Stop torturing yourself for a past you cannot change. Whether you realize it or not, you have a good heart. Even if you don't believe it, I think of you as a hero."

Severus looked at the woman sitting next to him. He marveled at her strength. At the ultimate faith she had in him. Faith he was not so sure he deserved. "Is this the type of talk you gave Potter when you were students here?"

Severus thought back to the final battle. He held an image of Hermione in his mind. Her hair wild and unkempt, her face smudged with dirt. It was her eyes that held him that day, as they did now. She had radiated power as she stood next to Potter, sure in her convictions. He had moved to cover the boy's back, showing his true loyalty to the light at last, as Potter faced the Dark Lord. She was there first. Severus turned instead, and cursed the Death Eaters moving forward to protect their master. Albus moved to his side, and between the two, they cast an ancient spell, allowing Harry to destroy the evil, once and for all.

"No. He normally raged about how unfair you were and I would have to remind him that it was probably hard on you, working for both sides at the same time. That he should respect you. Then he and Ron would recite the list of points you had deducted from Gryffindor that day. Actually, there were a few times I thought of hexing you myself, but students that hex teachers tended to get expelled." Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "It all worked out in the end, anyway."

Severus reached out and pulled her onto his lap. He played with the mass of curls that cascaded down her back. Her hair fascinated him. It felt like silk sliding between his fingers. His arms came around her as he buried his nose in her hair. 'Vanilla and cinnamon,' he thought. His voice was quiet. "I should have known, Hermione."

"You couldn't have known, Severus. Ginny told me he never mentioned it to anyone. What happens now?" She watched his eyes as he spoke. He looked weary but seemed to have lost that haunted look that she had noticed when she first spoke to him.

Severus sighed. "Now he goes to St. Mungo's, and they try to help him understand his fears. Do you know what test he failed?"

Hermione shook her head.

"It wasn't really a test. They were working on boggarts in Defense Against the Dark Arts. His boggart turned into his father. He was unable to banish it. I spoke with Lupin last night. He said the boy was distraught but seemed to pull himself together. He told him he could try again next week. There were others that had failed, but none were as upset as Ackart." Severus was still worried about the young man.

"Kind of like when Neville's boggart turned into you in his Grandmother's clothing. Maybe he was afraid to see his father again?"

He glared at the witch. "You had to bring that up, didn't you?"

"I thought you looked fetching in a dress and vulture hat."

Severus shook his head. "Not funny, Hermione. Not by a long shot."

Her hand traced the planes of his face. "How is Remus doing?"

"Lupin? He's upset too. I suspect we will all watch our charges a little closer for sometime to come."

"You mean Remus, don't you?" Hermione's grin was smug.

"No, I mean Lupin. The bet stated I had to address him using his given name for a month, nothing more. And since I do not see him anywhere in this room, I am free to call him anything I like."

"That's not what I meant! You were to call him Remus."

Severus shrugged his shoulders. "Call, address. Semantics. It is the same thing. You should have been more specific."

The clock over his desk chimed, signaling dinner in the Great Hall. They had been sitting talking, for several hours, without being aware of the passage of time. "Do you have time to eat dinner here, or do you need to get back to Cambridge?"

"No, I can have dinner before I go." Hermione took a deep breath. "Severus, I wanted to ask you about next weekend. Molly always has a joint birthday party for Arthur and me. She's planning on having everyone at the Burrow on Saturday evening. Will you go with me?"

Her birthday. Severus had pulled out her old school records to verify the date when she had mentioned her birthday, the week before. She would be twenty-two Friday, thanks to the use of the Time-Turner. He had planned on a quiet dinner Friday night, just the two of them. "Friday is your birthday. I was hoping to take you to a wizarding restaurant, in London, Friday night. Just the two of us." His hand trailed along her side, feather soft.

"Friday sounds great. Will you come with me to the Burrow on Saturday?"

"Hermione..."

"What?" The anger snapped in Hermione's eyes at his tone.

Severus chuckled to himself. She could go from soft to hellcat in a heartbeat. "Hermione, don't you think you would have a better time if you went alone? I am sure Potter and Weasley will not be happy with my presence."

"I don't care what Harry or Ron want. I have endured enough bimbos on Ron's behalf that he could put up with my boyfriend for one night."

Bimbos? He had no clue what she was talking about. Her boyfriend? Did she just refer to him as her boyfriend? "Did you just use the adolescent phrase, boyfriend, when referring to me? I believe I am too old to consider this relationship to be part of any pubescent phase you maybe going through."

Hermione thought the phrase would irk him. "All right. What would you have me call you?"

"Companion, master, innamorato." His hands tangled in her hair. Severus infused his voice with silk as he nuzzled the side of her neck, "lover comes to mind."

"Mmm. We definitely need to work on that." The sound of the clock chiming again drew Hermione's gaze.

The hand with Severus's picture had moved to 'You are needed in the Great Hall.'

"Severus." Hermione pointed to the clock.

Severus reluctantly detached himself from his exploration of her cleavage. Were all the fates conspiring against them? "I suppose we should go."

Hermione stood and rearranged her clothing. "You'll go with me to the Burrow Saturday night?"

"If you are sure that is what you want?"

Hermione nodded her head in agreement

"Very well," Severus agreed. "I will accompany you. You can give me the details Friday night when I pick you up."

"What time do you have to be back Friday?"

The gleam in his eye set her heart to flutter. "I don't have to be back at all on Friday. I am not on duty again until Sunday night." Severus watched as Hermione's nostrils flared with her sudden intake of breath, as she absorbed the meaning of his words.

Severus chuckled darkly. He intended to make this a birthday she would never forget. He held his arm out to her. "Care to join me for dinner?"

Hermione smiled up at him, thoughts of ravishing his body flooding her mind. She was sure the time between now and Friday would pass at a snail's pace. If she had a Time-Turner she would move ahead to Friday, and the consequences be damned. Her smile was sunny as she took his arm. "Thank you, I would love to."

They left his quarters discussing the research Hermione had covered that afternoon. They talked of the potion, but truth be told, both their minds were fixed on another subject entirely.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Coda - Literally "A tail"- the closing measures of a piece of music. Closing section of a movement.

Inamorato - a man with whom you are in love or have an intimate relationship

Thank you to Nakhash, my beta. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

For those who asked how many chapters are left, my estimate is between ten and say, one hundred. For example, I would never have thought the weekend at Hogwarts would have taken three chapters to cover all the events that occurred. I have a hard time estimating how many chapters the remaining material will require. That, and I tend to write longer chapters than I originally plan for. Add to that, I have not reached a final stopping point for the story. I know I want to carry it past Christmas. I happen to know about plans Severus and Hermione have for the summer break, some type of research sabbatical or something. I assume we will know more on that front when they decide to tell us. So, how does between 10 and 100 chapters left sound?

Still to come, Thursday's dance lesson, costumes (at last!), Hermione's Birthday (Lemons!), The Burrow, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

Is That A Prophetess I See?

Chapter 17 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 17. Is That A Prophetess I See?

Monday afternoon, Severus decided to forego lunch in favor of a fast trip to Diagon Alley. Having a free period after the lunch hour, allowed him two hours of freedom from his delightful charges. Severus snorted. Delightful, he did need his head examined. He strode purposely up the lane, intent on making his purchase and returning to the castle. His mind, occupied with the task at hand, failed to notice those around him as they scurried to move out of his way. The Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had a reputation far and wide. Some had been his students, having taught various dunderheads for twenty years at the school, others, the parents of students, past and present. Still others had heard of his heroics at the final battle, coupled with two decades of spying on a monster. For whatever the reason, most hurried to move out of his way as he advanced up the lane, his black teaching robes flowing menacingly out behind him in true Potions Master style.

It would have surprised, nay shocked, those people to know what his true mission was that afternoon. Shocked them enough that St. Mungo's might have had to name a ward after Severus if the facts had become known. The running guess, his stride, the familiar scowl set firmly on his face, the direction of his movement, all added up to the theory he was there to purchase ingredients for a potion of questionable origin from a store that bordered the edge of Diagon Alley. In truth, his destination, the Emerald

Leaf, was far less innocuous had it not been the evil Potions Master entering the shop. The Emerald Leaf was a well-known jewelry store frequented by pure-blood families for generations. The store was known for the quality of its merchandise as well as its discretion in revealing information regarding the purchases of its clientele.

Friday was Hermione's birthday. He wanted to buy something special for the young woman. Something that said: I-care-deeply-for-you-but-have-a-difficult-time-communicating-to-you-these-emotions-so-please-accept-this-whatever-as-a-token-of-my-esteem-and-understand-I-will-try-to-express-my-feelings-at-sometime-in-the-future-if-at-all-possible. Well, something that would convey that sentiment in general, at least.

Severus was vaguely aware that whatever he purchased would probably be on display Saturday night at the Burrow and subject to the opinion and comments of those gathered there. Their relationship, they did have a relationship at this point; he had to keep reminding himself this was not a delusion caused by one too many curses. Their relationship had just started to venture into the outside world. Their encounters had been primarily Hogwarts and her flat with a single excursion into Hogsmeade for dinner.

He was not a gregarious person by nature, and would be well content to keep his world within its current boundaries. Hermione, however, was not of the same notion. She thrived in the world as a whole, even if she claimed to lack social skills when dealing with others. The truth was it was her impatience with others that caused a problem, not her lack of social skill. People truly cared for the young woman. She could win anyone over, if she chose to.

For the life of him, he still could not understand her attraction to him. He understood the pull of intellect. It was what he first noticed in her when she was a first year, waving her hand annoyingly in his face with all the answers. He had told Potter he was at just as much of a loss, as he was, to explain why Hermione had decided to ignore all the evidence to the contrary: his temper, his attitude, his obvious desire to lock himself away in the dungeons, general public opinion, and a host of other issues - and agree to see him, to start a relationship with him.

Severus could assume she had lost her mind, or just enjoy her company and hope she never came to her senses. While it was true he showed her a side few, if any, ever got to see, he still did not think he was fit company for a witch twenty years his junior; but he was not about to push her away or point that fact out to her, again. He was sure her friends would be more than willing to take up that gauntlet. It had taken more courage on his part to pursue her than it had taken to face down the Dark Lord. He was not about to stop now.

He drew a deep breath into his lungs as he reached the shop in question. The door opened on silent hinges, no bells to alert the clerks as to a potential customer entering the shop. A witch of unknown age, looking like a clone of Trelawney, appeared almost instantly, stepping through a beaded curtain that lead from somewhere in the back.

Severus cleared his throat. "I would like..."

The woman held up a hand to stop him from speaking. "You are interested in purchasing a piece of jewelry, for...a young woman." The declaration was said as a statement of fact, not a question. Green eyes seemed to lock with his.

Severus resisted the desire to roll his eyes at her obvious comment. Why else would he be in a jewelry store that appeared to cater more to women than men? And from the looks of him, it was just as obvious the purchase was not for him. Most likely, ninety percent of the men walking in the shop were buying gifts for wives, girlfriends, or their mistresses. Or for all three females, for that matter. He was just about to flay the woman in front of him with his sharp tongue, when she spoke again.

"A Slytherin purchasing a gift of intent for a Gryffindor. I do not believe we have ever had occasion to fulfill a gift of this nature, before." Her smile was mysterious and seemed to illuminate her eyes with an odd glow.

"How did she know?" he wondered. Then it occurred to him. Their dinner, over the weekend, at Witchcraft. While it had not appeared in the *Daily Prophet* as more than an innuendo - Guess what well-known wizard was seen Saturday night at Witchcraft having dinner for two with what well-known witch? What would their respective houses say? More as this develops - people talked. He thought she must have known someone who could have mentioned it and drew her own conclusions from there.

His tone was snide, "Well done. You have shown me you have the ability to read a newspaper. Amazing. I do not have all day to stand here and trade trivialities with you."

The infuriating woman did not answer him. Instead, she seemed to be looking for something in particular. The woman rummaged through a drawer to the side of the main showcase. Severus remained quiet, waiting to see what she would say next.

Her eyes glowed as her hand closed around a black velvet box. She turned to Severus. Her eyes blazing with an intensity that made his skin crawl.

The woman's voice was soft, a contrast to the gleam of her eyes. "You are looking for a birthday gift for a special someone, someone who means a great deal to you. A ring would be misconstrued at this time, and a bangle of any type would be deemed frivolous. This pendant is the signature design of the artist that created it. The store was named for its design. I have not sold any of my grandfather's work in more than fifty years. While his pieces are in great demand, there are very few worthy of possessing one. No two pieces are exactly a-like. Each item is unique. The pendant will satisfy all that you desire to tell the witch."

Severus remained quiet. His first impulse was to leave, run as far away from the witch as possible. She unnerved him in a way few ever had. Something in her tone, something in her words, said she possessed a greater understanding of the universe than a quick review of the gossip column in the *Daily Prophet*. He watched as she opened the black case without ceremony. His breath caught in his throat as he viewed the contents.

The case was lined in black velvet. A silver chain stretched from edge to edge. A pendant, about three and a half centimeters long, dangled from the chain, against the velvet. It was the pendant that captured Severus's attention. A silver leaf, veins lightly washed with gold, dangled from the silver chain. A small emerald, set near the bottom, just to the side of the main vein, caught the light in the store and reflected it back again. The leaf was crinkled, much the same as a real leaf would be.

It was exactly what he was looking for. While he could not stomach the thought of buying Hermione something Gryffindor red, the yellow gold was...tolerable. The emerald, however, was a nice touch, he thought. A leaf was something different, something she probably would not have bought for herself.

The witch smiled at him. "May I assume this meets with your approval, sir?"

Severus nodded. "You can transfer the funds from my Gringotts account. I should like to take the pendant with me. You have a bill of sale for me to sign?"

The witch arched one brow. "No question as to the cost?"

Severus allowed himself to chuckle. "I highly doubt the price would be negotiable. In any event, the item satisfies my requirements. The bill of sale? I have other obligations to attend to." He had a desire to leave as quickly as possible, with as little contact with the odd witch as deemed necessary.

The woman returned with a quill, his bill of sale, and the velvet box, now residing in a silver pouch with an emerald green drawstring. A silver leaf was etched into a corner of the bag. Severus signed the bill. The parchment immediately duplicated itself. Severus slipped the silver pouch into an inside pocket of his robes. A copy of the bill joined it.

"Thank you and good day, madam." Severus nodded and turned to leave.

"You are welcome. We will be happy to meet any other needs you have in the future, regardless of when that maybe. I will see you in a year or two, Professor."

His hand had been reaching for the doorknob when the witch's words reached him. Severus turned to confront her. He was faced with an empty shop. Severus left the store before he could question her, that is, if he could find her.

He moved to a side alley and removed the pouch from his robe pocket. Several spells and a few incantations later, he was satisfied the pendant, chain, case, and pouch were spell and curse free. He placed the case back in the pouch. A corner of the bill was visible inside his pocket. He took the parchment out and studied the initials of the clerk that appeared under his signature: S.T. When had she signed it? Severus shook his head. Trelawney didn't have a sister, did she?

Severus's pace increased, wishing to put as much distance between himself and the shop. Her words replayed in his mind, 'I will see you in a year or two, Professor.' What did that mean? If he gave weight to her words, then he would have to admit divination was real. While the prophecy concerning Potter came to pass, he had some doubt if the boy would have survived if it had not been for his and Albus's spell to weaken the Dark Lord. It might be wise to find out what he could about the Emerald Leaf.

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Severus was in rare form as he taught his afternoon classes. Even his own house was not immune to losing points today. Granted, during double potions, he had taken eighty-nine points from Gryffindor and only seven from Slytherin, but it was five points more than he usually would have penalized his own house. The tables were a-buzz at dinner. Albus had been forced by the other angry faculty members to restore the lost points.

Severus was still distracted when he entered the Great Hall for dinner. The room fell silent as he passed the students tables, each afraid he would deduct more points. One student, a Ravenclaw, had lost three points this afternoon for breathing too loud while he was lecturing.

Albus sighed as he watched his Potions Master approach the High Table. The weekend had been difficult, but he thought dinner Sunday night, with Hermione present, had brought the dark wizard to a crossroad. 'What could have happened now?' he wondered.

Albus nodded as the Potions Master took his seat. "Severus."

Severus sat next to Albus, questions floating through his mind. It was with something akin to fear, he noticed Sibyll sitting at the far end of the table. The witch rarely left the North Tower. What was she doing at dinner, tonight? It would have surprised Hermione to know Severus had read, and enjoyed, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. She might have recognized him unconsciously imitating Alice. The words quietly left his lips, "Curiouser and curiouser."

"Problems, Severus?" Albus's voice cut through his thoughts.

Severus hesitated. Albus was without question one of the most powerful wizards alive. He could also be one of the most annoying men alive at times, in Severus's opinion. Did he risk his sanity by telling Albus what had transpired today? Did Albus already know, and was he just toying with him? If divination existed, could the fates give him a sign and push him in the right direction? What the hell was Sibyll doing out of her tower anyway?

"Severus." Albus was becoming concerned. What was bothering the man? Contrary to popular opinion, he did not know everything that went on in the castle. If he did, why would he have let Voldemort exist under Quirrell's turban, under his very nose, during Harry's first year? He tried again. "Severus, does this have to do with the rather excessive amount of points you took in your classes today?"

Severus snorted. "Excessive? Who complained? No, let me guess. Everyone."

Albus watched Severus wrestle with himself before reaching a decision.

"Albus, does Sibyll have a sister?" Severus decided it was worth a try as he gestured in Trelawney's direction. Albus seemed to know everything that was going on in any event.

The Headmaster looked at him. "Not that I know of. Why do you ask?" Albus's tone was a bit harsher than he had intended.

The Potions Master regarded the aged wizard before continuing. "I was in Diagon Alley today. The Emerald Leaf, to be exact. And I encountered a rather odd witch. She reminded me of Sibyll, acting as if she knew the answers to questions before they were asked."

Albus's eyes widened. The Emerald Leaf. Obviously things were progressing better than either party let on. "Why were you shopping at the Emerald Leaf? Did you purchase something?"

Severus glared at his mentor. Was he trying to make this difficult? "Friday is Hermione's birthday. I wished to purchase something special for her. Are you happy now, old man?"

A twinkle lit his eyes. His smile was truly genuine. "Yes. Yes, I am happy for both of you, Severus. You two seem well-suited to each other. I wish nothing more than for you to enjoy your own happiness."

"Albus." Severus sighed. He knew Albus meant well. "What do you know about the shop?"

"Actually, I believe the witch that runs the shop is related to Sibyll. Second cousin once removed on her father's side, I think. The grandfather was quite a character. Artistic type. His work is considered rare and wonderful by those who matter, regarding that type of thing. Did you purchase something?"

Trust Albus to know. "What do you mean 'rare and wonderful'? Are the pieces spelled?" Severus had performed several strong spells and incantations on the necklace. He would have staked his reputation that it was free of magic.

"No, my boy. Not spells or any other magic that you can see. Most of the jewelry in the store is from ordinary sources. It is the grandfather's work that the legend revolves around."

Severus groaned and covered his eyes with his hand. Legend? What had he gotten himself into? "The witch sold me a pendant. She called it an Emerald Leaf. It is a silver leaf with veins of yellow gold. A small emerald is set into the face of the leaf."

"Silver for Slytherin, yellow for Gryffindor, and an emerald to represent you? Interesting choice."

"Albus. The grandfather. The legend." Severus would have hexed the Headmaster if not for the fact that he had not finished relating what he knew of the grandfather, or the legend.

"The grandfather, his work is rare, not many pieces survived the first war. Many were melted down for their value. The pieces that survived were quietly bought up by his granddaughter and kept by her as a private collection of his work. The legend states that a piece recognizes the pureness of heart of its prospective customer. Most people were rumored to leave the shop with alternate purchases when the grandfather ran the store. The granddaughter, Senalda Trelawney I believe, is also descended from Cassandra Trelawney, the seer. She sold you a piece of her grandfather's work, a silver leaf?"

"Yes. She said the pendant was her grandfather's signature piece. The store was named for it. She did tell me she had not sold a piece of his work in more than fifty years." Severus was about to choke Albus. The man's eyes were twinkling brightly. "Albus, it does not mean anything. I am sure it was a trick to try to induce customers to pay outrageous prices. Nothing more. As if my heart holds a drop of pureness. Senalda Trelawney must be as crazy as Sibyll is."

Unfortunately, the legend felt true. Severus snorted. Pure of heart? "Maybe it is referring to Hermione."

"Severus, whether you chose to believe in divination or not, it seems to have chosen you." Albus was highly amused at the Potions Master's annoyance. He had seen the good in this man, years before. No matter how many times Severus claimed to dislike the students, and Harry in particular, he had risen to the task of protecting them time and time again, without thought for his own welfare. It was time fate gave him a future worthy of his actions.

Sibyll chose that moment to materialize at Severus's elbow. He might have noticed her approach had he not been so annoyed with Albus. Her voice carried its usual cadence of foretelling prophecy with each word. "Severus, my inner eye tells me you have ventured far today."

Severus turned his scowl on the woman. "How is your cousin Senalda, Sibyll? Did she owl you when I left the shop?"

Her hand went to her breast as if wounded. "You have seen my cousin? She is not visible to my inner eye."

"Sibyll, I have had about as much of this as I will tolerate." Sibyll never failed to annoy him. Their conversation had attracted the other occupants of the High Table. But then, any time Sibyll left her roost was cause for commotion.

"You do not understand. She is a sooth-sayer. A false prophetess. We have not spoken in many years. My knowledge comes from the tea leaves." Sibyll's voice had turned shrill.

"Really, Sibyll, were you reading the tea leaves when you noticed Severus Apparating back to Hogwarts?" Minerva's tone left little room for argument. "I was by the lake when you returned this afternoon, Severus. I happen to have noticed Sibyll in the tower window just before you appeared at the Apparation point outside the gates. Since we both saw you suddenly appear, it would be safe to assume you Apparated from some distance rather than just walked back from say, Hogsmeade."

Sibyll raised her hands in front of her. Her voice turned sing-song again, "I must return to my tower. The negative vibrations are clouding my inner eye."

"You do that, Sibyll." Minerva did not understand why Albus continued to keep the woman. Any attempt at asking him resulted in a rather vague answer.

"By all means, do not let us keep you from your chosen path. Go. Divine away." Severus's tone was snide, his smirk a bit too happy.

"So, what was that all about?" Minerva asked, as they watched Sibyll leave the Great Hall. She had been trying to eavesdrop on the conversation between Albus and Severus throughout dinner, with very little success.

"It seems Severus has purchased a gift for Hermione." Albus smiled at Severus, ignoring the scowl that had taken up residence on his features, again.

"Were you not told your features would freeze that way if you kept making that face?" Minerva cared for Severus, but really, he could be such a child sometimes.

"I fear it is too late, already." Severus continued to glare at the witch. Years of habit was hard to break; they were friends, but it would never do for the Head of Slytherin to be seen speaking willingly with the Head of Gryffindor, especially when the Dark Lord had been in power. Gryffindor. Hermione. Severus schooled his features into a neutral expression. But if you looked closely, one corner of his mouth was turned up as if a grin was threatening to show itself.

"What did you buy her? If you saw Sibyll's cousin you must have shopped at the Emerald Leaf." My word, thought Minerva, that shop was known for its better pieces as well as its prices. She would have something up on Irma tonight.

Severus watched Minerva's face, various emotions and thoughts crossing her features before being chased away. Did everyone have an interest in his life, or more specifically, his relationship with Hermione?

Minerva had always considered Hermione her darling, and took on the job of adopted mother after her parents' deaths. Severus supposed she did have a reason, more than most, to question him.

Severus stood. He drew himself to his full height, towering over Minerva. "I believe Miss Granger should be the first to see her gift, don't you? I am sure you will have adequate time to evaluate the piece at the gathering Saturday night. Now, if you will excuse me, I have a stack of essays to correct. Some of us require actual work from our students. Headmaster. Minerva." With a swish of his robes, he was out the backdoor and on his way to his office.

Minerva sank into the chair he had just vacated. "He does know how to make an exit," she said with a laugh.

Albus was pouring her a fresh cup of tea. "That he does."

"Severus will be attending the party at the Burrow, Saturday night? Willingly?" She found it hard to believe. He never attended any function at the school without being ordered to attend, and then had to be dragged kicking and fighting anyway.

"It is Hermione's birthday, Minerva. He will be the only snake in a room full of lions. Should prove interesting." Albus smiled at her, pleased at Severus's obvious interest in Hermione.

Minerva was speechless. Severus, willingly attending a social function, at the Weasleys' no less. There seemed to be nothing more she could say. Interesting? "Indeed," she mumbled.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Innocuous - Having no adverse effect, harmless. Not likely to offend or provoke to strong emotion.

Gregarious - Seeking and enjoying the company of others, sociable.

Gauntlet a challenge.

Senalda Female- Spanish meaning a sign, or symbol. Interestingly enough, Sibyll, means prophetess or seer in Greek. The name Sibyll was applied in the ancient world to many women who were inspired by the god Apollo with the gift of prophecy.

I know I said the next chapter would be the next dance lesson and then Hermione's birthday, but this chapter took on a life of its own. I had assumed Severus would want something special for Hermione's birthday, hence the trip to Diagon Alley. I found the pendant on-line when I looked up the name Emerald Leaf. I thought it sounded Slytherin. Imagine my surprise when it actually existed in real life. Go figure. The chapter took off from there.

The necklace does exist. I changed the bale to silver, blame artistic license. I do not believe Severus would have given Hermione the necklace if it were not predominately silver. The picture of the Emerald Leaf necklace can be found at this site: <http://www.jewelrycrossings.com/store/JT022PEA.html>

Here is the description: Reticulated sterling silver with a wash of 18K yellow gold is the background for a shimmering light green emerald. 18k gold bale gracefully extends across the crinkled surface of the leaf. Necklace complete with 16" sterling silver chain.

Thank you to Nakhash, my beta. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Back on track (maybe). Still to come, Thursday's dance lesson, costumes (at last!), Hermione's Birthday (Lemons!), The Burrow (The only snake in a roomful of lions), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

# Lesson Seven: Anticipation

Chapter 18 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

## Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 18. Lesson Seven: Anticipation

Severus looked at himself in the mirror. It was almost time for his dance lesson with Hermione. Time seemed to get away from him today. He ran a weary hand through his hair. Albus had heard from St. Mungo's. Ackart had started counseling today.

'It will be a long time before that boy will be able to accept why he was so afraid of his father. Afraid enough to try something that desperate,' thought Severus. It had taken him years to come to terms with his feelings for his own father. Years and time as a Death Eater.

Severus shook his head. He regarded his image in the mirror. He had changed in small ways. His hair was longer, falling past his shoulders now. His face had filled out. He had always been lean, but sleep and regular meals had improved his general health. Even his skin, while still pale, had a healthier tone. Same black eyes. Same hooked nose. The real changes, those that made the most difference, were not visible to the eye.

The clock over his desk chimed. The hand with his picture moved to 'You need to leave in the next few minutes.' Severus looked at the pendant again. He hoped Hermione liked it. He had never been in a relationship of this nature before. This would mark the first birthday gift he had ever purchased for a woman that was not a colleague or the wife of an associate. The first gift of any substance. Tomorrow was her birthday. He had reservations at a wizarding restaurant in London, The Wizard's Choice.

And then, tomorrow night. He still did not know if she was a virgin or not, a question that continued to nag at the edges of his mind. The odds were against it, but still. His dreams of the last few nights had become even more erotic than before. He felt an almost uncontrollable need to possess her, to have her. His need seemed to be greater than it had ever been.

Severus sighed. He still had a dance lesson to get through tonight. He closed the black velvet case and slipped it back in the middle drawer of his desk. He locked and warded the drawer before heading for Hermione's flat.

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Severus arrived for his dance lesson a few minutes before the hour. The lessons seemed frivolous now. He wondered if Albus would release him from his bet. Probably not. Not only were magical bets difficult to break, knowing Albus, he would probably tell him this would help improve his life in some way. The man could be most infuriating when he chose to be. As much as Severus enjoyed dancing with Hermione in private, it would be nothing compared to the embarrassment he was going to feel when they danced at the Halloween dance.

Hermione answered the door on the first knock. She took his breath away every time he saw her. Her arms wound around his neck. "Good evening, Professor."

His hands moved, of their own volition, around her waist and pulled her to him. "Miss Granger." Their kiss was warm, reestablishing the boundaries, the edges they had moved against.

Severus took his cloak off and hung it next to the door. The now familiar action brought home the fact this was real. Hermione was real. When the lessons ended, he would still be here, in her flat, enjoying her company.

Hermione had moved to the center of the room, waiting for him. "Is everything all right?"

Severus appeared mildly distracted. "Fine, just a very long and trying day. I need to return to the castle by eleven tonight. There are a few details I must attend to so that I can leave tomorrow."

"If it's a problem, we can skip tonight."

"I have no desire to 'skip' being here with you."

Hermione smiled. "Well. In that case, ready to review?"

Severus took the witch in his arms as the music started. They moved into the opening step of the Tango. After a month and a half of lessons, Severus could move at the slower pace through most of the movements. A few were still forced, and the la Salida, a side-by-side, hip-to-hip step, that Hermione had shown him last week, still needed work.

"How many more steps to this damn dance am I going to have to learn?" He was tired and had work to do when he returned to Hogwarts if he was going to take the weekend off. He instantly regretted his tone when he looked at Hermione. "I am...sorry. As I said before, it has been a long day and I still have much to do."

Hermione regarded his apology with amusement. "That word is really hard for you, isn't it? Ranks right up there with Remus. God, I should have made the bet for you to call Harry by his first name, too, not just Remus. When is the next game between Slytherin and Gryffindor?"

Severus crossed his arms over his chest. "I assume you find this amusing. I shall refrain from apologizing in the future. Please, continue. When you have proper control over your emotions, we can complete the lesson."

"Severus. Come on. I was trying to get you to lighten up. And yes, I do find it amusing. Why don't we skip the rest of the lesson? You still have three left, any way." Hermione tugged at his arm. He was like granite, not moving.

"Hermione, it is a magical bet." Severus stood looking at her as light dawned in her eyes.

"You can't skip it, can you? Is that what keeps you coming back week after week, or was there something more?"

Severus tried to gauge Hermione's emotion. She wasn't serious, was she? Could he be snide and say, 'Yes, why else would I be here you insufferable know-it-all? and then take her in his arms and kiss her? She couldn't get too insulted. She had called him a bat. Maybe he should just kiss her and say nothing? Should he tell her how much he cared for her, that he was attracted to her since the beginning, when he first saw her at the dance studio?

"Severus?"

Damn it. He had waited too long to say or do anything. Taking a deep breath, he said, "What would you rather hear? I just want to be here because you are here. Or, yes, that blasted bet makes me return week after week, but I would still like to keep coming back after the bet is fulfilled. Possibly on Wednesdays instead, since it is the middle of the week, and then it will not seem so long from Sunday to Friday. Or maybe, you should fill in the blank. Perhaps I should say nothing and just kiss you. I apparently am too tired to think of a motive. You chose a reason."

Hermione grinned and put her arms around him. "Could you repeat my choices again?"

Severus glared at the young woman.

"Fine. I think I like the middle one best."

"And which reason was that? I seem to have forgotten." Severus tried a half smile on the young woman. "While the damn bet requires I show up, this is where I want to be. Now, may we continue so that I do not look like a complete fool when we dance? How many more steps are there?"

"Well, I think we have covered most of the steps. You still need to learn La Cunita, which means cradle rock. That has a few flashy toe taps but is not hard to learn. We need to work on the Cierre. It's a three-step sequence that ends with both feet together. It's the basic close to the Salida or a Tango close but you hold the final step for a full beat before you move. There is La Cadencia. You step two to four times in place. There is also the side Cadencia, both moves help to transition to the next step and both are quite easy to do. And I think a Tango rock, too. It's like a Cunita before we add some adornments or embellishments. I don't know, two more actual steps and a few easy movements. I thought we would practice the La Salida. We're not in step as we move side-by-side."

Severus groaned. "I have no intentions of becoming a professional Tango dancer. I just want to complete the bloody bet. What, pray tell, are adornments?"

"Adornments? They're not really steps, just movements that make the dance more dramatic. Tapping your toe at the right time. Moving your foot in a circle. Movements of your head. Staccato movements used in between some of the walks. We can work on adornments next week. They're easy to learn and add to the dance."

Hermione waved her wand and the music started again. "Come on, let's take it slow and start at the beginning. Let's try a run through, and then we can practice the La Salida and see if we can synchronize our side-by-side movements. I can show you the new steps next time."

Severus moved forward and gathered Hermione in his arms. The smell of lilacs drifted up to his sensitive nose. He lost himself in the feel of her body as they started to move to the music.

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They practiced for just over an hour, working the kinks out of some of the movements.

"Do you want me to order some take-out, or would you rather get back to the castle?"

"Still not cooking?" he asked with a wry smile.

"Take-out or go. Would you like me to help you choose?" Hermione crossed her arms over her chest.

"Take-out. I have an article I want to show you." Severus moved to his cloak.

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The remains of their meal were sitting on the very edge of the coffee table, waiting for gravity to pull it to the floor. Books and parchments, once again, covered every available surface.

Severus sat on the sofa, papers spread out to his side. "If we change the proportions of the vulture's gizzard, the Wolfsbane should have a longer effect. The equation in that article will have to be adapted to suit our purpose, but I think it will help in determining the quantities of the ingredients."

Severus had found an article in *Potions Today* that described an equation using Arithmancy to give weight to the amounts of the ingredients in a potion. Hermione had excelled at Arithmancy when she was at Hogwarts, it was his hope she could manipulate the equation to help with the potion's alteration. "It uses the basic theory of Arithmancy, but applies the variables to the potion. I think we can use it."

"I've always thought Arithmancy was a useful tool for evaluating a variety of things. I don't think it will be that hard to adapt the equation. What is the name of the Potions master that wrote the article?"

Severus consulted the article. "Professor Mutabilis."

"Here it is." Hermione was sorting through various stacks of parchment in front and to the side of her. She pulled a page from one of the stacks and passed it to him. "I thought I remembered the name. He is one of the Potions masters that will be at the symposium. Maybe we should speak with him?"

"Perhaps." Severus's tone was noncommittal. The symposium. The issue of what she would do after Cambridge came to mind again. Severus firmly pushed the idea away. That talk could wait for another day. It was getting late. He needed to leave soon if he was to return to the castle on time. He had early hall duty and still needed to mark a stack of fifth year Potions essays.

"Severus."

"Yes?"

"What if I ask Vanessa and Ted to dance at Hogwarts on Halloween? I might be able to get Kathy and Justin to dance, too. If not, Vanessa can dance a waltz or fox trot with Ted, then I could do one or two dances with him, and then you and I could finish with the Tango." Hermione shrugged. "I just thought it might be easier if this was sort

of a...mini dance expo, rather than you and I as the only entertainment. It's just a thought."

Severus's eyes seemed to darken. His whole manner turned stormy. "Would Pritthead be willing to dance at Halloween?" It would make him feel less the fool if the others danced too. What was troubling him, at the moment, was the image of Pritthead and Hermione dancing the Rumba and the Tango, at the dance exposition he had attended at the Cambridge Student Union. They were not involved at the time, and he had still felt a twinge of anger seeing her dance with him. What would he feel now?

'Anger?' said the voice in his head. 'Anger? Try jealousy. You were jealous then, and you would be worse now, old man.'

Severus was trying to shake the image his brain had conjured up. "Bugger off!" he mumbled under his breath.

"What? I didn't hear you." Did she hear him right? That sounded like bugger off. Couldn't be. Hermione looked up and noticed his dark expression.

"Would they be willing to dance?" Severus tried to reason with himself, rein his anger back in. 'Pritthead is married to Vanessa. Get a hold of yourself. You are acting like an out of control teenager.'

"Severus, are you okay?" Hermione had moved next to him, her hand on his arm. She could feel electricity in the air. While he might have shown her a kinder side to his nature, there was no mistaking the power that resided within this dark wizard. He was utterly dangerous, a force of nature all his own.

"I am fine. Ask Pritthead. That would probably be the best solution." His teeth ground together in an effort to regain his composure.

"If we are through here, I have some costumes I would like to show you."

Severus waited for her to produce a photograph of the blasted costume. He would be glad when Halloween was over and they could dispense with this nonsense. He arched one brow in question. Hermione was grinning madly at him.

"They're in the other room. Come with me." Hermione led Severus toward her bedroom.

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Severus eyed the young woman grinning at him.

"Just keep in mind, these are prototypes of the costumes I have been looking at."

Several black garments were currently draped across her bed. The shirts resembled the types peasants in Muggle movies normally wore. The consequences of the bet had been specific as to the wardrobe covering his lower extremities; tights, with a codpiece adorned with a snake. Nothing, other than a 16th century costume, had been stated about the top half.

If Hermione thought he was going to be embarrassed by the garments she had chosen, she was sorely mistaken. With the practiced ease of someone who has long been comfortable in their own skin, Severus started to unbutton his shirt and cuffs without regard for her presence.

"Severus?" Hermione swallowed harshly. She was supposed to have the upper hand here, not him.

He paused in the act of unbuttoning the remaining cuff. His silk shirt was open, hanging loosely from his broad shoulders. "Was I not correct, in assuming you wished for me to try these garments on?"

"Um, well, yeah, but won't you rather I step out or something?" His nonchalance was rattling her more than it should have. Hermione unconsciously licked her lips as the top half of his physique came into view. Years of hard work, keeping his body fit hauling cauldrons, had managed to keep him in shape. He was classically built, wide shoulders that tapered to a narrow waist in the classic 'V' shape. His pale skin appeared almost translucent in the subdued light of her bedroom. A fine dusting of black hair surrounded flat nipples. White and silver lines, scars, crisscrossed his chest and what she could see of his back. A heavier line of black hair trailed from his navel to the top of his trousers.

Hermione could not tear her gaze from the line disappearing below the closure of his trousers.

"See something you desire?" he asked with a chuckle.

Severus's voice cut through the haze engulfing her brain. She smiled brightly, "I'm fine."

"Good." A flick of his wrist and his trousers dropped. The very tight briefs she remembered from Grimmauld Place came into view. A very prominent bulge resided within. His legs were well developed. Muscled thighs and calves, again well shaped by years of work and, oddly enough, from his habit of pacing.

Again, she unconsciously licked her lips at the sight of his nearly nude form. 'I can't believe the body he's been hiding underneath those huge robes he wears. What a waste,' she thought. 'My god, the female students will look at him in a whole new light after this.'

Hermione suspected he normally magicked his clothing off. This display was for her benefit. She was curious to see him shimmy into the tights. Hermione leaned back against her armoire and waited for the show to begin.

Severus held up the tights, pleased with Hermione's response to his physique. He noticed her grin. She failed to notice his. The tights snapped out and fell back to mold to his body. He saw the look of disappointment in her eye.

"Surely you didn't expect me to struggle the Muggle way, attempting to put these on?" His voice softened, "I am a wizard, Hermione." He scooped up one of the shirts; black silk with full sleeves and an open V neck with black laces. The shirt appeared, as if by magic, on his upper torso. His hair, longer than it used to be when she was a student, flowed freely around his shoulders.

Hermione thought he looked like a pirate, one of those male models that adorned the covers of Muggle romances. All that was missing was the gold hoop earring. She also thought he looked drop-dead gorgeous.

He looked at her questioningly. "Well?"

"You look like a pirate."

"Am I supposed to look like a pirate?"

"Well, the look works." She moved into his embrace. "You look...unbelievably sexy."

"Hermione." His tone said he did not believe her.

"No. I mean it. You look gorgeous. The female students will never look at you the same way again. I can't believe you have been hiding this body, under those robes, all these years." Her eyes drifted close as she turned to him.

Their kiss was slow, sensual. Hermione cupped his buttocks, the feel of his hardening erection pressing against her. "Severus."

His hands had been roaming over her body. Caressing her back, toying with her arse, kneading her breast. She was ready and willing, hot with desire. "Hermione,

we...can't. I told you I have to be back at Hogwarts early tonight. I need to leave in a few minutes."

"What?" Her eyes opened. "You have to what?"

"What?" screamed the voice in his head, echoing the sentiments of the woman in front of him.

All right, maybe this had not gone exactly as planned. He had meant to tease her when he saw what she had in store for him. But really, this was not all his fault. She started it. 'Very mature,' he thought, 'she started it.'

The voice in his head was now advising him to rip her clothes off, throw her on the bed, and just take her! So what if he was a couple of minutes late for hall duty, Albus would understand.

"Hermione, what were you thinking when you asked me to try these costumes on? I am quite sure satisfying the requirements of the bet never entered your mind when you planned this."

Hermione looked away, a blush creeping up her cheeks.

Severus's hand, under her chin, brought her eyes up to meet his. "I want you. You have no idea how much I want you. I also do not want this to end before it begins. I told you I had to leave early tonight. You cannot imagine what a boost you have given my ego with this...plan of yours. If I could, I would stop time and stay here with you. I promise you, we will have all the time we want, tomorrow."

"When did you become so eloquent? Have you always been a closet romantic?"

"Have you never listened to my first year speech? There are not too many people I care to speak to. Consider yourself fortunate." He kissed her gently on the lips.

Hermione felt his clothing change under her hands. He was wearing his own shirt and trousers when she opened her eyes. Her fingers played with the ends of his long hair. "You really did look great."

"I believe the bet also called for a codpiece, with a snake on it?"

"Right, next costume fitting I will have a codpiece for you." Hermione grinned sheepishly at him. She thought he looked incredibly sexy in that outfit. She was looking forward to seeing what was under those briefs he was so fond of wearing.

"You do not suffer from ophidiophobia, do you?" he asked with a smirk.

It was her turn to arch an eyebrow. "No, I am not afraid of snakes. Why?" Did he think because he was Head of Slytherin that she had an aversion to snakes?

'Show her your python,' yelled the voice in his head.

"Just asking. Hermione, I will look like a fool in that outfit dancing the Tango. I will look ridiculous no matter what I wear. My only saving grace will be having you on my arm." Hermione's cuckoo clock sounded the hour. "I need to leave. I shall pick you up at seven tomorrow evening?"

Hermione walked him to the door. "Seven o'clock. Where are we going?"

Severus grabbed his cloak from its customary place by the door. "The Wizard's Choice. I will see you tomorrow."

A quick kiss and he was gone. Hermione leaned back against the door. "Well, that hardly went as planned," she said to the empty room. Crookshanks meowed from the kitchen doorway. He casually walked over to his mistress and wound his way through her legs. "I guess we wait for tomorrow, Crooks. Are you hungry?"

The cat pressed his squashed face into Hermione's hand as she scratched behind his ear. "Come on, let's get you something to eat." The half-Kneazle followed her into the kitchen and waited patiently while she prepared a cat treat for him. Kneazles were known for their intelligence. Crooks had spent Hermione's third year at Hogwarts trying to attack Scabbers, Ron's rat, until it became known he was actually Peter Pettigrew in Animagus form. Crookshanks actually seemed to like Severus. He would rub against Severus's leg whenever he entered her flat. The Potions master claimed it was the half-Kneazle's way of annoying him. He was not thrilled with the orange fur Crooks used to decorate his immaculate black trousers. But Hermione was secretly pleased the cat had taken to the dark wizard.

Hermione sighed as she headed for her bed and sleep. "Tomorrow," she said. Only the silence of the room answered her.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

The above equation, actually the idea for it, comes from a statistical analysis tool called a multiple regression. The basic idea behind a multiple regression is a listing of variables - fixed, variable, and dummy. Each has a value or weight assigned as to its value in influencing the outcome of an equation.

It seemed like something that would fit with what Severus and Hermione are working on. Geek factor (as my kids say): I used to be a public auditor before going into private accounting, and this is something I used to use many years ago. I would assume I am a bit odd. I majored and minored in Accounting with grad work in statistics. Here is a web site with more information if you are interested: http://cne.gmu.edu/modules/dau/stat/regression/multregsn/mreg_1_frm.html

Mutabilis Latin for variable.

Teaser for Chapter 19 Hermione's Birthday or Lemons at last

(Rating NC17- for sexual activity- Please skip if this is not your cup of tea.)

-----Snip-----

His kiss branded her soul. They clung to one another, his mouth leaving a trail of kisses on her heated skin as they moved into her bedroom. He pulled on the catch at the back of her dress. The gown fell in a liquid puddle at her feet, leaving her nude but for a very abbreviated pair of knickers and thigh-high hose. She turned to pull the covers back on the bed. Severus moved behind her, his hands grasping her hips, pulling her back against his straining erection. His fingers slid forward under the flimsy material of her knickers, toying with the damp curls covering her mound.

Hermione moaned as the strength left her legs. She leaned back into his arms, feeling his hard member nestle against her bottom. She ached to feel him inside her. It seemed as if she had been waiting for him forever.

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-----Snip-----

Thank you to Nakhash, my beta. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Still to come: Hermione's Birthday, yes Lemons next, The Burrow (the only snake in a roomful of lions), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

A Dance As Old As Time or Hermione's Birthday

Chapter 19 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 19 -A Dance As Old As Time or Hermione's Birthday

Severus was nervous as he knocked on Hermione's door. He could not help but feel tonight was a turning point for the two of them. He could only hope he would still be welcome here when the evening ended.

Hermione had been anxious all day. She had received various owls and messages of Happy Birthday from her friends. Messages from everyone but the one she wanted to hear from. Soaking in a hot tub had gone a long way to ease her anxiety this afternoon. All feelings of calm fled as she heard a knock at her door.

Severus's eyes widened as he took in the woman before him. Hermione was wearing a Muggle-style gown, velvet, in a deep midnight blue. The dress hugged her ample curves, low in the front, and lower in the back. The dress reminded him of the one she had worn at the dance exposition. Her hair was swept from her face and cascaded gently down her back.

"You look...lovely." The words left his lips in a whisper as he appreciated the vision before him. Severus stepped into the flat and hugged Hermione. He kissed her gently before removing his cloak. He was dressed much as she was used to seeing him at the Ministry celebrations. A black velvet frock coat, slightly more formal than his usual coat, a charcoal gray shirt that edged out from the cuffs and collar of his coat, and black twill pants completed the outfit. "We have a few minutes before we need to be at the restaurant. I have something I wish to give you."

Severus produced a small box wrapped in silver foil and tied with a large gold ribbon. "Happy Birthday, Hermione."

"Severus, thank you." Hermione threw her arms around his neck in a fierce hug before moving to the sofa to open his gift.

It would be difficult to say which one of the two was more nervous at the moment. Severus stood awkwardly near the doorway, still unsure of the proper etiquette.

Hermione patted the sofa next to her as she looked at the gift. "Silver and gold, huh? Sit with me while I open it."

Once he was seated next to her, she pulled on the ribbon and removed the silver paper. With infinite curiosity she eyed the silver bag etched with the single leaf. A quick glance at Severus's face gave nothing away. She removed the black velvet case from the pouch and looked at him again. With the briefest of nods from the wizard next to her, she opened the case with trembling fingers.

"Oh my god, Severus. It's beautiful. I can't believe it." Her fingers caressed the surface of the leaf before she turned to hug and kiss him. It was several minutes later before she regarded the necklace again.

With a sigh of relief, Severus asked, "May I assume the gift meets with your approval?" He was debating exactly how much to tell her of his odd encounter with Sibyll's cousin when he purchased the pendant.

Hermione extracted the necklace from its case. "Yes, it meets with my approval. It far exceeds my approval. Will you help me put it on?" Hermione handed him the necklace before turning away from him. She gathered her hair to one side so he could slide the pendant around her neck.

Severus slipped the pendant in place and latched the clasp. His hands moved to her shoulders as he kissed the back of her neck. Her dress was cut low in the back, allowing him the opportunity to trail a few kisses along her spine. He smiled wickedly as he felt a shiver pass through her. His voice was low and sultry as he whispered in her ear, "Happy Birthday, Hermione. My wish is to make this a birthday you will not forget." He was pleased to feel her tremble at his words.

Severus stood and extended his hand to her. "Come, it is time for us to leave. You may be interested in the story of that pendant you are wearing."

Hermione's hand moved to cover the pendant. It seemed to glow with an inner light. "Will you tell me over dinner about the necklace? It's absolutely beautiful. Thank you so much." She reached up to kiss him on the cheek. "

Severus was mildly uncomfortable with her gratitude, though secretly pleased she was happy with his gift. "You are welcome. Shall we?" Severus helped her on with her cloak before retrieving his own.

"Where is The Wizard's Choice?" she asked, when they were standing outside her building.

"It is in wizarding London. Not that far from Diagon Alley." 'Or the Emerald Leaf,' he thought.

Severus enfolded Hermione in his arms, his cloak falling to enclose them both. "Hold on to me. I will Apparate us there." The sound of a loud crack split the night air as the two disappeared.

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The Wizard's Choice was *the* new restaurant, the height of chic. The restaurant was elegant and understated. Top Ministry officials and local celebrities could be seen dining there. Still, having two heroes from the final battle, one of them the elusive Potions master from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, was enough to cause a stir, no matter who the restaurant normally catered to.

Hermione was used to people turning to look at her. She was highly visible as she attended classes and met with Harry and Ron every few weeks for dinner. Harry could bring a room to dead silence by just walking into it. He had become adept at waving and moving to a quiet corner in an attempt to become unobtrusive.

Severus had never been comfortable with the attention he received for the Dark Lord's defeat. He saw it as a way to redeem himself for the transgressions he had committed in his youth, nothing more. While he hadn't complained at first, when his newfound status had brought a bevy of witches out of the woodwork and after him, he soon tired of the mindless chits. They had little to say over dinner. They talked about the latest robe styles or an article in *Witch Weekly*. If he mentioned *Potions Today* or *Ars Alchemica*, they would stare at him with a decidedly blank look. He found he had been happier with his own company than attempting to put up with theirs.

Hermione was different. Her mind moved at the speed of light. She could switch from topic to topic with amazing alacrity. She kept up on articles and topics in a variety of fields. Their work on the Wolfsbane Potion was more advanced than any research being performed today. Her professors at Cambridge were fools for dismissing her without a second glance. He was sure there was probably a thing or two she could teach them about their chosen fields, knowing her penchant to research any subject she took.

Severus shook his head and smiled. This was the annoying know-it-all that had plagued him for seven years. The student that would turn in four feet of parchment when he had only asked for two because she could not condense the volume of information her answers would contain.

During dinner, Severus relayed the unusual circumstance behind her pendant. Hermione was fascinated to hear the details. Her hand drifted up every so often to lightly caress the necklace. Their talk turned to the Wolfsbane Potion and the article on Arithmancy they had looked at the previous night, before moving on to articles of interest each had read.

They lingered over dinner, enjoying each other's company before returning to her flat.

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Severus waved his hand. The sound of music softly filled the room. The soft strains of *Summer Wind*, sung by Frank Sinatra, floated around them. It was the song she had used to teach one of her students the waltz for his anniversary. He held his hand out to her, "Dance with me."

She rested her hand on his shoulder. His arm encircled her waist, pulling her to him. They moved slowly to the music. Severus lowered his head. He nipped her earlobe before leaving a trail of kisses along the side of her neck. He was rewarded with a soft moan for his troubles. Her arms moved to encircle his neck. He moved one hand to gently knead her breast through the soft velvet of her gown. He could feel her nipple pebble through the fabric.

Hermione's voice was husky, "Stay with me tonight, Severus. Make love to me."

He watched her eyes gloss over as they swayed to the music. He could see lust, desire, and want in the depths of her gaze. Her pupils were fully dilated, making her eyes almost as dark as his. He could barely see the gold flecks that usually highlighted the warm brown. His voice was soft, melodic. "Are you sure that's what you want, Hermione? Are you really sure I am what you want? There will be no turning back after tonight. I have told you before; I am not a nice man. I won't share you. If we make love tonight, it will be because you are mine."

Severus studied her eyes, the windows to the soul. Her breathing became erratic. He watched as her hand moved slowly down the length of his chest. Her eyes meet his as her hand moved to gently caress the bulge in his trousers. "I can't imagine ever being with anyone else, ever again, Severus." She was his. No one had ever lit a fire in her blood as he did. She ached to feel him buried inside her, hard, hot with need.

His kiss branded her soul. They clung to one another, his mouth leaving a trail of kisses on her heated skin as they moved into her bedroom. He pulled on the catch at the back of her dress. The gown fell in a liquid puddle at her feet, leaving her nude but for a very abbreviated pair of knickers and thigh high-hose. She turned to pull the covers back on the bed. Severus moved behind her, his hands grasping her hips, pulling her back against his straining erection. His fingers slid forward under the flimsy material of her knickers, toying with the damp curls of her sex.

Hermione moaned as the strength left her legs. She leaned back into his arms, feeling his hard member nestle against her bottom. She ached to feel him inside her. It seemed as if she had been waiting for him forever.

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His hands gently moved her back. "Lie back on the bed." A whispered spell and his clothing disappeared, allowing Hermione to drink in his form. He was tall, a full head taller than she, with broad shoulders that tapered to a narrow waist. The line of hair from his navel continued downward, ending in a thick patch of black curls. His penis, hard and long, stood out proudly from its nest of hair. She was mesmerized, watching his member bob gently as he reached for her stocking-clad leg.

Severus rested Hermione's foot against the broad expanse of his chest. He slowly rolled the silk hose down her leg, teasing the inside of her thigh as he moved. He planted kisses from her knee down as he exposed her skin. Both legs received the same sweet torture. She was left breathless as he moved to lie next to her on the bed.

She eyed the length and thickness of his aroused member. He was much larger than the boys she had experimented with in the past. There was no question he was an adult wizard. She too had heard rumors from some of the witches he had bedded after the final battle, but had dismissed the stories as exaggeration. Now she realized they had not described his 'charms' to his full credit. She had some doubts as to whether he would fit.

Severus watched her eyes, so many emotions, so many questions, skittering across her face. He was long-practiced in the art of pleasing women. He had always been a man who answered to his baser needs.

The Dark Lord had passed the wives of the Death Eaters around to be used like so many whores at the revels; the followers were given no choice. Their wives service was a requirement of loyalty to the Dark Lord. Most of the other Death Eaters could not understand why he was a favorite of the women. Severus had learned long ago that there was more pleasure for a man to derive if a woman willingly accepted and welcomed his attention.

While Severus considered sex an itch to be scratched, he also thought of it as a picnic for his senses. Taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell, all differences to enjoy. He loved the taste of a woman's sex, the feel of soft skin, so different from his own. The sight of a woman's breasts, her nipples hardening in pleasure, changing in color. He reveled in his power over his partners, and took his own pleasure whenever he chose. While not long on looks, his reputation as a lover and the size of his 'equipment' took on the proportion of a fable. Severus allowed the stories to grow, adding to his air of mystery.

Tonight would be different. He had bedded the wives of the other Death Eaters, frequented the brothels in Knockturn Alley when looking for a quick release, and had used the chits that had chased after him when his status changed from spy to hero.

Tonight he truly cared for the woman he intended to make love to. Tonight was about making love, not just sex. He planned on being the last man she would ever have. Tonight was for her. He would enjoy himself, but he wanted her to know what it felt like to reach the heights he intended to take her to. His hand had been slowly caressing her arm, stroking softly from the shoulder to the elbow and back while she looked over his naked form.

He chuckled as her read the last comment in her eyes. "It will fit. Our bodies were made to fit together." He laid on his side, his head propped up with one hand, his other hand continued to gently stroke her arm, as he watched her eyes rove over his body, her hand hesitantly exploring his chest.

He did not want to ask. He really did not want to know. He was happy in his ignorance. Severus took a deep breath before asking the question he dreaded. "Hermione, have you ever been with a man?"

"Are you asking if I'm a virgin?" Her eyes widened as she looked at him.

His voice was soft. "I don't want to hurt you. I just...need to know."

"I may not be all that experienced, but, no, I'm not a virgin. To be honest, until I met you, I was not all that interested in sex. There have been a few boys, but it was never all that great." Her voice turned breathy as she tried to express what she felt. "You do something to me. I can't explain it."

His smile was warm. His voice sultry, "Tonight is for you. Let me show you the pleasure you have been missing." Arrogant? Absolutely. True? Without a doubt.

Hermione shivered as the sound of his voice excited her further. Severus moved over the aroused witch, enjoying the feel of skin sliding across skin. His kiss, while starting slowly, lit the fire growing between them. Tongues dueled for control. Hands played with sensitive skin. Hermione arched beneath him as she felt his leg slide between hers, gently spreading her legs apart.

She moaned as he kissed the line of her jaw. "Oh, god."

A growl was her only answer. He nipped her earlobe, while continuing along the side of her neck. His hands moved to knead and caress her breast, cupping the heavy globes and teasing her hardened nipples. His mouth left a trail of kisses as he traced a path past her collarbone, and moved to worship her breast using his mouth and tongue to further arouse the pebbled flesh, before giving the same attention to the other breast.

His name was a prayer and a curse as it left her lips. "Severus," she moaned.

"I want you to enjoy yourself. We have all night." His voice, smooth and sexy, sent an electric shock straight to her core.

Severus continued moving slowly down the length of her body, stopping randomly to lick and nip her heated flesh. His tongue dipped into her navel, before dancing around to tease the sensitive skin at her hip. Her muscles clenched as he nipped the supple skin, then soothed it with his tongue. The musky smell of her sex filled his nostrils as he buried his nose in the soft damp curls covering her mound.

Hermione's breathing was ragged. She could barely speak as he moved to nuzzle her sex. "Severus, you don't..." He looked up to see her watching him. The desire in his black eyes held her captive, silencing her objection.

His voice was husky, "I don't have to do this? Hasn't anyone ever pleased you before? Trust me, this is as much for my enjoyment as it is for yours."

The trust shining in her eyes was more than he could bear. He would take it slow. She had played with boys until now. Her excursions into sex had probably amounted to a few fumbling tries with none caring about her satisfaction. It was obvious she had never been with an adult wizard before. There was so much he could teach her, so much for them to discover.

He wanted nothing more than to plunge his engorged member deep within her. To pound her into the mattress, with nothing more than the thought of his own release. Instead, he held back. Tonight was for her pleasure, through he would benefit by it too.

His mouth slid past her sex to lick the inside of her thigh. She was arcing off the bed, desperately trying to get him where she needed his touch most. His fingers slowly parted her sex, gently stroking her sensitive nub. One long supple finger traced the slick folds of her sex, finding its way into her wet opening.

Hermione moaned at the feel of his hands on her heated skin. She had experimented with playing with herself to some success, but it had never felt like this. She was reduced to small whimpers and moans as he slid his finger into her welcoming body. Her hands clutched the sheets as she rode the wave of electricity rushing through her.

He was amazed at how tight she was. He was fairly well endowed. His cock would fit, but he would take it slow, let her adjust to his size before taking his own pleasure from her. His arm across her hips helped hold her in place.

Without thought, he bit the inside of her thigh, marking her and drawing blood. His tongue soothed the bite, the coppery taste of blood in his mouth. He moved to her sex, drinking in the taste of her essence. He stopped short of the incantation he knew was the final step in making her his. As if coming out of a daze, he realized he had actually performed the first two steps of an ancient ritual before coming to his senses. The spell bordered on Dark Magic. He wondered if she knew how close he had come to binding her to him?

Drinking your lovers blood, only a single drop was necessary, was the first step. Tasting the musky juice of her sex was the second. All he needed to complete the ritual was to say the incantation and she would be his, forever. There was a time, long ago, he would have gone ahead and performed the spell without her knowledge. He realized he was no longer that man. As much as he wanted her to be his alone, he would not perform the ancient ritual without her permission. There may come a time, in the future, when they would both perform the ritual and bind themselves to each other. When she would be willing to be his alone, now and forever, as the ancient ritual decreed. He would wait until she was ready to give herself over to him, to desire him alone.

Tonight was about her enjoyment. He turned his full attention to the pleasurable task at hand. Two fingers slipped into her opening. His mouth moved over her clit, sucking lightly, his tongue swirling around the hard nub, licking slowly at first, before increasing the speed and pressure of his tongue. Her taste was beyond anything he could have imagined. Pure heaven. He increased the suction of his mouth, feeling her body twitch in response to his actions. He could feel her walls tighten around his fingers as he pumped them in and out of her body. Steel encased in satin pulsated against him. His cock twitched as he felt how tightly she clamped down on his fingers. He would never last in the tight heat of her body. As he increased the suction on her clit, he could feel her orgasm start. Her muscles tightened around his fingers as she went over the edge.

Hermione's head thrashed as she crested another wave of emotion. Her orgasm washed over her, sending electric shocks straight to her core. She found it hard to breathe, as wave after wave of pleasure swept over and through her. His name was barely a moan falling from her lips. It was several minutes before she could think clearly again.

The sound of his name only served to heighten his arousal. His tongue dipped into the heat of her sex, his hands holding her hips down on the bed. He licked slowly up and back between her wet folds before thrusting his tongue into her slick opening. He could still feel the muscles of her walls twitching as she rode the aftershocks of her orgasm.

He moved slowly up her body, allowing the friction of their skin to add to his desire. He licked and sucked her nipple, teasing the hard bud as Hermione writhed beneath him.

"Oh god. Severus." Her voice was breathless. "Please."

"Please? What do you want?" The vibration of his voice against her sensitized skin sent a shock straight to her already sensitive clit.

"I want you. I want your hard cock inside me. Please, I need to feel you." Hermione's hands gripped his buttocks, pulling him to her.

Severus placed the head of his cock at the slick opening of her sex. He could feel her hands on his arse, urging him on. His voice was low, barely a growl. "Hermione, open your eyes. Look at me. I need to see you."

Hermione's eyes locked with his black gaze. The intimacy of looking into his eyes was greater than anything she had ever felt before. Her breathing was ragged as he eased his hardened shaft into her waiting body. Her breath hitched as her body fully sheathed his engorged member. He was hard and hot, and filled her as none of the others ever had. She watched his eyes glaze over as he leaned in to claim her lips. His tongue plunged in and out of her mouth as he held the rest of his body still, allowing her to adjust to his size. She could feel his member pulsing within her as she tried to move against him.

Her hands pulled at his body, her hips rocked against him, signaling her readiness. Severus moved slowly, using shallow thrusts in an effort to extend their coupling. Hermione was having none of it. She moaned into his mouth, destroying what was left of his control. His thrusts became stronger, harder, deeper, and more erratic than before. She met his movements, her hips raised to take him as deep as possible. His cock plunged over and over into her willing body. This was for her. He wanted to feel her come again before giving in to his own release. He could feel her walls tightening around him as another orgasm threatened to overtake her. Severus lowered his head and licked at her nipple before sucking hard on the pebbled flesh. He moved over her body, trying to regain a shred of his control.

His breath was hot in her ear. His words, a harsh whisper, sending her over the edge again, "So...tight. So... fucking...tight." He felt the start of her climax, her sex tightening around him. Clamping down on his cock.

He gave in to his own need, thrusting into her welcoming heat. The feel of her orgasm, joined with the friction of his cock plunging in and out of her tight channel, sent him over the edge, spilling his seed deep within her body. His hips rocked forward reflexively, a few more thrusts and he was spent.

Severus held himself over her, not wanting to crush Hermione under his weight. His member slipped from the warmth of her body, leaving him feeling momentarily lost. He shifted to his side, pulling her against him. She snuggled into the crook of his neck, throwing one leg possessively over his thigh, to rest between his legs. Her hand snaked across his chest, playing with the sparse hairs that outlined his flat nipples, before idly tracing one of the more prominent scars on his shoulder.

His chest and back were a road map of white and silver lines that told the silent tale of his years of spying, his years of being tortured at the hands of a madman. Tears pricked the back of her eyes as she thought of the years he suffered alone.

Severus was playing with the mass of honeyed curls that flowed down her back. He sensed the shift in her mood. A finger under her chin brought her eyes to his face. His smile, so rare, so open, melted her heart. "Hermione, Happy Birthday." She melted under his touch, this caustic, hard, sarcastic man, who had brought her untold pleasure tonight. This had been her real gift. Not the pendant or the pleasure, through she reveled in it. It was the unguarded glimpse into his heart. His smile, his warmth, so freely given, that had been her real gift.

She snuggled deeper into his shoulder, happy and drowsy from their shared intimacy. "I never got the chance to taste you," she mumbled sleepily.

Severus played with the mass of curls draped across his arm, encircling her back, his other hand casually caressing the back of her hand resting on his chest. "Rest. We have all night. All weekend if you wish it."

Hermione knew he was referring to the party at the Burrow tomorrow. "Hmm. You're going."

Severus laughed. "I was only thinking of you." Her breathing had evened out. He was not sure she had heard his comment. It did not matter. While he was loathe to socialize with anyone else, he would endure the Burrow for her.

'Damn it to hell, what is happening to you man?' Having finally gotten what it wanted, the voice in his head was now off on a new bent. It was at that moment Hermione shifted against him. The leg resting between his thighs moved up to slide along the length of partially aroused member. The satiny feel of her thigh gave new life to his erection and quieted the voice in his head.

Hermione's fingers followed the line of hair from his navel to his erection. Her fingers played with the heavy sac below his aroused member, teasing the sensitive skin. His labored breathing told her she was doing something right. He could feel her hand cupping and stroking his balls. Evidently she had decided not to sleep.

"Hermione, I told you, tonight is for you. It is your birthday." She was sending electric shocks up his spine.

"Right, tonight is for me." Hermione moved to straddle his hips. His cock jumped to attention, once again pressing into her backside as she sat on his stomach. She took his wrists in her hands. He allowed her to move them over his head, one hand holding the wrist of the other. She shivered as his sucked on her nipple, her breast moving over his mouth as she reached above his head. She pressed down on his hands. "Do not move. They are glued to that spot. Understand?" Her eyes bore into his.

Severus remained silent, curious as to what she had planned. She kissed her way down his chest, paying attention to his nipples as he had done to hers. A quiet groan escaped his throat, his muscles tensed as she licked and sucked the sensitive skin at the juncture of his leg and body, his cock bobbing gently with her movements. Hermione settled between his spread thighs, sitting back on her heels.

She allowed herself a chance to really look at his aroused member. It was long and fairly thick. His groin was covered in thick black curls. She ran her fingers through the curls, noticing the way his breathing changed as she teased the base of his penis. His shaft was heavily veined, the skin darker in color. Her hand moved forward to loosely encircle the base of his cock.

Severus remained quiet as he watched Hermione explore his body. Her touch was driving him mad, but he managed to hold still.

Her head tipped forward, pink tongue darting out to lick the pearly drop of fluid slowly seeping from the slit at the head of his penis. 'Salty, not bad,' she thought, as she continued to lick the tip of his hardened shaft.

Severus's eyes gleamed with lust as he watched Hermione's tongue swirl around the head of his cock. His breath caught in his throat as she took the head of his engorged member in her mouth. It was exquisite torture as she slowly licked the length of his member like an all-day lolly.

His body arced up to meet her mouth. His hands remained clenched above his head as she requested. He wanted to slide his hands into the wild mass of silky curls that made up the mane of her hair. He fought the urge to hold her head still while he used her mouth. She was sexually naive, but what she lacked in technique, she made up for in enthusiasm, he thought. Her eyes shinning with lust, the obvious desire for him that he saw on her face was destroying his legendary control. He could not remember anyone who wanted him with such desire as she did.

He started to lose control as she took the length of his shaft in the hot, wet, depths of her mouth. She sucked his length in and out of her mouth, using a movement she remembered hearing the girls in her dorm talking about. Severus's breathing became erratic as he neared his release. His voice was hoarse with emotion. "Hermione, wait." He moved to pull her away before he came.

She batted his hands away, quickening her movements. One hand moved down to cup his balls. She could feel them drawing up towards his body. His back arched, body stiff. Severus groaned her name as his orgasm hit, his hot seed flooding her mouth.

Hermione sat back, a smile on her lips. She watched Severus, his eyes closed, his hands clenching the pillow above his head. When he had his breathing under control, he opened his eyes and looked at her.

Severus thought she had never looked sexier. He pulled her up to hug and kiss her, tasting himself in her mouth. "You look pretty pleased with yourself," he said, after she had settled once again at his side.

Hermione grinned, "That was a...heady experience. Pun intended. I've never done that before. I've read books and the other girls used to talk, but that was the first time I ever actually did that."

Severus laughed at her obvious delight. "Than I am honored. You always were a quick study." She was chewing on her lower lip, a habit he knew from years of having her as his student. She had a question she wanted to ask. "What?"

Her hand once again moved to his lower regions. "How long before you can...perform again?"

"Dear, god. What have I created? Why do you ask?"

"Just wondering."

"Hermione, I am not as young as I used to be. I may be a wizard, but even I need some time. Have no fear, I am not finished with you yet." He moved to play with her breast, pulling and teasing her nipple, kneading the smooth flesh, before treating the other nipple and breast to the same treatment.

"Severus, thank you."

The quiet sincerity of her voice drew his attention. He looked deep into her eyes, his fingers gently sliding across the angle of her cheek before burying them in her hair. "I am the one who should be thanking you. You are... amazing."

"No. You don't understand. It's never been like this."

Severus was not sure he wanted to know. A part of him wanted to hear what she had to say. Another part of his brain reasoned she was *with* him now. That was all that mattered. "Hermione, you don't have to tell me anything."

"I know I don't have to. I want to. I haven't had that much experience. But no one has ever made me feel like you do." She was grinning, lost in a post-orgasmic haze.

"Hermione..."

"I won't ask you anything. Okay? I just wanted you to know. That's all."

'Now's your chance; ask her about Potter and Weasley. Go on. Ask her.' Severus almost bit his tongue to keep the words in his mouth. He had promised himself he would not ask her, no matter how much he wanted to know. Instead, he nodded silently.

"What? I can tell you want to ask me something." Hermione was tracing mindless patterns across his chest.

"Are you always this demanding?"

"Yes," she said with a smirk. "What did you want to ask me?"

He couldn't. All right he could. It was with great trepidation he asked, "Potter? Weasley?"

Hermione fell back in a fit of giggles. "Are you asking me if Harry and I? Or Ron and I ever...? Severus, they are like brothers to me. Oh god!"

"You and Weasley dated." It was a statement of fact. He tried to keep the tone of his voice neutral.

"We only went out on three dates. It never went past a kiss." Her giggles returned in force as she thought of Ron and her shagging.

Severus hadn't realized he was holding his breath. He moved over the giggling witch. "You think that's funny, do you?" He licked the shell of her ear, nipping the outer edge, sucking on her earlobe.

Hermione giggles died in her throat. She felt his very hard member nudge the opening of her sex. Her hips shifted trying to impale herself on his hard shaft.

The look in his eyes told her everything she needed to know. Want, lust, desire, need, and something more. Something she wasn't sure she could name, yet.

All thought fled as his mouth claimed her, possessed her. Severus thrust forward, sheathing his cock in one fluid motion. They made love again, with an urgency neither one could explain. Hermione's already sensitized channel answered his welcoming thrusts. Her muscles twitched in response to the friction he was creating. Tasting him had aroused her beyond belief. His strokes became deeper as he increased his speed. He thrust harder, faster and faster, carrying them both closer to the edge. They came together in an explosion of sensation, joined as one.

Severus pulled Hermione with him as he moved off her sated body. Once again, she cuddled into his side. He snagged the duvet from the side of the bed and pulled it over them. A quiet 'nox' plunged the room into darkness, the only light coming from the single window on the far side of the room. Hermione felt his fingers gently playing with her hair, lulling her to sleep. The last thing she remembered before sleep claimed her was Severus, gently kissing the top of her head and whispering Happy Birthday.

Severus looked at the sleeping witch in his arms. Contrary to Muggle men, he had never felt the urge to immediately fall asleep after sex. He watched Hermione smile as she drifted off. He thought back over the night they had spent, his body responding once again to the images playing in his head.

She was amazing. For someone with little experience, she was extremely adventurous. It seemed she was willing to try anything. He knew her willingness to experiment was probably due more to her trust in him than anything else. Trust he came close to violating tonight. His knowledge of Dark Magic was extensive. It seemed to emerge at odd times, seemingly without him calling the dark forward.

Severus thought back to the legend of the pendant, pureness of heart. Albus had believed it referred to him, not Hermione. How much was true of the old story? Hermione had been enthralled when he told her the legend. She had asked if he would take her to see the store one afternoon. She was curious. Her laughter had burst forth, unchecked, when he told her the name of the shopkeeper. It was a well-known fact what Hermione thought of divination. Still, true or not, it made for an amusing tale.

Hermione was pure light. Her heart was white to his black soul. Perhaps this was Albus's plan all along, he thought. Hermione would bind his darkness to the light that was her heart, her soul, ensuring he stayed on the side of right. While he resented Albus's attempt to manipulate his life, he could no longer deny his feelings for her. She was his now. Whether she knew it or not, they belonged to each other. The rest of the world would never see the side of him he showed to her. He had never allowed anyone to come this close to him, before. He had no idea what the future held, but he was sure she would be a part of it.

She had slipped past his defenses and taken up residence in his heart. The world saw him as sarcastic, difficult, loathsome, someone others avoided at all costs. She brought out a side of him that had never existed before. She saw something more in him. Characteristics he did not think existed. He shook his head. She really did embody her house.

Severus chuckled to himself. She had changed him in ways she would never know. There was a time he would have hexed Albus for his interference. Now, Severus would thank the man for bringing them together, then he would hex him. Definitely a softer side to his personality.



His arms tightened around her. He smiled as he allowed sleep to claim him. There were a few more surprises he planned to show her in the morning. They had hours before they had to be at the Burrow.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

The ancient ritual Severus almost used borders on Dark Magic. It is used to bind someone, heart and soul to the caster, to ensure unfailing fidelity in a spouse or lover and will be revisited in a later chapter. I'd like to give a nod to another story that carries this type of ritual into greater detail and with other magical repercussions. The story, *Cloak of Courage* by WendyNat uses a blood rite ritual to bind two people together through the 'The Call of the Blood'. It is a wonderful story, well crafted, and well worth your time to read. The story can be found in its entirety on Ashwinder.

A thank you to QueneArual who pointed out the error in the last chapter, it has been corrected. Hermione did not get Crookshanks until her third year.

A grateful thank you to Nakhash, my beta for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Still to come: The Burrow (the only snake in a roomful of lions) with a lemon or two, Harry and Ron's reactions, more dance lessons, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## What Did That Sign Say?

*Chapter 20 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

### **Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected**

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 20. What Did That Sign Say?

Hermione awoke to the feel of a warm body spooned against her back. An arm was draped across her waist, effectively pinning her to the bed. She wanted nothing more than to snuggle back under the covers with him. Unfortunately, her body had other demands that needed to be met first. A quick trip to the loo was in order before she could consider a lie in with Severus.

Severus. Last night had been amazing. It was a birthday she would never forget. The pendant was beautiful. She had never expected him to buy her such an extravagant gift. She couldn't wait to show it off at the Burrow tonight.

Hermione looked to the nightstand where the pendant was once again nestled in its black case. She would have to do some research on the grandfather and the origins of the legend he had told her about. She still wanted to see the shop for herself, just out of curiosity. Senalda Trelawney, maybe she could meet Sibyll's cousin. Severus had stressed that it was most likely a fanciful tale used to lure unsuspecting buyers into purchasing pieces of greater value. It was an odd story to be sure.

Last night had been like nothing she had ever experienced before. She shuddered as she recalled his mouth on her body, licking and sucking at her opening. Books can only go so far as to explain the mechanics of an act. They don't prepare you for the kaleidoscope of feelings and sensations you experience when that knowledge becomes a reality.

Severus seemed like a different person, completely opposite from her image of him as her teacher. As restrained and aloof as he was as Professor Snape, that's how open he was as a lover. He had brought her to orgasm several times over before thinking of himself, something that could not be said about any of her past encounters, definitely the difference between a man and boys. The first time he had kissed her, he had left a love bite on her neck. Last night he had left a mark on her thigh. 'Maybe there is some truth to the rumors of him being a vampire?' she thought with a chuckle.

Shifting slightly brought her need to use the loo foremost in her mind. She tried to gently ease out from under his arm, afraid her movement might wake him. His arm seemed to grow heavier as she tried to shift away. Severus groaned, his arm tightening around her waist, pulling her back towards his chest. Hermione waited a moment before again trying to extract herself from his grip.

His voice was husky, his breath warm against her ear. "Is there a problem, Miss Granger?"

Hermione looked at him over her shoulder. His eyes gleamed with mirth. One eyebrow raised in his traditional manner of query.

"You're awake! I thought you were still asleep. I was trying not to wake you."

His arm remained a steel band around her waist. "I regret to inform you, this is your flat. It is not possible for you to sneak away."

It was then that she felt something hard stirring against her bottom. "As much as I would enjoy trading quips with you, I believe a quick trip to the loo is in order."

"Far be it from me to stop you." His arm did not move.

"Severus."

He released her, rolling to his back as he moved away. "Fine, fine. I know when I am not wanted. One night of pleasure and you are through with me. I should have known. Perhaps one of those chits from the Ministry is still hanging around Hogwarts. What time is it? Maybe I can still make breakfast?"

Hermione noticed the distinctive tent in the sheets. She leaned in towards him, her face a few inches away. "Have I ever told you how creative I can be with my hexes? I seem to recall one that allows a witch who feels she has been wronged to rearrange the body parts of the wizard that caused the emotion. Very difficult to reverse. Don't move or I will be forced to bind you to the bed. I will be right back."

Severus smiled as she moved off the bed. She could hear a faint chuckle coming from him as he said, "Promises, promises."

Hermione returned a few minutes later. "Do you have to...?" She gestured to the bathroom.

"Hermione, I start my rounds at Hogwarts at 7:00am. It is close to 9 now. I have already... Thank you." He used the same gesture she did when he motioned to the bathroom.

Hermione giggled. "Sorry. Why didn't you wake me?" She slid back under the duvet and cuddled into his side.

"I enjoyed watching you sleep. I can't say I can ever remember waking up next to someone as lovely as you." His hand stroked the side of her face, fingers grazing softly across her cheekbone.

Hermione looked into his eyes. "Who are you?"

"Are you telling me you do not remember who you were with last night? I could not have been that bad." His eyebrow shot up again.

"Mmm. No. Not too bad at all. As far as I can remember."

Severus pulled her in for a slow, sensual kiss that left her breathless. "Okay, amazing."

"Did you have any special plans you needed to attend to this morning? Studying? Other responsibilities?" He wanted to ravish the young witch lying beside him, but understood if she had other obligations to attend to. Well, understand was too general a word. He might not be happy, but he would accept her need to be elsewhere but in his arms.

"What did you have in mind?" She was kissing the side of his neck, her hand trailing slowly down his chest. She noticed his erection twitch as she scratched along his arm before softly caressing the skin.

"Hmm. I have a few ideas." Severus gently sucked and nipped along the hollow of her neck.

Hermione giggled as her mind drifted back to her earlier thoughts of Severus. There had been numerous rumors about him that had circulated around the school, from time to time, regarding his sleeping arrangements. Stories of why people really thought of him as a giant black bat. Ron said, if he weren't a vampire, he would sleep at night instead of roam the castle that alone should be proof enough.

Severus stopped and eyed the young woman. "What?"

"You know, when I was in my sixth year, there was a rumor going round that you were a vampire." Hermione couldn't hide her smirk as she thought of a few other rumors he had dispelled last night.

"What makes you think I am not?"

"If you're a vampire, where is your coffin? All vampires sleep in coffins." Hermione grinned.

"Have you checked my valise? It has been shrunk to fit in the side left pocket. Sleeping in a coffin is nothing more than a Muggle superstition. I only need to have it near me. Would you like to see it?"

"Severus, this isn't funny. You're joking, right?" Her hand had stopped its downward path as she tried to gauge his expression. He was joking, right? Remus is a werewolf, her mind shouted. Just because werewolves existed didn't mean Severus was a vampire.

"Vampires have unusual strength, incredible staying power. Their sexuality is well documented." He continued to kiss her. Perhaps he was taking this little charade too far. He wagged one eyebrow at her, "Would you like me to show you how a vampire 'impales' its victim? Perhaps you would like to see something...different?"

Hermione slapped the side of his arm. "Not funny."

"I believe *you* brought up the subject of vampires, not me. But I would like to show you something different. Come here." Severus pulled Hermione on top of him, straddling his chest. "Relax. I believe this is something you will enjoy. Hold on to the headboard."

Hermione heard him whisper a spell; suddenly she felt lighter than air. "Severus!" she shrieked, as she felt his hands gently lift her and move her forward. She couldn't weigh more than a feather. A shiver ran through her as she felt Severus's tongue enter her body.

Hermione looked down to see Severus's black eyes watching her, his tongue lapping at her opening. She moaned as he moved to suck her clit, one finger, then two, sliding into her slick sex. Bolts of electricity were shooting there her. Her groin clenched and unclenched as he alternated pumping his fingers in and out of her body and sucking forcefully on her clit. She hung on to the headboard for dear life, lost in the sensations he was creating. This was like nothing she had ever felt before. To watch him as he pleased her was unbelievably erotic.

Severus watched her eyes slide close. Her breathing was erratic. The sight of her breasts bouncing up and down as she rode his mouth was having a decided effect on him. His erection was almost painful. He desired nothing more than to impale her on his hardened shaft, vampire style, he thought with a silent chuckle.

He could tell she was close to coming. Her walls were twitching around his fingers. He continued to slowly pump his fingers in and out of her wet opening. His eyes gleamed as he stopped to ask her, "Hermione, I could stop and we can continue our discussion, or you can come? What would you like to do?" He had no intentions of stopping. He didn't think she did either.

His name was a groan as she tried to focus her eyes on him. "Severus."

His mouth reattached itself to her body. His fingers increased their pace, sliding in and out of her sex. Close. Closer. Severus felt her stiffen as she shattered around him. He moved to her slick opening, once again, lapping at her juices.

She was lighter than a feather. He brought his legs up and gently slid her down the length of his body to rest back against his knees. "I don't seem to recall you answering me, but may I assume I made the right choice?"

Hermione raised one hand, vaguely waving it in his direction. "Oh, my god. What was that? What did you do?"

"My own variation of Wingardium Leviosa. Would you like to see the second half when you regain your strength?"

She was leaning back against his knees, facing him, her legs loosely straddling his prone body. She could feel his cock pulsating under her slick opening. Her hand slowly traced the veins in his shaft. Her fingers teased the head, spreading the pearly drops of fluid seeping from the slit.

Her name fell as a strangled sound from his lips. Severus lifted the spelled witch over his hard shaft. "Hold my cock. Guide it into you."

Hermione held his shaft as he lowered her body, her slick opening lining up with his hardened member. A solid thrust and she was impaled on his stiff shaft. Hermione moaned as she felt him pulsate inside her. Severus couldn't hold back. The sound of her moan, the feel of her hands on his cock, guiding him into her waiting body, fueled his lust. He held her hips as he pounded into her.

Hermione could feel her orgasm approaching. His thrusts were hitting her cervix over and over. The weightlessness of her body allowed him to easily impale her with each thrust. His movements became erratic. His back arched as he came deep within her. Hermione's climax ripped through her as she felt his final thrust, the throbbing of his member signaling his release.

Severus thought to move her to the bed as he ended the spell. She collapsed in his arms, both spent from their latest round of lovemaking.

Hermione had a silly grin as she regarded the man before her. "That was amazing! Can we do that again?"

Severus glared at her. "Are you *trying* to kill me?"

"No, that was incredible."

Severus pulled her against him, shaking his head, still trying to catch his breath. "Hermione, I am old. You have to give me a few minutes at the very least. We can do that again. But not at this moment."

His was slowly running his hand up and down her back. Enjoying the feeling of having her naked in his arms after having just made love to her. If this was a dream, he hoped he never woke up. This was something he never wanted to end. His eyes were closed, but he could feel her looking at him. Without opening his eyes, he raised one eyebrow in question. "What?"

"Speaking of old. When is your birthday? I know it's coming up and I'd rather not have to ask Minerva."

Severus groaned. "My birthday?"

"Well, you've made mine memorable. Unforgettable, really. I'd like to do the same for you. Is there anything special you want?" she asked with a smile.

'The Thong! Tell her you want to see her in The Thong. No, wait. Ask her to belly dance wearing The Thong! Then take her! How kinky is she willing to go?' The voice in his head was having a field day yelling birthday suggestions for Hermione.

