

How Hermione Granger became Olivia Prince

by Ravensblood

A short story about a make-over Muggle style and the effects of close proximity on the mental stability of Hermione and Severus. Disregards all main character death, other than Voldemort and anyone who died prior to his first defeat.

Die, Die, Dye your hair

Chapter 1 of 7

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Die, Die, Dye... Your Hair

"For all intents and purposes, Ms. Granger, you are far too recognizable as you are. Believe me when I tell you that any Death Eater in the country knows your exact description, and quite a few know you by sight. Granted, it's been a few years since any photos of you have graced the front page of the *Daily Prophet*, and it is my hope that any changes you may have undergone in your... development should mask your features to any casual observer. It is up to you and I to ensure that no one who is looking for you would give you more than a passing glance. Hence, Ms. Granger, the need for you to undergo a complete makeover." Hermione had to admit, it was rather comical how the man could slip into his lecturing voice so very easily. She didn't even attempt to hide her amusement, since he had no way of deducting house points. They were outside of school, the school year hadn't even really begun, and most importantly of all, the Headmaster had assured her that Professor Snape could not retroactively deduct house points based on her behavior before the start of term.

That did not, however, protect her from Severus Snape's wrath, should he choose to exercise it. Somehow, this year, after hearing from Harry about Snape's true intentions toward the downfall of the Dark Lord, his wrath was not nearly as intimidating as it was when she harbored little doubts about where the Potions master's loyalties truly lay. But sometimes, she forgot all about the fact that he was her professor and became intimidated all at once by his startling presence and the danger that lurked beneath his deceptively calm surface. Add to that the fact that the man had managed to live through the snake bite and loss of blood that had led the Golden Trio to leave him for dead, firmly placing him in the column of 'wizards I should not mess with', as far as Hermione was concerned. As it was, he merely pinned her with a quelling glance before he continued.

"I have procured a few items from the drug store down the street that will help us in our endeavor." Without much preamble, he lifted out a box of Clairol hair dye, a few cosmetics, and a straightening iron. Hermione was not surprised or amused to discover that the dye color of choice was black. Just like everything in his wardrobe, it seemed. (And his home furnishings. And his mood, come to think of it.) Her mouth quirked to the side and betrayed her chagrin.

"Yes? Is there something you wished to comment on?"

"I don't see the need for Muggle devices, Professor Snape. Can't we just use glamour charms, or Polyjuice Potion?"

"Ah, yes. Polyjuice Potion. The problem with that particular contrivance is that the potion wears off unless you spend all your time sipping it, and you will be woefully apparent in doing so. Also, it requires a bit of hair from a person who already exists, and I can't see your Gryffindor sensibilities allowing you to force some other girl's life to

be put on hold while you traipse about using her image." Hermione attempted to look sufficiently cowed by this, so he continued. "Glamour charms have their uses, but also their downfalls. I am oft wont to teach by example rather than by explanation, so if you would be so kind as to attempt to change your appearance using any spell you like, I will illustrate."

"Err, could you, you know, turn your back or something?"

Snape attempted not to roll his eyes; "There is an empty guest room behind you if you prefer privacy while you... ahem... change."

In all honesty, Hermione hadn't had much luck with disguise or glamour charms. She wanted to be able to survey the changes to make sure she didn't appear as some lop-sided monstrosity and give him more ammunition to chuck about her sense of the aesthetic. It was bad enough that the Headmaster had put HIM in charge of this farce. Somehow, the old twinkly-eyed bastard thought it would be a good idea to have her snarky Potions professor oversee her transformation, as well as act as her personal bodyguard (or babysitter, as He put it) for her final year at Hogwarts.

Though the Dark Lord had been defeated, there were still those among his followers who wished to do Harry and his friends harm. Far from solving all of their problems, the death of Voldemort had provided a martyr for the cause of anti-Muggle sentiments. Hermione, being the 'boy who lived's friend and a Muggle-born to boot was an especially juicy target. Hence the subterfuge. Hermione was to pose as Olivia Prince, Professor Snape's second cousin from the Australia Princes. Naturally, that required an image change, or anyone and everyone would know the truth just by looking.

With all that running through her mind, convincing her that all this was necessary, she decided to have a bit of fun with it. She cast a hair-color charm and attempted to tame her locks while rouging her lips and enlarging her bosom. She then transfigured a dress that hugged her curves and attempted to heighten her heels. Gazing back at herself in the floor-length mirror, she regarded a flesh-and-blood version of Jessica Rabbit. Adding abnormally long lashes and opera length gloves, she went to face the music, so to speak.

She attempted a little breezy humor as she opened the door a smidge. Her leg went out first, and she pressed her front to the doorframe, humming the first few bars of Jessica's musical number. Snape merely smirked, all the blood being held in his brain by sheer force of will, and muttered, "Cute. Now get in here."

She began to pout like a teenage girl putting on her very first slutty Halloween costume. "Don't you know who I am?"

"You're not bad, you're just drawn that way. Finite Incantatum," He waved his wand lazily in her general direction. Where before stood Jessica Rabbit in the flesh (quite a bit of flesh), now was Hermione "Plain Jane" Granger in a jumper and jeans.

"Oh, bollocks," she sighed, raising her hands in defeat. "I get it. And if I were to walk through one of those charmed portals like at the Ministry, it'd amount to the same thing. You're right, give me the box."

"Oh, no. Your hair, by the looks of it, and if memory serves, has never seen a product harsher than shampoo. You've never dyed your hair before, and I'm sure you'd make a right mess of it. This is why I am here. Come into the kitchen; the light's better."

"But..."

"No buts, Miss Granger. I hate repeating myself, and I'd hate even more repeating this whole process because you cannot be bothered to follow instructions."

"Was that what you were doing?" she retorted.

"What?" He just stared.

"When you changed those potions in your textbook. Were you just following instructions then?"

For a moment, he really was quite speechless. "Do you want my help or not?" he finally asked, looking fully prepared to walk right out and leave her to it.

"Is it really complicated?" she asked in a meek, doubtful little voice.

"I've seen you brew more complicated potions, but it helps to have eyes and hands where yours don't reach," he finally answered. Outside of the classroom, he was actually kind of... approachable. She didn't know what was worse. That he was approachable or that she was tempted to do just that, despite years of emotional conditioning (at his hands) telling her to flee as far and as fast as she could away, lest he find something to taunt her about.

The chair made a scraping sound as he pulled it across the cheap beige linoleum tile. It was little more than a stool, really. She shored up the last of her courage, walked in despite her better judgment, and sat; he swept a long black smock around her shoulders. It wasn't until he lifted her hair from beneath her collar that she realized just what a mistake this really was. The tingles started low and quickly sped upward in a sweep from tailbone to the top of her head and then made their progress down to her toes. The next twenty minutes were like heaven entwined with hell. She couldn't believe that the man who had caused her so much grief in her childhood was making putty of her now just with his hands on her hair. It would be even worse did he know it. And there were probably many more humiliations to come.

Severus tried to concentrate as the waves of her pheromones hit him one after another. The silly chit had been toying with him all night, and it absolutely had to stop. The hair dye could only mask so much, and he was human! Did she think him a bloody saint? And that stunt she pulled with Jessica Rabbit! Honestly! What heterosexual male hadn't seen that film and put that cartoon character on the list of "fictional characters I would love to shag"?

"Did it have to be black?" She finally spoke, breaking him out of his angry inner tirade.

"If you are to pose as any relative of mine, it is best you looked the part," he explained shortly.

"I'm just sure it'll wash my skin tone out. And it'll take forever to dye it back," she complained.

"Once you go black, you can't go back," he quipped, smirking a little. "Until it grows back out, that is."

Hermione managed to suppress a groan, but not the giggle that followed. "I didn't know you were a poet."

His silence spoke volumes.

"Okay, shutting up now," she murmured half under her breath.

They retreated to the uncomfortable silence she was desperately trying to get out of. Without talking or any meaningful intellectual stimulation, she was left to ponder the physical sensations that had left her so uneasy in the first place. As the sensations took her over once again, her pheromones rippled out in time with the tingles, and this time, it was Sev who was engaging in any small talk to lighten the tension.

"It won't wash you out, you know. You'll never look pale; you're too naturally tan."

"That's the Greek in me."

"Lucky for you, the nose was left out of qualities you inherited. Believe me, a nose like this is no easy thing to live with." Which brought him back to the reason behind the whole attempt at verbal escapism.

"I didn't know you had Greek in you."

"No, my dear. Roman."

"Mother or father's side?"

"Mother. Why do you ask?"

"Just curious about what your Roman forefather's surname could have been."

"Ancient history is best left to the historians, and I am sure there is none alive that could uncover the surname of a poor dirt farmer in Hellene times."

"Maybe it was Princeps," she mused, "and he was no dirt farmer at all."

Once again, he was astounded that she had squirreled away another seemingly inane bit of knowledge about him as his mother's maiden name. He knew she was a walking brain and all, but this was just disturbing. Unnerved, he let the subject drop, which was felicitous as it was time for phase two.

He slapped the shower cap down over her riotous curls, now liberally doused in black dye. She began to fidget in her seat as he washed his gloves and the dye applicator in the kitchen sink. After a while, she then started to make little grunting noises, which he found it in his best interest to put a stop to. She was a seventeen-year-old girl, and anything remotely approaching a sexual noise from her was like a punch in the gut. It was only natural.

"What is it now?" he demanded, irritated beyond all belief.

"It itches..." her whine was petulant and in better keeping with the child he thought he knew.

He made an "tsk" sound, and then his hands were once again on her head, digging lightly into her scalp, scratching tiny little circles. She let out a full, heart-felt moan as the burning fire that had taken up residence was quelled with each passing stroke. His fingers stilled, and she heard him suck in a noisy breath from between clenched teeth.

"Professor?"

"You have another half an hour. I suggest you find something to occupy your time," he bit out tersely. She knew a dismissal when she heard one. So without preamble, she got up and found her way to the library to peruse the books that had been the focus of some (More than quite a few, if she was perfectly honest with herself) of her fantasies at school.

With her removed to another room, he found it easier to think. Also more room in his pants. "You're going to have to be placed in my House," he called from the kitchen, wanting to prepare her for any shock she may receive along with her new identity.

"I know. The Headmaster told me so. No Prince has ever been a Gryffindor, and I'm not about to start making waves," she replied, only half-listening in on the conversation while she scanned the titles before her.

"You won't be able to be head girl, this year either."

"I know that too, Severus. Trust me, I'm up to speed," she called in her otherwise fully absorbed voice. In a flash, he was there before her, startling her out of her deep concentration.

"What did you just say?" He loomed menacingly.

"I'm up to speed?"

"Before that," he coaxed.

"I know?"

"After that," he purred, which had the startling effect of being even more menacing.

"Trust me?"

"Wrong, again, *Miss Granger*."

"Severus," she said in a breathy kind of voice, laced with the understanding of what line she just crossed with perhaps the scariest professor ever, and also the pleasure of being able to do so without recourse. (Well, mostly without recourse, anyway.) Add a healthy dollop of fear, just in case any one ever accused her of being completely without a sense of self-preservation, and you had a cocktail of jumbled nerves and emotions that had her taking a step back and pressing forward simultaneously. To the outside observer, she merely stood still, swaying almost imperceptibly on the balls of her feet.

Her breathy utterance had quite a different effect on him than he was expecting, and his reaction to that effect had him quickly retreating back in to the kitchen, away from her smell and womanly curves. That he desired her, he wouldn't deny. That he would give into his body's demands and possibly deflower a witch under his protection, he would do his damndest to avoid. Damn her, but she'd won that round with nothing more than the utterance of his given name. He couldn't even put his usual snarky command behind "Professor Snape, to you" from his defeated spot in the next room.

"I think I'll call you Cousin Sev," she chortled in her victorious mirth.

"You will not!" he barked from out of sight.

"Come in here and tell me otherwise, then," she grinned, knowing he would not, but not exactly knowing why he would not. That part still confused her. All she knew was that she had some strange power over the man, and she fully intended to exploit it.

Lather, Rinse, Repeat

Chapter 2 of 7

UST makes Hermione and Snape go crazy!

Lather, Rinse, Repeat

Hermione's head was on fire. It itched and burned so terribly, it was a wonder she wasn't already being hosed down by some intrepid fire fighter. She became convinced that if she were to put a piece of parchment on it, she'd instantly catch the thing alight. She was, in her own mind, a walking fire hazard.

Hermione was a hazard for Snape, as well, for a very different reason. Ever since she had set foot in number twelve, Grimmauld Place as a fully legal adult, he couldn't stop himself from being attracted to this battle-hardened, witty, curvaceous minx. That Dumbledore had the ulterior motive of torturing him mercilessly, Snape had no doubt. As a severely private person, Severus never showed the slightest interest in any female to his colleagues' recollections. It also helped that Snape valued intelligence more than physical beauty. He felt it only right that he look for the spark within, instead of holding up the fairer sex to a standard which he himself could not meet. His interest in her went far beyond the physical; Dumbledore, who never missed a thing, was probably aware of it and intended to force Severus to come to some sort of acceptance of the thing. His first knee-jerk reaction was avoidance. He was not allowed the luxury, not with the meddlesome old man in charge.