Severus wrapped his arms around her. "You do realize that is a dangerous question?"

"I take it you have an idea or two?"

"I may be able to make a few suggestions." He could hear the voice in his head yelling, 'Yes!'

"Do any of those suggestions involve chocolate sauce?" Hermione asked with a smirk. She had a few ideas of her own.

One eyebrow shot up. "Chocolate sauce? Indeed."

'What do you mean, indeed? Damn it, man. Ask her what she intends to dip in chocolate. Ask her.' Severus imagined several bodily parts on both of them that might be made more interesting if covered in chocolate. His cock twitched as he watched Hermione lick her bottom lip. Her pupils widened just a bit. Evidently she thought up a few body parts, too.

"I believe we may have to compare lists of bodily parts, when the time comes, if the look in your eyes is any indication," he said with a low chuckle.

"Body parts and methods of applying the sauce," she answered with a chuckle of her own.

Severus barely remembered to breathe, thinking about what she said, as Hermione claimed his lips in a searing kiss.

Their kiss was interrupted by the sound of her stomach growling.

She sighed as they broke apart. "How about we find something to eat for breakfast? I'm getting hungry. I also have two chapters in Advanced Charms I should probably review this morning."

"I take it we are not ordering out for breakfast?" Severus asked with a wry grin at the scowl Hermione was giving him.

"I imagine I can come up with a bowl of cereal or maybe some oatmeal."

Severus shook his head. "Considering your level of expertise in potions, how is it you cannot cook?"

Hermione started to become annoyed with his attitude until his words hit home. "Did you just compliment me on my knowledge of potions?"

"Why would I consider working with you if I didn't think you had such an exceptional ability at potions?"

"You've never complimented me before. In seven years as your student, you never once complimented me."

Severus moved to lie flat on his back. "You were my student, the best friend of the bloody boy who lived. What did you want me to do? Have Draco run to daddy and tell him I was showing favor to a Muggle-born? It was bad enough you were best friends with Potter. Praising your talent would have made you more of a target than you already were." He turned to look at her. Pain evident in his eyes. "Hermione, I did what I had to do to survive. My only goal, for the last twenty years, was to destroy the Dark Lord. If I died in the process, so be it. I truly never expected to survive the final battle, much less would I have ever expected to be here with you."

The pain and anguish in his eyes cut her deeply. "Severus, I'm sorry."

His hand came up to cup the side of her face before burying itself in her hair. "No, I believe I owe you the apology. You are an amazing witch. As brilliant as you are powerful, I am sorry I was never able to tell you before." Severus sighed. He was too old to start changing now. He watched her eyes. What had he been thinking?

"If you tell me this was a mistake, I guarantee I will not hesitate to neuter you. St. Mungo's will be able to certify you as a eunuch when I get through with you." Anger flashed in her eyes.

Severus burst out laughing. "No, this is not a mistake. *We* are not a mistake. I may not be the easiest of men, and I still think I am too old for you, but you don't seem to care. What about you, any regrets?"

"Just one." She watched his eyes darken. "Why did we wait so long?"

Severus didn't bother to answer. He took possession of her mouth, removing any doubt in her mind as to his feelings for her. She was sure he cared for her. She already knew she felt something special for him. It was enough for now.

Her stomach rumbling brought them back to the task at hand.

"I believe we were going to forage for breakfast? Do you have any eggs? I think it is time I taught you how to make an omelet." He was amazed at the depth of feeling she had for him, grateful to fate for giving him this chance with her.

"Can I ask you something?" Hermione was watching his eyes, biting at her lower lip.

Bloody hell. He knew that look. He was absolutely sure he did not want to answer whatever question she was going to ask. No good had ever come from a woman giving a man *that* look. "Yes?" he answered with some reservations.

"I understand you couldn't be nice when I was a student. You were spying for the Order. Voldemort was still in power. But now, I don't know. I know you still don't socialize with most of the staff at Hogwarts. You would rather be left alone in your dungeons than seek out the company of, well, anyone really. Albus is always saying he has to drag you, screaming, to the staff meetings." Severus snorted, a slight smile on his face as he listened to her. She took a deep breath before continuing. "I know you have a heart, no matter how much you try to hide it. But, dinner, and last night, and this morning. It's as if you're two different people, then and now. What changed?"

Hermione's gaze was intense, as she watched him. Severus was stretched out on the bed next to her, oblivious to his nudity. His long legs crossed casually at the ankles, one hand leisurely stroking her arm as he listened to her.

What had changed? That was exactly the question Potter had asked him last week. "What changed? I suppose, everything has changed. The world has moved on. I have never been an extrovert. I have told you before. I am solitary by nature, content to pursue my research and spend my spare time catching up on my reading. I would assume the fact that we have become intimate has changed your view of me more than anything. It is rather difficult to hold the same image of someone when you know what they look like in the throes of orgasm." Severus smirked at the shocked look on her face.

"So I changed how I think of you?"

"Yes, your perception of me has changed. I noticed my glare no longer has any effect on you."

"As you said, I have become intimately acquainted with your body. That does change a few things. Besides, you're no longer my professor. You can't give me detention anymore," she said with a smirk.

"Are you so sure of that?" His voice dropped to a growl, sending a shiver straight through her at the images his words conjured up.

"How has your view of me changed?"

"You are determined not to let this go, aren't you?" He shook his head. "Hermione, I have been over my reasons for becoming attracted to you, countless times in my head. I believe I benefit more than you do from any relationship we have. You are young, brilliant. So much ahead of you. I have never looked at a student as anything more than a child in my care. You are not my student any more. The first time I saw you in the dance studio, I was struck by how much you had changed in two years. Maybe you haven't changed as much as I thought. It could be I am finally able to see the woman you have become."

"Is that how you see me now, as a woman?"

"Would it help to tell you my past encounters have been just that, encounters? Spending the night, relationships of any type, could have been the difference between life and death in the past. Sleep renders a person defenseless. I would never have taken that risk while working for the Order. You are the first woman I have ever stayed the night with. I hope this will be the first night of many?" Severus was trying to lighten the mood.

He understood she had questions. His mind reeled every time he tried to analyze how they had come to this point. He just hoped she could accept him as he was. He might not like her friends, but he was willing to be civil for her sake. He had never courted a woman before. He knew the term was old-fashioned, and their activities of the last twenty-four hours did not hold with the era that term represented, still, the word suggested a time for them to get to know each other better.

He thoroughly enjoyed their research. The discussions, heated debates, even the disagreements over a term or ingredient, challenged him. She challenged him. Something few have ever been able to do. He enjoyed her sense of humor. He suspected she was bored a great deal of the time listening to stories of Quidditch or new fashions from her peers.

She had affected him as no other woman ever had. He had spent long years with only himself for company. Her taste, her fresh smell, the silky smoothness of her skin, she was a drug he could not seem to get enough of. His own private addiction. He was overwhelmed with his need for her.

Severus had given up worrying about their age difference. She was strong-willed and sure of herself. If his age, or any other aspect of his being annoyed her, he had no doubt she would not hesitate to tell him.

Hermione's stomach growled loudly. Her hand flew to cover the offending organ.

He raised one brow. "Breakfast?"

Severus watched Hermione slip out of bed. He was definitely enjoying the view of her backside as she opened the top drawer of her armoire and pulled out a pair of black dance shorts. "Do you want me to transfigure a pair of lounging pants for you? Say, black silk." A quick charm later, and pair of black silk lounging pants appeared in her hand.

"I did bring a dressing gown with me. *Accio valise*." A moment later, a small black bag flew through the doorway from the living room.

Hermione eyed the bag. "What else so you have in there?"

"I had assumed I would need clean clothing for this evening and a change of robes for tomorrow morning. Unless, of course, I am mistaken, and I return to Hogwarts tonight. In which case, I believe I may have over-packed. I am not due back at the castle until tomorrow afternoon. Perhaps I had presumed too much." Maybe this was too much too soon. He cursed himself for not thinking this through more.

"You're staying over tonight, too?"

"Hermione, I can return to Hogwarts after I see you home. I have only been gone the night. I am sure I will still have a place to live when I return. I do not believe Albus could replace me on such short notice."

Hermione was looking around the bedroom. "We can enlarge the living room, but I still don't think all of the books will fit."

"I beg you pardon?" What was she talking about?

"Well, you are going to need a place to live, right?"

"I could always stay at Snape Manor, if necessary." Severus looked at her. Her smile seemed to light her eyes. His voice was silky as he asked, "Tell me, Hermione, where will I be sleeping tonight?"

"If you are planning to sleep, you can go back to Hogwarts. However, if you would be interested in a diversion or two, you can stay here, with me."

Severus laughed. "Thank you. I believe that is an offer I cannot refuse." His manner turned serious. "Are you sure you want me to stay? Perhaps I should go back to Hogwarts tonight."

"No, I really do want you to stay. Actually, I wish you didn't have to leave." She realized it was true. She didn't want him to leave. She liked waking up next to him this morning. Tomorrow night, her flat was going to seem lonely without him.

Hermione leaned in to kiss him. She never made it. Her stomach decided to rumble again, without signs of stopping this time.

"I believe breakfast is in order." Severus said as he maneuvered her from the bed.

Hermione moved back to her armoire, searching for a large t-shirt and pair of knickers to pull on.

"Join me in the kitchen when you are ready." Severus managed to make his dressing gown float behind him in an odd parody of his teaching robes as he walked out of the bedroom. He also was wearing the black silk pants she had transfigured for him.

Hermione looked at the ratty t-shirt in her hand. Maybe this was not the look she should be going for. She thought Severus looked sexy in black silk bottoms and an open robe. 'Good thing my transfiguration skills are up to par.' She pulled out another pair of black shorts and transfigured a set of black silk pajamas for herself. Grabbing a hair ribbon, she pulled her bushy mane back into a loose tail.

A quick glance in the mirror and she was satisfied with the way she looked. While not a sexy little teddy, it definitely looked better than a ratty t-shirt. Hermione's step was light as she went to join Severus in the kitchen.

After breakfast, they sat in the living room reading in companionable silence. Severus used the time to get caught up on a few articles he had been meaning to read in *Potions Today*. Hermione also had several of the latest journals on hand. He was more than pleased with his selection of reading materials. Every so often she would question him on something she was reading or he would mention a part of an article, saying they would need to check out this aspect of a certain process, or look into an ingredient that was mentioned. The morning passed into afternoon in a haze of comfortableness.

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They had slept in after last night and spent a pleasurable morning together. Severus was determined to convince Hermione they should stay in and not go to the Burrow. Hermione was just as determined they should go.

"I have no intention of wearing red or gold robes." Severus's scowl, absent the last few days, had returned. He dropped heavily onto the bed, his back against the headboard. One leg on the bed, one off.

"I assumed you would be wearing your usual black." Hermione did not want to laugh at the image of Severus in red and gold, and maybe a large Gryffindor emblem on his left breast pocket. "Or wear your trousers with a silk shirt."

"Will there be anyone in attendance that is not a Gryffindor? Or is there a possibility I could contract Graver Gryffindors Grievous Syndrome?"

Hermione burst out laughing. "Other than really bad alliteration, what is Graver Gryffindors Grievous Syndrome?"

Severus raised one eyebrow questioningly. "You do not know what GGGS is?"

Amused, Hermione shook her head. She motioned for him to move over as she sat next to him on the bed. She enjoyed Severus when he was at his snarkiest.

"Graver Gryffindors Grievous Syndrome is an affliction that can develop when forced to endure the presence of several Gryffindors in one room for any length of time, such as the Burrow tonight. Where I am quite sure all in attendance, other than myself, will be a Gryffindor? I can only hope I will not be marked with red and gold stripes by tomorrow morning. It is one of the early stages of GGGS."

Hermione smiled, wrapping her arms around his waist. "And is there a cure for Graver Gryffindors...for GGGS, other than not subjecting yourself to such situations?"

"I seem to recall removing the house colors, and reverting to something neutral, can reverse the effects."

"As in skin to skin?"

"Might work." Severus lowered his head, claiming her mouth. The kiss was slow and sensual, his tongue exploring every crevice, tangling with hers.

A fire started in her belly and traveled lower, a now familiar tingling starting between her legs. His hand cupped the back of her head, gently massaging the sensitive skin at the nape of her neck. His other hand moved to her arse, pulling her closer while kneading the soft round globes. Hermione could feel his erection coming to life, pressed firmly against her stomach. His stamina amazed her. Ginny had told her stories of the abilities of adult wizards. Severus seemed to surpass everything she had ever heard or read.

"I know what you are doing, and it won't work." Hermione chastised him as they came up for air.

Severus grinned, one hand lazily stroking the side of her body. "What am I doing?"

"Don't try playing innocent with me, Severus Snape. We have plenty of time before we have to leave. I, however, am going to take a shower." Hermione slid off the bed and flounced towards the bathroom. She stopped in the doorway and turned back to look at Severus, stunned at what she saw.

Severus was lying on his back, one arm lazily propped up behind his head, one long leg stretched out in front of him, the other bent at the knee and drawn towards his chest, his erection standing proud and upright from the thatch of black hair covering his groin. Hermione licked her lips as she watched him. His free hand moved to cup the heavy sac below his stiff cock, before encircling the shaft, slowly moving up and down the length of his hardened member. His eyes were half closed, his voice a smoky drawl, "I thought you were going to take a shower? Is there a problem, Hermione?" His hand continued its steady pace from root to head, and back again.

Hermione caught her breath before speaking, "Would you care to join me?"

"Mmm, is there room for two?"

"I think that can be arranged."

Severus's eyes opened slowly, his hand continuing to stroke the length of his cock. "Did you have something else in mind, in addition to a shower?"

Hermione remained silent, watching his hand.

He slid from the bed, grace in the economy of his movement. He reached the doorway in three long strides. A hand under her chin tipped her face up to his. She could feel the steel of his cock pressed against her thigh as he kissed her, slowly, passionately. His eyes gleamed, his voice a whisper, "Will you shower with me, Hermione?"

She followed him into the bathroom and closed the door. They made love under the hot, steamy water. Wet bodies colliding against each other. Once again he whispered the spell that made her weightless. Severus pinned her to the tile wall as she wrapped her legs around his waist. They lost themselves in the feel of each other as the hot water cascaded over them.

It was sometime later before they actually used the shower for its designed purpose and dressed for an evening at the Burrow.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

A grateful thank you to Nakhash, my beta for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Still to come: The Burrow, Harry and Ron's reactions, more dance lessons, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

The Burrow - Are We Having Fun Yet?

Chapter 21 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 21. The Burrow - Are We Having Fun Yet?

"Hermione, dear, happy birthday. Come in. Severus, I'm so glad you could join us." Molly Weasley was ushering Hermione and Severus into the living area of her home. To say you could have knocked her over with a feather when Hermione told her the Potions Master would be joining them for their traditional birthday dinner was hardly an exaggeration.

Molly was well acquainted with the acerbic man from her work with the Order. There was many a time he had arrived in the late hours of the night at 12 Grimmauld Place to speak with Arthur or Albus. His manner weary, as he sat at the wood kitchen table waiting for one or the other to arrive.

Molly knew the hardships he had endured to bring even the smallest amount of information to the Order. At any turn he could have been found out. Each time he left might very well be the last time anyone saw him alive. She knew Albus trusted him implicitly. It was enough for her. It became commonplace for her to make him a cup of tea while he was waiting. She always offered to cook him something, regardless of the hour. He always politely declined, stating the tea was enough.

Ginny had told her about seeing Hermione at Hogwarts a few weeks ago. Molly was given to understand she was working on a potion with Severus. Minerva had been more than happy to owl her early this week with further developments concerning the pair when she had confirmed he would indeed be attending the party at the Burrow.

Molly noticed Hermione's pendant as she removed her cloak. "Hermione, your necklace is lovely. Is it new?"

Hermione's hand drifted to the pendant. "Yes. Isn't it beautiful? Severus gave it to me for my birthday. It's from a store in Diagon Alley called the Emerald Leaf. You won't believe the story they told him when he purchased it."

Molly looked at the pendant before fixing her gaze on Severus. "Is that a Trelawney, Severus?"

Blasted woman. Did everyone know about the legend of that store, except him? Why the hell had he bought the damn thing in the first place? Severus resisted the urge to make a snide comment. "Yes. I believe it is, Molly," he answered stiffly. Witches!

"I didn't think they sold original Trelawney's anymore. That is quite a...unique gift."

Did they have a bar? He needed a drink if he was going to get through this evening without hexing someone. He would have considered a small hex or two if he didn't think Hermione would stop talking to him. The prospect of another pleasurable night loomed before him. There was no sense in upsetting the witch at this stage.

Arthur watched the interchange between his wife and Severus. 'If ever there was someone in need of rescuing,' he thought. He approached the group as an awkward silence descended on them. "Hermione, happy birthday. Severus, good to see you, let's let these two talk while we get you a drink."

Hermione hugged Arthur. "Thank you and happy birthday to you, too." She was amused watching Severus attempt to be social as he nodded his head in greeting. The man exuded an air of formality when he was forced to endure the company of others. She knew he considered Arthur and Molly to be friends of a sort, but she doubted he had ever paid a 'social call' to their home before.

Severus was most grateful as Arthur led him to a severing piece that opened to reveal a bar. "Whiskey or brandy?"

"Whiskey."

Arthur smiled, attempting to put the man at ease. "Don't think too unkindly of Molly. She means well. Hermione means the world to her."

Severus remained quiet as the man poured him a drink. What could he say? Of course, Arthur, why should I mind if she asks questions that are none of her bloody business. Perhaps she would like to come round tonight and coach us while we shag? Maybe offer us a pointer or two. "Of course," he answered quietly, pleased he had managed to keep his comments to himself.

Several witches and wizards from the Ministry, Arthur's co-workers, had formed a loose group around the two. Most knew the Potions Master from past celebrations. A few greeted the dark wizard as he stood to the side watching Hermione.

One young wizard, a Hogwarts graduate from last year, was flirting with Hermione; unaware his life was hanging in the balance. Her laugh at something the young man said floated across the room.

Severus extracted himself from the group that had sprung up around Arthur and walked over to Hermione. Even without his teaching robes, he was still an imposing figure. Why the hell had he let Hermione convince him to dress more casual? Casual still consisted of a dark grey silk shirt, a vest, and his frock coat buttoned tightly against the outside world. Hermione had likened his layers of clothing to armour, a protective shield separating him from those around him.

"O'Conner." Severus glared at the young man who had gone visibly pale as he approached. O'Conner muttered something unintelligible before hastily moving away.

"Severus, he was just being polite." Hermione smiled inwardly, noting the storm brewing in the Potions Master's black eyes. While she did not hold with a caveman mentality, clubbing her over the head before dragging her back to his cave, it was nice to see a crack in his calm exterior. The man standing next to her was not the tight, controlled Professor she knew from her student days, but he was definitely not the wizard who had made love to her with such abandon in the shower this morning. She understood his presented a different persona to the outside world. Their relationship was too new, she was still too unsure of his feelings, to be completely comfortable with this version of the man. She missed the intimacy they had shared this morning.

Severus raised one brow in question. "What? He was still breathing when he left." She was his witch, as outdated or antiquated as that thought may be, she was his. He leaned in, his breathe hot against her neck. "You are mine, or have you forgotten?"

His voice was a growl that sent a thrill straight through her. Hermione's gaze was serious as she met his eyes. "Does the same hold true for you?"

"I thought you understood that last night?" Perhaps they needed to talk when they returned to her flat. Severus cringed as the statement replayed in his head. 'You need to talk? What the bloody hell has gotten into you?' raged the voice in his head. 'Less talk and more action I always say.' Regardless of the images his brain was projecting, he and Hermione needed to straighten out a few things.

Hermione never got the chance to answer him. Fred Weasley was suddenly hugging her and wishing her a happy birthday. It was George's turn to greet her as his brother turned to ask Severus his opinion on a problem they were having in the development of a new salve.

"Professor Snape, just the wizard I wanted to talk to," Fred said with a sly smile. "George and I are working on a new product and are having problems with one of the ingredients. Maybe you can tell us why the Isosceles Salve is producing squares instead of triangles when we test it."

Hermione smiled as the twins ignored Severus's glare while continuing to pepper him with questions. He sighed loudly as he answered a few of their questions, watching as Hermione left to greet Harry and Ginny. It was several minutes before he could lose the two. He cast a slow acting Do Not Notice Spell and quietly slipped away as the pair continued to talk to each other.

Severus headed for a quiet, out of the way seat in the corner. Five or Six hours more of this, and he thought he could get Hermione to leave. It was turning into a long night.

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"Snape."

"Potter."

Severus had been sitting quietly watching Hermione from across the room when Harry seemed to materialize at his side. The two men eyed each other warily before Severus decided to break the silence. "Is there something you needed?"

"Uhm, no." Harry looked uncomfortable.

Severus nodded his head. "I see. Hermione."

Harry breathed a sigh. "Yeah. You can add in Ginny, too."

After Harry had tracked Hermione down in the library the previous weekend, she had lectured him in earnest about her feelings for the git. He may not like Snape, but he did respect the man, and he had made a promise to both witches to try and be civil.

Ron, on the other hand, had been angrier than Harry had ever seen him when he tried to talk to him this week. He had hoped to defuse the situation before it started. Ron could be hot headed at times. Harry just hoped Ginny and Molly had talked some sense into him. Snape was not a man to be crossed. He knew Hermione had asked the Potions Master to be civil, but that did not account for Ron pushing the issue if he decided to be a prat about it.

Severus tipped his drink towards Harry, "I would rather not anger either one, myself. It might interest you to know I would have gladly hexed you at the match last week, had it not been for those two." Severus caught Minerva glancing at him from the impromptu coven that had convened around the main table. Every so often a burst of laughter seemed to emerge from the group of witches. He was thoughtful as he took another drink of his whiskey. "I would imagine Minerva and Molly might have a thing or two to add if things get out of hand. They look like they should be out in the woods somewhere, gathered around a cauldron, cackling among themselves."

Harry looked at the Professor, wondering just how much he'd had to drink. "Are you going to tell Hermione that?"

Severus scowled, "I may have been willing to face the Dark Lord, but I am hardly stupid, Potter. I prefer to keep my bits attached right where they are, thank you." He had no intention of becoming a eunuch if Hermione's earlier words carried any weight.

Harry looked at Severus as if he had just grown another head. It was at that moment Ron joined them in the corner.

"Oy, mate." Ron looked wistfully back at the tall blond witch he came in with. His current flavor of the week was in the thick of it with the other witches. It took a moment, but he acknowledged Severus's presence, his voice barely restraining his obvious dislike of the man. "Snape."

"Weasley." Severus was impressed with the lengths Hermione's friends were prepared to go on her behalf. Willingly speaking with the bat of the dungeon had to rank right up there with facing Voldemort again as top of the list of things they would rather die than ever do again. He suspected he was higher on that list than the Dark Lord.

Remus wondered over to join the group. He glared at Severus. "You wouldn't bet on the match with me, but you bet with Hermione?"

Severus drained his glass before answering. "I had more to gain if I bet with Hermione, Remus." He barely managed to spat the man's name out. He had three weeks left until he was free of the ruddy spell.

"You don't even know what I would have bet you."

Severus's smile was smug. "It doesn't matter. *You* are not Hermione." The implication of his words hit home.

Harry and Ron grimaced. Harry cleared his throat. "Look, I promised Hermione and Ginny I would be civil, but that does not include hearing anything...intimate about you and my best friend."

Severus rose from his seat and gave him a wry smile. "Then you are safe, Potter. I have no intentions of relating any of the details to you. Pleasurable as they may be." 'Let them choke on that,' he thought.

Severus was pleased to see Potter turn a bit green at the edges. 'Slytherin green,' he thought. A small chuckle escaped his throat.

Ron watched Severus head for the sideboard to refill his drink before stopping to whisper something in Hermione's ear. She was blushing as he walked away. Ron turned to Harry, as they watched Severus's progress across the room. "He's joking, right? Hermione and...him. I don't like it, Harry. He must have slipped her a potion or something. Why would she be interested in him?"

"That's enough you two. They seem happy together. Let it be." Remus really was happy for them, even if Severus still acted like a right bastard from time to time. At least, Hermione seemed happy.

Harry shrugged. "Where have you been? Hermione visited Snape at Hogwarts last week. At least she said I didn't have to snog him in any dark corners."

Ron choked on his drink. "You. Snog Snape?"

"Hardly, I told you before, Potter. You are not my type." Severus settled back down, prepared to wait until Hermione was ready to leave. He did not have to be back at the castle until tomorrow afternoon. He had stopped to remind Hermione he had the rest of the night off and had a few ideas how they could spend the time. Her blush had been the direct result of his offer to repeat the Wingardium Leviosa Spell when they returned to her flat tonight.

"What did you say to her?"

Severus's eyes seemed to gleam. "Just reminding her about a spell we had discussed this morning. Wingardium Leviosa."

Remus's nostrils flared, pheromones flooded the air. He had a pretty good idea of what the result of Severus's discussion with Hermione was regarding the spell. Her scent was heavily embedded in his skin as it was. Even stronger than the last time he had noticed it. He knew Severus had not returned to the castle last night. Remus could only imagine how they had celebrated Hermione's birthday.

Harry's look said he didn't believe the dark man. "And that caused her to blush like that?"

Severus's manner was nonchalant. "Ask her if you don't believe me."

"Harry, I don't think I want to know. This is too much for me." Ron was turning green at the thought of Hermione and ~~Snape~~, of all people.

Severus thought green was a good color for Weasley. Made him look almost festive. It was a shame Christmas was so far off.

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More people had arrived, filling the odd little house to the brim. The rooms continued to expand to accommodate the guests. A short time later, Molly called the group to dinner. The table and dinning area had enlarged to allow everyone a seat at the long table. Severus sat at one end, next to Hermione, with Remus seated to his left. Ginny, Harry, Ron, and Misty, his current date, were seated around them. Arthur and Molly, along with several witches and wizards Severus did not know, were seated at the far end of the table, along with Minerva and Albus. The rest of Molly's brood filled in the gaps with a few assorted others.

Dinner turned out to be a loud, noisy affair. Dishes magically floated from one end of the table to the other. Fred and George regaled everyone with tales of their latest concoctions. Ron, Harry, and Remus got into a lively discussion of the latest Quidditch season, even Severus joined in on that debate.

"You follow Quidditch?" In disbelief, Hermione had turned to hear Severus denouncing the latest seeker on the Chudley Cannons, much to Ron's annoyance.

"I have some interest in the sport."

"You never mentioned it to me."

Severus smirked, his eyes held an amused gleam. "Did you wish to discuss the current season? I was under the impression the topic was off limits. No Quidditch discussions. I seem to recall it was one of the ground rules you laid out originally. Are they subject to change without notice, Miss Granger?"

Hermione's eyes held a teasing gleam of their own, "I believe we will discuss the ground rules, and any revisions thereof, later, Professor." Her voice caressed his title.

Ron openly gawked at the interchange between the two. He turned to Severus. "*Who are you?*"

Severus shook his head. "I seem to get that question a lot lately."

Minerva had spent the better part of the evening covertly watching the pair. She was impressed with the necklace Severus had given Hermione, a real Trelawney. That certainly was something to think about. In all the years they had been colleagues, she had never known Severus to be cordial. The fact he had not hexed anyone up until now, especially with Harry and Ron in attendance, greatly impressed her. Minerva still had Hermione's best interest at heart, but even she had to admit Severus seemed... well, not exactly friendly, maybe calmer was a better word. Less hostile. In any event, Hermione appeared happy.

"Why don't you give me a minute, and I will get the birthday cakes?" Molly said over her shoulder as she disappeared through a doorway. Most of the guests decided to rise



and stretch their legs. Drinks were refreshed and a few ducked out the door for a breath of fresh air.

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Ginny pulled Hermione to the side. Her eyes danced as she said, "All right, since I know the Professor had the weekend off, and I didn't see him at the castle, I have to ask. Is there any truth to the rumors?"

"Ginny!" Hermione blushed when she thought about the rumors she was referring to.

"Oh, come on. Everyone in Gryffindor speculated about the man after the rumors started flying. One of those witches he went out with refused to discuss his measurements, saying it wasn't her place. But she kept referring to the size of his nose and winking. I mean Harry's nose isn't that big, but his equipment handles quite nicely. I am assuming you have first hand knowledge. So?"

Hermione blushed an even deeper shade of red.

"Oh my god!" Ginny shrieked. "They are true!"

Hermione leaned in and whispered in her friend's ear, "The rumors don't even do him justice. Last night was amazing. And this morning, and this afternoon!"

Ginny's eyes widened. "It sounds like you had a very happy birthday. How is it you are still standing?"

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Severus glanced at the two young women in the corner. Ginny's shriek had caught his attention. He could only imagine what that was about.

Ginny smiled as Severus joined them. "Professor. If you two will excuse me, I'd better help Mum with the birthday cake."

Severus watched her walk off. "Do I want to know what that was about?"

"I don't think so." Hermione raised one brow. "Should I ask if you are having a good time?"

"It has been...tolerable. I can think of a few other activities I would rather be engaged in right now."

"You're insatiable."

"I do not recall you complaining last night."

Hermione smiled. "Thank you for not hexing Harry and Ron. I'm sure it has crossed your mind a few times tonight."

His smile was evil. "Do not thank me yet, the night is young."

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Harry watched Hermione and Severus talking quietly on the far side of the room. "You know, they might just be okay together."

"Hermione and Snape? Have you gone barking mad?" Ron couldn't believe his ears.

"No, think about it. This is Hermione were talking about. Have you ever seen the inside of Snape's quarters? He has more books than Hogwarts. The man is an ex-Death Eater. If he could put up with Voldemort, I'm sure Hermione's moods won't bother him." Harry loved Hermione, but he wasn't blind to her faults. She could be bossy and overbearing. Her quest to learn tended to overshadow all reason at times. Maybe this is what she needed. "Do you think we should tell him to lay in a supply of chocolate?"

"I'm sure he'll find out for himself." Ron shook his head. Snape. It was a world gone mad.

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Everyone headed back to the dinning table as Molly and Ginny brought out the birthday cakes. Severus's hand rested lightly at the small of Hermione's back, as he guided her back to the table. That simple gesture alone spoke volumes about his feelings for the young witch. The action was noted and filed away for further speculation by several of the people present.

Severus had often commented that he was solitary by nature. He could also have added he was obsessive at avoiding human contact. He never willingly reached for another human being. You never knew what a trained wizard could tell by the connection. While he may have craved human contact at some point in his life, he had learned to suppress the desire, much as he had suppressed his other emotions during the course of his trials. He had spent the last twenty years keeping a close hold on his needs in an effort to facilitate his spying. He trusted no one. It would not have been wise if the Dark Lord had ever sensed more than absolute obedience from the Potions Master.

He had built an invisible wall around himself. Not allowing anyone close for so long, that he now found it difficult to open up. The need for secrecy was gone. He had nothing to fear from Hermione. Nothing more than the ordinary fears and insecurities that went along with a romance. The last twenty-four hours had been a roller coast of emotions for both of them. Their connection went beyond casual sex. There were deeper feelings rising to the surface. Feeling he did not want to confront at the moment.

A large pink and purple monstrosity, ablaze with candles, floated to a stop in front of Hermione. Arthur's cake, at the far end, was red and gold with what appeared to be a full load of candles. Severus could almost feel the heat of his candles from where he stood. He was grateful Hermione's cake, whether by choice or design, was not decorated in Gryffindor colors.

The assembled guests sang a loud, off key rendition of *Happy Birthday*, combining Arthur and Hermione's names into one name during the song. Severus quietly stood back and to the side of Hermione, his rich baritone not adding to the calliope of voices.

"Make a wish and blow out the candles." Ginny gleefully instructed.

Hermione managed to blow all the candles out on the first try. Arthur was on his third attempt, much to the amusement of his wife, at extinguishing the blaze that was still his cake.

"Hermione, what did you wish for?"

"Ron, you're not supposed to ask that. Her wish won't come true if she tells you." Ginny admonished her brother.

Hermione's smile was radiant as she glanced at Severus before turning to answer Ron. "My wish already came true, Ron."

Harry clutched his stomach. "Hermione, I asked you not to do that."

"Oh, grow up, Harry." Hermione laughed at his attempt to fake a stomachache. Ginny started to prod and poke him, performing a mock exam. She managed to reach a few ticklish spots as Harry howled with laughter.

Severus was annoyed with himself. It was utterly childish to be angry with Harry for making her laugh. While he would never admit it to anyone, Severus envied Hermione's easy friendship with the two young men. He understood they were not a threat to his relationship with her. The three seemed to truly love one another. While their feelings went deeper than mere friendship, there were no romantic entanglements between them.

The Trio had bonded over the incident with the Troll their first year at Hogwarts. They had cemented that love standing side-by-side facing the Dark Lord at the final battle. He knew Hermione had kept Harry focused and Ron had kept him grounded in reality during their years at Hogwarts.

The two offered Hermione unquestionable friendship and devotion. He suspected Ron's self esteem, not particularly high being the sixth out of seven Weasley's, had taken a major leap the day he befriended the boy who lived on the Hogwarts train. Hermione had spent seven years lovingly nagging Ron to study. It was by her sheer will alone he even passes his NEWTs.

The cakes sliced and served themselves. The conversation was loud and animated, the assembled enjoyed the evening immensely.

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Harry patted Ron on the back as he choked on his butterbeer. "You're kidding," he spluttered, in between coughs. "She's teaching him what?"

Harry grinned. "The Tango."

"Is there a problem, Mister Weasley?" Severus startled Ron as he silently appeared behind him.

"Blimey, someone should put a bell around your neck." Ron clamped a hand over his mouth and moved closer to Harry when he realized exactly who it was he had spoken to. He was sure he was going to be turned into something barely sentient any minute.

Severus glared at him, a list of hexes running through his mind. As he told Hermione, the night was young.

"I was just explaining to Ron, that Hermione was teaching you the Tango."

Severus turned his glare on the annoying boy who lived and continued to annoy him. "Would you like to explain why you seem to find that statement so amusing, Potter?"

Hermione's hand on Severus's arm seemed to calm the Potions Master. Her tone held a note of warning. "What exactly do you find funny about Severus and I dancing together, Harry? I'll have you know he dances very well. I would like to see either one of you Tango without harming yourself. I doubt either one of you would look half as good as he does in tights either."

"Tights?" Harry tried in earnest to hide his laughter. He failed miserably.

Severus was undecided as to who he should kill first. Hermione for her attempted defense of his abilities. Potter for his childish comments or Weasley, on principle alone. "Hermione. While I appreciate your defense on my behalf, perhaps you can stop before you bury me? I have managed to avoid hexing these two thus far this evening. I would hate to have to break my promise by hexing you instead."

Hermione could only laugh as she realized what she had said. A very unladylike snort escaped as she tried to gain control of herself. "I'm sorry, Severus. I didn't mean it the way it sounded. But you do look unbelievably sexy in tights."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose trying to stay the headache that was threatening to overtake him. "Hermione."

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Albus watched the interchange between Severus and the others. When he had set the consequences of the bet, he had hoped it would draw Severus out of his dungeons. He had never imagined anything would develop between Hermione and his Potions Master beyond a simple friendship. Albus was truly happy for both of them. It was magic of the highest order when two people found each other.

Minerva had disappeared with Molly and a few others, no doubt repeating and analyzing every word, every action the Potions Master had made. His touch at Hermione's back had touched more than a few who had known the dark wizard over the years.

"They seem happy together." Remus joined Albus as he watched the group near the table.

"They do appear well suited for each other." The aged wizard agreed.

"Was this your plan all along?"

Albus turned his twinkling eyes on Remus. "I would never interfere with the lives of my staff."

Remus shook his head. "Why do I have such a hard time believing that?"

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As the hour drew late, the guests started leaving in small groups.

Minerva drew Hermione to the side. Her gaze was intense as she regarded the young woman. She had felt responsible for her since the tragic loss of her parents. "I know Severus is a good man under all that black. I see a change in him for the better. But are you happy?"

Hermione's eyes softened. The older witch meant a lot to her. "Yes, Minerva. I am happy. He is an amazing man. Quite different when we are alone." Thoughts of the two of them alone brought a slight flush to her cheeks.

Minerva smiled. "If you have any doubts, hex first and ask questions later. You know you can reach me anytime of the day or night if you need me?"

"I know. Thank you." Hermione hugged the older woman.

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Severus thanked Molly for her hospitality as they stepped out the back door. Hermione said her goodbyes to those remaining and followed him.

"Together?" Severus opened his cloak to allow Hermione to cuddle into his side, her arms tightening around his waist as his arms encircled the young witch. They Disapparated with a loud crack.

Molly and Minerva exchanged knowing looks. Albus just smiled.

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Severus hung his cloak on the hook next to the door. He turned around to find Hermione looking at him, her gaze intent.

She reached up to take hold of his chin, turning his head from side to side.

"May I inquire as to what you are doing?"

"Graver Gryffindors Grievous Syndrome. I am looking for red and gold stripes. You were in a room full of Gryffindors tonight. Though unless I miss my guess, there were at least two Ravensclaws and a few who had not even gone to Hogwarts. Thankfully, I think you have been spared."

"I believe we should remove our clothing to be safe."

"Skin to skin?"

"Skin to skin." Severus's voice enclosed the words in velvet, causing Hermione's stomach to clench.

"Is there anywhere else I should check for striping?" Hermione laughed as he raised one eyebrow. Her voice dropped seductively, "Do you want me to check here?" Her fingers gently caressed the bulge in his trousers.

Her touch lit a fire within him. It unhinged him completely. Her desire for him was something rare and wondrous.

"Tsk, tsk. Wherever were you thinking? I was going to tell you to look at the bottom of my feet." The need to possess her surged through him, a deep growl escaped his throat. "Come here, Hermione."

Severus pinned her to the door. His mouth took possession of hers. His kiss was fierce, passionate. Desire coursed through his veins. Lust darkened his eyes. Their tongues dueled for control, driving the hunger within him.

He needed her to understand his need for her. His voice was husky, "You. Are. Mine. I thought we had established that last night." He rocked his hips against her, his body thrumming with need. He cupped her breast through the silk of her shirt, kneading and squeezing the firm globe.

His sudden shift in emotions had her holding on for dear life. Her breath was coming in small pants as she felt his arousal. "Does that mean you belong to me?" she asked breathlessly. She moved her head to the side as he kissed and nipped along the column of her neck.

His deep chuckle sent fire through her body. "If you want me, I am yours. I do not believe you will have any competition for my affections. There is hardly a line of willing witches seeking me out."

"That's not true. There have been several witches at the Ministry celebrations that have chased after you."

Severus's hands cupped the bottom of her arse, urging her legs up around his hips as he picked her up. "They are not you, Hermione. They are not you."

His mouth claimed hers once again as he carried her to the bedroom. A whispered spell against her lips, and their clothing disappeared. They made love slowly. Reestablishing the intimacy they'd had shared earlier. Taking time to explore each other's bodies and come together as the world shattered around them.

"You know, you never did cast Wingardium Leviosa." Her voice was muffled as sleep pulled at the edges of her mind.

"And you are complaining?" Severus rolled to his back, pulling Hermione against him. "Will you have time to accompany me back to Hogwarts tomorrow? We can research the Wolfsbane Potion if you are free?"

Hermione nodded sleepily, her words distorted by a yawn. "I don't have to be back until dinner time. I have an exam I need to review for in the evening. I am really going to miss you tomorrow night." Hermione burrowed deeper into his side. One leg slid over his thigh to rest possessively between his legs. Her breathing evened out as she fell asleep.

Severus dreaded the thought of sleeping alone tomorrow night, of waking up Monday morning alone, as if she were nothing more than a pipe dream. His arm tightened around her. He was with her now.

Tomorrow would have to take care of itself.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Unfortunately, my wonderful beta Nakhsh has succumbed to Real Life and is off on vacation. I have decided to post this, rather than wait another week. The corrected version will be reposted when she returns next week. Therefore, the mistakes are definitely mine.

Still to come: Another Sunday at Hogwarts, costume selections, more dance lessons, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Same Brew, Different Day

*Chapter 22 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

## Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 22. Same Brew, Different Day

Hermione smiled as she felt the warm body behind her. She stretched languidly against the length, snuggling deeper into the covers.

"Good morning, I see you have decided to join the living." Severus was sitting back on several pillows propped up against the headboard. A Potion Journal open in his lap; a sheaf of parchment, covered with his familiar handwriting, was floating in the air to his right.

"Good morning. What's that?" Hermione had shifted to her side, her right hand propping her head up, her other hand indicated the notes suspended in air.

"After reexamining the results of our tests with the potions material in the various cauldrons, I believe I have narrowed our focus down to three materials. I need to brew another batch of Wolfsbane today. I thought I would try all three materials and see what changes take place. How are your chopping skills? Would you care to assist me?"

Hermione sat up, her eyes gleaming with interest. The sheet covering her fell to her waist, exposing the upper half of her torso to his eyes. Severus was one of the few Potions Masters able to properly brew the Wolfsbane Potion. This was a chance of a lifetime as far as she was concerned. "Are you sure you want me to help brew the potion? I know it takes years of practice to brew it properly, the incantations, the wand and stirring motions."

Severus chuckled to himself. Hermione was so excited with the prospect of brewing a difficult potion that she forgot she was totally nude, and somewhat shy about it to boot. Her nipples were hardening in the cool morning air. He drew one finger gently across the hardened bud. "I suppose we should find something to cover these up before we start. I would rather you did not splash anything caustic on your exposed skin."

Hermione looked down at his hand, a slight blush colouring her upper body. Her mind still focused on the difficult potion, doggedly she asked, "Are you sure you want me to assist you? I would rather not ruin the potion if you think I should let you do it alone."

"Hermione, if I did not think you were capable of assisting me, I would not have asked. Brewing the potion will also help in the understanding of your theory to alter it. You will see exactly how and why the ingredients combine, and what effect the stirring and incantations have at each stage."

"You don't use assistants."

Here was one of the topics he had avoided thinking about, hitting him directly between the eyes. Severus sighed. "I explained to you before, it would have been impossible to have an assistant while I was spying for the Order. I never would have been able to come and go unnoticed."

Her voice was soft, "And now?"

"You want to know why I do not ask you to apprentice with me next year?"

Hermione was afraid to read too much into a relationship that had just started. It felt right to her. He was right for her. Did he see it that way? He had said she was his. What did that mean? She did not want to be separated from him tonight, what about all next year? "Okay, I know you have never had an apprentice before, but why not me if you think I'm so capable?"

"I know you are capable. Just as I know I can separate our professional and personal relationships. I am sure you are just as capable of separating the two. The outside world is not. Your reputation as a Potions Mistress would be questioned in light of our more personal relationship. While I do not care what anyone thinks of me, I do care that someone would doubt your ability based on gossip that could arise." Severus watched her expression change.

Hermione flopped back against the pillows. Begrudgingly she agreed with his assessment. "All right, for arguments sake, lets say I agree with you. I don't like it, but I agree with you. Who do I approach?"

"Do you have a list of Potions Masters who are part of the program? Perhaps I could review the list and tell you what I know of their abilities." He would have like to be the one she stayed with, but he was not willing to let her give up on her reputation before she had a chance to earn one. "Hermione, I would much rather you were with me. I just do not think it is the best course of action."

She knew he was right. Intellectually she knew he was not rejecting her or her ability. She knew that. It still hurt anyway. "I've been putting a list together of the Masters that will be at the symposium."

'Right, maybe there is a ninety-eight year old Potions Master on that list that drools and has a debilitating illness, living in a cold climate so she has to wear lots of layers of clothing. You want to keep her away from anyone young and good looking if you are not going to be around to oversee the two.' While he privately agreed with the voice in his head, he would try to look at her list objectively.

"Bring your list with. There is at least two separate times during the brewing process we will be able to review it while the potion cures. Come up here and look at this." Severus motioned for her to scoot up next to him.

Hermione grabbed the sheet and moved to his side. The journal page was covered in calculations. He had listed the material they had used the week before and their effects on the ingredients. Three materials seemed to stand out as having the most positive effects on the potion.

Severus regularly brewed the potion in a steel cauldron. This was used as a base line to compare the results of the other materials. Zinc could change the properties effects beyond the limit they were willing to allow. The glass cauldron did not affect the ingredients enough.

Hermione followed his evaluation of the various metals and materials. Nickel could be toxic; Palladium is highly toxic and is a carcinogenic; he listed pluses and minuses for each of the metals tested or discussed. Three stood out from the others: Iron, Gold, and Silver.

Iron was essential to the body. It has important magnetic properties and is responsible for carrying oxygen around the blood stream. The iron cauldron would cause a small amount of iron to be absorbed by the material, just as Muggle iron pots did. Could enriching the blood help the potion?

Gold had no effect on some ingredients and strongly altered or enhanced the properties of some magical ingredients. If they could control the positive effects and decrease the negative effects, the potion would strongly benefit.

Silver was an interesting choice. It was solid and was not known to interact with any of the properties. That did not mean it would not affect the potion knowing what silver could do to a werewolf. Would the potion harm a werewolf due to the dangerous nature of silver on a lycanthropic system?

Hermione looked at Severus, her eyes bright. Question, equations, and data fought for prominence in her mind. Instead she asked, "Silver?"

"You're wondering why I chose to include silver? I believe we should try one batch to see how the properties change. I do not think it will be a viable choice in the end. Still, it can act as a negative control in much the same way the steel is the base control. There are still three other materials we should consider for the next set of trials."

Severus had never before appreciated the sheer intelligence that radiated from this woman. He had watched her read the data. He could almost see her mind analyze and catalogue the information. He was sure she could launch into an informative lecture on the properties of any one of the material listed.

"All right, sounds like a plan. How long will the potion take to brew?"

"The complete process normally takes me about four hours. With your help we may shorten the time, then again we are going to brew four separate batches at the same time. I believe it would be safe to say..." Severus noticed he had lost her focus. He followed the line of her sight and sighed. Sure he knew what was coming next.

"Hermione?"

Hermione was sitting along his left side, the side where his Dark Mark should have been. She realised she had not seen it since that afternoon a few weeks ago in the lab, when he had forgotten to cast the glamour after their argument. She had been enjoying the sight of him naked on and off most of the weekend. It hadn't occurred to her what was missing until now. She ran her hand gently along his forearm, along the clear unmarked skin. "You don't have to do that, you know."

Severus nodded. He knew what she was referring to. "Then consider it more for my benefit, than yours. I would rather not see it."

She was silent for a moment. "All right. Let's get dressed and head for Hogwarts. You know, it's going to seem pretty lonely here tonight."

Severus pulled her to him and kissed her gently. "I agree. But you have University in the morning and I have a House full of brats to supervise."

A bray of laughter escaped the witch. "Brats? Since when do you refer to your precious Slytherins as brats?"

"Since I no longer have to worry about having *Crucio* cast on me every time I do not agree with them."

"I've heard you even awarded a few points to Gryffindor in the last two years. Though it's obvious you still favor Slytherin."

Severus shrugged. "I am Head of the House. What do you expect?"

Hermione held up her hands in mock protest. "No more revelations. Next thing you know you will be bringing me chocolates and flowers, and writing me love songs while telling me this is not the real you. The real you is soft and fluffy. Though the chocolate part might not be a bad idea."

"Hardly. I do not think I am the flower and love song type." Severus drew himself up, disdain evident in his voice. "I am not fluffy. Whatever that is."

Hermione laughed. "No, thank God, you are not." He was brilliant and caustic, and sexy as all hell, she thought. Not an ounce of fluff in sight. Thank God for small favors.

They dressed quickly, discussing the ingredients they would need to gather when they reached the castle. Hermione looked around the room. She really was going to miss him. Thursday seemed like such a long way off.

As if reading her thoughts, Severus drew her into his arms. His kiss was warm and sensual. His tongue caressed her lips before making love to her mouth.

Her arms twined around his neck, her body molding to his. She could feel his erection against her stomach. "Mmm, you keep this up and we won't be able to leave."

Severus released his hold on her and tried to discreetly adjust his throbbing member. His body had been behaving like a bloody hormonal teenager every time he got near her the last few weeks. He had thought that making love for the first time the other night would have taken the edge off of his feelings. Instead the opposite seemed to happen. Now she resided not just in his mind, but in his blood as well.

"Do you remember my comment the other day?" He gently stroked the side of her face, his fingers tracing a meaningless pattern across her jaw-line and down her neck.

Hermione leaned into his touch, her eyes drifting close. "Which comment was that? We've talked about a lot of things lately."

Severus chuckled. "The comment about changing the dance lessons from Thursday to Wednesday? Wednesday is more central in the week to see one another. I patrol the late shift on Wednesday. I do not have to return to the castle until 1:00 a.m."

Hermione's eyes opened wide. "Then why have you been coming on Thursdays instead?"

"In the beginning, I had no desire to spend any more time here than necessary."

"And now?"

Severus's voice dropped. "And now, I would rather not leave."

A thrill ran through her at the erotic quality of his voice. God what his voice could do to her. Seventh year potions had been a challenge as she responded to that quality in his voice even then. She was going to need a new pair of knickers if this kept up.

Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck. He automatically enclosed her in an embrace. She allowed her voice to drop, adding what she hoped was a sexy tone, "Why don't we stay here? I'm sure I have an old pot or two we could try to brew the potion in, in between other activities." She waggled her eyebrows suggestively at him.

Severus opened his arms and let her drop back on the bed. "I got the message. Shall we?"

They both laughed as he helped her back off the bed. Hermione grabbed her book bag. "Got everything?"

Severus had packed his notes into his valise before shrinking it and placing it in his pocket. He nodded as they left Hermione's flat and Apparated to Hogwarts.

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Severus's arms remained around Hermione a moment longer as they arrived at the Apparition point out-side the front gates of Hogwarts, a quick tightening of his arms and he stepped back. They turned and headed for a side entrance to the dungeons, away from the main doors of the castle.

Attuned to the events around him, Albus looked out the window. He smiled as he watched Severus and Hermione arrive. "Splendid, I see our Potions Master has returned. And he has brought Hermione with him. I imagine they will spend the afternoon in the lab."

Minerva gave Albus a look. They had been reviewing plans for the Halloween dance and dates for the Christmas holidays. "Working in the lab?"

"Oh, come now, Minerva. What else would be going on?" Albus's eyes twinkled brightly in the subdued sunlight of the room.

Minerva snorted. "You do not fool me for a minute, Albus Dumbledore."

"Well, I am certainly glad someone is on to me. What is it I have done?"

"Oh, come now, Albus. Do you expect me to believe those two got together on their own? And that gift he bought her- a real Trelawney? If his heart is pure, then I am Hagrid's mother." Minerva harrumphed into her tea. Really, what did he take her for?

"Have I ever told you what a fine young man your son is? Lemon Sherbet?" He offered her a small crystal bowl full of candies.

"Albus!"

"I have done nothing, Minerva. I may have forced her company on him, but they did the rest. I never thought it would go past an academic friendship. I am truly happy for the two of them."

Minerva sighed. She knew Albus long enough to know he was telling her the truth. "I am happy for them, too. But I warn you, he harms one hair on her head, and they will be picking up pieces of him from here to Hogsmeade."

Albus smiled, the mother lioness protecting her cub. "I have no doubt."

"Can we finish with the list for the Halloween dance? I still have a few errands I must attend to today."

"Of course, Minerva." Albus would not be surprised if one of those errands included tea and gossip with Poppy and Irma. He knew both witches had been working this morning and had missed their weekly gab session the night before. He pulled two bright orange lists from the side drawer of his desk. "Now, about the decorations. I thought you and Flitwick could..."

And the two continued with plans for the up-coming dance.

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They were already three hours into the brewing process. Hermione had never been so impressed in her life. She had always respected his abilities, but watching him brew the Wolfsbane explained why he was a Master at his craft. She listened intently as he finished intoning the tricantation, his wand creating intricate patterns in the air over the cauldron - the third stage incantation that allowed the current ingredients to act and react on the potion. The liquid simmering in the four cauldrons were each a similar shade of sky-blue. He had repeated the process for each of the cauldrons.

"Miss Granger, what can you tell me about the differences in colour of the potions in each of the cauldrons?"

Hermione sat up straighter. A rightcopyquill poised over their research journal ready to record the information. "If one were to grade the colours on a scale from one to four, with one being the lightest and four the darkest, I would have to say that all four cauldrons contain a potion that is sky-blue in colour, but vary from numbers one to four in intensity. Cauldron one would be a number four. The tone and pigmenting of the colour is darker than the rest. This is most likely due to absorbing a trace of iron from the cauldron it is simmering in. The potion has appropriated some of the properties of the iron cauldron."

Hermione went on to list the other properties and changes in the other three cauldrons. She was thorough and exact in her observations. "...and of course that is the main reason steel has always been used in the past to brew the potion, Professor Snape." She finished her observations with a bat of her eyelashes and a sunny smile on her lips.

Severus shook his head, "You look quite pleased with yourself."

"Are you not pleased, Professor?" Her voice held a teasing note to it.

"If you are not careful," he purred, "you will earn a detention for your insolence, Miss Granger." Severus was seated on a stool to the side of the workbench. The potions had another twenty-five minutes to simmer before they could start the final stage of the brewing. The colour would turn from a bright sky-blue to a deep royal blue signaling its change.

He wrapped his arms around Hermione's waist as she positioned herself between his legs. "Detention, Professor? Scrubbing cauldrons in the nude? Maybe being taken on your desk?"

Severus felt his member twitch in his trousers. The garment was becoming uncomfortably tight, a normal occurrence when she was around. The voice in his head was once again yelling, "Yes, yes. God, this little witch is a hot one."

One eyebrow arched in question. "Do not tell me. You have a detention fantasy?" Sometimes the most repressed people had the most erotic fantasies.

Hermione smiled seductively. "Believe it or not, Severus, you were the speculation of quite a few girls in Gryffindor, and most likely a few other houses unless I miss my guess. I imagine, especially once the rumors of the last two years started, that you were the subject of more than one witch's fantasy."

He had never has an interest in any of his female students. There had been the odd witch, usually in Slytherin, that had a crush on him, something he was at a complete loss to understand. Poppy had once said something about lost causes. He never paid any further attention to her explanation. Usually an extremely harsh glare and one or two difficult detentions, extracting bubotuber pus or the like, would end whatever interest the young witch ever had in him. He would return to being the bat of the dungeon, the greasy git. Never in his wildest state of mind would he have thought to pursue any of them.

"Was I the subject of yours?" His voice caressed each word.

Hermione blushed. Her mind flashed back to Severus undressing in the bathroom at Order headquarters when she had walked in on him.

He noted the flush to her cheeks. "You did have a fantasy about me. Perhaps I can make it come true if you tell me what it was." He was actually surprised to find she had thought of him in any way past that of her professor. She had never given him any indication she had any interest in him.

"Actually, you sort of did make it come true yesterday. I just...uhm, the summer between 6th and 7th year, when I walked in on you changing in the bathroom at 12 Grimmauld Place. And yesterday when we were at my flat." Her cheeks flushed a deeper shade of red as she thought of Severus taking her against the wall in the shower.

"Ah, I see. Well then, we shall have to devise something to do with the desk, won't we?" Severus kissed the side of her neck. "Hermione."

"Mmm, yes?"

"The potion is ready for the final stage." Severus smiled as her eyes opened.

"Oh, sorry."

They shared a quick kiss before moving back to the workbench. "You were right about your assessment of the potion's colours after the third stage, by the way." He indicated one of the ingredients in front of her. "Make sure you chop the vulture's gizzard into even slices. There should be one by each cauldron. It should not be added until you see yellow spots appear on the surface of the potion. At this stage, each of the smaller bubbles will burst through the top and leave a yellow spot."

"Will the yellow spots combine with the dark blue to form a green potion?" Hermione was carefully chopping the gizzard.

"No, the entire batch will turn a shade of primary red when the gizzard is added."

A chime sounded in the lab seconds before a knock came at the lab door. Severus scowled as he looked at the door. Only one man ever bothered him in his private lab. "Enter, Albus," he barked.

Albus walked in, resplendent in sky-blue robes that echoed the colour the potion had been a moment before. "Good afternoon, Hermione, Severus. I seen you have returned to the castle in one piece."

"If I were wise, I would have stayed away." Severus scowled at the headmaster.

"Did you enjoy your birthday, Hermione? The party at the Burrow was most lovely. I do so look forward to these happier times. Tell me, will you be dining with us tonight?"

"Thank you, Albus. But I have quite a bit of studying to do tonight. Maybe another time." Hermione smiled.

"Very well, take care not to wear yourself out. Severus, I shall see you later. Hermione." With a swish of his robes, he was gone.

"The man needs to learn more restraint. I swear he has gone dodgy in the last two years."

Hermione laughed, "I doubt Albus Dumbledore has gone dodgy."

"How can you tell? Never mind. Here, look at the final incantation." Severus was pointing to the black leather journal.

Hermione followed Severus's notes as he completed the last spell for each potion. "All right, make sure they are clearly marked as to which cauldron we brewed them in when you bottle them. We will compare the properties of the potions next week."

They worked along-side each other, discussing the various changes in the potion as they went. Several swishes and flicks of their wands, a few cleaning spells later, and the lab was once more clean.

Severus chuckled, "A good day's work, if I do say so myself. Well, was it what you thought it would be?"

Hermione smiled broadly. "Brewing a difficult potion? It was wonderful. You really are amazing, you know that."

"Years of brewing the potion for that thankless wolf, that is all." Severus had always been uncomfortable with praise.

"No, it's not practice, it's ability." Hermione was packing up her book bag. "As much as I hate to leave, I really do need to go."

Severus nodded. His emotions conflicted. "I should just chain you up in my quarters. No one will ever know." He was nuzzling the side of her neck, delaying the inevitable.

"Mmm, maybe another time." She shuddered as his chuckle vibrated against her collarbone. "Walk me out?"

"Of course, I will see you Wednesday this week, instead of Thursday. May I assume you will be coming to Hogwarts Saturday and Sunday?"

"I may be late Saturday afternoon. I have to meet with one of my advisors about the internship. I want to check out the other two names you gave me, too." They had reviewed her list of Potions Masters. Severus had pared the list down to four names, adding two more he knew of personally.

"Would you like to have dinner in Hogsmeade on Sunday? I can make reservations at Witchcraft."

"Getting tired of carry-out? Dinner at Witchcraft sounds great."

They had reached the front gates of Hogwarts. Hermione felt the tingle of magic on her skin as Severus cast a Do-Not-Notice Spell and a Silencing Spell for good measure. He gathered her to him and kissed her possessively. "I'm going to miss you. The dungeons are chilly at night. A warm body next to me would go a long way to dispel the cold."

"I'm really going to miss you. I wish I didn't have to go." A kiss later they broke apart. "I'll see you Wednesday. Bye, Severus."

"Wednesday. Be careful." He had a hard time saying the words good-bye, not liking the finality of the expression. Not wanting it to be- goodbye.

Hermione Apparated with a crack. His mood darkened as he headed back to the castle. He had woken up next to her warm and willing body the last two mornings. The last thing he wanted was to go back to his quarters, alone. The door slammed behind him as he entered the side entrance to the dungeon. Two fifth year Slytherins jumped at the sound.

"Mister Westmoore, would you like to explain to me what you and Mister Ranunculus are doing with that frog?" The two boys were on their knees, prodding a frog that was, oddly enough, coloured red with gold stripes and blue spots.

The boys froze in terror. "Professor Snape, sir."

"Yes, Mister Westmoore, I know who I am. I believe the question was what are you and Mister Ranunculus doing with that frog? I am waiting." Severus crossed his arms over his chest while looking down his nose at the two boys.

"We, uhm, tried to cast a colour change spell, sir, and something went wrong."

"Yes, I can see that. Very well, take your frog to Professor McGonagall and explain the spell you used. I am sure she will be able to correct your mistake." His scowl deepened as he watched the two rise from the floor. "I believe two feet of parchment on the properties of corrective spells, from each of you, on my desk by tomorrow afternoon at five, should help to further enlighten you as to the error of your ways."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." The two made a quick getaway, thankful not to receive a detention.

'Only two feet of parchment and no detention? You're going soft, mate.' He told the voice in his head to sod off as he returned to his quarters. He eyed the desk in his study. Mmm. Maybe he could think of something to pass the time until he saw Hermione again.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

The information on the materials used in the cauldrons is from this web site: <http://www.webelements.com>.

Ranunculus Latin meaning a little frog or tadpole.

I am more than happy to say my beta, Nakhash, is back from vacation and on the prowl for my mistakes. A grateful thank you to Nakhash, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still my fault.

Still to come: Another dance lesson, costumes, another weekend at Hogwarts, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Lesson Eight ? A New and Varied Rhythm

Chapter 23 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 23. Lesson Eight A New and Varied Rhythm

"Snape?"

The student union was unusually quiet for a Monday afternoon as Hermione waited for the rest of her study group. She looked up from her textbook as Edmund sank into the chair next to her. "Good afternoon to you, too."

"My cousin works for the Ministry. She was at Arthur Weasley's house Saturday night and just couldn't wait to owl me. Snape? You're dating Snape?" Edmund looked as if he had just swallowed a lemon, whole.

"Not that it is any of your business, but yes, I am." Hermione's countenance was growing rapidly darker as Edmund made the mistake of speaking again.

"Snape?"

"You keep saying that. I believe I already know Severus's last name. What is your problem?"

Edmund was having difficulty wrapping his mind around the fact that Hermione was seeing Snape, now she was calling him ~~Severus~~, too? "Severus?" The name was wrenched from his lips in a strangled whisper.

"Severus Snape. Very good. Would you like to try Harry Potter or Hermione Granger next?" Really, what was wrong with this idiot?

"How can you call him Severus?"

"Well, I can't really call him Professor Snape when we shag, can I?" Hermione smirked as Edmund clutched his stomach.

"Shh...shag? Do you know what his was, what he is?"

Hermione had just about enough. "I would watch what you say, Edmund. You would do well right about now to remember that Severus is a war hero. I do not take kindly to people that insult those I care about."

Hermione stood as Susan and Kathy approached the table.

"Sorry were late. Hermione, where are you going?" Susan noticed the angry glare Hermione was giving Edmund.

"I'll be right back. I am going to get myself a cup of coffee and try to cool off. If not, I may just turn Edmund into a rock when I get back. Or maybe a small rat, I can't decide which would be more appropriate. Maybe I'll turn him into a rock, anyway. Anything would be an improvement at this point." Hermione could hear Susan asking Edmund what he said to make her so mad as she walked away from the table.

Hermione sighed to herself. Severus had warned her, people would talk.

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Classes had gone as well as could be expected, considering it was Monday. The little dolts seemed to have a hard time refocusing their attentions to the task at hand after having the weekend off. He could still get the third year essays graded before supper if this little command performance didn't take too long. It had surprised him when Albus stopped him in the hall just before his last class, requesting his presence upon its completion. Severus sighed as he rode the moving stairs to the top. He wondered what the Headmaster wanted now.



"You wished to see me, Albus?" Severus stood before the oversized desk in the crowded office. Fawkes offered a cry in greeting.

"Severus. Sit. Make yourself comfortable. Tea?" A full tea service stood to the left of the aged wizard.

"Yes, thank you." Severus sat in the indicated chair, wary of the Headmaster. A smiling Albus was a dangerous Albus.

Albus served the tea accompanied by chocolate and lemon snap cookies. "So, how are you, my boy?"

Severus looked skeptical. "You asked to see me, late on a Monday afternoon, to ask how I am?"

"Yes, well, I just felt we don't talk enough." Albus smiled benignly.

"We never talk, Albus. You tell me what you think and I listen, whether I want to or not. What seems to be the problem?"

"Severus..."

"What is it, Albus?" He wanted his desk cleared before he left the castle Wednesday night. He had no intentions of arriving back any earlier than 12:59a.m. This was not helping to expedite matters.

The aged wizard sighed. "Hermione."

Severus's eyes narrowed considerably, his tone menacing, "What about Hermione?"

"I can see you care for each other and I am truly happy to see you two together."

"But?" The word came out as a hiss. Enough was enough. "Albus, I have work to attend to. What seems to be the problem?"

"Severus, I am aware you stayed at her flat last weekend. If she stays at the castle, she cannot be seen leaving your quarters early in the morning. It would give the wrong impression to the students."

Severus snorted. "Very well, we will not leave my quarters all weekend. No one will be the wiser. Now, if there is nothing else, I shall return to my office?"

"Severus."

"Do what you will, Albus. Give her rooms in Gryffindor Tower with a door that opens into my sitting room. Connect our fireplaces. Hand her Potter's old invisibility cloak. Whatever method you choose. I am sure you can find some way for her to discreetly enter my quarters without the prying eyes of the students." Severus could tell the aged wizard was up to something.

"Severus, the staff..." Albus's eyes twinkled brightly.

"If this is an issue, Headmaster, perhaps I can resolve the matter for you. I should like to formally request the one hundred and forty weekends off that I was entitled to but did not avail myself of. You may want to set up a rotating schedule with the staff to cover the weekends for Slytherin, starting Saturday morning and ending Sunday evening, as I do not plan to be in residence in the castle during those weekends."

"One hundred and forty weekends?" Albus was trying not to laugh. "Would you care to tell me how you came up with that figure?"

"One weekend off per month, nine months a year, less December and March due to Christmas and Easter, or seven weekends per year for twenty years that I was entitled to take off and did not. This past weekend was the first I have taken off in twenty years."

"And you plan on taking them consecutively?"

Severus smiled. "No, not exactly consecutively. Three at a time; I am still entitled to one weekend off a month during the current academic year. I shall fill in the rest of the month with the previously unclaimed days."

"I was under the impression the unclaimed days did not carry over from year to year."

"Then you are mistaken, Headmaster. You really should read the contracts you yourself have the staff sign."

"I suppose it would be easier to give Hermione rooms in the tower and connect your fireplaces. At least she can be seen entering and leaving her own room."

"Whatever you believe will resolve the problem, Albus. If there is nothing further?" Severus waited a minute for Albus to broach another subject. When none seemed to be forthcoming, he nodded and left the office.

Albus burst out laughing. A side door opened noiselessly. He addressed the figure that stood in the doorway. "Now do you believe he is sincere in his actions?"

"Albus, you must know I truly care for the man. I just have an obligation to see that Hermione will not be harmed." Minerva sat in front of the desk.

"You cannot protect her at every turn, Minerva. Severus is a good man. Let them be."

Minerva nodded. "Very well." While she agreed with the Headmaster's opinion of Severus, she still worried about Hermione. Albus tended to overlook the obvious where Severus was concerned. The girl had no real family. Keeping an eye on them, she decided, would still be a prudent measure.

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Wednesday night snuck up on her faster than she thought it would. She was researching a paper on the properties of Bladderwrack root for her Advanced Potions class, when a knock at her door interrupted her concentration.

Hermione hastily rushed to open the door. A quill tucked haphazardly behind one ear, an open text book in her hand. Absentmindedly, she opened the door and turned to walk away as she continued to scan the book.

Severus looked at her retreating back and frowned as he walked into the flat. "Good evening. Yes, I missed you, too," he drawled.

"Severus, I'm sorry. I seem to have backed myself into a knotty corner trying to prove this theory. Just one minute." She returned to the coffee table and flipped through another book.

Hanging his cloak on the hook next to the door, he stopped to watch her. She was young. Though she could match anyone ten times her age in intelligence and logic, she was still twenty-two, and still a student. He suddenly felt very old.

"Aha, I knew I was right! The Bladderwrack root cannot be used unless harvested under the first phase of a new moon or it has to be combined with sea salt to change its cycle." Hermione smiled triumphantly as she snapped the text shut. Moving to where he still stood near the front door she looked up into his eyes, her arms twined around his neck, feeling his arms encircle her in response. "Are you okay? You look worried about something?"

Severus shook his head and smiled. "I am fine. Just a bit overworked, that's all." He captured her mouth in a kiss that was slow and easy. An unspoken level of comfort, in

the knowledge of what pleased her, seemed to ease his mind as he elicited small moans and whimpers from the curvaceous witch.

"I seem to be running behind all day today. Give me a minute to change and I will be right with you." Hermione disappeared through the doorway of her bedroom.

"You need not change on my account." Severus scanned the bookcases lining the wall. She had an impressive library. Several rare books were included in the collection. He made a mental note to show her a companion edition he had in his study to one of the books she had here. It was a rare copy, something he was sure she would be interested in reading.

"I prefer to dance in a skirt. It helps to set the tone of the dance. Kind of like having the proper tools to begin with." Hermione appeared wearing a black leotard and skirt. Pulling her hair back from her face, she smiled at Severus. "You're welcome to borrow any that strikes your fancy, though I highly doubt I have anything of interest to you, considering the size of your library."

"I am sure I could find...something here that I might fancy."

"I meant the books."

Severus raised one brow. "So did I."

Hermione shook her head. "Ready, Professor?"

Severus pulled her into his embrace and moved into position as the music started. Holding her in his arms had taken on a new meaning since making love to her. The subtle shift of skin against his hand conjured images in his mind of a very nude Hermione riding his body. His fingers slowly caressed the soft skin of her back. Without knowing it, his dancing had become more fluid, more sensual. He was unconsciously mimicking the act of making love.

They practiced the opening steps of the dance. Their bodies moving together in this new rhythm, recognizing their desire for each other, as they turned to circle one another. Hermione's head snapped back; Severus moved in to nuzzle the side of her neck, executing a Sacada in the process. Eight weeks of lessons had taught him the steps. One weekend of making love had taught him how to move. The combination of the two was an extremely potent visual expression of their desire.

The final strains sounded as Severus drew Hermione in for a soulful kiss. He grinned as he released her. "Well?"

"You do seem to have a better grasp of the movements. The next two steps I want to show you shouldn't be too much of a problem considering how well you're doing."

Severus scowled. "Two more steps? I thought we were through? Did you not say we just had to practice?" He had the petulant air of three-year-old that had just been told Christmas was rescheduled to January 20th because of a prior engagement.

"Severus, I told you last week, we have two more steps and a few Adornments to cover. You have two more required lessons and then three weeks until Halloween. I thought we could still practice on Wednesday after the lessons are finished, if you wanted to. I will probably need to have you try on your costume again sometime in the next month, just to check the fit."

"Yes, indeed, that bloody pirate's costume. You still need to come up with a codpiece. Have you decided what your costume will look like?"

Hermione grinned. "I thought I'd go for the serving wench look. Sort of match your pirate outfit. Maybe a slit up the side, scoop neckline, the peasant-look. Something off the shoulder with a bit of a ruffle, I really have to sit down and look through a few books this week and finalized the image I'm looking for."

"What does one wear under a wench's costume?" His eyes darkened with lust as he thought of The Thong he had mistaken for his codpiece a few weeks ago.

"You will just have to wait and see. Now for this week's lesson. Last week we worked on the La Salida. I think you're doing better with the side-by-side steps. This week, let's start with La Cunita. La Cunita is called a cradle rock. It has a few flashy toe taps called Adornments. The taps also emphasize the rocking action of the move. This will ease you into what I was talking about - embellishing the dance."

Severus nodded as he watched her feet. He listened carefully as Hermione outlined the step, performing the movements as she spoke.

"I mirror your steps. Step forward with your left foot and bring your right foot to the back of your left foot and just "tap" the floor with your toe. Now, step back with your right foot and bring your left foot up to the front of your left foot and just "tap" the floor with toe as you did before. Hold the position for a two count before shifting your weight to your left foot. Then we'll transition into a two-step from here."

They slowly walked through the step and then repeated it three more times, increasing the tempo with each try. They moved through the dance again, Hermione inserting the step into two places in the sequence. They practiced the Cierre, a three-step sequence that Severus had a few problems with the last lesson. Through-out the next hour and a half they worked on the steps and practiced the movements several times.

Hermione's stomach had taken to growling loudly by the end of the lesson. Severus looked questioningly at her. "Did you eat lunch?"

Hermione shrugged. "I think so. How about a pizza?"

Severus frowned. "What do you mean you think so? One either eats lunch, or not. There are only two options."

"Well, sometimes 'one' can forget or 'one' can grab a late bite or 'one' may not be hungry at lunch time. Pizza. Yes or no?"

"Pizza will be fine. Where is the paper? I will charge it to my account. You really need to take better care of yourself."

Hermione smiled. "Yes, Professor."

"I would rather not look for a replacement dance partner at this stage in the lessons. I hardly have the time to teach potions, let alone teach someone else to dance with me if you are not able." Severus watched the paper glow as he tapped the square for payment.

"Mmm, that's all I am to you, a dance partner?"

"Did you desire to be something more?"

Hermione's eyes gleamed as she softly kissed his lips. "Pizza first, something more later."

Severus laughed. "As you wish." He retrieved his journal and joined Hermione on the couch. "I have the notes from last weekend. While we eat, let me show you the data comparisons for the four cauldrons. The iron and silver cauldrons show the most promise. I believe we need to focus on the difference between the two to determine which will benefit the Wolfsbane the most."

They spent just over an hour comparing and refiguring the results of the past weekend's work before Severus was satisfied with the results. Hermione, for her part, found it exhilarating to be a part of the scientific process, to know this was not just a lab experiment but also a part of something important and revolutionary.

Severus took in the gleam in her eye, her flushed cheeks, and smiled. "May I assume you find the work to be interesting?"

"I was just thinking how much more interesting this is than just the lab experiments we have been doing in class."

"Experiments are useful tools to teach you the process. You must learn to walk before you can fly."

Hermione laughed. "I think the expression is, you have to crawl before you can walk."

His expression was thoughtful, "Is that the Muggle version?" They were sitting side by side on the couch. Severus gently pulled back on her arm, drawing Hermione back into his lap and into his embrace."

"Could be? Are we finished with discussing the potion for now?"

Severus's voice was muffled as he nuzzled the side of her neck, slowly trailing kisses on his way to the hollow between her breasts. "You may continue if you like, I believe I have found other interests for now."

Hermione moaned. A thrill ran through her at the feel of his lips on her skin. She felt a rush of heat start to build at the thought of making love to him again. "Severus?"

"Mmmmm."

She shuddered as the vibration of his response shot straight to her sex. She wanted to feel him. She wanted to reach that level of pleasure he had brought her to last time. Another wave of electric shocks shot through her body in response to his ministrations. Severus worried her hard nipples with his teeth through the thin fabric of her leotard. His hand drifted along her side, gently caressing her thighs with feather light touches before slowly raking his nails along the sensitized flesh.

Hermione was barely able to get the words out, her breathing ragged. "My bedroom." She could feel his erection hot and hard beneath her bum. She moved a bit, drawing a moan from him.

Severus shifted his hold on the witch, sliding his arm under her legs. He silently cast a weightless charm on her and stood from the couch. Hermione was doing her best to distract him. Playing with his ear, nipping and sucking his ear lobe, and licking the sensitive flesh just below it.

He lowered her to a standing position next to the bed before crushing her to him in a fierce embrace. Her arms locked around his neck, her body molding to his. Their kisses were passionate, fierce, and filled with longing. A whispered spell later and they were both nude. Hermione could feel his engorged member pressing against her belly.

His hands moved to massage the rounded globes of her arse, pulling her sharply against him. She moaned as she felt his hardened shaft pressed against her. His husky whisper in her ear sent another wave of shocks through her, "Do you trust me? Would you like to try a different position?"

Her eyes were glazed with lust, desire shot through her. "Please, I just want to feel you buried inside me."

Severus smiled, his own eyes mirroring her lust. "Turn around, kneel on your hands and knees."

A look of fear came into her eyes. "You're not going to put it ..."

"No, trust me. You will enjoy this. I promise you, I would never hurt you. I will not do anything you do not want me to do." He had never met a witch that didn't like this position. The angle of his cock hit the 'G' spot perfectly. She was afraid he was interested in her arse. It told him volumes about her experiences.

Perhaps he could get her interested in some experimentation in the future. Some wizarding sex books might be of use to put her mind at ease and interest her in some of the variations he had previously indulged in. Though it had only been a few days since the last time they had made love, his desire for her was overwhelming.

"Just relax," he whispered as he caressed her arse cheeks. He gently toyed with the slick folds of her opening. She was already wet. He carefully positioned his shaft at her slick opening and slid into the welcoming heat of her body.

Hermione arched her back. A whimper escaped as he sheathed his member in her heated flesh. Severus stilled, allowing her body to adjust to the sudden fullness. His hand moved to play with her breast. He planted several kisses along her spine and was pleased to feel her shudder as he licked a sensitive spot by her shoulder.

Severus pulled back slowly, almost to the point of withdrawing before taking her body again. Hermione rocked against him and, between the two, they moved into a rhythm of pure pleasure. He filled her as no other. His cock was hitting spots she didn't know she had. He shifted his hips every few strokes. She was incredibly tight. Her muscles twitched as he picked up the speed of his thrusts.

His hand slid along her skin until he reached his destination, the small bundle of nerves that would send her over the edge. He stroked and gently pinched her clit. Her moans caused his balls to draw up further as he clamped down on his own release.

Hermione felt the familiar tightening of her groin, the feeling building along her nerves. A sudden deep thrust brought her to climax.

Severus felt her walls tighten, her muscles clamping down on his shaft as she came. Holding her hips, he drove into her, reaching for his own release. His movements became erratic. With a final thrust, he came deep in her body, spilling his seed.

He kissed the indentation between her shoulder blades before pulling free, feeling slightly bereft at the loss of contact as he collapsed on his back next to her. He closed his eyes, still trying to catch his breath.

"Oh my, god." In a minute she was all over him planting kisses on his eyelids, the bridge of his nose, his cheeks, and finally his mouth.

He chuckled at her exuberance. "Am I to assume that pleased you?"

"Oh god, yes. Yes, I am most pleased. I've read about the 'G' spot, but I never felt it like that before." Hermione kissed him again before snuggling into his side. "Oh my, god."

"I believe you have already said that. It is nice to see you have retained the use of your higher brain functions." Severus smiled as he watched her grab the coverlet and get comfortable. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled in the dim light. He gently brushed the hair away from her face, his fingers tracing the line of her cheekbone. "I don't think you have ever looked lovelier than you do right now. I'm glad you liked that. I told you, I would never hurt you or force you to do something you do not wish to do, but there is so much I can show you. So much more for you to feel, to experience."

Hermione watched his eyes as he talked, lost in the intensity of his gaze. She did trust him. She truly believed he would never harm her. She pulled him to her for a kiss. It was soft and sweet and clutched at his heart. He could feel her trust, her unshakable faith in him and vowed silently to never do anything to destroy that faith, no matter what.

"What time do you have to leave?" She had settled into his side, her leg over his, one hand splayed across his chest.

"I must return to the castle by 1:00a.m." Severus noticed her yawning. It was just after midnight. "Perhaps I should leave now and let you get some rest."

Hermione's hand tightened on his chest. "No, don't go. It gets lonely here when you're gone."

Severus rubbed her shoulder. "Rest for a few minutes. I will wake you before I leave."

"Don't you dare leave without telling me." Hermione's words lost some of their force as she continued to yawn.

Severus watched her sleep, a half smile on his lips. She fit perfectly along the side of his body. The last few nights, sleep had eluded him. He laid alone in his bed, remembering the feel of her body against his, the soft, silkiness of her skin. He buried his nose in her hair. The scent of strawberries and peaches touched his senses. He was content to watch her, to hold her, to have her to himself for even this small bit of time. All too soon he would have to return to the castle, to his empty bed.

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Severus shifted. "Hermione, I must leave. I need to return to Hogwarts." He kissed her furrowed brow and tucked the coverlet around her as he got out of the bed. A quick spell and he was dressed. He watched as she stretched, barely awake.

"I have an 11:00 a.m. appointment with my advisor Saturday morning. I will be at the castle sometime after that." She snuggled back into the covers with a sigh and fell back asleep.

"I will see you Saturday, then." Severus gently kissed her before leaving.

He stopped in the living room and gathered his notes. Crookshanks wound himself around his legs, trailing orange fur on his black trousers. The half-kneazle butted his head against Severus's legs, demanding attention. In spite of himself, Severus patted the animal on the head. "Take care of her," he said quietly to the cat.

With a last look at the bedroom doorway, he was gone. The cat cried plaintively as the door shut behind him.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Bladderwrack is also known as kelp or seaweed. Bladderwrack has proved most useful in the treatment of under active thyroid glands and goiters.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine

Still to come: Hogwarts, Harry and Ginny, and a few surprises. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

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## Angst in the Key of G

*Chapter 24 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

### Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 24 Angst in the Key of G

Hermione raced into the castle. Several people were gathered at the entrance of the Great Hall. Before she could ask any questions, one of the figures separated from the group and walked towards her.

"Harry! Where is he? Is he all right?" If Harry was here, Hermione could only surmise the others were Aurors, sent by the Ministry.

Her hands clutched his arm with surprising strength. "You heard?"

"Yes. News of the attack is all over Cambridge. I came as soon as I heard. Is Severus all right?" Hermione was frantic with worry.

The story had spread like wildfire. Severus had been shopping in Hogsmeade, when an escaped Death Eater attacked him. The foul man had come up behind him, screamed traitor, and proceeded to cast the Cruciatus Curse on him. Several people contacted the Ministry. Others tried to disarm the madman. Aurors appeared and overtook him.

Rosmerta had contacted Hogwarts when she recognized Severus. Albus arrived seconds before the Aurors. It was at his insistence Severus was brought to Hogwarts and not sent to St. Mungo's. Poppy had ministered to him too many times over the years not to qualify as an expert in the treatment of that particular curse.

Harry guided his friend towards the main stairway. "He's going to be fine. He was hit with the Cruciatus Curse but according to Poppy, he's okay." Harry found himself talking to Hermione's back as she ran up the stairs. "I'll join you as soon as I'm finished here."

Hermione's mind was on Severus. The Cruciatus Curse. One too many attacks with that particular curse was the reason Alice and Frank Longbottom were longtime residents of St. Mungo's. Repeated attacks had a cumulative effect on the human body. It was a curse Voldemort was fond of inflicting on his followers for his own amusement. She knew Severus had been subjected to the curse many times over during his years as a spy.

She was out of breath by the time she rounded the corner to the hospital wing. Her hand resting on the door, she drew a shaky breath before striding purposefully into the ward.

Hermione stopped as she heard his voice echoing through the empty ward.

"Dear god, woman, enough! You drink that vile liquid if you are so intent on someone taking it." Severus's voice could be heard coming from behind a curtain at the back of the ward. Hermione stood still, tears welling in her eyes. Relief flooded her mind upon hearing him. While his voice did not carry its usual tone or force and she could hear a slight waiver as he spoke, she nonetheless was relieved he still sounded like his usual prickly self.

"I have spent enough years putting you back together, young man, not to know the proper medical procedure. You will drink this. And you will drink it now." Poppy's voice booked no room for argument.

"You are heartless, you know that?" A sudden silence filled the room, followed by a string of the worst expletives Hermione had been privileged to hear in a long time. "The Dark Lord didn't finish me off, so you are going to? What are you doing?"

Poppy's sigh was one of long practice. "Oh, do be quiet, you old bat. And hold still. I still have a few more tests to run. You're too mean to die. You will be fine."

"I should like to return to my quarters now." The sound of equipment being moved signaled the end of Poppy's examination.

"You are not going anywhere. You cannot return to your quarters alone." Once again, her tone left no room for argument. She pulled the curtain back with unrestrained annoyance. Poppy noticed Hermione standing to the side. "Good afternoon, dear. Come, he won't bite."

Hermione came around the edge of the curtain. Her breath caught in her throat before she forced herself to smile. "Let me guess, you were bored, right? You could have called me."

Severus turned to face her. His skin was paler than usual. His eyes blood-shot. Various muscle spasms seemed to move arbitrarily across his body. His limbs twitched at irregular intervals. "Hermione." Her name was said through clenched teeth as he rode the wave of pain racking his body.

Tears threatened to spill down her cheeks as she reached for his trembling hand. "What can I do? How can I help you?"

His voice steadied as the pain subsided. His body tensed, waiting for the next round. "You should not have come. I would rather you did not see me like this." His voice lacked its usual authority, the words meaningless without the force of his personality behind them.

"Too proud for your own good." Poppy had moved back to his bedside.

Hermione stood to the side, listening to the two. It was obvious Poppy cared for him. The teasing between them had been a way to deal with the constant torture he suffered over the years.

"Be quiet, you old hag."

"Such flattery. Take this. It will help with the pain. You can complain to the Potions Master here at Hogwarts if you don't like the taste." Poppy helped him drink the offered phial.

Severus scowled at the matron. "You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"I told you, Severus. I have put you back together too many times to let a little thing like Cruciatus be a problem. Now, be quiet and rest." Poppy smiled at Hermione as she moved away. Hermione heard the door to the wing open on its hinges.

The Headmaster, resplendent in flowing lavender robes, came into view. "Severus, my boy. How are you feeling?"

"Just wonderful, Albus. Will you tell that witch I would like to return to my quarters now?" His tone still lacked its usual bite.

Hermione watched as the Headmaster smiled, his eyes twinkling with delight. "Splendid idea."

Poppy had returned to stand beside Albus. "And you may tell the old bat that he cannot return to his quarters alone."

"Nonsense, Poppy, Severus won't be alone. I'm sure Hermione will stay and see to his care. You can stop in and check his progress." A chorus of voices could be heard.

Severus tried to object. "Albus, I do not think that is the wisest..."

Poppy was having none of it. "Exactly who is the nurse around here?"

Hermione's voice cut through the din. "I would be more than happy to see to his recovery." She turned to Poppy. "What potions does he need to take and how often? What other care will he need?"

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It had taken awhile, but Severus was finally settled into his quarters. Poppy had given Hermione explicit instructions as to when, and what doses of the various potions he should receive, as well as signs to watch for if complications should occur. She had allowed them to leave hospital only after extracting a promise from the young witch. Hermione would Floo her the minute a problem appeared.

There really wasn't much Hermione could do for him. The potions were designed to ease the muscle spasms and lessen the pain inflicted by the curse. Rest and time would affect the only real cure. Poppy had said she would stop by in a few hours to check him.

"Did Albus send for you?" Pain edged his voice as he waited for the latest draught to take effect. He looked deathly pale against the dark green sheets of his bed.

Hermione added 'Talk to Albus' to her mental list of things to do. He bloody well should have owled her the minute Severus was hurt. She intended to insure that mistake did not happen again.

"No. News of your attack was all over Cambridge. There haven't been any Death Eater attacks in the last few years. The Wizarding world is small, so news spreads pretty quickly." Better left unspoken, was the Wizarding world's interest in a spy turned hero spreads even faster. "Would you mind telling what you were doing in Hogsmeade, on a Friday afternoon?"

His jaw tightened as he waited through the pain, the draught finally starting to dull the curse's effect for a time. "I had a free period and decided to pick up a few supplies we needed for tomorrow's trials. I don't suppose anyone was able to save the dragon scales I purchased?"

Hermione laughed. "I'll check, but I don't think I heard anything about any supplies."

She watched his hands shake as another round of spasms hit him. The calming draught was sending him into a deep, drug induced sleep. She reached out and stroked his hand. "I think I might leave you like this. Think how much money I could save on batteries if I used you as a vibrator instead of the one I have."

Severus snorted. His speech a bit slurred from the potion. "You are awfully cocky for someone who is not sure where her next orgasm is coming from."

"I've got a pretty good idea of where, it's just the when that's a little fuzzy." Hermione watched as his eyes drifted close, a small smile on his lips. Her heart ached as the smile quickly dissolved into a grimace as another spasm passed through him.

Severus struggled to fight the effects of the draught. "Hermione, thank you for coming."

"Where else would I be? Go to sleep. I'll be here when you wake up."

He never heard her answer. He had already fallen asleep.

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Severus woke several hours later. The pain seemed to have returned with a fervor. While the duration of the spasms had shortened, the pain had increased. The nerve endings were coming back on-line after being shocked into numbness he supposed.

He looked over to see Hermione asleep, her hand resting on his arm. He marveled at the young woman sleeping next to him. Her devotion to her friends was legendary. It seemed he was now to be included in that circle. He clenched his teeth as another wave of pain washed through him. It was several minutes before his breathing returned to normal. He opened his eyes to see Hermione watching him.

"You've entered the second stage. Why didn't you wake me? Poppy gave me a nerve relaxer for you to take." Hermione sorted through the phials at the side of his bed until she found the one labeled "Nerve Relaxer." She handed him a small phial filled with a bubble-gum pink solution. "Here, drink this."

Severus glared at her. "I am perfectly able to subsist without the use of constant pain potions."

"Your nerves are reacting to the shock of magic that hit you. There is no need to wear yourself out." Hermione held the phial out to him.

"I am not three years old, Miss Granger." He added a scowl to the glare for good measure.

"Good. Then try not to act like it. Take the potion."

Severus reached for the phial as another round of spasms racked his body. The pink liquid sprayed across the coverlet before the phial dropped from his fingers. Severus sank back against the pillows, exhausted.

Hermione quickly cleaned the spilled potion away. She produced another phial and held it to his lips.

He sighed heavily as he swallowed the solution. "I would rather you did not see me like this."

Hermione smiled. "You can't get rid of me that easily."

Severus's dark eyes burned with intensity. His voice was a whisper as his eyelids slowly slipped closed. "Thank god for small favors."

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Hermione looked up from her book. Someone was knocking on his chamber door. She glanced at the clock on the mantle. Poppy had checked him an hour ago. It was too soon for her to return. It couldn't be Albus. He had stopped by just before Poppy.

She eyed the new door, now situated between the loo and the cupboard. While Albus's main concern had been Severus, he did manage to convey his concern for propriety for appearance sake. The door opened onto a guest room in Gryffindor Tower; this would be her room as long as she chose to keep it. He politely requested she be seen leaving and entering that room in the morning. Personally, she thought it was a great shortcut. She could bypass half the castle if she wanted to visit Ginny or run to the library.

The knocking seemed to become more insistent. Hermione carefully slid off the bed, wondering who it could be. Gently closing the bedroom door behind her, she padded to the foyer. She could hear someone speaking on the other side of the door.

"Are you sure this is where his chambers are located?" Ginny asked. The snake tapestry was pulled to the side. Ginny and Harry were left staring at a blank wall.

"It was here last week, Gin," Harry said, totally perplexed.

Hermione brought down the wards. The doorway appeared to Harry and Ginny as Hermione opened the door to greet them. "Hi guys. Come on in."

Harry hugged Hermione. "Are you okay? You look like hell."

"Nice to see you, too. You want tea or something?" Hermione led them to the seating area of the study.

"Tea would be lovely. How is the Professor? Poppy asked me to stop in and do some simple scans. She'll be by herself in an hour or so." Ginny held her wand and a few other instruments in her hand.

"He's still asleep. I hate to wake him. He's moved into the second stage of the curse. The pain seems to have intensified. The only relief he gets is when the potions knock him out." Hermione's voice cracked, belying the tight hold she had on her already fragile emotions.

Ginny's voice was reassuring. "He will be fine, Hermione. Poppy told me he had been hit worse than this before, during the war."

Hermione nodded. "I know, when he was spying. Do they know who did this, Harry?"

"Yeah, a minor Death Eater who escaped from a lower security prison in Italy. The Ministry has felt for some time that the remaining Death Eaters should be held in Azkaban. There are still a few in other countries. This appears to be an isolated incident, if that helps." He hoped he was right, there was no sense worrying Hermione.

"But why would he come here?" Hermione's logical mind was trying to come to grips with a horror she thought was long past her.

"He came looking for me. Or Albus. Why else would he be in the vicinity of Hogwarts?" Severus leaned against the doorframe, breathing hard. The effort of walking had cost him more than he was willing to admit.

"Professor, you should be in bed." Ginny noted the beads of sweat on his upper lip and the unhealthy pallor of his skin. Spasms continued to move across his hands, his

body randomly twitching. She moved to help him.

"What are you doing up? Back in bed." Hermione rounded the sofa. He allowed her to pull his arm across her shoulders, supporting him as she helped him back to the bed.

Harry knew Voldemort had tortured Snape on a regular basis. He had endured Cruciatus far more times than most and still maintained his mind, a tribute to the man's strength, his single mindedness, and his determination to see Voldemort dead, once and for all. He was not prepared for the sight that greeted his eyes. Snape looked like someone had attached a live wire to him. Harry had suffered the effects of the curse himself for several minutes. He wondered how long the spell had been cast on the Professor to leave him in such a state.

Hermione settled Severus back against the pillows. His breathing was labored; the effort of fighting the pain taking a toll on his already abused body. Ginny moved to his side, reciting an incantation while attaching a small knob to the handle of her wand. It glowed red as she moved the wand back and forth across Severus. She murmured a new incantation and a multi-coloured glow radiated from the Professor himself.

Hermione perched on the edge of the bed. "What do the colours mean?"

Ginny pointed to Severus's hand. The colours rippled as another spasm shook his fingers. "See the change in hue? Green is healthy. Eventually, his entire aura should be green. The shift from red to orange to yellow to green, means the nerves in this part of the hand are still feeling the after affects of the shock. The healing starts deep inside and radiates out."

Hermione could see the colour along the center of his chest was shifting back and forth from yellow to green, other areas of his body radiated the full spectrum of colours. His whole body had twitched when she first saw him.

Ginny smiled. "Actually, Professor, you seem to be doing quite well. Your entire aura was almost red when they brought you in. I would say you are in very capable hands. Another day or two of rest and you will be fine. Poppy said she would be by in a few hours."

"Thank you, Ginevra, but I plan to resume my duties tomorrow. Please tell Poppy her visit will not be necessary."

"Oh no you don't. You are not moving from this bed, even if I have to tie you to it. Ginny, tell Poppy to double the strength of the sleeping draughts and send them to me. If I have to knock him out, he's staying in this bed." Hermione's eyes snapped, daring Severus to contradict her.

"Hermione," his voice held a tone of warning. "Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Yes, a very stubborn man, who is recovering from an extremely debilitating curse. Give yourself permission to be human, Severus." Hermione watched his hand clench as a new wave of pain passed through him. "Fine. You're so sure you're well? I challenge you to a duel. You win, I won't say a word. Nothing. You do as you wish. But if I win, you stay in this bed until Monday morning. *And I get to tell you I told you so. Repeatedly.*"

Severus scowled at her. "It would almost be worth the pain, if only to silence you for the weekend." He found he was too tired to argue. He would wait until morning and see how he felt then. "Hermione, I will owl you tomorrow. Potter, would you see that Miss Granger gets back to Cambridge safely?"

"What makes you think I'm leaving? I'm not going anywhere. I stay glued to your side until I'm satisfied your okay." Hermione smiled, he really needed to get off his high horse.

"Hermione, you have a meeting in the morning with your advisor. I will not let you jeopardize your internship because I was foolish enough to follow a megalomaniac in my youth. You will not miss that meeting." He waited, sure the voices in his head were going to berate him for encouraging her to leave him and study with someone else. Silence reigned in his mind. Maybe the curse had rid him of that particular demon once and for all.

Harry looked puzzled. Hermione merely laughed. "That is Severus's way of saying he was a Death Eater, Harry. Severus, I can Apparate to Cambridge from here. I'm a witch or have you forgotten? I'm sure Albus will be happy to stay with you while I'm gone."

"I do not need a baby sitter!" It was a rather impressive bellow considering his lack of strength.

"And I will not leave you alone!" Hermione was equally impressive as she shouted back.

"Uh, listen, Professor. I have a few questions for you. What if I come round when Hermione leaves? I have to question you in private anyway. I need to hear the details of what happened from you. Anything you can remember, the sequence of events, that kind of thing. I would assume you'd like to have a night of rest to clear your head before discussing what happened. What time are you leaving, Hermione?"

Snape stared at the young man. He had used his title, not just his name. Somewhere along the way, Potter had learned diplomacy. "Fine. Hermione, will you order a tray for us before you leave in the morning?"

Hermione turned grateful eyes on her friend. There was no love lost between Harry and Severus, yet Harry was showing a maturity she would not have thought him capable of. "Yes, of course, Severus. I need to leave at 10:45 a.m., Harry."

A chime sounded by the side of the bed. It was time for another nerve relaxer potion. Knowing what had happened to the last one, Hermione turned to Harry and Ginny, "Let me see you two out. I will be right back with the draught."

Severus closed his eyes. He could hear the low murmur of voice from the other room. He was bone tired. He didn't think he could move if the Dark Lord himself showed up. The bed dipped as Hermione sat next to him. She was stroking his arm, her voice soft as she called his name.

"I am still awake. What vile substance do you want me to consume this time?"

She held the phial to his lips. He drank without ever opening his eyes. "You don't have to stay. I understand. Your education comes first."

"I had my book bag with me when I left Cambridge. I really don't need too much more."

"Ah, the ever present book bag," he said with a chuckle.

"I'll stop by my flat after the meeting, feed Crooks, and grab a few things. I hope you don't mind. I borrowed a pyjama top to wear as a nightshirt."

Severus turned to look at her. She was lying on her side, a textbook open in front of her. The bottom of his black silk pyjama top fell just past her mid-thigh. Her legs seemed to go on forever. His hand still shook as he stroked the smooth skin of her thigh. "It is a crime for you to look that sexy when I am unable to do anything about it at the moment." He was fighting the weight of his eyelids. The nerve relaxer was heavily laced with a sleeping draught that was racing through his blood.

Hermione kissed the back of his hand. "You'll owe me. I guarantee I will collect sometime in the near future. Sleep. I'm not going anywhere."

She watched his breathing even out as he dropped off into a heavy, draught-induced sleep. She reset the timer at the side of the bed. Poppy had been emphatic about taking the nerve relaxer at regular intervals. The next round of potions and draughts included a revitalizer as well. It was a sophisticated potion designed to help repair damaged nerve endings.

She was grateful for her friends and their support. Hogwarts had always been a symbol of security for her. It seemed it was now to become her fortress as well. The world

had become a little colder for her today. She had lost her parents during the war. She had no intentions of losing Severus, too.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

My understanding, according to the Lexicon, is that constant Apparating is tiring and difficult. The further the distance, the more difficult Apparition becomes, hence the use of Portkeys. I would equate Apparating to driving. The longer you drive, the more tiring it is. The time and distance driving in a car for 20 hours as opposed to flying and arriving in 3 hours could be compared to Apparating and Portkeys.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine

Still to come: The next day: Saturday at Hogwarts, Harry and Ginny, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

The Games People Play

Chapter 25 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

### Chapter 25 The Games People Play

It was early Saturday morning, and Severus was finally able to sit upright for more than ten minutes before a tremor passed through him. "Hermione, as much as I appreciate you being here, I still wish you had not seen me in this condition."

Hermione's gaze was steady as she regarded the man she had come to care so much about. Her voice held an undertone of anger, "And how would you have kept me away? We were supposed to work together today, remember? Perhaps you could send me an owl saying you were unavoidably detained, see you Wednesday. Or, 'Dear Hermione, I find myself in a rather awkward position as the result of a potion gone wrong by a dunderhead worse than Longbottom. I will be out of quarantine on Monday. Regards, Severus.'" She watched his face contort in pain, spasms still traveling the length of his body. Her eyes softened, wishing she could stop his pain. Her voice was quieter when she spoke again. "Or were you going to try to hide it from me? Though I don't see how you could have, or why you think you have to. Do you think this make you any less in my eyes?"

Severus found it difficult to come to terms with his feelings. He loathed the feeling of helplessness the Cruciatus Curse created in its victims. It was harder still to have Hermione see him that way, helpless. He knew he was being foolish. It was a temporary state brought on by the curse; a few days at most and he would be good as new, or at least back to his normal, disagreeable self.

Hermione's concern for his well-being seemed to take their relationship to another level, as well. While he would rather not appear diminished in anyway in her eyes, it resolved some of his concerns about her feelings for him. He finally believed he was more than a passing fancy for her. He had to chuckle to himself, as if he really was a fancy for anyone.

"Do you think you could fetch a quill and parchment for me? I should like to record the owl you mentioned for future reference. Though, I do not believe I would address it as 'Dear Hermione'." Severus ran a shaking hand along her cheek. He tried to wipe the trail of a tear that trekked down her face, but his fingers refused to cooperate. "I believe the salutation should read, 'To my *dearest* Hermione'."

Her tears continued in earnest for another minute before getting herself under control. It broke her heart to watch this strong, proud man reduced to this level of pain and suffering. She would have dearly loved to hug and kiss him, but the damn curse had sensitized his nerves to the point of pain when confronted with human contact. The nerves were coming back on-line with a vengeance. Her voice was a whisper, "You will let me know when I can hug you, won't you? I don't think I ever want to let you go again."

"I believe the feeling...is mutual." Severus's body stiffened as the combination of muscle spasm and pain registered on his features before abating.



The timer chimed signaling time for another dose just as a knock came at his chamber door. "Potter. What timing," he said through clenched teeth.

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It was not surprising that Severus barely recognized the Death Eater's name. Voldemort had not allowed anyone to know all of his lackeys, preferring to have them meet in small groups. The entire group would not be in jeopardy if someone turned traitor. Traitor or spy.

Harry checked the parchment as the quill automatically recorded his comments. "Professor Snape, why do you think Death Eater Sanders was in Hogsmeade?"

"I'm sure he was heading for Hogwarts. He must have been looking for Albus Dumbledore or myself. It was just his good fortune I was in Hogsmeade to pick up supplies Friday afternoon."

"Is there anything further you would like to add at this time?"

"No."

"*Finite Incantatem*." Harry appeared to be sizing Severus up.

"Thank goodness the Order never had to rely on you spying. What is it, Potter?" Severus was mildly annoyed. He could find no fault with Harry's conduct, but the pain was once again wearing him out. He had deliberately taken a watered-down version of the pain draught. It would not do to be a drooling idiot when giving a Ministry report.

Harry sighed. "How isolated do think this attack was? We still don't know who helped him escape. The prisons in Italy are nowhere the level of Azkaban, but someone had to help him."

The image of Hermione strolling casually along the pathways at Cambridge jumped into his mind. "Do you have any information on the escape, any leads at all? Has someone visited him recently? Hogwarts is a fairish distance from Italy. Where did he get the wand?" Severus's mind raced with additional questions.

"I don't have the full report from the prison, yet. I was thinking of paying them a little visit in the next day or two. Maybe I can find out more in person than they would send in an official report."

Severus chuckled. "What good is being the boy-who-lived-to-save-the-world, if you cannot do something with it?"

"Yeah, something like that." Harry looked sheepish. He couldn't care less for himself; it was Ginny and Hermione, as well as his other friends that he worried about. "I think tracking the wand he used might give us the most information."

An odd expression crossed the dark man's face. "Potter, I would...appreciate it, if you would let me look at a copy of the report when you receive it. As well as any further information you gather."

Harry grinned. "Was that a grimace from pain or because you had to ask a polite favor from me?"

Snape's snarl was directed at the young wizard. "You are an arse, Potter, and she wonders why I find your company unacceptable?"

"Take it easy. I'll keep you informed. I would like your view of things anyway, with your background you may notice something I missed." Harry tried to placate him. Hermione would have his hide if Snape were worse when she returned.

"Because I am an ex-Death Eater," his tone was bitter, as he stated the simple fact. He was destined to spend the rest of his life paying for that decision.

"Come off it, Snape. I know what you were. I also know you are loyal to the Order. I wouldn't be alive today if you hadn't been standing next to me at the final battle." Harry's voice was quieter. "I also know you care for Hermione. And god help me, for some unknown reason she fancies you. I'm worried about her and Ginny. I hope this is an isolated thing. I need to be sure, that's all."

Severus eyed the young man. It seemed they had come to another level of understanding, too. He nodded before leaning back into the couch cushions. The thought of dreamless sleep in the face of the questioning and pain seemed very appealing right now.

The questioning had not taken that long. Harry and Severus sat looking at each other across the expanse of the coffee table. "You *can* leave, Potter. I am capable of looking after myself."

"I'm sure that's true, however, I can't leave." Harry looked slightly embarrassed as another wave of spasms passed through Severus.

"Let me guess: Hermione," he said in annoyance.

Harry nodded. "And Ginny, Poppy, Remus, Albus, Minerva..."

Severus held a trembling hand up. "Enough. I understand."

An awkward silence followed. Severus sat back against the couch, pain registering across his features again before subsiding.

"Would you like me to help you back to your bed?"

Severus glared at him. "You must really be enjoying this? The greasy git in pain. Call Weasley. I'm sure he would enjoy the show."

"Professor, I've been under the Cruciatus Curse before. I wouldn't wish it on anyone, not even you. And before you decide to lecture me, I know you have experienced the curse far more times than most people. Believe me, I am not enjoying it, even if it is you." Harry's lopsided smile was genuine as he looked at Severus.

"Well, well. Will wonders never cease? Call the *Daily Prophet*, Potter. I believe Hell just froze over." Severus sat for a minute. "Is there any tea left?"

"Yeah, I'll pour you some. Would you rather have a cup of coffee?" Harry watched Severus's hand tremble. "You know, you could almost make a milkshake without a blender."

"I'm glad you find my skills so useful." Severus glared at him. First Hermione, now Potter. If it weren't an Unforgivable, he would have been happy to cast the Cruciatus Curse on the boy. Shaking his head, he indicated a cup pushed to the side. "Do I look like I need caffeine to wind me up any further? Use that mug. Hermione cast a stabilizer charm on it. So, now what?"

"We could play a game of wizard chess. I don't think Hermione will be back for an hour or two, yet."

"Wizard chess, are you any good?" Severus sipped at his tea. Why not? He was bored out of his skull.

"Not bad," he said with a shrug. "Or maybe Exploding Snap, instead?"

Severus almost snorted his tea out his considerable nose. "Exploding Snap? How old are you? There is a chessboard in the far corner. Bring it here *Accio pain draught*." Severus held out his hand as a phial came speeding in from his bedchamber to land neatly against his palm. He couldn't stop the trembling, but half of a dose would dull

the pain to the point of being tolerable and still allow him to keep his wits about him.

Harry grinned sheepishly. "Chess it is."

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Ginny stopped in as they were finishing their first game. Severus was a brilliant strategist and played the game as he did all things, with the one goal in mind, to best his opponent. He was surprised at the level of skill Harry displayed.

Harry regarded the board. Severus had just put his king in check. It looked like mate. He could see no other options. "And mate. Care for a rematch?" His king had removed his dagger and plunged it into his stomach. He was in the process of staggering across the board to fall at the feet of the white queen.

"Let me check the Professor first. Harry, order another tray of tea and some chocolate biscuits from the kitchen. I think the chocolate would help at this point." Ginny charged her wand and scanned Severus.

Harry watched from the fireplace. He had played wizard chess with Ron throughout their school days. Ron excelled at the game, winning most of the time. But it had been a game. 'Snape plays as if his life depends on it,' he thought and immediately regretted it, as a wave of pain spread through the man. He supposed the Potions master did not have too many carefree days in his youth to enjoy playing a simple game.

The tray at the side of the table disappeared and a new one popped into existence to replace it. Severus watched Ginny scanning his body. There were far fewer red areas than yesterday. He watched the young witch, intent on her work. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Potter watching her. He supposed this was the result of his relationship with Hermione, too. Playing chess with Potter while waiting for her to return. God, what next? Saturday evening meals with the Weasleys, or perhaps double dating with Potter? He shuddered at the thought. If it came to that, he refused to be responsible for his actions.

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Hermione returned an hour later to find Severus and Harry engrossed in their second game of chess. By all appearances, Severus was winning this one, too. The two appeared amicable enough.

"Well, well, it would seem to be mate again, Potter." Severus gloated, as once again, Harry's king committed hari-kari before dropping to the board.

"You win again, Snape. I'll be in touch." An understanding look passed between the two men as Harry rose to leave.

Severus merely nodded.

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"I'll be around through tomorrow if you need me. Everything go okay at Cambridge?" Harry asked, as they walked to the door.

"Everything went fine. Thanks, Harry, I really appreciate your help. Are we still on for Thursday? Owl me and let me know where, okay?" Hermione hugged Harry as he left the dungeons. She turned back to find Severus glaring at her.

One eyebrow was quirked. "Thursday?"

"I'm meeting Harry and Ron for dinner. We try to get together once a month, though it varies more with Ron's schedule." Hermione sat on the couch, about a yard away, fearful of touching or jostling him.

"Am I required to attend this...dinner?"

"I never expected you to buddy up to Ron or Harry. Actually I'm pleased, as well as a little amazed, you haven't hexed them yet. And don't tell me the thought hasn't crossed your mind. Often. I'll meet them for dinner, myself. I always do. I don't expect you to become friends with them just because I am. Severus, I'm not sure where our relationship will lead, but we're not joined at the hip. I don't expect you to go everywhere with me. You are welcome to come Thursday. I just didn't think you wanted to."

Severus continued to scowl. "You are correct in that assessment. I would be willing to go with you alone, but I have no desire to dine with Potter or Weasley any more than necessary. You do not intend to place me under a Imperius Curse, do you?"

"Thanks, I think I'll pass on the curse. Somehow Azkaban doesn't hold any appeal for me." Hermione nodded, it was as she expected.

"Was the meeting with your advisor satisfactory?"

"Not bad. He said one of the Potions masters you mentioned is part of the program. They could contact him if I was interested in apprenticing with him. I don't have to place my requests until January. They want this term's grades before they see who qualifies and at what levels." She sat back, tired. Yesterday had taken a lot out of her.

"I am quite sure your grades will no doubt qualify for the top level. They have always been outstanding in the past."

"Did you just compliment me?"

"Did I?" he asked.

Hermione smiled broadly. "Mmm, I think you did. There's a seminar in Amsterdam I am required to attend next weekend. I can't believe they didn't give us more notice. It was either this weekend or Halloween weekend. We're going to be working on practicals. Cambridge is hosting a series of lectures and we get to do the grunt work. Setting up the samples and maintaining the exhibit area. At least I'll get to hear the lectures."

Severus's eyes darkened. "You will be staying for the weekend?"

"Yeah, ten of us are going this time. Professor Rancine and five of us will setup. We're all rotating manning the floor Saturday evening and Sunday morning. The other students are taking down Sunday night. I should be through by mid-day. I hate sharing a room with someone I don't know." Hermione pouted when she realized that eliminated her weekend with Severus. "Maybe we can get together Sunday afternoon when I get back, if you're free."

"Rancine? I will not have you going off with that man. You are not going. The answer is no." If it was the same Potions master that Severus was thinking of, he knew the man to be a womanizer of the worst kind. It must have taken quite a few Galleons to secure the position at Cambridge. The man was undoubtedly qualified in the field of potions. It was the possibility that he had taken advantage of two students that was the problem. The two witches quietly withdrew their complaints before the matter ever came to court, refusing to discuss the case any further. Taking advantage of students was deplorable in Severus's estimation. Authority was not to be abused in such a blatant manner.

"What do you mean the answer is no? I am not 'going off' with Racine, as you so sweetly put it. And who the hell do you think you are talking to, anyway? Rancine is the director of the program. The seminar is required as part of my participation in the internship. And even if it wasn't, how dare you imply that something else is going on? You are not my keeper, Severus. I thought we reached an understanding. Perhaps I was wrong."

"I am not trying to control you. The man is an outright womanizer."

Hermione's cheeks flushed with anger. "Give me a little credit. I'll be setting up for a lecture series, not attending an orgy. Thank you for your concern, but I can take care of

myself. I have no intentions of shagging the first penis that walks by. I am not seeing anyone else, nor do I intend to. I'm happy with things the way they are, you idiot."

"Yes, I can see that." If the thought of a weekend away set him off, how the bloody hell was he going to stand her apprenticing with someone else for a year? And what if Potter was wrong about the rogue Death Eater being an isolated event?

The voice in his head seemed to have returned. Hoping the curse had silenced it permanently was evidently too much to ask for. It added it's two Knuts now. 'An orgy, yes!'

Severus took a deep breath. This was another reason he had never been in a sustained relationship. It actually took work and attention to keep it going. Skills he was ill prepared with. He waited for the latest spasm to pass before addressing her. She was too angry for him to stop and think clearly through the medication. "If I pleaded pain and suffering as well as dealing with Potter, would you be willing to overlook this conversation? Perhaps I am really my evil twin and the real Severus Snape is being held captive somewhere."

Hermione's eyes grew large. "Do you have a twin?"

"If I said yes, will you forgive me?"

She moved between wanting to kill him and wanting to hug him. A comment from an article in Witch Weekly jumped into her mind. He was high maintenance. She chuckled, that was an observation better kept to herself. "You really can be charming if you put your mind to it. You're also annoying, aggravating, exasperating, chauvinistic, and infuriating, but you are charming. It's time for the next round of medication. Poppy gave me another potion to add to your treatment. Let's get you into bed."

The eyebrow went up. "Will you join me?"

Hermione laughed as she helped him to his feet. "Annoying, but charming. What am I going to do with you?"

"Wait a week and I will be happy to show you."

The timber of his voice sent a shiver down her spine. 'You can add sexy to the list, too,' she thought.

Severus needed less help than the night before. He chuckled as the ever-present book bag made its appearance at the side of the bed. Hermione changed into jeans and a t-shirt before addressing the growing number of phials on the nightstand.

"Okay," she consulted a piece of parchment, as she gathered the phials, "we continue with the nerve relaxer and the pain draught. I add the revitalizer and an inhibitor." When she finished she had four phials in hand.

Severus drank each as she handed them to him, washing them down with a glass of cool water. He lay back exhausted against his pillows. "What do you plan to do today?"

"Well, considering that cocktail should knock you out for two or three hours, I thought I would study and continue to check your breathing every half hour, just to make sure you're still alive."

Severus smiled, his eyes starting to close. "Poppy would not kill me, too many reports to file with the Ministry. Hermione, I regret we will not be able to work today, nor will I be able to take you to dinner tomorrow night as we previously planned."

"We can go out another time, just rest."

His voice was muffled, the words hard to hear. "Would you owl Witchcraft and reschedule our reservation for two weeks from tomorrow? I should like to take you to dinner then." He appeared to fall asleep at the end of the sentence.

Hermione had to wonder how strong this combination of potions was. The tremors had subsided a bit, but the pain was still draining his strength. He asked her to reschedule for two weeks, a concession to her unavailability next weekend.

The rest of the afternoon passed in relative quiet. Severus slept while Hermione studied. Every so often he would groan in his sleep. A low keening sound that broke her heart. It bothered her more to think of all the times he had endured this treatment alone. He had been subject to the Cruciatus Curse countless times during his years as a spy. His treatment had been doled out under Poppy's watchful eye, in the hospital wing. She was a caring and compassionate woman, but it still could not compare to recovering in your own chambers.

A knock at the door woke Hermione out of her nap. A glance at the clock told her it was near dinnertime. The room had grown warm, and she had been tired out from lack of sleep the night before, the combination of the two had lulled her to sleep. Rubbing her eyes, she moved her books to the side as she slipped from the bed to answer the door.

"Hi, come in." Hermione greeted the mediwitch as she ushered her into the suite.

"How is the patient? I have reviewed Ginny's scans from this morning, and I must say, he seems to be making fast progress. Is he giving you any trouble?" Poppy smiled at the young witch. Normally Severus was an example of the worst patient a Healer could have, but by all reports, he seemed to be much calmer than usual. She would have to attribute the phenomenon solely to the presence of Hermione. She watched as the young woman smiled tiredly. Poppy thought she could use a Pepper Up potion right about now.

"He's fine. Just seems to be sleeping an awful lot."

"I was planning to reduce the sleeping draught tonight. He is doing much better than usual. I expect it is due to your care, dear."

A voice called out from the other room. "Or it could be the lack of your care, as well."

Poppy swept into the bedchamber. "Hmm. Nice to see you sound like your old self. We will have you up and about and terrorizing the students in no time."

"Who is deducting points in my absence?"

Poppy had set several items by the side of the bed and was starting on new set of scans. "Hold still, or I will have to repeat the scan." Severus glared at the woman but complied. It was several minutes before she was satisfied with the results.

"Well, you seem to be doing fine. You should be able to teach class on Monday, at this rate. And to answer your question, I believe the Headmaster has set up a revolving schedule. Each instructor must take a fixed number of points per house per hour. He mentioned something about not wanting you to have make up the time when you returned."

"Remind me to thank Albus when I see him," he said dryly.

Poppy turned to study Hermione. "You look like you could use some rest yourself."

"I'm fine, really."

"All right, assuming you stay put tonight and tomorrow, I will clear you to teach Monday." Poppy grinned in the face of the glare that was being aimed at her.

"How very kind of you. I am sure the students would be devastated if I did not show up Monday morning."

"Mostly likely the students and staff would be in shock. I have enough to do without you adding to my load. Hermione, Floo the kitchen for something light for the bat and something for you, as well. You need to take care of yourself, too. Don't let him wear you out with his complaining." Poppy waited until she left the room before turning to Severus. "How are you really feeling? You seem to be doing well. Is there anything you want to tell me?"

"I'm fine. No different from usual." He had been hit with the curse enough times to know his own recovery. This might be a little faster than usual, but basically it was the same.

"I'm assuming the personal care and the more relaxed atmosphere has made the difference. I know how you hate the hospital wing." She glanced at the door, opened her mouth as if to speak, and then thought better of it, as Hermione rejoined them.

Severus was getting annoyed. "What is it?"

"You're fine. I'll be back to check on you in the morning. Hermione, here is the revised schedule. Let me know if you want a stronger sleeping draught."

"Thank you, but I haven't been taking one." Hermione scanned the parchment, noting the changes in the doses.

She nodded toward the figure in the bed. "I meant for him. I can see myself out." Hermione's laughter followed her to the door. Poppy was genuinely glad to see Severus doing so well. The man had endured far more than anyone would ever know. There had been quite a few times, through the years, she had doubted whether he would make it considering the shape he had been in. They seemed to be an odd couple; she hoped they would be happy together.

As cold and distant as Severus was sometimes, he would show up unannounced with a new batch of potions for her, then stay to help treat sick students if she was short handed. Trading barbs with him was far more refreshing than having to coddle a few she'd ministered to over the years. She took no offence with his often biting and sarcastic nature, instead understanding it was his way to deal with the stress and danger in his life.

Poppy hoped Hermione understood. The girl was young but had a good head on her shoulders. Minerva was constantly raving about her academic accomplishments. She could only hope her brains extended to common sense as well.

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"Would you like to eat in the other room? How about a change of scenery? You must be bored sleeping so much." Twenty-four hours had made a world of difference. The pain and tremors were still evident, but they appeared to be receding. Hermione didn't think he would be one hundred percent by Monday morning, but she realized he would be too stubborn to turn his classes over to someone else. "I would think you would relish an extra day or two away from the dunderheads you usually teach."

Severus settled heavily onto the couch. "Do you have any idea how long it takes to undo the damage of just one day of Albus substituting for me? The last time he taught my classes, he used a potion recipe donated by the Weasley twins. The students turned pink with white polka dots."

Hermione laughed. "Well, no real harm done. They probably had some fun with it." She watched Severus's eyes darken. Oh. They had fun.

"Exactly. When, if ever, did you have 'fun' in my class? Turning a student pink may be funny, but utmost diligence is needed if you are going to brew a Draft of Peace, or a Mandrake Restorative Draft, or simply stop someone from blowing themselves and those around them to pieces." He prided himself on the fact that in all the years he had been teaching, not one student suffered a fatality. The same could not be said for any of the other wizarding schools. It was through constant attention to the students, he kept them safe. If the result of his efforts was fear by intimidation, so be it. At least his conscience was clear, no one had ever suffered a life-threatening injury in his class.

"Well, have you ever thought about teaching the twins' potion? Maybe on April fools. I'm sure you could figure a way to turn the students red with white hearts for Valentine's Day." As she spoke, Hermione charmed the tray with his dinner, to hover in front of him.

He poked at the cheese sandwich before deciding on the broth. The elves had sent up something that looked strangely like purple custard. "Do you have any clue as to what that is?" He pointed to the purple blob.

"It looks like blueberry pudding." Hermione refrained from laughing as Severus scowled at his meal, beating the food into submission with his look alone. Tasting her own purple blob, she found it was indeed some type of berry pudding, and quite tasty at that. "Actually, it's some type of berry, very good too. I'll take yours if you don't want it."

"How thoughtful. I believe I shall keep it, thank you. Why would I want to start disrupting my classes?"

"The twins' potion? It wouldn't be disrupting; it would just lighten the mood every so often. I'd be glad to come and help if you like." She still wished he hadn't dismissed the thought of her apprenticing with him.

"I shall think about it. I would not want the students thinking I have gone soft. They might misconstrue the meaning behind the lesson." He leaned back, tired again. It was almost time for another round of potions; he would welcome the sleep at this point.

"You wouldn't want anyone thinking you cared." Hermione sent the trays back to the kitchens before perching on the far end of the sofa.

"They would be correct. I don't care."

"Yes, you do. You just don't want to admit it. Underneath all that black cloth, you really do have a good heart you know." Hermione smiled softly.

Severus snorted. "I do not have a heart." He raised his head to look at her. "You may come closer. I find I don't have the energy to do you any bodily harm at the moment."

"I don't want to hurt you." Hermione edged closer to where he was resting.

"You will not hurt me." His hand reached out to touch hers, covering it with his own.

Hermione could feel a slight tremor every so often, but her heart revelled in the warmth of his touch. "You do too have a heart, I've seen it."

His black eyes locked with hers. "I thought I rid myself of that particular organ years ago."

"No, I've seen it. Actually, I'm rather fond of it." She felt time stand still as she fell into his gaze. She would have given every Knut she had to hold him right now, instead she settled for the gentle touch of thumb stoking the sensitive flesh at her wrist.

"So it would seem." The chime sounded in the other room. He sighed heavily as he considered another night of draught induced sleep. He would have liked nothing more than to spend the night ravishing her; instead she was regulated to the position of nursemaid.

"I could bring the potions out here, but I'd rather not complicate matters when you bump into a wall or door as I try levitating you back. Why don't we get you back in bed?"

"The next time I see you, I intend that sentence to have another meaning entirely." Severus followed her into the bedchamber and continued on through the room to the bathroom.

Hermione smiled as she watched him, at least he was moving under his own steam.

He settled in a few minutes later. After taking the latest round, he lay back against the pillows and closed his eyes. His hand once again reached for hers. "What time will

you return to Cambridge tomorrow?"

"I was thinking I might stay until Monday morning, just to make sure you're okay. I can Apparate from here. It won't be tiring. I'll be fine."

"Hermione..." his voice held a tone of warning.

"I know, school comes first."

"Actually, you do. I do not believe I can stay awake long enough to construct a convincing argument, at the moment. We will talk tomorrow *Before* I take the next round of medicine." His eyes drifted close again. He lightly squeezed Hermione's hand before sleep, and dreams of the lithe witch filled his thoughts. He could get used to having her near. For all the years he spent alone, all the times he claimed to enjoy his solitude, he would rather have her with him.

He felt his heart speed up for a moment as she placed a soft kiss at his temple. Her voice was even softer, as he could barely hear her whispered, "Goodnight, Severus, pleasant dreams."

Damn, he really thought he had gotten rid of that annoying organ. It occurred to him his heart was no longer his. He had given it to her. He smiled as thoughts of Hermione followed him down to sleep.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

For those questioning the title of the last chapter, Angst in the Key of G was a reference to the anguish Hermione was feeling. The G is for Granger. More or less a play on words.

From this site: Medical Breakthroughs reversing nerve damaged as reported on the Ivanhoe Broadcast News. [http://www.ivanhoe.com/channels/p\\_channelstory.cfm?storyid=7436](http://www.ivanhoe.com/channels/p_channelstory.cfm?storyid=7436) ... "By improving blood supply, PKC inhibitors slow the progression of neuropathy and even reverse it."

If you are interested in the timeline for the story to date, under the scraps section of my deviantart account are two images. One is a copy of the calendars from August to November with dates, events, and pretty colors (the calendars are color coded). The other is a listing of chapter numbers, dates, and events or very brief notes. This listing is coded to the calendars I use to keep the story straight. They can be found here:

<http://pearle.deviantart.com/scraps/>

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine

Still to come: The next day: Sunday at Hogwarts, another dance lesson, and a weekend seminar. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

## Lesson Nine: Lessons Learned or Arrrgh!

*Chapter 26 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

### Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 26 - Lesson Nine: Lessons Learned or Arrrgh!

The late afternoon sunlight barely lit the enchanted window, neither occupant of the room noticed.

"You are not going anywhere. I promised Poppy and Albus you would stay in bed until tomorrow morning, and that is where you are going to stay." Hermione glared at the man sitting on the side of the bed, fully dressed.

"Where. Is. My. Wand? I would rather not ask you again, Hermione." Severus's glare was one of long practice, though it no longer had any effect on the young woman. The situation warranted his full range of weapons.

Her gaze turned 'innocent'. "I don't have your wand and you can't very well work without it."

"Hermione," he said, his tone menacing.

"I don't have it."

"You may not have it, but it is obvious you know *'where'* it is." Severus watched the young woman for a moment. "Albus." The name was a statement, rather than a question.

"Severus, please, you've barely got the twitch down to a slow vibrate. Take it easy today. Sit back, read, rest." A mischievous gleam came into her eye. "I'll wait on you, hand and foot."

A knock at the chamber door deterred any further conversation. Severus slowly moved towards the sitting room, intent on reaching the sofa. Hermione leaned against the doorframe, her arms crossed in front of her. She shook her head. 'Dear god, he's stubborn,' she thought, somewhat amused. While it was probably this trait alone that carried him through some of the worst experiences of his life, it was exasperating having to deal with him like this. Hermione might not have been so amused if she knew Harry and Ron held a similar opinion of her.

Another knock reverberated through the chamber. "Since you are so intent on working yourself to death, you want to get that?"

Severus levered his body down on the sofa as he completely ignored her. The last meter became more of a drop as he gave up any pretense of movement and allowed gravity to do its job. A tea set instantly appeared on the table in front of him. His scowl deepened while pouring himself a cuppa.

Her voice, edged with a sickeningly sweet honey tone, accosted his ears, "Would you like me to get that, Seviepoo?" Hermione crossed determinedly to the door. "Ignoring me won't help, you know."

Seviepoo? His hand tightened on the cup he was holding, but he maintained his silence.

The door opened with more force than intended and slammed against the back wall.

"Good afternoon, Hermione. How is our patient today?" Albus, dazzling in full-length lime-green robes edged in fluorescent orange, flowed into the chamber.

Hermione stifled a giggle as she watched the Headmaster. 'Where the hell did he shop?' she wondered.

"Dear god, Albus? Are you trying to blind me?" Severus stared at the robes his mentor wore.

Poppy set to work attempting to scan the uncooperative wizard. "Stop moving, Severus."

"Will you stop your foolish poking and prodding, woman? I am quite well. And I will thank you to decessate this minute before I am forced to physically restrain you." Severus batted Poppy's hand away. "I should like my wand back."

Poppy surveyed a folder that hovered in front of her. "No, not today. You can have it back in the morning if everything is all right. You are in no shape to cast any spells, yet."

"My wand."

Hermione snorted as she stifled another giggle. The image of a bulldog worrying at a bone came to mind.

"Severus, you cannot channel magic if you are going to vibrate. By morning you will be over the worst of the effects, I think. Though I must say, this is the fastest I've ever seen you heal. Shame Hermione wasn't here to tend to you in the past. How she puts up with your charming nature is a mystery to me."

The barest hint of colour stained the Potions master's cheeks at the matron's remark. "Perhaps, it is because she is easier on my eyes and brain than you are, you old witch."

Poppy's cackle filled the room. "No question about it, but I could say the same about any wizard younger than you, and maybe a few older too. Rest. Tomorrow, if you're very good, you can have your wand back. You won't even miss a class at this rate."

Severus sighed. He really did not have the energy to fight. Poppy turned to Hermione. "I'd like to update his medications. Here is the new schedule of doses for the remainder of the day." Hermione followed Poppy into the bedchamber as she outlined the changes.

Albus watched Severus watching Hermione leave the room. "A most remarkable witch. How are you really, my boy?"

"I am fine. Did Potter learn anything more about the attack?"

His tone was serious, a sharp contrast to the ludicrous robes he was wearing. "The belief is - it was an isolated incident. They have traced the wand through two past owners. The man was freed by the friend of a friend. Harry is still planning to travel to Italy tomorrow. We can appear and disappear in the blink of an eye, but it takes the Ministry three days to create the paperwork." Albus shook his head, bureaucracy.

Severus mulled the information over in his mind. Perhaps it was isolated; still, it never hurt to be cautious.

The amusement in Poppy's voice could be heard as she reentered the room with Hermione. "If he gives you any more trouble, just increase the sleep draught. He really is at his most pleasant when he's unconscious." Poppy smiled at the Potions master. "I will be by tomorrow, before breakfast, to check on you. Rest. It will help the healing process that much more."

"I'll walk with you, Poppy. I need to find Minerva." Albus nodded. "Do not push it, Severus. I can always take your classes for a day or two."

Severus groaned thinking back to the last time the Headmaster had substituted for him. "Like bloody hell you will," he muttered under his breath.

Hermione walked the two to the door. "I must say, those robes are...unique, Albus."

"Do you really like them?" His eyes held an odd twinkle. "Personally, I'm not that fond of the colour, but they do seem to annoy Severus so. I will check on you later." Hermione watched as the Headmaster stepped over the threshold. His robes rippled and shimmered in the dim light. The colours mutated from lime to burgundy and from fluorescent orange to gold.

Hermione stood wild-eyed as she watched the transformation. "Your robes? They're..."

Albus smiled, her laughter following him down the hallway.

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"What is so bloody funny?"

Hermione shook her head. "Albus."

"Hard to believe he is one of the most powerful wizards in our world. The man's gone dotty. Did you see those robes?"

Hermione sat next to him on the sofa and gently stroked his hand. "What would you like to read?"

Severus gazed deeply into her eyes. The air around them seemed to crackle. His blood pounded in his ears as he watched her lick her bottom lip. He could see the pulse at the base of her neck throbbing. 'So young, so lovely,' he thought.

Mine. The word jumped unbidden into his mind. He felt a tightening in his chest, somewhere in the vicinity of where his heart should be.

His hand came up to gently graze her cheek. Slowly, he lowered his head, his lips lightly brushing against hers before kissing her gently. His skin was still hyper-sensitised, but now it seemed to add to his arousal. He was careful to make just the barest of contact. 'Might as well enjoy the sensation while it lasts,' he thought, chuckling at the idea of enjoying the after-effects of the Cruciatus Curse.

"Hmm?" Hermione noted the mild tremor still present in his touch but was curious as to what he might find funny. She was hungry for the taste of him but at the same time afraid of hurting him. Letting Severus set the pace and movement, she greedily accepted whatever he would give her. She had every intention of attacking him when this was over and he could stand normal contact again.

"This is the first time I have ever enjoyed this curse. It really is too bad I did not discover the pleasures of hyper-sensitised skin before."

Hermione raised one brow. "And who would you have discovered this with?"

"No one, there is only you."

They kissed again, gently, connected to each other by an invisible bond.

The rest of the afternoon passed unremarkably in a fog of ordinariness. Neither one did anything more strenuous than lift a book. Reading, relaxing, and every so often citing passages of interest to one another.

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His voice carried an edge of annoyance. "Damn it, if I tell you you can hug me, it is all right to do so."

"I don't want to hurt you. I know how stubborn you can be; you must still be in pain."

"Stubborn? This from a woman who majored in stubborn for the last ten years?"

"It's nice to see you have your snark back," she said with a smirk.

He looked at her questioningly. "My what?"

"Your snark. You must be getting better." Hermione smiled as she gently hugged him.

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"You do not have to stay. I do not want you tired out for your morning classes." Truth was, he didn't want her to leave. Ever. But he was not about to admit that. He had promised himself he would not interfere with her education, no matter what he wanted from her.

"Apparating one morning will not be a problem. I'm not leaving until I know you are absolutely well. End of discussion." It was already late; a few more hours, until morning, would not tire her out.

"Do you know how childish you are acting?"

"I could say the same about you, you know."

"It appears we have reached an impasse."

"There is no impasse. I'm not leaving."

"Fine, fine. Fail your classes; give up on your plans to become a Potions mistress. Far be it from me to stop you from ruining your life." He thought Hermione had probably read the entire text already and most likely completed the assignments through the end of the quarter by now, if she had stayed true to form. Missing a week of classes would not affect her grades. She could probably miss two weeks and still not be behind. The truth was, he enjoyed the mild bantering with the woman.

"Right, I'll fail everything and be forced to move in here with you."

Severus had gone still. "Would that be such a bad thing?" The mood went from teasing to serious in a heartbeat.

Hermione's tone softened. "I think it would be wonderful. Maybe after University," she said with a shrug. They had not been dating, for lack of a better word, for all that long, but it felt right. They had yet to let the future take care of itself.

Severus closed the distance between them. His kiss was gentle but sensual, embodied with all the passion and feeling he had for her.

Neither one noticed Hermione's necklace glow briefly before returning to its original state.

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The wind caught the edge of her robes as they flapped around her ankles. Hermione felt a magical tingle graze her skin as Severus cast a Do-Not-Notice spell along with a Silencing Charm.

Severus winced as he hugged Hermione. "Wednesday."

"Are you sure you're all right? And stop scowling, it doesn't work on me."

"You heard Poppy, as long as I take it easy, I should be fully recovered by tomorrow night. I will owl you tomorrow if it will ease your mind. Now, go. You will be late."

"Do you want to take your lesson before or after?"

Severus was puzzled. "Before or after what?"

Hermione's voice dropped to a sensual purr, sending a signal directly to his groin. "I have every intention of shagging you within an inch of you life. You pick, before or after

your lesson. See you Wednesday." She kissed him quickly then stepped back to the Apparition point. With a crack, she was gone.

'And that is one of the pleasures of having a young lover,' he thought as he made his way back up to the castle. His smile was malevolent. 'Time to terrorise a few young minds,' he thought. It was the first time in a long while he really enjoyed a Monday morning.

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Hermione stepped up her pace. She had been running late all day. Her study group was already gathered in their usual spot. "Hi, guys. Sorry I'm late. What did I miss?"

"There you are. You left so quickly Friday, is everything okay?" Susan asked, concerned.

Hermione sighed as she settled her book bag on the floor. 'It's going to be a long afternoon,' she thought.

"Do you remember hearing reports about a Death Eater attack in Hogsmeade?" she asked by way of starting her explanation. "Well, the attack...."

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Time seemed to slow to a crawl. Monday and Tuesday appeared to last a week each as he waited for Wednesday evening's arrival.

Severus raised his hand to knock on her door. He stopped as he felt the tingle of magic. Her wards were dropping. 'She must have changed them since I was here last week,' he thought. Curiously, he touched the door handle. Another tingle of magic, a few clicks as the locks unlocked and the dead bolt unbolted, and the door creaked open. Smiling, he stepped into the flat.

Hanging his cloak on the hook next to the door, he looked around for Hermione. The sound of a cupboard shutting in the kitchen alerted him to her location. Quietly, he walked into the kitchen. Her back was to him. He moved behind her and enfolded her in his arms. "Good evening," he whispered softly in her ear.

Hermione leaned back into his embrace. She moaned quietly as she felt the reassuring weight of his arms encircle her. She hadn't realised just how much she missed his touch. "Good evening to you, too." She wiggled around to face him, returning his hug. "How are you feeling? Are you all right now?"

"Poppy pronounced me cured this morning. Albus refused to let me leave the castle without her okay. The man actually had the audacity to change the wards. He placed a barrier around the castle grounds until Poppy released me." Severus scowled at the memory.

"You wouldn't have known he placed the barrier if you had not tried to leave."

One brow went up. "That is not the point."

Hermione laughed, "That is exactly the point. You would not have known he changed the wards if you had seen Poppy first."

"Speaking of wards, I see you changed yours. Thank you." Severus buried his nose in her hair, strawberry-melon he guessed. 'She comes up with some of the oddest combinations for shampoos,' he thought. He revelled in the feel of her in his arms again. Slowly, Severus captured her lips in a searing kiss. His body responded to the touch and scent of the woman in his arms as their bodies molded to one another. A soft moan escaped his throat as Hermione ground her hips against his throbbing member. His voice had taken on a ragged edge to it, "Hermione."

She caressed his back, moving to cup his arse. Just the feel of his body under her hands, his erection pressed into her stomach, sent a shiver straight to her core. She could feel her own body respond, the ache that seemed to start at the very center of her being.

Severus planted several feather soft kisses along the side of her neck, moving to suck the tender skin as she moved her head to give him better access. Her hair shifted to fall across his arm. The feel of the silken strands cascading across his hand sent an unexpected tremor straight to his groin. He massaged her shoulders and neck, soft, sensual circles that left her trembling.

Hermione opened her eyes as she felt him pull back. "Severus?"

"As much as I am loathe to say it, we still have a lesson I must complete. I would rather not make love and then stop to dance before I go. I would like the last thing I feel to be your bare skin against mine." The bet, he couldn't skip a lesson. It was one of the terms of the consequences. He was magically bound to complete all ten lessons.

He was going to kill Albus when he got the chance. It had started out as an idle threat, but the man seemed to be going out of his way to annoy him these days. The dance lessons were his idea, as were the rules of the consequences.

'But without the lessons, you would not be contemplating the pleasant evening ahead of you buried in this luscious little witch,' the voice in his head commented. It was true; without the lessons, he and Hermione would never have come together.

Fine, he wouldn't kill him. Just hex him a few hundred times. At the very least, Albus could have given him the night off considering the shape he had been in last weekend.

Hermione sighed. "You only have one more lesson after this. Come on, let's dance." She took his hand and led him into her sitting room.

"A bit impatient, aren't you?"

"And you're not? I thought for a minute you were going to shag me on the counter, not that I would have minded."

Severus drew her into his arms as he nuzzled the side of her neck.

Hermione smiled. "That's not helping, you know. By the way, I heard from Vanessa and Ted. They will be happy to dance at Hogwarts on Halloween. She can dance two dances with Ted, I'll dance one, and then you and I will finish with the Tango. Vanessa said she was really looking forward to seeing Albus again. I didn't even know she knew him that well." She felt him stiffen slightly when she mentioned Vanessa and Ted before relaxing again into her embrace. They swayed softly to the music, gently hugging rather than dancing.

Severus groaned. He could just imagine Vanessa and Albus in the same room. Someone was bound to go blind from all that damn twinkling. Maybe he should warn Poppy. "You don't know a dimming charm do you? I suspect Vanessa and Albus may blind the students before the night is over."

Hermione laughed. "It won't be as bad as all that. We could always dance alone?"

"No, I would rather not dance at all. I will make a fool of myself as it is."

"Severus, you have shown amazing progress over the last two and a half months. You will not make a fool of yourself. After next week's lesson we will still have three weeks left to practice. I guarantee once those girls see you dancing in tights, I'm going to have to place a barrier around you myself." Hermione's eyes seemed to light up. "Maybe I should tattoo 'Property of Hermione Granger' in a strategic location, just to be safe."

Severus didn't think he could get anymore aroused than he already was, he was obviously wrong. Hermione staking her claim to him notched his arousal even higher. "Perhaps we should dance before I am unable to do so."

Hermione nodded. A wave of her hand and the music sounded. They started as they always did, practicing the Tango from the beginning. Severus's eyes locked with hers. Their movements were fluid. Sliding against each other, their bodies sensuously shifting back and forth, further igniting the already raging emotions they were feeling.

Severus exaggerated the rocking motion of the cradle rock as he tapped his toe. His groin snapped forward and back as he recalled Pritthead's move of the same step when he had danced the Tango with Hermione at the exposition. The thought of Pritthead fueled the fire in his blood. Their bodies collided against each other. Desire obvious in each movement.

Every step, every turn, seemed to arouse her further. Her breasts were crushed against his chest one minute as she was forcefully pulled to him and then released the next. They locked gazes as the dance moved from high speed to almost a stop before picking up momentum again. She could see Severus's eyes darken as he moved against her. She could feel the physical evidence of his arousal as he pulled her body back against his.

They reviewed the dance two more times, Hermione making corrections as they went.

It was the third time through, practicing through to the end of the dance. Severus's breathing was ragged as she arched over his arm. One hand held high over her head, the other braced around his shoulder. Her breasts were thrust forward by her stance; he could see her nipples, pebbled into hard buds through the fabric. He bent forward and captured one of the hard nubs between his teeth, not caring what happened to the fabric.

It turned out to be the shortest lesson Severus ever had.

Hermione moaned at the sensation, her hand moving to tangle in his hair. She started to kiss along his jaw line, trembling as he sucked and pulled at her breast. "Severus."

Severus shifted his free hand under her knees and scooped her up. Hermione continued to kiss him as she unbuttoned his shirt. She was a bit confused when he walked past the bed until she realised he was heading for the bathroom. "Severus?"

A phial appeared in his hand. Expertly, he uncapped it with one hand. The scent of herbs seemed to fill the air. "I thought we would soak a bit tonight. It is still quite early." He felt the pull of his muscles as he lowered her to her feet. Poppy had mentioned his joints might be a bit stiff. Moist heat would help ease the ache, as would the contents of the second phial he eased unnoticed out of his pocket. He uncapped and downed the potion without Hermione ever seeing him.

Hermione started the tub, emptying the contents of the phial he had handed her. She added a bit of bath salts into the water, as well. Severus moved to stand behind her, his hands on her hips pulling her back against his erection. He stepped away as he opened the clasp at the back of her dress. The garment fell in a soft puddle at her feet.

He smiled as he looked at her choice of knickers. While not 'the Thong' he had seen in her laundry, these were more abbreviated than any he had seen before. He hooked his fingers around the top, allowing his finger to slowly caress her skin as he slid the fabric down her legs. She shivered, feeling his fingers tease her thighs with the barest of touches, all the while running his tongue down the length of her spine. A whispered spell and his clothes disappeared. Another spell and several lit candles appeared. Severus was about to step into the tub when he noticed the bubbles.

"Hermione, I do not bathe with bubbles."

She turned to nuzzle his bare chest. Lapping at his nipples before gently cupping his erection. "But I do."

A wave of her hand and the bubbles turned green and silver. Another spell and they rose in the air and formed the words 'Slytherin Rules' over the bathtub.

Severus chuckled deeply, as long as he could have her, she could have her bubbles. "You really are talented."

He stepped into the tub and helped her in. She sat in the vee between his legs, his erection pressed into her back.

"It's a variant of the skywriting charm. I just used bubbles instead of smoke and clouds. I can charm pretty much anything," she said with a shrug.

"Yes, you can."

"I didn't mean it that way."

Severus pulled her back against him, his hands cupping her breasts. "I know." He thought she was especially adept at snake charming, his hardened member twitching in agreement. He would have to tell her sometime.

He spent the rest of the evening and into the night showing her just how much he missed her, and just how charming he thought she really was.

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Hermione looked around the exhibit hall, bustling and alive with a wide variety of witches and wizards. The seminar was intoxicating. They had been assigned stations to man on a rotating basis, some alone, some with a partner. At this point, all the students were expected to be able to answer the attendee's questions or be able to direct them to someone who could. It was the lectures that sparked her interest.

She had listened to one full lecture and part of another, on her lunch break. The thirst for knowledge had always been a magnet for her. Not for the hundredth time today, she wished Severus were there to share it with her. They could have attended the lectures together and then spent the rest of the night discussing them in between bouts of lovemaking, the perfect weekend in her estimation.

She sighed; she would see him for dinner tomorrow night, after the seminar. Fact was, she really missed him. A voice cut through her musings.

"Would you care to join me for a drink? The exhibit hall will close in an hour." Rancine's leer and general attitude did not earn him any favour in her opinion.

"Professor Rancine, I hardly think it's professional..."

The rest of her comment was lost as a familiar voice sounded to her right. "I'm afraid, Rancine, Miss Granger has other plans this evening."

Hermione's smile lit up her face. "Severus! What are you doing here?"

"What *are* you doing here, Snape?" Rancine glared at the dark wizard, his hand sliding into the pocket of his robes.

"A seminar on potions, where else would I be? Where shall I meet you when the hall closes, Hermione? I have taken the liberty of making dinner reservations at a local restaurant." Severus's manner was formal. Inside, he was ready to hex Rancine. They would have a hard time piecing him back together when he was through with the man. He just may keep a bit or two for potions ingredients.

Warily, he watched Rancine remove his hand from his pocket. The tension in his shoulders eased a little as he observed the man's hand was empty.

Hermione turned to the director. "I'm sorry, Professor Rancine, I already have plans for the evening." Still smiling at Severus, she pointed to a door next to the entrance. "My things are in there; why don't you meet me at the entrance in an hour?"

Severus nodded. "As you wish." With a nod to the director, he moved onto the next exhibit, hoping Hermione would see his actions as gallant and not overly possessive. He was worried about her, true, but he missed her, too. He relaxed a bit when he thought about how happy she had been to see him. He hated surprises himself, but he thought Hermione might appreciate him showing up unannounced. At least he hoped so.

His mind elsewhere as he viewed the tables, he failed to notice the reactions of those around him. The feared and renowned Potions master of Hogwarts was rarely seen outside the school grounds. An occasional glimpse of the man had been reported outside the Apothecaries in both Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley, but few had seen him elsewhere.

Whether in full Potions master regalia or not, Severus Snape was an imposing figure. He was oblivious to the buzz around him. Heads turned and people fell silent as he passed by, instinctively moving out of his way. A path seemed to open in whatever direction he turned. He wandered around the hall, viewing the presentations until the students started to close down the exhibits as eight o'clock approached.

Severus saw Hermione standing near the exit with a group of friends, one of them that idiot boy from her study group. Rancine appeared deep in conversation with a woman half his age just to the left of the students. Judging from the angle of his head, the man seemed more interested in the young woman's cleavage than the actual conversation. He noted Hermione's conversation as he approached.

"How can you have plans already? Come on, a group of us are going to hit some of the local clubs." Edmund's whine was getting on her nerves.

"Thanks, but I can't. Edmund, are you okay? You suddenly look sick." Edmund had gone deathly pale while talking to her. He looked as if he had just seen a ghost.

Severus appeared at Hermione's side, offering her his arm. His voice, sensual, silky-smooth in her ear, "Are you ready? Our reservations are at a small bistro a few blocks from here. Excellent food and live jazz are standard fare for the establishment, I think you will enjoy it."

"Good night all." The others grew silent as she linked her arm through his. Their voices could be heard as they joined the press of bodies exiting the hall, those around them falling silent in the Potions master's presence. "That sounds great. What time do you have to be back at the castle?"

"Not until tomorrow. Perhaps I could hold you hostage in my suite later?" His low chuckle sent a shiver down her spine.

"Maybe we should just dine in," she said teasingly, batting her eyes for emphasis.

A loud thud caught her attention. Looking back, Hermione realised Edmund had fainted.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine

Still to come: Sunday in Amsterdam, the last dance lesson, costumes, Harry and Ginny, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

I have finally surrendered and started a livejournal. Drabbles, photomanip, and general ramblings are the standard fare. You are welcome to browse. Feel free to friend me if you like, one can never have too many friends!

Ancient Magic - <http://www.livejournal.com/users/pearle9240/>

Regards, Pearle

Bewitched

Chapter 27 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 27 Bewitched

Dinner had proved to be an enjoyable affair. The Broom Closet was everything Severus had said it would be. The food was excellent and the jazz was most enjoyable. Hermione had to chuckle. Who would have thought the dreaded Potions master would like jazz? But the best part of the evening was just being with Severus.

Her arm was loosely threaded through his as they casually walked down the neon-lit street to their hotel. Music drifted out of doorways as people went in and out of the establishments that lined the avenue. She felt comfortable with him, safe, utterly at peace.

"Thank you for such a wonderful evening, and most unexpected. The restaurant was great. Who knew you liked jazz?" Hermione snuggled into his side. The night was not particularly, cold but she enjoyed the feel of his body as she leaned into him.

"Outward appearances can be deceiving. To use your phrase: who knew you would become so enticing one day?" His voice was pitched low, a sexy drawl meant to start a fire in her veins. "Do you need to return to your room for the night, or can you stay with me? Beyond keeping Rancine in his place, I have no desire to jeopardise your grade or position with the internship programme."

"I don't see why I couldn't stay. The evenings are supposed to be our own. I'm not required in the exhibit hall until tomorrow morning. Just let me run up and get my things. Where should I meet you?"

Severus escorted Hermione through the main entrance of the hotel. "I am in suite 493 Aphrodite's Suite."

Hermione tried not to smirk: Aphrodite, the goddess of love and romance. "Right, suite 493. You go ahead, I'll be there in a minute."

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Hermione entered her room to find two out of her three 'roommates' present. She had only met Catherine and Elisabeth that morning, when they were setting up the exhibit hall.

Catherine was sprawled across one of the beds paging through the current issue of *Witch Weekly*. She met Elisabeth's eyes as they watched Hermione pack her things. "Going somewhere? It's getting rather late."

"Yes, well, it's just past ten, not that late." The last thing Hermione wanted to do was answer a lot of questions. She looked around the room before deciding she had everything. "Where's Susan? Didn't she come back with you?"

Both girls were sitting at attention on the bed now. "She's still down in the lounge with a few of the others. So, where are you going?" Elisabeth asked. She had a pretty good idea, having seen Hermione leave with Snape earlier. It was still beyond anyone's rational comprehension that Hermione would willingly go with the infamous Potions master. And unbelievable to think she might actually be dating him, no matter what evidence to the contrary there may be. He was...Snape.

"I'm staying elsewhere tonight, so, I'll see you two in the exhibit hall bright and early tomorrow morning. Have a good night." Hermione shrunk her trunk, preparing to flee the room. She wasn't fast enough.

"Are you really seeing Snape? Is that where you're going?" Catherine's voice held a touch of awe as well as scepticism.

It really was none of their business. 'Are you not answering because it's none of their business or because it's Severus?' The small voice in her head seemed to be mocking her as much as the girls were.

"Actually, Severus has taken the Aphrodite suite. I'll be staying there tonight."

Elisabeth's eyes went wide. "With Snape?"

Catherine batted her friend with her magazine. "She just said he rented the suite, where else would he be?"

The two exchanged looks before turning back to Hermione. "You're really dating him? He's your boyfriend?"

Hermione snorted; she remembered calling Severus her boyfriend a few weeks back. "Severus is not exactly the type you would call boyfriend - but yes, we are seeing one another."

"Are they true?"

"Pardon me? Is what true?"

Elisabeth and Catherine exchanged knowing looks again. Elisabeth's voice was a whisper, "The rumours. Are the rumours about him really true?"

So *that's* what this was about. "No, they're not true." Hermione shook her head watching them. "The rumours don't even do him justice," she said smugly, watching as their mouths fell open.

Hermione pocketed her miniaturised trunk. She spoke to the room at large as she walked out the door. "Sleep well, ladies. Don't wait breakfast for me, I may be too tired to get up."

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The door to the suite opened as she approached it. It was obviously charmed to recognise the lithe witch. She heard it shut and lock as soon as she crossed into the room. Severus emerged from a doorway on the far side, clothed in nothing more than his black silk dressing gown. On further inspection, Hermione realised there was another door set in the wall a few feet down from the first. Her survey of the suite was cut short as Severus drew her into his arms. His kiss was warm and passionate.

Hermione hungrily returned his embrace as she moulded her body to his.

"You look like the cat that caught the Augurey. If you were still at Hogwarts, I would assume you were...up to something. Would you care to tell me what has happened?" he drawled.

Hermione shook her head and smiled with amusement as she reviewed the conversation with the girls in her head. "One of my room-mates wanted to know if you were my boyfriend."

He cocked one brow questioningly. "And your response?"

"You yourself told me you are too old to be referred to as my boyfriend. I told them we're involved."

Severus nodded his head. Involved. He supposed that described their relationship as well as any other terms he could think of. He hadn't broached the subject of his unannounced presence before. "Hermione, I hope you're not upset that I decided to come to the seminar unannounced. I realise I should have notified you first..."

Hermione's fingers on his lips stopped him. "I think it's sweet you came."

"I am not...sweet." He scowled at the thought.

"Yes, you are. You're my knight in shining black armour. Do I get to see the rest of the suite?" Hermione pulled away from him. She unbuttoned her blouse as she spoke, dropping it on the floor as she walked across the room. She stopped at the open door way and unzipped her skirt. Turning back to Severus, she let it drop to the floor. "Are you coming?"

His ragged breathing could be heard clearly in the quiet room as he took in the sight of Hermione, clothed in heels and an abbreviated pair of knickers, nothing else. Severus crossed the room in several long strides and swept her up in his arms. He growled as he whispered in her ear. "You have no idea what you do to me. Shall we see how long my 'lance' can hold a point?"

Hermione squealed with delight as he carried her into the bedroom of the suite.

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The morning sun in Hermione's eyes woke her before Severus did. She felt his arms tighten around her as she snuggled into his side. They'd made love three times last night, or this morning, depending on which time she'd looked at the time. She had been excited to find the other door of the suite led to a small private pool with a waterfall that was used for bathing. Severus surprised her by casting a spell to make her float on top of the water, pleasuring her before taking her in the pool. His arousal had been obvious from the time he had kissed her. It sent a thrill through her to know how much he cared for her. That he placed her pleasure above his. She returned the favour when they finally made it onto the bed.

It was her fondest wish come true. Hermione cuddled against him, sated and happy, sipping from a wine glass he had summoned. They discussed a few of the exhibits and debated one of the experiments before he pulled her down to make love again.

Now, in the cold harsh light of morning, she wanted nothing more than to close her eyes and drift back into sleep, snuggled against him. But it was not to be. The seminar. Rancine.

"Severus, I have to go. We are expected to attend breakfast so they can update us on any last minute changes." She ran her fingers through his hair, gently raking it back from his face.

"Go. Leave. I'm expecting someone in a few minutes, anyway."

Hermione glared at him. "Very funny. You do remember I excelled at hexing?"

Severus pulled her in for a quick kiss before releasing her. "Go. I'm sure Rancine is angry enough with me showing up yesterday, without having you antagonise him further by being late. Will you be required to leave with the group after the seminar is over?"

"No, those that didn't set up have to break down; the rest of us can leave whenever we like. I should be through about two o'clock. What did you have in mind?"

"Why don't I meet you at two, and we can return to Hogwarts and work on the Wolfsbane potion? We lost last weekend and part of this one. I would rather not get behind in our research." He was pleased she was as much of an academic as he was. Any time he had mentioned research in the past to any of the other witches he had taken up with, a look of pain seemed to settle on their features, or their eyes would glaze over. They did not hear a word he said. Hermione was as passionate about working as he was.

"That sounds fine. I need to take a shower and change." She gave him a quick kiss and headed for the bathroom.

Twenty minutes later, Hermione stood regarding her image in the mirror. Her hair was its usual uncooperative self. A fast shower, without the benefit of magical conditioners and time, did not help matters. With a disgruntled sigh and the quick work of long practice, her hair was gathered into a less messy mass at the back of her head. It was the best she could do under the circumstances. She dressed quickly, not wanting to be late.

Hermione stood in the doorway watching Severus for a moment. From all outward appearances, he seemed to be asleep. But as she watched his even breathing, she looked for other signs. She could see some movement below his eyelids, a slight tick below one eye, and, really, no one breathes that easily or lays quite that still when they're asleep. Not to mention the obvious arousal tenting the sheets.

"Do you think you could save that for later? I really can't be late this morning."

Severus chuckled, his voice still rough with sleep. "I'm sure it can be arranged. You do seem to have an affect on me."

She perched on the side of the bed, intent on a quick kiss goodbye before she left. Severus's hand gently cradled the side of her face, his thumb gliding softly across her cheek. Hermione's sigh was closer to a purr as she nuzzled his palm, placing several feather soft kisses along his lifeline.

His touch and intense gaze held her to the spot. "Your friends were quite right. They believe a spell was cast between us, but I would have to say it is you that has bewitched me. Can you feel the magic, Hermione? It is all around us, you have bewitched my very soul. Each time I am near you, every time I make love to you, every time I look into your eyes I can feel the pull of your magic. It gets stronger every time I'm with you."

His words were hypnotising. Slowly, he closed the distance between them. His lips brushed softly against hers before possessing her. Severus vaguely noticed the pendant she wore seemed to catch the morning sunlight with an odd glow. All rational thought fled as Hermione leaned into him, her kiss once again igniting the fire in his veins.

Hermione sat back reluctantly. "I would much rather stay here. But I really do have to go. I'll meet you by the entrance at two o'clock. You might want to look at the schedule; there are a few interesting lectures set up for today. Though I suppose you would have been a more knowledgeable speaker on several of the topics."

Severus watched her with mild amusement. "I am sure those that are speaking are most qualified. I shall look at today's programme. You have to be the only woman I know whose eyes light up with the mention of research or a lecture. They're almost as bright as when we make love."

"Mmm, I'm not sure which I enjoy more."

Severus cocked one brow. "Perhaps further experimentation is necessary. You had better hurry. I shall see you at two."

Reluctantly, she kissed him goodbye and left the suite.

Severus watched her leave. Each time they parted he felt a pull at his heart. Missing someone was a new experience for him. He had never allowed himself to become this entangled before, but then, he had never met a witch of Hermione's calibre before.

Magic has many forms. One heart calling to another is a magic all its own, even if the owner of that particular heart has not recognised the emotion he is feeling' yet. That is magic far greater than any potion or spell could ever created

Severus had almost guessed correctly without knowing it. Magic was in the air around them, but not in the way he meant. He had scoffed at the idea that he was pure, but pure can have many meanings. His heart was guileless, totally without deception. Trelawney could have told him his feelings for Hermione were pure, even if he didn't know it at the time, not that he would have listened, anyway. Even now, he marvelled at her attraction to him. She was completely at ease, no matter what his mood. Foolish as it might be for a man of his age and experience to fear the thought of her leaving, a part of him still believed she would leave, that he was nothing more than a passing fancy. Forbidden fruit. It was a thought he rarely entertained.

He pulled her pillow to him, burying his nose in the soft cotton covering. Her shampoo, lavender this time, mixed with her unique scent, filled his nostrils. She was still a mystery to him; the more he knew about her the less he seemed to know or understand. He was looking forward to working with her later that day; hopefully she could stay for the evening meal as well. It was with thoughts of how to plan the rest of their day that he headed for the bathroom and the remainder of the seminar.

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Severus wandered through the lecture hall. Hermione would be through in less than an hour. He had attended two lectures. The first lecture was based on an article from *Potions Today* by Thomas Nelthrope entitled "How to Change the Phase of Moon Growth to Suit Your Needs." The theory had to do with accelerating the growth of a plant so it could be harvested during the proper phase of the moon, rather than wait for its natural growth.

While fine in theory, Severus was leery to put that idea into practise. He had asked the lecturer if he would be willing to risk his life by accelerating the Scurvy Grass used in the Wolfsbane potion. If the grass was not allowed to grow naturally to full strength and harvested under a full moon with a pure platinum blade, the potion would not be strong enough to contain the power of the wolf.

The prat expounded on his theory. Arithmancy charts appeared, shaded in various areas, showing calculations supporting the speaker's conclusions.

Severus agreed that the theory was sound. That was not what he asked. Did he have enough faith in his theory to risk his life by brewing the Wolfsbane potion with the altered ingredient?

Nelthrope was quick to point out that he'd had success applying his theory when brewing a burn salve and cold remedy. Severus pressed his point. Burn salves and cold remedies can be off and still be effective. Would he apply his theory on something as complicated and dangerous as the Wolfsbane potion?

The man paled before mumbling a negative answer. His glare was minor compared to Severus's normal countenance.

All in all, Severus found the morning most enjoyable.

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"Tsk, tsk. You, of all people, consorting with a student, Snape."

Rancine's voice grated on his nerves as he turned to face the man. "Hermione is your student, Rancine. Not mine. And while I do not believe it is any of your business, we are not 'consorting' as you so blithely put it." Severus's face was a mask of barely contained fury as he regarded the wizard standing before him.

"What would you call it then? You're far too old for the delectable little witch." Rancine's smile was oily.

Severus was seconds away from casting an Unforgivable on the man. He stiffened as he felt a touch at his arm, until he realised it was Hermione. "I've just signed out, Professor. Edmund has taken over my post."

Hermione smiled up at Severus. "Ready to go?"

"What do you see in him, Hermione? I've known Snape far longer than you and I fail to see the attraction. Perhaps you could enlighten me. Did this start," Rancine waved he hand in their direction, "as a student, this attraction?"

She felt Severus's arm stiffen under the hand she had linked through his. Hermione laughed as she answered the slimy little man. "Oh, no. Severus and I could not stand each other during my Hogwarts days. What do I see in him? It's hard to choose. His dry wit. His brilliant mind. His ethics. His level of expertise. There is something so sexy about watching a man work on a dangerous potion." Hermione leaned forward with a conspiratorial air. "It doesn't hurt that the rumours about him are true. What more could a girl ask for? Good night, Professor."

Hermione tugged his arm as she bid Rancine goodbye. The man was standing with his mouth agap at her last comment. Severus merely nodded as he escorted Hermione through the exit.

All in all, it was a most pleasant day.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

From the HP Lexicon Augurey (Irish Phoenix) - Thin and mournful-looking bird somewhat resembling a vulture, greenish-black in colour, native to Britain and Ireland. Normally remaining hidden in its nest in brambles and thorns, flying only in heavy rain, the feathers of the Augurey repel ink. Its distinctive cry was once thought to be a death omen, but it is now known that the Augurey's cry foretells rain. The Augurey eats insects and fairies.

The comment "knight in shining black armour" is courtesy of one of my reviewers. Thank you to Devangel for the phrase.

I noticed I used the name Pritchard for the owner of the Lighter Than Air Dance studio. While reading the last chapter (well, both last chapters actually) of Hayseed's brilliant *Getting the Hang of Thursday's* I came across the name Pritchard in her story. I must have liked the name and not remembered where I first read it. Thursday's can be found in its entirety on Obscurus Books and is up to the last chapter on Ashwinder.

I have finally surrendered and started a livejournal. Drabbles, photomanip, and general ramblings are the standard fare. You are welcome to browse. Feel free to friend me if you like, one can never have too many friends! Ancient Magic - <http://www.livejournal.com/users/pearle9240/>

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Well, there was a change between Sunday when I sent this to Nakhash and today when she sent it back. My surgeries (now two) have been moved to March 9th. I hope to have another chapter of Dances up before then, providing they cut back on tests, scans, and doctor appointments. I will continue with the story and be back to writing as soon as I am able.

Until then, take care,

Pearle

## Something New

*Chapter 28 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

## Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 28: Something New

They returned to Hogwarts Sunday afternoon after the seminar. Severus had been annoyed with Rancine. While Hermione's comments amused him, he was still worried about the man. His expression was closed as he questioned her about 'the rumours' she had heard.

He was not expecting her to comment on his prowess in the bedroom nor the dimensions of his member. He had assumed she was referring to a few of the witches he'd had the misfortune to take out, or something to do with his days as a Death Eater, surely not his abilities as a lover.

He seemed to recall the rumours cropping up after the final battle; she had to have been a student then, a seventh year. He wondered where she'd heard them, let alone the fact they still seemed to be floating around. He couldn't stop the grin from spreading across his face when he realised what she meant. Her bravado of earlier seemed to disappear a bit as she explained even her roommates at the conference were curious about him.

Well, if there were any doubts as to the validity of their 'relationship', this weekend should have taken care of that. They had been highly visible during their time in Amsterdam. Taking her to dinner one night in Hogsmeade, or out on her birthday, was one thing, but showing up at the seminar and staying together in his suite was quite another. The waterfall had been particularly enjoyable. He wondered if Albus would allow him to install a small pond and waterfall in his quarters if he obtained the charm for it. Considering how much Hermione had enjoyed the water, it would definitely bear looking into.

Things had gone well until their last half hour in the lab. They had even made a small amount of progress on narrowing the number of ingredients and metals to use. The potion they were working on had a half hour to simmer. They had started discussing the Potions masters at the seminar while cleaning up.

Hermione had focused on three specific wizards at the seminar. Shyly, she told him she had ruled out a forth master that taught in Russia. She refused to consider any location that was too far to Apparate to and from on a weekly basis. She started to discuss the wizards she had observed over the weekend, listing the pros and cons of each one. All were registered with the Cambridge program, and all were fully qualified.

"What do you think?" Hermione had stopped to observe his movements.

Severus was scowling, racking the cauldrons with more force than necessary. "They're all good. I'm sure whatever you decide will be fine." The potion was reaching the end of the simmering stage. Two clockwise stirs, six medium petals, and the potion would be complete.

"You don't have to be so rude about it. I would much rather apprentice with you, but you won't even discuss that possibility." She set the journal on the lab table with a decided thud, annoyed with Severus's attitude.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, a headache threatening to overtake him. "We have been over this before, Hermione. I'm not part of Cambridge's program. After Rancine's comments this weekend, do you have any doubt he would discredit your work with me?"

"You are more than qualified to be part of the program." Her words sounded lame to her own ears. She knew he was right. "All right, fine. You're right. I admit it. What is your problem? I'm considering the alternatives. What do you want me to do?"

"I will not allow you to throw your education away."

"Fine. I agree. So what are you so angry about?" Hermione was virtually yelling at the man.

His eyes seemed to glitter with an inner fire in the dungeon's candlelight. What was he so mad about? All three wizards were located in and around the UK. A was about ten years older than Severus and situated with a private facility that did research in London. B was his age and teaching at private school in Ireland. C was younger and worked for a research branch of the Ministry in Scotland. Any one of them would have suited Hermione.

What was he mad about? Hermione spending her time in the lab with someone else. Hermione debating properties and procedures with another man. Hermione's eyes lighting up as someone else showed her a new technique or method for processing a potion. Hermione bestowing her smile on another man.

Severus sighed; he was aware he was not thinking rationally. An occurrence that seemed more common the more he was with her. She could not apprentice with him, that much was clear. The three wizards she had focused on were top in the field. She would do well with any one of them and anyone of them in turn would welcome a witch of her caliber.

So what was the problem? 'The problem is, mate, you're jealous,' the voice in his head gleefully informed him.

He did not need to be taunted about his love life by his own conscience, or whatever that voice represented. 'Sod off, mate!' The only respite he'd had from it was when he'd been recovering from the Cruciatus Curse. It had been blissfully quiet that weekend. Maybe Poppy knew how to silence it.

"There is no problem." His voice was gruff.

Would she go off and find that any one of the men was easier to be with than him? They would be working together in close quarters for a full year. He could Apparate to her on some weekends; she might be able to come to him once a month. His bed was cold without her now, what would he do when he saw her even less?

He refused to give in to the need he was feeling. That was a year off. One step at a time.

"You can't have it both ways, Severus. You won't let me apprentice with you, but you don't want me to apprentice with anyone else. It doesn't work that way." Her voice was quiet, belying the heartache she was feeling at the moment.

"All three are qualified masters. Each is known as an outstanding researcher. I should think any one of them would be lucky to have you." His voice had a hollow sound to it.

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

I can't say when the next update will be. I go in for surgery tomorrow. If all goes well and they let me have a pencil (or a crayon) and paper, I may have another chapter up in two or three weeks. Could be sooner if the pain pills kick in.

Melanie has been a sweetheart and drawn the costumes for Dances. Severus is not happy, I'm not sure he will leave them as is. They can be found here: <http://usagistu.deviantart.com/gallery/>

Still to come: the last dance lesson, costumes, a heartfelt talk, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine

Regards, Pearle

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And now for something completely different:

For those of you privy to the PLAYWITCH photo by the very talented Marquise, comes a new and exciting web site. Under Marquise's watchful eye Marquise, Ancientgirl, and myself have put together the first issue of PLAYWITCH magazine online. This issue contains interviews, ads, fan fiction, fan art, and columns. It is an adult site, with adult content, that will be 'published' on a monthly basis.

The hope is that you will find this site to be a place to visit time and time again: a place to laugh and relax, a place to let your hair down at the end of a hard day. We welcome your contributions, suggestions, letters, and submissions. With luck, the site will be launched on Sunday. You can follow the link below to the main entrance to PLAYWITCH.

<http://www.playwitch.net/>

(We are presently under construction keep checking next weekend for the grand opening!)

Lesson 10: Two Wrongs Don't Make A Right But Three Rights Do Make A Left

Chapter 29 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 29 Lesson 10: Two Wrongs Don't Make A Right But Three Rights Do Make A Left

Hermione blinked, and Wednesday was upon her.