Hermione spent her half hour in the library looking at books (but not daring to touch, in case of an incendiary incident) and desperately trying to ignore the intense discomfort radiating from her previously virginal scalp. Severus spent his taking a good long look in the mirror and thinking about things he hadn't allowed himself to consider since that fateful night in the Headmaster's office: *Lily*. He had done it. He had played his part in avenging the death of the only person who had ever truly mattered in the whole of his existence. He had served the grand purpose he set up for himself, had accomplished the one thing that kept him alive through Cruciatus after Cruciatus, kept him sane through revel after twisted revel, and kept him focused through raid after bloody raid. His purpose made being a double agent almost bearable; his revenge provided the steel behind his resolve.

Where did that leave him now?

Death seemed almost like a blessing, once his *raison d'être* ceased to be. But his heart kept pumping, his lungs continued to draw in air and expel breath after breath while he lay cold and helpless on the floor of the old shack. As he felt the darkness enfolding him, a voice, *Her* voice came to him as if in a dream. "Not yet, Severus. There is still more for you to do."

He would have liked to believe his hallucination, but it was merely shock from the trauma he received. Lily was no ghost and only ghosts could speak with the living. She was in whatever afterlife was reserved for the best, the purest, those who made the world a better place just by existing. He would never see her there. There was a darker place awaiting him. But he would have gone. It was no more or less than he deserved. It was no worse than the aimless quality his continued existence possessed. Sometimes he cursed the Auror who found and saved him, usually in the dead of night with quite a few firewhisks in him.

The Headmaster endeavored to provide him with a new purpose in looking after 'the brightest witch of her age.' The moniker used to make him snort in disbelief at the very best or made the bile rise in his throat at the very worst. After teaching the insufferable little know-it-all for six years, it made little difference to him whether or not she was all that those sentimental fools believed her to be. She annoyed him with her constant fishing for empty praise. She galled him to knock her down a peg or two with her smugness at being able to spout word for word what she'd read in a text. Memorization was easy, but knowing the proper application for said knowledge made one truly great. He would have loved to hate her for this and this alone, only she'd proven him time and time again that she had the capacity to apply all that she learned when the occasion presented itself. There was not a bit of luck in Hermione's success up to this point. Despite all that she achieved, she had no one to do it for. Her family died in the raids and left her alone for the world.

A lucky Gryffindor would still have her family.

She hadn't even hesitated when he'd told her that the honor she'd been working toward all of her student career was not to be hers, because of bad luck. She could have taken her honorary NEWTs and had everything handed to her. She declined and opted to go back and earn her place in graduating from Hogwarts, unlike her dunderheaded friends.

A lazy Gryffindor would have accepted the silver spoon on the silver platter and been assured that it was owed to her. *Anentitled* Gryffindor would have railed against having to give up being Head Girl. The child-Hermione would have done all these things, had he pegged her correctly. Just who was this intelligent, noble, strong young woman who kept company with two of the laziest idiots he'd had the displeasure of teaching?

He could say he'd found a new respect for her, although he would have been wrong. He respected very few. At the very least, though, he didn't despise her, and that was enough to behave civilly toward her until she did something to prove him correct in his original assessment. She was elevated above *them*, that anonymous, faceless mass that made up the bulk of people in the world. Severus hated people. Severus hated *them*. She was now in that middle category of 'people I can benefit from' and 'people I can stand to be in the same room with.' It was the best that any Gryffindor could have hoped for from him.

Which reminded him: he needed to stop thinking of her as a Gryffindor and start identifying her with his house. It wouldn't do for him to start docking points from a house she wasn't supposed to belong to at all. Her behavior was his responsibility, and he'd have to start taking that into account. He smiled a little. That also meant that her achievements would reflect on him as well. Based on the amount of points he could award her in his own class alone, Slytherin might in fact be winning the house cup, this year. *Finally*, said the sibilant whisper in his soul.

Hermione was just about at her wits' end. The itching had finally subsided, and now she felt the cold trickling of black dye down the back of her neck. It collected in the bottom of the shower cap and robbed her of most of the body heat she had been able to hoard in the drafty, old house. What was it about wizards that they couldn't seem to keep their houses warm? Spinner's End was just as cold and creepy as number twelve. Remembering the Burrow, she had to amend her thought. Dark wizards couldn't keep their homes warm. Even the Malfoys, the wealthiest of wizards, couldn't seem to burn enough to keep out the perpetual chill that accompanied dark magic. It bit into her flesh through the smock and her jumper. She thought it was a good chance that her bum, encased in tight-fitting stretch denim, would never be warm again. Just as that depressing thought passed her mind, she heard the sound of rushing water from somewhere on the second floor. Images of a hot, steaming bath had her ascending the stairs to investigate.

As she reached the first landing, the air seemed to grow noticeably warmer. With the promise of more heat, she quickened her pace, until she stood staring through an open doorway into a room that seemingly held more light than the rest of the entire house combined. It had a great deal more of that compelling warmth, too. What held her at bay was the steaming Muggle appliance of plumbing that took up half of the far wall of the room. In a house like this one, the massive, glass-door shower was as out-of-place as a vegetarian in a steak house. It just wouldn't want to be there. What further made her hesitate was her Potions master in a Muggle bathing suit, looking ill at ease under her scrutiny.

"This will go a lot faster if you cease ogling me and get yourself properly attired. Unless you want to keep that shower cap on your head for the rest of your life, that is." He smirked.

"Oh, no. I'm not getting in there with you like *that*." She shook her head vehemently. She instantly regretted the movement as it caused a cascade of damp locks to tumble down around the nape of her neck, chilling her further. "I am perfectly capable of washing my own hair, thank you."

He smirked even more, momentarily surprising her that it was even possible. Then he sneered, "No, Miss Granger, you are not. Let me tell you why your hair acts up the way that it does. You do not *care* for it properly, and I refuse to allow you to mangle it further."

She snorted. "I suppose you would apply the same care to my hair as you do your own? I apologize, but I don't relish the thought of a curtain of utter grease framing my face. I am unappealing enough as it is, physically. You yourself have said so on numerous occasions."

His mocking sneer faltered and he became quite serious. "Come here," he commanded. She hesitated for a moment before he sighed and moved with all the speed and grace due a jungle cat. In an instant, he was before her, the chill air of the hallway pimpled his pale skin with gooseflesh and hardened his nipples in a way that fascinated her horrifyingly. He gripped her firmly but gently by the wrist and raised her hand to the black glossy curtain others assumed to be greasy.

"It's like silk!" she murmured, awestruck.

"So are we agreed that I should show you how to tame that," he searched for an adequate word, "mane of yours?"

"I'm still a little uncomfortable about the concept," she admitted, "but you appear to have discovered some secret about proper hair care."

"Good, because it's freezing standing here with the bloody door open." He released her wrist and retreated deeper into the steam. "Shall I turn my back and give you time to transfigure yourself a proper bathing suit, or can you trust me in this, as well?" he quirked an eyebrow. His professionalism and courtesy went miles towards making her feel better about getting into the shower with him. He was purely her cosmetology consult in this. He wouldn't jump on her like some randy schoolboys she knew at the first hint of cleavage.

With a few well-practiced flicks of her wand, she had herself a passable bikini. Ginny taught her the trick after her first summer at the Burrow when the boys decided a bit of swimming was in order. Conveniently, nobody had thought to bring a swimsuit. Also conveniently, Ginny had seen her brothers pull this stunt before and was prepared, for Hermione's sake.

Snape kept it together enough to let no emotion whatsoever show on his impassive face. Years of spying for the Order had taught him well. As it was, the man was deserving of an Oscar and an Order of Merlin for his restraint. He also did not allow his eyes to do the thorough inspection of her form that he desired to do. He was left with the impression of sensuous curves barely concealed by the skimpy strings and bits of fabric that passed for a swimsuit. He held open the door and gestured for her to enter the cubicle.

He stepped in mere seconds after she did and immediately took the hand-held sprayer off the wall. "Kneel down and get your head as close to the drain as you can," he said. "Keep your eyes closed. Pinch your nostrils closed, too. It will be a lot more comfortable for you that way."

She did as he commanded, feeling eerily like she was kowtowing to some pale sultan from the South. The spray instantly hit her hair and the dye-slicked locks fell forward toward the shower floor. He'd sweep the spray beside her and behind her every few moments, then continue rinsing her until he was satisfied with the result. "You can stand up now," he murmured. He replaced the hand-held in its holster on the wall. She rose carefully from her kneeling position, afraid that her legs might have gone to sleep. They had.

He reached out and steadied her without a word. Gratefully, she smiled at him and raised her face to the shower's spray. She scrubbed the skin of her hairline and eyebrows until the itching went away. When she came up for air, he guided her back out of the reach of the water and began lathering her curls with a sweet-smelling shampoo. He rinsed his hands once he was done and gently pushed her back under. She closed her eyes hard, afraid of the sting of the shampoo in her eyes.

"Don't scrunch your brows like that. Your eyes will make a better seal against the water if you relax," he admonished. She complied, but it was hard to fight the instinct not to.

After the water ran clear, he repeated the process. This time, she did better at doing as he told her, instead of doing as she had always done. Once again, the spray of the water seemed deafening against their silence as he slicked her hair completely with an oily, thick conditioner. She felt the tingles start again and cursed them. Again, he rinsed his hands, then immediately turned off the water. She looked at him with a puzzled frown. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"No. That conditioner needs time to soak into your hair."

"How much time?" she asked, the cold air already seeping in and chilling her flesh. She wrapped her arms around herself for warmth, beginning to shiver just a little.

He made an impatient sound in the back of his throat and pushed open one of the shower doors. The draft made her shrink back and cringe but he quickly shut the door, his prize in hand. He wrapped the fluffy bath towel around her shaking shoulders and rubbed her arms vigorously for warmth. "About a minute or two," he told her gruffly, not adding what he thought of her delicacy against the cold.

When her shivering did not abate, he made another one of those impatient sounds and exited the cubicle. When he returned with his wand in hand, he did a drying spell on his own skin and a warming spell for her.

"Thank you, Professor Snape." Her teeth chattered slightly.

"Don't mention it. Really."

"I won't," she promised.

"Good," with that he whisked the towel off of her and tossed it over the glass and metal wall. The shower went on again, full blast. Hermione could have wept with relief. He rinsed her more thoroughly than the two times previously, taking the showerhead in hand and changing the setting to 'pulse'. She felt it smack against her tender scalp in a relentless focused beam. The dichotomy between the pleasure of the itch being scratched and the pain of it being scratched too hard felt strangely right to Hermione. It troubled her that she couldn't figure out why.

"From your earlier reaction to cold, I can tell that you won't like this next part much, but it has to be done," he informed her, as he adjusted the setting again.

"What part?" Her voice held a worried edge.

"The cold rinse," he replied and doused her head in the coldest water Hermione had ever felt. Gasping and spluttering, she cursed him and everyone who had anything to do with his birth as he kept torturing her with the spray. He took her verbal abuse stoically, no apology in his manner when it was done. He wrapped her once again in the towel, dried her with the steady backdrop of her teeth chattering, and used the same towel to wrap her hair up in a twist down her back. It was at this moment that his eyes chanced to slip his hold and gaze on the pert little nipples poking at him beneath her bikini top. He felt his pulse kick up a notch, but he betrayed little with his breathing or any flare of his nostrils.

His body betrayed him just the same. He had wondered why she was so quiet the next few moments. Now he knew. Her eyes were glued in horrified fascination to the tent at the front of his swim trunks. The massive erection was something he could never deny. He silently wished for her to say something, anything, instead of staring at the evidence of her body's effect on him. He also wished for his flowing black robes, very much. Well, that part, he could control. He transfigured them back out of the damned revealing scrap of cloth he wore previously. Finally her eyes snapped back up to his, wide and round with so many nameless emotions. The foremost one was shock, he decided. She broke eye contact first, blushed and shivered and looked anywhere but at him.

"It doesn't have to mean anything, Hermione." His voice was low and comforting. "It's just a natural response. I wasn't planning on ravishing you or paying you unwanted attention. You need not fear me."

"I don't fear you," she murmured, still staring pointedly at the tiles of the wall. The blush still stained her cheeks. "So does that mean you find me... attractive?"

He grit his teeth and bit back a hasty retort. In calmer tones he said, "I am a man, Hermione. You are a seventeen-year-old witch. What do you think?"

She mocked herself with her smile. "I think that it doesn't have to mean anything," she murmured and let herself out of the cubicle. Her Muggle jeans and jumper flowed back around her when she reached her wand. Once she was beyond his hearing, she whispered to herself, "But I wish that it did!"

Getting it Straight

Chapter 3 of 7

Further into the world of disguise, as things become clearer and more muddled all the same.

Get it Straight

Hermione Granger had long ago come to the realization that men had no control over their desires. As far as she knew, or at least from her experience, women had few desires when it came to men. Her own observations showed that a woman's passion was rarely invoked unless there was love involved. Sure, she'd seen many a girl or woman indulge a man his passions in return for *something*, be it jewelry, fortune, fame, comfort, or love. Love could be in the form of anything, she supposed. Children, pets, the illusion of caring from the man she indulged. Regardless, she was relatively sure that the true love between a man and a woman (like between Harry and Ginny) was rare and often fraught with conflict. The conflict of the War between the Dark Lord and the Order almost tore the two of them permanently apart. Hermione sometimes wished for such a love, but then she'd remember Ginny's drawn looks and Harry's deep depression during that horrible year, and she felt lucky not to have been ensnared in such an all-consuming emotion.

Men had no control over their desires, it was true. But they did have the choice not to act on them. It was clear that while Severus might desire her body, he had no wish to. It was something as involuntary as her god-awful monthlies, uncomfortable and often embarrassing. No wonder he wished to cover up the stark evidence of it immediately. It must be something of a mortification for him to be physically attracted to "Miss Know-It-All," the walking encyclopedia whom he hated from the moment she first raised her hand in his classroom. Doubtless he was experiencing some sort of mental anguish, or even self-loathing, if he still saw her as nothing more than the child she was for so many years. She herself had difficulties coming to terms with her body: an alien thing to her still. Although her breasts were probably fully grown, they had only been so for a few years. At her young age, those years seemed like a blip in existence when measured against the normal lifespan she could expect, or even the years she'd lived before. It never occurred to her that a fully grown man, one of experience, bravery, refinement, and wit could possibly see her as anything but a nuisance.

When she looked at herself in the mirror, what she saw left her nonplussed. Ordinary brown eyes. Brown hair that was anything but *normal*, a mass of corkscrew unruliness that frizzed at the slightest hint of humidity. An awful mix between bones sticking out at her joints and rounded fat everywhere she wished it wouldn't be. When she measured herself against Ginny, whose trim little figure showed no signs of softening into her mother's ample curves, she felt herself come up decidedly short. Her hips were too wide. Her arms and legs would never be termed athletic, but were more rounded like Botticelli nudes. Her breasts so far had avoided the lure of gravity, being so new and still sore from growth, but would eventually succumb if she didn't keep them firmly in place with a brassiere like her mother had taught her. Being the child of dentists, her smile was at least white and straight as those of the women in toothpaste commercials, if a trifle large for her face. Mercifully, her nose was small and pert, and her face on the whole did not appear disfigured or scarred with acne. Her face was a little too round for her features; she often felt like a garden squash. When her hair was having one of its wilder days, she'd then feel like a dandelion. On the whole, nothing to get excited about. Hermione "Plain Jane" Granger. Better suited for the library than the cover of ANY magazine. What could possibly persuade a man like Professor Snape to desire her?

The one thing about herself she took pride in, he found fault with: her mind. He detested how she could remember everything she'd learned. Yes, she learned most things from books, but that was because they contained more information than any syllabus was likely to cover! She positively thirsted for knowledge. If she could only pick the brains of every one of her professors; if only she could read from them like she read a book! She would love to discover all of the secret bits of truth about any one of her subjects (save Divination, or Care of Magical Creatures, though she loved Hagrid dearly), but she could never ask all of the questions she wished, nor did she know all of the right questions to ask. Books were there, all answers, indexes, titles, and tables of contents, so she needn't ask a single thing, only read and convert to memory. Books hid nothing (unless charmed to hide); one only needed to open the cover and all would eventually be revealed.

She scanned the titles in the library again. This time, she permitted herself to touch, to run her fingers over the spines of leather-bound tomes, to smell the lovely musky scent of old parchment, to feel the glide of gilded page-edges, to finger the satin book markers as she loved to do with her father's old set of encyclopedias. She did not select one to read, only began acquainting herself with the look and feel of one and another. Those that sent a ripple of warning, a chill over her skin, she left alone. Doubtless they contained spells for dark magic, and she rarely ever looked inside of such tomes unless there was a need. Now that Voldemort was dead and gone, there probably would not be a need again. That cheered her, just a little. Any of His supporters left would not know her and should not bother her.

She started a little as the silence of the room was shattered by a clearing throat. She turned to find Snape regarding her most oddly. "As much as I hate to interrupt your... fondling of my private collection, there is still much to be done about your transformation."

She blushed a little. She could see how what she was doing would appear to be an intimate act. Silently, she brushed past him and re-entered the kitchen, burning with embarrassment.

He fell into step behind her and murmured, "I knew you liked books, but..." His words drifted off, implying things she'd heard before.

"If I like them so much, why don't I marry them?" She echoed something that Ron had said before, during one of their snits.

He chuckled lowly; the deep sound sent shivers down her back. She had never heard him laugh before, and then he added fuel to the fire with a murmured, "Something like that." His voice stopped her dead in her tracks and he nearly ran into her. Curious, he watched her give herself a little shake before continuing on. When at last he could see her face as she sat on the stool, it showed nothing. He could have congratulated her on not betraying any emotion, but it irked him not to know why she stopped so suddenly. Especially now that he was beginning to see her as something of curiosity, not just a constant torment.

He had resigned himself to leave her alone after *the incident* in the bathroom, both to allow her to absorb his sincerity about his intentions, and to allow his own body to recover from her proximity. She was his student and his ward, he had no right to think about her in such a manner. He had no right thinking about any woman in such a manner. He respected women. He respected them so much that on the whole, he left them alone. Barring those who took payment for their favors, he spared the rest his company when he could. The circumstance of them being thrown together like this was neither of their faults. The fault lay solely with the twinkly-eyed old bastard himself. Severus had tried everything he could to spare both of them the ignominy of this entirely improper situation. He had even suggested that Miss Granger be given a companion or chaperon. Though it sounded extremely old-fashioned, even to him at the time, he almost wished that the Headmaster had granted his request. The thought of that girl spending three nights under his roof alone with him, let alone three weeks, sent him into a spiral of worry and self-loathing that rivaled any of his brooding moods to date.

"Nonsense," the old wizard had pronounced, "You are both responsible adults. I am sure all will be well, and you will come to see this with a bit of humor in the future. Are you quite sure you don't want a bit of toffee?"

Severus had tried not to take his surliness out on Hermione as he left Dumbledore's office by Floo, but his dark mood had made her obviously nervous even as she gathered her trunk and left with him to Spinner's End. She had also been noticeably relieved to note that he did not have a house-elf. Not that he wouldn't, but he was rarely ever at Spinner's End, even during Summer, and those that belonged to Hogwarts were more than enough for his needs. To be honest, the little creatures gave him the

creeps. He would never allow one to so much as touch him. They seemed far too unclean in his eyes. Merlin knew how often Lucius tried to gift him with one, but he often tried to gift him with many things that left a bad taste in Severus's mouth.

He was proficient in enough cleaning spells to keep most of the filth at bay, and cooking was the one thing that he and his mother would do together that she seemed to take pleasure in. Most of it was enough like potion making that they did rather well. Whenever his robes got dirty, he'd take them to Hogwarts for the elves to clean. During the breaks, they were literally batty without much to do. Their irritation and boredom, not to mention insufficient use of their magic, would cause bats to appear in much the same way that the high emotions of young witches and wizards would cause poltergeists. Needless to say, they were glad for any tasks set to them. Ridiculous little creatures. Imagine, enjoying drudgery!

He left his garden to go wild except for the little plots he kept for everyday herbs. He couldn't grow his own "magical" ones, for all it was still a Muggle neighborhood. Herbology really wasn't much of a strong suit for him in any case. All that he needed, he could take care of. Being a Muggleborn, he hoped that Hermione was the same. If she wasn't, he was absolutely sure that the Headmaster would allow this farce to end and put her in someone else's more *capable* hands. Molly's, for instance. He sighed and resigned himself to his fate. Three full weeks of temptation and cold showers, and more self-control and restraint than he'd had to use in many a year. There were things his hands kept wanting to do, flashes of images of pinning her against a wall and doing things... things that no woman in her right mind would want him to do. His imaginings would always stop exactly in the same ways. He'd look into her face and see the horror, the disgust, or the worst: pity, emblazoned in those chocolate and topaz eyes of hers. Even his own mind couldn't continue with the deed.

When he actually looked into a mirror at himself, all he saw was an ugly, unpleasant man. That never really bothered him, because looks didn't mean power. Being handsome did not allow one to brew a potion correctly or outwit an opponent. Cleverness, guile, and cunning got one through life, not the shape of one's face, nor the features contained. Take James Potter, Gilderoy Lockhart, Regulus and Sirius Black for example. All had been considered handsome men. Where were they now? Dead or as good as dead. In any case, none existed now as they would have liked. But he, Severus, had lived to fight or run as he chose. He was free to live life as he saw fit, not counting this little entanglement with Miss Granger. It would only last a year, he told himself, then he truly would be able to go about his business. He could go be a hermit if he chose, or become another face in the crowd in some other city somewhere in the world. He'd always enjoyed Paris, when he wasn't there on official Death Eater business. New Orleans was always rather nice in the winter, as was Sydney. All he had to do was ensure that Hermione Granger made it through her final year at Hogwarts and was able to complete her N.E.W.T.S.

With new resolve in mind, he had gone to collect Hermione for the next stage in her transformation and was caught up short by the sight of her hands, lovingly stroking the spines of his books. Transfixed, he had watched her as she pulled one down from the shelf and held it open to her nose. Her fingers, never still, had held the thing gently as if it were precious and fragile, while with two fingers she stroked the ribbon that served as a bookmark. She had replaced it, ghosted her fingers over more. He could see it when she passed over those books containing dark magic, could almost feel the goosebumps over her arms. He had felt his mouth go dry at the sensuous curve of her hip, the gentle caresses she bestowed over his books. He fought back the idiotic desire for her to bestow them on him. He had cleared his throat, more to banish his own thoughts than to disturb hers, but she pivoted to face him and he said the first inane thing that came to mind, laced with double entendres, and dripping with not a little bit of sarcasm.

What is she thinking? He wondered as he unwound the towel from her newly ebonized locks. Her silence was unnerving. Usually she was a veritable chatterbox. He didn't trust his own voice at the moment and he couldn't think of a thing to say. He set the towel aside and picked up the wide-toothed comb. He was satisfied that the conditioner had done its job, as he encountered no snarls when he ran it through. He eyed the straightening iron on the kitchen table. The light on its side indicated it was hot enough to use. Carefully, he picked up an individual lock of hair and clamped it between the two metal contacts of the iron, starting close to the top of her head and sliding downward with the wand like appliance. After two or three more locks had been passed through, she visibly relaxed as the iron warmed her hair and thus warmed her. The minutes inched by in silence with only the hiss of hair passing through the iron, steady and hypnotic.

Hermione was fast growing accustomed to the tingles that the attention to her hair produced. They mingled with the warmth from the iron and settled into a glowing sense of well-being. She felt her breaths grow even. It was not unlike meditation. Never had she been so aware of one tiny part of her body, each anchoring bit of scalp was given its moment to sing, was echoed in her toes and every hair on the way to them. She felt pampered, adored, safe. It was a wonder that it was Severus Snape that was making her feel this way. Yes, she realized, I do feel safe with him. And it was about time, too, after all he had done in the past to ensure that she not come to harm. Maybe it was not her in a personal sense, but there was that one full moon night when Lupin transformed before them, and he had sheltered her and Harry and Ron behind his body without a second thought.

"Thank you," she whispered. Her voice came out like that from being so long disused. For all its softness, it sounded like a shout in the previously quiet room.

"To what are you referring? I have not yet finished with even half," he murmured in answer, absorbed in his task.

"I never thanked you for protecting me, that night that Lupin became the Werewolf and you put yourself between us," she said softly, but with more surety.

His fingers stilled in surprise, but then he continued without a further betrayal of what he felt. "You're welcome."

"And thank you for your part in making the world a safer place, for Muggles and Muggleborns alike," she felt the need to add.

This time, he sounded slightly amused. "You're welcome."

"And thank you for helping me, this year. I wouldn't have been able to do this without you."

He took another pause, and his voice became deeper with utter sincerity. "You're welcome."

The room became silent again, and Hermione allowed the hypnotic tingles to overtake her. It was over before she knew it, and she felt just a little sad that it was. She was really enjoying the sensations. He had moved around her chair with cat-like grace, never once making a single noise or bumping her from her reverie. Her eyes had slid closed somewhere in the middle of the hot-oil treatment. Now they snapped open to find Snape regarding her critically. It was almost as if she wasn't there, but was just some potion he had been working on and was now studying his results. She almost laughed. He noticed her smiling and made no comment on it.

"It will do," he said in a gruff, pleased grunt. "Now, on to cosmetics."

Hermione felt her heart sinking into her toes. She'd never so much as put on mascara herself. After discovering magic, she'd never seen much point. With the exception of the Yule Ball, she rarely even thought about it.

Snape must have seen her frown, because he looked directly into her eyes and said, "This is all about disguise, not vanity. I am aware that this may seem like an awful lot of pretense, but consider all of the other students who will have known Hermione Granger. Some of whom are children of former Death Eaters. You must become a completely different person. When all of this is said and done, a little make up will be the least of the changes you will have to undergo." The way he said it, she was actually reassured. Mostly.