She had enjoyed dinner, Monday night, with her friends. Ron regaled them with tales of his travels and the ever-present string of witches that seemed to surround him. She realised Harry had the same groupies, but his interest in Ginny seemed to over-ride all that. All Harry had ever wanted was a 'normal' life. Whatever normal was.

Ron had teased her about Severus, but this weekend's confrontation had left her a bit touchy on the subject of their relationship. It was most fortunate Harry was able to divert the conversation before she was forced to hex Ron into silence.

Hermione glanced at the clock. She still had fifteen minutes before Severus was due for his lesson. His last lesson she amended. 'Ten's the magic number,' she thought. They still had three weeks until Hallowe'en, but tonight's lesson would satisfy the bet. They still had plans to practice the next three Wednesdays.

Severus was worried about embarrassing himself in front of the students, as well as his colleagues. Not to mention any Order members or Ministry officials that always seemed to be present at a Hogwarts feast or celebration. She suspected Albus might even have extended invitations to an extra few in light of the expected 'entertainment.'



Severus's dancing had improved markedly over the last few lessons. He had no need to be embarrassed. Unfortunately, no amount of assurance on her part could convince him otherwise. He had always carried himself with a natural grace, but lately his movements had taken on a more sensual quality. Hermione thought he could have had a career in dance if he had started young and had over-come his natural tendency to shun the world and all those in it.

'Who am I kidding,' she thought, 'Severus Snape - a professional dancer? Right.' She laughed at the thought. Well, even if they performed tomorrow, he would not be embarrassed. He had learned to dance the Tango as it was meant to be danced - a vertical expression of a horizontal desire. A desire that always seemed to overwhelm them at the end of the lessons.

Hermione wondered just how many hearts he would capture when the female population of Hogwarts saw him in costume moving to the beat of the music. 'Maybe tattooing "Property of Hermione Granger" in a strategic location might not be such a bad idea after all,' she mused.

Three more weeks until Hallowe'en and they would be through, then what? Maybe she could talk to Severus about stepping up their research at Hogwarts, though she rather liked having him here. With no one to bother them, Severus always seemed a bit more at ease when they were alone in her flat.

They still hadn't discussed the Potions Symposium coming up in November. Severus was expected to present a lecture on Dark Potions. The three masters from the seminar, as well as seven others involved in the intern program at Cambridge, would be attending. Six out of the ten would be presenting lectures, as well. She would have a chance to meet and talk with them before she had to submit her request in January. It was the main reason she had wanted to attend the conference, originally.

Her ending grade and rank would be the final determinate on what weight her request to study with a particular master would be judged. Hermione had every intention of being number one. School and learning had always been a driving force in her life, and still was. But now there was Severus to consider, too. He challenged her to excel, to pursue her studies, but a part of her wanted nothing more than to just be with him, to shut out the outside world. She knew that was a pipe dream; they lived in reality, not some fantasy of their making.

Hermione knew he was right; she could never apprentice with him. It was impossible. Rancine had made a snide comment to the class at large about not relying on the people they knew to get them through the programme and by-pass the requirements. Success or failure was based on what they knew, not who they knew. She was sure the comment was meant as a warning to her. It had set her blood to boil, but it also made her even more determined to come out on top. If only to rub it in Rancine's face.

Hermione felt the tingle of magic as her wards recognised Severus. She sincerely hoped they would not have another row when she brought up the topic of the symposium, later. With a last glance in the mirror, she went out to greet him.

'Well, at the very least she hasn't locked me out,' he thought with wry amusement as he hung up his cloak. Sunday's quarrel had been a minor disagreement of sorts. He was sure they were well past it; at least he hoped so. He still had a hard time shaking the feeling she'd left too abruptly. Severus stood silently, listening for a clue as to her whereabouts. The sound of a floorboard creaking in the hallway told him her location.

He watched as she came toward him. His breath seemed to catch in his throat before returning to normal. It was that way every time he saw her for the 'first time' again. Whenever they were apart, even for a few days, he would thrill at the sight of her once again. She was under his skin, embedded in his very soul, his drug of choice in so many ways.

"Am I still welcome here?" His voice was low, one brow raised questioningly. One long finger traced the side of her face, his hand coming to rest at the sensitive juncture of her shoulder and neck.

His rich baritone sent shivers to her very core. Not so much the words, but the tone. Not quite a whisper, it was the same voice he had used when he had told her how good she felt, how tight she was just before he entered her. She shuddered at the image her mind had dragged up. Hermione shook her head as if to clear it; they still had a lesson to get through.

"Of course, Professor, you still have one lesson left." She turned to kiss the inside of his wrist, softly licking the taunt skin.

Severus drew a sharp breath, his body responding to the heat of her mouth. 'That spot had never counted as an erogenous zone before,' he thought.

'Pin her to the wall. You can rip off her knickers and have your way with her. Show her who's the boss. Dear god, can you feel the heat?' the deranged voice in his head chanted with glee.

He ignored the voice. Tipping her head up, he captured her lips in a searing kiss as he crushed the lithesome witch to him in a fierce embrace. Hermione responded immediately, molding her body to his. It was several minutes before they broke apart, their breathing ragged.

"Lead on, Miss Granger, lead on."

Hermione smiled. A wave of her hand and music filled the flat. "Shall we start from the beginning?"

Severus shifted his hold on her as they moved into position. The music stopped and then restarted itself. They looked deeply into each other's eyes as the opening melody played. As the final note of the introduction ended, they started to move into the beginning sequence of the Tango.

The sensual back beat worked its usual magic. Their bodies slid against each other; with each turn, each movement, Hermione could feel herself becoming more aroused. She felt the play of muscles under her fingertips as they moved. His hips rolled forward before moving into the El Retrocesa, his body shifting as they moved backward into the practiced steps.

They moved through most of the dance with an easy grace. It was the last two steps Hermione had shown him that were not so quick in coming.

"Not bad. You still need work on the Cierre, but your movement during the La Salida is better. Let's try it again." The music restarted as they moved into position.

They worked through the dance steps two more times, Hermione adding an embellishment or two as they danced. The ending notes sounded as they moved into the final stance she'd shown him during their last lesson.

One hand was held high over her head, the other braced around his shoulder. Once again he was presented with a delicious view of Hermione's cleavage as she arched back over his arm. Severus lowered his head to kiss the hollow between her breasts. Instead of meeting the heated flesh of his lover, his lips encountered the feel of parchment. Startled, he lost his hold on Hermione, dropping her to the floor.

"Ow!" She landed with a thud, the air knocked out of her lungs at the unexpected drop. A piece of parchment fluttered to land gently on top of her chest before sliding off onto the floor.

"What in bloody hell...? Hermione, I'm sorry." Severus reached for her hand to help her up.

Not really injured, her dignity hurting more than her backside, Hermione reached for the piece of parchment. "Congratulations, you have successfully completed your ten week course of tango lessons. Here's your certificate, suitable for framing."

Severus looked at the parchment she was holding. He lost his hold on her hand as he started to laugh. Sinking to the floor next to her, he reached for the certificate. "You have got to be kidding?"

Hermione grinned. "Nope. That's your certificate. You are now an official graduate of the 'Lighter Than Air Dance School's Argentine Tango Ten-week course', just as it says right there. It even has a nice wax seal and everything."

"Does anything go with this certificate?"

Hermione batted her eyes at him in mock flirtation. "Whatever do you mean?"

Severus shrank the certificate for safekeeping and dropped it in his pocket.

"Severus, you don't have to keep it. Ted sends them out to the students as a formality. The children's parents like to show them off after the recitals." She shifted closer, no longer thinking about her sudden drop to the floor.

"Actually, I plan on framing this and putting it in my bedroom."

Now it was Hermione's turn to be shocked. "You are kidding, right?"

His voice was soft. "No, it will remind me of you."

"Are you planning on forgetting me anytime soon?" She closed the distance between them, shifting to the side so she could kiss him better.

Severus pulled her against his body as he deepened the kiss. His eyes were dark with lust, his gaze intense as they came up for air. "Hermione, I'm not as young as I used to be. Any objections to moving this into your bedroom, or should I cast a cushioning charm on the floor boards?"

"This from a man who can make love under a waterfall. Let's move into my bedroom. I have something I want to show you, anyway."

On the bed was a variation of the original costume he had tried on a few weeks ago. The shirt had evolved from its original basic black to a two-tone colour scheme. The top portion of the shirt was a luminescent white, while the bottom half was a dark green in colour. The sleeves ended in a bit of lacy fabric, while the neck of the shirt was cut into a deep 'Vee' and laced together with a piece of black leather. Next to the shirt was a pair of black tights; a black form-fitting codpiece, embellished with an 'S' in the shape of a snake rested on top of the tights.

Hermione sat on the bed, more than ready to enjoy the show he was about to put on. Severus looked silently at the costume. He was still of half a mind to kill Albus. He had completed the required ten lessons; he even had a certificate to prove it. But that wasn't enough. Not only did he have to dance the Tango at the Hallowe'en Dance, he had to wear a 16th century costume, complete with tights and a codpiece, to satisfy the final requirements of the bloody bet.

With a quietly murmured "*Divesto*", his clothes disappeared.

Hermione unconsciously licked her lips as she watched him.

Severus reached for the tights. He smirked as he watched her reaction. A quick snap and the material hugged his body. He scooped up the shirt. Magically, it appeared on his upper torso. He picked up the codpiece, not sure how it attached to the outfit.

Hermione slid from the bed and took the covering from him. "I charmed it to adhere to the front of your tights. That way it won't shift or fall off as you dance." Gently, she pressed the codpiece over his crotch. She frowned as she realised the sizing was all wrong. The codpiece was too small to cover him.

Severus watched as she said the charms to make the necessary adjustment to his codpiece. Her fingers shifting back and forth across his shaft was having a decided affect on his already aroused member.

"There," she said brightly. "Have a look." Hermione motioned to the mirror above her dresser.

Severus stared at his reflection, he felt almost nude in the ridiculous costume. He muttered an incantation under his breath. The shirt changed from white and green to all black. "It will do, I suppose."

"They did not dress in all black during the 16th century. Are you going for more of a Goth look?" A wave and snap of her wand and the shirt returned to its original colour scheme.

"I detest white. And I suggest you explain this 'Goth' to me." Once again he muttered '*Abeo vestitus*'. The shirt turned black again.

"You wear a white shirt under your coat. The collar and cuffs are always visible. I've seen you in the lab in a white dress shirt!" Wave, snap. The shirt was two-tone again.

"*Abeo vestitus*, but not outside of my private residence. I will not look foolish. It will be black."

Wave, snap. "They didn't wear all black back then!"

In the end, they reached a compromise. The top of the shirt was a luminescent black; the bottom remained a dark green. Severus appraised his costume in the mirror. "It is...acceptable."

"You will capture the attention of half, if not all, of the female population of Hogwarts when they see you dressed like this. I may have to tattoo 'Property of Hermione Granger' in a strategic location just to protect my interests."

"And when am I permitted a glimpse of your attire?"

Hermione smiled. "My costume is not complete. I should have it by next week."

Severus pulled her to him. "*Divesto*."

Their clothes disappeared and reappeared on the chair across the room.

"I don't have to be back to the castle until 1:00a.m." He lowered them to the bed, all the while alternately nuzzling and biting at her neck.

"Severus."

The tone of her voice was serious and immediately worried him. They had only been lovers for three weeks now. 'Perhaps she has reached the top of her cycle and is unsure how to tell me,' he thought. So far that hadn't been an issue, but it was bound to come up soon. He had been casting a powerful contraception spell, so there was no worry there. As he had explained to her, it would have raised untold problems if anyone had ever said they were pregnant with his child. He had told the Death Eaters' wives he was sterile from one too many potions accidents and secretly cast the contraception spell; no one ever questioned him.

He stopped and looked at her. "Is something wrong?"

"You know I would never make you look foolish." For all his bravado, she knew he could be overly sensitive at times. He was worried enough about dancing in front of the entire student body. She didn't want him to think she would ever play any type of joke on him, too.

"I know that. However, you and I have a different view of acceptable sometimes." He moved to kiss the side of her neck again, only to be stopped by the tone of her voice.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Hermione."

"No, what is it I do that you find unacceptable?"

Severus lay back on the bed. "You are younger and do not seem to value your privacy with the same regard I do. It is understandable."

"We're not going to go through that again, are we? I don't care about the difference in our ages. Why does it matter so much to you? What do I do that you find unacceptable?" Hermione shifted to her side so she could glare at him. "You're just like an onion, you know that?"

He had been called many things, but never an onion. In spite of himself, he was curious. "An onion? What does that mean?"

Hermione laughed at his expression. "It was a comment my mum used to make. It means you have your head in the ground. You don't see what is around you."

"I see," he replied stiffly. Is that how she thought of him?

Hermione watched an invisible veil cover his eyes. His body seemed to stiffen as he mentally distanced himself.

Quietly, she said, "Severus, look at me. You don't see. You won't look around you. I care for you. I would never do anything that would make fun of you. I don't care about our ages, but I know you do. I'm not planning on running off with the first young wizard I see. None of them could compare to you. You have to trust me."

Severus watched her eyes. He could see he had touched something deep inside her. He knew she was right; maybe that's what hurt so much. He thought she should have been with someone younger. He agonised over her meeting someone at University, during her internship, whenever she was away from his side.

"Hermione..."

"Would you fight for me?" Her tone was demanding. She was not about to let him brush this conversation aside.

"Would I fight for you? Do you mean a duel?" What was she talking about now?

"You've told me how much I mean to you. I believe you. But if someone expressed an interest in me, some one younger, some one ~~you~~ thought more 'appropriate', and before you lose your temper, there is no one. But if there was, would you fight for me or would just think: 'She's better off, so be it' and hand me over to them?"

He was taken aback by the intensity of her gaze as she waited for him to answer. Would he fight for her, or would he let her go? Even at the cost of his own happiness? He understood she had insecurities of her own to deal with. "I would do whatever made you happy. I happen to believe, however, / am what will make you happy."

In one fluid motion, he pinned her to the bed, the need to possess her stronger than ever before. Jokingly she had said she would tattoo him as hers. He found the desire to mark her as his own was overwhelming. "And, I am not...an *onion*!"

Hermione shrieked at the sudden shift in position. "Yes, you are. Many layers...." Whatever else she had intended to say was lost as his mouth descended on hers, hot and demanding.

His knee gently nudged her legs apart. One hand snaked between them to find her wet and ready for him. Words were no longer necessary as they expressed their need and desire for each other in a dance as old as time.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

She was lying with her head on his shoulder, her leg possessively thrown over one thigh. She traced the thin white line running from just above his left nipple to the edge of his collarbone. They never really talked about his days as a spy. Hermione knew the spidery white lines were the results of various curses and tortures Voldemort had inflicted upon him.

She was surprised Poppy had not been able to heal the skin too during her treatment of his wounds, eliminating the scars altogether. But then, there were so many Dark spells that did not allow for the healing of skin that Hermione had decided long ago not to ask. His eyes were closed, but she knew he wasn't asleep.

"Do you remember our original discussion?" she asked quietly.

She could feel the vibration of his voice through her fingertips as he chuckled before answering her. "We've had many original discussions. Which 'original discussion' in particular are you referring to?" He felt absolutely boneless, totally sated by the luscious witch lying by his side. Slowly, he stroked her side and back and anywhere he could reach, enjoying the feel of her body next to his. The scent of peach clung to her hair and skin tonight. He couldn't remember being this relaxed or this happy in a long time. In forever, really.

"Yes, well, when you agreed to let me attend the symposium with you? That discussion. I saw a notice giving the date as the end of next month."

"Hmm, I vaguely recall the conversation. Wish to change your mind and barter for the internship, instead?" Severus turned to watch her, his gaze soft.

Hermione smiled. "Would you let me?"

"What would be in it for me?" They both knew he was joking. He gently circled her nipple before rolling it between his fingers, the hardened bud deepening in colour, responding to his ministrations. His other arm tightened around her waist, pulling her closer.

"I could sue you for sexual harassment."

Severus looked puzzled. "You want me to harass you sexually?"

Hermione laughed. They'd had enough misunderstandings for one night. "Forget it. Have you reserved our rooms yet? Did you want me to pay the hotel directly? If you tell me how much it is, I can have the amount transferred to your Gringotts account."

His brow shot up. "Rooms?"

"I did promise you I would remove my offending presence as soon as we arrive at the conference. You won't even know I'm there. Remember? You even agreed to allow me to accompany you, provided we did not have to see one another after we arrived. I just assumed separate rooms would be in order." They'd come a long way in the last few months since their original discussion of these terms.

"I see. I apologise for not informing you sooner, but circumstances have changed. We will be forced to share accommodations as well as socialise together. Perhaps you'd like to change your mind?" He had decided not to dwell on her reasons for attending the symposium. She would be with him - that would be enough. Her apprenticeship was still almost a year away; he had no desire to spend that time arguing with her.

Hermione smiled. "What about your girlfriend?"

"Don't worry about her. What she doesn't know won't hurt her."

"Would you like to see *my* certificate for duelling and hexing?"

Severus chuckled. "I have not received the information for our accommodations yet. And before you object, you have told me, many times over, that you are a struggling University student. At the moment, I happen to be gainfully employed, so I will cover the expenses connected with the symposium. Since you seemed to enjoy the suite at the conference so much, I have requested an upgrade to a suite at this hotel."

Hermione's eyes sparkled. "Do they have waterfalls in the rooms, too?" She was pleased they could discuss the symposium with-out getting into another argument. Though she thought he was making an attempt at being reasonable in light of tonight's revelations, she would take what she could get.

"I'm not sure. I could check if you like. If I intend to remain gainfully employed, I need to dress and return to Hogwarts. It is almost time for my shift to begin." Severus slid gracefully from the bed. A quick spell and his clothes, fully cleaned and pressed, draped his body once again. He leaned down to kiss Hermione good-bye.

"Hang on. I'll walk you to the door." She slid nude from the bed and padded softly into the other room.

Her hair was wild; her lips red from his heated kisses, a slight blush still clung to her breasts from their earlier lovemaking. 'All this, and brilliant, too,' he thought. He felt his heart pull as he looked at her. Not only would he fight for her, he thought he would kill anyone else that came within a hundred feet of her, the idiotic duo included.

"In answer to your earlier question: Yes, I would fight for you. I could never let you go."

Hermione watched his eyes darken. They shared a passionate kiss at her front door.

"I'll see you Saturday. I have a revision session at 9:00a.m. I should be at Hogwarts by noon."

Severus nodded. "We still have reservations for dinner Sunday night at Witchcraft. Will that be acceptable?"

"I forgot, but it's fine, I don't have to be home early."

Severus pulled her close again. His kiss was surprisingly gentle.

"You need to go. You'll be late."

"Saturday."

"Saturday," she agreed.

And he was gone.

Hermione leaned back against the door, hugging herself. Something had changed between them again. She couldn't pinpoint exactly what it was, but a feeling of contentment stole over her. She hummed as she went into the kitchen to make a cuppa. She still had some revising to finish before bed.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

To all those who asked, Rancine is a name of my own creation, and yes, the idea was to make you think of something foul, something rancid when you thought of him. I'm glad it worked.

The title of the chapter: Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right but Three Rights Do Make a Left is from the book of the same name by Seymour Papert. It's classified as a 'learning story', whatever that is. I have never read the book, so I have no opinion on it. The title caught my eye when browsing at Amazondotcom.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: Hermione's costume, a Ministry celebration, a weekend at Hogwarts, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

You are welcome to browse my LiveJournal. Drabbles, photomanips, and general ramblings are the standard fare. You are welcome to 'friend me' if you like, one can never have too many friends!

Ancient Magic - <http://www.livejournal.com/users/pearle9240/>

I would like to thank everyone for their kind thoughts and well wishes. The surgery was successful. I am on the mend with a few weeks of recovery left. Enough time to relax and recharge.

Regards, Pearle

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## PLAYWITCH

We've received a great response to the first issue of Playwitch. The next issue is in the works and promises to be even better than the last. With luck and a lot of hard work, it will be up soon. If you haven't had a chance to visit the site, go check it out. Don't forget to sign the guest book and sign up for your free subscription before you leave. We welcome your contributions, suggestions, letters, and submissions. You can follow the link below to the main entrance to PLAYWITCH.

<http://www.playwitch.net/>

Playwitch contains interviews, ads, fan fiction, fan art, and columns. Playwitch is published on-line on a monthly basis. Please be aware that this is an **adult** site with adult content. **This site has images of nude men.** They are **manipulations** and **not real** pics.

# Questions or Just Another Day In An Enchanted Castle

*Chapter 30 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione

during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

### **Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected**

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 30. Questions or Just Another Day In An Enchanted Castle

It was rare that he received anything other than the usual Potions journals or occasional correspondence with another master. So it became an occasion of note when the morning post-owls dropped a shimmering gold envelope, larger than normal and humming the latest love ballad by the popular Wizard band, The Stone Hedges, on his plate. Everyone at the High Table turned expectant eyes in his direction, waiting to find out what the strange envelope contained.

He was prepared to let them wait.

Severus reached for a muffin while idly stirring his coffee and ignoring the obnoxious envelope.

"Would you like me to open that for you?" Remus asked him with a grin.

"Sod off, Lupin. It is of no consequence to you or anyone else here." Severus levelled his usual glare at the werewolf. It seemed the student body had also taken note of the delivery by the number of heads attempting to not look while looking at the dreaded Potions master. It was rather difficult to ignore an envelope that sang, "You've Turned My Heart of Stone To Mush" in three-part harmony, no less, *and* played it loudly in a continuous loop.

The envelope contained information about accommodations for the symposium. Severus would rather have stayed at a different hotel than where the actual conference was being held. As one of the presenters, this was not an option. The organizers of the event required all participants to stay at the same location in case of sudden changes in the schedule.

Severus recalled one conference years ago when two of the presenters were unable to speak after the first lecture. The series had focused on using potions in transfiguration work. Two of the keynote speakers volunteered as 'guinea pigs' when the speaker wanted to demonstrate his latest potion. Unfortunately, neither wizard responded to the reversal potion and had to be sent off to St Mungo's in a glass terrarium. They had inadvertently been transformed into horn-backed toads, and the speaker was unable to change them back. They were still missing when the conference ended. He never did find out if they ever became human again.

He tried several silencing and containment spells, all having no effect on the offending envelope. Severus assumed it was an advertising ploy by the hotel to attract attention to their establishment. Attention was the last thing he craved.

"Why don't you just open it?" Albus's voice was rich with amusement as he watched Severus colour at the suggestion.

"And why don't you just suck on a sherbet lemon, Headmaster." Severus grabbed the envelope and exited the back door.

"Thank you, I think I will." Albus's cheery voice and the laughter of those closest to the exit reached his ears before the door slammed shut.

He managed to muffle most of the sound by stuffing the annoying envelope in the pocket of his teaching robes. He had a few minutes before classes started and an unusually strong desire to blow up the offending envelope. It was only a matter of minutes before he reached his office.

After warding his door, he sat at his desk and examined the envelope. Several reveal spells confirmed that the envelope in question was indeed from the hotel and was no more noxious than the words of the song that was being played for the sixth time.

Severus used his wand to slice open the gold envelope and was immediately grateful he had not done so at the High Table. The envelope jumped from his grasp and stood upright on the desk. A tiny light show, similar to Muggle fireworks, shot out of the top. Mystic confetti jumped out of the slit and formed a loose chorus line around the envelope. A multi-coloured letter jumped up out of the top and hovered in mid air. The music swelled one last time before the letter started to read itself.

"The Enchantment

Located in the Wizarding section of beautiful Rome.

Dear Professor Snape,

We have received your request for an upgrade in accommodations and are happy to say we will be able to arrange your request. Due to a change in reservations, the Jungle Suite has just become available for the weekend in question. It features a small pond, complete with a waterfall, as you requested. It also has lovely tree house accommodations in a realistic jungle setting. Soft breezes carry the sounds of the jungle to your door; the smell of tropical flowers scents the air. It is an experience for the senses, one you will not soon forget.

If we can be of service in any other matter, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Have an enchanted day!

Sabrina Beam

Manager"

Severus sighed. The sound of his students gathering for Potions could be heard from the adjoining classroom. Looking at the clock, he discovered class was due to start in just minutes. Wistfully he looked at the letter and the now silent envelope. Hermione, she would be arriving tomorrow afternoon. He supposed the weekend would come soon enough.

Hermione checked her bag for the last time. She planned on Apparating to Hogwarts after her revision group. Crookshanks was meowing softly while winding around her legs. Hermione picked up the half-Kneazle, hugging him to her.

She could be observed entering and leaving the guest room at various times during her stay at the castle, as the Headmaster had requested. In reality, the connection worked as a shortcut between the dungeons and the library. It was much faster to go from Severus's bedroom to the guest room and avoid the endless climb up the staircases from the dungeons.

Reaching a decision, she looked Crooks in the eye. "Care for a road trip, boy? I'll be back after group to pick you up. There really is no reason you can't come with me." Hermione swore the cat looked like he was smiling as he stretched one long orange leg out and started to clean his paw.

Hermione held the cat carrier tightly as she steadied herself. While not as difficult as Apparating two people, Apparating with an animal still required additional concentration. She walked up the main walk and through the front doors of the castle.

"Really, Severus, you know the entire staff always pitches in at these affairs and monitors the students. And language, please. There are students in the corridors." From Minerva's tone it was obvious she was aggravated with her friend and colleague.

"Hermione, how lovely to see you." Minerva hugged her warmly. "You must stop by for tea and tell me how you are."

Hermione hugged her mentor. "Of course. I'll stop by later."

"I'll talk to Albus about changing the schedule." Minerva nodded to the two before moving on.

"Hi. We're here." Hermione smiled as she indicated the cat carrier.

"So I see." He should have known the damn half-Kneazle would show up. It was only a matter of time. He recalled her threatening to hex him when he expressed his displeasure with the animal on his first visit to her flat for his dance lessons. "Where are you planning on keeping...that?"

Hermione moved toward the stairway to the guest suites. "I thought I would let him loose in my room. Crooks lived here for four years. He knows the castle as well as you do."

"Ah, your room." Severus stopped at the foot of the stairs. He ran one long finger down her bare forearm, watching with fascination as goose flesh seemed to spread in its wake. He felt Hermione shiver slightly. "Cold?" he asked with a smirk.

"Not exactly." It amazed her how just a simple touch from this man could turn her on so.

"And your plans for the evening?" He deliberately lowered the volume and tone of his voice, enjoying the effect he had on the witch.

Hermione gazed directly into his eyes. "What did you have in mind?" From the way he shifted, it seemed she had just as much of an effect on him.

The sound of approaching students broke the mood. The castle had been relatively quiet that morning. A Hogsmeade weekend normally gave the staff some much need quiet time while the students were out.

Hermione watched as Severus disappeared and the Potions master made his appearance. He stood taller, a scowl firmly in place, and his hands dropped to his sides. Severus cast a glare at the students, moving them to silence without a word. Three girls, a Hufflepuff and two Ravenclaws, skittered up the steps, barely looking at the imposing figure in black.

Hermione leaned into him, lowering her voice. She whispered in his ear, "I suppose that means doing it over the railing is out of the question?"

He turned his patented glare on her, but the mirth in his eyes belied his tone. "For someone who graduated at the top of her class, you have a lot to learn about concealment and do-not-notice charms." Severus turned with a sweep of his robes. "Go unpack that beast you call a pet. Visit with the lioness in her den. I shall be in my office when you care to grace me with your presence."

The young witch laughed at his haughty manner. "How does an hour from now sound?"

Severus stopped as he reached the stairway to the dungeons and turned back to face her. "Keep that question in mind, I may be asking you that later tonight." He could hear Hermione's laughter as he headed for his office and yet another stack of essays to mark.

"May I assume from your continued presence in the castle that things are progressing well between the two of you?" Minerva offered Hermione another biscuit, which she politely declined.

"We've made some great progress with the alterations to the Wolfsbane Potion in the last two sessions. I'll be glad when the Hallowe'en dance is over and we can concentrate our efforts on the research." Hermione stirred her tea with one eye on the clock. She enjoyed talking with Minerva, but she didn't want to keep Severus waiting. After hurrying to her 'room,' she had let Crooks run free and rushed over to visit with her former Head of House.

"Hermione." The older woman admonished her. "You know that's not what I mean. I love Severus dearly, and I will be the first to admit he seems to be calmer and happier - well happy for him - than ever before. But he is not an easy man. Is there anything you want to talk about? Can I help in any way?"

"Minerva, thank you, but really, I'm fine. I know Severus can seem aloof, but he really seems to relax when we're together. He has a great sense of humour. His sarcasm is wicked when it's not directed at me. I really do enjoy our time together." Hermione felt an overwhelming sense of love for this woman.

"Actually, I've enjoyed his sarcasm for years. There is no one I would rather trade barbs with." Minerva sipped her tea. "So should I ask how serious you two are?"

Hermione choked on her tea. Coughing and sputtering, she tried to catch her breath. "Excuse me? Are you asking what his intentions are?"

"I'm asking what intentions the two of you have? How serious is this relationship?" Minerva sat calmly watching the young witch.

"I don't know how to answer you. We...we care about each other. I think for now we're just enjoying being together. We really haven't talked about it." Minerva had become a second mother to her in the years since she had lost her parents. She didn't want to upset the woman, but Hermione had no clue how to answer her.

"You do plan on finishing school?"

"Of course. Severus keeps telling me that should be my main priority. As a matter of fact, there is a Potions symposium we're attending the end of November. Ten of the masters present are part of the apprentice program. He has been helping me decide on what master I should request an apprenticeship with."

Minerva looked surprised. "And not with him?"

"He doesn't feel anyone would take my apprenticeship seriously if I interned with him. As much as I hate to admit it, I know he's right. He and Professor Rancine have already had a run-in at the last conference."

"Rancine."

It surprised Hermione how much venom she infused the man's name with. It was obvious Minerva had heard of him.

"I'm sure he's right." Minerva was pleased to see Hermione had not abandoned her plans, though the more she thought about it, she was sure Severus would push education at the witch. Force her to strive to be the best she could be. She was pleased they seemed to be happy together.

They next hour passed pleasantly as they discussed the future, the past, and a few other things in between. Hermione hugged Minerva and promised to stop by again soon, as she was leaving.

.xx.

Severus felt his wards shift as Hermione entered his office. He continued demolishing second-year essays. It was amazing to him the quality of the assignments some people turned in. While Hermione had turned in five times the required length on a topic, most of his students struggled to meet even the desired minimum. And what they did write was usually filled with misspelt words and erroneous conclusions.

"And how is Minerva these days?" He didn't look up; his quill dragged across the parchment as yet another answer offended his senses.

Hermione sank into the straight-backed chair in front of his desk. The chair was hard and uncomfortable, and was meant to discourage anyone from lingering in his office. "She's fine. She wanted to know what was going on between us."

Severus looked up, his quill poised to slash through yet another answer. "And what did you tell her?"

"I told her the truth. That we're fine. That we enjoy each other's company. Oh, and that I definitely plan on finishing school. She had some concern there."

"I see." Well of course she would finish school, what did Minerva think he was going to do, abscond with her to the dungeons, chain her to his bed, and disappear forever? Now that he thought about it, that might not be such a bad idea: a naked-chained Hermione waiting to do his bidding.

When did she get naked? 'Not naked, wearing The Thong, you idiot,' screamed the voice in his head. Hermione's voice cut through his musings.

"You do? Then explain it to me. I know Minerva feels protective towards me, but why doesn't everyone else just butt out!"

Severus smiled; he expected steam to come out of her ears shortly. "Would you like to see our accommodations for the symposium?" He reached into a side drawer and drew out the gold envelope and the folded letter. Hermione reached for the parchment, but he stopped her hand. "Watch."

He slid the letter back into the envelope, having learned the hard way the day before, with his fourth-year students waiting in the classroom, that this action triggered the envelope's 'song and dance' routine. As soon as the parchment was fully sealed in the envelope, it jumped from his fingers and stood upright in the middle of his desk. The Stone Hedges' song poured out of the top slit with the light display. Severus sat back in his chair, choosing to watch Hermione's delighted expression instead of the advertisement.

Hermione was enthralled with the show. Her laughter rang out in the close room as the mystic confetti completed its dance and dropped to the desk along side the now silent parchment. "Severus, this is wonderful! I hate to ask, where were you when you received it?"

"The Great Hall. It came in yesterday's owl delivery. Luckily, I didn't open it until I had returned to my office, but the bloody thing sang all the way back here."

She could just imagine him trying to silence the envelope as he hurried through the corridors. "The Jungle Suite? That sounds great." She eyed the dark man seductively. "And another waterfall."

"Why don't you come around this side of the desk, so I can say hello properly?" Severus held his hand out to her, his eyes darkening with desire.

.xx.

It was sometime later, when the chair became uncomfortable, that Severus suggested they head to the lab. The idea of taking her then and there had occurred to him, but they had the night together, might as well build the anticipation.

Up until now he had refrained from some of his more ... adventurous desires; perhaps they could discuss them later.

'What discuss? Just rip her clothes off and take her, man. Who are you? You've changed; I don't think I know you any more.' He told the voice to sod off; he had no desire to scare the witch. Though in truth, she reacted so passionately to anything he did, he didn't think she would object too much, if approached properly.

They were measuring out another set of ingredients for trial in the four metal cauldrons they had agreed upon. So far the silver and the iron cauldron appeared to be the most promising. "I'm sorry, Severus, did you say something?" Hermione asked distractedly. She was trying to cut the dragon's heart into thirty-two equal pieces.

Had he told the voice to sod off out loud? He didn't think so. "You may find that easier if you cut mathematically."

"Mathematically? I don't think we covered that yet."

It was a while later when he made it back to his chambers. Cleaning up the waterfall had not been as difficult as he feared. Between the three of them, the room was

restored in short order. It took a while longer to determine counterspells for the feathers, the spots, and the coloured skin. All but the original two students had been returned to normal. Williams and Girdwood were still in the hospital wing recovering. They would start serving two weeks detention with Filch the following night.

He had been forced to take eight points from his own house, four from each boy, at Minerva's insistence. She demanded more, but Albus had come to his rescue. No one was seriously hurt. Just boys letting off steam, and serving two weeks detention was really punishment enough. He left an angry Minerva in a somewhat better mood than he would have thought possible under the circumstances.

He entered his quarters expecting to see Hermione sitting by the fire reading a book. The empty room surprised him. He knew she was still in the castle; he had run into her damn cat in the corridor earlier. She could be off to the library, though he thought she would have left him a note if that were the case. He walked through to his bedchamber, intent on getting out of his now-sodden robes. He stopped when he noticed Hermione's clothes on the bed and a note hovering in front of the closed bathroom door.

The note was lilac scented and written in purple ink. 'What cheek,' he thought.

Dear Severus,

I assume you would like a nice long soak after dealing with you dear Slytherins. I'll see what I can do to relieve the stress of the evening. Please leave your attitude at the door and join me.

Hermione aka the know-it-all

Severus magicked his clothes off. 'Leave his attitude at the door? We'll see about that,' he thought. The sight that met his eyes when he stepped into the room brought him up short.

The room was lit with dozens of floating candles. The subtle scent of lilac tinged the air. Two glasses of white wine hovered by the side of the tub, moisture gathering on the outside of their chilled surfaces. Soft music played in the background. But the sight that took his breath away was Hermione, floating in the oversized tub, purple bubbles gently lapping at her body. Her breasts were barely visible through the bubbles, one tantalising nipple poking through the suds.

Hermione opened her eyes and smiled. "Hi, I missed you. Join me?"

Severus told his attitude to get lost as he joined her in the tub. No one heard from them again until lunch the next day.

TBC

.xx.

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: Practicing for the dance, Hermione's costume, a Ministry celebration, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

Regards, Pearle

The Eve of Things To Come

Chapter 31 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

.xx.

Note: At the time I started this story, Severus's birthday was not known. I chose November 4th as it fit with my timeline - after Hermione's birthday (Sept 19th) and the dance but before the Christmas holidays. JKR has since announced his birthday is Jan. 9th. I had thought about changing it, but that would change other events as well, so

She felt his body stiffen, a sudden warmth flooding her womb. Her name was a quiet moan from his lips. Severus's arms tightened around her as she settled into the crook of his neck. A quiet murmur and the coverlet floated out of her bedroom to fall gently over them.

Hermione crooked one brow. "I thought Prince Charming always carried the fair maiden to her bed chambers?"

Severus' eyes were closed, his breathing finally even. His voice held a wry tone. "When he shows up, we'll ask him,."

They sat that way for several minutes, just enjoying the feel of one another. Hermione's even breathing had convinced Severus she'd fallen asleep. He tried to gently shift her to her right a bit. He didn't want to wake her, but he had lost the feeling in his right leg.

Her sudden chuckle startled him. "Problems?"

"Possibly a solution. Albus can't expect me to dance if I can't feel my right leg." He tried flexing his feet, his movement causing Hermione to giggle harder. "Enough out of you."

Hermione shifted to the side so she could watch his eyes, laying half in his lap and half on the sofa. "Better?"

"Oh, infinitely so."

"I spoke with Vanessa today. Albus has offered them accommodations at Hogwarts for the night. They'll arrive early in the afternoon." Hermione drew lines across his chest and shoulders, enjoying the feel of his skin.

"Have you completed your costume?"

"I still have two weeks until the dance."

It was Severus's turn to raise a brow questioningly. "You don't have it, or you don't want me to see it?"

Hermione smiled. "Not quite done. It will most likely be similar to the dress I wore for the Exposition. I liked the way that one moved. Listen, your birthday is the week after the dance. Since it falls during the week, I thought I could come out to the castle. Any chance you can get the night off from your duties?"

"I'm fairly sure I can guilt Albus into it."

She stared deep into his black eyes, lost in the intensity of his gaze. Slowly, she lowered her lips to his. Her eyes drifted shut, giving herself over to her emotions. It was several minutes before they separated.

Her voice was breathy as she asked, "And what would you like for your birthday?"

His birthday. He couldn't ask her.

"What?"

"Whatever you chose."

"No, there's something you want, and you don't want to tell me. What is it?" She watched him intensely, waiting for him to answer her.

Severus drew a deep breath. "Do you belly dance?"

"You want me to belly dance for you?"

His cheeks coloured slightly as he thought of her belly dancing in The Thong.

Hermione noted the flush to his cheeks. "You want me to belly dance in the nude for you?" she guessed.

"No, not exactly nude," he managed to mumble.

The voice in his head had reached a fever pitch. 'THE Thong, you berk. Say the words! You're an ex-Death Eater, for god's sake! The Thong! You idiot! Tell her you want to see her belly dance in The Thong!'

Hermione was puzzled. "In costume? The Tango costume?"

Severus shook his head.

She ran her hand across his chest. "Whatever it is, just tell me? Enough with the twenty questions; it can't be that bad."

'THE Thong!' He was almost sure she could hear the deranged voice in his head.

"Do you recall an article of clothing I came across in your flat a while back?" he asked quietly.

Hermione tried to think. What clothing could he be talking about? Her puzzled expression forced him to continue.

"I thought it was...an eye patch. A black eye patch." He did not think the lingering pain of the Cruciatus Curse was half as bad as what he was feeling right now.

He could see her mind literally sorting through neatly categorised events until suddenly her expression brightened. "My thong? You want me to belly dance for you wearing just my black thong? Not in the Great Hall, I hope."

"I would rather be the only recipient of your charms." He relaxed slightly. Evidently, she didn't seem to think it was an odd request, after all.

The voice in his head was having a field day. 'Yes! The Thong. God, I can just see her now.' His body started to respond to the image his mind was creating. Hermione, her hair wild, face flushed, her lithe body undulating to the music, shimmering in the firelight, wearing just The Thong; his birthday present.

Hermione's mind was creating a few images of its own. Severus sitting in his black silk dressing gown, the erotic beat of the music as she danced around him, scarves fluttering back and forth. She'd wear her thong, but a few well-placed scarves would complete the sexy attire. "I think that can be arranged."

'Think how surprised she'll be when you rip it off with your teeth before ravishing her!' The deranged voice seemed to have a newfound purpose it would drive him crazy, past the point of mere distraction now that he would actually get to see one of his dreams come true. His mind vowed it would not concentrate on anything else until his birthday. He was sure the next few weeks would pass in slow torture.

Hermione wiggled against him, aware that he was aroused again.

"Don't start something you cannot finish, my dear."

She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively. "Care to give it a quick go?"

Severus laughed. "As enticing as that offer is, I have to be back at the castle in fifteen minutes. But I will take you up on it on Saturday."

They had never discussed it formally, but he assumed they would continue as they had been. She would come to him on weekends, unless he had the weekend off, and he would come to her during the week.

"Mmm, I have a few errands to run, but I'll be there by lunch time." She draped the coverlet around her as she moved off of him. She snuggled down onto the sofa to watch him dress.

As with everything else Severus did, his movements were precise and exacting. A few spells, a bit of foolish wand waving and his clothes were clean and once again covering his frame.

"Stay, you look far too comfortable to get up. I shall see you on Saturday."

A quick kiss goodbye and he was gone. Hermione pulled the covers around her, the scent of spices and Severus filling her nostrils. She always missed him most just after he left, when she could still smell him; feel him in her flat.

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The days passed quickly. Severus sat in the Friday morning staff meeting wishing he were anywhere but there. The meetings were held every three weeks and were worse than any curse he had ever been subjected to. And today's meeting was no exception.

"Our final topic of discussion is an upcoming dance by the Ministry, a sort of goodwill event. They are attempting to raise funds for research at St Mungo's and asked that Hogwarts staff and Order members attend." Albus's eyes twinkled as he made the announcement.

Severus' snorted. "Really, Headmaster, as if the Ministry cares about the Order?"

"While I do not care for the underhanded dealings of the current administration, the purpose of the event is quite noble."

"What a surprise." Severus mumbled under his breath, tuning Albus out.

"Did you just volunteer, Severus?"

His head snapped up. Damn it, he was thinking about Hermione again and missed the rest of Albus's comment. He shifted in his seat, trying to backpedal. "No, we cannot all leave the castle; I would be willing to stay and oversee the students."

Albus smiled broadly. "As I said, to avoid any conflict, the dance will be held here at Hogwarts the week after Hallowe'en." Albus looked pointedly at the Potions master. "And everyone is required to attend."

Severus chose to glare at Albus rather than dignify the comment, so obviously aimed at him, with a remark. He stood abruptly and bowed formally to his friend. "If you are through, Headmaster? I have a few things to attend to before my charges descend on my classroom and attempt to blow the castle up." Without waiting for an answer, he swept from the room, his robes billowing out behind him in trademark fashion.

"His charges? My, he's in an awfully good mood this morning," Minerva said with a laugh. The rest of the staff agreed.

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Just what he needed, another Ministry sanctioned event. It was bad enough the Order attended the celebration of the defeat of You-Know-Who every year, now they had found another way to torture him. Well, it wouldn't be too bad - Hermione would be there. They had attended such events before, but never as a couple. He had always watched her from across the room, moving from person to person with a quick smile and a warm hug.

Since it would be held at the castle, maybe he could get her to slip away with him and attend to a few more pleasurable pursuits than the moronic event with the idiotic duo fluttering around her. Even if he couldn't get her to leave early, he would do more than hug her when he got her alone, that was for sure. While not wholly accepting of their relationship, Potter was at least civil about it. Severus chuckled; of course, he had Miss Weasley, Molly, and Hermione to answer to.

He failed to notice two Ravenclaws that pulled back against the stone wall at his passing. The two had never seen him grin before and wished whoever he was after a quick death in the face of his wrath.

He headed for his office, intent on using the time before classes to make fast work of the essays he had to grade. His weekends were taken up with a certain witch and the research they were pursuing, when not pursuing each other. He no longer had endless hours to mark the essays and assignments.

Without noticing it, his life had become fuller, more complicated. He had slipped into a comfortable pattern; one he barely noticed. It would have surprised him, if he ever stopped to think about it; for the first time in his life, he was happy. Really happy just being, Severus Snape.

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The next two weeks passed in a pleasant fog of normality. Severus spent Wednesdays at Hermione's practising for the dance, followed by a quick bite to eat, and an evening of making love.

The weekends, by mutual agreement, were spent at the castle, even his weekends off. They spent hours researching and testing the Wolfsbane Potion refinements, making quite a bit of headway in the process. If they continued on at the current rate, and fate continued to be kind to them, they would be ready to test the improved potion over the winter break.

The remainder of the weekends was spent reading, discussing their various interests, and of course, making love.

Hermione had finally shown him her costume. It was styled along the lines of the dress he had seen her wear the night she had danced at the Exposition. The top had a deep 'vee' that showed quite a lot of cleavage, in his opinion. While not as 'backless' as the one she wore before, this one still showed a large expanse of skin. The left side was slit to the thigh, allowing her to pull it back and forth as she danced. It was one thing for him to admire her assets; it was quite another for the student body and other males present to enjoy the 'view' as well.

The gauzy material hugged every curve. The flow of the fabric accented the sensuality of her movements. The edge of the sleeves and the hem of her skirt were cut unevenly and fluttered around her body when she moved. The overall effect was one of smoldering sexuality.

They had just finished their final practise session when she modelled her costume for him. He had been admiring her form, but his heart skipped a beat when he locked eyes with her. While he had been appreciating her, she had been admiring him. He could see the naked desire, the raw lust in the look she directed at him; all that passion, all that intensity directed at him alone.

Until he had started to see Hermione, he would have said his life was tolerable. He was fortunate to have survived the war, something that still amazed him. He had enjoyed his days of research and academia, living at Hogwarts, and interacting, even on a limited basis, with the few people he considered his friends. Teaching would have been better if he didn't have to deal with the lower levels, but you can't have everything. All in all, his life the last few years had been...tolerable, even pleasant.

It paled in comparison to the time he now spent with Hermione. Even arguing with her, he was more alive, more in the present than he had ever been. While the thought of dancing before the school should have sent him screaming for the hills, the thought of holding Hermione, feeling her eyes on him alone as they danced, feeling her body

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With the arrival of Ted and Vanessa Pritchard, he decided it was time to retreat to his office. He politely thanked the two for their assistance with tonight's dance and left them to seek out Albus on their own.

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Severus turned to Hermione, his arms out. "Well?" He would have preferred to wear his robes and only appear in costume for the Tango. Albus had officially vetoed that idea by requiring everyone to come in costume only. No exceptions.

"You'll pay for this, you know?" she said, taking his arm.

The room was overflowing with students and visiting guests. Word of tonight's 'special entertainment' had spread rapidly. Rumors had run through the school as to the nature of tonight's entertainment. Leading guesses ran the gamut from a duel to a demonstration of the Dark Arts. After all, what better day than Hallowe'en to practice a bit of Dark magic? It wasn't until breakfast, that morning, that the Headmaster announced the dance exposition, staring the Pritthead's with special guests, Hermione Granger and their own Professor Snape.

No one wanted to miss seeing Professor Snape dance, in costume, with Hermione Granger, no less. The students had been accustomed to seeing Hermione sitting and talking with Professor Snape during meals and never gave it a second thought. Most assumed she was doing some kind of post-graduate work in potions if they even spared a thought for her at all. Even the times they were at dinner, or the rare times they were seen in Hogsmeade, appeared to be no more than two "colleagues" conversing. That is, until the true nature of their relationship came to light after Severus's surprise visit to Amsterdam.

It might have amused Severus to know he was the number one topic of conversation among the student body after his presence at the Potions conference became common knowledge. Actually, it was not his attendance at the conference, so much as whom he was seen escorting *after* the conference and where they were seen. The students watched with barely contained curiosity as Hermione showed up at the castle the next weekend. Whatever was supposed to happen - didn't. No roses appearing out of thin air. No romantic embraces. No kissing. Nothing. It didn't take long for the students to lose interest and move on to the next piece of gossip, until now.

"Don't you think it was enough that you made him take dance lessons? But to have him dance with Hermione in front of the student body...it's just too much." Minerva continued to scan the room for a glance of her friend and colleague. She noticed quite a few witches and wizards standing in small groups in addition to the students. "Albus, why are the Weasley's here?"

"I'm sure they're here to see Hermione. What other reason could there be?" Albus's twinkling eyes were about to blind the annoyed witch.

"Everything is set to go. We just need Hermione and Snape and we can start. The band can use the stage when we're through. I'll take it down later." Ted commented as he and Vanessa joined the two.

"It's not too late to call this off. I can't believe you, of all people, would subject Severus to such ridicule." Minerva glared at the Headmaster.

Vanessa noted her tight expression. "Minerva, I haven't seen Severus dance, but Hermione assures me he has mastered the Tango. I'm positive she would not allow him to look foolish. I spoke with her just the other day with much the same concerns as you have. And again she assured me they were ready to perform. I don't know Severus well, but I find it hard to believe Hermione would do anything that wasn't in his best interests."

Minerva turned angry eyes on the witch. Vanessa twinkling eyes were as bad as Albus's. 'You don't know him,' she thought, 'yet you stand here addressing him by his given name as if he were an old friend of yours.' Her tone was cold. "Whatever happens, I hold you two responsible for the consequences of tonight little demonstration," she said, the wave of her hand indicating Albus and Vanessa.

"As you should, Minerva, as you should." If at all possible, Albus's eyes glowed brighter with delight; the rest of his comment was lost in the buzz of voices as the doors to the Great Hall opened.

One by one, the students fell silent as they witnessed the couple that passed by them, those in the back row clamoring for a glimpse of Hermione and Severus. It was an odd reaction. Those in line with the couple fell silent only to start whispering anew after they passed.

Severus kept his eyes fixed on the far wall of the Great Hall, his pulse pounding in his ears as he crossed the dance floor with Hermione on his arm.

"You look great. Don't worry; we'll be fine. Just focus on me and it will be over before you know it." Hermione tried to squeeze his arm reassuringly as she felt him stiffen with tension.

"The only way I will be *fine*, is if we continue through the back door, out through the rose garden, and get as far away from this blasted castle as we can." His scowl deepened as he caught sight of Albus and Minerva talking with Ted and Vanessa.

The sound of voices reached unprecedented levels as the girls exclaimed over the Potions master's sexy costume. The tights fit Severus like a second skin and enhanced the subtle movement of muscle and tendon as he walked. They were treated to the image of a well-toned torso, long legs, a nicely sculpted bum, and of course - the codpiece and the imagined delights it hid. In the history of Hogwarts, no one had ever witnessed Professor Snape dressed in such revealing attire. Even his dueling costume consisted of a vest, frock coat, and barely tailored trousers.

If the girls had found a new idol to worship, the boys were another story. A rival was a rival, even if it was the greasy git, who no longer looked the part of the bat of the dungeon, or greasy for that matter. As Severus's sex appeal multiplied among the female population of the castle, students and staff alike, the male population started to feel threatened. Several boys voiced the possibility a spell had been cast to enchant those in the Great Hall. Most were told to shut up, some not so politely. All the boys could do was shake their heads and wonder if they had gone mad. A possibility that would increase after Hermione and Severus danced the Tango.

Minerva stood wide-eyed as she watched Severus and Hermione walk toward her. She decided it wouldn't matter whether he fell flat on his face or danced on air, just witnessing his confident stride, his command of his surroundings, his general physique, was enough to dispel her fears for his reputation after tonight. She was sure he would be the topic of discussion for a long time to come, but not for the reasons she originally thought.

"I don't believe it." Minerva couldn't help but agree with the awe in Irma's voice. "Has he always looked like that?" asked the amazed librarian.

"I think he's taking better care of himself since he's been seeing Hermione." Poppy and Irma Pince stood next to Minerva, watching the approach of a man they had dismissed as something other than an annoyance.

"Sort of makes me sorry I didn't help him with that book order in August. Who knew he looked like that? Do you think it's some sort of Dark spell?" Irma asked, staring at Severus in wonder.

Minerva shook her head. "It wouldn't have changed things. No matter how good he looks, I can't say he became any nicer until he started to see Hermione. If anyone worked any magic it would have to be her." It was a startling revelation for the witch. Severus's transformation had little to do with outward appearances. The true change was from within. He was calmer these days, easier to talk to, especially if Hermione was around. She had even caught him smiling while reading a journal in the teacher's lounge. Severus would always be a dangerous animal, but Hermione seemed to have done the unthinkable and tamed the wild beast.

"Hermione, a pleasure as always. Severus, my boy, you look wonderful." Albus greeted the two as they reached the group.

"All ready to dance?" Ted smiled at Hermione. From what he knew of Professor Snape, he found it hard to believe the Headmaster has insisted *on that* particular costume, but a wizard bet is a wizard bet.

"Severus, you look divine!" Vanessa knew the man was seething over the very public display of his person, a display he would rather have died before agreeing to in the first place. She smiled as she watched the unspoken communication between Hermione and the Potions master, a severe scowl darkening his already angry look.

She knew from Albus, the relationship between the two had changed. She'd heard rumors, the infamous trip to Amsterdam confirmed the growing attachment between the two, but this was the first time she had witnessed it with her own eyes, observing the obvious feelings they had for each other. Vanessa was truly happy for the pair, life was hard enough to get through on your own. It was nice to have someone to share it with. And from everything she'd heard, from all that Albus had told her, Severus was a man who deserved a bit of happiness.

Hermione patted his arm, ignoring the dangerous growl that was his only answer. The image of a Muggle lion tamer in a cage with a wild animal, imagining Hermione and Severus in the key roles, rose unbidden in Minerva's mind. "Albus..." her voice held the contempt she felt for the man at this moment.

"All set, Ted. Ready when you are." Hermione turned to her friend and mentor, her smile genuine. "It's fine. Really. I think you might even be surprised."

"I know I am." Irma remarked quietly before Poppy elbowed her in the side.

Severus turned glowering eyes on the pair, his scowl deepening. Hermione had managed to extract a promise of temperance from him. It was a variation on the old Muggle adage, "If you can't say anything nice about someone, don't say anything at all." It was his own fault he was in this ridiculous position, hexing someone or resorting to verbal abuse would only make matters worse. At least for tonight, he agreed to restrain from attacking anyone, verbally or physically.

"Right. Then shall we all proceed to the side of the stage? I thought you and I would dance the Samba and the Merengue, Vanessa and I will dance the Cha-cha and a Foxtrot before you and Snape finish up with the Argentine Tango. We can alternate the dances." Ted outlined the schedule for the show as he walked, not realizing Hermione was not walking with him.

Hermione turned to Severus, a gleam in her eye. "Ready?"

A curt nod was all he could manage. His anger at Albus warring with his desire to flee, to be anywhere but in the Great Hall.

"You will be great, just focus on me." Rising on tiptoes, she lightly kissed his cheek before dashing off to join Ted at the side of the stage.

Severus rose to his full height, his cheeks stained a light red in reaction to Hermione's kiss. "I will deal with you later," he snarled at Albus before heading for the stage. He might as well find out when his public display of humiliation was scheduled. No sense in waiting for the axe to fall on its own.

He had recognized quite a few witches and wizards as they had walked through the Great Hall. Several from the Order, Potter, Weasley, the whole bloody family from what he could tell. If not for Hermione, he would have chuckled it all, regardless of the consequences. He supposed that said something if he was not willing to abandon her, regardless of his fate.

The lights dimmed as a sudden quiet settled over the assembled. A nervous twitter could be heard here and there through out the Great hall. A spotlight lit the stage as Ted stepped out between the curtains. The announcement was similar to that at the first exposition.

"Good evening, my name is Thaddeus Pritthead and I would like to thank you all for allowing us to entertain you tonight. I run a small dance studio called Lighter Than Air. Tonight we would like to perform just a few of the many dances my studio teaches. If any of you have an interest in dancing and want to take lessons, my wife and I will be available to answer questions after the show. Tonight we will be performing a variety of dances - The Meringue, the Samba, and the Foxtrot to name a few. So relax, tap your toes, feel the music, and enjoy the performance." The light went out, and the stage was dark once more.

The room buzzed as the lights came up to gently illuminate the stage. The silhouette of two people standing motionless could be seen against the back curtain. It was the same opening Severus had seen them perform at the exposition, scripted to be as dramatic as possible. The man and woman on stage were in profile to the audience. They appeared to be frozen in time. The man held the woman in his arms, ready to dance. The woman appeared to be looking down. As the lights brightened, an overhead announcement proclaimed, "Ladies and Gentlemen, The Samba."

A sharp note sounded into the silence. The woman's head snapped up. A second and third note sounded as the two looked into each other's eyes. A strong Latin beat started to play in earnest as Severus watched Hermione and Pritthead move into the dance. While not as suggestive as the Rumba or the Tango, the Samba was still an erotic dance.

The dance was as he had remembered. Their moves were exact as Pritthead spun her around turn after turn, the movement causing her skirt to flutter around her body. Hermione's hips rocked to the beat. Their lower torsos moved forward and back suggestively with each step. The Potions master's breath caught as he watched the sway of Hermione's hips, the image of her moving above him as they made love caused a tightening in his groin.

This dress was cut up the side in much the same manner as the dress she had worn the night of the exposition. The fabric moved sensuously with each turn, exposing a generous length of leg and thigh. Her hair was loose, pulled back from the crown and allowed to cascade down her back with a life of its own, swaying with her movements.

The dance continued through its sensual moves, Hermione shifting around Ted's body as they concentrated on each other, moving in step to the music. The music increased in tempo as they mimicked the beat. Severus watched Pritthead's hand glide along Hermione's hip as they stepped out to do a forward and backward walk together. He felt anger flare through his body as another man touched his witch. Never mind the fact Hermione might have hexed him to tomorrow and back for the archaic comment, she was his.

Ted pulled Hermione in and spun her around again. The spin ended with her landing hard against his body. Severus felt his gut wrench in response. Pritthead stood mid-stage. He spun Hermione out and back one last time. His arm around Hermione's lower back anchored her in place as she moved into the ending stance. She arched her back, threw her head back and kicked her foot back as the music reached its downbeat. She held this position for the last few notes of the song.

Severus watched the rapid rise and fall of her chest as she tried to catch her breath. He barely heard the applause as the blood pounded in his ears. He needed to rein in his emotions before he did something he might not regret, namely casting an Unforgivable on Pritthead before spiriting Hermione away. Magical bet be damned.

Pritthead and Hermione stood side by side as the music ended and bowed to resounding applause. They turned and slipped back through the curtain as the lights dimmed again.

Cheers and catcall, mixed with the applause, could be heard coming from the assembled. The crowd quieted as the couple reappeared on stage and was silhouetted against the back curtain. The lights brightened in time to the start of the music. A voice overhead announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Foxtrot."

Vanessa and Ted moved to the beat of the lively dance. Their movements alternated between a lively double step and a slow double step combined with a rocking turn. They moved as one with practiced agility back and forth across the stage.

"Severus?"

Hermione's voice and the feel of her hand resting tentatively on his arm brought the dark man from his reverie as he met her concerned stare.

"Are you all right?"

Severus nodded his head, for once, not trusting his voice. He pulled her back against his chest as she turned to watch the dancers, his arm resting possessively across hers.

Hermione snuggled back against him in the semi darkness surrounding the stage, taken with the unexpected gesture. She could still feel the result of his arousal pressed against her bum, even if it wasn't visible to anyone else. "They dance well together, don't they? But not as well as we do," she said with a knowing smile.

His voice was low, silky, and sent a shudder of desire through her body as he whispered in her ear. "All I could think of as I watched you dancing with Pritthead, was your naked body moving above me as I made love to you." Severus smiled as he felt her shudder against him; ever grateful for the enchantment he had placed on the codpiece.

"Hold that thought. I have to dance with Ted again."

Severus watched Hermione move to the side of the make shift stage as the couple finished their dance. The audience applauded as the Pritthead's took their bows before the lights dimmed again. He could see the curtain part in the dim light as the new couple took their stance on the stage. Hermione's silhouette was easily distinguishable in the half-light, her hair forming a riotous halo around her head. The mechanical voice announced once again, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Merengue."

The lights brightened with the music. "Hot, hot, hot!" The chorus played over the rhythmic beat and soon had the audience repeating the words. Severus watched as Ted and Hermione moved through several varied steps around the stage. Hermione's hips shifted alluringly as they moved. The Samba and the Tango required a rolling movement, punctuated by an occasional thrust. The Merengue's hip movement was different. It seemed to require an up and down motion that was executed in time with the dance steps.

To the crowds delight, the beat seemed to speed up as the song played. As the music hit an accelerated beat, Ted dipped Hermione, only to have her bounce up again, hips shaking with the movement as the song reached the end. Once again the two bowed to the applause before the lights dimmed.

As before, Hermione appeared at his side as the voice announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Cha-cha."

Hermione watched his eyes as Severus watched the pair on stage dance. "Are you ready? We're up after this number. Just focus on me. Trust me, you will be wonderful. I won't let you do this if I didn't think otherwise."

Severus turned to look at the witch standing in front of him. The fact was, he did trust her, implicitly. "I know. Let's just get this over with already," he growled.

They moved to the side of the stage. Ready to move into place when the current number finished. The crowd applauded as Ted and Vanessa executed the final steps and stopped to bow. Hermione and Severus passed the pair as they slipped through the curtain.

Vanessa called softly as they passed, "Good luck. I know you'll be great."

The stage had gone totally dark. Severus and Hermione moved into their practiced opening stance. She could feel the tension in his shoulders as they waited for the announcer. "Relax, it's just you and me."

The crowd had gone silent, tension palatable in the air. "Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we offer a rare treat. The Argentine Tango, performed by Miss Hermione Granger and your very own Potions master, Professor Snape." The lights brightened to reveal the two in the traditional opening stance. A strong beat sounded as they moved into the opening steps. The sensual sound of the backbeat, coupled with the feel of the witch in his arms, fueled the fire running through his blood. The room fell away as Severus locked eyes with Hermione. They were back in her flat, dancing for no one but each other.

The steps were exact and performed in a rapid movement and then just as suddenly they shifted into a slow sensual turn. The shift from side to side and back was overstated as they slid against each other. Severus exaggerated the rocking motion of the cradle rock as he tapped his toe. His groin snapped forward and back, their bodies colliding against each other. Desire obvious in each movement.

"Albus?" Minerva watched in shock as the two danced on the stage. The sensual movements brought a slight flush to her face.

"A vertical expression of a horizontal desire. It's obvious those two have been intimate. I don't think I have ever seen the Tango danced with such desire, such passion, before. They look good together." Vanessa turned to Ted. "Do you think they would agree to dance at the next exposition? I know you usually dance with Hermione, but it just doesn't have the same emotion as those two. You can feel the heat between them."

Albus chuckled lightly. "They do seem to go together well, don't they?"

On stage the pair were oblivious to those around them. Each movement, each touch, further ignited the already raging emotions they were feeling. Her breasts were crushed against his chest one minute as she was forcefully pulled to him and then released the next.

They locked gazes as the dance moved from high speed to almost a stop before picking up momentum again. She could see Severus's eyes darken as he moved against her. She could feel the physical evidence of his arousal, even if no one could see it, as he pulled her body back against his. Hermione could feel the heat, the lust, radiating off her partner. The pulse in her ear matched the beat of the music as their bodies collided against each other before shifting apart.

The music reached its ending crescendo. Hermione arched over his arm, her breathing as ragged as his. One hand held high over her head, the other braced around his shoulder. Her breasts were thrust forward against the thin fabric of her dress by her stance. Severus bent forward to place a kiss in the hollow of her cleavage just as the lights winked out. The crowd broke into thunderous applause as the couple snapped back to themselves, realizing they really weren't alone in her flat.

They stood to take their bows as the lights came up. Ted moved to the side of the stage to allow the pair their minute in the spotlight. He stepped forward, assuming the applause would die off. He was wrong. If possible, the applause grew louder.

Albus joined him on stage. It was another minute or two before the audience was willing to settle down. "I wish to thank the Pritchard's for taking the time to entertain us tonight. Mr and Mrs Pritchard are available if you have any questions regarding their dance studio. And a heartfelt thank you to Miss Granger and Professor Snape for sharing their talent with us. If you will give us a few minutes, the Weird Sisters will set up and we can continue with tonight's festivities."

Vanessa met Hermione and Severus as they left the stage. "You two were amazing. I have never seen the Tango danced with such heat before. Perhaps you will consider dancing for us at the next exposition?"

Hermione smiled. "We were good, weren't we?"

Exposition? What in the bloody hell was the witch talking about? He was just glad he had managed to make it through without falling flat on his face. Did she really think he would ever do *that* again? In fact he was planning a nice little bon fire as soon as they returned to his quarters. He thought the tights and codpiece would burn rather nicely.

Albus joined them as he stepped off the makeshift stage. "I suspect there will be quite a few witches that will view our Potions master in a new light when classes resume on Monday. Well, my boy, this completes the consequences of the bet." With a wave of his hand and a puff of smoke, a small card with Severus's name materialized in his hand. "All obligations fulfilled." Albus held the card up by one corner and gently blew on it. The card glowed red before disappearing entirely in a cloud of smoke.

Severus watched the display, relieved to be free of the bet as he felt the corresponding release of magic tingle across his skin. He was surprised to feel a twinge of sadness mixed with the emotion. While he hated being on display for the school, he had enjoyed the weekly lessons with Hermione. Perhaps she would be willing to teach him another dance or two. He smirked as he thought about what the private lessons could lead to. His mood darkened again as Ron and Harry joined the group.

"Hermione, that was...amazing. Really, I'm at a loss for words. You two were..." Harry turned red as he recalled their dance.

"We were good together. *We are* good together." Hermione smiled smugly, happy for the opportunity to prove her friends wrong. She had been listening to their "concerns" for the last few weeks. Their comments ran from - you will make a fool out of yourselves - to - you can't really be serious? You aren't really going to dance in public...with Snape? What will people think?

"I am...impressed, Severus. That was a... remarkable ...display." Minerva appeared to be at a loss for the proper words to express her opinion of their performance.

Hooch was not having the same trouble. "You two were unbelievable. Talk about hot!"

Poppy and Irma merely nodded their heads in agreement, though to which comment, Severus was not sure. He coloured slightly at the praise, though secretly pleased he had managed to provoke such a pointed response in his colleagues.

Hermione jumped in before Severus could comment. He had kept his promise to remain noncombative. She wasn't sure how much longer he could hold out.

"While we thank you all, I believe Severus and I have a prior engagement to attend to." Hermione reached for his hand, ignoring the silent question his raised eyebrow projected. She knew from past experience the dancing had left him feeling just as randy as she was. The enchantment might have hidden the obvious result of his arousal from those around them, but she could feel the steel of his erection as he pressed against her backside. The Tango was foreplay at its finest and never failed to arouse the two of them.

"That was rather tactful." Severus commented as they untangled themselves from the group.

"What did you expect me to say, please excuse us, we need to retire to the dungeons so we can shag like bunnies, or perhaps we could just slip behind one of these tapestries for a moment?"

Severus chuckled. "I would like nothing better than to ravish you. To carry you off and have my evil way with you, but I believe I can wait until we reach my quarters."

Hermione stopped just as they reached the doorway exiting the Great Hall, a determined gleam in her eye. "Then what's stopping you? Let's see you carry me off."

It seemed just as many witches, wizards, and students that had watched their arrival, were watching their departure from the Great Hall. Severus looked the resolute witch in the eye. "You don't think I will, do you?"

A knowing smirk was his answer. "I know you only danced the Tango because you lost the bet. But no, I don't think you would act that out of character." Hermione turned to exit the Great Hall. She missed the mischievous glint in *his* eye.

She shrieked in delight as the world tilted on its axis before it righted itself as she landed against his chest. She could feel his erection, even at this angle, pressed hard and heavy against her bum. She giggled as she shifted in his arms. "Is that a wand in your tights or are you just happy to see me?"

"Stop that," he growled, but the desire she saw shining in his eyes and the roughness of his voice told a different story. Severus turned to the assembled, he had gone this far - he might as well play it for what it was worth, he could always blame it on the bet. He dropped the enchantment on the codpiece as he bowed to the crowd. "And to all, a good night." He turned with her in his arms and left the stunned group in silence.

"Did you see...?" Minerva stopped short. She didn't see what she thought she saw, did she? How could she admit she had been admiring his...codpiece as he was leaving? Thinking they would probably never get another chance to see Severus in that type of outfit again. It was unthinkable that said codpiece seemed to grow and bulge.

"See what?" Albus asked, his eyes sparkling.

"Nothing, nothing at all." She said, shaking her head. It must have been a trick of the light and shadows. But had she voiced her thoughts, she would have found she was not the only witch to notice the change in the codpiece in question. Even witches near the couple had a hard time admitting what they too had been eyeing and the subsequent change that occurred.

"Lucky little witch."

Minerva nodded absent mindedly, agreeing with Irma's whispered comment. The hall seemed to come alive again as the Weird Sisters moved into their first set.

"Harry..."

Harry shook his head. He thought he knew what he saw, but even he wasn't going to comment on Hermione and... Snape. He shuddered at the thought. "Let it go, mate. We'll talk with Hermione tomorrow, or during the week. I suspect she might hex us right now if we went looking for her." Harry turned to Ginny with a smile as the music started. "Dance?"

"I'd love to." Ginny laughed, moving into Harry's arms. She turned to her brother before Harry swept her away. "I'm sure there are any number of witches that would be willing to dance with you. Go dance, and let them be."

Ron shook his head. It had been so much easier when they were students and he knew who was on what side. Harry and Ginny. His baby sister. Hermione and ~~Snape~~. Well, they did seem well suited for each other, but *Snape*! A young witch approached him. He vaguely remembered Ginny saying she was one of the new apprentices at the school. Clara Something. He flashed a knowing smile. "Hi, didn't my sister tell me you were a model for *Witch Weekly*?"

The young witch blushed. "Hardly. I'm the Herbology apprentice. Clara Watkins."

"Are you sure I haven't seen you in a photo layout somewhere, a pretty witch like you?"

Clara laughed. "No, I tend to spend most of my day following Professor Sprout around, replanting herbs, and grading papers."

"Ah, in that case, would you like to dance?" Ron led the young witch to the dance floor. Hermione and Snape were long forgotten as they started to move to the beat. "So, what do you think of Quidditch, Clara?"

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Severus shifted his hold on Hermione as he turned sharply to his right, moving thorough the open doorway leading to the lower levels and the dungeons.

Hermione nuzzled the side of his neck. "You can put me down now. I can walk, you know. I wouldn't want to you to tire yourself out."

"And have you run off before I have my wicked way with you? I don't think so." While he was not as young as he used to be, he still had a few tricks up his sleeve, one that involved shortening the distance to his quarters to start with. He stopped abruptly before a tapestry about hundred yards into the corridor.

Hermione barely recognized the English translation of the Latin phrase Severus had mumbled. The tapestry shimmered before dissolving. She looked through the opening, only to see the tapestry of the snake guarding the entrance to his chambers several floors below them. "Isn't that your doorway?"

Severus stepped through the portal, the opening closing behind them. "So it is." She had never taken note of the painting opposite his doorway before. It was a replica of the image on the tapestry they had stepped through.

"Are there other connections like this?"

She felt the tingle of magic as his wards recognized them, the tapestry disappearing as his door opened automatically. Severus lowered her to the floor before hungrily devouring her mouth. He had been aroused even before their performance in the Great Hall. Her constant wiggling as he carried her only served to feed that arousal.

Hermione's arms wound their way around his shoulders, one hand playing with the hairs at the nape of his neck as their kiss deepened. She moaned as he roughly kneaded her breast, her stomach tightening as electricity surged through her veins. Tingles seemed to run up and down her body before pooling in her groin. "Severus."

Severus managed to turn the eager witch around and set her on the edge of his desk. They could take it slow later, right now he was overcome with the desire to have her. From the sound of her moans it seemed she was in complete agreement. He slipped one hand up her thigh, reaching for her knickers. Sliding the thin scrap of fabric to side he was pleased to find her wet and ready for him.

A whispered spell and the codpiece dropped to the floor, another spell and the front panel of the tights disappeared. Severus positioned his hardened member at the slick opening of her sex. "Hermione." He whispered, impaling the willing witch with one swift thrust. She groaned in response, as she lay back on the desk, pulling him down with her. Papers and books cascaded over the sides as they moved. She was hot, and wet, and tight, and everything he had every wanted.

They moved against each other with an urgency created by their need for one another. Severus could feel her muscles tightening around him as she clutched his shoulders, his torso bent over her body as he thrust in and out of her welcoming heat. He could feel his own orgasm building at the base of his cock. His balls tightening and pulling up as he tried to hold on. He felt the first twitches of her orgasm as her muscles tried to clamp down on him and gave into his own end. He drove deeply into her body, her whimpers spurring him on. With a final thrust, he groaned as he emptied his seed into her, his hips continuing to piston reflexively as he rode out his release.

Hermione pulled him to her in a fierce hug. He tried to move to the side in an effort not to crush her, their bodies still joined together. "No," she whispered, not wanting to break the mood. "I want to feel you." Gingerly, he lay partially on top of her, both of them breathing hard from their efforts.

He locked eyes with her, moving to softly brush her lips with his. His kiss was surprisingly gently and held a world of promise for the two of them. Finally, sliding from her body, he sighed deeply.

"Well that was fun," she said with a smile.

"I suppose a long soak in a hot tub is in order."

"Are you going to carry me there?"

"Carry you? My, my, how spoiled you've become. Carry you all the way to the bath? Must I teach you how to walk again, too? Perhaps I should just chain you to my bed. Then it won't matter whether you ever walk again." Severus scooped her up in his arms and headed for the bathroom.

"I was joking! You can put me down."

"Mhmm. We'll talk about it later."

Hermione settled into his embrace. "How did you manage to remove the front of your tights? I don't remember that panel being there."

"Obviously you're not male. How did you expect me to use the loo? Take off the tights?"

Hermione's laugh was warm as they crossed the threshold of the bathroom. "I suppose I really hadn't thought about it."

He set her down on her feet before turning to close the door.

She turned an appraising eye in the direction of his exposed groin. "You know, it's a good look for you. Maybe it will catch on."

"Hermione."

"After the looks you received tonight, it wouldn't hurt if I tattooed my name where everyone could see." She ran her hand across the flat plane of his pelvis. "P-r-o-p-e-r, right here. The 'P' should start here and the 'r' would finish up here." She ran her finger from the very base of his penis to tip of his foreskin. He was starting to harden again at her touch.

Severus looked puzzled. "Proper? Why would you want me to have a tattoo that said proper?"

"Not proper. It would only read 'Proper' in your...relaxed state. I think there is enough room to tattoo - Property of Hermione Granger down the length of your erect cock." As she spoke the words appeared along the length of his penis, the phrase not fully legible in his semi-erect state. "However, I better be the only one who sees it that way. All anyone else should be able to read is the beginning of the first word and the end of the last - Proper."

Severus stared at her before breaking into uncontrollable laughter. He moved to sit on the edge of the tub as he held his stomach. "And how long have you been waiting to pull that on me?" he asked through his laughter.

Hermione moved between his splayed legs and shrugged. "A while."

"You really are amazing." He shook his head before pulling her into his embrace.

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It was no surprise to anyone that Severus and Hermione missed breakfast in the Great hall the next day.

Or lunch.

Or dinner.

TBC

A/N: The steps and form of the dance (as well as those that appear in future chapters) are from this web site: Tango tutorial - <http://64.70.140.102/ourdance.htm>. Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

Technically, this chapter completes the challenge requirements this story was supposed to be an answer for and this chapter, while not the end of the story, could conceivably be an ending, but don't worry, there is still more story to tell.

If you missed the note at the beginning, this chapter was not beta'd by Nakhsh. She has been quite ill and has my wishes and thoughts for a speedy recovery.

I assumed you would rather have the chapter; even unbeta'd then wait. When she is better, I will edit for any error she encounters, until then, the mistakes are mine alone.

Still to come: A Ministry celebration, The Thong will make an appearance, a mystery woman, the symposium, the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are always welcome.

P.S. I have it on good authority that the words in question at the...end ... of the story, faded away in the hot, soapy water with just a minimal amount of rubbing. *.Grin.* Just thought you might want to know.

Regards,

Pearle

Happy Birthday, Severus

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

New

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Albus laughed heartily. "What a wonderful idea. Perhaps I will do just that."

Severus's gaze travelled across the room. It annoyed him to see several witches at each of the house tables gazing up at him in adoration. He was still the bat of the dungeon, the greasy git. He hadn't changed. They were responding to looks alone. His personality was still the same.

The female population was most definitely taken with his physical appearance; there had been much discussion in the dorms about who saw what during the dance and later, when he turned to leave with Hermione in his arms. It was probably that action, more so than the costume, which had attracted the hearts and minds of the young witches. They had been enthralled when word of his liaison with Hermione, after his unexpected visit to Amsterdam, had become public knowledge. But to sweep the obvious object of his affections up in his arms and carry her from the Great Hall? It was so romantic: the dark brooding wizard involved with a younger witch. It was the stuff fairy tales were made of, even if it did centre around Professor Snape.

He was, however, still Severus Snape. He sneered at the students in general. Even more annoyed when several witches turned away giggling.

"I don't think that helped," Remus said with a laugh.

Severus turned and scowled at him. "And *what*, in your oh so esteemed opinion, do you think would help?" After the day he'd had, he was actually willing to entertain suggestions from anyone, even Remus.

"Well, time will tell. I would say these schoolgirl crushes will end soon, or you just might have to get used to all the attention. I thought I heard something about a fan club in your honour."

Severus snorted. "Indeed." Very funny, as if he needed one more complication in his already misguided life. "I suppose they will want autographed posters to hang on their walls, too," he said snidely.

"I would imagine," Remus answered, smiling.

Tomorrow couldn't come soon enough.

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"Just because I can't make it tomorrow, is no reason to cancel the study session. You can still revise without me. Our exam is not until next week." Hermione noted the time. She really needed to head for the library if she was going to finish the research for her paper on the similarities and differences between calculus and Arithmancy for her Advanced Arithmancy class, and have tomorrow evening free.

"Hermione's right, there's no reason we can't still meet tomorrow. I'm sure we need the revising time a lot more than she does." If anything, Kathy thought, Hermione didn't seem to need the sessions at all. She spent most of the time helping everyone else rather than studying herself.

"What are you doing that is so important you have to cancel a group session?"

The whine in Edmund's voice grated on the witch's nerves. She would be glad when this semester was over. They had fewer classes together the second term, Hermione concentrating more on her Advanced Charms major than anything else.

Hermione slammed her book closed. "I'm not cancelling anything, the rest of you can still meet. I'm just missing one session. One session. How many have you missed or been late to so you could catch the end of some Quidditch match?"

"It was a play-off match. Just because you don't follow Quidditch doesn't make it any less important. Your friend Ron was playing. I would have thought you'd've wanted to see the match."

"Fine. You're right. I'm wrong. Okay? Anything else? I need to head for the library." Hermione angrily packed her book bag as she spoke.

"So what *are* you doing tomorrow?" Edmund looked at her questioningly.

"Edmund!" Kathy was just as curious; still, she couldn't believe he had the nerve to ask.

"I don't believe you." Susan glared at him, thinking he was more of a berk than she first thought, if that was possible.

Hermione eyed the group, mentally shrugging why not? "Tomorrow is Severus's birthday. I intend to have dinner with him and help him...celebrate."

"What do you mean celebr...?"

"Look at the time. Gotta run. See you all in class on Wednesday." She slung her book bag over her shoulder and took off for the library. It really was a shame that hexing another student was a punishable offence. There were quite a few creative hexes she could think of to shut Edmund up, if only to give her a little peace and quiet.

Her thoughts turned to tomorrow. She would most definitely help Severus 'celebrate' his birthday. She planned to make it a birthday to remember. Her bag shifted on her shoulder; first things first, she had a paper to research.

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Severus woke early. Stretching, he winced as his neck cracked with the movement. He noticed a small pile of packages at the foot of his bed. November fourth. It was his birthday. He was forty-one today.

Over half his life had been spent spying for the Order. He'd never expected to see forty; every birthday that passed while the Dark Lord lived just seemed to bring him closer to his eventual death. It had surprised and annoyed him when he found himself still alive after the final battle. Death was to have been his final penance for his misspent youth.

He had a pretty good idea what the packages contained. Albus sent him socks every year in whatever disgusting colour he could find, the uglier the better it seemed. Really, did he think he was a house-elf in need of freedom? He expected one year to find a coordinating tea towel to go with the socks.

Opening the brightly coloured package, he found a note in Albus's familiar scrawl: "May you have the happiest of birthday's!" Inside was a pair of neon green socks decorated with dancing, smiley-face daisies. As he watched, the socks changed from one hideous colour to another. Every so often the daisies would stop moving and turn to wave at him.

Minerva invariably sent a book, some sort of mystery usually. She had stumbled upon Severus in the staff room some years back, reading a dog-eared copy of Sherlock Holmes. The conversation following had established them both as mystery buffs. Thus every birthday and Christmas the two gave each other books with the expressed understanding that they would be loaned to the other after they were finished.

He chuckled as he tore through the wrapping: red and gold, Gryffindor's house colours, with dozens of Snitches zooming across the package. Leave it to Minerva to remind him her house was currently ahead. He was sure that would change soon, it was still early in the year. Ripping the paper, he was stunned at the book he held, Charlotte Armstrong's novel, *A Dram of Poison*, in reasonably good condition. The book had won the prestigious Edgar Award in 1957 and had long ago gone out of print. He could not imagine the trouble she had gone to, to find it.

Poppy's usual tin of sugar cookies, a green knitted scarf from Molly Weasley, and some rare potions ingredient from Sprout rounded out the remainder of his gifts.

discussions about you through the years in the girls' dorms. Your voice can be an incredible turn-on. Very erotic." Hermione smiled. "But you already knew that, didn't you?"

His smile was smug. "The greasy git a turn-on? The bat of the dungeon?" And in a perfect imitation of Ron, "Snape?"

Hermione winced as she recalled some the names her friends had come up with. "That was very good. Can you do Elmer Fudd?"

"Don't you know we bats have superior hearing? Believe me, I have heard it all. The tights should not have changed anything."

Her voice was soft. "Severus, I have always respected you. The girls are young. It's not seeing you in tights that changed things. It's actually seeing you as a man for the first time, not their teacher, not a war hero, but a man."

"You're fairly intelligent for a witch."

"Thanks a lot." At least his mood seemed to have lightened. She suspected his birthday bothered him unconsciously for some reason, but decided that was a topic for another night. "I believe I still have a birthday request to fulfill."

"Yes, you do." Severus banished the table before moving to the sofa. He spied her book bag on the adjacent chair. "You brought your books?"

"I'll need them in the morning. You did say you had the *whole* night off?" Hermione looked around the sitting room. "No, not in here. The bedroom, I think."

He followed her into the bedroom, the voice in his head making rude comments in anticipation.

"Start a fire while I change. I'll be right out." She quickly kissed him before disappearing into the bathroom

After starting the fire in the empty grate, he lounged in the armchair while he waited, watching the closed door for her return. The door opened slowly to reveal Hermione, dressed in full costume. Severus forgot to breathe as she walked toward him.

"Do you like it?" she asked nervously.

"You are a vision." He voice was rough as he watched her move.

She was wearing some sort of harem costume. Gauzy scarves, that swayed and parted seductively, hung from a metallic belt that rode low on her hips. He watched her walk, bare skin peeking out from between the scarves as she moved. A green jewel was affixed in her navel. Her hair flowed loosely down her back. She wore some type of metallic bra on top; small metal circles dangled from the edges and reflected the firelight. The top was small and allowed a generous view of her breasts. Her feet were bare, but she wore ankle bracelets comprised of the same metal circles. They jingled softly as she moved.

He settled back in his chair, prepared to watch the show.

"Not that chair. *Accio chair*." One of the dining room chairs came flying in from the other room.

"What's wrong with this one?" The armchair he had been sitting in was obviously more comfortable than the dining room chair.

"I can't dance around it. Trust me. Okay?" Severus nodded, curious as to what she had planned. She placed the chair in the middle of the bedroom sitting area, in front of the fire. He settled into it, his long legs stretched out in front of him.

A wave of her hand and the sound of exotic Eastern music filled the air. Hermione stood still for the first few beats, her hands at her sides, her head down. She seemed to come alive as the music started to build. Her hands rose upward, a quick foot twist twirled her around several times, the scarves fluttering as she spun. The metal discs jangled with her movement, reflecting the firelight as she turned.