"What else did you have in mind, sir?" she wondered, slightly nervous.

"Your wardrobe, for one, needs to be completely changed. Princes do not wear Muggle clothing. Your speech patterns, possibly your accent will require work. If you cannot effect a convincing Australian accent, we will make something up about an English governess. You will need to learn French, Italian, and Latin, just to be on the safe side." Hermione found her heart thrilling at the opportunity to study different languages with a private tutor. "We will go to a Muggle Optometrist and get you colored contact lenses. Dark blue, I should think. Almost black. A few visits to tanning salons, to darken your skin so that you appear to have lived in the Outback for most of your life. I'm sure you'll enjoy that part, with your love of heat." Hermione's head was near to spinning with all that she would need to do. "From this point on, think of yourself as Olivia. Only you, the Headmaster, and myself will know that you are playing a part. You will have to be Olivia. This we will begin today. I will refer to you as Olivia and you will answer to it."

"Y-yes, sir," she murmured, his authoritative tone touched something deep in her psyche.

"What is your name?" he demanded.

"Olivia Prince, sir."

"Olivia, look at me." She felt her heart hammer in her chest as she forced herself to look him in the eye. He had quelled her fears in an instant. He had taken control, and she felt that with his help, she could do this. She could do anything he demanded of her. Because he had probably done this all before. Because he was confident that he could do this again, with her. "What is your name?"

"Olivia Prince, Severus." Her eyes blazed with a tiny rebellion and it called to something dark in him. His hand moved out almost before he could check it, and he knew that he would have to be more careful with this one in the future. She knew that his given name had power when she uttered it, but he was not about to start this game. Not with her, not any time soon. He flexed his fingers but made no comment.

"I'm glad that we're clear on that, Olivia," he said and turned back to the table that held all of the cosmetics he had purchased for her. She felt something quail inside, that she would have to go by another name, when he had *just* begun using hers.

A/N: I'm sorry for the shortness of the chapter, but I have a plan! I do! (Please don't kill me)

Powder and Paint

Chapter 4 of 7

Who knew that Severus was an accomplished cosmetologist? I never would have guessed.

Powder and Paint

Severus turned back from the table with his wand in one hand and a small mirror in the other. He placed the mirror on the floor and magically enlarged it to stand full length, on its own before Hermione's stool. She let out an involuntary gasp when she saw her hair.

Black, glossy waves framed her face and shoulders to fall halfway down her back in place of her brown, frizzy curls. She felt the difference keenly as she shook her head from side to side. The swish of soft waves was distinctly alien from the normal bounce of tight ringlets; she could feel every nuance in the follicles of her scalp. This was *real*—the color, permanent. The shape of each strand irreversible by magic. She was herself, but not: the difference between Hermione Granger and Olivia Prince becoming etched deeply into her awareness in the way that her Transfiguration into Jessica Rabbit could never be.

Snape allowed her the moment she needed to mentally adjust before sweeping his tall self and black robes between the mirror and his charge. He instantly drew her attention to the compact he held in his hand. If he could have postponed revealing the changes he was making until they were all complete, he would have. This was a work of art wrought over human flesh and deserved the moment of revelation due to it. Unfortunately, they needed every spare moment to ensure she could do much of it on her own. The intricate nature of her disguise was complicated by the fact that she'd never done her own makeup before, a skill she would need to learn. He needed to be able to show her, step by step, the techniques he would use to create another's face out of the bone structure of her own. He would use paints and powders to hide certain physical traits, accentuate those which he could use, and imply those which he required to be there if they did not before exist. He needed her to be able to duplicate every effect perfectly before she returned to Wizard society.

"This," he intoned, "is foundation. It does exactly that: it provides the foundation for the rest of the layers we will apply to it. It evens out the complexion, and can hide certain imperfections and marks. For what it does not hide, we will use concealer. It is also aptly named." He fell silent and studied her face with intense concentration. He took stock of every mark, crease, dimple and shape that made her recognizable as herself. She tried her best not to fidget under his scrutiny, but it was disconcerting in the extreme. He seemed to strip her bare under his gaze. Thank goodness he was keeping his eyes corralled to her face!

He continued without wavering for even a moment, ignoring all else but what task lay before him. *That mole, there, that crease, that hollow, the dark circles beneath her eyes, the web of veins under the delicate skin of her eyelids that tint the skin blue, the slant of her brows, the dip on either side of her upper lips...* and so on until he had a complete picture of what he would do to change the landscape of her visage to the naked eye. He turned back to the table and selected all that he would need to affect the transformation from the stock of makeup he kept for disguise. "Hold these," he instructed, naming each item he placed in her hands in turn. "Eyeliner, eye-shadow (we'll stick with earth-tone shades for now), lip liner, lipstick, lip gloss, blusher, mascara. Watch what I do, carefully. I will ask you to repeat it later." He stepped to the side so that she could watch herself in the mirror and took a tiny sponge out of the bottom compartment of the foundation compact. He applied the slightly sticky stuff in broad swipes, blurred and blended the edges together with the sponge with deft little strokes until her skin disappeared under a fine layer of what felt like a marriage of a liquid and a solid. She opened her mouth, wiggled her face around, and tested the bend and stretch of her skin beneath the new weight. Her face had become virtually spotless. She hadn't realized there were sprinklings of freckles across her cheeks and nose until they were gone. Her skin tone evened out, he inspected his work before continuing on. The stick of concealer, he applied in half-moon shapes beneath her eyes to hide the dark circles she'd gained from sleepless nights studying Horcruxes, dabbed over the small scar on her forehead she'd gotten when a neighboring boy hit her with a flung rock when she was six, smeared over darker moles the foundation couldn't combat. He evened out the color with the same rubberized sponge he'd used applying the foundation. "Now, we have a blank canvas to work with," he mused, almost forgetting her presence entirely while he worked.

He selected the black and silver tube he'd dubbed 'eyeliner' from the pile in her clutches. His touch on her thumb was brief, but sent tingles up her arm. He didn't seem to notice, or chose not to acknowledge it. He also took a tiny brush, pristine in its absence of tint. Palming the liner, he leaned in from the side, indicating where the liner was to be applied so she could watch in the mirror. "Like this," he muttered, "looking upward, and here, with your finger pulling the lid so you can get to the lip. Then close your eyes one at a time, with a broad stroke over the edge of the lid, and an up-curve at the edges. Be very careful with this, make sure your brush is not overloaded as it tends to drip." He explained all of it without actually touching any paint to her eyes. The execution of the application went just as he said it would. He instructed her to look up, then down as he held each lid in turn with a single finger. Once it was done, she gazed back into the mirror to gauge the result.

Her eyes burned from the unfamiliar substance mingling with her tears on sensitive tissues. She blinked rapidly to try to clear them. "You'll get used to it," he assured her. Once the stinging became less, she attempted a perusal again. The liner gave her eyes an exotic, almost oriental cast. Coupled with her black hair, it looked right, somehow, but not at all Hermione.

He changed tools again and awaited her signal that she was done. His palette consisted of tiny squares of pigmented pressed powder in an array of shades and colors. As he had mentioned, they were all earth tones. She never knew there were so many shades of brown! They ranged from light as cream to deepest sienna, chocolates and golds, greens and roses. All of them a different shade of brown. Suddenly, it seemed impossible to differentiate between the lot of them and her courage failed to make up for just how out of her depth she felt. Some shimmered, some were matte, and yet he began choosing them seemingly at random and using the tiny planes of skin around

her eyes as his canvas.

With just those shades and just that space, artistically he began to change her perception of the shape of her eyes. Every now and again, he snapped her out of her bewildered daze with a question. "Do you see what I did there? How that shade made that hollow?" Or, "This green disperses the red in that shade there, do you mark it?" All of his questions were absolutely rhetorical. He continued on as he was, absorbed, whether she hummed a response or not. Speech was beyond her, and she knew that any motion of her head was simply not acceptable. A nod would carry dire consequences, she could well believe. It did not pass her notice that she was normally a loquacious individual. In most cases, she would babble on as if there was no stopping her inner monologue. He seemed to have quieted that, too, with his confusing world of cosmetology and disguise. For the first time in her life, Hermione Granger was struck dumb, and there was no one around to notice it. Snape was off in his own little world, playing about with colors and shapes. Who was she in the face of that grand pursuit? She knew she was going to be a hopeless failure the first time she attempted a reproduction of his mastery over illusion, so she permitted her mind to go find something else to do and lost herself in the glide of the brush or the little triangular swab over the sensitive skin just north of her cheeks. Being a canvas had a sort of sensual appeal when it got down to the painting of it, more than it had any right to. The experience was far too compelling not to savor.

The next step was simpler and easier for her to follow. He lined her lips, very carefully mind you, with a dark lip pencil. He filled the space inside with a red lipstick so deep, it was almost like blood. He held a tissue between her lips and told her to clamp down on it, even stretched his lips over his teeth and demonstrated it for her. The tissue took away some of the dark of the red, leaving a suitably scandalous color behind and drying out her lips. "This," he said, indicating the tube he named "lip gloss" with the words *plumping gloss* scrawled across the side in silver, "is a new technology. Three guesses as to what it does, and the first two don't count."

It tingled, was what it did! Her lips swelled in size, like that time she ate too much chicken teriyaki and the salt in the sauce caused her lips to react violently and inflame. The effect was slightly more natural looking, and the tingling was more akin to a cool sensation than a burning, irritated one. The surface of her lips maintained their smoothness instead of raising little moisture-starved ridges. The feeling of glossy, pouty, tingly lips drew her awareness to them and kept it there. The glossy red, coupled with her smoky, exotic eyes made her feel sexy, alluring. All at once she felt invincible, bold. No wonder Lav and Parvati were always messing about with the stuff. It felt *good*, made one feel feminine and wild. Hermione was giddy with it.

Several swipes of the mascara tinted her lashes the same shade of black as her hair and brows, made them seem longer. Severus applied three different shades of blush, mixing and layering as he went along with another of his sponges. Her face began changing its shape before her very eyes. Her cheeks became thinner, the bone structure sharper and better defined. Her eyes were smoky and almond-shaped, made smaller and more penetrating all at once.

"Amazing," she whispered in awe.

"That is why they call people who do this for a living 'makeup artists'," he said with barely concealed pride.

"I have a new face," she giggled merrily.

A ghost of a smile passed over his carefully maintained mild countenance. He had not allowed a shred of interest past his defenses, although he failed to stifle the spark of intense involvement during his more artistic moments.

"Now, we clean it off and you will repeat it until I am satisfied that you have grasped the basic concepts of what I did here today. Eventually, you will have it perfected before I let you step foot outside of this house." She didn't doubt that he meant it. She would not see proper daylight again until she could fashion herself new eyes around the structure of her own. "*Aufero planto*", he intoned with a swish of his wand, and a good few layers of the makeup were gone. He then gathered up all that he had used and placed it into a pile on the table. Turning back to her, he had two bottles in his hands. "Read the directions and clean off the rest. I can't remove it all with magic, and if I tried, I'd probably end up exfoliating the top two layers of skin. Never sleep in your makeup; it will clog your pores and cause blemishes. You'll need to do all of what I have done for yourself every morning upon waking. I'll teach you a stasis spell to keep it fresh throughout the day."

She went into the bathroom to wash her face, first with a purple solution dubbed 'makeup remover' on a clean rag. "Honestly, where do they come up with these names?" she wondered facetiously. She heard Snape snicker in the next room. The Neutrogena face wash was something she was familiar with, as she used it often when she feared zits. The smell made her think of happier times, made her think of home.

Fresh faced, she returned to the mirror in the kitchen and went about the painstaking process of a novice imitating a master. Just as she had feared, her replication of his techniques regarding her eye-shadow was an abysmal failure. He made her redo that part three times before even he decided to call it a night. He merely grunted when she reproduced the things he did with blush, and was satisfied with how she lined and colored her lips. "Save the plumper for when we're actually in need of it, don't waste it on practice," he admonished. "It's expensive and hard to come by."

All in all, she felt that the day was eventful and not the least unpleasant. She crawled under the coverlet in the generic smoke-tone guest room with a sense of accomplishment. Not only had she learned something new about which she knew nothing before, but she had survived a day alone with Severus Snape: the most feared professor in Hogwarts memory. She had invaded his home, used his given name with impunity, and held several conversations with him and he never once hexed her into oblivion. She was beginning to think that maybe her childhood memories of the man were just a little skewed. No doubt, it was the immature little brats he taught that put him in his dark moods, along with the fact that he served a madman who often displayed sadistic tendencies. She smiled. *Voldemort was bad in his own right, but save me from meddling, senile old wizards!*

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Hermione drifted in a world without gravity or light. She saw herself as if from a point outside her own body. Her skin was white, lit from within to her perception. Her hair reverted back to her springy mass of curls, at points shifting to red, then black, becoming a convoluted mix between cartoon blobs and lank tresses. Her face became a blank mask, showing no features but smoldering eyes and red lips in a formless plane of white. Her naked body spun slowly in the void, every muscle shifting beneath skin, tensing, waiting.

She came to inhabit her body again, every sense stretched outward to find nothing but the sound of her own heartbeat, the throb of her pulse. Even the space she floated through had neither temperature nor anything to indicate whether she moved at all. Yet, she waited and spun slowly. She knew she spun as one knows impossible things in dreams. She hardly knew what she was waiting for before he appeared.

Out of the darkness, he came, his features hidden behind a black curtain of his own hair, dark robes covering almost every inch of his skin from his neck down. Only the gleam of his hands at his sides gave him away. His skin was lit from within, like hers. He seemed to move slowly through the darkness, but he was upon her in an instant. She couldn't think how to escape, but she never wanted to. She knew this man, though she could not recall his face. She recognized him akin to her though here he was a stranger. The primal part of her thoughts cared nothing for familiarity or strangeness, it only hungered, but forgot to tell her what it hungered for. It grumbled at her as she waited, unknowing, not understanding herself at all.

There was no speech in this place, she came to know. Only actions and feeling. Her pulse was echoing in the strength of her glow, his pulse was in time. His hands reached out to caress, to hold. She fitted herself to his broad chest. His height and the width of his shoulders made her feel small and fragile, and his fingers did exquisite things to her scalp and back with maddening dexterity. She tilted her face up to meet his, and she knew they kissed, but would never be able to describe it, nor was she any closer to identifying who he might have been. His face was a mask, like hers. Her fingers tangled in the silk that spilled freely down his shoulders. His fingers stopped caressing and started molding her flesh, changing her shape into something she couldn't name. Her blaze burned brighter than a flame, becoming a wild creature of sensual beauty. Her every pore was coming alive! There was power in his eyes, which appeared before her and pierced her to her soul. Black, fathomless, like the world, like the ache in her.

His robes parted at his toes, and darkness lay within. Out from the panels came the tendrils, binding and stroking her newly forming and re-forming body. When the part came to the level of his groin, a slumbering python stirred; its massive slitted eyes opened and regarded her. She feared it, though she couldn't say why it was so, and she yearned for it as her primal self remembered it and sent a cry through her being. The python moved like water, wound itself around one of her thighs and sought entrance between her legs. She knew it could not enter unless she willed it so, as she was a being of light and this was her world. Her primal self demanded it.

With fierce pressure and heat, the python pressed its way inside, molding and stretching her in its own way, altering her as He was altering her. It invaded her until there was no more room to go.

A bright flash of light overtook her form in the void, and in that instant, the stranger's face was revealed. She jerked awake with a cry, her body still shuddering with guilty release. She sent a questing hand down between her legs and found her nether lips to be wet and pulsing. Her finger slid about and found the nub that made her jolt when she touched it. Her quivering flesh lurched pleasurably in response. With slow circles, she brought about another crashing release with the echoes of her dream still present in her mind. The face, she forgot. But the dream was heavy enough with symbolism that she could well guess who the dark man was.

With a huff, she turned her face into her pillow. Great. She wasn't absolutely sure, but she suspected that her dream and subsequent orgasms were about one snaky professor who had made it quite clear that he wanted nothing of the sort to do with her. Damn her idiot subconscious!

@ @ @

Severus was jolted awake by some unknown commotion. He lay absolutely still in bed as he listened for the cause of his rude awakening. Before long, his finely tuned ears heard something that he quite wished they didn't. Feminine moans, small and muffled arose from the floor beneath his bedroom. The guest room. *Her* room. Within moments, he heard what he identified as the sound that woke him once again: her throaty shout of completion. Damn the paper-thin walls!

When he was absolutely certain that she would have drifted off again, he made his way to the shower to take a cold one. Yes, he decided, it was definitely going to be a long three weeks. If Herm--OLIVIA was a multiple-orgasm masturbator, he was in for a lot of nights like this one.

How it would have galled him to know that those were her first. How it would have given him a brain aneurysm to know that they were because of him!

A/N: (please, no hurling rocks!) I will try to update it soon!

Auferloplanto- means remove makeup. Because I also have the imagination of whoever named that stuff.

Snake Before Coffee

Chapter 5 of 7

There has to be a morning after... and a shameless plug of my favorite beverage.

I make no money off this fic. Snake and Hermione and Spinner's End are JKR's brain-babies, but I love to play with the pretty shinies. Please, no sue!

Snake Before Coffee:

Severus made his way down to the kitchen more by feel than by sight. Dawn had reared its ugly head once again and was playing havoc with his sensitive night-trained vision. There was something utterly catastrophic about experiencing this time of day, let alone without caffeine to mitigate its effects.

He blessed the fates when the aroma of fresh-brewed coffee met him on his way down. He possessed just enough energy to pat himself on the back for remembering to set the timer on the appliance the night before. He even felt grateful toward Arthur Weasley for the thoughtful Christmas gift. As he curled himself around the mug of black ambrosia, hunched over the Formica table in the corner of the kitchen, his mind began to catch up with the rest of him.

He definitely wished it hadn't.

He longed belatedly for just a few more moments of ignorance. As it was, whatever peace he might have had for the morning was effectively shattered by the knowledge that he had a house guest, and all of the memories of said guest from the night before. Merlin, help him. He despaired of surviving until term began. That he would die of a heart attack or aneurysm before September seemed a surety. He was far too old for this.

His mood degenerated along those lines while Hermione had her own depressing matters to attend to.

For the next hour or so, Severus went about draining the pot of sweet, loin-girding caffination while Hermione battled it out with her face. In the end, she had to concede to defeat. She just couldn't focus on putting on a proper disguise while the heavenly smell taunted her from just a few yards away. What she wouldn't give for a cup of Joe right about then. Coffee had always been something of a luxury in the Granger household: her parents only drank it on special occasions. Being dentists, they mourned the fact that coffee stained teeth, but their mixed Greek and Turkish ancestry ensured the familial addiction to the brew. Holiday mornings saw the three of them gathered around the table for coffee and baklava, followed by a furious brushing of teeth and the abstinence from such substances for at least a month. Hermione felt it was a great shame; her mother was an excellent pastry chef, and her father could brew a cup of Turkish coffee thick enough to stand a spoon in. At Hogwarts, it was tea, pumpkin juice, or nothing. British Wizarding society never took to the bean. She was dismayed to find that it was strictly a Muggle thing.

She zombie-walked from the guest room into the kitchen, grabbed a clean mug from a cabinet, filled it, and went about doctoring it without paying the other occupant of the room any mind. Severus's shocked silence lasted just long enough for her to take her first sip. The dark atmosphere of the room was lost on her; it gave her futile warning as to his thunderous mood.

"Miss Granger! What in the name of Merlin do you think you are doing?"

"Wha?" She took in his apoplectic mien with all the intelligence of a confounded skrewt.

"Your attire is unacceptable! I insist you put some real clothing on at once!" It occurred to her that red was not his best color, nor did that particular shade on his face bode well for her at this time.

Comprehension dawned about halfway through the cup. She blinked down at herself, taking in her threadbare camisole and pajama bottoms. At first, she had no clue what the problem was. Snake busied himself counting to thirty while the gears in her head turned audibly. She raised her eyes to take in his attire from her place against the counter top. He was fully turned out in his teaching robes, as always, without a single button out of place. It occurred to her that his customary dress was rather Victorian, while hers was currently very slumber party-esque. "Oh," was all she said, not the least abashed. "You called me Miss Granger."

Snake found that the Lovegood-like apathy in her statement did nothing to aid his blood pressure even as he mentally castigated himself for his gaffe. "Olivia Prince would not appear at the table in her night clothes," he growled out, as if he'd meant to say exactly what he did. "Olivia Prince would never emerge from her room until she was

perfectly put-together." His tone grew steadily in volume until he was fairly booming in that baritone of his. "Hermione Granger will march her insolent self back into that room, and she will emerge as Olivia Prince or NOT AT ALL!"

Hermione blushed with rage at being addressed as nothing more than a child but held her tongue until he was finished berating her. She pushed off from the counter and made her way back toward her room with her prize in hand. Snape before coffee was a fate she'd not wish on her worst enemy.

Severus took several deep breaths before he could see clearly again. Once the rage was gone, all that was left was what was quickly becoming familiar: the feeling of arousal and self-disgust. It would probably take the same amount of time for her to finish dressing as it would for the newest in a long line of unwanted erections to subside. What was the girl trying to do to him? The early morning chill had pebbled her nipples, which were all-too visible due to the unbound state of her breasts. The thin chemise had done nothing to disguise the exact shape and size of her womanly attributes. The unbidden thought that they would fit perfectly in his hands, that they were firm and undaunted by gravity, took far too long to drag from the forefront of his mind's eye. And as she sauntered away, his eyes had become glued to her heart-shaped buttocks--just as easily spied beneath the paper-thin cotton of her bottoms. He sat and ground his molars together, damning Albus to hell for subjecting him to this torment.

When Hermione emerged again, she was a damn sight easier to deal with in her school robes which mercifully covered every pertinent inch of her in unrelenting draperies of fabric. She killed off the last of the coffee and set about brewing another pot while stony silence waged war between them. Finally, she turned back to fix his eyes with her own. The rage that simmered within was only noticeable in the flash of gold within their chocolate depths. Her voice was clear and without malice when she said, "Olivia Prince will require an endless supply of Pepper-up if she is to be seen before Noon."

Severus resisted the urge to groan and drop his head into his hands, but it was a very close thing.

Lunch was a grand sight better than breakfast. Snape-the-terrible had evaporated like the morning dew to be replaced by Snape-the-painfully-polite. By the time that she had finished with her soup, her salad, and her roasted chicken breast with rosemary new potatoes, she had been instructed, grilled, and ultimately browbeaten with proper pureblood table-manners. The Weasleys came to mind briefly. Particularly Ron, whose table manners were far enough from what Snape (and therefore all of Slytherin pureblood society) demanded of Olivia Prince, they might as well have been on a separate continent.

The day progressed with a lesson in diction, whereupon Snape left her in the Library with a phonograph and a record of 'Australian Accents for Dummies' charmed to play on repeat until he'd come to relieve her for dinner. By the time he'd emerged from the lab, she'd resolved not to ask just where the food was coming from, as she was positive that neither of them had prepared it. She strongly suspected House-Elf involvement, but she couldn't bear to part with the last shred of denial. Dinner tasted faintly of garlic and hypocrisy.

She blushed crimson when "Please pass the salt," came out "Plase paess the sault," but Snape bestowed one of his rare smiles.

Then he said, "I wasn't positive about that method, but the results are startling. Hmm. Speaking like a true Aussie and it's only the first day. Your powers of regurgitation are startling," thereby ruining the effect.

The look she shot him with was positively frosty. "Do please excuse me," she sounded out in her best impersonation of Eliza Doolittle's painstakingly perfect diction before rising from the table.

She made to retire to her room in a perfect icy snit. She got as far as the library-cum-sitting room door before his low, silky voice emerged from somewhere directly beside her left ear. "Just where do you think you are going?" She halted immediately and failed to suppress a shiver. Damnation! She hadn't even heard him rise from the table!

"I am tired and would like nothing better than to retire for the evening. It's been a long day," she replied evenly, inwardly marveling that she'd managed not to gasp.

"We still have work to do."

She turned to face him, as startled as he was that they stood so close. "And what, pray tell, would that involve?"

"Your hair, a shower, and a demonstration that you can shampoo and condition your mop correctly without my assistance." His eyebrows climbed steadily heavenward in perfect innocence. She turned on her heel and corrected her initial course to the stairs, murmuring *afuero planto* with neither hesitation nor a backward glance. Severus was left wondering why he actively sought his own torment.

Yes, he knew that he was in complete control of the proceedings. The feeling of absolute power over the infuriating siren was the only thing that nudged their ridiculous arrangement toward being bearable. Her tiny acts of rebellion--the fire and ice of her emotional responses to his demands--only served to provoke him to make further demands, to push her even harder. But in the end, she always complied with only the minimum of fuss. This, too, stroked his darker urges. None of this boded well for his sanity. It made him wonder whether she'd comply if he demanded the ultimate surrender of her.

By day, he yearned only to touch, to experience. By night, he burned to possess, to take, and to subjugate her will to his own.

He sighed heavily as the sound of running water through the pipes in the wall reached his ears. With the slow and steady pace born of reluctance, he made his way to the upper floor to join her, secretly glad that she'd chosen the relatively neutral territory of the upstairs bathroom instead of the one that connected to her own room. Before he transfigured his robes in an act of foolish wand-waving, he pulled from the inner pocket a phial of deflating drought and downed it in one go. He was determined not to have a repeat of *the incident* from the night before. Inwardly, he recognized his stupidity of not thinking of the solution prior to this afternoon, but he had to admit that there were other concerns on his mind. Like whether or not any of this would even prove plausible, much less come out looking like it would work as spectacularly as it was shaping up to. A lot of it had to do with her attitude and the fact that she was such an apt pupil, in any subject.

With a steady hand, he drew back the glass door and joined her in the cubicle.