As she came out of the third spin, her hips came alive. Severus watched, mesmerised, as they moved up and down, back and forth, and around in circles. Her body undulated back and forth. Her skin shimmered in the firelight. She arched back before bending forward, the metal discs making a quiet jingle as she moved.

She grabbed the edges of the scarves that were draped at her sides, crossing her arms back and forth in front of her while continuing to move her hips. Every so often she thrust her upper torso up and back. The movement was smooth and seemed to ripple from top to bottom. He marvelled that she could be so flexible.

A sharp tug pulled the scarves loose from her belt. Her left leg arched up through the remaining scarves before pivoting across her body, sending her into another spin. Severus was treated to the provocative sight of bare skin as the scarves flowed around her.

Once again her hips started to move as the spin ended. She moved toward him, trailing the scarves along his arms as she moved around the right side of the chair. Almost immediately, she appeared on the other side of him, her hips rocking in circles to the heady beat. Standing in front of him, she threw the scarves back over his shoulders and bent forward, shimmying the whole time.

Severus licked his lips as he watched her breasts move back and forth in the tight confines of her bra. His hands gripped the arms of the chair; her movements were sensual and driving him to distraction. He was so busy watching her cleavage, so tantalisingly displayed before him, that he missed the spell she whispered. The scarves trailing along his arms took on a life of their own as they wound around his wrists and forearms, effectively binding him to the chair.

"What...? Hermione!"

Quickly, she moved behind him. He could feel the cool metal of her bra through the linen of his shirt as she leaned against him. Her hands trailed up his arms, her breath hot as she whispered in his ear. "Trust me. Tonight is about your pleasure. Let yourself go." She nipped his earlobe before moving away.

He groaned as she moved to the beat. Her hips held sway as they rolled in circles before dropping and rising a few more times. Hermione arched back and forth several times, each arc going further back and further forward until she was almost bent over. She grabbed two more scarves from her sides and spun in one direction, and then the other.

Severus's breath caught in his throat. Along the line of the metal belt he could see a black string. She had charmed every other scarf to stay in place and only flutter when she spun, so half the scarves floated around her while the other half hid her lower torso. But with the removal of two more scarves he could see the black string. She was wearing The Thong under her costume.

Hermione remained in constant motion. Her hips would roll while her body undulated, the smooth ripple moving from top to bottom and back up again. She snapped the scarves and they disappeared. Once again she danced around his chair, moving in close before dancing away.

He was aroused beyond his limits. He had tried a few reversal spells and was unable to release his hands. He longed to grab the little witch on her next pass by him and ravish her beyond reason.

He moaned softly as she pulled the last two scarves loose. He could see the The Thong in all its glory now. The triangle in front had a small red rose on it and barely covered her thatch of curls. The triangular swatch at the back was even smaller, more the size of a postage stamp, and really didn't serve any purpose other than to arouse him further.

He flexed his fingers, desperate to free his hands and grab her. Surprisingly, the deranged voice in his head had been quiet throughout the entire dance. Severus

suspected it might have passed out from sensory overload. Hermione twirled several times, pulling the scarves around her torso as she moved. Her legs and buttocks were fully exposed to him. She performed a series of leg lifts designed to snap her hips back and forth provocatively as she moved in front of him.

Slowly she dropped to her knees, her arms held outward from her body, shimmying her shoulders and upper body the entire time. He forgot to breathe as he watched her lean back, the back of her head almost touching her heels, and then spring forward. She did a few belly rolls before getting back to her feet and backing up a few steps.

The music swelled as Hermione did a few more shoulder rolls that allowed her body to roll with the beat. She matched the final notes with several quick spins before coming to a stop and allowing the final notes to play out. With her hand on her heart, she finished the dance with the traditional bow. Her hand moved from her heart, to her mouth, to her forehead and rolled outward.

Severus watched as she tried to catch her breath.

Once again she dropped to her knees. This time she moved between his open legs, her hands resting lightly on his thighs. "May I assume you enjoyed my performance?" She gently traced his erection through the fabric of his trousers, smiling as she felt him twitch.

"Untie me, Hermione." His voice was low, and rough, almost a whisper. His eyes appeared darker than usual, his body taut as he strained against his bonds.

"No, I don't think so. I still have a few more surprises planned."

Severus raised one eyebrow but remained silent. She gently massaged his thighs, a mischievous smile on her face as she looked up at him.

He was awed by the vision before him - her hair was spread out wildly around her shoulders. Her skin glowed in the firelight. She watched his eyes as she opened the clasp on the front of the bra, her breasts spilling free of their confinement. He watched the metallic straps slide down her arms, wishing his mouth could follow their path. It dropped to the floor, forgotten. Another spell - and his trousers, boots, socks and briefs disappeared.

He remained still as she leaned forward to unbutton his shirt, the feel of her hardened nipples against the sensitive skin of his bare thighs sending electric shocks straight to his groin. His control was legendary, but he was still a man. He threw his head back and closed his eyes, overwhelmed as she ran her hands up and down his torso before leaning forward to plant a line of feathery soft kisses from his breastbone down.

He was still wearing his shirt, she had left it hanging open as she administered to his skin, sucking and licking random spots on his chest and thighs. His cock twitched, hoping to draw her talented mouth in its direction.

"You left my shirt on." He found he could barely speak.

"I've always thought you look especially sexy in shirtsleeves."

He wondered if he had any higher brain function left that could record that fact for future reference. Probably not, he was impossibly hard and had lost the ability to reason.

"*Accio tray.*"

Severus groaned as a silver tray with chocolate sauce settled at her side. "Hermione, I want to feel you, taste you."

"There will be time for that later. For now, don't think. Just feel."

He watched breathlessly as she dribbled warm chocolate over his already aroused member. He was close to coming. The thought of her licking the chocolate off his body brought him closer to the edge.

Her tongue swirled around his cock, her hands continued to stroke him to a fevered pitch. His breathing was ragged as he rapidly approached his release. He moaned softly as he came, his hips bucking several times before he was spent.

Hermione sat back smiling. She grabbed her wand from the tray and cast a cleaning spell on Severus and herself. As much as she loved chocolate, she had no desire to destroy his furnishings with the messy substance.

Another wave of her wand, "*Finite Incantatem*," and the bonds holding him to the chair disappeared.

Severus felt absolutely boneless. "Come here, I don't think I can move yet."

Hermione banished the tray to the other room before straddling his lap and kissing him. "Happy Birthday!"

He laughed as he pulled her to him in a tight embrace. "Thank you. That was...amazing. I don't think I have ever experienced anything like it before."

"I'm glad."

"Any chance I can get you to dance for me again sometime?"

"I think that can be arranged."

They sat quietly for a few minutes, enjoying the feel of skin on skin.

"While not practical, I do like the looks of this Thong. Where did you get it?"

"It's a Muggle fashion thing."

"Mmm." He shifted in the chair. "Would you mind if we move to the bed? I'm starting to lose the feeling in my legs."

Hermione stretched as she moved off his lap. She smiled as he reached out and caressed her breast.

"*Do you think we can get Dumbledore to make these Thong things part of the required uniform?*" Not only had the annoying voice returned, it appeared to be more deranged than ever.

Severus stretched out on his back and sighed deeply. He would remember this birthday for years to come. He felt the bed dip as Hermione joined him, snuggling into his side.

"You were amazing."

"Well, you gave me a birthday to remember, I just wanted to do the same."

"This definitely surpasses the socks Albus gave me," he said with a chuckle.

"I almost forgot." Hermione sat up and grabbed her wand from the nightstand. "*Accio book bag.*" Her book bag came flying in from the outer sitting room.

"You do know you could probably kill someone with that thing?"

Hermione ignored him as she searched through the bag. "Here it is!" She held up a small package wrapped in silver and gold foil. "Happy Birthday, Severus."

Severus sat up. "Hermione, you didn't have to get me anything. Just having you here tonight was more than enough."

"I wanted to," she said with a shrug.

"Gold and silver? Very diplomatic. It's not socks, is it? Albus didn't tell you I like socks, did he?"

"Do you like socks?"

"Of course not. But he insists on giving me the most hideous pair he can find for every occasion imaginable." He tore through the wrapping and recognised the name of a Wizarding jewelry store on the top. "Hermione."

"Just open it."

He opened the box to find a silver clasp for his cloak inside. It was shaped in the form of a snake, with two small emeralds for eyes.

"Hermione, I can't accept this. You keep telling me you're a poor University student. This must have cost you a fortune." The piece was exquisitely made and must have been very expensive.

"I wanted to get you something special for your birthday. You're always paying for me."

"I seem to be the only one gainfully employed at the moment," he said dryly.

"Please, I want you to have it," she said softly.

"Hermione..."

"Actually, I've managed to save a bit of money lately," she said, cutting him off before he could start lecturing her on the foolishness of such an extravagance. "You can't imagine the amount of money I save in food bills by eating at Hogwarts every weekend. That, and you wouldn't let me pay when we ordered in on Wednesday nights after your dance lessons. You've already told me you won't let me pay for the symposium. I've saved quite a bit. I really should thank you."

Severus laughed. "It's nice to know I'm good for something."

"Most definitely. Your knowledge of potions is quite helpful, too."

"Indeed." He pulled her in for a kiss, his desire for her starting to build again. "Thank you."

He traced a path along the side of her body, stopping when he came to the string crossing her waist. Hermione reached down to remove her thong.

"No, don't."

"It is removable."

"Let me." Moving between her legs, he dipped his head and caught the edge of The Thong between his teeth. His smile was feral as he pulled it off her body. He quickly shed his shirt before returning to the task at hand. "My turn."

It was the best birthday, bar none, he had ever had.

TBC

A/N: Challenge rules can be found following chapter one.

*A repeat of the Note at the beginning, for those of you that missed it and now want to email me and let me know the correct date of Severus's birthday*At the time I started writing this story, Severus's birthday was not known. I chose November 4th as it fit with my timeline - after Hermione's birthday (Sept 19th) and the dance but before the Christmas holidays. JKR has since announced his birthday is Jan. 9th. I had thought about changing it, but that would change other events as well, so I decided to leave it as is.

The book *A Dram of Poison* by Charlotte Armstrong was published in 1956 and won the Edgar Award in 1957 for best mystery. I have never read the book, but the title sounded like something Severus might like to read.

This is the actual synopsis of the book: This book has plenty of intrigue and suspense when poison innocently labeled as olive oil goes astray. But it's also a life-affirming romp with an assortment of delightful characters whom you love enough to return to time and again. A celebration of life and of individuality.

The steps and form for the belly dancing came from this site -[http://groups\(dot\)msn\(dot\)com/Ankestamen/yourwebpage4\(dot\)msnw](http://groups(dot)msn(dot)com/Ankestamen/yourwebpage4(dot)msnw). The dance Hermione did does not follow any particular form, but is more a compilation of several styles.

The traditional bow consists of putting your hand on your heart when you bow (from my heart), standing and putting your hand to your mouth (from my words), and then to the forehead (from my mind), roll the hand off your forehead to the audience (I thank you).

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash glad you're back for her corrections and suggestions. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: the Ministry celebration; a mystery woman; the symposium; the Wolfsbane Potion; Christmas break, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Regards,

Pearle

Wherefore Art Thou, Hermione?

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 34 Wherefore Art Thou, Hermione?

Severus woke to the feeling of a soft warm body pressed up against his side, and the ticklish feeling of hair teasing his skin. He sleepily brushed away the strands of Hermione's hair tickling his nose. He could still smell her lavender shampoo as he turned onto his side and pulled her body closer, enjoying the feel of skin to skin. Her previous scents had utilised fruits and spices, it seemed she had moved on to florals now.

"Good morning, I trust you slept well?"

"Coffmpgy."

"What?"

"Coffee." Came the answer with a little more force.

Severus chuckled as Hermione burrowed under the covers. "Now that, I understood."

Hermione rolled onto her back and looked at him. "Did I ever tell you how much I hate mornings?"

"You never seemed to mind them before. Why now?"

She turned toward him and nuzzled into his chest, her hair flying into his face again. "Because usually it's a weekend, and we lie in. Wha tinee h hiss it?" she asked through her yawn.

"Would you care to try that again? In English this time?" he asked, amused by her annoyance.

"That was English. I asked what time is it?"

"It's not quite six a.m. And while I had the night off, it is back to work this morning. As much as I would like to lie in with you, I need to be at breakfast in the Great Hall in half an hour. What time do your classes start?"

"My first class is at eight." Hermione stretched before hiding back under the covers. "I usually get more than three hours of sleep," she mumbled into the pillow.

Severus smiled. Last night had been amazing. It had been the early hours of the morning when they had finally fallen asleep. "It would seem you require a bit more sleep if you are to function as a human being."

Hermione lifted her head and glared at him. "The ability to awake in the morning does not necessarily correlate with the ability to speak or move. I need coffee."

"Now that was actually concise and clear. What if I Floo the kitchens for a cup of coffee? You can wake up while I take a fast shower," he said with a smirk.

Hermione raised her head and stuck her tongue out before glaring at him.

"Lovely. Very mature."

"I've told you before, I'm not a morning person."

"I suppose I can Apparate you back to Cambridge before my classes start. I would rather you didn't splinch yourself due to lack of concentration. While I prefer certain parts of your anatomy, I would rather you remain whole as opposed to fragmented."

She glanced at the tent his body was creating with the sheets. "Speaking of body parts...?"

Severus shook his head. "A shower, breakfast, classes."

Hermione slid from the bed and headed for the bathroom. "Well, come on. The shower isn't going to take itself." She yawned as she crossed the threshold, mumbling to herself. "A shower, breakfast, and classes. I hate mornings."

Severus smiled as he followed her. There was something to be said for mornings, after all.

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Hermione was in a slightly better mood after showering, the hot water temporarily waking her up. She still had time for breakfast before heading back to school. "I don't know how you get by on so little sleep."

Severus was dressed in full Potions master regalia, his robes billowing out behind him as they walked to the Great Hall. "Years of practice. I don't believe I slept more than two hours a night during your seventh year. Potter was constantly off somewhere getting himself, or you and that idiot Weasley, or all three of you, into some kind of trouble on a regular basis. It was all I could do to patrol the corridors and see that the boy stayed put."

"Constant vigilance." She smiled as the students hurried to move out of their way, remembering what it was like to be here as a student herself.

He opened the door to the Great Hall and gestured for Hermione to enter.

"Ow!"

Hermione tried not to laugh as a young boy, probably a first-year, stood rubbing his head. He had evidently been shocked to see Professor Snape being cordial to someone, and had walked head-on into the doorframe, rather than through it. Severus's hand at the small of her back gently propelled her forward.

"Mr. Wells, you would do well to watch where **you** are going and not what **I** am doing unless we are in class."

"Yes, Professor."

Hermione seated herself between Severus and Professor Flitwick, wondering how the house-elves knew to set an extra place for her. Gratefully, she reached for the coffee carafe, hoping a jolt of caffeine would jump-start her system.

"Good morning, Severus, Hermione. I'm so glad you could join us for breakfast before you leave. I trust you enjoyed your birthday dinner, Severus?"

Hermione tried not to blush as she recalled the events of the previous evening.

"I did, Headmaster. Thank you for asking." Severus sipped at his coffee, not rising to the bait. Years of dealing with Albus allowed him to ignore the innuendo in the man's voice.

"Hermione, we never did get the chance to talk last night. Are you heading right back to Cambridge or do you have time this morning?" Minerva asked, taking the seat on the far side of Albus.

"I need to get back, I have classes this morning, but I will be here over the weekend for the Ministry Ball. Perhaps we can talk then. Is there something specific you needed to speak to me about?"

"No, child, nothing specific." She gave Severus an appraising look. "I just want to ask you a few questions about your upcoming apprenticeship. It can wait until we have more time."

Severus glared at the older witch. He had already assured her he would not spirit Hermione away. Education was important; he had no intentions of hindering her path to a Master position.

Hermione glanced at the time. "I really do need to be going."

"I shall walk you to the Apparition point."

"Albus, Minerva, Professor." Hermione nodded as she left. They exited through the back door of the Great Hall. "Where's Remus?"

Severus gestured to a heavy wood door that was partially hidden in the shadows a few feet further down the corridor. The door opened out to a small walkway leading to the main gates.

"Last night was a full moon. Potter should be here today to cover his classes. If the next two trials go well, I believe we will be ready to test the potion over Christmas break."

Hermione felt the tingle of magic on her skin as Severus cast "Do Not Notice" on them. "So, I guess I will see you Saturday."

One eyebrow rose questioningly. "Are you too tired for dinner tonight?"

"Tonight?" she asked, confusion evident in her voice.

"Yes, I understand if you would rather have a quiet evening alone, but I thought we could have an early dinner and maybe go over a few of the calculations that may need adjusting. Nothing too strenuous," he said with a smirk.

"But you had last night off."

"That was my birthday. Wednesday is my night off."

"Pizza Magic?"

Severus sighed wearily. "Fine, Pizza Magic. Hold on tight and I will Apparate us together."

Hermione held up her hand. "That's all right. I'm awake. You go ahead, classes start in a few minutes. You've got students to terrorise," she said with a grin.

"Very funny. You're sure you're awake enough to Apparate?" He would rather not see her splinch herself.

"I'm fine. I'll see you tonight." Hermione gave him a quick kiss before stepping back and Disapparating.

He smiled as he walked back to the castle, thinking about the previous night; his birthday had been most memorable: Hermione, her belly dancing, the chocolate...

"*Don't forget The Thong*, the deranged voice in his head reminded him.

Yes, The Thong. He wondered if she owned any other "Thongs". It was something he would have to remember to ask her.

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Hermione pulled out her burgundy dress robes and held them up in front of her.

"*Nice, very nice lines. You'll look attractive*," commented her mirror. Only the mirror attached to the inner door of her wardrobe was still charmed to speak, the rest had been quieted by a series of complicated wards and charms.

She didn't want to look "attractive". She wanted to look fabulous tomorrow night. The robes joined the other discarded articles of clothing littering her bed.

"*What was wrong with those robes? I thought they were the nicest set you've looked at so far*."

Hermione eyed the dress hanging to the side. Gold lamé. It looked like liquid gold. She would certainly stand out in a crowd in that. The cut was a cross between a Muggle

gown and Wizarding dress robes. The neckline was cut deeper than she usually wore, showing off her cleavage to its fullest.

She was going with Severus. They seemed to attract attention wherever they went. If people were going to be looking at her, she might as well give them something to look at.

"The gold lamé it is," she said, holding the dress up.

The mirror gave out a low whistle. *"Who are you trying to catch by wearing that number?"*

The witch smiled. "Not exactly catch, more like entice."

*"I should say that will do it, dear"*

Hermione hummed as she packed her bag. Wednesday night she had asked Severus what he was planning to wear to the Ministry dance. He had given her an odd look before commenting that he really hadn't thought about it.

*"I suppose my usual dress robes. Why?"*

*"I just don't want to clash with whatever you're wearing," she said with a shrug.*

*"Christmas in November? You wear Gryffindor red and I wear Slytherin green?"*

*Hermione smiled. "Want to confuse everyone? You wear red and gold and I'll wear green and silver."*

*Severus snorted. "You're too short to be me."*

*"You're wearing green, then?" She vaguely remembered his robes from past celebrations. They were... dark. "Green or black."*

*"They're dress robes. Black, of course. And my new silver clasp," he answered, a slight smile pulling at the corners of his mouth.*

*"I'm glad you liked it."*

*"Am I to be tortured with you decked out in Gryffindor red and gold all night?" he asked sardonically.*

*"We'll see. I did promise Minerva..."*

*He glared at her before directing their conversation back to the modifications for the Wolfsbane Potion again.*

Crookshanks jumped lightly on the bed and butted his head against his Mistress's hand. "Are you up for a weekend at Hogwarts, boy?" The half-Kneazle allowed Hermione to scratch under his neck before moving out of reach.

While incredibly independent, he felt she had neglected him all those times she'd left him alone in the flat. Of course weekends at Hogwarts had gone a long way to soothing his ruffled fur. It was not that he minded the tall, dark human that visited his Mistress. He felt justifiably annoyed the times he was left alone. More so when she returned, smelling of him and Hogwarts.

Crooks butted against her again, purring loudly as she scratched him. "I just have a paper to drop off with my instructor in the morning. Then we can head to the castle."

Once again he moved out of reach and started to casually groom himself. It wouldn't do for him to lose the upper hand.

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Severus adjusted the clasp at his throat. He was pleased with Hermione's present. It was one of the few times in his life someone had given him something other than books or socks. It was a feeling Hermione would have appreciated having received book tokens from Flourish and Blotts as Christmas presents for most of the ten years she had been friends with Harry and Ron.

He glanced at the closed bathroom door. What was she doing in there? He wasn't in any particular hurry to attend the Ministry dance, fundraiser actually, but the sooner they arrived the sooner they could leave.

"Hermione, I will wait for you in the sitting room."

"I'll be out in a minute." She took a calming breath and studied her image in the mirror. Her hair had been charmed off her face, but still hung loosely down her back. The dress hugged her bust before draping over her hips, the neckline cut lower than she normally wore. The gold gave her skin a warm glow while accenting the colour of her hair. With a final nod she went out to meet Severus.

Standing in the doorway, Hermione struck a dramatic pose. "Ta da!"

Severus turned to look at her and stopped short. "You look... Why don't we just stay here?" he asked silkily.

"I'll take that as a compliment. We'll be back soon enough; in the mean time, I would like to show off my dress, and you."

"Well then, shall we?" He offered her his arm, thinking back to past Ministry affairs; while he would have liked to miss the event entirely, it pleased him to have her on his arm.

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The dance was in full swing when Hermione and Severus entered the Great Hall. The main tables had been replaced with a large dance floor surrounded by small, intimate tables for two. The Hall was lit with thousands of floating candles, the glow from the flickering light soft and warm.

It was a replay of their entrance to the Hallowe'en dance, all over again. Conversation stilled as they walked by, only to start again with fervour as they passed. The two were a striking contrast: Severus, swathed in black on black on black and highlighted with sterling silver accents; Hermione, looking like liquid gold, the metallic threads reflecting the flickering flames.

She led Severus over to the far corner where Harry, Ginny, and Remus were standing. Severus excused himself, barely waiting for greetings to be exchanged.

"Is everything all right?"

"Of course, Harry. Why?"

Harry shrugged and nodded toward Severus.

Remus patted him on the back. "Don't worry, Harry, that's about as friendly as Severus gets sometimes. Don't take it personally. It's a tribute to Hermione that he's here at

all."

Severus watched Hermione laughing with her friends. Ron had arrived with a tall, willowy blonde draped over his arm. Actually, the young woman appeared to be clinging to his person, her arms wrapped around the young man, her body flush with his side. Even her long flowing tresses seemed to wrap themselves around the redhead.

He chuckled darkly as he dubbed the clinging witch "Ivy" in his mind.

"Severus, my boy. Glad to see you here."

Albus was twinkling with renewed zeal in the flickering light, Molly and Arthur Weasley with him. Again, greetings were exchanged.

The tedium of greeting people and exchanging small talk was another reason he normally avoided these functions. He wondered how long would be deemed acceptable by Hermione before he could sprint her back to the dungeons and some private time.

"*What do you think she's got on under that gown? I don't see a line anywhere.*" The voice in his head was once again contemplating Hermione's undergarments, or possible lack thereof.

"...Christmas?"

Arthur's voice pierced his thoughts: he was smiling, looking at him questioningly, obviously waiting for an answer to a question Severus had not heard. He'd heard Lupin's name at some point. That much he was sure about. Christmas? It must be about the Wolfsbane he decided. "Yes, of course."

"Wonderful, then we'll look forward to seeing you both there." Molly smiled as she patted his hand. "Oh, look Arthur, there's Tonks. Didn't you want to ask her about the 'recording player' she had the other day? We'll be back in a minute, Severus. Oh, Tonks. Tonks." Molly called after the young Auror, Arthur trailing behind his wife.

"Seeing us? What did I just agree to? Wasn't he asking me about Lupin and the Wolfsbane?" What the bloody hell had the man asked him? What did he say yes to?

Albus chuckled. "I believe you agreed to Christmas breakfast at The Burrow. I'm sure Hermione will be thrilled. Ah, there is the Minister now. If you'll excuse me, I believe I have a few issues I need to annoy him about."

Severus glared at those around him. How did he let himself get trapped into these things? *Well,* he thought with a sigh, *it would have only been a matter of time before Hermione mentioned Christmas breakfast, anyway. What the hell was happening to him?* Twenty minutes was long enough. Where was Hermione? He was ready to leave.

"Severus!"

"Aldrena?"

The witch's eyes seemed to devour him. "Where have you been hiding yourself? You never called me back."

"I've been busy." Where the hell was Hermione? Severus backed up a step; was Aldrena leering at him? The room had filled up considerably since they had arrived. He caught a flash of gold in the far corner and the all too familiar face of the boy-who-lived-just-to-annoy-him. Potter and Weasley must be holding her captive, he decided.

"Your little playmate seems to be occupied. How about a whirl with a mature witch and not some child?" Her hands reached for his.

He wasn't sure if she only meant to pull him onto the dance floor or out of the room entirely. "Stop, you foolish woman." His voice was low but seemed to cut through the noise surrounding them.

"I thought I meant something to you!" Her voice had a petulant ring to it and was growing in volume. There was no mistaking the allegation of abandonment in her words. "How could you do this to me?"

"Aldrena, it was one date, a year ago." How could she possibly make something out of one date?

A crowd had started to form as the witch's voice rose in sorrow. "But I thought you cared. Did what we have mean nothing to you? Were you just toying with me?"

His eyes held a dangerous glint. Before he could speak, a voice rang out from behind the woman.

"Apologise to the nice witch, Severus. We wouldn't want her to think poorly of you now, would we?"

Aldrena turned, her smile cold as she eyed Hermione. "I do not believe this matter concerns you."

"Oh, but I think it does." Hermione reached for the buttons on the witch's robes. "Does yours say the same thing mine does?"

"Does my what say what?" Angrily she batted Hermione's hands away.

"Your brand. Severus marked my heart as his sometime ago. I was wondering if he did the same to you." Hermione smiled sweetly at the woman, her hand on her heart.

Severus raised one brow, barely hiding his smug expression. He extended his hand to Hermione. "Dance?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

"Aldrena." He nodded to the woman as he swept Hermione into his arms and out onto the dance floor. Aldrena stood wide-eyed as they moved away. Severus thought he saw tendrils of smoke coming off the angry witch. He smiled at Hermione. "I branded your heart?"

"Yep, it says 'Prop of SS'. Should I have told her where I put my brand?" she asked wickedly. "Though it might only read 'Proper' right about now."

His sudden laugh startled those dancing around them, most not used to sound of the Potions master's deep baritone.

Hermione enjoyed making him laugh. It made her feel good to help him let loose every so often.

Severus tightened his arm around her waist, pulling her closer. "Any chance I can tempt you with a walk in the moonlight?"

"I think so."

Ron and Harry watched Severus and Hermione slip out the side door. "Can you believe someone actually challenged Hermione for the git? And I thought Hermione was mental for caring for him, wonder what that says for her?" Ron shook his head in disbelief before pouring a second glass of punch.

"It's a world gone mad." Harry noticed Ron's current love interest waving at them, her hair no longer blonde, but now fuchsia. "Ron, I think Tiny is trying to get your attention."

"Tina, Harry, not Tiny."

Severus didn't seem to hear him. "It's my fault. I heard the rod fall; I should have known this could happen." He ran his hand distractedly through his hair, his entire focus

on the unconscious woman in the bed.

Albus moved to his side; gently he laid a hand on his shoulder. "Severus, you probably saved her by cushioning the blow, but we really should wait..."

The dark man threw his hand off. "Leave me alone, Albus. I'm not leaving. Go. Do what you have to. But let me be."

The pain in the Potions master's voice drew Harry into the room. He stood just inside the doorway, out of the path of the Healers and other staff that hurried in and out of the room. Hermione was still, her skin as pale as the sheets she lay upon. Harry could see the gentle rise and fall of her chest, the only sign she was still with them.

There were several Healers and Apprentices standing around her. Various pieces of equipment floated around and near the bed.

One of the more advanced young Healers looked around the room. He could feel the power, the magic, surging through the air. There was something here, something he couldn't name. He looked to his mentor, surprised to see the older wizard suddenly stop and close his eyes.

Poppy looked at the man in confusion. She had been assisting the Healer until his sudden stillness took her by surprise. "Healer Seaton? Is there something wrong?"

"I haven't felt such a force in almost fifty years." Healer Seaton raised his head and stared into the black eyes of the Potions master. "You gave her the necklace." It was a statement of fact.

"The necklace; it's glowing." Poppy's voice was barely a whisper as she looked at Hermione's necklace. The leaf glowed with an ethereal light. "What does it mean?"

The Healer continued to look at the dark man. "Did you know what it was when you purchased it?"

Severus's voice was strained with worry. "I have no idea what it means. I'll answer whatever questions you have later. Please, just help her."

Satisfied, the old man nodded and turned back to the bed. It was important that the necklace had not been purchased with the intent to enslave; though that type of enchantment rarely gave off the power and purity of energy he was feeling. The dark wizard and this witch, they were the source of the elemental magic he was feeling. It seemed to electrify the very air in the room.

"Can't you just cast *'Energate'* and wake Hermione up?" The longer his best friend remained unconscious, the more worried Harry grew.

"I'm sorry, Mr Potter. It doesn't work that way. *'Energate'* would work if the source of her injury were caused by a hex. Unfortunately, Miss Granger has suffered a strong blow to the head. Even magic cannot reverse the effects of a coma."

Severus jumped up. "Coma? What do you mean coma? She's going to be all right, isn't she? Hermione. Hermione, you've got to get up."

Harry had never seen Severus lose control before. He watched as the man's expression changed from outrage to fear.

"You've got to help her! She'll regain consciousness, won't she?"

"Only time will tell. I'm afraid there is nothing more we can do, Professor. Someone, you I assume, is holding her here. Three of the most powerful wizards alive are in this room, yet it is from you alone that I feel the bond. Time will tell." The ancient wizard bowed his head and cast several spells at once. "She is resting comfortably for now. I will check on her in a few hours."

"Comfortably? You can't leave her like this." Severus moved to the side of the bed and grabbed Hermione's hand. "Hermione, you've got to wake up. It's time to go home. Hermione, can you hear me?"

Harry looked away. The pain and anguish in Severus's voice tore at his heart.

"We have done all that we can, Professor. It is up to her now."

"What did you mean when you said you felt a bond?" Harry looked from Professor Snape to Hermione. Her necklace continued to glow. "Do you mean like...soul mates?"

"Not exactly. It's not as easily defined as that. It is one heart calling to another. The Professor's heart, his intentions, must have been pure and honourable when he purchased the pendant. I have seen a few of Trelawney's pendants over the years, but I have never felt such power, such purity, as the surge of magic that is present tonight." Healer Seaton gestured to Severus. "He is keeping her here; it is their bond that keeps her grounded to this body. It will be up to her whether she chooses to return or not." Quietly, the Healer turned and left the room.

"Poppy, will you please see to the others waiting outside? Harry, I must ask you to wait outside, too. I need to speak to Professor Snape alone for a minute." Albus waited until Harry and Poppy left before turning to Severus. "Severus, she's a strong woman, a powerful witch. She will come through this, I'm sure of it."

"She looks like she's sleeping, Albus. I can't lose her. I won't." Severus snorted. "Pure and honourable. Bloody hell, don't they know who they're talking about? That's the same type of drivel Trelawney was handing me when I purchased the pendant." Severus pulled his chair closer to the bed and sat down, Hermione's hand still clasped in his.

"I'll stay with Hermione. Why don't you go get something to eat? You need to keep your strength up." Albus had never seen Severus in such a state before.

"You'll need to find someone to take my classes, Albus." His eyes never left Hermione.

"Severus, you can't stay here."

"I'm not leaving. I need to be here when she wakes up." Hermione would wake up, she had to, and the first person she was going to see was he. He'd made a bargain with the devil when he'd joined Voldemort; he would do whatever he had to now, pray to whatever god or deity that would listen, to get her back.

"I'll bring you back something to eat." Albus didn't want to press the point; first, he needed to speak with Healer Seaton.

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Harry stopped just inside the door.

"What is it, Potter?" Three hours had passed since he had laid Hermione on the cot, and she still hadn't moved.

"I brought you some tea and a few books." Harry hesitantly handed the books to Severus.

"You brought me books? What kind of joke is this, Potter?" It felt good to lash out at the young man. He was strung so tight, he felt as if he would fall apart any minute.

Harry gulped nervously. "A lot of Muggle doctors believe people in comas can hear everything that goes on around them. The Healer said your...force was keeping her here. I just thought that if you...read to her. If Hermione heard your voice, it might help."

Severus looked at the book in his hand, *Moste Potente Potions*. "She can hear me?"

Harry shrugged. "That's what I've heard. I want my best friend back, Professor."





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"No! Stay back! NO!" Hermione screamed as she suddenly thrashed about in the bed. Her eyes were still closed, her body jerking back and forth.

Bells were ringing. Severus could hear people running in the corridor towards her room. Hermione gave out one last blood-curdling scream before lying still again.

"NO! Harry, move!" Hermione had started screaming again. She seemed to be reliving the final battle. "Ron, don't! Wait for the signal. NO!"

Hermione turned toward him again. Her breath came out in a shaky whisper, her voice rusty from screaming minutes before. "Severus?"

"I'm here, Hermione. I'm here."

"What?" Now it seemed to be Severus's turn to be confused. Were comas contagious?

Hermione covered his hand with her own, the effort of speaking still taking a toll on her weakened body. Her answer was so quiet, Severus almost missed it.

Severus thought he heard the phrase, "It took you long enough." But he couldn't be sure. She seemed to be sleeping again.

Severus dropped wearily in his chair. He was still holding Hermione's hand. She was going to be all right.

"You're staying here tonight, Professor?"

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"My head hurts. Actually, I've got quite a headache. Let me sleep for a few hours, and then we can leave. I'm glad I finished my paper Friday, I wouldn't want to worry about

it tonight."

"Your paper?"

"Mhmm, for class Tuesday. I've got a study group tomorrow afternoon and two classes to revise for tomorrow night. It was either do the paper Friday, or go home early tonight. I'm just glad it's done already."

"Hermione, I know you think it's Sunday, but you've been... unconscious for a bit."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's not Sunday night."

Hermione looked at him, puzzled. "Well if it's not Sunday, what day is it?"

He wasn't sure if he should be telling her this. The last thing he wanted to do was upset her. "Why don't you get some sleep and we'll talk in the morning?"

"What day is it?"

Severus sighed. "It's Tuesday."

"Tuesday? How could I lose two whole days? It was just Sunday morning a few hours ago." Hermione suddenly looked at Severus. Really looked at him. The dark heavy stubble on his face, the shadows under his eyes, the almost bruised-looking skin. His hair, standing up in spots. His clothes, wrinkled. "It really is Tuesday, isn't it? Have you been here the whole time?"

"I wanted to make sure I was here when you woke up. I told you, you're mine. Where else would I be? Besides, who else would put up with me?"

"I think I could come up with a few names."

For the first time since the whole nightmare began, Severus laughed. "Go to sleep. I'm not going anywhere. I'll be here when you wake up."

Hermione snuggled down in the bed. "Say it again."

Severus knew what she wanted to hear. "I'll be here when you wake up."

"Severus."

He leaned forward and chastely kissed her. "I love you."

This time there was no mistaking her comment. "It's about time. Mmm, I love you, too." She was asleep almost as soon as the last word left her lips.

Severus watched her even breathing. For the first time in days, he closed his eyes and didn't worry about what the morning would bring. For a change, life was truly worth living. He fell asleep to the sound of her breathing and her words of love echoing in his heart.

TBC

A/N: Both sites list information on the moon cycles. The Moon is full, completely circular, for only one to two days. I'm assuming Remus would therefore be unable to teach for roughly three days, more or less. [http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/moon\\_phases.html](http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/moon_phases.html)

<http://www.madsci.org/posts/archives/jun99/928930010.As.r.html>

The herbs mentioned are real. The information was taken from this site: [http://www.greatestherbsonearth.com/nsp\\_herb\\_supplements.htm](http://www.greatestherbsonearth.com/nsp_herb_supplements.htm)

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never ending supply of commas. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: the symposium; the Wolfsbane Potion; Christmas break, and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

## A Little Knowledge Is a Dangerous Thing

*Chapter 35 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

### Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 35. A Little Knowledge Is a Dangerous Thing

Severus came awake slowly. He massaged the kink in his back, growling as the sounds from the corridor intruded on his sleep. "What are they doing out there?"

"Good morning."

He turned toward a smiling Hermione. The last three days had taken their toll on him. He had been running on pure adrenaline, his fear carrying him along. Now that he knew Hermione was going to be OK, he gave in to the weariness that had overtaken him.

Even a full night's sleep, something he was not that well acquainted with normally, did not fully recharge his energies. Lack of sleep and worry had left bruising shadows under his eyes, his face still looking haggard, his colouring more pale than usual. Only his eyes reflected his joy as he watched Hermione stretch.

"Good morning. You appear to be in good spirits. How do you feel?" He stood next to the bed studying her. Her colour was high, her eyes bright; it was hard to believe she had been in such dire peril for the last few days.

Hermione yawned. "As long as I don't move too much, I'm fine. Though I've really got a headache. Can you get me a potion so we can get going?"

"Going?"

"Going. Out of here. Home. I've already missed three days of classes. I need to contact my instructors and find out what assignments I missed. I wonder if Susan has the notes from Advanced Charms?" She held her head as she pulled herself up into a semi-sitting position, pain shooting through her brain. Wincing, she tried to find a comfortable position. "You don't have any headache potion on you, do you?"

"I highly doubt they're going to let you leave today. Especially if you're still suffering from the fall." Severus smiled; he had no doubt she was probably weeks ahead in all her classes already. Missing a few days would not cause any great hardship. He gave her an appraising look. "I assume you've already read your textbooks from cover to cover. How far ahead on the assignment syllabus are you? This is November. Would through the end of December be an accurate assumption?"

"That's not the point. I normally revise after each class. New material is presented, as well as assignments added." Hermione tried to glare at him, the pain in her head short-circuiting her action. "Am I that predictable?"

"You were my student for seven years. I have never known you to be unprepared in anything you undertake. I would expect nothing less than your usual thoroughness and attention to detail. It's what makes you, you." She had taken a hard hit to the head; he had expected her to have a headache, but he was not pleased to see her grimace in pain. "I don't understand why they have not given you a potion to alleviate the pain. Let me see if I can find the Healer."

A smiling witch in bright pink robes strolled into the room. "Good morning. How are we today?"

Severus glared at the young woman. "How are *we*? Madam, your health does not concern me in the least. However, Miss Granger is suffering from a severe headache. Why has no one administered a headache potion?"

"What a Grumpy Gus! Take a deep breath and relax. I'll just have a look at our little patient..." The young witch smiled at the dour man, not realising she was taking her life in her hands.

"What did you say?" The Potions master's eyes glinted dangerously, his hand reflexively closing around the wand in his pocket.

"Belinda, you are needed in room 10." Healer Seaton stood in the doorway of Hermione's room, his timing diverting a disaster and saving Severus from life imprisonment in Azkaban for using an Unforgivable on the young woman.

Severus glared at the young nurse as she scurried out, before turning his full attention to Hermione and Healer Seaton.

"How are you feeling this morning, Miss Granger?" Healer Seaton ran his wand over Hermione, noting the changes in her aura.

"Other than my head is killing me? Not too bad. Can I please get a headache potion so I can go home?" Hermione held her head as she eased back.

"Miss Granger, please lay perfectly still while I perform this next set of tests. Your movements may throw the results off." The Healer chanted softly as he performed a series of intricate wand movements.

Severus stood quietly on the side, his weariness forgotten. He knew the spell the Healer was casting. He held his breath, watching the man for a sign. "Any internal bleeding on the brain? Is her skull intact?"

Healer Seaton looked up. "It would seem you are rather well acquainted with medicine, Professor. Everything seems to be in order. No bleeding, no hair-line fractures, though we normally do not discuss the possibility of such in front of the patients." The wizard gave Hermione a reassuring smile. "It would seem the headache is the result of a bruise to your brain from the fall. With rest, I would assume you will be able to attend classes again on Monday, but I am afraid I must restrict your ability to Apparate for the next two weeks, longer if the headache persists. Let me see about getting you a draught to ease the pain."

"Why has she not been given one before this?" To allow someone to continue in pain when a simple headache potion would ease the ache was inexcusable.

"The delay in administering the potion allows us to determine if something more serious is occurring. Up until last night, Miss Grange was unable to tell us how she felt. Taking a potion to relieve a symptom can mask a more serious problem sometimes. I am happy to say that is not the case here." Healer Seaton finished his exam, marking the results on a file hovering to the side. "If you continue to improve at this rate, I believe you may leave tomorrow. Provided you continue to rest, of course."

"Tomorrow!" That was *not* acceptable. She had three days of work to catch up on as it was.

"I'll see that she complies." Severus's tone booked no room for argument from the young woman currently staring daggers at him.

"I will forward the chart to Madam Pomfrey when Miss Granger is released. She can do the follow-up exam. I'm always available by Floo connection if you have any questions." Healer Seaton nodded, satisfied Professor Snape would oversee the recovery. He would have liked to have questioned him further about the Trelawney pendant, but the Professor had not been too forthcoming about the circumstances of its purchase to begin with; he highly doubted he would care to discuss its purchase now that Miss Granger had regained consciousness.

The Healer's belief that Severus was not aware of the pendant's "communication" properties when he'd purchased it was confirmed by Headmaster Dumbledore the first

night. The Headmaster had sought him out with questions as to Miss Granger's condition. A rather informative discussion had followed, shedding light on several questions for both parties.

"You'll what?" Hermione held her head as she tried to sit up.

"Hermione, stop. Lie still until they bring in the potion." Even as he spoke, an older witch appeared in the doorway bearing a small blue phial.

"Headache that bad? Here, this will fix you up. Easy now." The witch helped Hermione into a semi-sitting position and waited while she drank the phial. "Should only take a minute to act. Just close your eyes and rest, dear."

"Thank you." Hermione gingerly lowered her body back down. Even breathing seemed to agitate the pain in her head.

The woman nodded to Hermione, casting a curious glance at Severus on her way out of the room. She'd had to trade two late shifts with Rolanda to get this rotation today. Hermione and Professor Snape had been the talk of the break room for the last three days.

Those that had seen the man -- he'd not left the room since he had brought the injured witch in Sunday afternoon -- had commented on his unusual devotion to the young woman. While speculating about their relationship, who should show up but the-boy-that-lived-to-save-the-world *again*! The nurse laughed. Cleo was going to be so upset she chose this week to go on holiday and miss all the action.

Severus watched Hermione's chest; her breathing had eased. The lines around her eyes had lessened as the pain receded. He settled himself into the chair he had vacated earlier, prepared to watch for any signs of problems.

"Why don't you go back to Hogwarts? Take a shower; get something proper to eat; maybe even take a nap in a real bed?"

"Trying to get rid of me already?"

"I have a date with a nice young Healer I met yesterday. If he sees you here, it will scare him off."

Severus smiled. "Feeling better, are we?"

"Yeah, the pain has died down some, but I really am tired." Hermione yawned; she'd been lying in a bed for three days, what was there to be tired about? "Go ahead. I'll be here when you get back. Where else am I going to go?"

"Are you sure? I suppose I could do with a proper set of robes." Severus brushed the crease of his trouser leg. He was still wearing the clothes he'd put on Sunday morning: a dark charcoal-grey shirt and a pair of black linen trousers, not a robe in sight. "My cleaning spell is starting to wear a little thin. Maybe next time you decide to put yourself in mortal peril I will remember to grab a set of robes."

"Severus. I'm sorry I..."

"Stop, I was joking. It was an accident. I'm grateful you're going to be fine. Magic can do many things, but it still can't unlock the mysteries of the brain. I have you back. That's all that matters." Frank and Alice Longbottom jumped into his mind. They were long-time residents on an upper floor of this very hospital. He tried hard to suppress a shudder when he thought the possibility of Hermione never regaining consciousness had been an option.

"It felt like I was floating. I could hear you talking to me, but I couldn't answer. I tried several times, but the words wouldn't come. Severus, thank you. I...I never felt like I was alone; I was scared, but I could hear you; I could feel you nearby." Hermione looked at him in wonder, awe in her voice. "You were here the whole time."

Severus shrugged, still trying to come to terms with his feelings and the emotions of the last few days. "Where else would I be? There are just a few items I need to clear up before we return to my quarters."

"Return to your quarters?"

"Yes. My quarters. You are staying with me until Monday. At which time, if Poppy clears you, I will Apparate you back to Cambridge." Where did she think she was going to go? There was no way he was going to let her out of his sight until he was sure she was well again.

"Thank you, but I have classes to catch up on, things I need to take care of. I need to get back to my flat. I promise I'll take it easy. I can't go back to Hogwarts with you."

"There is no argument. You can and you will. I can pick up whatever you need from your flat. I'll stop by Cambridge, if you like, and alert your professors as to your condition."

Harry cleared his throat.

Severus sighed. He hadn't heard the young man enter the room.

"Actually, I was thinking I could do that this afternoon. Or if you would rather..." Harry didn't think Snape could be diplomatic under the best of circumstances. Hermione had already told him about the altercation between Snape and Rancine. Bringing those two together again would be like throwing a lit match at a Weasley Wizarding Firecracker. Just sit back and watch the fireworks.

Potter to the rescue again. Would he ever be rid of the boy? No, that wasn't fair. Wasn't he thinking yesterday he owed Hermione's return to Potter? "I suppose it would be prudent to let Pot...Harry speak with your instructors."

Hermione turned wide eyes from Severus to Harry and back again. "Severus? Harry? Am I hallucinating again?"

Harry smiled at Severus, amused that he still had trouble saying his name. "You've been practising."

The dark man ignored his comment. "Will you remain with Hermione until I return? I have a few things to take care of before bringing her back to Hogwarts." There was also a certain witch he wanted to speak to about a necklace, but there was no need to mention that at the moment.

Harry settled into the side chair. "Sure, it's early. I can speak with her professors after lunch."

"Very well."

Hermione watched the polite interaction between Severus and Harry. "Hello? Remember me? What the hell is going on between you two?"

"Going on? I merely asked...Harry..." Severus gritted his teeth; he was determined to be civil. Potter's assistance was the main reason for Hermione's recovery; she as much said it was his voice that helped her. He would never have sat reading to her if Potter hadn't told him people in comas could still hear those around them. Potter had even supplied Potions journals and texts to read. "...To keep you company until I return."

"With a little more practise, you might even be able to say my name without clenching your teeth." Harry ignored Severus's glare. "You can still call me Potter, Professor. I'd be willing to settle for just civilized between us."

Harry had hated Snape throughout his years at Hogwarts; their work in defeating Voldemort had forged a hard-earned respect between the two. Neither one was particularly friendly toward the other, but they had called a truce on outright attacks. Hermione's relationship with Snape had not made things any easier, but watching the

man the last few days had changed quite a few of Harry's opinions of him.

It had shocked and amazed both Ron and him that Snape refused to leave Hermione's side. Over the last three days, Harry had brought the dark wizard tea and sandwiches when Snape refused to leave the room, instead reading almost continuously to the young witch, saying he had to be there when she woke up.

He only used the loo when either Harry or the Headmaster could sit at Hermione's bedside, claiming they were the only two he could trust to watch Hermione in his absence, and even then he was only gone minutes at a time, demanding to know what had happened while he was gone. Had the Healer been in? Did Hermione move? Was there any change? At first Harry thought Snape had gone around the bend, but now he understood just how much Hermione meant to him, that their relationship was real and not some Slytherin attempt at revenge on the dream team.

"Go ahead, sir; take your time. I won't leave."

Severus nodded. He bent over and gently kissed the top of Hermione's head. "Do not get up without assistance. You don't need another hit on the head. You may have brains to spare, but there is no need to shake them up any further. I will return shortly."

"Bat!" Hermione smiled up at him.

Severus cocked one eyebrow. "Know-it all."

Harry smiled; those were endearments?

Hermione's laugh followed Severus out the door.

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Severus straightened the collar of his shirt, aligning the top button with those of his robes. It felt good to take a hot shower and put on clean clothes. He was still worried about Hermione, but he was sure Potter would watch her while he was gone.

The partially brewed Wolfsbane potions had been placed in stasis, the ingredients and tools cleaned and put away. He suspected it had been Albus's doing. The house-elves would never have cleaned the lab of their own initiative; in fact, they were forbidden to enter his quarters without his expressed approval.

He'd made a few arrangements to see to Hermione's comfort while she recovered. A wizard Severus had never met had been taking over his classes. The man seemed to be adhering to the class schedule he had set out at the beginning of term. He had even asked Albus if the wizard could take his classes through the rest of the week so he could remain with Hermione. *"I must be losing my mind,"* he thought. He had never allowed anyone to substitute for him. The one time Albus had taught his classes had been a disaster, and here he was asking Albus if the instructor could stay till the end of the week?

"So now what? She's coming to stay here. Do you two set up quarters together? You told her you loved her, what's the next step? Her ruddy cat is already at home here at the castle, how much longer before she calls this home, too?" This was not the deranged voice in his head he was used to hearing. This one sounded suspiciously like his father. He supposed it was really his subconscious trying to get him to face facts.

Severus cast a full cushioning charm over the stone floors, one that would activate if someone fell. He was not about to risk permanent injury to Hermione again. The truth was, he liked having her here. He liked waking up beside her. He felt a sense of peace, when he'd look up from his marking, to watch her lost in her studies, a quill stabbed haphazardly through her hair, books spread out around her, parchments and ink bottles spilling out of her book bag.

He'd told her he loved her. It was probably evident for a while now, as plain as the nose on his face. Well, nothing could be that obvious. He looked around. He hoped she would call this home one day; maybe after she finished her apprenticeship.

With someone else.

The scowl returned to his face. Best not to think about that right now. He had one more "errand" to run before he returned to St Mungo's. Leaving through a side door of the castle, he walked to the Apparition point and Apparated to Diagon Alley. He had a few questions for Trelawney about the pendant she'd sold him.

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Severus Apparated to the side alley next to the Enchanted Leaf. A glance inside the store showed the main showroom empty. Through the beaded curtain at the back, a man, roughly his age, could be seen working at a desk. There was no sign of the witch that had sold him the pendant.

The wizard smiled as he greeted the Potions master. "Good afternoon, Professor Snape. How can I be of service today?"

Severus raised one brow in question. "Have we met?"

The man laughed, his manner open and easy. "No, Professor. I apologise for the familiarity, but I doubt there is a witch or wizard alive that doesn't know you, either from your long tenure at Hogwarts or the remarkable defeat of You-Know-Who."

It was one of side effects of being well-known, something that annoyed him greatly. Severus nodded. He drew the receipt for the pendant from an inner pocket. "I would like to speak with Senalda Trelawney."

The shift in the man's demeanour was less than subtle. "My sister? I'm afraid she no longer attends to business matters. Perhaps I can help you with something?"

"Your sister? She sold me an Emerald Leaf pendant two months ago. I have several questions concerning the pendant. When do you expect her to return?"

"Two months ago? That's impossible. It's been almost a year since Senalda has worked in the shop. However, if you have a problem with the piece, we will be glad to exchange it. We fully stand behind all our work." The wizard took a step back, his hand moving into his pocket as if he expected trouble.

Severus ignored the man's stance and laid the parchment on the counter. "I have a receipt with her initials on it. Do you see the date, September 15th, 2001?"

"There must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake. Your sister sold me a pendant made by your grandfather. The bloody pendant glowed for three days before it returned to normal. I need to know what it means. If Hermione comes to any danger as a result of it, you will not live long enough to regret selling it to me. Do I make myself clear?"

The man's eyes came alive. "The pendant glowed? Did anyone else see it?"

"Of course. At least half of St Mungo's was in and out of the room. What does it mean?"

The wizard smiled his first real smile since Severus walked in. "It means you have been blessed with a rare gift. Recognise it for what it is, Professor, and don't try to question it. Sometimes real magic cannot be explained."

Severus could not detect any duplicity in the comment. Even without Legilimency, he felt the wizard was telling the truth. Still... "Please tell your sister I wish to speak with her."

The wizard stood silently as he watched Severus leave. "You should never have sold him that pendant. What were you thinking?"

Senalda Trelawney emerged through the beaded curtain. "You felt it, too, didn't you? Don't tell me you didn't. It's just like Grandfather said. He'll be back."

"That's what I'm afraid of. That was a very foolish thing to do. Do you know who that was? How stupid could you be to sell the pendant to a Death Eater?" Daemon Trelawney towered over his sister, who seemed to be ignoring his anger.

"Former Death Eater. You, yourself, just said he helped Harry Potter defeat Voldemort." Senalda's eyes were bright.

Daemon winced at the casual way his sister said You-Know-Who's name. "That's not the point. What if he had tried to enslave her?"

"But he didn't. That's exactly the point. That wasn't what the magic was saying. I knew it the minute he walked in the door. It was exactly like Grandfather said. I have never felt it like that before." The pieces made by Tiresias Trelawney had always been in great demand, though few were ever privileged to receive the Emerald Leaf, his signature piece. Less than fifty were ever rumoured to exist.

Both Senalda and Daemon could feel a low vibration when they held the jewellery: the magic of their grandfather recognising the same magic in their blood as the piece's creator; it was how they automatically knew if a piece was real or not.

All of the pieces in the "enchanted" collection were imbued with a small amount of magic during their creation. Most just brought a bit of luck to the recipient, or a slightly enhanced feeling of good for a time; only a few were true representations of Tiresias's gift. The Leaf was said to recognise the pureness of heart, the pureness of the feelings for another. It only responded to those that did not have ulterior motives. It recognised the call of one heart to another before the two ever admitted feelings for each other, but it was more than that: it bonded the two hearts together.

As with all things good, there is always a potential for evil to prey on it. Somehow, someone was able to alter a pendant's enchantment. Instead of calling to the other heart, it attempted to enslave it. The wizard was partially successful in his attempt. It was only a matter of luck that Tiresias had run into the witch wearing the pendant. He could feel the evil emanating from the Leaf. It was a simple matter of trickery, convincing the young woman there was a stone missing which he would gladly replace at no charge. He switched the enchanted Leaf for a "non-magical" one. He later heard the witch had broken her engagement to the wizard and fled the country. It was the last Leaf he ever sold.

Daemon looked questioningly at his sister. "Do you know what he meant when he said half of St Mungo's has seen the Leaf glowing?"

Senalda shook her head. "Have you seen the latest issue of *Witch Weekly*?" She disappeared into the back, only to return with a copy in her hand.

"I never read that tripe."

"Well, this may interest you." Senalda spread the magazine across the counter.

The headline, on the front cover, screamed in large letters, "**Hermione Granger, Best-Friend of Harry Potter, The Chosen One, Hurt in Freak Accident at Hogwarts**".

Below the caption was a picture of Severus Snape, scowling at the photographer, and a picture of the three friends at the Ministry Awards ceremony, the photographer studiously avoiding Severus after the fiasco at the final battle.

Inside the magazine, the reporter went to extremes when listing the star players in the drama: Hermione Granger, War Heroine, Recipient of the Order of Merlin, First Class, and Current Companion of Professor Severus Snape, Potions Master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Recipient of the Order of Merlin, First Class was rushed to St. Mungo's Sunday after a freak accident.

The article described Hermione's condition: from her injury Sunday afternoon through her return to consciousness Tuesday night. The reporter made note of Severus's constant presence at her bedside and his refusal to believe she would not recover from her injuries. Only one line made note of an unusual necklace, a birthday gift from the Professor to the witch and rumoured to possess strange properties. The reporter went on to speculate about their relationship and their possible future together.

Daemon gave a short laugh. "Interesting. At least we weren't mentioned. We were lucky this time. I want you to stay away from them. What were you doing in the store anyway?" Senalda had been out on buying trips for the last year, saying she really didn't want to deal with the everyday workings of the store anymore.

"I stopped in that afternoon to check on a shipment that had come in. You were out. I guess I forgot to lock the door. The next thing I knew, Professor Snape came in. Considering how things have worked out, I can only assume it was fate."

"Fate. We haven't sold any of Grandfather's jewellery since he stopped designing fifty years ago. What was it doing here?" Daemon closed the magazine as he spoke and handed it back to his sister..

"I grabbed the wrong box from my house the day before. It was the other reason I stopped in. I was going to check on the order and grab the pendant."

"Well, it may have worked out for the best, but I don't want you near them again. Do you want a cup of tea? I picked up scones at that new bakery around the corner."

Senalda nodded. "Yeah, sounds good."

Daemon disappeared through the beaded curtain. He wouldn't have been so happy if he had noticed the smile on his sister's face.

TBC

A/N: Tiresias is the greatest of the Greek seers. He is infallible, always correctly interprets the will of the gods, and should never be ignored, as those who disregard his advice quickly come to learn. Tiresias was walking in the woods when he came upon two snakes having sex. He hit them with his walking stick, so they turned him into a woman. Years later, whilst walking in the woods, he once again came upon two snakes having sex. He again hit them with his stick, and this time they turned him back into a man. Tiresias thus is the only person to have lived both as a man and as a woman. This made him the perfect person to arbitrate between the bickering Zeus and Hera, who were arguing over the question "Who enjoys sex more? Men or women?" Zeus said "women", while Hera said "men." Tiresias, who had been both, was able to say "women enjoy sex more." Zeus therefore won that debate. This angered Hera, who struck him blind; to compensate for this, Zeus gave him the ability to divine the will of the gods.

Daemon is Greek meaning guardian spirit.

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Still to come: Harry and Rancine have a run in, Severus and Hermione return to Hogwarts, the Symposium, the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

The More Things Change?

Chapter 36 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Ch 36 The More Things Change...

Severus strode purposely through the corridor toward Hermione's hospital room. His gut clenched as the sound of her laughter floated out into the hallway. Of course she would be having a good time with Potter. They had been friends since almost the start of her days at Hogwarts.

He had told Minerva he had no intentions of spiriting her away to his dungeon and hiding her from the outside world. Truth be told, that was a lie. While he would never lock her away, the desire to do so seemed to grow stronger every time he saw her. He wanted to be the one that made her laugh, that made her smile. He wanted to be the centre of her attention, and it galled him to have to admit it, even if he were his own confessor.

Jealousy. It was such a childish emotion for a man of his age, for someone who had lived the life he'd lived, but it was there all the same.

*Do you think Potter has seen her in The Thong?* "He ignored the deranged voice in his head that seemed to be even more focused on Hermione's undergarments since his birthday.

"Severus, you're back. Harry was just telling me about the latest screw up in his department." Hermione's smile was radiant; her eyes warm as she regarded him.

Severus felt the tightness in his chest loosen, pleased that she seemed to have missed him so much. "Everything is ready when Healer Seaton releases you."

"I've got the list of what you want from your flat and the names of the department chairmen. Anything else you can think of?" Harry moved out of Severus's chair and stood at the side of Hermione's bed.

"No, that should cover it. Don't forget to ask Susan for her notes. The Advanced Charms group should be meeting in the student union in about fifteen minutes. Thanks, Harry, I really appreciate this."

"I think Ron and Tina are going to come visit you with Ginny and me later tonight. I'll bring your stuff back then." Harry nodded to Severus as he turned to leave. "Professor."

Severus took a deep breath. "Thanks for the warning, Harry."

"Not bad, you barely clenched your teeth. Should we practice saying Remus now? If I recall, you couldn't say that one either." Hermione truly appreciated his effort to be civil to Harry, but she couldn't pass up the chance to tease him.

He glared at Hermione before turning back to the Potions journal he was browsing, happy she seemed to be back to her old self. Secretly, he was pleased not to have to chase down her instructors or friends for notes and assignments. It was obviously a task the boy-who-lived could handle with his eyes closed. "How is your headache? Has the pain died down?"

"It's better. I'll be glad when it's finally gone." Hermione studied his profile for a minute. "If you're here, who's teaching your classes?" she asked.

"Albus was able to find a substitute for the week."

"You're letting a stranger teach your Potions classes?"

"I'm just glad it's not Albus, though he has been acting as temporary Head of Slytherin. I suspect I will have to redecorate the common room when I get back. Most likely he's turned everything some awful shade of lime-green or purple by now." He shuddered when he thought of the outrageous robes the Headmaster wore. "The wizard substituting seems competent enough. I looked at the essays he left in my office. He's following my lesson plans. There shouldn't be too many problems with my classes when I return."

"Severus, look at me."

"What?"

"You never let anyone teach your classes."

"Professor Rancine?" Harry studied the wizard. He was a small man, on the thin side, with his hair slicked back and small beady eyes, reminding him of a weasel. "I'm Harry Potter. Hermione Granger asked me to stop by and explain her absence this week." Rancine was head of the Apprentice Programme. The students worked on an independent programme with him while attending the core classes. Rancine was responsible for the programme as well as student placement when they started their



apprenticeships.

"Of course, the famous Harry Potter. I'd know you anywhere, Mr Potter. We could use a wizard like you here. Just think of the prestige it would bring to the school to have the wizard that brought down He Who Must Not Be Named on our staff." Rancine was beaming at Harry as if he held the secret of the universe.

"Thank you, but I'm happy working at the Ministry. About Hermione..."

"Yes, Miss Granger. She's a close friend of yours, if I remember correctly. Tell me, Mr Potter, you were able to destroy He Who Must Not Be Named, surely you must recognise evil when you see it?" Rancine's smile was oily as he regarded Harry.

"I'm sorry, I don't seem to be following you. Evil? What are you talking about?" What the hell was the man going on about? He was supposed to tell him Hermione had been hurt and hoped to be released and back at school on Monday. Period. End of story. What did this have to do with Voldemort?

"She's supposed to be your best friend. How can you let her see Snape? The man is an abomination. Why you didn't do the wizarding world a favour and end his miserable existence when you took out You-Know-Who, I'll never know. How can you let such an impressionable young witch keep company with the likes of him? He's a Death Eater, for god's sake!"

Snape. Hermione had warned him about Rancine and his attitude. Harry was starting to have a new appreciation for the man. While Snape had done some terrible things in his life, and Harry would be the first to say how much he hated the man, he also knew he had been loyal to the Order, saving his life, and the lives of his friends, several times over. Without Snape's help, Voldemort would have won the war.

Harry sighed. "Hermione, Professor. Can we please stay with the topic at hand? And for the record, Hermione has a mind of her own. It's not up to me to tell her who to see or who not to see."

"Of course. Very well, when is Miss Granger expected to be released from St Mungo's?"

Maybe he should have let the Professor come. Snape could have blasted Rancine into bits, like so many Hogwarts rose bushes, and done everyone a favour. Harry groaned; this was not turning out like he had expected.

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"It's almost seven o'clock. What time did my brother say he would be here?" Ginny glanced at the clock again.

"He said he was picking Tina up after work and they'd Apparate straight here. I thought after work meant around five. If they don't get here in the next half hour, we'll just go ourselves. I still need to tell Hermione what her professors said and give her the notes I picked up. Rancine was even more horrible than she said. I can see why she doesn't like him. The man is worse than Snape at his worst."

Ginny weighed Harry's words carefully; she knew it wasn't Hermione alone that didn't like Rancine. Professor Snape had had a run-in with him in Amsterdam, and Hermione had mentioned some type of scandal that had been hushed up. A knock at the door sounded before Ginny could comment. "Finally," she exclaimed as she hurried to answer the door.

"Hello, sorry we're a bit late. Stopped off at the pub with a few of Tina's office mates before coming and sort of lost track of the time." Ron ushered Tina, almost wearing another of her barely-there outfits, into Ginny's quarters.

"Don't make yourselves comfortable. Visiting hours will be over soon. Honestly, Ron, couldn't you've sent an owl or called me over the Floo connection? We would've gone on ahead if we'd known you were going to be this late." Ginny reached for her cloak, while opening the door and shoving Ron back out into the corridor, herding them all toward Hogwarts' main entrance.

"Well, it's not like she won't be there. They're not releasing her tonight." Ron shrugged. He hated hospitals; if it weren't Hermione, he probably wouldn't have gone.

"Yes, they're still keeping her there tonight. That doesn't change the fact that you're late. With luck she'll be released tomorrow and Professor Snape can bring her back here. She's on bed rest until Monday."

Ron grimaced. "Ugh, don't tell me she's staying with 'the greasy git'. She'd be better off unconscious again, if you ask me."

"That's it. That's enough! I've heard all I want to hear about Snape today." Harry had stopped and turned toward Ron. "Did you ever stop to consider that Voldemort would've won if Snape hadn't been there? Hadn't saved my life, or yours, or Hermione's over and over again? What would've happened if Snape hadn't been feeding us information all along? Did you ever consider that he and the Headmaster were the only two powerful enough to cast the holding spell? And where in the bloody hell do you think he's been since Sunday when Hermione fell? Snape hasn't left her side in the last three days. I may not like him, but he's done right by Hermione. Something that I can't say about you when you show up two hours late. First that berk in her study group, then Rancine, and now you. I don't want to hear another word about Snape. Got it? And for the record, you sure as hell could've owled us you were going to be late so we didn't have to sit around like idiots for the last two hours waiting for you." Harry angrily shoved open the front doors and stomped off to the Apparition point, just outside the main gate.

He couldn't believe he'd just defended Snape to Ron. The git had spent all seven of his years at Hogwarts making his life hell. Harry was sure he wouldn't miss the Professor if he never saw him again, but enough was enough. Hermione was their friend and Snape had proved himself beyond honourable where she was concerned. Damn it! Voldemort was dead - life should be much easier than this. With a last angry glare at Ron, Harry Disapparated away with a resounding *crack*.

"What in the bloody hell was that all about?" Ron stood in the open doorway, dazed, as he watched Harry Disapparate.

"That, I believe, Mr Weasley, was Mr Potter reaching a new level of maturity. Sherbet lemon?" The Headmaster held out a gold foil-wrapped candy, his eyes twinkling merrily. "Miss Weasley, tell Miss Granger I send my best." Dumbledore bowed to the group and disappeared through the doors of the Great Hall.

Ginny sighed. "Come on, Ron, I'd like to get to St Mungo's before visiting hours are over," she said over her shoulder, while hurrying to the Apparition point. A loud *crack* signalled Ginny's departure.

"They're all nuts," Ron mumbled as he took Tina's hand before Disapparating. "One too many *Crucio*'s."

With a *crack*, they Disapparated, too.

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A/N: The title of the chapter is "borrowed" from my story of the same name, "*The More Things Change - The More They Stay The Same Sort OF (tentative title i may still come up with something better)*". The story answers a bad fiction challenge by Southern\_Witch\_69 and can be found on my author's page (for those interested in reading it).

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections, suggestions, and never ending supply of commas. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

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# A Capella – Alone Together

Chapter 37 of 49

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

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Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Ch 37. A Capella Alone Together

Ron grabbed Harry's arm. "You want to tell me what that was all about? Did you actually defend the git back there?"

"Lower your voice! Hermione's room is just around the corner," Ginny hissed at him as she ran her fingers through her hair. One of the memos floating in the lift had got caught in her hair clip. Annoyed, she'd had to remove it to release the malfunctioning memo. Her hair floated around her like fire, adding to her annoyance.

Harry's angry whisper surprised Ron. "Look, it's been a long day and I'm tired of arguing. Just drop it."

"You defended him."

Tina tugged at Ron's shoulder. "Ronny? Do we have to stay long? Hospitals give me the creeps."

Harry rounded on the young witch, startling everyone. "Then why did you come? You knew we were coming here. It's bad enough you're late, now I have to listen to you whinge?" He turned and stalked off toward Hermione's room, ignoring the stares of those around him.

.xx.

Severus groaned quietly to himself. He could hear voices in the outer corridor that sounded suspiciously like the other two-thirds of the dream team. He knew they were Hermione's friends, but their presence seemed to accentuate the difference in their ages. He was never more aware of that gap then when she was with them.

Hermione had fallen asleep after taking her latest dose of pain medication. While he was concerned about her headache, Healer Seaton assured him it was normal and should disappear in a day or so. If the scans continued to improve, she would be released into his care tomorrow afternoon.

"You can't insult my girlfriend, and then just walk away!" Ron's loud stage whisper could be heard clearly through the open doorway.

"Insult? Did either one of you care that you were two hours late? You went for drinks, knowing we were waiting for you! How's that for an insult? You want to go? Then, go! You want to be mad at me? Fine. Ever since you started seeing her, you've walked all over our friendship. That's one of your best friends lying in there. How many times have you been here to see her? She was unconscious for almost two days and all you managed to show up for was a few minutes Monday night. I don't remember seeing you around here. You want to insult Snape? Great. But he's been here since he brought Hermione in. You stopped by one time, two days ago. Yeah, Ron, you're a great friend and he's just the greasy git!" Harry left Ron standing speechless in the corridor and turned into Hermione's room.

Ginny sighed. "You're an idiot, Ron."

Hermione stirred, the noise in the hall penetrating the draught-induced sleep. "Severus? Harry?"

Harry stood at the foot of the bed, trying to get his anger under control. Ginny could still be heard, arguing with her brother, in the corridor. He glanced at Severus before turning back to Hermione. "Hi, how're you feeling?"

"Still have a bit of a headache. Was that you I heard in the hall?" Hermione tried to look past Harry to see what all the fuss was about.

Severus helped her into a sitting position and summoned a fresh glass of juice. "Seaton said you should keep drinking. You need to keep your strength up."

"Just Ron being more of a prat than usual," Harry answered. He took two miniaturised parcels out of his side pocket and gave her a half-smile. "I got everything on your list. Your instructors all said you were up to date and if you wanted to teach any of the classes next year, that would be fine with them."

"Harry!"

"What? If I know you, you've already read all the textbooks, including the books the footnotes were based on."

Severus's quiet snort drew a glare from the young woman in the bed. "It seems your secret is out." He drew himself to his full height as the others entered the room. "Since you seem to have something to keep you amused, I believe I will get a bite to eat. Don't get out of bed," he admonished.

"You don't have to stay tonight. I'm fully conscious now. Why don't you go back to Hogwarts? You can have the elves get you something to eat and sleep in your own bed." She would miss him, but he'd been sleeping in the chair for the last three nights. "You just have to be back tomorrow afternoon. Healer Seaton said I can't Apparate for another two weeks."

"Trying to get rid of me already?" Severus raised one brow questioningly. "You're taking medication that makes you groggy. I've no desire to see you fall again. I still remember how to transfigure a chair into something more comfortable."

"Severus, I'm not a child."

"Then stop acting like one."

Hermione stuck her tongue out at him. "Bat!"

"Oh, lovely. Yes, I want to rush right back, to this." Discretely, Severus squeezed her hand. "Do you need anything?"

"No, I'm fine. Take your time." Hermione returned the gesture before releasing his hand.

Severus turned and nodded. "Miss Weasley. Harry." He glared at Ron before sweeping out the door, his robes billowing out behind him in trademark fashion.

Ron gestured wildly, no sound coming out of his mouth.

"I'll release you. But I'm warning you, one wrong word, you upset Hermione in any way, and I'll bind and hex you so fast you won't know what hit you. Got it?" Ginny raised her wand and said a quiet series of incantations.

Harry looked at his girlfriend. "Ginny? What did you do to him?"

"With six brothers, you have to be a little more creative than most... and faster. I took his voice away before he could say anything else stupid. Not one wrong word, Ron." Threateningly, she drew her wand across her throat. Satisfied, she moved to the chair next to the bed, her smile broad. "Wow, it looks like things are going well with you two. How're you feeling?"

Ron opened his mouth to say something, thought better of it, and then closed it again. Both Harry and Ginny were giving him a look. He patted Tina's hand. "We'll talk later."

"All right, what's going on?" Hermione looked questioningly from one to another.

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There was a small coffee shop in the sub-basement. Severus peered questioningly at the assortment in the glass case. Potter had brought him a sandwich from there the day before. The food wasn't bad, just not a great variety, and slightly less bland than the cardboard containers holding the sandwiches.

He'd heard most of the conversation in the corridor. His hearing was quite acute and Potter was doing very little to lower his voice. He would guess the argument stemmed from his attention to Hermione and that Weasley brat's habit of thinking the world revolved around him. He supposed he shouldn't be so surprised Potter had defended him; they had been civil to each other for Hermione's sake. This just seemed to be a natural extension of that. Severus shook his head, as if he needed the boy who lived as his protector.

He thought back to the time he'd heard Miss Weasley take Minerva to task about his relationship with Hermione. That time, the girl had defended him. He shook his head, just what he needed, a slip of a girl and the bloody boy who lived to approve of him.

Severus sat down heavily at one of the small tables with his coffee and sandwich. It had almost killed him when he thought Hermione might not awaken from her coma. He loved her with all his heart. He just hoped it was enough.

.xx.

The room was quiet when he returned, only Harry remained. Hermione was sleeping once again, her gentle breathing the only sound in the quiet room.

"Professor." Harry stood and stretched.

Severus watched him, his eyes unreadable as he came to an unlikely conclusion. "Thank you for staying with Hermione. Did they bring in her medication?"

"Yeah, she fell asleep right after. Is she really going to be all right?"

"Yes, Seaton said there was no permanent injury to her brain. It's bruised from the fall and needs time to heal, but she'll be fine. I'm not so sure she'll be able to return to Cambridge, Monday; we will have to wait and see." Severus drew a deep breath. "I owe you a life debt... Harry."

Harry looked toward the bed and studied Hermione. "No, you don't. I'm just happy to have my best friend back."

"Even at the expense of your other best friend?" he asked.

Harry continued to watch Hermione sleep. "Ron's an idiot."

"I sincerely hope you were not looking to me for an argument."

Harry shrugged. "Just...just take care of Hermione. I still don't know why she loves you, but if you're what makes her happy..."

"Believe me, I don't know why, either." Severus's wry smile caught Harry off guard.

"Neither do I." Hermione's quiet voice surprised them both.

"I believe this is a private conversation." Severus moved to the chair next to the bed. "How long have you been awake?"

"Long enough. Did you get something to eat?"

Harry watched the two of them. He didn't know if he would ever get used to Snape. He never would have thought Snape was capable of love, but Harry could see the man's eyes softened when he looked at Hermione, his actions over the last few days further confirming his commitment to her. Who was Ron, or he for that matter, to say if they should or shouldn't be together?

"I, uh, think I'll get going. I've got a late meeting tomorrow but I'll see you back at Hogwarts on Friday." Harry shuffled from foot to foot. Seeing Snape as anything but the

Hermione's moan brought him out of his reverie. He set the essays, and other paraphernalia he had retrieved, on his side of the bed before coming to her side. Gently, he

soothed the frown lines on her forehead. "Shh, you're fine."

Her breathing evened out, the frown lines disappearing as the young woman snuggled further into her pillow.

Now what?

.xx.

Severus had settled onto 'his' side of the bed, the headboard supporting his back, his legs stretched out before him. He had transfigured a large book into a desktop. It floated a few inches above his lap, allowing him to review the essays while keeping an eye on Hermione.

"No, Mr Collins, you obviously were not paying attention when we covered antidotes in class. You do not get to pick and choose which side effects you treat." His quill descended on the parchment again, red ink bleeding across the page as he crossed out several lines before leaving a comment in the margin.

"If you dislike it so much, why do you still teach?" She had been watching him unnoticed the last few minutes as he destroyed yet another essay.

"And give up all this glamour?" Dramatically, he swept his arms out to encompass his dungeon quarters.

"It does have its charm." As do you, she thought.

"Where else would a bat live?" He levitated the desktop to the side and gently pulled Hermione against him. Softly, almost as if he was afraid she would break, he rubbed her back. "How do you feel? Is your headache gone? Still dizzy? Would you like something to eat?"

"You would have made a great matron," she said with a giggle.

"Hermione."

"I'm fine. My headache's not too bad. It's the dizziness that's really bothering me. Other than that, I feel fine."

Severus looked sceptical.

"Really. How was the substitute?"

"Caldwell? Not bad. He kept to the lesson plan. No major accidents; only three cauldrons exploded; thankfully, no injuries. I don't think I'll have too many problems Monday morning."

"Monday? Why not tomorrow? Don't you have classes on Friday?"

"Caldwell can finish out the week."

"Severus, I'll be fine. You can stop in between classes and check on me, if you want."

"I have no intentions of letting you hit your head again. Albus retained Caldwell for the week, I might as well let him finish it out." Truth was, she wasn't all that steady on her feet, and while Seaton had assured him she would be fine, she might not be so lucky if she fell a second time.

Hermione purred softly as he rubbed her shoulders. "I have so much to catch up on. I really shouldn't be lying here relaxing."

"You're not relaxing. You're healing. I'm quite sure you're ahead in your studies. Didn't Potter say your instructors didn't have any assignments for you?"

Hermione pulled back to watch his eyes. "That's another thing. What's going on with you and Harry?"

"Going on?" Severus's tone hardened. "Nothing is going on. I'm grateful for his help."

Hermione peered intently into his eyes. "Did you hit your head, too?"

"Hermione."

"Grateful?"

"Reading to you was his idea. It seemed to be the catalyst that brought you back." Severus sighed, he hoped she wouldn't want to discuss the properties of the Trelawney pendant. He still wanted to find out more about its origins.

"And the pendant?"

Right on cue, he thought. "Perhaps it was all things together."

Hermione yawned. "I spent the last three days in bed, how can I be so tired?"

"Exactly why you need your rest. Now, lay back, I'll Floo the kitchen for some tea and toast. Maybe a bit of broth?"

"Sounds good. I think I'll wait 'til tomorrow to start on my revisions. I'll still have the weekend, too. I take it you're going to Apparate me to Cambridge on Monday?"

"Something like that, hang on." Severus disappeared through the bedroom doorway. The main fireplace was connected to the kitchens. He hoped Hermione would be well enough to attend classes on Monday; however, any speculation to that point now would only start an argument, something he wished to avoid.

Severus returned with a tray. A wave of his wand and the tray hovered to the side of the bed. He helped her into a sitting position before setting the tray to hover over her lap.

"Thank you." Hermione smiled at his nod. She watched as Severus settled in and resumed his marking. "Did you cast a stabiliser charm on the bed? I didn't feel you sit down?"

Severus nodded. "You're dizzy enough. You don't need me rocking you when I get in and out of bed."

Her hunger sated, Hermione settled on her side, her back braced against Severus's hip, a book open in front of her. "I may just stay here and read my way through your library."

"That should keep you occupied until next week, at the very least," he said with a quiet chuckle. Another essay fell victim to the Potions master's red ink as he answered, only pausing briefly to glance in Hermione's direction. He could feel the easy rhythm of her breathing. At that rate, she would be asleep within minutes he thought.

Fifteen minutes later, the book Hermione had been reading slid quietly from her hand, the sound of the crackling fire the only noise in the quiet room. Silently, Severus spelled her book to the nightstand. He sipped his tea as he watched the woman sleeping next to him, well aware of the domestic picture the two of them made.

TBC

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A/N: A capella - One or more vocalists performing without an accompaniment.

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Pearle

Lion Taming in the Wilds of London ? Or Alternately ? How to Handle a Snake

Chapter 38 of 49

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~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 38 Lion Taming in the Wilds of London Or Alternately How to Handle a Snake

Once again, Severus sat watching Hermione's breathing, his arm loosely encircling her waist. Tomorrow morning he would Apparate her back to Cambridge and resume his class schedule. Hermione had healed quickly, Poppy marvelling at her rapid return to health in such a short time.

He smiled as the witch at his side nuzzled back into the warmth of his body. It was early November and already the dungeons seemed to be colder than usual.

*"What rot. You're just thinking about losing the warmth of the body next to you. How will you feel when she's gone?"*For some reason, his conscience, or what he assumed passed for his inner voice, had taken to talking to him, instead of the annoying voice he usually heard. He thought he would much rather contemplate Hermione's bum than be reminded how keenly he would feel her absence.

Life would return to normal. There were classes to teach, tests to grade. Time moved on. He knew Hermione would return to Cambridge; she had her studies to complete. It bothered him that she seemed to occupy his thoughts more and more these days. He would never stand in her way, but lately his thoughts had been for his greater good, not hers.

Possessively, he tightened his hold on the witch lying against him before giving in to the need for sleep.

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Poppy had okayed her return to Cambridge, after much pleading on Hermione's part. She would take it slow. She was feeling much better, even the feeling that the world was tilting off-kilter on its axis had decreased dramatically. Severus had prepared an Equaliser Draught, one designed to dispel nausea from broom-sickness. It seemed to do the trick: the world remained in focus once more.

Hermione tightened her hold around his waist and closed her eyes. The miniaturised bottles of Draught, as well as her belongings, bumped against her arm. They were currently stored in one of Severus's inner pockets, spelled with an Unbreakable Charm.

"Are you sure you're all right? Waiting another day to return to University might not be a bad idea."

The wind had picked up, whipping their robes back and forth as they stood together at the Apparition point just outside the main gate. "You heard Poppy, she said it was safe for me to return to school as long as I take the Equaliser Draught through tomorrow night. Harry will be meeting us at my flat in just a few minutes. Though why you made him promise to walk me from class to class, I don't know. I'm fine; I don't need a babysitter."

"I will assume you're fine when you no longer need the Draught. Let Harry walk you around today. I'll be there tonight, after my last class." He really didn't want her to return to Cambridge until she was perfectly well, a sentiment quick destroyed by the stubborn witch at his side.

"Can we go already?"

"Perhaps you can loosen the grip you currently have on my body? If I'm to Apparate both of us in one piece, I may need to breathe."

Hermione loosened her hold. "Sorry. I have been Apparating since sixth-year, I just hate the feeling of Side-Along-Apparition. I always worry about being splinched."

Severus chuckled. "Hermione, I've never splinched us before and have no intentions of doing so now. Caldwell is gone. If I am unable to teach my class today *Albus* will take over. I need to get there and back in one piece. Ready?"

"Right. It's okay to separate my body into parts as long as I don't interfere with your teaching schedule."

"I like your body parts right where they are." Severus pulled back to look at the young woman. "You told me your head was fine. Please be honest, do you still have a headache? Any double vision? Dizziness?"

"Poppy said..."

"I don't care what Poppy said!" His voice held an edge to it before he thought to soften his tone. "I'm asking you. Are you okay?"

His eyes scanned her face before meeting her gaze. She had to smile; never would she have thought "the bat of the dungeon" could show such care for her. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just a little...nervous. Healer Seaton's comments about Apparating just worried me a bit."

"Which is why I will Apparate both of us, and will continue to do so for the next two weeks." He held up his hand as she started to protest. "He said two weeks; I don't care how well you feel, you will not take chances. And don't start about how much of a bother it is, it's only two weeks. Besides, I like the feeling of you pressed up against me. It's the only acceptable way for me to hug you in public."

Hermione smiled. "Yes, Professor. Maybe we should try this nude some time." She could feel evidence of his arousal as she started to rub against him.

"Stop that. I need to concentrate. And we need to go."

With a loud crack, the two disappeared and reappeared in front of Hermione's flat. Harry was sitting on the stoop waiting for them.

"You're late. I was worried something had gone wrong." After being assured everything was as it should be, Harry turned to Severus. "I could stay tonight if you can't get away. Or Apparate her back to Hogwarts, if that would be easier."

"Thank you, but I have cleared my schedule both tonight and tomorrow after my last class. I think it best if she Apparates as little as possible, even if one of us is doing the actual Apparating." He drew the spelled phials and Hermione's miniaturised backpack out of his inner pocket. "These are spelled not to break. She takes three drops every four hours. It can be mixed with water or taken straight. Here is her backpack; it would be best if you carry it. She shouldn't do any heavy lifting for a few more days and this must weigh at least two stone, if not more. I will stay tonight and tomorrow. You just need to accompany her to classes today and then be here in the morning to accompany her again tomorrow."

Harry nodded as he placed the phials and backpack in his own pack. "Every four hours, when did she take it last?"

"At eight a.m. Her next dose is at noon. I shall bring another set when I return tonight."

Hermione watched the two men as the phials and her backpack changed hands. "Excuse me, but does 'her' get to say anything? I'm no longer in a coma, you know."