The procedure went as well as he could hope for, even though she balked at the cold rinse. He was expecting her to and had strong-armed her in place and wrested the aperture from the wall before she could escape. Her shriek of torment bounded off the walls and battered at his nerves, but he did not relent until all of her hair was as icy cold as his house's pipes could provide.

He performed the warming charm on her person and provided the fluffy towel with an odd sense of tenderness when she couldn't quite disguise the tears that made her eyes luminous. Their gazes met and held while her teeth slowly gave up their chattering. He rubbed her arms through the towel as the silence stretched out between them. A wordless conversation seemed to be passing in their shared look alone, though neither of them would be able to say exactly what it was that had been conveyed.

His eyes were dark and inscrutable, his lashes nearly hooding them completely. The thought that he might kiss her seemed to come from very far away.

Her eyes were large, open and so very trusting. He wondered at the answer he saw there for a question he hadn't asked, or even thought to ask.

Neither moved for what seemed like an eternity, until she sneezed and the moment was gone.

He saw her to her bedroom door and set the silencing charms with bitter necessity.

He climbed into his own bed, secure in the knowledge that he'd have a full night's sleep with coffee awaiting him in the morning. He counted down another day in his mental calendar, honestly surprised to have lasted even this long. Things would be easier once she was studying other languages with her tutors. He could avoid her entirely for the most of the day, ensconced in his basement lab. He would only have to see her at mealtimes and if he needed to make a change to her schedule. He felt positive he'd not have a repeat of the morning of dishabille. He made it quite clear what was acceptable and what was not.

He fell into sleep mentally cataloging his stores, coming up with enough ingredients for a week's worth of Pepper-up. He would need to make a stop into the apothecary

around the same time as their trip to the seamstress for the requisitioning her new wardrobe.

He was awoken some time in the night with the sense that he was not alone. The bed dipped beneath him with the weight of another person climbing atop him, careful and silent as a thief. He grabbed for his wand, but his 'guest' had the sense to immobilize him while he was still sleeping.

He panicked silently, helpless to stop whatever was about to happen. A sense of hopelessness overwhelmed him with the crashing force of a tidal wave. He pushed the wave back only through sheer force of will and opened his eyes to meet death head-on, as he'd done before. Death was nothing new.

What met his sight was unexpected to say the least. Hermione Granger straddled his supine form, flyaway caramel curls in a halo about her head. She grasped each of his wrists in a firm but gentle hold, smiling beatifically down at him. She placed both of his hands palm-down on her springy, ridiculous hair, close to the crown of her head. She drew them sensually downward, letting the natural weight of his arms set the pace of their descent. As they passed, her hair became the black silk that his rational mind knew it should be. She repeated the action over her face, familiar features disappearing under the mask of paint he was fast becoming accustomed to. Her smile was no longer the angelic one from the moment before; it too had changed. It was a lush-lipped smoldering smirk of dark promise.

He felt his cock stirring at the boldness of her actions and her naked intent. She felt it, too, for she ground down upon it even as she continued the slow glide of his palms and fingers over her collar-bone and down her breasts. She placed them finally on her hips and bent down over him, close to his face, until they were surrounded by a curtain of her inky black tresses.

"Severus," she whispered close to his ear. "Fill me."

With a groan and a push, he was fully encased inside her, bypassing blankets, night clothes, and physics all at once.

Her moan was surreal and perfect to his ears. She felt like heaven, a balm to his soul. Her hands cupped his face and she undulated above him as if she were a candle flame, guttering in the wind. "Severus," she whispered insistently, urgently. "Come for me."

With a shout he bolted awake, fighting his way out of his comforter, disoriented and confused and not at all happy about the mess in his pants. He banished the cold, sticky pool with his wand (which was beneath his pillow, right where it should be) and summoned a phial of Dreamless Sleep.

Before he found his way into merciful oblivion, he added the brewing of more of the potion to his mental to-do list.

A/N: I know, I'm simply ghastly at updating. But, for those who wished for another chappy, here it is. You know I'm making this all up as I go along... but it feels like this one will be coming soon to a close.

Lessons learned

Chapter 6 of 7

Posture training, Language lessons... Ballroom Dancing?

Lessons Learned

A week into her stay at Spinner's End, and Herm-(OLIVIA!) had finally become proficient with the bewildering business of her own transformation. Severus had washed her hair three more times in exactly the same manner and oversaw her once before deeming her fit to do it on her own. Although, he'd made it a point to drink a deflating draught before setting foot near that shower with her every time.

The straightening iron made another appearance on the sixth day, along with a hot-oil treatment laced with a stasis potion to keep that particular necessity to a minimum. She painted her face no less than a dozen times a day to get into the practice of doing it perfectly every time. On top of these grueling tasks, she also had to go through what Severus called "posture training."

She was strapped into the highest heels she'd ever worn (four inches, to start with), put through foot-cramping obstacle courses throughout the house, and if she so much as wobbled, had to start all over again. If that wasn't enough, once she'd completed the course all the way through to his satisfaction, she had to do it again. With books balanced on her head. Then, with higher heels... and even more books.

Often in moments of despair, she suspected that all of it wasn't really necessary, that Severus was simply being a sadistic bastard to punish her for all of her (imagined or not) slights to his person. That in the absence of assigning detentions and docking house points, he had contrived this special form of torment to take out all of his hateful energies on the only victim readily available: Herm- (OLIVIA), no--(screw it)--Hermione!

And even though he had explained very rationally and specifically the necessity of this process, she was still susceptible to bouts of despair. It wasn't until she found that the perpetual stoop of her left shoulder--the shoulder upon which her half-ton of books normally swung--was gone that she actually felt better about the painful and often humiliating tasks he set her to.

Walking with bad posture would also turn out to be only one of the myriad things that purebloods "Did-Not-Do." She used to believe that she had good table-manners because she ate with her elbows off the table. The things that she did not know about proper pureblood etiquette, as it was turning out, could fill a book bound thicker than Hogwarts: A History.

It was unfair unto ridiculousness that her dreams continued to plague her with regurgitation of her days, heavily fortified with symbolism and a heavy dose of sexual flavor. She managed to keep her blushes at bay only by hating him with everything she could muster. Yes, resentment was a good emotion with which to cool her ardor. She was not prepared for any of her female physical responses to the male in him. She had always believed real feminine arousal to be a myth, a fabrication of fictional novels bent on brainwashing lonely women into desiring the cultivation of a relationship with a man--any man--in order to feel the things that the women in the novels did. Chagrin did not even begin to describe her reaction to discovering that her assumption was, in fact, the fiction.

Her first French lesson was on the fifth day. Severus found a Muggle tutor who was willing to stay in the house. He was *Obliviated* on a daily basis. Her lessons progressed in such an odd fashion that it was a wonder that she retained any knowledge of the language at all. Meeting one's tutor for the first time every day surely put a damper on developing any kind of rapport. It was purely by the virtue of Severus's insistence on speaking French all the time that she gained any sort of aptitude for the language.

On the twelfth day, it became Italian, with a new tutor. And (exactly) the same process. Her Latin tutor was the exception, only because the ancient Muggle was suffering

from Alzheimer's and could barely remember his own name. But teaching Latin had been his entire career and was on permanent retention, perhaps only by rote. She'd sung "R, ris, tur, mur, mini, n'tur" so many times, it was no wonder to her that he'd been unable to forget that particular ditty even though he'd forget meeting her several times a session. Being short on time, Italian and Latin shared the same week. Severus deemed them close enough in accent and word-meanings to shove them together so closely.

He'd yet to let her leave the property, and time was growing ever shorter. Instead of taking her to a tanning salon, as she'd anticipated, he'd opted to have her sun in the back garden (on good days) and use a u.v. lamp in the tiny, neglected solarium when the weather was unseasonably bad. Being in Britain, this happened a lot. She enjoyed the tanning process out of all she had to do the most, especially since he'd brewed her a special skin oil in his basement lab--which she still hadn't seen!--that smelled of flax-seed and lemon verbena. Before long, her skin had darkened a shade or two. The other ingredients in the magical potion of his kept the sun from prematurely aging her skin, though Severus had briefly considered adding that particular change to their roster of disguise, discarding it as something no self-respecting pureblood would ever allow to happen to herself.

It was on the twentieth day that she finally let her impatience with being cooped up in the house free reign.

"Sir, I was wondering--"

"Ah, ah, ah," he wagged a finger at her. "*En français.*"

"*Je besoin aller obtiens les vêtement nouveau, sil vous plait, Severus*" Please don't sneer, she thought. *I really DO need new clothes, at least I suspect that's why you haven't let me out of the house beyond the overgrown backyard in weeks!*

His eyes blazed at her for only an instant before he relaxed purposefully and placed his book aside. *Posso non vedere motivo non andare oggi?* a bland "Why not?" delivered by a devastating baritone in the sexiest language known to mankind had her knees pressing together under her school robes as a wash of lust swamped her. His effortless switch to Italian was her cue to continue in that language. She cursed him silently. He knew Italian was her weakness!

She wracked her brain for a response and watched as his smirk grew with every passing heartbeat. *Non ho abbigliamento adatto*, she finally blurted in relief. It translated roughly into, 'But I have nothing to wear.' Not poetry, but acceptable in a pinch.

"I will find something suitable for you," he replied as he rose from his chair.

She moved to the side, not wishing to tempt changing his mind by making him any angrier with her. She really wanted to see something besides the inside of that house and its tiny back yard. She'd made her way through most of the books of which she'd dared to crack the covers. His moods had grown blacker with each passing day they'd spent in such close quarters. She fully suspected the fresh air would be good for both of them.

He returned from the second floor after more time had passed than she would have thought necessary. Surely, he was just going to transfigure one of his own robes. However, he returned with a neatly folded bundle that did not resemble anything she'd thought to be in his wardrobe. What he held in his hands, he carried with the kind of care and reverence he rarely displayed to any of his own possessions. When he allowed the bundle to open and fall toward the floor, she saw it was indeed a woman's garment, tailored to nip in at the waist and fall gracefully from there. The cut would probably be considered out-of-style to a trained modiste, but the simple style was elegant enough to be timeless. The color was black with silk embroidery. It was the equivalent of 'the little black dress' that no woman should find herself without, according to Muggle fashion laws.

"It's beautiful," she murmured, running the silky cloth through her fingers as he held it a full foot off the floor.

"It was my mother's." Knowing him as she could not avoid doing after spending so long in his company, his bland tone was nearly choked with emotion.

"I'll take good care of it."

He simply nodded as she gathered it into her arms, taking care not to let it touch the floor or rumple the fabric as best she could.

She found herself in front of the mirror in her room again. She barely even looked at herself anymore, beyond what was necessary for 'faking' her features. She shot a glance over to the simple, elegant set of robes that were currently resting on the mattress, waiting for her to slip them on. The fabric had felt smooth, like silk, and just as lightweight. Randomly, she thought it felt like a separate being, possessing an inner warmth and a texture not unlike human skin. She only hoped she'd do the robes justice.

Without further preamble, impatient to go OUT amongst other human beings who would *remember* seeing her and for the possibility of conversing with some of them, she shucked off her tatty school robes, shimmied out of her jeans, and was in her trunk in a flash. Her shirt was soon sailing through the air after the rest. She rummaged about in the spacious confines of the trunk that held almost all of her worldly possessions. The rest were in her vault at Gringotts, along with what she couldn't bear to part with of her parents' things. They still didn't feel like they were hers...

She sat back on her haunches with her prize, refusing to give into the tears that wished to escape after thinking about her parents; crying wouldn't bring them back. What it *would* do was ruin her makeup and delay her until she could fix it. Then Snape might change his mind about the outing. *Had he already?* With that thought, she had removed the rest of her underthings and slid into the satin slip she'd rescued from her trunk. The borrowed robes went on after that, soft as a sigh and lighter than air. She almost called for Snape to do up the closure at the back, but then remembered what she was.

A witch.

And witches used magic to do these things.

Except that she didn't know the spell to fasten buttons when she couldn't see them, and she feared to damage the robes with an unacceptable spell for such a task. She cleared her throat nervously, cast her eyes around her room, and magicked everything on the floor back into the trunk before she realized she was running out of excuses to procrastinate. And time was wasting.

"Umm, sir?" She practically whispered. "Oh, how silly," she chided herself. "Severus?" There. That was better.

She could hear him thundering into the room with his 'this better be important' stride. Then he halted--quite suddenly--at the door. She had her back to him. She had put her hair up in a bun to make dressing easier. She was wearing his mother's robes.

His heart must have kicked him in the chest. She realized. *I probably look just like her at this moment.*

She spun to face him, hoping to end his torment by breaking the tableau as quickly as possible. His expression... she couldn't fathom it. "I need help with the buttons," she blurted, suddenly aware of a heavy tension in the room.

He cleared his throat awkwardly, nodded, and circled his finger in the air for her to turn around so he could get at the back of the dress.

Merlin! Will I ever cease to feel wrong-footed around him? She turned, hating that she could not see him. There was a detached sort of comfort in being able to track a person's movements with one's eyes. Instead, all of her other senses screamed awareness of him. She felt a blush creeping up her cheeks as the corner of the bed became suddenly visible at the periphery of her vision, holding her rapt attention. The things she'd done in that bed whilst thinking of the man who was approaching her... gods, this was a mistake! She could smell the herbal scent of his shampoo, the musky undertone of his aftershave, and that masculine sweetness that was all him, only him. She heard the rustle of his robes and the creaking of the floor beneath the tread of his boot where the joist had swelled from moisture in the summer daytime air. She

fancied she could feel his body heat as he took up position behind her. When he finally reached out to begin fastening the row of buttons that began at her mid-back, her eyes slid closed to better savor the quick, gentle movements. Her awareness strained to feel every action. Madly, she hoped he'd slip up and touch her skin.

I must be going insane! He's touched me before, she told herself. Although she had to admit, it had been more than a week since they'd shared so much as a handshake, now that he'd taken to leaving her alone to deal with her hair and makeup. Showers seemed lonely without him, which was ridiculous because before him, she'd always showered alone. She stood there for an immeasurable amount of time before she realized that he'd finished with the buttons. Their breathing was deep, even, and together.

She couldn't possibly know, but she thought his hands were still mere inches from her back, hanging in the air exactly where he'd released the last of the buttons. How long had they stood there, silent? Why wasn't he saying anything? Should she? She mastered the urge to fidget, convinced that it would not be the 'thing to do right now.' But it was difficult as the seconds strained by to be completely still and wait for cues from him.

She was rewarded for her efforts when she felt his hands settle finally at her waist. He exerted a gentle pressure, guiding her to turn around to face him fully. He eyed her up and down, holding her at arms' length for a brief, respectful interval. "The robes suit you," he said simply. What he did next had her turning a spectacular shade of crimson under the mask of paint. She felt the heated blush keenly, hoping that it didn't show.

With the pad of his thumb, he pulled her lower lip from between her teeth. She'd been chewing on it in a characteristic show of the tension winding up inside her. The smooth texture felt perfect there, but he removed his thumb at once. "You'll have to stop doing that," he murmured thoughtfully. "It's a dead giveaway." Then, as if he couldn't stop himself from altering her appearance, as a sculptor can't quit working on a piece until it's finished, he pulled the band out of the bun and arranged her hair to cascade gracefully around her shoulders. His hands returned once again to their resting place at her waist. The inner relief that he'd not yet broken all contact had her taking a step forward, bringing their personal spheres together into almost the same space. She looked up at him, a question in her gaze.

The air grew thicker. Severus Snape swallowed visibly.

With all the grace and aplomb of a courtier, he plucked her hand from her side, holding it up at shoulder level. He quirked an eyebrow at the badly disguised look of surprise on her face and placed her other hand on his shoulder before leading her in a graceful box-step.

"Ballroom dancing?" she giggled after a few steps, the tension dispelled and the humor of the situation dawning. She was dancing with her dour Potions master, the same steps she'd learned for the Yule Ball. If only her friends could see her now!

His single eyebrow melted back into a state of equilibrium with the other, and a faint smile played about his features.

"One never knows when you'll need the polish," he quipped, spinning her out and flaring the robes about her ankles. He brought her back in and met her smile of wide-eyed disbelief with a smirk of masculine accomplishment.

"I never knew you could dance, Severus," she remarked as he led her out, back into the library.

"My dear, there is a lot about me you do not know," he said with a final bow over her hand.

"Courtly manners suit you. But I admit, this side of you tends to make me nervous."

"Hmph!" *Was that a laugh?* "With good reason, I suspect. But I hope it will soften the blow when I tell you that our day out will not be a lark. I have many errands to run, so you will be on your own when the harpies descend to take your measure."

"Sir, I was wondering if we could spare an hour or two in the book shop?"

"Have you run through my collection already?" He mock-glowered, his mood remaining conscientiously light.

"Ah, most of it. All but the dark texts," she admitted.

"I suppose I have not been keeping you busy enough, then. We will stop in at Borgin and Burkes, but I doubt they will thank you for using their store as a public library. We will purchase what you need for school and perhaps one or two items, but that will be all," he declared with finality. Sensing the slight hurt he'd caused with his curt high-handedness, he softened his tone. "I suspect I need not tell you that you've garnered a bit of a reputation as a bibliovore. I am afraid you'll have to restrain yourself from indulging that particular addiction until you've been established as Olivia Prince in the minds of society."

"Understood, sir," she sighed with resignation.

"Good. Go put your shoes on. We must be off."

a/n: I'm slowly working my way through the cliches. (Makeover, check. Ballroom dancing or equivalent, check! New, more adult clothing, CHECK! Internet translations into languages I don't speak, CHECK! Heehee it's so much fun!)

Fear not. The next chapter will include his reaction to seeing her in the robes for the first time from his side of things.

What do you think? Did he really get brought up short by the bittersweet nectar of memory? Or was his mother the furthest thing from his mind?

Love it? Hate it? Tell me about it! (Or I'll stop)

Shop 'Till You Drop

Chapter 7 of 7

Severus's musings about his mother, his reaction to Hermione in the robes, and a jaunt to Diagon Alley with an unwanted third wheel.

Special thanks to HermioneDiggory, who is just freaking awesome for saving the Headmistresses red ink by providing her services as a beta and helping me in my battle against writer's block

CHAPTER 7: Shop 'Till You Drop (or 'We Have Contacts!')

It had occurred to him that his stores were getting dangerously low on the ingredients he needed to maintain the peace in the household. She was correct when she said she'd be needing embarrassing quantities of Pepperup. He'd managed not to use too much of the deflating draught by putting a halt to the 'supervision' of washing her hair, but Dreamless Sleep was an unfortunate necessity. He had run out of the more hard-to-come-by ingredients and only had a few doses left of the finished product.

So when she requested an outing for the wardrobe she'd need to be seen out in public by others of the magical bent, it seemed as good a time as any. He wondered why he was putting it off, because he had previously come to the decision that he'd use something of the robes his mother had put away to ensure she looked the part. Was it nerves?

No. He was sure that she was ready to take on her new persona.

As he ascended the stairs to the attic, he had to come to terms with the fact that he was dreading the dredging up of painful memories that this task would undoubtedly provide. Toward the end of his schooling, his mother had completely severed herself from everything that had to do with being a witch. All of her robes, her books (that he had not absconded with for school or his own curiosity), her wand, and all of the wizarding photographs had gone into storage in the dusty old attic. She'd set some preserving charms and left them there, never to return to them again.

Over the years, he'd renewed the charms out of a sense of preserving her memory. Sometimes he'd railed at her as he did it, though she was no longer around to hear that she was stupid for letting his father cow her into losing her magic. Sometimes he'd done it with silent tears, mourning her loss as he loved her, still. Each time, though, he had descended the pull-down stairs feeling emotionally drained and melancholy for the experience.

The 'Notice-Me-Not' wards still carried the barest hint of her flavor. He let the dying echoes of his mother's magic wash over him like a balm to his emotional scars before he went about dismantling them. The stasis charms were left in place as he lifted out the robes, still in their boxes, and stacked them one-by-one to the side. Finally, he found the box he was searching for, as it was markedly different from the rest.

He knew the box well. It looked the same as the day he had purchased it in Hogsmeade.

His note still lay atop the tissue paper under the lid. She'd never even opened it, he realized. The sharp crinkling of the paper in his suddenly clenched fist accompanied the overwhelming sense of sorrow that his mother feared his father more than she'd loved her son--the rage that his father could even CLAIM that he loved his wife yet he resented everything that made her who she was. Roughly, he put the rest of the boxes back in their places as he stood with the one he sought. He scooped the soft fabric out of its wrapping and let the rest fall unheeded to the floor. It was out of a sense of duty that he replaced all of the charms and wards, but as soon as it was done, he was back down the stairs and on the second floor.

These robes will never see the inside of that box ever again, he vowed, *even if it means permanently loaning them to Hermione.* He felt better for the declaration--the feeling that in this, he had control.

He allowed himself the moment to pause and run the fabric between his fingers to feel the silky slide of it against the sensitive webbing between digits. It was this hedonistic pleasure that led him to choose the robes in the first place. He had saved up all of the money he'd been making, brewing potions for Hogwarts students for the entire year: love charms, Polyjuice, hangover cures that didn't require alerting the school matron of underage drinking and the like. He'd run a tidy business. He had put aside enough to purchase more necessary ingredients and spent the rest on these, as a present to his mother. They had not been inexpensive, but he had hated her old shapeless house dresses and determined that she should have something finer. Something worthy of the woman who had been the shining star of her graduating class. So much potential... wasted. All for a man who was never worthy, all in the name of 'love.'

A part of him had... perhaps... sought to use the robes to remind his father that not everything about the magical world was to be feared, hated. He had such foolish hopes, born of youthful naivete. He shook his head as he magicked the stairs to fold up and return to their place in the ceiling behind him. The purchase had been a futile gesture on the part of a silly boy, trying to put the pieces of his broken family back together and bind them with nothing more effective than bubblegum. By then, the pieces were warped and would never fit again.

By the time he'd finished his trek back down the narrow stairs, his emotions were firmly back under control, for the most part. He'd said very little and fought hard to betray nothing, but Hermione reacted as though she'd seen far more than he'd wished her to: a side effect from such close association, no doubt.

Having delivered the robes from their lonely confinement in **the box** and into the arms of a witch who would wear them instead of leaving them in an attic to rot, he waited for her to shut the door of her room before he let his facade go. He felt bone-weary, and it showed in the defeated slump of his shoulders and the way he let his hair fall around his bowed head to conceal his features. He walked into the kitchen, looking for all the world a battered martyr, and halted before the liquor cabinet. He seldom indulged, fearing a transformation into his drunken father. It was also hazardous to his job as spy to be anything but in full possession of his mental faculties. Drink tended to dull the senses that needed to be sharp when in the precarious business of subterfuge, but all the same, he felt that he deserved some liquid comfort just then to dull his aching emotions.

The dusty bottles that greeted him attested to the length of time it had been between indulgences. He recalled a rather lovely Irish creme that Rosmerta gifted him some few Christmases back. He reckoned it would make a worthy addition to a mug of coffee.

It seemed he had only had a few fortifying swigs in his favorite reading chair when Hermione's voice called for him from her room. He gave a mournful glance to his half-finished mug of white Irish, put a stasis charm on it, and went to see what the chit needed.

The chit...

That was no chit.

Before him stood a *woman*: straight-backed, regal, and elegant with her wand unashamedly in the hand which reposed on her minimally cocked hip as befitting all that she was. The black hairs at the nape of her neck had escaped the hasty coiffure and curled ever-so-slightly above the bare strip of flesh that ended in the middle of that perfect line, just above her tastefully-emphasized hips and derriere. He knew now that the robes would never have looked so on his poor, downtrodden mother. She had been too thin, too unhappy, too drawn and careworn to do them justice. Her brittle frame could never have carried them off the way that *this woman* wore them: this woman who refused to be stopped before the endless torrents of adversity. She adapted. Her spirit, like her body, was lithe and supple with a hidden strength that shamed him at times. She would bend, yes, but never break.

She would--she would turn around and look adorably flustered. "I need help with the buttons," she blurted. He would not embarrass her by laughing at the unsure tone in her statement. *Silly girl*, he wanted to say, *you have nothing to feel insecure about. You are amazing*. Fearing her reaction to those bald words, fearing laying himself bare for her to mock, he did not.

He relished the feel of her body heat emanating from the siren strip of skin even as he worked to vanish it beneath the row of buttons. By the end, he was helplessly addicted to the task. It felt endearingly domestic to be helping her with the closure of her robe, and it took him by surprise that there were no more buttons left. *Perhaps if I undo the top one again. What in the name of Merlin am I thinking?* He shook himself out of his trance but could not for the life of him take his hands away from where they hovered. He could not say how long he stood there wrestling with himself, but for her part, she made no move. Not even to fidget. He wondered where the bushy-haired know-it-all had gone, not exactly sure how he felt about her disappearance.

He wondered if she was as composed as she seemed. He wondered yet again what it was she was thinking because, although the view from behind was spectacular, it lent very little in the way of an emotional barometer. It was the intense curiosity that helped him win the war with his errant hands, who in the end only acceded to a compromise. So his next move was to put his hands on her waist and guide her to turn around, so he may gauge her reactions properly.

It was with a sense of relief that he noted her lower lip caught between her teeth. *So my little Gryffindor is still in there*, he mused, disguising the smile in his eyes by making a show of looking her up and down in a cursory fashion. "The robes suit you," he said evenly, glad to have gained mastery over his vocal cords at the very least. Before he could stop himself, though, he had rescued her bottom lip with his thumb. *You were just overjoyed to see it there! Why are you chiding her for it? True, a dead giveaway, but proof she is still herself beneath all this artifice. You can let her go now.* Still, his hands had minds of their own, and he had to admit he was reluctant to give up the delightful feeling of having her so close to him. The soft slide of her ebony locks across his fingertips was akin to the hedonistic pleasure of the robes' texture. Even having taken such liberties with her person, he could not stop touching her. He was treading very heavily on the line of impropriety, and he was trying very hard to come up with a way to explain it away. His hands found themselves back on her hips. When she took a step forward, he had just about given up all hope of redemption. He swallowed thickly at the hint of approval in her eyes, sure his poor subconscious must be providing hallucinations to make up for all the dreams he'd been missing.