Both wizards turned to look at her and then back at each other. Severus's eyes gleamed as he continued to ignore her presence. "I will return with dinner tonight. Just make sure 'her' stops to rest when she gets tired and does not overdo it. If there are any problems, if you have any concerns, call me over the Floo immediately. Albus has left the connection open in case of emergency. Use the Order password."

Harry smiled. "Got it."

Severus turned to Hermione, his traditional scowl in place. "Be good, or else. I will see you later...*her*!" With a loud crack, he disappeared.

"God, he can be so annoying at times. Come on, I don't want to be late. I've missed enough classes as it is."

Harry smiled as he followed Hermione across the street. It seemed the Professor was well versed in "Hermione handling".

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Hermione counted to ten before turning to the twit sitting next to her. "I may have missed that class, Edmund, but I learned the spell for fireballs years ago fifth-year, actually. If you cast North to South, instead of East to West, you are creating a matrix for a fire-ring and not a fireball. Size is determined by changing the end of the spell, not another spell."

Harry sat at the next table reading *Quidditch Today*. While he often bought the magazine to keep up on Ron's team, this month's issue had an article on the new line of brooms coming out. He listened with half an ear to Hermione telling that idiot Edmund off; he was pleased his friend seemed to be coming around so quickly. She sounded just like she had when they were students at Hogwarts.

He had dogged her steps throughout the day, noticing she was not quite as energetic as when they'd started out this morning. He silently agreed with his own decision to join the Ministry rather than continuing his education at an institution of higher learning. A few hours of attending classes with Hermione made him realise how right that decision had been. Still, knowing what a swot his best friend was, he understood why she and Snape seemed to connect so well.

"Hermione's right. Professor Rundall said to work with the standard size. She was going to show us the size adaptation next class." Sally looked up from her notes as she finished relaying the information. "Edmund? Are you all right? You look like you've just seen a ghost."

"What's he doing here?" Edmund's question was barely a whisper as he pointed to a figure in black 'flowing' toward them.

The sudden drop in noise in the crowded Union caught Harry's attention. He looked up as Severus pulled one of the empty chairs back. The Professor was in full 'costume' today, his robes still swirling about him as he settled into his seat.

Severus nodded to Hermione before turning to Harry. "I trust all went well today?"

"Uhm, yeah. Fine. Though I think Hermione is a bit more tired than she's letting on. How did you know we were here?"

One brow quirked in amusement. "Worried I'm tracking you? Hermione told you last week her study group met in the Student Union on Mondays and Wednesdays after class. Today is Monday." He pulled a Potions journal from his inner pocket, stretched his legs out, and prepared to settle in.

"Do you have dinner in there, too?"

"I was running a bit late. A pizza should suffice; God knows Hermione normally lives on them anyway. Are you staying or going?"

Severus glared at the young man. "You have just spent the day trailing Hermione around as my request. I would much rather you left, but I do have need of your services tomorrow."

Harry shook his head and smiled. "You're welcome, but I think I'll get going; I'd rather not put your patience to the test." He pulled the two phials from his pack, one almost empty. "Tomorrow same time?"

Severus pocketed the potion and nodded. "Same time."

"You're leaving?" Hermione watched Harry shoulder his pack.

"You seem to be in good hands, I'll see you tomorrow." He was pleased to see how pale Edmund had turned as he nodded to Snape.

"You're just going to sit there?" she asked, as she eyed Severus.

Severus looked up from his journal. "Are you ready to go?"

"Not yet, but soon." Hermione shook her head as Severus turned back to his reading. She had no problem continuing the study session, but she sincerely doubted Edmund would be able to concentrate. There also seemed to be quite a few people standing around staring in their general direction. "Edmund, breathe. I guarantee you Severus won't hex you in the middle of the Student Union. Too many witnesses. Actually, I am a bit tired. Why don't you finish up without me; we're almost done anyway."

Hermione gathered her books and notes together as she spoke. Before she could move, Severus was at her side taking the books and her backpack from her. She glared at him but didn't argue. The table had gone strangely silent as the others watched them.

He thought Potter's assessment was accurate. She seemed too pale, with slight circles starting to mar the skin under her eyes. "Do you feel up to walking?"

"Are you going to carry me?" She asked before noticing the gleam in his eye. Remembering what he had done when she'd challenged him at the end of the Hallowe'en dance, she said, "Never mind, don't answer. I'm fine, just a little tired. Let's go."

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The evening passed rather quickly, Hermione making an effort to 'catch up' with her studies. Papers and books were strewn around the witch as she referenced one book to another.

Severus looked up from the essays he was marking. "You don't have to do all that tonight."

"Said the man who brought essays from today's classes with him to mark." She smiled at his quiet snort. "Another ten minutes and I plan to call it a night. How about you?"

He watched as she stretched. "How about a hot bath?"

"Are you planning to join me?"

"I could be persuaded; however, you need to lower that eyebrow. I truly meant just a bath. You're just getting back on your feet, and I'm sure today wore you out more than you're willing to admit."

Severus drew a hot bath, adding essence of lavender to the water. After disrobing, he sat at the back of the tub, inviting Hermione to sit between his legs and lean back against him. The tub had been magically altered to accommodate his height. It was also deeper than most, giving the illusion of a small pool rather than a bathtub.

Hermione purred her approval. "Mmm, this feels great, though I'm not really all that tired. I love the smell of lavender."

Severus gently massaged her arms and shoulders as she settled back against him. "You need to take it easy. I know you feel better, but I don't want you to push it." A gentle snore was his answer. Hermione had fallen asleep. "Good thing you're not tired," he said with a wry grin.

After summoning his wand, he managed to levitate the sleeping witch out of the tub without waking her. A quick spell and they were both dry. Gently, he carried her into the bedroom and magically turned down the bed.

"Where are you going?" Hermione turned sleepily as he pulled the covers up around her.

"Shh, I'm just going to make sure the door is warded. I'll be right back."

She was sound asleep by the time he walked back into the room. With a sigh, he slid into the bed behind her. Instinctively, Hermione moved toward his body. Severus smiled as he listened to her quiet breathing. It was some time before sleep overtook him.

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Tuesday went much the same as Monday. Harry accompanied Hermione to her classes before meeting Severus at her flat, this time. Snape had even managed to thank him for his assistance before Hermione shuffled her friend out the door.

Severus was in the kitchen whipping up a simple omelet for dinner. "Do you think you can be trusted to make toast? I still don't understand how you can be so competent at potions and fail so miserably at cooking."

Crookshanks wove his way through their legs, shedding on the black cloth of Severus's trousers before moving into the other room. He turned to see the dour man glaring at him before deciding it might be wise to make himself scarce for a bit.

"He does that on purpose." Severus cast several charms to rid himself of the orange fur, all to no avail.

"Does what?"

"Shed on my trousers."

"He's a cat, Severus."

"A magical cat." He portioned the omelet onto the plates on the counter and cast a warming spell. "Are we eating in here or out there?"

"How about in here?"

Severus nodded, moving the plates to the table. He watched Hermione buttering their toast. Her colour was better tonight. The tension lines around her eyes were gone.

Coily, she batted her eyes at him. "Does this meet with your approval?"

His eyes betrayed his want, darkening with lust at the double meaning behind her words. "Sit. You need to eat."



Annoyed, Hermione cut him off mid-sentence. "I'm fine! I don't need a baby-sitter. Go to work." She shuffled through a stack of books and papers scattered across her window seat. "Where did I put that sheaf of parchment? I had it yesterday. Did I leave it in the other room?"



He found himself outside the main gate of Hogwarts when longing for Hermione enveloped him, the thought of his empty bed further adding to his melancholy.

"Do you think she has any more of those Thongs? Maybe something with ties on the side you can pull open with your teeth? Do you think she's wearing one now?" asked the deranged voice in his head wistfully.

He cursed himself for missing her, at the same time wondering if he could justify dropping in to see her before Saturday. He strode up the path with renewed purpose; if he wasn't happy, no one he encountered was going to be happy. 'God help any student caught out of bed tonight', he thought.

TBC

A/N: Converting the weight of Hermione's backpack from Imperial weight to US standard. One stone = fourteen pounds. Therefore, two stone weighs twenty-eight pounds.

Lavender is affectionately called "the angel of healing and purification" because it's refreshing and can relieve stress, headaches and insomnia

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: The symposium, a few bumps in the road, Rancine (who is for ever up to no good), the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

## The Enchantment, The Symposium, and A Few Loose Ends

*Chapter 39 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

### Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine: they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Ch. 39 - *The Enchantment*, The Symposium, and A Few Loose Ends

Slytherin 180

Ravenclaw 60

Severus was in an excellent mood Monday morning when he returned to Hogwarts from dropping Hermione off at Cambridge. The weekend had gone exceptionally well. Slytherin had literally blown Ravenclaw out of the sky during the Quidditch match. He still had to find out who substituted the *Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes' Colourful Exploding Quaffles* for one of the real game Quaffles after the eighth goal of the match. Odds were it was a Slytherin, but the Ravenclaws were not above suspicion.

Fortunately, the exploding Quaffle had detonated just above the Ravenclaw goal in mid-air, not harming anyone in the process, but still managing to stop play when it took out two of the goalposts and a Bludger that had been heading for the Ravenclaw Keeper. A few spells later, the goals were repaired and the game continued.

Ravenclaw had been ahead 50 to 30 at the time of the explosion. Hermione had commented it almost looked like the half time entertainment at some of the football games she had heard about in America. The explosion created a series of rainbow-coloured starbursts, the type that are usually associated with fireworks displays. The last explosion shot through the air and formed the words "Thank You for Choosing a Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes Product. We Appreciate Your Business" in ten-foot letters that shimmered before disintegrating in one final starburst.

The students in the stands applauded wildly at the display and started chanting "Weasley, Weasley" over and over again. Albus had even mentioned establishing an intermission and using the exploding Bludgers on a regular basis as entertainment at the games. Luckily, no one encouraged his idea.

The rest of the weekend passed as planned: a quiet dinner in Hogsmeade, and an even quieter night for the two of them in his chambers. At his request, Hermione submitted to yet another round of scans by Poppy, who pronounced her in good health Sunday morning. Reluctantly, she agreed to allow him to Apparate her back to

Cambridge this morning, since the two-week restriction Healer Seaton had placed on her ability to Apparate didn't end until Friday.

The thought of spending the coming weekend away with Hermione at *The Enchantment* raised his spirits considerably; while he missed her, a common occurrence every time they parted, they would have three full days and nights together in Rome. He was due to give his presentation Friday afternoon. They could spend the rest of the exhibition attending lectures, evaluating the masters Hermione wanted to talk to, and still have time for taking in the exhibits and wares in the new Trade Hall.

They would even have time for a bit of sightseeing Sunday afternoon. Albus had given him Sunday night off, as well, so he wasn't due back at the castle until fourth period Monday morning. The Symposium was scheduled to end at noon on Sunday. He had put in a request for a Portkey to Florence as a surprise for Hermione. The city was rich in scenery and history. It had been quite a while since he had last visited Florence, but he thought the easy pace might be a nice change from the hectic events they had experienced over the last few weeks. They could browse through the shops that lined the quaint city square and take in a few of the museums. The city was home to the artworks of many of the great old-world masters. A leisurely-spent afternoon, dinner, and then Portkey back to Cambridge Sunday night.

The sound of bubbling brought his attention back to the present. He looked up from the stack of essays he was supposed to be marking and quickly scanned the classroom. Three rows back, one seat off the centre aisle, a cauldron rocked merrily on its stand, the young man standing behind it frozen in place as the dark purple potion bubbled to the point of almost overflowing. Severus cursed himself for his lack of attention as he quickly cast a containment charm and levitated the cauldron off the heat, before magically turning off the flame.

"Mr Collins, would you care to tell me why your cauldron has suddenly decided to exhibit characteristics more commonly associated with a nervous first-year?"

A quiet twitter ran through the classroom, silenced quickly as Severus glared at the students before turning back to the young wizard in question. "Mr Collins?"

"A nervous first-year, sir?"

"Yes, it appeared to be sitting in its seat, shaking."

"I, uh, think I might have added too much wormwood to the potion, sir." Collins's cheeks blazed bright red with embarrassment, a stark contrast to his pale skin, as he valiantly tried not to pass out. He had managed to avoid the Professor's acid tongue so far this year, but given his expertise, or lack thereof, at Potions, it was inevitable he would screw up at some point. His only hope was to live through to the end of the year, take his OWLs, and be done with Potions once and for all. While he had entertained dreams of becoming an Auror when he was younger, if it meant two more years with Snape, he was willing to consider other, less interesting professions; he only hoped he could make it to the end of the year.

"I see. And is there a reason you did not cut the flame under your cauldron in an attempt to stop the overflow, or were you waiting to see if I would be willing to save your hide? Do you know what that potion would have done to you if it *had* bubbled over and touched your skin, considering the amount of excess of wormwood you added?" Severus smiled as the boy paled further.

They were brewing the Draught of Peace, a rather tricky potion, but it figured prominently on the OWL exam. Actually, the added wormwood would not have permanently harmed the boy. Instead of feeling an artificial sense of peace, he would probably have fallen fast asleep, the wormwood altering the properties of the potion to resemble the Draught of the Living Death rather than the one they were attempting to make. While the thought of Collins falling into a dead sleep might be pleasant, the dratted child could have accidentally fallen forward into his cauldron, instead. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose as he thought about the time it would take him to clean up the mess *that* would create. Not to mention the possibility of Collins drowning in his own creation if he fell forward, instead of back or to the side. The possibility existed, minute as it might be, that he might not be quick enough to get him out of the cauldron in time.

"Ten points from Ravenclaw. You will turn in four feet on Wednesday on the properties of wormwood and the resulting changes the excess amount of wormwood you added would create in the Draught of Peace. Your potions should be bubbling *gently* at this stage." He smiled evilly at Collins before continuing, "...they should be a warm lilac in colour. Cast a stasis charm on your cauldrons before housing them in your cupboards, and clean your workstations. Mr Collins, you will report here tonight at seven. I expect you to brew the Draught properly if you wish to get credit for this assignment. Well, what are you all waiting for? Get moving."

The students hurried to obey. Satisfied, Severus sat back down. He had a staff meeting to attend after this class. As far as he was concerned, the Dark Lord's use of the *Cruciatus Curse* was far more humane than his forced attendance at the monthly staff meetings. He caught site of the Symposium schedule as he opened the side desk drawer.

Hermione. Thursday night seemed a long way off.

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Hermione's week moved along as expected. She meticulously crossed off her classes in her talking planner, taking great pleasure in the simple act. Harry surprised her Monday when he showed up unexpectedly at the Student Union as her study session ended.

He denied Severus had put him up to it; nevertheless, she invited him back to her flat. They shared a pizza and chatted amicably until he left a few hours later, still hotly denying he was acting on Severus's orders.

Classes and revising took up all of her time. Finals were just around the corner, not to mention the notes she still had to re-review for the classes she'd missed after her accident. She was grateful her stamina was back to normal, not Apparating the only restriction remaining on her magic through this Friday's deadline.

Hermione smiled as she thought of the coming weekend. She thoroughly enjoyed Severus's company whenever he was around, but taking the dour man out of his everyday surroundings tended to add a new dimension to his personality. She had been more than pleasantly surprised when he had shown up in Amsterdam, playing the genial host and guiding her around the town. Even their forays into London took on new meaning when he showed her wizarding areas she never knew existed.

He had been a frequent visitor to Rome over the years and had told her he had a few surprises planned. She grinned evilly as she thought of a few surprises she might have for him, too.

"Merooow!" The orange half-Kneazle wound himself around his Mistress's legs, shedding copious amount of fur on the soft flannel of her robe *That should teach her to ignore me*, he thought.

"Sorry, boy. Are you hungry? Come on, Crooks, let's get you something to eat." Harry had agreed to stop in over the weekend and check on him. Hermione sighed as she went in search of food for her cat. This weekend. She still had three papers to write, two books to read, and several classes to revise for before she could even think of leaving for the weekend. Not to mention the review sheets she had started in an effort to rate the masters attending the Symposium. She wanted to have a handle on the pluses and minuses associated with each before making her decision. With a heavy sigh, she pushed thought of Severus to the back of her mind and returned to the present: feeding Crooks and starting on the notes for her first paper.

The weekend seemed a long way off.

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Severus felt the tingle of magic as Hermione's wards dropped in recognition. He let himself into the flat, aware she wouldn't be home for another hour. He had finished marking the week's essays last night and verified Albus had reassigned his House duties to the remaining three Heads of House, still not taking Albus up on his offer to substitute. He had no desire to come back and find the Slytherin common room redecorated again. His two upper-level classes had been given an independent study project in lieu of Friday classes - six feet on the properties and possible interactions of six rare and seldom used herbs of which only three books in the Restricted Section contained the needed information due on his desk by the close of class on Friday. It meant more work for him when he returned, but it was far preferable than having

Albus substitute for the day.

He supposed he could have stayed in his quarters until it was time to pick her up, but he was most anxious to see Hermione again. He'd become used to seeing her midweek, Wednesday nights, but he had arranged to switch his Friday night duties with Flitwick's Wednesday night, not to mention he'd wanted his desk clear for the weekend.

He settled on the sofa, drawing the notes for his presentation from the side pocket of his trousers. His reference books for the notes resided with his miniaturised trunk, currently resting in the inner pocket of his robes hanging on the hook next to the front door.

Crooks nonchalantly strolled along the back of the sofa, stopping every so often to casually lick his paw and clean his face.

"Don't even think about it. Hallowe'en is long over. I shan't have need of orange and black trousers until next year." He glared at the immense ginger cat, hoping it would get the message.

Having stopped just a few inches away, Crooks never paused in the process of his grooming, choosing to ignore the dark man rather than acknowledge his existence.

Satisfied, Severus turned back to his notes. Some minutes later he felt the cat butt against his shoulder, demanding attention. "You certainly like to live dangerously, don't you?" He absently scratched the cat behind its ear, knowing Hermione would never forgive him if he hexed her familiar.

It was this cosy little scene that greeted her eyes when Hermione finally made it back to her flat. "Well, well, it looks like you two have started without me." She laughed at Severus's guilty expression as he hastily pulled away from Crookshanks.

"It's the only way to keep the damn thing from ruining my clothes."

Hermione perched on the arm of the sofa. "Right, you still think he sheds purposely on your trousers."

Severus pulled her onto his lap. "Enough out of you." He captured her lips in a passionate kiss, pulling her tight in his embrace.

She smiled warmly when they finally broke apart. "I missed you last night, though even with the extra study time I could still use a few more days to get my ducks in line if we're going to be gone the whole weekend."

"Would you rather leave in the morning? I know they require the speakers to check in tonight, but I can make arrangements to retrieve you tomorrow."

"*You're going to a romantic hotel without her? What are you - nuts? Of course she's going with you, how do you expect us to get shagged tonight if she's not there?*"

While he agreed in principle with what the annoying voice in his head was saying, he had made a vow to himself not to stand in her way, especially where her education was concerned. If she needed another night to catch up, so be it. It wouldn't be the first time he'd had to take matters into his own hands, so to speak.

"Have you lost your mind? I'm not sending you anywhere without me, especially to some place called *The Enchantment*. I can't wait to see what the Jungle Suite looks like. What time is our Portkey?"

"We still have another half hour. Are you packed already?" While he had meant what he said, he was still inordinately pleased they would have tonight together as planned.

"Just about. I still have a few things I need to do." With a quick kiss, she was off his lap and heading down the hall to her bedroom. "Where do we leave from?" she called over her shoulder as she disappeared through the bedroom doorway.

"We're scheduled to depart from your front steps in..." he pulled the matchbook from the breast pocket of his dress shirt and checked the timer on the front "...in thirty-four minutes."

Fifteen minutes later, Hermione emerged from her bedroom, freshly scrubbed and dressed for travelling, her trunk gently bobbing along behind her. "All set."

Severus levitated her trunk to the floor. "You're not supposed to lift anything heavy. Why didn't you call me?"

"That was last week. Severus, I'm fine. Really. Just let me make sure the refill spells on Crooks's dishes are in place, and we can go. Harry said he would stop by and check on him over the weekend."

He still worried that there was something St Mungo's and Poppy had overlooked. No one remained unconscious for three days without having some kind of long-term problems to deal with. Knowing it was wiser to let the matter drop for now, he shrank her trunk and placed it with his. "And where, may I ask, is your book bag? You look positively nude without it."

"It's in my trunk. You don't think I'd leave without it, do you?"

He walked up behind her, admiring the view from the back. She had changed into a pair of black tailored trousers and a rather form-fitting jumper. Her hair was pulled back at the crown and flowed sensuously down her back. "Have I told you how great you look lately?" He pulled her back against his chest, engulfing her in a hug.

"Is that to imply that I don't usually look this good?"

Severus cleared his throat. "Ready to go?"

Hermione turned and kissed his cheek. "Coward," she said with a laugh. "All set. After you, sir." She snagged her travelling cloak off the hook next to his.

"You may live to regret that comment, Miss Granger."

"Right." She looked around the flat one last time. "My trunk?"

He patted the side of his cloak. "It's here with mine. Ready?"

Hermione followed him out the door and down the stairs. She snuggled into his side, allowing him to pull her tightly against him. Portkey travel did not use the same type of magic Apparating required. While there were no limits on her ability to Portkey, she disliked the disorienting feeling when you arrived. It was easier to hang on to Severus and let him steady her when they landed.

Severus pulled the matchbook out of his pocket and checked the timer. "We have less than a minute to go."

He held Hermione's hand, the matchbook resting between their palms. Suddenly she felt the tug of magic somewhere behind her navel, and they were instantly whisked away. Seconds later, Hermione landed shakily in a cordoned off section of the main lobby of *The Enchantment*. Severus's arm around her waist helped to steady her through the dizzying feeling she had come to associate with that type of travel.

"Ah, Professor Snape and Miss Granger, right on time. Welcome to *The Enchantment*; I'm Sabrina Beam. We have your accommodations all ready for you. If you will follow me, please?" A middle-aged woman, draped in dark green velvet robes, stood smiling next to the velvet rope, checking off their names on the clipboard she was holding.

They had no choice but to follow her across the lobby to the check-in desk. A young man standing behind the counter greeted them. "Good evening, welcome to *The Enchantment*."

"Markus, this is ..." Sabrina consulted her clipboard, "...Professor Severus Snape and Miss Hermione Granger. They have reserved, oh my, the Jungle Suite. Oh, that's one of our finest accommodations. I'm sure you will be quite pleased. Markus will check you in and answer any questions you may have. Have an enchanted day!" Sabrina hurried back to the arrival point. The Portkeys had been scheduled to arrive every ten minutes, the next one due in just a minute. "A concierge's work is never done," she mumbled quietly.

Breathlessly, Hermione looked around the opulent lobby. The ceiling was several stories high and was formed predominately of finely grained marble trimmed in shades of dark green shot through with streaks of silver and gold. Torches set at irregular intervals along the walls lent a warm and inviting glow to the open area.

Hermione smiled as she heard Sabrina Beam exclaim, "Professor Thompson, right on time. Welcome to *The Enchantment*; I'm Sabrina Beam. We have your accommodations all ready for you. If you will follow me, please?"

"Hermione?" Severus smiled as she turned back toward the counter. He nodded toward the young man behind it. "He needs your wand for a minute."

"As I explained to the Professor, the entry to your suite is keyed to your wand." The young man pointed to a series of marble columns against the far wall. "The end column will take you to your suite." He tapped a square set into the counter top. It glowed oddly, engulfing their wands in an eerie light.

Handing their wands back, he turned to the young wizard who had suddenly appeared at Severus's side. "Charles, please show our guests to the Jungle Suite."

"Of course. If you will follow me?"

Dutifully, they followed the young man to the row of columns. The marble column was unremarkable, save for an open square situated in the very centre. "Each column represents a floor in the hotel. Your wands have been keyed to your accommodations. Only you will have access to your room; should you wish to have someone meet you there, you need only to alert the desk. A special one-time-only guest wand will be made available for your visitor. If you will tap your wands on the silver circle set into the bottom of the open square, you will be transported to your suite." The young man removed a wand emblazoned along the side with the words "The Enchantment - Staff only - Level 5" from his side pocket.

"Are you coming with us?" Hermione thought the method resembled Portkey travel. It boggled the mind to think they had to keep reprogramming the room entrances for each new guest.

"Yes, ma'am. I will be happy to point out the various amenities of the suite and answer any question you have. If you would tap the circle, please, I'll be right behind you."

Hermione shrugged as she and Severus simultaneously tapped the circle. Instantly, they were transported to a small private foyer, more the size of large closet rather than a suite. A large closed door stood in front of them, the only exit obvious in the closed room.

Charles appeared behind them. "This is a privacy measure for our guests. Hotel personnel, as well as invited guests, are not immediately admitted to your room. If you will touch your wand anywhere on the door in front of you..."

Severus tapped the door, feeling a tingle of magic as the pre-programmed wards recognised his wand and opened silently. The view through the open doorway was not to be denied. With a startled gasp, Hermione walked through the doorway and into paradise.

"I hope the suite meets with your approval." Charles stood discreetly to the side. The Jungle Suite was one of the most expensive and most often requested suites in the hotel. It stunned most of the guests to silence the first time they viewed their enchanted surroundings.

"Severus, look, a waterfall." Hermione's smile lit her face as she recalled the erotic memories she had of the last hotel room they had stayed in and their adventures in that waterfall. She held onto the balcony railing surveying the room.

The inner door had opened onto another foyer, this one open-ended on one side. A small desk, with enchanted writing paper and several rolls of parchment proclaiming the offerings of the hotel, stood to the left of the open doorway. A closed railing ran across the open end of the foyer, creating a small balcony that overlooked the suite. A rope walkway, hanging at least two stories above ground, ran from a gate set into the railing to a giant tree house, complete with bamboo walls and a thatched roof, situated in the middle of the room.

Severus could see a waterfall with a small wading pond in the far corner of the jungle floor; a lush path of green grass led from the edge of the pond to the bottom of the tree housing the tree house. The sounds of rare and unusual birds calling to one another could be heard above the sound of the waterfall. Everywhere he looked, brightly coloured flowers covered the trees and shrubs inhabiting the suite, the air scented with their exotic fragrances.

"If you will follow me, I'll show you the tree house and the lift that takes you down to the jungle floor." He opened the gate and stepped out onto the walkway. Sensing Hermione's hesitancy, Charles smiled. "You're quite safe, the walkway is solid. Actually, there is a spell surrounding it, creating a sort of invisible tunnel. It would be impossible to fall from here, if you were to accidentally slip." He turned and walked on toward the tree house.

"Severus, you go first. I'll follow you."

"Very well." Severus smiled; she could face down a Dark Lord all on her own, but she needed him to go first on the walkway. He took her hand and stepped out onto the path. It was an interesting illusion. The rope walkway looked as if it should sway and creak in the air. Instead, all he could feel was solid floor beneath his feet.

Hermione followed behind him. "Well, this isn't so bad."

Charles waited for them on the outer balcony of the tree house. Silently, he ushered them through the doorway and stepped to the side. A large bed, more of a giant hammock, dominated one wall of the room. A large chest of drawers, complete with a shimmering mirror, lined the other wall. Several 'windows' and an open doorway, leading to what Severus assumed was the lift down, occupied the wall to his left, giving the room an open and airy feeling.

Hermione smiled as she looked out the window at the jungle floor below; she could never have imagined a more romantic place on earth.

"The bed controls are located here, sir. If you wish to have the bed swing, functioning more like a true hammock, set the lever to the bottom. Moving it to the top will not change the look of the bed, but it will no longer move; the bed will remain firmly in place and feel the same as any normal bed would. There are controls for the lift located inside it and inside the door here, as well as a panel set into the tree at the bottom. The closed door there leads to a rather spacious bathroom, complete with your own Jacuzzi. Or you can swim in the pond under the waterfall. The room is completely private, the only access through the door you originally came in. Should you find the sound of the birds not to be to your liking, there is a banishing spell on one of the parchments on the desk in the foyer. You can also reach room service, if you wish, by filling out the appropriate scroll, also located on the desk. The front desk can also be accessed in this manner."

He gestured to a thick packet of parchment resting on the dresser. "The Symposium sent your registration information just before you checked in, Professor Snape. If you would like, I would be happy to unpack your trunks for you."

Severus shook his head. He could easily come up with quite a few unforgettable scenarios that lent themselves to their surroundings. First he needed to get rid of the young man. "Thank you, but I believe that will be all."

Severus tipped Charles generously, pleased with their accommodations, before escorting the young man back to the entranceway and out the door. The Professor added a few wards of his own to those already in place and turned back to the tree house. He found Hermione where he'd left her, looking out on the jungle floor below them.

"Does this meet with your approval?" Gently, he pulled her back against his chest. She tipped her head to the side, giving him easy access to her neck.

Hermione moaned softly as he placed feather-soft kisses down the side of her neck, nipping and sucking the tender skin as he moved along. He gently pinched her nipples through the rough weave of her jumper, finding the sensitive buds already hard when he touched her. "This place is amazing." She turned to face him, threading her fingers into the hair at the base of his neck. "Don't you think we're a little overdressed?"

"While I agree with you, I still have to register with the welcome committee. Perhaps you'd like to soak in the tub while I'm gone. I don't imagine it will take me too long. I should be back shortly."

"You're going to the Exhibition Hall? Maybe I'll come with you. I'd rather wait and explore the jungle floor when we come back." She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively. "The wading pond looks extremely inviting from here."

Severus smiled; she had to be the only woman he'd ever met that got as turned on by the thought of academics as she did at the thought of sex. He grabbed the registration packet off the dresser and gestured toward the walkway. "After you."

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They found the central registration for the Symposium fairly quickly, Severus taking care of the details as Hermione wandered about.

"All set. It's still early, but I took the liberty of making dinner reservation for seven o'clock at a local restaurant near here. I haven't been there in quite some time, but I remember the food was excellent."

Now that they were out of "The Garden of Eden", as she had dubbed the room, Hermione was more interested in wallowing in the knowledge laid out around her. "Would you mind if we looked in the Trade Hall for a while? We only have an hour to kill before dinner. Once we get back to 'The Garden of Eden', I'd rather stay there, if you know what I mean."

A certain part of his anatomy twitched in agreement with her suggestion.

"And you were going to let her stay alone in her flat tonight? Thank God, she didn't listen to you, you berk."

Severus had to agree with the voice, the thought of 'exploring' the waterfall filling his head with erotic images.

"Severus?"

He snapped back to the present, gesturing to a sign hovering over the doorway in front of them, proclaiming "Trade Hall" in large black letters. "Lead on."

The Hall was crammed with various merchants displaying their wares. It brought Hermione back to her childhood when she would shop with her mother on a Saturday morning at the market, moving from vendor to vendor, inspecting their wares, except those merchants never displayed anything nearly as unusual as the items that met her eyes now.

Items in jars, reminiscent of the jars in Severus's office, looked back at her from several of the booths. Various items floated in the air, hovering several feet off the ground, some changing colour as a prospective buyer examined them. There were quite a few products she couldn't identify. She moved to a stall displaying bundles of translucent cloth. A loud squeaking sound from a barrel next to the table startled her. "What's that?"

"Don't touch it!" Severus reach out and grabbed her hand. "He's a type of Gagorian silk worm, very common in small towns in the foothills. They spin the silk you see woven into the fabric there. Their bite is most caustic. What are they doing here?"

"Ah, I see the gentleman is familiar with Gagorian silk. While it's true the silk cloth you see is most commonly used to create wearing apparel, we have found a new way to weave the silk creating an even weave throughout the fabric. It has proven most effective as an inexpensive means of straining potions ingredients."

Deftly, the merchant grabbed the top cloth; a wave of his wand and the sides drew up to form a loose bag. The wizard moved to a cauldron opposite the screeching barrel. He cast a quick Silencing Charm over the worms, cutting off the sound mid-screch.

"Why do they do that?" Hermione, her thirst for knowledge piqued, had never seen that type of creature before.

"It's their way of communicating. Now, watch." In the manner of con men everywhere, he plucked a beaker off the back table and poured it into the makeshift bag. The contents bubbled gently before seeping through the translucent fabric. "And voilà! The potion is evenly strained. A simple wave of your wand, and the cloth is cleaned and ready to use again."

"Right." Severus led Hermione away as the merchant turned to his next victim. "Cheesecloth does the same thing at a much lower cost, I'll venture." He had to wonder who was responsible for signing up the vendors. Most likely anyone with a Knut to spend was allowed to rent space in the Hall, from what he could see.

Hermione looped her arm through his. "Think of it as an adventure."

Severus smiled wanly; the only adventure he wanted to think about involved Hermione and a waterfall, but they would get to that later. He really needed to focus on the here and now, but after four days without her and such an erotic setting waiting for them, he found his mind wandering to more erotic thoughts than potions ingredients and supplies.

Hermione led him to another stall. Cauldrons of all shapes and sizes, of every material imaginable, were stacked in towering columns, magic the only thing keeping them from falling over. "You seem to know a lot about the area. Have you been to Rome before?"

"A few times, though it's been a while." Severus reached out toward a glass cauldron buried in the middle of one of the towers. "This looks interesting. I've always wanted one for my personal lab." He looked around when he failed to hear a response. Hermione had wandered further down the aisle; he saw her standing a few booths over, reverently holding a book in her hand, another one hovering at her elbow.

He chuckled, thinking she would most likely buy out the merchant before the Symposium even started. He'd probably have to drag her out of there if they were going to make their reservations.

"You've made a fine choice there, sir." The merchant indicated the glass cauldron Severus had been admiring. "Would you like me to remove it from the stack so you can get a closer look?"

"What temperature is this cauldron rated...?" The sound of Hermione's name, shouted in the crowd, caught his attention. Severus looked on in astonishment at the young man hugging Hermione two stalls to his left, the book she had been looking at hovering forgotten in the air.

"Hermione! It's so good to see you." The young man enfolded the startled witch in his embrace. "What are you doing here? Did you find a master to apprentice with already?"

"Steven?" Surprise was clearly written on Hermione's face. "I thought you were in America? What are *you* doing here?" His hug was fierce and making her more than a little uncomfortable as she tried to free herself from his grasp.

The young wizard moved back to look at her, his hands resting lightly on her shoulders. "I came back. I started November first with Knavish Potions and Charms. I joined

their research team. You look wonderful." His voice dropped slightly. "I can't tell you how much I've missed you. Leaving you was probably the biggest mistake I ever made."

Hermione shook her head. "It was the best choice for both of us, you know that. We're much better off as friends than we ever were as a couple."

"Maybe, I'm not so sure of that anymore. Maybe we can have dinner tonight and talk about why we broke up in the first place. I don't think I remember why anymore." He stepped back, his hands dropping to his sides as he noticed Hermione's expression. He knew that look in her eyes. Friendship. Fine, he could press his reasons for still wanting to see her later. For his own safety, he adjusted the distance between them: space more befitting a "friendship" rather than something more intimate. "You still haven't answered my question, what are you doing here? If I remember right, you don't start your apprenticeship until next year."

Severus's surprise turned to anger at the meaning of the young man's words. Couple? They were a couple at one time? Just how well did she know this wizard? Severus eyed the young man, quickly assessing his opponent with a practised eye. The young man was about Hermione's age, dark hair, fair complexion, about his height, only a few inches shorter. It was obvious the young man worked out, he appeared to be fit. "*Not bad looking - if you went in for those 'pretty boy types'*", he thought.

"Oh yeah," said the annoying voice in his head, mocking him. "*The man's got nothing on you. I can see why she broke up with him!*"

He told the voice to sod off while trying to ignore the urge to hex the young man and forcefully drag Hermione out of there. While he could hear most of the conversation between the two, he desperately wished Hermione would turn around. Her back had been to him throughout their whole exchange. He needed to see her eyes, to know what she was thinking.

"Steven, we broke up because we were friends. We had fun, but there never was anything more between us, you know that. I'm here with Professor Snape. I wanted to observe a few of the masters I was thinking I might like to apprentice with. Severus is speaking tomorrow, so this seemed to be a golden opportunity for me."

"Look, I get off at eight. How about a late dinner and we can catch up on each other?"

Hermione shook her head. "Steven, I'm here with Severus not just for the Symposium; I'm *with him*."

"Snape?" His eyes widened with recognition as he added up the facts. He had attended Beauxbatons, but he knew of Snape by his reputation alone. She couldn't mean... "Snape? The same Snape that taught Potions at Hogwarts? You're dating your professor? You're dating *that* Snape?"

Hermione chuckled. Funny, a lot of people seemed to have that reaction when she mentioned her relationship with Severus. "Ex-professor, but, yes, I'm seeing *that* Snape. Is there another Snape? As far as I know, Severus is an only child."

She sensed his presence even before she felt the warmth of his hand at her elbow. The subtle scent of sandalwood mixed with herbs gently reached her seconds before the smooth velvet of his voice flowed over her.

"There you are, I was wondering where you'd wandered off to. I don't want to interrupt, but it is getting late. Shall we return to our suite and freshen up before dinner?" He moved to the side, his arm draped lightly across her back, staking out his property.

"Severus." Hermione smiled warmly at the dark man; she wasn't sure how much of the conversation he'd heard, but from his possessive hold, she guessed most of it. "This is an old friend of mine. Severus, this is Steven Garrison. Steven, Professor Severus Snape."

Both men nodded silently, neither one moving an inch.

"Well," she replied, awkwardly, "we really do need to get going."

"Uh, yeah. Well, it was nice to see you again. Take care of yourself. It was, uhm, nice to meet you, too, Professor Snape." He had heard rumours that she was dating someone, but he had dismissed them as hearsay. He watched with open curiosity as Severus led her out of the Exhibition Hall.

The 'Hermione' he had dated had been way too focused on her studies to become involved with anyone. It was one of the reasons they had broken up. She was never available for a quick date when he wanted to see her. She refused to go to any of the campus Quidditch matches, saying her time was better spent in the library, revising for her classes. She had even tried to set up a revision schedule for him, claiming he wasn't taking his education seriously.

Their breakup had been amicable. Every few weeks they would have lunch in the Student Union. He would bring her up-to-date on his choice of masters for his apprenticeship and she would talk about her plans. He dated several witches at a time, not seeing anyone exclusively, since he had finally decided on going to America to finish his course work.

Even though the women he dated were much more suited to his tastes and lifestyle, he found they lacked a certain...something... that he'd had with Hermione. His dates went to Quidditch matches with him at the drop of a wand, pub-crawling until all hours of the morning, and never once berated him for not revising. Still, he found something wrong with each and every one of them.

Steven shrugged; he had thought about looking Hermione up, now that he was back in London, but something or someone always seemed to get in his way. One of those 'someones' came up behind him now.

"Stevie, this is sooo boring. Can't we duck out of here and have some fun?"

He smiled at the young witch. "I have to work for another hour, then the night is ours. Why don't you go back to the room and get ready?"

Stacy nodded happily. "Just don't keep me waiting, or I might have to find someone else to occupy my time while I wait for you."

He watched the young woman walk out of the hall: her long blond hair swung from side to side, her hips swayed provocatively in the tight robes she wore, accenting the curves of her body as she moved. "*Well, one witch down, and hundreds more to go!*" he thought, but a wave of melancholy swept over him when he realised he would never have another chance with Hermione. He looked longingly at the doorway where Hermione and the Professor had disappeared, before turning back to the work at hand.

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She pushed him onto the bed. "All right, talk."

Severus shook his head. "There is nothing to talk about. We have dinner reservations in fifteen minutes. I suggest you freshen up so we can go."

"I'm not going anywhere. Talk to me. What is it? I assume you're upset because of Steven. We dated for a while, a year ago. There was nothing there. No spark, nothing. Just, sort of ... nice. He was going off to America to apprentice, so we broke it off. We got along better as friends than anything else, anyway."

Severus watched her eyes. Friends? "Just how well *did* you know this man?"

"Is that what this is about? You're jealous because we dated? You want to know if I slept with him?"

He was on her in a flash, pushing her back into the soft duvet that draped the bed, his body covering hers. His mouth sealed over hers, his tongue demanding entrance to the warm cavern of her mouth. Jealous? He was too old to be jealous. He was too old for this, as he pushed the image of Hermione with the young man out of his mind.

The need for air broke them apart. "I don't care what you did or didn't do in the past. You are mine now. And I do not share." His breath was hot as he hissed into her ear.

Hermione shivered at the force of his words. "Neither do I." She could feel the steel of his erection pressing into her thigh. She knew she should be annoyed with his 'caveman routine', but the rare sight of Severus Snape losing control, lowering his defences, amazed her. She rolled her hips, nudging his arousal.

None too gently, he pinched and pulled at the hard bud of her nipple before capturing her hands in his, quickly pinning them over her head. A quiet whisper and their clothes disappeared before he leaned in for another searing kiss.

She opened before him, her body arching into his, her legs moving around his waist, trying to draw him to her.

He pulled back, his body throbbing with need. His gaze was fierce as he locked eyes with her. "You are mine." The statement was punctuated with a full thrust of his hips, her body sheathing his as his erection slid home. "Say it," he growled.

"I'm yours," Hermione groaned. She could feel her climax building already as he greedily sucked at her nipples. He nipped the soft flesh before soothing it with his tongue. "I love you. I'm yours and you're mine," she whispered softly.

Severus nodded. He was hers. While there was no question she belonged to him, the same was true of him. He belonged to her. He didn't want to live anymore if he didn't have her. He was barely conscious of the world around him. His sole focus the witch moving against him, eliciting feelings he'd never had before. He could feel his balls begin to tighten as the sensation built at the base of his spine. He had been rougher than usual, though she seemed to enjoy it too, if her moans were anything to go by.

"Say it," she demanded, shaking as her orgasm built with more force than ever before, her hips rising to meet his every thrust.

"I'm yours, forever, and ever. I love you." The words were ground out through clenched teeth as he tried to hold on, to let Hermione come first.

He felt a sudden tingle of magic as Hermione came. He rode the wave of contractions as he thrust into the heat of her body, coming forcefully just moments later. Again, the tingle of magic passed over the two. His lust-fogged brain catalogued the sensations for later examination, choosing instead to focus on the need to breathe as he rode out the aftershock of his own climax, Hermione's muscles still sending out small tremors as they clenched and unclenched around his still-hard member.

Severus moved to the side, not letting go of the woman in his arms as he tried to catch his breath.

"I think we missed our reservations." Hermione pulled the covers over them as she settled into his side, smiling when she felt him pull her closer.

He chuckled, gracing her with one of his rare smiles. "I don't think we're dressed appropriately for *Agata e Romeo*, anyway." Gently, he moved her hair back off her face. "Are you okay? I was a bit... I was a bit 'rougher' than you've been used to."

Hermione broke out laughing. "Rougher? You were amazing!"

Amazing? Maybe it was time to introduce her to a few of his more 'unusual' areas of interest.

"Severus, I love you. There is nothing between Steven and I. You have to believe me."

He nodded silently. He knew she'd had other lovers, he just never thought he would ever come face-to-face with one of them. He had assumed she wasn't a virgin, even before she had confirmed the fact. He had just been grateful that none of her forays into sex had been with either member of the idiotic duo; he didn't know if he could have handled that.

"*Right, much better she'd shagged someone that looked like he stepped off the cover of Witch Weekly*"; the annoying voice in his head taunted, *"then she can really appreciate you better. I wonder if she..."*

Severus shut down the thought before it could form. He didn't want to think about Hermione with anyone else. His past was far more notorious than hers, and she didn't seem to think anything about it. He knew he was acting childish; he couldn't seem to help it. He'd never before felt the depth of emotions he felt when he thought of her.

Hermione sighed. "Hello?" She waved her hand in front of his face, drawing his attention back to her. "Dinner? I really am starving. Room service or a bite in the hotel?"

"Let's stay in tonight. We can have dinner out tomorrow, and I was able to get us a Portkey to Florence on Sunday after the Symposium ends, we can go out then. Tonight I think I would much rather have you all to myself." Gently, he tucked a few stray hairs behind her ear before pulling her down for a soft kiss.

"Room service it is. Maybe we can explore the pond later, if you're feeling up to it?"

"I believe I can 'rise' to the occasion."

"Do you need to revise your presentation for tomorrow? I was looking over the schedule of lectures. There're four other presentations I'd like to attend: two tomorrow and two on Saturday. You can go with me, or we can meet up later if you have other plans." She caressed his growing erection as she spoke, fascinated with the feel of steel encased in satin, smiling when he twitched as she varied her movements.

Severus chuckled softly: making love and academics, all in all, a most remarkable witch.

TBC

A/N: I swear, every time I try to tie up a loose end, it splits off into a new plot point. There still seems to be a lot of story left to tell. I thank each and every one of you who have come along for the ride. The next two chapters should answer the questions (and may create a few more) that were raised in this chapter.

Knavish Potions and Charms - knavish literally means 'an unprincipled, crafty fellow.' Sort of fits with the way I pictured Steven Garrison.

Agata e Romeo is a real restaurant in Rome, listed as one of the top ten restaurants to eat. It is described as an "intimate cordon bleu haven run by husband-and-wife team Agata and Romeo, who bring a light touch to traditional fare."

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: more of the Symposium, Severus's presentation, a few bumps in the road, Rancine (who is forever up to no good), a surprise meeting in Florence, the unexplained magic (which will make sense in the next chapter or two - Grin), the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

Pieces of a Rather Puzzling Situation

Chapter 40 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 40 Pieces of a Rather Puzzling Situation

Diffused light filled the tree house, the sound of gently falling water mingling with the call of exotic and unusual birds filling the scented air.

Severus groaned.

He missed his dungeons; no one should be subjected to sunlight before two in the afternoon. It should be written down somewhere, carved in stone and followed as law. He could handle mornings, having taught early classes for the last twenty years. It was the bright light, associated with annoyingly happy and cheerful Headmasters, one in particular, which got under his skin.

"Can you turn off those damn birds before I hex them into tomorrow?" The lump next to him shifted, pulling the covers further over her head.

"Good morning. I trust you slept well?"

"Do I smell coffee?"

Severus smiled and reached for the urn that had magically appeared at their bedside. "Yes, thank you, I slept well, too."

Hermione glared at him while reaching for the coffee cup he held out to her. He'd learned quite early on that she was not a 'morning' person. She thrived on the nighttime, and only liked the early hours if she was still awake for them. A liberal application of coffee was usually needed to bring her back to human form anytime before noon. Trial and error had taught him to wait until *after* her first cup, usually chugged fairly quickly, to try and converse.

He watched her up end the cup, her eyes sliding shut in almost orgasmic bliss as she savoured the flavour. She sighed deeply before opening her eyes and smiling at him. "More? Great coffee; by the way, is this part of the ambiance or did you order it beforehand?"

Severus shook his head as he poured her another cup. Obviously, her mind had decided to join the conversation as she came awake. "I ordered it las..."

"Damn it, look how bright it is. What time is it?" Hermione sat upright. "There's a lecture I wanted to attend at nine, and you still have your presentation at eleven."

His hand on her arm stilled the witch's movements. "Hermione, it's early. We have plenty of time; it's not even eight yet. You mentioned Galestorm's lecture last night. I wouldn't let you sleep through it. Relax."

She smiled sheepishly. "I'm sorry. It's just a little overwhelming. I wanted to meet these men so I could decide on my apprenticeship. I never figured you would talk about the alterations to the Wolfsbane Potion we're doing. These people are masters. What will they think when you present an idea from a third-year grad student? Maybe you should present it as your idea? That way it will have more weight."

"They will think you are the most brilliant witch they have ever met, something I already know. Stop selling yourself short. This is your idea, not mine. I will not take credit for something that I didn't do. Especially where you are concerned. Stop and take a deep breath. Everything will be fine. Come here." His voice softened as he gauged her level of nervousness.

He shifted her around so she was sitting with her back to him. Gently, he moved her hair to the side and started to work the muscles along her shoulders and down her spine. He could feel the tension radiating out from her, and it wasn't even eight a.m. yet. What would she be like by afternoon? "Breathe, Hermione, just breathe."

The young woman shifted forward, moaning softly. "Mmm, I could stay here all day. God, you have great hands."

"Yes, I believe you mentioned that last night, too." He smirked as he felt her tense for a very different reason. They had 'stayed in' last night, ordering room service for a light meal before exploring the jungle floor of their suite. The waterfall provided them with the opportunity to practice a few altered spells, his version of *Wingardium Leviosa* included. They made love slowly, taking time to enjoy each new sensation in the surging water.

Hermione had surprised him, when grinning evilly, she sat him on a submerged ledge and plunged under the water. He felt a moment of panic when she remained under the water administering to his hardened member, afraid she would drown herself while offering him pleasure. Bubbles broke the surface as she continued to suck and lick his stiff shaft. He tried to pull her up but she keep pushing his hands away before finally breaking the surface again.

"I'm fine. Sit back and enjoy."

Shock registered on his face as he looked at her. She had two small gills on either side of her neck. She wasn't drowning under the water, she was *breathing*! The gills were nowhere the size of those Potter had sprouted his fourth year during the Triwizard Tournament, those lasting hours. He could only assume she had taken a smaller amount of gillyweed, or modified the results of the weed, more likely. Either way, the sensation of the warm water churning around his cock and balls, Hermione's eager and talented tongue and mouth doing things to his body he'd never dreamt, was almost more than he could stand. He lay back and lost himself in the moment, marvelling at the brilliant woman, brilliant in all things, attending to him.

Now, pulling the pliant witch back into his embrace, he whispered in her ear, "As much as I would love to keep you here all day, we do have to get out of this bed sometime soon if we're to make that lecture on time."

Hermione kissed him over her shoulder. "You're evil, pure evil." She smacked him on his thigh before sliding from the bed. "Let me jump in the shower first, I need a bit of extra time to charm my hair this morning. The tree house is great, but I could do without the humidity."

Severus watched her sashay toward the suite's bathroom, her lithe body enticing him with her every move. *And she says I'm evil?* his body responding to the visual stimuli of Hermione. With a sigh of his own, he moved to retrieve his notes for today's presentation. He had every intention of trying out a few of his more 'inventive' ideas on the witch tonight; that train of thought would have to wait for later, they had other, more pressing, matters to deal with at the moment.

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Galestorm's lecture, "Potions and You, A History of Change," proved to be as boring as it sounded.

"I would assume, from the sheer volume of yawns I witnessed during Galestorm's presentation, that you have crossed him off your list?" he asked.

"As hard as it may be to believe, I think Professor Galestorm is more boring than Professor Binns. I never thought I would say that about anyone."

Severus had to agree with Hermione's evaluation of the man. Galestorm was one of the four masters Hermione had targeted for her apprenticeship. The man was much published in the field, bringing forth a new article almost every quarter. He was roughly the same age as Severus, teaching at a private academy in Scotland. If she apprenticed with him, she would be within easy Apparating distance of Hogwarts. Even Hogsmeade would have been a simple Floo call away.

But the man would never challenge her. He would stay true to the programme, training her in all the traditional methods of potions making, but he would never offer her the chance to expand her horizons, to push past the boundaries and explore the unknown.

They wove their way through the crowded corridor. "One down and three to go." Hermione pulled a folded scroll from her shoulder bag. "You're presenting in room 200. That should be this way."

Silently, he followed the witch. He had watched her dress this morning studious dark blue robes, low heels, her hair pulled back in a soft chignon at the nape of her neck and had been more than a little surprised when she had pulled a handbag from her trunk. He had half expected the ever-present book bag to make its appearance, instead. A silencing glance and a mumbled comment about appearing professional stopped any further discussion.

No amount of discussion could convince her that she was valuable on her merits alone. Severus marvelled at a brain so brilliant as to create original spells, to research and process information some of the most accredited minds were lack to do, and yet unable to think herself worthy of the masters she was pursuing. It was ludicrous, really, but it was pure Hermione.

They turned into the main corridor and located room 200. Severus moved to the lectern, his black dress robes billowing around him. Hermione took a seat in the front row, refusing his offer of sitting behind the podium, saying she would join him when the time came. Her eyes shone with pride as she watched Severus behind the lectern.

The room filled quickly with wizards and witches of every size and shape hurrying to get a seat. Room 200 was actually a double room, set with seating for at least 400. The room was packed. The chance to hear the elusive Potions master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, war hero, medal winner, Potions master extraordinaire expound on Dark potions, the Wolfsbane in particular, was too good to miss. It seemed as if everyone attending the Symposium was present.

An owl hooted, signalling the start of the current session. Every seat was taken and still there were dozens of people standing against the back wall, and still more standing in the doorway. Rancine's voice could be heard clearly in the outer corridor.

"If you would all please take your seats. We need to leave the corridors clear, please." Rancine pushed through the throng standing in the doorway. "Is there some reason you people won't sit down?"

"I believe even you should be able to discern the problem, Rancine. We seem to be short a few seats." Severus's tone was snide as he regarded the oily little man.

"You can't all be registered for this presentation? I need to see your scrolls." His voice rose with annoyance, his face turning red. When he'd agreed to help organized the presentations for the Symposium, he'd set up a strict time schedule of lectures, varying the topics to help maintain interest. This would never do.

"Oh, enough." Severus said with a sneer. A wave of his wand and the room magically enlarged, another wave and several rows of empty seats, enough to accommodate everyone, appeared. "If you don't mind?"

"This is highly irregular, Snape. You cannot..."

A chorus of 'shhs' and 'would you get out of the way' met his protest. Rancine moved to the doorway, glancing hatefully at Severus.

"Good morning, I have been asked to speak today on Dark Potions, their attributes, what creates them, Dark Magic and, more specifically, the Wolfsbane Potion." A single piece of parchment blinked into existence on the lectern in front of Severus. "I am to inform you: if you are not registered for this presentation, you must leave."

The parchment levitated several inches above the podium and burst into flames. "I believe that takes care of that."

He spent the next hour and a half holding his audience enthralled. He dragged out obscure potions that were now considered Dark by the Ministry but had at one time been in common use, only to fall into ill repute during Grindelwald's rise. The first Dark Lord had been even more deeply immersed in the Dark Arts than the second Dark Lord. Those in attendance hung on his every word as he explained what made intent 'Dark'.

He held them on the edge of their seats, using his voice to its fullest as he touched on the potions he had helped to create, finally coming to the last potion on his list, the Wolfsbane Potion. A potion almost every master had tried to brew, very few having any success.

"I could stand here and tell you of the difficulties of brewing this potion: the timing required at each stage of the process; the phases of the moon necessary to ensure each ingredient is at its full potency when added to the brew. But you are all educated wizards and witches. You have all read the recipe, attempted the potion, and know the difficulties involved. Instead, I would like to introduce you to someone, and tell you about a project we have been working on concerning a few revolutionary changes we have undertaken in creating an alteration to the traditional Wolfsbane Potion. A preliminary report of our findings will be published in the next issue of *Potions Quarterly* with actual trials to begin over the winter hols."

Severus nodded to Hermione, waiting until she joined him to introduce her. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like you to meet Miss Hermione Granger."

A quiet ripple ran through the group. Her name was well known as a hero of the war; a friend of Harry Potter, the boy who lived to save the world; and had most recently been linked with his in *Witch Weekly*. Hermione smiled shyly and nodded at the crowd.

"Those of you immersed in academics would definitely appreciate the level of OWLs and NEWTs Miss Granger attained while at attendance at Hogwarts, but it is something far more extraordinary I should like to tell you about. Miss Granger has devised a way to 'alter' the Wolfsbane Potion, allowing those taking it to retain greater control of their minds than ever before. We are currently testing various combinations of materials: a silver cauldron, a pewter cauldron, and an iron cauldron combined with different stirring rods to change the principal effects of an ingredient. It has been a long series of trials to find the right combination of ingredients to create a potion that will offer the user the most benefits without adding to its side effects."

It didn't take long for the group to start questioning Hermione. Severus led the various queries for a few minutes, slowly stepping back and allowing Hermione to take charge. She forgot her nervousness as her passion for the subject at hand came forth. If the assembled had any qualms of listening to a 'third-year grad student,' they quickly forgot them as Hermione warmed to the topic, her brilliance shining through.

An owl sounded signalling the end of the session. Rancine burst through the closed doorway, once again trying to take control of the situation. "Thank you all for attending. We ask that you leave quickly and quietly. Lunch is currently being served in the main hall next to the Trade Exposition. Please move on, we would like to keep to the schedule."

The group as a whole protested the interruption. Severus smiled as the witches and wizards turned on the oily little man.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, while I can understand your enthusiasm, I really must ask you to disperse, we would like to have this room back to normal and ready for the next presentation when lunch ends. Now, move along, please."

A middle-aged wizard shouted from the back of the group, "Miss Granger, where can you be reached? Are you currently teaching at Hogwarts with Professor Snape?"

"Uhm, no. I'm currently studying at Cambridge. Professor Snape and I have been using his lab at Hogwarts for our experiments, but I don't teach there."

Severus's hand at the small of her back steadied the young woman. "Perhaps I neglected to mention that fact. Miss Granger is a third-year grad student in the new experimental programme at Cambridge, carrying a double major of Charms and Potions. For those interested, she will be starting her apprenticeship next year."

A clamour of voices rang out as questions were thrown at the pair.

"Why aren't you apprenticing with Professor Snape?"

"You're a student?"

"How did you come up with your theories?"

"Would you be willing to do a question and answer tomorrow?"

"How can we reach you?"

Rancine continued to break up the room, trying to stop those interested in talking to Hermione from reaching the lectern.

"Miss Granger."

A younger man, just past thirty, with rugged good looks, addressed Hermione. Severus sighed: Tenbrook. He'd run across the man before. He was a Potions master of note, working for a private firm in London that did research, in addition to creating commercial potions. He could offer Hermione the challenge she needed. He was also one of the few masters that Severus knew of that could brew the Wolfsbane Potion properly. He was perfect for Hermione. Severus hated the man on principle alone.

Severus gestured in Tenbrook's direction. "Hermione Granger, Michael Tenbrook."

The man nodded. "Good afternoon, Professor Snape. I must say, I thoroughly enjoyed your lecture. Perhaps you would allow me to contact the two of you at a later date to discuss this development? I'm curious, who have you decided to apprentice with, Miss Granger?"

"I haven't applied yet, Professor Tenbrook. Actually, you're on my list. I was planning to attend your presentation tomorrow afternoon."

"It's not Professor. Please, call me Michael." A warm smile lit the man's face. "You haven't signed with anyone? Your name was removed from the list of eligible apprentices last week. I believe I have a copy of it somewhere." The man started patting his robe, turning out random pockets as he looked. "I don't seem to have the list with me."

"I really must ask you to leave the room now." Rancine approached the small group forming around the lectern. "We have need of the facilities for our other presenters."

"Professor Rancine, Mister Tenbrook said my name was removed from the list of apprentices. Do you know anything about that, sir?" Hermione looked questioningly at the professor.

"Really, Miss Granger, you are not the only student at Cambridge. I have over forty students to oversee in the apprentice programme alone. Whatever the problem, you may see me during normal office hours. Now, if you would all please disperse, I should like to keep the programme as close to schedule as possible." Rancine glared at those around him, daring them to comment.

"I believe Miss Granger asked you a question, Rancine." Severus's voice was low, menacing.

A voice in the growing crowd called out. "Granger? I have the apprentice list here. Your name's not on it."

The parchment made its way from the back of the small group to Hermione. She scanned the list, noting the names of her classmates and Rancine's signature at the bottom. "Professor?"

Rancine grabbed the list. "Mhm. Well, yes. I seem to recall you were matched up with a Professor Kuznetsov at the Siberian Institute. Oh, that's a fine institution, Miss Granger. You will be pleased with the level of education you receive there."

"Professor Rancine, how could I have been matched with Professor Kuznetsov? I haven't filed my request yet. The applications aren't due until January."

Kuznetsov, the name set off the Sneakoscopes in Severus's head. Kuznetsov had been a crony of Rancine's, coming forward to vouch for his pal just before the two witches he was accused of compromising withdrew their complaints.

"Rancine." Severus's hand closed around the wand in his pocket. It was obvious he was trying to destroy Hermione's chances of working with anyone who could really help her. At the same time, he might try to draw a few favours in exchange for a promised change in the programme.

"Really, Snape, this is none of your business. This is between my student and I." Rancine's voice had taken on a haughty quality, meant to assert his authority on the matter.

"I just made it my business."

Hermione could feel the tension radiating outward from Severus. If they didn't break this up soon, there was no telling what he would do to the man.

Tenbrook looked from one to another, sensing the growing danger. "The rules clearly state no apprentice is to be assigned a master until after grades have been posted. There must be some mistake. Miss Granger, I would be happy to discuss the programme with you. Perhaps you will have some free time over the next few days; I could

meet with you and Professor Snape, if you like. You can fill me in on the work you're doing with the Wolfsbane Potion, and I can answer any questions you have about an apprenticeship."

"Mister Tenbrook, I do not believe this concerns you, either. Miss Granger and I will resolve this matter when we return to Cambridge. Now, if you will excuse me, I have other matters to attend to."

Severus's quiet tone cut to the quick. "You will 'resolve' this matter now. Under no circumstances will Hermione apprentice with Kuznetsov. He may have gotten you off the hook last time. I will most assuredly guarantee you he will not help you out now. Her name will go back on the list. You will *not* interfere with her education."

"Are you threatening me?"

Tenbrook raised a hand. "Now, we're all civilised people here. There is no need for threats. I'm sure Professor Snape is merely concerned for Miss Granger's welfare. No doubt this is just a mistake."

Rancine snorted quietly. "Well, *some* of us are civilised. I believe this has gone on long enough."

"I agree. Hermione, I will return to Cambridge with you. We will settle this once and for all with the Headmaster there."

"Severus..."

"Oh, yes. That's right. Your authority extends to the whole of the wizarding world, does it? Just who do you think you are to tell me what to do? You may have fooled the Wizengamot into believing you were on the right side, but you don't fool me for a minute, Snape."

Severus ignored the barb. While casting an Unforgivable on the man would have been most satisfying, he had no intention of rotting in Azkaban for the fleeting pleasure said hexing could bring. "Tenbrook, we're staying here at *The Enchantment*. Perhaps we can meet sometime tomorrow afternoon. It would be helpful to discuss the Wolfsbane with another master who can actually brew the potion properly." Severus glanced at Rancine, knowing the man would understand that he was making a passing reference on Rancine's inability to brew the difficult potion.

"I will not stand here and have you attempt to discredit my abilities, Snape."

"Do you have any abilities that *are* credible, Rancine?"

Rancine bristled, pulling himself up tall, puffing his chest out. "See here. I will not allow you to insult me. I believe a challenge is in order."

"A challenge? Severus...?" Hermione's face reflected the confusion she was feeling. Somehow, the whole matter seemed to have spiralled out of control. One minute she was in the middle of a fascinating academic debate, and the next all propriety was gone, along with the chance to choose her own future.

"Yes, a duel. For an insult to his imaginary 'honour.' Actually, Rancine, I don't believe I will duel with you," Severus commented, his tone conveying his boredom with the man. "Hermione, shall we?"

"A frightened Death Eater? Really, Snape, your reputation paints a much more dangerous person than you really are."

"You shouldn't belittle yourself in such a matter, Rancine. It's really not becoming."

Rancine bristled. "Enough. You won't duel me?"

"Perhaps the fact that I am a Duelling Master and you are...you... has escaped your attention? It would not be a fair fight." Severus reached for Hermione's arm, intent on guiding her away. "Shall we adjourn to the Trade Hall? There was a new cauldron I wanted to show you."

Rancine cast his eyes around at the larger crowd that was starting to form. This would never do. "You're afraid, fine. Hide behind Granger; run away. I'm surprised you didn't tell her to take care of me in your stead."

Severus stopped and turned back to the oily little man. His eyes narrowed in annoyance. "You must be joking? I have never 'run' from anyone in my life."

"Severus, he's baiting you. He's not worth Azkaban when you kill him." Hermione watched the two men. Severus, angry and commanding, was a sight to see. The force radiating from this powerful wizard was almost tangible in its strength.

The dark man tried to ignore the woman at his side, but her words penetrated his gathering anger, tempering his desire to cast an Unforgivable on the man. Perhaps he would just cast a few of the more creative hexes and curses he knew, instead, the results of which Rancine would never forget. With that thought in mind, Severus raised his wand.

Rancine could feel a change in the air around him. The thought that he had pushed Snape too far ran fleetingly through his mind. "Listen to the girl, Snape. You don't want to kill me."

One brow went up for emphasis, his smile unpleasant. "It's not killing you I have in mind."

"Severus!" Hermione was on the verge of casting a full Body-Bind on both men before they did something stupid. She took a step back and drew her wand; the crowd gathered around them shifted to give her room. "Someone will get hurt, and it may not be who either of you plan on. You two need to stop this now."

Rancine gestured in her general direction, his gaze still locked with Severus's. "Or what? You'll send me to my room? You may have him kowtowed, but I can assure you, I will not put up with your bossiness. You will lower your wand this minute or I will have you expelled from Cambridge."

Severus smiled. The man had just made the biggest mistake of his life. Hermione would put up with a lot of things, but threatening her education was number two on her list of reasons to retaliate, all else be damned. It fell right behind protecting and loving her family and friends. He lowered his wand. "You don't realise what you just did, do you?" His voice was soft, menacing. He could feel the air around them shift as Hermione's anger gathered. "I wouldn't exactly say Hermione has me kowtowed, but even I know enough not to threaten her education. I suspect you don't want to duel either one of us. Obviously, you've never watched the images of the final battle, have you? I can only describe that last hex she hit the Dark Lord with as hell on Earth. The pain must have been exquisite as she short-circuited his power. It was quite ingenious, really, a spell of her own creation. The disruption in the Dark Lord's power allowed Dumbledore and I to contain him as Potter finished him off, but the first round of damage was all hers, Rancine."

Rancine paled at the implications of Severus's words. "I think this has gone far enough."

"Oh, I quite agree. You really should think before opening your mouth." Severus's smile was dangerous as he evaluated Rancine. The man was not a threat to either one of them, at the moment. It would be best to get Hermione out of here and calmed down. He glanced in her direction, only to stop short. Subconsciously, he had noticed a subtle change in the air currents flowing around him, but he had not attributed it to anything other than doors opening and closing.

The air in the room seemed to swirl around Hermione in a physical manifestation of her anger. Her voice was quiet, but deadly. "I don't believe you. I know you sabotaged my choices for my apprenticeship, but are you really so rotten that you would destroy my life, my future? Because of...what?" She raised her wand, the wind picking up as she unconsciously called forth some unknown force of very powerful magic.

Severus was starting to get worried. This was something new; he could feel the air crackling around her. Hermione was one of the most powerful witches he knew, but this

went beyond normal magic. He was pretty sure she was drawing forth some type of elemental magic from the way the very air around her seemed to be charged. He just didn't know how it was possible. He had never seen her react this way before. He would have to figure that out later, when he was sure she was safe. For now, he just wanted to get her away from the others. It was then that he noticed her pendant was glowing again. *Damn Trelawney, what in the hell type of magic was contained in that leaf?* "Hermione, remember what you said. You don't want to kill him, either. I would rather not have to visit you in Azkaban; St Mungo's was quite enough, thank you." Slowly, he moved toward the angry witch, Rancine forgotten for the moment.

"Are you planning to have me expelled?" her voice rang strong as she faced Rancine.

Rancine gulped nervously. "Perhaps I was a bit hasty. Your grades have been outstanding. Why don't we forget this little tiff ever happened?"

"Answer. The. Question. Are you *planning* to have me expelled?" Each word was spoken clearly, enunciated to its fullest and encased in her growing anger.

"I think you better answer her, Rancine." Severus stood quietly at Hermione's side, trying not to startle her. He could feel the air crackling with the force of the power she was calling forth. Her eyes glowed with an odd light, the gold flecks in her irises sparkling in the dim room.

"Expelled? Who said anything about having you expelled?" He glanced nervously at the young woman. What the hell was going on? Was this a result of fighting You-Know-Who? Or did it have something to do with Snape? He should never have challenged either one of them. Who knew what Dark Force the man was using. "You're most definitely in good standing, Miss Granger. With your grades, you should be able to choose whomever you want to apprentice with. I'm sure Tenbrook here would be happy to take you on, if you so choose. There must have been a glitch in the system; I'll see that it gets corrected the second I get back," he added hastily.

"I'm not asking for any favours. I only want what's fair."

Severus gently laid his hand on her outstretched arm. "It's over. You can stop now."

As suddenly as the wind had picked up, it died down. Severus watched as her eyes seemed to refocus on him.

"I only want him to do what is fair. I'm not asking for any favours," she repeated as he hugged her.

"I know, love, I know." Gently, he rubbed her back. Her eyes had returned to normal, but what the hell was that display of power about? "You look a bit done in, let me take you back to the room."

"The lecture on potion practices..." Hermione answered, sounding dazed.

"...Is not for another hour. We have plenty of time." Gently, Severus led her from the room, Rancine and the rest forgotten.

Michael Tenbrook stood quietly off to the side. *A most interesting witch, indeed*, he thought, pleased she was now available as a possible apprentice.

TBC

AN: Basically, this is the second part of the Symposium; the next chapter should tie up a few loose ends and complete the Symposium.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: more of the Symposium, a few bumps in the road, Tenbrook (odd fellow) and some of the other masters, a surprise meeting in Florence, the unexplained magic, the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

## A Series of Seemingly Unconnected Events

*Chapter 41 of 49*

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

**Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)**

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

**\*\*\*New\*\*\***

### **Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected**

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 41. A Series of Seemingly Unconnected Events

"How do you feel?"

"Why do you keep asking me that? I told you I feel fine. What's the problem?" Hermione stood and walked to the railing overlooking the jungle floor, her annoyance evident in her stance.

"You didn't notice anything different back there, when you were talking to Rancine?" They had returned to the suite after the 'incident,' as Severus referred to it in his mind. Hermione seemed disoriented, but otherwise, no worse for the wear. Whatever the source of the strange magic had been, and he strongly suspected the glowing pendent had something to do with it; it seemed to have stopped, for now.

They sat on the small veranda outside the doorway of the tree house. Severus summoned a tea tray, originally intent on slipping Hermione a calming draught until he could figure out what had happened. He held off, worried the draught might mask some undetected spell.

"Rancine." Her eyes flashed with indignation at the mention of the wizard's name. But to the Potions master's relief, the air, as well as her eyes, seemed to remain unchanged. "I don't believe that vile little man would do this to me. I have a good mind to turn him into a toad!"

Hermione seemed to be...Hermione. No change, so what the hell was that display in the Lecture Hall?

"Hermione, when you were pointing your wand at Rancine, did you think of any silent spells? Did you feel different?"

Hermione crossed her arms defensively across her chest. "Are you going to tell me what you're going on about? What're we doing up here? We could have gone to the Trade Hall instead of coming back to the suite."

"Did you..."

"No more questions until you tell me what's wrong."

"Sit down." He sighed heavily as he relayed his impression of the events. When he was finished, Hermione looked more dazed than ever. "And you don't remember anything different? Saying anything different, even if it was just to yourself?"

"No, I just remember feeling furious with Rancine and wanting to... well, I wanted to hurt him. But no, nothing different. What do you think happened?" Her voice was quiet, almost fearful.

"I don't know. I believe it involves that pendant you're wearing. Why don't you take it off for a while?"

Hermione's hand shifted to the leaf. "It means a lot to me; you gave it to me. You and Harry both said I wouldn't have recovered if I hadn't been wearing it when I fell. Look, I feel fine. Maybe it had nothing to do with magic, just some quirk in the air system. Let's go down to the Trade Hall. You mentioned something about showing me a new cauldron you were interested in? The lecture on potions procedures starts in less than an hour. And besides, I'm famished. We really should grab a bite to eat while we still can."

He'd preformed several spells on the pendant when they had first returned to the suite in an effort to detect harmful intent. As far as he could tell, there was nothing wrong with it. But he knew looks could be deceiving, he had only to look in his own mirror to have that adage proved to him. "All right."

It greatly worried him that he could not identify the source of the strange magic. Strange magic? There was something about that phrase that he thought he should remember. Magic. Magical surge. Hermione...

"Are you going to stand there all day? We have less than a half hour until the next lecture starts. I love you, Severus, but I have no intentions of staying here in 'Eden,' until much later tonight. Shall we?" Hermione tapped her foot restlessly. She understood something had unsettled the wizard, but everything was fine now, so why not just forget it? Besides, the conference was in full swing ten floors below them and she had no intention of missing any more of it than necessary.

Whatever connection his brain was about to make, was gone now. "Of course. I think we could both do with a bite to eat."

"What did you think of Michael Tenbrook? Can he really brew Wolfsbane properly? He's awfully young to be a master. It almost seemed like you knew him."

Severus groaned. Michael Tenbrook. Well, why shouldn't she be full of questions considering the circumstances of their meeting? "I've had occasion to be in contact with the man a few times in the last few years. At one point, he was looking for some of the rarer ingredients for the Wolfsbane. He's qualified in the field of potions. What did you think of him?"

'I know what I think of the man. He's a Potions master, much younger than I am, not an ex-Death Eater, most likely much more social than I am, and would probably be more accepted by your friends on general principles alone, but still, I'd like your opinion of the wizard while I just stand here and hex myself into oblivion,' he thought, as he silently waited for her answer.

"You don't think he's a little odd? Sort of one of those nutty scientist types? Or an absentminded professor?" Hermione fumbled in her bag for the packet she'd received when she originally registered for the Symposium. In addition to the lecture schedule, they had included a small packet of coloured parchment squares. Each had the date and a meal designation printed on it. She fanned through the papers looking for Friday, November 28, 2001: Lunch as they walked through the main hallway. A witch, roughly about her age, stood in the doorway of the Dining Hall collecting the squares before directing them to a seat. "Here it is, the green one, right?" Hermione smiled at the witch as she handed her the square.

"Yes, all the lunch coupons are green, you just need to watch the dates since they won't reissue them if you turn in the wrong date. Table for one?" the witch asked as she collected the square.

Severus's rich baritone sounded to the left of Hermione as he corrected the witch. "No, the lady and I are together. A table for two, please."

The witch flushed as she took his coupon. "Sorry, Professor Snape, I didn't realise it." She waved two fingers at another witch standing toward the middle of the room. "If you will follow Linette, she'll seat you." The young woman eyed Hermione jealously as Severus led her away.

They sat at a cosy table for two, the young witch seating them, reminding them they had about twenty minutes until the next round of presentations started. A fast order of coffee and sandwiches later, found Severus still curious as to Hermione's comment about Tenbrook.

"What did you mean when you said 'nutty scientist' type when you were describing Tenbrook?"

Hermione shrugged. "Sort of odd, you know? He might be intelligent; actually, I get the feeling he's probably knowledgeable about a great many things, but he's...not all there. Like he's not really connected to reality. I'm not sure I can explain it any better than that."

"So, have you ruled him out?"

"No, actually, I was wondering if you thought we should meet him to discuss the Wolfsbane. I do have a few questions he might be able to answer about the apprenticeship, too." Hermione glanced at her watch. "We have about ten minutes, tuck in."

"Really good mate, don't let it go. Keep pushing until she tells you she can't wait to shag him. Or at least model our Thong for hirth.

Had the annoying voice in his head been a corporeal entity, Severus would have hexed him right about now. Our Thong? 'We' don't wear that type of undergarments, he reminded the voice. And since when did the voice have any rights to the witch, anyway?

"You think he's odd?"

Hermione laughed. "And you don't? I think he might be interesting to work with, if I don't have to keep reminding him to live in the real world and not a test tube. I can't imagine how he gets dressed in the morning, not that he looked all that together. Most likely, he has his head in a book or his nose glued to his research. Not everyone handles intelligence well. Not everyone can be you, Severus." Hermione patted his hand. "Damn it, we've got two minutes. I really don't want to miss the lecture on phial properties. They're supposed to present a new stasis charm. Come on, let's go."

Severus watched astonished as Hermione gulped the last of her coffee. His head in a book? How did the fact she could have been describing herself when she was at Hogwarts seem to escape her attention? It appeared as if she really didn't have any interest in Tenbrook, other than on a professional level. He released a breath he didn't realise he was holding. "All set. Is this one of the masters you're interested in?"

"No, I just thought a new stasis charm might help us with our research. Professor Wickfield's lecture is right after this one. He's one of the masters I thought about, but he's doing research at a private facility in Asia. It's further away than I thought about going." She was moving with amazing speed, matching his long strides as they moved toward the Lecture Hall. "I looked at the schedule. We should have a bit of time to look through the Trade Hall again later."

This morning's events forgotten, or at least put to the side for now, Hermione charged on through the day.

The lecture, entitled "Factoring Phials," went into great detail about a new procedure that strengthened the normal stasis charm cast on most lab phials. The charm was based on a complicated series of Arithmancy equations designed to allow the user to substitute the 'X' factor in the equations for the ingredients in the potion they were using, thus keying the strengthening charm to a specific item. The 'X-Phials Solution', as the professor called it, had more than doubled the length and power of the stasis charms in his experiments.

Hermione was fascinated by the calculations, knowing if they really worked, they would be able to preserve the Wolfsbane, at full strength, for longer periods of time. To the logical mind, Arithmancy was the most practical solution to any problem. Analyse the problem, deduce the cause, calculate all possible outcomes and, logically supported by tried and true equations, arrive at the solution. She was fascinated with the procedure and quickly grasped the mechanics the lecturer was attempting to present to those assembled.

Severus chuckled quietly to himself. While proud of the witch next to him, he knew that look in her eyes. He had spent seven years on the other side of a desk, groaning every time her eyes lit up in the manner they did now. True to form, Hermione was giving the professor a run for his Galleons, questioning and attempting to revamp the processes each step of the way.

"Severus, do you realise what this would mean for the Wolfsbane if this procedure actually worked?"

"I do, but did you happen to notice all five experiments used potions containing some combination of fox glove and scully grass? Those two ingredients, when combined properly, help to increase the stability of a potion, even if the ingredients are unstable themselves. I'm not quite sure it will have the same effect on other potions."

"Meaning, it would only give other potions a small boost, not double the charm as he originally claimed?" she asked.

The 'he' in question cleared his voice, stopping further speculation on the procedure's effects.

"Professor Snape is correct, in so much as the Arithmancy equation helps to enhance the already existing properties of fox glove and scully grass; however, it does boost the stasis charm placed on most phials." Professor Vaughn looked uncomfortable as he glanced between Severus, Hermione, and the rest of his audience. He had hoped to find a commercial backer for his process. Knowing that the procedure would not produce such dramatic results in all potions would hinder the marketing of it.

With less than five minutes left to the presentation, Professor Vaughn attempted to reassure the assembled that the problem Severus identified was one he was in the process of correcting and would soon have the procedure ready for sale if anyone were interested.

An owl sounded marking the end of the presentation and, once again, an impromptu question and answer session sprung up around Severus and Hermione as they tried to leave the room.

"Is there a problem here? May I ask why you are gathering in the doorway? You only have ten minutes to the next lecture. Is someone hurt, or in need of assistance? We have qualified medical staff on call for just such an emergen..." A voice in the corridor grew louder as those gathered in the doorway moved aside to allow the wizard through. His look of annoyance faded into something akin to terror as the wizard in question took in the group gathered in the room, his eyes stopping to rest on Hermione and Severus. Rancine nodded curtly as he started to back out of the room. "Professor Snape, Miss Granger."

Severus glanced at Hermione, relieved to see her breathing normal, her general appearance - normal; even the pendant she still wore appeared to be normal, nothing more than a simple piece of jewellery, at the moment. He watched her eyes widen at the sight of Rancine stumbling over his own feet, but still, nothing unusual seemed to occur. Everything as it should be, no glow, as far as he could see.

"I...uh, I believe I'm needed elsewhere. If you'll excuse me." Rancine tripped as he tried to turn and bolt from the room. "Sorry, really, I need to run."

Severus watched, amused, as the oily little man scrambled out. While still concerned over what could have caused Hermione's display of power, it seemed to have resolved one problem: it 'magically' transformed Rancine into a pathetic lump. "I don't think he'll bother you anymore."

"He looked terrified." Hermione watched the doorway in amazement, still shocked at the wizard's sudden departure.

"You were quite impressive this morning." Severus managed to extract themselves from the group and propelled Hermione toward the door. His breath was hot in her ear as he murmured, "You looked like a Goddess, calling forth hellfire and damnation. If I were Rancine, I'd run too."

While his comment was benign, the timbre of his voice and the proximity of his body brought on an immediate flood of desire. The tone was one he often used to whisper lascivious and suggestive words and comments when they made love.

Severus smiled, watching a slight flush appear across Hermione's cheeks. He had plans for the witch later, when he could manage to tear her away from the Symposium. His hand at her back, laying claim to the young woman, gently directed her to the left. "Wickfield's lecture is this way. What's he speaking on?"

"I think health and beauty-enhancing potions; the lecture is titled: Is There A New You In Your Future? How to Improve Your Life With a Few Simple Potions."

Severus snorted. "As if any of those actually work."

Hermione gave Severus an odd once-over. "Do you mean to say you've tried a few potions of that nature?"

They'd reached the Lecture Hall and were settling themselves into seats as far back and out of the general view as possible.

"Of course not. I am who I am, faults and all. I told you that before. But I've had to reverse enough potions and charms when a few of the students have got it into their heads to 'better' themselves. You can find fake enhancement charms at the back of almost every magazine the little idiots read. The only thing that gets enhanced is the manufacturer's bank account. I've never seen one work yet."

A now-familiar voice interrupted Hermione's attempt to answer.

"There you are and looking fit, I must say, glad to see it. I was afraid you wouldn't show after this morning. If it's any consolation, I would have been happy to see either of you hex Rancine. The man gets on my nerves faster than any wizard I've ever met. Considering Wickfield, too? Not a bad choice, but deals in too much fluff, if you ask me. Enhancement potions, eh, should try something more substantial. Snape, have you thought about meeting me? I'd still like to discuss the Wolfsbane with you two if you're open to it." Tenbrook's discourse finally came to a stop when the need to breathe asserted itself. The wizard took a deep breath and looked expectantly between Hermione and Severus.

His eyes gave off an odd sparkle in the bright lights of the room that reminded Hermione of the Headmaster, or at least someone who might be a distant cousin of his. "Uhm, Professor Tenbr..." she started hesitantly before he interrupted her again.

The wizard smiled broadly. "No, no, it's not Professor. Why don't you just call me Michael? Might make things easier."

Severus wasn't sure what to think. Closer examination confirmed Hermione's assessment of the wizard. He was odd and barely pulled together, even the bottom of his robes were closed wrong, the last three buttons not lining up correctly.

Hermione had teased him about the number of buttons on his own clothing, even going so far as to say she was going to replace them with Velcro, so she could tear his clothing off quicker. An inappropriately placed open-mouth kiss had stopped her from making any further comments. While he would have lost his job if he'd had that knowledge firsthand and he'd had absolutely no interest in her during her student years it would have been helpful to know that kissing certain areas rendered her speechless.

A furtive glance at the impressive scowl forming on Severus's face told Hermione exactly how he felt about the wizard. She suspected it was his caveman persona resurfacing, again. For some reason, he'd seemed to feel the need to remind her they were together, quite often, in the last day and a half. Seeing Stephen might have triggered that particular insecurity to surface. It was something she wanted to discuss with him later.

She'd've laughed if she didn't think both wizards would've thought her off her rocker. Severus Snape, bastard extraordinaire, ex-Death Eater, Potions master, master of the Dark Arts, and one of the most powerful wizards alive insecure, and over Tenbrook, no less. Who would have thought such a thing possible?

"Uhm, Michael, it's nice to see you again. I'm not sure what our schedule is, can we get back to you later?"

He nodded, looking around for a seat. Much to Severus's relief, the only seats available were toward the front. He watched the wizard sit next to a middle-aged witch, her hair streaked green and silver to match her robes, her laughter overly bright as she responded to something Tenbrook said.

The room quieted as Wickfield took the podium. "Good afternoon, it's nice to see so many friendly, smiling faces. Today I'd like to acquaint you with both the common and uncommon health and beauty enhancing potions normally used, not that any of you need them."

As expected, a ripple of laughter ran through the room.

"Doesn't he remind you of an older version of Lockhart?" Hermione whispered.

"That's what I was thinking. Must have used a few of those potions on himself."

The man was tall and thin, with bright blue eyes and a full head of curly brown hair that fell to his shoulders. Severus placed his age at roughly 95. He would have liked to endorse the man as a top choice for Hermione, if he hadn't sounded like a complete idiot. "Are you really considering studying with him?"

"His last published article compared healing agents against the body's own immune system. I just didn't realise he was using these properties to whiten teeth and soften skin. Michael was right: this is pure fluff. Imagine what he could do if he applied this theory to nerve regeneration or diseases. What a waste." Hermione shook her head, another one crossed off her list. Two down and two to go. At the rate the masters were dropping, only Michael Tenbrook would be left.

Michael! Did you hear her call him Michael as if they were old friends? This can't be good. You need to take her back to Eden and shag her senseless, while you still can. Hell, maybe you should lock her up in the dungeon. Forget what you told Minerva, if you keep her chained to your bed, you'll always know where she is.

Severus thought the annoying voice had a point with that last comment, though he didn't think Hermione would be too cooperative after a few hours of forced captivity. Stifling a yawn, he let his mind wander as Wickfield went on to describe his forty-two point system of skin rejuvenation, followed by his sixty-three steps to whiter teeth.

Periodically, Tenbrook would glance over his shoulder and smile in Hermione's direction.

Do you think she'd notice if we shot a few hexes at him? Nothing devastating, maybe a Dropsy Hex, or how about the one where you keep tripping over your own feet?

The presentation ended with information on how those assembled could purchase Wickfield's personal line of health and beauty potions. Severus sneered in Wickfield's general direction, thinking the pompous wizard was worse than Lockhart.

Half a dozen witches, ranging in age from fifty to at least one hundred, as well as quite a few wizards, were vying for the man's attention. Wickfield's exaggerated arm movement above one witch's head could only mean he was explaining the addition of a charm to enhance a 'gravity defying' hair potion he had invented.

"I'm not sure if the part of a dandy is real, or just an act. It's hard to tell in his case," Tenbrook commented, joining them and laughing heartily as he followed Severus's line of sight. Seemingly unconcerned as the Potions master turned his annoyed countenance toward him, the wizard continued, "Ah yes, well, I did say he was fluff, didn't I?"

"He reminds me of Gilderoy Lockhart, just not as ... dim." The boys had never told anyone the complete details about what had happened to Lockhart in the Chamber of Secrets, but Hermione had her suspicions.

"I suspect Wickfield is a far sight more competent than Lockhart ever was. Such a waste of talent; look at the fools flocking around him." Severus gestured in Wickfield's general direction.

"Yes, he could do so much more. I seem to recall Lockhart was at Hogwarts at one time, before his unfortunate accident, wasn't it? Well, no matter." Tenbrook was interested in training the witch. He could tell the young woman had a mind of her own; she obviously had an untapped intellect he could put to good use developing some of his more obscure potions for his own end.

He thought the key to Hermione was Snape. Even someone with no prior knowledge of their relationship, someone living in a cave the last few weeks and not privy to ~~the~~ *Quibbler* and its multitude of articles on the two, calling Hermione 'The Sleeping Beauty That Magic Awakened,' although stopping short of calling Snape 'Prince Charming' no one in their right mind would want to anger the dark wizard, and you could hardly call the man charming could see his protectiveness where she was concerned.

Still, it was obvious how much Snape cared for Hermione: his tone, the way he looked at her. The articles had detailed his constant presence at her bedside, her subsequent awakening from her coma, and Snape's aid in her recovery. There had even been an in-depth interview with one of the nurses detailing her eyewitness account of the pair from start to finish, when Snape had Apparated the young woman away to Hogwarts.

"Rather than continuing to bother the two of you, since I'm sure you don't need my presence as your chaperone, shall we set a time, say tomorrow afternoon, to meet and talk?" Michael hoped his smile, if not neutral, looked at least encouraging; the look on Snape's face was almost enough to send him reaching for his wand.

Tenbrook might have been the most qualified master to train Hermione, but he got under Severus's skin. He'd sooner spend a fortnight vacationing with Lupin than have to

deal with Tenbrook again. Which is why it made no sense at all when he agreed they should meet for lunch the next day, after Tenbrook's presentation: better to commit to a short, timed meal, than be stuck with Tenbrook for the evening.

"We'll be attending your lecture at 10:30 tomorrow morning, why don't we have lunch together after that? You can answer Hermione's questions about what an apprenticeship entails, and we can fill you in on the alterations we're working on. I know you've brewed the Wolfsbane properly in the past, it can't hurt to have another master look at it."

Severus ignored the look of abject shock on Hermione's face; his reasoning was solid. It didn't matter if the annoying voice in his head was calling him a few choice names for allowing Hermione to be on the same continent as Tenbrook, let alone arranging for her to break bread with him. The wizard seemed hell-bent on speaking to them, most likely to curry favour with Hermione. Word of her display that morning, coupled with her work on the Wolfsbane alterations, adding to the fact that she was a heroine of the war, and her sudden availability as an apprentice again, made her the most sought after candidate on Cambridge's program list.

Two masters had approached her with apprentice offers just before Rancine had showed up at the last presentation. A third was scared off when he realised Hermione was with him.

"Wonderful, wonderful! Miss Granger, Snape, I'll take my leave. See you tomorrow. Enjoy the rest of your day." Tenbrook executed a small bow before turning and slipping off into the disbanding crowd.

"Who are you and what have you done with Severus Snape?" Hermione put her hand to his forehead before holding his face in her hands and peering intently into his eyes. "No fever. Yep, that's you in there. You agreed we would have lunch with him? Have you gone mad?"

Severus pulled Hermione's hands down. "Stop that," he said gruffly.

"You see? Even she thinks you're crazy. Maybe you can arrange a romantic weekend away for the two of them?"

The annoying voice was really starting to...annoy him. The only time his conscience had left him alone was when he'd been recovering from the *Cruciatius Curse* a few months ago, and then it'd only been quiet for a day or two. "Sod off," he mumbled quietly.

"What? Did you just tell me to sod off?" Hermione stared at Severus; she'd heard him mumble something, she just wasn't sure what it was he'd said.

"No, I didn't tell you to sod off, and I haven't gone off the deep end. I have the feeling Tenbrook will follow us around like a lost Puffskein until you agree to listen to him. Might as well get it out of the way. It wouldn't hurt to have another master look at the calculations for the alterations." Severus sighed dramatically. "He has brewed the Wolfsbane before. We've a bit of time to spare, would you like to have a look through the Trade Hall before we change for dinner? I rescheduled our reservation from last night."

They walked in the direction of the main hall. Severus deliberately ignored Hermione's look. He was in no mood to discuss anything calmly at the moment, better to wander around the bits and baubles for a while than get into a discussion about control and 'their relationship.' This was exactly the reason he'd avoided a relationship for so long. They took work. Unless you had the other person chained to a wall in the dungeons, you really had to stop and consider their feelings.

Hermione was rapidly running out of qualified masters to train with. He didn't like Tenbrook on general principle, but he might as well see what the wizard's agenda was, before hexing him into nothingness.

It was times like this that Severus almost missed the war. He could have made Tenbrook 'disappear' without anyone being the wiser. If caught, he could always blame one side or the other for the wizard's untimely demise. A Death Eater that thought Tenbrook was a spy for the Order, or visa versa, would have suited the situation nicely.

Why don't you just call me Michael? Bah! Maybe if he brought Crookshanks round, the half-Kneazle might attack the wizard. There was no love lost between himself and Hermione's familiar, but they both had her best interest at heart. Perhaps he could casually drop the beast in Tenbrook's lap. Even if the half-Kneazle didn't find anything wrong with the wizard, he might do substantial damage to his person just by digging in with his claws when he jumped off. It was something to think about.

Severus caught Hermione's attention, "We have just enough time to change if we want to make our reservations." He was looking forward to a quiet dinner and some private time, alone with the witch. He'd been social enough for one day.

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Dinner at *Agata e Romeo* was every thing Severus had promised it would be: a small intimate restaurant with food that was out of this world. By tacit agreement, they avoided discussing Tenbrook, focusing on a wide variety of other topics instead. Severus knew they would have to talk about the Potions master at some point, since the possibility of Hermione training under him was becoming more of a distinct probability, especially at the rate the other masters were disappearing from her list. Now, back at 'Eden,' he had other things on his mind.

Severus gently nipped at Hermione's bottom lip, his hand running slowly up and down her back, the feel of her silk dress, sensuous as it slid through his fingers, when he stopped to knead her bum. He wondered what she was wearing under the gown, the only indication of an undergarment, was a thin string at her hip-line. "How adventurous do you feel tonight?" he whispered huskily.

"What did you have in mind?" The added height of her dress heels brought her mouth in line with his ear. Hermione smiled when she heard his nearly silent growl as she licked the sensitive shell of his ear before nibbling on his earlobe. She could feel his erection as his knee insinuated itself between her legs, pressing against her, adding to her arousal.

Hermione moaned as Severus's hand created a slow sensuous path up her side to her breast. He played with the hardened nipple through the silky fabric, alternately pressing the hard peak back down into her full breast, and then roughly pulling on it again, the erratic sensations sending waves of lust straight to her core.

Her lush body never failed to turn him on. To have free range to every sweet curve she possessed was sheer heaven. A small wave of doubt washed over him, making him wonder if he should continue on the course he started tonight, hoping that he would not risk alienating her affections. He thought he'd read her right; she seemed to respond to his rougher handling the night before. At least he hoped he was right.

He pulled her close, his arms encircling her body. "Do you trust me?" he asked in a velvety tone, his hot breath on her ear adding to the heat in her blood. She could feel the wetness gathering between her legs at the suggestion in his tone.

Hermione tried to move back but Severus held her tightly against his body. She felt a thrill run through her at the thought she might be 'trapped.' She was sure if she pushed he would let her go, but the feeling of being held so tightly, the erotic tone of his voice, sent her mind reeling. She trusted him implicitly. She trusted him with her life. Her voice came out a lust-strangled whisper, "I trust you, always."

Not releasing his hold on the witch, he lowered his mouth to hers, his tongue demanding entrance, not waiting for her response as he plunged forward, tasting her. His kiss was forceful, demanding, and utterly erotic as he explored the warm cavern of her mouth, leaving no part untouched. The hand at her back slid upward to cradle the back of her head through her hair, drawing her even closer.

Hermione moaned at the new sensations; this was a Severus she hadn't experienced yet, and it was turning her on to no end. "Severus..." she said breathlessly when he finally released her mouth. The pressure of his lips along the column of her neck meant she'd have a mark there later, the thought added to the wetness growing between her thighs.

Severus manoeuvred Hermione back toward the bed; gently, he lowered her to the soft duvet. The bed, not moving, was still set on the more traditional setting. He pulled

back to look into her eyes, his gaze intent. "I want you to remember I love you ...and that you trust me."

"Severus?"

A wave of his hand and Hermione suddenly found herself laid out spread eagle, her hands and feet bound by soft ropes to the four corners of the bed. She shrieked at the sudden restriction, ready to take him to task for not saying something first. The comment died in her throat as she looked into his eyes. His expression was one of pure lust, of want, of naked desire. She could barely make out the irises of his eyes, his dilated pupils obscuring whatever trace of colour that might exist.

Slowly, Severus ran one hand along her leg, trailing his fingers up under the hem of her robes. Her breathing grew ragged as he softly traced the line at her thigh, igniting the sensitive skin between her body and leg, his fingers brushing softly against her mound. The silky material of her robe bunched against her heated skin as his fingers travelled higher, following along the edge of the thong she wore.

He groaned as he caught sight of the thong. It was just as abbreviated as the others she'd worn before. This one was made from the same silky fabric as her robes and coloured a lovely Slytherin green.

"Merlin's beard, another thong. Dear God, did you see that?"

She'd charmed a small snake to crawl across the face of the thong, trailing off one side to reappear somewhere else along the edges. Fascinated, he followed the snake's path back and forth, Hermione squirming at the feeling.

"Have you ever been restrained before?" He spelled away her robes, the thong now the only article of clothing covering her lithe body.

"Once."

"I see." Casually, he rose from the bed. Once. She'd... he pushed the thought away. The past was the past; dwelling on it did neither of them any good.

"Severus?"

He stopped and looked at the young woman spread out before him. Leaning down, half-kneeling beside her prone body, he kissed her. The kiss was soft, gentle, meant to put the witch at ease. "Are you all right with this? We can stop now..."

Adamantly, Hermione shook her head. "No, please..."

He touched a finger to her lips. "...or we can continue. If we go on, you need a safe word. I would never hurt you, you have to know that. But I want you to feel safe with what happens. I want you to know that you have control. Understand that the word 'no' will not stop me, only your safe word will."

Hermione nodded. She'd read about sex games before. Only one of her previous partners had been willing to experiment, a wizard she met at University. He didn't have the presence, the sheer force of will that Severus did. Her body shook with unbridled lust at the thought of what this amazing man could do to her.

He'd shed his formal robes and frock coat when they'd returned to the suite. Now he shucked his boots and socks off, tossing them haphazardly to the side. The remainder of his clothing followed. He turned back to the young woman, smiling as she licked her lips, her eyes locked on his engorged member.

Once again, Severus stretched out beside her; his hand roamed her body, stopping periodically to knead her breast, cup her mound, pinch a nipple, or just stroke along her exposed flesh. He raked his nails along her side, then ran his fingers back down the sensitised skin in soothing circles, only to repeat the maddening touch elsewhere.

"Let me see, what should be your safe word?" His nails gently scraped the underside of one breast; he bent his head, his tongue following the previous path of his fingers. His tongue swirled around one pert nipple, the heat of his mouth making the skin furrow further. "Any suggestions, love?" he asked around a mouth full of breast.

Hermione arched into his touch, she could feel the heat of his body as he lay next her. "Severus," she whimpered.

"No, I don't think my name would work. You seem to be saying it quite a bit tonight." He suckled at her breast, tugging roughly on her nipple. Without warning, he slid her thong to the side and plunged one long finger into her throbbing sex.

Hermione arched off the bed, her hips rocking as she tried to impale herself on his hand. A second finger followed the first. He used his thumb to spread her secretions around, tracing the outline of her sex before moving to tease her clit. Her hips rose and fell in rapid succession as she tried to ride his hand; he offered her just enough to keep her on the edge, slowing down when she tried to reach her climax.

"Severus."

"I thought we'd decided that my name was not acceptable?" Despite her groan, he pulled his hand back. His fingers shown wetly as he held them up. "Have I ever told you how much I enjoy your body? You taste like ambrosia to me."

Hermione watched as he licked his fingers, his eyes sliding shut as his tongue lapped at the juices. She could feel herself growing wetter at the erotic picture he presented.

His black eyes bore into hers. "I believe I know just the word, a name actually, that can put a stop to our fun. The mere mention of it should be enough to bring both of us up short. Rancine."

"Rancine?" Hermione's eyes narrowed in anger.

Severus chuckled. "It's a name you're not likely to mention in the throes of passion. I believe his name is enough to sufficiently kill the mood for both of us. Unless you'd rather use Harry Potter. I'm sure that will work just as well."

"No, Rancine will do."

"Fine." His finger trailed over her stomach, en route to her sex once again. Lightly, he slapped at her thigh. "Stop moving. So tell me, what other sexual practices have you engaged in?"

Hermione's breathing was ragged as she tried to hold still, her focus on the hand slowly petting her sex.

"I asked you a question."

The pitch of his voice sent a throbbing ache straight to her core. "Some bondage ... a bit of light spanking ...oh." She drew a sharp breath, her thong magically sliding from her body as his finger travelled past her nether lips to stroke her arse instead.

"Hermione."

"Uhm, I've never... I mean, I tried anal sex once, but it hurt too much. You're not going to..."

"No, you need to be much more relaxed than you are right now. One step at a time, love." Silently, he called his handkerchief to him, a flick of his hand and it transformed into a blindfold that floated through the air and landed gently across Hermione's eyes. She felt the cloth settle against her skin, blocking out her sight. She immediately mourned the loss of his heat as Severus moved from her side. The bed lost its solid feeling, swinging as the lever shifted from solid to hammock.

"I'm fine. Here we are, Room 408."

Once again, they took seats near the back. Severus felt as if a Hippogriff was stomping around in his stomach. He could only hope the man would be as boring as the other presenters.

No such luck. His presentation was concise, informative, and fascinating. He joked throughout the lecture, putting his audience at ease immediately. Even the most difficult of information was presented in such a way as to make it readily understandable to those with little past knowledge of the procedures. The last ten minutes of the presentation were taken up with a lively question and answer session, Hermione asking the lion's share.

An owl sounded signalling the end of the session. Tenbrook waited for them to reach the front of the room. "That was most interesting, Hermione. You have an amazing mind."

Hermione coloured slightly at the unsolicited praise, secretly pleased she had been able to keep up with the debate.

Tenbrook smiled brightly and clapped his hands together. "Well, ready for lunch?"

TBC

A/N: As per usual, I wrote more than I planned, so the Symposium arc will be a bit longer than the original three chapters I thought it would be.

From *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*- A Puffskein is a long-tongued custard-coloured little furball that makes a calming purring noise. These pleasant creatures are often kept as pets, particularly by wizarding children; Ron Weasley used to own one until Fred used it for Bludger practice. As scavengers that will eat anything from leftovers to spiders, they are very easy to care for.

The "X-Phials" is a nod to my son who, I'm happy to say, is home again. We have been slowly working our way through the first three seasons of the *X-Files* on DVD. While I'm sure Mulder would have been interested in meeting Severus, I can't say the reverse would be true.

The snake thong was inspired by Marquise's amazing centrefold of Severus in this month's Playwitch. Of course, I only work there to help out with the articles and ads. Thought I heard Ancientgirl and Marquise say the same thing...grin.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. And a quick get well wish, as well. Remember, sleep is your friend. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Still to come: more of the symposium, lunch with Tenbrook, a surprise meeting in Florence, the unexplained magic (which will make sense soon), the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

My Lunch With Tenbrook? And Severus

Chapter 42 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

*****New*****

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Dances with Witches by Pearle

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~~~

Chapter 42 My Lunch With Tenbrook... And Severus

Lunch.

With Michael Tenbrook.

Lunch with Hermione **and** Michael Tenbrook.

Severus nodded curtly at Tenbrook's confirmation of lunch, afraid to speak lest the first words out of his mouth were a spell he'd learned, but not used, since his Death Eater days: a Dark spell based on advanced Alchemy principles to turn flesh and bone to ashes, most convenient in disguising nefarious deeds.

Hermione and Tenbrook continued their discussion of his lecture, Tenbrook going into greater detail on some of the more technical points of the processes. With a disarming smile, he'd explained he was Muggle-born and never understood the wizarding world's resistance to accepting anything created by Muggles.

They arrived at the Dining Hall and joined the queue to turn in their meal tickets. The same witch that had taken their vouchers for breakfast was still on duty. She smiled as they approached the doorway.

"Good afternoon, Professor Snape. Table for two, sir?" she asked, greeting him warmly, while managing to glare in Hermione's direction.

"No, we'll need a table for three."

"I see." Her manner even frostier, she regarded Tenbrook standing next to Hermione and held three fingers up to the young witch located in the middle of the room. "If you'll follow Sharon, she'll seat you. Have a pleasant lunch."

The witch led them to a booth on the far side of the room, Hermione sliding in first before Severus took the seat next to her, Tenbrook sitting across from the two. "Your server this afternoon will be Callie. I'll take your drink orders and she'll bring them straight away." The young woman took their order and disappeared. An awkward silence descended on the trio before Tenbrook cleared his throat and smiled in Hermione's direction.

"I must say, Hermione, very few grasp the principles of the Muggle-to-wizard technology process in the first go around. I normally have to spend weeks teaching associates the basics before they can assist me in any experimentation. Your comprehension of the facts, coupled with your enthusiasm, make for an extremely refreshing change from the academic types I'm used to dealing with."

*You bloody berk, are you just going to sit there while he romances your witch? What is wrong with you? Say something, or you can just kiss her goodbye now.*

Severus didn't need the annoying voice in his head to agitate him any further. Tenbrook, while acting as pleasant as possible, was sending his blood pressure, something most wizards just took for granted, up through the stratosphere.

"Hermione has always been quick to understand new material."

*Very nice. I'd give you a tumble myself. That comment is sure to endear you to her even more!* If he could have been sure casting the *Cruciatius Curse* on himself would silence the voice again, he might have risked it.

Instead, he gazed fondly at Hermione and said, "I only wish I was in the position to have her as my apprentice. She is more knowledgeable than quite a few masters I've encountered." Severus smiled thinly, annoyed that he should have to justify his reasoning to anyone.

Tenbrook nodded amicably. "I can understand. There are only a handful of masters that have the ability to brew the Wolfsbane Potion properly. If Hermione is able to not only brew it but understand the complexities of ingredient interaction as well as material influence, then she is head and shoulders above just about everyone else." His countenance turned serious. "If my lecture interested you and you haven't decided to apprentice with anyone else, I would be happy to entertain thoughts of taking you on, as per the program, of course, when you're ready."

Severus watched Hermione's eyes light up. Tenbrook had been the most interesting and the most knowledgeable of all the presenters and, more specifically, the most qualified out of all the masters Hermione was interested in, so far. Considering the wizard was also well versed in the Wolfsbane Potion probably didn't harm his chances for being Hermione's top pick, either.

A young witch, with blue hair and orange eyes, brought drinks to the table and took their lunch order. She and the young witch taking tickets, Meredith, were close mates. Her friend had been in her cups last night, lamenting about her hopeless attraction to the dark wizard and how unfair it was that Granger, the cow, had him all to herself and didn't seem to worship the ground he walked on, like she would if he'd only look her way.

Severus sat quietly, his mind racing as he thought about Tenbrook's offer. There was a possibility, no matter how slim, that Tenbrook was as harmless as he looked. Right, and he and Weasley might become best mates too. Tenbrook. There would be time to dwell on what might be, later, he thought snidely, during a lull in the conversation as their food appeared in front of them.

The witch eyed Hermione. The glasses and condiments were lined up perfectly, she thought. Taking a deep breath, she walked back to the table. A false smile appeared on her lips as she surveyed the table once more. "Is there anything else I can get you?" The young woman gestured widely with her outstretched hand and hit the saltcellar at the edge of the table.

In a move worthy of the current world domino champion, the saltcellar tipped, hitting the pepper mill next to it, which knocked over a full glass of pumpkin juice before the mill landed with a resounding thud in Hermione's coffee. Both the pumpkin juice and spilled coffee seemed to be magically drawn to the witch, not wasting even a lone atom to fall on Severus's robes, but choosing, instead, to travel uphill and land entirely in Hermione's lap.

"Oh. God, I'm sorry. Tsk, how clumsy of me." The waitress reached for her wand, ready to clean up the mess she'd 'accidentally' created.

Hermione laughed as she looked at the mess in her lap. "Don't worry, I've been covered in worse." A fast Scouring Charm on her part had the spill cleaned up and her robes returned to their original pristine state before the waitress had even drawn her wand. "You're in good company; I've been spilled on by the best. I'm fine, really."

Severus watched the witch's expression fall. He'd been around troublemakers too long to not know this was planned.

"I'm really sorry. I...uhm, I don't know why I'm so clumsy today." The waitress refused to look any of them in the eye. "Let me get you both another drink."

He was sure the incident had not been an accident, but to what purpose?

Michael indicated the full glass of pumpkin juice sitting to the side of his plate. "Are you all right? I haven't touched my drink yet; you're welcome to it, if you like."

"I'm fine. No harm done. It's just some juice and coffee. I think the time Fred and George substituted those magic dribble glasses was worse. They designed a special spell that turned the drinks in the glass neon as they dribbled out. It took more than three incantations to get it off, and then there was still a slight stain wherever the liquid had touched. Come to think of it, they still owe me a new set of dress robes."

"Fred and George Weasley?" Michael had heard, as had most of the wizarding world, of the twins' exploits during the final battle. Since Hermione was known to be a good friend of Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, it would be natural to assume she meant the Weasley twins.

Hermione nodded. "Fred and George like to use their family and friends as test subjects for some of their 'safer' products. That's not to say none of us have never hexed them for it; they just think they have less chance of having an Unforgivable cast on them by one of us."

"Fortunately, the idiots have never tried anything out on me."

"That's because they're not too sure you won't turn them into inanimate objects."

"They would make an interesting set of bookends," he said thoughtfully.

"I think they're hoping you'll advise them on a new formula for a children's bubble bath they're working on. It's based on the skywriting charm I used, but instead of letters, a magical creature would hover in the air before turning into a cascade of bubbles that would fill the tub. Unfortunately, the creatures come out of the can fighting, spraying bubbles everywhere." Hermione remembered quite well when she wrote "Slytherin Rules" in green and silver bubbles just before one of their baths.

Severus raised one brow. Judging by the slight blush to her cheeks, he thought she was recalling the time she'd demonstrated the spell for him too. "Sounds more like a charms problem, than potions."

"No, it has something to do with the initial ingredients having an adverse reaction once the charm is activated. I think they need to change the potion base if they're going to get it right."

Michael Tenbrook was a student of the Muggle art of body language. He could tell quite a bit about those he met simply by watching them speak and interact with others. He took the time now to watch the byplay between witch and wizard, aware that there were underlying comments of a more intimate nature left unsaid, merely by the angle and movement of their bodies.

"I believe I will wait for them to approach me; I might have an answer to their problem, but I need to check a few facts first." Severus rose from the table. He had discretely watched their waitress as he and Hermione spoke. Up until just a few minutes ago, the young witch had been busy taking care of the surrounding tables. He watched her signal to the witch at the door before moving off to a side alcove. "If you'll excuse me for a moment."

Both Hermione and Tenbrook nodded before launching into a discussion of the types of Potions apprenticeships available as he left the table.

He followed a side corridor leading to the men's room, but instead of entering, he cast a Disillusionment Charm and walked back to where the waitress was talking to her friend.

"...she's not. I'm sorry, Meredith, but you're wrong. She was really very nice about it. She seems like a nice person."

"Oh, come off it. She's Potter's best friend; she's got to be full of herself. I heard her arguing with the professor yesterday. She doesn't deserve him." Defiantly, the witch crossed her arms in front of her, scowling at her friend.

"Well, I feel bad I spilled those drinks on her. I'm sorry I listened to you; she didn't have to be so nice, you know. I'm not doing anything more. Besides, Snape only has eyes for her; he wouldn't notice you if you were covered in chocolate and danced nude around the room for him." The waitress's orange eyes had taken on a distinct red cast that matched the annoyance in her voice.

'I was the one that was covered in chocolate, not the other way around,' Severus thought with a chuckle. The need to take points and hand out a detention arose at the thought the waitress's actions had been intentional, but it was an automatic response, at best. He found it impossible to wrap his mind around the confession: Meredith, the witch that took their meal tickets, was interested in him. Interested to the point of getting her mate to try and sabotage his relationship with Hermione. As if a spilled drink could break them up.

"Why is that cow sitting there talking to another man? The Professor is nowhere around. Did you happen to notice that?" Meredith said triumphantly.

"I saw Snape head for the loo. I'm sure he'll be back any minute. Besides, did you read the article in *The Quibbler*? They're crazy about each other."

Meredith frowned. "You can't believe everything you read in the *The Quibbler*."

"That isn't what you said when you tried their chocolate and fudge diet. Just forget it."

"But Callie, if you'd ju..."

"No! That's final. I have to get back on the floor before someone notices I'm gone. Let it go."

Severus walked back to the bathroom doorway before dropping the Disillusionment Charm and returning to their booth, still unsure of what action he should take. Hermione and Tenbrook were engaged in a lively discussion, debating the finer points of Tenbrook's earlier lecture.

Despite himself, Severus felt drawn into the conversation. The hour passed quickly as a lively discussion ensued, jumping from topic to topic until finally settling on the Wolfsbane Potion and the range of experiments they'd performed.

Hermione explained the various cauldron materials they'd tried and their effects on the Wolfsbane's ingredients. She recited, almost chapter and verse, the details of their research: the cauldron tests; the materials they'd rejected, and why; the various ingredients and their variants when combined with other ingredients and cauldrons. And the ensuing results that gave them hope that the potion could actually be altered to improve the inflicted's control.

Tenbrook sat in awe, listening to the detailed explanation. "That's amazing. You don't need an apprenticeship, my dear. I believe you deserve the title of master right now. I dare say you surpass most of the masters in the field today. Have you thought of applying this principle to other potions?"

Hermione blushed at the man's praise. It was one thing for her friends to think she was smart, but for a complete stranger to sing her praises that was an entirely different matter.

"I think there are quite a few potions that might benefit by Hermione's alterations. We were focusing on the Wolfsbane first." Severus noted the slight flush that coloured the witch's cheeks and made a mental note to discuss her feelings regarding Tenbrook when they were alone.

Unfortunately, it was the annoying voice that managed to catch the mental note and decided to torment him further. *Right, you're going to ask her what? Are you interested in Tenbrook? Do you want to shag the man? Why do you blush so enticingly whenever he praises you? Is that the problem I don't compliment you enough? I know, the next time she pleasures you, why don't you tell her...?*

Severus slammed down on that thought. It seemed the annoying voice had met up with the deranged voice he'd first heard when he found Hermione's thong.

*The Thong*, the voice corrected him.

'Perhaps the annoying voice was suffering from schizophrenia,' he thought, since it seemed to vacillate between annoying and deranged at every turn. Maybe they could invite paranoia to join them and get a group rate next time they all went on holiday? Severus shrugged and brought his attention back to Hermione. She was expounding on their plans to test the altered Wolfsbane on a test subject and what they hoped the results would be.

Tenbrook nodded. It appeared the two were actually working on the alteration as a joint venture. He knew Severus Snape was as brilliant as he was antisocial. The papers and articles the dark wizard had published in the last two years held testament to his intellect. The fact that the two, witch and wizard, seemed to talk to one another on almost a separate plane, was something he hadn't considered.

"Of course, I think we can have a private lab available to you, if you want to continue your research. I have quite a private library, too. There might be information there that would be useful in your research. I normally give my apprentices every other weekend off, so you'd have a bit of downtime to work at your own project if you wanted. Mind you, most tend to spend their off time frivolously, but I don't think that would apply to you."

A private lab research a library. Hermione's eyes lit up.

Tenbrook smiled. "We have a residence facility attached to the main research building. I could have rooms available for you, Snape, if you two would like to continue your work."

"Severus can visit?"

"Of course. We're a private facility, however ..."

Callie appeared, smiling brightly at Hermione. "I'm really sorry about spilling the drinks, earlier. I'm glad the juice didn't stain."

"Thanks, but I'm fine." An owl sounded signalling the end of the lunch period. "I don't know where the time went. Michael, this was most interesting. I'd like to owl you with a few more questions, if I may?"

"You mentioned you had plans tonight. What about breakfast tomorrow? I don't Portkey out until three."

"I'm sorry, we can't tomorrow, either. Severus has arranged a special Portkey to Florence for us."

"I see," Tenbrook said, letting his disappointment show.

"You're not too far from Cambridge. Maybe we can make other arrangements to meet. Why don't I owl you next week?" Hermione started gathering her belongings. "Severus, we need to go. The presentation I want to attend is on the far side of the building."

Callie had moved off to the side, under the pretence of clearing and resetting the tables around them while trying to hear their conversation.

Unobtrusively, Severus moved alongside the waitress; he noticed her hands shake as she waved her wand over the table. His tone was just this side of menacing, but still silky, as he said quietly, "You may tell your friend that if she comes near Hermione, or plots against her again, they won't find so much as an eyelash when I'm through. The same applies to you. Do I make myself clear?"

The young witch's hands shook uncontrollably, her wand dropping to the table from the movement. "Professor, I am so sorry. I never should have let Meredith talk me into..."

A raised hand silenced the girl. "You'd do well to reevaluate your friendship. And for the record: I was the one wearing the chocolate sauce, not Hermione." He smirked as he moved away from the witch. She'd gone quite pale and sounded like a stuck Newt. He could see her eyes rolling up and thought she might pass out, though whether it was from his threat or the image of him wearing chocolate sauce, he couldn't be sure.

Hermione had paused in the doorway when she realised Severus was not behind her. She smiled as he caught up to her and Tenbrook. "There you are. I was just telling Michael that Wednesday might not work this week. I wasn't sure if you still had the night off or not. Will you be coming to my flat, or did you take too much time off for this weekend?"

*Oh wonderful, now she's cancelling dates with us to be with Michael! This calls for a bit of subterfuge. A fast Memory Charm to her and a quick Killing Curse followed by a Disillusionment Spell to him, until you can dispose of the body, should do nicely.*

They had moved into the main corridor, the crowd moving around them gently buffeting the trio as they tried to move out of the main flow of traffic. Severus's voice held a note of detachment as he tried not to follow what he thought was sound advice from the deranged voice. "I was planning on coming out, but if you and Tenbrook have made plans..."

Hermione gave him an odd look. "No, I meant if you *were* coming over, we could both go see the facilities. I thought you might want to have a look at the lab we could use if I apprentice with Michael. There are a few things I need to check out with my Charms professor before we talk further. I just thought we could kill two birds with one stone. But if you'd rather not..."

She wanted him to go *with* her to Tenbrook's? He was under the impression she would be meeting the wizard on her own. They definitely needed to talk. "No, Wednesday would be fine. I may be able to come after my last class. I'll owl you on Monday after I speak with Albus."

Tenbrook smiled. "Wonderful. I'll expect the two of you Wednesday, then. You can owl me with the details." He was distracted by a group gathering in the entrance to the Dining Hall.

Hermione rose up on tiptoe trying to see what the disturbance was. "I think someone passed out on one of the tables. It looks like our waitress; I hope she's okay."

Severus nodded to Tenbrook. "We'll see you Wednesday." His hand at the small of Hermione's back directed the witch to join the flow of people moving past them. "We need to get moving if you want to attend the presentation."

"Don't you want to know what happened in there?"

Severus smiled. "I'm sure she's fine. Must have been something she ate. What room did you say the next lecture is in?"

Hermione fished her schedule out of her bag, thinking Severus looked a little too smug. She glanced back to the group that had gathered around the doorway and looked at the dark wizard once more. She was sure there was something he wasn't telling her. "Room 509. That's down here and to our left."

"Shall we?"

The witch allowed him to guide her away, his mood much lighter than just a few minutes ago. She almost thought he was going to start whistling as they walked, he seemed that happy at the moment.

Except Severus Snape didn't whistle.

Ever.

TBC

A/N: A bit shorter chapter, but important to the story, nonetheless. And posted faster, too!

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine. Nak glad you're feeling better, take care of yourself!

Still to come: more of the Symposium, a surprise meeting in Florence, the unexplained magic (which will make sense soon), the Wolfsbane Potion, Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), and more. Enjoy. Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle



# Sunday in the Park

Chapter 43 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

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Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

\*\*\*New\*\*\*

## Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Summary: Severus Snape loses a magical bet. The consequences? The Tango! My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS

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~~~ Dances with Witches ~~~

Chapter 43 Sunday in the Park

Severus smiled as he listened with half an ear to Hermione discussing the next lecturer they were about to hear. His mood had mellowed a bit, lunch having gone better than he'd expected. He didn't trust Tenbrook, but he didn't seem quite the evil Severus first thought him to be. This was the last lecture Hermione wanted to attend. A quick stop at the Trade Hall to order a glass cauldron and the rest of the evening and tomorrow would belong to them. A pleasing thought that actually brought a smile to his lips.

"...When she spoke at Cambridge. It's such a shame she chose next year to take her sabbatical. I would have loved to study under another woman. Oh, well. I'm just glad I could hear her speak again before she takes off for America." Hermione guided Severus into Room 308 and headed for the back of the room.

"She? Who's the next speaker?"

Hermione shook her head. "Professor Morley. Have you been listening to anything I said?"

Years spent as a spy allowed Severus to develop the ability to listen to several conversations at once while gleaning the meaning from each. A talent that proved most useful when large groups of Death Eaters gathered. His practice of distancing himself from the others created an invaluable diversionary tactic, enabling him to move unhindered from group to group and eavesdrop on several conversations at once.

He recited, in a Hermione-like manner, her comments regarding Professor Morley. "One of the more interesting lecturers you've had this year at Cambridge. Well-respected and recognised in the field of potions. Going on sabbatical to America early next year; therefore, regrettably unavailable to apprentice with, as you would have welcomed the possibility of studying with another woman in a field overwhelmed by men. The Symposium has provided a great opportunity to hear her speak." It was typical of the type of answers she would've given him as a student. "You did, however, neglect to mention the witch's name."

"All right, you were listening, more or less." Hermione glared at his self-satisfied smirk. "And I didn't say the field was overwhelmed with men. I merely implied it."

Severus watched the speaker take her place at the podium. Morley. Mid-fifties, blonde, medium-build. Female. Why hadn't he thought of her before? Hermione apprenticing with a female master would put quite a few of his jealous tendencies to rest.

And not too hard on the eyes either. All in all, she would have been a good bet; too bad she's not available. Are you finally admitting you've more of a jealous nature than you'll own up to?"

He mentally shoved the annoying voice to the back of his mind, not acknowledging the sentiment it expressed, and concentrated on the lecture that was about to start.

Hermione had been right in her estimation that Morley was one of the more interesting speakers. The witch spoke about her interest in ancient and lost potions, the forerunners of several of the potions they used today, and the possibility of resurrecting some of those potions that had been lost and abandoned. She cited the main problem: being those potions that were passed from master to apprentice without ever having had the benefit of being put to parchment. It was rumoured that parchment fragments, scrolls, and other paraphernalia that had turned up, of all the unlikely places, at a graveyard at the edge of Salem contained ancient and rare potions, not seen in hundreds of years.

The American Ministry was requesting help in the retrieval and study of the fragments and scrolls they had rescued, in the hope that some long-forgotten potion could help those that had been subjected to curses and hexes that had so far proved to be irreversible.

From start to finish, it was a fascinating exercise in pure research, one that both Severus and Hermione would have loved to pursue themselves.

Professor Morley waved to Hermione as the crowd thinned out at the end of the lecture. Her greeting was warm as she smiled at the young witch. "Hermione, how wonderful to see you again."

"Professor, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed your lecture. It must be so exciting, going to America to examine the scrolls." Hermione blushed slightly as Severus shifted next to her. "I'm sorry, I should have introduced you two. Um, Professor Morley, Professor Snape. Professor Snape, Professor Morley." Hermione seemed to be at a loss for words as she glanced from one to the other.

The witch held out her hand in greeting. "Please, call me Ella."

Rather stiffly, Severus took her hand and offered a courtly bow. "Your lecture was most interesting, Ella. It's Severus, Severus Snape."

"Yes, I know. You're as well known for your heroic deeds as you are for your knowledge of potions and the Dark Arts, Professor. Actually, I was at your lecture, Friday. I think just about everyone at the Symposium was there," she said with a laugh. "The chance to hear the reserved Professor Snape speak was just too good to pass up. And as to be expected, you didn't disappoint us. If you ever have the time, I would be interested to hear about the changes the two of you are creating in the Wolfsbane Potion. You do plan to publish your research, don't you?"

Rather than be insulted by the woman's abject honesty, Severus chortled. "We plan to test the first alterations over the Christmas hols. If all goes well, we'll publish the results sometime in the spring."

"Jointly?"

Severus nodded. "It's Hermione's theory. I merely helped her to work within the proper constraints to find the right alterations for the ingredients."

Ella was sure Snape had done quite a bit more, but she had no doubt they were working as equals. Severus was known for his expertise in potions, but Hermione was brilliant, a fact that made itself known within minutes of first meeting the young witch. Hermione was memorable on several levels: her intellect; her status as a hero of the Last Battle and a friend of the boy who lived to finally destroy the evil that was He Who Must Not Be Named, once and for all; and for the simple fact that there were very few witches who chose to become masters in the field of potions. "So, you're here with Severus to set the potions community on its ear with your findings, eh?" The witch's smile took the bite out of the comment, turning it into the compliment it was meant to be.

"Not really. I came to listen to the masters I was thinking of apprenticing with next year. I'm just sorry you're not available. I would love to study potions with a woman; there are so few in the field."

"Thank you, I'm flattered that you think so highly of me. But I'm sure your education won't suffer studying under a man."

"There you are. I was wondering what happened to you."

"I'm sorry, I didn't realise the time. Hermione, Severus, I'd like you to meet my partner, Kathryn Dalton. Kath, may I present Hermione Granger and Professor Severus Snape."

Kathryn immediately recognised both names as heroes of the Last Battle. "It's an honour to meet you both. I don't mean to break up your discussion, but we're on a bit of a time schedule."

"I'm afraid she's right. We have a Portkey back to London in less than an hour, and I still have to tie up a few loose ends regarding a purchase I made this morning, in addition to finishing my packing."

Kathryn shook her head. "Done. If I left it up to you, we'd be rushing at the last minute with you saying, 'what's the problem, we still have sixty seconds left?' You just need to schedule delivery of the books you bought. I've already packed us up *and* checked us out of the hotel."

Her partner? Severus nodded to the other woman, a woman who looked remarkably like an older version of Hermione. "Than we won't keep you. Ms Dalton, it was nice meeting you. Ella, good luck with your research."

Her partner? Well, you know what they say: two's company, three's a crowd. I wonder what four is? Guess Morley isn't the answer, mate. Better stick with Tenbrook.

Hermione fell into step with Ella. "We'll walk with you to the Trade Hall. Severus was thinking of purchasing a glass cauldron he saw the other day."

The odd foursome headed for the Trade Hall. Ella stopped just inside the entrance. "I'm sorry we're so short on time. I've really enjoyed talking to you both."

Surprisingly, Severus felt much the same way. Kathryn Dalton had told him, when asked, that she worked for the Ministry in Charms development. The conversation between the four had touched on quite a few topics in the short walk to the Trade Hall and had been most interesting to all.

Hermione nodded. "Perhaps we'll run into one another again. Good luck with your research."

"I'll be watching the trade journals for your results. *The Daily Prophet* and several of the publishers were nice enough to extend overseas delivery to me. I'd hate to miss out on any of the earth-shattering developments that might occur while we're gone." Ella's laugh was warm.

"Ella, the time? I'm sorry, but we really need to get moving."

Ella smiled at the other woman. "Don't know why I've put up with you for so long."

"Because without me, you'd still be standing in our flat trying to remember where you last saw your trunk. Honestly, I can't figure out how you manage to make your publication deadlines on time."

"Ah, the trick is knowing what's important and what's not. Trunks and Portkeys bah. Books and journals, well, there's really no comparison, is there?"

Kathryn turned to Severus and Hermione. "It really was a pleasure meeting you two. Hopefully, we'll see you again sometime." She turned on her heel and faced Ella, pointing to the far aisle. "Go."

"Hermione, Severus, take care." Ella shrugged, moving in the direction Kathryn had indicated. "I'm going, I'm going. Really, we have plenty of time. This will only take a few minutes."

Hermione watched the two disappear as they turned into one of the aisles. "Well, that was...interesting, to say the least. I really like Ella. Her research sounds fascinating. Imagine, examining scrolls that no one has seen in hundreds of years."

He'd had a feeling the research would have been right up her alley. "I seem to recall reading an article by a Professor E. Morley a few months ago on the unusual practice of using certain ingredients for the negative value they might add to a brew, rather than the positive effect they might have. I believe it was based on an ancient Italian principle, thought to be discovered by Leonardo da Vinci."

One brow rose quizzically. "*The Leonardo da Vinci?*"

"Yes, Leonardo da Vinci. Painted the *Mona Lisa*? He was a Potions master." Severus gestured to a merchant stall a few feet ahead of them. "Here we are. See the stack on the right? I was thinking of that middle-sized cauldron."

Hermione turned to stare at him. "Leonardo da Vinci was a wizard?"

Severus chuckled. "Why do you look so surprised? His work, his inventions, his art they have long been heralded as the work of a master. As if it were touched by angels. I don't know about angels, but I don't doubt that magic accounted for some of it."

Hermione stood lost in thought as Severus negotiated the purchase and delivery of the cauldron. It still surprised her when someone famous turned out to be a wizard, she supposed it had something to do with growing up Muggle.

They spent another hour browsing through the stalls in the Trade Hall. Hermione had been thrilled when she found a rare Arithmancy journal in one of the bookstalls tucked away in the back corner.

They headed for the main lobby and the Portkey columns.

"Where are we having dinner? You've been rather mysterious about it."

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"This is exciting, I've never been to Florence before," Hermione said, checking her appearance in the mirror.

Severus looked around the treehouse, making sure they hadn't left anything behind. Their trunks were miniaturised and rested safely in his inside coat pocket. "I've already checked us out; we just need to be at the departure zone in a half hour, or we'll miss our Portkey."

They made their way to the main lobby, bustling with wizards and witches. They could still see a fairly large crowd in the Trade Hall. Several stalls proclaimed last minute sales in an effort to draw people in and boost their sales now that the lectures had ended and quite a few of the Symposium's participants had already departed. Severus guided Hermione to the far side of the lobby, toward a large sign designating the departure zone. He checked in at the desk next to the roped off area, showing the bored wizard the papers he'd received confirming their Portkey's time and destination.

"If you and the lady will just move to the side, we'll call your name when it's time. Please don't leave the immediate area. We're on a tight schedule with all the people departing today. I would advise you not to miss your assigned time; our next open departure is not available until tomorrow. You're scheduled to leave in fifteen minutes, at twelve-noon for..." The young man glanced at the name listed at the top of the parchment. "...Professor...Professor Snape. I, uhm, didn't realise it was you, sir. It won't be but a few minutes, sir."

Severus glared at the young man, who had the good sense to pale under the Potion master's malevolent gaze.

Less than ten minutes later, Severus's name was called. He and Hermione moved behind the rope, both taking hold of the brass ring the wizard handed them. At the count of three, Hermione felt the pull behind her navel that characterised Portkey travel. No matter how many times she Portkeyed, the feeling always left her slightly disoriented when she landed.

They arrived in another roped off zone inside a small office. A young witch in gaily-coloured robes greeted the pair. "Good afternoon, Professor Snape, Miss Granger. I can't tell you how happy we are to have you visiting our town. Your request for the Portkey stated you were here for recreational purposes, is this correct?" The witch took the ring from their joined hands.

Hermione nodded blankly at the witch.

"Wonderful, you're scheduled to Portkey out at ten tonight. If you could please return here ten minutes ahead of your departure time, we would appreciate it. Enjoy your day."

They walked out the front door of the office and stood in the middle of a grassy park. The building seemed to disappear behind them; a Disillusionment Charm, Severus guessed.

"Oh my God, look!" Hermione pointed to the building ahead of them. Rising majestically in front of them was Michelangelo's statue of David.

Severus smiled. "Would you like to see the museum? It's been a while since I was here, but the Gallery of the Academia has some of the most outstanding paintings and sculptures in the world."

Impulsively, Hermione kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you, this is wonderful. Come on."

Severus followed Hermione into the museum; they spent two hours pleasantly wandering through the exhibits. It had been some time since he'd been to Italy, but Severus was well read. He acted the part of guide, pointing out various works of art by old world masters as well as relating bits of information he'd read. Hermione was particularly interested in those artists he indicated were actually magical and not Muggle.

While the works of art contained in the museum were breathtaking, the city outside the museum was also a feast for the eyes. The ancient buildings, with their medieval accents and classic Roman architecture, were as impressive as the works of art some of the buildings housed.

They came to the Ponte Vecchio, the oldest and most photographed bridge in Florence, characterised by its three arches and two wide arcades on each side. Like most bridges of the day, a row of shops ran along its length. There were small stands that dotted the sidewalks outside the shops, offering a variety of food, drink, and merchandise. Severus stopped and purchased sandwiches from one of the vendors. He and Hermione walked casually along, commenting on items in various windows as they passed.

A piece in the window of a jewellery shop caught Hermione's eye. "I just want to look a minute."

Severus nodded as he followed her into the little shop. The store was larger on the inside, magically enhanced, no doubt. Hermione gazed at a small silver cauldron, wondering if Severus would wear such a pendant. In true mythology, the symbol was meant to be feminine, but he was a Potions master, after all, and cauldrons were an item that represented his trade. 'I wonder if they have any necklaces with phials? Or maybe a stopper for death?' she thought with a chuckle.

The case held quite a selection of 'magical' items. In addition to the silver cauldron, she saw two broom pendants, a witch's hat much like the one that completed her uniform when she was at Hogwarts, dragon pendants of various sizes and shapes, and even a pendant that seemed to resemble a Time-Turner, though she thought it might actually be an hourglass, instead.

To her surprise, she spied beautiful glass stoppers in the next cabinet. The stoppers were various sizes, etched with fine lines of gold and silver, some covered in runes she didn't recognise. Next to those were two short rows of small phials, the corks in their tops containing a bail to thread a chain through. The hand-written note next to the first row proclaimed the phial's contents could help cure any and all ills just by wearing one close to one's heart from new moon to new moon.

"Severus, look." Hermione was pointing to the phials when a sudden shriek interrupted her.

She'd felt the strange energy the minute she entered the store. It was her grandfather's pendant, but not quite. She recognised the original magic, but something about its power signature was different, stronger, but in an odd way. She seemed to recall her grandfather telling her about a couple he'd made a leaf for, how the energy had changed. "They've claimed each other," she said in wonderment. "They must have evoked the elemental magic woven into the leaf, without knowing it."

It was the type of magic her grandfather had described, but a force she herself had never been privileged to experience, until now. The clerk's touch at her shoulder startled the witch out of her reverie.

"Senalda, are you all right?"

The witch shrieked, her hand moving to her breast as if to still her racing heart. "God, Charles, you startled me." Senalda scanned the small shop, her gaze stopping at Hermione and Severus. "Professor, Miss Granger."

Hermione watched as a more subdued version of Sybill Trelawney walked towards her.

"You've claimed each other, how wonderful. I've heard rumours about the elemental magic needed to complete the circle, but I've never been privileged to feel its power before." Her green eyes glowed with an inner light. While she did not have the wild, bug-eyed look her cousin did, there was no mistaking her general physique for anything other than a Trelawney: tall, thin, flowing hair, but lacking the beads and bangles Sybill favoured.

What was the idiot woman blathering about? "Trelawney," Severus said with a snarl. "What the devil are you talking about? What's in that pendant you sold me?"

"A gift, Professor, a great gift."

Of course, Senalda Trelawney, the witch from the *Enchanted Leaf*, the witch that sold Severus her pendant. "Claimed each other, like... soul mates?" Hermione asked, glomming onto the unusual phrase.

"No, not quite, soul mate implies a lack of free will. No, a claiming is the closest I can come to putting the magic into words," she said with a smile.

"Try harder," Severus bit out between clenched teeth. A great gift; she was spouting the same dribble her brother had that day he'd returned to the *Enchanted Leaf*. His hand tightened on the wand in his pocket; he would've hexed the witch if he thought it would help. Hell, even if it didn't help, hexing her would at least make him feel better. "What did you do to Hermione?"

"I didn't do anything. Professor, I know we tend to fear that which we don't know or understand, but you really have been given a great gift."

"Yes, you keep saying that, but what in the bloody hell does it mean?" he hissed at the witch. Without realising it, he'd placed himself between Hermione and Trelawney, his stance defensive as he moved to protect her.

"Why don't we go somewhere where we can talk privately? We seem to be gathering an audience here." Senalda gestured to the throng watching the byplay between them.

Severus nodded, abruptly ushering Hermione out the door. Silently, the odd trio walked down the avenue to a small café at the end of the bridge. They sat at a table near the back of the nearly empty café.

"Explain." Severus pinned the witch with a glare, daring her to lie to him.

Senalda smiled. "Yes, I'd love tea, thank you."

Hermione tried to hide her chuckle as Severus's glare turned murderous.

"Ms Trelawney, you mentioned..." Hermione started to say, only to have Senalda interrupt her.

"Please, call me Senalda, all my friends do."

A young wizard took their order for tea and scones then disappeared, leaving them to try and sort things out again.

"Ms Trelawney..." At Senalda's look, Hermione corrected herself. "Senalda, you said we 'claimed' each other. What does that mean?"

"It means you've each declared, willingly, that you choose to belong to the other. The leaf recognises the integrity of your heart, the purity of your intentions."

Severus snorted. "Purity is hardly a word I would associate with me."

"Your intentions, Professor. Whatever you are, or are not, is not the issue, only your true feelings toward Hermione matter. You don't mind if I call you Hermione, do you, dear?" Hermione started to answer, but Senalda pressed on. "You've created a magical bond between the two of you, one the pendant recognises. I could feel the magic in the pendant calling to me that day you walked into the shop. It recognised your intentions then, even if your heart didn't know what it felt. I read in the *Daily Prophet* about Hermione's unfortunate accident. There was a comment about the leaf glowing. I assume you had established a bond then, but this goes beyond that."

Severus sat back and tried to absorb Senalda's explanation. It was still too vague for his tastes. Claiming each other. A bond. "So we are... bound... to each other?"

"You said we weren't soul mates, how does this differ?" Hermione asked, her brow furrowed in thought.

Severus was not happy with Hermione's thoughtful expression. Did the thought of being 'bound' to him upset her? He wasn't sure how he felt about it, either. Could it be reversed if they chose to separate? While it was true they'd declared their love for each other, they hadn't really discussed the future in anything other than general terms: breakfast at The Burrow Christmas Day; testing the revised Wolfsbane Potion on Lupin over the holiday; Hermione's apprenticeship. He assumed she would stay with him at Hogwarts over Christmas, but they hadn't really talked about it. Severus made a mental note to ask Hermione what her plans were. He didn't want to just assume she'd stay with him, only to find out later on she'd made other arrangements.

And what would be so terrible if you two were bound together? You have another brilliant, good looking, thong-clad witch looking to enjoy... the annoying voice actually snickered at him before finishing its thought. "...your company?"

Fortunately, the waiter had returned with their order, interrupting Senalda's explanation of what it meant to 'claim' each other. The last thing Severus wanted to do was ask her to repeat herself. He refocused his attention and concentrated on the witch's explanation.

"The idea of Soul mates implies a lack of free will on the part of the individuals involved. Their souls belong together, no matter what events occur. No one else can ever be right for them, can ever make them happy *but* their soul mate. The commonly held belief is that soul mates are joined throughout eternity, destined to wander from life to life seeking each other out. Could be why the only time you hear about a couple being 'destined' for each other is when you look back through history. Can't say I've heard anyone referred to as 'true magical soul mates' in the last six or seven hundred years."

"And claiming each other is different? Would you care to explain the difference?"

"It goes beyond the bond the leaf recognised in the two of you; it means, Professor, you've given yourselves to each other, of your own free will. The magic will only work when evoked without malice, when pledged with purity of emotion. It takes very powerful emotions to create the right timing to call upon this type of magic." Senalda bit into her scone, watching Hermione and Severus digest her comments.

"What type of magic is it?"

It was Severus who answered Hermione's question. "Elemental. The same magic that protected Potter all these years. Her grandfather drew on both psychic energy and natural magic when he created the leaf."

Senalda smiled. "Very good, Professor. Yes, elemental magic is magic at its most basic form, but the hardest of all to control or invoke. Let's say your soul, for lack of a better word, requires thirty items or points to be matched to reach completion and utter happiness."

"Points?"

"Yes, such things as intelligence, looks, kindness. Maybe traits would be a better word. Your soul requires your ultimate mate to share thirty traits with you to find total and unequivocal happiness. That's not to say that you wouldn't be happy with someone who shares twenty-five of those traits you're looking for, or even twenty. We don't know if each trait has the same value to your heart, to your soul, do we? Do blue eyes matter as much as kindness to others? Would two people with blue eyes, assuming that was one of the traits you wanted, would two people with blue eyes rank the same with your heart if one was intelligent and the other could barely read and write, assuming all else is the same? Would you accept another person if they had most of the traits you desired but had brown eyes, instead? Do some traits matter more than others?"

"So, you're saying there is more than one person that could be right for you. The values for each person might be the same, but each would satisfy something different within you." Hermione warmed to the topic as she applied Arithmancy principles to its logic. "Two mates could add up to the same value, but could still have different characteristics. You might be happy with both, but in different ways. The same as two plus two equal four and one plus three equal four. You arrive at the same end, just by different means."

"Exactly. That's the principle the leaf uses to recognise one heart that calls to another, even before the hearts in question know their attraction for each other. It also recognises that your heart, your soul, is happy and has stopped its search; though keep in mind, there are people that might satisfy those same requirements, but you won't feel an attraction to them. These would be people that become your closest friends; you feel genuine affection for them, but nothing more."

Hermione thought Harry and Ron fell neatly into the second category. Not that they met the requirements, as Senalda phrased it, that she was looking for; she loved them dearly, but there was no heat. Severus, however, was another story. The heat that existed between them amazed her. There were times she was actually surprised they didn't burst into flames at the sight of one another; though she supposed, they did catch fire, but in an entirely different manner.

Severus, too, looked thoughtful. "But that's not the 'claiming' you mentioned?" he asked.

"No, that's the bond the leaf creates. The claiming has to do with two people, willingly, at a time of intense emotions and without malice aforethought, giving himself or herself, wholly and unconditionally, to the other person. Legend has it that this 'claim' is characterised by a surge of magic. It is said to create an invisible connection between two people, one that allows either of them to draw on the elements when it perceives the other half of their bond to be in danger. It has to be the change I feel in the magical signature of the leaf."

Senalda watched as sudden comprehension dawned on Severus. "And judging by your expression, I'd say you know exactly what happened and when. Was it as legend claims? Did you feel a magical surge? Where were you when it happened? What did you say? Can you remember?"

Severus remembered. Their first night in Eden, after they'd run into Hermione's ex-boyfriend, emotions *had* been running high, for both of them. Severus had taken Hermione, without any preliminaries, but she had been just as hot for him. He told her she was his, and she agreed, demanding the same of him all the while telling him how much she loved him. He remembered declaring his love for her just before they both came. A tingle of magic had surrounded them, pushing them both to limits they'd never reached before. It had to be the explanation for the unusual magic Hermione displayed the next day when Rancine confronted them. She must have drawn on the wind as the air whipped around her. Rancine may never know how lucky he was that day. Hermione calmed down before actually hexing the man. There's no telling what change the elemental magic might have caused in her magic at that point, though watching Rancine disintegrate would have been most satisfying, in his opinion.

Hermione looked questioningly at Severus. "The argument I had with Rancine? Is that when the 'claiming' occurred? You said the air was whipping around me. Wind is one of the four elements."

Severus shook his head. "No. That's most likely a result of this 'claiming.' I believe it occurred the night before, when we returned to our suite after leaving the Trade Hall." He watched as Hermione ran through the last three days in her mind, sure it wouldn't take her long to come to the same conclusion he had.

A look of intense concentration crossed her features. "We saw the suite, went back downstairs, stopped by the Trade Hall. That idiot Steve was there. We went back upstairs." Hermione flushed as she recalled exactly what had transpired upon their return to Eden. "When we went back upstairs," she said in a whisper.

Severus nodded. He had meant to mention the tingle of magic, but it had merged with the most intense orgasm he'd ever had. It had been difficult to breathe, let alone possibly harm himself, when his blood was occupied elsewhere, by attempting to call on a higher brain function by speaking to her.

"Well, it seems you both have figured out the when and where. What happened? What did it feel like? What did you say?" Senalda could tell by Severus's guarded expression and Hermione's equally guilty one that the details might not be forthcoming. "There has only been one recorded instance of this type of claiming before, more than a hundred and fifty years ago. My grandfather told me about it, but I never expected to feel this type of magic; it was legend, nothing more, or so I thought."

Severus understood the woman's need for clarification. For all intents and purposes, they were a lab experiment that worked without the researcher knowing *why* it worked. "What is it you feel? All of my grandfather's pieces contain a bit of his magic. My brother and I share that magic. It has a certain pattern, a signature. It's how I can tell a fake piece from the real thing. I felt the pull of the leaf responding to you, Professor, when you walked into the shop. My brother was quite angry with me for selling you that piece. But I've been trained, just as he was. I could tell your intentions were pure, that your feelings for Hermione were real. I'd never felt the magic so strongly, ever."

One brow quirked questioningly; he recalled the brother's odd attitude when questioned at the store. "What was his objection?"

"Many years ago, an unscrupulous wizard tried to alter the pendant's enchantment. Instead of calling to another heart, it attempted to enslave it, hoping the leaf would act more like a love potion than an indication of their true feelings. My grandfather recognised the alteration for what it was and managed to replace the leaf with a non-magical one. Shortly after that, my grandfather started to buy back the Enchanted Leaves, fearful they could end up in the wrong hands. I continued the practice after his death."

"Yet you sold one to me."

"Yes."

"Why?"

Senalda sighed. "Because the magic... compelled me to. I know you couldn't feel it, but the pull was too strong. It would have haunted me for the rest of my life if I hadn't complied."

"And your brother?"

"Daemon felt it, too. He's not happy with me, but I think he understands."

"He was worried you misread my intentions. Because I was a Death Eater."

"Severus..."

Severus shook his head, his hand on Hermione's stopping her objection. "Madam?" He knew what the answer would be; the Mark on his arm would colour all that he did for the rest of his life. Senalda's response, however, brought him up short.

"You're an ex-Death Eater, a decorated member of the Order of the Phoenix. You and Potter defeated Voldemort. The leaf never lies. Your intentions were pure." Senalda stared into Severus's eyes, daring him to correct her.

"I believe Potter and I had help with the Dark Lord's defeat," he said dryly. She'd called the boy Potter? Begrudgingly, he had to admit he found her company... tolerable. "And this 'claiming,' is it permanent?"

"It means your souls are compatible on all counts. Whatever you desire in a mate, your hearts and souls have found those traits in the other; that alone would have created the magical pull I felt, but at some point, you had to have given yourselves to each other. I know you both know when it happened; I can see it in your eyes. I must know, please, you have to tell me the details."

"Is it permanent?"

"Permanent, as in the theory that soul mates always seek each other out throughout eternity? No, I don't think so. It's a gift; it's something to be treasured, to know you are right for each other, that the person you love, loves you, unconditionally, as much as you love them. But I would add a word of caution, Professor. Love can be stronger than any force on earth, but it can be just as fragile, too. It must be nurtured and tended to, and allowed to flourish, if it is to grow and continue on."

"Like a garden," Hermione said, smiling as she thought about sharing a bond with Severus. She *was* happier than she'd ever been. She felt the rest of her life would fall into place, as long as he was at her side.

Severus nodded; Lily's love. Her ultimate sacrifice for Potter had proven just how strong love could be. He understood that sacrifice now. It was the way he'd felt when Hermione was unconscious. He would have gladly traded places with her, if it had meant she would've been safe. He wouldn't have wanted to go on without her.

Gently, Senalda tried prodding the two for information. "When? Where? Professor, Hermione, please, I need some sort of information."

A slight nod when their eyes met induced Severus to try and explain the events that led up to the claiming. "We had just returned to our suite after an...altercation of sorts, in the Trade Hall."

"Altercation?"

"An unfortunate meeting. Hermione ran into an old boyfriend that was... less than pleasant." Trying to clinically recall events and his emotions was as difficult and out of character for Severus as witnessing the dour man skipping merrily through the halls of Hogwarts while whistling a happy tune would be.

"We didn't fight. I told Steve I was with Severus," Hermione said, taking pity on him and continuing the account of their evening. "We returned to Eden..."

"Eden?" Senalda asked, uncertainly.

"The Jungle Suite at The Enchantment. It has to be the most romantic room I've ever seen. You walk over an illusion bridge; it looks terribly rickety, but really, it's quite solid. You walk over this bridge to a treehouse set in the middle of a jungle. If you take the lift to the bottom, there's an amazing waterfall with a pond, tropical flowers everywhere, and complete privacy throughout the suite. The treehouse is something else. It even has its own Jacuzzi. It's heaven."

Senalda laughed; who knew the Professor was a hedonist at heart? "It sounds wonderful. I can see why you call it Eden."

A faint blush coloured Severus's cheeks. "I thought Hermione would like it."

"Anyway, we returned to our suite and sort of ... confronted each other about our...feelings,"

"Were you arguing?"

"Not exactly."

"The sequence of events leading up to..." Severus said, trying to recall the events again.

"Sex magic."

Severus looked at Hermione, his eyebrows lost in his hairline as shock registered on his face at her blatant comment.

"Well, that has to be what caused it. You were upset and pulling that caveman routine on me, don't you remember? You kept saying I belonged to you and I agreed. I remember telling you the same thing and feeling a wave of emotion, just before we each, uhm...just before... well, now that I think of it, I think that was a wave of magic. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. I just didn't intend to recall the events with such attention to detail, especially, to a third party," he said stiffly.

"Severus, Senalda is the only one that seems to know what this is. We need to know if there is anything we should watch out for. I don't have a library I can run off to for research at the moment. I highly doubt this is covered in *"Hogwarts: A History"* either, though the author did include quite a few odd facts."

Severus smiled, appreciative of Hermione's attempt to put him at ease. "A know-it-all that doesn't know something? My, my, that is unique."

"At least this explains what happened when I got mad at Rancine." Hermione reached for his hand. "Do you mind? I mean, it doesn't seem to be permanent, but it does mean there are a few more things for us to think about."

"Mind? I should think you would be the one to mind." Mind? She was all he ever wanted.

"No, not at all. Just think how I can hold this over Ron when he tells me you're not right for me." Hermione patted his hand and turned back to Senalda. "Is there anything else we should know?"

"Not that I can think of. Not too much is known about this type of magic, anyway. Perhaps you'll be so kind as to keep in touch with me. Drop me an owl now and then and let me know how things are going."

"Senalda," Severus's rich baritone caressed the witch's name, "what are you doing in Florence?"

"I'm here on a buying trip. I come to Florence once every three months. Several of the merchants broker jewellery made by local artists in some of the smaller villages. Their work is breathtaking." Senalda gathered her belongings. "I've taken up enough of your time. I really do appreciate you opening up to me; I know how difficult that must be, considering the nature of..." Senalda stopped short. Severus had deigned to use her first name; discussing his sexual relationship with Hermione did not seem like a good idea at the moment. "I'll be in London over the Christmas holiday, visiting my brother and his family. Perhaps we can get together for tea?"

Hermione smiled. "That's perfect. We'll be at Hogwarts working on an experiment. I'll owl you and we can set up a date."

Senalda nodded to both as she stood. "Professor, Hermione, I can't tell you how much this meeting has meant to me. I'll speak to you soon."

Severus and Hermione sat in silence for a minute, the events and revelations of their conversation running havoc in both their minds.

"So."

Silently, Severus nodded. So, indeed, now what?

"Severus, talk to me. What are you thinking?"

"What happens next?"

"Well, it's only five-thirty; we still have over four hours until we Portkey home. We could go see the Uffizi Gallery. The brochure I picked up says it's one of the great museums of the world and houses the premiere collection of Italian Renaissance art, featuring works by such masters as Botticelli, Titian, Michelangelo and da Vinci. Who knows when we'll be in Florence again?"

"Hermione, we need to talk."

"About what?"

"About us, about this 'claiming', about what's happened."

"Nothing's happened. We're the same people we were yesterday; nothing's changed that."

"Oh, Crooks. Did you miss me?"

"Mmm, not really. God, I'm tired." Hermione dropped to the sofa. "What's there to talk about? It looks like Michael is the best choice for my apprenticeship. How early can you get here on Wednesday? I don't know what time Michael expects us, but it would be nice to have a bite to eat together before we talk to him. I really wish Ella hadn't gone to America."

"What do you want me to say, Severus? What is there to talk about? I don't feel the need to discuss anything at the moment." Hermione glared at the dark man.

"Because it doesn't matter what we say or do. What is, is. I don't understand your need to quantify everything. This claiming is a good thing. Unless... unless you don't think that way." Her expression turned fearful. "Is that it? You're really upset by it, but too afraid to tell me?"

Severus sighed, realizing he'd taken too long to answer her. Reaching out, he took her hands in his, if only to stop her from shredding the hem of her jumper as she pulled at the loose threads. "You're afraid I'll leave? Honestly, Hermione, I should be worried you'll run as fast as you can in the opposite direction. I'm hardly a prize catch. Are you looking for a... commitment of some kind? I can't imagine my life without you ever again, but this... this is still new for both of us. You need to talk to me. My mind is creating extreme situations, waiting to see if any one of them will come true. What are you thinking?"

Severus let her go, not sure why she was so agitated, but worried by her reaction all the same. He felt an odd sense of disconnect; earlier Hermione had been thrilled with Trelawney's explanation of their claiming. Perhaps she'd had enough time to think about it and realize just what it might mean to the two of them.

Severus watched Hermione fidget, trying to access her true feelings. Her emotions seemed to be running ramped in too many directions for him to gauge her response. He doubted even Legilimency would help; she really didn't seem to know what was bothering her. "Are you afraid I'll propose to you?"

"Are you worried I won't? I don't think I've ever seen you in such a state before. I'm not sure what it is that has you so upset. What is bothering you?"

"A prophesy?" For the first time in quite a while, he had no idea what she was talking about. "Is there another prophesy I don't know about?"

"Is that what's bothering you? You think there's another Dark Lord waiting to swoop down on us?"

"Hermione, there is no prophesy. It was my love for you, our love for each other, that evoked the magic, not some maniacal new Dark Lord. Without the pendant, I would have lost you when you fell. The Healer said it was our bond that kept you here."

Severus shook his head. "No new Dark Lord, though I don't know what Potter's political aspirations are. He might bear watching."

When he thought about it, considering the raw power it had taken for Potter to defeat the Dark Lord, the idea wasn't really that far fetched.

"Not at the moment." Severus pulled her into his lap, enjoying the feel of her body against his. "Do you want me to?"

"I have no intentions of letting you go, ever, claiming or no claiming. I'll know when the time is right." Gently he leaned in and kissed the witch. "However, I have classes to teach tomorrow, and you have classes to attend. I believe we should get some sleep."

[illegible]

"Were you planning on watching me from there for the remainder of the night, or would you care to join me?" He continued to make notes in the journal, not looking up as he spoke. He could feel the sadness coming from Hermione, something he felt, too.

"You're not on the Floo network now. Besides, the only outside connection is in Albus's office. Do you really want to come through there every time?"

"I don't want you to go home."

"I know. I'd rather stay here, but one of us needs to be gainfully employed, and at the moment it seems that task falls to me. Have any prospects you haven't told me about?"

A quiet *nox* threw the room into darkness as the two settled down into the bed. "My apprenticeship with Tenbrook, I should get some type of stipend from him."

Severus pulled Hermione back against him, spooning into her back. One hand slid under 'his' pillow, the other rested across her midriff, holding her to him. "As if I trust the man. Let's just see where Wednesday gets us."

"I know you don't like him, but really, I thought he was nice."

"Yes, and Potter and Weasley are your two best friends. That just reinforces the fact that you're a terrible judge of character. It's late, go to sleep."

"I'm here with you."

"And yet again you prove my point. Go to sleep."

"Severus."

"Sleep." It was quiet for a minute, but Severus could feel Hermione holding herself still. It was obvious the witch was not winding her way toward sleep. "What?"

"Nothing. Go to sleep."

"Hermione."

"Nothing. Go to sleep."

"Fine. Goodnight." It would only be a matter of time before she spoke again; he had only to wait for her to tell him what was on her mind. He just hoped it wouldn't be too late; he did have classes to teach in the morning.

"Have you ever thought about children?"

"Children?"

Hermione shifted, turning toward him in the darkness. "Yes, children."

"Of course I think about them. Everyday, every time one of the little blighters blows up a cauldron."

"That's not what I meant. I know you're meticulous about casting contraception charms. I have to finish school and my apprenticeship. I know we really haven't talked about a future together in anything but general terms, but knowing how you feel about the students, well, we've never really talked about... kids."

Severus sighed. A quiet *Lumos* and light filled the room once more. This was too serious a conversation for the dark; he needed to read Hermione's face, not just rely on the tone of her voice. "This has to do with 'the claiming,' doesn't it?"

Hermione refused to be swayed. "We've never talked about kids before."

"I don't know." Severus ran a hand through his hair and lay back against the pillows. "I didn't expect to live past the final battle, so having a family was never a consideration before now."

"And now?"

"And now, I suppose you want a child?" *How the hell had the conversation turned to this?* he wondered?

"Not now, but someday."

"Can we discuss this then?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Fine. You do realize what a terrible father I would make?"

"That's just it. I don't think you'd make a bad father."

"Yes, well, we've already proved what a bad judge of character you are."

"Severus!"

"Potter and Weasley. Need I say more?"

"Have you ever thought about having a family?" Hermione studied his profile as he struggled to answer her.

"No." Severus shook his head. Why did the most dangerous conversations have to happen in the middle of the night when his mind was not operating at its fullest? It had been a two am conversation with Lucius when he'd made the decision to join the Dark Lord. A choice he would regret to his dying day, regardless of its outcome. Things always appeared so much clearer in the light of day...when there was coffee and lots of it. "Maybe. I don't know, I suppose, a long time ago, when I was young and naïve, I thought about having a family. Life doesn't always turn out the way you think it will."

"And now?"

"And now? You're not going to let this go, are you?"

"No. We talk about school, and academics, and potions, and a host of other topics. I tell you what I think and feel about anything and everything, but we never talk about what you want."

Idly, Severus stroked Hermione's back as his mind jumped dangerously from one thought to another. "Everything I want is right here," he said quietly. "Tell me something, and don't say it doesn't matter or that you've never thought about it because I know you have."

Hermione had an idea where this conversation was going. Severus seemed to become self absorbed when his thoughts turned to his past, a past he couldn't seem to come to terms with and continued to berate himself for, even after all the good he'd accomplished. She waited quietly for him speak.

"I love you. I know you know that." He held up his hand to forestall her answer, still not looking at her. "I know you love me. I don't know why, but I know you do. The

The Symposium. Hermione. Rancine. Their confrontation. Severus shook his head. "It wasn't like that at all. I didn't do anything. It was Hermione who argued with Rancine, though I can't say I wouldn't mind pickling the man and using him for potion ingredients at some point."

"Yes, well, your fan club seems to think differently."

"What did you hear?" Severus sighed. It seemed his life was destined to resemble a really bad novel at times.

"Hermione was about to be hexed by Rancid and you saved her. Is that really the man's name?"

"Rancine, but rancid is an accurate description of the berk. I didn't *do* anything. They had an argument and we left. Nobody hexed anybody."

"And the wind storm that surrounded Hermione?"

"Yes, there was that, but it wasn't me." Severus eyed the werewolf. Reluctantly, he had to agree that Lupin had proved to be a competent Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor; perhaps he could shed some light on the whole 'claiming' and Trelawney disaster that was threatening his quiet existence. "What do you know about a wizard named Tiresias Trelawney?"

.XX.

While Severus was half a continent away discussing Trelawney's magic with Remus, Hermione was inundated with rumors and innuendo of her own.

She'd received Michael's owl asking her and Severus to join him for dinner Wednesday night before showing them his research facility and discussing her possible apprenticeship, just after Severus had left that morning. Her mind reeled as she tried to work out what it could mean to her future. Every so often her brain, the traitorous organ that it was, would echo a thought she'd been resolutely silencing since its inception last night he talked about proposing to her! Marriage. Deftly, she squashed the thought and returned to speculation about her future apprenticeship. There would be time to think about Severus later when she had a clearer head. So preoccupied with trying to detect a Slytherin meaning, Severus' term, not hers, behind Michael's offer, she failed to notice the whispers around her as she walked to her first class.

"Hermione, you're back."

Hermione lowered her book bag to the table as she claimed the chair between Susan and Mark. "Yeah, the Symposium ended yesterday morning. I would have owled you last night, but it was rather late when Severus and I got back. I'll need to borrow your notes from Friday's classes so I can catch up. Did I miss anything?" Hermione looked up at her friend, noticing, for the first time, the surprise on the girl's face. "Is something wrong?"

"Are you feeling okay? We heard you were hexed."

"Hexed?"

"Professor Rancine..."

Hermione shook her head. *Rancine*. Was there no getting rid of that man? "No, I'm fine. I had a slight... difference of opinion with the professor, but it's all sorted out now."

Further discussion would have to wait as their professor entered the lecture hall and started speaking.

.XX.

"You are to sign nothing. An old friend of mine is a barrister in London; he specializes in 'hidden meanings' as they apply to apprentice law. I want him to review any contracts Tenbrook gives you."

"That's a branch of wizard law hidden meanings?"

Severus shrugged. "Some of the older contracts bound an apprentice to their master by means of Dark magic, soul trading and the like. I doubt Tenbrook would be stupid enough to invoke any of the old ways, but you can't be too careful. There's something not quite right about this offer. I just don't know what it is."

"And it couldn't be that he just might want the top student in her class as his apprentice?"

"Hermione, no one is questioning your abilities. I don't trust the man."

"All right, fine. I do know enough not to sign a contract without reading it through in the first place. I'm not that naïve."

"Reading the contract is not enough. Some of the older clauses won't show up without casting the appropriate spells on the parchment first."

"That can't be binding. How can they hold you to something you didn't know was there in the first place?"

Severus smiled. "Which is why it's Dark magic. Not everything is as it seems. Apprentices were often seen as property as recently as a hundred years ago. I'm sure the university has guidelines on what is and what is not acceptable, but you never know what some unscrupulous master might slip into an agreement when you're back is turned." He helped Hermione into her cloak as they headed out the door. "I seem to recall the Wizengamot adopting a reform bill that Albus helped push through when he became Headmaster. He'd been appalled that Hogwarts apprentices were bound-over to those they studied under for up to ten years or more, lacking any rights or ownership of property until the completion of their contracts."

"Bound-over? That's terrible. Sounds more like they were slaves than apprentices." Hermione glanced at her watch. "We still have another three minutes before the Portkey activates."

Severus studied the metal ring in his hand, the Portkey Tenbrook had sent Hermione for their meeting. The irony of its resemblance to an apprenticeband was not lost on the Potions master. He could feel a line of runes etched into the back of the ring, though a series of spells revealed nothing more than encoded directions to Tenbrook's facility. As far as he could tell, everything was above board and as it should be, even the paperwork accompanying the Portkey was stamped and spelled in the proper places.

"Severus, relax, I'm sure everything is fine." Noting the timer, Hermione reached out to touch the ring.

Distractedly, Severus nodded. Despite the assurance of his revel spells that nothing was amiss, he couldn't quiet the vague feeling that something wasn't right. There was little time to speculate what that *something* might be as the timer counted down to zero and magicked the pair through the night air to their destination.

TBC

A/N: Yes, yes, I know an evil cliffhanging bridge-chapter by the evil author (who hasn't updated in forever), for which I'm truly sorry. It just seemed the appropriate place to stop. I'm hoping RL will continue to cooperate and allow me time write (while recuperating from the latest allergic reaction and this round of medication...two and a half weeks to go!).

A grateful thank you to my beta, the wonderful Southern_Witch_69 and her prowess with comma (or lack thereof) detection. Thank you, Sun, I'm still looking for a wholesale source to replace the commas you're using up on me.

The link to my LiveJournal is listed on my author's page. I normally will post information on updates, problems with RL, and any excuses I can come up with there. I would like to thank everyone for their continued support and warm wishes over the last few months. It really means a lot to me. My husband is doing very well, back at work and feeling good. I still have a few issues to work out, but for now, things are status quo.

Pearle

"You're growing *Androsace alpina*. I thought that plant only grew in the upper altitude of the Alps. And *Echinacea* root. And Hawthornee. And Comfrey. How can you grow them all together? They each require a different type of climate and precipitation." Hermione continued to mentally catalog the various plants she could see. The range of growth was amazing. She thought Sprout would have given her right arm to get a look at the place.

"Very good. Few people can identify *Androsace alpina* on sight. If you look carefully, you may notice the zones I've set up. If you were to look overhead at the layout, you would see multiple columns, some wider than others, set side by side. Each column is a separate climate. It allows the plants to exist along side one another, but still receive the needed temperature and precipitation they require."

"Severus, look, there's shilajit. Remember how long it took us to find a sample of that?"

Tenbrook turned an appraising eye toward the Dark man. "You were looking for shilajit?"

Severus resisted the urge to Crucio the man, Tenbrook would have been in Slytherin House, no doubt if he'd attended Hogwarts. And would have embodied the worst that his house had to offer. While Severus was the epitome of Slytherin, he was still a man of high principles. "Yes, we've tried a distilled version in the alterations of the Wolfsbane we've been working on."

"I would be happy to harvest some for you."

"Thank you, but we have all we need at the moment. Also the fact that the plant cannot be harvested under a full moon would preclude us taking you up on such a generous offer." The sentiment, while polite, belied the sarcastic meaning of the statement and the implied - *"...but then any Potions master worth his weight in salt would have known that."*

In spite of Severus' contempt, Tenbrook continued to extol the delights of his solarium.

While only half listening to Tenbrook's running commentary, Hermione imagined what she and Severus could do with the multitude of rare and unusual plants growing here. Spying a small patch of Rhynia, she resisted the urge to Stupefy the man and gather Snape and the sample before Apparating back to their lab and adding the rare plant to their experiment. One look at Severus, however, his words and tone still ringing in her ears, made her decide otherwise. While his comment may have sounded sincere regardless of the malice laced throughout it, Hermione knew that asking for a sample of Rhynia would be akin to murder. Perhaps if she took the apprenticeship, she might be able to procure a bit for their use. Wisely she held her tongue and hoped she would get a chance to speak to Severus alone before he did anything foolish.

Both men turned toward the witch when she tried to suppress a laugh that tried to escape and ended up sounding as if she'd choked instead. Severus' raised one brow, silently asking the question Tenbrook articulated. "Everything all right, Hermione?"

She coughed, patting her chest. "Yes, I'm fine. Must have swallowed wrong."

Hermione shook her head at Severus' continued unasked question. Thinking of Severus doing something foolish had triggered the memory of a previous conversation she'd had with him when she'd used the same phrase.

She knew he was annoyed, even without the look on his face. They were meeting Harry in an hour; the boy who lived, again, had left a gift for Ginny at her place when he'd visited there last and wanted to stop by and retrieve it.

"I've a good mind to hex Potter when he comes through. You were kind enough to let him hide the present here, but to encroach upon our time together; has he no consideration? Our time is limited during the week as it is, but to waste it waiting around for Potter to show up..."

"Please, don't do anything foolish. I have no desire to visit you in Azkaban."

"Foolish?" Severus glared at her in exasperation. "Hermione, I became a Death Eater. I highly doubt I could do anything 'more foolish' than that."

Hermione took in the look on his face, the fact that he was lying on his side, completely nude, languidly stroking her breast, and burst out laughing. His comment, paired with their current location and state of undress, struck her as one of life's funnier ironies. Tears ran down her face, her speech broken as she tried to explain the reason for her sudden loss of control, as it were.

Severus, for his part, was content to watch her, a wry smile on his face. He'd never known Hermione to maliciously laugh or attack him. He'd found she had an odd sense of humor, finding things most people took as mundane, to be hilarious when paired with other thoughts or memories and had learned some time ago, that if he waited, she would tell him whatever had set her off when she got herself back under control. It was normally worth the wait.

Her pleasant musings were interrupted as a different house elf appeared calling them to dinner.

Hermione eyed the spot where yet another house-elf, this one serving the main course, had just popped in and out moments before. "Professor Tenbrook, just how many house-elves do you have working here?"

"It's Michael, please, we're not that formal around here, and I seem to recall you calling me by my first name at the Symposium."

Hermione nodded, distracted as an another elf, the one that had brought them drinks in the solarium maybe, she wasn't sure, popped in with another serving tray. "How many?"

"I'm not really sure. I know at least two of them were attached to the house when I bought it; I brought a few elves with me that have been in my family for generations willed to me by my great-great-great aunt on my father's side."

"Willed to you?"

"Yes, my great-great-great aunt Matilda, lovely witch. She was quite fond of the little creatures and worried they would be neglected."

Hermione's voice rose slightly. "She gave them to you, gave you living breathing individuals, as if they were knickknacks to be handed down?"

"Well, I don't believe she saw it that way. They're house-elves. She just wanted to know they would be well cared for when she passed through the veil. Is there a problem?"

Severus drank deeply from his endless wine goblet, pleased as the dark rich wine seeped back into the goblet again. He barely hid a chuckle as he watched Hermione rally her forces to tell him what she thought his problem was. He really didn't think it would be enough to put her off Tenbrook completely, but the man wasn't racking up any points, either.