Inspiration hit like lightning, and he gave himself over to the absurdity of doing the box-step with all the courtly manners the professors had valiantly tried to bludgeon into the heads of all participating students in time for the Yule Ball. Not that any of it took with most of them, but he had been required to learn it all before he was able to move about in proper society, so it had fallen to him to assist Minerva in her bid against being embarrassed by her students' inadequacy in front of the other schools. Fear, he found, was the best motivator with the thick-witted, so he applauded her choice in assistants even as he bemoaned the task.

She could have asked Flitwick. And then where would they be? The boys would be swishing and flicking about the hall. An amusing thought, but at times disturbing as he pictured Harry Potter in a frilly dress. However, he allowed his thoughts to stray where they may to distract him from the compulsion to hold onto Hermione. It worked like a... charm... and he managed to retain what was left of his imperious distance to return to business as usual.

She returned from the room, this time with her boots on, which under the robes looked as though they could really do with replacements. He added the cobbler to his mental list of things. She really needed to be wearing dragon hide to pull off the look, though her bare feet were just as acceptable in his estimation. Still, the boots would afford her the needed protection from broken glass, pebbles, and, later, cold weather.

Before they could leave, though, he had to adjust one more thing about her or the jig would be up. He produced a set of small, white plastic circles from an inner pocket of his robes. The look in her eyes told him she knew exactly what they were and wasn't exactly looking forward to the eye irritation. "These came with the post the other day. I had to order them special from an American company that produces colored contacts for Muggle films. They came with instructions for their cleaning, storage, and use, but I'd wager that they never took into account magic being a reality. The Headmaster has sent a small list of charms for you to practice and use so that you will never need to take them out. I have also availed myself of the lab to brew better eye drops to keep the irritation to a minimum. We'll use the day-time drops now, and I will have the ones for night wear finished by the time you go to sleep."

"Thank you, I... that's very kind of you," she stuttered. He put the plastic case into her upturned palm and gestured for her to proceed him into the bathroom.

He held her hair back for her as she stood in front of the bathroom mirror and put in the contacts. She blinked rapidly and teared up just a tad. He had to help her with the special eye drops for the first go, but the relief she felt afterward was a palpable force in the room. She blotted the corners of her leaking eyes with tissue and inspected her makeup for smudges before sighing and pulling out the eyeliner from her basket of cosmetics on the counter.

He leaned against the door frame, suddenly content to stay and watch her fiddle with her face. Once she'd put it to rights, he took in the overall effect. Eyes once hazel had become smoky blue, dark enough to almost pass for his black. The clear edges of the contacts were barely discernible, even in the bright lighting from the fluorescent fixture. Satisfied with the result, he turned and made his way to the back yard by way of the solarium, secure in the knowledge that she'd be just behind him.

Severus chose *Apparition* for their mode of transportation into London. Standing outside of the brick wall that led to Diagon alley, he took a moment to give a reassuring nod to his charge. They were not entirely alone, however, as the warm summer day had Leaky Cauldron patrons enjoying their frothy beverages in the shade of the building's backside. He pressed the bricks in their order, and a happy sigh from said customers arose at the breeze the magical portal kicked up. 'Eu de Pub' was replaced by the myriad scents of wizard London, and not a moment too soon. He much preferred spun confectionery, dragon hide, potions ingredients, parchment, and yes, even owl dung to stale beer and old piss.

The midday sun came streaking through the spotty cloud-cover and caught the blue highlights of the black of her hair, stunning him momentarily as it took all of his attention. It took him a moment to register the fact that she was speaking to him.

"...off to first, Severus?"

"I shall deposit you at the clothiers while I withdraw the funds we'll need from Gringott's." He took her arm in his and led her off down the narrow street.

She took a breath and let it out slowly, nervous but trying not to show it. "You'll be fine. Just wait for me inside Madam Malkin's, and I will return to collect you by the time they have finished measuring you. I'll even help pick out fabrics for your new robes if you like."

She smiled with gratitude, though her nerves had it a little rumpled around the edges. "I just feel a little like I'm being thrown to the wolves."

"More like pink kittens with razor-sharp claws," he rejoined as they reached the door to the shop.

"Ugh, don't remind me of pink kittens. It calls to mind one Ministry official I think Hogwarts would like to forget. As would I."

He glanced around furtively to make sure they would not be overheard. "Just remember: chin up, don't talk about school unless it's to express curiosity. If anyone asks why you're buying an entire wardrobe (not that I think they will, they do work on commission, you know) just say something vague about what you had in Australia not being suitable for Scottish winters. I will be back shortly. You'll do fine. Really. Remember to use your accent." He pushed open the door and ushered her inside with a comforting hand at the small of her back. Then he fled.

The withdrawal of funds from the account the Headmaster had set up went quicker than he would have expected. Gringott's security had gone lax after the Dark Lord's fall, he supposed. He took enough for the fees to cover the commissioning of her wardrobe, also the little extra for the ingredients he'd need for her Pepperup and eye drops as a justifiable expense. He would have liked to take his time ordering ingredients to be sent to the school, but images of Hermione backed into a corner, warding off faceless, beribboned shop clerks with a broom had him keeping his time in the apothecary to a minimum.

In the end, he was glad of his haste. He entered the shop and immediately recognized the familiar blond head of his godson, who was currently chatting up the clerk, with Hermione (Olivia!) nowhere to be seen. "Draco," he said by way of greeting, and the blond spun on the spot, real delight lighting up his eyes.

"Severus! My Head of House and lately absent godfather. What brings you here? Not that it isn't always a pleasure to see you."

He had hoped the end of the war would mellow his godson somewhat, but instead had unlocked a pocket of Malfoy charm that had erstwhile laid dormant. With the madman safely dead and no longer spending his way through the Malfoy riches and some very convincing testimony on the part of many of the war's heroes regarding the Malfoys' change of heart to bring about his downfall, the pureblooded family had once again come up smelling like roses. Power, influence, and affluence had always suited Draco to a tee, and he had spent his summer living the good life with Zabini in Italy. He could never pull off his father's cool indifference, but the switch to overly-pleasant and effusive had Snape's Slytherin sensibilities all bunched up in a way that made spending long periods with the young man uncomfortable. He had almost dreaded returning to teach his godson's final year.

Before he could answer, Hermione (Olivia!) chose that moment to return from behind a curtain, no less than three shop attendants in her wake. From her slightly stiff

posture, he could tell that she'd recognized Malfoy's voice and wasn't exactly pleased that he was the first of her classmates she'd have to fool.

One tended to remember the girl who had delivered a blow to one's person. Not to mention the time they'd spent in the Order together that final, fateful year.

Severus spared a probing look at his godson's features, looking for the tell-tale signs of recognition. He almost wished he hadn't. What he saw there could only be described as 'smitten.' "I am here," he finally answered, "to escort my cousin on her shopping excursion before she takes her final year of schooling at Hogwarts. Draco Malfoy, I present Olivia Prince. Olivia, this is my godson, Draco Malfoy."

"Charmed," he said, bowing to take her hand and kiss the air above it.

"I'm sure," she replied in a dry voice, shooting a bewildered look over Draco's bent back to his dour Head of House. It was her discomfiture alone that had him keeping his temper.

Introductions having been made, he was permitted to return to the business at hand. "How goes the robing process?" he asked, prodding Draco to release her hand with his solicitous hand at her back. He led her over to the waiting couch. She sank into it gratefully. She shot a peeved glance over at the fluttering shop attendants, who were at this moment going absolutely gaga over Draco, who, for his part, only had eyes for 'Olivia.' The magical measuring tape flew about the blond wizard, never once smacking him in the nose, oh no. Neither did the flighty, frilly harpies peck at his physical 'flaws,' inferring that his hips were too round or his chest too flat.

"I'll just be glad when this is all over," she muttered, picking up a book of fabric swatches from the low table beside the couch.

Deciding to ignore the flurry of movement in the corner in front of the mirror, he chose another of the resource materials from the same table and took his seat beside her. He curled his nose in distaste as the waft of perfume hit him from between the pages. He took out his wand and did a discrete air-clearing charm before he could look at the moving models with any real acuity.

In the end, they had found that arranging the books across their laps, held open so each could cross-reference a style of robe with a type of fabric in all of the hues available made the most sense. 'Olivia' summoned a scrap of parchment and a quill from the counter to take notations on their choices, which Severus intercepted and took the duty upon himself. *We've yet to do anything about your handwriting*, he scrawled on the corner of the sheet and siphoned the ink back off with one of his most-used spells once she'd read his note.

She merely nodded. "You will have to teach me that spell," she murmured with a joking manner.

Draco rejoined them a little later and took the small armchair to Severus's left, obviously wishing that the chair had been situated closer to his newer acquaintance. After choosing the style he wanted for his new set of robes for the upcoming party at Malfoy Manor, he made himself an amiable nuisance by making suggestions regarding Olivia's colors and which style would drape her frame the best. Snape had to admit, Draco knew a thing or two about fashion, but his over-eager willingness to 'help' had him gritting his teeth. He recognized the emotion of jealousy, as familiar with it as he was. It made no rational sense that he should feel jealous of Draco, for all that it was plain that his attempts at flirtation were hitting the brick wall that was Hermione's indifference. Measured glances at her profile allowed him to catch each instance of consternation, discomfort, and irony as they passed while she stared fixedly at the books before her. He was glad she'd showed no interest in his attractive, confident godson. He was her teacher, for all the gods' sakes, and old enough to be her father. He had no claim on her and had no reason to guard her virtue, as they were not really family. Still, Draco's behavior had his hackles in the upright position, illogical as it was.

Eventually, Draco left for the rest of his errands, feeling just a bit put off that his advances had been politely declined by the attractive newcomer. He made his requests to the clerk, leaving his choices of style, fabric, and embroidery embellishments in a neat packet on the counter, which the clerk promptly stuck to an order form and sent into the back. Perhaps when they attended school together and she saw how popular he was, he mused as he left for the cobbler, she would be more receptive to his charm. If not, well, there were plenty of fish in the sea, as the saying went. He whistled a jaunty tune as he strutted off down the alley to pick up his new dragon hide boots.

Only after Draco's departure did Hermione fully relax her stiff muscles into a more natural state. She let out a relieved breath, and Severus found himself sliding his hand over hers to give it a reassuring squeeze. They had fooled someone who knew her, and it seemed as though the entire endeavor so far had all been for this one moment of success. She smiled at him, giddy with triumph, and he found himself smiling back. They returned to their task of selecting her wardrobe with renewed vigor.

Once their list of notations were complete, they rose as one from the couch to inform the clerk that they were ready to see Madam Malkin, who would be the one in charge of overseeing the completion of all of the robes. The clerk escorted them into another room. The walls were lined with bolts upon bolts of fabrics within wooden frameworks built into the floor, walls, and ceiling to hold the weight. Some shades were just too glaring to be borne, but arranged as they were in a graduated spectrum--from monochrome black and whites through violets, indigo, blues, teals, greens, yellows to ambers, ochers, screaming scarlets, and dark wines--they each had their place in the grander color scheme. Every color imaginable was there, and quite a few fabrics were duo-tone or even tri-tone, depending on the way the light hit them.

Madam Malkin met them with all due courtesy and professionalism that had been missing from her shop girls, a fact which Hermione struggled not to point out. She was just ecstatic to be treated a bit more with the customer service Madam Malkin was famous for. In the end, she had an array of potential garments that ranged from serviceable to sumptuous and would hold her in good stead for what ever the weather had in store for her in her final year. She'd chosen mostly subdued colors, blues and grays being predominant, choices that Snape thought were very appropriate.

Malkin refused to leave it at that, though. She had a brilliant turquoise that looked spectacular with Olivia's coloring and set the blue tones of her eyes and highlights to best advantage, which she'd insisted that a set of dress robes be made of. Severus knew better than to meddle in the affairs of a true artist, so he'd fully endorsed that one addendum to the set until the both of them teamed up had Olivia's protests crumbling under. Severus paid for the commissions, and the two of them left the shop together.

Although her mood had improved from her earlier time with the pecking hens, Hermione/Olivia was still looking just a bit peaky, perhaps out of consternation that he had ganged up on her with the seamstress. He swung them from their course to the cobbler's for a little much-needed detour from their shopping. He quirked a smile at the confusion in her manner and ushered her into Florean Fortescue's.

They had just purchased their cones and were seated when an all-too-familiar voice saying, "Fancy meeting you here," came breezing over from another table. He watched Hermione/Olivia's spine become rigid again as Draco swung his legs out and stood to join them.

a/n Am I confusing you with ambiguity about what we are to call Hermione/Olivia now?

Good.

Really, I want to swamp HermioneDiggory with love and flowers for her work. She got this back to me in record time!