"Really, if I didn't have the elves to cook and clean here, who would do all that for me? I'm not married you know." Tenbrook replied defensively, thinking his explanation would satisfy the witch, he was truly surprised to see Hermione's murderous, looking as if she might hex him into oblivion any minute, her expression darkening further as he backpedaled and tried to clarify his answer. A sideways glance at the Potions master's amused face had not helped matters. "I just meant that if I was married, most likely my wife would take care of the house, and the elves, and such, but since I'm not married, I don't have a wife, so I, uh, need the elves to care for things," he finished rather lamely, "until I get married, someday, that is." Unconsciously his hand dropped to his side where his wand was hidden, concern for his person now a real issue as Hermione's eyes narrowed in anger.

"And your wife would do all this for you?" she asked quietly.

Another tick mark appeared on the right side of the imaginary scoreboard Severus was keeping in his head. Elf rights-check; women's rights-check; the score stood at zero to negative two. "Out of curiosity," he asked, seemingly innocently as he smiled at Tenbrook. "How do you feel about cats?" It couldn't hurt to tip the scales a bit more

against the man.

"I never met a cat I didn't like."

Hermione's shoulders relaxed a fraction of an inch; at least she knew Crooks would be welcome, but she still wasn't happy with his comments equating a wife with his house-elves and treating both as if they were servants.

"I find they make excellent potions' ingredients." Tenbrook laughed as he delivered the punch line to the old potions joke; it was several seconds before he realized he was the only one laughing. "I mean, they do keep the rats in line, too." He finished quickly as he noted the fire blazing anew in Hermione's eyes.

"So, I assume Hermione's cat would be safe here, as long as he earned his keep?"

"Of course not, her cat..."

"Would be potions fodder?" Severus interjected before Tenbrook could finish his comment.

"Her cat..." He said, glaring in Severus' general direction, "would be as welcome as she is."

"I see."

"Snape, I understand you and Miss Granger have an... understanding, and you are a guest in my home. One I, myself, invited, but it appears as if you're attempting to sabotage this agreement before it ever starts. I have nothing but the highest regard for Hermione. I would propose to provide an apprenticeship of the highest caliber, one that would cover several complimentary disciplines as well. As I mentioned before, I would be happy to provide you with a private lab for your own research while she is in residence here. My facilities are at your disposal. I believe there is much we can all learn from each other, if you would kindly remove the wand from my throat and the knife from my back."

Severus felt his stomach clench, Hermione was beaming in the man's general direction, his comments about women, elves, and cats evidently forgotten for the moment. He knew she was worried about finding a suitable Master to apprentice with that was within Apparating distance of Hogwarts. It was just a matter of necessity that a few of the comments would be pushed to the back burner as she considered the academic merits of the man. Whatever ground he had gained in his war against Tenbrook was lost with Hermione's next comment.

"Michael, that sounds wonderful." She turned to look pointedly at him. "Doesn't it, Severus? I can't wait to see the lab and the rest of your facility."

The evening had rapidly gone down hill from there. It seemed everything and anything shown to them was selected with Hermione in mind and met whole-heartedly with her approval. Even the apprentice's rooms were spot on; the damn man had set up the sit-in across from a floor to ceiling library 'for ease of research' he'd said. Severus could almost feel Hermione slipping away as each new item or fact was presented. He quickly reverted to his 'evil' Potions master persona, glaring at the two of them, as Hermione and Tenbrook discussed University and the curriculum required to gain her Masters in Potions.

They were currently ensconced in front of a roaring fire in Tenbrook's book-lined office, the man himself, pouring them a cuppa from the gleaming silver tea service sitting on the table in front of them. "You will need to take the contract to a qualified barrister. I'm sure Professor Snape can advise you as to the general conditions of a traditional contract, but you should have it reviewed, none the less."

"Michael, it all sounds so wonderful." Hermione cast a sidelong glance at Severus, frowning as she noted his stiff posture and glare. "But I will need some time to think things over."

Tenbrook handed her the delicate porcelain cup he'd been holding, careful not to spill the tea he'd poured. "Of course, take all the time you need. I don't want to pressure you, but you are the only candidate I'm considering as an apprentice. I don't find the other students to be worthy of my time."

Hermione smiled. "No pressure there." Severus' sudden smile startled the witch. "Severus?"

Ah ha....

"You received an commodation from the Ministry?" The Dark man motioned to a framed letter sitting on a low shelf to his left, the Ministry seal shifting in the firelight.

"Yes, it was during the trouble with You-Know-Who. Undersecretary Umbridge approached me to make Veritaserum for the Ministry. Their stores had run alarmingly low. Quality Veritaserum is difficult to obtain, let alone brew properly, as you well know. I was only too happy to help. Such a dedicated witch, I don't understand why she hasn't moved higher up in the Ministry."

Hermione's cup hit the saucer. Unceremoniously, she ripped the contract she'd been holding in two before thrusting it into the startled man's face as she abruptly stood up. "I believe that ends this interview. Thank you, Professor Tenbrook, but I will look elsewhere for a more... qualified Master to train with." Hermione's glare singed the little man. "One who doesn't traffic with the devil."

Severus winced at her choice of words, he'd been in league with Voldemort himself, and if he wasn't the devil, Severus didn't know who was, though Hermione was always quick to point out they'd have lost the war without him, a fact that she claimed erased the fact of him having joined the madman in the first place.

"I'm not sure... I don't..." Tenbrook looked from one to the other. "I don't understand."

"Umbridge."

"Yes?"

Severus laid a restraining hand on the witch's arm. "Hermione, he's not worth Azkaban."

Tenbrook sat heavily in his seat, his voice a squeak. "Azkaban?"

"Yes, not many are aware of Hermione's ability to wandlessly cast an Unforgivable. Probably saved Potter's neck during the final battle and I would hate for her to unnecessarily show you a sample of that talent now. I see we've overstayed our welcome. No need to get up, we'll see ourselves out." He could afford to be genial as he tried to hustle Hermione out before *she* did something foolish; she would have nothing further to do with the man, of that Severus was sure. Gently, he took Hermione's arm, hoping to steer her towards the door before she hexed Tenbrook.

"I know you and Harry Potter are friends. Your relationship with him and Ronald Weasley is legendary, as is your heroism during the final battle, but I don't see what that has to do with Madam Umbridge." Tenbrook looked between the two, still trying to figure out how things had gone so wrong so quickly.

Once again Severus tried to steer Hermione toward the door. "No, I don't imagine you would know. Umbridge's tenure as Headmistress was rather short, less than two months. Shall we?" He gestured pointedly towards the study door, hoping Hermione would leave.

"It's not just the problems she caused as Headmistress or her position after she left, it's what she did to Harry when she started teaching." Hermione turned angrily toward Severus. "Have you ever looked at the back of his hand?"

Severus tried to ignore Potter and Weasley as much as possible, but he knew what she was talking about. The spelled-quill Umbridge had used to discipline Potter when he refused to lie about Voldemort's return. The quill that had permanently cut the phrase "I must not tell lies" into the back of Potter's hand when he'd been forced by the

It was an oddly subdued Hermione that walked along the dungeon corridor that Saturday. She seemed to wander aimlessly, her gait slow as she made her way toward the Potions classroom and Severus' office and quarters beyond that.

She'd been at a loss to focus properly since leaving Tenbrook's home Wednesday night, her classes an odd jumble of bits and pieces as she tried to dispel her feelings of disappointment. Even Edmund had looked at her notes for Advanced Charms and commented that they seemed... incomplete. He wisely decided not to push the issue when Hermione turned on him, demanding to know why he hadn't taken proper notes himself. If his wrist was broken or he had problems with his hand that was causing him undue pain that in some way was stopping him from completing the task himself, she would be glad to 'fix' it for him, she asserted.

Edmund correctly assumed her brand of 'fixing' would not be a pretty sight. Chalking it up to some kind of quarrel with Snape, he apologized profusely and left quickly, recalling a previous engagement before the witch pointed her wand at him and made good her threat.

Even now, as Hermione approached Severus' office, her feet dragged. She had so looked forward to their time together in the past, but today it was more of an effort than she was willing to make. Dejectedly, she opened his office door and went in.

"Ah, there you are. I was beginning to think you'd changed your mind about coming this weekend." Severus slashed through the first paragraph of the parchment he was holding, red ink obliterating the writing; his eyes remained on the page as he greeted Hermione. "I believe the first years get worse every year. And I thought that was impossible considering last year's batch." His head snapped up at her lack of rebuttal, silence greeting his comment.

"Hermione?" His frown deepened as he took in her pale complexion and general malaise. "Are you ill? Have you a fever? Spots anywhere?"

Hermione gave him an odd look. "Spots?"

"You're Muggle-born, so I don't suppose you've had Dragon Pox. You're a bit old for it; still, it has been going around." Coming round the desk he looked deeply into her eyes. "You're eyes do look a bit red." Gently gripping her chin, he tipped her head up. "Open wide, I want to see if your tonsils have turned purple."

Frowning, she pulled back. "Purple?"

He ran his thumb along the smooth skin of her cheek. "No scales or pockmarks, that's always a good sign; open your mouth. I want to see your tonsils. You are a bit more pale than usual, but at least you haven't turned green yet."

"Severus, I don't have Dragon Pox. No scales. No spots. No purple tonsils or green skin," she said with a laugh. "I'm still upset about Tenbrook, that's all. Who will I apprentice with now?"

His patented glare surface. "Tenbrook? You're worried about Tenbrook, not sick?"

"No, not sick, just worried." Her eyes softened as she looked at him. "But thank you for caring."

"Hermione, you will find someone else to apprentice with. There are dozens of Masters that would welcome the chance to train you."

"But none of them are close to here."

"We'll work something out," he said with an exasperated sigh. "You're sure your tonsils aren't purple?"

"Quite sure." For the first time since entering the dour man's office, Hermione smiled. "They announced that Rancine was taking an extended leave, something about a nervous condition. Professor Brisbane is taking over the department chair."

"At least now you know things will be run fairly. Just let me finish dissecting Mr. Smythe's assignment and we'll go into the lab. There's an article I want to show you. It may be of help to us in setting the elements for the last stage of the Wolfsbane." Over the last few weeks, they had come close to properly altering the Wolfsbane. Christmas was just three weeks away with the next full moon occurring just before that. If they had any plans to test Remus over the holiday, they would need to resolve the last of the potion's problems soon or lose their window of opportunity until the next month.

Immersion in academia had always had a positive effect on Hermione, and working on the Wolfsbane with Severus was no exception. The witch's mood lightened over the next few hours as they chopped, diced, and debated various properties of the ingredients. The potion they had arrived at was better than the standard brew Severus had been making for the last decade, but it still wasn't the dramatic difference either one had hoped for when they'd started their project.

"Well, if my calculations are correct, he will retain more of his 'humanity.' That alone is a major accomplishment."

Angrily, Hermione tossed down the stirring rod she'd been holding. "It's not enough. *Here, Remus, we really weren't able to do what we thought we could, but you'll be happy to know you'll be able to keep a bit more of your mind as you change.*" No, I don't think so. There must be something we haven't checked or changed yet."

"Hermione, the whole benefit of the potion is to allow the person to retain rational thought. The fact that the alteration will increase that ability is huge."

"It's still not enough," she said, sounding like a two-year old and hating herself for it.

Severus crossed his arms, a quiet smile tugging at his mouth. "And what would you consider enough?"

"Nothing short of a... cure."

"By all means," he said with a grand sweep of his arm. "Show me the cure."

"Now you're just mocking me."

"Never. It's getting late." Several foolish waves of his wand cleaned the top of the lab table and stored the remaining ingredients. "Would you prefer dinner in the Great Hall or in my quarters?"

"Are you required to eat in the Great Hall tonight?"

"No, I still have rounds to make later, but my presence at dinner is not required tonight."

"Then your quarters it is." Hermione smiled. "I still know my way around the castle. How about I join you on your rounds?"

Severus gestured Hermione through the doorway to his quarters. "Oh, yes, I'll definitely be able to maintain discipline with you accompanying me. Roast beef sandwiches and chips?"

"Fine."

Severus tossed some powder into the fire and called through the Floo Network to the kitchen to place their dinner order with the elves before turning back to Hermione. "Is there some reason you're not reviewing your original list of Masters? I seem to recall you had narrowed the field down to four back then. Eliminating Tenbrook cuts the list to three. I know you weren't happy with those three masters, but surely there must be others that you found acceptable. What about numbers five through ten, that didn't make that list?"

Hermione sighed. "They're going to publish a revised list of masters before we leave for the holidays for us to choose from. Professor Brisbane thought the list should be

reviewed. He was under the impression that Rancine may not have been a fair judge to compile it in the first place. Originally we were supposed to decide who to petition by the end of January. I think they're going to push the date back to February or March so we can have time to research the revised list."

"There you are. I'm sure there will be someone on that list that will fit your needs."

"Professor Brisbane told me there had already been three owls from some of the masters that heard us talk at the Symposium offering me apprenticeships. I was going to go to library Monday and revise my list. I should be able to check on the Masters there."

"So, why are you still so upset?" Severus sat next to Hermione, their dinner tray on the coffee table in front of them.

"If you hadn't seen the letter, I would never have known how bad Tenbrook is. This is too important to leave to chance."

Severus chuckled quietly. "You have never left anything to chance. I imagine by next week you'll have exhausted the resources at Cambridge. I'd even wager you will have so thoroughly invested each master that you will even know what core comprises their wands as well as their blood types."

Hermione smiled. "Even *I'm* not that obsessed."

One brow rose questioningly. "Really?"

"Yes, really." She sighed as she finished her pumpkin juice. "I'm sure you're right, it'll be fine. So, what about the holidays coming up? I know we going to test the new Wolfsbane, but what about the rest of the break? Do you usually stay at the castle?"

"I normally stay here and research. I was hoping you would stay here with me, that is, if you have no other plans?"

It was at that minute Severus' fire glowed green, flecks of ash spraying the hearth in front of the fire as a tawny little owl flew out of the fireplace. "Severus? Hermione? Sorry to disturb you." Dumbledore's disembodied head hung in the fireplace, the flames seeming to highlight the sparkling of his eyes. "It seems this poor owl has been trying to reach you and has been repelled by multiple charms every time it approaches your windows, Severus. Really, you should alter you wards. How else do you expect to receive mail? Good evening, Hermione. Lovely to see you. Perhaps you'll join us at the High Table for a meal tomorrow. I know Minerva would love to see you."

"Headmaster." Hermione barely acknowledged Albus as she tried to quiet the owl down enough to remove the missive attached to its leg.

"Who in the bloody hell felt the need to contact you here?"

Hermione tossed the owl a bit of left over roast beef before breaking the seal on the letter. She scanned the parchment, her eyes flying over the writing before breaking into a smile. "It's from Senalda. She hasn't heard from me so she was writing to let us know when she'll be in Hogsmeade. She wants to meet us for tea."

It really was a shame Hermione did not believe in Divination; otherwise, she might have seen the note Senalda's owl delivered for what it was: a life changing stroke of luck.

My Dearest Hermione,

I cannot tell you how much it meant to me meeting and talking with both, you and Professor Snape. It does my heart good to know that I read the magic correctly. I am most anxious to speak with the two of you. I understand the conditions evoking the claiming were rather personal, but I would so love to know the details. I understand Professor Snape's reluctance, but perhaps you would indulge me with a few facts when next we meet.

I will be in Hogsmeade December 22nd through December 26th visiting my brother and his family. If it meets with your approval, I would like to meet you and the professor at the Three Broomsticks on the 23 at seven for dinner. If this time and date is not convenient, please let me know.

Take care: May the stars align to do your bidding until next we meet.

Senalda Trelawney

As it turned out, the day and time were acceptable.

While Hermione looked forward to the meeting, Severus withheld his opinion of the witch, but his glare said it all.

Severus rolled his eyes, Senalda's letter thrown roughly to his desk. "May the stars align. She's as flaky as her cousin," he said with a sneer. "I'll meet her, but I'm telling you now, we will not discuss what happened in anything but the vaguest of terms. She knows more than she should to begin with."

"I looked through every book in Cambridge. I found only two that even held a passing mention of Tiresias Trelawney's leaves. Do you know anyone else who can tell us about the leaf?"

"Fine. We'll meet with her, but I promise nothing more." Severus' glare drew a smile from the witch. "Perhaps you should tell her exactly what we were doing when you felt the magic? Relay each and every detail, every feeling," he said with a sneer.

"She already knows it was sex magic. It's not as if I'm going to invite her to join us in bed in case it happens again."

Yes! Maybe they can wear matching thongs? For once Severus thought the annoying voice had an acceptable response.

"Maybe the two of you can wear matching thongs. We can discuss various positions that create a greater flow of magic that will heighten your pleasure."

Hermione sat up a bit straighter. "Are there certain position that create a greater flow? Does magic really increase your pleasure?"

Severus watched the witch's eyes darken for a minute. His voice dropped to a silky purr. "Would you like me to show you some of those positions?"

Hermione's eyes fluttered closed as Severus swept her hair to the side, baring her neck to his heated gaze. Drawing his tongue along her throbbing pulse, the witch, her owl, and dinner plans, were soon forgotten.

TBC

A/N: I know, I know, it's been way too long. I had said I would not post until I had finished the story, but since the request for a chapter update was listed on the Potter Place Christmas Fanfiction Wishlist, and it is Christmas/Chanukah/other/whatever, and the story should be finished soon (six chapters - all being written simultaneously to the end), I'll eat my words and post the next chapter with the understanding the rest will follow in a week or two (~*cringes*~ three at the most).

A grateful thank you to my beta, the wonderful Southern_Witch_69 and her prowess with comma (or lack thereof) detection. Thank you, Sun, I appreciate all the help and time you give me.

Still to come: Christmas break (including breakfast at The Burrow), the revised Wolfsbane, Dinner with Senalda, Valentines, an apprenticeship, the school year, and the finale.

Happy Holidays to one and all!

Did I Say That Out Loud?

Chapter 46 of 49

Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the codpiece challenge on Wiktt. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters).

Dances With Witches was a winner in the laughter category of the Multifaceted Awards (Round 2)

Chapters 47 & 48 new as of March 2012

New

Chapter 49 - Expecting The Unexpected

Summary: Master Viridis contacts Hermione and an unusual confrontation takes place.

Summary: Severus loses a magical bet to Albus. The consequences? He's forced to take Argentine Tango lessons from Hermione during her summer break from University. An uneasy friendship is formed that turns into something more. What part does the Wolfsbane Potion play, and what is the mystery behind the Enchanted Leaf? Equal parts: humor, sensuality, adventure, and mystery. My answer to the Codpiece Challenge on WIKTT. HG/SS (Rating for later chapters)

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

Note: Since I started the story so long ago, it should probably now be considered AU and is not compliant with The Half-Blood Prince or Deathly Hallows.

[illegible]

Dances with Witches

Chapter 46: Did I Say That Out Loud?

December shouldered on, as December is wont to do. With just a mere week to go until the students left for the holidays, the break drew nearer by leaps and slow lags, depending on the hour. Wednesday night was spent discussing revisions for the potions with a varying amount of success when said revisions were applied in practice at Hogwarts on that weekend. In the end, they came up with a potion that, while not a cure, was a significant improvement over the Wolfsbane Severus currently brewed.

Hermione spent the week bouncing back and forth between classes and the library. She was in much better spirits that Saturday as she made her way down to the dungeons. She smiled indulgently as she watched Severus ink through the parchment he was grading. "Problems with the first-year essays again?"

Severus' glare drew a sly smirk from the witch. "Dare I ask what has you in such a mood? Severus?"

Absentmindedly, he ran a hand through his hair, a headache forming behind his eyes. "Albus."

"Albus." Hermione smiled, trying not to laugh as she nodded sympathetically. "What did he do this time?"

"He's come up with yet another bloody idea to promote inter-house relations."

"And that would be?"

The dark man bit out the words through clenched teeth, his glare hot enough to burn holes in the desktop as he tossed a rolled up parchment in Hermione's direction. "Game night."

Hermione unrolled the parchment and scanned the page. "Oh. Oh, my God." She laughed as she read the notice. "I don't believe this. Bingo, Monopoly, Life, Twister. Severus, if a student isn't Muggle-born, they'll have no idea how to play these games. Where..."

Wearily he shook his head. "Arthur Weasley brought them round one day to ask questions of the new Muggle Studies instructor. Albus saw them, and, well... there you have it." He gestured to the scroll she held.

"I don't know. It might be fun. I used to play them when I was young. Though maybe they should limit the games to those in Muggle Studies class. Make it a group project."

Severus' eyes narrowed in annoyance. "Heads of House are expected to moderate the evenings."

"Ah, worse than a Yule Ball, then. Maybe we can have a game night of our own." She wiggled her eyebrows lewdly for emphasis. "I can show you how much fun the two of us can have with a few of these. We can play strip Twister later. I'll even model my new holiday thong for you."

Severus thought he heard the echo of an ethereal thud in his head; he suspected the annoying voice had passed out. The thought of strip Twister **and** a thong too much for it to handle.

Reaching for the witch, Severus smiled. "I think that is an excellent idea." Enfolding Hermione in his embrace, he leaned in for a slow sensual kiss. "However, considering it is only one in the afternoon and that I am required to attend dinner tonight, that plan of action will have to wait for later."

"What a shame." Hermione shivered as Severus gently nibbled her earlobe, his hands skimming softly along her arms. "Mm, you keep doing that, and we'll never get anything done."

"We only have this week to finalize the potion. The next full moon falls on the twenty-first, just two days after the students leave. If Lupin is going to test the potion, we need to be sure of what we're doing. There will be time for us later."

"Right." While disappointed, she had to agree with him. And the chance to prove her theory was just too good to pass up.

The two disappeared through the back archway, walked through his quarters, and set to work in his private lab. Severus was pleased with the revised potion. The amount of humanity Lupin would retain would more than double with the new formula. While Hermione was disappointed with the amount of progress they'd made, he was more than happy with the changes, considering the formula had not been changed since Damocles had first created the complicated potion.

Hermione reached for their research journal to record the latest results. "It's still not a cure."

"No, it's not, but it is a tremendous improvement. The shilajit may be difficult to obtain on a regular basis, but I'm sure we can find someone who can supply it. Unfortunately, I don't believe it alters the taste any." He finished labeling the potion phials, each marked clearly with the alterations they contained as well as which cauldron and stirring rod was used for the final solution.

"Does it taste bad?"

"According to Lupin, it tastes abominable."

"Can't we do something to make it taste better?"

"Not without changing the properties of the potion at this stage."

"Well, that's it, I guess."

"Hermione, we don't have to stop trying. We can continue our research after the holidays. This is not an assignment that's due before you leave on break." Methodically, he stored the remaining potions ingredients, mindful of the rarity of some of the ingredients they had used.

Hermione smiled sheepishly. "I guess I hadn't thought past Remus trying the potion. Between worrying about my apprenticeship and revising for end of term, I just figured we'd be done with the potion, too."

"Hardly, once we've tried the potion out on Lupin, we should look at other potions that can be modified. A change in another formula may point the way to additional changes to the Wolfsbane. Research has no end."

Hermione nodded, realizing they had made tremendous strides in the past few weeks. Still...she had hoped for a cure.

Severus watched the emotions play across her face. There were times she could be read like a book, without the use of Legilimency. "Hermione, we may never find a cure. There may not be one. But this is still cause to celebrate if it works."

Her smile was tired. "You're right. You're a brilliant researcher. It'll work."

"Yes, I am. But I rather like to think we work well together. You do realize how much further you are than most masters. There can only be a handful, that I know of, that can actually brew Wolfsbane properly. Not only can you brew it, you successfully altered the potion. Definitely a good day's work."

Severus resisted the desire to roll his eyes as Hermione pulled her day-planner out from underneath their journal. "So, the students leave on Friday, the nineteenth. Crooks and I can be here that evening before dinner. I should be able to leave Cambridge as soon as classes are over."

"Wonderful, I've so missed that ruddy cat."

"Be happy he likes you. He's a very good judge of character." She turned back to her calendar. "That just gives us Saturday to prepare a fresh batch to try out on Remus on Sunday."

"Traditionally, he takes the potion for three days, to ensure full coverage during the first phase of the full moon."

"That's great," she said, changing an entry in the calendar. "I come on the nineteenth; we can brew the potion on the twentieth. Remus will need to take it the twenty-first through the twenty-third. Oh, that means he'll be able to attend Christmas breakfast at the Burrow. We're supposed to meet Senalda on the twenty-third at seven, should I reschedule? Is that too late to give him the potion?"

"He can take it before we leave. We'll know Sunday night if it was successful or not. Does it say anywhere in there 'shag Severus'?" he asked with an amused smile.

Hermione nodded her head. "It does, but I encrypted the notations in case anyone else looked at my planner. Look." A quick reveal did show a number of entries that weren't visible before.

Severus' eyes grew wide as he read her notations. "You have been busy. Oh, I like this one. Very creative," he said, tapping the entry that had appeared on the date marked December 31st, New Year's Eve.

"Well, they're just a few of the different positions and fantasies we've mentioned trying. I thought it might be helpful if I wrote them down," she said with a shrug.

"You've numbered the positions? And the locations, too?"

"In case we want to repeat any or combine a few we like."

"And color coded them."

"I like to keep things organized."

"I see." A glance at the lab clock showed they had fifteen minutes before dinner started. "Come, I need to be in the Great Hall in a few minutes. I'm sure there'll be plenty of time for us to look over your list later. I have just enough time to find a few wayward students to deduct points from on our way there." Donning his formal teaching robes, Severus disappeared; Professor Snape stood in his place. He brushed a nearly invisible piece of lint from the sleeve of his robes, straightening the collar and cuffs as he primped. "Shall we, Miss Granger?"

Hermione smiled, shaking her head. It never ceased to amaze her; the change from Severus to feared Potions master was a visible thing. He stood taller, his stance broader, he became even more intimidating than usual. She knew it was an illusion, a persona he donned as effectively as he did his robes, but still, to see him transform into this person fascinated her.

One brow rose questioningly. "Is there a problem?"

Her smile turned into a smirk. "No, sir. No problem at all."

"I may not be able to take points off Gryffindor where you're concerned, but I can still give you detention," he said silkily, opening the door with a flourish.

Hermione's eyes widened. "Maybe I should add school girl fantasy scenarios and role-playing to that list?"

.XX.

"It's bad enough I'm required to attend, I won't let Albus pressure you into it, too," he said angrily; they'd returned to his quarters even before dinner was finished, his mood darkening as he recalled Albus' request of Hermione. "And explain to me how you can suggest 'Game Night' be turned into a weekend? Have you lost your mind?"

"And what would you show? *The Wizard of Oz*?" he asked with a sneer.

Severus frowned. "It doesn't matter. We're not showing movies."

"Now that," he said stepping towards her, "...is another matter, entirely."

Her smile was wicked as she altered the spinner. The traditional sections, left and right foot and left and right hand remained, but a new caption was added to each of the colors. Now, when a person spun anything red, he also had to remove one article of clothing, his choice, according to the caption.

The yellow circles now read, "Remove – opponent's choice." His eyes widened as he read the green circles, "Kiss – your choice." Of course the blue circles, not to be left out, now read, "Kiss – opponent's choice."

Can you at least wait until she shows us the holiday thong before you open your mouth and screw this up for us? He should probably have his head examined, since he thought the voice was starting to make sense lately.

“So you just created this?”

A slow sigh seemed to escape the dour man; there was no one else. He was getting too old for this. It was a simple matter for his boots to join her footwear. "And now?"

"You stand at that end. I stand here. You just have to say 'spin,' and the spinner will turn."

"Ladies first," he said with a slight bow.

Severus' first move was a mirror of hers, even down to the article of clothing removed. Several spins later, they were both partially dressed, each choosing to remove the other's shirt when the spin of their choice came up. Several heated kisses had ensued as their bodies became entangled with each other.

It wasn't long before Hermione was down to her 'holiday thong.' A cheery scrap of red fabric with the words, "Christmas Wishes Granted Here" printed across it in green and white. It had taken all of Severus' will not to ravish the witch when her knickers were revealed, the substantial bulge in his own underpants testament to her allure.

His soulful ministrations to his erection, even though the cotton of his underpants, destroyed whatever shred of concentration Severus had been holding on to. Collapsing, he lay flat on the mat, the colored circles beneath him forgotten as Hermione pulled his underwear to the side and drew his erection into the heat of her mouth. His groan fed her arousal, her bum wiggling as he stroked the inside of her thigh.

"I told you Muggle games could be fun."

[illegible]

The next week passed uneventfully. Hermione spent the lion's share of her time, when not with Severus, in the library either revising for end of term exams or actually taking the exams themselves. Even the revised list Professor Brisbane had distributed was shunted to the side as she focused on studying.

The list now included an additional ten names that had not been there before. Three of the instructors had already been crossed off of Hermione's 'possible list.' She assumed she would find the information she needed to research the remaining seven new masters in Hogwarts Library over the holiday break. Hopefully, one of the new candidates would meet her needs and she his.

Friday finally rolled around, bringing with it the end of the term as well as the end of exams and the fear and excitement of the new and improved Wolfsbane Potion they were going to give Remus in less than forty-eight hours.

A mild winter storm blew gusts of cold air mixed with fluffy snowflakes through the front doors as students and staff departed for the holidays. Hermione arrived at the castle, a light dusting of snowflakes clinging to her winter cloak, her cheeks rosy from the walk up from the Apparation point. The last of the students darted out the front door leaving the main foyer silent. She stood quietly, her head cocked to one side as she listened to the castle sighing around her. The butterflies in her stomach took flight as she thought about the days ahead. A slow smile came to her as she thought of how far she'd come from the bossy frightened firstie she'd been.

With so few staff, and only a handful of students staying over for the holidays, dinner was a quiet affair at a single round table in the staff lounge, an event Severus usually looked upon with dread, preferring instead to grab a bite in his quarters whenever possible. Had the headmaster not required the staff to attend the first dinner following student departures (ostensibly to discuss plans for the remaining break), he would have been happily ensconced in his quarters with Hermione right now.

"Harry, I didn't expect to see you until Thursday. What are you doing here?" Hermione hugged her friend before settling into her seat, Severus nodding silently in Harry's direction as he sat next to her.

"Ginny is on call for the holiday, so I thought I would keep her company." The redhead in question burst through the staff door, her anger propelling her along.

"Six students in the whole school. Six students. And my idiot brothers have to sell them, at half price no less, their new line of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes Skiving Snackboxes. Two of them are unconscious, one had feathers that refuse to molt, and the other two have sprouted donkey ears and a tail. Just wait until I get my hands on those two." Angrily, Ginny pulled out the chair next to Harry and sat down.

A quick look at those around her revealed the Hogwarts staff and only one student, so focused she was on the Wolfsbane potion and testing Remus Hermione had failed to notice those around her.

"And since you are obviously awake, featherless, and in possession of only those appendages normally found on the average wizard, Mr. Dankin, may I ask how you escaped the fate your fellow classmates are suffering?" Severus' direct questioning, coupled with his unwavering stare, made the young man shift uncomfortably in his seat.

"I've had problems with Skiving snackboxes before, sir," Dankin stammered out, his color draining rapidly under such close scrutiny.

"I see."

"Kevin was my patient last week. He had lovely pink spots and chartreuse stripes that went so well with his eyes," Ginny said, smiling, one brow raised, daring the young man to challenge her comment.

"Spots kept him in the hospital?"

"Well, the spots and stripes faded quickly enough, but there were other...less visible, problems. Fortunately, I was able to owl George and Fred for an antidote. He barely missed one day of class. I do believe it was Misters Drumshire and Harper that slipped the Skiving Snackbox into his breakfast, if I'm not mistaken." Ginny smiled indulgently at the young man. She had hoped for a quiet holiday to spend some time with Harry without the hustle and bustle of the school around them, though growing up with six brothers, especially George and Fred, she was given to understand Dankin's desire for revenge.

"And you placed this Weasley snack where?" Considering the student was a Hufflepuff, Severus was impressed with the young man's method. It was actually more indicative of a Slytherin than a Hufflepuff.

"In the chocolates Derrick received from his mom. I thought it would be safe enough. He never shared, though I know Bill would sneak a few. Caught him at it one time. Am I in trouble, sir?" Dankin was fairly vibrating in his seat, his nerves stretched to their limit.

Severus poured himself a cuppa, shrugging elegantly. "I'm not you're Head of House. None of my Slytherins are involved. I assume it would be up to Madam Weasley. Since it is the holiday break, and she is the one burdened with excess work, it would only be fitting she determines your future. Unless, of course, she would rather I see to your... punishment. Something that should fit the circumstances, I imagine."

The young man paled as he looked at the teachers and guests at the table. Slowly, his eyes rolled back up into his head until only the sclera could be seen as he slid unconsciously to the floor.

"Severus!" Hermione and Ginny both bolted out of their seats in an effort to catch the young man.

"What? I didn't touch him."

"No, you just scared him to death."

He gestured to the body now stretched out on the floor. "He's not dead. I can see a steady pulse throbbing at the base of his throat."

Harry smiled quietly to himself. He was surprised Neville hadn't passed out any number of times Snape had belittled him in Potions. War hero or not, Snape was an imposing figure and still feared by those he taught.

"No comment, Potter?"

"Nope, none that I can think of," Harry said with a grin. While Ginny revived Dankin, he turned toward Snape. "Professor, I know you're planning on trying your revised potion Sunday night. I'd be happy to help in any way I can. What, um, safety methods were you planning on using?"

Hermione looked up from her placing?place? on the floor. "Safety methods? I'm sure Remus will be fine. In any event, Ginny will be there if there's some type of medical problem, but I can't imagine there will be anything Severus or I can't handle."

Severus peered thoughtfully at Harry; they'd come a long way since Hermione was hurt. "I'm not sure which would be more effective, setting up a ward surrounding Lupin or actually restraining him. My only worry is if the potion tampers with his strength, a fact I don't know if I can extrapolate properly at the moment or not." He glanced quickly at those around him. "Perhaps you and Lupin will join me in my office after we eat. We should have a plan in place before Sunday night."

"Restrain him? Severus, do you know what you're suggesting?" Hermione's indignation rose sharply as she looked between her best friend and her lover, who were casually discussing Remus as if he were some lab rat.

"He's right, Hermione. If the potion doesn't do what you think it will, I'll be putting all of you at risk. That's something I won't do." Remus' quiet voice silenced those at the table. "I suppose we should use the Shrieking Shack. It would be fitting if things work out well. I'll do whatever you decide, Severus."

-Pearle

Ginny shivered as she watched Remus' skin ripple, the muscles and bones shifting as the transformation slowly changed the wizard into his own worst nightmare. Even though both Harry and Hermione had seen Remus transform before, the events of that night their third year had happened so quickly, neither one had really had the chance to understand the changes the wizard went through. Only Severus remained focused.

"Lupin," he called softly, "a running commentary would not be amiss. Can you speak or have you lost the ability?"

A low growl escaped as Remus pulled against his bonds. His nose and jaw had lengthened some, not to the extent they usually did, but there was a visual change in his facial structure. His legs had pulled up, his fingers and toes were blunted, his palms appeared to thicken and darken in colour, but his hands did not fully change into paws. Even his tail, the tip visible through a tear in his robe, was not as long as it usually was.

He turned toward Severus, his eyes glowing gold in the moonlight. "I think I can still talk. It's hard to concentrate, but the change feels ... different this time." His voice was lower than normal, and held a rough quality making it sound not quite human. "Not as ... harsh." The transformation was slower and not as complete as it had been in the past, allowing him to retain more of his humanity and to think more coherently. The goal had been to keep Remus as human as possible; the fact that the potion seemed to be suppressing his transformation to some degree was an added bonus.

"I can see a difference in your face. You don't look as wolfish as you did in the past. I don't believe we will be able to stop you from transforming fully, your condition has permanently altered your DNA, but I believe this is an improvement over your usual state. I would assume the pain is also lessened if you do not transform fully. Do you think you can answer a few questions for me?"

A fierce growl sounded as Ginny carefully stepped forward to cast examination charms over the man. "I ... I won't hurt you. I won't even touch you, but I need to get a new reading so we can chart the changes in your body."

The man/wolf continued to move on the bed, an occasional growl escaping as he nodded his understanding. The witch quickly scanned his bound form; a dicto-quill at her side linked magically to her wand recorded the information.

Severus' smooth baritone cut through the sounds in the room. "State your name, please."

"Remus John Lupin," he snarled.

"Date of birth?"

"Marrrrrrh ... ugh." The bones above Remus' eyes cracked as his brow tried to lengthen. They shifted back to normal once again, before settling on creating a slight protrusion over his eyes.

Until now Hermione had been standing quietly to the back of the room, seemingly frozen to the wall as she witnessed the changes in Remus. But the apparent pain he was in roused her anger and fears. "Stop it! Can't you see he's in pain?"

Severus glanced quickly at the witch before focusing his attention back to the werewolf, or now, part werewolf-part man, as the case seemed to be. "Hermione, perhaps you should wait for me back at the castle?"

"No, no, you don't understand." Remus struggled to sit up before falling back against the pillows. "This is not ... bad. I can still think. Pain's ... not same as usual. Better. My ... change, it's better. I feel more in control ... Hermio ... aaah!" His voice low, his words came out clipped, as if the effort of speaking was a monumental task, each word a drain on his soul.

Several groans punctuated his comments, but even the pain, as far as Severus could tell, was reduced. Things seemed to be progressing better than he'd hoped. "Lie back, Remus. Don't fight your body. I'm sure the stress of the situation does not help." Severus' voice was low and soothing, almost hypnotic. They had definitely altered the transformation. The form on the bed was neither man nor animal, but an odd combination of both. The transformation continued to ravage the wizard's body, but to a seemingly lesser degree than Severus had previously witnessed. He believed the man when he said the pain was lessened. "Hermione, there is an improvement, to this point at least. He has never before been able to speak once the transformation starts. Only time will tell to what extent we have changed things. And for how long."

Remus' quiet snarls, interspersed with low moans and whimpers filled the small room as his body cracked and shifted like something out of a bad horror movie. "Severus," he panted. "Ask."

Hermione fell back against the wall, her arms wrapped around herself, cringing with each whimper she heard; her face was a study in sorrow as she watched Remus writhe on the bed, his back bucking as his spine shifted. "I didn't think it would be like this. Isn't there anything you can do?"

Harry, too, felt for their friend, but after meeting with Severus to set the wards, the dark man had explained what a normal transformation entailed, so he'd had some inkling of what to expect. He glanced at Severus before pulling Hermione into a hug. "I know this is hard to watch, but it's okay. The formula you created has helped him." Gently, he rubbed her back. "Do you want me to walk you back to the castle?"

"It's ... better, really." Remus tried to smile at the witch, failing miserably as another series of changes wracked his body.

"Always the center of attention, eh, Lupin? If you two are through? Can we get back to the questions I have?"

"Jealous?" Remus tried to laugh, the sound coming out as more of a growl than a laugh, but the attempt at normalcy broke the tension in the small room.

"Indeed." He watched the strain ease a bit from Hermione's shoulders before turning back to Remus. He'd tried to warn her of what to expect, knowing this emotional reaction was a likely outcome from her. This was the woman who had championed house-elves, had declared her love for him...the unparalleled champion of the underdog.

Nodding nervously, she turned to Severus. "What can I do to help?"

"Nothing at the moment. Just observe. You'll need to write up a detailed report of events when we review the data." He was pleased to see her eyes had lost some of their glassiness as she conjured a pad and quill and lost herself in the familiar task of recording her thoughts and observations.

The rest of the night was spent cataloguing the changes that took place while trying to ascertain how much of Remus' humanity remained. Somewhere about midnight, the wizard's body stopped trying to change further and stabilized itself. It stayed static until the moon started to drop in the sky, creating a reverse transformation as the sun asserted itself. Remus was able to answer most of Severus' questions; he had full recall of his personal information. His knowledge of general circumstances and events were a bit shaky, but that was to be expected. No one was really sure what part of his brain the wolf resided in, only that his 'human mind,' his free will, had always disappeared after transforming before.

It was a weary but happy group that made its way from the shack to the castle. Remus was ecstatic with the potions results. Even Severus' comments, cautioning him they needed more data and further testing to be sure this was not a one-time event, did nothing to dampen the wizard's spirits. His buoyant mood eased some of the guilt Hermione had felt watching him transform. She had wanted a cure for her friend but understood that any change for the better was still something to celebrate. It was agreed they would all meet again at the shack the next night. With expectations running high, they entered the castle, the sun shining brightly on the horizon behind them.

The second night went much the same as the first. Severus handed Remus the steaming goblet of Wolfsbane. "Any other changes today I should know about?"

Remus shook his head, downing the dreadful potion with a grimace.

They were once again gathered in the Shrieking Shack, the light outside the grimy windows darkening as the winter sun slipped below the horizon. Technically, the moon would only be considered full for a few seconds when the moon's shadow disappeared as it aligned with the earth. These few seconds would be the only time it was considered truly full, but the lunar pull, the moon still close to the earth at its zenith, still had an effect on the afflicted wizard, provoking a change the second night, too. The change was virtually the same, but this time the group knew exactly what to expect.

It was a tearful Remus who thanked everyone the next morning. Once again Severus cautioned him about the need for further testing, but Remus would hear nothing of it.

His gratitude to Hermione and Severus knew no bounds, proclaiming he owed them a life debt for the change they had wrought in his life. The Potions master, unaccustomed to such shows of sentiment, nodded stiffly while enduring Remus' emotional hug. He would have dearly loved to hex the wizard, but spying Hermione's smiling tear-filled eyes, he thought better of it. There would be no living with her if he harmed the man, even just a little bit. He shook his head, knowing she had changed his life in more ways than he cared to admit.

Hermione was beyond thrilled. The potion was a success. Watching Remus transform had bothered her to no end, but his reassurances that this change had been better than any before, ever, had gone a long way to easing her mind. It would take some time to analyze the data, to see if the results were finite or if they could be tweaked a bit. The condition altered his DNA. Changes would have to be made at a structurally genetic level if it were to be termed a cure. But easing the pain, treating the 'symptoms' of the condition, in lieu of a cure, went a long way to improving the quality of the lives lycanthropy afflicted. Severus planned to start brewing this new form of Wolfsbane for the wizard. With Remus' help, he would make arrangements to test it on two other known werewolves, friends of Remus' for whom he currently brewed the standard potion. They made tentative plans to meet over Easter break, though Remus made it clear he expected Severus to continue supplying him with the improved potion from now on, not having any desire to go back to the old brew.

Once again it was past dawn before the pair returned to Severus' quarters. With the success of the last two nights buoying her spirit, Hermione stretched languidly in the large four-poster and tried to catch a few hours of much needed sleep. As she waited for Severus to join her, her thoughts drifted to their meeting with Senalda Trelawney for tea later that afternoon. She was looking forward to seeing the strange witch, even if Severus was still resistant. They'd been forced to change the time, agreeing to meet Senalda earlier than originally planned in an effort to return to the shack early enough to monitor Remus for the final night of his change.

After a brief rest, they spent the remainder of the day compiling the data they'd gathered. It would take time to analyze the information, and both of them were anxious to determine if the brew was as successful as it seemed to be.

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Severus looked up from his research to see Hermione frowning over the parchment in her hand. Several pages were spread out on the floor in front of her, as well as several large tomes open to the side of the consumed witch. He recognized the parchment in her hand as the colours on the paper shifted in response to Hermione's unspoken command. Their research was important, but the more pressing issue, at the moment, was still the decision of which masters to apply to for a formal apprenticeship. "Still undecided as to who you should apprentice with?"

"The department has extended the deadline for petitions to the end of February to give us a chance to research the new masters they've added to the list. There are a few that sound promising, but after my experience with Tenbrook, I'm a bit skeptical to approach any of them. What if I choose the wrong master?"

"Hermione, Tenbrook would have pushed you to your limits and in the process trained you to be an exceptional master." Hermione bristled at his comment, ready to take the man's head off for defending Tenbrook even as Severus held up one hand to forestall her argument in a vain attempt to explain himself. "He is a worthy master...that does not preclude him from being a worthless human being. I did wonder where the Ministry was getting its Vertiaserum from, but I was too occupied with other events to think about it for too long. I am quite sure any one of the master's would be thrilled to have you as an apprentice. After you've researched the list, I'll sit down with you and we can figure it out together."

A quick glance at the clock over his mantel showed they still had a few hours before they were due to meet Trelawney for tea. A waste of time as far as he was concerned, but the thought of getting Hermione out of the castle and away from her growing dread of picking a master might not be a bad idea, even if the diversion was Senalda Trelawney.

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It was a happy and somewhat relaxed Hermione and a decidedly annoyed Professor Snape that met the witch later that afternoon at the Three Broomsticks.

"Senalda, Happy Christmas. It's great to see you again." Hermione and the woman exchanged hugs while Severus stood to the side, glaring at anyone who dared to look in their direction.

Once seated, their orders taken, Severus felt more uncomfortable than usual, still not sure what he was doing there. He was aware that Hermione generally liked the witch and seemed to take any information she gave her to heart first before even thinking about verifying the knowledge, something very out of character for the witch. It's not that he didn't trust the woman...he didn't. Life and experience had taught him most people had a hidden agenda. One had but to sit back and wait for the fact or deception, as the case maybe, to unfold and then decide how to handle it. On general principle alone, in his eyes, everyone was guilty until proven innocent.

But if he were being honest with himself, something he was loath to do, he owed Hermione's life to two people and two people alone...the witch sitting across from him and Harry Potter. Without the leaf Trelawney had sold him, there would have been no bond. And without Potter, he never would have read to Hermione, reaching out to her through their bond and calling her back to consciousness. To be fair, Potter had helped throughout Hermione's recovery, too. Spelling him by her bedside, dogging her steps at Cambridge, and generally caring for his friend. As hard as it was to admit, Potter had matured past the hotheaded, impulsive youth he had been and had become a young man to be reckoned with and someone Severus had begun to grudgingly respect.

Which brought him back to Trelawney. The conversation had been flowing around him, but their current topic garnered all of his attention.

"Who are you planning to apprentice with?" The question was innocent enough, but watching Hermione, Senalda could tell it struck a chord deep within the witch. She watched the interaction between Hermione and the Professor closely, wondering just how deep their bond extended. She knew Hermione was willing to be a friend, but Severus was another matter, though his attitude most likely was a result of years of watching his back and relying on only himself that stopped him from accepting others. That and a deep distrust of ... everyone.

"Well, originally I'd been accepted by Master Tenbrook, but after I found out about his alliance with Umbridge, I found I just couldn't stand to be near him. What about all the Muggle-borns she sent to Azkaban? Or her barbaric registry? If Master Tenbrook could befriend Umbridge, then obviously those things didn't bother him. I couldn't work with someone like that."

"Definitely understandable, considering what you've been through." Senalda nodded agreeably, while never a fan of the Ministry, she'd heard of some of the horrors Umbridge had perpetrated, both publicized and a few behind the scenes incidents she'd heard of from a close friend who worked in the Department of Rules and Regulations. "And there is no one else you're interested in?"

"Professor Morley, but she's on sabbatical in America for the next two years. I could probably go to America to study with her, but I don't want to be that far away from Scotland. She offered me the position upon her return, but I don't want to put my education on hold for the next two years, either. The department added almost a dozen new names to the masters list just before break. I was planning to research their credentials while I was at Hogwarts this week. Hopefully one of the new masters will be right for me."

"Would you consider working with Master Viridis?" Senalda asked casually. A calculated sip of tea allowed her to watch Hermione's reaction to her suggestion over the rim of her cup. She could see the witch's eyes widen at the mention of the wizard's name.

"Master Ag Viridis? I would love to work with him, but he doesn't take on apprentices. He's one of the driving forces behind several of the new potions St Mungo's has been using in its spell and damage wards. His work on nerve and tissue rejuvenation is cutting edge."

"What if I could arrange for you to speak with him? Would you talk with him?"

Severus raised a skeptical brow. "Why would he allow you to influence him in such a manner?"

Senalda shrugged innocently. "We've worked together in the past. He owes me a favor, but I believe he could be persuaded to take Hermione on even without that

advantage." She turned to Hermione. "I'm sure your grades are outstanding. My cousin told me you scored the highest Newts in the history of Hogwarts, tying Professor Snape's. With that type of record, and the work you did for the Order of the Phoenix, I would imagine he would jump at the chance to have a witch of your caliber to train."

Severus felt an odd chill race through his blood wondering what actions Senalda had performed to result in such a powerful wizard owing her a favor, and wondered further why she was so willing to call in that favor on Hermione's behalf. "And in return, you would require ... what?"

The witch shook her head. "Nothing. I don't want anything, from either of you."

Severus' eyes bore into the witch's. "Nothing?" He waved his hand at the tea set. "No further updates? No more lunches or dinners?"

"Severus!" Hermione hissed angrily, turning angry eyes in his direction. "Someone offers to help and you immediately suspect the worst."

"And you are too trusting. It has been my experience that the offer of help is usually anything but. There are very few philanthropic souls in this world, Hermione."

Senalda's peal of laughter surprised the dark man. "I would expect nothing less from you, Professor. But you two have given me more than I could ever hope for. I don't want anything. Let this be my way of repaying you, instead."

"Repaying us? Whatever for?"

"For your information about the bond. For proving a long held legend to be true. It also justifies my belief in my grandfather's magic. There are many who believe the leaves are pure fairy tale, an attempt at creating a demand for his jewelry. That the bond is nothing more than an advertising gimmick. Something I can assure you it's not. You have justified my belief in the purity of your heart when I sold you the leaf in the first place. It's a great feeling to know I don't have to second-guess my judgment as my brother first had me believe."

"Evil ex-Death Eater takes advantage of innocent young witch by trying to enslave her," Severus mumbled angrily.

"Something like that, though I know that neither one of you exactly fits those personas." Seeing his look of disbelief, Senalda hurried to add, "The leaf, its magic told me to trust in you."

"Against all evidence to the contrary?" One brow rose skeptically, accentuating the meaning of his question.

"Against all evidence to the contrary." Senalda stated, her manner firm, regardless of what Severus thought.

"Why?"

"Severus, enough."

"Enough what? Would you rather I be more "Gryffindor" about things and go rushing in blindly when I should look?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Enough with the house prejudices. You know what I mean."

Senalda sat back and observed the bickering couple, a sly smile gracing her features.

Severus glared at the witch. "Do you find something amusing?" While his patent glare may have caused heart failure among any number of Hogwarts students, it had no effect on the woman sitting across from him.

"It's nice to see I was right."

"My heart is anything but pure."

"I never said your heart was pure. I said your feelings toward the witch were pure. There is a difference. The aura the leaf gave off had assured me that you meant her no harm. Indeed, it showed you had nothing but good intentions toward her."

"And you were able to read all of that just from looking at Severus and the leaf?" Hermione's hand closed around the pendant, she'd worn it continuously since that day in October when she'd been injured.

"My brother and I have been trained to read the magic that my grandfather's pieces were imbued with."

"But you no longer sell those pieces." Severus watched as Senalda's eyes met his.

"No, we don't. But as I explained before, the magic compelled me to sell it to you. My soul would not have rested had I refused. The aura was the true magic my grandfather had shown us when first teaching my brother and I to recognize it. Until you came in, I had never thought I would ever see that aura again. That is the reason we have been slowly buying back all of his pieces. None of the current owners have responded properly to the magical pieces. None have ever been so pure in their feelings. I have never told anyone this before, but those who have refused to sell us their leaves, and there have been a few, we switched out for non-magical leaves. They still own a Trelawney, but it's now a Daemon Trelawney instead of a Tiresias Trelawney. It's safer that way."

"And for this you will use your influence with Master Ag Viridis?"

Senalda studied the dour man. "Yes, the peace of mind alone would have been enough. But, Professor, you and Hermione have given me a gift as well. To know that the legend of the claiming is true, to actually feel the magic my grandfather had told my brother and I of, to know that only one previous case existed where the magic of claiming had been evoked, and that was more than one hundred and fifty years ago, is beyond hope. I never thought I would feel the bond magic as strongly as I did the day you walked into my store Professor, but to have been privileged to know the magic of the claiming, too, is a rare gift indeed. Professor, if it would set your mind at ease, I would be willing for you to use Legilimency on me. I truly wish for you to understand I mean neither of you any harm."

Severus had spent years reading people. Students attempting to lie to him, to hide their transgressions from him. Years as a spy, watching those around him, waiting to see who would hex him. He had learned to read people and could tell whether they were being honest with him or not. Even without Legilimency he was sure the witch was sincere. "Very well."

"Severus! You are most certainly not going to use Legilimency on Senalda."

"No, I'm not."

Hermione looked surprised, the wind knocked out of her sails. "You're not?"

"No, I believe she has your best interest at heart. After all, she did sell me the leaf that saved your life."

Senalda sat back, a feeling of great serenity overwhelming her. "Thank you, Professor, I am most honored."

At a loss for words, Severus nodded his understanding.

"You said you planned to visit with your brother's family tomorrow night. Would you like to join us at the Burrow for a late lunch tomorrow afternoon? I know Molly and Arthur would love to have you there. Molly has been fascinated with my necklace since Severus gave it to me."

"Molly and Arthur Weasley? Shouldn't you check with Mrs Weasley before extending such a generous invitation?"

Hermione smiled, shaking her head. "They're like family to me. They sort of adopted Harry and me. I lost my parents during the war. And Harry, well, Harry's been an orphan all his life. Somewhere along the way we became honorary Weasleys. Besides, Molly always says the more the merrier. Really, they would love to have you come."

Senalda looked speculatively at Severus. "And I'm sure this is high on your list of enjoyable gatherings."

"You have no idea."

"Severus."

"They are friends ... of a sort."

Senalda smiled as she tried to imagine the dour man interacting with his 'friends'. "I will be back in London early next week and will speak with Ag then. Look for an owl during the week with details on how and when to contact him."

"Senalda, I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing. But perhaps you will indulge me and have tea again at some later date."

Hermione hugged the woman. "Of course."

Master Ag Viridis. He would be perfect. A top master, known for how thorough he was, he would push Hermione to her limit and beyond. Her education would be second to none. Located in London, she would most likely be able to keep her flat. And then there was the fact that the man was seventy-five and known to be happily married for more than thirty years. He was ... perfect.

Time had crept up on the trio, Hermione and Severus needing to return to the castle and oversee the final night of tests on Remus. Senalda agreed to come for dessert, if only to have one more chance to observe the odd couple.

It was with some reluctance they parted, Hermione securing a promise from Senalda to stop in at the Burrow for desert as Severus attempted to steer Hermione toward the castle once more.

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The third and final night of observing Remus went much as the previous two had. Hermione questioned the need to continue restraining Remus since the previous nights had gone so well.

Severus sighed. "Hermione, two nights of success is not enough to risk your safety and the safety of everyone here." Recording the time in his journal, he watched as Remus drank down the Wolfsbane potion with a grimace.

"But he's..."

"Hermione, I can't tell you how happy I am with the changes you've made." Remus shifted as Severus and Harry locked his restraints in place. "You've given me a new lease on life. But Severus is right, let's make sure the change is permanent before risking everyone's safety. And don't worry I'm fine. Really."

Hermione nodded. It was interesting to note that the atmosphere in the room was much more relaxed than it had been the last two nights. She could tell both Severus and Harry were still on their guard, but the tension in the room had been drastically reduced.

The group watched as once again the sun started it decent below the horizon. Ginny stepped forward and ran a preliminary scan on the wizard as his body responded to pull of the moon. Hermione winced as the sound of bones shifting echoed in the room. It was a sound she was sure she would never get used to. Severus' voice cut into her thoughts as he started to question Remus.

"Shall we begin? State your name please."

"Remus John Lupin," he said with a tired smile.

"Date of birth?"

And so it went. It was a very tired but happy group that walked up to the castle that morning. Dawn had just broken across the sky a few minutes before. The resulting change back had seemed to be an easier one for Remus.

"So, we'll see you at the Burrow in a few hours?" Ginny was grateful her mother had changed the Christmas gathering from breakfast to lunch, giving them time to catch a fast nap before gathering at the Burrow.

They'd stopped in the entrance hall, Harry already halfway to the stairs leading up to Ginny's quarters and Severus halfway to the stairs leading down to the dungeons. Hermione hugged Ginny before following Severus. "Of course, we'll be there. A few hours sleep and we'll be good to go."

Severus waited until they'd started their decent into the dungeons. "A few hours sleep and we'll be good to go? Surely you can't be serious? We'll be lucky if we get three hours sleep."

"Says the man who suffered from insomnia for years. What did you average per night when I was in school? Two hours, three hours a night?"

"Times have changed."

"We're going. They're our friends." At Severus' quiet snort Hermione amended her comment. "Okay, they're my friends, though Harry really respects you now. You like Molly and Arthur. Besides, Harry made me promise I'd be there. He said he had a special announcement he wanted to make today, so we have to go."

"Fine, fine. I'll go and be my usual charming self." He knew arguing was useless. These were her dearest friends. Even if Hermione hadn't insisted, both Molly and Arthur had made a point of seeking him out and repeating their invitation to Christmas lunch when they'd stopped by the castle the previous week.

Hermione smiled as they slipped through the entranceway to Severus' quarters. "There's the wizard I've come to know and love." She kissed him chastely on the cheek before heading off to the loo. "If we hurry we can take a four hour nap."

Severus shook his head as he watched the door closed behind her. It never ceased to amaze him how Hermione could throw him off balance with something so simple as a kiss or her declaration of love. Some days he thought she was probably a figment of his feverish mind. That he'd been certified insane and was currently occupying the place of honor in Azkaban or the Janus Thickety Ward at St Mungo's. He could never decide which of these scenarios was more likely.

Shedding his robes, he turned down the covers before sliding into the bed to wait for his witch.

-TBC-

Severus knocked back the remainder of his drink, watching Ron for any sudden movements. "What about Hermione?"

"Leave off, Harry. If you won't deal with him, I will." Pushing Harry away, Ron turned on Severus. "I don't know what you did to get her to like you, but it's not natural. I still think you slipped her a potion or something; you don't have qualities a girl like her would go for. Do you really believe she deserves getting stuck with the likes of you? It's not like you could ever deserve her!"

"Ron." Harry sighed tiredly; they'd been over this ground numerous times. Ron still couldn't believe Hermione had chosen Snape. He and Ginny had talked about it. Hermione was happy. If she was happy, who was he, or anyone else for that matter, to say what was right or what was wrong. The Potions Master may not have been his favorite person, but seeing his devotion to his friend after her accident, well, Harry had to respect the man for that, if nothing else.

Severus' voice was low, devoid of its usual sarcasm, his black eyes glittering dangerously despite the tone of his voice. "You're right, Weasley, I don't deserve her, and I'm quite sure she knows it, even if she won't admit it. But I am thankful for every day she decides to ignore that fact. Potter." He nodded briskly to Harry as he turned toward the kitchen door. "I imagine the garden might offer a bit more solitude as the pests seem to have infested this room instead."

"Ronald Weasley!" Molly's yell in the quiet room carried more anger than any howler ever sent to Hogwarts. "Severus is a guest in our home. If you think..."

"How dare you? I..."

"What is your..."

"Ron..."

He could hear a calipée of voices behind him as he slipped out through the open doorway seeking sanctuary in the quiet afternoon air of the Burrows' magical garden. He shook his head, not sure why he had even bothered to come. Social pariah had always been at the top of his skills list, time hadn't changed that fact.

He'd felt her approach even before she spoke. "Thank God you never tried to spy on anyone during the war. You're louder than a Hippogriff."

"I didn't know stealth was required."

Severus turned and watched Hermione approach. "Didn't you know? All those years of spying have left me with a hair trigger. As Minerva is so fond of saying, hex first, ask questions later."

Hermione laughed and stepped closer.

Softly he rubbed her back as he contemplated the clouds rolling by. "Hermione, you didn't need to check on me. I'm sure you haven't finished listening to Miss Weasley's tales of wedding frippery yet."

"Ron is an idiot."

Severus snorted at the sudden comment. "Tell me something I don't know."

Hermione studied his face. "Maybe I'm the one that doesn't deserve you?"

"No, you don't deserve me, you deserve much better, but you *are* stuck with me. In my wildest dreams, I would never have inflicted myself on you. I'm still not sure how 'we' came about, but I'll be damned if I'll let you go."

"I didn't mean it that way."

Smiling, he chuckled quietly. "I know."

"I suppose it's just that everyone thought I would end up with Ron. Especially Ronald. Ever since our breakup sixth year, he was sure I would come around. All he had to do was bid his time. Really, I'm sure our breakup didn't bother him all that much, if at all, especially if you look at the stream of witches that adorn his arm every time I see him." Her eyes suddenly lit with a mischievous gleam. "Actually, I don't think it's so much that he and I are not together—it's who I replaced him with that bothers him the most."

"Are you saying I'm a replacement for Weasley?" His voice rose dramatically, amusement and revulsion warring with each other, as he appeared to contemplate her comment.

"And I would say the better wizard won."

Potter. Weasley. Sometimes, it was all too much. Severus shook his head. He would never have imagined his estimation of Potter could change so much, but as he'd said before, times change. Point in fact; he never could have imagined Hermione with him. "Times change, people change."

"For the better, I hope."

Pulling her tightly against his side, he gently kissed the top of Hermione's head. "Definitely for the better. I can't remember the last time I had such a willing woman in my bed on such a regular basis."

"Oh, thank you very much. That can change on a moment's notice." Hermione said with a smile. Severus' warm laugh, a sound that she marveled at each time she heard it, warmed her heart. "And to think, if I wasn't always around, you wouldn't get to see so much of Harry or Ron."

Severus snorted. "Potter has been tolerable; it's Weasley that's a bit hard to stomach."

"Your staying with me in the hospital did seem to really count with Harry. He's all the family each of us has these days. I'm sure Hell must have frozen over, since Harry seems to have a new respect for you, too."

"Potter and I have one important thing in common that I would deign to agree upon—your welfare."

Hermione looked around the magical garden. "This is nice. I remember Molly saying she wanted to enjoy the sunshine even in the winter."

Severus nodded. "Arthur asked Flitwick about the charms needed to create a climate controlled open-air garden." They stood silently for a moment and allowed the cool afternoon air to engulf them until Severus gestured toward the Burrow's back door. "Go. Your friends will be wondering where you are."

"What about you? You're not coming back in?"

"I'll come in a minute."

"Severus..."

"Go. I just want to enjoy the quiet for a bit longer." After a quick kiss, he watched her head back into the house. His mood had turned introspective, a condition that usually did not serve him well. He'd wondered before if their relationship could survive her friends' scrutiny, regardless of Hermione's unshakable belief that she knew her own mind and could not be swayed; there was still something to be said for peer pressure. Potter's begrudging acceptance of him after Hermione's accident had been a surprise

Hermione smiled; the potion worked and two of her best friends were getting married. Life was good. The past Christmas' at Hogwarts, especially after Voldemort's return,

"They are best mates." Hermione eyed the still wizard. "Is that a problem?"

"No, not unless you suddenly lose your mind and make it a double ceremony."

"Well, considering the bond we share, I'm sure everyone expects us to get married."

"You have always been free to choose another man."

"And you would let me go? Just like that."

"I told you once I would fight for you. I meant what I said. But I want you to be happy." Severus slid the stack of essays to the side, his bottle of red ink refilling automatically as he replaced the cap. "If there is someone else that makes you happier, by all means, go to him. I'll be there to comfort you if he should meet a sudden untimely end."

Amused with his nonchalant attitude, one brow rose questioningly. "Untimely?"

Severus shrugged. "Life is full of danger. One never knows what is around the next corner."

Hermione abandoned her decorations to stand in front of Severus. "Then I suppose, if only to spare some innocent life, I should just stay here with you."

"It might be wise."

Effortlessly, Hermione slid into his lap, gently combing her fingers through the fine hair at his temple. "I am known as the smartest witch of my generation for a reason."

"Indeed..."

Whatever else Severus might have said was lost as Hermione's lips claimed his.

It was several minutes before Severus broke the kiss. Snogging his witch had proved to be most enjoyable and ordinarily lead to other, equally enjoyable, activities, but the fact was his heart raced anytime he thought of the words marriage and Hermione together in the same sentence.

.XX.

New Year's snuck up on them as they spent the week in between Christmas and New Year's Eve alternately working on their notes for the revised Wolfsbane, reading, and making love. Severus marveled at the ease of their time together. The school year had left him wanting, their time too short during the week and severely infringed up during the weekends by other responsibilities. They'd been invited back to the Burrow to ring in the New Year with the Weasleys but politely declined, having previously decided to bring in the New Year privately.

Severus found he couldn't get enough of his witch, and all too soon she would be returning to Cambridge. He had every intention of making New Year's memorable. His seduction planned, he listened with half an ear as Hermione detailed new plans for Ginny and Harry's wedding the following June as they sat down to a private dinner in his quarters.

The evening had gone as planned: a romantic dinner, champagne in front of the fire, a sensuous massage with oils he had personally created, and an evening of making love while reinforcing their bond. She would be leaving all too soon; he wanted her to remember how much he cared. Now all he had to do was work out the timing and the evening would be perfect.

One minute to midnight:

"Mine," he said between measured pants.

"Always," she agreed, drawing a strangled groan from the dour man as she tightened and released her inner muscles.

"Tease. Stop that. I have plans for you." And while the command may have sounded harsh, his soft tone and straining muscles belied the pleasure he derived from her movements.

"Mine," she whispered.

"Until the end of time," he growled, his mouth claiming hers in a searing kiss, sealing their pledge.

The clock struck, its chimes counting out the hour, Severus felt the knot at the base of his spine explode; he thrust rapidly, unable to hold back any longer. His seed spilled forth, pushing Hermione over the edge. As the final chime sounded, the pair in the bed felt a distinct surge of magic caress their skin. Hermione's leaf glowed brightly for a few seconds before fading in the candlelight, a result of renewing their pledge to one another.

Severus brushed his lips across Hermione before gently kissing her. "Happy New Year, witch. From that surge of magic, it would seem we've reinforced our bond. You may consider yourself claimed."

Hermione smiled, one hand reaching up to run her fingers through Severus' hair. "As are you. I've always thought New Year's was a magical time. This just proves it."

"It would seem we brought the New Year in with a bang. Perhaps this should be a yearly tradition," he said with a quiet chuckle.

"A bang? Damn it, you and your massages ... You made me forget to set the charm." Swearing, Hermione grabbed her wand off the nightstand.

"Hermione?"

"Hang on." A quick swish and flick of her wand accompanied by a mumbled spell, one that a confused Severus could only make out the words 'count' and 'bang' as she chanted it. One final swish of her wand, and a spectacular light show appeared over their bed.

"What..."

"Just watch. I wanted to surprise you. This was supposed to start at ten seconds to midnight. I had a timer charmed into it and everything, but the massage felt so good, and then you started kissing me, and we ... well, I guess I forgot."

Muggle spotlights played across the ceiling, the beams merging in the center before slithering off to the sides and back again. Severus could hear voices chanting some type of countdown.

"10... 9... 8..."

"Just wait."

"3... 2... 1... 0!"

Severus watched as a miniature fireworks display played across the ceiling. Each Hogwarts houses was represented: four separate blasts displayed the house crests, the house mascots briefly coming to life before melding to form the school crest and then "blowing up" as a fire-breathing dragon emerged from the center of the flames, it's exhale of fire a swirl of colors that was breath taking. The school motto, "Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus," appeared below the dragon until both images burst forth into sparks of light before dimming slightly in deference to the grand finale. But the grand finale was not to be outdone. The outline of a potions jar with two realistic hearts

-Pearle

Two weeks of waking up next to the witch, two weeks of endless time had spoiled him. He cursed his need for her even as he wished the holiday would never end. All in all, it had been a memorable year, he thought, as he recast the wards on his private lab before entering his quarters through the side entrance. Even this late in the evening, it wouldn't take long to fill the list of potions Miss Weasley required for the hospital wing. He supposed it could wait until Monday, but knowing that the blood

replenishing potion, among others, was due to go off before then, left him feeling uncomfortable. In the past he would have brewed the Hospital's potions at the beginning of the break before entertaining any thought of leisure time for himself. This year, Hermione had changed all that. Still, she was a talented brewer in her own right; between the two of them, they could make short work of it.

Silently, he let himself into his quarters. He could hear Hermione talking to someone on the Floo connection in his study. Straining his ears, he could just make out Hermione's voice.

"Are you sure? Did you run the test again?"

What test? Was that Poppy she was talking to? She hadn't mentioned any problems. Did this have to do with the fall she'd taken in November? He thought she'd had a final recheck two weeks ago and had said everything was fine. What wasn't she telling him?

"I see. And it came out the same? Well, a baby isn't on my list of things to accomplish right now, but if..."

'A baby! She's pregnant?' an odd voice, one he'd never heard before, definitely not "The Thong" voice, screamed inside his head.

Severus felt the room shift; he reached out and planted a hand against the wall to steady himself. A baby? Dear, Merlin. He loved Hermione; there was no question about that, but... a baby? They'd both cast protection charms anytime they'd made love, figuring two charms were safer than one. While no charm was 100% effective, the two charms should have provided at least 99.999674% protection.

'Well, someone has to make up that less than 1%,' the voice commented smugly.

Staggering slightly, Severus moved to the sofa and sat down.

Well, the leaf had ensured they would be together; it was only a matter of time before...

"Severus?"

He barely had time to compose himself before Hermione was standing in front of him.

"I didn't hear you come in. Are you all right? You don't look well." Frowning slightly, she pressed a hand to his forehead, accessing his temperature. "No fever. But you seem paler than usual. Even your skin feels a bit clammy. Is something wrong?"

"Wrong?"

"Yes, are you ill? Is something wrong?"

"Wrong?"

Her laugh was mirthless. "Yes, wrong, as in 'not right.'"

He drew a deep shuddering breath. "Hermione..."

It was at that moment his Floo connection in the lounge roared to life.

The flames flared green as Minerva's voice sounded through the connection. "Severus? Severus, are you there?"

He could hear the panic in Minerva's voice. What in the devil did she want with him now? Wasn't he entitled to a moment's peace? He had important issues to discuss with Hermione. He needed to discuss the baby. Baby? Was she really pregnant? When was she due? Why hadn't she told him yet? How did this happen? Oh, Merlin, did she want him in the delivery room? Did he want to be there? Was it a boy or girl? Did she have a name picked out already? The child would not be sorted into Gryffindor if he had anything to say about it. He wondered if the child would be a result of its genetics (i.e. with his Slytherin genes and tendencies, which would dominate its DNA no doubt, it had to be a boy, he thought smugly) as opposed to her DNA. Just how much did environment affect things? Dear Lord, what if it was a girl? No, no, better not to speculate. And what could he possibly do about what would happen to his child due to the unfortunate and most likely constant contact with Potter's and Weasley's Gryffindor tendencies, he wondered, shuddering slightly knowing he wouldn't be able to ban or hex the idiotic duo due to Hermione's affection for the pair. Oh, God, he didn't even want to think of Hermione's whole persona. Oh, Circe, the child would be a Gryffindor. He could see Albus' twinkle now.

"Severus!" Minerva's shout brought him out of his trance. "It's imperative you come to the front hall immediately. Something has gone wrong with the underground plumbing. Water is leaking in through cracks that have suddenly formed in the main wall of the lower level. Both the boys and girls lavatories on the first floor are flooding at an alarming rate. Albus thinks it has something to do with the Chamber of Secrets below them. He needs all four Heads of House to recast the structural wards and repair the damage. Between the five of us, we should be able to reverse the problem, but you must hurry."

"Minerva, I can't..." If the witch thought he was going to leave Hermione to stop some flood in the loo, she had another thing coming.

"Severus, now!" The normally benign Headmaster's voice roared through the Floo connection, quelling any question of refusing the summons. He could hear Albus issuing orders to the others to seal the hallway as he closed the connection with a slam.

Rubbing his forehead in a vain attempt to banish the headache that was forming there, he turned to Hermione. "I'm afraid I need to ..."

"Yes, of course. Maybe I should come, too? Six wands are better than five."

"No, the castle will only recognize the Heads of House and the Headmaster when dealing with the basic wards. Anyone else might actually make things worse. I'm sorry, but I really need to go."

"Go, I understand. It's a good thing everyone is here, or it could've been worse."

Severus nodded as he headed for the door. "You do know the castle is sentient? It must have known we're all here. I swear it does something like this at least once a year out of boredom. Though how one would amuse a castle, I'll never know."

Hermione smiled; she didn't think she would ever tire of magic.

It was late when he returned to his quarters. Hermione had left the fire blazing in the lounge grate, its warmth a welcome sight after the night he'd had. The castle had 'played' with them. Just as one crack was repaired, another would form on the opposite wall. Flitwick had tried to cast a waterproofing charm on their robes, but the charm kept giving out. There was nothing he hated more than dragging sodden robes around as he walked, his feet squishing with every step he took. It wasn't until the repairs were done and the entire mess in both loos cleaned up that the charms finally held. The drying charms he'd cast on his robes drove away some of the chill he felt.

A note hovering over the coffee table said Hermione had gone to bed but that he should wake her when he returned. Summoning a glass and a bottle of vintage Olde Ogdens, he collapsed on the sofa instead. He hadn't had time to question Hermione about the baby, but the thought had never been far from his mind, nonetheless. He didn't even know if he wanted children. Well, that was a moot point now, wasn't it? A plan, he needed a plan. Perhaps he should wait until Hermione brought it up, then he wouldn't have to admit he'd overheard her conversation. His partially inebriated brain thought that was a splendid idea. With his course of action decided, he headed off to bed.

.XX.

"Istrne cofme?"

"Pardon me?" He'd been with Hermione long enough to know that she was not a morning person. Several cups of strong coffee, applied liberally to the semi-conscious witch, were required before a coherent conversation could be attempted.

"Is there coffee?"

"Perhaps you would prefer tea?"

"Coffee!"

Severus smiled, one cup wouldn't hurt her, though tea, decaffeinated, would have been a better choice he thought. "As you wish." A tea service, replete with decanters of both tea (Severus' brew of choice) and coffee appeared atop Severus' nightstand. The elves had thoughtfully included an assortment of fresh scones and fruit toppings, too.

'Breakfast' passed quietly, Severus waiting for Hermione to talk to him; Hermione focused on attempting to wake herself up, instead. "You didn't wake me up when you got back last night."

He snorted quietly. "More like early this morning, really; you were sound asleep when I came to bed. I didn't see the point in waking you. You must have needed the rest." There, he'd handed her an opening you could force a Hippogriff through. Maybe now they could talk.

She nodded absentmindedly, stretching as she came awake. "What's on today agenda?"

He watched her move, alert for any changes in her body he might have missed. "I have a bit of brewing to do for the Hospital. Otherwise, we have the day to ourselves."

Hermione's smile was sly. "I'm sure we can find something to amuse ourselves."

Severus nodded, wondering why she didn't tell him her news. Well, he could wait until she was ready. "I need to speak to Poppy about a few of the potions on the list she and Miss Weasley sent me. We can start brewing after that."

Hermione yawned, "That's fine. Ginny wanted to talk to me about something or other this morning. Why don't we meet back here at lunch time?"

Severus nodded his agreement. Was she planning on confiding in Ginevra before talking to him about his own child? He was a patient man, but even he had his limits.

Severus caught the barest glimpse of Hermione and Ginny as they ascended the stairs. From the direction they were heading, he assumed his lover was dragging the Weasley girl to the library to research something or other. He had to smile. In some ways, Hermione was still the same person she had been as a student.

"And thank Merlin she's changed in all the ways that count! Especially her choice of knickers." The annoying voice in his head had returned to making periodic lewd remarks, still salivating over The Thong whenever Hermione chose to wear one. He was sure his psyche had splintered, but he was hard pressed to figure out how to repair the problem without opening himself to ridicule if he had to tell someone else about it. Pushing through the doors to the Hospital, he shook off his concerns for the moment.

"...A wee babe. It's been so long, I can barely remember when we had a baby in residence in the castle." Minerva's brogue was thick with emotion, the thought of a wee one bringing out her maternal instincts.

Poppy addressed the head hovering in her Floo. "I don't remember there every being a baby here."

"Oh, it was sometime before you started. It will be wonderful to have new life in the castle again."

"Well, you do have time. It won't be ..." Poppy cut off the witch, years of experience telling her she was no longer alone, someone had entered her domain. "I have to go, someone's come in. I'll talk with you later."

Severus stared blindly at the open door to Poppy's office. He had managed to catch the tail end of Minerva and Poppy's conversation. The topic sounding eerily similar to the conversation he'd overheard last night. Where had Hermione and Ginevra gone? Had Hermione been talking to Poppy before she left here with Ginevra? While never good with 'relationships,' he thought they'd reached an understanding. How could Hermione not tell him?

Poppy snapped her fingers. "Severus." Distractedly, Severus turned towards her. "Are you all right?"

"I... I'm... fine." Abruptly, he turned on his heel and fled the room.

Poppy shook her head as she watched the dour man leave in a flurry of black, his robes snapping out behind him. A cackle escaped her as she thought about Hermione and Severus, still amazed at their relationship.

Lunch had been a quiet affair, both Hermione and Severus lost in their own thoughts as the two ate lunch in Severus' quarters. "Shall we?" Severus stood, gesturing to the lab door. He watched Hermione walk ahead of him, wondering the whole time why she didn't talk to him.

Once in the lab, Hermione pulled several small cauldrons down onto the workbench. "How do you want to divide the list? I can take the first four potions...they shouldn't take me long." She continued to review the potions list while summoning her ingredients. When said ingredients failed to appear before her, Hermione looked up to find Severus watching her, his eyes blazing, his arms crossed defensively across his chest.

"Severus, why is your supply cabinet warded? I can't brew these potions if I don't have the proper ingredients."

"This has gone on long enough."

"What are you taking about? What's going on?"

"I might ask you the same question." He glared angrily at the impertinent witch. "Do you remember nothing I have taught you?"

"Of course I remember what you taught me. What does that have to do with warding the supply cabinet? What is wrong with you?"

"Are you not aware that the burn-healing paste contains stinging nettles?"

"Yes, of course. You wouldn't have an effective draught without it."

"Pregnant women should not handle stinging nettles in its raw form. While the leaves have many beneficial properties, contact with the trichomes on the stems might stimulate uterine contractions and cause a miscarriage."

"I'm well aware of the problems stinging nettles can cause. What does that have to do with anything?"

"Then if you know, why would you risk our child?"

Hermione's eyes widened. "Our child?"

A large tawny owl arrived just after breakfast the next day. It seems Senalda had kept her word and spoken to Master Ag Viridis after all. The scrolls the owl left raised as

many questions as they answered. Master Viridis letter praised Hermione's accomplishments, both as a heroine of the war and as an academic.

Viridis was a well-respected researcher, a consultant to St Mungo's. Ironically, the university had already credentialed him when he worked as an adjunct on one of the potions committees; he'd explained he had been approached when the program was first established, but felt he did not have the time or the inclination to educate and mentor an apprentice. This, of course did not apply to Hermione. Her accomplishments were legendary, and he would be honored to have her as an apprentice. He'd also managed to obtain a copy of the paper Severus had presented at the Symposium. He would welcome the chance to discuss the changes she had created in the Wolfsbane potion with two of them. Perhaps she could adapt it to other potions as her master's project? He went on to detail his current area of research, what he would expect from his apprentice (which, to Hermione's amazement, involved hands-on experience at St Mungo's), and further information about his own education.

A second scroll contained a list of question he had for the witch. What were her expectations? What did she feel were her strengths and weaknesses? What did she perceive were her areas of expertise? What did she wish to gain from her mastery, other than the obvious? Did she feel that the magic used to create potions only came from within or was there a greater force in the universe? And the list went on from there.

Severus could see Hermione vibrating with energy as she read through the pages. Here was someone who would truly challenge her in not just the traditional ways but on a greater level. When she was ready, he would be more than happy to meet with her and talk about setting up a formal agreement. It was perfect fit for both of them.

"My God, did you know Master Viridis is currently working on a variant of memory potions specifically designed to target each section of the brain? By focusing on the different types of tissue, he hopes to reduce damage caused by several different curses. He's not just examining the curses but the affected areas, as well as potions that could repel the damage." Her voice filled with wonder as she paged through the scroll, repeating comments of interest to her.

Severus had to smile; he could see he'd lost her. He was sure she would spend the rest of the day researching the items mentioned in the scroll, pleased that Master Viridis thought so highly of her before fluttering to the other end of the scale...that she was not worthy of his attention.

And as thought became fact, the day passed quietly. Lunch was a quiet affair with Hermione absent-mindedly grabbing a sandwich that appeared next to her as various scrolls, books, and magazine appeared and disappeared around her, while others shifted, some on their own, other's at her insistence as Hermione continued to work her way through Master Viridis' questions and comments.

It was late afternoon before Hermione looked up from her work. "Merlin, I never realized how involved Master Viridis' work was. I can't wait to see his notes on healing potions for the brain. If he's been able to identify a particular pattern of change due to a curse, maybe we can find changes in the brain that are caused by lycanthropy and treat it the same way. I wonder if he would let me use that premise as my master's thesis?"

Severus smiled. Some things would never change. Hermione had always been the consummate academic. "There is a possibility; you will have to ask him when you speak to him. When will see him for a formal interview?"

Frowning, Hermione reached for Viridis' scroll. "He said he would contact the university this week and place a formal request for me and that I should submit a request for him. I need to get the questions answered and return them to him. So I would imagine it would be another two weeks or so before we can meet."

"I assume that would be about right. At least this solves the problem of who you should apprentice with."

Hermione leaned back against the foot of the sofa behind her. "I can't believe Senalda came through like this. It's almost like... magic," she said with a laugh.

He had to agree. It would appear to be good to be true, but the damn leaf had changed both their lives in so many ways since the day he bought it just a few short months ago, not the least of which was to save his witch's life. Maybe it was time to accept its actions and just move on. The chiming of his desk clock, signaling a warning that dinner would start in one half hour, interrupted his thoughts. "Unfortunately, since term starts again tomorrow, I am required to have dinner in the Great Hall tonight. You are welcome to join me, or I can walk you down to the Apparation point now, and you can head back to Cambridge and get a jump on your revising. I'm sure you're at least hours behind."

Smiling, Hermione got up and walked over to Severus. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to spend our last day of vacation on Master Viridis' scrolls. It's just that..."

Severus raised a hand to quiet her as he pulled Hermione into his lap. "Don't apologize. I'm truly glad the question of who to apprentice with has been resolved so quickly and not just quickly, but with someone so worthy of your talent. Viridis is a great potions master; he will challenge you to do your best. I know how important this is for you future education." They kissed quietly for a minute before the clock chimed again. "Fifteen minutes until dinner. Will you join me or did you want to head back?"

"Dinner at Hogwarts...what a treat. At least we'll have a few minutes later before I have to get back." She rose quickly, straightening her clothes before summoning a simple robe to wear to dinner. "I need to talk to Gin for a minute when we get in. She wants to meet either this week or next to look at wedding robes. She's still annoyed that someone leaked news of her engagement to the *Prophet*. Really, other than family and friends, who knew? I can't imagine any one of us would talk to the *Prophet*."

Severus nodded, adjusting his own garments, straightening seams and setting his cuffs. The day after Christmas the *Daily Prophet* had sported a large banner proclaiming, "The Chosen One Has Chosen A Mate!" A mate. The headline made both Ginny and Harry sound less than human. The article then went on to detail their "relationship" from first meeting to the desperate kiss the pair shared after the final battle when they'd finally found each other alive and breathing. The kiss was captured for all eternity by a lucky photographer at the scene as the iconic image became synonymous with Voldemort's defeat. It was projected around the world with the caption "Good Wins Out!" A second headline further down the page told readers to stay tuned for further details as they emerged regarding the upcoming "Wedding of the Century."

Severus motioned towards the door. "Shall we?" And with that, Severus was gone and the stern Professor Snape took his place. With a flourish of his robes, Professor Snape proceeded to escort Miss Granger to dinner.

TBC

A/N: A grateful thank you to Shug for her support, her time, her general enthusiasm for Dances, and for beta'ing the chapters for me. I truly appreciate your help.

Note: Due to working through the weekend and into the beginning of next week, it will be about two weeks or so before the next update.

Still to come: Valentines, Master Viridis, testing at Easter, the school year, a wedding, the future, and the finale.

-Pearle